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## The Presentation of Race at Mark Twain Historical Sites in Hannibal, Missouri

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## The Presentation of Race at Mark Twain Historical Sites in Hannibal, Missouri

### Abstract

Hannibal, Missouri may not be among the top five or even the top three places to visit, but it is surely getting its share of tourist and revenue. Each year an estimated 350,000 tourists from across the United States and many from around the world visit Hannibal, Missouri to pay homage at the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum Annex. The Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum is located on 206-208 Hill Street, and has been accessible to the public as a museum since 1912, and has been registered as a National Historic Landmark since December 29, 1962.<sup>1</sup> In 1911, less than a year after Mark Twain's death, it was rumored that the house that he had spent his boyhood years was to be demolished. The local chamber of commerce made an attempt to raise money to save the property, but was unsuccessful. A fellow chamber member George A. Mahan, and his wife Ida Dulany Mahan purchased the house, and donated it to the city of Hannibal. Although, was property of the city of Hannibal, the Mahan family remained active with its management until 1978, expanding its facilities to include other buildings associated with Twain, like the John Marshall Clemens Law Office, Pilaster House, 2 museum buildings, and more recently, the Becky Thatcher House reconstructed Huckleberry Finn House. The Mark Twain Cave is owned and operated separately.<sup>2</sup> Between the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum complex, the Cave and other Twain affiliated industries, the author's legacy is capable of generating \$13,000,000 annually for the city.

THE PRESENTATION OF RACE AT MARK TWAIN HISTORICAL SITES IN  
HANNIBAL, MISSOURI

Research Paper

Submitted

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

Anthony W. Birch

University of Northern Iowa

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This Study by: Anthony W. Birch

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has been approved as meeting the research requirement for the

Degree of Master of Arts

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Hannibal, Missouri may not be among the top five or even the top three places to visit, but it is surely getting its share of tourist and revenue. Each year an estimated 350,000 tourists from across the United States and many from around the world visit Hannibal, Missouri to pay homage at the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum Annex. The Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum is located on 206-208 Hill Street, and has been accessible to the public as a museum since 1912, and has been registered as a National Historic Landmark since December 29, 1962.<sup>1</sup> In 1911, less than a year after Mark Twain's death, it was rumored that the house that he had spent his boyhood years was to be demolished. The local chamber of commerce made an attempt to raise money to save the property, but was unsuccessful. A fellow chamber member George A. Mahan, and his wife Ida Dulany Mahan purchased the house, and donated it to the city of Hannibal. Although, it was property of the city of Hannibal, the Mahan family remained active with its management until 1978, expanding its facilities to include other buildings associated with Twain, like the John Marshall Clemens Law Office, Pilaster House, 2 museum buildings, and more recently, the Becky Thatcher House reconstructed Huckleberry Finn House. The Mark Twain Cave is owned and operated separately.<sup>2</sup> Between the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum complex, the Cave and other Twain affiliated industries, the author's legacy is capable of generating \$13,000,000 annually for the city.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Services, U.S. Department of the Interior.

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/nationalhistoricalandmarks/list-of-nhls-by-state.htm>. March 8, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Lowe, Hilary Iris. *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 62.

<sup>3</sup> Loewen, James W., *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 148.

Yet, beginning around 1995, Hannibal, began receiving criticism from scholars and others for omitting race and slavery from its portrayal of the past. The administrators, museum directors and associated citizens of Hannibal who were responsible for preserving the memory and narrative of these six Mark Twain sites were accused of having knowingly and deliberately whitewashed the public's understanding of the legendary author's life as a boy growing up in Hannibal from 1844 to 1853, and of his literary works. July 2019 marked Hannibal's bicentennial celebration, called in one of its brochures, "an event 200 years in the making."<sup>4</sup> After one hundred and nine years presenting Twain to the public, did it still omit race and slavery from the city's past, and if so, who, was responsible? How did it affect Mark Twain's efforts to improve race relations in the United States? Are African Americans now represented in Hannibal's tourist literature, website advertising and marketing strategy?

Pursuing the answers to the questions derive from a variety of sources. Three of the primary sources used are fictional works by Mark Twain that are set in Hannibal, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). In each of these books Twain conflated his boyhood experiences and literary imagination to create a clever narrative that addressed slavery, race, and racism in fictional towns based on the historic Hannibal, Missouri.

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<sup>4</sup> Gelber, Trish, *Hannibal 200 Bicentennial 1819-2019: It's an Event 200 Years in the Making...*(Hannibal: Hannibal Convention & Visitors Bureau, 2019), 1.

The Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century Critique of Hannibal

In 1996, literary scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin, wrote a skeptic's critique of Hannibal and its Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum in her book, *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (1997). In her critique, Fishkin pointed out that "the city had not overcome its segregated past."<sup>5</sup> The Boyhood Home and Museum was much more than just a story about two white kids named Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher. The city glossed over and failed to address Huck Finn's and Jim's struggles with racism. In an interview with the museum's curator Henry Sweets III, Fishkin asked "is Twain's antiracism known here?" Is it taught here?" Sweets responded with, "It isn't brushed under the rug, it is approached. . . The tie to Mark Twain for Hannibal is *Tom Sawyer*. The connection people feel is really *Tom Sawyer* rather than through any other of the writings."<sup>6</sup> In 1912, when the city of Hannibal opened the Mark Twain Boyhood Home Museum the city wanted to avoid discussing the city's past relationship with slavery and racism. According to Hilary Iris Lowe, author of *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism* (2012) the citizens of Hannibal chose Tom Sawyer's story over Samuel Clemens's, because the city wanted to present a positive portrayal of the New South. To present the Clemens's real-life experiences would mean the "family-friendly site" would be forced to expose the city's as well as author's intimate relationship with slavery and racism.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 36.

<sup>6</sup> Sweets, Henry. Boyhood Museum's treatment of Slavery evolves, "Travelwithtwain.org/2011/09/29/hannibal-mo/mark-twain...hood-home-and-museum-brgins-to-acknowledge-slavery-after-criticism/,1.

<sup>7</sup> Lowe. *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism*, 88.

In addition to Fishkin's initial critique, other scholars followed Fishkin's lead. In 1999, James W. Loewen's *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong* argued that the Boyhood Home and Museum and other affiliated sites were "tourist traps," and are selling only a "part of Mark Twain. Loewen compared the museum's presentation of Twain to the robot that Coca-Cola uses to recount "its 23-minute bland-as-pabulum 'American Adventure' in Disney World"<sup>8</sup> He also criticized the way in which the city markets and advertises itself, suggesting that Hannibal is only targeting white visitors, since it only includes white people in its tourism brochures and booklets. Loewen further argues that the Twain who the city of Hannibal presents is a whitewashed one without a moral center or irony, and not the race conscious writer that influenced later black writers such as Richard Wright, Toni Morrison and others.<sup>9</sup>

During an interview with Hannibal's mayor Richard Schwartz, Fishkin asked, "why there didn't seem to be any evidence anywhere in Hannibal of a celebration of Twain as an antiracist writer, the aspect of him that speaks most to our needs as a nation still struggling with racism?" According to Fishkin, Schwartz paused in thought, and stated "that's a tough one... I'm not going to slough it off, but I'm going to tell you a story."<sup>10</sup> What followed were several stories of how he had experienced racial awareness in Hannibal and how those experiences intersected with his life. One story told how in 1969 as he was graduating from high school his father and grandfather had called on a photographer to take pictures of his graduation. The father and grandfather who were

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<sup>8</sup> Loewen, *Lies Across America*, 148.

<sup>9</sup> Loewen, *Lies Across America*: (1999), 149.

<sup>10</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 36.



Elks members were hoping to induct the young Schwartz as a third-generation family member of the lodge. Schwartz refused their offer because the lodge did not allow minorities to join and he argued that he would not join the organization if his best friend who was black could not join. The father and grandfather were upset. Schwartz remembered that when he was about ten years old his grandmother informed him that people are talking about him having black friends, and that interracial friendships were not socially accepted in Hannibal. Schwartz mentioned several incidents involving racism and Hannibal's segregated past that has yet to be addressed like the city's two American Legion posts, one white, the other black. Schwartz shared with Fishkin how one of his students once became the local organizer of a Ku Klux Klan rally at Clemens Field. Finally, Schwartz asked Fishkin, "How do you inoculate children against racism?" Fishkin responded that while "Mark Twain seems to me a fantastic vehicle for that kind of education, I don't see him being used that way." Schwartz responded that "you're right, He's probably not being used that way. . . . And we're the perfect example of that, I suppose"<sup>11</sup> Schwartz ended the interview with asking Fishkin her if she had heard what the Southern Baptist Convention had done on the previous day. The group voted that slavery had been wrong, and they condemned racism.<sup>12</sup>

Fishkin also interviewed Faye Bleigh, director of the Hannibal Visitors convention, ambassador for the city of Hannibal, and winner of the 1964 Becky Thatcher competition. Before Fishkin could ask Bleigh a question, Bleigh handed her a 1995 copy

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<sup>11</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 36-37.

<sup>12</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 37.

of *Life* magazine that crowned the city as being “the best place to be from sea to shining sea.”<sup>13</sup> Bleigh explained the somewhat demanding process in which seventh grade boys and girls must go through in order to participate in the Becky Thatcher and Tom Sawyer contest. One of the most important parts of the contest is the reading and knowing Mark Twain’s *Tom Sawyer* as all Hannibal residents apparently do. Bleigh mentioned that she did not read *Huckleberry Finn* until she attended college, because at Hannibal high school, *Huckleberry Finn* was not taught. According to Terrell Dempsey, a local resident, who refer to himself as an “accidental historian” and wrote *Searching for Jim: Slavery in Sam Clemens’s World* (2003), “Hannibal is careful with Huck, he is just a little too mischievous for the town to embrace.”<sup>14</sup> While race is at the center of *Huck Finn*, it is easier to avoid if Museum just focus on *Tom Sawyer*. Next, Bleigh informed Fishkin that Hannibal’s overall mission was “not only to promote the boyhood years, but when visitors come to town we hope that we have developed Hannibal in such a way as to let them step back in time and experience the excitement and the magic of Twain’s writings.”<sup>15</sup> Fishkin asked Bleigh, “if she had ever heard a Hannibal child question the end of *Huckleberry Finn*, or is anyone ever disturbed by the imprisonment of Jim?” Bleigh replied, “I’ve never heard anybody upset over it.”<sup>16</sup> This may have been true for Hannibal’s white citizens but it was a problem for its African American population and more than likely would have disturbed Mark Twain himself to know that the city that has

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<sup>13</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> Dempsey, Terrell, *Searching for Jim: Slavery in Sam Clemens’s World*. (London: University of Missouri Press, 2003), x.

<sup>15</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 33-34.

<sup>16</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 33.

dubbed itself as “America’s Home Town,” because of his personal affiliation with the city.

According to Loewen’s *Lies Across America*, historic markers are usually placed in or near a community by local white people who are invested in the community, and have a desire to preserve the memory of a prestigious person or event connected to their community. Historic markers are generally funded by public monies, and reflect the interest of the dominant culture of that community, often resulting in racist interpretations or the erasure of race altogether.<sup>17</sup> Despite the fact that Jim, was one of Twain’s most controversial and famous black characters in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, there were no indications that Jim or any of Twain’s other black fictional characters are represented in the city’s interpretation of Twain’s literature, advertisement or the city’s presentations.<sup>18</sup> In spite of the city’s more recent efforts to ignore Jim’s existence, Dempsey argues, “ that was not always the case:”

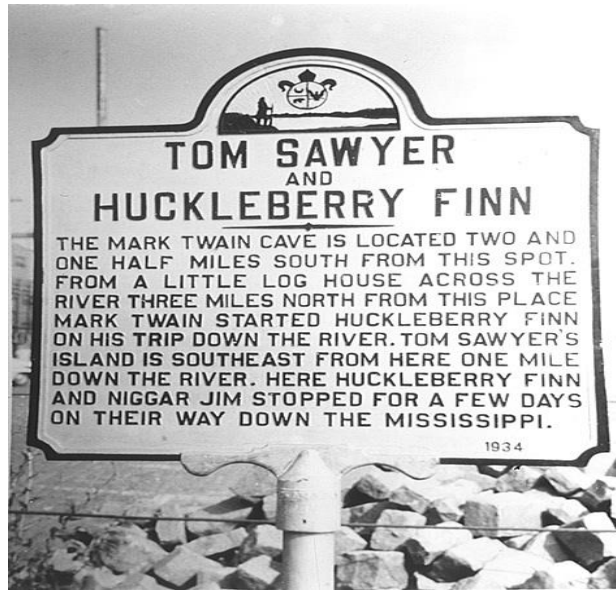
I recalled a historical marker-one of several placed about town in the 1930’s by the Missouri State Historical Society-that referred to Nigger Jim. The signs were problematic beyond the obvious misspelling. They referred to fictitious events, not actual history. Then there was the use of the word *Nigger* in the name. . . The word is not used as a part of Jim’s name in the novel *Huck Finn*.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Loewen, James W., *Lies Across America* (1999), 15-16.

<sup>18</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, x.

<sup>19</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, xi.



Hannibal, MO- Infamous Hannibal Nigger Jim historical marker stood from 1930s – early to mid-1990s. Hannibal’s First Memorial to Mark Twain’s Jim.<sup>20</sup>

The historic marker that Dempsey remembered (and is illustrated here) stood unchanged in Hannibal until the early to mid-1990s. Dempsey argued “While Twain never referred to his character as Nigger Jim it is how the white citizens of Hannibal referred to him, because up until recently it was a word associated with all black people.”<sup>21</sup>. Initially, complaints about the word only caused city officials to have the out of context and racially offensive word ground off but the marker remained standing. Additional complaints from Hannibal’s African Americans caused historical marker to be completely between the early 1990s to the mid – 1990s. The exact date in which the marker was removed remains unknown to the public. The marker was placed in a storage shed, and in 2001, when city council members agreed to donate the marker to a local

<sup>20</sup> Faye Dant, *Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn Historical Marker*, Jim’s Journey: The Huck Finn Freedom Center, Hannibal, Missouri, <https://jimsjourney.org/about>.

<sup>21</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, xi.

group the marker mysteriously vanished and has never surfaced.<sup>22</sup> While the local group wanted the marker to interpret race in Hannibal, the sudden disappearance of the infamous historical marker strongly suggests that the city officials of Hannibal are not being transparent and progressive enough toward change. The existence as late as 2001 when such a marker is a historical reminder of how black people were looked upon in Hannibal, although it was also one of the few public indications that black people lived in Hannibal, or were connected to Mark Twain.<sup>23</sup>

It was apparent that the responses Fishkin received from Mayor Schwartz and Faye Bleigh added fuel to Dempsey's critique of the city's stance on race. Dempsey argues that: "the visitors and convention bureau and the Mark Twain Boyhood Home have cleaned up local history to match the Norman Rockwell-sanitized version of the town as a childhood paradise. It is a world where little freckle-faced white boys and blonde, pigtailed white girls frolic freely. It is a world of perpetually carefree youth. It is quietly, politely, and blandly wholesome"<sup>24</sup>



America's Hometown

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<sup>22</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, xi.

<sup>23</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, xi.

<sup>24</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, xi.

Twain drew from his own childhood experiences to address slavery and the racist treatment African Americans endured and Hannibal blatantly omitted these experiences from the way in which the city interpreted his life and literary contributions. Furthermore, Loewen highlights that Twain created challenging narratives in *Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) that questioned if the United States could be simultaneously moral and racist.<sup>25</sup> A decade before Fishkin visited Hannibal, native Ron Powers made his own assessment of the small riverside town. Powers had been a former media critic for *CBS Sunday Morning News*, a recipient of the Pulitzer Prize for Criticism in 1973, and author of several books. In the mid-1980's Powers visited his boyhood home and saw a declining downtown district with the exception of a few souvenir shops and tourist attractions. Powers saw a community that had many of the problems found in other urban communities.<sup>26</sup> As a boy, Powers remembered the cultural diversity that once existed downtown in the business district. He remembered black people and businesses owned and run by black people in the middle of predominately white Hannibal. During his visit, he realized that all that was left of the prominent black people and businesses were memories. In *White Town Drowning* (1986), Powers writes:

My first stop was at 1221 Market Street, half a block from where Market joins Broadway in a Y-shaped confluence known in my boyhood as the Wedge. The wedge had once been a miniature black community-not "ghetto" so much as compressed universe-only a block long on either stem of the Y.

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<sup>25</sup> Loewen, *Lies Across America* (1999), 148-149.

<sup>26</sup> Shackel, Paul. "America's Home Town: Fiction, Mark Twain, and the Re-creation of Hannibal, Missouri," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* Vol 17, No.3 (May 2011): 198.

. . . Negritude smack in the middle of the white town. . . The Wedge shanties were gone now. . . Where had they gone, the people of the wedge?<sup>27</sup>

In addition to missing the black citizens and black business that used to thrive in the city Powers was stunned with the new direction in which the city of Hannibal was headed. The picture below shows an area called the Wedge situated on Market and Broadway. This picture was taken in March 1977 just before demolition.<sup>28</sup>



HANNIBAL, MO - This is a later picture of the "Wedge". Some of the businesses in the area at that time were a convenience store, a service station, a beauty shop, a barber shop, Dixon's Cafe, Paradise Tavern (aka Mattie's Paradise), and Elite Tavern (Fouche's) (many of which were owned and/or operated by African Americans).<sup>29</sup>

### Slavery in Mark Twain's Hannibal

After the Missouri Territory was granted its statehood and entered the Union as a slaveholding state the population exploded. Missouri became an extremely attractive to emigrants from other southeastern slaveholding states. In *Searching for Jim: Slavery*

<sup>27</sup> Powers, Ron, *White Town Drowning*. (New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press), 49-50.

<sup>28</sup> Wedge, Hannibal Free Public Library, <http://hannibal.lib.mo.us/digital/afam/B7324.htm>,1.

<sup>29</sup> Wedge, Hannibal Free Public Library, <http://hannibal.lib.mo.us/digital/afam/B7324.htm>,1.

(2003), Dempsey writes that “by 1840, Missouri had a population of 383,702, including 323,888 whites and 58,240 slaves. In Marion County, where Hannibal was the largest town, there were 7,239 whites and 2,342 slaves.”<sup>30</sup> The new territory attracted second and third sons from states such as Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky because of the practice of “primogeniture.” This ensured that all of the family’s estate would be inherited by the first son and remained intact. The new territory was also attractive to sons of slave owners because they could bring slaves and acquire more slaves, and in John Clemens case Missouri was a place where whites could find a fresh start.<sup>31</sup>

Slavery was a way of life for John Clemens, all of his grandparents owned slaves, and when his father died, he inherited three slaves: a Negro woman named Mariah, a girl named Louisa, and a boy named Green.<sup>32</sup> In times of financial hardship John Clemens would sell the slaves that he and wife Jane had inherited down river.<sup>33</sup> According to Dempsey, as an adult, John Clemens practiced law and was licensed in Kentucky. The first record of him in his chosen profession is an indenture for a slave belonging to his sister, which he signed John Marshall Clemens, Atty.”<sup>34</sup> When John Clemens and Jane Lampton Clemens married on May 6, 1823, Jane brought an additional three slaves to the family.<sup>35</sup> According to Philip S. Foner’s *Mark Twain: Social Critic* (1958) in early 1835, John and Jane Clemens packed up “Jennie, the slave girl,” last of three slaves John

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<sup>30</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 9.

<sup>31</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 9.

<sup>32</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 15.

<sup>34</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 14.

<sup>35</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 14.



Clemens had inherited from his father's estate, sold all of their belongings except a tract of Tennessee land, the last sign of hope for the poor family, and headed westward. The Clemens family destination was Florida, Missouri, where his successful brother-in-law, John Quarles, had been urging him to bring his family. Quarles and wife Patsy (the sister of John Clemens) had moved to Florida in 1831, and opened a general store on the Salt River. Quarles's general store was very successful because Missouri was the frontier and the population was increasing.<sup>36</sup> While in Florida, John Clemens practiced law, served as judge of the Monroe County Court, and worked as a store clerk first as a partner to his brother in law and then as sole proprietor.<sup>37</sup> John Clemens's residency was abruptly cut short after the general store he set up to compete with his brother in-law had failed. Things got worse when a scheme to build several dams so that steamboats would have a water route to Florida failed after Congress rejected the Projects.<sup>38</sup> This, another failed business attempt, and the death of nine-year-old daughter Margaret in August of 1839 led Clemens to call a new place home. In 1839, four years after the birth of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, John Clemens packed up his family and moved thirty miles away to Hannibal, Missouri.

At four years old young Samuel Clemens left his Uncle John's 240-acre farm where he had intimately interacted with his uncle's slaves since birth.<sup>39</sup> In Hannibal, Young Clemens personally witnessed the days when owning slaves was socially

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<sup>36</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> Foner, Philip. *Mark Twain: Social Critic*. (New York: International Publishers, 1958),15

<sup>38</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 4.

encouraged to highlight status for white people. Twain wrote, “My uncle John A. Quarles, he had eight children and fifteen or twenty negroes. . . I was a guest for two or three months every year, from the fourth year after we moved to Hannibal till I was eleven or twelve years old. . . His farm has come very handy to me in my literature once or twice.”<sup>40</sup> Dempsey argues it is a possibility that it is a possibility that one of his uncle’s slaves by the name of Daniel Quarles who was emancipated could have been Twain’s prototype for *Huck Finn*’s Jim.<sup>41</sup>

Slavery played a major role in Hannibal during the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s, and Dempsey argues that, “Hannibal was never the white town drowsing in the sun of Clemens’s childhood idyl, but instead Hannibal was a place of turmoil, Clemens was subjected to the same ideology of oppression that kept Jim a slave.”<sup>42</sup> Early in his search for Jim, Dempsey discovered a small collection of valuable sources, a book titled *The Story of Hannibal: A Bicentennial History* (1976) by J. Hurley Hagood, in which Dempsey realized Hannibal was very quiet about its slaveholding past.<sup>43</sup> A second valuable source was a book he stumbled upon titled *A Bible Defense of Slavery*, (1852), where he learned of the churches’ powerful influence over slavery in Hannibal.<sup>44</sup> Dempsey argued that local officials simply regurgitated what he thought of as old lies: local Hannibal leaders argued “Yes, slavery was here, but it was gentler than down south, people weren’t beaten or sold. Families weren’t split up, it wasn’t very common, it

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<sup>40</sup> Kiskis, Michael ed. *Mark Twain’s Own Autobiography: the Chapters from the North American Review*. (USA: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 133.

<sup>41</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 180.

<sup>42</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 280.

<sup>43</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, xi.

<sup>44</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, xi.

wasn't very important - not much to it, really."<sup>45</sup> Slavery in Hannibal may not have been as demanding as it was in larger slaveholding communities in the Deep South but the same harsh dehumanizing realities as slaves being held in bondage in other parts of the United States. Justifying slavery has always been a burden that the slaveholder, and like-minded people, and oftentimes descendants, had to bear in order to rationalize why the white race was superior and the black race was inferior. Initially, the church was responsible for supplying the slaveholders and proslavery citizens of Hannibal with a plausible justification. In 1854, the *Hannibal Tri-Weekly Newspaper*, published a story advocating and praising Josiah Priest's *Defense of Slavery*.<sup>46</sup> According to Dempsey, Priest had written expansively on ancient times and the Bible: "Priest's book was just one of several popular in slave culture which argued that a curse of slavery had been placed upon the African people following the great flood."<sup>47</sup> Because of the association with Ham, the black race was classified as subhuman, who lacked cleanliness, was accustomed to deplorable living conditions, and could be subjected to cruelty due to an insatiable tolerance for pain. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1844, an article was printed in the *Palmyra Missouri Whig Newspaper* printed a story that stated that a Negro in New Orleans fell from a four-story house to the ground and landed on his head with and was not injured. (200)<sup>48</sup> It was also common for blacks to be considered lazy and shiftless despite the

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<sup>45</sup> Priest, Josiah. (Glasgow, Ky.: W.S. Brown, 1852), 69.

<sup>46</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 69.

<sup>47</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 69.

<sup>48</sup> *Palmyra Missouri Whig*. April 20, 1844.

heavy labor that blacks performed - this was considered “nigger work” and free of charge.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the church, local newspapers such as the *Hannibal Missouri Courier*, were responsible for communicating stereotypes and racism against the enslaved black people of Hannibal and blacks in general. As a child, Mark Twain was exposed to unexplained oddities due to birth defects of black people that were widely covered in newspaper stories. The fascination with negro physiology was a shared interest among whites to include whites outside of Hannibal. On April 30, 1853, Twain’s older brother Orion read an article printed by an Illinois newspaper about a black person who suffered from some sort of skin condition. A second Illinois newspaper responded to the article. Orion enjoyed the article so much that on May 21, 1853, he reprinted it in the *Hannibal Journal* and wrote a response as well:

“Now, Mr. Journal man, we don’t know about this white wool! But last winter, in St. Louis, we saw a negro man, who up to his nineteenth year, was “black as any nigger,” after which time he began to turn white, in spots. His face and shoulder, are now almost white. He was raised in Kentucky. If the editor of the journal will call at Dobyns & Spaulding’s daguereans rooms, corner of Fourth and Olive streets, St. Louis, he can see a splendid miniature picture of the “animal,” which if not as large as life, is “twice as natural.”<sup>50</sup>

Another huge contribution the Hannibal newspapers made to perpetuate racism throughout its slave culture was to incite fear of race mixing. Dempsey writes, in

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<sup>49</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 198-199.

<sup>50</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 201-202.

*Searching for Jim*, (2003) “In the slave culture of Hannibal, anything African was inferior. . . Amalgamation was one of the greatest fears of the slave culture. The press effectively used this fear against the abolitionist. Whites socializing with blacks was considered disgusting.”<sup>51</sup>

Mark Twain’s first major commentary on the institution of slavery happened in *Huckleberry Finn*. Huck Finn is floating down the Mississippi River with Jim, an escaped slave, who like him, is escaping from tyranny, but Huck is uncomfortable with the role of abolitionist.<sup>52</sup> Mark Twain recognized the problem with slavery and the changes that Huck Finn goes through as he struggles with the concept before finally denouncing it. Huck Finn resist slavery by helping Jim escape, even if it means going against the pulpit. In the book, Huck cries out, “All right, then I’ll go to hell. . .It was awful thoughts and awful words, but they was said. And I let them stay said, and never thought no more about reforming.”<sup>53</sup>

Even prior to Missouri becoming the twenty-fourth state in 1821, the citizens of Hannibal favored slavery. Local businessmen, political figures and the clergy used their power and influence to keep slavery alive. This was unlike Hannibal’s neighbor twelve miles across the Mississippi River, Quincy. But Quincy was in Illinois which had obtained its statehood in 1818 and was under a strict clause of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, that had “forever forbidden slavery in the territory or in the states to be formed

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<sup>51</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 204.

<sup>52</sup> Robinson, G. Forrest., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), xiii.

<sup>53</sup> Robinson, *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, 237.

from it.”<sup>54</sup> Many whites who did not agree with slavery of support the institution, often settled on the grasslands of Illinois. Settlers journeyed from all over the United States and Europe to live in Illinois. In contrast Missouri was parceled from the Louisiana Purchase, and requested to enter the union as a slave state.<sup>55</sup>

After the Missouri Territory entered the union as a slave state in 1821, its population exploded. Missouri became attractive to emigrants and southeastern slaveholders because slavery was welcomed and slaveowners could bring their slaves. By 1840, there were 7,239 white people and 2,342 enslaved African Americans in Hannibal, Missouri. Slavery was a family tradition in the Clemens family, and in 1831, when John and Jane Clemens moved to Florida, Missouri they brought a young slave girl with them. During his boyhood years, young Samuel Clemens developed close relationships with slaves and slavery while visiting his Uncle John Quarles farm in Florida, Missouri. While growing up in Hannibal, Twain witnessed how politics and religion played a major role in keeping slavery alive. He also witnessed how his own father John Clemens helped protect and perpetuate slavery as a Marion county judge in Hannibal. Young Clemens also witnessed the physical and social mistreatment many of the slaves suffered from at the hands of white people in Hannibal. Later in life, Twain used these boyhood memories and experiences of slavery in Hannibal to challenge slavery in his literature, and it is to those books we now turn.

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<sup>54</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 8.

### Slavery in Mark Twain's Literary Work

Mark Twain was a distinguished American writer and novelist who wrote about what was happening in the world around him. He used his talent as a writer, to address racism, slavery and other social problems of his day. Three of Twain's most popular books are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), and *Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins* (1893). Twain wrote in his autobiography:

In my school boy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it. . . The texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure; if slaves themselves had as aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing.<sup>56</sup>

In his article entitled "America-s Home Town: Fiction, Mark Twain, and the Re-creation of Hannibal, Missouri" (2001), anthropologist Paul A. Shackel, argues that "Despite his emphasis on social injustice issues, many Americans are hardly aware of Twain's writings on these topics. While Hannibal identifies itself as 'America's Home Town', the city of Hannibal, which is diligent in keeping the memory of Twain alive, mostly ignores his views related to social injustice."<sup>57</sup>

#### *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

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<sup>56</sup> Twain, Mark. ed. Charles Neider *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* (New York: Harper Perennial Publisher, 1990), 8.

<sup>57</sup> Shackel, Paul. "America-s Home Town: Fiction, Mark Twain, and the Re-creation of Hannibal, Missouri," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* Vol 17, No.3 (May 2011):197.

*Tom Sawyer* is a story about a boy of around ten or eleven years old growing up in the fictional town of St. Petersburg, standing in for Hannibal. Tom is a somewhat rebellious boy who lives with his aunt Polly, half-brother Sidney, and Mary who is his cousin. Tom's best friend is a local boy named Huck who is also rebellious, and the son of the town drunk. Twain does not address racism or slavery head on in *Tom Sawyer*, but rather demonstrates how white Americans use stereotypical perimeters to address and criticize the difference of culture, equating superstition with blacks and small children. Twain wrote in the preface of *Sawyer*, "the odd superstitions touched upon were all prevalent among children and slaves in the West at the period of this story - that is to say, thirty or forty years ago."<sup>58</sup>

A conversation between Tom Sawyer, and Huckleberry Finn debating which negro superstition was the best cure for warts revealed their prejudiced attitudes towards black people. Sawyer attempts to explain how spunk-water was the best remedy for curing warts, and when Huck inquires why it was Sawyers informed Huck that Bob Tanner had tried spunk-water and it worked. Huck responded with "who told you so?" Sawyer answered, "they'll all lie. Leastways all but the nigger. I don't know him. But I never see a nigger that *wouldn't* lie."<sup>59</sup> In the passage above Twain illustrated how stereotypes played a dominant role in the prejudice attitude white people held against black people.

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<sup>58</sup> Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1922). Preface Page.

<sup>59</sup> Twain, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, 56.



### Injun Joe

While Twain does not address social injustice against Injun Joe, or present him as a victim of racism like he did with Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain did portray Injun Joe as someone outside the boundaries of St. Petersburg's society (Hannibal). In this character, Twain also exposed how white Americans viewed Native Americans, while the city of Hannibal would also play a major role in stereotyping American Indians by labeling a local African American citizen after Twain's fictional Injun Joe. In *Tom Sawyer*, Injun Joe is portrayed an evil villain who murdered Dr. Robinson during a botched grave robbing. Fishkin writes that "Twain describes Indian Joe as a wild and savage Indian".<sup>60</sup> Because Injun Joe's race was ambiguous to the citizen of St. Petersburg, he was ridiculed by the Huck and the citizens of St. Petersburg. On one occasion, while in the cemetery when Tom recognized Injun Joe's voice, he tells Huck "its Injun Joe," and Huck called Injun Joe a "murderin' half breed".<sup>61</sup> Another case was Injun Joe is referred to as a half breed is during the murder of Dr. Robinson. Twain writes:

"All at once the doctor flung himself free, seized the heavy head-board of Williams' grave and felled Potter to the earth with it – and in the same instant the half-breed saw his chance and drove the knife to the hilt in the young man's breast."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 42.

<sup>61</sup> Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, 84.

<sup>62</sup> Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, 86.

Another stereotype Native Americans are subjected to is revenge, and because Injun Joe was portrayed as a Native American Huck also viewed Injun Joe as being motivated by revenge. Twain illustrated this stereotype when Injun Joe plotted revenge against Widow Douglas for embarrassing him before he died. Injun Joe explained:

Kill? Who said anything about killing? I would kill him if he was her; but not her. When you want to get revenge on a woman you don't kill her-bosh! you go for her looks. You slit her nostrils -you notch her ears like a sow! <sup>63</sup>

A wax figure of Injun Joe was at the Haunted House at the Hill Street Wax Museum. Fishkin argues that, “even in wax his character was too dangerous to be displayed with the other character of the book. He is displayed in a separate area alone”. <sup>64</sup> In his article entitled “Where the Huck is Finn? The Hunt for Huckleberry Finn in Hannibal, Missouri” (2011), professor of English, argues that children growing up in Hannibal were threatened that Injun Joe will come and get them if they lie or misbehave. <sup>65</sup> In addition to the threats, a life – size wax figure of “Injun” Joe was used to frighten visitors as soon as they entered the premises. <sup>66</sup> The Wax Museum closed its doors in 2006, and re-opened them in 2014 when small business owner Jacklyn Karlock purchased the house looking for an opportunity to open a gift shop. Now the wax museum has a new attraction, a gift shop. When interviewed by Hannibal news journalist Steven Johnson, Karlock claimed

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<sup>63</sup> Twain, *Tom Sawyer*, 236.

<sup>64</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 42.

<sup>65</sup> Zima, Dustin. “Where the Huck is Finn? : The Hunt for Huckleberry Finn in Hannibal, Missouri, *Pacific Coast of Philology* Vol 47, (2012), 104.

<sup>66</sup> Zima, Dustin. “Where the Huck is Finn? 104.

the Injun Joe wax figures is still a part of the museum's exhibits for, but is no longer hanging out at the front entrance to scare children or customers.<sup>67</sup> Twain portrayed Injun Joe in *Tom Sawyer* is both racist and stereotypical, because even though *Sawyer* was written in 1876, to subject a Native American of today to the same treatment as Twain portrayed Injun Joe it would be classified as racist and stereotypical.

According to Fishkin, history played a mean trick on Joe Douglas, because the local white citizens of Hannibal robbed him of his good name and reputation by claiming he was the prototype for one of the most disgraceful characters in American literature.<sup>68</sup> Joe Douglas who outlived Twain by thirteen years was nothing like Injun Joe, nothing like Twain's character and spent many years trying to disassociate himself from the fictional Injun Joe. Despite his efforts to prove he was not the real life Injun Joe, many people in Hannibal insisted on keeping the false folklore alive. Sadly, this has been carved in stone in recent decades. Eugene W. Yarbrough, a former caretaker of the Mt. Olivet Cemetery and a relative who was a stonecutter arranged to make Joe Douglas a headstone free of charge. It is not certain as to when the headstone was actually erected, but it has been recognized as being a recent addition. The cemetery was unkept for years and after Yarbrough cleaned the cemetery up tourists began asking about the location of Injun Joe's final resting place.<sup>69</sup> It was obvious that Yarbrough and his relative was not the least concerned with the historical Joe Douglas, or the feeling of his wife and family,

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<sup>67</sup> Steven Johnson, "Hannibal Haunted House and Wax Museum to Reopen," KHQA Newsdesk, Hannibal, MO: KHQA, April 14, 2014.

<sup>68</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 46.

<sup>69</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 47.

or the African American community in Hannibal that considered Douglas its founder.

The headstone has a picture of Douglas and the inscription which misspells his name reads:

INJUN JOE  
 JOE DOUGLASS, KNOWN TO MANY  
 IN HANNIBAL AS INDIAN JOE  
 DIED SEPT. 29, 1923 AT AGE 102.  
 HE WAS FOUND. AN INFANT. IN AN ABANDONED  
 INDIAN CAMP BY A MAN NAMED DOUGLASS WHO  
 RAISED HIM. HE DENIED THAT HE WAS THE INJUN JOE  
 IN MARK TWAIN'S WRITINGS AS HE HAD ALWAYS LIVED AN  
 HONORABLE LIFE. HE WAS BURIED FROM A.M.E CHURCH.<sup>70</sup>

In spite how the white people in Hannibal chose to ignore Joe Douglas's plea that he was not the evil villain that Twain wrote about in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, he was able to live a long and meaningful life. He owned the first house as well as other property in an African American community in Hannibal named Douglasville in his honor.<sup>71</sup>

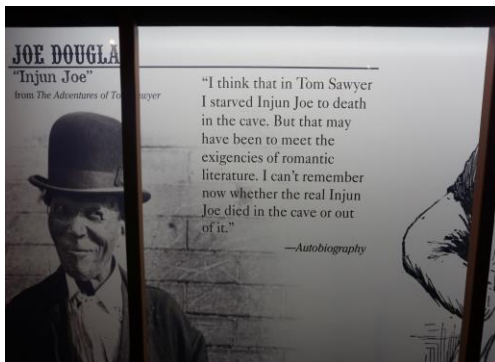


Photo of Hannibal's Joe Douglass before death in September 1930.<sup>72</sup>



The "Injun Joe" headstone on Joe Douglass grave in Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Hannibal, Missouri.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 47.

<sup>71</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 43.

<sup>72</sup> Birch, Anthony, (May/2019).

<sup>73</sup> Injun Joe headstone on Joe Douglas grave, [2129691413818%2F&psig=AOvVaw3FqsyyEmBc6Nf3wvH%2F&psig=AOvVaw3FqsyyEmBc6Nf3wvH-2Syg&ust=1587572234734000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRqxFwoTCNC4xJr4-gCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAh](https://www.flickr.com/photos/2129691413818%2F&psig=AOvVaw3FqsyyEmBc6Nf3wvH%2F&psig=AOvVaw3FqsyyEmBc6Nf3wvH-2Syg&ust=1587572234734000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRqxFwoTCNC4xJr4-gCFQAAAAAdAAAAABAh).

The Historical Joe Douglas led an interesting life and held an honored place in Hannibal's black community. According to Joe Douglas, he had been found by a white man in an abandoned Indian camp, in Calloway County, Missouri. The man took him in and raised him until he was able to take care of himself.<sup>74</sup> After an unsuccessful search for his birth parents, and living and working Ralls County, he moved to Hannibal where he supported himself by working odd jobs. Over time, he saved his money and began investing his savings into real estate. Fishkin writes, "Douglas purchased lots in the valley between the Cruikshank home and Paris Avenue which became known as Douglassville, an area in which other African Americans built homes."<sup>75</sup> According to Fishkin, Douglas was well known in Hannibal, and although his exact date of birth and age was unknown, he was a unique figure in the history of Hannibal for well over seventy-five years. He was believed to be about 102 years when he died on September 30, 1923.<sup>76</sup> While Mark Twain never said Joe Douglas was Injun Joe, many people claimed Douglas was Injun Joe from Twain's *Tom Sawyer*, despite Douglas' repeated insistence that he was not.<sup>77</sup>

When Mark Twain wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), he wrote a story about a mischievous boy named Tom Sawyer who lived in the fictional town of St. Petersburg, Missouri (Hannibal). While Twain's book *Tom Sawyer* never addresses

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<sup>74</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 43

<sup>75</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 43.

<sup>76</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 43.

<sup>77</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 43-44.

slavery directly, he does confront racism with the treatment of Injun Joe. Because the character Injun Joe is portrayed as a Native American Twain gave his readers a narrow glimpse of how white Americans viewed Native Americans through the critical lens of racism and stereotypes, and fear of outsiders. Hannibal cast the same racism upon a leading citizen of its black community, Joe Douglas, by relentlessly associating him with Twain's infamous character Injun Joe.

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

In 1884, Twain published *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and unlike *Tom Sawyer*, Twain directly addressed race, racism and the hypocrisies of slavery as the centerpiece of the novel. When the book appeared in the spring of 1885, most American critics received it very coldly.<sup>78</sup> Foner writes, "the guardians of the genteel traditions fumed over Twain's satirical handling of the bigots and hypocrites of the ante-bellum south and his audacious elevation of the rowdyish Huck Finn and the Negro runaway slave, Jim into heroes."<sup>79</sup> In *Huckleberry Finn* Twain painted a realistic picture of pre-war life along the great river.<sup>80</sup> It is based closely on Twain's boyhood years growing up in Hannibal where slavery and racism was a part of his everyday life.

Fishkin writes,

The Hannibal of Twain's youth, like the St. Petersburg of both *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* was a slave-holding society; but only in *Huckleberry Finn* would this fact struggle to the foreground... In *Huckleberry Finn* Twain

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<sup>78</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 47.

<sup>79</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 47.

<sup>80</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 47.

became alternately fascinated, stymied, and inspired by a story in which an adult black male on a quest for freedom came to play a central role.<sup>81</sup>

*Huckleberry Finn*, is about a thirteen or fourteen-year boy who lived in St. Petersburg (Hannibal), Missouri. Huck was the envy of Tom Sawyer and all the other boys in the neighborhood, because he was a rebel, did not attend school and did what he wanted to do. He was a motherless child, who for a short time lived with a woman named Widow Douglas and her righteous sister Miss Watson. The two sisters try to civilize him from his wretched ways. His father who he calls Pap is the town drunk who physically abuses him. One night Huck's father kidnaps him and nearly beats him to death. Afterwards Huck devised a plan to fake his own death, and runs away by sailing down the Mississippi River on a raft to a nearby island. When Huck arrived at Jackson's island, he discovers Jim a runaway slave. Jim is running from Miss Watson who has threatened to sell Jim down river away from his family. Foner argues that Jim is the real hero of the novel, he is a warm human being, lovable and admirable, and his nobility shines through the entire book. Jim represents all that is good in man.<sup>82</sup> *Huckleberry Finn's* and Jim's journey started off with Huck regarding Jim the same as all other southern whites, a slave. Huck realized that he and Jim are running from the same oppressive society, but feared that helping a runaway slave escape would be morally wrong. Dismissing deeply ingrained beliefs that slaves should be treated less than human was a constant struggle for

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<sup>81</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 94.

<sup>82</sup>Foner, *Social Critic*, 205.

Huck, and his conscience got the best of him when Jim told Huck how being so close to freedom made him feel “feverish and trembly.” Huck felt personally responsible for helping Jim reach freedom, and guilty for treating Miss Watson mean as he assisted Jim.<sup>83</sup> As their journey progressed Huck realized that despite the efforts of slavery to deprive Jim of his humanity, he was a good person who deserves his protection, friendship and love.<sup>84</sup> On one occasion, Huck realized he hurt Jim’s feeling after he had played a mean trick on Jim. Huck says: “It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn’t ever sorry for it afterward, either. I didn’t do him no mean tricks, and I wouldn’t done that one if I’d ‘a ‘knowed it would make him feel that way.”<sup>85</sup> Another instance was Huck acknowledged that Jim was a good person was after Huck awakens on the raft, and hears Jim moaning in his sleep. Huck concluded that Jim was dreaming about his wife and children, and he was missing them. Huck concluded, “I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folk does for their’n. It don’t seem natural, but I reckon it’s so.”<sup>86</sup>

Twain addressed the issue of slavery as Huck is running away from his version of an oppressive society, forced to be civilized by widow Douglas and Miss Watson in a society that looked down on him. escape is motivated by the threat of being sold down river to New Orleans where he would probably never see his wife and children again. According to Dempsey, Hannibal was part of a large and thriving national slave-trading

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<sup>83</sup>Twain, Mark. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Special edition, (United States of America, 1992), 122-123.

<sup>84</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 205.

<sup>85</sup> Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 120.

<sup>86</sup> Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 215.



network. Slave dealers purchased slaves and shipped them to the larger slave markets in St. Louis, Memphis, and New Orleans.<sup>87</sup> In 1842, Sam Clemens recalled an occasion where his own father John Clemens once tried to sell one of his slaves down river to New Orleans. Based on a letter dated January 5, 1842, some scholars debate that the slave named Charley was a horse. Sam Clemens claimed it was a male slave.<sup>88</sup> After Jim explained to Huck that he had run off, Huck realizes he is helping an escaped slave flee from slavery he becomes morally conflicted with the alignment of the church and society itself. Huck thought, “people would call me a low-down Abolitionist, and despise me for keeping mum.” Huck explains to Jim that he is not going to tell and that he not returning to St. Petersburg”.<sup>89</sup>

### *Puddn’head Wilson*

Although, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), would be Mark Twain’s champion literary work on race, racism and slavery it certainly would not be his last. A later novel, *Puddn’head Wilson* (1893) also set in Hannibal would continue to prod and probe the wicked affects of white-supremacy and oppression. Historian and author Sidney E. Berger argues, that Twain addressed the issues of miscegenation and slavery head-on, maybe for the first time in American literature.<sup>90</sup> The story’s setting is in the small river side town of Dawson’s Landing, representing Hannibal. Twain wasted no time showing how the slaveholding culture of Dawson’s Landing breeds an aristocratic,

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<sup>87</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 218.

<sup>88</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 224.

<sup>89</sup> Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 60.

<sup>90</sup> Twain, Mark. *Pudd’nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins*, ed. Sidney Berger. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), xv.

tradition in a democratic society.<sup>91</sup> Twain points out, that these “gentlemen” thought nothing of separating slave families by selling mothers, fathers, and children down river.<sup>92</sup>

There are several main characters *Puddn’head Wilson* that tie the story together. David Wilson is a lawyer from the Northern United States who relocates to Dawson's Landing. He brings with him extraordinary intelligence, and sarcastic humor that rubs the townspeople the wrong way, so they dub him as an idiot. The locals given him the nickname “Puddn’head”, because they are unable to grasp the irony in his humor, and refuse to take him seriously enough to give him their legal business. Outside of law, he experiments with science, and a particular hobby of fingerprinting helped him solve a murder that revealed a dark secret that involved sex and miscegenation. At the center of this dark secret discovered by Wilson is Roxy. Roxy was a twenty- year old slave who by appearance looked white, but according to the standing laws of Dawson’s nineteenth century slave culture, the one-sixteenth of black blood was enough to cancel out the other fifteen parts.<sup>93</sup> Foner wrote in *Mark Twain: Social Critic*, “Just as Jim the Negro slave, is the hero of *Huckleberry Finn*, so Roxy, the slave girl, is the heroine of *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. The central theme of the novel revolves around the interchange of two babies, one Negro, the other white in the cradles”.<sup>94</sup> Twain dismisses the myth of racial superiority when Roxy and her mistress gave birth to two boys on the same day, and a

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<sup>91</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 211.

<sup>92</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 211.

<sup>93</sup> Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, 9.

<sup>94</sup> Foner, *Mark Twain: Social Critic*, 211.

week after giving birth her mistress dies leaving Roxy to tend to both of the infants. Roxy switched the two infants to save her own child whom she named Chambers, from living his life out as a slave. Years later when it was revealed by David Wilson that the two babies had been switched by Roxy and that the master's child, named Tom Driscoll had lived his life as a slave had been permanently conditioned to think of himself as inferior.<sup>95</sup> Twain concludes the story of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* with a final point of mockery and irony. After Roxy's son had admitted to the murder, and was assumed by the public that he was the master's son, he was sentence to life in prison. But when it was revealed that he had one thirty-second negro blood in his veins, he was then pardoned by the governor and sold as a slave down river to be exploited for the rest of his life. Twain made the point, "that the profit motive is at the root of the slave system".<sup>96</sup> In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Mark Twain addresses the dark and taboo issues of white-supremacy, slavery and miscegenation. All of this stood as a direct threat to the real slaveholding society of Hannibal. Sadly, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* has mainly ignored by the Mark Twain attractions in Hannibal as well as the general public.

In 1993, Shelley Fisher Fishkin, wrote her groundbreaking book *Was Huck Black?* This book was part of a major shift in how American literature was studied and interpreted. Fishkin argues in *Was Huck Black?* "that we need to revise our

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<sup>95</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 211.

<sup>96</sup> Foner, *Social Critic*, 213.

understanding of the nature of the mainstream American literary tradition".<sup>97</sup> Two decades later Hilary Lowe writes:

During the 1980s and 90s, literary criticism had shifted from the New Critical and post-structuralist modes of analyzing literature to the current focus on literary history. Many if not most, college courses that included Clemens, read *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and saw it as his response to the racist politics that followed reconstruction in the South. Hannibal, during Fishkin's visit, seemed unaware of this sea change in understanding Sam Clemens's literary legacy.<sup>98</sup>

These changes in how American literary scholars viewed Mark Twain's literary work initiated a stream of criticism toward Hannibal for erasing racism and slavery from the narrative of its local history while celebrating an author now honored for his anti-racist message. More particular, in 1995 Fishkin interviewed Executive Director Henry Sweet III, Director of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum, and inquired about her most concerned issue, "is Twain's antiracism known here? Is it taught here?" Sweets replied with, "it isn't brushed under the rug, it just isn't approached. The tie to Mark Twain for Hannibal is *Tom Sawyer* rather than through any other of the writings."<sup>99</sup> When asked about race, slavery and Twain's leading character Jim from one of Twain's most famous novels *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Sweets and other museum employees could not justify the discrepancies. These sites and the city's tourism

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<sup>97</sup> Fishkin, Shelley Fisher. *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 4

<sup>98</sup> Lowe, Hilary Iris. *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism*, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012), 88.

<sup>99</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory* 31.

advertising have also been criticized for intentionally marketing to white patrons and acting as tourist traps rather than educational venues. In addition to omitting Mark Twain's most famous black character Jim from Hannibal, in 1998, the town had excluded all African Americans and people of color from its visitor's guide. Of the one hundred and twenty-two faces in the town's brochure all appeared to faces of Caucasians, and by 2018, the museum has made many corrective changes to the how it is interpreting and presenting Samuel Clemens, but according to the updated brochures, internet web sites, there has been no response to the criticism. Hannibal continues to exclude African Americans and market to whites only.<sup>100</sup> According to the author of *Lies Across America*, Hannibal put up a newer historical marker that was practically content free. Loewen wrote: When Twain created stories based on his past, he did More than explain himself. He explained something About all of us, something about human beings.<sup>101</sup>

### Response to Criticism

From 1995 to 2001, there were very little to no change taking place Hannibal, or at the Mark Twain Boyhood Home Museum and its affiliate sites. By 2002, a project was in motion to obtain a new Mark Twain Museum building located on Hannibal's Main Street. The board members decided to rethink the interpretive plan for the new museum.<sup>102</sup> The Foundation hired museum consultant Jay Rounds, a professor at the

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<sup>100</sup> Loewen, James W., *Lies Across America: What Our Historic Sites Get Wrong*, The New Press, 2019. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/rodlibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5482653>. Created from rodlibrary-ebooks on 2020-01- 14:29:04. 163.

<sup>101</sup> Loewen, James W., *Lies Across America*, 162.

<sup>102</sup> Lowe, Hilary Iris. *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism*, 90.

University of Missouri, St. Louis, and founder of the Museum Studies Program to analyze the old interpretations and collections at all of the Mark Twain historical sites and create a new narrative that the average visitor would understand and appreciate.<sup>103</sup> Rounds wanted to determine how the typical patron understood both the museum and Mark Twain. After a year of research, Rounds submitted a proposal to the Mark Twain foundation board members, and the foundation accepted Round's master plan.<sup>104</sup> The 2003 master plan suggested that the museum use lighting and audio and visual effects that would lead visitors through a house filled with a series of Clemens's autobiography, letters and novels.<sup>105</sup> The plan was to have two distinct planning groups for the museum, one for Twain's fictional works, and the other group would serve as the biography group. According to Rounds, the main concern was that the museum was more about Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher than a museum about Mark Twain.<sup>106</sup> Regina Faden, new director of development and community outreach, and author of "Presenting Mark Twain: Keeping the Edge Sharp," wrote that the master plan defined three phases of development.<sup>107</sup> For Phase One exhibits, opened in 2005, the exhibit developers created a more historical understanding of Mark Twain by talking about his real life experiences in Hannibal as a boy. The developers would use more of the museum directors own words, and for the first time, text panels are used to tell the story of slavery in Hannibal, and its

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<sup>103</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 90.

<sup>104</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 90.

<sup>105</sup> Lowe, Hilary Iris. *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism*, 91.

<sup>106</sup> Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory*, 90.

<sup>107</sup> Regina Faden, "Presenting Mark Twain: Keeping the Edge Sharp," *The Mark Twain Annual* No. 6, (2008), 24.

effect on the African Americans both free and the enslaved.<sup>108</sup> Sandy, the Clemens family slave, was chosen by the exhibit developers for the narrative slavery. Sandy was a slave boy the Clemens hired from someone to work in their home as a domestic servant.<sup>109</sup> Rounds and Faden designed a new series of exhibits for the Interpretive Center that presented Sam Clemens's history in Hannibal. The Interpretive Center uses photos and interactive exhibits to convey Sam Clemens's history to the public.<sup>110</sup> One exhibit tells the story of slaves in the Clemens home. Sandy would have slept on a small pallet similar to this rug near the fire place.<sup>111</sup>



New exhibit: rug placed in the Twain Boyhood Home Museum Kitchen.<sup>112</sup>

By 2006, the city of Hannibal began addressing old wounds that involved race, and the insensitive treatment of the local African American community. One example, is it sponsored a one-day African documentary film festival through a partnership with the

<sup>108</sup> Regina Faden, "Presenting Mark Twain: Keeping the Edge Sharp, 24.

<sup>109</sup> Dempsey, *Searching for Jim*, 81.

<sup>110</sup> Lowe, Hilary Iris. *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism*, 92.

<sup>111</sup> Lowe, *Mark Twain's Homes and Literary Tourism*, 92.

<sup>112</sup> Anthony Birch, (May/2019).

University of Missouri-St. Louis's Center for international studies, and sponsors of the African World Festival. A local newspaper announced that the invitation that was extended the entire community of Hannibal, to including teachers and local churches.<sup>113</sup> Another instance was the city of Hannibal reached out to the black community was by recognizing the closing of the black Douglas School in 1955 during desegregation. According to Faden, the closing was not recognized by the city or covered by any of the local newspapers at the time. In 2006, the Hannibal School Board presented certificates recognizing those students who were a part of this dramatic social change for former black Douglas School students<sup>114</sup> Most importantly, Faye Dant, a board member of the Marion County Historical Society, the Missouri Humanities Council, and the Missouri Association for Museums and Archives, opened Jim's Journey: The Huck Finn Freedom Center in 2011.<sup>115</sup> The center is located in a historic stone building, next to the Hannibal Convention and Visitors Bureau, and owned by the city of Hannibal. According to Dant, the name of the museum, Jim's Journey, is based on the character of Jim, the escaped slave who appeared in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*.<sup>116</sup> Jim's Journey is the only museum dedicated to Daniel Quarles the African American who inspired the character of Jim in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Daniel Quarles also known as Uncle Dan'l was the real life slave owned by Samuel Clemens's uncle John Quarles. Samuel Clemens

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<sup>113</sup> Regina Faden, "Presenting Mark Twain: Keeping the Edge Sharp, 28.

<sup>114</sup> Regina Faden, "Presenting Mark Twain: Keeping the Edge Sharp," 28.

<sup>115</sup> University of Missouri, Missouri Folk Arts Program, "*Upcoming 2018 Juneteenth Celebration in Hannibal, By Faye Dant.*" <http://mofolkarts.missouri.edu/2018/06/11/upcoming-juneteenth-celebration-inhannibal-by-faye-dant/>. 1.

<sup>116</sup> Dant, Faye. 2019. "Jim's Journey." *Hannibal Magazine*, July 2019. <http://www.hannibalmag.com/jim-s-journey.2>.



spent some of his summers with John Quarles on his uncle John Quarles farm in Florida, Missouri. Twain described Uncle Daniel in his *Own Autobiography*, “Uncle Dan’l,” 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.”<sup>117</sup> The center is a repository for photographs, documents, literature and exhibits that highlight the African American experience in the Hannibal area. It’s a place to learn about learn how slavery flourished for decades until it was abolished after the Civil War, and how African Americans have been subjected to decades of racism, discrimination and segregation in the years since.<sup>118</sup> The Jim’s Journey: The Huck Finn Freedom Center played a significant role in this research. Visiting Jim’s Journey and having the opportunity to meet and speak with Faye Dant added another dimension to my research. Faye Dant, a native of Hannibal has spent several decades collecting stories, photographs and artifacts from the local African American that gives Hannibal’s history another texture. The Huck Center sheds a bright light on how Hannibal has hidden race, racism and slavery from its past, and how mistreated its black citizens from slavery to the present. Loewen argues, that the Huck Finn Freedom center’s exhibits tell the story of Hannibal’s black community from slavery to the present, and in the process, the Freedom Center interprets Twain’s thinking and writing in ways that Hannibal has failed to do. The Center explains how Twain absorbed a racist point of view from his community

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<sup>117</sup> Kiskis, *Mark Twain’s Own Autobiography*),115.

<sup>118</sup> Dant, Faye. 2019. “Jim’s Journey. 2.

growing up in Hannibal, the church he attended, and his own slave-owning family.<sup>119</sup> The Freedom Center offers its visitors the opportunity to learn the real Samuel Clemens and how he used his talents as a writer to fight for human rights and against the racism he observed in his day.<sup>120</sup>



Jim's Journey

A decade after the initial interview with Fishkin, Sweets was re-interviewed. Sweets, and the museum's long-term director stated, "we don't react to one person," but continues on with how the museum has changed its presentation. Sweets explains how the museum has included added an exhibit that focuses on the Clemens family's intimate relationship with slavery. A small sign in the kitchen of the boyhood home explains the tiny sleeping pallet on the floor. The sign reads, "Household slaves would not have beds. They would have slept on a . . . compilation of sheets, blankets, clothes or rugs. . . . Slaves would have slept near the fireplace where they could tend the fire and have it ready to

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<sup>119</sup> Loewen, *Lies Across America*, 163.

<sup>120</sup> Loewen, *Lies Across America*, 163.

prepare breakfast.”<sup>121</sup> Sweets said the museum plans to “change drastically,” by addressing issues of race past and present. A recent discovery of ledgers from the courtroom of John Marshall Clemens’s law office could present an opportunity for the museum to update their present interpretation and presentation of John Marshall’s role as justice of the peace.<sup>122</sup> Sweets Another change was Cindy Lovell, who served as assistant director of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home and Museum from 2009 to 2013. She taught a course titled, “Prison Nation” in Quincy, Illinois.<sup>123</sup> This course educates the public on what has been called the new Jim Crow. Lovell also serves on the Community Partners for Reconciliation. The panel is half black and half white, and the goal is to eradicate racism in Hannibal. The museum hosted a Partners for Reconciliation-sponsored anti-racism workshop, and assisted local black residents to develop Jim’s Journey to observe and recognize the history of Hannibal’s black residents and contribution to the city.<sup>124</sup> Another case where the city of Hannibal made a conscious effort to acknowledge and correct its wrongful past, is the racist way it had treated Joe Douglas who was also known as Injun Joe in Hannibal. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2016, a new historic marker commemorating the importance of Douglasville was placed near Joe Douglas’s former residence at 819 Hill Street.<sup>125</sup> Keynote speaker Ruth Hunter Linear, presented the history

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<sup>121</sup> Sweet, Henry. “Travelwithtwain.org/2011/09/29/hannibal-mo/mark-twain...hood-home-and-museum-brgins-to-acknowledge-slavery-after-criticism/, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Sweet, Henry. “Travelwithtwain.org/2011/09/29/hannibal-mo/mark-twain...hood-home-and-museum-brgins-to-acknowledge-slavery-after-criticism/, 2.

<sup>123</sup> Sweet, Henry. “Travelwithtwain.org/2011/09/29/hannibal-mo/mark-twain...hood-home-and-museum-brgins-to-acknowledge-slavery-after-criticism/, 2.

<sup>124</sup> Sweet, Henry. “Travelwithtwain.org/2011/09/29/hannibal-mo/mark-twain...hood-home-and-museum-brgins-to-acknowledge-slavery-after-criticism/, 2.

<sup>125</sup> Eric Dundon. 2016. “Memory of Joe Douglas, Douglasville celebrated at unveiling of sign.” Courier-Post, September 29, 2016. <https://www.hannibal.net/news/20160929/memory-of-joe-douglas-douglasville-celebrated-at-unveiling-of-sign/>. 2.

of the area, and Joe Douglas's involvement in establishing what is considered to be one of the first and largest communities in the area settled by former slaves.<sup>126</sup>

In 1995, Shelley Fisher Fishkin criticized Hannibal for erasing race, racism and slavery from its past. From 1995 to 2001, there was no sign that any changes had taken place. By 2002, Hannibal began to make plans for changes in the way it interpreted and presented Mark Twain and the famous writers literary work. Under Rounds guidance the board members master plan suggested that the museum use lighting and audio and visual effects that would lead visitors through a house filled with a series of Clemens's autobiography, letters and novels. The museum shifted its emphasis from Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher and spent more effort presenting Samuel Clemens. The museum also introduced its visitors to more of the factual part of Sam Clemens's life growing up in Hannibal. His experiences and familiarity with the harsh realities of the lives of slaves and slavery. The white citizen of created opportunities to partnership with African Americans to establish a museum that would articulate the experiences of blacks from slavery to the present. In 2011, Jim's Journey: The Huck Finn Freedom Center was the result partnership efforts between the white and black citizens of Hannibal. A new plaque was presented commemorating the memory of Joe Douglas one of Hannibal outstanding African American citizens. The sign recognized the importance of an area known as Douglasville, and shed positive light on a dark era of the city's history. Despite these efforts, Hannibal failed to change its advertising and marketing strategies by including

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<sup>126</sup> Eric Dundon. 2016. "Memory of Joe Douglas, Douglasville celebrated at unveiling of sign." Courier-Post, September 29, 2016. <https://www.hannibal.net/news/20160929/memory-of-joe-douglas-douglasville-celebrated-at-unveiling-of-sign/>. 2.

African Americans in its brochures and as late as 2018 continued to cater to white patrons.



Memory of Joe Douglas, Douglasville celebrated at unveiling of sign  
Eric Dundon Courier-Post<sup>127</sup>

### Conclusion

In 1995 the city of Hannibal, Missouri was cited by erasing race, racism and slavery from its history. It was also criticized for misinterpreting and misrepresenting the literary work of one of America's most famous writers Mark Twain. Over the past twenty-five years Hannibal has made effort to change how it interpret Twain's life and literature by recognizing slaves and slavery played a major role in his life. The museum's board members recognized that omitting Jim Twain's most famous black characters from its presentations was wrong, and made strong efforts to include Jim and other stories about slavery into its narrative. Many of the white citizen help black citizen with various partnerships to create better race relations between whites and blacks in Hannibal, but as

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<sup>127</sup> Eric Dundon. 2016. "Memory of Joe Douglas, 2.

late as 2019 the city continues to omit African Americans from its advertising and marketing strategy suggests the city of Hannibal and some of its white citizens are still struggling with racism.

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