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Assembling Counter-Majorities: Mark Twain's Democratic Mugwumpery

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In this essay, I read Mark Twain as a practitioner of what Deleuze and Guattari call an "active micropolitics," focusing especially on his depictions of race and racism. In his popular stories, essays, speeches, and autobiography, Twain gave voice not only to marginal and underprivileged characters, but also to minoritarian, changeable sentiments circulating among popular majorities. Moreover, he suggested these sentiments might comprise not only actual counter-*majorities, but also potential counter-*majorities*, linking personal complexity to democratic potential. I argue that despite his appreciation for the inertia of popular prejudice, Twain's appeals to minoritarian sentiments, and the popularity thereof, testify against Tocqueville's fatalism concerning majority opinion in general, and white supremacism in particular.*

Keywords *Twain; Tocqueville; Deleuze; race; racism; majority*

> You may not see your ears, but they will be there.
>
> Mark Twain, "A Fable"

> So that far from being socially undesirable this struggle between Americans as to what the American is to be is part of that democratic process through which the nation works to achieve itself.
>
> Ralph Ellison, "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity"

In his fatalistic assessment of the future of the three [sic] races in America, Alexis de Tocqueville links majority rule to the inertia of white supremacism. Lamenting the impossibility of integrating former slaves as equal citizens of the Republic, he declares that while a person may change, and a king who changes might alter a society, a people cannot "rise, as it were, above itself."[1] Theorists of radical

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1. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: Bantam, 2000), 433.

democracy argue to the contrary, identifying the people precisely with the constituent power to transform the interests and identities of civil society.[2] Like Ellison, they identify democracy with a collective struggle over the production of a popular will. Along these lines, Jacques Rancière distinguishes politics, which transforms the "distribution of the sensible," from both the regulatory function of the police and the expressive function of republican representation, situating political subjects "between…social and juridical categories."[3] Yet this struggle between must somehow find purchase *within* those who are so constituted. For a democratic people to change, that is, a majority must be mobilized against the interests and identities that so define them. Deleuze and Guattari suggest that such change is always underway, albeit with uncertain results. They describe both individual interests and social groupings as dynamic processes of assemblage agitated by more or less powerful tendencies to dis- and re-assemble along other lines. From this perspective, every distribution of majority and minority factions is a "state of domination" that not only subordinates one group to another, but also suppresses contending affects and perceptions that comprise what they sometimes call a "becoming minoritarian" distributed across majority and minority groupings.[4] They identify the "in-between" with a transversal relation that "sweeps up" the different positions it crosses.[5] Conceived as a dynamic assemblage, a democratic people need not overcome but only differently become themselves in order to be transformed. Indeed, at lower registers, they are always becoming. However, Deleuze and Guattari are quick to emphasize that "molecular escapes and movements would be nothing if they did not return to the molar organizations to shuffle their segments, their binary distributions of sexes, classes and parties."[6] To this end, Deleuze and Guattari endorse an "active micropolitics" that mobilizes beliefs and desires against the grain of familiar categories and identities.[7]

In this essay, I read Twain as a regular practitioner and sometime theorist of an active micropolitics so understood, focusing especially on his depictions of race and racism.[8] Twain is well known as a champion of the underdog. Working in a

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2. See Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (New York: Polity Press, 1988); Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (New York: Verso, 2000).

3. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 59.

4. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 291.

5. Ibid., 293. Also see ibid., 277: "The only way to get outside the dualisms is to be-between."

6. Ibid., 216–17.

7. See ibid., 292. Cf. Paul Patton, *Deleuze and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 8.

8. I do not propose to, nor can I provide a full survey of Twain's various treatments of race, much less the extensive literature addressing the historical sources for and impact of the same. Rather than trace biographical sources for Twain's racialized discourses, or the paths of their historical reception, I focus on several works in which Twain links a dynamic conception of selfhood to the idea of what I call counter-majoritarian assemblages as they work against de Tocqueville's fatalistic views concerning race and racism in America. For an influential discussion of Twain's adoption of African-American styles, idioms,

variety of genres, including fiction, journalism, public speeches, and autobiography, he mocked prevailing customs and prejudices, ridiculed economic, religious and political elites, and decried imperialism. However, he also gave voice to heterodox sentiments moving below the surface of majority opinion.[9] Moreover, he suggested that such sentiments might comprise not only *counter*-majorities that challenge prevailing dispositions and opinions but also counter-*majorities* that outnumber, and so might reconfigure them. In combination, his writings link affective complexity to democratic potential, both appealing to critical sentiments and prompting readers to reflect on the implications of the changeable, emergent nature of identity for political orders. In his writings on race, Twain linked the dynamic character of the self to what could be called a "transversal humanity," a common power of transformation at odds with both essentialist theories of racial difference and fatalistic views of sedimented racism. In this respect, I argue, his writings fit in a tradition of anti-racist politics and literature united by a struggle against sociological perspectives in favor of dynamic human potentials. Furthermore, they illustrate the importance of style, and of humor in particular, in facilitating a hospitable popular response to counter-majoritarian perspectives.

This is decidedly not to say that Twain opposed Tocqueville's fatalism with an affirmative vision of democratic progress and racial reconciliation. Quite the contrary, Twain was deeply pessimistic, especially in later life, and rejected progressive narratives of all sorts. If a counter-majoritarian politics can draw on popular sensibilities, this does not mean it is likely to succeed, nor that the results will always be happy. Although Twain hardly underestimated the forces of popular custom and prejudice, he nonetheless appealed to a popular audience, alerting his readers to contrarian ideas and affections that might – or might not – reshuffle binary distributions of race.

Counter-Assemblages in Twain's Heaven

Counter-majoritarian assemblings are conspicuous in Twain's short story, "Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven." Upon arrival – after decades of travel at

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and manners, see Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?* (Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 1993). For a critical evaluation of Twain's use of racialized language, especially regarding its public impact, see James Leonard, Thomas A. Tenney, and Thadious M. Davis, eds., *Satire or Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1992); Jocelyn Chadwick-Joshua, *The Jim Dilemma* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1998); Elaine and Harry Mensh, *Black, White and Huckleberry Finn* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000).

9. See Mark Twain, "Goldsmith's Friend Abroad Again," in Mark Twain, *Collected Tales, Sketches, & Essays*, 1891–1910 (New York: Library of America, 1992), 455–70; and "My Platonic Sweetheart, 284–96; and "The Great Dark," in 297–343; both in Mark Twain, *Collected Tales, Sketches, & Essays 1852–1890* (New York: Library of America, 1992).

over a million miles a minute – the eponymous captain finds heaven populated with afterlives from billions of planets. To make matters worse, he shows up in the wrong section, having drifted off course while racing a comet bound for Satan. When he asks directions to the earth's region, it requires a microscope to find our solar system on a celestial map the size of Rhode Island. "It is called the Wart."[10] Chaperoned by Sandy McWilliams, a bald-headed old angel from New Jersey with whom he strikes up a warm friendship, the captain learns that other planets have larger worlds, longer days and lives (numbering in the millions of years). Furthermore, the minoritization of our natural world and populations is matched by that of our social and racial hierarchies. Other beings have their prophets and patriarchs, many ranked above those of earth. Heaven is no egalitarian Republic, and not only because of its unimpeachable ruler. It is replete with discriminations, "Russia – only more so." However, it reconfigures differences of rank and station, the exalted and the humble along different lines by including lives, and possible lives, not counted in conventional registers.

In heaven, as one might expect, the virtuous get their due. "That is the heavenly justice of it – they warn't rewarded according to their deserts, on earth, but here they get their rightful rank."[11] Kings therefore do not bring their status with them, though some manage to gain favor for their abilities. However, heavenly justice recognizes not only neglected accomplishments, but also lives *in potentia*. The captain is surprised, for instance, to find that Napoleon and similar figures are not held in the highest regard for military genius. "Who stands higher?" he asks. Sandy explains,

> Oh, a *lot* of people *we* never heard of before – the shoemaker and horse-doctor and knife-grinder kind, you know.… The greatest military genius our world ever produced was a bricklayer from somewhere back of Boston – died during the Revolution – by the name of Absolom Jones…everybody knows, now, what he *would* have been, and so they flock by the million to get a glimpse of him whenever they hear he is going to be anywhere."[12]

Heaven thus gives credit not only to unrecognized merit, but also to unrealized possibilities. By assigning such possibilities to persons, Twain implies a latent hierarchy of "rightful rank." Rather than describe a normative order, however, his story performs a shift in perspective. His fictional heaven does not serve as a model for earthly lives (a tiny minority in a vast, populated universe) but instead highlights their partial and arbitrary distribution.

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10. Mark Twain, "Extracts from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven," in *Collected Tales, 1891–1910,* 826–63, at 833 (see previous note).
11. Ibid., 852.
12. Ibid., 859.

As the captain discovers, moreover, heaven is not an ideal state achieved, but instead a realm of becoming, "…the very last place to come to *rest* in, – and don't you be afraid to bet on that!"[13] It gives full scope to shifting inclinations, leading to frequent changes of occupation, age, and milieu. The result is greater diversity, circulation, contrast, and finally pleasure. Twain proposes that a jostling of differences forms the basis of all sensation, and that happiness requires the disturbance of familiar assumptions and routines. "As soon as the novelty is over and the force of the contrast dulled, it ain't happiness any longer…. Well, there's plenty of pain and suffering in heaven – consequently there's plenty of contrasts, and just no end of happiness."[14] A fixed state of perfection would lack the "variety of types and faces and ages, and the enlivening attrition of the myriad interests that come into pleasant collision in such a variegated society."[15] Happiness arises not from contrasts per se, but from the "enlivening attrition" of transformative encounters, a phrase that places the emphasis on what is gained rather than what is lost. In another sign of heaven's privilege of transformation, prophets are elevated over patriarchs, that is, those who usher a new future over those who guard the past: "Yes, sir, Adam himself has to walk behind Shakespeare."[16]

Twain's heaven would sound familiar to readers of Whitman, whose poetry of the future Twain offered to extend by trading a year of his own life.[17] With its diversity, its repudiation of fixed hierarchies and its preference for prophecy over patriarchy, it could even be said to be typically American.[18] Heaven, Twain assures us, "is built right, and on a liberal plan."[19] However, it is set over and against the reality of a nation whose pretenses to individualism and social mobility were violated by deep prejudices and inequalities. Rather than simply disavow a corrupt present in favor of a utopian future, Twain's heaven indicates the hidden potentials of historical memory. The geography of heaven replicates and inflates that of the earth, including past generations forgotten in official histories, with profound implications for the interlocking categories of race, language, and nationality. In heaven, resurrected hordes overwhelm familiar borders and populations. Most angels hailing from "England" speak Danish, German, Latin, Gaelic, and so forth. In the American section, indigenous angels predominate, leading alien visitors to take whites and blacks alike for diseased Indians. On the whole, Twain supposes, people still seek out their racial kind. However, a common temporal predicament affiliates the newly arrived "Yanks and Mexicans and English and Arabs," all of

13. Ibid., 838.
14. Ibid., 839.
15. Ibid., 842.
16. Ibid., 851.
17. See Mark Twain, "To Walt Whitman," in *Collected Tales, 1852–1890*, 940–41 (see note 9 above).
18. See George Schulman, *American Prophecy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
19. Ibid., 848.

whom find themselves the common inhabitants of a particular historical moment among a host of others.[20] The salience of racial and social distinctions is thus transformed by shifting the scale of inclusion and comparison, a transformation with a distinct ethical value. As Sandy admonishes the captain, "You can't expect us to amount to anything in heaven, and we *don't* – now that is the simple fact, and we have got to do the best we can with it."[21]

By situating terrestrial lives in cosmic space and time, Twain's story deflates anthropocentrism, American exceptionalism, Christian morality, and white supremacism. In his playful hands, moreover, the deflations are liberating, the attritions enlivening. His readers are amused even as they are admonished, invited to laugh at rather than to condemn the pretenses of which they are relieved. In heaven, too, people are brought down gently. The grandiose self-images of last-minute converts are humored with a brief celebration, and newcomers are given a chance to don wings and halo for a time before putting away childish things and moving by force of thought. Sandy's friendship has a similar effect for the captain, softening his disappointments. These are no minor details, you see. To the contrary, like Twain's comic style generally, they mitigate resentment, making it easier to do the best we can with the fact of our minoritization.

After-Life on Earth: Twain's Autobiography

Twain's autobiography provides a less fanciful, more nuanced, and more intimate view of contending inclinations below the surface of public selves and social categories. Moreover, it highlights the myriad events whereby those inclinations are variously suppressed or brought forth. As his autobiography makes clear, what we become is not simply in us, but rather emerges through evolving intersections of affects and encounters. It thus shows in close-up the dynamics of personal experience that can facilitate collective transformations. In a sense, this text also comes to us from the afterlife. By stipulating that its publication be deferred until he was a hundred years dead, Twain sought to free himself from concerns with social status and personal reputation, writing "as from the grave."[22] However, his greatest innovation, as he saw it, involved the temporal structure of its composition. Throughout the text, he performs a Proustian recollection *avant la letter*. Rather than following the linear calendar, the text enacts the desultory logics of attention and memory, blending present objects of concern with recollections of earlier episodes. "In this way you have the vivid things of the present to make a

20. Ibid., 836.
21. Ibid., 857.
22. Mark Twain, *Autobiography of Mark Twain*, Vol. 1. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 221.

contrast with memories of like things in the past, and these contrasts have a charm all their own…. It is the first time in history that the right plan has been hit upon."[23] In another entry, Twain describes his approach as a blend of news and history, moving from present interests to an "uncharted sea of recollection."[24] Throughout, he reproduces the surprise and contrast of encounters among distant things in which he took pleasure, an approach that, unlike his aborted conventional beginnings, yielded several large volumes.[25]

Amidst his traveling recollections, Twain often pauses to reflect on the interplay between past and present, commenting on the ingenious guiles of memory and perception. Reflecting in his prelude on the logic of experience that subtends his approach, Twain describes consciousness more generally as a narrow, selective excavation of multivalent sentiments in play below the threshold of action and opinion.

> What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself. All day long, and every day, the mill of his brain is grinding, and his thoughts, (which are but the mute articulations of his feelings,) not those other things, are his history. His acts and words are merely the visible thin crust of his world, with its scattered snow summits and its vacant wastes of water – and they are so trifling a part of his bulk! A mere skin enveloping it. The mass of him is hidden – it and its volcanic fires that toss and boil, and never rest, night nor day.[26]

In this remarkable passage, Twain depicts speech and action as superficial and inert fragments atop a vast flow of thought. Hence, "a full autobiography has never been written…never will be."[27] Moreover, he figures thought as a "mute" articulation of feelings. Twain's vision of the self as a play of affects in continuous transformation bears a striking resemblance to Nietzsche's view of the self as a struggle of contending drives, an inspiration for Deleuze and Guattari's conception of states of domination. Taking up their arguments, and drawing on contemporary sciences of embodied cognition, a variety of theorists have argued that conscious thoughts and nominal emotions variously mobilize and censor tumultuous affects.[28] As Twain reminds us, moreover, experience includes much that is subtle and disorderly. He captures in outline a counter-history that cannot be written, but

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23. Ibid., 220.

24. Ibid., 283.

25. Twain abandoned earlier beginnings that followed the "old and inflexible" model of a linear history, he explains, because "some other and newer interest" (the sparks of his later success) distracted him. See Twain, *Autobiography* Vol. 1, 203 (see note 22 above).

26. Ibid., 220–21.

27. Ibid., 257.

28. See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), #115. Cf. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002), 28, 30

which we nonetheless partially sense, the "storm of thoughts that is forever blowing through one's head."[29]

Throughout his writings, Twain discloses contending sentiments beneath managed appearances, giving voice to thoughts and volitions initiated but not actualized. Further, he shows that action is also an uncertain undertaking, subject to the vagaries of energy and influence. In "The Private History of a Campaign that Failed" – dealing with his aborted participation on the Confederate side of the Civil War – he writes, "You have heard from a great many people who did something in the war; is it not fair and right that you listen a little moment to one who started out to do something in it, but didn't?"[30] As we eavesdrop on startings, we learn something about the contingent encounters that elicit opinions, judgments, and personae. Consider, for instance, the effect wrought on Twain and his friend John Hay by the unexpected return of the latter's wife from church: "We rose to our feet at once, of course – rose through a swiftly falling temperature…but we got no opportunity to say the pretty and polite thing and offer the homage due: the comely young matron forestalled us…. Hay, grown gray in a single night, so to speak, limped feebly at my side…, he tried to ask me to call again, but at that point his ancient sincerity rose against the fiction and squelched it."[31] As Twain indicates, not only individuals, but also dispositions rise and fall, variously inhibited or inspired by company and circumstances. Had Hay's wife been at the theater, things might have gone differently. Building on the insight that we become ourselves in the presence of others, Twain suggests "it would be a simple thing to make a dueling law which would stop dueling," namely by stipulating the attendance of families, especially mothers of the would-be combatants, whose tearful eyes would quickly deflate the righteous self-regard that props up martial bravery.[32]

Popular Counter-Majorities

Stepping back to contemplate the lives of collectives, what political potential might we find in the sentiments that toss and boil under the surface of popular customs and opinions? Twain makes an intriguing suggestion in "Privilege of the Grave" – published posthumously, appropriately enough. Whole nations, he proposes, are otherwise than they seem, insofar as popular consensus rests on the self-censorship of dissenters. Citizens choose parties not for their doctrines (which neither they nor

29. Twain, *Autobiography* Vol. 1, 256 (see note 22 above).
30. Twain, "The Private History of a Campaign that Failed," in *Collected Tales, 1852–1890*, 863 (see note 9 above).
31. Twain, *Autobiography* Vol. 1, 223 (see note 22 above).
32. Ibid., 301.

he understand) but out of group loyalties, making public opinion no opinion at all, but merely a policy of conformity. Moreover, the relative stability of groups obscures the changeable dispositions of their members.

> When a man has joined a party, he is likely to stay in it. If he changes his opinion – *his feeling, I mean, his sentiment* – he is likely to stay, anyway; his friends are of that party, and he will keep his altered sentiment to himself, and talk the privately discarded one…. These unfortunates are in both parties, but in what proportions we cannot guess. Therefore we never know which party was really in the majority at an election.[33]

As in his autobiography, Twain identifies opinion with sentiment, and conceives the latter as a changeable force beneath the superficial crust of public affiliations.

Of course, parties have always been suspect in American democratic politics, inasmuch as factional discipline distorts the spontaneous convergence of individual preferences and opinions that ostensibly forms a popular will. Like Madison, Twain compares the conformity, discipline, and hierarchy of parties to aristocratic European associations.[34] However, as Twain emphasizes in a speech on "Consistency" (1887), party shibboleths belie not only the differences between individual views, but also their continuous mutation:

> No man *remains* the same sort of Presbyterian he was at *first* – the thing is impossible; time and various influences modify his Presbyterianism; it *narrows* or it *broadens* it, grows deeper or shallower, but does not stand *still*. In some cases it grows so far beyond itself, upward *or* downward, that nothing is really left of it but the name, and perhaps an inconsequential *rag* of the original substance, the *bulk* being now Baptist or Buddhist or something.[35]

As in Twain's autobiography, the privilege of the grave reveals a vital play of sentiments behind conventional postures. "We change – and must change, constantly, and keep on changing as long as we live."[36] In short, Twain conceives of popular sentiments – and so the will of the majority – as *becoming*, shifting the scene of emergent selfhood from the living room to the broader world of

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33. Twain, "The Privilege of the Grave," *The New Yorker* 50 (December 22, 2008), emphasis added, at http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2008/12/22/081222fa_fact_twain, accessed December 29, 2009.

34. See Twain, *Autobiography*, Vol. 1, 311–12. Cf. 314 on the "tyranny of party" and the "lie" that men prize independence of action and opinion (see note 22 above).

35. Twain, *Collected Tales, 1852–1890*, 910 (see note 9 above).

36. Ibid., 909. Twain's account of continuous transformation echoed the vision famously set out by Emerson in "Self-Reliance," namely that "society never advances,…it undergoes continual changes." Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Self-Reliance," in his *Essays* (New York. Charles E. Merrill Co., 1907), 112. It also found common cause in a broader evolutionary philosophy coming into its own at the time, which describes history as transformation without linear progress (it too can go up *or* down). Cf. Twain, *Autobiography* Vol. 1, 230–31 (see note 22 above).

democratic politics. Presbyterian majorities suppress not only other factions, but also the budding Buddhists and Baptists among them.

Twain did not presume that countervailing sentiments are generally strong enough to overturn macropolitical conventions and institutions. Rather, he supposed they require bold public exemplars, what he calls "starters," or "mugwumps," the latter a bastardized and irresistibly sayable Algonquian term designating Republicans who switched parties to support Grover Cleveland for President. Twain so nominated all who break with convention and inaugurate a different order: "No single great and high and beneficent thing was ever done… but a Mugwump started it and Mugwumps carried it to victory. And their names are the stateliest in history: Washington, Garrison, Galileo, Luther, Christ. Loyalty to petrified opinions never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul in this world – and never will."[37] Above ground, Twain avowed his own Mugwumpery. Like that of his fictional characters (and this exalted list), his "political behavior defies conventional categories."[38] As Gore Vidal points out, Twain's views also evolved, his early racism and misogyny gradually yielding, his anti-Imperialism "erupting" when he confronted the outrages of the Spanish-American war.[39]

Democratic and Racial Minoritization

All this talk of broken chains and counter-majorities may be well and good, but to recall Tocqueville, what are we to make of the persistence of white supremacism? To yield a counter-majoritarian politics, disloyalty must find a popular voice. Contemplating American democracy in the early nineteenth century, Tocqueville declared this impossible. As he saw it, dissenting minorities had been disarmed by social mobility, cultural homogenization, and especially universal suffrage.[40] Suffrage, he argued, enhances not only the power, but just as crucially, the *visibility* of majorities. There can be no counter-majoritarian politics in America, "because neither party can pretend to represent that portion of the community which has not voted."[41]

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37. Twain, *Collected Tales, 1852–1890*, 916 (see note 9 above). On Twain's break for Cleveland, see Twain, *Autobiography* Vol. 1, 315–19 (see note 22 above).

38. Wilson Carey McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 445.

39. See Gore Vidal, "Twain on the Grand Tour," in *The Last Empire* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 68–78, at 73.

40. In part, this was to the credit of the country, inasmuch as it prevented minority factions or associations from becoming warring classes, as in Europe. See Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 226 (see note 1 above).

41. Ibid.

While it could be plausibly argued that counter-majoritarian politics gain new life wherever participation is low, Twain's descriptions of changeable sentiments and party loyalty suggest, more radically, that we might reinterpret as "nonvoting" that portion of minoritarian sentiments distributed across parties and among both majority and minority groupings, whether or not they cast ballots. Indeed, it has become common practice to posit hidden majorities among the electorate, from Nixon's "silent majority" to Occupy Wall Street's 99%. However, it is one thing to mobilize a heretofore silent majority, another to popularize the notion that all majorities are provisional assemblages of mutable popular inclinations, still another to combine mobilization and critical reflection. To put it in the language of radical democracy, how does the non-place of the people become present to citizens in such a way as to encourage them to change positions? In his masterful analysis of "constituent moments" in revolutionary America, Jason Frank finds the democratic surplus envisioned by agonistic democrats manifest by unruly crowds of "people out of doors." He writes, "The postrevolutionary American crowd marks a democracy of the *in*articulate insofar as it was perceived as a shadowy, virtual, inchoate identity without the crystallizing or articulating voice of a 'leader' to give it form, to give it sovereign voice."[42] Yet his corollary claim that "the 'uncreating word' of the postrevolutionary American crowd forever resists *final* representation or articulation" is importantly qualified.[43] Mobs lend themselves to many would-be leaders, each articulating popular demands in their own way – some inspired, some banal, others loathsome.[44] Moreover, some articulations are more compelling and/or durable than others, albeit never final, depending upon a variety of intervening factors. While Frank amply demonstrates the unsettling force of the gatherings he describes, this does not mean (nor does he claim) that all crowds resist articulation, nor that boisterous gatherings are the only disarticulating performances. At stake are the means and conditions by which the unsettled character of the people becomes apparent to those who compose it (including members of a crowd) and by which micropolitical becomings are leveraged to reshuffle macropolitical categories, or are prevented from doing so. Here, de Tocqueville's infamous discussion of the races serves as a case in point.

As Tocqueville suggests, the constituent power of the people is disarmed by the constituted visibility of popular majorities in American politics. This was especially the case where majority power was bound up with white supremacy. Racial inequality was baked in, as he saw it, because "the abstract and transient fact of slavery is fatally united to the physical and permanent fact of color."[45] Thus, the

42. Jason Frank, *Constituent Moments* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2010), 100.

43. Ibid., 100, emphasis added; also cf. 69.

44. See Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 141.

45. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 414 (see note 1 above).

visibility of majority opinion was complemented by that of racial difference, electoral politics by racial aesthetics. Inasmuch as white supremacism was channeled to state power by virtue of democratic rule, political power reinforced social prejudice. The root of the problem, he supposed, was prejudice itself, which remained "stationary" even where laws change.[46] Hence, even where black political participation was legalized from above, white racists ensured that blacks were denied access to elections, courts, and inter-marriage.[47] Racism and racial inequality were fused in a double-bind: "To induce the whites to abandon the opinion they have conceived of the moral and intellectual inferiority of their former slaves, the negroes must change, but as long as this opinion subsists, to change is impossible."[48] Because it would need majority support, there could be no counter-racist politics in America.[49]

Tocqueville's fatalistic view of racial inequality was hardly novel. In his "Notes on the State of Virginia," for instance, Jefferson repudiated integration on similar grounds, essentializing racism even as he expressed doubts concerning the biological supremacy of whites. In doing so, he voiced a popular aesthetic prejudice. Cross-racial sympathies were blocked, he claimed, by the "eternal monotony" of dark faces, which evince none of the pink hues that for him signified a changeable interior life.[50] Thus, Jefferson traced the obduracy of inter-racial difference to that of infra-racial sameness, white racism to black affective opacity. In doing so, he blended an aesthetic racial essentialism with what Etienne Balibar calls meta-racism.[51] For Tocqueville, as for Jefferson, entrenched racism precluded the recognition, generally speaking, of potential affinities between white and black Americans, and more specifically, of a shared affective complexity and capacity for transformation that might promise democratic collaboration.

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46. As Sheldon Wolin argues, Tocqueville privileges custom over constitutions as a source of political order, even a means of "neutralizing" democratic man. See Sheldon Wolin, *Tocqueville Between Two Worlds* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 335–36. However, by treating culture as an independent force, Tocqueville downplays the role of racist laws and official discourses in shaping popular prejudice. See Rogers Smith, "Beyond Tocqueville, Myrdal, and Hartz," *American Political Science Review* 87 (1993): 549–66, at 552.

47. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 416 (see note 1 above).

48. Ibid., 415, note e.

49. As Joel Olson argues, "The implication of Tocqueville's argument is that the United States is democratic and white supremacist simultaneously…," in *The Abolition of White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 51.

50. Jefferson writes, "Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one, preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race?" (264), at http://etext.virginia.edu/toc/modeng/public/JefVirg.html, accessed March 20, 2012. On blushing and racism, see Douglas E Cowan, "Theologizing Race," in *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity*, ed. Craig R. Prentiss (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

51. See Etienne Balibar, "Is There a 'Neo-Racism'?" in *Race and Racialization*, ed. Tania Das Gupta (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 2007), 85

While we may reject Tocqueville's dire predictions, we know racism ably survived the legal enfranchisement of African-Americans promised after the Civil War, undone by Jim Crow, and only fitfully realized in the civil rights era through a combination of sustained activism, rebellion, and federal supremacy. Indeed, given the current state of race relations in the U.S., Tocqueville's fatalism remains a dangerous temptation.[52] We might say of Tocqueville, as Jack Turner does of Ralph Ellison, "in a United States still suffering from race's metaphysical illusoriness but sociological reality, [his] example is all too instructive."[53] Meta-racism, too, proved resilient. Even Hannah Arendt, who identified biological racism with the totalitarian politics she dissected in the aftermath of the holocaust, had trouble imagining American citizens acting in concert across the visible barriers of color she infamously declared "unalterable and permanent."[54] Unlike popular hostility to European immigrants, whose audible differences fade with linguistic assimilation, racism against African-Americans could be dissolved neither by voting rights nor integrated spaces, but only by visible assimilation, that is, miscegenation. Hence, Arendt privileged the right to inter-marriage over integrated schools. Like Jefferson, she presumed African Americans' visible difference obstructed collaborative world-making. Inasmuch as they looked different, it was harder for black people to "appear." As if to prove the point, Arendt regularly identified actual black political struggles with group interests and "social opportunity" rather than "human or political rights" or "participatory democracy," effectively racializing her central categories of human practice.[55]

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52. Melvin Rodgers has accused Ta-Nehisi Coates of succumbing to this temptation. See Melvin Rodgers, "Between Pain and Despair: What Ta-Nehisi Coates is Missing," *Dissent*, July 31, 2015, at https://disentmagazine.org/online_articles/between-world-me-ta-nehisi-coates-review-despair-hope, accessed August 3, 2015. Despair or no, one can hardly argue with Coates's argument that "The problem with the police is not that they are fascist pigs but that our country is ruled by majoritarian pigs." Ta-Nehisi Coates, *Between the World and Me* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2015), 79.

53. Jack Turner, "Awakening to Race: Ralph Ellison and Democratic Individuality," *Political Theory* 36 (2008): 655–82, at 675.

54. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, 1973); and "Reflections on Little Rock," *Dissent* 6 (1959): 47.

55. See Arendt, "Reflections," 46 (see previous note); Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt,1969) 19. As Neil Roberts demonstrates, Arendt also "disavowed" black agency in her accounts of the American and Cuban revolutions. See Neil Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 34–37. Roberts nonetheless deploys some of Arendt's key terms in his favorable evaluation of Frederick Douglas. Indeed, Arendt's image of politics as constitutive world-making has been adopted by a variety of postcolonial and critical race theorists. Robert Gooding-Williams, for instance, distinguishes "expressive" and "action-in-concert" strands within African-American political thought, which he identifies with Du Bois and Douglass, respectively. See Robert Gooding-Williams, *In the Shadow of Du Bois* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011). Cf. Gary Wilder, *Freedom Time* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015), 46.

Assembling Racial Difference: Race, Law and Accident in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Because racism is grounded not only in ideas, but also in sentiments and perceptions, a theoretical demonstration of the illusoriness of race's metaphysics may not be enough to dislodge white supremacism. In order to reshuffle racial differences, counter-racism must also find purchase in counter-racist sensibilities and perceptions. Hence the importance of popular literature (and other media). To be sure, philosophical discourses also operate on sentiments, one way or another, and can disseminate polemical energies. For his part, Twain did not develop a sustained normative or philosophical critique of racism. However, by framing counter-racist perceptions, and by giving voice to conflicting, mutable inclinations, his writings challenged not only essentialist images of racial difference, but also fatalistic views of racism.[56] Recounting his impressions of London in *Following the Equator*, for instance, Twain effectively inverts Jefferson's racial perceptions: "No end of people whose skins are dull and characterless modifications of the tint which we miscall white. Some of these faces are pimply; some exhibit other signs of diseased blood; some show scars of a tint out of a harmony with the surrounding shades of color. The white man's complexion makes no concealments. It can't. It seemed to have been designed as a catch-all for everything that can damage it."[57] Elsewhere, Twain's critique of race went beyond simple reversals of aesthetic judgments to alter perceptions of racial difference as such. Thus, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, (1894) blushing crosses racial lines, and racial lines cross individuals. "It was the 'nigger' in him asserting his humility, and he blushed and was abashed."[58]

In his preface to the 1959 edition of the novel, Langston Hughes commends Twain for portraying African-Americans as human beings, not because they appear virtuous, but instead because they are not reduced to the crude and demeaning "categories" that predominated in the literature of the period.[59] In Twain's novel, and in other writings, humanity is not an attribute but rather a predicament

56. I do not mean to enter longstanding debates concerning Twain's personal racism, but simply to note that his inconsistency on the subject exhibits the same evolving complexity he attributed to personal sentiments more generally. On one hand, he actively promoted the political efforts of Frederick Douglas and Booker T. Washington, and criticized anti-Chinese policies and practices. On the other hand, he often portrayed Native Americans with vicious contempt. On Twain's endorsement of Douglas, see http://www.virginia.edu/insideuva/textonlyarchive/97-04-04/2.txt, accessed November 18, 2013. On Twain's anti-racism, See Vidal, "Twain On the Grand Tour," 77 (see note 39 above). On Native Americans, see Mark Twain, "The Noble Red Man," (1870), *Collected Tales, 1852–1890*, 442–46, or "Letters From the Earth," *1892–1910*, 881–928, at 926–27 (see note 9 above for both sources). Cf. Helen Harris, "Mark Twain's Response to the Native American," *American Literature* 46 (1975): 495–505 at 497.

57. Mark Twain, *Following the Equator* (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Books, [1897] 1989), ch. XLI.

58. Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (New York: Bantam Books, 1959), 45.

59. Ibid., xi.

wherein attributes harden and dissolve by turns, a confounding interplay of character and environment. In his novel, Twain traces both the complexities of character that obviate racial categories and some of the practices by which racial differences are reproduced, including clothes, speech, manners, and taste. Hence, it is often read as a critique of essentialism.[60] Indeed, Hughes declares that its presentation of racial difference as a function of environment and custom "makes Pudd'nhead Wilson as contemporary as Little Rock, and Mark Twain as modern as Faulkner, although Twain died when Faulkner was in knee pants."[61] I would go just a bit further, and say that the novel is contemporary even now, and (almost) as postmodern as Deleuze, though Twain died when Deleuze was in no pants at all.

By various means, Twain's novel dramatizes the undemocratic, one might say minoritarian character of American racial categories while revealing some of the intersecting legal and aesthetic practices on which they rest: "To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody, but the one-sixteenth of her which was black outvoted the other fifteen parts and made her a negro. She was a slave, and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a negro."[62] Twain goes on to paint these fictions surrounding the "one-drop rule," still deeply engrained in both official ideology and common sense, as absurdities. The absurdity of the legal fiction is brought home starkly when Roxy is eventually sold to herself.[63] Social and aesthetic productions of racial difference are more variously displayed. The conspicuous role of clothing in both racial and gendered passing – Roxy appears at Tom's door as a "man"; Tom disguises himself by dressing in women's clothes and blackening his face – illustrates their basis in performative and symbolic conventions.

So much for Arendt's "unalterable and permanent" racial differences (and her supposition that miscegenation would dissolve them). As Twain emphasizes, social fictions are sustained not only by the literally superficial artifice of clothing, but also by customary patterns of speech, manner, and temperament. Thus, "by the fiction created by herself [Roxy's son] was become her master…, this exercise soon concreted itself into a habit."[64] Wilson Carey McWilliams overstates matters, though, when he asserts that the novel teaches us that "after a certain point the reformation of character is impossible."[65] Rather, racial and gender distinctions are

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60. See Susan Gilman, *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Stephen Railton, "The Tragedy of Mark Twain, by Pudd'nhead Wilson," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56 (March 2002): 518–44, at 522.

61. Twain, *Pudd'nhead*, xii (see note 48 above).

62. Ibid., 9.

63. Deleuze identifies absurdity of this kind with humor generally, which he describes as a "downward movement from the law to its consequences…." Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism* (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 88.

64. Ibid., 20.

65. McWilliams, *The Idea of Fraternity*, 438 (see note 38 above).

at once synthetic and persistent, entrenched in multilayered habits that are neither immune to reform nor easily discarded. As a relevant entry from Wilson's diary concludes, "Habit is habit, and not to be flung out the window by any man, but coaxed down-stairs a step at a time."[66] In the novel, Wilson eventually overcomes the prejudice that gave him his nickname. In exceptional cases, furthermore, events can trigger sudden, dramatic transformations. When Tom discovers he was switched in infancy with the slave he has long abused, Twain likens the change in his "moral landscape" to that of the territory around Krakatoa caused by its violent eruption: "Some of his low places he found lifted to ideals, some of his ideals had sunk to the valleys, and lay there with the sackcloth and ashes of pumice-stone and sulphur on their ruined heads."[67] The Civil War, we know, had similar effects on many of those who experienced it, Twain among them.[68]

As Hughes notes, Twain's appreciation for the environmental determination of character, which renders color only "skin deep," does not replace biological differences with intractable cultural types. Twain depicts character not as a reflection of inherited collective dispositions (*a la* Herder) but rather as a sensitive register of contingent encounters.[69] Actions and their consequences emerge from incidental, sometimes trivial causes. The novel thus enacts the emergent constitution of personae illustrated in Twain's autobiography while raising the political stakes involved. In one scene, Roxy is tempted by some unattended cash left on Mr. Driscoll's desk, yet inhibited by a church revival she attended a fortnight before. Her inner turmoil then provokes a passionate reflection: "She looked at the money awhile with a steadily rising resentment, then she burst out with: 'Dad blame dat revival, I wisht it had 'a' be'n put off till to-morrow!' " Roxy's indignation concerning the contingencies shaping her character comprises an extra-moral judgment, with a corresponding meta-affect. It critically assesses what Nietzsche might have called the value of liberal Christian values under conditions of racial injustice, which prevent an otherwise justifiable theft from a man "who daily

66. Twain, *Pudd'nhead*, 31 (see note 58 above).

67. Ibid., 54.

68. "The eight years in America from 1860 to 1868 uprooted institutions that were centuries old [and] …transformed the social life of half the country." In Mark Twain, *The Gilded Age* (New York: American Publishing Company, 1874), 168.

69. Some question whether Twain attributed differences in racial character to conditioning rather than biology, highlighting a reference to Tom's "native viciousness," in *Pudd'nhead*, 22 (see note 58 above). Taking up this charge and compiling further evidence, Henry Wonham argues that "it is simply not possible to be black and white at the same time in Pudd'nhead Wilson," in "The Minstrel and the Detective," in Wonham, *Constructing Mark Twain* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001), 131. However, one arguing otherwise might look, in addition to the points I discuss above, to an early manuscript of the text that includes passages in which Tom reflects on the role of white and black "blood" in shaping his personality. His reflections at once exhibit a critical intelligence and mediate the dispute over essentialism, one might say, by positing a Lamarckian development of habits across generations (specifically, he supposes the history of slavery produced both white depravity and black cowardice). See http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/wilson/pwms.html, accessed October 6, 2015.

robbed [her] of an inestimable treasure – [her] liberty."[70] Again, it is not virtue, but instead a combination of contingency, sensitivity, and reflection that makes for a human figure. Twain's novel thus promotes what might be called a transversal humanity, that is, not a humanity that is achieved, but one that becomes and transforms, never standing still.[71]

Twain's novel conveys a sense for the contingencies of history not only through its nuanced depiction of character and environment, but also by means of its discursive techniques. The plot emerges from a series of vignettes observing various characters and situations whose interactions are not resolved in a single narrative arc. Twain also explicitly thematizes non-narrative elements, as when he includes in his list of town personages two unnamed brothers "of no consequence" and one "formidable" colonel with whom he nonetheless declares "we have no concern."[72] He thus enacts the uncertain determinations of fate while highlighting its irreducibility to intention and purposes.[73] Hughes find both echoes of Greek tragedy and premonitions of cinema in the structure of Twain's story, which is comprised of a "series of visualizations, most of them growing logically one from another, but some quite coincidental."[74] Such devices, we saw earlier, are more fully developed, and explicitly endorsed, in Twain's autobiography. In this case, however, the sense for personal complexity conveyed by his literary techniques serves a critique of racialized personhood. What Jefferson could not see, Twain's story makes palpable. Of course, its impact also depends upon the humanity, that is, the sentimental responsiveness of Twain's audience. To become transversally is, in Claire Colbrooke's words, "to transform oneself in perceiving difference."[75] The precise effects of the novel on its readers at the time cannot be ascertained, but as

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70. Twain, *Pudd'nhead*, 12 (see note 48 above).

71. In part, my reading here reiterates Henry Wonham's argument that Twain's ambiguous deployment of racialized performances renders identity an "unstable compound." See Henry B. Wonham, "Mark Twain's Last Cakewalk: Racialized Performance in *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger*," *American Literary Realism*, 40 (2008): 262–70, at 268. In another essay, "The Minstrel and the Detective," Wonham argues persuasively that Twain's vision found little purchase on the rigid, polemical racist distinctions of the early twentieth century (see note 69 above). However, what I am calling transversal humanity differs from the ideal of an "undifferentiated identity and unmediated communication" that Wonham infers from Twain's employment of blackface performances in "The Mysterious Stranger," (in the "Last Cakewalk," 270). A transversal humanity is very much mediated, at once moved by a finite plurality of sentiments and constrained by habits, but nonetheless a site of emergent possibilities.

72. See Twain, *Pudd'nhead* 28, 3 (see note 58 above).

73. Tracy Strong suggests that Twain's use of the first-person in Huckleberry Finn – a less distinctive technique – has a similar effect inasmuch as "any novel so written is then about the process by which a given individual…comes to change as he or she moves about in his or her world. And the same happens with the reader." Tracy Strong, "Glad to Find Out Who I Was: Mark Twain on What Can Be Learned on a Raft," *Journal of Law, Philosophy and Culture* 5 (2010): 151–78, at 160.

74. Twain, *Pudd'nhead*, xiii (see note 58 above). Carl Dolmetch compares Twain's impressionistic recollections to the styles of Schnitzler, Chekhov, and Proust in *Our Famous Guest* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 225.

75. Claire Colbrooke, *Deleuze* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 133.

Deleuze and Guattari argue, political transformation *can* emerge from a "change in values…imperceptible from the viewpoint of macropolitics."[76] Such perceptual change may elude the notice even of those who undergo it. You may not see your ears, but they will be there.

Against Sociology: Assembling a Counter-Racist Politics and Literature

Earlier, I linked what Deleuze and Guattari call an "active micropolitics" with the transformative politics Rancière opposes to sociology. Furthermore, I proposed that the same features that make Twain's writings exemplary for radical democratic theory also place him in a tradition of anti-racist politics and literature united by a struggle against sociological perspectives in favor of dynamic human potentials. I follow up on the latter suggestion here.

In an interview with Robert Penn Warren, Ralph Ellison situates a struggle with sociological categories in the phenomenology of interracial encounters. Especially in the South, "there is an implacably human side to race relationships. But at certain moments a reality which is political and social and ideological asserts itself, and the human relationship breaks up and both groups of people fall into their abstract roles."[77] Precisely in such conditions, "an alertness to human complexity" is of vital importance: "Men in our situation simply cannot afford to ignore the nuances of human relationships. And although action is necessary, forthright action must be guided – tempered by insight and compassion. Nevertheless, isn't this what civilization is all about? And isn't this what tragedy has always sought to teach us?"[78] Ellison famously singles out Arendt for her inattention to the complexities of black experience, specifically the motives of black parents in Little Rock, Arkansas, who exposed their children to danger by sending them to schools being forcibly integrated by the Federal government. By the same token, but with less clear import, he criticizes black leaders of the civil rights movement who failed to question the limiting terms set by "sociology."[79] Conversely, in "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," Ellison credits *Pudd'nhead Wilson* precisely for its tragic perspective. Like Hughes, Ellison finds in the novel a presentation of black humanity, where humanity again signifies not moral virtue but complexity and potential. Tracing the changing appearances and disappearances of African Americans in modern American fiction, he privileges Twain's

76. Deleuze and Guattari, *Plateaus*, 216 (see note 4 above).

77. See Robert Penn Warren, *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2014), 344; cf. 347

78. Ibid., 343.

79. Ibid., 344.

blend of political criticism and stylistic innovation. In particular, he highlights the character of Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, who, "like all men, is ambiguous, limited in circumstance but not in possibility."[80] Huck's identification with Jim, in turn, confirms that black humanity represents the capacity of the romantic individual to transcend traditional moral authorities, symbolizing "the darker, unknown potential side of his personality."[81]

To embrace the latter as human is to refuse what Ellison calls a "Manichean" American tendency that projects chaotic dangers onto Black bodies to preserve a vision of white democracy where personal freedom would make for no trouble.[82] Like Emerson, Whitman, and Melville, Twain embraced a Romantic self, with all its corollary potentials and dangers. However, Ellison argues that Twain stands out among them for confronting the historical reality of white supremacy whereby human potentials have been restricted, and for appreciating the revolutionary implications of cross-racial identification: "Huck Finn's acceptance of the evil implicit in his 'emancipation' of Jim represents Twain's acceptance of his personal responsibility for the condition of society. This was the tragic face behind the comic mask."[83] By contrast, he argues, twentieth-century authors, exemplified by Hemingway, detach the stylistic innovations of Twain's prose

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80. Ralph Ellison, "Twentieth Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," *The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 88. Elsewhere, in a more nuanced assessment, Ellison suggests while the character of Jim draws on conventions of minstrelsy, "it is from behind this stereotype mask that we see Jim's dignity and human capacity – and Twain's complexity – emerge." See Ellison, "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke," in *The Collected Essays*, 104. As indicated by Ellison, Twain's portrait of interracial friendship between Huck and Jim allows for diverse interpretations. For this and other reasons – including the centrality of interracial relations in the novel and its prominent, often controversial place in grade-school curricula – *Huckleberry Finn* is the focus of many, if not most studies of race in Twain's writings. For Fishkin, in *Was Huck Black?*, the character of Huck exemplifies Twain's adoption of African-American vernacular (see note 8 above). For a more critical assessment of racist themes evoked by the figure of Jim, and particularly of the novel's didactic function, see Peaches Henry, "The Struggle for Tolerance," in *Satire or Evasion,* 124–40; and Elaine and Harry Mensh, *Black, White and Huckleberry Finn* (see note 8 above for both sources).

81. Ellison, "Twentieth-Century Fiction," 88. In his autobiography, Twain cites Huck's considered decision to face hell rather than betray Jim as the cause for the expulsion of his novel from the library of Concord, Massachusetts. See Mark Twain. *Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 2* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 29. If one must become evil (and so be socially condemned) to counter popular prejudice, then to be accepted is in a sense to fail, as Railton argues with respect to "Pudd'nhead" Wilson, whose redemption at the end of the novel coincides with the re-assignment of white and black characters to their "proper" place. On Wilson's redemption, see Railton, "The Tragedy of Mark Twain," 527 (see note 60 above).

82. See Ellison, "Change the Joke," 102 (see note 80 above).

83. Ibid. 89. It is precisely this responsibility that Leo Marx accused Twain of "evading" in the final sections of the novel, an accusation still widely discussed. See Leo Marx, "Mr. Eliot, Mr. Trilling, and Huckleberry Finn," *The American Scholar* 22 (1953): 423–40. Cf. Bernard W. Bell, "Twain's 'Nigger' Jim, The Tragic Face Behind the Comic Mask," in *Satire or Evasion*, 124–40 (see note 8 above). For a defense of the novel's final chapters against such criticisms, see Chadwick-Joshua, *The Jim Dilemma*, ch. 4; Betty H. Jones, "Huck and Jim: A Reconsideration," in *Satire or Evasion* (see note 8 above for both sources).

from their social ends, resulting in "a marvelous technical virtuosity won at the expense of a gross insensitivity to fraternal values."[84] For Twain, the one serves the other.

Twain's literary subversion of racial categories, operating on sentiments and perceptions, can be seen as a complement to political and historical criticisms of sociology. As Khalil Gibran Muhammad has shown, social-scientific methods reinforced a "condemnation of blackness" in the decades following reconstruction (starting with the 1890 census) by presenting statistical evidence of black criminality stripped of historical context, namely, a racially biased justice system.[85] Contesting these discourses, while also deploying some of the same methods and language, W.E.B Du Bois sought to place a social-scientific study of black criminality in larger context, particularly in his study of *The Philadelphia Negro*.[86] In *The Souls of Black Folk*, published just a decade after *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Du Bois traced the interaction of micro- and macro-political forces that underlay American racial categories.[87] He criticized social-scientific approaches that reduced African-American life during reconstruction to its positive destitution, obscuring a struggle for future development and overcoming: "While the sociologist gleefully counts his bastards and prostitutes, the very soul of the toiling, sweating black man is darkened by the shadow of a vast despair."[88] Taking an historical approach, Du Bois traced the interaction of race prejudice with a welter of legal, economic, and educational obstacles to African-American striving. Like Tocqueville, he lamented the double-binds of white racism and black degradation.[89] However, despite his intense personal encounters with the violent bigotry of southern whites, he insisted they did not form a "bloc" determined by their collective past. To the contrary, he described the white south in Nietzschean (we might now also say Twainian) terms, as a "ferment of social change wherein forces of all kinds are fighting for supremacy."[90] As Du Bois makes clear, the forces fighting for supremacy are not those of whites or blacks, but rather of different perceptions, sensibilities, aims, and values. In other (Deleuzean) words, race is an assemblage in which these fates and identities of whites and blacks are

84. Ellison, "Change the Joke," 91 (see note 80 above).

85. Khalil Gibran Muhammad, *The Condemnation of Blackness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011).

86. Ibid., 68–73

87. Ibid., 113 Although their lives overlapped, Du Bois and Twain apparently never met. After Twain's death, Du Bois contributed a short text on "negro humor" to the Mark Twain Journal, concluding "…with inborn humor, men of all colors and races face the tragedy of life and make it endurable." W.E.B. Du Bois, "The Humor of Negroes," *Mark Twain Quarterly* 5 (1942–43): 12.

88. W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2003), 13.

89. Ibid., 13–14.

90. Ibid., 45.

intertwined, and in relation to which they can find common cause and mutual resources in transversal struggles against a state of domination by which they are distinguished.[91]

In these infra-racial struggles, Du Bois knew, the winners will not always be our favorites, as attested by the Atlanta riots of 1906, the occasion for his woeful poem, "A Litany of Atlanta," where racist mobs were incited by stereotypical narratives of black sexual predation circulating in the popular press. They were many similar cases. However, just as public hostilities can be catalyzed by linking a plurality of fears and grievances, other sentiments and ideas can be called on. For DuBois, it was the task of the so-called "talented tenth" to transcend racial categories and undo double-binds. Different leaders, he suggests, appeal to different aspects of the collective personality, different attitudes that struggle for dominance, whether revolt, accommodation or self-realization, each embodied in successive generations.[92] Thus, his remark concerning Booker T. Washington's popular appeal (to accommodation) might apply to leadership more broadly: "It is as though Nature makes men narrow in order to give them force."[93] As Jonathan Flatley argues, however, DuBois's "Souls" is also a literary text that exerts a less narrow, more nuanced force. Du Bois introduces contending visions of "racialization," not only imagining different ways of relating between races but also evoking corresponding "counter-moods."[94]

Du Bois thus blended theoretical arguments with aesthetic devices, moving both ideas and sentiments. Twain, we have seen, also sought to analyze as well as transform the sentimental levers of political action and belonging. In a short essay titled "The United States of Lyncherdom" (1901), for example, he reinforces DuBois's arguments concerning the dynamic state of Southern white sentiments in the same period. As indicated by the title, lynching was already a popular practice (and would become more so in the first two decades of the twentieth century).[95] Twain makes palpable the scope of lynching at the time, conjuring an image of 203 simultaneous lynchings with a million assembled witnesses. Having assembled these crowds before his readers, he considers the forces that gather, and that might disperse them. Not only do lynchers make up a small fraction of the population of Missouri (known then as a "lynching state"), Twain argues, but lynching also makes up a minoritarian impulse even

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91. At times, certainly, Du Bois presented the races as having distinct virtues. See Du Bois, *Souls*, 14–15 (see note 88 above). Cf. Paul Gilroy, *Darker than Blue, On the Moral Economies of Black Atlantic Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2010), 6.

92. Ibid., 39.

93. Ibid., 37.

94. Jonathan Flatley, *Affective Mapping* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 110, 113

95. See Amy Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

among its participants. The crowds that assemble at a lynching are merely seeking the approval of their neighbors. Such mobs, he asserts, can be moved or disbanded by a brave individual who can elicit otherwise hidden sentiments of resistance: "A Savonarola can quell and scatter a mob of lynchers with a mere glance of his eye."[96] Sometimes, a gesture can transform so many quivers of discomfort into a collective act of resistance.[97] Twain writes, "Then perhaps the remedy for lynchings comes to this: station a brave man in each affected community to encourage, support, and bring to light the deep disapproval of lynching hidden in the secret places of its heart – for it is there, beyond question. Then those communities will find something better to imitate – of course, being human, they must imitate something."[98] Like the mothers of young men about to duel, the brave man forestalls violence by arousing counter-sentiments.

Extending the insight, Twain notes that any conspicuous rebel will attract followers, whether it be Jack the Ripper or the man who goes over Niagara Falls in a barrel: "It is the law of our make that each example shall wake up drowsing chevaliers of the same great knighthood."[99] Many hidden sentiments await their Savonarola, or their John Brown. The difficulty is to find the "starters."[100] Starters, as we have seen, can take various forms. Most of all, starting requires courage, a virtue rare in all classes. Yet, like all virtues, those of the Mugwump require a favorable milieu. Twain initially declares this difficulty insurmountable in the case of lynching, as too few are morally brave. Inspired by a second thought, he appeals to Christian missionaries in China, trained in advocating for unpopular causes. Though jesting, Twain implies people might be trained in the art of counter-majoritarian leadership, and learn to imitate Mugwumpery itself. Thus, reflecting on the possibility for "Christian Citizenship," Twain suggests that a clergymen, properly situated, might exhort his congregation to moral bravery, lead them to vote their conscience rather than follow his (or a party's) lead, and so "bring about a moral revolution."[101]

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96. Twain, *Collected Tales,* 1891–1910, 483 (see note 10 above).

97. See Wendy Pearlman, "Emotions and the Microfoundations of the Arab Uprisings," *Perspectives on Politics* 11 (2013): 387–409.

98. Twain, *Collected Tales* 1891–1910, 483 (see note 10 above). Compare the following: "Secretly, the poor white detested the slave-lord and did feel his own shame. That feeling was not brought to the surface but the fact that it was there and could have been brought out, under favoring circumstances…showed that a man is at bottom a man, after all…." Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (New York: Norton, 1982), 172.

99. Ibid., 486.

100. Ibid., 484.

101. Ibid., 659.

Twain's Pessimism versus Tocqueville's Fatalism

It is not clear what revolution would follow from a politics of conscience. "Starters" can just as well appeal to implicit racial bias (which we also know is there beyond question in the hearts of those who advocate a colorblind republic). While Twain's writings suggest that both racism and counter-racism find purchase in popular sentiments, the former has had a longer and better training in America. Moreover, Twain's examples of heroic starters do not exactly speak well for the inclinations of majorities, who "must imitate something." Like Du Bois, he suggests it is the role of exemplary Mugwumps to draw on contending sentiments among the same groups of followers. By reflecting on such cases for a popular audience, however, his text distributes a broader sense for the changeable, conflicting sentiments below the surface of visible groups and articulate opinions. He was a popular missionary for the unpopular, poking many a sleepy knight. He proselytized not only for dissent but also thinking, encouraging his readers to reflect on contending sensibilities, emergent judgments and the agents of their prompting.

Tocqueville was acquainted with secret dissent, but he did not imagine it could trouble the inertia of democratic majorities. The majority not only exercises greater moral power than monarchs, he claimed, but it is also less tolerant of criticism. Lacking the certainty of royal power and prerogative, it cannot stand to be mocked, "and the slightest joke which has any foundation in truth renders it indignant."[102] For him, this explained why America had no Bruyère or Molière. As I have argued, Twain's enduring popularity suggests otherwise. In his fiction and his social commentary, he waged a tireless satirical campaign against customary authority and popular prejudice. His example therefore lends credence to a hope he dared express, namely that a different training might serve the habit of liberty. Men can be trained, he claims, to produce their own patriotism, and to "stop taking it by command."[103] We know this will be a matter of many steps, rather than a single tumble, and that one can travel up *or* down. Indeed, Twain hardly expected the best of people. He knew too well the inertia of custom, the tyranny of public opinion, and the role of the press in reinforcing the same. Contemplating the patriot who chokes down distasteful propaganda to appease the public, he concludes, "a man can seldom – very, very seldom – fight a winning fight against his training; the odds are too heavy."[104] Nonetheless, while Twain's appreciation for the inertia of conventions made him a pessimist, his sensitivity to minor voices and the complexities of

102. Tocqueville, *Democracy*, 308 (see note 1 above)
103. Twain, *Collected Tales 1891–1910*, 478 (see note 10 above)
104. Ibid., 476.

human relationships undercut a fatalistic view of social divisions and hierarchies. In short, he was a starter.

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