

AMERICAN STUDIES JOURNAL

Number 40

Summer 1997

Regional American Literature



Mark Twain's Boyhood
Home, Hannibal, Missouri

ISSN: 1433-5239
DM 5,00

AMERICAN STUDIES JOURNAL

Number 40
Summer 1997

Contents

- 2 *Editorial*

Regional American Literature

- 3 *Introduction* by Michael J. Bandler
10 *A Literature of Place* by Barry Lopez
14 *From Place to Place: Writers on the American Road* by Sven Birkerts
18 *Voices from the Regions* by Michael J. Bandler
21 *Wheredunit?* by Michael J. Bandler
24 *Mark Twain: America's Regional Original* by Henry B. Wonham
30 *Illustrating Huckleberry Finn* by E.W. Kemble
35 *Mark Twain in a Dilemma: A Victim of a Joke He Thinks the Most Unkindest Cut of All*
37 *Colored People – Reminiscences of Home* by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.
42 *Further Reading on Regional American Literature*

Methodology

- 46 *Understanding Regional Boundaries in the United States*
by Howard De Leeuw
50 *Regions of the Continental United States*
51 *Today's South in the EFL-Classroom* by Andreas Müller-Hartmann

News / Notes / Views

- 56 *The Future of Publishing* by Kushal Dave
58 *Some Electronic Texts Available through Project Gutenberg*
59 *American Dreams & Discontents: Beyond the Level of the Playing Field*
by Isabel V. Sawhill and Daniel P. McMurrer

Editorial

Dear Readers:

Issue 1 of what was then called the *American Studies Newsletter* came out in September 1983, commemorating the tricentennial of German immigration to America. The editor, Dr. Jürgen Bodenstein of USIS Germany, promised "to provide interesting articles and essays presenting social, political, historical, literary, and cultural subjects as well as current information about America that teachers might find useful for themselves and for their work." Last spring, 37 issues later, the German Association for American Studies took over and now presents to you no. 40 of the *American Studies Journal*, the second issue published under its auspices.

We have not changed much. The *ASJ* received a facelift, utilizing modern desktop publishing techniques. The aims expressed by Jürgen Bodenstein, however, are as valid as ever and will continue to serve as our guideline.

The current issue focuses on regional American literature. Since several of the essays deal with Southern writers, we thought it appropriate to include two articles on the South presented to the methodology workshop at the GAAS 1996 annual meeting. For publication in future issues, the editors will also consider contributions from you, our readers; all articles submitted to the editor will be reviewed by competent scholars.

ASJ 40 was prepared for publication by Birgit Plietzsch with some help from the layout team of WAS®, Detmold. Special thanks go to Erica Benson, USIS English Teaching Fellow at the Center for U.S. Studies, whose suggestions on style and whose proofreading skills helped to improve the manuscript.

Lutherstadt Wittenberg, July 1997
Hans-Jürgen Grabbe



Impressum

Herausgegeben im Auftrag der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien von Hans-Jürgen Grabbe (Halle-Wittenberg) in Verbindung mit Gerhard Bach (Bremen), Peter Freese (Paderborn) und Ursula Lehmkuhl (Bochum)

Redaktion: Birgit Plietzsch (Halle-Wittenberg)

Druck: USIA Regional Service Center, Manila

ISSN: 1433-5239

Redaktionsadresse:

Zentrum für USA-Studien, Stiftung LEUCOREA an der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg,
Collegienstraße 62, 06886 Lutherstadt Wittenberg
Fax: (03491) 466223, E-Mail: asj@zusas.uni-halle.de



The *American Studies Journal* appears semi-annually. The subscription rate is DM 15. This includes postage and handling. Subscribers from outside the European Union must add DM 10 for extra postage. If you would like to receive more than one copy, please add DM 2 for each additional subscription.

Prepayment is required. Please transfer your remittance to Zentrum für USA-Studien, Account Number 26212, Sparkasse Wittenberg, BLZ 805 501 01. Payment by check cannot be accepted.

Fotonachweise:

Corel Corp.: 3; Library of Congress: 7, 6, 38, 39, 40, 41; U. S. Postal Service: 35; University of Virginia: 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 36.

Regional American Literature: Introduction

by Michael J. Bandler

In a few choice sentences in each of his novels of contemporary family life, novelist Pat Conroy lifts the veil on the Low Country of South Carolina that he has known from boyhood. E.L. Doctorow, with resonant word images, reveals New York sites and experiences from an earlier time that have meaning for our day. Ivan Doig, from the rugged crags of the western United States, weaves sentences together and opens readers' eyes to the vastness of Montana, while David Guterson, traversing the land, dapples pages of his books with glimpses of life on both the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.



Regional literature is thriving these days across the United States, from Stephen King's Maine to Garrett Hongo's Hawaii. The sheer impact of the contributions of hundreds of novelists, poets, essayists, naturalists, and biographers is palpable. Indeed, to gain a sense of the nation – its landscape, its spirit, its achievements and its challenges – one might do well to forgo the specificities of guidebooks, and simply turn to the works of literary artists, just as others might turn, in different circumstances, to the canvases of visual artists.

There is nothing new, actually, about a regional tradition in American literature. It is as old as

Native American legends, as evocative of place as the 19th-century writings of James Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain and Bret Harte, as vibrant as the worlds created earlier in this century by novelist William Faulkner and playwright Tennessee Williams, as reflective of society as the novels of Sinclair Lewis and Eudora Welty. Today, these writers and others from generations past have contemporary counterparts, who are keeping the tradition alive.

Regional literature in the 1990s is expansive and diverse. It infiltrates genres. It is mirrored in the writings of tenth-generation Americans and those of the new ethnics. The special properties of certain regions loom in poetry and drama, as well as in fiction and nonfiction. Regional writing reflects, as before, not only geography, but also moods and yearnings, dialects and idiosyncrasies. It encompasses the tangible and the intangible. For the most part, the literature of "place" tends to be rooted, involved, committed – frequently striking what nature essayist Barry Lopez calls a "hopeful tone" in "an era of cynical detachment." And it proclaims, at the dawn of a new century, that American culture is creative and meaningful, from one tract of land to another, and on all social and economic levels as well.

Interest and participation in regional literature – coming, critic Sven Birkerts suggests, in response to the minimalist or postmodernist fiction of the past generation – is enjoying considerable impact, with accompanying reverberations. It has given rise, for instance, to the launching of a number of bookstores – such as Boston's Globe and Chicago's Savvy Traveler – specializing in fiction and nonfiction related to particular spots, arranged by site. Thus, a would-be traveler who heads for the bookstore shelf marked "Southwestern United

States” in advance of a trip to that region quite likely will find Tony Hillerman’s mysteries and Rudolfo Anaya’s novels available for purchase.

Cause and effect can blur. It is difficult to ascertain, for example, whether smaller regional publishing houses sprang up because of a wealth of writers in their area or whether the opening of such firms sparked a literary explosion there. Still, the fact is that regional publishers and regional writers are contributing mightily to literature in America. Moreover, in addition to the ascent of such publishers as Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, which has introduced readers to an array of North Carolina writers such as Clyde Edgerton and Jill McCorkle, the number of regional literary journals continues to grow. Add to that the support, for more than a quarter-century, that the U.S. National Endowment for the Arts provided to both established and fledgling literary workshops that discovered new talents across the nation. (Although the U.S. Government is no longer able to provide the level of funding it has in the past, because of budgetary constraints, the corporate and private sectors continue to support these activities.) The picture, then, is a healthy one, and both writers and readers are beneficiaries.

Who are these writers, and where are they? And how does “place” manifest itself? A journey along the byways of regional literature might begin in the Northeast – in Bangor, Maine, home of Stephen King, one of the nation’s more popular fabulists. Making use of his base, he has created an endless string of fantasy and horror bestsellers set in the state. Across the boundary of New England, Albany, New York, is the focus of attention of one of its native sons, journalist-turned-novelist William Kennedy, whose stories, set in the state capital, capture elegiacally yet often raucously

the lives of the denizens of the city’s streets and saloons.

New York City may have more writers per capita than any other city in the United States – and possibly the world – yet most of them aren’t writing about their town. Indeed, for a place so indelibly etched in the minds of tourists and other travelers, New York has been captured only by a select few novelists who, more often than not, use the literary form to focus on social concerns. Tom Wolfe – predominantly a writer of nonfiction – may have created the quintessential New York City novel when he wrote *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, a swirling seriocomic work about the interconnection of politics and society. Equally focused, in treating New York life at earlier moments in time, are the writings of E.L. Doctorow. They capture the city’s moods at various moments in the past 100 years: the tensions of turn-of-the-century America, the lawlessness of the Prohibition years, the wide-eyed futurism triggered by the 1939 World’s Fair, and the sober realities of the Cold War era – all with the city as backdrop. And, for glimpses into down-home life on the streets of the boroughs, readers can choose from the innocence of Avery Corman’s neighborhood imagery; the more visceral, crime-infested world as depicted in the fiction of Richard Price; and the rhythmic pulses of the city’s Hispanic section that novelist Oscar Hijuelos knows so intimately.

Moving past central Pennsylvania, where John Updike traced the peripatetic journey of one Rabbit Angstrom against the backdrop of more than three decades of American contemporary history, we journey to Maryland. There, in the environs of Baltimore, Anne Tyler continues to delineate in spare, quiet language ordinary and extraordinary events in the lives of her characters and the introverted mood of the

Introduction

region as well. On the Chesapeake Bay waterways lapping against the state's eastern shore, where novelist John Barth has reigned for years, we find a new talent, Christopher Tilghman, centering his writings on those waterways.

but on emotional nuances and psychological effect. Moving past Richmond, Virginia, scene of the crimes in which mystery novelist Patricia Cornwell's protagonist, medical examiner Kay Scarpetta, is enmeshed, we reach North Carolina. This state is home to Algonquin



Lower Manhattan, 1911

Down the interstate from Baltimore is the U.S. capital. Washington may appear, to readers, to enjoy a special place in American fiction, given the number of plots of popular political and global suspense adventures that either unfold there or find their way there in the course of the tale. But they are not true Washington novels. More worthy of the title are the writings of Ward Just, a onetime international correspondent who switched to a second career, creating in fiction the world he knows best – populated by journalists, members of Congress, diplomats and military figures – and focusing not on political machinations or world crises,

Books and to a rich literary tradition that boasts, among others, Thomas Wolfe. More recently, Reynolds Price, Anne Tyler's mentor, has been described by a critic as holding the obsolescent post of "Southern-writer-in-residence," although others of the period were also worthy of the title. Concentrating on the people and land of eastern North Carolina, Price wrote several books about a young woman named Rosacoke Mustian, then shifted his focus to other themes before returning to a female protagonist in 1986. Jill McCorkle, still in her 30s, represents the newest generation of North Carolina writers. Setting her novels and short

stories largely in the small towns of the state, she has focused on subjects ranging from the mystique of teenagers in America's heartland to the particular sensibilities of contemporary Southern women. The lore and history of the southern Appalachians are central to the homespun fiction of Lee Smith, while the sensitive antennae of Clyde Edgerton – a Mark Twain for our day – are tuned in to Carolinians ripe for satire. If Edgerton is in the Twain mold, then T.R. Pearson is this generation's Faulkner with Neely, North Carolina, replacing Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi.

South Carolina was placed on the literary map by Pat Conroy. His bracing autobiographical novels about his household – dominated by his tyrannical, often abusive father – are awash in ambivalence, as downbeat themes about his dysfunctional family are countered by the lush descriptions of the natural beauty of the Low Country, on the nation's eastern coast. Even before confronting the lingering sores of his home life and schooling; however, he wrote a beautiful work of nonfiction, *The Water is Wide*. In it, he describes his experiences as a young, untested schoolteacher working with impoverished children on a barrier island off the Carolinas.

The midwestern heartland continues to produce a wealth of writing talent, heirs to Willa Cather and Eudora Welty and to rugged urban literati like Saul Bellow as well. If urban literature is somewhat in repose these days, Chicago writers like Scott Turow, whose legal dramas have set a standard for much of the genre, and Stuart Dybek, author of fiction rooted in the city's ethnic environs, are keeping the city on the literary map. Jane Smiley, who teaches writing at the University of Iowa, is prominent among the rural talents. Before skewering academic life in her most recent book, *Moo*, she won the

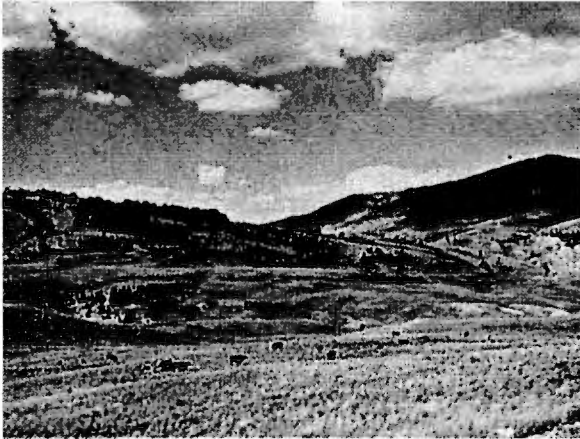
1992 Pulitzer Prize in fiction for *A Thousand Acres*, a transplant of Shakespeare's *King Lear* to contemporary America. It chronicles the bitter family feud unleashed when an aging farmer decides to turn his land over to his three daughters. Not far away, Louise Erdrich, part Chippewa Indian, has written some powerful pieces of fiction set in North Dakota, homing in on the tangled lives of Native American families. She is one of the progenitors of a younger group of Native American writers on the plains and in the West that includes Susan Power, Linda Hogan and Sherman Alexie.

In a more popular vein, Larry McMurtry, a fixture on the bestseller lists, has borne witness to the perambulations of Texas history from the frontier to the freeway, and as his characters shift their bases to Las Vegas and Hollywood, he changes his settings as well. Meanwhile, Texas' ethnic side is being given strong voice by Sandra Cisneros. Her short fiction, collected in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, about Mexican Americans in San Antonio and other border communities dovetails neatly with her first anthology, *The House on Mango Street*, centered on a young Hispanic-American girl in Chicago.

Another "border" writer worth noting is Douglas C. Jones, one of the nation's most underrated novelists. He has masterfully traced the westward push and disappearance of the frontier in a series of profoundly evocative novels centering mostly on one family, following its members from the mid-19th century to the 1930s, across a stretch of land from Tennessee to the Continental Divide (the Rocky Mountains). Other Southern writers of note include Bobbie Ann Mason, one of the more rooted chroniclers of contemporary family life in the state of Kentucky, and

Introduction

Mississippi's Lewis Nordan, a discovery of Algonquin Books, whose novels are principally linked to the Civil War and the advent of integration.



Gravelly Range at the foot of Black Butte, Madison County, Montana

The land straddling the Rockies has become a fertile literary tract. Cormac McCarthy can be found there, exploring the Southwest in several of his novels after transplanting himself from Tennessee. This reclusive writer with a limitless imagination has only recently gotten his due in the marketplace. Generally considered the rightful heir to the Southern Gothic tradition, McCarthy is as intrigued by the wildness of the terrain as he is by human savagery and unpredictability. Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko, born and raised in New Mexico, has gained a large general audience through her fiction, particularly *The Almanac of the Dead*. It offers a panorama of the region, from ancient tribal migrations to present-day drug runners and corrupt real estate developers reaping profits by misusing the land (a theme frequently explored by mystery writer Carl Hiaasen with Florida as the backdrop). Silko's work is a perfect complement to the thrillers of Tony Hillerman, of Santa Fe, whose detective

stories feature two low-key Navajo policemen as protagonists. John Nichols, with affection, good humor and intelligence, has treated the cultural heritage and sensibilities of ethnic New Mexico in a lauded trilogy, including, most notably, *The Milgaro Beanfield War*. And Hispanic-American novelist/poet Rudolfo Anaya adds themes of mysticism and spirituality to the literature of this region.

Something about Montana, to the north, must be special to produce such a rich and diverse lode of writing talent. The rugged fictive narratives of Ivan Doig, including a family trilogy, center on what he describes as "the westering expanse of this continent." His books, such as *English Creek* and *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, are complemented by the minimalist fiction and nonfiction writings of Rick Bass, which revolve around mountains and wilderness, and the disaffected, rootless antiheroes of Thomas McGuane's novels. Add to these writers Native American poet novelist James Welch, who details the struggles of the members of his ethnic group to find meaning within the historical tensions in their lives.

For decades, two writers personified the Far West, specifically California. Wallace Stegner, an Iowa native, spent the bulk of his life in various locales between the Rockies and the Pacific Ocean. He had a regional outlook even before it was in vogue, and many writers today look to him as their progenitor/mentor. His first major work, *The Big Rock Candy Mountain* (1943), chronicles a family caught up in the American Dream in its Western sensibility in the aftermath of the disappearance of the frontier. The epic ranges from Minnesota in the Midwest to Washington in the Northwest, and concerns itself with "that place of impossible loveliness that pulled the whole nation westward," in Stegner's words. In 1972, he won the Pulitzer Prize for *Angle of Repose*,

a reflection of the spirit of place in the personality of a woman illustrator and chronicler of the Old West. Stegner's untimely death in an automobile accident in 1993 robbed American literature of an artist in his productive golden years.

Complementing Stegner over time has been Joan Didion, journalist and novelist, who put contemporary California on the map in her 1968 nonfiction volume, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, and in her incisive, shocking 1971 novel about the aimlessness of the Hollywood scene, *Play it as it Lays*. In recent books she has moved to other areas. Her role as a California writer has been partly assumed by several younger talents, among them Lisa See, who has recorded the turbulent history of Asian migration to California and the West Coast, and two mystery writers, Sue Grafton, who conveys the sense of languor of the beach communities of present-day southern California, and Walter Mosley, whose African-American detective hero probes his cases against the tapestry of post-World War II Los Angeles. Then, too, other ethnics, specifically Asian-Americans like Amy Tan and Fae Myenne Ng and (with an East Coast setting) Gish Jen and Chang-Rae Lee use "place" as the background for explorations of their hyphenated status.

Far to the northwest in Oregon and Washington, a spirit of place abides in the writings of naturalist Barry Lopez and novelist/essayist David Guterson. Guterson, in fact, has become something of a cult favorite, with the continuing success of his first novel, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, a study of the events surrounding a murder trial of a Japanese-American fisherman on a remote island off the coast of the state of Washington. And Sherman Alexie, who finds great joy and enchantment in his Native American tradition, has been

tabbed as one of the more promising young writers of today. Way offshore, Hawaii's literary expansion is apparent in the works of Garrett Hongo, particularly his memoir, *Volcano*, and the offbeat fiction of Lois-Ann Yamanaka.

Two parallel literary forms rooted today in "place" deserve mention. The linkage of one – poetry – to that sensibility is inherent in the art form. Poets have minimal time to gain readers' attention, as opposed to writers of fiction or nonfiction, who enjoy the luxuries of paragraphs and pages, and so a sense of place, where appropriate, invariably comes into play. In the past, the United States boasted of Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg; today, the roster of poets attuned to "place" includes Amy Clampitt, W.S. Merwin and Gary Snyder.

Drama, though, is a more interesting case in point. To a significant degree, the expansion of the sense of place in contemporary theater can be directly attributed to the growth of the regional theater movement. These nonprofit institutions that have become centers of culture on the urban and suburban scene, mostly since the mid-1960s, have the National Endowment for the Arts – and expanded corporate support – to thank. And with the establishment of first-rate troupes outside the traditional New York City hub, in places like New Haven and Hartford, Connecticut, and Louisville, Kentucky a parallel surfacing of gifted young dramatists has transpired.

One wonders what American theater and literature, would be like today without the coruscating, fragmented society depicted in the works of Sam Shepard; the monosyllabic, staccato Chicago street talk of David Mamet; the range of 20th-century life experienced by the heroes and heroines of August Wilson's continuing play cycle; the introspective

Introduction

glimpses into Midwestern lives and concerns reflected by Lanford Wilson; and the Southern eccentricities of Beth Henley. Whereas their progenitors – Eugene O'Neill, William Inge and Tennessee Williams – directed their plays at the centralized theater audience of New York City, the newer dramatists are shaped and nurtured within their regions and others before facing that alien urban stage.

So many writers are bringing their own uncommon impressions to American literature. They are impassioned as they describe and analyze for readers the world over what they see on the surface of and beneath the landscape and beyond the horizon. Literally and figuratively, they are bringing new hues, new perspectives and new meaning through literature to the places in their hearts across the United States.



A Literature of Place

by Barry Lopez

In the United States in recent years, a kind of writing variously called "nature writing" or "landscape writing" has begun to receive critical attention, leading some to assume that this is a relatively new kind of work. In fact, writing that takes into account the impact nature and place have on culture is one of the oldest – and perhaps most singular – threads in American literature. Herman Melville in *Moby Dick*, Henry David Thoreau, of course, and novelists such as Willa Cather, John Steinbeck and William Faulkner come quickly to mind and, more recently, Peter Matthiessen, Wendell Berry, Wallace Stegner, and the poets W.S. Merwin, Amy Clampitt and Gary Snyder.

If there is anything different in this area of North American writing – and I believe there is – it is the hopeful tone it frequently strikes in an era of cynical detachment and its explicitly dubious view of technological progress and even of capitalism.

The real topic of nature writing, I think, is not nature but the evolving structure of communities from which nature has been removed, often as a consequence of modern economic development. (A recent conference at the Library of Congress in Washington, "Watershed: Writers, Nature and Community," focused on this kind of writing. It was the largest literary conference ever held at the Library. Sponsors, in addition to the Library, were Poet Laureate Robert Hass and The Orion Society of Great Barrington, Massachusetts.) It is writing concerned further with the biological and spiritual fate of those communities. It also assumes that the fate of humanity and nature are inseparable. Nature writing in the United States merges here, I think, with other types of post-colonial writing, particularly that found in Commonwealth countries. In numerous essays nature writing addresses the problem of

spiritual collapse in the West, and like post-colonial literatures it is in search of a modern human identity that lies beyond nationalism and material wealth.

This is a huge, not to say unwieldy topic, and different writers approach it in vastly different ways. The classic struggle of writers to separate truth and illusion, to distinguish between roads to heaven and detours to hell knows only continuance, not end or solution. But I sense collectively now in writing in the United States the emergence of a concern for the world outside the self. It is as if someone had opened the door to a stuffy and too-much-studied room and shown us a great horizon where once there had been only walls.

I want to concentrate on a single aspect of this phenomenon – geography – but in doing so I hope to hew to a larger line of truth. I want to talk about geography as a shaping force, not a subject. Another way critics describe nature writing is to call it "the literature of place." A specific and particular setting for human experience and endeavor is, indeed, central to the work of many nature writers. I would say a sense of place is also critical to the development of a sense of morality and of human identity.

After setting out a few thoughts about place, I'd like to say something about myself as one writer who returns again and again to geography, as the writers of another generation once returned repeatedly to Freud and psychoanalysis.

It is my belief that a human imagination is shaped by the architectures it encounters at an early age. The visual landscape, of course, or the depth, elevation and hues of a cityscape play a part here, as does the way sunlight

everywhere etches lines to accentuate forms. But the way we imagine is also affected by streams of scent flowing faint or sharp in the larger oceans of air; by what the composer John Luther Adams calls the sonic landscape; and by an awareness of how temperature and humidity rise and fall in a place over a year.

My imagination was shaped by the exotic nature of water in a dry California valley; by the sound of wind in the crowns of eucalyptus trees; by the tactile sensation of sheened earth, turned in furrows by a gang plow; by banks of saffron, mahogany, and scarlet cloud piled above a field of alfalfa at dusk; by encountering the musk from orange blossoms at the edge of an orchard; by the aftermath of a Pacific storm crashing a hot, flat beach.

Added to the nudge of these sensations were an awareness of the height and breadth of the sky and an awareness of the geometry and force of the wind. Both perceptions grew directly out of my efforts to raise pigeons and from the awe I felt before them as they maneuvered in the air. They permanently gave me a sense of the vertical component of life.

I became intimate with the elements of that particular universe. They fashioned me, and I return to them regularly in essays and stories in order to clarify or explain abstractions or to strike contrasts. I find the myriad relationships in that universe comforting, forming a “coherence” of which I once was a part.

If I were to try to explain the process of becoming a writer, I could begin by saying that the comforting intimacy I knew in that California valley erected in me a kind of story I wanted to tell, a pattern I wanted to invoke, in countless ways. And I would add to this the two things

that were most profoundly magical to me as a boy: animals and language. It’s easy to see why animals might seem magical. Spiders and birds are bound differently than we are by gravity. Many wild creatures travel unerringly through the dark. And animals regularly respond to what we, even at our most attentive, cannot discern.

It’s harder to say why language seemed magical, but I can be precise about this. The first book I read was *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. I still have the book. Underlined in it in pen are the first words I could recognize: *the, a, stop, to go, to see*. I can pick up the book today and recall my first feelings like a slow, silent detonation: words I heard people speak I was now able to perceive as marks on a page. I, myself, was learning to make these same marks on ruled paper. It seemed as glorious and mysterious as a swift flock of tumbler pigeons exploiting the invisible wind.

I can see my life prefigured in those two kinds of magic: the uncanny lives of creatures different from me (and, later, of cultures different from my own) and the twinned desires to go, to see. I became a writer who travels and one who focuses mostly, to be succinct, on what logical positivists sweep aside.

My travel is often to remote places – Antarctica, the Tanami Desert in central Australia, northern Kenya. In these places I depend on my own wits and resources but rely heavily and just as often on the knowledge of interpreters: archaeologists, field scientists, anthropologists. Eminent among such helpers are indigenous people, and I can quickly give you three reasons for my dependence on their insights. As a rule, indigenous people pay much closer attention to nuance in the physical world. They see more, and from a paucity of evidence, thoroughly

observed, they can deduce more. Second, their history in a place, both tribal and personal, is typically deep. These histories create a temporal dimension in what is otherwise only a spatial landscape. Third, indigenous people tend to occupy the same moral universe as the landscape they sense.

Over time I have come to think of these three qualities – intimate attention; a storied relationship to place rather than a solely sensory awareness of it; and living in some sort of ethical unity with a place – as a fundamental human defense against loneliness. If you're intimate with a place, a place with whose history you're familiar, and you establish an ethical conversation with it, the implication that follows is this: the place knows you're there. It feels you. You will not be forgotten, cut off, abandoned.

As a writer I want to ask myself: How can you obtain this? How can you occupy a place and also have it occupy you? How can you find such a reciprocity? The key, I think, is to become vulnerable to a place. If you open yourself up, you can build intimacy. Out of such intimacy will come a sense of belonging, a sense of not being isolated in the universe.

My question – how to secure this – is not idle. I want to be concrete about how to actually enter a local geography. (We often daydream, I think, about entering childhood landscapes that dispel our anxiety. We court these feelings for a few moments in a park sometimes or during an afternoon in the woods.) Keeping this simple and practical, my first suggestion would be to be silent. Put aside the bird book, an analytic frame of mind, any compulsion to identify, and sit still. Concentrate instead on *feeling* a place, on using the sense of proprioception.

Where in this volume of space are you situated? What is spread out behind you is as important as what you see before you. What lies beneath you is as relevant as what stands on the horizon. Actively use your ears to imagine the acoustical space you occupy. How does birdsong ramify here? Through what air is it moving? Concentrate on smells in the belief that you *can* smell water and stone. Use your hands to get the heft and texture of a place – the tensile strength in a willow branch, the moisture in a pinch of soil, the different nap of leaves. Open the vertical line of this place by consciously referring the color and form of the sky to what you see across the ground. Look *away* from what you want to scrutinize to gain a sense of its scale and proportion. Be wary of any obvious explanation for the existence of a color or a movement. Cultivate a sense of complexity, the sense that another landscape exists beyond the one you can subject to analysis.

The purpose of such attentiveness is to gain intimacy, to rid yourself of assumption. It should be like a conversation with someone you're attracted to, a person you don't want to send away by making too much of yourself. Such conversations, of course, can take place simultaneously on several levels. And they may easily be driven by more than simple curiosity. The compelling desire, as in human conversation, may be for a sustaining or informing relationship.

A succinct way to describe the frame of mind one should bring to a landscape is to say it rests on the distinction between imposing and proposing one's views. With a sincere proposal you hope to achieve an intimate, reciprocal relationship that will feed you in some way. To impose your views from the start is to truncate such a possibility, to preclude understanding.

A Literature of Place

Many of us, I think, long to become the companion of a place, not its authority, nor its owner. And this brings me to a closing point. Perhaps you wonder, as I do, why over the last few decades people in Western countries have become so anxious about the fate of undeveloped land and concerned about losing the intelligence of people who've kept intimate relationships with those places. I don't know where your thinking has led you, but I believe this curiosity about good relations with a particular stretch of land is directly related to speculation that it may be more important to human survival now to be in love than to be in a position of power. It may be more important now to enter into an ethical and reciprocal relationship with everything around us than to continue to work toward the sort of control of the physical world that, until recently, we aspired to.

The simple issue of our biological plausibility, our chance for biological survival, has become so precarious, so basic a question, that finding a way out of the predicament – if one is to be had – is imperative. It calls on our collective imaginations with an urgency we've never known before. We are in need not just of another kind of logic, another way of knowing, but of a radically different philosophical sensibility.

When I was a boy, running through orange groves in southern California, watching wind swirl in a grove of blue gum and swimming ecstatically in the foam of Pacific breakers, I had no such thoughts as these imperatives. I was content to watch a brace of pigeons fly across an azure sky, rotating on an axis that to this day I don't think I could draw. My comfort, my sense of inclusion in the small universe I inhabited, came from an appreciation of and a participation in all that I saw, smelled, tasted

and heard. That sense of inclusion not only assuaged my sense of loneliness as a child but also confirmed my imagination. And it is that single thing, the power of the human imagination to extrapolate from an odd handful of things – a faint movement in a copse of trees, a wingbeat, the damp cold of field stones at night – to make from all this a pattern – the human ability to make a story, that fixed in me a sense of hope.

We keep each other alive with our stories. We need to share them as much as we need to share food. We also need good companions. One of the most extraordinary things about the land is that it knows this, and it compels language from some of us, so that as a community we may actually speak of it.

Barry Lopez is a writer and essayist specializing in natural history writing. He is the author of several volumes of short fiction, including the *Desert Notes/River Notes/Field Notes* trilogy, as well as works of nonfiction such as *Of Wolves and Men* and National Book Award winner *Arctic Dreams*. He lives along a river in a rural sector of Oregon.

From Place to Place: *Writers on the American Road* by Sven Birkerts

In the second half of this century, the United States became a more mobile society, as citizens first shifted from urban to suburban settings and then began transposing their lives more readily from one part of the country to another. Writers, like other Americans, naturally have been part of this shift. This article speaks to that development and its relationship to "place."

"The strengths of American literature," writes English critic George Steiner, "have, characteristically, revealed themselves in regional clusters and local constellations." Steiner means, I suspect, that given the nature of our history – the colonization, the slow movement westward – the artistic traditions of the United States are bound up significantly with locale. Looking back, he offers the example of what he calls the "Hawthorne-Melville-Emerson-James grouping." Never mind that Nathaniel Hawthorne set work in Italy, Herman Melville wrote vibrantly of the South Seas, and Henry James arranged most of his high-toned trysts in the capital cities of Europe – Steiner's point stands. American writers, like all writers, write about what they know best, and one of the things they know best is the world around them. Our literature is suffused with place, and places – from James Agee's Knoxville, Tennessee, and Louise Erdrich's Dakota plains to John Steinbeck's Salinas, California, and Mark Twain's Mississippi River.

Times have changed. We find ourselves, quite suddenly, living in a watershed period, when all basic terms and traditions are being revised by the ubiquity and instantaneity of electronic communications. Fewer and fewer people now grow up with roots deep in a community or region and with a grounding in local lore. Population studies show that we have become increasingly multiregional; like Bedouins, we

are accustomed to breaking camp and moving on. That a writer might nowadays live out a long life in one place – as Eudora Welty has in Jackson, Mississippi – is almost unthinkable. More in keeping with the spirit of our times is the experience of Richard Ford, also from Jackson, who moves steadily from place to place and fills his work with a shifting array of settings.

Moreover, place itself seems to be changing. We are now deep in the era of homogeneity. The architecture of our shopping malls and housing developments obliterates particularity and helps insure that wherever we go we will find, as Gertrude Stein put it, no there there. Our neighbors are now mainly people who have come in from elsewhere, and when we communicate with our soulmates and our kin it is less and less often in person and more often by telephone and electronic mail. Whatever the benefits of electronic communications, they do not foster a sense of geographical rootedness.

We might expect, then, that American literature would mirror this epochal transition, with characters coming unrooted and circumstances manifesting estrangement and blandness. And so, to a degree, it does, though rarely in works by writers of the literary mainstream. Looking to the minimalism of the 1970s and 1980s, or the postmodern novels of Don DeLillo, Paul Auster, Richard Powers and David Foster Wallace, we could easily theorize a dissolution of the immediacies of place. When DeLillo writes, in *White Noise*, "we walked across two parking lots to the main structure in the Mid-Village Mall, a ten-story building arranged around a center court of waterfalls, promenades and gardens," we realize that we could be anywhere in the United States. And that's the point.

But we also find a striking and powerful countervailing trend: Writers and readers alike appear to be bewitched by place and, to an only slightly lesser degree, by the past. Indeed, the two are very often in combination. Consider the enormous recent popularity of David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, Larry McMurtry's *Lonesome Dove*, Robert James Waller's *The Bridges of Madison County* and, in an adjacent genre, autobiography, Mary Karr's *The Liars' Club*. The three novels, all looking back some decades, are place-saturated – Puget Sound, the Great Western Plains and rural Iowa are as essential as any characters or narrative turns. We could not imagine Mary Karr's memoirs unfolding anywhere but in east Texas.

Alongside those works from our more recent bestseller lists, we find a number of arguably more estimable examples: Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing*, William Kennedy's *Albany*, New York, books, Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres*, Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Beloved*, and the works of E. Annie Proulx.

Proulx, more than most, seems possessed by the possibilities of regional proteanism. Where her prize-winning novel, *The Shipping News*, inhabited the rocky promontories and eccentric inlets of the Maritime Provinces, her latest novel, *Accordion Crimes*, spans a period from the 1890s to the present and traverses with authoritative detailing, American locales as different from each other as New Orleans, rural Maine, Montana, and Missouri.

Proulx works her sentences with the keenest specificity, feeding the appetitive senses. "Through the rain-streeced windshield," she writes,

Maine appeared as alternating plats of spruce, slash and clear-cut, withered acres of poplar and cherry, rolled-up leaves like charred scraps of paper on the defoliated trees, dark, too, with rain, and roadside moose the shade of old butternut husks, darkness unrelieved by whatever pale strip the sky unrolled, the crippled rivers and chains of lakes bordered by tattered horizons.

The same authorial sensibility gives us, among a dozen settings, this impression of the Rio Grande Valley in Texas:

He dimly remembered standing beside someone, a man, not his father, in the tangled fragrance of guajillo, black mimosa, huisache, in the cedar elms and the ebonies, watching a dark blue snake twine among the tiny leaves.

These are but single sentences extracted from longer passages of evocation, but even here, in miniature, we register a sense of the author's intimacy of contact. The sinuosity of the prose itself suggests nuance and engagement. Nor is Proulx dealing just with the outermost particulars. The same sinuosity brings in the local inhabitants, their peculiarities of speech, their mannerisms and tics. For, of course, place is not fully place for us until it has expressed itself in human terms.

Proulx worked for some time as a journalist, and in an interview with Amanda Bichsell she describes how she is always researching, filling notebooks with her observations about landscape, regional customs and the like. "That's usually the part I do first," Proulx explains, "construct the surroundings. The weather, the shape of the land, the kinds of streets and roads, the food we eat ... the climate,

the wind, the rock. All of those things are incredibly important in our lives, so when those things are established in a novel, for me, the characters literally step out of the landscape."

Some might object that this is place researched, not lived; that these are details seized by an outsider – an anthropologist – and arranged to make a literary effect. But it would be an objection to a practice that goes back to the beginnings of the art and remains the norm today. Richard Ford, recently the winner of the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for *Independence Day*, by his own tally has lived in fourteen homes in nine states and has set his deeply observed "realist" stories and novels in most of the time zones. Then there is William Vollmann, prolific *enfant terrible* of contemporary letters, who thrusts himself into exotic locales in his frenzied research missions. Thus far, he has done Afghanistan, Vietnam, the Canadian tundra and San Francisco's Tenderloin district – and he is not yet forty.

Obviously, then, there is a range – different kinds of immersions practiced by different kinds of writers for different reasons. Proulx is nothing like Ford; Ford is nothing like Vollmann, and none of these relative outsiders is like, say, Andre Dubus, the New Hampshire writer who has put in a long career studying the fraying blue-collar world of his Merrimack Valley or Larry Brown, who lives in Faulkner's own Oxford, Mississippi, and writes about that region with an insider's special center of gravity.

But what exactly is the distinction between the rendition of places visited and places known profoundly? Moreover, if there is a distinction, who will discern it? Not only are most readers themselves outsiders to what they are reading about, but reader and writer alike are subject

to the age-old variability of perception. Subjectivity rules this art as it rules every other. No two, or ten, writers will ever see the same Paris, or New York or Tuscaloosa. Unless the artist commits some egregious misstep – adorning a northern facade with bougainvillea, say – few will arch the skeptical eyebrow.

The purist disagrees. Sure, craft and imagination can go a long way, and ignorance on the part of the reader can excuse a great deal, but nothing can feel as right, as natural, as possession from within. When an author knows a world in his or her very fiber, the difference is clear. It's like listening to real blues after a diet of well-intentioned imitators. Eudora Welty, Peter Taylor, John Updike, Rudolfo Anaya are writers who know their people and locales absolutely. Reading them, we feel that knowing, not just through this or that detail of setting, but on every level. We sense the author's confidence from the rhythm and the diction. We note the rightness, the ease of characters in their settings. They belong.

Cormac McCarthy is one writer who puts these notions of insider/outsider to an interesting test. Raised mainly in eastern Tennessee, he set all of his early novels in his native region. Here was locale reflected from the inside by a writer overtly interested in the particularities of place. A passage from his first novel, *The Orchard Keeper*, illustrates this:

In late summer the mountain bakes under a sky of pitiless blue. The red dust of the orchard road is like powder from a brick kiln. You can't hold a scoop of it in your hand. Hot winds come up the slope from the valley like a rancid breath, redolent of milkweed, hoglots, rotting vegetation. The red clay banks along the road are crested with withered honeysuckle, pea vines dried

and sheathed in dust. By late July the corn patches stand parched and sere, stalks askew in defeat. All greens pale and dry. Clay cracks and splits in endless microcataclysm and the limestone lies about the eroded land like schools of sunning dolphin, gray channeled backs humped at the infernal sky.

McCarthy already was a mature writer when he left Appalachia and moved to El Paso, Texas. Ten years later, he published *Blood Meridian*, the first of his novels to use a Southwest setting. Since then he has written the first two tales of his projected border trilogy, *All the Pretty Horses* and *The Crossing*. Both have been celebrated for, among other things, their powerful presentations of place. And, indeed, looking closely at the following passage, comparing it with the earlier description, can we find any sign at all that this is not the prose of a man who has grown up in this very place, absorbing it with mother's milk?

The creek was clear and green with trailing moss braided over the gravel bars. They rode slowly up through the open country among scrub mesquite and nopal. They crossed from Tom Green County into Coke County. They crossed the old Schoonover road and they rode up through broken hills dotted with cedar where the ground was cobbled with traprock and they could see snow on the thin blue ranges a hundred miles to the north.

The answer that McCarthy provides to the dichotomy of insider/outsider may be that writers and diarists who are responsive to the nuances of place are likely to be attuned to these nuances wherever they find themselves.

There is no way to generalize about the presence of place in contemporary writing except to say

that it is, against expectations, vividly prominent. This prominence is no great mystery. The changes in the world we live in – the estranging velocities, the electronic infiltration of the most basic transactions – are one thing; our psychological responsiveness is quite another. The outer and inner experiences are in disequilibrium. We patrol the Internet, but what we crave are the simple pleasures of a good face-to-face talk. "Only connect," wrote E.M. Forster, and we know exactly what he meant.

Here literature takes on its compensatory role. If the daily round finds us strung out and distracted, we are not likely to pick up a novel looking for more of the same. And if we feel, as I believe we increasingly do, that we have come unmoored in space and time, that we are not claimed by community or a sense of historical participation as our forbears were, then we will find ways to remedy that lack.

Fiction is our supreme sense-making enterprise, our way of entering other lives while processing our own experience at the same time. What it seems to be offering us in the United States now, in happy abundance, is two things: a chance to understand the terms of the trade we are making – giving up geographical rootedness for mobility and electronic reach – and an opportunity to reap some of the satisfactions of a prior way of life, if only by proxy.

Sven Birkerts is the author of *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age*. He has recently edited *Tolstoy's Dictaphone: Technology and the Muse* for Graywolf Press. His literary criticism appears in numerous journals and newspapers.

Voices From the Regions

by Michael J. Bandler

Words sweep across the pages of American literature, bringing into view sights and sounds and images. For those outside the United States, who can only imagine what visual splendors lie behind the undulating syllables "Florida" or "South Carolina" or the staccato rhythms of "Texas" or "Massachusetts," American writers can be wondrous escorts. As authors delineate the places they know, from the pristine past of memory or perhaps from their everyday glimpses of a harsher present reality, they reveal, more intimately and more profoundly than travel guidebooks, the individual tiles of "place" which, when taken together, form a mosaic of the United States.

Readers might be transported across an ocean to the big city – such as the teeming streets of New York – and find enchantment there. In *World's Fair*, E.L. Doctorow turns a sanitation company's water wagon from a utility truck cleaning streets into a vehicular sorcerer, and the stream it leaves in its path becomes a newfound urban waterway:

The street was black and shining. In the raging course of water flowing swiftly along the curb I tossed ... [an] ice cream stick. Other children had appeared and dropped in their sticks and twigs. We followed our boats back down the block as they turned and twisted in the current, followed them down the gentle incline of Eastburn Avenue to their doom, a waterfall pouring into the sewer grate at the corner of 173rd Street.

David Guterson, who has gained recognition mostly for depicting the Pacific Northwest, also has vivid recollections of his boyhood in a small Rhode Island town in the Northeast. In one of the stories in his collection, *The Country Ahead of Us, The Country Behind*, he presents Wilkes as a place

where the light in early winter seems to roll off the backs of the clouds and ignite along the waters of ponds and millstreams, and the cold rot smell of the barren forests comes ghostly out of the tough earth, and the gold air and sky have a muted volume of both space and spirit broken only by the reach of church spires, soft-white and giant against the slow maple hills.

What cuts deeply for Doctorow and Guterson – memory – is complemented by what viscerally affects Pat Conroy, and his autobiographical protagonist, Tom Wingo, in *The Prince of Tides*. "My wound is geography," he observes, adding that "it is also my anchorage, my port of call:"

I was born and raised on a Carolina sea island and I carried the sunshine of the low-country, inked in dark gold, on my back and shoulders. As a boy I was happy above the channels, navigating a small boat between the sandbars with their quiet nation of oysters exposed on the brown flats at the low watermark. I knew every shrimper by name, and they knew me and sounded their horns when they passed me fishing in the river.

Across the American landscape, in the high elevations of Montana brought to life by novelist Ivan Doig, nature and wildlife also have a role to play. In *Dancing at the Rascal Fair*, he writes:

We came to the Two Medicine River in sunny mid-afternoon and were met by gusts of west wind that shimmered the strong new green of the cottonwood and aspen groves into the lighter tint of the leaves, bottom sides, so that tree after tree seemed to be trying to turn itself inside out. In the moving air as we and the sheep went down the high bluff, a crow lifted off straight up and lofted backwards, letting the gale loop him upward. I called to Varick my theory that

maybe wind and not water had bored this colossal open tunnel the Two Medicine flowed through. And then we bedded the sheep, under the tall trees beside the river.

Midway between the Carolinas and Montana, the nation's endlessly flat midsection reveals itself in Jane Smiley's description of a family's vast spread, in *A Thousand Acres*:

A mile to the east, you could see three silos that marked the northeastern corner, and if you raked your gaze from the silos to the house and barn, then back again, you would take in the immensity of the piece of land my father owned, six hundred forty acres, a whole section, paid for, no encumbrances, as flat and fertile, black, friable, and exposed as any piece of land on the face of the earth.

Writing in and about the southwestern United States, Rudolfo Anaya brings the landscape of his native New Mexico into precise focus promptly in the opening paragraph of *Bless Me, Ultima*:

Ultima came to stay with us the summer I was almost seven. When she came the beauty of the llano unfolded before my eyes, and the gurgling waters of the river sang to the hum of the turning earth. The magical time of childhood stood still, and the pulse of the living earth pressed its mystery into my living blood. She took my hand, and the silent, magic powers she possessed made beauty from the raw, sun-baked llano, the green river valley, and the blue bowl which was the white sun's home. My bare feet felt the throbbing earth and my body trembled with excitement. Time stood still, and it shared with me all that had been, and all that was to come.

Each writer has one's own take on "place." For many, including Richard Russo, who con-

centrates on the small towns of the Northeast, place is denoted by society. In Russo's case, the world he has known is in decline. He wistfully conveys this turn of events again and again in his books, as in this passage from *The Risk Pool*, set in mythical Mohawk, New York:

Summer had flown. Fourth of July. Mohawk Fair, Eat the Bird, and Winter. ... Indeed, a great deal of territory had been surrendered since our ancestors had stolen the land and erected white churches with felled trees. Up and down the Mohawk valley the green world had gone brown and gray, and the people who lived beneath the smokestacks and in the shadows of the tanneries were scared that even the brown and gray might not last. They didn't know what came after brown and gray, and neither did I. One thing was for sure. Each Mohawk Fair was sadder and grayer than the last. And winter followed. With a capital W.

This sociological treatment of place finds its way as well into the writings of Ward Just, a foreign correspondent-turned-novelist whose trenchant tales of Washington life penetrate the emotions that pervade the nation's capital. In *Nicholson at Large*, he blends Baedeker with commentary as he observes:

He swept past the Washington Monument and into Rock Creek Park, the Jefferson Memorial to his left; the last time he'd seen Mr. Jefferson, cobwebs hung from his marble nose. In Washington, the monuments did not change. Landmarks were where they always were. The people changed but the buildings remained the same. He thought that in some ways the buildings and what they represented were more important than the people, they were manifestations of continuity. To those who lived in Washington they were apparitions from a submerged past and therefore an affirmation.

Similarly, John Berendt strikes at the heart of Savannah, Georgia, in his enduring nonfiction bestseller, *Midnight in the Garden of Good & Evil*. He observes that although the city had enchanted him, he also had come to understand the principal reason for its “self-imposed estrangement from the outside world,” the fact that it was determined “to preserve a way of life it believed to be under siege from all sides.” He writes:

For me, Savannah’s resistance to change was its saving grace. The city looked inward, sealed off from the noises and distractions of the world at large. It grew inward, too, and in such a way that its people flourished like hothouse plants tended by an indulgent gardener. The ordinary became extraordinary. Eccentrics thrived. Every nuance and quirk of personality achieved greater brilliance in that lush enclosure than would have been possible anywhere else in the world.

Ultimately, though, most writers who concentrate on a sense of place view their surroundings from a visual perspective. Thus, to Anne Rivers Siddons, who normally limns the southeastern section of the nation in her fiction, Palm Springs, California, emerges in her novel *Fault Lines* as

a great swathe of green, a dense emerald prayer rug, flung down in all the tawny, wild-animal colors of the desert. ... Palms, jacarandas, hibiscus, lantana and a great many other exotic flora for which I had no name yet, formed bowers and islands in the almost continuous velvet carpet that ... was a network of golf courses without parallel in the United States.

Even so, even when the focus is on description, a drop of fantasy invariably dapples the para-

graph. In *Volcano*, Hawaiian-born writer Garrett Hongo’s memoir of childhood, the title village

is a big chunk of the sublime I’d been born to – the craters and ancient firepit and huge black seas of hardened lava, the rain forest lush with all varieties of ferns, orchids, exotic gingers and wild lilies, the constant rain and sun-showers all dazzled me, exalted me. ... There was something magical about it – a purgatorial mount in the middle of the southern ocean – and there was something of it native to me, an insinuation of secret and violent origins and an aboriginal past.

And, composing her thoughts from the hushed beauty and solitude of an island in the north central United States, between Canada and the state of Minnesota, Linda Hogan, a Native American poet and novelist reflects in *Solar Storms* on what it means when one is situated within “the hands of nature”:

In these places things turned about and were other than what they seemed. In silence, I pulled through the water and saw how a river appeared through rolling fog and emptied into the lake. One day, a full-tailed fox moved inside the shadows of trees, then stepped into a cloud. New senses came to me. I was equal to the animals, hearing as they heard, moving as they moved, seeing as they saw.

Finally, the gifted writer can bring it all together – nature, place, society – with the wisp of nostalgia that always accompanies memory. Barbara Kingsolver reveals this in the title essay from her collection, *High Tide in Tucson*. Musing about the impact of having transplanted herself from rural Kentucky to the heat of Tucson, Arizona, she reveals that she still hears the “secret tides” of the creek back home:

Voices From the Regions

As I force tomatoes to grow in the drought-stricken hardpan of my strange backyard yet I never cease to long in my bones for what I left behind. I open my eyes on every new day expecting that a creek will run through my backyard under broad-leafed maples,

and that my mother will be whistling in the kitchen. Behind the howl of coyotes, I'm listening for meadowlarks.

In a larger sense, aren't we all?

ASSET *The (1997/98) Yellow Catalog*

The 1997/98 ASSET catalog offers a variety of reasonably-priced teaching materials to individuals and institutions engaged in teaching English and American Studies. The new titles in this year's catalog are *Discover America*, and three American literary classics *The Red Badge of Courage*, *The Gift of the Magi*, and *To Build A Fire*. Over 50 books, pictures, maps, and audio cassettes on a wide variety of topics including American culture, history, literature, grammar, idioms, and teaching improvement are available.

For your free 1997/98 Yellow ASSET catalog, write to:

ASSET
American Embassy - USIS
Deichmanns Aue 29
53170 Bonn

Wheredunit?

by Michael J. Bandler

It could have happened anywhere: A woman is missing, along with a priceless artifact. A casual shooting turns out to be premeditated. An insurance racket needs to be unmasked. An innocent man is accused of a heinous murder.

Anywhere. Each one of the above is the strand on which to hang the kind of hard-boiled detective story that is a staple, indeed, a creation, of American culture. If the crimefighters fashioned by the Mickey Spillanes, John D. MacDonalds and Dashiell Hammetts of the past were scruffier versions of the classic European amateur and professional detectives created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers and others, then today's American cop represents something more: a reconciliation with "place."

The priceless object mentioned above happens to be an Anasazi pot from the concealed recesses of the Native American heartland, and two detectives of Navajo extraction conduct this investigation and others in the crime novels of Tony Hillerman. The casual shooting takes place in a crime-infested housing project in Boston, bringing a city cop invented by writer Robert B. Parker onto the case. The insurance scam is part of a whole tapestry of greed in the wake of natural disaster and ecological peril, recurring themes in the Florida-based comic thrillers of Carl Hiaasen. The "wrong man" in the murder probe is an inner-city amateur sleuth named "Easy" Rawlins, in the latest series of thrillers by Walter Mosley.

More than ever before in their history, police procedurals have become decidedly regional in their settings, outlooks and concerns. In the past, there were just a handful of "whodunit" writers like Californians Ross Macdonald and Hammett, Floridian John D. MacDonald, a writer or two from the urban streets like

Spillane, and John P. Marquand, a refined New England novelist, who devised a series of crime-solving episodes involving a respectable Asian sleuth, Mr. Moto. The focus in earlier books was on internal considerations, specifically the criminal mind. Though that remains true of many mystery novels today, a number of storytellers' outlooks have recently turned decidedly outward and now operate on a much broader canvas.

No longer is there a stereotypical detective on the prowl. Nor is there a conventional mystery writer. As a result, readers identify writers with their particular areas of operation much more readily than in the past. They look forward to getting some chills and, at the same time, learning about Native American culture and its preservation through Hillerman's books involving Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn and Officer Jim Chee of the Navajo Tribal Police. Preservation of a different type – environmental – in the face of storms and schemes on the Florida landscape is what drives Hiaasen to resolutely demarcate "good guys" and villains in his books. As for the speech patterns of characters George V. Higgins and James Lee Burke, could they be from anywhere but Boston and southern Louisiana?

For Hillerman, a former New Mexico journalist of German-American extraction and a journalism professor, the shift to fiction rooted in place about a quarter-century ago was natural given his passion for Native American culture. It was the cross-culturalization that intrigued him. The chance to portray the landscape followed alongside. Troubled by the limited awareness of that culture among the larger population, he once observed to an interviewer that he aimed to show how ancient ways "are still very much alive and are highly germane even to our ways."

In the spring when the snowpack melts a hundred miles away in the Chuska Mountains, Many Ruins carries a steady stream. In the late-summer thunderstorm season it rises and falls between a trickle and booming flash floods, which send boulders tumbling like marbles down its bottom. In late autumn it dries. The life that occupied it finds water then only in spring-fed potholes. From where he stood on the sandstone shelf above such a pothole, Leaphorn could see the second of the ruins Etcitty had described. Two ruins, in fact.

Whether dealing with Zuni tribal rituals or the contours and properties of the reservation terrain, Hillerman, in the words of one critic, Ralph B. Sipper, "Never loses his sense of place." That's equally true of Hiaasen, one of a number of south Florida reporters-turned-mystery novelists. Is it the climate or ecological peril or some of the clientele of the resort communities ("The criminals come to Florida for the same reason that everyone else comes to Florida – the weather's great and they blend in with the local riffraff so well," Hiaasen says) that has galvanized him as well as Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist Edna Buchanan and former newsman John Katzenbach and others towards crime fiction? Is it the uncertain natural forces that affect this region used to expecting the unexpected, with unpredictable damage potential? Whatever the case, schemers, polluters and developers come out the worst in his books, which are written with the passion of someone who remembers the ecology of Florida from his youth and has witnessed its decline. "Where are we?" an unsavory character asks the unlikely hero of Hiaasen's most recent tale, *Stormy Weather*, while huddled by a fire in a wooded creekside setting. "Middle of nowhere," is the response. "Why?" she asks. "Because," he answers, "there's no better place to be."

A couple of states westward, in Louisiana, James Lee Burke plies his trade through the persona of Dave Robicheaux, a New Orleans homicide detective. Pointing to earlier U.S. writers of "place" such as Stephen Crane, James T. Farrell, Flannery O'Connor and Ernest Hemingway as his principal influences, Burke contends that his literary philosophy is simple: "The character and the earth on which he stands are inseparable. He is shaped by the world around him." "A writer who writes with a causal attitude towards his protagonists is always going to indicate, in an oblique way, the *raison d'être* for the ethos of the character, by involving the reader in those causal relationships between environment and behavior," Burke elaborates. "But you do it with three-cushion shots [a billiard term referring to a sideways, rather than direct hit] – that's the art."

For one thing, Burke's novels reflect the diversity of the society in the bayous of Louisiana, with its Cajun and African-American influences. The hoary, ingrown political structure and remnants of the South in pre-civil rights days are strong presences. And yet, writing about Louisiana and New Orleans "just about as well as anyone ever has," according to literary critic Jonathan Yardley, Burke gets beyond politics and society to the uniqueness of the region. As another reviewer noted, he enables the reader to get that sense of place, to "smell the particular sweetness of banana trees and stagnant water, taste ... fried shrimp and cayenne pepper and thyme, watch pelicans rising against crimson sunsets."

On the other side of the continent, Walter Mosley lets his audience know, forthrightly, exactly where they are:

Southeast L.A. was palm trees and poverty; neat little lawns tended by the descendants of ex-slaves and massacred Indians. It was beautiful and wild; a place that was almost a nation, populated by lost peoples that were never talked about in the newspapers or seen on the TV. You might have read about freedom marchers; you might have heard about a botched liquor store robbery (if a white man was injured) – but you never heard about Tommy Jones growing the biggest roses in the world or how Fiona Roberts saved her neighbor by facing off three armed men with only the spirit of her God to guide her.

Mosley, all of whose Rawlins thrillers have a color in the titles (*Devil in a Blue Dress*, *Black Betty*, *White Butterfly*, *A Red Death*, *A Little Yellow Dog*), is a perceptive observer of society, specifically the African-American experience in Los Angeles' Watts district and elsewhere during the postwar boom in the aerospace industry in the 1950s, a time of great possibilities. It is a world as far removed from Raymond Chandler's Hollywood as Chandler's elegant detective Philip Marlowe is from Easy Rawlins, and the author's exploration of the southeastern neighborhood he remembers from his youth – rather than the rest of Los Angeles which he visited only occasionally – is by design. As for the ambivalence between inequity and potential, it is what fuels his work. As he told an interviewer a year ago, Los Angeles "is forever a point of discovery – discovering the people around you and discovering who you are."

Hillerman, Hiaasen, Burke and Mosley reflect the preoccupation with surroundings so prevalent in mystery writing. And, like a number of contemporary writers such as Richard Ford and Cormac McCarthy, have demonstrated their capacity to convey a sense of place even when removed from their home turf. Hillerman and George V. Higgins, the author of many Boston-

based crime sagas, have been equally effective when setting episodes or full novels in Washington, D.C. Elmore Leonard, whose settings range from Detroit, Michigan, to Florida, New Orleans and Los Angeles, cites such masters of place as John Steinbeck and John O'Hara as models.

Similarly, Mosley – temporarily taking leave of Easy Rawlins in mid-1995 to pen a non-genre novel, *RL's Dream* – painted an effective portrait, set in New York City, of an old African-American blues musician who recounts his life in flashback while dying of cancer. Conversely, Hispanic-American novelist Rudolfo Anaya penned his first mystery, *Zia Summer*, in 1995, followed in September 1996 by *Rio Grande Fall*, steeped in old New Mexican traditions. And Sherman Alexie, the gifted Native-American novelist, has just written his first thriller, *Indian Killer*, centering on a serial murderer amidst issues relating to Native Americans.

Whether today's crime novelist is peripatetic, like Leonard, or rooted in one spot like Sue Grafton, whose private eye Kinsey Millhone operates in a southern California beach community, the sense of place conveyed is keenly appreciated by the reader, who picks up on that relationship between environment and behavior that James Lee Burke summons. Even if the atmospherics are sociologically sobering rather than physically enthralling, there always exist possibilities and, as Walter Mosley notes, self-discoveries.

More than a half-century ago, Hemingway asserted, through one of his characters in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, that "the world is a fine place, and worth the fighting for." Many of America's crime novelists would agree.

Michael J. Bandler is a USIA staff writer.

Mark Twain:

America's Regional Original

by Henry B. Wonham

In 1895, Mark Twain, the great American novelist and essayist, spelled out some of the principles of his literary aesthetic with uncharacteristic candor. Building upon a variety of influences and upon his own rich experience as an author, Twain (the pseudonym Samuel Langhorne Clemens chose to use) located the key to literary creativity in a concept he called "absorption."

Specifically, he maintained, in "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," that the successful artist must be a regional specialist, who has endured

*years and years of unconscious absorption;
years and years of intercourse with the life
concerned; of living it, indeed; sharing*

*personally in its shames and prides, its joys
and griefs, its loves and hates, its prosperities
and reverses, its shows and shabbiness, its
deep patriotisms, its whirlwinds of political
passion, its adorations – of flag, and heroic
dead, and the glory of the national name.*

While the foreign writer can register and describe exterior scenes and events, he continued, only "the native novelist" can provide an accurate representation of the nation's interior experience, "its soul, its life, its speech, its thought." Literary creativity, according to Twain, depends on the unconscious accumulation of local knowledge, for the writer is ultimately less a creator than an "observer of peoples."



TOM SAWYER'S BAND OF ROBBERS.

The artist may travel, as Twain did compulsively throughout his career, but he has only one legitimate subject, only one reservoir of unconscious material from which to draw. When the observer of peoples is at home, "observing his own folk, he is often able to prove competency," Twain observed in his essay. "But history has shown that when he is abroad observing unfamiliar peoples the chances are heavily against him."



THE BREAKFAST-HORN.

This theoretical commitment to a local or regional perspective in literature is surprising, given the frequency with which Mark Twain ignored it. He had made his mark on the international literary scene in 1869 with *The Innocents Abroad*, his sensationally popular travel book, and returned to the genre in a number of successful works, including *A Tramp Abroad* (1880) and *Following the Equator* (1897). Moreover, for all his ruminations on the subject of literary nativism, Twain frequently employed foreign settings in his fiction: England in *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King*

Arthur's Court (1889); Africa in *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894); France in *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (1896); Switzerland and Austria in successive versions of "The Mysterious Stranger," to name but a few examples of his exotic backdrops.

Yet even if the observer of peoples did venture beyond the local scene in a surprising variety of works, Twain's defense of regionalism in "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us" rings true as an account of what is most distinctive about his art. As readers have generally agreed for more than 100 years, Mark Twain is at his best at the level of village life, where regional peculiarities directly inform his conceptions of setting character. Even an abbreviated catalog of his most unforgettable rural villages is as diverse as it is long, each local setting distinguished by its own highly wrought linguistic styles and social arrangements.

The roster includes Angel's Camp in his 1865 piece of short fiction, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," and Virginia City in *Roughing It* (1872). It ranges from St. Petersburg along the Mississippi River banks in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and Bricksville in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) to Dawson's Landing in *Pudd'n-head Wilson* (1894) and Hadleyburg in "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1899), as well as Eseldorf in Twain's posthumously published "Mysterious Stranger" manuscripts.

Within each of these isolated communities, subtle differences in speech and custom are charged with significance. Resistance or conformity to rigid social norms is expressed in barely noticeable variations of syntax and diction, marking a character like Huck Finn as a substandard speaker and a potentially subversive force in the old racist South or dis-

Mark Twain: America's Regional Original



STRIKING FOR THE BACK COUNTRY.

tinguishing a character like Pudd'nhead Wilson as an incipient member of the Southern political elite. As Twain intimates in the prefatory note which identifies the seven principal dialects employed in *Huckleberry Finn*, that novel's finest ironies are highly localized and depend on the author's intimate knowledge of regional particularities, his "unconscious absorption" of the soul, speech and thought of a specific American place. Through his mastery of such particularities, the regional writer gains access to universal rhythms of human nature, which are the essence, according to Twain, of the American novelist's art.

Few readers would disagree that Mark Twain excelled as a regional writer, one whose capacity for meaningful expression is inherently bound to a specific sense of place. There is much less agreement, however, over where, in particular, Twain's regional sensibilities lie. In fact, he enjoys the unique distinction of having been claimed by four different sectors of the United States as a spiritual native son.

Perhaps the most comprehensive effort to fix Twain's regional identity has come from the South, where scholars like Louis D. Rubin, Jr., Arlin Turner and Arthur Pettit have linked Twain's achievement to historical and psychological currents underlying the tradition

of Edgar Allan Poe, William Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren and Eudora Welty. Focusing on works like *Tom Sawyer*, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, the Southern claimants describe Twain's blend of nostalgia and disgust with the regions of his birth, noting that some of his finest work, like that of Faulkner, Warren and others, is rooted in a complex ambivalence about Southern culture, history and landscape.

Yet while Faulkner and many of his post-bellum compatriots seem almost tragically wedded to a disintegrating Southern milieu, Mark Twain wasted little time – and perhaps little thought – on Missouri after 1861, when he boarded a Nevada-bound stagecoach with his brother Orion, rather than fight for the Confederacy in the Civil War. At age 26, he was already a "desouthernized Southerner," in the words of William Dean Howells, a social commentator of the era.

Like the narrator of his irresistible Western book, *Roughing It*, Twain quickly abandoned his inappropriate Southern attire and assumptions, adopting instead the bohemian lifestyle of a self-professed "vagabondizing" Westerner. His five years in Nevada and California were a crucial period of growth and discovery, during which Twain embarked on a career in journalism that would have lasting impact on his literary style and sensibility. When he arrived in New York City in January 1867, his regional literary identity was firmly established in the Far West, where he had become known to readers as "The Sagebrush Bohemian" and "The Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope."

Numerous critics have insisted that Twain's literary achievement bears an unmistakably Western stamp. Yet he lived most of his adult life in the tidy Victorian splendor of Hartford,

Connecticut, and earnestly sought to be identified with New England's social and literary elites. The bumptious, rowdy Westerner



THE END. YOURS TRULY, HUCK FINN.

and the ambivalent Southerner would seem to have little in common with the author who crooned over Hartford's "sterling old Puritan community," a community whose language, values and polite restraint he seemed to embrace in works like *The Prince and the Pauper* and *Joan of Arc*. The Eastern Mark Twain, like the Southern and Western version, also is the subject of voluminous critical literature which seeks to situate his regional identity in his profound relation to the literary, philosophical, religious and comic traditions of New England. Twain's adult personality and mature literary persona, such critics have argued, share a regional inflection with the "Down East" humor of James Russell Lowell, the stubborn individualism of Henry David Thoreau, and the genteel liberalism of the Beechers, the Twitchells, the Aldriches, the Warners and other prominent members of his Hartford set.

Lastly, Mark Twain has been claimed as a Midwestern writer. His darkly satirical view of life in the upper Mississippi Valley links him to a prominent tradition of Midwestern ironists of the time and of the century since including Howells, Hamlin Garland, Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser and Ernest Hemingway. It is perhaps revealing that the contemporary writer who has acknowledged his creative debt to Twain most publicly is Garrison Keillor, the storyteller, whose sardonic pastoralism revolving around the fictitious Lake Wobegon achieves a distinctive blend of humor and pathos, very much in the manner of *Huckleberry Finn*.

The endless critical squabbling over Twain's regional affiliations suggests a paradox, which critic Howells perceived when he wisely dodged the regional issue and defined Twain's imagination as "entirely American." The paradox is simply stated: Mark Twain's best writing is regionally inflected, playing on the subtleties of colloquial speech and social custom as only a local novelist can play. Yet unlike Faulkner, Bret Harte, Thoreau or Anderson, Twain belongs to no region. We might simply dismiss this paradox by affirming a critical truism expressed several years ago by David B. Kesterson: Twain, like the 19th-century U.S. poet Walt Whitman, "contained multitudes" and, therefore, "could not be confined by one region." But Twain's self-professed regional aesthetic is more significant than such an adoring comment implies.

We might begin to address the paradox by observing that although the regional perspective is undeniably key to Twain's creativity, his imagination just as characteristically balks at regional identification. Indeed, as much as he idealized local settings from Hannibal to Hartford, the persistent gesture in Twain's fiction is one of flight. Tom Sawyer escapes

Mark Twain: America's Regional Original

with his gang from St. Petersburg to the boy haven of Jackson's Island. Huck Finn performs symbolic suicide in order to flee his violent, provincial home. Hank Morgan travels centuries to King Arthur's Camelot and back. The narrators of *The Innocents Abroad*, *Roughing It* and *Life On the Mississippi* are compulsively on the move.

Howells understood his close friend's peculiar need to imagine transcendence of the very cultural limitations that bring his art alive when he described Twain as a writer "originally of Missouri, but then provisionally of Hartford, and now ultimately of the Solar System, not to say the Universe." As this wonderfully apt comment implies, Mark Twain is the quintessential regionalist in American literature, having derived more aesthetic capital from the local perspective than any other U.S. writer. Yet his imaginative tendency is to "light out for the Territory," in Twain's words, as an escape from cultural limitations – often expressed in provincial habits of speech and behavior – that restrict human freedom.

Twain's ambivalence about the local scene – his simultaneous commitment to "unconscious absorption" and transcendent escape – betrayed the complexity of his regional associations with all parts of the United States. Moreover, his ambivalence about settings like St. Petersburg, Camelot, Dawson's Landing and Hadleyburg – all of which incorporate elements of idyll and nightmare in a troubling mix – captured the mood of the United States as it galloped toward an industrialized, urban reality in the post-Civil War era.

A wistful preoccupation with the image of America's vanishing rural communities inspired the explosion in regional and local color writing during the last decades of the 19th century; an

explosion Twain helped to ignite with his representations of small-town life. Regional eccentricities of the sort that abound in the Far West of *Roughing It* and the antebellum Mississippi Valley of *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* were fast disappearing in the frantic drive towards cultural, economic and political nationalization after the Civil War, and writers of the period responded by indulging in romantic images of America's rural past. Twain clearly participated in this retrospective vogue, but his own pyrotechnics, like those of Hank Morgan, were most often deployed against the local pastoral scene, whose innocence and remoteness from the pressures of industrialism he never took for granted.

It matters very little, finally, whether Mark Twain was most profoundly a Southerner, a Westerner, an Easterner or a Midwesterner. His art is regional, not in the sense that it emerges out of a particular geographical or cultural milieu, but because in everything he wrote, he captured the anxiety of a culture poised between its rural past and its urban future, unsure whether to romanticize or to run from its history. Mark Twain excelled at doing both – often at precisely the same moment. Thus he is justifiably measured, from coast to coast, as our premier writer of regional prose.

Henry B. Wonham is Professor of American Literature at the University of Oregon. He has contributed the Afterword to a new edition of *Roughing It*, part of the 29-volume *Oxford Mark Twain*, published in 1996.

The illustrations have been reprinted with permission of the University of Virginia Library. © 1996 by the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia.

Illustrating Huckleberry Finn

by E.W. Kemble

I was a budding cartoonist on the *Daily Graphic* in 1881 when that paper was the only illustrated daily in New York. Newspapers had not begun to publish pictures, and Thomas Nast reigned supreme as the master cartoonist of the country.

Harper's Weekly turned up its dignified nose at this little upstart of a paper, and *Leslie's Weekly* sneered at its impudence. The idea of an illustrated daily! At all events, it did very nicely for a spell, but when the daily newspapers began to use pictures it gave a few convulsive gasps and died. Then along came *Life*. Its appearance caused the know-it-alls to stick their tongues in their cheeks and, holding the small publication at arm's length, exclaim, "Ten cents for that? What gall!"

I remember my first visit to the editorial department of this unique publication. John Ames Mitchell was the founder and editor in chief and Henry Guy Carleton was associate editor. Mitchell's studio was used as the office. Between towering rows of returned copies a narrow trail had been cleared, and through this I timidly made my way. Carleton was sitting nearest the door, so I made my entrance speech to him. "Are you the art editor?" Unfortunately he stammered badly, and while he was gathering a reply I sidled in the direction he pointed and repeated my inquiry to the only other visible individual. This was Mitchell, and he also had a slight hesitancy in his delivery, accompanied by a nervous movement of the hands. I thought they were playing a joke on me and was about to retreat when I was asked to sit down. Then and there began a most pleasant friendship with both men which lasted for years.

"The Thompson Street Poker Club" by Carleton ran in *Life* for many weeks, and I made the pictures for it. Cyanide Whiffles, Tootes Williams and the other members of the club were types I delighted in portraying.

While contributing to *Life* I made a small picture of a little boy being stung by a bee. Mark Twain had completed the manuscript of *Huckleberry Finn* and had set up a relative, Charles L. Webster, in the publishing business. Casting about for an illustrator, Mark Twain happened to see this picture. It had action and expression and bore a strong resemblance to his mental conception of Huck Finn. I was sent for and immediately got in touch with Webster. The manuscript was handed me and the fee asked for – two thousand dollars – was graciously allowed. I had begun drawing professionally two years before this date and was now at the ripe old age of twenty-three. Homeward I trod with nimble feet – they had really been made nimble by a season's training for the one-hundred and two-twenty yard dashes at the Mott Haven track of the New York Athletic Club. My home was not far from this place and the Harlem River but a short distance beyond, and what a blessing it was to my physical well-being that on my off days I could don running trunks and spiked shoes for an hour of practice sprints, or go to the boat house, array myself in a pair of gorgeous red running trunks and a sleeveless jersey with Mercury's winged foot spread o'er my youthful chest and get into a racing gig for a pull up the mud-colored waterway.

Now began the important job of getting a model. The story called for a variety of characters, old and young, male and female. In the neighborhood I came across a youngster, Cort Morris by name, who tallied with my idea of Huck. He was a bit tall for the ideal boy, but I could jam him down a few pegs in my drawing and use him for the other characters.

From the beginning I never depended upon models but preferred to pick my types out of the ether, training my mind to visualize them.



WATCHING THE BOAT.

So I engaged my youthful model, and I remember that from the very start he became immensely popular among his feminine school-mates as all of his income went for sweetmeats which were duly distributed on his homeward journeys from the seat of learning.

I had a large room in the top of our house which I used as a studio. Here I collected my props for the work. I spent the forenoon completing the drawing, using "Huck" as soon as he was released from school. He was always grinning, and one side of his cheek was usually well padded with a "sour ball" or a huge wad of molasses taffy. Throwing his wool cap and muslin-covered schoolbooks on a lounge, he would ask what was wanted at this session. I would designate the character. "We will do the old woman who spots Huck as he is trying to

pass for a girl." Donning an old sunbonnet and slipping awkwardly into a faded skirt, Cort would squat on a low splint-bottomed chair and become the most woebegone female imaginable. Forthwith he would relieve his extended cheek of its burden of taffy with a mighty gulp. I would make a simple outline sketch on yellow toned paper and then take a rest, during which Cort would pop a "coconut strip" into his grinning mouth.

For the king, Cort wore an old frock coat and padded his waistline with towels until he assumed the proper rotundity. Then he would mimic the sordid old reprobate and twist his boyish face into the most outlandish expressions. If I could have drawn the grimaces as they were, I would have had a convulsing collection of comics, but these would not have jibed with the text, and I was forced to forego them.

I used my young model for every character in the story – man, woman and child. Jim the Negro seemed to please him the most. He would jam his little black wool cap over his head, shoot out his lips and mumble coon talk all the while he was posing. Grown to manhood, "Huck" is now a sturdy citizen of Philadelphia, connected with an established business house.

This Negro Jim, drawn from a white schoolboy, with face unblackened, started something in my artistic career. Several advance chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* were published in the *Century Magazine*, then under the able editorship of Richard Watson Gilder and a select staff of assistants. My picture caught the fancy of Mr. Gilder and W. Lewis Frazer, the art director. I was asked to call and exhibit my wares. I went to *Life* and borrowed a few originals, but not one picture contained a Negro type.

"We want to see some of your Negro drawings," Mr. Frazer said. "I have none," I replied. "I've never made any until this one in *Huck Finn*." The art editor looked dubious. "I have several stories I would like to have you illustrate, but they are all of the South." "Let me try," I urged, "and if they do not suit the text, you need not use or pay for them." I made the drawings. Mr. Frazer nodded his head as he looked at them. "I guess they'll go. We'll strike off some proofs and send them to the authors and see what they say."

The proofs were sent and soon came back with the stamp of approval. One author went so far as to declare: "At last you have an artist who knows the South." I had, up to that time, never been further south than Sandy Hook [New Jersey]. My coons caught the public fancy. The *Century* then engaged me to work exclusively for their magazine. This continued for several years, and all the stories from those charming writers of the South, Thomas Nelson Page, James Lane Allen, Harry Stilwell Edwards, Richard Malcom Johnson and George W. Cable, were placed in my hands for picture work. I was established as a delineator of the South, the Negro being my specialty, and, as I have mentioned, I had never been South at all. I didn't go for two years more. Then I told Mr. Gilder that it was high time for me to go and see what the real article looked like. He agreed with me. After visiting several plantations and noting the local color, a thing I had missed but had not attempted to carry out to any extent in my pictures, I found that my types were, in most cases, the counterparts of those surrounding me. I had seen the Negro of the city but he was a different bird from the plantation product, both in carriage and dress. It all seems so strange to me now, that a single subject, a Negro, drawn from a pose given me by a lanky white schoolboy, should have started

me on a career that has lasted for forty-five years, especially as I had no more desire to specialize in that subject than I had in the Chinaman or the Malay pirate.

Years later I sat beside Mark Twain at a luncheon in the home of Mrs. Clarence Mackay. I had not seen him in all the intervening years. His face bore no trace of the siege he had been through when the firm of Charles L. Webster went bankrupt and he began his lecture tour, paying back every dollar of the indebtedness. We fell to talking of the past – its writers and illustrators. Abbey had never been equaled, he contended. His delightful drawings for Herrick's *Poems*, for *She Stoops to Conquer* and *The Quiet Life* stamped him as a master of his craft. Frost stood alone in his humor. There were Smedley, Reinhart and Remington, a little group of shining lights undimmed by time. We spoke of *Huck Finn* and I told him of my model and of the various uses to which I had put him. He seemed greatly amused and wanted me to enlighten him about my beginnings as an illustrator.

From early childhood I had kept a pencil busy night and day when freed from the irksome task of home study, which I thoroughly abhorred, drawing anything that tickled my fancy – soldiers, Indians, long processions of circus parades. These I would cut out with scissors and place on a seam in the carpet, where they would stretch from wall to wall, and woe betide anyone who disarranged this imposing aggregation. My mother was the principal offender, for the long skirts of that day swept my creations into discordant combinations. Then came boarding school, where I indulged in caricatures of the teachers. School days over, I had several small positions at office work, capped with an all-important job in the Western Union Telegraph Company.

Illustrating Huckleberry Finn

In the auditor's department I toyed with long rows of figures until I could see them at night crawling over the bedspread.

Whilst engaged in guarding the finances of this important institution I spent my evenings drawing various whims and fancies. My father suggested that I think up some timely ideas, do them in ink and take them to some periodical. I made four small comics, signed my name in a conspicuous place on each sketch and, on the following day, sallied forth at the luncheon hour to the house of Harper & Brothers in Franklin Square. Up the winding iron stairway I climbed and sought the art department, a small boxed-in enclosure presided over by Charles Parsons. Standing with hat in one hand and my boyish attempt at humor in the other, I waited patiently for the elderly gentleman in charge to address me. He looked up from a desk piled high with art and beckoned me. I gave him the package and was told to call in a few days and he would enlighten me as to their availability.

I went back to my desk and dismissed the sketches from my mind. Several days later, while indulging in my noonday feast – a plate of roast beef, mashed potatoes, bread and butter, all for fifteen cents at Smith and McNeel's Restaurant on Fulton Street – I remembered my drawings. "A few days" had passed. The meal was rapidly disposed of, and I hastened to the publishing house to learn the verdict. Maybe they would give me a dollar or two for one of them. (My salary at the Western Union was ten dollars a week.)

Up the spiral stairway I went with dubious forebodings; in a mild and timid tone I half whispered my request that I had come for my sketches. "What name?" the director asked me.

I gulped and murmured "Kemble." "Oh, yes," he replied. "You don't wish to take them all home with you, do you?" He smiled and going to his desk, wrote something on a printed slip and handed it to me. "If you will take that to the cashier on the main floor, he will give you the money. It is for seventy dollars." How I got down the circular iron stairway I have never been able to learn – whether I slid, tumbled or jumped. The cashier, a beetle-browed individual, glared at me, wrote something in a large book, came out from his cage-like enclosure and directed me to sign on the dotted line. Then, he went back to his cage and through a tiny window poked seventy dollars in gold at me.

I pocketed my treasure and went back to my work. Every column I added up that afternoon seemed to have a seven in the total. I was reprimanded by the auditor for my carelessness. That evening, for fear that I would be robbed I ignored bus and street car and walked the entire distance from Vesey Street to Forty-third, where I lived. The following week I resigned my mathematical position and joined the *Daily Graphic* as a staff artist.

The marvelous methods of an art department of that period are worth recording. A spacious loft on the top floor of the plant served as the studio. Some ten budding geniuses were seated at tables where their shares in the pictorial features were given them by the art director. Each man was more or less a specialist in his particular line. Gray Parker did horses and social events. Cusaks, a Spaniard, did any old thing and sang snatches from *Carmen* while doing it. Zenope, a Turk, did portraits and delivered monologues of children reciting bits from their Sunday school lessons. C.V. Taylor, long and lanky, with spreading side-whiskers, did cartoons and street scenes. I was cartoonist

and character artist. George B. Lucks was a contributor and did wonderful song and dance acts for us whenever he paid a visit to the sanctum.

If the West Point cadets were to parade on the following day, a full page spread had to be done the day before. The reviewing stand was put in by one man, the cadets drawn by the military genius, the mayor and his guests inserted by the portrait man, and then the whole masterpiece was pieced together and made ready for the photographer in an adjoining room. The thing that always bothered us most was the weather forecast. We would wait until the last minute and if a report came from the weather bureau announcing "rain tomorrow," the rain specialist, who was skilled at making an open umbrella from a bird's-eye point of view, covered the whole opus with his product. Completed, the plate was made and the paper went to bed, and invariably the day of the parade just reeked with sunshine.

Huckleberry Finn was filmed a few years ago, and the director, the lamented William Desmond Taylor, who was mysteriously murdered in Hollywood soon after the picture was released, took a copy of the original edition and made his characters fit my drawings. I had not seen the book in years, and as my characters appeared on the screen, resembling my types so faithfully, even as to pose, my mind ran back to the lanky boy who posed for me and the pride I had felt in doing my first book.

This article originally appeared in *The Colophon: A Book Collectors' Quarterly*, February 1930.

The illustration on page 31 has been reprinted with permission of the University of Virginia Library. © 1996 by the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia.

Mark Twain in a Dilemma: A Victim of a Joke He Thinks the Most Unkindest Cut of All

Hartford, Conn., Nov. 28 [1884] – *Huckleberry Finn*, Mark Twain's new book, was complete last March, but owing to complications and differences with his publishers, it has not yet appeared, although it has been extensively announced – a prospectus of the story sent out and the opening chapters recently published in the *Century*. When the book was finished last month Mark Twain made a proposition in regard to its publication to the American Publishing Company of this city, which published his *Innocents Abroad* and his later works. From them the company, which heretofore had been but a small concern, achieved a reputation and standing equal to any of the older established publishing houses in the country. Mark Twain on his side obtained royalties amounting in all to over \$400,000. When *Huckleberry Finn*, the sequel to *Tom*

Sawyer, was completed, Twain again made a proposition to his publishers to produce this new work. Negotiations were commenced, but never completed. The parties could not agree to terms. Evidently Mark Twain considered that he had built up the American Publishing Company, while they seemed to think themselves the founders of his fame and fortune. Liberal royalties were offered Twain by the publishing company, but he refused to accept them. The final offer was that the profits should be divided, each of the parties to receive 50 per cent, of the proceeds from the sale of the new work. This proposition was not satisfactory to the author, who wanted 60 per cent of the profits. This offer the company refused to accept, and he determined on entering a new business – combining that of publisher with that of author.

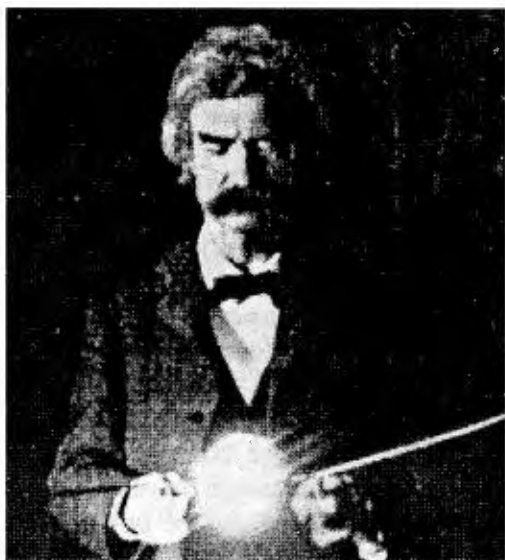
Tom Sawyer



United States 8c

Mark Twain had a nephew residing in New York in whose business ability he had great confidence. This man, whose name is Charles L. Webster, is engaged in the book-publishing business at No. 658 Broadway. He entered into a partnership with his nephew to produce his new work and to supervise all the mechanical details of its production. The copy was all sent to him and by him given to the printers. In order to properly embellish the book the services of a leading metropolitan engraver were secured, and from this comes all the trouble into which Hartford's popular author is now plunged. The engravings, after having been cut on the plates, were sent to the electrotyper. One of the plates represented a man with a downcast head, standing in the foreground of a particularly striking illustration. In front of him was a ragged urchin with a look of dismay overspreading his countenance. In the background, and standing behind the boy, was an attractive-looking young girl, whose face was enlivened by a broad grin. Something which the boy or man had said or done evidently

amused her highly. The title of the cut was "In a Dilemma: What Shall I Do?"



When the plate was sent to the electrotyper a wicked spirit must have possessed him. The title was suggestive. A mere stroke of the awl would suffice to give to the cut an indecent character never intended by the author or engraver. It would make no difference in the surface of the plate that would be visible to the naked eye, but when printed would add to the engraving a characteristic which would be repudiated not only by the author, but by all the respectable people of the country into whose hands the volume should fall. The work of the engraver was successful. It passed the eye of the inspector and was approved. A proof was taken and submitted. If the alteration of the plate was manifested in the proof, it was evidently attributed to a defect in the press and paper, which would be remedied when the volume was sent to the press. Now the work was ready for printing.

In issuing books to be sold by "subscription only" the publishers first strike off a large number of prospectuses, which are to be used

by the agents when soliciting subscribers to the work. Some 3,000 of these prospectuses, with the defective cut, were presented and distributed to the different agents throughout the country. The entire work had passed the eyes of the various readers and inspectors and the glaring indecency of the cut had not been discovered. Throughout the country were hundreds of agents displaying the merits of the work and elaborating on the artistic work of the engravings. It was remarkable that while the defect was so palpable, none of the agents noticed it, or if he did, he failed to report it to the publishers. Possibly they might have considered the alteration intentional, as the title to the illustration was now doubly suggestive.

At last came a letter from the Chicago agent calling attention to the cut. Then there was consternation in the office of the publishers. Copies of the prospectus were hauled from the shelf and critically examined. Then for the first time it dawned on the publishers that such an illustration would condemn the work. Immediately all the agents were telegraphed to and the prospectuses were called in. The page containing the cut was torn from the book, a new and perfect illustration being substituted. Agents were supplied with the improved volumes and are now happy in canvassing for a work to which there can be no objection, while they smile at the prospects of heavy commissions. But the story leaked out. Several opposition publishers got hold of the cut, however, and these now adorn their respective offices.

Reprinted from the *New York World* (semi-weekly version), Nov. 28, 1884, p.8.

The illustration on this page has been reprinted with the permission of the University of Virginia Library. © 1996 by the Rector and Visitors of the University of Virginia.

Colored People – Reminiscences of Home

by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

What follow are excerpts from the author's recently published memoir, *Colored People*, which centers on his childhood in a small rural West Virginia community in the years before the civil rights movement brought integration to the United States. Gates' meditations begin with some prefatory remarks addressed to his daughters. The text itself offers a glimpse of a place with all its social, political and geographic implications.

*

Dear Maggie and Liza:

I have written to you because a world into which I was born, a world that nurtured and sustained me, has mysteriously disappeared. My darkest fear is that Piedmont, West Virginia, will cease to exist, if some executives on Park Avenue decide that it is more profitable to build a complete new paper mill elsewhere than to overhaul one a century old. Then they would close it, just as they did in Cumberland with Celanese, and Pittsburgh Plate Glass, and the Kelly-Springfield Tire Company. The town will die, but our people will not move. They will not be moved. Because for them, Piedmont – snuggled between the Allegheny Mountains and the Potomac River Valley – is life itself.

I am not Everynegro. I am not native to the great black metropolises: New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles, say. Nor can I claim to be a "citizen of the world." I am from and of a time and a place – Piedmont, West Virginia – and that's a world apart, a world of difference. So this is not a story of a race but a story of a village, a family, and its friends. And of a sort of segregated peace.

In your lifetimes, I suspect, you will go from being African Americans, to "people of color,"

to being, once again, "colored people." (The linguistic trend toward condensation is strong.) I don't mind any of the names myself. But I have to confess that I like "colored" best, maybe because when I hear the word, I hear it in my mother's voice and in the sepia tones of my childhood. As artlessly and honestly as I can, I have tried to evoke a colored world of the fifties, a Negro world of the early sixties, and the advent of a black world of the later sixties, from the point of view of the boy I was.

*

On the side of a hill in the Allegheny Mountains, two and a half hours northwest of Washington and southeast of Pittsburgh, slathered along the ridge of "Old Baldie" mountain like butter on the jagged side of a Parker House roll, sits Piedmont, West Virginia (population 2,565 in 1950, when I was born), the second major city of Mineral County. West Virginia is famous for its hills, the Allegheny Mountains, which run along the Potomac River in the east, the Ohio along the west, and the Kanawha and Guyandotte in the south. And of all the mountain ranges gazed upon by its riverine mountaineers, none is more beautiful than the south branch of the Potomac Valley, overlooked by Gates Point, the highest promontory in the county, rising above Patterson's Creek.

It was in Piedmont that most of the colored people of Mineral County lived – 351 out of a total population of 22,000. To my children, Piedmont as a whole must seem to be a graying, desiccated town, rotting away brick by brick, just like my old school. Its population is down to about eleven hundred souls, three hundred of whom are black, a population whose average age increases each year, so that the spirited figures who dominated my youth – those who survive, anyway – must strike my daughters as

grizzled elders. No, my children will never know Piedmont, never experience the magic I can still feel in the place where I learned how to be a colored boy.

The fifties in Piedmont was a sepia time, or at least that's the color memory has given it. Piedmont was prosperous and growing, a village of undoubted splendors. I say village, but that's an unpopular usage among some. ("Class Three City" is the official West Virginia state euphemism.)

Village or town, or something in between – no matter. People from Piedmont were always proud to be from Piedmont – nestled against a wall of mountains, smack-dab on the banks of the mighty Potomac. We know God gave America no more beautiful location.

And its social topography was something we knew like the back of our hands. Piedmont was Italian and Irish, with a handful of wealthy WASPs [White Anglo-Saxon Protestants] on East Hampshire Street, and "ethnic" neighborhoods of working-class people everywhere else, colored and white.



For as long as anybody can remember, Piedmont's character has always been completely bound up with the Westvaco paper mill: its prosperous past and its doubtful future. At first glance, Piedmont is a typical dying mill town with crumbling infrastructure and the resignation of its people to its gentle decline. Many once beautiful buildings have been abandoned. They stand empty and unkempt, and testify to a bygone time of spirit and pride. The big houses on East Hampshire Street are no longer proud, but they were when I was a kid.

On still days, when the air is heavy, Piedmont has the rotten-egg smell of a chemistry class. The acrid, sulfurous odor of the bleaches used in the paper mill drifts along the valley, penetrating walls and clothing, furnishings and skin. No perfume can fully mask it. It is as much a part of the valley as is the river, and the people who live there are not overly disturbed by it. "Smells like money to me," we were taught to say in its defense, even as children.

Just below East Hampshire, as if a diagonal had been drawn from it downward at a thirty-degree angle, was Pearl Street, which the



Piedmont and Rockfish Valleys; Afton, Virginia at the turn of the century

Colored People

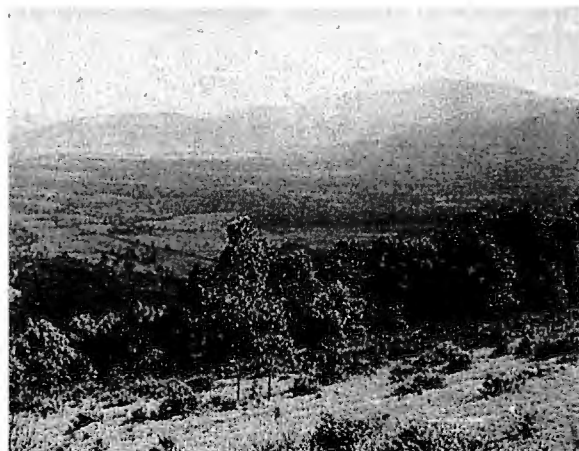
colored people called "Rat Tail Road," because it snaked down around the hill to the bottom of the valley, where the tracks of the B&O run on their way to Keyser, the county seat. Poor white people like Bonnie Gilroy's family lived down there and five black families. We moved there when I was four.

Like the Italians and the Irish, most of the colored people migrated to Piedmont at the turn of the century to work at the paper mill, which opened in 1888.

Nearly everybody in the Tri-Towns worked there. The Tri-Towns – three towns of similar size – were connected by two bridges across sections of the Potomac less than a mile apart: Piedmont, West Virginia; Luke, Maryland; and Westernport, Maryland, the westernmost navigable point on the river, between Pittsburgh and the Chesapeake Bay. The Italians and the Irish ... along with a few of the poorer white people, worked the good jobs in the paper mill, including all those in the craft unions. That mattered, because crafts demanded skill and training, and craftsmen commanded high wages. It was not until 1968 that the craft unions at the mill were integrated.

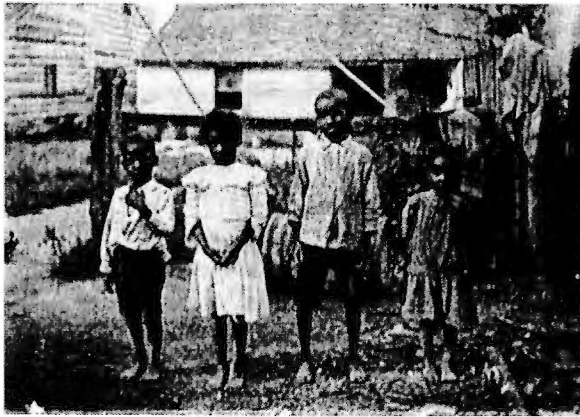
Until the summer of 1968, all the colored men at the paper mill worked on "the platform" – loading paper into trucks ... The end product of the paper mill was packaged in skids, big wooden crates of paper, which could weigh as much as seven thousand pounds each. The skids had to be forklifted from the mill onto the shipping platform and then loaded into the huge tractor-trailers that took them elsewhere. Loading is what Daddy did every working day of his working life. That's what almost every colored grown-up I knew did. Every day at 6:30 a.m., Daddy would go off to the mill, and he'd work until 3:30 p.m., when the mill whistle would blow. So important was the mill to the life of the town that school let out at the same time. We would eat dinner at 4:00, so that Pop could get to his second job, as a janitor at the telephone company, by 4:30. His workday ended at 7:30, except when there was a baseball game, over in the Orchard or at the park in Westernport, in which case he would cut out early.

Almost all the colored people in Piedmont worked at the paper mill and made the same money, because they all worked at the same job, on the platform.



Piedmont and Rockfish Valleys; Afton, Virginia at the turn of the century

The colored world was not so much a neighborhood as a condition of existence. And though our own world was seemingly self-contained, it impinged upon the white world of Piedmont in almost every direction.



When Daddy was a teenager, dance bands used to come to the Crystal Palace Ballroom in Cumberland. They'd play a set or two in the evening for white people and then a special midnight show for the colored. Daddy says everybody would be there – the maimed, the sick, the dying, and the dead. Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway. And Piedmont's own Don Redman. Later, we had our own places to dance – the colored American Legion, and then the VFW.

It was amazing to me how new dances would spread in the black community, even to small towns like ours. Somebody'd be visiting his relatives somewhere, go to a party, and that would be that. He'd bring it back and teach everyone, showing it off in the streets in the evenings or at a party in somebody's basement.

Before 1955, most white people were only shadowy presences in our world, vague figures of power like remote bosses at the mill or

tellers at the bank. There were exceptions, of course, the white people who would come into our world in ritualized, everyday ways we all understood. Mr. Mail Man, Mr. Insurance Man, Mr. White-and-Chocolate Milk Man, Mr. Landlord Man, Mr. Police Man: we called white people by their trade, like allegorical characters in a mystery play. Mr. Insurance Man would come by every other week to collect premiums on college or death policies, sometimes fifty cents or less. But my favorite white visitor was the Jewel Tea Man, who arrived in his dark brown helmet-shaped truck, a sort of modified jeep, and, like the Sears Man, brought new appliances to our house. I loved looking at his catalogues. Mr. Jewel Tea Man, may I see your catalogues? Please?

And of course, we would bump into the white world at the hospital in Keyser or at the credit union in Westernport or in one of the stores downtown. But our neighborhoods were clearly demarcated, as if by ropes or turnstiles. Welcome to the Colored Zone, a large stretched banner could have said. And it felt good in there, like walking around your house in bare feet and underwear, or snoring right out loud on the couch in front of the TV – swaddled by the comforts of home, the warmth of those you love.

People in Piedmont were virulent nationalists – Piedmont nationalists. And this was our credo: "All New York's got that Piedmont's got is more of what we got. Same, but bigger. And, if you were a student: You can get a good education anywhere. They got the same books, ain't they? Just bigger classes, 'at's all."

Otherwise, the advantage was all to Piedmont. Did you know that Kenny House Hill was written about in "Ripley's Believe It or Not" as the only street in the world from which you

Colored People



Bullneck Rock east of Piedmont, 1892

can enter all three stories of the same building? That made it the most famous place in this Class Three City; other of our attractions were less well publicized.

Like Dent Davis's bologna, which was so good that when colored people came home to Piedmont for the mill picnic each Labor Day, they would take pounds of it back to whatever sorry homes they had forsaken Piedmont for, along with the bright-red cans of King Syrup ... with the inset metal circle for a lid, the kind that you had to pry open with the back of a claw hammer. ... Some of them, those whose tastes were most rarefied, would take home a few jars of our tap water. And that was before anybody thought of buying water in bottles. People in Piedmont can't imagine that today. A dollar for a bottle of water! We had some good water in Piedmont, the best drinking water in the world, if you asked any of us.

Dent's bologna, and our water, and our King Syrup, and the paper mill's annual pic-a-nic, all helped account for Piedmont's tenacious grip upon its inhabitants, even those in diaspora. And then there was our Valley. I never knew

colored people anywhere who were crazier about mountains and water, flowers and trees, fishing and hunting. For as long as anyone could remember, we could outhunt, outshoot, and outswim the white boys in the Valley. We didn't flaunt our rifles and shotguns, though, because that might make the white people too nervous. Pickup trucks and country music – now that was going too far, at least in the fifties. But that would come, too, over time, once integration had hit the second generation. The price of progress, I suppose.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., is the W.E.B. DuBois Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University, and a prominent essayist, critic and social commentator.

Further Reading on Regional American Literature

Books and Articles

- Barbuto, Joseph and Lisa Weinerman, eds. *Heart of the Land: Essays on the Last Great Places*. Foreword by Barry Lopez. New York: Pantheon, 1995.
- Busby, Mark. *Larry McMurtry and the West: An Ambivalent Relationship*. Denton: University of North Texas Press, 1995.
- Daynard, Jodi, ed. *The Place Within: Portraits of American Landscapes by 20 Contemporary Writers*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.
- Fishkin, Shelley F. *Lighting Out For the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Hart, James D. and Philip Leininger. *The Oxford Companion to American Literature*. 6th ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Kazin, Alfred. *A Writer's America: Landscape in Literature*. New York: Knopf, 1988.
- Lopez, Barry. "Caring for the Woods." *Audubon* vol. 97 no. 2 (March-April 1995): 58-63.
- Mee, Susie, ed. *Downhome: An Anthology of Southern Women Writers*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1995.
- Morris, Gregory L. *Talking Up A Storm: Voices of the New West*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994.
- Nealon, Jeffrey T. "Work of the Detective, Work of the Writer: Paul Auster's City of Glass." *Modern Fiction Studies* vol. 42 no. 1 (Spring 1996): 91-110.
- Nelson, Robert M. *Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction*. New York: Peter Lang, 1993.
- O'Connell, Shaun. *Remarkable, Unspeakable New York: A Literary History*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1995.
- Quantic, Diane D. *The Nature of the Place: A Study of Great Plains Fiction*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Rasmussen, R. Kent. *Mark Twain A to Z: The Essential Reference to His Life and Writings*. New York: Facts on File, 1995.
- Ross, Daniel W. "Barry Lopez's Arctic Dreams: Looking into a New Heart of Darkness." *CEA Critic* vol. 54 no. 1 (Fall 1991): 78-86.
- Setterberg, Fred. *The Roads Taken: Travels Through America's Literary Landscape*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1993.
- Simonson, Harold P. *Beyond the Frontier: Writers, Western Regionalism and A Sense of Place*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University, 1989.
- Stine, Annie. *The Earth at Our Doorstep: Contemporary Writers Celebrate the Landscapes of Home*. San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1996.
- Temple, Judy Nolte, ed. *Open Spaces, City Places: Contemporary Writers on the Changing Southwest*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1994.
- Twain, Mark. *The Oxford Mark Twain*. Edited by Shelley Fisher Fishkin. 29 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Selected Web Sites

Project Gutenberg

Project Gutenberg represents an extensive collection of electronic texts. Most Project Gutenberg texts are "public domain" works distributed by Professor Michael S. Hart through the Project Gutenberg Association at Illinois Benedictine College.

<http://promo.net/pg>

The Tech Classics Archive

This classical Literature resource offers 375 works by classical authors, in English translation. The complete body of work is attractively and logically formatted for easy and swift browsing. It is supported by a newly improved search engine. The Tech Classics Archive is a non-commercial, student-created World Wide Web site.

<http://the-tech.mit.edu>

American Literature

This web site consists of the American Literature Survey Site and the American Reader. The American Literature Survey Site was developed in the spring of 1995. It contains student work, interactive texts and more. In some ways, it represents a snapshot of the web in early 1995, but it is also a dynamic evolving resource. The American Reader was built in the summer of 1996. This site is the outgrowth of a class in which students selected their own readings and constructed an anthology. It provides both student-authored works and interpretations.

<http://www.en.utexas.edu/~daniel/amlit.html>

BDD Online

Pat Conroy, Elmore Leonard, Sara Paretsky, and Robert B. Parker are among the featured

authors interviewed on this Bantam-Doubleday-Dell site. Also of interest are author profiles, information on previous books and excerpts from new titles from these publishers.

<http://www.bdd.com>

Salon

"An interactive magazine of books, arts, and ideas," Salon contains lengthy interviews with writers such as John Updike, Richard Ford, Louise Erdrich, and Amy Tan under the "books" subheading. Shorter interviews with other authors including Alice Walker, Barbara Kingsolver, and Joyce Carol Oates appear in the "Lit Chat" section.

<http://www.salon1999.com/archives/welcome/welcome.html>

The Modern English Collection at the Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia

The Electronic Text Center at the University of Virginia combines an online archive of thousands of SGML-encoded electronic texts with a library-based Center housing hardware and software suitable for the creation and analysis of text. Through ongoing training sessions and support of individual teaching and research projects, the Center is building a diverse and expanding user community and providing a potential model for similar enterprises at other institutions.

[http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/modeng.
browse.html](http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/modeng/browse.html)

Mark Twain Resources on the World Wide Web

These pages list resources by or about Mark Twain. Major subdivisions of this site include: The Continuing Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Inventing Sam Clemens, Mark Twain in

the Daily Hawaiian Herald, Getting the Bugs out of Tom Sawyer: An Entomologist's View of a Classic, and The Matter of Hannibal.

<http://marktwain.miningco.com>

Southwestern Writers Collection

This collection at Southwest Texas State University (San Marcos) contains books, manuscripts, personal papers, correspondence and artifacts related to the literary and artistic spirit of the American Southwest. Other major components of this collection include photographs of the Southwest and Mexico, music and films (e.g. *Lonesome Dove*) from this region. The Hispanic Writers Collection also at this site primarily covers the work of fiction writers, poets and playwrights, including Rudolfo Anaya and Ana Castillo.

http://www.library.swt.edu/alkek_lib/spec_coll/swwc/intro.html

Current and Upcoming Books by Regional Writers

Alexie, Sherman. *Indian Killer*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Books.

Anaya, Rudolfo. *Rio Grande Fall*. New York: Warner Books.

Bass, Rick. *The Book of Yaak*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Bell, Madison Smartt. *Ten Indians*. New York: Pantheon.

Brown, Larry. *Father and Son*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books.

Burke, Lames Lee. *Cadillac Jukebox*. Westport, CT: Hyperion Books.

Cornwell, Patricia. *Cause of Death*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Doig, Ivan. *Bucking the Sun*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Dorris, Michael. *Cloud Chamber*. New York: Scribner's.

Grafton, Sue. *'M' is for Malice*. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

McCorkle, Jill. *Carolina Moon*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books.

Mosley, Walter. *A Little Yellow Dog*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Power, Susan. *Strong Heart Society*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons.

Proulx, E. Annie. *Accordion Crimes*. New York: Scribner's.

Ravenel, Shannon, ed. *New Stories From the South: The Year's Best*. Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books .

Turow, Scott. *Laws of Our Fathers*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Viewfinder

Englisch im Kurssystem der gymnasialen Oberstufe

The American Dream

Humankind's Second Chance?

Peter Freese

Land der unbegrenzten

Möglichkeiten?/Fortschrittsglaube/

Hoffnung auf persönlichen Erfolg/

Vision und Realität

Topic 50 768-6

Resource Book 50 769-4

From Melting Pot to Multiculturalism

E pluribus unum?

Peter Freese

Mythos Schmelztiegel/

multikulturelle Gesellschaft/

nationales Identitätsgefühl?

Topic 50 750-3

Resource Book 50 751-1

neu

Religion in the U.S.A.

In God We Trust

Detlef Rediker, Donald Turner

Tradition/Wertvorstellungen/Vielfalt der

religiösen Gemeinschaften/Einfluß in

Politik, Kultur und Bildungswesen

Topic 50 760-0

Resource Book 50 761-9

neu

Los Angeles

Super City in the Golden State

Hanspeter Dörfel

Lebensgefühl L.A./Paradies mit

ökologischen Problemen/Natur-

katastrophen/soziale Konflikte

Topic 50 782-1

Resource Book 50 783-X



Langenscheidt-Longman

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Postfach 40 11 20, 80711 München

Understanding Regional Boundaries in the United States

by Howard De Leeuw

Where to Draw the Line

Regional boundaries in the United States are often fuzzy, making it difficult to provide a definitive answer to the question of where the South ends and the Southwest begins. Therefore, teaching the South in the English as a foreign language classroom must be approached with an understanding of the difficulties inherent in any attempt to draw lines within and between regions of great diversity.

Because of the mobility in American society and the speed in which this society changes, characteristics which have been used to chart the South in the past are no longer completely valid, as John Shelton Reed writes in his book *My Tears Spoiled My Aim and Other Reflections on Southern Culture*: "If we map the South with the same criteria people used even fifty years ago, what we get these days looks more like a piece of Swiss cheese than a coherent region" (1). Consider, for example, the following facts about one of the 50 states, and try to guess which state it could be:

This state

- was the site of a noteworthy Civil War battle which is reenacted every year.
- is the second largest producer of cotton in the United States.
- has several Southern Baptist churches with more than 5,000 members each.
- has a large minority population.
- has its own cuisine.
- has a very hot climate, and its residents consume large quantities of iced tea.

All of the above mentioned characteristics could apply, to a certain extent, to many states which are traditionally considered to be in the South.

Any student who has been taught about the South might recognize criteria that have been presented in class for defining the South. But which state is this? It is Arizona, in the heart of the Southwest. A Civil War battle was fought at Picacho Peak, Arizona, about 60 kilometers north of Tucson. The battle is noteworthy because it is the only Civil War battle which was fought in what was then known as the Arizona Territory. Arizona is second only to California in the production of cotton. Hispanic Americans make up a significant minority population in the state. Mexican and a blend of Tex-Mex food is the predominant cuisine. Arizona is extremely hot, with the major population centers of Phoenix and Tucson frequently reaching temperatures above 40 degrees centigrade on summer days. Iced tea is a common beverage, although unlike in most areas of the South, unsweetened iced tea is preferred in Arizona.

An understanding of regional boundaries as they apply to the Southwest is essential for developing a greater understanding of the South. As Charles Reagan Wilson writes: "The problems in defining the Southwest are important ones in understanding the complexities of Southern culture and its cultural boundaries." Furthermore, "the Southwest is a most significant area for the clash of cultures, where a Southern White-Black tradition came into contact with a more pluralistic Hispanic-Indian-frontier culture" (2).

References to the Southwest originally referred to a subregion of the South, which included Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas. However, as land was settled all the way to California, the Southwest grew, but, as Wilson notes, "the relationship of this land to the South was increasingly unclear" (3). Texas continues to be a state which is difficult to classify along

regional lines and is indicative of the challenges one faces when defining the characteristics of a particular region.

Rather than explore an answer to the question of where the South ends and the Southwest begins, I would like to pursue the following question: What can students learn about regional boundaries that will be beneficial for their understanding of American culture and history while at the same time sensitizing them to the limitations in defining boundaries? Before addressing specific activities for the classroom, it is important to consider some differences in what I prefer to call "geographic perception" between Americans and Germans.

Differences in Geographic Perception

My understanding of geographic perception is based primarily on the experiences I have had living both in the United States and in Germany. Americans often refer to the location of the South by adding terms such as "down South" or "the deep South." Likewise, the North is often referred to as "up North." The reasons for these distinctions might seem obvious. On a map, the South is "down" and the North is "up." Furthermore, most major north-south rivers in the United States flow towards the South. This adds to a perception of the North being "up" and the South being "down."

Consider how this would apply to Germany. The southern part of Germany is more mountainous than the northern part. The distinctions of "up" and "down" are reversed. In addition, major rivers in Germany, most notably the Rhine, originate in the south or southeast and flow northwestward. It would be beneficial to make students in Germany aware of their geographic perceptions and

investigate how these perceptions would apply to regions of the United States.

Another important element in understanding regional boundaries is the perception of size and distance. Germany is farther north than nearly the entire United States, excluding Alaska, of course. The majority of what has traditionally been viewed as the American South is on the same latitude as northern Africa – a fact that often surprises German and American students alike. Distances are far greater in the United States than in Germany. It would therefore be important in a discussion of regions, such as the South or the Southwest, to help German students grasp the size and location of these regions in comparison to Germany.

Five Features of Cultural Landscapes

Up to this point, some of the difficulties in defining regional boundaries have been presented. These difficulties are not insurmountable, however. The following five features for charting the cultural landscape of the South, listed by Richard Pillsbury, provide a good starting point for distinguishing one region from another: (4)

- vernacular house form
- religion
- individualistic attitudes
- diet
- music

Pillsbury defines vernacular house form as the arrangement, function and size of the rooms in a house as well as the characteristics of the structure's outward appearance. These factors are often "effective indicators of cultural origins

because they represent measures of a society's attitudes about family life and interaction within the home."

Religion in the South includes many denominations but the majority represent what Pillsbury calls a "conservative fundamentalist orientation," with church attendance and activities representing a vital part of community and family life, more than in other regions of the United States.

Diet is a readily recognizable feature used to distinguish one region from another. In the South, according to Pillsbury, muffins, biscuits, corn products, grits, sweetened iced tea, carbonated drinks as well as pork and chicken products are widely consumed.

While country music has often been identified with the South, it has experienced broad popularity throughout the country, making it less useful as a regional factor. Instead, Pillsbury suggests that Gospel music, while less well-known, is perhaps a more suitable Southern feature.

All of the above features of cultural landscapes were presented by Pillsbury as relevant for defining the cultural landscape of the South. They also represent valid starting points for teachers and students who endeavor to understand regional boundaries in the United States and in their own countries.

Classroom Activities for Understanding Regional Boundaries

As pointed out earlier, it would be beneficial to have students in Germany investigate their own geographic perceptions and consider how their

perceptions apply to the United States. This exercise should have the effect of broadening students' understanding of an American's perception of size, distance and geographic proximity. In addition, each of the five features mentioned above provides numerous possibilities for the classroom. One activity would be to have students apply these features to their own region and country. Vernacular house form in Clausthal-Zellerfeld in the Harz Mountains, for instance, is drastically different from architecture in Frankfurt. One could go on to explore individualistic attitudes, music, and diet with regard to regions in Germany.

Teachers could demonstrate to students the difficulties in defining regions by dividing up the class according to certain criteria. For example, one could divide the class according to those who like to drink cola and those who prefer juice or mineral water. The teacher could have one group stand on one side of the classroom and the second group on the other side. Then, the teacher could add another criterion, such as students who like techno or rap music and those who do not. The composition of the groups could suddenly be quite different. The purpose of this activity would be to demonstrate how even a relatively homogeneous group of individuals from the same region represents diverse preferences and attitudes.

If students have access to the Internet, they could search the World Wide Web for references to "Southern states." This search could reveal a variety of organizations which are broken down along regional lines. A survey of each organization's classification of "Southern states" could be made, revealing a core group of states which are generally accepted as part of the South, and other states which only occasionally are considered part of the South, such as Oklahoma.

Understanding Regional Boundaries

In conclusion, the following statement by Reed, reflects the complexities involved in defining regional boundaries (5):

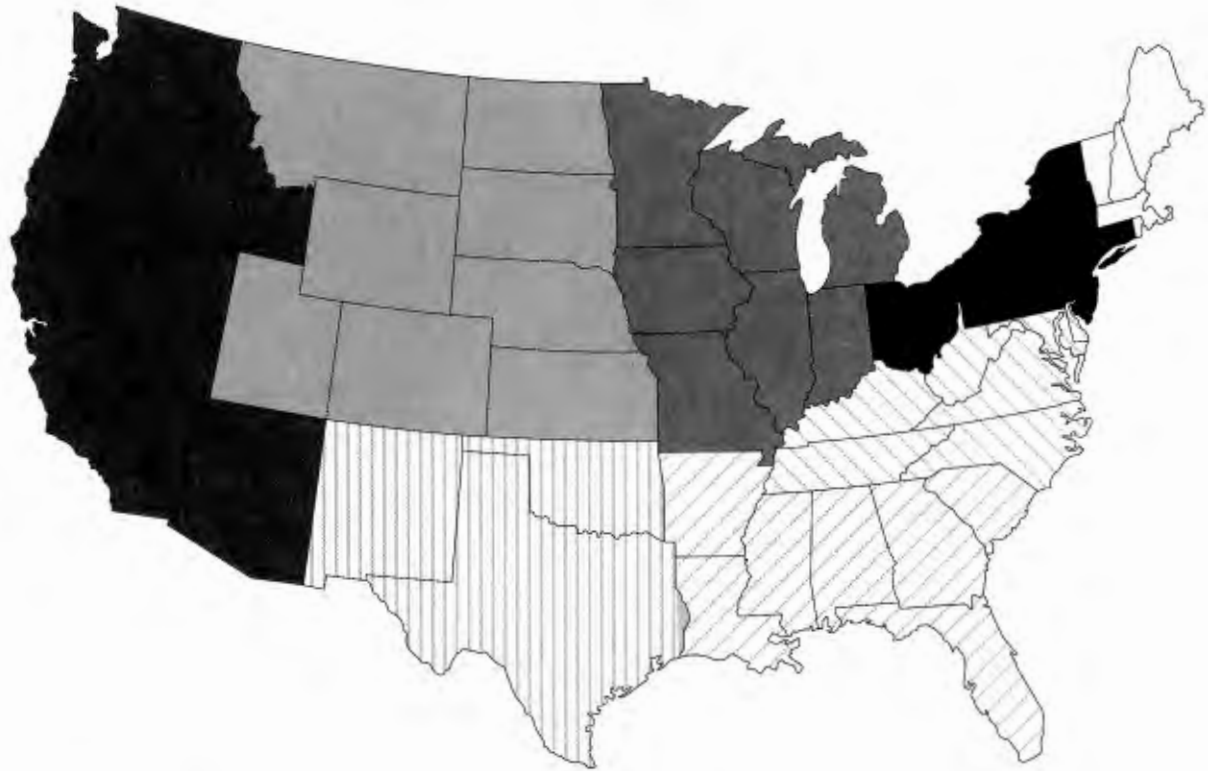
So where is the South? Well, that depends on which South you're talking about. Some places are Southern by anybody's reckoning, to be sure, but at the edges it's hard to say where the South is because people have different ideas about what it is. And most of those ideas are correct, or at least useful, for some purpose or other.

Attempting to answer the question of where the South ends and the Southwest begins can be a valuable task for students because it confronts them with the complexity of not only foreign cultures but also their own.

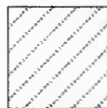
Works Cited

1. Reed, John S. *My Tears Spoiled My Aim and Other Reflections on Southern Culture*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1993: 13.
2. Wilson, Charles Reagan. "Southwest." *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Eds. Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989: 561-562.
3. Ibid: 561.
4. Pillsbury, Richard. "Landscape, Cultural." *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*: 534-35.
5. Reed: 13.

Regions of the Continental United States



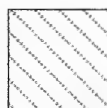
WESTERN
Washington, Oregon, Idaho,
Nevada, California, Arizona



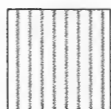
SOUTHERN
Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama,
Georgia, South Carolina, Florida



MOUNTAIN
Montana, North Dakota, Wyoming,
South Dakota, Utha, Colorado,
Kansas, Nebraska



MID-ATLANTIC
Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky, West Virginia,
Virginia, Maryland, Washington D.C., Delaware



SOUTHWEST
New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas



NORTH CENTRAL
Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey



CENTRAL
Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan,
Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Missouri



NORTHEAST
Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island,
Massachusetts, Connecticut

Today's South in the EFL-Classroom

by Andreas Müller-Hartmann

Thinking about the position of the South in today's English curriculum three questions come to mind that could help to approach this diverse and interesting region of the United States:

1. Why should we teach students about the South?
2. What should we teach them?
3. How should we teach it?

The first question is quickly answered. In terms of sheer numbers alone, the South deserves a place in the curriculum and in textbooks. Over the last 25 years, the South has become a center of population and economic growth. From 1970 to 1990, the population of the eleven states of the former Confederacy plus Kentucky rose by 40 percent (more than 20 million people), twice the national growth rate. Additionally in 1970, one-quarter of the U.S. population lived in the South; this proportion will increase to one-third by the year 2000 (1).

Furthermore, for a long time the South was bypassed by immigration, but that situation has changed tremendously as a result of dramatically improved conditions since the 1970s due in part to the Civil Rights Movement. Apart from second and third-generation immigrants who move down South to work or retire, the region as George E. Pozzetta points out, has "become one of the principal immigrant receiving areas of the nation. Vietnamese exiles, Mexican migrant laborers, Cuban 'boatlifters,' Haitian refugees, and other Latin American immigrants have gravitated to the South in unusually heavy numbers" (2). In the years 1993-94, 451,000 people came to the South from abroad, thus making it the region with the highest influx (West: 356,000; Northeast: 267,000; Midwest: 132,000) (3).

The demographic changes in the South are closely related to its economic development. The South hosts five of the six states that added the most jobs in 1993 and is home to eight of the top ten states leading in the establishment of new manufacturing plants since 1991. With regard to new job creation Charlotte, North Carolina, and Atlanta, Georgia, are ahead of the nation.

Considering these numbers one could ask whether it is acceptable for a textbook, for example, Cornelsen English G series (grade 9) (4) to exclude the South from its multicultural panorama. The story-line of the book is based on five American families, who represent different ethnic groups from other regions; the South, however, is left out.

If we include the South in our curriculum, as we should, what should we teach about it? A look at English textbooks in Germany shows that topical textbooks about the South (for the upper levels) concentrate on the historical development of black-white relations (5) with hardly any reference to other ethnic groups, such as Asian Americans, Hispanics or Native Americans.

The Asian and Hispanic populations are particularly important to the Southern cultural landscape. In 1994, 16.7 percent of all Asians in the U.S. (7.4 million) lived in the South, almost the same proportion as in the Northeast, 17.5 percent (West: 57.7 percent; Midwest: 8.2 percent). The Hispanic population is present everywhere in the South and is especially concentrated in Texas and Florida: In 1990, 1.57 million Hispanics, the majority of whom were Cubans, lived in Florida, not far behind the 1.7 million African Americans in Florida.

Native Americans are another case in point: The textbook referred to earlier does not even mention Native Americans in the South. In 1990, 29 percent of Native Americans lived in the South while nearly 50 percent were in the West. Only in the South, however, did the proportion of Native Americans noticeably increase between 1980 and 1990, from 26 percent to 29 percent. Moreover, among the ten largest Native American nations, four are Southern: the Cherokee, the Choctaw, the Lumbee, and the Creek.

The preceding figures call for a different representation of Southern ethnic groups in teaching materials – a representation that considers the important historical position of African Americans and also examines the present variety of ethnic groups and their relationships among each other as well as to the white mainstream culture. Answering the third question – How should we teach the South? – will provide suggestions how this model can be achieved.

When Eckard Fiedler called for a regionalist approach to American Studies in 1985, one of his reasons was that it is not possible to teach all aspects of the U.S. in school (6). Instead it is feasible to concentrate only on the South, since the South in itself is a very diverse region. In 1995, Wilhelm Geisler and Valerie Heitfeld posed the question of what to include in a cultural studies syllabus taking into consideration the fluidity of culture and the problem of accessibility to authentic material for teachers in Germany.

One possible way to deal with the South's diversity is a project-oriented approach that concentrates on a cluster of interrelated questions, reflecting important aspects of

American society such as multiculturalism, immigration, political and economic power and environmental issues. This approach should make use of electronic forms of communication such as e-mail and the Internet to ensure current and authentic materials to complement the textbook. At the same time, intercultural learning should form the basis of this approach assuring a learner-oriented project that leads to a dialogue between the students' culture and the foreign culture.

In attempting to incorporate modern regionalism in the school curriculum, a project-oriented approach allows students to get a feeling for the diversity of the South, while enabling the teacher to deal with those aspects he or she considers important in the pursuit of an effective teaching unit in the general field of American Studies. The example of Dade County, Florida, will be used to illustrate this point.

What does Dade County have to do with our students? Dade County, which is located in Southern Florida and includes Miami and large parts of Everglades National Park, can become the center for a project introducing issues that are of interest to German students of English and that can open a dialogue between the foreign culture and their own culture. The resulting unit would investigate multicultural aspects, environmental and ecological questions and global contact issues in Dade County.

In addition, our students are most likely to encounter Florida and its stereotypical images through tourism. A member of the Miccosukee tribe in the Everglades who brings busloads of tourists to his village relates the following story (7):

Today's South in the EFL-Classroom

We had a group of people visit from Denmark. ... They said this place was not real because they know what Indians look like. They know Indians live in teepees, dance around fires, wear war paint and loincloths and hunt buffalo. They wanted Indians to come out with tomahawks and raid the buses.

Such stereotypes are certainly not restricted to Danish tourists. Florida is a tourist's "paradise," a point that could be used to start the project. The first and last sequences of every *Miami Vice* episode, as well as brochures from local tourist offices readily available on the World Wide Web [or by mail] could act as spring boards to discuss the kind of images that are produced to attract visitors to South Florida. The resulting picture of the area could then be compared to the reality [presented, for example, in newspaper and magazine articles].

Additionally increased tourism and the population growth along the Southeast coast of Florida lead to environmental questions such as the availability and quality of water resources. The restrictive measures that have been taken over decades to protect the land and people from hurricanes and the overflows of Lake Okechobee have massively damaged Everglades National Park, one of the main tourist attractions of the area and the most important economic base for the Miccosukee Indian tribe on the northern border of the park.

Students might also be interested in the problems of political refugees in Dade County. From 1985 to 1990, Florida ranked third after California and New York as the state with the largest number of people moving in from abroad. With 59.7 percent of its population being foreign-born, Miami ranked first in this category in 1992 among cities with over 200,000

inhabitants. In the same year in Dade County, there were 1.4 million white people, almost 400,000 African Americans including a larger number of Haitian refugees, 564,000 Cubans, and 294,000 other Hispanics, mostly Nicaraguans. The relationships among the various ethnic groups, their access to power, their treatment by the U.S. government, and their economic position in Miami are issues that could be examined and compared with similar and not so similar developments in Germany's dealings with refugees.

To achieve such comparisons and to ensure authentic material, e-mail and the Internet are two forms of communication that could be effectively put to use. Schools in the Miami area could be contacted via e-mail to find possible partners for such a project. The Internet is another source of information about the different ethnic groups. Texts on the Internet are quite diverse, ranging from tourist brochures about the city of Miami to poems by Haitian refugees, from newspaper articles from the *Miami Herald* to the homepages of the Seminole tribe of Florida.

Works Cited

1. Applebome, Peter. "A Sweetness Tempers South's Bitter Past." *New York Times* 31 July 1994: 1, 20.
2. Pozzetta, George E. "Ethnic Life." *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*. Eds. Charles Reagan Wilson and William Ferris. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989: 404.
3. Census data (All census data can be found under the URL: <http://www.census.gov/>).

4. Schwarz, Helmut, Carl Taylor and Franz Vettel. *English G. Neue Ausgabe, Band B4*. Berlin: Cornelsen Verlag, 1988.

5. Fiedler, Eckard, Reimer Jansen and Godhard Tietze. *American Studies in the South*. Arbeitsberichte 44a. Bremen: Wissenschaftliches Institut für Schulpraxis, 1985.

6. Fiedler, Jansen, Tietze: 1.

7. Mairson, Alan. "The Everglades: Dying for Help." *National Geographic* 185 (April 1994): 32.

Information on Southern Florida Available through the World Wide Web

collected by Birgit Plietzsch

The following resources are examples of Internet searches using AltaVista (<http://www.altavista.digital.com>). The World Wide Web was searched for "Florida," "Dade County," "Miami," and "Everglades."

Florida Keys On-Line Guide

The Florida Keys On-Line Guide offers information on boating, diving, fishing, geography and history, eco-tourism, the Everglades, etc. This site also contains links to maps and photos.
<http://www.florida-keys.fl.us/>

Miami Herald

The electronic edition of the Herald is updated daily and offers different sections (e.g. USA, Americas, World, Florida, Dade/Miami) and services (e.g. News Library, FactLine).
<http://www.herald.com>

Miami

This web site is the Internet "Town Center" of Miami, Florida.
<http://Miami.info-access.com/>

Dade County

This site is part of the Interactive County Atlas. Information about physical characteristics, history, population, economy, local government as well as events and places can be found.

<http://cartlab-www.freac.fsu.edu/Interactive-CountyAtlas/Counties/Dade.html>

Dade County Public Schools

This home page contains links to school district information, school web sites, multicultural resources, student projects, etc.

<http://dcps.dade.k12.fl.us>

The Everglades

The Everglades home page contains links to a calendar of events, the Everglades Magazine, Everglades National Park Past and Present, etc.

<http://www.florida-everglades.com/>

together

Der neue

Diesterweg für

E N G L I S C H

D

ER NEUE DIESTERWEG für Englisch. Das sind innovative Englischwerke, die individuell für die Hauptschule, die Realschule, das Gymnasium und die Orientierungsstufe entwickelt werden. Methodik und Didaktik sind auf die Bedürfnisse der einzelnen Schulformen abgestimmt. Die Lehrwerke orientieren sich an den Schülerinnen und Schülern sowie der englischsprachigen Welt von heute. In der Gesamtschule verfolgen wir mit dem Lehrwerk »Notting Hill Gate« schon seit vier Jahren erfolgreich dieses Konzept. Wenn Sie mehr wissen wollen, schreiben Sie uns, rufen Sie an oder besuchen Sie uns in einem unserer Schulbuchzentren.

→ Verlag Moritz Diesterweg · Wächtersbacher Straße 89 · 60386 Frankfurt · Telefon (069) 42081-152 (Frau Bode)

The Future of Publishing

by Kushal Dave

It's 6 p.m. and a faceless modemmer dials into an Internet provider. Using File Transfer Protocol, he logs onto a UNIX server in Indiana. He types in a few arcane commands, and within a half hour he possesses the complete score for Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, various works of classic fiction, political papers, census results, the *CIA World Factbook*; no, this isn't some "hacker" snubbing his nose at copyright law – this is the world of electronic publishing, where a modemmer can log onto a commercial online service and point and click his way through all sorts of periodicals: *TIME*, *Business Week*, *PC World*, *Investor's Business Daily*, *Compute*, *The New Republic*, even *The New York Times*; where a CD-ROM contains thirty minutes of video and articles about current events; where trees and money are being conserved. Electronic publishing is a fast-growing field, and its proponents are predicting the extinction of the paper document.

The marriage of electronics to publishing is not a recent development; it had previously been mutually beneficial. Computers were used to desktop publish newsletters and magazines, but in the end the publications arrived on paper. Computers were used to search lists of paper documents, but eventually a physical document arrived in the searcher's hands. No one wanted to read things on computers. Besides the low-quality monitors, people wanted to be able to read on planes, in hotels, in waiting rooms, on trains – and at that time inexpensive portable computers did not exist.

The fully electronic document is coming in to its own, thanks to the many benefits it provides. The cost is a magnitude lower than paper while the speed is much higher. Michael Hart, executive director of Project Gutenberg, in an electronic mail dialogue, cited the example of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. Not taking

into account the cost of a computer (as little as \$1,000), since most people have them anyway, a copy of the book on floppy disk might cost a dollar. No time is spent publishing the document: once it's in e-text (electronic text) form it can be gotten almost instantly. On the other hand, the cheapest possible paper copy of the book would be \$5 because of the cost of printing, and printing would also delay its availability to the public. Moreover, electronic documents have a better availability, since they can be reproduced infinitely and do not require leaving your house, thanks to low-cost modems. Furthermore, it is now possible to read Associated Press reports as they are released and not have to wait for the next morning's paper, and you save the 25 cents the newspaper would have cost. Cost, speed, and availability are just some of the compelling arguments for electronic publishing instead of paper.

Additional advantages of electronic publishing are all the new possibilities it provides. Just about anybody can electronically publish anything. (There is even an Internet newsgroup where people can publish their XXX-rated stories.) Underground newsletters about music clubs and Generation X society, for example, are now even easier to distribute, since money for paper is no longer required. All sorts of amateur, weird, funny, or short documents and graphics (that would have never made it in the paper publishing world) are now being electronically published. There are also documents with increased depth (such as extensions of magazine articles) that would never have been published because of space limitations. Karin L. Trgovac, director of communications for Project Gutenberg, sums it up by saying, "I think electronic publishing helps to level the field in terms of who can publish. Look at the range of people who have access."

Fortunately, the increased number of documents does nothing to impede searches for particular documents. Services like Gopher on the Internet can lead you in the right direction, and within a document, searching is a snap. Just type in what you want and before you could find the index in a paper document, you'll have found what you wanted.

Thanks to feedback and other features, electronic documents are an example of the encroachment of interactivity upon the passive activities we hold dear. People can now have ongoing dialogues with authors ranging from John Leo of *U.S. News & World Report* to John Grisham [a popular novelist] (If you're interested in this, check out the book *Electronic Mail Addresses of the Rich and Famous*.) Electronic documents also offer copying, quoting, indexes, modification, hypertext links and the like. "Physical media just can't compete. ... [An electronic text] just offers more 'bang for the buck'," explains Hart.

Project Gutenberg named for the developer of the famous printing press, at Illinois Benedictine College has put electronic text in operation and has seen its advantages and pitfalls. Its hundreds of available titles have no copyright, which enables free distribution, but certain rules apply to anyone using Project Gutenberg™ e-texts. The process is far from streamlined – a conservative estimate is that it takes 50 hours to get any e-text selected, entered, proofread, edited, copyright searched and analyzed, etc. When one considers, however, these e-texts may reach as many as one million people by the year 2001, the value of their work is immense. You can contact Project Gutenberg at P.O. Box 2782, Champaign, IL, 61825 or via e-mail at hart@vmd.cso.uiuc.edu.

Many companies are attempting to capitalize on the multimedia possibilities of electronic publishing. Sound and pictures are being incorporated in low-cost World Wide Web publications. In addition companies like Medio and Nautilus are producing CD-ROM's that represent the new generation of periodicals – now music reviews include sound clips, movie reviews include trailers, book reviews include excerpts and how-to articles include demonstrative videos. All this is put together with low costs, high speed, and many advantages.

But even more important than the niceties of electronic publishing are the benefits it can offer society. As Michael Hart wrote in a winter newsletter, "For the first time, we have the capability for everyone on a universal scale, literally, to have information, education, and literacy at their fingertips, should they choose to be informed, educated, or literate. ... Perhaps the best use of the Internet is to fight this epidemic and to make the cures for illiteracy and ignorance available so cheaply that there can never again be any excuse for ignorance and illiteracy – forever."

Reprinted with permission of Kushal Dave. This article can be found on the Internet at <http://promo.net/pg/articles/kushal.htm>

Kushal Dave is a high school senior and an avid computer and Internet user. He loves to write, sing and debate. Kushal enjoys receiving e-mail and welcomes all opinions. Kushal's web page can be found at <http://www.pulver.com/~krave/>

Some Electronic Texts Available through Project Gutenberg

Conrad, Joseph (1857-1924)

- A Personal Record
- Almyer's Folly
- Amy Foster
- An Outcast of the Islands
- End of the Tether
- Falk
- Heart of Darkness
- The Secret Sharer
- The Shadow Line
- To-morrow
- Youth

Crane, Stephen (1871-1900)

- Maggie, Girl of the Streets
- The Red Badge of Courage

Dreiser, Theodore (1871-1945)

- Sister Carrie

Fitzgerald, F. Scott (1896-1940)

- This Side of Paradise

Hawthorne, Nathaniel (1804-1864)

- From Twice Told Tales
- House of the Seven Gables
- Mosses From An Old Manse
- The Scarlet Letter
- The Snow Image

London, Jack (1876-1916)

- Before Adam
- Burning Daylight
- John Barleycorn
- Love of Life and other stories
- Tales of Fish Patrol
- The Call of the Wild
- The Red One
- White Fang

Twain, Mark (1835-1910)

- A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court
- A Tramp Abroad
- Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
- Adventures of Tom Sawyer
- Life on the Mississippi
- Pudd'nhead Wilson
- The \$ 30,000 Bequest
- Tom Sawyer Abroad
- Tom Sawyer Detective
- What Is Man?

These and other electronic texts can be found on the Internet at <http://promo.net/pg/>

American Dreams & Discontents: Beyond the Level of the Playing Field

by Isabel V. Sawhill and Daniel P. McMurrer

Progress towards the ideal of an American society based on equality of opportunity that rewards ability and achievement has been significant. Yet, some long-standing problems and some newly emergent inequities remain to be resolved. In this article, two staff members of The Urban Institute, a leading nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank, seek to reconcile these continuing discontents with the record of accomplishment.

In 1931, when the historian James Truslow Adams coined the phrase “the American dream,”⁽¹⁾ he captured something peculiarly American: (2) belief in a society both open and dynamic, grounded in a commitment to individual opportunity and to a better life for each generation. In the American lexicon, as Frank Luntz notes, opportunity “is not just the chance for rapid social mobility, but has also to do with our entrenched belief in the concept of meritocracy. Americans are more likely than any other democracy to believe that people succeed because of actual individual talents, efforts, and accomplishments rather than the social class into which they are born” (3).

The American dream is now said to be in trouble. Many Americans complain that working hard and playing by the rules no longer ensures the kind of upward mobility that has drawn millions of immigrants to our shores. And many cite the fear that their children’s generation will not do as well economically or socially as they have done.

The irony is that these complaints come at a time of unparalleled prosperity and follow a dramatic expansion of opportunities to many previously excluded groups. What has gone wrong? Has opportunity in America really diminished? Or are our expectations simply out-stripping what we can achieve? We seek

answers to such questions in this essay, which provides some historical perspective.

American Public Philosophy: A Belief in Equal Opportunity

Most Western European democracies have espoused more egalitarian philosophies than have ever taken root in the United States. American society, instead, has been premised on the idea of equality of opportunity for each individual rather than equality of results. Tocqueville described this attitude as early as the 1830s (4). It has, if anything, grown stronger over time (5). Although a progressive tax system and a web of redistributive social programs serve to smooth extreme disparities in the United States, these interventions generally play a smaller role than in most other industrialized nations.

Reflecting an emphasis on establishing a fair process to guide the initial competition rather than on altering the distribution of rewards, public efforts in the United States have been directed toward two goals:

- Creating a level “playing field,” on which all individuals have equal opportunity to seek the rewards of the market economy, regardless of race, sex, nationality, or religion.
- Equipping individuals with the necessary tools for success on that playing field by broadening access to education.

The Record of Achievement

Much of U.S. history can be seen as the continuing struggle to achieve these two goals, thereby moving American practice closer to

ideology. Benjamin Barber put it this way: "What is perhaps most notable about the American story ... is how it has worked at every crucial cross-roads in our history ... to capture the aspirations of the excluded and to extend the boundaries of power and property" (6).

The struggle is not over, and the goals not fully achieved. Progress, nonetheless, has been extraordinary. Legal barriers have come down and attitudes have been transformed. As recently as 150 years ago, almost all African Americans were slaves; women were largely excluded from higher education and the professions, as well as the voting booth; and a large influx of Irish and German immigrants stood near the bottom of the economic ladder. Today, the earnings of blacks have nearly caught up with those of whites with similar educational backgrounds, and the proportion of young adults who complete high school is now the same for blacks as for whites (7). Women are as well-educated as men, enter similar occupations at similar rates of pay, and can swing a national election to a candidate who lacks majority support among men. Numerous earlier generations of immigrants have achieved levels of success that often surpass those of native-born Americans.

Efforts to extend rights to previously excluded groups have been accompanied by a continuing expansion of educational opportunities. The importance of the education system in creating opportunity has grown as other sources of opportunity have faded. During the 1800s, the vast expanse of unsettled territory was a primary means through which the nation delivered on its promise of a chance of advancement for all citizens, leading Frederick Jackson Turner to deem the West "another name for opportunity" (8). But even then, the common school was viewed as a great leveler and source of upward mobility (9).

With the closing of the frontier around the turn of the century, Americans increasingly looked to education as the primary source of opportunity. In 1940, Harvard University president James Bryant Conant called the public schools a "vast engine" for "regaining that great gift to each succeeding generation – opportunity, a gift that was once the promise of the frontier" (10). The education system expanded dramatically. Between 1900 and 1975, secondary school enrollment increased from 10 percent to over 90 percent among children ages 14 to 17. During the same period, the high school graduation rate increased from 7 percent to 73 percent (11). College enrollment and graduation rates have also increased significantly (12).

Today, with technology playing an ever more central role in all industries, the demand for highly educated workers has increased still further (13). Reflecting this increase, the wage premium for education has grown. In 1972, college graduates, on average, earned 38 percent more than high school graduates. By 1993, this differential had increased to 57 percent (14).

The scale of public spending on education reflects the central role played by education in the United States. While the United States spends relatively little on direct redistributive efforts, historically it has spent more per capita on education than almost any other industrialized nation. In the 1990-91 school year, for example, the proportion of gross domestic product spent on public education (at 4.9 percent) was higher than in any other G-7 nation except Canada (15). Yet most Americans voice support for even more government spending on education. Americans also rank highest in the world in the percentage of citizens who receive higher education, and Americans still remain much more likely than

American Dreams & Discontents

individuals in other countries to support further expansion of higher education opportunities (16).

Discontents of a Meritocracy

A society based on equality of opportunity rewards ability and achievement, the dictionary definition of a meritocracy. Historically, the ideal of equal opportunity in the United States has been so grossly compromised by differential treatment of particular groups that much of the nation's political energy has been absorbed by efforts to rectify these injustices. Few have speculated about what society might look like if true equality of opportunity were to be achieved. While that time has not been reached, we have moved far enough to discover that a society based on meritocratic principles is not an unmixed blessing. As the importance of discrimination and illiteracy has faded, other factors, some long overshadowed and others newly emergent, are now playing an increasing role in shaping individual opportunity.

Persistence of Inequality

Progress in eliminating discrimination has not gone hand in hand with reductions in inequality; it has only reshuffled winners and losers in the competition. Many may well have hoped that leveling the playing field would change the distribution of income, a hope that in retrospect was doomed to failure. Changing the rules governing the competition for wealth and status does nothing to change the structure of the market economy and the rewards that flow from it. The degree of inequality is unchanged, even though who ends up where in the income distribution changes (17).

Psychological Fallout

As access to education or jobs becomes more open, those who do not succeed can no longer point so easily to some external source for their failure (18). The closer society moves to a level playing field, the more likely it is that the consequences of individual failures will have to be confronted – by society as a whole as well as by the individuals themselves (19).

Effects on the Family

The leveling of the playing field has liberated women from purely domestic roles. This dramatic change, along with the growth of the welfare state, has undermined the economic basis of marriage. As job opportunities for women have increased, their dependence on a husband's earnings and on the institution of marriage has declined. This has led to more divorce and to more childbearing outside marriage – trends that have been at least partly responsible for the dramatic growth of single parent families (20). In the three decades since 1950, the number of children living in single-parent families has increased from 7 percent to 27 percent. This increased incidence of single-parent families, in turn, has had major consequences for the distribution of income and future opportunities for children.

A New Economic Environment

Finally, two economic developments of the last two decades slowed growth and structural changes that have placed a new premium on skill and education are threatening the American dream. As long as America was blessed with rapid economic growth, no matter where one was on the economic ladder one could

reasonably expect one's children to reach a higher rung. As the growth rate has slowed since the early 1970s, the competition increasingly resembles a game in which one individual can gain only to the extent that another loses. In this environment, where economic growth is not enough to provide all with a ready path up the economic ladder, the opportunity structure matters more, and issues of fairness become more salient.

This conclusion is strengthened to the extent that the rate of growth that we experienced in our earlier history was a function of unique factors such as unlimited access to land and other natural resources in the 19th century, and an inexhaustible world market for our goods in the wake of World War II. It would be nice to believe that we could improve economic opportunities by ratcheting up the growth rate to earlier levels, but no one has yet devised a credible strategy for doing so.

Economic growth has not only slowed, but its benefits now accrue almost entirely to those with the most education. Simply being a loyal, hard-working employee no longer guarantees that one will achieve the American dream. Whatever progress has been made in extending educational opportunities, it has not kept pace with the demand. The fate of the unskilled and the least able in this new environment is a new worry not easily reconciled with existing ideology.

Looking Forward

America may not be a true meritocracy. Social class and race still matter. Still, the country has progressed enough toward its historically-given goal of equal opportunity to make many

wonder why we, as a society, are not feeling more optimistic about the future. The persistence of inequality, the loss of external rationales for failure, the decline of marriage and the family, and the new economic environment all have contributed, in our view, to current discontents. It is quite possible that as our society faces that Cold War, post-industrial age, we are at the cusp of a new era in which the benefits from economic growth and global markets are not widely shared, forcing us to seek new responses to social responsibility. As we look to the future, however, we should not lose sight of how much has already been achieved.

Notes and References

1. See Samuelson, Robert. *The Good Life and Its Discontents*. New York: Times Books, 1995 for more on Adams and the American Dream.
2. For a discussion of American "exceptionalism," see Lipset, Seymour M. *American Exceptionalism*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1996.
3. Luntz, Frank I. "Americans Talk About the American Dream." *The New Promise of American Life*. Eds. Lamar Alexander and E. Finn Chester, Jr. Indianapolis: Hudson Institute, 1995.
4. One should distinguish American ideology and American practice. Some scholars who have studied the actual degree of social mobility around the time of Tocqueville, using the best available data, find little evidence of a "rags to riches" pattern. See Pessen, Edward, ed. *Three Centuries of Social Mobility in America*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath & Co., 1974.

American Dreams & Discontents

5. Lipset: 98.
6. Barber, Benjamin R. *An Aristocracy of Everyone: The Politics of Education and the Future of America*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992: 71.
7. Day, Jennifer. "Educational Attainment in the United States: March 1995." *U.S. Census Bureau Report P-20-489*.
8. Turner, Frederick J. "The Problem of the West." *The Atlantic Monthly* (September 1896).
9. See "The United States at Midcentury." In McPherson James M. *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
10. Conant, James B. "Education for a Classless Society: The Jeffersonian Tradition." *Atlantic Monthly* (May 1940).
11. U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970*. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1976.
12. For example, the percentage of the population (age 25 and over) with at least a college degree almost tripled between 1960 and 1994 (from 7.7 percent to 22.2 percent). U.S. Bureau of the Census. *Statistical Abstract of the United States 1995*.
13. Katz, Lawrence F. and Kevin M. Murphy. "Changes in Relative Wages, 1963-1987: Supply and Demand Factors." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107 (Feb. 1992): 35-78.
14. Mishel, Lawrence and Jared Bernstein. *The State of Working America 1994-95*. New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1994.
15. National Center for Education Statistics. *The Condition of Education 1994*. U.S. Government Printing Office, 1994: 150. The Group of Seven (G-7) nations are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States.
16. Lipset: 83.
17. Indeed, the erosion of traditional norms about who should hold what jobs at what pay (women should become nurses, not doctors, etc.) appears to have been accompanied by an erosion of social constraints on employer hiring and compensation practices more generally. At the extreme, more open and geographically widespread competition can contribute to the rise of what Robert Frank and Phillip Cook (*The Winner-Take-All Society*. New York: Free Press, 1995) call "winner-take-all" labor markets, which bid up the salaries earned by top performers in a particular field. Those individuals who were previously protected from competition by virtue of being male, white, or the best at whatever they do in their town, have been hurt most by these developments. Thus, by loosening the role of social norms and limited spheres of competition relative to the role of supply and demand, the move toward meritocracy may actually increase inequality. White males with little education have been particularly affected.
18. Amartya Sen (*Inequality Reexamined*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1992: 6.) notes that the opposite may also occur: "In situations of persistent adversity and deprivation, the

victims do not go on grieving and grumbling all the time, and may even lack the motivation to desire a radical change of circumstances.”

19. Many commentators have discussed this problem. See Bell, Daniel. “On Meritocracy and Equality.” *The Public Interest*, 1970: 43, and Kaus Mickey. *The End of Equality*, New York: Basic Books, 1992: 47.

20. See Cherlin Andrew J. *Marriage, Divorce, Remarriage*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992: 51-52.

Isabel V. Sawhill is a Senior Fellow at The Urban Institute and holds the Arjay Miller chair in public policy. Daniel P. McMurrer is a Research Associate at The Urban Institute.