

# Samuel Clemens Sheds the Liberal Skin of Mark Twain: An Active Response to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

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**Abstract** This study investigates how Samuel Clemens sheds the liberal skin of Mark Twain in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) to achieve whites' utopia. By setting the narrative of Tom in the 1830s, Clemens alters the past of pre-Civil War society to create future remembrance of the past. By doing so, he makes the white class vigilant toward the impending disaster of black overtaking whites, if the problem of color conflict is further ignored. It reveals the author's struggle to conceptualize the narrative style as a blend of 'historical realism' and 'minstrel tradition' to deride blacks' attempt to imitate whites. Therefore, they do not deserve realistic treatment. Clemens repudiates the instances of historical reality to debunk the scope of narrative fallibility; however, it persists in the difference between the actual and the textual reality. Through Tom's narrative, Clemens counters Roxy's desire for blacks' utopia to realize whites' utopia. In the broad spectrum of reader-response theory, the active reader's response discourse aims to bring forth the implications behind Clemens' writing style and how through the scientific invention of the fingerprint, he creates a paradigm to achieve eugenics (whites' utopia). It paves the path to restore whites' *status quo* by eliminating the scope of blacks' dissent.

**Keywords** Eugenics; fingerprint; imitation; miscegenation; whites' utopia.

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## Introduction

This article scrutinizes Mark Twain's novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) to carry out an active investigation of the historical reality of the pre-Civil War society of the United States. It further shows how after the failure of the *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), Samuel Clemens sheds the liberal skin of Mark Twain in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. This research argues that Mark Twain was the product of the "memory activism"<sup>1</sup> style in *Huckleberry Finn*, evident in the dissent against the post-Reconstruction society that did not give rights to black people. In contrast, the writing style of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* divulges Clemens' apprehension that exceeding color conflict (outcome of miscegenation) would become the cause of white people's downfall. In the novel, Roxy desires to achieve the blacks' utopia (by creating a black genealogy against whites) by placing her son Tom in a white milieu. In contrast, Clemens counters her narrative with the scientific invention of the fingerprint to herald a path in realizing whites' utopia by achieving eugenics.<sup>2</sup> This study focuses on Clemens' regaining his old conservative self and the former untainted white society before intermixing takes place. Therefore, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, he rejects the idea of brotherhood imagined between a black man and a white boy in *Huckleberry Finn*. It is apparent in creating a paradigm, like how to segregate blacks from whites to achieve eugenics through the science of fingerprint to make the white class supreme.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Clemens reimagines the historical reality of the pre-Civil War society by altering the past to create future remembrance of the past without showing commitment to the truth, to evade the problem of 'narrative fallibility.'<sup>3</sup> He conceptualizes a blend of 'historical realism' and 'minstrel tradition' to debunk the direct references to historical reality (like family experience). Clemens historicizes the text by setting it in the 1830s, but written during the

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1 "Memory-activism" is a style to protest against the present reality by altering certain past events to create a future remembrance. For detailed explanation, see Rigney, Ann. "Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic." *Memory Studies*, Vol. 11, no.3, 2018, pp. 368–80, 372.

2 "Eugenics" is a state to attain the purity of blood, for more information, see Galton, Francis. *Fingerprint*, New York: Macmillan and Co. 1892.

3 When narrative fails to be reliable, it creates an idea of narrative fallibility since there is a difference between the textual and the actual history.

1890s. This exhorts him to depart from the style of “catastrophic realism”<sup>1</sup> (of *Huckleberry Finn*) dealing with the truth to criticize the minstrel tradition of blacks imitating whites. Through the repudiation of historical reality, Clemens eliminates the scope of narrative fallibility in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, as seen in *Huckleberry Finn*. This research seeks to highlight the difference between the actual and the textual reality by employing the lens of negative criticism,<sup>2</sup> a part of historical criticism, to question the credibility of the author’s statement.

In the broad spectrum of reader-response theory, this research relies on the active response of the reader’s discourse world to bring forth the implications behind Clemens’ writing style and how, through Tom’s narrative, he desires to attain the whites’ utopia. Indeed, historical realist fiction demands an active response because the reader’s mind is a “‘meaning-seeking faculty’ which by nature discovers *narrative fallibility*, even when the objective foundation for that discovery is lacking” (emphasis added, qtd. in Robinson 40). Therefore, reader-response theory is an appropriate approach to highlight the “dissonance and displacement between then and now, making the past recognizable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar” underlying the text (Groot 3). Eventually, Clemens finds a way to reach his intended goal through the science of fingerprints by throwing blacks to their ghettos and making white society absolute in all manners. Madame Caprell once told Clemens that he “‘finally live[s] in the south,’ and that he would always remain loyal to Southern values and ideals” (qtd. in Pettit, *Twain & South* 24). Thus, Caprell’s statement and Clemens’ bent toward the South corroborate that he is a Southerner to the core of his heart.

### ***Huckleberry Finn* to *Pudd’nhead Wilson*: A Shift from Liberal to Conservative**

The ambivalent attitude of Clemens toward blacks is conspicuous in oscillating between satire, parody, benevolence, and callousness. Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* attempts to assuage the sufferings and hardships of black people from the nation’s cultural memory by changing the historical reality. By doing so, he depicts the surreal acts of a black person’s (Jim) freedom supported by a white boy (Huck), blacks having voting rights, and Jim being given a voice and agency in pre-Civil War society can be seen as an act of dissent against the historical reality. The novel

1 The style of “catastrophic realism” depicts the realistic picture of the socio-political and historical turmoil of society by showing its commitment to truth, for more information, see Bhat-tacharya, Sourit. *Postcolonial Modernity and the Indian Novel on Catastrophic Realism*. 19, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, <https://bit.ly/2UjazEI> (accessed June 6, 2022).

2 In the broad spectrum of historical criticism, negative criticism is a lens to question the credibility of the author’s statement whenever the actual bases of doubts can be found.

is a curious attempt at improvisation by blurring the lines between the actual and the textual reality.

Through Mark Twain, Clemens rejects the postbellum South and commits himself to work for black concerns. In the year 1882, Twain “gave 2500\$ to Lincoln University for black scholarships; six years later he supported [...] as many as five black scholars through Yale Law School” (qtd. in Pettit, *Twain & South* 125-126). He ceased to make jokes about blacks and chose readings that could produce racial harmony between blacks and whites. Indeed, *Huckleberry Finn* can also be perceived as one of that attempt. The difference between Twain and Clemens was divulged when Twain “telegraphed President Hayes to urge him to rescue the vagabond niggers, while Clemens wrote Howells that he was eager to have ‘one of those darkies’ [...] so he could write a ‘delicious’ article about their foolish behavior” (emphasis added, qtd. in Pettit 127). Through Mark Twain, Clemens became the renowned satirist of the age but later betrayed his liberal personality to support the white race.

The inspiration to write on miscegenation and to use blood quantum theory<sup>1</sup> in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* arose from his visit to Sandwich Island with George Washington Cable after they met Kanaka's children. Those children were one-half nigger, one-half white, and there were also dark colored women. Clemens' discussion with Cable about ‘miscegenation’ gave way to the *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. In the novel, Clemens manifested his apprehension in a white-looking black person (Tom) and what potential threat he might create, who had even gone to the extent of murdering a white man. Through the narrative of Tom, Clemens anticipated the future problems that the color conflict would initiate and how that could lead to the destruction of the white race.

### **Historical Realism and Minstrel Tradition: Conceptualizing the Writing Style**

The Southern past always remains an impetus for Twain's writing which Henry Nash Smith calls “Matter of Hannibal” (4). Through the narrative of Tom, Clemens creates a continuum between the past and present by reflecting on present laws and customs (of post-Reconstruction times) in the context of the past. The novel starts with an idyllic portrayal of “Dawson's Landing, hugging the banks of the Mississippi in 1830, which is a confusing combination of the St. Peterburg of *Tom Sawyer* and the Brecksville of *Huckleberry Finn*” (Pettit, *Twain & South* 144). It reveals Clemens' urge to historicize the aforementioned place. The subsequent

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1 “Blood quantum theory” is the law in the United States of America to define native American status by fractions of their ancestry.

chapter merges the historical reality into melodrama by depicting blacks imitating whites. Thus, the novel simultaneously presents and denies its historical and racial context. It alludes to the juxtaposition of two South in Clemens' imagination, "one of nostalgia, the other of Nausea and nightmare—and these two souths continued to vie for supremacy throughout *Samuel Clemens' career*" (emphasis added, Pettit, "Blood-Feud" 30). Like *Huckleberry Finn*, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is also written in memory activism style to make the white race vigilant toward the exceeding color conflict that can take a disastrous turn in the future.

Twain's ambivalence toward the South is conspicuous in his behavior when after a gap of forty years, he says, "he was certain that most slaves in Missouri were 'convinced and content' [...] cruelties were very rare" (Pettit, *Twain & South* 14). The vogue of reconciliatory narratives in post-Reconstruction society aims to demonstrate that black people were content in the pre-Civil War society, but this notion punctures the historical reality. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Clemens portrays the white class as more decent and generous toward blacks in the 1830s, but this does not portray the historical reality. The "fiction of law and custom" (Twain 15) is designed to punish blacks which Roxy refutes while describing her master as a "fairly humane man, toward slaves and other animals" (Twain 16). However, the reality was different in the 1830s, when a master had the right to kill enslaved person whenever he wished. One of the incidents left Clemens awestruck, "when I was ten years old I saw a man fling a lump of iron-ore at a slave-man in anger [...] It bounded from the man's skull, and the man fell and never spoken again" (Dighe 4). In another incident, when Clemens was just four, "he had tossed and turned in his bed one night while listened to the groans of a captured runaway slave who had been tied and beaten in a sack near Clemens' home" (Pettit, *Twain & South* 15). These incidents demonstrate that Clemens' historical narrative contradicts the historical truth to achieve specific aims. These textual anomalies are discernable through the lens of negative criticism by questioning the credibility of the author's statement. Thus, the role of the active reader comes into play, to divulge the difference between the actual and the textual reality. By transferring the historical traits of white people into Tom, Clemens shields the white race from wrongdoing and lays the onus on the impure blood running into the white bodies to defend the white race.

By setting the novel in the 1830s, Clemens does not display the historical reality. He removed those incidents from the revised manuscript, which connected with his family experience. Clemens used his father, John Marshall Clemens as a model for Percy Driscoll and Judge York Leicester Driscoll. Even Roxy's character was inspired by Jenny (an enslaved person) in Clemens' family, and like her, she

was also sold down the river. In the revised manuscript, Clemens purges an incident from his father's life, in which "Percy Driscoll takes a long horseback journey through the mud and slush of winter to sell a slave in Tennessee and also to collect a debt from a planter" (Moss 50). He cancels the debts because the planter could not pay, but he persists in selling an enslaved person and never ponders over "the poor creature had a heart in his bosom to break" (McKeithan 20). Clemens revoked this journey in the revised manuscript to distance himself from the family's experience. His changing perception about blacks exhort him to remove Jasper's incident from the original manuscript. The revised manuscript reduces the heroic figure to indulging in sexual banter with Roxy. While in the original manuscript, Jasper saw an uncontrollable buggy coming toward him:

He took a position, spat in his hands & [...] instant the flying horse was upon him & that he grabbed him & stood him up on his hind heels in the air! Then the dust settled & he had a great & glad surprise, for he saw his young mistress, with her nurse & baby, sitting in the buggy. (McKeithan 24)

Amazed by his heroic prowess, Jasper's master set him free. Based on the actual incident, this event occurred on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1877, when "John Lewis, a black handyman at the Clemens family's summer retreat, rescued a cartload of Livy Clemens' relatives by grabbing the runaway horse" (Moss 51). Arthur Pettit describes Mark Twain's reactions, who "at once added Lewis to his list of demigods. [...] The Lewis incident is important not because Clemens found yet another hero, but because this time he gave the wreath to a black man" (qtd. in Moss 51).

In the revised manuscript, Clemens' conservative self does not allow him to hail the courageous act of a black person. By debunking these instances from the revised manuscript, he has distanced himself from real-life incidents and reality. Clemens engages with the minstrel tradition to satirize the spurious nature of white-looking blacks who, according to him, do not deserve realistic treatment in the historical framework. When Roxy learns about Tom's disinheritance by Judge Driscoll for gambling, she reproaches Chambers, "you mis'able imitation nigger dat I bore in sorrow en tribbilation" (Twain 44). She forgets that Chambers is not her son but the true heir of the Driscoll family's fortune, who has been a white man imitating enslaved people because of the web created by Roxy. However, he retaliates by saying, "If I's imitation, what is you?. Bofe of us is imitation white—dat's what we is—en pow'ful good imitation, too—Yah-yah-yah!—we don't 'mount to noth'n as imitation niggers" (Twain 44). This conversation shows how laws and

customs are designed to differentiate the imitation from the real white. Clemens proposes the science of fingerprint as an addendum to those laws and customs segregating white from blacks.

We can see that “Roxy, a black in whiteface, and Chambers, presumed to be a black in whiteface, play minstrel roles as ‘imitation Niggers,’ Roxy by law and Chambers ironically by means of Roxy’s act of rebellion” becomes white (Sundquist 104). Clemens has apprehension that this imitation would lead to the acquisition of political, social, and economic gains, which would undoubtedly cause white people’s destruction. Tom imitates whites to such an extent that he sells his mother (Roxy) down the river to raise money for his debts. The imitation by Roxy and Chambers dramatizes the national policy of separate but equal,<sup>1</sup> that depicts the political turmoil in the post-Reconstruction society.

### **White Rage: Plessy’s Case Influence on *Pudd’nhead Wilson***

After the emancipation of black people, there was the promulgation of ‘black codes’—designed to re-enslave black people. Indeed, “the codes required that blacks sign annual labor contracts with plantation, mill, or mine owners. [...] *If they refused to show no proof of gainful employment, they would be charged with vagrancy and put on the auction block*” (emphasis added, Anderson 20). They could not leave the working space; if dared, they would be imprisoned and sold in the auction. W.E.B. Du Bois articulates the endless suffering of black people by stating, “The slave went free, stood a few brief moments in the sun, and then went back again to slavery” (30). Carol Anderson (2017) conceptualizes the term ‘white rage’ to show how it has been unleashed on blacks through laws and bureaucracies. Indeed, “The trigger for white rage, inevitably, is black advancement. It is not the mere presence of black people [...] it is blackness with ambition, with drive, with purpose, with aspirations, and with demands for full and equal citizenship” (Anderson 7). In the 1890s, there was an ascendancy of the carceral system and lynching epidemic, and black people were imprisoned for minor offenses, like carrying a firearm or stealing a pig. Andrew Johnson (like Clemens) has deeply been troubled by the nightmare of blacks’ empowerment; therefore, he proclaims, “This is [...] a country for white men, and by God, as long as I’m president, it shall be a government for white men” (19).

After emancipation, three constitutional amendments were made for blacks’ better future. Nevertheless, the ban on the ‘badges of servitude’ (under the Thirteenth Amendment) persisted in public accommodations, like restaurants,

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<sup>1</sup> “Separate but equal” is the law in the United States of America, designed to achieve racial segregation by providing ‘separate but equal’ services for whites and blacks.

hotels, and railcars (evident in Plessy's case). The Fourteenth Amendment was enforced by the state, not by the federal government, and the right to vote in Fifteenth Amendment had not been guaranteed by the federal government but by the states. Frederick Douglass highlights the failure of constitutional amendments by stating that "The citizenship granted in the Fourteenth Amendment is practically a mockery, and the right to vote, provided for in the Fifteenth Amendments, is literally stamped out in *the* face of government" (emphasis added, qtd. in Miller 114).

To challenge the biased law in 1892, Homer Adolph Plessy boarded the Louisiana railroad car to outlaw the state's railroad car law. The law was ordained in 1890 and directed "all railway companies operating in the state to provide 'equal but separate' accommodation for the white and colored races" (Maidment 125). Plessy was immediately arrested as he announced himself as a negro to the conductor. His case becomes a basis to challenge the "Jim Crow laws that violated the rights and privileges of national citizenship guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendments and the prohibition of involuntary servitude stated in the Thirteenth Amendment" (qtd. in Sundquist 107). Plessy's appeal at the Louisiana Supreme Court was countered by Justice Charles Fenner, who asserted that "following the order of Divine Providence, human authority ought not compel these widely separated races to intermix" (qtd. in Sundquist 107). Instead of providing rights to blacks, the jury reinforces the 'separate but equal' doctrine to segregate whites from blacks.

Indeed, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a manifestation of those laws and customs that Clemens historicizes by setting the novel in the 1830s. He anticipates the 'separate but equal' doctrine of the 1890s by demonstrating the condition of blacks after the failure of constitutional amendments. Roxy's one-sixteenth blackness outvoted her fifteenth-sixteenth whiteness, which alludes to the disenfranchisement of blacks' voting rights in the 1890s. In short, Clemens' white rage stems from his narrative that runs abreast of America's laws and customs, to punish black people in post-Reconstruction society.

### **Roxy Anticipation of Blacks' Utopia: Tom as an Avenger of Blacks' Exploitation**

*Pudd'nhead Wilson* is a novel about the problem of color conflict produced by the sin of miscegenation reflected in the paradigm of blood quantum theory to measure the (im)purity of blood in white-looking black people. This study investigates how the presence of these people in the white milieu can pose a potential threat and what Clemens attempts to realize through the science of fingerprints. In the novel, Roxana is the main force behind the chaos Tom stirs up in Dawson's Landing since the 'fiction of law and custom' has declared this white-looking woman black. Indeed,



one-sixteenth of Roxana's black blood has surpassed the remaining fifteenth of white, and the same goes with her son (Tom), who is one-thirty-two black. Roxana is a conundrum of beauty, courage, and dignity, and "by painting this woman in a baffling black-and-white collage *Clemens had* tried [...] to satisfy the requirements of the Victorian teachings demanded that her skin *to be white*" (emphasis added, Pettit, *Twain & South* 141). Roxana's outer whiteness may deceive anyone, but the strain of impure blood is marked in her speech and manners. Her complex personality also raises a question of whether she is more white than black, a victim indeed of "fiction of law and custom."

In Clemens' time, "concubinage was, after all, an accepted part of social system of the antebellum South" (DeVoto 64); however, he never acknowledged it as wrongdoing of the white class that resulted in the present color conflict that frightened him. His sexual urge for black women stems from his visit to Sandwich Island, which is revealed in his notebook—imbued with the scribblings of "animal copulation, masturbation, scatology, and heterosexual intercourse, most of it set down after Livy died" (qtd. in Pettit, *Twain & South* 151). Clemens' sexual orientation toward black female sexuality suggests that he is sexually troubled in the 1890s, which is apparent in the expression of his repression. When he had a dream about a black female, which he finally wrote down in 1897, "In my dream last night, I was suddenly in the presence of a negro wench. [...] *She had a round black face, shiny black eyes, [...] good-natured & not at all bad-looking*" (emphasis added, Kaplan 397). Clemens finds the black woman as 'not at all bad looking,' which indicates that his recourse to fulfil his repressed sexual desire through a black woman could have violated Clemens' code of conduct, not of color. The black color of her body made her sexuality possible for him.

Roxy's character is a fulfillment of Clemens' repressed desire without departing from the custom and codes of the white society, and by making her black from the inside, he dissociates himself from the object of his desire. He endows "Roxana with the uninhibited mannerisms of his black dream woman, while at the same time satisfying the popular demand for the Tragic Mulatto who must appear to be white" (Pettit, *Twain & South* 153). In order to exonerate himself from this blame, Clemens demonstrates that he has "no physical or psychological resemblance whatever to the self of his dreams" (Pettit, *Twain & South* 152). Roxana's black blood has given her license to speak in an uninhibited manner, differentiating her from the white ladies who maintain their decorum and status while speaking. Thus, Twain not only highlights the difference between a black and white woman but also consolidates the ethos of the white community, in which white women do not behave in an

overtly sexual manner as Roxy does with Jasper. When Jasper intends to court her after recovering from childbirth, she retorts, “How do you come on, Jasper? [...] wid niggers as black as you” (Twain 14). In contrast, white women do not behave this way; although Roxana looks white, she is black from the inside.

Roxy cannot fight against the perpetrators of her race at the forefront; therefore, she contrives a scheme to switch her son (Chambers) with the actual heir (Tom) of Driscoll’s family. She places him as an avenger of the master’s sexual abuse, who exploits black woman’s sexuality and robs black man’s liberty. By doing so, Roxy plans to take vengeance on the perpetrator of her race, consequently, unleashing havoc in Dawson’s Landing. Through Tom, she forges counterfactual history against Clemens’ desire (of white supremacy) to achieve blacks’ utopia. She switches her son with the true heir of Driscoll’s fortune. From here onwards, Roxy’s son will be known as Tom, while the true heir of Driscoll’s family is Chambers. By making Tom white, Roxy aims to initiate the genealogy of white-looking blacks vis-à-vis the First Family of Virginia (FFV) within their white locale. Through Tom, she takes revenge for two hundred fifty years of exploitation from the perpetrator of her race. She has to keep her mission clandestine to defile the white blood of which they are proud because “if she triumphs, black becomes white, mulattoes take over, and the son with a drop of nigger blood becomes the father who sleeps with white women” (Rogin 83). Therefore, Tom’s character is a manifestation of Clemens’ dystopian nightmare of blacks overtaking whites, which greatly disturbs him.

The act of switching has made Tom white, but it has led to a “natal alienation” between Roxy and her son (Porter 133). Because of “the fiction created by herself; he was become her master” (Twain 25). She has to accept this reality first; otherwise, no one will ever do, and “she was merely his chattel now, his convenience, his dog, his cringing and helpless slave, the humble and unresisting victim of his capricious temper and vicious nature” (Twain 28). When Tom is oblivious to his real identity, “the little counterfeit rift of separation between imitation-slave and imitation-master widened and widened, and became an abyss” (Twain 25). Although Tom looks white, he is indeed “a different sort of beau ideal, the very type of the upstart Negro of post-Reconstruction plantation fiction: cowardly, absurdly, pretentious, lazy and irresponsible, a petty thief but potentially a murderer” (Jehlen 45). Through Tom, Roxy anticipates the reversal of power structure to establish blacks’ utopia by showing how “a black man occupying the place of a white man, wielding the same power, usurping the authority of white fatherhood, connotes a global reversal” (Jehlen 46).

By setting the novel in the 1830s, Clemens anticipates the potential threat to make the white race aware that the disaster already on its way would certainly erupt

in the future. When Tom murders the Judge, he blackens his face with charcoal (becomes a black man) and disguises himself as a girl when he flees the scene, “these masks are the ‘proper’ murderers, who take their revenge against the master who has stolen both the black man’s liberty and exploited the sex of both white and black women” (Rowe 151). The destruction initiated by Tom in Dawson’s Landing corresponds to the vengeance of blacks after the Reconstruction’s tragic failure.

### **Fingerprint: Aid in Achieving the Whites’ Utopia**

The fingerprint technique is invented to catch the criminals. However, in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Clemens goes beyond this method by posing it as a solution to restrain the exceeding color conflict, which he sees as a threat. It is not the first time Twain employed the fingerprint technique, which already existed; he also used the same technique in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) to detect a criminal. Clemens was highly inspired by Francis Galton’s book *Fingerprint* (1892), in which he developed the science of ‘eugenics’ to maintain blood purity. Michael Rogin argues that Galton aims “to investigate the origins of ‘natural ability,’ to give ‘the more suitable races or strains of blood a better chance of prevailing speedily over the less suitable’” (79). In contrast, Clemens employs fingerprint to realize the whites’ utopia by purging the scope of blacks’ dissent. However, Galton’s comment on Clemens’ use of fingerprint displays his disappointment, “great expectations, that have been falsified, namely their use in indicating Race and Temperament” (qtd. in Rogin 80).

In *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Clemens’ “introduction of fingerprinting science into an antebellum story served [...] the means for ‘reinventing’ slavery” (Sundquist 116). The fingerprint technique has indeed consolidated the ethos of slavery, which is fundamental to the South. Through the setting of the novel in the 1830s, Clemens derides present attempts to isolate whites from blacks with a ‘separate but equal’ doctrine, evident in the problem that emerges with Plessy’s case. If white society had dealt with color conflict earlier with something like a fingerprint, as Clemens did in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, the problem of color conflict would not have become threatening. Moreover, by showing the disaster Tom has caused in Dawson’s Landing, Clemens hints that something similar is waiting to happen with the white race. David Wilson is an extension of Clemens’ personality, whose practice of taking fingerprints creates a paradigm for whites, like how to isolate whites from blacks. If Wilson had not taken Tom and Chambers’ fingerprints as an infant, it might not have been possible for him to discover their real identity. He is not only taking their fingerprint but also marking their class identity. By doing so, Clemens highlights the vitality of the fingerprint technique, which provides certitude along with the ‘blood

quantum theory' to make the white race absolute in all manners. To make the system more profound in its working, Clemens proposes the technique of fingerprint in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* to get the assurance that one drop system fails to provide. Had it succeeded, then the problem of color conflict might not have become perilous.

The continuum between past and present is also discernible in Tom's journey as a white boy. It can also be seen as an allegory of Plessy's journey in the white car. However, Plessy was conscious of the motif of his journey, whereas Tom was the object of Roxy's larger scheme to defeat the white race. Eventually, both failed to achieve their intended goal and were thrown back to their ghettos to live as black people for the rest of their lives. By divulging Tom's real identity, David Wilson (Clemens) traces the history of miscegenation from past to present and the disaster it may concoct in the future. To show his real identity, he has stripped of Tom of all the advantages he has been cherishing as a white boy. Wilson is indeed a Clemens' extension, "who serves in *Clemens*' own word not as a character, but as a 'mechanism'—kind of reflective panopticon standing for *Clemens* within the novel itself" (emphasis added, Marcus 203). He is the spokesperson of Jim Crow laws, ostensible in unfolding the path to achieve the whites' utopia.

Through Tom's narrative, Clemens makes the whites race vigilant about the problem miscegenation has created and how it can be solved. He also warns people that no amount of deceit can guarantee permanent protection from discovery. In the novel, "After twenty-three years of indoctrination into white manners, speech, and decorum, the fair-skinned Tom Driscoll can still be declared tainted" (Pettit, *Twain & South* 154). Similarly, "after twenty-three years of indoctrination into black manners, speech, and decorum, the fair-skinned Chambers is beyond redemption" (Pettit, *Twain & South* 154). The problem can be solved not by maintaining the purity of blood but by putting an end to racially discriminatory practices. After knowing Luigi's past read by Wilson from his palm, Tom utters, "a man's own hand is his deadliest enemy! [...] keeps a record of the deepest and fatalest [*sic*] secrets of his life" (Twain 64). Tom does not have any idea about misfortune written in his hand, which Wilson has already sealed by taking fingerprints in the beginning, to make the revelation of his real identity at the end of the novel.

## Conclusion

The study concludes that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* displays Clemens' struggle in writing a realistic historical narrative by altering the past to create future remembrance of the past without showing commitment to the truth. However, he invites trouble by presenting the white class as decent and generous toward blacks in pre-Civil War

society, which can make sense in the novel but not in recorded history. Thus, it stirs an idea of narrative fallibility brought forth by the active response of the reader's discourse world by highlighting the difference between the actual and the textual reality. Through the lens of negative criticism, this article creates a paradigm for future readers to study the narrative fallibility by questioning the credibility of the author's statement when suspicious bases of doubts can be found.

Clemens historicizes the novel by setting it in the 1830s but imitates the laws and customs of post-Reconstruction society. Through Tom, Roxy takes revenge for the masters' sexual abuse tradition of exploiting black women's sexuality and robbing black men's liberty for around two hundred fifty years, through the murder of Judge Driscoll. By placing Tom in a white society, Roxy aims to initiate a white-looking black lineage vis-à-vis the white community by diluting the purity of the FFV bloodline. In order to counter Roxy's desire, Clemens creates a future remembrance of the past to make whites aware of the impending disaster that is already on its way to overtake the white race. Therefore, he employs the science of fingerprints to build a paradigm, like how to segregate blacks from whites to achieve eugenics (whites' utopia). He is restoring the *status-quo* of white society by eliminating the scope of blacks' dissent. Clemens strives to save the white society and their economic interest in slavery, which is fundamental to the white South. Thus, it validates that he is a Southerner to the core of his heart.

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