Lighting Out For the Chinese Territory: Mark Twain & ‘Sivilization’ in China

"Now when I had mastered the language of this water…
I had lost something which could never be restored to me while I lived.
All the grace, the beauty, the poetry had gone out of the majestic river!"
— Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883)

“Human beings CAN be awful cruel to one another.”
— Mark Twain, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)

“I am a Boxer too,” Mark Twain remarked at a meeting in the Berkeley Lyceum, New York on November 23, 1900 when he addressed on the foreign occupation in Manchuria.\(^1\) It was a time when there witnessed an increasing number of foreign investments and missionary activities in China. Many local Chinese felt threatened by the invasion of western beliefs into their way of life that was deeply rooted in traditional Chinese beliefs and culture. Churches were conceived to disrupt *feng shui* and inflict bad luck, whereas mining and railroad construction were taken as disturbance to dead ancestors that were buried underground. In 1898, a group of Chinese from the Shandong province known as the Boxers emerged as the “Boxers United in Righteousness” (義和團, also called “Righteous Fists of Harmony” and "Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists") and declared wars on foreign powers. Distressed and disgusted by an increasing external force over their native land, Boxers besieged missionaries and foreigners by destroying their properties and railroad tracks, and killing their converts. Carrying the slogan “Support the Qing, Destroy the Foreign!” (扶清滅洋), and calling foreigners "Guizi" (鬼子, literally: ghosts), they trapped 473 foreign civilians, 400 military personnel, and about 3000 Chinese converts to Christianity on June 19, 1900.\(^2\)

Twain was then sixty-four years old, having already lived and traveled all over the U.S., set foot on the Holy Land, Middle East, India, Vietnam, Australasia, and South Africa, and lived in Europe for no less than ten years. He had established his reputation among the reading public, the literary circle, royal families and celebrities of all sorts across both sides of the Atlantic. Where his reputation as a humorist, a travel-lecturer, and indeed, a celebrity has surpassed his other endeavors, very few people know about his anti-imperialist position and involvement with the American Anti-Imperialist League. Fewer people yet are aware of his strong tie to China, especially in regard to the American and European imperial politics over the Pacific. His friendship with Anson Burlingame, then U.S. Minister to China (from 1861-1867), had certainly deepened his understanding of
and acquaintance with the Chinese. He was even asked to take Burlingame’s ambassadorial place as Burlingame was resigning from his post in 1867 to become China’s first ambassador to the United States and leading European nations. However tempting, Twain declined the position because he wanted to settle down with his then future wife, Olivia Langdon, and that he would hate to put his writing career aside for a diplomatic career.

Lao She, the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in literature in 1968 and a leading Chinese author of the twentieth-century, begins in a speech commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Twain’s death with, “Mark Twain, an outstanding writer of critical realism in the United States as well as an exposé of imperialist aggression and the hypocritical civilization of U.S. capitalism, passed away fifty years ago.” Where Twain was mostly remembered for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), its sequel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *The Innocents Abroad* (1869), and other humorous sketches, Lao directed the audience’s attention to the more serious and yet lesser known side of Twain. In the last twenty years of his life, Twain in his works often touched on the dark side of human nature and western imperialism. What upset him at that point, apart from his personal trauma (bankruptcy as a result of his wrong investment in the Paige typesetter in 1894, the death of his favorite daughter Suzy in 1896, followed by that of his wife eight years later), was the continuous imperial aggression that was happening around the world in the name of civilization.

Lao has also raised an important point by asserting that “Mark Twain’s reprimand of the imperialist aggressive powers and sympathy for the anti-colonialist Asian and African people are especially significant to us.” In fact, Twain’s sympathy for the Asians would have been less significant without his sympathy first for the Africans, which largely came from his connection with black people at home as a result of slavery. With a reputation easily second only to the U.S. President, Twain’s anti-imperialist stance and writings did have a strong implication as an American and a public figure. In the same speech at the Berkeley Lyceum, Twain remarked that if foreigners all left China, “what a pleasant place China would be for the Chinese!... I am with the Boxers every time. The Boxer is a patriot. He loves his country better than he does the countries of other people. I wish him success.” By saying he was a Boxer, Twain did not literally partake in the Boxer Rebellion, nor was he a pugilist. He was simply doing what Huck Finn did in the novel—following his “sound heart” rather than a “deformed conscience” by helping the runaway black slave, Jim attain his freedom. As Twain later explained, “when I publicly attacked the American missionaries in China and some other iniquitous persons and causes, I did not do it for any reason but just the one: that the inclination to do it was stronger than my diplomatic instincts, and I had to obey and take the consequences.”
For someone growing up in a pre-Civil War slave-holding town imbued with conservatism and supremacist ideals, Twain had come a long way to reach maturity not only denouncing slavery, but also declaring himself an anti-imperialist and a Boxer. Obviously though, Twain’s alignment with the Chinese (and other minorities as well) did not happen overnight. When the young Clemens first left his hometown in Hannibal, Missouri at the age of seventeen to work as an itinerant printer and a journalist in New York and Philadelphia, he would encounter people of different skin colors and cultures other than his Southern neighbors. Shortly after he arrived in New York in 1853, he wrote to his mother, Jane Clemens, that he saw “Niggers, mulattoes, quadroons, Chinese, and some the Lord no doubt originally intended to be white, but the dirt on whose faces leaves one uncertain as to that fact, block up the little, narrow street; and to wade through this mass of human vermin, would raise the ire of the most patient person that ever lived.”

Clemens was taken aback by such diversity in a non-white community, and was rather frank about his feelings toward these people, whom he apparently still looked at through the fresh lenses of a white Southerner. As he started traveling, Clemens’s views on race and (non)-white America would start to take on a different turn. As William Dean Howells remarks in “Mark Twain: An Inquiry” (1901), “one of the most notably Southern traits of Mark Twain’s humor is its power of seeing the fun of Southern seriousness, but this vision did not come to him till after his liberation from neighborhood in the vaster far West.” If going West was what it took for Clemens to view his Southern hometown more critically, the same for him going abroad and looking back at America with a more objective and critical perspective.

So how did Twain transform from viewing Chinese as “human vermin” to becoming a Boxer himself? And how did his travels across the U.S., Europe and along the Equator contribute to his change of attitudes toward the cultural Other? In fact, Twain’s changed reception of the Chinese could be said to have taken place in two major transitional phases, both of which involved his traveling and living away from home. The first happened in the West when he witnessed police brutality toward the Chinese, and that had compelled him to write about what he saw was utterly wrong. It was also a time when he befriended Burlingame and made traveling plans to China although he never went in the end (mid-1860s, when Twain was in his early thirties). The second phase was upon Twain’s return from his longtime residence in Europe (in 1900, aged sixty-four), when he was infuriated by what he realized was happening globally as western imperial powers including America were taking the land and blood by force of not only Chinese, but also Filipinos, Boers, Cubans, and other minorities, pushing through wars
of aggression rather than ones of liberation.

Twain’s initial, albeit still minimal, interest in the Chinese started as he was working as a journalist for Iowa’s *Muscatine Journal* in St. Louis, New York City, and Philadelphia. With this job, he had the opportunity to write about all kinds of observations, including an “enchantingly beautiful” sunset scene in China in an exhibition at Wyman’s Hall. However, it was not until he headed West to work for his brother Orion in Nevada, then a reporter in San Francisco, was he more aware of the strong Chinese existence in America. As he writes in *Roughing It* (1872), “Of course there was a large Chinese population in Virginia [Nevada]—it is the case with very town and city on the Pacific coast… There are seventy thousand (and possibly one hundred thousand) Chinamen on the Pacific coast. There were about a thousand in Virginia.” Although Twain was not very fond of Chinamen as he put it (it should be noted, however, that he was a keen observer of just about any other races and cultures, and often ridiculed aspects of them that appeared odd from his own experience and upbringing), he was a fighter for their justice in his work as early as in his twenties. While working as a reporter in San Francisco in the mid-1860s, Twain witnessed a young white person attacking a Chinese who was minding his own business. A few policemen stood by the side just to watch the show. Furious by what he saw, Twain depicted these scenarios in works such as “What Have the Police Been Doing?” (1866) and “Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy” (1870). Twain made use of his weapon of satires by inventing ignorant characters who saw nothing wrong with bigotry. “What Have the Police Been Doing?” was narrated by someone playing the policeman’s loyal friend, who stood idly by and spoke ignorantly of police brutality and corruption over the Chinese population. “Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy” was about the minority being mugged by gangs with police doing nothing. In the story, a young boy was taught that it was “a high and holy thing” to abuse the Chinese and went stoning “a Chinaman” on his way to Sunday school. When the boy was arrested, the narrator decried the injustice of the fact that the boy “no sooner attempts to do his duty than he is punished for it.” Because of the politically sensitive subjects that these articles dealt with, they were refused publication in San Francisco, and Twain had to publish them in Virginia City instead.

These articles were written during Twain’s acquaintance with Burlingame, which was a decided turning point for Twain in his relation to the Chinese. The two met in 1866 when Twain was a correspondent in the Sandwich Islands (Hawaii) for the *Sacramento Union*. They became friends when Burlingame offered Twain the opportunity to write about the
clipper ship *Hornet* disaster, which came to form the foundation for Twain’s writing on the subject at *Harper*. Despite their rather short friendship (Burlingame passed away in 1870), Burlingame’s correspondences, associations, and strong relations to China had in many ways, as Martin Zehr in “Mark Twain, ‘The Treaty with China,’ and the Chinese Connection” (2010) puts, “magnified Twain’s observation-based interests in the Chinese.” Twain had great respect and admiration for Burlingame. Upon Burlingame’s death during a diplomatic mission in St. Petersburg in Russia, Twain remarks in his tribute that Burlingame “had outgrown the narrow citizenship of a state and become a citizen of the world… In real greatness, ability, grandeur of character, and achievement, he stood head and shoulders above all the Americans of to-day, save one or two... He was a good man, and a very, very great man. America lost a son, and all the world a servant, when he died.”

In 1868, Burlingame was head of the Chinese Embassy mission to the United States advocating the passage of the Burlingame-Seward Treaty, which he collaborated with Secretary of State, William H. Seward after the Tianjin Treaty was signed in June 1858. In a speech addressing to a crowd in New York on June 23, 1868, Burlingame urged for mutual understanding and respect between U.S. and China by asking for the preservation of the Chinese autonomy to the country herself. The critical point of the speech fell on the moment when he spoke against viewing Chinese as barbaric: “There are men of that tyrannical school who say that China is not fit to sit at the council-board for the nations, who call them barbarians… These things I utterly deny. I say, on the contrary, that that is a great and noble people. It has all the elements of a splendid nationality.” Burlingame ended his speech by speaking of China’s great ancient and intellectual civilization, and reiterates three times, “Let her alone.”

Six weeks after Burlingame’s address, Twain himself wrote an article titled, “The Treaty with China” within days after he returned to New York from San Francisco on July 29. Going over the eight articles of the Burlingame-Seward Treaty one after another, Twain defended for the Chinese and spoke of them as hospitable, faithful, temperate, peaceable, and industrious, rather than as “degraded barbarians.” He went on to ridicule the laws in California as they did not allow Chinamen to testify against white men—“California is one of the most liberal and progressive States in the union.” Sharing what Burlingame believed in, Twain pleaded for the preservation of the Chinese sovereign and that America leave the Chinese alone. He was in support of the Chinese rights to vote, hold offices, receive education, own land, testify in court, as well as acquire citizenship in the U.S., as indicated in the Treaty. Twain remarked, “I am not fond of Chinamen, but I am still less fond of seeing them wronged and abused… the idea of making negroes citizens of the United States was startling and disagreeable to me, but I
have become reconciled to it… The idea of seeing a Chinaman a citizen of the United States would have been almost appalling to me a few years ago, but I suppose I can live through it now.”

In fact, what Twain wrote in “The Treaty With China” and the short stories about San Francisco police was vividly captured in a letter series he wrote in 1870, “Goldsmith’s Friend Abroad Again,” which was narrated by a Chinese character named Ah Song Hi. In a series of seven letters to his friend, Ching-Foo in China, Ah Song Hi described his new-found excitement to leave his “oppressed and overburdened native land” across the sea for the “Land of the Free and Home of the Brave,” where everybody was treated equally without being asked about his nationality, color, or creed. The letters followed Ah Song Hi’s journey in America, how he first had all his money taken away from him by the immigration upon landing, then violently kicked and harassed by the police, and barely just a month after ended up in prison for “making a disturbance” in the street. By writing out a story with a Chinese narrator whose American dream was shattered upon entering the country, it took Twain much courage and capacity indeed, to not only stand in the shoes of the other but also ridicule the founding ideals of his very own motherland.

Discussing Twain’s capacity to empathize with the ethnic and cultural Other as a result of his travels, Martin Zehr remarks in “The Vision of the Other in Mark Twain’s ‘War Prayer’” (2006), that “[w]hile Twain certainly, from a literal standpoint, was the most-traveled author of his generation, it is critical to observe that his travels, in a more literary sense, include the ability to transform his perspective to that of the Other.” Zehr attributes Clemens’s ability to see the world through the eyes of the Other, and in this case Chinese immigrants in America, to his childhood experience with slavery as well as his travels away from the slaveholding Hannibal. Even though Clemens in his boyhood had no aversion to slavery, he never forgot a scene where a group of slaves were waiting to be sold down the river—“I vividly remember seeing a dozen black men and women chained to one another, once, and lying in a group on the pavement, awaiting shipment to the Southern slave market. Those were the saddest faces I have ever seen.” Similarly, in his household, there was a slave boy named Sandy whom he often hung out with:

“All day long he was singing, whistling, yelling, whooping, laughing—it was maddening, devastating, unendurable. At last, one day, I lost all my temper, and went raging to my mother, and said Sandy had been singing for an hour without a single break, and I couldn't stand it, and wouldn't she please shut him up. The tears came into her eyes, and her lip trembled, and she said something like this—'Poor thing, when he sings, it shows that he is not
remembering, and that comforts me; but when he is still, I am afraid he is thinking, and I cannot bear it. He will never see his mother again; if he can sing, I must not hinder it, but be thankful for it. If you were older, you would understand me; then that friendless child's noise would make you glad.' It was a simple speech, and made up of small words, but it went home, and Sandy's noise was not a trouble to me any more.”

Even though Clemens might be too young to make more mature sense of the suffering of Sandy, and of slavery at large, Jane Clemens's words were imprinted in his memory and mentioned a century later in his Autobiography.

Indeed, Clemens's experience growing up in Missouri (a state straddled by the Mason-Dixon line that separates slave states from that of the free), as well as his transformation from a slave holder's son to an abolitionist, is metaphorically and literally written through Huck's moral journey and eventual decision to "steal Jim out of slavery" (283). As Howell asserts, “No American of Northern birth or breeding could have imagined the spiritual struggle of Huck Finn in deciding to help the negro Jim to his freedom, even though he should be forever despised as a negro thief in his native town, and perhaps eternally lost through the blackness of his sin.” Perhaps to Twain’s own surprise, his initial empathy for the unfair treatment of black people at home would slowly manifest to other minorities in America, and eventually to the rest of the world as he traveled to Europe and the “Far East.” As he witnessed anti-Semitism abroad, he exclaimed in “Concerning the Jews” (1898), “all I care to know is that a man is a human being—that is enough for me: he can't be any worse.”

By the turn of the twentieth century, Twain would have lived in Europe for ten years to combat his financial losses from his untimely investment in the Paige typesetter. Before returning to the U.S., he had the opportunity to travel East for his around-the-world lecture series in 1895-1896. His journey to the South Sea Islands, Australasia, the East Indies, India, and South Africa were put together in Following the Equator (1897). It was a time when America was a few years away from getting into the Spanish-American War (1898); its victory would give the country colonial control over Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. This happened alongside the British colonization of the West Indies, India, and the Antipodes, as well as the French, Belgian, German, and Dutch colonial ventures in Africa and the Far East. Imperial powers mostly considered it part of God’s will to liberate the weaker races. This coincided a strong current of social Darwinism, which determined the Anglo-Saxons to be a superior race, making it an easy excuse for
them to civilize the racial “other” from their so-called superstitious and suppressive local regimes. As Twain was traveling along the equator, the European conquest in the Eastern Hemisphere he witnessed had come to disillusion and disgust him.

James E. Caron writes that of all Twain’s voices, “perhaps none was more useful for expressing the darkest hues of his satiric mode than David Wilson as putative author of ‘Pudd’nhead Wilson’s Calendar,’” which was used as epigraphs for The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson and again in Following the Equator. 24 This gesture announces a connection of Twain’s tour overseas to the racial context of Pudd’nhead Wilson back in the U.S. Establishing a global racial context in places along the equator and American slavery, in Susan Gilman’s words, is “a penetrating, and often exuberant, satiric meditation,” as it allows Twain to reexamine the “Negro Question” at home and abroad. 25 Rather than the niggers, the mulattoes, the quadroons, and the Chinese who Clemens once regarded as “human vermin,” it was now the white race he came to denigrate for its claims to moral superiority. Throughout the tour, Twain realized, as Anthony Brandt remarks, that “savagery is common throughout the entire human race, and not just a property of so-called ‘savages.’”26

The term “civilization” frequents Following the Equator as an irony on the growing unchecked “land grabbing” activities among the Europeans and their suppression of the so-called “savages.” As Twain put,

“Civilization is an elusive and baffling term. It is not easy to get at the precise meaning attached to it in those far distant times. In America and Europe it seems to have meant benevolence, gentleness, godliness, justice, magnanimity, purity, love, and we gather that men considered it a duty to confer it as a blessing upon all lowly and harmless peoples of remote regions; but as soon as it was transplanted it became a blight, a pestilence, an awful terror, and they whom it was sent to benefit fled from its presence imploring their pagan gods with tears and lamentations to save them from it. The strength of such evidence as has come down to us seems to indicate that it was a sham at home and only laid off its disguise when abroad....”27

He wrote rather extensively of the “slave catching” activities that went on in the South Sea Islands, where the Kanakas were deceived, if not stolen, into cheap labor for the Queensland plantation in Australia. In the plantation, they ended up working longer hours, earning less, and in more severe climate just to “acquire civilization” (43). While en route from Sidney to Melbourne, Twain did not see a single “aboriginal” or
“blackfellow” being addressed for their contribution to the country: “In the great museums you will find all other curiosities, but in the curio of chiepest interest to the stranger all of them are lacking. We have at home an abundance of museums, and not an American Indian in them. It is clearly an absurdity, but it never struck me before” (89). The author also gave an account of the decades of black/white struggle and violence against each other, and the eventual near-extermination of the blacks in the various parts of Australia.

Whereas *The Tragedies of Pudd’nhead Wilson* writes out the absurdity of slavery, *Following the Equator* is almost an extension of Twain’s observation of a similar situation abroad. The tragedies lie in the twisted moral values under the customs of an unjust law. This is again expressed in a chapter that comments on Cecil Rhodes’ administration in southern Africa, which opens with Wilson’s epigraph, “First catch your Boer, then kick him” (415). Twain remarked ironically, “The great bulk of the savages must go. The white man wants their lands, and all must go excepting such percentage of them as he will need to do his work for him upon terms to be determined by himself.” He went on by saying that Rhodes and his “gang” were “chartered to rob and slay” *lawfully*, but “not in a compassionate and Christian spirit.” He concluded that “[t]his is slavery, and is several times worse than was the American slavery” (428).

Despite what he witnessed and the cynical passages he wrote, Twain remained ambiguous on the issue of western imperialism in the three years after the publication of *Following the Equator*. Before returning to the U.S., Twain was in favor of imperialism because he was under the notion that America was fighting genuinely for Cuban and Filipino independence from Spanish tyranny. However, Twain’s attitude toward imperialism began to change in 1900. The reunion and renewed contract with William Dean Howells, a zealous anti-imperialist himself, had filled Twain in with a clearer picture of the role America took in the Spanish- and Philippine-American Wars (the latter from 1899-1902). The Treaty of Paris (1898), which granted the U.S. control over Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines, had convinced him that the American war for humanity had become a war of conquest. A letter to his friend Rev. Joseph Twichell early in 1900 clearly illustrates Clemens’s changed stance in regard to the Philippine-American war: ”Apparently we are not proposing to set the Filipinos free and give their islands to them; and apparently we are not proposing to hang the priests and confiscate their property. If these things are so, the war out there has no interest for me.”28

All the same, the day before international troops relieved the legations in Beijing, a few weeks before Twain sailed home, he wrote to Twichell again expressing his sympathy
toward the Chinese: "They have been villainously dealt with by the sceptered thieves of Europe, and I hope they will drive all the foreigners out and keep them out for good." On October 6, immediately before leaving England, Twain expressed his growing distrust of the American intervention in the Philippines and at the same time gave his support to the Chinese:

You ask me about what is called imperialism. Well, I have formed views about that question. I am at the disadvantage of not knowing whether our people are for or against spreading themselves over the face of the globe. I should be sorry if they are, for I don't think that it is wise or a necessary development. As to China, I quite approve of our Government's action in getting free of that complication...There is the case of the Philippines... I thought we should act as their protector—not try to get them under our heel. We were to relieve them from Spanish tyranny to enable them to set up a government of their own, and we were to stand by and see that it got a fair trial. It was not to be a government according to our ideas, but a government that represented the feeling of the majority of the Filipinos, a government according to Filipino ideas. That would have been a worthy mission for the United States.

Ever since his return from Europe, Twain would be actively denouncing American and global imperialism. Almost immediately after he landed, he spoke with a reporter from the *New York Herald* on October 16, 1900, "I am an anti-imperialist, I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land." Twain helped found the American Anti-Imperialist League on June 15, 1898, where he became vice-president in 1901 until he passed away in 1910.

“To the Person Sitting in Darkness” (1901)

Less than three months after his return from Europe, Twain was already working on what would become the League’s most popular publication—“To the Person Sitting in Darkness.” Published in *North American Review*, the political piece attacked the hypocrisy of Christian colonial aggression, from the gilded scene of the American cities to the global European exploitation of the weak in China, Africa, Cuba, and the Philippines. The publication had bought an overwhelming response from the League, as its New York, New England, and national Chicago offices all requested permission to reprint Twain’s work. The article opens with an excerpt from an article in the New York *Sun*: "The purpose of this article is not to describe the terrible offenses against humanity committed in the name of Politics in some of the most notorious East Side
districts. They, could not be described, even verbally. But it is the intention to let the
great mass of more or less careless citizens of this beautiful metropolis of the New
World get some conception of the havoc and ruin wrought to man, woman and child in
the most densely populated and least known section of the city.”

Twain spent half of the article on lampooning the American missionary, Rev. William
Scott Ament of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, the
Russian Czar Nicolas II, and the German Kaiser Wilhelm II’s aggression in China. The
main purpose of Ament’s dealings in China, according to Twain, was rake as much
money from the Chinese as possible in the name of spreading God’s gospels: “he
made for the purpose of collecting indemnities for damages done by Boxers.
Everywhere he went he compelled the Chinese to pay… He also assessed fines
amounting to THIRTEEN TIMES the amount of the indemnity.” Not only that, the
money was taken out of pauper peasants, women, and children who would inevitably
be put to starvation and lingering death, whose blood-money so acquired might be
"used for the propagation of the Gospel."

The article goes on with what Twain called, the “Blessings-of-Civilization Trust,” which
Christendom has been playing “badly of late years.” Civilization, Twain asserted, is
“strictly for Export—apparently. Apparently… inside the bale is the Actual Thing that
the Customer Sitting in Darkness buys with his blood and tears and land and liberty.”
With Ament setting a role model in China, the Kaiser followed suit by demanding the
Chinese in Shandong for “a hundred thousand dollars apiece for them, in money;
twelve miles of territory, containing several millions of inhabitants and worth twenty
million dollars; and to build a monument, and also a Christian church” for a few
missionaries he lost in a riot. The author then asked rhetorically if Germany would do
the same to America, England, France, and Russia, “[o]r only to China the helpless—
imitating the elephant’s assault upon the field-mice?”

The Person Sitting in Darkness, likewise, does not refer only to Chinese, but also other
minorities. In the second half of the article, Twain ridiculed the British Cabinet Minister
Joseph Chamberlain’s aggression in South Africa, whose game was adopted by the
U.S. over Cuba and the Philippines, as well as by Russia, France, and Germany over
the Pacific. Directing his criticisms back to the U.S., he wrote that it “played the
European game, the Chamberlain game.” Can we afford Civilization? Twain asked.
Perhaps not, when “we have debauched America’s honor and blackened her face
before the world” with the heads of states, the Congress, and the State Legislatures,
who belong to Christendom and the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust. Just as in
_Pudd’nhead Wilson_ (1894) wherein Roxy and “Tom” literally _blacken_ their faces for
thieving. America has darkened its uniform and flag—prime symbols of freedom and democracy—by its aggressive land-grabbing activities. Later in the year on a separate article, Twain wrote that when the American flag “was sent out to the Philippines to float over a wanton war and a robbing expedition I supposed it was polluted.”

The most telling gesture in “To the Person Sitting in Darkness” was when Twain made a direct reference with the term “niggers”—a derogatory epithet which U.S. soldiers used to address the Filipinos out of racism—to the people in the Philippines, China, Cuba, South Africa, and other suppressed peoples: “We must stand ready to grab the Person Sitting in Darkness, for he will swoon away at this confession, saying: ‘Good God, those ‘niggers’ spare their wounded, and the Americans massacre theirs!’” The reference to black people at home that Twain made is a symbolic gesture as it indicates his awareness of a hegemony that classifies people by their race not only at home but abroad. Again, through his connection with black people in America, Twain was able to empathize from the perspective of the Other, which encompasses a much broader race population this time of not only blacks but all other non-white minorities.

Perhaps not too surprisingly, “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” which many would consider anti-American even put in today’s context, did not go unattacked. John Kendrick Bangs, editor for Harper’s Magazine in the humor section, for instance, questioned Twain’s Americanness and patriotism. He published an article in the same issue right below Twain’s article in Harper’s Weekly, “Is the Philippine Policy of the Administration Just?” After asserting that Twain was “somewhat astray in his Americanism,” Bangs went so far as to discuss Twain and treason and the idea of Copperhead (a term commonly used in the years of 1860 to 1865 to describe people who rebelled against the U.S. forces): “I should not, for one instant, think of calling Mr. Clemens either a traitor or a Copperhead, for he is neither, but I do think that upon his return last autumn after a prolonged absence from his native land, during which time he may reasonably have been expected to get out of touch with things American.” Of all that Bang said in his diatribe, which was sentimental and filled with unsubstantiated claims, he raised but one relevant point, that is Twain’s absence from America giving him a different set of judgments. Truth be told, Twain’s experience abroad has offered him a capacity to proffer a more critical perspective in regard to western imperialism. In fact, he used his position well, and delivered his views effectively. While attacking missionaries in China, he also disregarded the policies of Chamberlain, the Kaiser, and McKinley, which made his ground solid and powerful.

In an equally provocative essay titled, “The United States of Lyncherdom” (written in 1901, published posthumously by Albert Bigelow Paine in Europe and elsewhere),
Twain expressed his frustration that all Missourians were presented as lynchers in the news. Rather than the half million innocent Missourian citizens, Twain implied that perhaps imperialists were the real lynchers. In what follows, Twain directs the readers’ attention to China: “Let us import American missionaries from China, and send them into the lynching field” to see what civilization really meant. Pleading the U.S. to leave China alone, he put ironically: “We ought to be careful. We ought to think twice before we encourage a risk like that; for, once civilized, China can never be uncivilized again…” He then depicted a scene where a “negro” was being swung in the air before he was slowly burned to death, and suggested that China should see it. With the remark that “our country is worse off than China,” the writer concluded, “O kind missionary, O compassionate missionary, leave China! Come home and convert these Christians!” Initially planning to write a book on the lynching history of America, he eventually refrained from doing it for fear that he “might not have even half a friend left down there [in the South].” Twain’s feeling for his country is mixed with bitterness, and it was awfully hard for Twain to write so about his motherland. As Abel Startsev puts lucidly, “one has to love one’s motherland infinitely, and also suffer similarly, without end, for the shame which is brought forth by the fundamentalists and racists and Lynchers, to love it so much to call it the United States of Lyncherdom for all the world to see.”

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“The only very difference between the averaged civilized man and the average savage is, that the one is gilded, the other painted.”

— Mark Twain, Notebook

In the interview announcing himself an anti-imperialist with the New York Herald, Twain remarks on speaking truth through fiction: “I have found that when I speak the truth, I am not believed, and that I have never told a lie so big but that some one had sublime confidence in my veracity. I have, therefore, been forced by fate to adopt fiction as a medium of truth. Most liars lie for the love of the lie; I lie for the love of truth. I disseminate my true views by means of a series of apparently humorous and mendacious stories.” How accurate it is the way Twain describes his own position as a truth speaker and a humorist! It is true that Twain creates fiction such as The Gilded Age, Pudd’nhead Wilson, and Letters from the Earth (1909) to satirize the reality of capitalism, slavery, religion, and human nature. Through fiction, Twain delivers biting socio-political commentaries that are nonetheless filled with humor. However, upon the last two decades of his life, Twain’s tone turns from that of humor toward bitter sarcasm, and there cannot be more serious truth than what his anti-imperialist writings are
In a banquet speech given in the American Society in London on July 4, 1907, Twain traced the founding of America to its English ancestry, as well as the large scale killings as a result of land conquests: “Really we destroy more property on every Fourth-of-July night than the whole of the United States was worth one hundred and twenty-five years ago. Really our Fourth of July is our day of mourning, our day of sorrow.”40 Much as Twain having respect for England and the desire to “bring about the union of America and the mother land,” now they were “kin in sin,” they were “thieves, highwaymen, pirates, and we are proud to be the combination.”41 In November the same year, Twain talked about patriotism at the Children’s Theatre, “Citizenship? We have none!… I remember when I was a boy and I heard repeated time and time again the phrase, 'My country, right or wrong, my country!' How absolutely absurd is such an idea. How absolutely absurd to teach this idea to the youth of the country.”42

For Twain who cared tremendously about his reputation and popularity in the public eye, his scathing remarks on anti-slavery and anti-imperialism reflect the fact that he cared just as much about his country and humanity. In the final chapter of *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck concluded that he “got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it. I been there before” (369). On the surface, it may seem that Huck simply does not want to be confined by the rules and customs of the adult world, but perhaps there is more to what civilization means here. Education and social upbringing, for instance, are taken as key elements of civilization as they do not only elevate one’s social position, but also help one stand apart from the so-called lower class, such as that of slaves. Ironically, the way America treats its black denizens and other global minorities is no more savage than how these people of color are perceived to be.

Huck’s refusal to be “sivilized,” as indicated by his inability to spell the word right, is suggestive of his disbelief of the white men’s idea of civilization. While treating colored folks as if they were savages and animals, the kind of savage acts that white folks inflict on others in the name of civilization makes them not so civilized after all. It is out in the territory and away from civilization where Huck feels truly “free and satisfied” (49). In the novel, the territory refers to the Indian community in the West where Huck is longing to venture out to. To put it in a global context (by the time *Huck Finn* was published, Twain would have not only lived in the West, but traveled to the Middle East and the Holy Land, frequented Europe, and settled down with his wife Olivia Langdon in their home in Hartford, Connecticut), the “unlit territories” would mean places that are not yet explored or “sivilized,” or places that belong to “the person sitting in darkness.”
From speaking of Chinese as “human vermin” to speaking for them in suffrage, Twain’s transformation is representative of him undergoing a moral journey from being a white Southerner to a global traveler who embraces people for who they are regardless of their nationality, color, and creed. Twain’s effort in asking white imperial powers to leave the Chinese alone reminds one of Huck and Tom getting Jim out of slavery. Nevertheless, Twain’s compassion was more intertwined with that of Huck, whose conscience compelled him to save Jim for a noble cause, just as Twain who wanted to put global hegemony and the suffering of Chinese to an end. As a humanist, Twain thinks ill of monarchy and aristocracy. As reflected in *Huckleberry Finn*, the aristocratic Grangerfords and Shepherdsons, in Mark Coveney’s words, “remains creations of frightfulness and fear.”  

The fraudulent king and the duke’s betrayal of the freedom raft put together by Huck and Jim, as Eric Mottram remarks, is Twain’s “assault on America’s aristocratism and lawless competition.” Monarchy to Twain is a “vast, nearly universal savagery.” Breaking away from the upper-class refinement and the Widow Douglass’s *sivilization* of Huck, Twain writes of the “unlit” territories that he values. Although Twain did not fight for anti-imperialism all the way through his death in 1910, the leaders and members of the Anti-Imperialist League did not lose their deep respect for the great humanist. As Jim Zwick insightfully put, they were “able to appreciate what is not yet justly understood: that, more than a brilliant humorist, he was a passionate and zealous reformer.”
Notes:

1 "Address at a Meeting of the Berkeley Lyceum," November 23, 1900, Mark Twain’s Speeches, 144-6.
3 In 1968, Lao She was ranked the first place for the Nobel Prize in literature. However, China was then at the summit of Culture Revolution, and Lao was said to have passed away. Sweden Ambassador to China tried to search for him to no avail, and the Nobel committee reassessed the other four nominators, and awarded the prize to Kawabata Yasunari instead. http://www.beijingattractions.org/Beijing-History/Lao-She-and-Nobel-Prize.html; Lao’s quote is from Lao, “Mark Twain: Exposer of the ‘Dollar Empire,’” in Fishkin, ed. The Mark Twain Anthology, 283.
4 ibid., 284.
5 In a lecture explaining what Huckleberry Finn was about, Twain first remarked that “a sound heart is a surer guide than an ill-trained conscience.” He then described Huck Finn as “a book of mine where a sound heart and a deformed conscience come into collusion and conscience suffers defeat.” (Hutchison, Stuart., ed. Mark Twain: Critical Assessments, 193).
6 Neider, ed. The Autobiography of Mark Twain, 466-467.
7 Mark Twain’s Letters, vol. 1, 10.
8 Howells, “Mark Twain: An Inquiry,” in Fishkin, ed. The Mark Twain Anthology, 91.
9 Mark Twain’s Letters, vol. 1, 51.
10 Twain, Roughing It, 820.
11 The first was reprinted in the Golden Era, Nov 29, 1863, and Bernard Taper, ed., 189-91, Mark Twain’s San Francisco (OH: McGraw Hill, 1963), and the second was published in The Galaxy in 1870 and reprinted in his collection Sketches, New and Old in 1875.
14 Mark Twain, “A Tribute to Anson Burlingame”, Buffalo Express, 1870, reprinted in McCullough and McIntire-Strasburg, ed. Mark Twain at the Buffalo Express: Articles and Sketches by America’s Favorite Humorist, 153-157.
17 ibid., 7, 9.
18 Need Source.
19 Zehr, “The Vision of the Other in Mark Twain's ‘War Prayer,'” 87.
23 Twain, “Concerning the Jews,” 528.
26 Brandt, “Introduction” to Following the Equator, xxiii-xxiv.
27 Twain, “The Secret of Eddypus, the World Empire,” in Zwick, ed. Mark Twain’s Weapons of Satire, 84.
28 Twain, Mark Twain’s Letters, vol. 4, 447.
29 Twain, Mark Twain’s Letters, vol. 4, chapter 39.
32 All of the citations from the article below are taken from Harper's Weekly 45 (Feb 9, 1901): 154.
33 Twain, “The American Flag” (1901) in Zwick, ed. Mark Twain’s Weapons of Satire, 16-7.
34 All of the citations from the article below are taken from Harper's Weekly 45 (Feb 9, 1901): 155
36 ibid, 484.
37 Quoted in Kaplan, Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain, 365.
38 Startsev, “Mark Twain in America,” in Fishkin, ed. The Mark Twain Anthology, 295.
40 The American Society in London gave a banquet, July 4, 1907, at the Hotel Cecil. Ambassador Choate called on Mr. Clemens to respond to the toast “The Day We Celebrate,” reprinted in Hirst, ed. Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches & Essays, vol. 2, 408.

43. Coveney, “Introduction” to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 24


45. “On Foreign Critics” (1890), from “Monarchy,” *Oxford Companion*, 375-6, pp. 375

46. ibid., xvii.

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—. “To the Person Sitting in Darkness.” *Harpers Weekly* 45 (Feb 9, 1901): 154.


