looks back regretfully at Horace Greeley, who warns, “Don’t Drop the Carpet Bag.” The
cartoon warns as well both that Abolitionist Abe will fail to his destruction in trying to
make his crossing to the distant White House, and that he will bring the slave—depicted
as just an innocent child—and the entire Nation with him (Figure 3: 1: 378).

At about this time a disagreement developed between Vanity Fair’s first editor,
Frank Wood, and the Stephens brothers, leading to Wood’s resignation. Since many of
the Bohemians who were the magazine’s mainstay joined him, the managers turned to
Leland to rescue the periodical. Leland was able to broaden the base of contributors, and
soon the coterie of Bohemians came flocking back. But even while he made peace with
the Pfiffner contributors, he found himself at war with his employers over editorial
policy. Leland recalled that the Stephens brothers were “very much averse to absolutely
committing the magazine to Republicanism, and I was determined on it. I had a delicate
and very difficult path to pursue, and I succeeded, as the publication bears witness”
(Memoirs 1: 22). One does detect a definite lessening of attacks on African
Americans and abolitionists during Leland’s editorship, but only after nine months, as I
have mentioned, Leland was gone—replaced by Artemus Ward. Once again it was open
season on these groups.

Vanity Fair’s treatment of Representative Owen Lovejoy, whose 1862 bill to
free all American slaves would be defeated by only two votes, reveals the virulence of the
weekly’s Negrophobia. Among other progressive measures, he called for the use of
black troops at equal pay in the Union armies, causing Lovejoy to engage in a number of
very public and bitter debates with conservatives in Congress. Beginning with “Mr.
Lovejoy and His Nigger,” the weekly attacked him viciously, blaming the conflict
between the sections on the slavesholders, but on “the unfortunate Nigger,” who has
made “disturbance enough in this country already. The Rebellion, of which he is the
remote origin in great degree, is a very serious fact.” Instead of joining other
Congressmen in mobilizing men and materiel to end the Rebellion, Lovejoy is charged
with getting “a Nigger into the war . . . a very large, very fat, very savory Nigger, of the
species familiarly denominated ‘back.’” Commenting that Lovejoy’s “whole system is
full of the Nigger per se,” the writer cannot contain himself: “Not as a cause of trouble.
Not as the foundation of differences that have led to insurrection. But as a Nigger. He
thinks Nigger; he talks Nigger; he dreams Nigger. . . . he even seems to see Nigger, taste
Nigger and hear Nigger. Very possibly he smells Nigger. At all events, he has never
given evidence in public, of the slightest consciousness of any subject whatever, that had
not a Nigger in it.” It is Vanity Fair itself that is tainted on this subject (4: 41).

Another target was Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts, who insisted
that African Americans be allowed to fight in a war meant to secure their own rights as
citizens. In “Governor Andrew’s School for the Massachusetts Soldier,” Vanity Fair
portrayed the staunchly abolitionist governor, who in 1863 would organize two famous
Negro regiments, the Massachusetts Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth, as telling his troops,
“Now, boys, three cheers—two for the Nigger and one for the Union” (Figure 4). In an
accompanying essay published on June 7, 1862, “Governor Andrew on Patriotism,”
Vanity Fair satirized Andrews as a vainglorious Napoleon of a governor (5: 274-75).
Andrew worked closely with Frederick Douglass. Although Vanity Fair claimed that
above all it was committed to the preservation of the Union, its prejudice blinded it to the
growing need in the Union army for African American soldiers and sailors, who
contributed to the Union victory. In fact, “between 180,000 and 200,000 black
Americans served in the Union army,” and some 30,000 joined the navy (Tindall 645-
46).
Figure 3: “Shaky”
*Vanity Fair* 1 (1860): 178.

Figure 4: “Governor Andrew’s School for the Massachusetts Soldier”
*Vanity Fair* 5 (1862): 274.
But when it came to race, *Vanity Fair* refused to yield. The Preface to the sixth volume (July 1862) is primarily an attack on African Americans and abolitionists. "We think that the Nation is, at present, of more consequence than the Negro: that the glory of the former should be considered in preference to the glorification of the latter, and that all the gammon preached about immediate emancipation is a dodge for bringing political capital to the miners of the black diamond," the editors argued. This was well before Lincoln had decided to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, when it was still thought that he favored gradual, compensated emancipation, as in the Delaware Plan, which would free the slaves over thirty years, with the federal government paying some $500 dollars for each slave (Oates 268). That was as far as *Vanity Fair* would go, even at this point in the war. Rather, it would use its satire, its demeaning images of the Negro, to preserve a white republic, as in a drawing, "What the Thirty-seventh Congress has Done," published on August 2, 1862, which shows a recently freed Negro child-man jumping for joy while on the facing panel a white man sits with the letters of bankruptcy now enslaving him (Figure 5). The African American just couldn't win. Denied the opportunity to enlist, he was also portrayed as lounging in a brightly colored suit drinking a draft of beer while the drafted white troops march off to war (Figure 6).

In its attacks on the African American, *Vanity Fair* evidently spoke for a considerable portion of the Northern population—those who, for instance, responded in outrage when Lincoln finally issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which once Democrat called "impudent and insulting alike to God as to man, for it declares those "equal" whom God declares unequal" (Oates 339). The weekly may have gained some readers as a result of this position, but these would not have offset defections among liberal readers who were offended by its blatant racism. *Vanity Fair* itself admitted in July 1862 that, as a consequence of its repeated attacks on African Americans, it had suffered significant defections: "During the last six months we have received several bushels of anonymous letters, expressing the most exaggerated hatred, intensified abhorrence, and unmitigated malevolence toward us. Several thousand of these epistolarians—or吡tollarians, if we must have our little joke—assume that the mayor of Timbuctoo is the principal stockholder of *Vanity Fair*, and that our mission is to vindicate the traffic in black chattels, here, for his benefit." The weekly then insulted "about eleven hundred of our communicants," whom they charged with the "bad grammar" that is the revealing mark of the "humatics" of the "so-called abolition press."

Faced with rapidly rising production costs and defections among readers who objected to the magazine's racism, the weekly found itself struggling for its very existence. In the Preface to the seventh volume (January 1863), the editors issued a desperate plea for "rags, rags . . . the rags the thing," and again, "Rags!—h! h! h!" More than anything else, the shortage of rags, the basic ingredient of paper-making, was responsible for the escalation of costs. The humor results from the contradiction that an entity as noble and valuable as a brilliant literary magazine should be threatened by a shortage of rags, of all things. But there was no disguising the brutal truth that "the paper-maker becomes ravenous," rushing down upon *Vanity Fair* "like a wolf on the Fold, with a fabulous price streaming from his horrid price on his horrid claps." Just a few weeks earlier, on December 14, 1862 the editors had published the witty comic poem "RAGS HOT" exploring the dire consequences of the paper shortage for the nation's intellectual life. Why the poem was, but still racist, as it joked about "in what a dilemma the Press is";

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**Figure 5:** "What the Thirty-Seventh Congress has Done"
*Vanity Fair* 6 (1862): 113.

**Figure 6:** "Drafts"
*Vanity Fair* 6 (1862): 125.
Lo! the Tribune's come down
To a tint whity-brown—
A sort of an Octo-noot color—
While the Sun's in eclipse,
The Times all goes to rips,
And the Herald grows darker and duller.

Only think! should the Press
Have to take a recess,
Of the dread intellectual famine!
No leaders, no news,
No Executive views,
No gomption, no gossip, no gammon,
We had all better tear
Our duds up and go bare,
Though the cold should our cuticles crinkle,
Than be always full-dressed
While our minds, sore distressed,
Get no chance to obtain a "new wrinkle." (6: 303)

To elude the wolf of ravenous production costs and while avoiding becoming an "octo-noot" paper, Vanity Fair henceforth would become a monthly. But after two small issues in January and February and a brief run as a weekly, from May 2 through July 4, Vanity Fair itself became another casualty of the war, "gone for good."

As should be obvious, the periodical's failure also reflected the inability of the editors to respond in new ways to the tragic realities and underlying purposes of the war. Isn't it strange, they wondered in January 1863, that the Emancipation Proclamation should not have "thrown a glat of the invaluable tatters into our market" in the form of rags from the newly freed slaves? But "strange to say . . . the obsolete Child of Sorrow does not seem to strike his banjo with responsive strains to the pensive whistle thus piped into him." The editors had expected to see "the fascinating Ethiop walk up, clad in Pomp, to the feet of the suffering North, and lay there as an offering, done up in a bandana handkerchief, the rags in which he earstwhile rollicked at the simmering South" (7: 3). The rags necessary to make a "reputable white paper such as we have hitherto served Vanity Fair on to our readers, week after week" were simply unavailable. Vanity Fair would be a "white paper" or nothing at all.

Although African Americans were far and away its favorite target, the weekly satirized other ethnic groups as well. On May 5, 1860, it portrayed "Bridget," its caricature of the drunken Irish woman, being attended to by two New York policemen (Figure 7: 1: 293). The Irish are frequently satirized, and so too are the Jews. Under the title, "Why Not?" on May 17, 1862, Vanity Fair gave this report: "We notice a meeting, last week, of 'The Society for Ameliorating the Condition of the Jews'—but why don't we have a 'Society for the Condition of the Jewed'? That is the question which 'One Who Buys His Clothes in Chatham Street', asks us to proposed" (5: 241).

In "The Burlesque Business," published on November 30, 1861, Vanity Fair offered a cogent defense of political satire, explaining that it was operating in a rhetorical environment where to burlesque was to be sublime: "Few things have not in their time been burlesqued—it is a mistake to suppose otherwise . . . To burlesque is now deemed sublime; to be serious is to be ridiculous." As they claimed, even "Shakespeare was a
burlesquer of men and things." At a time when politics was full of absurdity, where speakers "found their eloquence upon extravagance" and when "the odd, the absurd, the grotesque, the humorous are always made to stick out," then burlesque is a means of restoring sanity. The editors boasted that "We are engaged upon a noble work," by "doing for literature what the actors of the day are doing for the stage—we are simplifying matters—stripping them of their excrescences, and proving that everything is capable of being burlesqued... It is a difficult and apparently thankless task, the one we have in hand, but who else is there capable of doing it?" (4: 245). Who could question the need for such cultural work? If only *Vanity Fair* knew the difference between burlesquing individuals for their faults on the one hand and racial and ethnic groups on the other!

America has never experienced a shortage of worthy targets to be burlesqued—certainly not during the Civil War, when generals, politicians, and other self-important figures claimed the public's attention. And so *Vanity Fair* sponsored its ever-alert correspondent, General "McArone" (George Arnold), as he breathlessly brought to his readers accounts of his stupendous triumphs: first it was taking Richmond and followed in short order by an account of freeing all the slaves in the Gulf States. But in a later dispatch, McArone confessed that he had not taken Richmond after all, but had left orders for its evacuation. It was Memphis that he conquered, leading to a description of the naval battles fought on the Mississippi. "If you fail, dear *Vanity*, to get clearly at the facts of this affair," he wrote, "charge it all to my imitative talent and the fascinating style of the Tribune" ("Our War Correspondent", 5: 297).

But as the war ground on, bringing with it death and suffering, the characteristic *Vanity Fair* humor with its incessant puns and irreverence grew tiresome. How could one laugh when the editors were forced to insert regularly one black-lined box after another—each with a poem memorializing a fallen soldier? Mourning and punning did not make the best bedfellows. One of the periodical's most brilliant contributors, Lieut. James O'Brien, U.S. Volunteers, died of wounds on April 6, 1862, only 33 years old. He was memorialized on April 19, 1862. Here is the second and concluding stanza:

Hush, hush! The memories nash
With imperative gush on heart and head;
Speak low—none of us know
Half we forego in the galling dead.
Plant flowers, not where April showers
But tears like ours shall keep them in bloom
And their breath impart to each kindred heart
On the crypt of which lies the Poet's tomb. (5: 190)

Aware of the desperate situation—for it and the Union—on September 20, 1862, in the poem "V. F. to the Rescue," the editors proposed to transform their magazine into a patriotic periodical if that would help save the Union. They would "cast... aside... our bauble, caps and bell" (6: end page). But alas, it was too late for such a transformation. Faced with the escalation in production costs and erosion of readership, *Vanity Fair* had no choice but to withdraw from the battle. The last issue appeared in July 1863.

How might *Vanity Fair* have changed if it had attempted to reinvent itself? It would have had to surrender its endemic racism. The example of a distant descendant, the *New Yorker*, is instructive. On December 20, 1941, just after Pearl Harbor, the weekly published a racist cartoon by Rhea Irvin, "The Mikado," demeaning the Japanese enemy. In "Uniform Blush: What was Funny-When the *New Yorker First Went to War," Roger Angell described Irvin's drawing as a "wincingly xenophobic takeoff of 'The Mikado,'" with the toothy, swastika-robbed gentility of Japan grinning amid descending bombs and parachutes. But Angell points out that the weekly shortlly eliminated such demeaning images in favor of a more reassuring, even innocent humor, one that treated the buffetting of ordinary Americans faced with the new realities of war (Angell, 90). Similarly, after 9/11 the *New Yorker* deployed a gentle humor to help readers in New York and elsewhere in adjusting to a new world in which terror came to America. Could any subscriber from those days forget Mara Kalman and Rick Meyerowitz's cover for December 10, 2001, entitled "New Yorkistan" showing the greater New York area divided into such areas as "Bronxistan," "Botoxia," "Upper Kvenchyna," "Moollaw," "Gaysmenistan," and "Trumppistan." It's all there—and more.

Once the United States and Britain—the "Coalition of the Willing"—launched its attack on Iraq in March, 2003, criticism of the policy of the Bush administration was branded unpatriotic, a betrayal of American troops. Of course, burlesque, to use *Vanity Fair's* term, was needed all the more. Frank Rich, the *New York Times* culture correspondent, credits Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* on television with being an equal opportunity satirist, taking on Republicans and Democrats alike and not shying away from the war itself: "The Bush on 'Saturday Night Live' may still be fat-boy simple, wishing that 'Shock and Awe' had been named 'Tango & Cash,' but *The Daily Show* sees a slicker operator. After the president told the Iraqis in a subtitled TV address that they were 'a good and gifted people' who 'deserve better than tyranny and corruption and torture chambers,' Mr. Stewart cited it as proof that 'condescension knows no borders.' Nor is the show taking at face value the White House's professed devotion to postwar Iraq. 'We won,' said Mr. Colbert [one of the show's characters] in his report from Baghdad 10 days ago. 'Rebuilding is for losers. Time to party! Then it's off to Syria for the next invasion.' Finally, I cite "The Vision Thing," a drawing by Anita Kunz for the cover of *The New Yorker* (October 13, 2003) showing President Bush riding a white horse across an empty landscape—only here, it's the President of the United States who is wearing blinders, not the horse. How will policy makers in Washington deal with what looks like a destructive, costly quagmire in Iraq? In the midst of war, we need humor in its various forms more than ever.

*Works Cited*


Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in a slave state. His family owned a few slaves. They had come from the Southeast to Missouri in search of prosperity like so many other Americans of the early-to-mid nineteenth century. But Missouri was a border state, as much western as “Old South” or “Deep South” and hence was a state with significant ideological divides—for example, the state was fairly evenly split between supporters of the Union and the Confederacy. As a young man, Sam Clemens fought, briefly, for the Confederacy. When he had enough, he fled to Nevada.

Despite this background, James Cox argues that Clemens is less a figure split on an East-West axis than one whose major faultline, insofar as identity is concerned, lies along a North-South axis. Cox attributes the fact that Hannibal, Missouri, is ideologically situated “just far enough north to be where West was South and East was North” to the polarizing impact of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. “If we sketched his life out of the historical and geographical configuration, we could say that Samuel Clemens fled (or deserted or escaped) the political North-South axis, once it completely volatilized, to go west... but only to find a pen name originating in the river piloting parlance of his days as a steamboat pilot on the lower Mississippi, i.e. on the southern part of the river from New Orleans to Saint Louis and back” (“Life on the Mississippi Revisited,” 64-65). Eventually, his career would be defined by imaginative (and occasionally literal) returns to the South. Much of his best work—for all its discursive complexity—is set in the antebellum South. Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, his masterpiece, comes to mind, but also Do The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, “Old Times on the Mississippi,” Pudd’nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins, and even A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, not on the basis of its setting, of course, but on the basis of the compelling analogies it suggests between two settings, Twain’s Arthurian Britain and his slaveholding South.

Sam Clemens arrived in Nevada in August of 1861 and by the fall of 1862 he was contributing to the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise using a number of pseudonyms. In that city named for the most Southern of Southern states (and which mirrored Missouri in being divided between sympathizers with the Confederacy and sympathizers with the Union), he was also becoming a Union man. As far as we know, “Mark Twain” first appeared in that newspaper on February 3, 1863, and the first line of the piece signed with the pen name reads, “I feel as if I had just awakened out of a long sleep” (Cox, Mark Twain 5; see Smith 47-49). For anyone interested in Mark Twain’s construction and use of the South in his subsequent work, that sentence is heavy with significance. For one thing, this opening line implies a break with his childhood and youth, a break that will establish the terms on which the relationship between Mark Twain and the frontier South in the days “befo’ de war” would be conducted (“Life on the Mississippi” 294). With the possible exception of Life on the Mississippi and sketches like “Journalism in Tennessee,” both of which deal with the postwar South, Mark Twain would draw most of his material from the dreams and the nightmares of that “long sleep” of youth on the Southwestern frontier prior to secession. However, these dreams and nightmares not only inhabit the present but reflect, and shape, the present’s own