



---

The Ending of "Huckleberry Finn": "Freeing the Free Negro"

Author(s): CHARLES H. NILON

Source: *Mark Twain Journal*, Vol. 22, No. 2, Black Writers on "Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" One Hundred Years Later (FALL, 1984), pp. 21-27

Published by: Alan Gribben

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41641249>

Accessed: 05-10-2017 16:28 UTC

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*Alan Gribben* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Mark Twain Journal*

## The Ending of *Huckleberry Finn*: "Freeing the Free Negro"

By 1876 when Mark Twain put the unfinished *Huckleberry Finn* aside, the restraints of military government in the South were removed, Black Codes or laws similar in effect were restored in most southern states, and the freedom that the black person had begun to know was drastically limited.<sup>1</sup> Although Huck's Pap calls attention to educated free black people who voted and could not be sold into slavery before the Civil War and although, during the Reconstruction years, black office holders were present in the national government and in state governments in the South, increasingly from 1876 to 1895 black people were denied political recognition, forced into sharecropping, lynched (as it was proposed that Jim be), involved in convict lease systems (as George Washington Cable points out) and intimidated in many different ways. While Twain was completing *Huckleberry Finn*, black people were being freed much as Huck and Tom were freeing Jim and in a "style" that would have pleased Tom. The last chapters of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* show figuratively and pass judgment on this process of "freeing the free Negro" that Twain became increasingly aware of after 1880.<sup>2</sup>

As Twain develops the story of Jim's freedom in the last twelve chapters, he describes metaphorically the way black people were being "freed" in the South at the time he was finishing the novel. After the federal troops were removed, the South treated the former slaves in much the same way that Tom treats Jim and apparently with the tacit approval of the federal government. Phelps Farm and the surrounding community are a microcosm of the way the South treated "the Negro Problem."<sup>3</sup>

Critical support for the idea that these chapters describe metaphorically what was happening in the South while Twain was writing them is found in some judgments of his work.<sup>4</sup> Budd, Foner, Kaplan, Lynn and Pettit recognize that concerns of the sort illustrated there were present in Twain's mind as early as 1874, when his character Aunt Rachel told what it meant to be black in a particular time in history, in "A True Story" (*Atlantic Monthly*, November).<sup>5</sup> They and other critics agree that Twain was aware of and disturbed by the treatment that black people received in the South during post-Reconstruction years and that his personal response to what was happening to them increased after 1880. They suggest that he was concerned

about the effects of the development of the Solid South, the dominance of the Democratic Party, and the loss of black freedom in the South through the action of the Supreme Court in 1883, and that he expressed his concern about these evils.

According to some critical opinion, Twain believed the persistence of the chivalric code in the South conditioned, to some extent, the South's social and political behavior, including its tolerance for lynching that was exemplified in Klan activities and in lynching. Louis Budd says that *Huckleberry Finn* is at its firmest in the fake rescue when it burlesques "Scott and Dumas and the phantasies of the Southern gentry," and he argues that the South's lingering chivalric ideal "encouraged the penchant for a code tolerant of violence."<sup>6</sup>

Most of these critics present Twain's association with George Washington Cable in such a way as to show evidence that what Twain expresses in the novel's last chapters may have resulted partly from Cable's influence. Kenneth S. Lynn calls attention to Twain's reference to Cable in *Life on the Mississippi* as "the masterly delineator of its [the South's] interior life and history, and he says that Cable "decided that the Negro in the Post-war South was the daily victim of persecution that made a mockery of his technical freedom"<sup>7</sup> When the Supreme Court upheld the emerging pattern of segregation in the South in the civil rights case of 1883, Cable responded in protest with "The Freedman's Case in Equity." When this essay appeared in print, Cable and Twain were near the mid-point of their four-month lecture tour.<sup>8</sup> Although there is evidence that Twain did not discuss this essay with Cable, he was nonetheless aware of it and of the sharp criticism of Cable it drew in the South. Guy A. Cardwell says that Cable may have influenced Twain's thinking about southern society and treatment of black people during the period immediately prior to his completion of *Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>9</sup> Twain read, admired and discussed Cable's *The Grandissimes* (1880) and *Madame Delphine* (1881) with him and with his friend, William Dean Howells. In his own way, he appears to have done in *Huckleberry Finn* something similar to what Cable says he did in *The Grandissimes*. Cable reveals in his diary that that novel "contained as plain a protest against the times in which it was written as against the earlier times in which its scenes were set."<sup>10</sup> This is also true of *Huckleberry Finn*. The events in it occur in the

*The Ending of Huckleberry Finn; "Freeing the Free Negro"*

1840s, but Twain's treatment of them, especially in his last chapters, protests against the 1880s.

If it is understood that Twain is doing figuratively what William Wells Brown does in *Clotel* (1853, 1864) and what Paul Laurence Dunbar does in *The Fanatics* (1901), perhaps what he is attempting in the novel's last chapters through his presentation of Huck and Tom as they free Jim will become more evident. Like Cable, these novelists show the dilemma of the free black person before the Civil War, and they argue as he does in "The Freedman's Case in Equity" that black people were freer as slaves than they were after they were freed by law. Describing with considerable accuracy Ohio's historic treatment of freed slaves, Dunbar makes this point emphatically in *The Fanatics*, and Brown's heroine kills herself when there is danger that she will be sold and made a slave again. William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* (1938) and Albion Tourgee's *A Fool's Errand* and *The Invisible Empire* (1879, 1880) and *Bricks Without Straw* (1880) provide descriptions of the Solid South, the dominance of the Democratic Party, the tolerance of violence and the development of Jim Crow. It was Faulkner's Colonel Sartoris who as mayor decreed that no black woman should appear on the streets of Jefferson without an apron. Tourgee and Faulkner show the social and political processes used in the South to take away the black man's freedom. Tourgee, who was a contemporary and acquaintance of Twain's, uses actual events that occurred in North Carolina in the two novels mentioned here. Thomas Dixon, Jr. in *The Leopard's Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905) and Thomas Nelson Page in *Red Rock* (1889) justify these practices of oppression, and Dixon recommends the use of violent means to support them. Through the metaphor of the last chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain does what Brown, Dunbar, Faulkner and Tourgee do more directly; and through the meaning that derives from his narrative technique in these chapters, he offers a judgment on the behavior and attitudes found in Dixon and Page.

Through Tom Sawyer, Twain represents the southerner who continued to accept the chivalric code and to be influenced by the mythologies of Dumas and Scott. Tom's devotion to this romanticism and to what may be called "the southern mystique" appears to dull his sensitivity to violence and to illustrate perhaps one source of the South's tolerance of the Klan and of lynching. Tom behaves with the same arbitrary, selfish assurance the South did when the political supports of a solid South, a single-party system and the Supreme Court decision of 1883 made it possible to assume as Budd suggests, "that the Bourbon Brigadiers had nullified the advances for which the Union Army had bled."<sup>11</sup>

What the actual practices are that determine the quality of the black experience in the South in the post-Reconstruction years are represented only metaphorically in the last twelve chapters of *Huckleberry Finn*; however, authors such as Albion Tourgee provide good accounts of the practices that Twain satirizes. These practices are the subject of polemical and socio-historical discussion in such books as Bertram Wilbur Doyle's *The Etiquette of Race Relations in the South, A Study in Social Control*; Edgar Gardner Murphy's *Problems of the Present South*; Charles S. Johnson's *Shadow of the Plantation* and John Dollard's *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*.<sup>12</sup> Certain political actions and attitudes that were observable after 1876, in the opinion of authors such as these, made possible and perhaps determined the character and purpose of the practices Twain parodies in Tom's "evasion."

Rutherford Hayes' election announced the Republican Party's new *laissez-faire* policy. After 1876 the Supreme Court most often interpreted the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments in ways that weakened the protection of black people. It also held the state's police powers—a state's right to protect its public health, safety and morals—to be paramount and more important than the rights given to the individual under the Fourteenth Amendment. The Court found state "Jim Crow" laws to be a valid exercise of a state's police powers. If a state law was not plainly discriminatory, the Court did not make an effort to assure that it was applied alike to black and white. It appeared, however, to distinguish between race discrimination and race distinction. Race distinction was not contrary to the Constitution. Generally national political acts and judgments returned black people in the South to the control of the South.<sup>13</sup> The effect of this restored power reintroduced oppressive measures in some states that were as severe in their denial of the freedom of black people as were the Black Codes, which appeared in the southern states in the fall and winter of 1865-66 to replace the old slave codes.

It is the Tom Sawyers of the South, and of the nation, who took over the freeing of free black people after the Emancipation and after the Civil War. Although the idea of freeing Jim is Huck's, Tom decides how he is to be freed or more precisely that Huck and Jim will not be told that Jim is already free until he has used Jim for his own purposes. Some of the people in the South who spoke most seriously of preparing the former slaves for freedom were, like Tom, concerned to provide profit and pleasure for themselves. For them, as for Tom, black people were "niggers." They were inferior and freedom for them was necessarily different from what freedom was for white people. There was no need to be especially concerned about a nigger's feelings, and Tom was

not concerned about Jim's. People who behaved like Tom Sawyer defined "the Negro Problem," developed the concept of gradualism, and persuaded the nation to accept the separate but equal principle as just. The Tom Sawyers of the South made the attempts of the Huckleberry Finns to free themselves and black people difficult and sometimes prevented or perverted those efforts.

Huck became involved in Jim's quest for freedom and in freeing himself from ignorance and prejudice when Jim and he became allies and took to the raft. Both river shores were dangerous: although Illinois was technically a free state, fugitive slave laws were in effect and Huck, too, would have been subject to arrest. The extent to which he freed himself, as they went down the river, is seen in Chapter 31 when he tries to write Miss Watson a letter telling her where Jim is. Up to this point he has been able to conduct his relationship with Jim, as he has learned and wanted to, with increasing decency. His decision not to send the letter proclaims his moral quality and his deviation from southern conventions. When he discovers that the King has turned Jim over to the Phelps as a runaway slave for whom a reward was posted, and has received forty dollars in return. Huck decides that he must find and free him. Like some people in the South who felt about black people and their freedom as he had learned to feel about Jim, Huck knows that if he wishes to help Jim he will have to do it without offending those in power, to whom he cannot speak openly and honestly about his purposes. It becomes clear in Chapter 31 that Huck may have to compromise and dissemble.

The reader becomes aware of Huck's necessity to pretend to be someone he is not and to accept Tom Sawyer's judgment rather than his own, after Huck discovers that the King had disposed of Jim when he talks with the Duke about the predicament that Jim's loss places him in. Huck is in no position to say to the Duke what a terrible thing the King has done, or to declare his purpose to free Jim. What he says describes his reaction to Jim's absence in a way that does not offend the Duke, but that hides his real thoughts. Huck's disingenuousness with the Duke indicates that in the South the process of freeing the free Negro has been perverted. Huck tells the Duke, "I says to myself they have took my nigger, which is the only nigger I've got in the world, and now I'm in a strange country, and ain't got no property no more, nor nothing, and no way to make my living." Huck is in a strange country where he must conceal his motives from persons like the Duke, conceal his identity from Aunt Sally and others, and accept Tom Sawyer's judgment rather than his own. What Huck says to the Duke is different from what the boy who was willing to go to hell, rather than tell Miss Watson

where her slave is, would have expected to say. With the Duke he assumes the role of the southerner who has suffered economic loss as a protective disguise to win sympathy and prevent suspicion about his real purposes. This behavior protects him and helps secure the information that he needs in his effort to find and free Jim. Huck's is the dilemma of the morally decent man living in the South who wants to keep his integrity and to work for the freedom of former slaves.

Huck knows and understands the Duke, but he misjudges Tom Sawyer to be, in contrast to himself, a morally decent person whom he can admire. Huck knew that the Duke might take advantage of him, but he trusts Tom and expects fair dealing from him. He has no trouble telling Tom why he is at the Phelps farm, and explaining the mistake Aunt Sally has made about who he is. He does not expect, however, that Tom will help him free Jim, nor does he know Tom's hidden reason:

Here was a boy that was respectable, and well brung up; and had a character to lose; and folks at home that had characters; and he was bright and not leather-headed, and knowing and not ignorant; and not mean but kind, and yet here he was, without any more pride or rightness, or feeling, than to stoop to this business, and make himself a shame, and his family a shame, before everybody.

Naively, he assumes that Tom is actually risking his reputation by taking part in the rescue. Discovering where Jim is, and finding a way to free him, is Huck's responsibility, but Tom takes over and uses both Huck and Jim for his purposes that have little to do with freedom.

Recounting the elaborate "evasion," Twain shows clearly that Huck must follow Tom's leadership and that Jim suffers by Tom's concern for style and throwing "bulliness" into his plan. Tom's judgment of how black people should be treated is first illustrated in his behavior toward the Phelps' slave who brings food to Jim in the cabin where he is a prisoner. When Huck and Tom enter that building with him, the slave notices that Jim knows them, that he greets them with pleasure and they greet him. When he comments on this, Tom denies that they know each other and have greeted each other; and he forces the slave to reject the truth of what he has seen, to give up confidence in his knowledge and the accuracy of his vision. No respect is shown for him as a person. Tom persuades him to believe that witches cause it to appear that Huck, he and Jim greet each other. Tom plays on the slave's superstition, using his weakness to gain his own ends as he uses Jim and other people.

Life is altered for all of the Phelps Farm community by the "evasion." White people as well as black people are hurt by Tom's actions. The

*The Ending of Huckleberry Finn: "Freeing the Free Negro"*

effects of "freeing the free Negro" on white people are shown as Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas respond to the "evasion." As Tom's plan develops they, like Jim, lose control of their lives. They are affected by his antics much as Nat, their slave is; candlesticks, sheets, shirts and spoons disappear. Aunt Sally fears that she is losing her sanity, that she has lost her ability to count. It would not have been a surprise if she, like Nat, had turned to witches to find an explanation for what had happened to her. Before the "evasion" ends, it involves the whole community. The neighbors are frightened. Tom is shot in the leg. People consider lynching Jim. The life of a quiet community is disturbed by Tom's self-fish game. By extension, the behavior of the South's Tom Sawyers caused decent people to live in what Huck called a strange country.

Huck's plan for freeing Jim is honest and will work, as Tom concedes, but Tom rejects it because it has no *style*. Huck accepts Tom's plan, yielding without much protest because Tom's plan has style and would make Jim, he thought, just as free as his plan would, and "maybe," he says, "get us all killed." Because Huck respects and trusts him, he expresses confidence in Tom's plan. He does not tell what the plan is because he knows that Tom will change it from time to time, "heaving in new bulliness whenever he got a chance." Huck's references to the style and danger in Tom's plan and to Tom's "bulliness" are significant because these aspects of the plan conceal Tom's real purposes. He admits that Huck's plan to free him would work, but he argues, "I bet we can find a way that's twice as long." When Huck discovers a board that could be removed to provide an opening for Jim to escape, Tom says, "I should hope we can find a way that's a little more complicated than that." When Huck mentions sawing Jim out, a more complicated way, Tom is pleased; that way of rescuing Jim is, he says, "real mysterious and troublesome, and good." It is these things for him and they will contribute to his fun. He knows that Jim is already free, but he conceals this fact from Huck and Jim with no concern for how they will be affected.

Huck is wrong when he assumes that Tom's plan will make Jim just as free as his own will; the plan affects Huck and Jim adversely. Some things that are done to Jim cause him pain and are at least potentially dangerous. Like Huck, Jim is forced to pretend he enjoys what he does not—though he draws the line at keeping a pet rattlesnake. Although his personal sensitivity is offended, he endures the presence of spiders and garter snakes and the bites of rats. He does not do it, but Tom is willing to saw Jim's leg off to remove a chain from it. Huck is unable to consider the full consequences of Tom's self-serving arbitrariness (his "bulliness" or

bullheadedness) on Jim. Tom's plan does more to harm Jim than simply make him uncomfortable; it prevents him from being a man, stimulates fear in him and causes him to mistrust his own judgment, injuring him as many of the actions of white persons in the South during the post-Reconstruction period injured black people, emotionally and spiritually.

Huck's reference to Tom's plan getting them killed may be a reference to the fact that violence was frequently a part of the process of coercing black behavior in the South during the post-Reconstruction period; Tom does violence to Jim's humanity. Moreover, the Tom Sawyers of the South are often responsible for people being killed. Tourgee illustrates this point in *A Fool's Errand*. As is true in that novel, in a good number of places in the country at that time the Klan, or persons who behaved like Klansmen, monitored the "freeing" of black people, determined what jobs they could have, where and how they could live. Some people who challenged the Klan, black or white, were killed. The lynch mob helped to control the freedom of black persons, and Twain is uncomfortably aware of the increase of lynching in the South. Tom's style or bulliness, as in the "nonnamous" letters that he sends to Aunt Sally's neighbors, is responsible for his being shot and for the talk of lynching Jim.

There are similarities in Huck's, Jim's and Tom's association in the last twelve chapters of the novel that remind the reader of the association of the rich and poor white men in Lillian Smith's "Two Men and a Bargain,"<sup>14</sup> and through that reminder suggest relationships and their import such as Twain depicts. In Smith's modern fable, a rich white man and a poor white man agree how free black people are to be in the South. Freeing them is the subject of the discussion, as Jim and his freedom are the subject of some of Huck's and Tom's discussions, and like Jim, black people in Smith's fable have little to say in the matter. Smith makes it clear that the situation has its origin in the post-Reconstruction period when Jim Crow, as a means of social control, was accepted in the South and became legal in "the separate but equal" doctrine.

Tom in his own way presumed to accept for himself the privileges of the powerful, as the rich man does in Smith's fable, and as the rich man would, assumes that Huck must accept his point of view. He takes advantage of him as he does of Jim, as Smith's rich white man takes advantage of her poor white man and of black people. Huck senses that he is being taken advantage of, just as Smith's poor white man does and, like him, does not trust his own knowledge sufficiently to act according to what he thinks is right and reasonable. Because of his view of himself and his respect for Tom, Huck is

persuaded to go along with whatever Tom proposes. Chadwick Hansen says that Huck and Jim have no choice but to accept Tom's leadership; they are completely in his power.<sup>15</sup> Because the Toms of the South represent conventional authority, the Hucks must agree that they are right. Huck is, as he has said, in a strange country. The relationship among Huck, Jim and Tom is a duplication of the relationship among white people of Tom's caste, white people of Huck's caste, and the South's black people during the post-Reconstruction years.

Twain's judgment of the character of Tom's conduct of the "evasion" activities (and of the "evasion" activities of individuals in charge of freeing free black people in the South) is made clear when Tom provides rotten wood that will provide a dim light (phosphorescent light, foxfire) and conceal their "evasion" activity. Tom wants a dim light because he does not want to risk the discovery of what Huck and he are doing; nor does he want Huck to know why he is helping to free Jim. Tom's use of foxfire calls attention to the fact that certain of the actions "to free the free Negro" in the South can only be performed in a light that conceals. A light or a logic of the quality of foxfire is sufficiently dim or unclear perhaps to make the application of Black Codes appear an appropriate means of preparing black people for freedom. The logic, the rationalizations, that some of Twain's southern contemporaries used to support the political suppression of black people was not only a logic that permitted the South to justify what it was doing in whatever ways it chose, but also a logic that would not bear close examination. Foxfire permits individuals to name things as they please. Tom says for instance, that case knives must be used to dig the hole through which Jim is to escape, but he uses a pick and "lets on" that it is a case knife. He is perfectly willing, because the light of his rotten wood conceals, to call a pick a case knife. In the South that Twain satirizes, southerners speak of themselves as the black man's friends, of knowing best what he needs, and of acting to protect his interests. Frequently these affirmations of interest and good will, like Tom's case knives, will not bear scrutiny in good light.

The "nonnamous" letters, instances of Tom's bulliness heaved into the process of freeing Jim, move the novel toward its end and toward Twain's final comment on "freeing the free Negro." They result in two things crucially important in showing Twain's judgment of the effects of the South's treatment of black people. Through Jim's willingness to sacrifice his freedom to care for Tom and through Tom's assumption that he could pay Jim for taking advantage of him, for playing games for his amusement with Jim's life, Twain parodies contemporary practices and the most regrettable con-

sequences of freeing the black man the way it was being done in the 1880s. Jim could have freed himself easily by slipping the chain off the leg of his bed and walking out of the cabin. He does tell Tom that he will break out if Tom insists that he pet a rattlesnake. Twain does not permit the reader to speculate about Jim's responsibilities for freeing himself or for accepting the things that happen to him while he is being freed. He does protest some of the absurdities that Tom asks of him, but, in the main, he follows Tom's directions, plays the "jews-harp," and accepts all of Tom's bulliness. Trusting Tom disarms him and prevents him from working for his liberation. Perhaps black people in the 1880s contributed less to their own freedom than they could have because of paternalism and because they trusted white people who they thought were working in the best ways to free them.

Although by the end of the novel Jim may have become passive about his own liberation, he is clearly aware of how he regards Tom and of what he should do in Tom's own time of need; he does not hesitate to risk his freedom. When he acts to protect Tom, the reader may recognize that his failure to act more directly to free himself came not from a fear to do so but from a feeling, perhaps, that Tom knew best how to free him. Jim assumes that Tom regards him as human, in the same way that he believes Tom to be human. When Huck and he talk about caring for the injured Tom, Jim says:

Well, den, dis is de way it look to me. . . . Ef it wuz *him* dat 'uz bein'sot free, en one er de boys wuz to git shot, would he say, 'Go on en save me, nemmine 'bout a doctor f'r to save dis one? Is dat like Mars Tom Sawyer? Would he say that? 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!

As this speech suggests, Jim regards Tom as his friend just as he does Huck. He believes that Tom is honest, responsible and willing to make essential sacrifices for others when they are in need. He accepts him as a person of superior status much as Huck does and probably thinks he is wiser than Huck. He believes that Tom is interested in freeing him and that Tom knows the best way to do this. Like Huck, Jim accepts the myths of caste. It is important to notice that Jim refers to Tom as "Mars Tom Sawyer" and to Huck as "Huck." Jim's false assumptions about Tom's concern and attitudes are costly errors. Many black people in the 1880s, like Jim, trusted their good intentions of their former owners or other whites, and suffered for it as Jim does. Jim risks his freedom to help Tom, but he is treated badly for acting well.

For the doctor who treats Tom's wound, the men who recapture Jim and the Phelps's neighbors, Jim

*The Ending of Huckleberry Finn: "Freeing the Free Negro"*

remains a nigger in spite of his self-sacrifice and humane assistance to Tom. In the Phelps' farm community, and in the larger South, black people who pursue their own interests and freedom, as it appears to Sister Damrell and Sister Hotchkiss that Jim is doing before Tom's emergency, are insane. For them, Jim is mad and dangerous. For the men who capture, curse, strike and imprison him after he has helped Tom, he is crazy, a bad nigger who should be lynched as an example to show other niggers what happens to bad niggers. The doctor says that Jim is a good nigger and praises what he did for Tom, but still does not recognize his humanity

His description of Jim is like Thomas Nelson Page's descriptions in "Marse Chan," and other stories of the faithful retainers of ante-bellum days:

I never see a nigger that was a better nuss or faithfuller, and yet he was resking his freedom to do it, and was all tired out, too, and I see plain enough he'd been worked main hard, lately. I liked the nigger for that; I tell you, gentlemen, a nigger like that is worth a thousand dollars—and kind treatment, too . . . He ain't no bad nigger, gentlemen; that's what I think about him.

Thus, the doctor recognizes in Jim what in white people are considered admirable human qualities. Ordinarily, people who behave as Jim does in serving Tom are rewarded. To the doctor Jim's behavior means that he is not a bad nigger. The good Christians who are the Phelps' neighbors respond to what the doctor says; his status deserves their respect. They agree with him that Jim "acted very well, and was deserving," and they promise "they wouldn't curse him no more." Twain's irony is clear. They do not curse Jim, but they also do not remove any of his chains or treat him better as Huck hoped the doctor's speech would cause them to do.

Before Jim is told that Miss Watson has freed him and that he is to be rewarded for giving Tom so much pleasure, he risks the success of what Huck and he think is a genuine effort to secure his freedom, in order to help Tom. As Jim risks his freedom, the freedom of black people was often risked in the post-Reconstruction South to protect the interests of white people—as Lillian Smith suggests in her fable. The significance of such behavior in the novel is stated in Laurence B. Holland's comments on the events that occur after Jim's escape from the Phelps' cabin. He says: "Saving Tom, freeing him from danger, is taking precedence over setting Jim free."<sup>16</sup> Tom has been hurt and he needs help, but his injury is the result of his "bulliness" and the pursuit of his own pleasure, and his using other people. Holland considers the events after Tom is wounded to be the most important in the book. Jim is captured because he

places Tom's care above his own freedom, a choice that affirms the quality of his humanity. The manner of his capture and the treatment that he receives deny that humanity. Holland says that "Liberation dissolves into enslavement and they come close, without actually doing so, to cancelling each other out."<sup>17</sup> Holland continues his argument by showing that "Tom's antics confer the burden of heroism on Jim but make a cruel and diseased mockery of it," and he judges that "Tom's antics are in effect the rehearsal for the ominous enslavement that ensues when Jim is enchained 'again' in the 'same' cabin."

Another seriously disturbing effect of Jim's association with and domination by Tom, perhaps more serious than the threat that his physical freedom will be sacrificed to save Tom, is that he appears at the end of the novel to have accepted the value Tom places on him. Something has happened to change him from the person he was on Jackson's Island who could say, "I own myself, en I's wuth eight hund'd dollas." Tom's behavior (like most white behavior that he has experienced) does not encourage Jim's self-respect.

Clearly, something has changed Jim from the person he was on Jackson's Island. He does not appear to have the same goals after the "evasion" that he had when he and Huck took to the raft. Perhaps the humiliations inflicted on him before the "evasion" caused him to despair of ever being free. (It should be remembered that he anticipated being free before the "evasion," and in fact was actually freed although Tom withheld that information from him.) At one point Huck says to him, "Now, old Jim, you're free *again*" [Twain's italics].

In the last chapter when Tom explains that he has exploited Jim for pleasure, Jim shows no resentment of the way Tom took advantage of Huck's and his powerlessness. He is pleased and appears to be fully compensated by the forty dollars:

*Dah* now, Huck, what I tell you? What I tell you *dah* on Jackson islan? I *tole* you I got a hairy breas', en what's de sign un it; en I *tole* you I ben rich wunst, en gwinter be rich again; en it's come true; en heah she *is!*

Although Jim may have lost respect for himself, he has kept his sensitivity to the needs of others, as is shown in his behavior when Tom is shot and at the end of the novel when he shows delicacy and concern for Huck's feelings in explaining to him that his father is dead.

Jim has lost a great deal. Earlier in the novel, he was able to remind Huck of the mutual obligations in a friendship, and he spoke out effectively against Huck's mistreatment of a friend. He does not find a similar impropriety or exploitation in what Tom has

done to him. He may have protested against spiders, rats and snakes and against finding metal objects in his food during the "evasion," but he appears, after he is paid, to have forgotten the discomfort and lack of respect that were forced on him. It is of crucial importance that he appears also to have forgotten his interest in the condition of his wife and children (who did not belong to Miss Watson and thus could not be freed in her will as he was). His delight in being "rich" with the forty dollars Tom gave him shows how he has been injured by accepting Tom's values. Tom says he had planned to hire a brass band and march Jim back to his community in the noisy splendor of a torch-light parade so he could be admired by envious friends and former associates. The changed Jim might have enjoyed this.

Even in the end, Tom shows little concern for what Jim might want to do with his life once he is free, and no regard for him as a person. His assumption that he can simply pay Jim forty dollars for his trouble underscores this. Perhaps, ultimately, he agrees with the doctor that Jim is a good nigger. His intention to provide Jim "the nigger satisfaction," as such gestures were thought to be, of a brass band and a colorful procession shows that Tom, like many southerners, assumed that black people were different—childlike—not sensitive to actions white people would find demeaning, and that they had no understanding of the meaning of freedom or the practical necessities for getting along in the world.

Figuratively, through the burlesque and parody of these last chapters, Mark Twain shows the effects of the contemporary handling of "the Negro Problem." "Freeing the free Negro" affects him as adversely as Tom's "evasion" affects Jim. Twain suggests that, like Jim, black people in the post-Reconstruction South were losing a sense of selfhood and often were forced to see themselves as inferior. Jim's losses suggest that the consequences of the "evasion" were complex and serious, as serious perhaps as the effects of chattel slavery had been.

University of Colorado

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>A good description of Black Codes and other laws that were introduced to control the behavior of black people after the Civil War and that were, in a sense, models for laws passed after Reconstruction is found in J.W. Burgess' *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902, pp. 45-56. Burgess refers to Black Codes as the Mississippi Acts; Benjamin Quarles describes Black Codes briefly in *The Negro in the Making of America*, New York: Collier Books, 1964, pp.

129-31; C. Van Woodward's chapter "Mudsills and Bottom Rails," in *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1951, pp. 205-34, is a good discussion of the black man in the South after 1876.

<sup>2</sup>Roger B. Salomon devotes a good deal of attention to the way in which Twain's attitudes changed during the post-Reconstruction period in *Twain and the Image of History*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961, pp. 74-94. See also Kenneth S. Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959, pp. 229-30.

<sup>3</sup>"The Negro Problem" was sometimes called "The Southern Question," "The Future of the Negro," etc. What is meant by the Negro problem is made clear in James Bryce's "Thoughts on the Negro Problem," *North American Review*, 153 (December 1891), 641-60; and in Thomas Nelson Page's "Some of Its Difficulties and Fallacies," a chapter in *The Southern Problem*, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914, pp. 29-55. Edgar Gardner Murphy presents an excellent statement of the problem from a southerner's point of view in "The South and the Negro" in *The Present South*, New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904, pp. 153-201.

<sup>4</sup>Generally, Louis J. Budd's *Mark Twain: Social Philosopher*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1962; Philip S. Foner's *Mark Twain: Social Critic*, New York: International Publishers, 1958; Justin Kaplan's *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966; Kenneth S. Lynn's *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959; and Arthur G. Pettit's *Mark Twain and the South*, Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1973 support at least by implication the idea that the last chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* are a figurative description of what was happening in the South after 1876.

<sup>5</sup>See Budd, p. 92; Foner, pp. 202-205; Kaplan, pp. 180-81.

<sup>6</sup>Budd, p. 104.

<sup>7</sup>Lynn, p. 231.

<sup>8</sup>The essay was adapted from a commencement address delivered at the University of Alabama June 18, 1884 and was published in *Century Magazine*, January 1, 1885 and in Cable's *The Silent South*.

<sup>9</sup>*Twins of Genius*. East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1953. pp. 68-77.

<sup>10</sup>Lynn, p. 233.

<sup>11</sup>Budd, p. 92.

<sup>12</sup>George M. Frederickson's last four chapters in *The Black Image in the White Mind*, New York: Harper and Row, 1971, pp. 198-319, provide a good discussion of the southern ideas and practices that Twain satirizes.

<sup>13</sup>Quarles, pp. 142-44.

<sup>14</sup>*Killers of the Dream*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1949. pp.174-91.

<sup>15</sup>"The Character of Jim and the Ending of *Huckleberry Finn*," *Massachusetts Review*, 5 (Autumn 1965), 61.

<sup>16</sup>"A Raft of Trouble," Word and Deed in *Huckleberry Finn*," *Glyph*, 5 (1979), 68.

<sup>17</sup>Holland, p. 71.