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Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain's Asia and Comparative Racialization (America and the Long 19th Century)

By Hsuan L. Hsu



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Sitting in Darkness: Mark Twain's Asia and Comparative Racialization (America and the Long 19th Century) By Hsuan L. Hsu

Perhaps the most popular of all canonical American authors, Mark Twain is famous for creating works that satirize American formations of race and empire. While many scholars have explored Twain's work in African Americanist contexts, his writing on Asia and Asian Americans remains largely in the shadows. In *Sitting in Darkness*, Hsuan Hsu examines Twain's career-long archive of writings about United States relations with China and the Philippines. Comparing Twain's early writings about Chinese immigrants in California and Nevada with his later fictions of slavery and anti-imperialist essays, he demonstrates that Twain's ideas about race were not limited to white and black, but profoundly comparative as he carefully crafted assessments of racialization that drew connections between groups, including African Americans, Chinese immigrants, and a range of colonial populations.

Drawing on recent legal scholarship, comparative ethnic studies, and transnational and American studies, *Sitting in Darkness* engages Twain's best-known novels such as *Tom Sawyer*, *Huckleberry Finn*, and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, as well as his lesser-known Chinese and trans-Pacific inflected writings, such as the allegorical tale "A Fable of the Yellow Terror" and the yellow face play *Ah Sin*. *Sitting in Darkness* reveals how within intersectional contexts of Chinese Exclusion and Jim Crow, these writings registered fluctuating connections between immigration policy, imperialist ventures, and racism.



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Editorial Review

Review

"Hsu has extended Twain's familiar critiques of race issues as applied to African-American populations to Asia and Asian-Americans, based on Twain's cumulative writings on the subject.... [T]his work is a timely, incisive exploration of issues which are unfortunately as contentious today as they were in Twain's era."

-Martin Zehr, The Mark Twain Forum

"Advanced scholars will be most at home with the level of discussion, but the author clearly relates plentiful historical references to Twain's texts and develops a convincing case for the prevalence of race-related issues in Twain's consciousness."-*Choice*

"A brilliant book that will add immeasurably to Mark Twain studies, American literary studies, and the field of comparative studies of race and ethnicity. Exciting, well-written, and filled with surprising, unexpected connections, *Sitting in Darkness* contributes to our understanding of the history of comparative racialization in America while deftly placing literature in legal and social contexts that are truly illuminating."-Shelley Fisher Fishkin, Professor of English and Director of American Studies, Stanford University

About the Author

Hsuan L. Hsu is Associate Professor of English at the University of California, Davis and author of *Geography and the Production of Space in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*.

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