

Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain and America's Asia

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The bestselling status of the *Autobiography of Mark Twain* (2010) and the recent controversy over the 2011 NewSouth edition of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (in which the n-word has been replaced with “slave” throughout) attest to Twain’s unique appeal as an author of popular and formally sophisticated works that satirize US formations of race and empire. For a broad international audience,¹ Twain exemplifies how literary form and style can be mobilized against racist institutions; at the same time, his writings have provided key examples for critical conversations about the possibilities and limitations of canonical engagements with blackness and empire.² Whereas Toni Morrison’s reading of “the Africanist presence” at the “center” of *Huckleberry Finn* has given rise to illuminating scholarship on blackness in canonical American literature (54), historical dynamics of comparative racialization raise questions about how “Africanist” representations intersected with representations of Chinese immigrants in a period when the figure of the indentured coolie laborer blurred boundaries between traditional notions of freedom and servitude. My book project, “Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain and America’s Asia,” draws on recent scholarship on Asian immigration, US imperialism, race theory, and legal history to situate Twain’s race fiction in a comparative perspective: in the intersectional contexts of Chinese immigration restrictions and Jim Crow, even historical novels about antebellum slavery registered fluctuating connections between immigration policy, imperialist ventures, and antiblack racism. Although the project’s focus is on the explicit and implicit comparisons that Twain drew between different racial groups over the course of his career, contextualized

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analysis of his writings also provides occasions to think through broader methodological issues, such as how literature can reveal formative tensions between different racial groups, how to critique processes of comparative racialization without reproducing their logic of analogy, and how readings that attend to shifting institutions of structural racism can complement accounts that focus on the exposure of racial prejudice. The book's title, which I take from Twain's trenchant essay, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" (Zwick 1901), points not only to the underrepresented status of the Chinese and their supposed lack of enlightenment, but also to how Western imperialism affected a host of racialized and colonized populations. If it invokes the possibility of analogizing colonized Chinese and Philippine subjects with an image of "darkness" frequently linked to African Americans, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" also attends to the different ways in which Boers, Chinese Boxers, and Philippine revolutionaries were subjugated. In addition to arguing that race in Twain's writings and his era must be read comparatively and demonstrating the importance of Chinese immigration and US transpacific relations in his writing, "Sitting in Darkness" experiments with modes of reading that analyze how the shifting legal, material, and discursive grounds of racialization manifest in literary form.

When Mark Twain headed west in 1861 after serving for two weeks in the Missouri state militia, he distanced himself from the battlefields of the Civil War, but not from the political and cultural dynamics of slavery. Lighting out for Virginia City and San Francisco—where Twain's professional writing career took off—was a viable option because the Compromise of 1850 had organized territories acquired from Mexico in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo around a series of agreements concerning the future expansion of slavery. Although California was admitted as a free state in 1850, proslavery Democrats had considerable influence in the state's government, and early legislatures "denied blacks voting rights, prohibited African American court testimony, and banned black homesteading, jury service, and intermarriage with whites" (De Graaf and Taylor 10). The state assembly even passed a bill that, had it not been blocked by state Senator David Broderick, would have banned the immigration of free blacks into California. Setting the stage for virtually unprosecutable acts of racist violence by whites, the first session of the state legislature stipulated in 1850 that "No black or mulatto person, or Indian, shall be permitted to give evidence in favor of, or against, any white person" (*Statutes of California* 230); the California Supreme Court's decision in *People v. Hall* (1854) extended this exclusion to Chinese witnesses. If the US West taught Twain an appreciation of vernacular narrative, brash

humor, and the social and economic dynamics of boom towns, it also exposed him to volatile scenarios of comparative racialization wherein antiblack laws and customs were adapted to subordinate diverse groups including African Americans, Native Americans, Mexican Americans, and Chinese immigrants.

Whereas he is best known for a handful of novels about Southern slavery and feudal England, Twain produced, throughout the arc of his career, a shadow-archive of writings about China, Chinese immigrants, and transpacific imperialism—a constellation of issues that, borrowing from Colleen Lye, I call “America’s Asia.” Twain’s interest in the Chinese is evident, for example, in his reports on arrests in San Francisco; his friendship with the US minister to China (and, in 1867, China’s envoy to the US), Anson Burlingame³; his writings on Chinese migrant workers in the US West, his unfinished fictional narrative with a Chinese protagonist, “Goldsmith’s Friend Abroad Again” (1870–1871); his interest in Wong Chin Foo’s early Chinese American historical romance *Wu Chih Tien* (1889)⁴; and his critical assessment of the Western response to the Boxer uprising and the Philippine War of Independence in “To the Person Sitting in Darkness.”⁵ As a reporter for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* and the *San Francisco Daily Morning Call* during the war years, Twain wrote numerous articles about the Chinese population that had recently migrated to the western US. These reports range from descriptions of Chinatown and Chinese buildings to accounts of arrests and trials involving Chinese residents accused of various crimes. They include humorous representations that highlight the exotic language and appearance of Chinese residents, sensational accounts that dwell on supposed immorality and uncivilized habits, and more sympathetic responses to the persecution of unoffending Chinese men. While these ambivalent representations of the Chinese resonate with popular depictions of African Americans as primitive, undisciplined, criminal, or passive, Twain more directly invoked longstanding debates concerning African Americans in the eastern states in other articles with titles such as “Miscegenation” and “Chinese Slaves.” Shortly after the Civil War, Twain would even use the Chinese conjoined twins, Chang and Eng Bunker, to allegorize the tensions of national reconciliation: in “Personal Habits of the Siamese Twins” (1869), the brothers, who must live in bodily union, disagree in both politics and temperament, and fight on opposite sides in the Civil War.⁶ When Twain’s travel correspondence was serialized in the *Sacramento Daily Union* and the *Daily Alta California* in the 1860s, those newspapers were publishing numerous commentaries on the “Chinese Question.” Forrest Robinson attributes Twain’s departure from San Francisco (and a crucial turning point in his career) to his published criticisms of racist

policing: “His now seasoned nose for trouble led him into conflict with the San Francisco police, who took umbrage when he criticized them in print for corruption and mistreatment of the Chinese. Clemens beat a temporary retreat to the Sierra foothills, where, in the cabin of Jim Gillis on Jackass Hill in Tuolumne County, he first heard the story of the frog that would make him famous” (38). Fishkin also traces Twain’s shift toward fiction as a mode of social critique in his writings about the Chinese in San Francisco:

As a young reporter in San Francisco in the mid-1860s, Twain witnessed an incident he considered outrageous: several policemen stood idly by, apparently amused, as young white hooligans attacked a Chinese man who was going about his business. Twain’s publishers refused to run the account he wrote of the incident, caring more about not offending the paper’s subscribers (who shared the police’s prejudices) than about the truth. Twain quickly learned that exposés of racism in San Francisco would not be printed in newspapers there. So he started writing a different kind of story, one with the same subject but an alternate strategy, and published it in a paper in the next state and in a national magazine. (*Historical Guide* 135)

Shifting from journalism and travel writing to fiction in the 1870s, Twain wrote incisive satires about anti-Chinese discrimination, experimented with a first-person epistolary narrative about a Chinese immigrant, and co-authored the play *Ah Sin* (1877) with Bret Harte. In California, Nevada, and Hawai‘i, Twain witnessed and wrote about a new post-Civil War system of racial inequality based on the policing of movement, the segregation of public space, settler colonialism, overseas economic interests, and the production of uneven vulnerabilities to premature death years before he began publishing novels set in the antebellum South.⁷ Twain’s writings about the Chinese thus provide a basis for reading his entire corpus in the contexts of comparative racialization and comparative colonialism.

Twain’s most well-known novels thematize the relationship between the industrial, post-Reconstruction era and race relations in the antebellum South (although *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* [1889] ostensibly takes place in medieval Europe, the contrast between its Yankee protagonist and an honor-based, feudal, and serf-holding society would have resonated with contemporaneous representations of the South). Thus, Twain’s fiction insistently returned to the social, demographic, and cultural transformations wrought both by Emancipation *and* by the nation’s changing attitudes toward Chinese immigration. Although Twain’s

commentaries on Chinese populations in San Francisco and western mining towns may appear far removed from the settings and black/white motifs of novels like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), they initiated a career-long engagement with Chinese immigrants and US transpacific relations which influenced Twain's depictions of Native Americans, African Americans, and Philippine nationalists.

While scholars have long noted Twain's numerous writings about Chinese immigrants, Asian laborers in Hawai'i, the Boxer Rebellion, and the US–Philippine War, no one has published an extended study of Twain's representations of Asians, and this archive has been marginalized within his body of work. Margaret Duckett presents an overview of Twain's treatments of Chinese immigrants, but attributes Twain's increasingly sympathetic attitudes toward the Chinese primarily to his wish to achieve something like “the current popularity of Bret Harte” by emulating Harte's relatively complex representations of Chinese characters (57). In a comprehensive overview of what he calls Twain's “Chinese connection,” Martin Zehr draws an implicit analogy between Twain's Chinese and African-American characters. “In both instances,” he argues, “Twain's transformation is a product of a developing empathy that is, in turn, a product of his often-demonstrated ability to successfully adopt the perspective of the other in his writings” (7). Fishkin draws this analogy more explicitly in her lucid discussion of Twain's critique of anti-Chinese laws and customs in “What Have the Police Been Doing?” (1866) and “Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy” (1870): “When Twain took up the subject of racism in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the time, the place, and the race would be different. But the central question would be the same: How can a society that debases human lives on a mass scale consider itself civilized?” (*Historical Guide* 136). Hsin-yun Ou, who draws a similar analogy, focuses on “Twain's growing empathy for Chinese immigrants” over the course of his career, attributing his humanitarian feelings to friendships with the advocates of Chinese immigrant rights, Anson Burlingame and Joseph Hopkins Twichell (48). While these arguments help us understand Twain's stance toward public opinion and his sympathetic engagement with the humanity of Chinese immigrants, their reliance on empathy and analogy downplays the historical specificity of the Chinese question. Why were Chinese characters and stereotypes so popular in the decades following the Civil War? What historical conditions support analogies between African-American and Chinese subjects—and what conditions are obscured by such analogies?

In a critical assessment of “the Afro-Asian analogy,” Colleen Lye details “the limitations placed on Asian American politics

when Asian racialization is attributed to a white supremacy that is by temporal and conceptual priority antiblack” (“Afro-Asian Analogy” 1734). If framing Twain’s Chinese plots as analogues of his narratives about slavery highlights his critiques of racial prejudice and his capacity to empathize with racial others, it also risks falling into an ahistorical framework of formal equivalence wherein “the Chinese [in the western states] were placed in the ‘mental compartment which in the East had been reserved for blacks’” (Lye 1734, quoting Saxton 260). Twain’s texts about the Chinese were not just practice runs for his later antislavery novels, not just exercises in interracial empathy: they incorporated and often satirized a range of discourses about the Chinese. Some of these discourses did take the form of analogy: for example, the California Supreme Court prohibited Chinese testimony in *People v. Hall* (1854) by reasoning that the state’s ban on “black” testimony was intended to refer to anyone who was not “white.” However, even analogically imposed laws could have divergent effects: the ban on testimony had a particularly devastating effect on the Chinese in California because they were already subject to a “foreign miner’s tax” that would make them vulnerable to being robbed and displaced by white men against whom they could not testify. The most influential racial analogy of the time was the notion that Chinese migrant laborers (often called “coolies”) represented a form of indentured servitude analogous to antebellum slavery; by thus analogizing coolies to slaves, anti-Chinese agitators differentiated Chinese laborers from free black and white workers. Racial analogies could produce either convergent or divergent effects when they colluded with preexisting conditions. Twain’s literary fiction helps us think historically about racialization by dramatizing the conditions that ground specific instances of interracial comparison, as well as their convergent or divergent consequences.

By focusing on popular and legal responses to Asian immigrant laborers, “Sitting in Darkness” attempts to produce historically nuanced accounts of how Twain’s writings function not only as anachronistic satires of antebellum slaveholding society, but also as critical anatomies of his own era’s racial politics. For, as Lisa Lowe and Moon-Ho Jung have shown, Chinese immigrants represented an emergent form of racialized labor that unsettled existing notions of freedom and slavery. In a stunning reading of the 1807 British Parliamentary debates concerning the introduction of coolies to the West Indies at the moment of emancipation, Lowe writes, “the Chinese coolie appears in colonial and parliamentary papers as a *figure* for this world division of labor, a new racial mode of managing and dividing laboring groups through the liberal promise of *freedom* that would commence with the end of

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slavery” (195). In his historical account of how the figure of the coolie intersected with discourses of slavery after Emancipation, Jung argues that “[t]he construction of coolies, moreover, formed a crucial ingredient in redefining blackness and whiteness—and Americanness—when equality under the law (Reconstruction) and wage labor (industrialization) seemed to erode their meanings” (9). Far from being direct analogues for antebellum African slaves, representations of the Chinese had specifically *modern* associations: Lowe associates the coolie with “a modern racial governmentality in which a political hierarchy ranging from ‘free’ to ‘unfree’ was deployed in the management of the diverse labors of colonized peoples” (195); Lye observes that “the Asiatic figures of early-twentieth-century American literature (despot, coolie, mask) referred not to persons but to a host of modernity’s dehumanizing effects (laboring conditions, group entities, corporations)” (*America’s Asia* 11). California in the postbellum decades was a vast experiment in the “modern racial governmentality” described by Lowe: a young state with an extractive economy whose laws attempted to racialize and control—through a carefully calibrated array of racial analogies and differentiations—a population that included displaced Native Americans, Mexican Californios who were naturalized by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, legal and “illegal” Chinese migrants, black and white immigrants from the eastern seaboard, and immigrants from all over the world.

Moving beyond the model of racial analogy, recent monographs by Helen Jun and Julia Lee have examined the long history of interaction between African-American and Asian American cultural production, mapping “the fertile but uneven terrain from which African American and Asian American interracial representations emerged” (Lee 2). Their analyses unearth striking patterns of interracial tension: for example, Jun argues that the nineteenth-century African-American press deployed a discourse of black Orientalism that detailed Chinese differences in order to argue for the relative assimilability of African Americans (15–21). While scholars have analyzed the significance of “AfroAsian encounters”⁸ amid the interracial tensions and varied race legislation of the late nineteenth century, we need a better understanding of how this dynamic field of cross-racial analogies and tensions played out in literary form. Perhaps because there were relatively few publishing outlets for Asian American, Mexican-American, and Native American authors, literary scholars working on comparative racialization have tended to focus on treatments of interracial encounter by ethnic authors writing after 1900. But since much of the legal and discursive groundwork of comparative racialization was established during struggles over Reconstruction, the Chinese Exclusion

Act, and overseas imperialism, literary treatments of race during the decades between the Civil War and the US–Philippine War—even texts that appear to feature only one racialized group or character—were all forged in the context of comparative racial thinking.

Twain's race narratives bring literary techniques to bear on racial discourses that insistently compared and contrasted African-American and Chinese immigrant populations. Whereas critics have shown how the formal complexities of Twain's works—such as dialect, irony, caricature, historical anachronism, courtroom farce, and incongruous endings—critique racist attitudes toward specific groups (chiefly African Americans), I argue that Twain's writings track the racial logic of his era by dramatizing comparisons and contrasts between racialized groups. The formal peculiarities of Twain's narratives—from the abrupt *deus ex machina* ending of *Ah Sin* to the evasion of *Huckleberry Finn* to the massacre of *Connecticut Yankee* to the self-conscious splitting of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins*—reflect multiple, intersecting histories of migration, US imperialism, and racial formation. Even when focusing on only one racialized character—Ah Sin, Injun Joe, or Jim—Twain's texts implicitly draw on and respond to the larger field of comparative racial discourse. To understand how Twain's accounts of racialized characters alternately affirm and undo the logic of racial analogy, "Sitting in Darkness" situates his writings in specific contexts and public debates—such as laws regulating testimony, vagrancy codes, discussions of corporate personhood, and debates concerning overseas empire—each of which had particular resonances with the antebellum and post-Reconstruction racial politics of the South. The book complicates understandings of Twain as either a Western writer or a Southern writer by focusing on connections between his novels about Southern slavery and his earlier formative writings about the US West and the Pacific—a transnational region that encompassed frontier mining settlements, San Francisco's police courts, Hawaiian sugar plantations, and eventually the sites of imperial battles and massacres in the Philippines.

In a 26 September 1866 travel dispatch published in the *Sacramento Daily Union*, Twain presents an uncharacteristically celebratory assessment of the extraordinary productivity of Hawai'i's sugar plantations.⁹ Writing just a year after the Civil War, as business leaders throughout the nation were concerned with how to source cheap labor and commodities in the wake of Emancipation, Twain endorses Chinese "Coolies" as a promising and inexhaustible source of plantation labor. After identifying Kanaka men and women plantation workers with the past ("day by day the Kanaka

race is passing away”), Twain turns to Chinese contract laborers as the key not only to Hawai‘i’s productivity, but also to California’s future prominence in the global economy (Twain, *Letters* 270). In a section entitled “Coolies for California,” he predicts: “You will have Coolie labor in California some day. It is already forcing its superior claims upon the attention of your great mining, manufacturing and public improvement corporations. You will not always go on paying \$80 and \$100 a month for labor which you can hire for \$5. The sooner California adopts Coolie labor the better it will be for her. It cheapens no labor of men’s hands save the hardest and most exhausting drudgery—drudgery which neither intelligence nor education are required to fit a man for—drudgery which all white men abhor and are glad to escape from” (271–72).

While he frequently represents other racial groups as premodern and indolent, Twain introduces the “Coolie” as the “secret” to emancipating white workers from “drudgery” and modernizing the state of California: “Give this labor to California for a few years and she would have fifty mines opened where she has one now—a dozen factories in operation where there is one now—a thousand tons of farm produce raised where there are a hundred now—leagues of railroad where she has miles to-day, and a population commensurate with her high and advancing prosperity” (273). After noting how several Western corporations have already profited from Chinese laborers (the Pacific Railroad Company, for example, “pronounce it the cheapest, the best, and most quiet, peaceable and faithful labor they have tried” [273]), Twain turns to the topic of transpacific commerce and its promise of US economic supremacy:

We have found the true Northwest Passage—we have found the true and only direct route to the bursting coffers of “Ormus and of Ind”—to the enchanted land whose mere drippings, in the ages that are gone, enriched and aggrandized ancient Venice, first, then Portugal, Holland, and in our own time, England—and each in succession they longed and sought for the fountainhead of this vast Oriental wealth, and sought in vain. The path was hidden to them, but we have found it over the waves of the Pacific, and American enterprise will penetrate to the heart and center of its hoarded treasures, its imperial affluence. The gateway of this path is the Golden Gate of San Francisco; its depot, its distributing house, is California; her customers are the nations of the earth; her transportation wagons will be the freight cars of the Pacific Railroad, and they will take up these Indian treasures at San Francisco and flash them across the continent and

the vessels of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company will deliver them in Europe fifteen days sooner than Europe could convey them thither by any route of her own she could devise. (274)

Although the notion that the Chinese were “quiet” and “peaceable” laborers turned out to be misguided (Jung reports that, in fact, “those laborers portrayed as docile coolies rose up defiantly against their captors and employers—in India and China, aboard ships, on sugar plantations across the Caribbean, in the Cuban independence movement, and before various inquiry commissions” [127]), Twain’s dispatch from Hawai‘i about California’s Pacific future prophetically highlighted both the pivotal role of racialized labor in the state’s economy and California’s pivotal role in the nation’s economic and imperial expansion. “In what he saw as the remote isolated locale of Hawaii,” writes Amy Kaplan, “Twain learned a lesson in the transnational dimensions of whiteness that emerged from the movement of labor, capital, and racial discourses across the globe” (81).

Because Twain viewed both Chinese immigrant labor and transpacific trade as key elements of the US’s future affluence, he consistently opposed laws discriminating against Chinese immigrants and arguments for excluding them altogether. For example, Twain and Bret Harte’s co-authored play *Ah Sin* (long marginalized by critics as a failure among audiences and an embarrassing work for indulging in repeated scenes of yellowface minstrelsy) presents a dramatic argument against the ban on Chinese testimony. In revisiting this play, my aim is not to absolve Twain from accusations of racism or to prove that he was sympathetic to the Chinese, but rather to shift the interpretive focus from reading for racial stereotypes to reading for structural racism. If *Ah Sin* includes apparently unmotivated plot elements, plenty of pidgin English, racist physical comedy, puns, and songs, it also represents an extended dramatization of the consequences of the prohibition on Chinese testimony enacted by *People v. Hall*. As the legal historian Charles McClain writes, “Of all the wrongs visited upon the Chinese in the period from 1850 to 1870, the ban on their testimony in the state’s courts . . . rankled most deeply, and the removal of this disability was consistently the chief item on the agenda of the community leadership” (22–23). While the ban on African-American testimony against whites was lifted in 1863, the prohibition on Chinese testimony persisted until 1870, legitimated by the widespread belief that heathens were unable to comprehend the sanctity of an oath.¹⁰ Twain had written several sketches about the ban on testimony prior to *Ah Sin*, including the satire

“Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy”, and his assignment writing police court summaries for the *San Francisco Daily Morning Call* exposed him to numerous instances of this legal disability in action. I argue that the apparently arbitrary plot elements of *Ah Sin*—including the Chinese laundryman’s refusal to name the perpetrator of an attempted murder and his withholding, throughout the entire play, of the knowledge that the supposed murder victim is still alive—make perfect sense when we acknowledge that (as Ah Sin puts it) “Chinaman evidence no goodee” (3.1). Ah Sin’s reluctance to share information about the crime he witnessed does not seem remarkable (or, as one critic put it, “without conceivable motive” [Crinkle]) when we consider how one Chinese man explained to Reverend William Speer why he had withheld testimony about a robbery he’d witnessed in Tuolumne County: “The reason why he did not go and give information to Mr. G. was that the facts could not be proven on account of their testimony being invalid, and he feared that, if left at large, his life would be taken by the robbers or their associates” (13). Read as a meditation on the testimony ban, *Ah Sin* appears as an important precursor to *Huckleberry Finn*: in fact, the entire action of the play turns out to be motivated by the Chinese laundryman’s stranger intimacy (to quote Nayan Shah’s discussion of early twentieth-century intimacies between South Asian and white men throughout California) with his friend Plunkett, whom he gladly hides in his own home for most of the play. Yet differences in dialect, religion, and cultural stereotyping make the intimacy between Ah Sin and Plunkett far less apparent than the Huck’s friendship with Jim.

Recalling that Twain co-authored *Ah Sin* during the four-year hiatus in the composition of *Huckleberry Finn*, I situate the novel’s narrative of interracial intimacy amid a range of texts in which Twain and Bret Harte critiqued the laws, institutions, and historical inequities that produced uneven, racially differentiated access to mobility and public space throughout the US West and South. The disproportionate use of vagrancy laws to criminalize Native American, Mexican, black, and Chinese subjects—many of whom had already been forcibly displaced by legal or extralegal means—grounds analogies between a range of texts and characters including the Chinese narrator of “Goldsmith’s Friend Abroad Again,” the “vagrant” Injun Joe, Pap Finn, Jim and Huck (who respectively experience their downriver voyage as paralyzing and liberatory), and the Chinese, Native American, and canine protagonists of Harte’s little-known rewriting of *Huckleberry Finn*, “Three Vagabonds of Trinidad.” Whereas “Goldsmith’s Friend Abroad Again” features a Chinese protagonist arrested, persecuted, and fined for the alleged crime of vagrancy, legal codes and customs

pertaining to black and white travelers in the postbellum period helps us understand why *Huckleberry Finn* dramatizes divergent experiences of mobility: on the one hand, Huck experiences a freedom that is alternately exhilarating, disillusioning, and edifying as he experiments with boundaries of race, class, and gender while shuttling between river and shore; on the other hand, Jim's travels occur in hiding under the guise of captivity; his spatial progress (or regress) down the river paradoxically requires that he remain immobile, concealed in a cave, secluded in a swamp, posing as a captured runaway tied up in the wigwam on the raft, or painted blue and disguised as a "Sick Arab." While this comparison of *Huckleberry Finn* with narratives about Chinese immigrants and Native Americans follows the logic of racial analogy, these analogies are grounded in historically specific vagrancy laws imported to California by Southern Democrats who migrated westward.¹¹

In *Those Extraordinary Twins*, racialization works by differentiation rather than analogy, associating Chinese and other immigrant laborers with modern corporate capitalism. I situate this narrative in two related contexts: the establishment of corporate personhood (along with 14th amendment protections for corporations) in *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad* (1886) and popular representations of Chinese railroad workers as swarming, monstrous coolie masses functioning as collective—rather than individuated—agents. Twain's conjoined twins—referred to as "monsters," "foreigners," a "combination," and a "corporation" (they're sued as a corporation for kicking Tom Driscoll in the farce)¹²—resemble representations of coolies not only because racial and national others were frequently caricatured as monsters, but also in their particular forms of monstrosity (swarming arms, combined bodies, undifferentiated masses) and in their shared association with increasingly influential corporations. Reading the coolie as "a figure of modernity's economic masses," Colleen Lye explains that "there can be no such thing as a single coolie. Asiatic racial form is indissociably plural" (*America's Asia* 55). The history of corporations and their popular association with Chinese coolie labor clarifies the connection between Twain's farce about conjoined twins and his tragedy about racial passing (*Pudd'nhead Wilson*) by indicating how the two narratives dramatize connections between antiblack racism and anti-immigrant policies. Conversely, Twain's decision to detach these two narratives and thus gloss over the problem posed by the twins' corporate agency also dramatizes how anticorporate and nativist discourses disentangled black Southerners from immigrants, sharply distinguishing between subjects who could be individuated or assimilated and swarms of aliens ineligible for citizenship. When Twain

uses fingerprinting to establish Tom Driscoll's individual and racial identity in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, he turns a technology for producing racialized populations into a technology for identifying the race of an individual, and he disentangles the technology of fingerprinting from its origins in colonial and racial governance. As Twain would have known from reading Sir Francis Galton, fingerprinting had already been used as a means of managing colonial and immigrant subjects and thus as a technology for producing racially differentiated populations.¹³

By reading Twain's writings in the context of legal battles over Chinese Exclusion, the displacement of Chinese settlers from the countryside to urban Chinatowns, and the writings of early Chinese migrants such as Wong Chin Foo and Yung Wing, "Sitting in Darkness" shows how Twain's picaresque plots, historical novels, courtroom farces, journalistic parodies, and anti-imperialist sketches critically engaged particular modes of comparative racialization at the level of literary form. I approach race comparatively because comparative racial reasoning underlies both Twain's own corpus and the formative legal cases, like *People v. Hall* and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which contributed to America's racial categories. A comparative approach has the benefit of shifting the focus of conversation from Twain's sympathies and his attitudes about stereotypes to how his works register and critique the structural inequalities that ground racial comparisons: who can testify in court, who can be employed by the state, who can vote or run for office, who can apply for citizenship, and who can move or stay still in public space. By examining how Twain uses such issues of material inequality to ground and interrogate analogies between different racialized and colonized groups, I hope to extend our understanding of how he and other authors mobilize literary form to expose and address structural modes of racism that function even in the absence of prejudicial intentions.

Notes

1. For a striking selection of international authors' responses to Twain, see Fishkin, ed., *The Mark Twain Anthology: Great Writers on His Life and Works* (2010).
2. See Morrison on blackness in *Huckleberry Finn* (54–57); see Susan Gillman and Forrest G. Robinson's *Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson: Race, Conflict and Culture* (1990).
3. See Twain's endorsement of the Burlingame Treaty in his recently republished 1868 *New York Tribune* piece, "The Treaty with China."

4. See Hsu, Hsuan L. "A Connecticut Yankee in Wu Chih Tien's Court," *Common-Place: The Interactive Journal of Early American Life* 11.1 (2010): n. pag.
5. For a fuller account of Twain's writings about China and the Chinese, see Zehr; for Twain's anti-imperialist writings, see Zwick.
6. For an extensive analysis of this text, see Cynthia Wu, "The Siamese Twins in Late-Nineteenth-Century Narratives of Conflict and Reconciliation," *American Literature* 80.1 (2008): 29–55.
7. See Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (2007): "Racism, specifically, is the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death" (28).
8. See Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen, eds., *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics* (2006).
9. Kaplan explains Twain's optimism in these letters: "*The Sacramento Union* hired him with clearly defined goals to promote California's economic interest in the growing sugar industry and to market the islands as accessible to American travel and business and equally available to popular knowledge and fantasy" (61).
10. For a discussion of links between beliefs about Chinese oath-taking and the validity of their testimony, see John R. Wunder, "Chinese in Trouble: Criminal Law and Race on the Trans-Mississippi West Frontier," *Western Historical Quarterly* 17.1 (1986): 25–41: "At common law the ability to take an oath was crucial to the admission of any testimony. The oath—a promise to tell the truth or face God's wrath—was dependent upon the witness's religious beliefs" (27).
11. For an extended version of this analysis, see Hsuan L. Hsu, "Vagrancy and Comparative Racialization in *Huckleberry Finn* and 'Three Vagabonds of Trinidad,'" *American Literature* 81.4 (2009): 687–717.
12. See Brook Thomas *American Literary Realism and the Failed Promise of Contract* (1997), who suggests that *Those Extraordinary Twins* raises questions about whether and how "a legal system that assigns guilt and blame on an individual basis" should be modified to hold corporations and their members responsible for their actions (239).
13. Fingerprints had also been proposed and seriously considered as a means of monitoring California's Chinese immigrant population in the 1880s. See Simon A. Cole, "Twains, Twain, Galton, and Gilman: Fingerprinting, Individualization, Brotherhood, and Race in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*," *Configurations* 15.3 (2007): 227–65.

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