A COMPANION TO

MARK TWAIN

EDITED BY **PETER MESSENT**

AND **LOUIS J. BUDD**

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A Companion to Mark Twain

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To William, Alice, Ella and Leah, with love (PM)
To Exelee, our best reader-to-be (LB)

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Notes on Contributors

Lawrence I. Berkove is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Michigan-Dearborn and President-elect of the Mark Twain Circle of America. He has published widely in his field of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American literature, but Twain has been a special and ongoing interest of his from the beginning. His Modern Library edition of *The Best Short Stories of Mark Twain* came out in 2004. Berkove is also a leading authority on the literature of the Sagebrush School of late nineteenth-century Nevada, whose members had a formative influence on Twain. He is now working on a book-length study of Twain's religion and its influence on his literature.

John Bird is Professor of English at Winthrop University. He has published articles on Mark Twain and is the editor of the Mark Twain Circle of America's annual publication, *The Mark Twain Annual*. He is completing a book on Mark Twain and metaphor.

Louis J. Budd, James B. Duke Professor (Emeritus) of English at Duke University, has concentrated on American realism and naturalism, especially as seen in the novels of William Dean Howells. He has also published steadily on the career of Mark Twain, most often as manifested in his literary reputation, popular images, and citizenship.

Martin T. Buinicki is an Assistant Professor of English at Valparaiso University, specializing in nineteenth-century American literature and the history of the book and authorship. His work has appeared in *American Literary History*, *American Literary Realism*, and the *Walt Whitman Quarterly Review*. His book *Negotiating Copyright: Authorship and the Discourse of Literary Property Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* is forthcoming from Routledge.

Gregg Camfield is Professor of English at the University of the Pacific. He is the author of *Sentimental Twain: Mark Twain in the Maze of Moral Philosophy* (1994), *Nec-*

essary Madness: The Humor of Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature (1997), and *The Oxford Companion to Mark Twain* (2003), as well as numerous articles on American literature and culture.

Mark Dawidziak is the television critic for the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. A theater, film, and television reviewer for 25 years, he is the author of ten books, including *Mark My Words: Mark Twain on Writing* and *Horton Foote's The Shape of the River: The Lost Teleplay about Mark Twain*. The founder and artistic director of northeast Ohio's Largely Literary Theater Company, he is the author of four produced plays, including a two-act adaptation of several Twain sketches, *The Reports of My Death Are Greatly Exaggerated*.

Andrew Dix is a Lecturer in American Literature and Film at Loughborough University. He has co-edited *Figures of Heresy: Radical Theology in English and American Writing, 1800–2000* (2005), and published journal articles and book chapters on Native American fiction, John Steinbeck, and Jonathan Raban's travel writing. He is currently writing *Beginning Film Studies* for Manchester University Press.

Victor Doyno wrote on Twain's creative processes in his *Writing Mark Twain*. When that book was at proof stage, the first half of the manuscript to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (previously missing) was rediscovered. This subsequently became the subject of *Beginning to Write Mark Twain*, included on the CD-ROM *Huck Finn: The Complete Buffalo and Erie County Public Library Manuscript*. Doyno also wrote the foreword and textual addendum to the Random House *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: A Comprehensive Edition* and the afterword to the "Oxford Mark Twain" edition of the novel. He is now working on Twain's early newspaper work, 1853–68. Vic wishes to thank the editors for help in preparing his essay for publication following his recent stroke.

Shelley Fisher Fishkin is Professor of English and Director of American Studies at Stanford University. She the author of the award-winning books *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America* (1985) and *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (1993), as well as *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (1997). She is the editor of the 29-volume "Oxford Mark Twain" (1996), the Oxford *Historical Guide to Mark Twain* (2002), and "*Is He Dead?" A New Comedy by Mark Twain* (2003), and co-editor of *Listening to Silences: New Essays in Feminist Criticism* (1994), *People of the Book: Thirty Scholars Reflect on their Jewish Identity* (1996), *The Encyclopedia of Civil Rights in America* (1997), and *Sport of the Gods and Other Essential Writings by Paul Laurence Dunbar* (2005). She is past president of the American Studies Association and of the Mark Twain Circle of America.

Christopher Gair is Senior Lecturer in American Studies at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of *Complicity and Resistance in Jack London's Novels: From*

Naturalism to Nature (1997), *The American Counterculture* (forthcoming 2006), and numerous essays on American literature and culture. He is editor of *Beyond Boundaries: C. L. R. James and Postnational Studies* (forthcoming 2006) and managing editor of *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations*.

Alan Gribben was one of the three founders of the Mark Twain Circle of America, and he also helped establish the American Literature Association. Since 1991 he has chaired the English and Philosophy Department at Auburn University Montgomery, where he was named a Distinguished Research Professor in 1998. Professor Gribben writes the annual "Mark Twain" essay for *American Literary Scholarship* and is currently revising and updating his *Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction* (1980).

Sam Halliday teaches Nineteenth-Century American Literature and Intellectual and Cultural History at Queen Mary, University of London. He is currently completing a book entitled *Thinking Electricity: Science, Technology and Culture in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*.

Susan K. Harris is the Hall Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Kansas. Her publications include *The Cultural Work of the 19th-Century Hostess: Annie Adams Fields and Mary Gladstone Drew* (2002), *The Courtship of Olivia Langdon and Mark Twain* (1996), *19th-Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies* (1990), and *Mark Twain's Escape from Time: A Study of Patterns and Images* (1982). She has edited *Mark Twain's Historical Romances* (1994) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (2000), as well as Stowe's *The Minister's Wooing* (1999), Sedgwick's *A New-England Tale* (2003), and Wiggins's *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* (2005).

Gavin Jones is an Associate Professor of English at Stanford University. He is the author of *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (1999), and has published articles on George W. Cable, Theodore Dreiser, W. E. B. Du Bois, Sylvester Judd, Paule Marshall, and Herman Melville, in journals such as *American Literary History*, *New England Quarterly*, and *African American Review*. He is writing a book on the representation of poverty in American literature.

Holger Kersten is Professor of American Literature and Culture at the University of Magdeburg, Germany. He has presented papers and published articles on Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, Jack London, the Lewis and Clark expedition, and humor in American literature. His research interests include the use of nonstandard language in literature, national images, and nature writing.

Randall Knoper teaches English and American Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. He is the author of *Acting Naturally: Mark Twain in the Culture of Performance* (1995) and of various essays on American literature and culture. He is working on a book about American literature and sciences of the brain and nervous system.

Leland Krauth is a Professor of English at the University of Colorado at Boulder. In addition to numerous articles on nineteenth- and twentieth-century American writers, he has published two books on Mark Twain, *Proper Mark Twain* (1999) and *Mark Twain and Company: Six Literary Relations* (2003).

James S. Leonard is Professor of English at The Citadel. He is co-editor of Prentice-Hall's two-volume *Anthology of American Literature* (8th edn., 2004), editor of *Making Mark Twain Work in the Classroom* (1999), co-editor of *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn* (1992), co-author of *The Fluent Mundo: Wallace Stevens and the Structure of Reality* (1988), editor of the *Mark Twain Circular*, and managing editor of *The Mark Twain Annual*.

Richard S. Lowry is Associate Professor of American Studies and English at the College of William and Mary. He is the author of *Littery Man: Mark Twain and Modern Authorship*, as well as essays on travel writing, photography, and the history of childhood. Currently he is working on a book project entitled *Suffer the Children: Family, Love, and the Prehistory of Welfare*.

T. J. Lustig teaches in the Department of American Studies at Keele University. He is the author of *Henry James and the Ghostly* (1994) and, more recently, of articles on Tim O'Brien and trauma theory. He is currently working on a study of nineteenth-century cultural thought in Great Britain and the United States.

Jeffrey Alan Melton is an Associate Professor of English at Auburn University, Montgomery. He is the author of *Mark Twain, Travel Books, and Tourism: The Tide of a Great Popular Movement* (2002). He has published articles on travel literature and Mark Twain in *South Atlantic Review*, *Papers on Language and Literature*, *Studies in American Humor*, *Popular Culture Review*, *Studies in American Culture*, and *Thalia: Studies in Literary Humor*.

Peter Messent is Professor of Modern American Literature at the University of Nottingham. He is the author of *New Readings of the American Novel: Narrative Theory and its Application* (1990), *Ernest Hemingway* (1992), *Mark Twain* (1997), and *The Short Works of Mark Twain: A Critical Study* (2001). He also edited *Criminal Proceedings: The Contemporary American Crime Novel* (1997). He has published in many other areas of American literature and is at present working on a study of Mark Twain and male friendship.

Scott Michaelsen is Associate Professor of English at Michigan State University. With David E. Johnson, he co-edits *CR: The New Centennial Review*, an interdisciplinary journal of theoretical inquiry into the Americas. He is the author of *The Limits of Multiculturalism: Interrogating the Origins of American Anthropology* (1999) and co-editor of *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics* (1997).

Bruce Michelson is Professor of American Literature and Director of the Campus Honors Program at the University of Illinois. His books include *Literary Wit* (2000), *Mark Twain on the Loose: A Comic Writer and the American Self* (1995), *Wilbur's Poetry: Music in a Scattering Time* (1991), and the forthcoming *Mark Twain and the Information Age*. He is a featured commentator in the "American Passages" video series produced by the Annenberg Foundation and Oregon Public Broadcasting, and he authors the "Instructor's Guide" and the website for *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*.

Linda A. Morris is Professor of English at the University of California, Davis. In addition to articles on Dorothea Lange, Mark Twain, Mary Lasswell, and American satire, she is the author of *Women Vernacular Humorists in the Nineteenth Century: Ann Stephens, Frances Whitcher, and Marietta Holley* (1988); *Women's Humor in the Age of Gentility: The Life and Work of Frances M. Whitcher* (1992); and *American Women Humorists: Critical Essays* (1994). She is currently completing a book entitled *Gender Play in Mark Twain*.

Cameron C. Nickels is Professor Emeritus of English and American Studies at James Madison University. Past president of the American Humor Studies Association and editor of its newsletter, he is currently writing a book on Civil War humor. He also plays in a bluegrass band.

Hilton Obenzinger writes fiction, poetry, history, and criticism. He is the author of *American Palestine: Melville, Twain, and the Holy Land Mania*, a literary and historical study of America's fascination with the Holy Land, as well as *A*hole*, an experimental fiction, *Running through Fire: How I Survived the Holocaust by Zosia Goldberg, as Told to Hilton Obenzinger* (an oral history of his aunt's ordeal during the war), *Cannibal Eliot and the Lost Histories of San Francisco*, a novel of invented documents that recounts the history of San Francisco to 1906, *New York on Fire*, a documentary poem of the history of New York City as seen through its fires, and *This Passover or the Next I Will Never Be in Jerusalem*, winner of the American Book Award. He teaches advanced writing and American literature at Stanford University.

Tom Quirk is Professor of English at the University of Missouri-Columbia. His publications on Mark Twain include *Mark Twain: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1997) and *Coming to Grips with "Huckleberry Finn": Essays on a Book, a Boy, and a Man* (1993). He is the editor or compiler of *Tales, Speeches, Essays, and Sketches by Mark Twain* (1994), *The Innocents Abroad* (2002), *The Penguin Portable Mark Twain* (2004), and *Dictionary of Literary Biography Documentary Series: Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (forthcoming). He is currently writing a book with the provisional title *Mark Twain and Human Nature*.

Stephen Railton teaches American literature at the University of Virginia. His most recent book is *Mark Twain: A Short Introduction* (2003). Among his other

publications are several essays on Twain, and among the online resources he has created is *Mark Twain in his Times: An Electronic Archive* (http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/railton).

R. Kent Rasmussen holds a Ph.D. from the University of California at Los Angeles in African history, a subject on which he has published five books. His writings on Mark Twain include *Mark Twain A to Z* (1995), *Mark Twain's Book for Bad Boys and Girls* (1995), *The Quotable Mark Twain* (1997; also published as *Mark Twain: His Words, Wit and Wisdom*), and *Mark Twain for Kids* (2004). A greatly expanded edition of *Mark Twain A to Z* is scheduled for publication in fall 2005 as *Critical Companion to Mark Twain*. He is also the editor of the three-volume *Cyclopedia of Literary Places* (2003). Rasmussen is now a reference book editor in southern California. His interest in motion pictures goes back to his childhood, and he is now building a collection of 16mm films about Mark Twain and adapted from his works for eventual donation to a library or museum.

Forrest G. Robinson is Professor of American Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His writings on Mark Twain include *In Bad Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain's America* (1986) and three edited volumes: *Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson: Race, Conflict and Culture* (1990, with Susan Gillman), *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain* (1995), and a special number of *Arizona Quarterly* on "Mark Twain's Late Works," co-edited with Shelley Fisher Fishkin and forthcoming in 2005. He is presently at work on a biographical study of his favorite American humorist.

Gary Scharnhorst is Professor of English at the University of New Mexico. He is editor of *American Literary Realism*, editor in alternating years of *American Literary Scholarship*, and general editor of the "American Literary Realism and Naturalism" monograph series published by the University of Alabama Press. He is also a former president of the Western Literature Association and former chair of the American Literature Section of the Modern Language Association.

David Lionel Smith is the John W. Chandler Professor of English at Williams College, where he is also Director of the W. Ford Schumann Performing Arts Endowment. He was editor, with Jack Salzman and Cornel West, of the *Encyclopedia of African American Culture and History*, and at present he is editing with Wahneema Lubiano the *Blackwell Companion to African American Writing*.

Peter Stoneley is a Professor in the School of English and American Literature at the University of Reading. He wrote *Mark Twain and the Feminine Aesthetic* (1992), and his most recent book is *Consumerism and American Girls' Literature, 1860–1940* (2003). His current projects include *A Concise Companion to American Fiction, 1900–1950*, which he is co-editing for Blackwell with Cindy Weinstein.

Henry B. Wonham, Professor of English at the University of Oregon, is the author of several books on American literature, including *Mark Twain and the Art of the Tall Tale* (1993), *Charles W. Chesnutt: A Study of the Short Fiction* (1998), and *Playing the Races: Ethnic Caricature and American Literary Realism* (2004). He is also the editor of *Criticism and the Color Line: Desegregating American Literary Studies* (1996) and a critical edition of *Tales of Henry James* (2002).

Thomas D. Zlatic received a Ph.D. in literature from St. Louis University and has published on Mark Twain in *American Literature*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, *Clio*, and *Papers on Language and Literature*. His essay "Mark Twain and the Art of Memory," co-written with Thomas M. Walsh, was awarded the Foerster Prize for best article in *American Literature*.

Note on Referencing

Mark Twain's Major Works

Reference is made throughout this collection to the "Oxford Mark Twain," the set of facsimiles of the first American editions of Mark Twain's works edited by Shelley Fisher Fishkin and published by Oxford University Press, New York, in 1996. Where the texts included in the following list are used, page references immediately following quotations normally refer to these editions, which will not then be listed again in the "References and Further Reading" section of each individual essay. Where any exception is made to this convention, publication details of the edition used are given in that section, with references in the text on the usual author–date pattern.

Twain, Mark (1869). *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrims' Progress*.
Twain, Mark (1872). *Roughing It*.
Twain, Mark, and Warner, Charles Dudley (1873). *The Gilded Age: A Tale of To-Day*.
Twain, Mark (1876). *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
Twain, Mark (1880). *A Tramp Abroad*.
Twain, Mark (1881). *The Prince and the Pauper: A Tale for Young People of All Ages*.
Twain, Mark (1883). *Life on the Mississippi*.
Twain, Mark (1885). *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.
Twain, Mark (1889). *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.
Twain, Mark (1892). *The American Claimant.*
Twain, Mark (1894). *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson and the Comedy Those Extraordinary Twins*.
Twain, Mark (1896). *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*.
Twain, Mark (1897). *Following the Equator.*
Twain, Mark (1906). *What Is Man?*
Twain, Mark (1907). *Christian Science.*
Twain, Mark (1909). *Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven.*
Twain, Mark (1910). *Mark Twain's Speeches.*

Mark Twain's Short Works

Where reference is made to Mark Twain's short works, the source is generally Louis J. Budd's two-volume Library of America edition, published in New York in 1992, details of which appear below. Again, where any exception is made, publication details for the edition used are given in the individual "References and Further Reading" section.

Twain, Mark (1992a). *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays 1852–1890*.
Twain, Mark (1992b). *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays 1891–1910*.

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PART I
The Cultural Context

1

Mark Twain and Nation

Randall Knoper

The national consciousness so typical of the nineteenth century pervaded Mark Twain's work, from the early years, when his humor merged with the nationalist effort to define an American literature, to the later years, when his status as representative American and his anti-imperialism gave him a complicated relationship to the United States as a world power. He identified himself with American humor, and was quickly identified with it in the press, the publication of *The Innocents Abroad* (1869) conferring an international reputation for expressing an American point of view. Self-conscious Americanism, as often as not laced with irony or satire, tinged his ideas about society and culture. Intertwined as the concept of nation is with notions of race, ancestry, territory, language, modernization, politics, international relations, literature, values, and gender (among other things), it necessarily became one of Twain's topics – sometimes quite explicitly, sometimes indirectly. But Twain's own remarks about the idea of a nation, and about America, were notoriously various, changing from one occasion and audience to another. This variety has helped generate a rich range of interpretive comment about Mark Twain and the American nation. For well over a hundred years, through various moments and varieties of twentieth-century national self-definition, Twain has been used to epitomize American values and contradictions. Various critics and scholars have tracked and measured the staggering ubiquity of Mark Twain in America – from Twain T-shirts to white-suited Disney simulations – including his widely disseminated nationalist meanings.[1]

My aim here is more modest. I lay out a few of Twain's explicit comments about nation as a way of focusing some of the ideas it evoked for him and the contradictions it entailed. I also adduce examples from his fiction to show how he explored and complicated the matter – to the point, I believe, of intuiting features of national feeling and the modern nation-state as we now understand them, and of wondering how these things come into being. Then I select influential academic interpretations of Mark Twain and America that span the twentieth century and that mark the ways, both celebratory and critical, in which he has been treated as an icon of American

culture and used to imagine America – in his roles as a figure of the frontier, a writer of American humor and vernacular, and a recorder of American race relations. Twain still has this function in our time, when nationalism rightly arouses suspicion in the academy and yet is experiencing an intense popular renaissance. The continued pairing of Twain and nation will undoubtedly foment more disagreement and controversy; one can hope it will also bring more insight into both.

Nation, Genealogy, and Race

A standard practice of nation-constructing is the linking of the new entity to a past, fashioning stories and elaborating genealogies that explain the nation in terms of fathers who can be celebrated, or in terms of immemorial origins, sometimes of a primordial racial sort. History is rewritten as national history; the nation is narrated in this process of self-imagining. Twain repeatedly participated in and mocked this process. For the most part, he jokes with the legends of American founding fathers and national heroes. "A New Biography of Washington" (1866), for example, berates this national patriarch for not knowing enough to tell a lie – a skill the writer claims to have learned early on – and says the chances are slim that American youth would emulate Washington's example (Twain 1992a: 205–7). "The Late Benjamin Franklin" (1870), while granting that Franklin "did a great many notable things for his country, and made her young name to be honored in many lands as the mother of such a son," aims mainly to debunk his "pretentious maxims" as ancient and "wearisome platitudes" deceptively tricked up for modern consumption (Twain 1992a: 425–7). It may be too much to credit this burlesquing Twain with sophisticated doubts about the storytelling that constitutes national identity, but his themes – casting aspersions on supposed truth-telling, humorously embracing wholesale lying, cynically discrediting the words of these fathers, doubting the likelihood that latter-day Americans could reproduce the legendary paragons – all this suggests that he has turned onto the fabrication of national myth his characteristic raillery and doubts about the possibility of truth in representation. In any case, in Twain's writing a national pantheon does *not* descend to us unbesmirched. A Fourth of July speech delivered in London in 1873 declares the United States

> A great and glorious land . . . a land which has developed a Washington, a Franklin, a William M. Tweed, a Longfellow, a Motley, a Jay Gould, a Samuel C. Pomeroy, a recent Congress which has never had its equal – (in some respects) and a United States Army which conquered sixty Indians in eight months by tiring them out – which is much better than uncivilized slaughter, God knows. (Twain 1910: 414)

If Washington and Franklin are not explicitly discredited in this passage, they are in the shady company of the corrupt boss Tweed, the rapacious capitalist Gould, the bribe-taking congressman Pomeroy, and a US Army that has "improved" upon its propensity for slaughtering Indians only through its inefficiency. Here is a mixed

genealogy at best, a nation at least partly fathered by real bastards, figuratively speaking.

In this vein, Twain's most striking patricide of national fathers is "Plymouth Rock and the Pilgrims," a speech given in 1881 to the New England Society of Philadelphia (Twain 1910: 17–24). "What do you want to celebrate those people for? – those ancestors of yours, of 1620 – the *Mayflower* tribe, I mean," he asks. Those Pilgrims

> took good care of themselves, but they abolished everybody else's ancestors . . . My first American ancestor, gentlemen, was an indian – an early Indian. Your ancestors skinned him alive, and I am an orphan . . . Later ancestors of mine were the Quakers . . . Your tribe chased them out of the country for their religion's sake. (pp. 19–21)

He goes on: "All those Salem witches were ancestors of mine . . . The first slave brought into New England out of Africa by your progenitors was an ancestor of mine – for I am of a mixed breed, an infinitely shaded and exquisite Mongrel" (p. 22). In this way Twain contrasts the Pilgrim forefathers to a multiethnic and multicultural nation, embodied in a mongrelized Twain, whose ancestors – grandfathers *and* grandmothers – have been murdered, exiled, and enslaved. He beseeches his audience to disband the New England Societies and sell Plymouth Rock! And if he relents at the end – "chaff and nonsense aside, I think I honor and appreciate your Pilgrim stock as much as you do yourselves, perhaps" – this sop to his audience's dignity only briefly blunts the pointed, though humorous, denunciation that preceded it (p. 24). The English settlers themselves are given a mixed moral heritage, at the same time that a multifarious mulatto nation arises around the supposed Pilgrim origins of the American self.

True to his own sense of doubleness, and drawing perhaps inevitably on the intrinsic contradictions that lie within any conception of nation, Twain does trace national chronologies that have positive value – but these show their darker sides as we comb through them. One such narrative looks for national origins in England and the Anglo-Saxon race. In two Fourth-of-July speeches, one in 1873, the other in 1907, and both made in London, where the audience obviously affected the sentiment, Twain anchors American nationality in English soil and history. In the earlier speech he acknowledges the English "mother soil" and half-seriously asks: "With a common origin, a common literature, a common religion and common drinks, what is longer needful to the cementing of the two nations together in a permanent bond of brotherhood?" (Twain 1910: 414). His later speech, reflecting his sanguine version of American nationalism as a force for freedom, declares that the United States had five Fourths of July, in the sense of memorable moments for liberty, all of them actually bequeathed by England: the first was Magna Charta, the second the Petition of Right, the third the American colonists' principle of no taxation without representation, the fourth the Declaration of Independence, the fifth the Emancipation Proclamation. Since the first four were all made by British subjects, the only truly American one was the last, though it too followed England's abolition of slavery. Twain concludes:

> Let us be able to say to Old England, this great-hearted, venerable old mother of the race, you gave us our Fourths of July that we love and that we honor and revere, you gave us the Declaration of Independence, which is the Charter of our rights, you, the venerable Mother of Liberties, the Protector of Anglo-Saxon Freedom – you gave us these things, and we do most honestly thank you for them. (p. 412)

Twain significantly invokes here a racial matrix for national origins – typical of turn-of-the-century national self-imagining – at the same time that he exalts the freeing of the slaves, making the love of liberty flow in Anglo-Saxon blood, to the benefit of African Americans. The potential miscegenation that comes with declaring emancipation a moment of national conception comes with a reassertion of white national genealogy and hierarchizing of racial difference.

Twain's most notorious treatment of this difficult muddle of nation, ancestry, and race comes in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894). In that novel we learn early on that York Leicester Driscoll was "proud of his old Virginia ancestry" and that Pembroke Howard was of "proved descent from the First Families" (Twain 1894: 20–1). This went for Cecil Burleigh Essex too, "another F. F. V.," or member of a First Family of Virginia, with whom we supposedly "have no concern," though he is the father of a central character, the black slave Roxy's son (p. 22). This semi-mythical lineage and place refer to national origins, of course: the first British colony of the New World. The genealogy of these sons of the "F. F. V." is joined with the explicit declaration that they are gentlemen. In their labeling, several crucial meanings are intertwined: that these men can trace their heritage back to fathers of the nation, but also that they are slaveholders, are white, belong to a fraternity of men who stand above others, and have authority over others. That is, the crucial questions of genealogy and inheritance in this novel have implications most obviously for whiteness (does your ancestry mean you are a free white or a black slave?), but a whiteness, nonetheless, joined to pride in nation.

This genealogy of American white manhood is pointedly deranged when Roxy, perversely ratifying its importance, tells her son that, because his father was descended from the First Families of Virginia, no other "nigger [is] . . . as high-bawn as you is" (Twain 1894: 120). This is more than a moment of burlesque, more than an instance of mock-pretentious minstrelsy, more than Roxy's simply putting on airs and aping white status hierarchies. It blurts out an officially hidden, racially mixed line of descent. Roxy further disrupts the official national genealogy of the city fathers when she denounces her son Tom's manhood – because he smirched his honor by refusing to duel with Luigi after the meeting of the Sons of Liberty – and then tells him that "the nigger in him" has disgraced his birth, his Essex blood, and also the blood of John Smith, and that of Smith's "great-great-gran'mother" Pocahontas and her husband, "a nigger king outen Africa." The invocation of John Smith, of course, places this charge in the territory of national legend, and so does the invocation of Pocahontas. If Roxy avoids the Indian–white miscegenation of the marriage between Pocahontas and her actual husband John Rolfe, and instead has Pocahontas marry a

black African king, their progeny nonetheless is John Smith. Roxy's national genealogy has black roots, is miscegenated and complicated "somers along back dah" (p. 189). While her imagined heritage might be adduced for the argument that Twain treats racial genealogies, like race itself, as a "fiction of law and custom," the lineage she declares does more than show itself to be a fiction. It also pointedly names an alternative national genealogy to the myth of origins that the white town fathers embrace, remingling multiracial family-descent lines into the national narrative. In having Roxy mime the family (and national) pride of the white males, but mime it impurely, Twain seems quite consciously to be assaulting the constellation of whiteness, manliness, and nation. But even if he is irreverent about this configuration of authority, his novel re-enacts Roxy's treatment of the matter, challenging the injustice but preserving a belief in character based on race and blood that underpins the problem. He follows a pattern, as we shall see in a moment, that critics of his apotheosis as national author have traced in his treatment of race in America.

Nation and Modernization

While acknowledging the risk of seeming to retrofit Twain to our twenty-first-century conceptions, we might nonetheless say that *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), in its depiction of the (failed) transition from feudal aristocracy to Hank Morgan's "republic," grapples with questions we still have about the emergence of a nation and the conditions necessary for the modern nation-state. One group of historians, that is, sees nation and nationalism as products of modernization, specifically of capitalism and industrialization, which forged the homogeneous (or standardized), literate national populations necessary for their own development.[2] Seemingly disagreeing with this idea, Hank repeatedly refers to an English "nation" (a term he uses over 50 times – one of his favorite words), by which he means an Anglo-Saxon people whose sense of themselves and their rights as "men" pre-existed the sixth century and has been nearly obliterated by the church and the nobility. Nonetheless, he is quite attuned to the importance of mass education and industry for fashioning the nation-state he proposes (his Man-Factory combines the two), and capitalist marketing is one of the ways he extends its influence. Notably, he says that "The first thing you want in a new country is a patent office; then work up your school system; and after that, out with your paper . . . You can't resurrect a dead nation without it" (Twain 1889: 109). Whether this is a new country or a resurrected nation, the connection of nation-fashioning to newspapers suits Benedict Anderson's now ubiquitous conception of the nation as an "imagined community" grounded in the emergence of what he calls "print capitalism" (Anderson 1991: 37–46). This refers in part to the capitalist development of print materials, the newspaper in particular, which enabled people to imagine themselves part of a community of individuals that included others they would never meet – readers of the same newspaper, consumers of the same news, all privately engaging in this same activity on the same day. The distribution of printed material and the

vernacular language of the newspaper bound people together in this new conception of a nation – and it happened first in the Americas in the late eighteenth century. Twain did in fact associate the birth of "the press" with the American Revolution and the birth of the republic (Twain 1992a: 942–3). He also saw the press as a kind of glue for the common folk. The journalistic style of Hank's able assistant Clarence is immediately "up to the back settlement Alabama mark" – "he talked sixth century and wrote nineteenth" (Twain 1889: 121), including disgraceful familiarities – meaning for one thing that his backwoods language is vernacular in a very old sense: a language that elbows out the Latin of clergy and scribes, replaces the courtly language that excludes the masses, and therefore potentially becomes a national idiom. While it is true that, like the back-settlement Alabama paper, the *Camelot Weekly Hosannah and Literary Volcano* is a local paper, not a national one, bits of national news appear to foster the larger imagined community. And of course in Hank's case other communications technologies bolster the conditions of national interconnections. His telegraph and his "atmosphere of telephones and lightning communication with distant regions" (p. 305) ensure this. When Morgan trounces a soothsayer's supposed clairvoyance about the king's activities by using telegraphic information to announce that the king is traveling and will arrive in two days – and of course is right about this bit of national news – he exemplifies the consciousness of newspaper and nation, of other people and events simultaneously proceeding, out of sight, within the imagined community (pp. 309–10).

Hank arguably also introduces another, related condition of the nation according to Anderson: the dispersed "homogeneous, empty time" (Anderson 1991: 24–6), a time measured by clock and calendar rather than by the sacred and centered timelessness of prefiguration and fulfillment. Hank's "miracle" of predicting the solar eclipse puts his calendrical calculations into the place of the divine order, replacing miracles as prefigured divine signs with the measured march of godless nature. With this desacralized, abstractly homogeneous sense of time comes another condition for the nation, the displacement of the king as a type of the divine by the secular administrator (or "Boss"), and the displacement of the dynasty as the principle of social organization by the state. Hank plays along with the pre-national, monarchic idea of a chain from God to king to people: he keeps up the performance of Arthur's supposed healing of scrofula by touch – the "king's-evil business" (p. 334) – and his other spectacles seem to invoke supernatural power. But in fact all of these ostensibly sacred symbolic moments, from going a-grailing to his staged miracle in the Valley of Holiness, are technologically produced or at least efficiently administered. Hank's administrative entity grows into the substratum for his nation-state, inaugurating a system of schools, taxes, communications, American-based national currency, national advertising and marketing, industry, and "missionary" expansion, extending his profane influence all the way to "obscure country retreats" and the "quiet nooks and corners" (pp. 117–18) of the nation – culminating in a network of wires and explosives connecting all his innovations, ready to blow them all up. Here, with a ruthless