1-1-1955

Mark Twain's treatment of the Negro

Hazelyn Delores Scott

Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation


This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. It has been accepted for inclusion in ETD Collection for AUC Robert W. Woodruff Library by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Robert W. Woodruff Library, Atlanta University Center. For more information, please contact cwiseman@auctr.edu.
MARK TWAIN'S TREATMENT OF THE NEGRO

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

BY

HAZELYN DELORES SCOTT

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

JANUARY 1955
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Influence of Background on Interest in the Negro.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. Portrayal of Negro Character in Works</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. Race Relations</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This thesis is a treatment of Mark Twain's attitude toward and portrayal of the Negro as is exemplified in certain of his works. The results are here presented of an examination of his accessible published works. From these a selection has been made of those works that seemed significant in as much as they contain conventional and realistic or principal and minor Negro characterizations. Those works utilized in this study are as follows: Innocents Abroad (1869), Roughing It (1872), The Gilded Age (1873), The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876), Life on the Mississippi (1883), The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1885), The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894), The American Claimant (1892), Tom Sawyer Abroad (1894), Following the Equator (1897), King Leopold's Soliloquy (1905), "General Washington's Negro Body-Servant" (1872), "Was It Heaven? or Hell?" (1872), "A True Story Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It" (1876), and "My First Lie" (1898). The writer has also gained considerable information as to Twain's attitude toward the Negro from his Autobiography (1924).

In order to show clearly just how the Negro is treated in Mark Twain's works, this study will include in Chapter I an account of the influences on his interest in the Negro - environmental and literary - which motivated and inspired him to present a realistic and sympathetic view of the Negro. Chapter II is an analysis of his portrayal of principal and minor Negro characters and the phases of Negro life stressed in the aforementioned works. Chapter III shows how race relations - the attitude and actions of white characters toward the Negro, the attitude and actions of Negro characters toward the whites, and general inferences based upon the tone of the works - are significant in Twain's works. In Chapter IV, the writer summarizes and
evaluates the findings and tries to determine whether or not Twain's broader purposes concerning the Negro have been understood or misunderstood by his readers.

This study does not profess to incorporate facts relating to Mark Twain's attitude toward the darker races as a whole, but it is hoped that this view of his treatment of the Negro may serve as a basis for a study in that capacity.

The writer expresses her gratitude to the library staff of Atlanta University for their endeavors in aiding in the procurement of the various materials, especially to Mrs. R. E. Clement; and to her adviser, Dr. N. P. Tillman whose encouragement, aid, and patience proved invaluable in the preparation of this thesis. The writer is also indebted to Mrs. Lucy Grigsby who read and critically appraised this thesis.
INTRODUCTION

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, a dynamic humorist, satirist, and novelist of the latter nineteenth century, is an outstanding artist in the field of American letters. During his life, he was chiefly regarded as a light humorist; but after his death a revaluation of his work was attempted, and at least one school of opinion came to regard him as a true and serious artist. This change is due partly to an evaluation of the books published after his death, The Mysterious Stranger, What is Man? and Other Essays (1917), Mark Twain's Letters (1917), and Mark Twain's Autobiography (1924), which have served to reveal the rage and contempt, the despair and pity of his inner life.

In surveying his works as serious and profound literature, one of the most obvious and most obdurate patterns to solidify grows out of the extent to which he becomes a reformer and the extent to which the characters in these works have their roles determined by the color of their skin. Mark Twain was a born reformer and was always on the side of the underdog; thus, since the race problem was one of the most important problems of his day, it is significant to attempt to ascertain his interest in and attitude toward the Negro as manifested in certain of his works.

For the most part, fictionists up to the period of the Civil War had been unwilling to concede human dignity to their black characters. The white character was significant in that he was to be revealed through the glow of romance; his virtues portrayed with the intent of evoking love and admiration, his vices merely to titillate and to be condoned; while to be black connoted that he should serve as a support and a foil for the hero's glamor— to be treated, most likely, with tenderness but not with respect. In neither case had there been deep probing of feeling, subtle concern
with motives or even adequate realistic noting of surface incongruities.  
During this period, however, when the nation was acutely self-conscious over the institution of slavery, certain stereotypes of the Negro arose. Three of the most familiar stereotypes which are still prevalent to some extent are the acceptance of the Negro as one designed to make easier the white man's physical lot and to like doing so because his racial capacities attune him to just that, the Negro as an ageless child and the comic Negro.

The foundations of the white authors' inclination to undertake authentic recording of Negro life were laid in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the works of such writers as Albion Tourgee, George Washington Cable, and Mark Twain. These writers wrote of the Old South and in order to add color to the life in the Old South, they depicted Negroes as "niggers," "darkies," or "pickaninnies." Mark Twain, especially, has been condemned by numerous critics, librarians, and teachers for his portrayal of the Negro in his "classics of childhood," The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, as well as in other important works. These censors are of the opinion that he, like other writers of his day, presents only a stereotyped and distorted concept of the Negro. They do not view his works as being a realistic presentation of the Negro of the Old South—of the Negro as just another human being with fundamentally the same hopes and emotions as whites.

One significant objection to certain of Mark Twain's works which are on approved lists as books portraying true American child life is that voiced

1Paula Smelling, "Southern Fiction and Chronic Suicide," The North Georgia Review, III (Summer, 1938), 4.
by Charlemae Rollins in a pamphlet, *We Build Together*. She criticizes, adversely, those novels which "fairly 'reek'" with those conventional epithets used to colorfully portray the plantation Negro, namely, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer* and *Pudd'n head Wilson*. She observes:

Many writers feel that in order to paint a true picture of the "Old South," where white people did actually call the Negroes "nigger" and "dicky" and where, upon occasion, Negroes call each other by these names, the words cannot be entirely eliminated.

Nevertheless, she objects to the use of these terms if the author purports to present a realistic portrayal of the Negro character. Concerning Twain, she says:

The literary quality of Mark Twain's books, acknowledged classics of childhood, is fully appreciated and not questioned here. Only the treatment of the Negro characters in his books is deplored. Twain's writing is often described as portraying true American life, yet the characters in his books generally refer to the Negroes as "darkies," "coons," or "niggers."

Miss Rollins acknowledges the fact that many of these plantation stories are probably well-intentioned, and many are written with sympathy and some understanding, but they do give a distorted concept of the Negro which no boy or girl today could emulate.

It is quite possible that Twain's works might present such a view of the Negro to children; however, the writer contends that Twain's purpose was not to present a stereotyped and comical picture of the Negro but, rather, a realistic and indirectly satiric portrayal of the tyranny of slavery. According to Wagenknecht, Mark Twain "was a humorist, but even from the beginning he was more than a humorist, and he disliked it intensely when people

---

1 Charlemae Rollins, *We Build Together* (Chicago, 1943).
2 Ibid., p. 8.
3 Ibid., p. 13.
failed to see that 'more.'" He further states:

Theoretically, Mark Twain is the Devil's advocate in the case of the Universe versus Humanity; no man ever poured fiercer scorn upon his own kind. He felt that the human race, in general, would be better off dead but when he comes to deal with individuals he has a different attitude. The race might be contemptible but even so it must be looked after and cared for. Twain might not believe in the cause or he might not admire the people involved, but let him once be convinced that an injustice was being practiced, and he would immediately constitute himself counsel for the defense. Thus, his eyes were opened to the shameful exploitation of the colored races of the world, and in his works, he attempted to say momentous things to the world concerning this. Apparently he realized that indirect satire may often permeate further, and in the end be more powerful, than any direct attack can ever be; therefore, he utilized this method. It is this indirect method of attack which causes the child, and many an adult reader, to receive a distorted picture of Negro life. He is unable to comprehend the subtle meaning which underlies Twain's portrayal of Negro character and life. Contrary to numerous opinions, it is the writer's belief that Twain was not presenting the Negro in the traditional pattern primarily, but that in a manner which provides reflectionary material for the reader, he attempted to present the fortunes of the oppressed race.

It is the purpose of the writer to examine or re-examine Mark Twain's writings to see if the adverse criticisms are well founded. Was he contributing to the established stereotyped conception of the Negro or was he presenting a realistic but indirectly satirical picture of the black race? If the former is true, the fault is in the reader who misinterprets and we need to emphasize the role of the teacher in helping the child to interpret

---

2 Ibid., p. 139.
such works so as not to get a warped concept of the author and his portrayal of life and character.
CHAPTER I

INFLUENCE OF BACKGROUND ON INTEREST IN THE NEGRO

Only in America and in the "Gilded Age" following the Civil War could there have been evolved a Mark Twain. It is unsafe to regard any artist as an embodiment of his time or its thought, for an individual is not a symbol of his era; yet no artist is severed from the experience of his age. One so instinctively a part of his place and people as Mark Twain could not escape repeating their history. Thus, in a qualified manner, his books do represent the experience of America grappling with democracy. His mind was formed in the experience that assumed democracy, and his life was almost exactly coextensive with the seventy-five years of democratic experiment; therefore, his works represent American experience repudiating its assumptions of democracy. His works also represent the realistic life of the frontier town in which he grew up.

In attempting to arrive at basic tenets pertaining to Twain's treatment of the Negro character in his fiction, it is necessary to observe, first of all, those significant influences which aided in determining the direction that his literary tendencies would take. We begin, necessarily, with his immediate ancestry and his childhood environment.

Clemens's father, John Marshall Clemens, an adventurer and a dreamer, met and married Jane Lampton, an optimistic aristocrat of noble English stock. The young couple attempted to settle in various cities in Tennessee and finally bought seventy-five thousand acres near Jamestown, Tennessee, to

1Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America (Boston, 1932), p. 295.
"secure" their heirs. They, then, continued their westward movement. 1 Arriving at Florida, Missouri, John Clemens decided to settle his family here, for he believed Florida destined as the future metropolis of the Southwest. This dream was not realized, however, and after four years, during which time Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born (November 30, 1835), the family turned back toward the East, settling in Hannibal, Missouri, on the Mississippi River.

In many of his works, Twain has pictured this frontier town especially in Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and Life on the Mississippi. These works, however, do not give completely realistic pictures of the town and fact must be separated from fiction in order to get a clear portrayal. Hannibal, during Samuel Clemens's childhood, was not a squalid, backwoods town like the usual river community, but a town of considerable population surrounded by a rolling country of graceful hills covered with beautiful forests. 2 There were fine streets and homes in Hannibal as well as humble dwellings. This metropolis had displaced such shacks as covered the town of Florida, for it contained the gentry with their mansions, newspapers, and even a library and a college. On the other hand, Hannibal, though not utter frontier, was a typical station in the near-frontier; it passed on supplies and caught the returning news from the frontier. It lay between frontier days and the crises of the Civil War, the latter forecast in the mobbing of an occasional abolitionist and the tracking down of runaway slaves. On the whole, however, with its atmosphere of restlessness, of individualism, and of romance, for it was dominated by the Mississippi River with its mysterious horizons, it was a "heavenly place" for an

1Edgar L. Masters, Mark Twain (New York, 1933), p. 3.
2Ibid., p. 10.
imaginative youth such as Twain was.\textsuperscript{1} Twain has observed that in Hannibal when he was a boy

\begin{quote}
... everybody was poor but didn't know it; and everybody was comfortable, and did know it. And there were grades of society -- people of good family, people of unclassified family, people of no family. Everybody knew everybody, and was affable to everybody, and nobody put on any visible airs; yet the class lines were quite clearly drawn and the familiar social life of each class was restricted to that class.\textsuperscript{2}
\end{quote}

He attributed the state of life in Hannibal to the fact that the town's population had come from slave states and still had the institution of slavery with them in their new home. This was to be an influential factor in the development of Twain from childhood to maturity.

Twain was a high-strung puny youth, who, throughout his youthful years, manifested a rather startling imagination which was nurtured by the environment which surrounded him, particularly by the potent influences of the intimate, enveloping institution of slavery and the daily companionship of the slaves. Paine observes that "All the children of that time were fond of the Negroes and confided in them. They would... have been lost without such protection and company."\textsuperscript{3} As a child, Twain was abandoned to these influences, for at times his father was relatively prosperous and could afford to keep slaves in the household. Frequenting the cabins of these slaves he drank in "wild, weird tales of blood-curdling witchcraft."\textsuperscript{4} One critic remarks that in Twain's household

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{1}Fred L. Pattee (ed.), Mark Twain: Representative Selections ("American Writers Series"; Atlanta, 1936), Introduction, p. xiv.
\textsuperscript{2}Samuel Clemens, Mark Twain's Autobiography (New York, 1924), p. 120.
\textsuperscript{3}Albert B. Paine, Mark Twain: A Biography, (New York, 1912), I, 15.
\end{footnotesize}
It was Jennie, the house-girl, and Uncle Ned, a man of all work—apparently acquired with the improved prospects—who were in real charge of the children and supplied them with entertainment. Wonderful entertainment it was. That was a time of visions and dreams, small gossip and superstitions. Old tales were repeated over and over, with adornments and improvements suggested by immediate events. At evening the Clemens children, big and little, gathered about the great open fireplace while Jennie and Uncle Ned told tales and hair-lifting legends.1

Such an atmosphere created a lasting impression, both of the tales and of the story-tellers, on such an imaginative mind as that of little Sam.

Too, during his childhood, Sam was often the guest of his uncle, John Quarles, who lived on a farm near Florida, Missouri. In his Autobiography, he states that his uncle had a wonderful farm, eight children and fifteen or twenty Negroes and that "It was a heavenly place for a boy."2 Here, his sensitive mind was further influenced by the Negro slaves. He tells of

... a bedridden white-headed slave woman who we visited daily and looked upon with awe, for we believed she was upward of a thousand years old and had talked with Moses. The younger Negroes credited these statistics and had furnished them to us in good faith. We accommodated all the details which came to us about her; and so we believed that she had lost her health in the long desert trip coming out of Egypt and had never been able to get it back again... We called her "Aunt" Hannah, Southern fashion. She was superstitious, like the other Negroes; also, like them, she was deeply religious. Like them, she had great faith in prayer and employed it in all ordinary exigencies, but not in cases where a dead certainty of result was urgent. Whenever witches were around she tied up the remnant of her wool in little tufts, with white thread, and this promptly made the witches impotent.3

The inferences manifested in these lines lean toward the fact that even as a child Twain was interestingly aware of the Negro and deeply impressed by his idiosyncrasies—that this picture of Negroes who were superstitious, religious and had great faith in prayer was early stamped upon his mind.

---

1 Paine, op. cit., p. 15.
2 Clemens, op. cit., p. 96.
3 Ibid., p. 100.
A most significant statement valuable as a determinant of his attitude toward the Negro at this early period of his life is as follows:

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.1

His relationship with his Negro companions was essentially the same as that with his white companions although both races were aware of a cleavage which had a restraining effect on the white-black relationship. Twain and his friends, however, had a faithful friend and adviser in "Uncle Dan'l," who was "a middle-aged slave whose head was the best one in the negro quarter, whose sympathies were wide and warm, and whose heart was honest and simple and knew no guile."2 It was "Uncle Dan'l" who became the model for Twain's famous fictional character "Nigger Jim."

Thus, one can see that his uncle's farm and the life surrounding it exerted a strong influence on the formation and development of his attitude toward the Negro race, which was, in the main, one of "strong liking"3 and of "appreciation of certain of its fine qualities."4 Concerning his attitude toward slavery in his youth, Twain states that he had no aversion to it for

No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers 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—and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure....In Hannibal we seldom saw a slave misused; on the farm, never.5

---

1 Ibid.
2 Ibid.
3 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
Though realistically expressing his earlier acceptance of slavery, Twain here reveals an ironic note when detailing the various measures used to insulate the rightness of the institution—that is, when he observes that "God approved it," and that "it was a holy thing." Many critics note that in Hannibal, he and his brothers and sisters did see frequent abuses of slaves, most especially runaway slaves who were regarded as worse than wild beasts and treated worse when caught. It would seem logical, however, to accept Twain's statement as to the infrequent abuses of slaves rather than those of persons or critics not actually on the scene at the time.

Slavery punishment, also, was not unknown in the Clemens household, for we are informed of an instance when Jane Clemens undertook to punish Jennie, who was often saucy and obstreperous, for her insolence. Jane was not successful as Jennie snatched the whip from her; therefore, John Clemens was summoned to inflict the punishment which resulted in his tying Jennie's wrists with a bridle rein and whipping her with a cowhide. This action made a deep imprint upon young Sam's mind even though he felt that slavery was "right." However, he understood from John Marshall Clemens that slavery was actually wrong. The Clemens slaves would have been given their freedom, but this would have caused a great loss of money. When prosperity was lagging, though, his rather found it necessary to sell his slaves. This may be considered heartless, but slavery was a sacred institution then and this was merely the custom.

Of his mother, Mark Twain said:

Kindhearted and compassionate as she was I think she was not conscious that slavery was a bald, grotesque and unwarranted

---

1Paine, op. cit., p. 15.
2Ibid., p. 17
3DeVoto, op. cit., p. 65.
usurpation. She had never heard it assailed in any pulpit but had heard it defended and sanctified in a thousand...as far as her experience went, the wise, the good, and the holy were unanimous in the belief that slavery was right, righteous, sacred, the peculiar set of the Deity, and a condition which the slave himself ought to be daily and nightly thankful for.¹

She, however, must have experienced doubts that troubled her and made her sympathetic with the slave's lot. After Jennie was sold, the Clemens family hired a little shore-boy who was always singing and making noise. Becoming exasperated with the noise, Sam asked his mother to make Sandy stop singing. Mrs. Clemens, with tears in her eyes, 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 he is thinking, and I cannot bear it. He will 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.²

This was a simple speech which left a lasting effect on Twain and probably further advanced his sympathetic understanding of the Negro. From his mother, Twain inherited his life-long habit of protecting the outcasts and the unfortunate.

Samuel Clemens was thus brought up in circumstances which early gave rise to a form of optimism which was probably native to many residents of that frontier. At the same time, however, these circumstances kept him, during his youth in the slack society which was to serve as the background for most of his best writings, and they deprived him of the regular schooling which might have had important or unfortunate effects upon his mind and style.³

Forced to leave school at the age of twelve after the death of his father, Twain became the apprentice of a printer. Printing led him to

¹Clemens, Autobiography, p. 123.
²Ibid., p. 102.
reading and reading to writing, first for his brother's newspaper and then for papers elsewhere. In 1856, he planned to make a trip to South America, but on the way to New Orleans, he got himself apprenticed to a river pilot and there began his "life on the Mississippi." With the outbreak of the Civil War, he sought to find another occupation; so he joined the army, which he deserted soon afterwards. He then went West and began writing humorous tall tales under the influence of Artemus Ward. Later, sailing on an excursion to the Holy Land, he recorded his famous *Innocents Abroad* (1869). This work brought him fame; and upon his return to the United States, he was married to Olivia Langdon in New York.

Twain now settled down in a civilized society which changed the tone of his works. This society wanted to hear about the Old South which was then a favorite subject of writers. Twain had a wide knowledge of this subject as a result of his childhood environment so he could write brilliantly and realistically of it; he knew frontier life in the raw and was well acquainted with its many primitive characters. As a result of the pressure exerted on him by this civilized society, Twain began to write of the Old South and its institutions as he had known them.

 Certain literary influences also are paramount in attempting to ascertain something of the development of Mark Twain's interest in the Negro as a fictional character. Foremost among possible influences is the movement in literature toward realism and local color. In the period from the beginning of the Civil War to the last decade of the century, New England gradually lost its virtual monopoly of America's literary output. About 1870 and later, however, both the South and the West began to come into prominence.

---


and to take a larger and larger part in creating a national literature. The literature of this period was prevailingly realistic. Realistic literature pictures what is true to life, the here and the now. It describes the usual everyday happenings and the ordinary everyday people of common everyday life. It merely paints men and women and things as they really are. There is no glamor, no glitter in realism, but only the truth, even if it is disagreeable. Consequently, from various parts of the country the voice of the common people was heard, first in folk literature and then in the stories of outstanding primitive humorists like Artemus Ward and Mark Twain.

But the greatest opportunity for the various sections of the country to assert their literary independence came from the sudden interest in local color. Readers became conscious of regional differences; Eggleston and Riley showed the simple rusticity of the Middle West, Bret Harte and Joaquin Miller showed the rough romance of the Far West, and Harris and Cable depicted the old glamor of the deep South. Twain's material became the characteristic frontier life of Hannibal. It is typical of the newspaper humor of the South and the Southwest that was the first vigorous realism in American literature. Twain's newspaper literature was redolent of the frontier, for it was born of frontier leisure and frontier realities. It had a humor derived from an instinctive realism and placed overwhelming interest upon folk themselves. No aspect of frontier society is missing from this literature. Twain was probably not aware that he was bringing to literature a theme it had refused to use. Apart from him, the institution of slavery had little significance in the fiction of his century. The South had no realist before Mark Twain, except the humorists who generally ignored

---

Before the Civil War and during Reconstruction days, however, the plantation tradition had penetrated American fiction. This tradition presented the ante-bellum South in rich pageantry; it offered the spectacle of the irresponsible lordly class of whites and their scale of life, as well as the spectacle of the lower class, cheerful in acceptance of a humble lot, unambitious, ignorant, superstitious, and fantastically funny. Through the person of the genuine "darkey," though, the plantation furnishes one of the most conspicuous figures of the tradition; "the folk figure of a simple, somewhat rustic character, instinctively humorous, irrationally credulous, gifted in song and dance, interesting in spontaneous frolic, endowed with artless philosophy."  

This plantation concept made its first important appearance in American literature with the work of John Pendleton Kennedy (Swallow Barn, 1832) and William Alexander Carruthers (The Cavaliers of Virginia, 1834). Before this time, there was already in the country a wide-spread, though dim conception, if not of the plantation in full detail, at least of certain distinctive modes of life. This literary tradition, however, became increasingly distinct as successive writers illuminated and romanticized its various phases. This tendency was notable in James Paulding's Westward Ho!, William Gilmore Simms' The Yamassee, and Ingraham's The Southwest.  According to Gaines, the greatest body of literature in this period was the work of the abolitionists who were actuated by motives other than the humorous portrayal of the plantation Negro. This was fiction which, in spite of much distortion, consisted of

1 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 292.
3 Ibid., p. 28.
4 Ibid.
the elements of more sympathetic literature, and was designed to awaken 
pity for the slave by contrasting the life of the planter with the slave’s 
existence. Most effective was The White Slave by Richard Hildreth. This 
propaganda literature persisted and served to reinforce the plantation tra-
dition upon literary consciences. For several years developments moved 
along on an established level, but during the period in which Mark Twain 
wrote (1870-1905) there appeared a new appreciation for the old plantation 
tradition, exclusively for the value of the material. This shift to senti-
mentality in the attitude toward Southern life and its typical institution 
was one manifestation of the widespread hunt for local color in distinctive 
phases of national life as seen in the works of such writers as Cable, Har-
riss, and Page. Mark Twain, though not a plantation writer yet reflects 
elements of the old regime. He introduced in several connections what were 
accepted as plantation features. Especially are these tendencies noted in 
The Gilded Age, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and Pudd’nhead Wilson, where 
he treats great planters and exhibits some of the common plantation material 
(which to him, is factual representation) varying from Negro characters to 
duels. His other works which are treated in this study usually deal with 
or treat the plantation type Negro either as a major or minor character. 
No one can read these works, however, without becoming aware that the 
slave-holding community which is set down with such creative gusto and re-
ality is, nevertheless, condemned.

During Twain’s early manhood, it was a common belief that slavery in-
fallibly affected those who lived in its midst by making them hard-hearted. 
Twain believed that, generally, "it stupefied everybody’s humanity, as re-
garded the slave, but stopped there."\(^1\) It is significant to note that

\(^1\) Clemens, Autobiography, p. 123.
this was not the effect wrought upon Samuel Clemens. On the contrary 
the institution aroused the sympathetic sensibilities of one whose child-
hood was spent among the black slaves so that he regarded them as human 
beings. Thus, it is the opinion of the writer that certain of his works 
are subtly devoted to the Negro cause as he viewed it. In regards to the 
Negro, then, Mark Twain must be considered as the interpreter of his times 
and of his region, for he was a realist and a local colorist. Slavery as 
an institution and Negroes as sharers of the scene were organic in the 
community in which he lived and to which he returned as a source for his 
fictional but factual material. As a result of his close contact with the 
Negro slave in his youth and his awareness of the general attitude toward 
slavery, Twain's purpose in many of his works seems to be that of display-
ing the conditions of slavery, the most hopeless and tyrannical of human 
institutions. Especially is he interested in a realistic but satirical 
portrayal of the Negro as a character.
CHAPTER II

PORTRAYAL OF NEGRO CHARACTER IN WORKS

The first chapter of this study attempts to set forth significant environmental influences and their relationship to the development of Mark Twain's interest in the Negro as well as pertinent literary tendencies which motivated his portrayal of Negro character and life. Only those facts which were valuable in determining the author's development in relation to his interest in the Negro were utilized. Being aware of the stereotyped opinion and treatment of the Negro in American literature during the nineteenth century, we naturally become interested in noting to what extent Twain's characters are conventionally or realistically but satirically portrayed. In this chapter we shall attempt to formulate basic conclusions as to Twain's portrayal of the Negro character in his fiction.

For this study, the writer has classified Twain's Negro characters according to the positions allowed them in his fiction, that is, as principal or minor characters.

From a detailed study of Mark Twain's fiction we become aware of only three Negro characters who hold principal positions—Nigger Jim in Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer, and Tom Sawyer Abroad; and Roxy and Chambre de Valet in Pudd'nhead Wilson. It is the opinion of the writer, however, that Nigger Jim is Twain's greatest fictional character. This might be true of his portrayal of Jim because his characteristics and actions were based directly on a person known to him. A feasible point then from which to begin the study of Twain's portrayal of Negro characters is Nigger Jim.
Nigger Jim is introduced into fiction in Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) when Tom, who plays hookey from school, finally comes home to help "the small colored boy" saw wood for the next day. Tom, however, tells of his adventures while Jim does almost all of the work. Here and in the other minor incidents of this novel in which Jim figures, he is portrayed as the typical, eager-to-please, hard-working and loyal servant.

Another instance in which there is still a rather limited but better perspective of his character is the scene in which Tom attempts to get Jim to whitewash the fence for him. Jim, at first, is determined to obey his "missis" who has sent him for a bucket of water and says:

'Can't, Mars Tom. Ole missis, she told me I got to go an' git dis water an' not stop foolin' roun' wid anybody. She say she spec' Mars Tom gwine to ax me go 'long an' 'tend to my own business---she 'lowed she'd 'tend to de whitewashin'.'

However, Tom's offer of "a white alley" and a peep at his sore toe in exchange for the whitewashing job is so tempting that Jim begins to waver from his avowed purpose:

Jim was only human—this attraction was too much for him. He put down his pail, took the white alley, and bent over the toe with absorbing interest while the bandage was being unwound.

Only Aunt Polly's timely entrance prevents him from completing the bargain. This shows something of his guilelessness and gullability but no more so than is revealed of the white boys who actually whitewash the fence for Tom. Jim, with the universal curiosity of boys, is unable to pass over the returns offered by Tom. Thus, Twain introduces the youthful Jim to us as a faithful servant to his missis and an innocent but loyal comrade to Tom.

---

1 Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (New York, 1876), p. 3.
2 Ibid., p. 13.
3 Ibid.
In The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884) Twain "deepens the characterization of Jim, who, like Tom and Huck and the rest of that fine company, was drawn from life. "He is no longer the simple-minded mysterious guide in the ways of dead cats, doodlebugs and signs of Tom Sawyer," observes one critic. There are no direct references to Jim and the superstitious beliefs of Tom and Huck in Tom Sawyer; however, Tom and Huck do reveal that most of their beliefs come from the "niggers." Twain, in Huckleberry Finn "treats Jim in much the same manner as he treats his other characters with one exception and that is he makes him highly superstitious." Here he is more vividly portrayed and is more humanized than the Negro commonly found in American fiction during the nineteenth century. In this novel, Jim is pictured as an ambitious, rebellious person with very human ideas. He is able to think and reason for himself thus revealing his individualism. When he overhears Miss Watson making plans to sell him down South for eight hundred dollars, he runs away for "she awluz said she wouldn't sell me down to Orleans." 

'I tuck out en shin down de hill, en 'spec to steal a skift 'long de sho' som'ers 'bove de town, but dey wuz people a-stirring yit, so I hid in de ole tumbledown cooper shop on de bank to wait for everybody to go 'way. Well, I wuz dah all night. . . . I 'uz hungry, but I warn't afeard; bekase I knowed the ole missis en de widder wuz goin' to start to de camp-meet'n' right arter breakfas' en be gone all day, en dey knows I goes off wid de cattle 'bout daylight, so dey wouldn' 'spec to see me 'roun' de place, en so dey wouldn' miss me tell arter dark in de evenin'. De yuther servants wouldn' miss me, kase dey'd shin out and take holiday soon as de ole folks 'uz out 'n de way. 'Well when it come dark I tuck out up de river road, en went 'bout two mile er more to whah dey warn't no houses. I'd made up my mine 'bout what I's gwyne to do. You see, ef I kep' on tryin' to

2 Helen Emily Price, "Herman Melville's Attitude Toward the Darker Races" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of English, Atlanta University, 1939), p. 23.
get away afoot, de dogs 'ud: track me; ef I stole a skiff to cross over, dey'd miss dat skiff, you see, en dey'd know 'bout whah I'd lan' on de yuther side, en whah to pick up my track. So I says, a raff is what I's arter; it doan' make no track. 1

From this explanation to Huck of his manner of escape, we see that Jim, resentful over the prospect of being sold down the River, employs his courage and reason in the attempt. He runs away on the spur of the moment but succeeds in mapping out a successful plan by which to escape to Jackson's Island.

After reaching Jackson's Island Jim encounters Huckleberry Finn who has also run away from the village. Huck visits the village disguised as a girl and discovers that some of the men are planning to search the island for Jim, whom they believe has killed Huck. Huck and Jim then begin their immortal journey down the Mississippi. It was Jim's plan to reach Cairo and then

the first thing he would do when he got to a free state [was to go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived; and then they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an Ab'ltion-ist to go and steal them. 2

Here Twain presents a compact but effective picture of slavery and a man's hope for freedom for himself and for his family. Huck, concerning Jim's plan, says:

'It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free. It was according to the old saying, "Give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell." Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this nigger, which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children—children that belonged to a man I didn't know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm.' 3

---

1 Huckleberry Finn, pp. 60-61.
2 Ibid., p. 123.
3 Ibid.
Is it not pathetically ironic that a man should have to steal his own children from another man to whom they belong? Is this not one instance of Twain's portrayal of the tyranny of slavery as an institution?

Further examples of Jim's ability to reason and think things through are frequent throughout the novel. A typical example is that of a discussion between Huck and Jim concerning King Solomon in the Bible. Huck has been telling Jim about "kings and dukes and earls and such" and about harems. Huck observes that "Solomon had one; he had about a million wives." Jim says:

\[\text{Jim}^7\] 'Why, yes, dat's so; I-I'd done forgot it. A harem's a bo'd'n-house, I reck'n. Mos' likely dey has rackety times in de nussery. En I reck'n de wives quarrels considerable; en dat 'crease de racket. Yit dey say Sollermun de wise' man dat ever live'. I doan take no stock in dat. Bekase why: would a wise man want to live in de mids' er sich a blim-blammin' all de time? No--'deed he wouldn't. A wise man 'ud take en buil' a biler-factry en den he could shut down de biler-factry when he want to res'.'

\[\text{Huck}^7\] 'Well, but he was the wisest man, anyway; because the widow she told me so, her own self.'

\[\text{Jim}^7\] 'I doan' k'yer what de widder say, he warn't no wise man nuther. He had some er de dad-fetcheds' ways I ever see. Does you know 'bout dat chile dat he 'uz gwyn to chop in two?' 'Well, den! Warn't dat de beatenes' notion in de worl'? You jes' take en look at it a minute. Dah's de stump, dah--dat's one er de women; heah's you--dat's de yuther one; I's Sollermun; en dish yer dollar bill's de chile. Bofe un you claims it. What does I do? Does I shin aroun' mongs' de neighbors en fine out which un you de bill do b'long to, en han' it over to de right one, all safe en soun', de way dat anybody dat had any gumption would? No; I take en whack de bill in two, en give half un it to you, en de yuther half to de yuther woman. Dat's de way Sollermun was gwyn to do wid de chile. Now I want to ast you; what's de use er dat half a bill?--can't buy noth'n wid it. En what use is a half a chile? I wouldn' give a dern for a million un um.'

\[\text{Huck}^7\] 'But hang it, Jim, you've clean missed the point--blame it, you've missed it a thousand mile.'

\[\text{Ibid.}, \text{ p. 107.}^{1}\]

\[\text{Ibid.}^{2}\]
Huck is unable to convince Jim that his conclusion is wrong because he has missed the point. Jim stands firm to his argument refusing to be swayed by Huck's admonitions thus revealing the fact that he is quite the individualist. Twain does not portray him as the abject, happy-go-lucky type of slave, who simply accepts whatever befalls, but as a rebellious Negro slave with his own ideas. From the above passage we see something of the humorous characteristics with which Twain endowed his "Nigger Jim."

The popular conception of Negro humor included a broad comedy of dialogue, of conduct, of character. Religion, superstition, and music were frequently used to produce ludicrous effects, and the black character was usually a clown. Though portrayed as a humorous individual, Jim does not possess the primary characteristics of the conventional Negro comical character. Twain incorporates broad comedy of dialogue in revealing the character of Jim, but he does not attempt to assign him the part of a clown.

His humorousness is pictured in much the same innocent and unconcerned way as Huck's and Tom's. Sterling Brown states that Jim "is at his comic best in detailing his experience with high finance." Here, he tells Huck that he was once rich—he once had fourteen dollars but he began speculating and "got busted out." He first bought a cow for ten dollars, but the cow died on his hands; however, he sold the "taller" for a dollar and ten cents so had five dollars and ten cents left which he put in a bank that belonged to "Misto Bradish's Nigger." The bank was supposed to pay him thirty-five dollars at the end of the year. He decided to invest this so as to keep things

1 Ibid., pp. 107-09.
2 Gaines, op. cit., p. 198.
3 Brown, op. cit., p. 68.
4 Huckleberry Finn, p. 64.
moving. From "a nigger name' Bob," he bought a wood-flat and told him to take the thirty-five dollars when the end of the year came. That same night somebody stole the wood-flat and the next day the bank busted; therefore, he had only ten cents left.

Huck asks:

'What did you do with the ten cents, Jim?'

Jim 'Well, I 'uz gwyne to spen' it, but I had a dream, en de dream tole me to give it to a nigger name' Balum--Balum's Ass dey call him for short; he's one er dem chuckleheads, you know. But he's lucky, dey say, en I see I warn't lucky. De dream say let Balum inves' de ten cents en he'd make a raise for me. Well, Balum he tuck de money, en when he wuz in church he hear de preacher say dat whoever give to de po' len' to de Lord, en boun'to git his money back a hund'd times. So Balum he tuck en give de ten cents to de po', en laid low to see what wuz gwyne to come of it. '

Huck 'Well, what did come of it, Jim?'

Jim 'Nuffin never come of it. I couldn't manage to k'leck dat money no way; en Balum he couldn'. I ain' gwyne to len' no mo' money 'dout I see de security. Boun' to git yo' money back a hund'd times, de preacher says! Ef I could git de ten cents back, I'd call it squah, en be glad er de chanst.'

This is typical of Twain's portrayal of Jim as a comical character—not consciously clownish but genially humorous. In his observations on what the preacher said we see a type of sardonic humor which, in a sense, is quite characteristic of Twain's religious satire prevalent in his works.

As was previously stated, Jim is highly superstitious and religious like the average Negro slave of Mark Twain's day. According to DeVoto

The slave's world was dominated by the terror of death. No sunlit landscape lacked its oppression of unseen malevolence. The air vibrated with the will of ghosts and witches to do evil to the luckless race of men. It was a world that stank of death and shuddered with its terror. The mind was spellbound, obsessed,
conditioned by the presence of corpses, their will to evil, and their power. Till a child could not venture beyond candlelight without dreading the touch of clammy hands.¹

So children grew up in terror; thus, Jim's belief in the superstitious. He was an expert in manipulating these phenomena. DeVoto observes:

Witches rode Jim one night but mostly his skill outwitted them. He owned a hair ball from the fourth stomach of an ox, in which a spirit lived and with which he could do magic. The hair ball could prophesy but when a hex was on it there were other means of divination. Birds and chickens, whose routine forecasts were the weather, beheld always the future's pattern. These had their lore, common enough to Jim, who was versed in all signs. Knowledge reached him from the Sussex downs, so that he knew you must tell the bees when their owner died; he had observed, too, that bees would not sting idiots. Dead men must not be talked about, lest they come back and haunt him. He knew the loathsome prescience of snakes and how to work homeopathy with their flesh. He 'druther see the new moon over his left shoulder as much as a thousand times than take up a snakeskin in his hands.' Competence at reading dreams also armed him against spirits, for dreams were a symbolic language, the key to which unlocked a man's past and future, dredged up dark secrets, and suggested a system of re-education that would change one's destiny. So he had a professional sympathy with the Duke of Bilgewater who could find water and gold with a divining rod and had travelled widely about America, dissipating witch spells.²

We see that Jim possessed his share of the Negro's superstitiousness and is in this manner similar to the conventional portrayals of Negro character in the nineteenth century.

Too, in _Tom Sawyer Abroad_ (1894) which is an account of the adventures of Tom, Huck, and Jim as they travel abroad in a balloon, the characterization of Jim is much the same as it is in _Huckleberry Finn_ except that it is probably more profound in _Huckleberry Finn_. In _Tom Sawyer Abroad_, however, Jim is now a free Negro so we see no more of the search for freedom, but merely a realistic example of a devoted friend and comrade

¹DeVoto, op. cit., p. 76.
²Ibid.
to the two boys. He is still his old argumentative self, though.

Thus, we see that in these three works, *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, one of Twain's leading characters is *Nigger Jim*, who, according to Sterling Brown,

...is the best example in nineteenth century fiction of the average Negro slave (not the tragic mulatto or the noble savage), illiterate, superstitious, yet clinging to his hope for freedom, to his love for his own. He is human and completely believable whether arguing, sympathizing or repenting or forgiving.

Twain's portrayal of Jim is ironical in that he attempts to emphasize both his conventional and the realistic qualities—he is the typical honest and superstitious slave while, at the same time, he is a serious and ambitious person eager for better conditions. Here, Twain goes to the limit in refuting previous conceptions of the Negro while revealing Jim as a picture of the slave world—a sad world of melancholy charm and broken families. *Nigger Jim*, a heroic person, is the main object of *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* and with whatever sentiment rendered, remains except for Roxy and Uncle Dan'l the only Negro who truly lives, as a person apart from the folk tales of Harris, in the literature of the nineteenth century. 2

Sterling Brown remarks that Twain's last novel concerning Negroes, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), falls a great way from the great tenderness and truth of his portrait of the Negro in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*. 3

This, of course, is a debatable point. In this work (*Pudd'nhead Wilson*), the institution that had furnished a living background for his other books becomes the active center. 4 Twain here returns to the scenes of his boyhood

---

1 Brown, op. cit., p. 69.
2 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 292.
3 Brown, op. cit., p. 68.
4 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 293.
days and pictures the life of an antebellum Missouri town on the Mississippi River. The story becomes a farce, however, and the author fails to develop the promising potentialities of his mixed-blood characters although the delineations which he does give are significant, especially those of Roxy and her son, Valet de Chambre.

Twain sets this fantastic tale in the period of slavery in violent and ugly Dawson's Landing. Roxana, a slave, gives birth to a boy, Valet de Chambre, on the same day that her mistress becomes the mother of a son, Thomas a Becket Driscoll. Roxy is indistinguishable from white and the father of her son is a white aristocrat. In an effort to save her child from bondage Roxy exchanges the infants who are almost identical and it is not detected by Tom's father, his mother having died when he was born. This deception results in the boys growing up in reversed position—the white boy succumbs to the degrading influence of slavery and Roxy's son grows up as a dissolute and criminal aristocrat who tricks his own mother and sells her down the river. 2 The Roxana narrative furnishes a penetrating study of the influence of heredity and environment in determining the development of a person as well as a telling picture of the limitations of bondage and the circumscriptions of caste in the South. 3 More important is the intense and artistic presentation of the slave Roxana.

According to DeVoto, "Roxy is unique and formidable." 4 She is the beautiful light-skinned house servant of the Driscolls; she is one sixteenth Negro and claims that she is the great-great-great-granddaughter of

---

1 Penelope Bullock, "The Treatment of the Mulatto in American Fiction from 1826 to 1902" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of English, Atlanta University, 1944), p. 150.


3 Ibid.

4 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 293.
Captain John Smith of Virginia. She, however, has a "high and sassy way" and is by no means faultless—a petty thief and a liar, yet she is capable of sacrifice and deep maternal love. When her son is in need of money in order to pay his gambling debts, she offers herself to him to be sold into slavery to secure the necessary money.

'Ain't you my chile? En does you know anything dat a mother won't do for her chile? Dey ain't nothin' a white mother won't do for her chile. Who made 'em so? De Lord done it. En who made de niggers? De Lord made 'em. In de inside, mothers is all de same. De good Lord he made 'em so. I's gwyne to be sole into slavery, en in a year you's gwyne to buy yo' ole mam—my free ag'in. . . .

Here she is overjoyed at being able to do something for the son whom she loves. After escaping from "down de river," we see her lamenting and grieving in a conversation with her son who so cruelly deceived her:

'Sell a pusson down de river—down de river! for de bes'! I wouldn't treat a dog so! I is all broke down en wore out, now, en so I reckon it ain't in me to storm aroun' no mo', like I used to when I 'uz tromped on en 'bused. I don't know—but maybe it's so. Leastways, I's suffered so much dat mournin' seem to come mo' handy to me now den stormin'.

She is intelligent, proud, and courageous and is a first-rate sketch of a realistic Negro character. One critic observes:

In outline and in detail she is memorably true. She lives; her experiences and emotions are her own, and, being her own, are faithful to the history of thousands. With new instruments at its service and a generation of writers far distant from the reality, literature may make another essay of slavery—but is unlikely to go beyond the superstition, affection, malice, and loyalty of this woman. In her exist, as nowhere else, the experience, the thought, and the feelings of slaves. Even in melodrama she retains her verity. When she forces Valet de Chambre Essex to his knees, she is within reach of the preposterous, but the scene is as true, as inevitable as her thieving and tippling. It ends

1Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson (New York, 1894), p. 143.

2Ibid., p. 151.
with her declaration that "dey ain't another nigger in dis town
dat's as high-bawn as you is", and this is grandeur.¹

The scene in which she forces Valet to get on his knees to her is a
good example of her intelligence and forcibleness of character. She has
not seen her young "Marse Tom" for a number of years and pays him a visit
to tell him how well he looks now that he has grown up. He is exceedingly
nasty to her and becomes angry when she asks him for a dollar; he tells
her to go away and not to bother him anymore. Roxy says:

'You has said de word. You has had yo' chance, en you has
trompled it under yo' foot. When you git another one, you'll
git down on yo' knees en beg for it!' ²

Tom (Chambre) bluffs and makes an attempt at mockery but when she threatens
to tell all to his uncle he tries to bribe her by giving her the dollar.
Of course, she would not lower herself to such an act. Tom is of the opinion
that she knows of his gambling, when, in actuality, she is planning to
relate the true facts concerning his race. He implores her to tell him
what she knows but she loftily says:

Roxy* Look-a-heah, what 'uz it I tole you?*

Tom* You--you--I don't remember anything. What was it you told me?*

Roxy* I tole you dat de next time I give you a chance you'd git
down on yo' knees en beg for it.*

Tom* 'Oh, Roxy, you wouldn't require your young master to do such
a horrible thing. You can't mean it.'*

Roxy* I'll let you know mighty quick whether I means it or not!
You call me names, en as good as spit on me when I comes here po'
en ornery en 'umble, to praise you for bein' growed up so fine en
handsome, en tell you how I used to nuss you en tend you en
watch you when you 'uz sick en hadn't no mother but me in de
whole worl', en beg you to give de po' ole nigger a dollah for
to git her som'n' to eat, en you call me names--names, dad
blame you! Yassir, I gives you jes one chance no', and

¹DeVoto, op. cit., p. 293.
²Pudd'nhed Wilson, p. 64.
dat's now, en it last on'y a half a second—yo hear?'

Tom gets on his knees and says:

'You see, I'm begging, and it's honest begging, too! Now tell me, Roxy, tell me!'

'Fine nice young white gen'1 man kneelin' down to a nigger wench! It's wanted to see dat jes once befo' I's called. Now, Gab'r'el, blow de hawn, I's ready. . . . Git up!' 1

Thus Roxy triumphs.

Chambre, her son, is the direct opposite of his mother. Though Twain realistically portrays his character, he is not a likable individual but rather one to be pitied. He becomes a liar, a coward, a gambler, a thief, and finally, a murderer. 2 Although his character could be attributed to a rigid caste system that granted excessive power to petty people, the fact still remains that he is to be pitied. He is a person with little initiative and individuality: he simply accepts what comes along. Chambre is based upon the thesis that from the Negro blood come the baser emotional urges, indolence and savagery. 3 This is brought out in the following speech by Roxy:

'En you refuse' to fight a man dat kicked you 'stid o' jumpin' at de chance! En you ain't got no mo' feelin' den to come en tell me, dat fetched sich a po' low-down ornery rabbit into de worl'! Pahl! it makes me sick! It's de nigger in you, dat's what it is. Thirty-one parts o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, en dat po' little one part is yo' soul. 'Tain't wuth savin'; 'tain't wuth totin' out on a shovel en throwin' in de gutter.' 4

Here, Twain presents, chiefly, a sympathetic approach to the problem of mulattoes in American society. Like the conventional literature of his

1Ibid., pp. 65-66.

2Brown, op. cit., p. 68.


4Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 123.
day, he presents the hypothesis that white-Negro hybrids have acumen and attractiveness because of their white ancestry, that they deserve pity because they possess Caucasian blood, and that their bitterness, misery, defiance, and ambition are traceable to proud paternal forebears. Even though he presents these conventional ideas, he does so in a cynical and satirical manner, thus revealing his attitude toward the conception—the attitude of a rebel. Like the Negro fictionists of the years between 1890 and World War I, Twain was using the old line of championing racial justice by sympathetically describing the frustrations and sufferings of the Negro-white hybrid generally considered superior to blacks.

We have seen that in Twain's portrayals of principal Negro characters he has presented Jim as a loyal servant, who, not satisfied with his servitude, rebels when he learns that his mistress has failed to keep her promise; Roxy as a shrewd but human character with a pronounced mother-love; and Valet de Chambre as a weak and pining hypocrite. In each of these characterizations Twain presents a true-to-life account of a victim of the institution of slavery, and, in a subtle and satirical manner, champions the Negro cause.

Likewise, Twain presents equally as vivid representations of other Negro characters who do not hold prominent positions in his fiction and who have not lived as non-stereotypes in the minds of the reader as the above characters have. Foremost as an example of this type of character is Uncle Daniel as portrayed in Twain's The Gilded Age. The Gilded Age, according to Gaines, "concerns chiefly Beriah Sellers who, though a great planter only in his dreams, is a kind of burlesque on the Virginia planter who emigrated;  

old Daniel of this story is typical in many ways of the plantation darkey.\textsuperscript{1} Twain visualizes in Uncle Daniel the faithful house slave of the Southern estate with a loyalty that scorned a proffered freedom and a cheerful optimism. He, like his wife Jinny, is pictured as a defenseless and pious black.

Again, in \textit{The American Claimant}, an account of an American adventurer who has claim to the earldom of Rossmore and the adventures of the son of the Earl of Rossmore in America, Twain presents the typical devoted house slaves. Significantly, these servants bear the same names as those in \textit{The Gilded Age}, for they were drawn from real life.

\textit{In \textit{The American Claimant} we first view Uncle Daniel as "a white-headed negro man with spectacles and damaged white cotton gloves"\textsuperscript{2} announcing, in a most dignified manner, the arrival of a guest. We become more fully aware of the character of Uncle Daniel and of his wife Jinny through the dialogue of others, especially that of Mrs. Sellers. Mrs. Sellers reveals the fact that her husband had sold Uncle Daniel and Aunt Jinny south when they got bankrupted before the war, but the darkies came "wandering back after the peace, worn out and used up on the cotton plantations, helpless and not another lick of work left in their old hides."\textsuperscript{3} The Sellers family took them in although aware of the fact that the darkies would be of little service to them. Concerning them, Mrs. Sellers further states that

\begin{quote}
... sometimes you'll see one or both of them letting on to dust around in here—but that's because there's something they want to hear about and mix their gabble into. And they're always around at meals, for the same reason. But the fact is, we have to keep a young
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{1}Gaines, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 81.
\textsuperscript{2}\textit{The American Claimant}, p. 29.
\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 38.
\end{flushright}
negro girl just to take care of them, and a negro woman to do the housework and help take care of them. . . . They quarrel together pretty much all the time—most always about religion, because Dan'l's a Dunker Baptist and Jinny believes in special Prividenees and Dan'l don't, because he thinks he's a kind of a freethinker—and they play and sing plantation hymns together, and talk and chatter just eternally and forever, and are sincerely fond of each other and think the world of Mulberry. . . .

Here, Twain fails to develop individual characteristics for these persons but briefly sets them forth as type characters, that is, as typical plantation darkies.

In The Gilded Age we are confronted with a complete picture of the devoted slave, again in the person of Uncle Dan'l. In this work, Uncle Dan'l stands guard over the Hawkins children and is so devoted to them that when the Lord of vengeance comes in a chariot of fire, he offers himself in their place. Uncle Dan'l, frightened out of his wits by the steamboat as it belches out fire and smoke, begins to pray and to reason with the Almighty:

'O Lord, we's ben mighty wicked, an' we knows dat we 'zerve to go to de bad place, but good Lord, deah Lord, we ain't ready yit, we ain't ready--let dese po' chil'en hab one mo' chance, jes' one mo' chance. . . . Good Lord, good deah Lord. . . . dese chil'en don't b'long heah, dey's f'm Obedstown whah dey don't know nuffin, an' you knows, yo' own sef, dat dey ain't ' sponsible."

DeVoto observes that "his life was consecrated to the children and so too was his religion." Twain, who was deeply aware of the closeness of the Negro to his God, expresses this theme repeatedly.

Another typical example of Twain's realistic portrayal of the Negro slave is found in one of his short stories entitled "A True Story Repeated Word for Word as I heard It." In the person of Aunt Rachel, a colored

---

1 Ibid., p. 39.
2 The Gilded Age, p. 37.
3 DeVoto, op. cit., p. 88.
servant of about sixty years of age who is not so renowned as others of his Negro characters, Twain sets forth a most perfect sketch. This is simply the story of an old black cook who tells of how her children were all sold away from her and how after twenty years she found her youngest boy again. Aunt Rachel is always laughing and seemingly happy but when asked how she has lived sixty years without having any trouble, she is astonished and relates the sad details of her life of bondage.

"Has I any trouble? Misto C--, I's gwyne to tell you, den I leave it to you. I was bawn down mongst de slaves; I knows all 'bout slavery, 'case I ben one of 'em my own se'f. Well, sah, my ole man--dat's my husban'--he was lovin' an' kind to me, just as kind as you is to yo' own wife. An' we had chill'en--seven chill'en--an' we loved dem chill'en just de same as you loves yo' chill'en. Dey was black, but de Lord can't make no chill'en so black but what dey mother loves 'em an' wouldn't give 'em up, no, not for anything dat's in dis whole world."

Love for one's own flesh and blood, then, is a universal emotion, but the slave owners fail to recognize this fact and, according to Aunt Rachel

"Dey put chains on us an' put us on a stan' as high as dis po'ch--twenty foot high--an' all de people stood aroun', crowds an' crowds. An' dey'd come up dah an' look at us all roum', an' squeeze our arm, an' make us git up an' walk, an' den say, 'Dis one too ole,' or 'Dis one lame,' or 'Dis one don't 'mount to much.' An' dey sole my ole man en took him away, an' dey begin to sell my chill'en an' take dem away an' I begin to cry; an' de man say, 'Shet up yo' dam blubberin', an' hit me on de mouf wid his han'; . . . ."

Here, Twain presents a study of a most pathetic though stout-hearted individual who has survived the hardships of slavery, the misery of separation from her children and yet has the ability to laugh. Howells observes that this story is

1Mark Twain, "A True Story Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It," Sketches New and Old (New York, 1875), p. 266.
2Ibid., p. 267.
... a study of character as true as life itself, strong, tender and most movingly pathetic in its perfect fidelity to the tragic fact. ... The rugged truth of the sketch leaves all other stories of slave life infinitely far behind, and reveals a gift in the author for the simple, dramatic report of reality which we have seen equalled in no other American writer.

Similar to "A True Story" is "General Washington's Negro Body-Servant" which is another of Twain's character sketches. This work is not as revealing in terms of character traits as the first sketch treated, for Twain over-emphasizes the Washington myth here. It is a simple biographical sketch of the servant stressing the indifferent attitude of the servant toward his master, especially. The author satirizes the newspapers which continue to report the death of the servant and to add to his virtues years after his actual death.

Twain's first treatment of the Negro as found in _The Gilded Age_ is largely traditional as compared to his presentation of the Negro in "A True Story" which is a realistic and pathetically moving picture of a "bitter memory of cruelty and separation." The practice of writers in the Southern tradition was to glorify slavery, to ignore its horrors, and to depict it as a blessing for the Negro and a burden on the white man. Twain veers sharply from this tradition, for in this short story, we view its horrors in grim reality. The servant in "General Washington's Negro Body-Servant" is also realistically portrayed but is not so striking as Aunt Rachel, or even as the type characters, Uncle Dan'l and Aunt Jinny.

In his presentation of major and minor Negro characters, whether realistic or traditional, Twain, without being directly outspoken, reveals his

---

2 Brown, _op. cit._, p. 67.
attitude toward the injustices of racial discrimination. He reveals a consideration and even tenderness for the Negro race and makes an effort to repair the wrong done by his nation by presenting truly realistic pictures of the plight of the Negro. Type characters such as Uncle Dan'l and Aunt Jinny are given stable individual qualities which set them apart from the traditional plantation formula. Wholly individualistic characters like Aunt Rachel and Jim afford Twain an opportunity to exalt the Negro race. In all of these characterizations, Twain undertook the authentic recording of Negro life always with an undercurrent motif of satire.

In all of Twain's works where the Negro is noticeably treated, we find certain characteristics of Negro life stressed, especially those of the Negro on the plantation and the newly freed Negro.

Not far removed from the main current of plantation fiction is *Pudd'nhead Wilson* with many reflections of slave life, particularly the cruelty of some masters, the flight of fugitives, and the tragedy of tainted blood. Here is a true picture of the life of the typical plantation slave—the hardships, the struggle for survival, the deceitfulness, as well as the few pleasant moments which the slave enjoys. *The Gilded Age* and *The American Claimant* present typical house slaves on the plantation, whereas Twain sets forth individualistic traits of seemingly contented slaves in "A True Story" and "General Washington's Negro Body-Servant." As was previously stated, *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* exhibit some of the common plantation material varying from Negro characters to duels. Contrary to the typical approach, however, is the emphasis placed on the Negro slave's search for freedom as seen in *Huckleberry Finn."

---

1Gaines, op. cit., p. 81.
In other works in which the author does not place emphasis on Negro characters or even present individual Negro characters, we also note his stressing of certain elements of life as related to the Negro. For example, in *Life on the Mississippi, Following the Equator* and *Roughing It*, Twain places emphasis on river life and travels and affords the Negro, if not a significant position, at least some part of this life. In *Life on the Mississippi*, Twain states that

Mississippi steamboaters were important in landmen’s eyes according to the dignity of the boat they were on. It was a proud thing to be of the crew of such stately craft as the *Aleck Scott* or the *Grand Turk*. Negro firemen, deck-hands, and barbers belonging to those boats were distinguished personages in their grade of life, and they were well aware of that fact, too.

Here, too, he also gives a moving and realistic picture of the Negro’s position immediately after being freed.

Complaint is made that the planter remains grouty toward the former slave, since the war, will have nothing but a chill business relation with him, no sentiment permitted to intrude; will not keep a ‘store’ himself, and supply the negro a poocke and make him able and willing to stay on the place and an advantage to him to do it, but lets that privilege to some thrifty Israelite, who encourages the thoughtless negro and wife to buy all sorts of things which they could do without—buy on credit, at big prices, month after month, credit based on the negro’s share belongs to the Israelite, the negro is in debt besides, is discouraged, dissatisfied, restless, and both he and the planter are injured; for he will take the steamboat and migrate.

As has been aptly noted by one critic, Twain "was a philosopher who could satirize most tellingly the foibles of his age, his country, and his native valley." As the representative writer of a large and thoroughly typical section of the country, he could individualize and immortalize such

---

2 Ibid., pp. 290-91.
3 H. Houston Peckham, "The Literary Status of Mark Twain, 1877-1890," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, XIX (October, 1920), 337-38.
familiar southwestern types as Nigger Jim, Huck, and Roxy. All the wrongs against the Negro are condemned through the mere fact of their presentation and Twain, forever battling "the damned human race," was going at human nature though attacking it indirectly.

\[1\text{Ibid., p. 337.}\]
CHAPTER III

RACE RELATIONS

In Chapters I and II respectively of this study, we have treated those environmental and literary influences which caused Twain to treat Negro character and life as such an integral part of his works, and we have attempted an analysis of his fiction with respect to his presentation of Negro life and character. In any treatment of the Negro, race relations become a significant factor for a deeper understanding; therefore, in this chapter, we shall note to what extent race relations play an important part in Twain's treatment of the Negro.

Twain, though not a plantation writer, does reflect, in his own way, elements of the old regime as noted especially in the relationship between the races as found in his works. In these works the Negro is pictured as true-to-life and is often traditionally presented. So, too, will we find the relationship between the races, that is, based upon the literary plantation tradition or upon conditions as they actually existed on the plantation. According to Gaines,

The pattern of such novels as employ the plantation is constant; a joyous life for both races, the gaiety of the whites being, however, subordinated to a stern sense of responsibility for the welfare of the blacks; Southern character glorified with ethical and cultural perfection; tender feelings of both sides of the race relations with special emphasis on the happiness of the slaves. This was the chief message, that the slaves were gloriously happy.¹

This then was the literary pattern followed, but Gaines observes further

¹Gaines, op. cit., p. 47.
that
the popular conception of race relations as always happy. For a season the onslaught of abolitionism provoked an outcry but it was hushed in the period of glorification beginning about 1880. From that time on public imagination has recognized that on the whole, the white was benign, the black happy in the peculiar status of plantation society.1

Gaines indicates that the one fundamental quality of race relations which was overlooked by the relations in the tradition was naturalness—the absence of any definite interracial mood.2 This naturalness was the race relations of fact and was found nowhere in the tradition. It was based on "a natural division between responsibility and labor, a natural joint participation in many of the activities of life, but there was no racial, or inter-racial, consciousness."3

It is the writer's opinion that although Mark Twain was aware of the race relations of the tradition, his purpose was to present the actual facts of race relationship under the plantation regime just as he presented realistic characterizations. He attempted to depict with vivid realism the life of his day and section so pictures race relations as they actually existed—the attitude of the Negro toward whites and the attitude of whites toward the Negro as interrelated—but with an eye to the moralistic effect.

Foremost among the themes of race relations of the tradition is slave loyalty which is almost inseparable from slave contentment. An expression of this feeling of slave loyalty is graphically exemplified in Huckleberry Finn where a Negro ventures capture in behalf of a white. Huck and Tom help Jim to escape from the Phelps' farm but only at the last moment and

1Ibid., p. 17.
2Ibid., p. 211.
3Ibid.
with a posse on their heels. Tom is shot in the calf of his leg, and Jim refuses to leave until Tom gets medical attention. Jim says,

'. . . Ef it wuz him dat 'uz bein' sot free, in one er de boys wuz to git shot, would he say, 'Go on en save me, nemine 'bout a doctor f'r to save dis one'? Is dat like Mars Tom Sawyer? Would he say dat? You bet he wouldn't! Well, den, is Jim gwyne to say it? No, sah--I doan' budge a step out'n dis place 'dout a doctor; not if it's forty year!'

This example of Jim's loyalty is quite different from the traditional slave contentment, for, of course, we know that Jim is far from being content in that he is, at this moment, seeking his freedom. An adequate expression of Jim's qualities as revealed here is that of Edgar M. Branch when he observes that "Jim, of course, is foremost in selflessness and magnanimity." Jim is quite fond of Tom and Huck and respects greatly "Mars Tom's" ideas.

On occasions, we find that Jim thought of Huckleberry as one of the best boys of all, for when Huck was carrying Jim to Cairo so that he would be free as he desired, Jim begins to shout:

'Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n' for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldn't ever ben free ef it hadn' ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de only fren' ole Jim's got now.'

'Dah you goes, de ole trug Huck; de on'y white genlman dat ever kep' his promise to ole Jim.'

Thus, we see that Jim regarded Huck as his true friend and a very clever one at that. One occasion when some white men were approaching the raft where Jim was hiding, Huck made false pretenses in order to keep them away and Jim knew that Huck's clever thinking had saved his life. He says:

---

1 Huckleberry Finn, p. 381.
3 Huckleberry Finn, p. 124.
'I was a-listenin' to all de talk, en I slips into de river en was gwyne to shove for sho' if dey come aboard. Den I was gwyne to swim to de raf' agin when dey was gone. But lawsy, how you did fool 'em Huck! Dat wuz de smartes' dodge! I tell you, chile, I 'spec' it save' ole Jim—ole Jim ain't going to forgit you for dat, honey.'

Jim is able to express his gratitude to Huck only by his deeds of kindness which he readily lavishes upon Huck whenever possible. For example, when they were hiding on the raft, they took turns at the watch; but Jim often stood Huck's watch in order that Huck might sleep. Huck observes that "he was always mighty good that way, Jim was."  

Here, we note, too, Huck's attitude toward Jim which, in the main, is that of one friend to another. However, when Huck had known Jim on the plantation, he looked upon him and the other slaves in much the same way as the average white person in the south. He thought of Jim as "most ruined" for a servant because he got stuck up after having seen the devil and having been ridden by witches. Huck's attitude toward the Negro in _Tom Sawyer_, the earlier sequel to _Huckleberry Finn_ is, for the most part, conventional. In this work he apologizes to Tom for eating with a Negro although he notes that Uncle Jake who gives him food is "a mighty good nigger." 3 Nevertheless, he is ashamed of actually sitting down and eating with Uncle Jake so explains by saying that "a body's got to do things when he's awful hungry he wouldn't want to do as a steady thing." 4

Thus, Twain satirizes the members of his race who could use the Negro in much the same manner as they would use an animal—for their own benefit;
those who could fake the "equal relations" attitude, while, at the same time, they were thoroughly ashamed of any contact with the "inferior race." Typically exemplified here is one of the attitudes of the whites toward the Negro at that time. One can readily see that the immature individual reading this portion of Tom Sawyer might become indignant; but the mature mind, of course, must take into consideration the over-all aims and purposes of the author gleaned from a study of the man and of his works. Tom Sawyer may be thought of as a satire against the moralizing Sunday school tales which aimed to instill into the minds of the youngsters the differences between "the good little boy" and "the bad little boy." Subtly, then, Twain reveals the hypocritical nature of the lessons in that Huck is being kind to Uncle Jake under false pretenses.

In Tom Sawyer, too, Huck sets forth his knowledge of the psychological make-up of the Negro, for he notes that Uncle Jake likes him "becuz I don't ever act as if I was above him."¹

Later, in Huckleberry Finn during Huck's episodes up and down the Mississippi, he becomes more mature—his ideas toward life and man change and prove unconventional. Huck, according to Bellamy, is a developing character and much of this development is due to his association with Jim and his increasing respect for the black man.² During Huck's travels with Jim, he begins to think of Jim as more than just a slave, but as an individual—a human with feelings and emotions. He first begins to respect Jim for his knowledge of all kinds of signs and omens. As Huck becomes better acquainted with Jim he finds that Jim possesses many universal qualities. He is

¹Ibid.
²Gladys Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist (Norman, Oklahoma, 1950), p. 342.
astonished upon his discovery of the fact that Jim can love with the same intense emotions as whites. On one occasion he found Jim

'. . . sitting. . . with his head down betwixt his knees, moaning and mourning to himself. I didn't take notice nor let on. I knew what it was about. 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 often moaning and mourning that way nights, when he judged I was asleep, and saying, "Po little 'Lizabeth!" po' little Johnny! it's mighty hard; I spec' I ain't ever gwyne to see you no mo', no mo'!" He was a mighty good nigger, Jim was."

Throughout the novel, we find remarks made by Huck attesting to the fact that Jim was a "good nigger." At one time Huck plays a trick on Jim and Jim gives him such a speech that Huck says,

'It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back.

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 afterward, 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.'

Bellamy states that "a part of Huck's development came when he apologized to Jim for fooling him about a dream. Jim very properly resented Huck's deceit, and Huck was abashed before Jim's stately indignation." Huck is becoming more fully aware of Jim as a human.

When Huck's conscience begins to bother him about helping Jim escape, for he knows he is breaking the law, he almost decides to turn Jim in but, by now, he has learned to look upon Jim as a person. He begins thinking about his relationship with Jim and the trip down the river:

... I see Jim before me all the time; in the day and in the

---

1 Huckleberry Finn, p. 215.
2 Ibid., p. 120.
3 Bellamy, op. cit., p. 343.
night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. 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 do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now. ...  

Huck is faced with a dilemma when he tries to choose between right and wrong—between self-centered, conventional morality, and unselfish intuitive morality. His innate kindness triumphs, however, as he decides to save Jim and take his punishment: "All right, then, I'll go to hell. . . ."  

Huck's respect for Jim continues to grow and is perhaps at its apex when Jim risks his long wanted freedom to aid Tom. He pays Jim high tribute when he remarks: "I knowed he was white inside." The relationship between Huck and Jim was then based upon trustworthy friendship. As one critic has put it, "Huckleberry Finn's greatest virtue was his humanity."  

In Huckleberry Finn, the attitude of Jim toward other white characters and the attitudes of other white characters toward Jim are significant, but it is in the relationship between Huck and Jim that Twain clearly evinces his social beliefs. Briefly, however, concerning Jim's attitude toward other whites, we note his pity for the Duke who has encountered numerous misfortunes and his disdain for the awful smell of the King. Jim has a great deal of respect for his owner Miss Watson until she proposes to sell

1 Huckleberry Finn, pp. 296-97.
2 Ibid., p. 297.
3 Ibid., p. 381.
4 Ruby J. Gainer, "Realism in the Novels of Mark Twain" (Unpublished Master's thesis, Department of English, Atlanta University, 1952), p. 51.
him. In *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, he maintains his respect for Tom's opinions on some subjects but challenges him at times. The other whites in these two works hold the attitudes of superiors toward inferiors, or masters over slaves, in their relations with Jim. Especially is this true of the King, the Duke, Miss Watson, and the Phelps family. Even Tom does not think of Jim in the same humanistic fashion as does Huck. He does not violate any moral code or legal law in attempting to set Jim free, for he is aware of the fact that Jim is actually a free Negro at the time. Adventures, to him, were of prime importance.

Sterling Brown holds that in *Huckleberry Finn*, "the callousness of the South to the Negro is indicated briefly without preaching, but impellingly."

This is shown throughout the work but especially in the passage where Huck tells Aunt Sally about the steamboat accident:

\[\text{Aunt Sally} \quad \text{Good gracious! anybody hurt?}\]
\[\text{Huck} \quad \text{No'm. Killed a nigger.}\]
\[\text{Aunt Sally} \quad \text{Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt.}\]

As to the attitude of other Negro characters toward whites in Twain's works, we find no such realistic and individualistic expressions as those revealed through Jim. In *The Gilded Age* and *The American Claimant* Uncle Dan'l and Aunt Jinny look upon their masters as superiors and are completely satisfied with their condition of servitude. Their attitude toward whites is completely conventional. Too, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Tom who supposedly is a Negro slave, reveals this attitude of bland acceptance of his fate. Valet de Chambre, after discovering his true identity, at first finds it hard to associate with whites on the basis of equality as he had previously.

---

He feels that now he is an inferior and wonders:

'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.'

He looks upon the Negro's enslavement as wrong and is opposed to it.

Roxy, like Valet de Chambre, is a distinct personality, although she does typify the devoted mammy to the young hero. Unlike the traditional slave, she felt no deep affection for her master, nor do we find any indication of a respectful devotion. She simply accepts her status as a slave as inevitable and makes the best of the situation. It is true, however, that Roxy believed the white man was superior. This is clearly shown when she changes the infants in the cradle and attempts to justify her deed by noting that white folks had done it; therefore, it couldn't be wrong.

'Dah now--... it ain't no sin, 'ca'se white folks done it. Dey done it--yes, dey done it; en not on'y jes' common white folks muther, but de biggest quality dey is in de whole 'bilin.'

The master's attitude toward and treatment of the slave as revealed in Pudd'Nhead Wilson conforms to the actual facts of race relationship on the plantation. According to Gaines, "the opinion of post-bellum scholars who have gone with care and conscience into the ramifications of the subject tends more and more to give a favorable interpretation to the master's conduct." Generally, the treatment of slaves by their masters was kind and humane. Phillips, in his American Negro Slavery, notes that "there was clearly no general prevalence of severity and strain in the regime."
Naturally, there were some cruel masters, but Gaines observes that

... the great majority followed the code prescribed by custom and public opinion and this code, though an imperfect one and a sadly flexible one, represented a crude approximation of the attitude of the best Southern spirits. In the large, the negro who did his share of the work received a modest sufficiency of life's necessities and was not often subjected to any form of physical torture, either of punishment or of overwork.

Fundamentally... the relation was one of naturalness.  

Driscoll, the master in Pudd'nhead Wilson, was, as the narrator notes, "a fairly humane man toward slaves and other animals." Here, we witness Twain's subtle indictment of slavery which places a man on the same level as any common animal. Driscoll reveals his humaneness when punishing his slaves by promising to sell them down the river. Then, gloating over his kindness and what he calls "a noble and gracious thing," he goes to "set the incident down in his diary, so that his son might read it in after years, and be thereby moved to deeds of gentleness and humanity himself."  

This is indeed satirical, for Driscoll's deed is not nearly so magnanimous as he supposes. The slaves, though spared the punishment of being sold down the river are, nevertheless, up-rooted from what has been home to them without any thoughts of their feelings. Though not overly cruel, we do find that Driscoll has beat Valet on several occasions for turning a hand against his young master. Throughout the work, however, Driscoll maintains a strictly impersonal attitude toward his slaves, even toward Roxy who rears his child.

Another aspect of race relations, the theme of unchastity which was prominent in the tradition as well as on the actual plantation, is present in Pudd'nhead Wilson. The author, however, concentrates upon the agony of

1Gaines, op. cit., pp. 231-34.

2Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 17.
characters whose blood is mixed and minimizes bestial lust. Thus, Twain again reveals himself as a champion of the Negro.

In The Gilded Age we note another aspect of race relations—the feeling of responsibility for the Negro as exhibited by whites. One critic notes that in this work, Mark Twain devoted several chapters to the inside workings of Congress concerning the bill which was to purchase the Tennessee land from the Hawkins family. The university to be established upon it was to be open to the Negro race; for the hypocritical Senator Dilworthy claimed from a principle of conduct he would never push a private interest if it were not justified and ennobled by some larger public good.

The senator's hypocritical interest in the condition of the Negro is revealed in the following conversation with Colonel Sellers:

\[
\text{Senator Dilworthy:} \quad \text{'Providence,' he said, 'has placed them in our hands, and although you and I, General, might have chosen different destiny for them, under the Constitution, yet Providence knows best.'}
\]

\[
\text{Colonel Sellers:} \quad \text{'You can't do much with 'em,' interrupted Col. Sellers. They are a speculating race, sir, disinclined to work for white folks without security, planning how to live by only working for themselves. Idle, sir, there's my garden, just a ruin of weeds. Nothing practical in 'em.'}
\]

\[
\text{Senator Dilworthy:} \quad \text{'There is some truth in your observation Colonel, but you must educate them.'}
\]

\[
\text{Colonel Sellers:} \quad \text{'You educate the niggro and you make him more speculating than he was before. If he won't stick to any industry except for himself now, what will he do then?'}
\]

\[
\text{Senator Dilworthy:} \quad \text{'But, Colonel, the negro when educated will be more able to make his speculations fruitful.'}
\]

\[
\text{Colonel Sellers:} \quad \text{'Never, sir, never. He would only have a wider scope to injure himself. A niggro has no grasp, sir. Now, a white man can conceive great operations and carry them out; a niggro can't.'}
\]

\[
\text{Senator Dilworthy:} \quad \text{'Still,' replied the Senator, 'granting that he might injure himself in a worldly point of view, his elevation}
\]

\[^1\text{Gaines, op. cit., p. 222.}\]

\[^2\text{Bellamy, op. cit., p. 294.}\]
through education would multiply his chances for the hereafter—which is the important thing after all, Colonel. And no matter what the result is, we must fulfill our duty by this being.'

Colonel Sellers,'I'd elevate his soul,' promptly responded the Colonel; 'that's just it; you can't make his soul too immortal, but I wouldn't touch him, himself. Yes sir! Make his soul immortal, but don't disturb the negro as he is.'

However, a significant incident in which a white man exhibits a true feeling of responsibility for the Negro is found in Following the Equator. Here, the captain of a guano ship hangs a white man for killing a Negro. The whites object to his hanging without a trial but Captain Blakely thunders:

'Trial! What do I want to try him for, if he killed the nigger?'

'Didn't he kill the nigger?'

'Then I'm going to hang him, that's all. Everybody says he killed the nigger, everybody knows he killed the nigger, and yet every lubber of you wants him tried for it. I don't understand such bloody foolishness as that. Tried!'

Thus, justifiably, he punishes the criminal.

It is the opinion of the writer that race relations as portrayed in Twain's works are true to the facts of human nature and real life. On the whole, there existed "a measurable contentment and a measurable devotion on the part of those who were slaves," and on the part of the whites, kindness and a feeling of responsibility tempered with occasional cruelties.

In addition to these indications of race relations, Twain makes inferences in many of his works which reveal clearly his attitude toward racial discrimination. A representative but subtle indictment of racial

1 The Gilded Age, pp. 187-88.
2 Following the Equator, p. 288.
3 Gaines, op. cit., p. 226.
discrimination is found in *The Gilded Age* where in a dissecting room a repulsive black face wears a scowl that seems to say:

"Haven't you yet done with the outcast, persecuted black man, but you must now haul him from his grave, and send even your women to dismember his body?"\(^1\)

There are numerous passages which indicate or set forth certain characteristics supposedly common to the Negro. For example, in one instance Tom and Huck are discussing some information which they received from a Negro, but which previously came from some white boys. Tom remarks:

"Well, what of it? They'll all lie. Leastways all but the nigger. I don't know him. But I never see a nigger that wouldn't lie."\(^2\)

Tom doubts the verity of the information if it came from whites, for he knows they will lie; and, he would also doubt the word of the "nigger" if he knew him personally. However, he knows "niggers" in general so he concludes that this particular one might have lied also. Note Twain's subtle observation as to the natural bent toward untruthfulness of human nature.

Again, in one of Twain's short stories, the doctor, after appointing two Negro nurses, notes that they are

... good nurses both, white souls with black skins, watchful, loving, tender—just perfect nurses—and competent liars from the cradle. ...\(^3\)

The idea brought out here is that Negroes will lie, but Twain states that "... all people are liars from the cradle up..."\(^4\) He goes further to say that we all commit the lie of silent assertion which we do without

---

\(^1\) *The Gilded Age*, p. 148.

\(^2\) *Tom Sawyer*, p. 57.

\(^3\) Mark Twain, "Was It Heaven? or Hell?", *The $30,000 Bequest* (New York, 1872), p. 82.

saying a word.

For instance: It would not be possible for a humane and intelligent person to invent a rational excuse for slavery; yet you will remember that in the early days of the emancipation agitation in the North, the agitators got but small help or countenance from any one. Argue and plead and pray as they might, they could not break the universal stillness that reigned, from pulpit and press all the way down to the bottom of society—the clammy stillness created and maintained by the lie of silent assertion—the silent assertion that there wasn't anything going on in which humane and intelligent people were interested.¹

Thus, Twain attacks vehemently those who had closed their eyes to the shameful exploitation of the colored race under the pretense that they were sharing the blessings of civilization with their less fortunate brothers.

Likewise, but more subtly, Twain again attacks racial discrimination as is revealed in the following conversation between Jim and Tom.

'Mars Tom, who put de people out yonder in St. Louis? De Lord done it. Who put de people hear whar we is? De Lord done it. Ain' dey bofe his children? 'Cose dey is. Well, den! is he gwine to scriminate 'twixt 'em?'²

Tom answers:

'Scriminate! I never heard such ignorance. There ain't no discrimination about it. When he makes you and some more of his children black, and makes the rest of us white, what do you call that?'³

'He does discriminate, you see, when he wants to; but this case here ain't no discrimination of his, it's Man's....'

Outwardly, here, Tom is attempting to account for the fact that time is not the same in all parts of the world. However, when Tom proves that God does discriminate, but that man places even more emphasis on discrimination, we see something of Twain's social and religious beliefs. The hidden meaning

¹Ibid.
²Tom Sawyer Abroad, p. 35.
³Ibid.
seems to be that although God made humans of different complexions, this was not intentionally for discriminatory purposes; it is man alone who has set up as a criteria the pigment of one's skin.

Thus, we see that in Twain's presentation of race relations, he attempts to thwart the plantation tradition. Yet, in order to give a realistic portrayal of race relations as actually found on the plantation, his works necessarily contain certain traditional characteristics. Particularly is this tendency noted in the language that he uses.

Local color in various works of the period was achieved by the introduction of Negro characters speaking a crude dialect and performing comic tricks. In many instances, Negro dialect was a matter of bad spelling and did not approach the true dialect of the Negro at all. Twain, however, strove for a truer representation of Negro dialect as well as the dialect spoken by his white characters. For him, as Bellamy notes, "... speech and the manner of speaking became increasingly important... because he found it possible to tell a great deal about his characters by carefully recording what they said and how they said it." For example, as Gainer has found,

... the language of Roxy reveals the depth of her soul, her fears, her superstitions, her affection, her malice and her loyalty...  

and

... the hopes, the humanity, and the aspirations of Jim are visualized in his language; although it is the dialect of a slave, it is the hope of a race.

---

1 Bellamy, op. cit., p. 143.
2 Gainer, op. cit., p. 85.
3 Ibid., p. 89.
According to Tidwell, Twain

... was both sincere and competent in his representation of the
dialect of Nigger Jim. He revealed the salient low colloquial,
Southern, and Negro features of Jim's speech, not by a thoroughly
consistent spelling of every word, but by what is better an accur-
ate one. ... He represents in full detail the nuances of Jim's
pronunciation.

As a realistic portrayer of Negro life and character, Twain seems to ap-
proach the truthful representation of Negro speech.

Likewise, Twain's white characters closely follow the actual speech
habits of the typical white man of that period and region. Twain makes
use of numerous dialects—Backwoods, Pike County, Missouri—and approxi-
mates the direct terminology of the inhabitants of these localities.

Many critics have condemned his works because he, as narrator, and his
white characters make seemingly superfluous references to the Negro as
"nigger" or "darky." These persons have perhaps based their judgments
on their preconceived connotations of the terms rather than on a thorough
analysis of the contexts. As one writer observes, "... the true meaning
of a term is to be found by observing what a man does with it. ..." 2

This is true in this case, for although some individuals think of these
terms "both as a designation and an insult," 3 the author evidently had
no offensive intentions. As Hayakawa states:

In some classes of society and in some geographical areas, there
are people who know no other words for Japanese, other than "Japs" 7
and in other areas there are people who know no other words for
Negroes other than "niggers" 7. Ignorance of regional and class diff-
erences of dialect often results in feelings needlessly hurt.
Those who believe that the meaning of a word is in the word often
fail to understand this simple point of differences in usage. 4

1 J. N. Tidwell, "Mark Twain's Representation of Negro Speech," Ameri-
can Speech, XVII (October, 1942), 176.

2 P. W. Bridgman, quoted from S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Action (New

3 S. I. Hayakawa, Language in Thought and Action (rev. ed.; New York,
1949), p. 89.

4 Ibid.
On the basis of the overwhelming evidence of Twain's sympathetic attitude toward the Negro, it is reasonable to assume that when he used the terms "nigger" and "darky" they were not meant as terms of insult. These were terms which were commonly used by both races to designate members of the Negro race during Twain's time. Twain, being a recorder of the actual facts of life, naturally made use of the language which was prevalent. Thus, we see that he views the Negro's position with impartial, unprejudiced eyes.
CONCLUSION

In the decade immediately following the Civil War, American white writers viewed the Negro as a serious character for literary interpretation for the first time. The Negro has continued to gain status for serious artistic treatment partly because of the forces of realism which aided in destroying the stereotyped concept of the Negro. Mark Twain has followed this realistic tradition.

Twain's treatment of the Negro is chiefly ascribable to the environment which surrounded him and to his own nature—his sympathetic sensitiveness. Like other writers of the period who were not content with simply entertaining pictures of life among the lowly, he has focused attention on the meaning of what was presented. For Mark Twain, slavery furnished the requisite picturesque and gloomy wrong. His thorough grasp of slavery as an institution enabled him to attack not only the mere facts of slavery itself, but also the spirit, the thing in human nature which makes slavery possible. Under the humorist in Mark Twain lies the keen observer, the serious man, the ardent reformer, and he took note of all that was evil in the life he knew and proclaimed it indignantly to the world; thus his interest in slavery. The influence of the Negro on Mark Twain was deep and sustained throughout his life. His works reveal the conflict that constantly went on inside him and show clearly that he campaigned for justice for the Negro.

Twain's campaign for the Negro is most distinctly set forth in his portrayal of Negro characters, for his characters are his greatest literary achievements. Realizing that the public was accepting the ideas presented by the pro-slavery writers which revealed only the optimistic side of the
slave's life, Twain attempts to emphasize both sides. In emphasizing the pessimistic side, he becomes something of a satirist and a moralist. Because of the humorous nature of his works he is better fitted as a satirist than the average writer; and, his ability as a satirist is revealed in the case of slavery when he attacks the spirit of the thing, not merely the fundamentals. Through his characterizations, he has taught unobtrusively, but powerfully, the virtues of common sense and honest manliness. With something of Hawthorne's interest in ethical problems and something of the same power of getting at the heart of them, he has written some works wherein the moral is obvious and unobtruded—works concerning race relations especially.

Critics seem to feel that Mark Twain's appeal is chiefly to the very young and to the eternally youthful. It is most unfortunate though if his masterpieces should become only a part of the curriculum of childhood, for most youngsters and many grownups do not realize that in such childhood classics as Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer, the author enriches the imagination by presenting experiences of a truthful nature. In the works treated in this thesis we find that Twain was presenting a realistic, but indirectly satirical, picture of the black race in an attempt to champion the Negro's cause. When reading his works, then, we must consider him not only as a writer of humorous adventures of youth but also as the interpreter of his times and of his region.


**SECONDARY SOURCES**

**Books**


---

Articles


Pamphlets

Rollins, Charlemae. We Build Together. Chicago: The National Council of Teachers of English, 1941.

Unpublished Material

