

# Huckleberry Finn

at the  
CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts  
San Francisco

An Essay in Seven Parts by Erik Bakke

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## I. Kara Walker (1969) and Frederick Douglass (circa 1818-1895)

Kara Walker's work THE NIGGER HUCK FINN PURSUES HAPPINESS BEYOND THE NARROW CONSTRAINTS OF YOUR OVERDETERMINED THESIS ON FREEDOM--DRAWN AND QUARTERED BY MISTER KARA WALKERBERRY, WITH CONDOLENCES TO THE AUTHORS is found on the second floor of the exhibition *Huckleberry Finn* at the CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco.

Mark Twain uses the word "nigger" around 200 times in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He does not use the word once in his letter to President James Garfield recommending that Frederick Douglass continue on with his position as Marshal of the District of Columbia. The letter dated January 12, 1881, reads in part "I offer this petition with peculiar pleasure and strong desire, because I so honor this man's high and blemishless character and so admire his brave, long crusade for the liberties and elevation of his race. He is a personal friend of mine, but that is nothing to the point--his history would move me to say these things without that. And to feel them, too." By this time Twain had already been at work on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* for five years and was four years away from publishing it.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [www.virginia.edu/insideuva/textonlyarchive/97-04-04/2.txt](http://www.virginia.edu/insideuva/textonlyarchive/97-04-04/2.txt)

<sup>2</sup> Paraphrased from 9.28.2010 discussion with Kara Walker at opening reception for *Huckleberry Finn*.

*Huckleberry Finn* is the third show of a series based on "canonical American novels." The first show in 2008 was *The Wizard of Oz* and the second in 2009 was *Moby-Dick*. *Huckleberry Finn*'s exhibition dates are September 28 to December 11, 2010. Fifteen commissions were completed for the exhibition and it includes work in a wide variety of media by thirty-six artists and, further, includes historical documents, photographs, artifacts and films. The exhibition fills the two floors of the Wattis galleries; part of the wall text introducing the exhibition reads, "Twain's depiction of the South in the 1830s was actually a close and uncomfortable look at race relations in his own time."

Set among Walker's signature black paper, mostly life-size, cut-out figures that create a wall length tableau are eight framed gouaches. In one gouache Huck is found idly relaxing on a raft, lying on his stomach, pipe in mouth, being fucked by Jim. The "Nigger Huck" may have been interested to know that anti-miscegenation laws were lifted by the Supreme Court in 1967.

In discussion Walker has stated that, upon rereading *Huckleberry Finn*, it struck her that Huck as a child of an abusive upbringing managed to escape with his good nature intact.<sup>2</sup>

Huck's father is described in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as being abusive not only to Huck but of any kindness shown him. That Huck lived in fear is made clear in the description of his father's return after a long absence, "I used to be scared of him all the time, he tanned me so much. I reckoned I was scared now, too (...)"<sup>3</sup>

Walker's using "nigger" as a descriptive of Huck gets right to the point of Huck's father treating Huck as a slave. Not only does he treat him as a slave but the book's narrative leads the reader through the very same injustices Frederick Douglass describes in his account of his life as a slave in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. One of the primary impetuses for Douglass desiring to work hard to learn to read was the argument the slaveholder holding him, Mr. Auld, gave his slave holding wife, Mrs. Auld, against teaching Douglass to read. Douglass quotes Mr. Auld, "if you teach that nigger (speaking of myself) how to read, there would be no keeping him. It would forever unfit him to be a slave. He would at once become unmanageable, and of no value to his master. As to himself, it could do him no good, but a great deal of harm. I would make him discontented and unhappy."<sup>4</sup> Douglass then details the troubles he underwent learning to read and then how he taught

others to read and how reading the abolitionist journal *Liberator* reenforced his own ability to express the wrongs of slavery and led him to become involved in the abolitionist movement. Huck's father expresses the same logic as Mr. Auld directly to Huck regarding the education Huck had been receiving in his father's absence.

*And looky-here--you drop that school, you hear? I'll learn people to bring up a boy to put on airs over his own father and let on to be better'n what he is. You lemme catch you fooling around that school again, you hear? Your mother couldn't read, and she couldn't write, nuther, before she died. None of the family couldn't, before they died. I can't; and here you're a-swelling yourself up like this. I ain't the man to stand it--you hear? Say--lemme hear your read.*<sup>5</sup>

Pap's attitude towards Huck's education is not the only similarity one can make in comparing Huck to a slave. Not only does Huck's father consider Huck property but he also considers Huck's property his property. Douglass clearly describes how when he worked for wages he was obligated to give the slave holder all his money--and then on occasion if he gave, for example, the slave holder six dollars he might get six cents in return. Huck is in the situation, as described in Twain's book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, of having come into a fortune of six thousand dollars. The exact reason for Huck's father's return is to get this money which he cannot do because Huck was clever enough to sign over his money to the

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<sup>3</sup> Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 23.

<sup>4</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 20.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 24.

judge managing his money as soon as he realized his father was coming. Huck is then left with whatever dollars he borrows from the judge. Here is the exchange between Huck and his father: "Say--how much you got in your pocket? I want it." "I hain't got only a dollar, and want that to--" "It don't make no difference what you want it for--you just shell it out."<sup>6</sup>

This exchange reminds of a number of exchanges in Douglass' account, "I could see no reason why I should , at the end of each week, pour the reward of my toil into the purse of my master. When I carried to him my weekly wages, he would, after counting the money, look me in the face with a robber-like fierceness, and ask, "Is this all?" He was satisfied with nothing less than the last cent."<sup>7</sup>

Walker's work extends the length of the Wattis gallery's upper floor's southeast wall. Across the length of the wall are nearly life size silhouettes of figures made from cut black paper. The medium and style of these figures are recognizable as those Walker introduced at The Drawing Center in 1994--antebellum figures, slaves and slaveholders and others, interact in a scene at once sexual, violent and fantastic.

Walker's 2010 work at the Wattis includes what we can take to be the repeating figures of Huck and his father and Jim. Other figures are also present. The father can be recognized in part for being the figure, at one point in

the tableau, beating Huck and for his "long and tangled and greasy" hair. A variety of scenes--as in Walker's earlier work, some sexual some violent--play out through the interactions of the cutout figures. The figures stand on a light brown ground painted directly onto the wall. This ground is divided into two parts, and like the banks of a river the left and right side dip down at the works center leaving visible a gap of white wall. Into this gap can be seen falling two figures, much smaller than the rest, that can be understood as Jim and Huck. Framed and hanging amidst the entire scene are eight gouache paintings. The contents of the gouache paintings help define Walker's approach to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In the first gouache, which is located at the corner next to the title label, and off the main wall of the work, is a painting with a depiction which suggests a book jacket. On the left side of the jacket underneath a drawn caricature of a black girl is the text "THE LAST DAYS OF HUCK FINN BY THE AUTHOR TOPSY." This text is not written as typed here but in reverse. On the right side of the text is a caricature of Huck with the text, "ROTE ABOUT THAT TWAT TOPSY AND WHY I HATE OBAMA CARE I THINK YOR TRULY: HUCK." The figure of Topsy is not one it would be easy to associate with any figure in Twain's book. Here she can be understood to be an insertion into the narrative by the artist. In one of the scenes depicted through the cutout figures Huck is running and Topsy's legs are over his shoulders and the viewer understands that by the way Topsy is waving

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>7</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 1995), 60.

Huck's hat, like rodeo cowboy riding a horse, and by the presence of Huck's erection, that the couple is engaging or is about to engage in some rather high-energy sexual activity. Huck, while running, has Jim's hand clasped to his ankle. The hand and wrist have been torn from Jim's arm. Jim with his torn arm stands just behind Huck as if this tearing off of his arm has just happened. Here, perhaps, we have Topsy replacing Jim as Huck's lover.

To the left of this vignette is the previously describe image of Huck's father beating him. Huck protests, futilely waving his arms. This image ties to the image of Huck to the left of this one where Huck drags, axe in hand, what looks like his father's lifeless body. In fact Walker has gone further and here it looks like Huck might be dragging just the skin of his lifeless father.

The title of Walker's piece assists here: "THE NIGGER HUCK FINN PURSUES HAPPINESS BEYOND THE NARROW CONSTRAINTS OF YOUR OVERDETERMINED THESIS ON FREEDOM..." In Huck's case freedom from the father is not just a psychologically Oedipal freedom after the metaphorical killing of the father. Huck was in actual bondage to his father, and, in fact and a fact not known to Huck until later in his journey down river, it is not just the running away by taking a raft down the Mississippi that brings him his freedom but the actual death of his father. Walker points to this freedom as being something more, and that it should be something more, than just release from bondage. Within Walker's narrative both violent retribution and sexual freedom are aspects of this expanded freedom.

Walker's multi-media approach is in accord with her approach in a number of her recent works. The exhibition *Kara Walker: My Complement, My Enemy, My Oppressor, My Love*, at the Hammer in Los Angeles in 2007, featured not only cutouts and watercolors but also light projections and an emphasis on text. Of course, thematically not only did the work in that exhibition point directly to the history of slavery in the United States, as does Twain's narrative in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, but it investigates the conflict, trauma and confusion--including feelings of repulsion and attraction--created between an abuser and an abused.

If we are to take, for a moment, Topsy as the author of the the work at the Wattis her titling of the piece as "THE LAST DAYS OF HUCK FINN" raises other questions. Without holding to a fixed answer these words can be thought of as referring to the last days of the Huck Finn we the readers thought we knew. The new Huck has gone beyond what have been described as the confines of Twain's story. Or, perhaps, the message is more bleak. If you do go beyond the confines of society--if you do take violent revenge on an oppressor (even one deserving of the retribution); if you do explore sexual freedom to a full extent; if you do co-mingle with those on the margins of society--then you to will be diminished and if not swallowed up by the margins of society you will be relegated to them.

Societal constraint also figures large in Walker's work. In the vignette with Topsy atop the sexually readied Huck is the cutout of a woman wearing an Antebellum ball gown:

she has a shepherds crook and looks as if she is about to pull Topsy off of Huck. She could be taken as a stand-in for the Widow or Miss Watson in Twain's story--the crook suggests the pulling off of the stage of an unwanted performer in a vaudeville act; the characters of Twain's story may be attempting to remove the unwanted intruder. But here, the figure, judging by her formal evening dress is in sexual competition with Topsy. She not only represents a societal critique of with whom Huck should couple but also, perhaps, the view of the individual members of society competing amongst themselves. This also brings the reader back to Douglass' account of normative behavior of slaveholders and his own particular origins.

*The whisper that my master was my father may or may not be true; and, true or false, it is of but little consequence to my purpose whilst the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father.*

*I know of such cases; and it is worthy of remark that such slaves invariably suffer greater hardships, and have more to contend with, than others. They are, in the first place, a constant offence to their mistress.*<sup>8</sup>

Walker at once points to Huck's freedom as circumscribed by Twain and also to the larger question of how to sort out the reality of and ramifications of

interracial and interclass, not to mention interperson, sex during the time of slavery and after.

The playwright Scott Kaiser has in his play "Splittin' the Raft" (the version referenced here from 2007) superimposed Frederick Douglass' voice onto Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In the play Douglass appears as narrator of Huck's story and also as Douglass himself--as the orator Douglass he offers words from his own speeches.

HUCK: He went for me, too, for not stopping school.

*(PAP comes up behind HUCK and beats him with his hickory.)*

DOUGLASS: He caught me a couple of times and thrashed me.

HUCK: I didn't want to go to school much, before, but I reckoned I'd go now to spite pap.

BLACK WOMAN: Every time he got money he got drunk; and every time he got drunk he raised Cain with Judge Thatcher about the money; and every time he raised Cain he got jailed.

*(PAP is cuffed again.)*

HUCK: He was just suited--this kind of thing was right in his line.

DOUGLASS: Then, one day in the spring, he caught me, and took me up the river about three mile, in a skiff.

*(HUCK rows the skiff, while PAP sits in the stern and drinks.)*

PAP: Yes, and I told 'em so; I told old Thatcher so to his face. Lot's of 'em heard me.

HUCK: Pap warn't in a good humor, so he was his natural self.

*(DOUGLASS appears, as if speaking at a podium to a crowded hall.)*

DOUGLASS: Oh, be warned, fellow citizens, be warned!

PAP: There was this free nigger standin' there from up north--why there ain't a man in this town that's got as fine clothes as what he had.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 2.

DOUGLASS: A horrible reptile is coiled up in your nation's bosom; the venomous creature is nursing at the tender breast of your youthful republic.

PAP: And what do you think? They said he made ab'litionist speeches up north, and he thought he knowed everything.

DOUGLASS: For the love of God, tear away, and fling from you the hideous monster, and let the weight of twenty millions crush and destroy it forever!

PAP: I says to the people, why ain't this nigger put up at auction and sold?—that's what I want to know.

DOUGLASS: Whether we turn to the declarations of the past, or to the professions of the present, the conduct of the nation seems equally hideous and revolting.

PAP: And that ain't the wust. They said that nigger could vote when he was at home.

DOUGLASS: America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future.

PAP: When they told me that, I says I'll never vote agin. The country may rot for all me—I'll never vote agin as long as I live.

DOUGLASS: Standing with God and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of liberty, which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the bible, which are disregarded and trampled on, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America!

PAP: That prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted, low-down ab'litionist, free

nigger—why he wouldn't a give me the road if I hadn't shoved him out o' the way.

HUCK: Pap and me crossed over to the Illinois shore where it was woody and there warn't no houses but an old log hut in a place where the timber was so thick you couldn't find it if you didn't know where it was.

*(PAP kicks the pig out of the way, and pushes HUCK into the cabin.)*

BLACK WOMAN: He kept me with him all the time, and I never got a chance to run off. He always locked the door and put the key under his head, nights.

*(PAP strikes HUCK to the floor with his hickory.)*

DOUGLASS: By-and-by, pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it. I was all over welts.

BLACK WOMAN: He got to going away so much, too, and locking me in.

HUCK: Once he locked me in and was gone three days. It was dreadful lonesome. I judged he had got drowned and I wasn't ever going to get out any more. I was scared. So I made up my mind I would fix up some way to leave there.

*(Night. PAP returns to the cabin. He carries his rifle. He has the delirium tremens—and believes two spirits are following him.)<sup>9</sup>*

Kaiser's juxtaposition brings to the reader's attention Pap's poor character but also that he may very well have been, in his complaint, speaking of Frederick Douglass or, among other possibilities, if we take the descriptions more literally, John G. Mitchell or William Wells Brown. Here we can compare Kaiser's use of Twain's passage regarding Pap's views of the free man to the original passage.<sup>10</sup>

*"O, Yes, this is a wonderful govment, wonderful. Why looky-here. there was a free nigger there, from Ohio; a mulatter, most as white as a white man. He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat; and there ain't a man in that town that's got as fine clothes as what he had; and he had a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane--the awfulest old gray-headed nabob in the State. And what do you think? they said he was a p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed evrything. And that ain't the wust. They said he could vote, when he was at home. Well that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was 'lection*

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<sup>9</sup> Scott Kaiser, *Splittin' the Raft* (2007), 13-15.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 33, 34.

*day, and I was just about to go and vote, myself, if I warn't too drunk to git there; but when they told me there was a state in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drew out. I says I'll never vote agin. Them's the very words I said, they all heard me; and the country may rot, for all me--I'll never vote agin as long as I live. And to see the cool way of that nigger--why he wouldn't a give me the road if I hadn't shoved him out o' the way. I says to the people, why ain't this nigger put up at auction and sold?--that's what I want to know. And what do you reckon they said? Why they said he couldn't be sold till he'd been in the State six months, and he hadn't been there that long yet. There, now--that's a specimen. They call that a govment that can't sell a free nigger till he's been in the State six months. Here's a govment that calls itself a govment, and lets on to be a govment, and thinks it is a govment, and yet's got to set stock still for six whole months before it can take a-hold of a prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted free nigger and--"*

Through Pap, Twain's Socratic irony is at its fullest. The reader must ask, of course, "how can a free man be sold?" Also by putting the words in the mouth of the violent drunk Pap, questions are certainly raised about who is the ideal voter and what is the function of voting in a democracy. Before going back to Walker's work we can stop to look at two more instances where Twain makes it clear, through his use of irony, that the author of the work is most likely not only an abolitionist but also sensitive to the pain and suffering of all mankind. Huck, in the course of telling one of his many lies, is explaining to Tom Sawyer's Aunt Sally, who unbeknownst to Huck has mistaken him for Tom, that the reason he, meaning Tom though he doesn't know that this is who he is pretending

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 279.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 269.

to be, is late is because of a problem with the boat. This exchange follows.

"It warn't the grounding--that didn't keep us back but a little. We blew out a cylinder-head."

"Good gracious! anybody hurt?"

"No'm. Killed a nigger."

"Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt."<sup>11</sup>

Both Aunt Sally and Huck are complicit in their unthinking agreement that nobody got hurt. The sensible reader, responding as they should to the ironic construction, will say to themselves, "wait, no, a person was killed."

Not much earlier in the book Huck comes to the conclusion that he is going to free Jim from incarceration. This is a key moment for Huck in his thinking about who he is and it is also a key moment for the reader as the reader is being carefully directed by Twain to think about slavery. In fact, to emphasize that it is a key moment, Kemble's illustration of the scene shows a pensive Huck, and the caption reads "Thinking." Huck is thinking about a letter he has just written that will return Jim as a slave to Miss Watson.

Miss Watson your runaway nigger Jim is down here two mile below Pikesville and Mr. Phelps has got him and he will give him up for the reward if you send. Huck Finn.<sup>12</sup>

Here Finn is acting as he was brought up. And as the following passage illustrates he at first feels good about



acting as society would have dictated. But then, as we can be sure Twain would have thought would have been a fine idea for all of his readers, Huck begins to think for himself.

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray, now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking; thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, stead of calling me--so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the only one he's got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself "All right, then, I'll go to hell"--and tore it up.<sup>13</sup>

Twain, brilliantly, couches Huck's decision not in terms of his deciding to do the right thing but by showing that Huck is certain he is doing the wrong thing by not turning over Jim to a slaveholder. Not only that, but Huck is certain he

is going to hell and is quite uncomfortable with his decision. What follows is Huck's decision then that he should free Jim not because it is right but because he is already going 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. I shoved the whole thing out of my head; and said I would take up wickedness again, which was in my line, being brung up to it, and the other warn't. And for a starter, I would go to work and steal Jim out of slavery again; and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that, too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog.<sup>14</sup>

His justification for being this way is that his father was bad so he is naturally bad. Again, it is left for the reader to say "no, wait, the father was a selfish, violent, cruel asshole and Huck has decided to do a selfless act to help a friend even though it puts his body and psyche in peril."

Returning to Walker's tableau and looking just to the right of the Jim with the missing hand, the viewer sees the point where the two banks of the river dive into the floor. In this gap are falling a small black paper cut-out of Jim and one of Huck. Returning to the work's title "THE NIGGER HUCK FINN PURSUES HAPPINESS BEYOND THE NARROW CONSTRAINTS OF YOUR OVERDETERMINED THESIS ON FREEDOM..." reinforces that notion that freedom is not to be found in the "narrow constraints" of the river. Freedom in this tableau is to be found on land. And what is happening on

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 269-271.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 271.

land: on the left bank, Huck partakes in a personal revolution of sex and violence; on the right bank, there is more of the same. Immediately to the right of the river gap are two figures. They are a little hard to place directly, but an adult woman and man are about to engage in a French kiss. The woman looks like a grown up version of Topsy and the man looks to be a middle age, rotund member of the upper middle class (his class based on his dress and shoes), perhaps an art collector. Topsy is lifting his pocket watch just at the moment of the kiss. In a nice sleight of hand, the view of the pocket watch gives the impression that Topsy might instead be lightly pulling on the ring, with chain attached, of a Prince Albert penis piercing.

The vignette to the right of the kissing couple includes Huck's father. Here the father is bent over puking into his hat. Astride his back is the figure of a boy, who could be a young Jim, who holds a piece of wood with a nail through it and looks as if he is going to strike Pap in the head. In front of Pap is Huck with a boulder size rock large enough to smash Pap's head with a definitive death blow. This scene reminds of Huck's experience of being locked in the cabin with Pap and his father's hallucinations. Kaiser refers to these in the selection from his play quoted above: "He has the delirium tremens—and believes two spirits are following him." Twain describes the father's vision as overlapping with his view of Huck.

*By and by he rolled out and jumped up on his feet looking wild, and he see me and went for me. He chased me round and round the*

*place, with a clasp-knife, calling me the angel of death and saying he would kill me and then I couldn't come for him no more. I begged, and told him I was only Huck, but he laughed such a screechy laugh, and roared and cussed, and kept on chasing me up.<sup>15</sup>*

To the right of what seems must be the imminent murder of Pap by either a slave or a son stands the young Topsy looking on. Topsy wears Huck's hat and smokes his pipe. She seems to be looking on the murder with approval. A small scale black paper Huck, not tall enough to reach her knee, stands at her feet at rapt attention while stroking his hard dick. Coming out the top of Huck's hat, as it appears on Topsy's head, is an afro in the shape of a mushroom cloud that also looks a bit like a brain--perhaps referencing Pap's soon to be displaced brains--and with the exploded hat suggesting at once an atomic explosion and an ejaculation.

In the black paper vignette to the furthest right of the tableau Huck carries Jim on his back. The brown ground slopes steeply toward the ceiling and Jim and Huck both use paddles from the canoe to help them climb the hill, to help them realize their difficult escape. Here one might think of Don Quixote and Sancho Panzo on foot.

The second part of Walker's title reads "...DRAWN AND QUARTERED BY MISTER KARA WALKERBERRY, WITH CONDOLENCES TO THE AUTHORS." As the first watercolor makes clear the two author's are Topsy and Huck with "Kara" as the illustrator.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 36.

The last image of Topsy taking over Huck's role explains in a different way why he is experiencing his last days. The battle described previously may not be the young Jim with stick and nail and Huck with rock trying to kill Huck's father but may be the young Jim and Huck trying to kill each other. This would be the continuation of the vignette on the left bank where Topsy has interrupted the relationship between Jim and Huck, resulting in Huck causing harm to Jim. This scenario would go a ways to explaining Huck's calling Topsy a "Twat" and to his trying to exit stage right with Jim to avoid all the drama--if not his own demise. As to why Huck says his story is also about, "... WHY I HATE OBAMA CARE I THINK"--the suppositions up to this point are attenuated enough to leave further interpretation along this line for a later moment.

Walker has designed the tableau, comprised of the black paper vignettes previously described, so that to see it all the viewer needs to be some distance away, and at this distance the eight framed watercolor works of modest size that hang amidst the tableau are not fully legible. Likewise if the watercolor works are being observed from up close it is difficult to take in the black paper tableau.

The title gouache (where the "authors" Topsy and Huck state their views), what will be called the first one, here, as described, is off of the main wall. The second gouache work hangs between the vignette of Pap striking Huck and of Topsy and Huck getting it on. In this second gouache a spaghetti armed cartoon figure painted jet black hugs a portion of raft. Holes are cut in the raft emphasizing the cartoon aspect of the drawing. It reminds

of Fred Wilson's toy eyes glued to black glassworks that reference historical caricatures of African-Americans that emphasize bright, bright whites of eyes against charcoal black faces.

The third gouache appears right above the river gap and the fourth just above that. The text "LICK EM' DRY" floats in front of a pastoral scene (not a body of water in site) in the third gouache. If the phrase "LICK EM' DRY" is searched for, verbatim, using Google the following Twitter account appears. Condolences to the Authors.

Renee\_Couture1

Name LICK EM' DRY )

Bio Love my females odee )!!! Loving my Life &nd it gets no better :)!

Thee sexx was amazing ;)!! 4:25 PM Oct 23rd via Twitter for BlackBerry®

@ATadEvil hmph what?? 2:59 PM Oct 22nd via Twitter for BlackBerry®

Where's the party at tonite I'm ready to shake my rump shaker owww!! 2:08 PM Oct 22nd via Twitter for BlackBerry®

The paranormal activity movie was freaky Imaooo...katie snapped that nigga neck thoo smh ;)!! 2:07 PM Oct 22nd via Twitter for BlackBerry®

\_ImPrettyAmazin I Wish The Endin Was A Lil Better; But Paranormal Activity Was Def A Okay Movie 11:51 PM Oct 21st via ÜberTwitter Retweeted by Renee\_Couture1

@cashblowin i heard it alreadyy its hott goahead cb im proud of you 9:51 AM Oct 21st via web in reply to cashblowin

@cashblowin loveeeee yahhh....how the hell are you?? 9:36 AM Oct 21st via web in reply to cashblowin

@lam\_sp aint shit trying to do my hair!! I wanna go to see panormal activity 2 tonite!! 9:03 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry® in reply to lam\_sp

This is what I madee for breakfast!!! Yummy hahaha <http://yfrog.com/n7w17lj> 9:02 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry®

Omg I burned my fucking hair w/ this damn perm...(Screaming) shit it hurts odee!! 9:00 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry®  
@MrLukeBenson sexyy hunnie bcuz I'm going FIERCE!!! 8:58 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry® in reply to MrLukeBenson  
@cashblowin I know how life goes I've been thruu it but shit dnt think ur low 8:56 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry® in reply to cashblowin  
@lam\_sp tell me about it!!! How you been thouu?? 8:56 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry® in reply to lam\_sp  
Omg my bday is in 9days!!!! Yayyy Happy Halloween people!! 8:55 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry®  
I want some pancakes, bacon, eggs, sausages, toasted bagel w/ butter nd a glass of oj! 8:50 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry®  
I dnt understand why people have to act different when they on the phone w/ their exs like comeon chica I knew it was her from the jump!! 8:46 AM Oct 21st via Twitter for BlackBerry®

Gouache number four presents the two in need of being licked dry. As described, Jim fucks Huck. In contrast to the cut-outs where Jim's aspect is more caricature than portrait, here Jim is rendered with some sensitivity and also as if for a poster promoting a black, gay matinee idol.

The next three gouaches reside between the French kissing couple and the puking Pap black paper vignettes. In gouache number five a small Topsy is holding the hand of a nude figure that looks like a female Huck. Continuing left to right is the sixth gouache; a nude man of African descent is running. He is tangled up in red ribbon or tape. Perhaps this is why Huck hates "OBAMA CARE." In the third gouache of this group, the seventh from the left, one smaller figure wearing a hat is hugging the larger figure of a woman wearing a hat. The couple could be embracing or perhaps the smaller is suckling.

In the final, the eighth, gouache Huck appears on the left and Jim on the right. Both figures are doubled--realigned like a moving image on a neon sign. Jim stands. Jim bends over and reaches forward and perhaps grabs Huck's cock or perhaps inserts his finger like a doubting Thomas.

If compared in a relative fashion the gouaches provide some moments of sanity through some warm embraces and human connections (though not completely) where as the parallel world of the paper cut-outs offers a caricature of a punishing hell (though not completely). To absorb the richness of the complete work, the viewer would be advised to not be in a hurry to leave too quickly.

## II. Allison Smith (1972) and German Colonialism (1848)

At the Wattis on a downstairs wall, with the same southeastern orientation as the wall on which Walker's work is installed upstairs, is Allison Smith's installation *A Good Haul*, 2010. Twain describes how Huck and Jim observe a house floating down the river. Inside the house is a dead man shot in the back. Jim looks at the body and says to Huck, "I reck'n he's ben dead two er three days. Come in , Huck, but doan' look at his face--it's too gashly."<sup>16</sup> What Huck does not know and what the reader does not know is that the dead man is Huck's father. Even the next day when Huck asks about the dead man Jim steers Huck away from the conversation saying that it would be "bad luck." This is but one instance where Jim's sagacity is on display. Not to nitpick an excellent exhibition and it's informative texts but Jim's intelligence as noted throughout *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* does make one description in the Wattis' exhibitions texts stand out awkwardly. Within the brochure for the exhibition, available at the entrance, and containing overviews of each artists' work, is a description of Jason Meadow's sculpture containing this comment, "Though playful in obvious ways, the sculpture is also a incisive parody of Mark Twain's depictions of Huck (as a sharp-witted, adventure-seeking white youth) and Jim (as tall and loveable, if dimwitted, black man)." Leaving aside whether

or not Meadow's had anything to do with this comment or if his work functions as a parody, and particularly a parody of something that does not exist in Twain's book, it should be stressed here that calling Jim "dimwitted" is misleading, inaccurate and perpetrates the very misconceptions and stereotypes about Twain's book, and, of deeper import, slaves and those of African heritage, that one hopes the Wattis exhibition would in part dispel. One can find plenty of examples of Jim's lack of education and further examples of his being superstitious and, in addition, Twain at moments makes a caricature of him, particularly in Chapter 8, and has him offer up a comedic routine of the sort one would have found in minstrel shows of the day. But on the question of Jim's intelligence Twain goes out of the way to show that Jim not only understands fundamental truisms about human nature but has the ability to make a disinterested evaluations of circumstances and make decisions that require not only intelligence but wisdom. When Huck tells Jim the story of speaking to Judith Loftus, one of the few people not tricked by Huck's lies, it is Jim's evaluation that "she was a smart one" and that if she had anything to do with searching for them she would be smart enough to get dogs and then they would be in trouble.<sup>17</sup> At the start of Chapter 14 Huck makes Jim's ability to evaluate circumstances quite clear. He says, "Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head, for a nigger." The whole point of this sentence is the juxtaposition between the first part of the sentence

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 78.

and the last three words. As becomes clear in the later stage of the book when Huck evaluates for himself what he should do about Jim's enslavement, in the first part of the sentence Huck offers a true real world evaluation that Jim is smart, from experience, and in the second part he mindlessly repeats what society has taught him about slaves and those of African heritage. At the end of Chapter 15 Jim explains to Huck why his practical joke is not appropriate. Huck has been away from the raft in a canoe and when he comes back to the raft Jim is asleep. Huck insists that all the time he was away and the trials Jim experienced in Huck's absence were but a dream. The confused Jim is finally able to separate his sleep from the reality of Huck's absence and explains how traumatized he had been thinking Huck was lost.

*En when I wake' up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun', de tears come en I could a got down on my knees en kiss' yo' foot I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinking' 'bout, wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed.*<sup>18</sup>

This thoughtful bit of observation on the nature of friendship shames Huck and he is contrite and apologizes and the reader shares in Huck's experience of learning from Jim. Later in the book Jim comes out of hiding to help a Doctor save Tom Sawyer's life. The Doctor, far from being an abolitionist, speaks on Jim's behalf so he

will not be killed for running away: "...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 man hard, lately. I liked the nigger for that; I tell you, gentlemen, a nigger like that is worth a thousand dollars..."<sup>19</sup> Not only is Jim humane but he is clever. It is his notion that Huck dress up as a girl to disguise himself, "Then he studied it over and said, couldn't I put on some of them old things and dress up like a girl? That was a good notion, too."<sup>20</sup> Finally we are back to the site where Jim finds Huck's father and his ability to misdirect Huck and keep him from thinking about who it was. The floating house is also the source of the "good haul" collected by Huck and Jim and the source of Allison Smith's installation.

The label for Smith's work, on the wall next to the installation, lists the following items in the work: "playing cards, whiskey bottles, cloth masks, calico dresses, sun bonnet, women's underclothes, men's clothing, straw hat, baby bottle, chest, trunk, tin lantern, butcher knife, Barlow knife, tallow candles, tin candlestick, gourd, tin cup, bed quilt, reticule, needles, pins, beeswax, buttons, thread, hatchet, nails, fishing line, buckskin, dog collar, horseshoe, medicine, curry comb, fiddle bow, and wooden leg."

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 66.

Revealing both the fluidity of her project, and its not quite hidden historical and contemporary references, the wall list gives no suggestion of myriad references left for the viewer to discover and contained in the items of her installation. Items are placed on the floor, on a shelf above the items on the floor and on the wall above the shelf.

To see how the feel of Smith's list compares to the feel of the book, the list can be re-extracted from the book with more of the adjectives included: old greasy cards; old whisky bottle; a couple of masks made of black cloth; two old dirty calico dresses; a sun bonnet; women's under-clothes; men's clothing; boy's old speckled straw hat; bottle that had had milk in it; a rag stopper for the baby to suck; a seedy old chest; an old hair trunk with the hinges broke; an old tin lantern; a butcher knife without any handle; a bran-new Barlow knife; a lot of tallow candles; a tin candlestick; a gourd; a tin cup; a ratty old bed quilt off the bed; a reticule with needles and pins and beeswax and buttons and thread and all such truck in it; a hatchet; some nails; a fish-line as thick as my little finger, with some monstrous hooks on it; a roll of buckskin; a leather dog-collar; a horseshoe; some vials of medicine; a good curry-comb; a ratty old fiddle-bow; a wooden leg.

The reader can observe that Smith's list is fairly faithful to the book. Looking at her installation certain items, containing references external to the book, catch the eye. The item announcing itself the loudest is a burlap bag

hanging from the bottom of the shelf. It is printed with text and imagery. There is an image of Saddam Hussein and one of Osama bin Laden, with rifle-scope cross hairs over their faces. The text above their heads reads "Terrorist Body Bag." Underneath the portraits on the right side is the text "© A. Ross." In two conjoined rectangles underneath their respective images is the text "Saddam Hussein Osama bin Laden." The line of text underneath the names is "Directions: Locate Capture" and writ large under this line of text is the word "KILL!" The next line of text reads "Stuff wretched remains in bag" and the next line reads "Send to hell!" The line below that reads "Note: bag good for all terrorists." and the final line of text, in a large rectangle, reads "God Bless America."

The next item that stands out as worthy of its own mention is a coat that looks like an Indian blanket coat. Smith's art practice includes crafting of objects and working with textiles, so the viewer can assume this is a coat of her creation. The pattern might at first seem nondescript, but the fact that the stripes on the coat are the same color scheme and order as those on the German flag seems a bit much just to be a coincidence.<sup>21</sup> It then seems quite possibly a reference to the great number of Germans that immigrated to the Missouri area during the 19th Century. The city of Hermann, Missouri, for example, is less than a 100 miles south of Jim and Huck's starting place, the fictional town of Petersburg, Missouri that seems to be in the same location as Twain's childhood hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. The town of

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<sup>21</sup> In fact, through discussion with Smith at her excellent and lucid presentation at the Wattis on Wednesday 17 November 2010, all associations made here of Smith's work *A Good Haul* with Germany, Germans and things Germanic were revealed to be inventions found only in this text.

Hermann was founded by the Deutsche Ansiedlungs-Gesellschaft zu Pennsylvania (German Settlement Society of Philadelphia) in the 1830s. Gottfried Duden promoted the area to other Germans as the Missouri Rhineland in his writings and it remains a wine growing district today. In addition the Giessen Emigration Society (founded 1833) had the further goal of creating a new German state within the United States. Heinrich H. Maurer of Tulane University wrote of this in 1917.

*German nationalism was brought to America shortly after 1830. It came in four important different forms: (1) as a movement to plant German colonies, states, and compact settlements; (2) as a Kulturpolitik, a keen sense of responsibility for German culture; (3) as a specific reaction upon American political experience; and (4) as a tendency toward separate political organizations. German nationalism has stimulated several attempts to carve a German colony or colonies for the German people out of the public domain of the United States. Of these some of the more ambitious were the Giessener Auswanderungsgesellschaft and the Mainzer Adelsverein, formed in Germany, and several societies formed in America, like the German-American settlement society of Philadelphia and some "Germania" societies.<sup>22</sup>*

In Smith's work, this coat referencing Germany is propped up in the "hair trunk." On the lid of the trunk a pair of small socks rests. Printed on the foot of each sock is a version of the original Confederate flag--the "Stars and Bars." This version has ten stars which leaves this writer a bit lost but certainly we can look to a couple of other references. The first reference being to the German

national colors on the coat which points to Nicola Marschall (1829–1917) from Rhenish, Prussia (now the Rhine Province of Germany) who is credited with designing both the "Stars and Bars" and the first Confederate uniform. Suddenly, or after looking for quite a while and doing some reading, everything falls into place and the coat is no longer just an Indian blanket coat but the coat for a confederate officer designed by a would be German colonist.

While the Giessen Emigration Society focused on Missouri the Mainzer Adelsverein (*Society for the Protection of German Immigrants in Texas*) looked to develop a new German colony in Texas. Much of the German immigration into the lands on either side of the Mississippi took place in 1848 at the time of the German Revolution. Twain was of course writing of a time prior to this in *Huckleberry Finn* but equally important he was writing his text decades after the establishment of these German communities. Allison Smith may very well be signaling Twain's own sentiment about how difficult it was to bring back the river of his childhood. In 1882--while working on *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*--Twain stated "The river is so thoroughly changed that I can't bring it back to mind even when the changes have been pointed out to me, (...) It is like a man pointing out to me a place in the sky where a cloud has been."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Heinrich H. Maurer, "The Earlier German Nationalism in America," *The American Journal of Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1917), 519.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 365.



Smith shows her hand further with the lettering on a ceramic water pitcher that is the furthest item to the left of the items on the floor. The lettering reads “St. Petersburg, Missouri.” This town is the fictional town on the Mississippi that is Huck’s home. As mentioned above it exists at the same location as Twain’s hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. On the far right of the shelf is another ceramic. This ceramic is a corked jug with the word “Katrina” written on it. Off the neck of the jug drops a rope down to the floor. On the rope are fishing hooks, “a fish-line as thick as my little finger, with some monstrous hooks on it,” and tied to the rope on the floor is a, or a replica of a, “Crescent Lid” to a “New Orleans Crescent Meter Box.” The Ford Meter Box Company has been providing these lids to New Orleans since 1921 but recently have taken to replacing them with plain lids, as reported in their publication the *Meter Setter* (November 2009), due to these lids becoming collectors’ items and as a result being the target of regular theft. The circular, iron lid features a crescent moon with lines radiating from the moon, eight stars and the text “WATER METER” written horizontally across the front. The rest of the lettering is curved. The top curved text reads “SEWERAGE & WATER BOARD CRESCENT BOX,” and the bottom curved text reads “FORD METER BOX CO. WABASH. INC.” Smith’s play here goes a couple of directions. Of course a water meter measures water but here the water it is measuring is the amount of water above it, above the city of New Orleans courtesy of Katrina. Further Samuel Clemens pen name Mark Twain is a measurement meaning two fathoms (12 feet) which

would be called out meaning it would be safe for a boat to pass. Of course in New Orleans, at the end of the Mississippi river, the waters of the Katrina flood signaled nothing but danger with the storm surge coming in at between two and three fathoms on August 29, 2005 and the flooding as it was measured on August 31st being widespread at depths of five to ten feet and numerous places deeper than that. Smith’s installation, with its visual play (not to be undervalued) and numerous ties to history, is “read” differently after doing some research. “Read” here, to continue to play, should also be considered in the manner of the Chinese expression “*du hua*” used to mean “to read a painting.”<sup>24</sup> The work is much more in actuality than any account of it.

In reading Smith’s installation, not everything will be covered here and, in addition, everything that is covered here will not necessarily follow the route of Smith’s thinking (i.e. some things are probably wrong).

In Twain’s work part of the haul is described as “a couple of masks made of black cloth(…).” The sentence continues with the comment that “and all over the walls was the ignorantest kind of words and pictures, made with charcoal.” One could imagine that these were the masks of holdup men. Smith includes masks in her installation. They rest on top of a folded blanket. The overshot weaving style suggests this work is of or related to a 2006 series of Smith’s works where each work was titled *Security Blanket (Drums of War)*. It occurs that Smith is winking to her viewers and saying looky here--

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<sup>24</sup> Maxwell K. Kearns, *How to Read Chinese Paintings*, (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008)

here is one of my works hiding behind a mask but in plain site within this other work that is ostensibly about something else. Of course, much of Smith's other work also has directly to do with the time period of Mark Twain and the Civil War.

The chest next to the hair trunk is lined with the *New York Times*. Visible is an article on the Tea Party. Tucked behind leather straps within the lid as a t-shirt with the words "Civil War Reenactor" printed on it along with the image of a cannon. Hanging off a corner of the lid is a coonskin cap. In Smith's work only part of the *New York Times* article is visible and below excerpts are provided to give a sense of the content.

*New York Times*

August 28, 2010

*Where Dr. King Stood, Tea Party Claims His Mantle*

By KATE ZERNIKE

WASHINGTON — *It seems the ultimate thumb in the eye: that Glenn Beck would summon the Tea Party faithful to a rally on the anniversary of the March on Washington, and address them from the very place where the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I have a dream" speech 47 years ago. After all, the Tea Party and its critics have been facing off for months over accusations of racism. But many of the busloads of Tea Party activists expected in Washington this weekend do not see any irony or offense. In fact, they have come to see the Tea Party as the aggrieved — its loosely affiliated members unfairly characterized, even persecuted, as extremists.*

(...)

*"It is nothing less than 'hate speech' for the N.A.A.C.P. to be smearing us as 'racists' and 'bigots,' " the petition declared. "We believe, like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., in a colorblind, postracial society. And we believe that when an organization lies and resorts to*

*desperate tactics of racial division and hatred, they should be publicly called on it."*

(...)

*He looked into the crowd and said it proved that the Tea Party was not racist. "I see black faces, Hispanic faces. I'm Jewish," he said. "Shalom, Nevada!"*

(...)

*Lloyd Marcus, a black singer who has performed on the cross-country tours of the Tea Party Express, often introduces himself by saying, "I am not an African-American, I am a Lloyd Marcus American!"*

*In a letter posted Friday on the social networking Web site Tea Party Nation, Mr. Marcus wrote, "Glenn Beck's values and principles are far more consistent with M.L.K.'s values than the black civil rights leaders who have sold their souls to the anti-God, anti-family and anti-America progressives for political power." He signed it, "Lloyd Marcus, unhyphenated American."*

(...)

Also visible in the chest is an article from the same day's paper on the five-year anniversary of Katrina. Excerpts are again provided to give a sense of the content.

*The New York Times*

August 28, 2010

THE TV WATCH

*5 Years On, Katrina Dampens Coverage*

By ALESSANDRA STANLEY

*There is a "but" in almost every look at Hurricane Katrina five years later — inspirational tableaux of bustling restaurants and open schools hedged with shots of crushed trees, abandoned houses and a Gulf Coast still flecked with BP oil.*

(...)

*Even the dramatic images of daring helicopter rescues of stranded people from rooftops are blunted by stories of police corruption, and worse, that followed. PBS marked the anniversary with a joint exposé by ProPublica, The Times-Picayune and "Frontline" that painstakingly reveals how New Orleans police officers, some of them rescue*

heroes, used inappropriate lethal force and then tried to cover up a death.

(...)

Many reports circled back to Charles Evans, who was 9 and adorable when he was taped outside the convention center, asking viewers for help. A month later, he was onstage at the 2005 Emmy awards — a smiling symbol of survival. Now 14, Charles describes the storm as a “scary movie that I would never want to watch again.” And he doesn’t offer a happy ending.

“New Orleans is not back to normal,” he said on NBC. “A lot of people may think that it is, but it’s not.”

Smith uses the still visible aftermath of Katrina to draw attention to the line of history that can be drawn from the time of slavery to the current circumstances of those of African descent in America and, further, the happenings in New Orleans also stand in for a kind of logical conclusion of historical events in the same manner the town is the geographical conclusion of the Mississippi. This line of history is the subject of the popular speaker (and popular target of conservative groups--see the position of the National Leadership Network of Conservative African-Americans) Joy DeGruy Leary and her “explanatory theory” Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). Below are excerpts from her “key concepts.”

*PTSS theory states that African Americans sustained traumatic psychological and emotional injury as a direct result of slavery and continue to be injured by traumas caused by the larger society’s policies of inequality, racism and oppression.*

(...)

*The lack of any therapeutic intervention for millions of captive, displaced Africans who likely suffered from PTSD during or after the advent of slavery suggest that PTSD remained a perennial problem*

*among African Americans. It is also overwhelmingly clear that new traumas continued to plague African Americans long after slavery was officially ended.*

(...)

*According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders Third Edition-Revised, (DSM IV), PTSD is described as being a reaction to a distressing event which may have occurred months or years before.*

*“The most common trauma involved a serious threat or harm to one’s life or physical integrity; a serious threat or harm to one’s children, spouse, or other close relatives and friends; sudden destruction of one’s home or community; or seeing another person who has recently been, or is being seriously injured or killed as the result of an accident or physical violence. In some cases the trauma may be learning about a serious threat to a close friend or relative, e.g., that one’s child has been kidnapped, tortured, or killed. The stressor is usually experienced with intense fear, terror, and helplessness. The disorder is considered to be more severe and will last longer when the stressor is of human design.”*

***All*** of the above mentioned traumas were the common and perpetual experience of African slaves and their African-American descendants. A less severe form of the violence and abuse continued after slavery officially ended with peonage, Black Codes, Convict Leasing, lynchings, beatings, threats to life and property, the rise of the Klan, Jim Crow segregation, the death of Emmett Till, the race riots of the 60’s, the 1989 beating death of Mullageta Sera (an Ethiopian man) by white supremacists Skin Heads, the proliferation of white supremacist groups, the near election of an ex-Klansman to Governor for the state of Louisiana, the 1992 police beating of Rodney King, the 1999 dragging death of James Byrd in Jasper Texas by four white youth, the police shooting death of Amadou Diallo in 1999, and the 2002 police beating of 16 year old Donovan Jackson-Chavis, a special education, hearing impaired youth. All

*these events remind African Americans that the trauma has never really ceased and that it is likely to continue if there is no intervention. (...)*<sup>25</sup>

Smith's emphasizing the name of the fictional town of St. Petersburg redirects attention to the actual St. Petersburg in the United States--the one in Florida. Florida was the third state to join the Confederacy, and at the start of the Civil War in 1861 slaves made up 44% of Florida's population. St. Petersburg and Tampa suffered a Union naval blockade during the war. Twain was of course well aware of Florida's history and refers to Florida in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as a place for outlaws. In 1996 *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* discussed the history of racial violence in Florida.

*Racial violence has long plagued Florida. From 1889 to 1918, 178 blacks were lynched in the state. On New Year's Day in 1923, when a white woman said that she had been assaulted by a black man, a white mob marched into the black town of Rosewood and literally wiped it off the map. The town was completely burned. Eight black residents were killed.*<sup>26</sup>

Smith in her artwork not only references the period of the civil war but has used reenactments as source material. She describes on the Website themuster.com, "THE MUSTER IS A PUBLIC ART EVENT IN WHICH ARTIST ALLISON SMITH invokes the aesthetic vernacular of the American Civil War battle reenactment as a stage set for a polyphonic marshaling of voices in her artistic and intellectual communities."

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<sup>25</sup> Joy DeGruy Leary, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, <http://www.joydegruy.com>

<sup>26</sup> *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* (Winter 1996/1997): 35.

Near St. Petersburg is a less mediated reenactment.

The Hernando Historical Museum Assoc., Inc. and North Pinellas County Scout Sertoma Club, Inc. present the 31st Annual Brooksville Raid Reenactment, Jan. 15th & 16th, 2011. This reenactment is a recreation of a Civil War battle that happened in Hernando County in July of 1864.

The Raid is held the 3rd weekend in January every year. We have become the largest Civil War reenactment in Florida with over 1500 reenactors and their families. We have 28 cannons, 60 horses, and over 50 sutlers.

The public is invited to tour, at no additional charge, the authentic confederate and union camps and actually see how they lived and what it was like during the Civil War. We expect around 60 sutlers (Vendors), so you can purchase any Civil War items you might want. We also have kettle corn, old time root beer and you can't leave without having a FRY BREAD. All animals must be on a leash.

Getting back to the content of *A Good Haul*, on the shelf is a small medallion cast with the information "Seabrook Plantation, Edisto Island, SC." Stamped onto the medallion is the name "Robert."

Information on footnote.com about Seabrook Plantation includes the following.

The estate inventory of William Seabrook, filed in December of 1860, lists the names of 119 enslaved ancestors at the Seabrook plantation on Edisto Island, Charleston County, South Carolina.

Ancestors listed on Edisto Island were:

- *Caesar - slave*
- *Nancy - slave*
- *Samuel - slave*
- *Elizabeth - slave*
- *Alex - slave*
- *George - slave*
- *Suckey - slave*
- *William - slave*
- *Caley - slave*
- *Amaritta - slave*
- *Billy - slave*
- *O Toney - slave*
- *O Mary - slave*
- *Christiana - slave*
- *Wellyard - slave*
- *Joan - slave*
- *L William - slave*
- *Noah - slave*
- *Molle - slave*
- *Betsey - slave*
- *O Amy - slave*
- *Sarie - slave*
- *Abram - slave*
- *Virgil - slave*
- *Harry - slave*
- *Sampson - slave*
- *Clarissa - slave*
- *Bella - slave*
- *Taff - slave*
- *Betsey - slave*
- *Amelia - slave*
- *Rachel - slave*
- *Phoeby - slave*
- *Sandy - slave*
- *Jemmy - slave*
- *Sophy - slave*

- *Phillis - slave*
- *Renty - slave*
- *Sam - slave*
- *John - slave*
- *Tenah - slave*
- *Thomas - slave*
- *Sibb - slave*
- *Charles - slave*
- *Jimmy - slave*
- *Joe - slave*
- *Laura - slave*
- *Jenny - slave*
- *Joseph - slave*
- *Elizabeth - slave*
- *Mary - slave*
- *Hetty - slave*
- *Margarette - slave*
- *Bella - slave*
- *Peggy - slave*
- *O Mary - slave*
- *Dennis - slave*
- *Binah - slave*
- *Rachel - slave*
- *Joshua- slave*
- *James - slave*
- *Rose - slave*
- *Jane - slave*
- *Prince -slave*
- *Peter - slave*
- *Mingo - slave*
- *Alek - slave*
- *Minter - slave*
- *Judy - slave*
- *Davy - slave*
- *Peter - slave*
- *Philip - slave*
- *Mary Ann- slave*
- *Simon - slave*
- *Caesar - slave*

- *O Beck - slave*
- *John - slave*
- *John - slave*
- *Sue - slave*
- *Sarah - slave*
- *Doll - slave*
- *Ben - slave*
- *William - slave*
- *John - slave*
- *Jeanett - slave*
- *Peter - slave*
- *Becka - slave*
- *Robert - slave*
- *O Nanny - slave*
- *O Abram - slave*
- *Jane - slave*
- *Maria - slave*
- *Jacob - slave*
- *Lazarus - slave*
- *Sophy - slave*
- *Susan - slave*
- *Toney - slave*
- *Jack - slave*
- *O'Kate - slave*
- *O Flora - slave*
- *O'Sarie - slave*
- *Adam - slave*
- *Curry - slave*
- *Seylla - slave*
- *Jimmy - slave*
- *Minty - slave*
- *Sam - slave*
- *Big Hannah - slave*
- *Sarah - slave*
- *Binah - slave*
- *Dick - slave*
- *Juba - slave*
- *Ephraim - slave*
- *Elsey - slave*

- *Infant - slave*
- *Juett - slave*
- *William - slave*
- *Edward - slave*
- *O Elsey - slave*

The name Robert is easily found among these names. As illustrated here, reading Allison Smith's installation can be a long a varied journey through American history.

Smith's interest in detail announces to the viewer that pursuing references in her visual offerings will be rewarded. Smith lists one of the items in the installation as a "butcher knife." In *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* this knife is described as "a butcher knife without any handle." In Smith's actual installation the butcher knife appears without a handle. The overall affect of Smith's installation, on first glance, is of collection of found objects, historical refuse, combined with a craft aesthetic. What makes *A Good Haul* a great piece is that it does not depend on a viewer's taste--their inclination toward wool, wood, cloth and ceramic or not--to establish itself as a work with terrific intelligence and welcomingly broad scope. To quote this month's (October, 2010) *Vanity Fair's* quoting of Tony Kushner quoting Herman Melville, "Better to sink in boundless deeps, than float on vulgar shoals." In the interview the rest of the quote "and give me, ye gods, an utter wreck, if wreck I do." is left out.

From some steps back the most visible element of Smith's *A Good Haul* is a bed quilt. In Twain's language "a ratty old bed quilt off the bed." The quilt in *A Good Haul* is, as expected, a modest quilt, but it brings to mind

another 2010 work of Smith's, not shown here, called *Fancy Work*. Smith explains.

*Fancy Work* is an installation that looks to an exuberant early-nineteenth-century decorative arts movement known as American Fancy to trace an alternate lineage for modernist abstraction and psychedelic light shows. Drawing from patchwork quilts by Rebecca Scattergood Savery and others that were inspired by the 1815 invention of the kaleidoscope, I gathered a group of local makers to create a vibrant, dizzying wall work composed of more than 2,400 screen-printed, cut, and sewn linen diamonds. The design is a variation of the traditional Star of Bethlehem quilt pattern, which Scattergood innovatively took to the edges of her quilts like explosive shockwaves that could not be contained.<sup>27</sup>

*A Good Haul* has a corncob pipe sitting on the shelf and though one would expect to find it there it isn't actually mentioned in the book as part of the "haul." Granted a work of art is more than the total weight of its referents, but in the case of a *A Good Haul* most every item in the installation that catches the viewer's eye begins to take on a shimmering aura of the yet to be catalogued references it hides. Some kind of mini-zebra looking pelt and a camouflaged patterned bonnet are two items hanging on the wall that point so many directions that they, both, suggest that sometimes the artist is probably having some straight up fun amidst her intellectual play and remind that, again, a great is always more than the sum of its parts. The camouflage does, though, remind of the 2006 Thomas Hirschhorn exhibition at the Wattis, *Utopia, Utopia = One World, One War, One Army, One Dress*, which was essentially a show of and about camouflage.

Allison Smith is an Associate Professor at California College of the Arts, the host of the exhibition. Prior to 2003 CCA was called the California College of Arts and Crafts. The institution might consider that Smith's work alone justifies proudly slapping that final "C" back on.

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<sup>27</sup> <http://www.allisonsmithstudio.com/pages.php?content=gallery.php&navGallID=23>

### III. Geoffrey Farmer (1967) and Eadweard Muybridge (1830-1904)

Geoffrey Farmer's work *You will not know about me*, 2010 (Farmer's title is an early version of the start of the first sentence of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* which Twain eventually wrote as "You don't know about me, without you have read a book by the name of "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," but that ain't no matter") includes numbers of allusions equal to those in Allison Smith's *A Good Haul*--yet where as Smith's referenced time period and the connections between her references can be discussed with a closer eye to standard historical narrative, here in Farmer's work the leaps between images, symbols and historical events cover distance in more of a quantum fashion: quotes from *Huckleberry Finn*, for example, are juxtaposed with images as varied as the Owl of Minerva taken from an ancient Roman coin and Cher rollerskating at Studio 54 and with celestial references and much more. Similar to Walker's and Smith's works, Farmer's poetic requires time to absorb.

Unlike Smith's installation and Walker's tableau that are anchored to walls, Farmer's installation is a cross between a small zen rock garden and a suspended, slow explosion of a collage sprawling--in a bonsai fashion as his source materials and artifacts tend to be modest in size--across an area on the upper floor gallery. There are five main elements: a gong; a small rock with pamphlets; a metal armature with paper and items attached; a sculpture; and a larger rock. The armature (what Farmer refers to as a "sign post") has the most items attached by

far, but each of the other main elements also has something attached or related to it.

The exhibition material states that the installation is to change form as the exhibition progresses.

Farmer's pamphlet under the small rock, for viewers to take, has a date heading that reads "As of Sept 28, 2010." It's list gives indication of both the content of Farmer's installation and his particular aesthetic.

#### List of Figures/Space/Characters:

1. *Sign post. Past pages under black apple. List of characters under rock (to take). Sign post design is based on description of sign Huck encounters.*
2. *Witch Pie Old Bell. To be struck to indicate the beginning and ending. Can be used as mask. Based on page 176.*
3. *White Southerners brought black slaves into the California mines as early as the summer of 1849. Slave owners and slaves came primarily from western U.S. states--Texas, Mississippi, Missouri, Arkansas. Slavery wasn't popular in the mines, but there were no laws barring it in the early days of the gold rush.*
4. *A photograph by Robert Frank depicting a scene on page 287, Huck's description of Tom's arrival*
5. *A yet named Starfish character.*
6. *Red-snake-mallet-that-bit-Jim. If bitten cut off the head and throw it away. Skin the body and roast a piece, and eat it.*
7. *Cathedral window of first all black cathedral, Mississippi Valley.*
8. *Psyche in the Realm of Mystery--This may be "Psyche under the Shell of Mystery" exhibited in the Women's Building, 1893 Exhibition. Brought to New Orleans nine years after the publishing of the novel.*
9. *Do They Know It Is Christmas? If I could invent my own culture, look up; this is what a Christmas tree would look like if it were from there.*



10. Some people believed that owls were particularly bad to children. In Georgia it was believed that owls ate new-born babies. In New Orleans it was believed that owls were evil spirits that carried children off in the night.
11. Comet Jim Halley Clement. African Spear and Cosmic Structure Figure. Visible every 75 years. Halley's comet was visible at the time of his birth, making his arrival an even more momentous occasion. Mark Twain said, "I came in with Halley's Comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it... The Almighty has said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, they must go out together.'"
12. The Pleiades. The Pleiadeans first appeared in accounts given by contactee Billy Meier. The Pleiadeans originate from the planet Erra (which is supposedly located in an alternate reality that is a fraction of a second ahead of ours) and are outwardly similar to humans.
13. Pleiadean figure, taken from Carl Jung's garden.
14. Rodney King altered by a young child.
15. American ballet companies have a diversity problem.
16. Gold Ear, Gold Frog. All of a sudden the lightning let go a perfect sluice of white glare, and somebody sings out: By the living jingo, here's the bag of gold on his breast!" Page 259
17. There are also the "conjuring gourd" and the grog-bones and pounded glass carefully hidden away by many an old man or woman, who by the dim light of a tallow candle or a pine torch works imaginary spells on any one against whom he or she may have a grudge.
18. Hanging figure in the infinite.
19. Cher studio 54. The End of Modern-day Gomorrah, on February 4, 1980.
20. Leaf, blood drops
21. Poem tomorrow, or late my love I'm very sorry I can't make it last. The best thing to do for us both is for me to go and you to remain.
22. The hands hanging, against the turtle
23. (The) Huck character; yet to be developed.
24. Owl/Aids.

25. If you see a spider in the morning, it means good luck so you shouldn't kill it, but if you see one at night, it means bad luck so you can kill it. Page 254

From Farmer's intensely subjective position the viewer can move on to the work in *Huckleberry Finn* exhibition that documents very specific history and geography. The artists in the course of making these seemingly more straightforward documentations also imbue their work with their own particular consideration of aesthetics. These include Ruth-Marion Baruch's photographs of the Black Panther Guard of 1968; Dorothea Lange's photographs of cotton hoers in Mississippi from 1937; Henry Lewis' color lithographs of Hannibal, Missouri and other towns in Missouri and Mississippi, 1846-1849; Ben Shahn's photographs of the poor in Arkansas in 1935 and in Pennsylvania in 1937; and Alec Soth's 2002 photographs of Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Kentucky (notable among these is *Jim, Wax Museum, Hannibal, Missouri*). As Twain was writing about a time "forty to fifty years ago" to illustrate his own time the above documentations of the landscapes and more recent generations of disenfranchised Americans, decades and more decades after Twain's time, bring in sharp clarity the intimate connections between all individuals struggling for their civil liberties and their survival amidst the transforming, yet never unhinging from its history, American landscape.

That Twain was aware of Eadweard Muybridge's work in Palo Alto, California (of his 24 camera, fast motion horse photographs, sponsored by Leland Stanford) and that Muybridge's 1877 experiment took place just a year after

Twain started to work on *Huckleberry Finn* reminds the reader of the modernity of the time in which Twain was writing.<sup>28</sup> Part of the modernity of Twain's writing was his introduction of American dialects (a staple of late 20th and early 21st Century film) into the practice of American literature--interestingly, as Twain was interested in depicting with veracity the spoken language of the American people, Muybridge was conducting an experiment to learn about how a horse actually runs (despite centuries of horse paintings this was something unknown up to this time). Thinking about Twain's work as having at least a parallel in time to Muybridge's makes seeing Thomas Edison's three and one half minute film of 1909 of Mark Twain drinking tea and walking around his Connecticut Home, Stormfield, a little less surprising, but not much.

Of the historic film's screened continuously during the exhibition three stand out. The first is the Edison film. The second is William Desmond Taylor's *Huckleberry Finn* of 1920. This film was recently screened for the first time in 90 years by the George Eastman House in the spring of 2010. Here at the Wattis its 84 minutes are on a continuous loop and well worth making time to view during a visit to the exhibition. After watching the Taylor film viewing the 1955 made for TV film *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, shown on a small TV at the entrance of the exhibition, is a study in contrasts. In the 1920s film, shot on location, something as basic as the raft has a presence and realism that makes clear the high stylization of the Hollywood TV production with Huck

looking as if he were paddling a toy raft in a calm swimming pool.

Pare Lorentz's 32 minute film *The River*, the third of the impressive historical films, of 1938 shows and discusses the Mississippi river, its industry and the environmental impact of that industry. Thomas Hardie Chalmers, the baritone, narrates--his voice a resonating accompaniment to Lorentz's distinctive vision, a vision financed by the U.S. Government under Franklin Delano Roosevelt to draw attention to the benefits of the New Deal and, particularly here, to its conservation, dam building, programs under the Tennessee Valley Authority.

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<sup>28</sup> Gary Scharnhort, *Mark Twain: the complete interviews*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006)

## IV. Edgar Arceneaux (1972) and Triangular Slave Trade (1502-1862)

As must be clear by now the work and documents in the Wattis exhibition point to times in advance of and after Mark Twain's time. Edgar Arceneaux's work covers the largest expanse of time of all as the basis for his work *My Father Jim* is "a series of 1970s *Scientific American* natural history books given to him by his father-in-law, Jim."<sup>29</sup> The other lineage Arceneaux claims with the title is to Jim of Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The question arises as to how the notion of claimed lineage fits in with the installation. The books have "sugar crystals" on them from what can be assumed to be a soaking of the books in sugar water. Notably some of the crystallized books are not part of the *Scientific American* Library series.

The first grouping of books from the *Scientific American* Library series are *On Size and Life*; *Mathematics and Optimal Form*; *Timing of Biological Clocks*; *Extinction*; and *Sun and Earth*. There are several books not of the series but the one that stands out is *The Captive Mind* by Czeslaw Milosz of 1953. In this book, discussing Stalinism through his own experience, Milosz points to how intellectuals can become complicit in injustices and come to support a totalitarian system.

Another book that stands out is *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* by Julian Jaynes where he discusses the relationship between subjective consciousness and the acquisition of metaphorical language.

Taking these two books as commentary on the context of appearing in the *Scientific American* Library series the viewer can consider, particularly through the presence of the Milosz work, how the progress in scientific and intellectual knowledge can be separate from progress in a society's ability to treat its members fairly. Likewise, Jayne's book can be used to emphasize how the ability to be of "two minds" of something can be tied to the historic origins of our contemporary mind.

In the same installation in a group of crystallized books in a box can be found *Constructing the Universe*; *The Solar System*; *Molecules*; *The Second Law*; and *Stars* all, also, from the *Scientific American* Library series. Also in this box is *The Voices of Time*<sup>30</sup>, a collection of short stories by J. G. Ballard. Here amidst the titles that seem to express an inherent optimism, that of knowing we can know our universe, is a book whose premise is that entropy (one would look at *The Second Law* to understand how it functions) points to the eventual falling apart of all order, of everything. More recent theories, in the scientific world, consider that cosmic entropy may be thwarted by forces we have yet to fully understand.

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<sup>29</sup> *Huckleberry Finn*, exhibition brochure (San Francisco: CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, 2010)

<sup>30</sup> Reviewing Arceneaux's installation on 17 November 2010 shows the book in the box to be J. T. Fraser's work *The Voices of Time: A Cooperative Survey of Man's Views of Time As Expressed by the Sciences and by the Humanities* and not a collection of J. G. Ballard's fiction including his story *The Voices of Time*.

With the body of books is a critique powered by the contents of the books themselves. The artist in choosing this specific group of books has added one level of critique and he adds another by having the books crystallized in sugar. It is unclear from the text in the exhibition brochure if Arceneaux contributed to its content, but the statements it contains point to one possible critique: “The adorned, sealed books raise a question about the relevance of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: whether its value exists in its pages, or in the crust and sugar that have accumulated around it.” Given the selection of books, and despite the context of the exhibition, it seems less interesting to read *My Father Jim* as a direct critique of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* than to go a different direction; Jim can be considered as the slave father for all those subjugated and the sugar can refer very directly to the well-over 300 years of triangular slave trade of which sugar was a large part (sugar to goods to more slaves). What follows is that despite all progress and even understandings how progress and dystopia can exist simultaneously the whole mechanism is junked up with the reality of actual human actions and those actions impacts on real lives.

## V. Glenn Ligon (1960) and Caricature (1885)

Glenn Ligon for his 1993 series *Runaways* designed runaway slave posters based on descriptions of himself. The ten lithographs are on display at the Wattis. The text of one of the lithographs reads as follows.

*Ran away, Glenn, a black male, 5' 8", very short hair, nearly completely shaved, stocky build, 155-165 lbs., medium complexion (not "light skinned," not "dark skinned," slightly orange). Wearing faded blue jeans, short sleeve button-down 50s style shirt nice glasses (small and shaped), no socks. Very articulate, seemingly well educated, does not look at you straight in the eye when talking to you. He's socially very adept, yet, paradoxically, he's somewhat of a loner.*

(The text above was being hand written in a notepad while in the gallery and on this process turned a matter for reflection. The upper Wattis gallery was empty of other visitors. The sound filling the space was the Japanese accented voice of Simon Fujiwara emanating from his video. But at one moment a shuffling sound made itself present and looking halfway across the gallery resulted in seeing a couple sitting in a chair and kissing. The same action was pursued by the same couple at the opening reception for the exhibition but here on another day in the empty room the presence of two performers engaging in their work carried a different weight. The kissing couple is a Tino Sehgal piece and significantly, though in the midst of it, not part of the *Huckleberry Finn* exhibition. For three years the Wattis Institute has been exhibiting Sehgal's pieces; the Wattis' Website states, "Taking the framework

of a traditional retrospective but removing its time constraints, this continuous, gradual presentation of a single artist's oeuvre will allow audiences to follow and engage with Sehgal's practice in new ways." Having recognized the performers from the reception and having briefly discussed the piece with them at prior moment that day it was clear at this moment what the action and the piece was--but being outnumbered by the art two to one and easily hearing their shifting bodies and the sounds of their kissing brought the visceral physicality of the performers to the fore and if the work was switching back and forth in the mind, as from duck to rabbit, from removed conceptual exercise to a very real sharing of space then the Sehgal piece was successful at being more rabbit than duck as the presence of the two art workers functioned, perhaps oddly given the range of possibilities, as a not-unpleasant, living metronome--one that wordlessly requested some respect of its space--while the lengthy homework for this article was completed.)

In the exhibition are numerous items categorized as "artifacts and memorabilia" by the organizers. These range from items made in the time of slavery to media clippings regarding key moments in African-American History (e.g. the death of Malcolm X; the death of Martin Luther King; the death of Emmitt Till; the contribution of Rosa Parks). These offerings illustrate not just that the legacy of slavery did not depart with its illegality but that racism is not a legacy but an entrenched part of life in American. As more information comes out about the U.S. Government's actions through the FBI's Counter intelligence Program (Cointelpro)--and its contemporary

counterparts--it is clear that this racism is not just a social problem but has been, perhaps more importantly, a political agenda. A partial listing of the "artifacts and memorabilia" in the exhibition *Huckleberry Finn* follows.

Am I Not a Man and a Brother?, ca. 1800, copper antislavery token / Certificate of manumission, Campbell County, Virginia, 1807 / Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?, 1837, copper antislavery token / Anti-Slavery Record, July 1837 / Broadside advertising \$100 reward for a runaway slave, Warrenton, Virginia, 1854 / Broadside advertising the Auction and Commission House, Odd fellows Hall, Corner of Mayo and Franklin Streets, Richmond, Virginia, ca. 1860 / James T. Lloyd, Lloyd's Map of the Lower Mississippi River from St. Louis to the Gulf of Mexico, 1862, Paper map, 175 x 10 in. / Virginia Slave Children Rescued by Colored Troops, ca. 1864, Two carte de visite photographs / Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1885 Book (Charles L. Webster and Company edition with illustrations by Edward W. Kemble) / Hammond Multiplex typewriter, ca. 1885, oak and metal / Announcement by the Occidental Publishing Company, San Francisco, for Mark Twain's new book *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 1885 / "Huckleberry Finn," Hartford Courant, February 20, 1885 / "Mark Twain's Readable New Story," San Francisco Chronicle, March 15, 1885 / "Huckleberry Finn in Concord," New York Herald, March 18, 1885 / "Huckleberry Finn," Sacramento Daily Record, March 26, 1885 / Edward W. Kemble, *Coons*, 1896, Book (R. H. Russell & Son edition) / J. Ottmann Lithographic Company, Jim Crow Ten Pins, ca. 1900, wood, cardboard, and paper / Lynching, early 20th century, albumen print / Underwood & Underwood Mark Twain in Bed, 1906 / Segregation sign, Lenox Theater, Augusta, Georgia, 1921(the sign is posted at the entrance to the Wattis' second floor gallery and reads **COLORED ONLY NO WHITES ALLOWED LENOX THEATER, GA ACE SIGN CO. MARCH 1921**) / Robert E. Lee steamboat, ca. 1926, copper / Life (pages 30–31), May 17, 1963 / Thomas Holland, Bust of Mark Twain, ca. 1966, plaster, bronze, and wood / Reproduction of Mark Twain's White Linen Suit, 2010, linen, waistcoat: 27 x 15 in., suitcoat: 30 x 18 in., trousers: 44 x 16 ½ in.

One of the artifacts mentioned above is Edward W. Kemble's *Coons* of 1896, (R. H. Russell & Son edition). The illustrations in this book are caricatures, stereotypes and hard to imagine as anything but racist depictions. Questions arise as to why Twain picked Kemble to illustrate *Huckleberry Finn*, which he did, and what exactly he had in mind when he, after being dissatisfied with Kemble's original efforts, had Kemble redo his drawings.

Reproductions of the following Kemble drawings for *Huckleberry Finn* are included in the exhibition; *Jim and the Ghost*; *In the Cave*; *Jim sees a Dead Man*; *'O My Lordy, Lordy!'*; *Asleep on the Raft*; *Another Little Job*; *Adolphus*; *The Breakfast Horn*; *Thinking*; *Irrigation*; *Jim Advises a Doctor*; *Out of Bondage*; *The End, Yours Truly, Huck Finn*; and *Jim's Coat of Arms*. Certainly caricature is used in these drawings but they don't seem as insensitive as the images in *Coons*. The Wattis exhibition is not an analysis of the state of illustration then or now. Yet, racist caricature, of not just blacks, was a staple of main stream illustration until well into the 20th Century. Further, when looking at any depiction of Jim in the exhibition the question of caricature comes up. Walker depicts him two different ways. The *Huckleberry Finn* film of 1920 makes no effort to avoid extreme caricature. Soth's photograph of the wax Jim at the Wax Museum in Hannibal has the viewer asking what the options were for the wax sculptor--why this Jim? Hank Willis Thomas follows the corporate world's playing with our perception of caricature with his blown up image of the figure "Ben" from the Uncle Ben's rice box. Uncle Ben's image is now in a gold

frame, printed like the picture, that has “Chairman” written on it--this is representative of the 2007 ad campaign that featured Uncle Ben’s “promotion.” The image has not changed (not to mention reality)--just the suggestion of how it is to be viewed. The 2008 work is entitled *After 61 Years of Service, I Ben, Promoted*. The ironic title with its punning play on Ben’s name and uneducated verb conjugation solidifies the “NO” answer to the question as to whether the real Uncle Bens of the last century ever got their due, their promotion, after any amount of time. The following interview is between two illustrators who address Kemble (and also Thomas Nast whose work is in the Wattis exhibition) and speak of the problem of caricature both historically and now. Jerry Pinkney has specialized in illustrating African-Americans and has done illustrations for the African Burial Ground Interpretive Center and the Underground Railroad Freedom Center as well as designs for Black Heritage postage stamps. Ken Laird interviewed Pinkney in 2002 as part of his MA thesis at Syracuse University; excerpts follow.

*An Interview with Jerry Pinkney  
by Ken Laird*

*Laird: Let me ask you this, and it could sound a little provocative, but have you ever turned down an assignment because you might have felt it fringed on being racist? I’ll give you an example, maybe Little Black Sambo, which I saw you’ve illustrated. Have you ever had an assignment given to you that you just didn’t feel comfortable doing?*  
*Pinkney: Yes. The only example comes to mind very quickly, and maybe because it’s huge; there was a time when in textbooks they began to think that there was an absence of any people of color in their material. They actually somewhat masterminded a chart to identify other races, and that chart was given to me to help me draw*

*African-Americans, not only African-Americans, but Asians and the whole thing. I turned it down.*

*Laird: What was your rebuttal in the reason that it was turned down?*  
*Pinkney: It was simply that I thought it was stereotyped. ...In their interest of trying to inform artists about people other than themselves they used stereotypes to demonstrate that. They thought they were doing well. But at the same time, it had the opposite effect. It showed African-Americans only with curly hair or with broad lips. They were not looking at African-Americans. I want to tell you something, this is very important; I was sitting in a workshop; I was actually a visiting artist at a lecture on the history of illustration; in that history of illustration, they dealt with that time period where all minorities were open to exploit. It was very interesting for me as an African-American to realize that there was a time in this country when everybody, an immigrant was open to be stereotyped. It isn’t that you were Irish, or you were Italian, or certainly if you were Jewish, there are examples across the board of how that was looked at and portrayed in a very, very negative and malicious way. I think that’s important only because in a sense, you have to understand that and put that in perspective. You really are trying to not necessarily to correct but to change things. This existed in this country, not only for African-Americans, but for all minorities.(...) It was brutal for all minorities, the problem was this, it continued for African-Americans much longer.*  
*Laird: (...) I’m somewhat defending the statements that you just made. I use four or five particular golden age illustrators as examples. One is Thomas Nast, the other is E. W. Kemble.*  
*(...)*

*Pinkney: It was the style or fashion at the time. Again, for the African-American, it was less painful when you realized that. With the Jewish people, or Irish, or Italian you begin to see that the same thread ran through all of that and this certain sense and the need and the desire of Americans to protect themselves and to use that as a way of placing those folks in a certain perspective. The difference, of course, is the fact that eventually, the Irish were white, the Italians were white and they were able to assimilate where African-Americans were never able to do that.<sup>31</sup>*

<sup>31</sup> <http://hubpages.com/hub/An-Interview-with-Jerry-Pinkney-Part-I>

Simon Fujiwara in the video from his 2010 installation work *Artists' Book Club: Hakuruberry Fuin no Monogatari* discusses experiences with *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in Japan and further the experience of having a western mother and being a "Japanese gay boy." He plays the role of the interviewee in interview with an English speaking interviewer and explains how he first tried to read the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in English and how he hated it from the first sentence "you don't know about me..." He had a problem with the language in the book. He thought it was all wrong and was disappointed that it did not sound like English. Fujiwara's character says he knew he spoke English better than in the book and goes on to comment on the fact that at the time of the original publishing of the book in America readers also did not understand that the language was colloquial. He then explains how he watched the Japanese animated version of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* which ran for 48 episodes. He mentions that the Jim was the first black character he had seen in a cartoon.

At another point in the video Fujiwara's character discussed trying to go to clubs in Japan with his boyfriend who worked for Disneyland and who was obviously foreign. He points out that 90% of the clubs had "no foreigner" restrictions and the clubs would not allow him to enter with his boyfriend and sometimes, when the clubs recognized he was half Japanese, they would not let him enter on his own. The reason the clubs gave was that they didn't want to encourage sexual tourism--in the interview Fujiwara's character says that this made him "so

angry." Here in California (where voters not so long ago voted to exclude certain fellow citizens from having the right to marry solely based on these citizens' particular minority status--no, not of being of African descent) that the discussion of unfair exclusion is far from over should not be surprising.



## VI. Mark Twain (1835-1910) and Andy Warhol (1928-1987)

Most of the artists in the *Huckleberry Finn* exhibition have not been mentioned up to this point. Following are mentions of artists (and their works in the exhibition) not mentioned elsewhere: Romare Bearden (*Sunset Limited*, mixed-media collage, 1974); Elizabeth Catlett (*Sharecropper*, linocut, ca. 1945, and other work); Claude Clark (*Slave Lynching*, oil on canvas, 1946); Abraham Cruzvillegas (*Jim Beam*, a large, hanging sculptural installation, plywood table, stainless steel screws and chains, iron, mango wood oars, cans, barrels, steel cable, fishing pole, bananas, and paint, 2010); Jamal Cyrus (*Promotional Material*, offset prints on paper, 2010); Emory Douglas (*Revolution in Our Lifetime*, two screenprints in hinged frame, ca. 1970); Ellen Gallagher (Glisters, oil, ink, polymer, graphite, and paper on canvas 2010); Felix Gonzalez-Torres; "Untitled" (The End), a white piece of paper with a black border stacked in a pile with the intention that viewers will take a copy home, offset prints on paper 1990); Rodney Graham (*Huckleberry Finn: Portraits from Memory Done in My Library Primarily in the Cubist Style*, mixed media mounted on burlap with plexiglas cover, 2010); David Hammons (African-American Flag, dyed cotton, 1990); Clementine Hunter *Cotton*, oil on upson board, ca. 1975, and other works); Tim Lee (*Huckleberry's Adventures (based on an English translation of Huckleberry Monogatari by Kuni Sasaki, 1921 [based on a Japanese translation of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn {Tom Sawyer's Comrade} by Mark Twain, 1885])*, leather-bound

book, 2010); Kristen Morgin (*Book Report: Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain*, unfired clay, paint, ink, wood, and wire, 2010); Thomas Nast (*Innocent Amusements South*, lithograph, 1879); Kirsten Pieroth (*Untitled (Essence)*, boiled paperback edition of Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and jam jar, 2010); Horace Pippin, *Uncle Tom*, oil on canvas, 1944, and other work); Betye Saar (*The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, mixed media, 1972); Yinka Shonibare MBE (*Jim's Escape*, 25 kites, wood, piano wire, and Dutch wax printed cotton, 2010); Andy Warhol (*Birmingham Race Riot*, from the portfolio *Ten Works by Ten Painters*, screenprint, 1964).

The Andy Warhol work above is of a series of work with imagery taken from the previously mentioned, and included in the Wattis exhibition, images published in Life magazine of May 17, 1963. Christie's has a page describing a larger Warhol work *Mustard Race Riot*, 1963, also based on these images, that was sold at Christie's--Sale 1431 Post-War and Contemporary Art (Evening Sale)--in 2004 for \$15,127,500. Included with the sale information and the lot description was the following text

### *Pre-Lot Text*

*Signs of Separation: The Socio-Political Climate of Andy Warhol's Mustard Race Riot (1963)*

*The zenith of national outrage against segregation and state-sponsored repression of those lobbying for justice, came to a head with the national publicizing of the events of May 3, 1963 in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park. On that day and for five days thereafter, white firemen from Birmingham attempted to disperse groups of young black demonstrators by turning on high-pressured firehoses against them. In an effort to put down the protest, the segregationist Birmingham Police Commissioner, Eugene (Bull) Connor, ordered police to use attack dogs to disperse the crowd.*

*Scenes of vicious dogs biting into the flesh of the demonstrators, of powerful jets of water knocking men, women, and children to the ground and ripping the clothes off their bodies were photographed by white photojournalist Charles Moore and reported to the nation in an eleven-page lead story in Life magazine (May 17, 1963), then the country's largest and most popular weekly magazine. The story and the photographs were shocking to the rest of the nation and have become etched into the American psyche as the strongest symbols of the struggle for racial equality and civil liberties.<sup>32</sup>*

Now this year, Twain's full autobiography has been made available, as he wished, 100 years after his death. The promotional blurb from the publisher, University of California Press, follows.

*"I've struck it!" Mark Twain wrote in a 1904 letter to a friend. "And I will give it away—to you. You will never know how much enjoyment you have lost until you get to dictating your autobiography." Thus, after dozens of false starts and hundreds of pages, Twain embarked on his "Final (and Right) Plan" for telling the story of his life. His innovative notion—to "talk only about the thing which interests you for the moment"—meant that his thoughts could range freely. The strict instruction that many of these texts remain unpublished for 100 years meant that when they came out, he would be "dead, and unaware, and indifferent," and that he was therefore free to speak his "whole frank mind." The year 2010 marks the 100th anniversary of Twain's death. In celebration of this important milestone and in honor of the cherished tradition of publishing Mark Twain's works, UC Press is proud to offer for the first time Mark Twain's uncensored autobiography in its entirety and exactly as he left it. This major literary event brings to readers, admirers, and scholars the first of three volumes and presents Mark Twain's authentic and*

*unsuppressed voice, brimming with humor, ideas, and opinions, and speaking clearly from the grave as he intended.<sup>33</sup>*

On March 26, 1885 the *Sacramento Daily Record* ran a story called "Huckleberry Finn." The article describes how *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* was banned by the library at Concord "for not having humor in it" and for the fact it was "couched in the language of a rough, ignorant dialect."

125 years on it is difficult to say where the culture stands. In 1898 the American Anti-Imperialist League was formed to fight the annexation of the Philippines. Mark Twain and other prominent figures were members. As backwards as the Concord library sounded in 1885 the 1898 goals of the American Anti-Imperialist League sound forward-thinking today.

The question that ultimately hangs over the exhibition is not how well the artists engaged with a masterpiece, if not the masterpiece, of American literature--some did a bang up job, thank you--but whether the cultural tensions that inform their works point to an entropic culture, to follow Arceneaux's lead, or one that can actually draw energy from the visual and conceptual intelligence on display in a show like the Wattis' *Huckleberry Finn* and be the better for it.

Erik Bakke  
California, 2 November 2010

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<sup>32</sup> [http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot\\_details.aspx?intObjectID=4387786](http://www.christies.com/LotFinder/lot_details.aspx?intObjectID=4387786)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.ucpress.edu/book.php?isbn=9780520267190>

## VII. Images (2010)

[Click here for exhibition images of \*Huckleberry Finn\*](#)