In 1948 the *Literary History of the United States* laid out a triumphant nationalist vindication of American literature, and Rinehart published the first college-text version of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, introduced by Lionel Trilling. For over 50 years after it appeared in 1885, *Huckleberry Finn* had been criticized by the establishment and defended by an avant-garde while also widely read by many who were in neither of these cultural parties. But Trilling’s essay proved the book’s open sesame into college canonicity. World War II brought the US to an unparalleled place of world power, and it also marked the point at which many previously oppositional intellectuals found their way to accommodation. Trilling’s essay is part of this movement.

Trilling was already known for his sense of nuance and complexity in the *Partisan Review* debates over Marxism and modernism, yet his introduction is hyperbolic praise, commonly reprinted under the title “The Greatness of *Huckleberry Finn*.” The authority accrued through his persuasive redefinition of *Huckleberry Finn* helped transform Lionel Trilling from an urban ethnic caught up in factional left-wing debates to a major voice guiding American cultural politics. For Trilling’s contribution was part of a far more widely shared agenda. Detailing the greatness of *Huckleberry Finn* brought Trilling together in the discursive formulation of America with Henry Nash Smith, an academic of his generation whom he perhaps never met and who might seem in every way his antithesis: Trilling the New York Jew who spent over half a century at Columbia, Smith the Texas WASP with his PhD from Harvard who long taught at Berkeley; the critic versus the scholar; the generalist versus the Americanist. Smith became literary editor of the Mark Twain estate and custodian of the Mark Twain papers, edited the Riverside college text (1958), published what many still consider the out-
standing single overall discussion of *Huckleberry Finn* in *Mark Twain: The Development of a Writer* (1962), and edited, in the highly influential and prestigious Twentieth-Century Views series, *Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays* (1963). I take these two to stand for the work of a generation—born early in the twentieth century, formed between the wars, and coming to their full powers after the war—who joined a book to a nation at a key moment in its history.

Through their argument and scholarship a widespread critical and cultural understanding of *Huckleberry Finn* was codified that is still familiar in schools and newspapers: despite some readers’ trouble with the ending, *Huckleberry Finn* is “almost perfect” in “form and style” (Trilling xv), not only “one of the central documents of American culture” but also “one of the world’s great books” (Trilling vi) for the “vernacular protest” (Smith 115) of its prose and plot, which permit an “exploration of Huck’s psyche” (Smith 120) and convey a morality of the “uncoerced self” against the “social conformity” (Smith 122–23) satirized throughout. A generation born in the 1920s, led by such brilliant academic essayists as Richard Poirier, in *A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature* (1966), and James M. Cox, in *Mark Twain: The Fate of Humor* (1966), began to challenge this received version in the ’60s, but only recently has the culture at large proved open to alternative modes of understanding *Huckleberry Finn*, and these modes come from scholars of a third generation, whose whole maturity postdates the civil rights movement. Not only *Time* and *Newsweek* but even *People* published articles, months before it appeared, heralding Shelley Fisher Fishkin’s vivid reconsideration of Mark Twain’s creative relationship to African-American culture.

The long process that motivated this change, that has made it seem more and more both possible and necessary, is nicely focused by Peaches Henry in *Satire or Evasion?* The postwar, nationalist canonization that brought *Huckleberry Finn* into so many classrooms from junior high through college coincided with the African-American self-assertion of the civil rights movement. Only after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) can Henry’s research locate any record of protests to challenge the book’s racial offensiveness as a school text. Even while such protests have regularly been met with outrage as violations of free speech or as politicizations of culture (see Thomas A. Tenney’s extensive, annotated guide “For Further Reading” in *Satire or Evasion?*), the civil rights movement slowly changed the academy. There are now enough African-American professors to allow the concerns that have produced such protests to produce scholar-
Twain’s solution would permit an imaginary national first person to trust that in “our” hearts “we” had always been right; many African Americans, inside and outside the academy, have found that answer inadequate.

Cold-war–liberal American culture seemed to find in Huckleberry Finn a century-old solution to the race problems that had newly reemerged on the national agenda. Twain’s solution would permit an imaginary national first person to trust that in “our” hearts “we” had always been right; many African Americans, inside and outside the academy, have found that answer inadequate. Now Maynard Mack, the original editor of Twentieth-Century Views (and a contemporary of Trilling and Smith), in collaboration with Richard Brodhead (a member of the third generation), has launched New Century Views, promising a millennial transformation in our understandings. In this series Eric J. Sundquist has edited Mark Twain: A Collection of Critical Essays (1994), and his three selections on Huckleberry Finn signal the change: two of them are from Satire or Evasion? The big difference is that what Satire or Evasion? calls “black perspectives” are now crucial, and what Fishkin calls “African-American voices” are entrusted to convey them.

In 1984, to honor the centennial of Huckleberry Finn while also honoring the complex responses to the work among African-Americans, Thadious Davis guest edited a special issue of Mark Twain Journal that commissioned original essays by eight African-American scholars. Satire or Evasion? reprints these along with further essays, also by African-Americans, commissioned by Thomas Tenney, editor of the Mark Twain Journal, and James Leonard, editor of the Mark Twain Circular, which bring the total to 15; in addition, Leonard and Tenney have contributed valuable introductions to the volume as a whole and to each of the volume’s four sections (“Huck Finn and the Authorities,” “Jim and Huck in the Nineteenth Century,” “Blackface and White Inside,” and “Huck Finn in the Twentieth Century”). Anyone concerned as a teacher, scholar, or citizen with the relations between Huckleberry Finn and its cultures—the circumstances from which it emerged, its reception at different times and by different individuals and groups, the uses to which it may be put—will find much value and much provocation in these essays. The two Sundquist has reprinted are “Huck, Jim, and American
Racial Discourse,” by David L. Smith (the most theoretically ambitious of the contributions), and “Adventures of Huckleberry Finn and Afro-American Literature,” by Arnold Rampersad (the most maturely condensed literary-historical judgment).

The perspectives in Satire or Evasion? vary widely. John H. Wallace, notorious for producing an edition of Huckleberry Finn in which “the words ‘nigger’ and ‘hell’ are eradicated” (24), reasonably proposes that “[t]he vast majority of black students have no tolerance for either ‘ironic’ or ‘satirical’ reminders of the insults and degradation heaped upon their ancestors” (22), and Julius Lester in a more meditative vein argues: “While I am opposed to book banning, I know that my children’s education will be enhanced by not reading Huckleberry Finn” (200). Kenny J. Williams, deadpan, finds it “amazing to note the number of times readers find it necessary to assert with conviction that . . . [Mark Twain] was not” a racist (231), and Bernard W. Bell pushes toward paradox: “Twain, like Huck, was a racist; yet both found themselves fighting nobly, though futilely, against the customs and laws of white supremacy” (135). On almost exactly the middle page of the volume, Fredrick Woodard and Donnarae MacCann recognize what I find to be the central question, namely, the need to determine “for whom Huckleberry Finn is a classic” (142). It is now widely recognized that what once seemed the canon of American fiction (works by authors such as James Fenimore Cooper, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Twain, Henry James, Ernest Hemingway) failed to represent the nation effectively: it not only excluded books written by women but also failed to welcome women as readers. It is, however, still not widely accepted, even as a possibility for debate, that Huckleberry Finn may be a classic for many white males and for rather fewer others.

If some essays in Satire or Evasion? strenuously struggle against Twain, others are more wavering or positive. Rhett S. Jones adapts a notion from Du Bois to explain that Huck’s “double-consciousness” toward Jim can produce in readers a “sense of betrayal,” which, Jones sensitively speculates, is what motivates those who object to the book (192). David L. Smith finds in Huckleberry Finn an “explicitly antiracist stance” unmatched by any “major Euro-American novels” except those of Melville (104), yet Smith’s analysis of Twain’s “strategy of subversion” (105) finds it so “subtle” that he finally concludes, after his extended, laudatory demonstration of Twain’s techniques: “[I]t is not surprising that most of his contemporaries misunderstood or simply ignored the novel’s demystification of race” (116). Such an avowed contradiction between Smith’s theoretical
reading and the historical record opens room for much further investigation. Betty H. Jones goes beyond Smith’s praise of Twain’s negative example to find positively that “with Jim’s liberation, Huck, as a model and type of his country, frees all slaves” (172). The overall effect of the volume, then, is greatly to enrich the available resources for thought on Huckleberry Finn; even beyond the specific work of individual essayists, the whole collection demonstrates that “there is no single ‘black’ position on Huckleberry Finn any more than there is a monolithic white one” (10).

This context of multiplicity suggests important ways in which Victor Doyno’s learned and long considered Writing Huck Finn—based on work carried through from 1966 until 1991—may seem old-fashioned, not so much for its principled commitment to “facts” (xiv) as for its reverential concern to show a great author’s “creative process” as involving choices that unerringly led to “unified,” “artistic,” and “appropriate” results (xv). His special contribution, which may benefit any teacher of the novel, arises from Doyno’s detailed discussions of Twain’s changes in the manuscript of Huckleberry Finn. Yet if his book is belated, it is also premature, for while it was in production, the long missing first half of Twain’s manuscript came to light, setting Doyno to work on a sequel (xvi).

Doyno’s perspective is not at all narrowly textual. He discusses the relations that may be established between Huckleberry Finn and the racial politics of the South in the years after the Civil War and the failure of Reconstruction (228–39). His may be the most concise starting place for exploring this currently engaging topic (see, for example, Fishkin’s use of it [73]). Doyno also gives extended attention to Twain’s active involvement, around the time of completing Huckleberry Finn, with the widely shared struggle by American authors to establish international copyright agreements that would require American publishers to pay fees to foreign authors, thus ending the practice of “pirating,” which made foreign literature available in the US for much lower prices than American works, for which authors had to be paid (184–98).

These two historical concerns come together for Doyno. He argues that in Huckleberry Finn the “liberation” of American culture from “European stratification, pretensions, and literature” (29) is structurally and morally parallel with “Jim’s liberation from the bonds of slavery” (198). The conjunction of these two elements of “relevant historical background” should allow “the reader” to find in the Phelps farm sequence no longer any problems, but instead “an enjoyable, . . . comedic, artful conclu-
sion with timeless cultural importance” (228). Doyno’s stance is conflicted. In his critique of European literary and social pretensions, he appeals to readers against “English Departments,” where “most contemporary literary critics” are “lodged” and, more importantly, where may be found a superstitious veneration of “books [as] a higher form of knowledge” (227). Yet he is himself an English professor who finds timeless value in Twain. I want to disagree with Doyno’s assessment of Huckleberry Finn as strongly as possible, but not because I believe either Huckleberry Finn or foreign books yield higher knowledge. Rather, I am worried by the easy assimilation of differing modes of “enslavement” and “liberation” (from chattel slavery as from foreign values), and I am appalled by Doyno’s praise for Twain’s “nativist” (204) cultural politics.

Doyno could not be more severe toward Tom Sawyer’s position at the Phelps’s farm. Tom’s “willingness to hurt or endanger people for the sheer thrill of it” Doyno finds a reasonable “definition of pure evil,” produced when an “average American boy” becomes the “Europeanized victim” of misleading fiction (204). It is because Tom is “enslaved by European notions” that he expresses “racially based contempt for Jim’s ‘understanding’” (209–10). Reversing many antebellum Americans, Northern and Southern alike, who denounced abolitionism as part of a British conspiracy to weaken the US (Davis 11–12, 43–47), Doyno here makes racism not American but exclusively foreign. The timeless cultural importance Doyno finds in the Phelps’ farm sequence is its “patriotic . . . defense of realistic, nativist, pragmatic individualism as opposed to foreign values” (223). None of my ancestors lived in the US when Huckleberry Finn was published in 1885, and so I can say simply that Doyno has produced a Huckleberry Finn as offensive to me as it has long seemed to many African Americans. Yet I can hardly believe that Doyno, despite his praise of individualism, really himself “individually” holds the views he expresses, which have long been pernicious in the US and the like of which have in the world at large produced horrors throughout the course of the twentieth century. I suspect, rather, that he holds them only in his corporate identity as an Americanist who has fallen into the rhetorical logic of what we may call, following the supermarkets, the American “value pack.” Important new voices such as Eric Lott’s warn against accepting the view, associated in literary and cultural studies with Sacvan Bercovitch, that a “hegemonic . . . liberalism” pervades the national culture (Lott 184), yet for understanding Doyno’s stance, I find invaluable Bercovitch’s analysis of the pattern by which at any historical moment exclusions are always
necessary to define the supposedly universal “America” (*American* 152–60).

Shelley Fisher Fishkin plays the other side of Bercovitch’s model. Recognizing that the consensus of inclusion changes over time, she hopes to use “America” as her Trojan horse to bring new values into *Huckleberry Finn* while still valuing it in the name of “America.” Fishkin proposes to redefine the “American.” She argues that *Huckleberry Finn*, long recognized as fundamentally American, is also fundamentally African American. According to Fishkin, in an argument that I abbreviate because it is already so well known, the very possibility of the American vernacular of Huck’s narration required the encounter of Samuel Clemens with an African-American boy named (perhaps) Jimmy around 1872: Jimmy’s lively speech reawakened Clemens’s memories of his life among enslaved African-Americans in Missouri, and it also directly influenced the particular voice devised for Huck in the novel. Fishkin’s book is rich in biographical particulars of Clemens’s relations with African-Americans, especially the intriguing issue of African-Americans as an eager audience for Twain (89, 188–89). It also exemplifies a specific political strategy: granted the talismanic power of *Huckleberry Finn* in American culture, Fishkin appropriates that prestige to use for interracially progressive purposes, rather than attempting the uphill battle of questioning the identification of a nation with a book, or of the US as “American” with this particular book.

Despite my admiration for Fishkin’s effort, I want to make her effort the occasion to reflect on the costs and limits of the American nationalist perspective, even when Fishkin defines it so much more generously than Doyno. In the long run, I would prefer we try to learn to inhabit Bercovitch’s question “What would happen . . . if ‘America’ were severed once and for all from the United States?” (*Rites* 65). For in asking this question, Bercovitch renews a topic deeply important in the intellectual culture of the US at least since Randolph Bourne’s pained, polemical reflections on World War I (“The patriot loses all sense of the distinction between State, nation, and government” [357]). This topic is equally at issue in Jürgen Habermas’s recent reproach to German nationalist historiography, in which Habermas designates as preferable a position, like Bercovitch’s, called “constitutional patriotism”: “a patriotism that has become more abstract, that now relates not to the concrete totality of a nation but rather to abstract procedures and principles” (261).

Fishkin’s argument relies crucially on a writer and thinker who also cared deeply about the interrelations of culture and the state: Ralph Ellison, with whom she conducted a lengthy inter-
view in 1991. She draws on Ellison for two views in particular: his understanding of an overarching American identity in which, as he put it in 1977, "[i]n relationship to the cultural whole, we are, all of us—white or black, native-born or immigrant—members of minority groups" (Going 16) and his conviction that, despite some shortcomings, *Huckleberry Finn* marks a high point of American fiction, both as art and as socially engaged morality. Both of these views are important. Ellison's understanding of "Americanness" (Going 7) is far more capacious than Doyno's. It stands equally against whites who ignore African-American contributions to American culture and against blacks who would define and promote a separatist cultural nationalism, and it thus prefigures much emerging work on the culture of the US as "hybrid." Ellison's praise of *Huckleberry Finn* is especially useful for Fishkin in dealing with the challenges that the book has faced in the last 40 years because of the historical paradox earlier mentioned: in the years after World War II *Huckleberry Finn* became for the first time an almost universal classroom text, and yet it uses hundreds of times, in an age of African-American struggles for equality and public respect, the highly offensive term nigger. Ellison, however, cared so little for this verbal issue that he repeatedly in his published criticism referred to Jim as "Nigger Jim" (Shadow 50, 58; Going 281) even though Twain's book never itself uses this locution. Ellison's indifference to this concern, in contrast, for example, to many of the contributors to *Satire or Evasion?* makes it easier for Fishkin to forge ahead with her positive view on Twain's hybridized antiracism, unencumbered by any defensiveness.

I am very grateful to Fishkin for sending me back to Ellison, whom I had read in the 1960s and then put away because he angered me politically. I can now value his work with greater historical balance, although still ambivalently. Ellison is a critic whose work is still not widely enough known and discussed, and I offer this discussion as a small memorial to a major writer.

For *Huckleberry Finn*, Ellison's most important text is not the much reprinted and cited "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke" (1958), which poses the problem of Jim as a representation drawn from the realm of minstrelsy, but the earlier essay "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity." This essay proposes that the moral history of the US may be imagined as "a drama acted out upon the body of a Negro giant" (Shadow 28), and it argues that after the failure of Reconstruction almost all American writers failed to do what earlier American writers, from Emerson to Twain, had done: to conceive of "the Negro as a symbol of Man" (Shadow 32). Ellison dwelt on Hemingway's
influential formulation that all modern American writing comes from *Huckleberry Finn*, with Hemingway's further proviso that the book's ending is just "cheating." Ellison claimed, in contrast, that only the determination to steal Jim free once he has been "stolen" from Huck gives the book its great moral value. Hemingway, thus, has lost the "fraternal" meaning of Twain's book and kept only its "technical discoveries" (*Shadow* 35). But Ellison did not make this an individual shortcoming of Hemingway's, for he read Hemingway as exemplary for a phase of national history in which "by excluding our largest minority from the democratic process, the United States weakened all national symbols and rendered sweeping public rituals which would dramatize the American dream impossible" (*Shadow* 36). Readers of *Invisible Man* (1952) will recall the crucial scenes of powerful public ritual that articulate that "portrait of the artist as a rabble-raiser" (*Shadow* 179).

*Huckleberry Finn* thus for Ellison represented national value, and it also took on specific personal value. He wrote elsewhere that as a youth he could imagine himself as Huck Finn "(I so nicknamed my brother)" (*Shadow* 58) but not "as Nigger Jim," and he further identified his youthful African-American milieu as one in which he and his friends were, like Huck Finn, "'boys,'" a "wild, free, outlaw tribe which transcended the category of race" (*Shadow* xv). In defining the boys he grew up with in Oklahoma as "Americans" who, because they were also "frontiersmen," were given equally to "voracious reading" and "quixotic gestures," he may blend Huck with Tom Sawyer. Compared to Doyno, Ellison is soft on Tom. Indeed, Ellison's understanding of the particular character of American nationality appears to me highly quixotic, or Tom Sawyerish, insofar as it emphasizes the foundation of the US and of its American identity, along with the personal identity of its citizens, on a body of resonant texts.

In an important position-taking essay of 1957, "Society, Morality, and the Novel," a title that consciously played against Trilling's "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," Ellison defined the crucial feature of American culture: "The moral imperatives of American life that are implicit in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights were a part of both the individual consciousness and the conscience of those writers who created what we consider our classic novels." Ellison asserted that "[t]hese documents . . . inform our language and our conduct with public meaning, and they provide the broadest frame of reference for our most private dramas" (*Going* 248).

This claim provokes a question that Ellison did not address: is a critic always right to invoke these national-foundational doc-
uments even when the work in question either fails to refer to them or seems to do so only to diminish them? My own recent work on historical distinctions between "national" and "literary" narratives grows in part from this question (see "Nationalism" 15–18; "Narrative"). If this national-textual "frame of reference" is simply always there, it would seem hard for Ellison to maintain his distinction between Twain and Hemingway. After all, no more than do Hemingway's narrators does Huck explicitly invoke the founding national documents; their relevance depends on a reader's choosing to place the book in their "frame." Yet as Ellison emphasized in his address upon receiving the National Book Award, "understatement depends . . . upon commonly held assumptions," which are not necessarily available to a writer of "minority status" (Shadow 103). Here Ellison framed in relation to race an issue that had long, and has since, been much discussed in relation to gender, typically as the hyperbolic overstatement of sentimental writers following Stowe set against the elliptical understatement of ironical writers following Hawthorne. Toni Morrison, in Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination (1992), and Kenneth W. Warren, in Black and White Strangers: Race and American Literary Realism (1993), have recently done important work in bringing out the barely spoken racialist frame of reference that shapes prestigious work in the more elliptical line.

In "Society, Morality, and the Novel," Ellison placed the literature of the US in a larger context, about which the same interpretive problem may be posed. Consider this statement: "In the nineteenth century, during the moment of greatest middle-class stability . . . the novel reached its first high point of formal self-consciousness" (Going 246). This is already a notable formulation. For the modernism that made "formal self-consciousness" a feature to be noted and valued generally failed to find this virtue in the literature of the nineteenth century. Ellison shows here a characteristic mixture: he maintains a conservative humanist canon, such as might have been associated with Popular Front criticism, and he combines it with the aesthetic principles of high modernism, more associated with Partisan Review. Yet there is a further remarkable element in this sentence of Ellison's, for I have omitted a long interpolation. The sentence actually reads as follows:

In the nineteenth century, during the moment of greatest middle-class stability—a stability found actually only at the center and there only relatively, in England and not in the colonies; in Paris rather than in Africa, for there the baser
instincts, the violence and greed could destroy and exploit non-European societies in the name of humanism and culture, beauty and liberty, fraternity and equality while protecting the humanity of those at home—the novel reached its first high point of formal self-consciousness.

More like Edward Said than Lionel Trilling here, Ellison frames the culture of the novel around the turbulence of imperialism, and he recognizes that even as the novel may be a form of truth telling, novels could also “reconstruct an image of experience that would make it unnecessary for one to be aware of the true reality upon which society rested” (Going 247). We recognize again the problem of understatement: what must be said explicitly in order to invoke awareness of a frame of reference?

Ellison's complex sense of global geopolitics as the enabling conditions for formal accomplishment in the nineteenth-century novel matched his understanding of his own time. Since the failure of Reconstruction, the accomplishment of *Huckleberry Finn* remained an isolated landmark, and therefore, Ellison writes, “now in the 1950s, at a time when our world leadership has become an indisputable and perplexing fact, we have been forced to return to problems, in the form of the current desegregation issue, which should have been faced up to years ago” (Going 252). The national first-person plural is deeply rooted in Ellison's discourse here in a way that troubles me, perhaps by recalling that his powerful praise of Twain and critique of Hemingway first appeared under the imprimatur of Henry Kissinger. In his *Paris Review* interview (1955), Ellison observed in a similar vein, “Our so-called race problem has now lined up with the world problem of colonialism and the struggle of the West to gain the allegiance of the remaining non-white people who have thus far remained outside the Communist sphere” (Shadow 182).

What may sound simply like cold war liberalism takes on its fuller intricacy in Ellison's 1958 interview with the French journal *Preuves*. He emphasized that African Americans were “the only black peoples” in the world who were “not fighting for separation from the ‘whites,’” and this goal of integration was sought “precisely in terms of American Constitutionalism” (Shadow 270). Is this a Tom Sawyerish or quixotic textualism? In 1964, Ellison observed that “Negroes' struggle . . . for freedom . . . [has] always been moral; what is new is that their efforts now have sanction in national law.” The “protection” afforded by “the ultimate force of federal troops” had become available to African Americans for the first time “since the end of Reconstruction” (Going 96). It is a great historical privilege to feel oneself and
one's people so directly the beneficiaries of the power of the state. The thrilling success of the ideals of the civil rights movement may explain the triumphalism when in 1977 Ellison wrote of "the irrepressible movement of American culture toward the integration of its diverse elements" (Going 22).

Yet "integration" has a more sinister sound too in this sentence, especially for those of us uneasy with Ellison's decision in 1969 to speak at West Point or with his 1968 contribution to the Lyndon Johnson festschrift, in which he explained further his priorities concerning the uses of state power: "[A]s a charter member of the National Council on the Arts, I felt that governmental aid to the American arts and artists was of a more abiding importance than my hopes that the Vietnam war would be brought to a swift conclusion" (Going 79). Integration had seemed more dubious, although no less important, in Ellison's early observation, apropos of Richard Wright's *Black Boy*, that "the welfare of the most humble black Mississippi sharecropper is affected less by the flow of the seasons and the rhythm of natural events than by the fluctuations of the stock market" (Shadow 89).

Here the integration is not political but economic, not integration into a nation but into global capital flows. In his assessment of Lyndon Johnson, however, Ellison does not reckon that the economic cost of the Vietnam War might nullify his political conviction that Johnson was "the greatest American President for the poor and for the Negroes" (Going 87). If the global here seems to unbalance Ellison's national reckoning, in the case of his own cultural inheritance he is emphatic: his roots are not just black and not only American but include Marx and Freud (Going 206), Malraux and Dostoyevski (Shadow 168).

To recognize the strengths and problems of Ellison's concerns for the international along with the national opens a critical perspective on Fishkin's nationalist use of Twain. Her book ends: "Will Huck become an emblem of a society that is now, and has always been, as multiracial and multicultural as the sources of the novel that we have embraced as most expressive of who we really are?" (144). To push beyond this populist finale in Fishkin and to further reflect on Ellison, contrast the final sentences of Said's *Culture and Imperialism*: "It is more rewarding—and more difficult—to think concretely and sympathetically, contrapuntally, about others than only about 'us.' But this also means, . . . above all, not constantly reiterating how 'our' culture or country is number one (or not number one, for that matter). For the intellectual there is quite enough of value to do without that" (336). Since my reflections on Said and Fish-
kin aim to challenge the nationalism of established American literary historiography, it is exactly to my purpose that in treating the nineteenth century *Culture and Imperialism* deals primarily with Britain and France. Said does touch on more recent American culture and politics, but no one could say that the book is a work of American studies, and, I would argue, for that very reason Americanists will benefit by considering what alternatives it makes possible.

The key methodological notion of *Culture and Imperialism* is what Said calls “contrapuntal criticism.” (I would emphasize that this is a matter of procedure, not of theory.) Taken from musical discourse, the adjectival form of counterpoint has several important resonances. It does not emphasize resolution but rather the interplay of parts that would be independent were they not brought together into a larger composition. In this respect, the notion of the contrapuntal is quite distinct, I think, from the assimilative, unifying rhetorics and models of mimesis, metaphor, and allegory that dominate Americanist discussions of the relations between the story elements of *Huckleberry Finn* and its historical or political meanings. This emphasis on the contrapuntal as bringing together through an act of will two distinct elements is closely allied with the notion of the hybrid that I touched on earlier and that Said himself makes some use of. (This is not the occasion to consider the problems in the biological valences of hybrid.) He distinguishes essentialized “cultural identities” from cultures considered as “contrapuntal ensembles” (52). “Contrapuntal” suggests that the interrelated parts have active and intricate relations to each other and to the whole of which they together are parts. The term thus allows a large scale of thinking that still does not claim to be all-embracing. In a crucial formulation Said proposes that “the whole of a culture is . . . disjunct,” but that “many important sectors of it can be apprehended as working contrapuntally together” (194).

In contrapuntally joining imperialism with the institution of the novel in Britain and France in the nineteenth century, Said deploys a mediating notion rather like what Raymond Williams called “structures of feeling,” but I think Said manages greater material precision in what he calls “structures of attitude and reference.” He explains, for example, a tendency that “fixes socially desirable, empowered space in metropolitan England or Europe and connects it by design, motive, and development to distant or peripheral worlds . . . conceived of as desirable but subordinate” (52). Or, as another example, he cites the sentiment that “subject races should be ruled, that they are subject races, that one race deserves and has consistently earned the right to
be considered the race whose main mission is to expand beyond its own domain” (53). This language of space and expansion registers a fundamental concern in Said’s book that brings him closer to some themes of American literary and cultural study than to the traditions of synoptic comparative literature that provide most of his own methodological models, even as he deviates from them.

As part of what Said calls “secular” criticism, he acknowledges works of culture as great but not as transcendent (or, in Doyno’s term, “timeless”). By thus recognizing the necessary limits and imperfections of all human activities, Said takes a strong position against what he calls the “rhetoric of blame.” This is a polemical position of Said’s that will certainly hurt feelings and provoke debate among some readers who have previously used his work. Here is the strongest moment on this topic:

> It would be silly to expect Jane Austen to treat slavery with anything like the passion of an abolitionist or a newly liberated slave. Yet what I have called the rhetoric of blame, so often now employed by subaltern, minority, or disadvantaged voices, attacks her, and others like her, retrospectively, for being white, privileged, insensitive, complicit. Yes, Austen belonged to a slave-owning society, but do we therefore jettison her novels as so many trivial exercises in aesthetic frumpery? Not at all, I would argue, if we take seriously our intellectual and interpretative vocation to make connections, to deal with as much of the evidence as possible, . . . above all, to see complementarity and interdependence instead of isolated, venerated, or formalized experience that excludes and forbids the hybridizing intrusions of human history. (96)

This perspective on Austen, along with Said’s extended appreciation of the “pleasures of imperialism” in Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (132–62), suggests that it might be possible to discuss *Huckleberry Finn* without hyperboles of either outrage or defensiveness. It also suggests ways to reconsider the impasse of David L. Smith, caught between the subversive textual heroism he reads in *Huckleberry Finn* and the blank historical silence he acknowledges. By forgoing the “rhetoric of blame,” one may acknowledge the great value of *Huckleberry Finn* without feeling obligated to construct for it a historically impossible purity.

The reference to “hybridizing intrusions” recalls what Said never forgets, the pain that is part of historical action and pro-

*By forgoing the “rhetoric of blame,” one may acknowledge the great value of Huckleberry Finn without feeling obligated to construct for it a historically impossible purity.*
cess. Yet there remains a question he has not yet worked out, I think. Grant that *Culture and Imperialism* magnanimously refuses the “rhetoric of blame” that has marked so much recent socially and politically concerned criticism, and grant, too, that this refusal by no means diminishes the book’s power to make critical political judgments. Nonetheless, the book’s practice of “connection” rejoins the realm of pain (empire, slavery, war, among others) to the realm of pleasure (the separated aesthetic sphere). Once the connection is reestablished, what can assure that the pain does not overwhelm the pleasure? The present vividness of America’s historical racism is what provokes the pain that leads students and their parents to protest the classroom prestige of *Huckleberry Finn*.

What could contrapuntal American literary history be like? Said addresses the contemporary US but in the nineteenth century only Britain and France, yet the nineteenth-century literature of the US has provided the ground on which later twentieth-century American nationalism has been most eager to build its sense of a powerful “we.” No work has been at once more revered and more loved in this process of national self-reinforcement than *Huckleberry Finn*, even when the national self is proclaimed as “hybrid,” as by Fishkin. No work is more regularly referred to by the upper-middlebrow establishment of the *New York Times*, which also proclaims America’s continuing imperial mission. But where in the book is the place to set the imperial counterpoint? Meditating on his own beginnings in Oklahoma and on Bessie Smith’s song of “Going to the Terr’tor’,” Ellison already noted the key role of “geography” in the “symbolism of our [in this context, African-American] folklore” (*Going* 131), and Roy Harvey Pearce long ago laid out the relations between boomer landgrabbing and Huck’s plan to “light out for the Territory.” Can Said help us further to connect *Huckleberry Finn* to the moment of Twain’s writing, a few years before the 1890 census reported the “closing of the frontier,” the moment of consolidating America’s continental empire before the US began overseas imperialism?

A first answer must be in the very freedom to move on the river through the heart of North America. Although Mark Twain published *Huckleberry Finn* in 1884–85, it is set 40 to 50 years earlier, 1835 to 1845. Only in 1803 had the Louisiana Purchase brought into the US the Mississippi, which had previously marked the western border, and that purchase came only after a period of crisis in which for six months the Spanish governor of Louisiana had forbidden US use of the port of New Orleans and closed the Mississippi to US traffic. As of 1835, when Samuel
Clemens was born, Missouri was still the westernmost state of the Union: Iowa to its north and Arkansas to its south were still territories; and by the Platte Purchase of 1837, Missouri extended itself yet further west, federally expropriating from Indians (several thousand Iowa and Sac and Fox, along with smaller groups) and converting to slave-holding the corner of the state that extends north and west from Kansas City.7

Huck and Jim, although under some constraints, have access to the river, but in 1861 Samuel Clemens had to give up his career as a Mississippi pilot, only two years after he had begun it, because the Civil War so disrupted river traffic and because he dreaded being drafted as a gunboat pilot. When Huckleberry Finn was excerpted in the Century magazine, from December 1884 through February 1885, it was in the same volume that began a three-year series of memoirs of the Civil War, which won tremendous circulation for the journal. The first excerpt from Huckleberry Finn was the account of the murderous Grangerford-Shepherdson feud; the next month the Century, along with a second piece from Huckleberry Finn, ran a lengthy account of the “Operations of the Western Flotilla,” that is, the series of engagements that allowed the Union to control the Mississippi from Cairo to Memphis (shades of Egypt!). The major map used to illustrate this article centers on the Madrid Bend (Walke 441), exactly the portion of the river that is illustrated in the map provided in the standard scholarly edition of Huckleberry Finn (369) to show the location of the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud, where Huck landed after the raft was run through by the steamboat. The Grangerfords lived in Tennessee, a Confederate state; a mile away the Shepherdsons lived in Union Kentucky. So the democratic racial harmony of Huck and Jim’s America-on-a-raft is overturned, and they are cast into the midst of bloody and terrible combat, exactly at the point where Secession split the Mississippi.

The interpretive approach of Culture and Imperialism differs from the line of criticism, from Trilling (xiii) to Fishkin (69, 144), that has found Huckleberry Finn “subversive.” It would not take this tiny mise-en-abîme of the Civil War as proving Twain’s subversive social commentary. Rather, it allows us to reflect on what Said calls the “structure of attitude and reference” by which free movement on the Mississippi is understood as an essential part of American identity, without any special thought to the recent purchase of the river valley from France or to the Civil War that actually obstructed traffic for several years and threatened to re-impose on the river all the complexities of international travel.
that Jefferson’s purchase had hoped to end. By historiographic
counterpoint, the element of Huckleberry Finn most frequently
considered antipolitical, antisocial, oppositional, or simply natu-
ral, Huck’s rafting, comes athwart the national-imperial posses-
sion of “our” continent.
Notes


2. Since I composed my reading of Ellison, there has appeared another ambivalent response to his politics, in *Heroism and the Black Intellectual: Ralph Ellison, Politics, and Afro-American Intellectual Life* (1994), by Jerry Gafio Watts, to which Charles Johnson has responded by defensively asserting Ellison's indisputable merits. Yet I do not find that Johnson comes closer to Ellison's core. For example, Johnson writes, "In his attempt to catch Ellison off guard, Mr. Watts brands him 'an American patriot.'" As my analysis indicates, I do not think Ellison would have denied his American patriotism.

3. Ellison's initial entry to the New York literary world came at the peak of, and through the agencies of, the Popular Front. See O'Meally 30–31, 37. As late as 1978, Ellison quoted as a touchstone André Malraux's speech on the "cultural heritage" (*Going* 32), keynote at a major international Popular Front event, which F. O. Matthiessen had used as a point of departure for *American Renaissance* (1941) (see Arac, *Critical* 162, 165, 172).

4. "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," written as early as 1946 (*Shadow* 24), was first published in 1953 in *Confluence*, a Harvard publication largely funded by the Rockefeller Foundation and personally edited by the young Kissinger, who used it to develop and display his connections (see Isaacson 72–74).

5. See, e.g., in *Satire or Evasion?: the Phelps farm is a "microcosm" to "describe metaphorically" (62) the South of Twain's time; the relation among Huck, Jim, and Tom "is a duplication" (70) of the historically existing structure of race and class relations; "allegorically speaking, Huck *is* his country" (156); Huck and Jim, in fleeing Pap and Miss Watson "are seeking the American dream" (211). Or in Doyno: "Jim's liberation from the bonds of slavery can be paralleled with Twain's struggle to free the formation of Americans' imaginations from European bookish expectations" (198).

6. Adams 282–318 charts the complex diplomacy of this crisis and emphasizes the decisive impact of the successful San Domingo revolution on Napoleon's decision to sell Louisiana, an element of global racial politics that I cannot develop further here.

7. See McCandless 116–17. Most one-volume reference works make no mention of the Platte Purchase, even though it opened to slavery land from the Louisiana Purchase located north of 36 degrees and 30 minutes north latitude and, thus, abrogated the Missouri Compromise long before the Compromise of 1850 did so.
8. Note that, had he been born in Missouri, Jim would have been born in French or Spanish territory. Leaving aside the huge body of work that has demonstrated the complex negotiations constantly and necessarily performed by slaves between African-American culture(s) and Euro-American culture(s), this international perspective makes even more incredible the still common observation on the "French lesson" of ch. 14 that Jim "knows nothing about cultural differences" (Doyno 216) and "betrays his ignorance of cultural diversity" (Satire 111).

9. Horwitz provides the outstanding exception to this interpretive tendency.

Works Cited


Davis, David Brion. The Slave Power Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style.


