

Introduction

On 13 January 1895, the Sunday *New York Herald* published an article entitled “Indians and Mark Twain,” recounting a “good story” told by one Charles A. Davis, manager of the iconoclastic orator Colonel Robert Green Ingersoll. Davis had come to his position by a circuitous route, having spent much of the preceding decade as a press agent for the Adam Forepaugh Circus, promoting ticket sales through sensational advertisements and publicity stunts that often tested the limits of local law. Although the circumstances surrounding the article’s appearance are unclear, Davis’s improbable tale about once having arranged an interview between a “big Sioux chief” and America’s most beloved author may have been an attempt to divert attention away from the latest controversy in which his current employer found himself embroiled. In early 1895, the efforts of an irate group of New Jersey ministers to prevent Ingersoll’s forthcoming lecture in Hoboken by invoking an obscure, century-old statute against uttering blasphemy had become national headlines. Amidst the “hubbub” of pending court injunctions and civil rights attorneys decrying the violation of Ingersoll’s constitutional right of free speech,¹ Davis’s anecdote about “How the Humorist Was Outhumored by an Untutored Savage”—as the *Herald’s* subheading phrased it—cleverly substituted one media circus for another, deflecting reporters’ requests for updates on this tense situation through a touch of levity. But might this bizarre anecdote have any basis—however remote—in truth?

Surprisingly, several historical facts corroborate its feasibility. Davis alleges that the meeting occurred on a “particular,” though unspecified, date when the circus appeared in Hartford, as sources confirm that it did in 1883, 1886, and 1888. Moreover, according to the show’s official programs, only its 1888 iteration—rebranded the “4 Paw and Wild West Combined”—included

the “greatest gathering of real blanket Indians ever seen this side of the Rocky Mountains.”² Many of these were Lakota veterans of the 1876 Battle of the Little Bighorn, whom Forepaugh had recruited for his new finale, “Custer’s Last Rally,” the first dramatic reenactment of this landmark event, later adopted and made famous by Buffalo Bill Cody. These details, when set within the context of the agent’s statement that “the Indians were then a feature of the circus,” point to 1888 as the likely date of the purported incident.

On the morning of 12 June that year, Hartford newspapers reported that the circus announced its arrival with a “grand and gorgeous” parade—in which “delegations of Sioux, Comanche, Kiowa, and Pawnee Indians, in full war paint and feathers” rode through the streets accompanied by scouts, trappers, plainsmen, and a “cowboy brass band.”³ This “sumptuous” spectacle passed within a half mile of the Clemens mansion en route to Brown’s Lot, a field on the southern edge of the city, where performances were held at 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m.⁴ Given Mark Twain’s fame in the late 1880s, Davis—whom circus historian William L. Slout describes as legendary among his peers for “working up interviews with his stars and proprietors”⁵—doubtlessly recognized that securing the writer’s endorsement for the “4 Paw and Wild West Combined” would be a public relations coup.⁶ To this end, the *Herald* reports,

The enterprising agent . . . called upon the humorist and laid the matter before him. Mark said he didn’t care for Indians and was busy, and didn’t see what the Indians had to do with him, anyhow.

“Why, the fact is,” replied the circus man, with a gravity worthy of a higher life, “they have heard of you and want naturally to see you.”

This didn’t appear strange to Mr. Clemens. Still, he was indisposed to grant the request until Davis swore that a big Sioux chief had declared that he would never die happy if compelled to return to the reservation without having seen and spoken to the man whose fame was as wide as the world.

“All right,” said Twain. “Run ‘em in at six and let us make it short.”

About that hour the humorist sat on his porch and saw to his astonishment an immense cavalcade of mounted warriors coming down the street. In the place of a half dozen chiefs expected there were not less than fifty savages tearing along like mad in exhibition of their horsemanship. They turned in upon the lawn and broke down the shrubbery and wore off the grass and devastated the whole place. The spokesman of the party was a mighty hunter, and had been previously informed that Twain was distinguished for the awful slaughter of wild beasts, so he laid himself out for a game of brag. The interpreter was in the deal and, instead of repeating what the chief really said, made a speech of his own, speaking of Twain’s literary achievements.

“For Heaven’s sake, choke him off!” said Twain once or twice.

The interpreter turned to the chief and said the white hunter wanted to hear more. And on he went. Every time the humorist cried for quarter the chief was told to give another hunting story. Finally, the Indian vocabulary becoming exhausted, the chief quit, whereupon Twain made a brief reply, which was quadrupled in length by the interpreter turning it into a marvellous hunting yarn. The chief listened with stolid indifference, but when they got away he grunted contemptuously and said:—“White hunter heap big liar.”⁷

Although certain aspects of this narrative—such as the “immense cavalcade” of mounted warriors tearing up the bushes on Clemens’s property—are clearly embellished, if not altogether invented, the specificity of the hour at which Davis states the interview occurred bolsters the credibility of his claim. At 6 p.m.—in other words, during the interim between the circus’s afternoon and evening performances—a smaller group, consisting of the agent, interpreter, and “big Sioux chief,” could conceivably have traveled across town to pay Mark Twain a discreet visit, hastily exchanging greetings and a handshake.

Despite—or perhaps because of—its sensational subject matter, the *Herald* story spread quickly through the nation’s newspaper exchange system, appearing over the next several months in the *Washington Post*, *Philadelphia Times*, *Pittsburgh Dispatch*, *Kansas City Journal*, and *Los Angeles Herald*, as well as in a score of smaller regional publications in Texas, Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska. In each reprinting, the body of the text remained unchanged, although its title shifted to capitalize on the author’s celebrity—alternately becoming “Mark and the Redskin” or “Having Fun with Twain.” The subheading varied as well, ranging from “Twain Comes across a Jocular Untutored Savage” to “The Humorist Tricked by a Showman and Misrepresented to the Warriors.” The piece even resurfaced a decade later in William Carter Thompson’s 1905 memoir *On the Road with a Circus*—not as a hoax but as a consummate example of the “wily,” “publicity-provoking designs” used by press agents to advertise their shows.⁸

So did Sam Clemens actually ever meet a “mighty” Lakota leader who engaged him in a cross-cultural “game of brag”? Probably not; at least no evidence exists to prove it. Yet even if Davis’s tale is apocryphal, one aspect of it rings profoundly and indisputably true: Mark Twain did *not* care for Indians. This book is an attempt to understand why. A curious lacuna exists in the enormous body of scholarship on Twain’s life and work: studies of his views on race—among them Arthur Petit’s *Mark Twain and the South*, Shelley Fisher Fiskin’s *Was Huck Black?*, Jocelyn Chadwick’s *The Jim*

Dilemma, Terrell Dempsey's *Searching for Jim*, and Joe Fulton's *The Reconstruction of Mark Twain*—focus overwhelmingly on African Americans and slavery. Comparatively little attention, however, has been paid to the writer's stance on nineteenth-century America's other major racial issue—the dispossession and attempted extermination of the country's indigenous population. Over the past half century, only a handful of essays have addressed this topic, in piecemeal, cursory fashion; it has also received brief mention in books such as Philip Foner's *Mark Twain: Social Critic* (1958); Louis J. Budd's *Mark Twain: Social Philosopher* (1962); Leslie Fiedler's *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968); Maxwell Geismar's *Mark Twain: An American Prophet* (1970); Jeffrey Steinbrink's *Getting to Be Mark Twain* (1991); Joseph Coulombe's *Mark Twain and the American West* (2003); Ned Blackhawk's *Violence over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (2006); and Harold J. Kolb's *Mark Twain: The Gift of Humor* (2015).

The paucity of critical inquiry regarding Twain's conflicted attitudes toward native peoples, as reflected in the fiction, letters, journalistic sketches, and speeches he wrote over a period of nearly sixty years, is in my estimation not a matter of oversight but deliberate avoidance. The author's status as an American cultural icon rests, in large part, on his reputation as “a champion of the oppressed of all races.”⁹ While Twain's views on blacks affirm that notion by demonstrating unequivocal growth away from the racism of his origins in the antebellum South, his representations of Indians do not follow a similarly redemptive arc. They are instead vexingly erratic and paradoxical, commingling antipathy and sympathy, fascination and visceral repugnance. Previous scholars seeking to explain the harshness of Twain's stance have been stymied not only by the absence of a linear trajectory but also the fact that—as Lou Budd perceptively noted—“there is no good reason why he reacted so violently.”¹⁰

This conundrum has historically divided critics into two antithetical camps that oversimplify—and thereby inevitably distort—Twain's attitudes toward Indians by either vilifying or idealizing them. The most extreme example of the former tendency is Leslie Fiedler, whose reputation as a nonpareil literary provocateur had been cemented four decades earlier with the publication of his controversial essay “Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey.” With characteristic bravado, Fiedler charges that Twain was “by instinct and conviction an absolute Indian hater, consumed by the desire to destroy not merely real Indians, but any image of Indian life which stands between White Americans and a total commitment to genocide. His only notable Indian character is Injun Joe, that haunter of

caves and hater of white females, who stalks the underground darkness of *Tom Sawyer* and is finally imagined dying the most dreadful of deaths."¹¹ He offers little additional evidence in support of this sweeping claim, mentioning only Twain's satirical treatment of James Fenimore Cooper's Indians and derogatory remarks about the "Digger tribe" in *The Innocents Abroad* before rushing headlong into an equally facile discussion of Herman Melville. Similarly, Helen Harris's 1975 essay "Mark Twain's Response to the Native American" pronounces his depiction of Indians "unfailingly hostile."¹² Both scholars were apparently unaware of an 1886 letter to President Grover Cleveland, in which Clemens denounces a New Mexico bounty on Apache scalps as "scoundrelism." This document, along with a handful of others, undermines the absolutism of their stance by demonstrating that the writer's views on Indians were neither simplistic nor one-dimensional.¹³

The opposing critical viewpoint is equally problematic in its determination to absolve Twain from the charge of racism through selective use of evidence. This inspirational narrative of racial transcendence was first proposed by Philip Foner, who argued that Clemens outgrew the "disparaging references to those of alien origin" found in his early writing and ultimately embraced a vision of "men and women of all races, creeds, and colors . . . uniting in a universal brotherhood of man."¹⁴ Though Twain's response to cultural "Others" undeniably progressed over time, this conclusion is too pat—akin in some ways to the familiar contention about Huck Finn's wholesale rejection of his racist attitudes about blacks after spending time on the raft with Jim. More than a decade later, Maxwell Geismar followed Foner's lead in both his acknowledgment of the writer's "deep prejudice" against Indians and insistence that it was fully overcome. He lauds Twain's declaration that "my first American ancestor . . . was an Indian" in the 1881 speech "Plymouth Rock and the Pilgrims" as "a remarkable opening up of the ignorant frontier mind"¹⁵ but ignores his monstrous depiction of the Sioux three years later in "Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians." Geismar also cites the presence of "billions of red angels" in the 1907 story "Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven" as definitive proof that Clemens's "original ingrained prejudice about the Indians of his youth . . . was finally exorcised"¹⁶—a conclusion rendered untenable by his gruesome description of the rape, mutilation, and murder of Minnesota settlers at the hands of Indians in "Letters from the Earth," composed just months before his death.

Lynn W. Denton's 1972 essay, "Mark Twain and the American Indian," proposes an analogous paradigm—that the author's early bias against native peoples gradually "changed to toleration and then finally to

idealism."¹⁷ Like Foner and Geismar, she charts a redemptive pattern that culminates with "Stormfield," declaring that Twain "wholly renounced the prejudice . . . of [his] Nevada days" in this late text. Denton also correlates the liberalization of the writer's attitudes with a growing disenchantment about European colonizers in general and Puritans in particular, arguing that he became "more and more convinced that white-oriented civilization must receive the blame for the introduction of evil into an otherwise sinless society."¹⁸ Her thesis concerning Twain's recognition of the "innate goodness of the [continent's] original inhabitants" is grounded in a misreading of his allusion to Indians in *Life on the Mississippi* as "simple children of the forest" (LM, 37)—a clichéd nineteenth-century rhetorical trope that reifies their inferiority. Rather than valorizing the primitive, the writer's cynicism about civilization reflects a dim view of human nature in general, as *Following the Equator* attests: "There are many humorous things in the world; among them the white man's notion that he is less savage than the other savages" (FE, 213).

Louis J. Budd, James McNutt, Jeffrey Steinbrink, and Harold Kolb offer a more nuanced, clear-sighted perspective on the subject, arguing that while Twain's prejudice against Indians diminished over time, it did not entirely disappear. Budd, for example, asserts that "the brightest side of [the writer's] whole intellectual career is his progress away from racism" emphasizing the dynamic, evolutionary quality of his views rather than an end result of unconditional triumph.¹⁹ He also concedes that Twain's attitudes toward racial and ethnic minorities were not uniformly liberal. Unlike African Americans and the Chinese, Indians were relatively slow to "stalk into the circle of his sympathy"—an "ugly truth" attributable to the fact that Clemens initially had "little respect for any peoples who were outside the pattern of an industrial society."²⁰ Although he eventually acknowledged "how the pioneer had pre-empted [the Indians'] lands and smashed their culture," Budd notes that Clemens "was never to focus directly on the dark agony of the American Indian, a subject fit for his most trenchant insights."²¹ This omission, in Budd's opinion, is both regrettable and perplexing, particularly in light of Twain's bold critique of US imperialism in the Philippines during the last decade of his life.

James McNutt's 1978 essay "Mark Twain and the American Indian: Earthly Realism and Heavenly Idealism" similarly concludes that the subject of Indian-white relations "alternately angered, baffled, and saddened [the writer] for a lifetime." He deems "Twain's resolution of the problem . . . ambiguous at best," in that he "never totally refrained from using the Indian's savagery as a club whenever convenient"; native peoples instead

remained indelibly imprinted in his imagination as “a metaphor for violence and a symbol of uncivilized behavior.”²² Building on McNutt’s assessment, Jeffrey Steinbrink characterizes Twain as “an ‘unfinished’ writer, philosophically undisciplined and more than occasionally inconsistent, throughout his career.” He claims that much of the work Twain published in the *Galaxy* between 1868 and 1871—particularly the 1870 sketch “The Noble Red Man”—“raises the question whether, like Huck Finn, he had a sufficiently sound heart to countervail the deformed conscience society had inculcated in him” and concludes that “the American Indian [was] a lifelong blind spot in the field of Clemens’ moral vision.”²³ Harold Kolb’s interpretation, in turn, reaffirms the notion of a linear trajectory first proposed by Foner and Geismar but stops short of complete redemption. He maintains that Twain’s early references to Indians while living in the West “tend to be more negative than the later [ones]” because he “adopt[ed] the more sympathetic eastern view of natives” after relocating to New York and then Connecticut.²⁴ Although Kolb admits “this evolving pattern is not uniform” and that Twain only “partially transcended the race prejudice of his moment in history,” his analysis of this progression is nonetheless too simplistic.

The views expressed on both sides of this critical fault line are—to a greater or lesser degree—characterized by a tendency toward overgeneralization, which has yielded a series of unsatisfying, often misleading conclusions. Twain’s representations of American Indians are so checkered and convoluted that they defy easy categorization or summary—pitfalls I hope to avoid here. *Mark Twain among the Indians and Other Indigenous Peoples* is the first book-length work devoted exclusively to this subject. My title is an allusion to “Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians,” the writer’s 1884 sequel to *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which—though unfinished—represents his most sustained, ambitious attempt to portray what he perceived as the realities of native character. While Clemens was literally only “among” Indians for a relatively brief period during the early 1860s, he was nonetheless deeply enmeshed in—and hence metaphorically “among”—the ubiquitous, often incendiary, accounts of Indian raids and atrocities reported in the national press as well as the stereotypes of “noble” or “ignoble” savages promulgated in popular music, drama, and dime novels.

My approach is both chronological and geographical, exploring the origin and development of the writer’s ideation about native peoples in relation to the various communities he inhabited, from antebellum Hannibal and the mining camps of the Sierra Nevada to the socially progressive enclave of Hartford’s Nook Farm. The book is in a sense a work of literary archaeology, sifting through the strata of diverse, often obscure, primary sources in an

attempt to re-create the cultural milieu of these formative local environs. In addition to Twain's manuscripts, letters, and unpublished notebooks, I have examined the official records pertaining to Orion Clemens's role as acting governor and ex officio superintendent of Indian Affairs at the Nevada State Archives and his little-known 1856 essay "The History of the Halfbreed Tract"; the tenor of contemporary reportage about Indians in regions where the writer lived; and the membership rosters, meeting minutes, and promotional pamphlets describing the philanthropic initiatives of the Connecticut Indian Association, a native rights advocacy group that flourished in Hartford throughout the 1880s—the period of his greatest literary productivity and civic engagement. I have also closely analyzed Clemens's reading, mining the extensive marginalia in works such as Francis Parkman's *The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century* and James Bonwick's *The Lost Tasmanian Race* for insight into his evolving views on "savagery," native spirituality, and the fateful extinction of American Indians and other indigenes around the globe ordained by "progress."

This documentary evidence challenges many of the claims found in the work of earlier scholars. For example, Geismar's assertion that Clemens exhibited the "deep prejudice of the frontiersman" against Indians implies that such antipathy was not merely prevalent but endemic in the West, when in fact the individuals with whom the writer was most closely associated in Nevada Territory—Orion, Governor James Warren Nye, and his fellow *Enterprise* writer Dan DeQuille, to name just a few—espoused progressive, sympathetic views of the Great Basin tribes. In order to more accurately understand the origins of Twain's literary identity, the cavalier attitudes evident in his early journalistic sketches must be reassessed within this broader spectrum of opinion. As Ned Blackhawk has observed, "While many suggest that the frenetic, atomistic world of Virginia City allowed Clemens to reinvent and imagine himself anew—to become Mark Twain—few have considered where his discourse of [native] inhumanity resides."²⁵ During his years in the West, Clemens was in a sense blind—or, at least, wryly indifferent—to the dispossession of the region's indigenous population, mocking their squalid appearance and living conditions as proof of intrinsic inferiority rather than a dire economic consequence of settler colonialism.

The conceptual course I chart in *Mark Twain among the Indians and Other Indigenous Peoples* differs from the trajectory proposed by previous scholars in several ways. I reject the notion of a strict linear progression in the writer's convictions; rather—as his notebooks, personal correspondence, and both published and unpublished work attest—the change was uneven, proceeding in fits and starts. Contradictions abound and are never fully

reconciled. In *Roughing It*, for example, he callously dismisses the starving natives loitering at western stage stations as “a silent, sneaking, treacherous looking race . . . [of] prideless beggars,” commenting, “if the beggar instinct were left out of an Indian he would not ‘go,’ any more than a clock without a pendulum” (RI, 127). Four years later, however, in the 1876 story “The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut,” the narrator’s conscience—personified as a “shriveled, shabby dwarf . . . covered all over with a fuzzy, greenish mold”—reveals him to be plagued with shame and self-recrimination over “a peculiarly mean and pitiful act . . . toward a poor ignorant Indian in the wilds of the Rocky Mountains,” presumably on that same historic journey (CT1, 645, 649).

Twain’s expressions of sympathy for Indians tend to be discrete, short-lived epiphanies, punctuated by lapses into more regressive modes of thinking. This incongruity is reflected in the dissonance between Clemens’s 1886 letter to Cleveland, often hailed as a watershed in the evolution of his racial attitudes, and the ethnocentric imagery found in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, published three years later. The writer’s passionate protest against the bounty on Apache scalps is grounded in a recognition of the humanity of native peoples—the very trait denied in his characterization of the inhabitants of Camelot as unreasoning “animals” and “white Indians,” and the elite Knights of the Round Table as a “polished-up court of Comanches” (CY, 129).

Additionally, my research refutes the conventional claim that Clemens’s harshest attitudes about Indians coincide with his residence in the West and that their modulation is attributable to his relocation to the Northeast in 1868. While the writer’s views unquestionably became more liberal during the twenty years he lived in Hartford, this growth occurred in a gradual, subtle fashion—and at least a decade later—than earlier critics have alleged. In the early 1870s, Twain’s geographic distance from native peoples—along with significant changes in his personal and material circumstances—actually fueled his antipathy toward them rather than diminishing it. His description of the “Goshoot” tribe in *Roughing It* (1872) as “the wretchedest type of mankind I have ever seen . . . manifestly descended from the self-same gorilla, or kangaroo, or Norway rat, whichever animal-Adam the Darwinians trace them to” (RI, 126–127) is, for example, far harsher than any firsthand observation he made about Indians while living in Nevada Territory. At the core of my argument is “The Noble Red Man”—written in Buffalo and published just six months after his marriage to Olivia Langdon—which reveals the degree to which the writer’s antagonistic attitudes are entwined with Victorian ideologies of gender, particularly the

archetype of women as chaste and vulnerable “angels of the house” whose virtue must be vigilantly protected by men. This text, which ends with a horrifying vignette of “wives . . . ravished before their husbands’ eyes [and] husbands . . . mutilated, tortured, and scalped, and their wives compelled to look on” (CT1, 446), also marks the inception of a pattern in which Indians are depicted as demonic sexual predators intent upon the destruction of white womanhood. Several of Twain’s later female protagonists, such as the Widow Douglas in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), seventeen-year-old Peggy Mills in “Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians” (1884), and the anonymous young bride in “The Californian’s Tale” (1893) face the prospect of rape, captivity, or murder at the hands of Indians.

Although this trope disappears from Twain’s fiction for more than a decade after 1893, it reappears in his harrowing description of an 1862 Minnesota massacre at the end of “Letters from the Earth”:

Twelve Indians broke into a farm house at daybreak and captured the family . . . They crucified the parents; that is to say, they stood them stark naked against the wall of the living room and nailed their hands to the wall. Then they stripped the daughters bare, stretched them upon the floor in front of their parents, and repeatedly ravished them. Finally they crucified the girls against the wall opposite the parents, and cut off their noses and their breasts. They also—but I will not go into that. There is a limit. There are indignities so atrocious that the pen cannot write them. (CT2, 927)

Twain’s acknowledgment that the Dakota Indians who perpetrated this unspeakable crime had been “deeply wronged and treacherously treated by the government of the United States”—dispossessed from their ancestral homeland and reduced to starvation when the provisions guaranteed by federal treaty were not supplied—reflects a measure of political sympathy for their plight. His conclusion, however, reinforces an obdurate view of native barbarism and depravity: “Now you have *one* incident of the Minnesota massacre. I could give you fifty. They would cover all the different kinds of cruelty the brutal human talent has ever invented.”

Mark Twain among the Indians and Other Indigenous Peoples also offers an extended analysis of several key factors—some previously unknown, others ignored or undervalued—that precipitated advances in the writer’s thinking about American Indians during the 1880s and 1890s. His 1881 introduction to the tenets of traditional Iroquois spirituality in Francis Parkman’s *The Jesuits in North America in the Seventeenth Century* was transformational, upending an inherited cultural bias regarding Christianity’s superiority to other belief systems. Clemens’s apprecia-

tion of the “good sense” manifested in the Iroquois conception of God fostered a reconsideration of native primitivism. Three years later, while doing background research for “Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians,” he was even more intrigued by a discussion of Cheyenne religion in Colonel Richard Irving Dodge’s *Our Wild Indians: Thirty-Three Years’ Personal Experience among the Red Men of the Great West*. His marginalia in this volume articulate various plans to incorporate these beliefs, including Huck’s conversion to Cheyenne spirituality, into the unfinished sequel. Given the canonical status of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the Indianization of Twain’s most beloved protagonist—if brought to fruition—might well have altered the course of American literature.

Clemens’s interest in indigenous religion coincides with his exposure to the progressive ethos of the Connecticut Indian Association, a Hartford-based group of female reformers, who promoted the education and assimilation of American Indians into mainstream society. Although neither he nor Livy ever became members of this organization, many of their friends and neighbors at Nook Farm did. The group advanced its humanitarian agenda on multiple fronts, sponsoring lectures, amateur theatrical performances, and so-called butterfly teas to galvanize the interest of the city’s intellectual elite. Throughout the 1880s, the association also waged an intensive public relations campaign seeking to raise public consciousness about the myriad injustices to which native peoples had been subjected. To this end, they wrote and placed hundreds of articles—including the 1886 editorial condemning the New Mexico bounty on Apache scalps—in local newspapers, where Clemens encountered them on a regular basis. Over time, the association’s persistent advocacy on behalf of Indians thus exerted an indirect, but nonetheless discernible, influence in the modulation of his views.

These incremental advances in Twain’s racial attitudes established the groundwork for the transformative experience of his 1895–96 world lecture tour. In observing the adverse effects of British imperialism on the indigenous populations of Australia and New Zealand, he finally understood the terrible human toll exacted by the advancement of Western civilization. His 1897 travelogue *Following the Equator* rages against the unjust dispossession of Australian Aborigines and the genocidal efforts of colonial settlers who left arsenic-laced flour in the bush for them to eat; it also records the heartrending distress of his discovery that Tasmania’s entire native population had been wiped out within a half century after the arrival of the island’s first British convicts. The sobering reality of extinction—and the appallingly sadistic means by which it had been achieved—caused the writer to

question both the notion of progress and long-held assumptions concerning the binaries of savagery and civilization. Twain's epiphany peaked in New Zealand, where he spent five weeks in late 1895 immersed in Maori history and culture, marveling at their art and meeting numerous representatives of local tribes. His conclusion that the Maori were "a superior breed of savages" (FE, 318) reflects the emergence of a newfound cultural relativism that would become the distinguishing feature of his later socio-political views.

Although the pattern of indigenous dispossession that unfolded in Australia and New Zealand—the discovery of gold followed by a massive influx of foreign fortune seekers, whose presence precipitated inevitable clashes over land use and resources—was uncannily reminiscent of recent US history, the plight of American Indians remains a largely unacknowledged subtext in *Following the Equator*. Glancing allusions, such as Twain's characterization of Aboriginal women as "wild squaws" and declaration that "Fennimore Cooper . . . wouldn't have traded the dullest [Aboriginal tracker] for the brightest Mohawk he ever invented," demonstrate his cognizance of the parallel (FE, 264, 218). But rather than exploring this correspondence, the writer suppresses it; as Peter Messent has observed, Twain's writing on race in the travelogue "operates over and over in a culturally self-reflexive manner . . . [yet] his awareness of the American racial theme is, at best, intermittent and . . . often unconscious."²⁶

Twain continued to avoid the uncomfortable topic of American Indians during his last decade—at least in print. The 1902 dialogue "The Dervish and the Offensive Stranger," his most forthright admission of the wrongs that had been committed against them, remained unpublished until thirteen years after his death, when Albert Bigelow Paine included it in the anthology *Europe and Elsewhere*. In this piece, the writer acknowledges Indians as the "original owners of the soil" and describes the European colonization of the Americas as an egregious act of theft. The force of his indictment is blunted, however, by his situating these facts within an exculpatory philosophical framework that there is "no such thing as an evil deed . . . [only] good intentions and evil ones. . . . The results are not foreseeable" (CT2, 547–48). According to the Stranger's deterministic logic, "it is the law" that good intentions have produced good and evil results in equal measure throughout history. In other words, Europeans bear no culpability for driving Indians from their homes and "exterminat[ing] them, root and branch," since their conquest of the New World provided "farms and breathing-space and plenty and happiness" to the landless, "plodding poor" of the Old.

My intent in *Mark Twain among the Indians and Other Indigenous Peoples* is neither to defend nor to defame the writer but to explore the complexity of his engagement with native populations both at home and abroad. Clemens came of age during the bloodiest era of Indian-white relations, personally witnessed the devastating effects of colonization on the Great Basin tribes in 1860s Nevada Territory, and lived two decades beyond the crushing defeat of the Lakota at Wounded Knee and the official “closing” of the American frontier. While his attitudes toward Indians progressed in response to these sweeping historic changes, he never succeeded in fully exorcising this racial animus. It is perhaps unrealistic to expect such an outcome; for all of Twain’s brilliance, he remained inescapably a man of his time and place. His intellectual journey—sprawling, untidy, incomplete—matters more than where he ultimately arrived.

Mark Twain is our nation’s greatest storyteller; his work celebrates the American voice in its infinitely varied regional permutations. “A nation’s language is a very large matter,” he wrote in 1880. “It is not simply a manner of speech obtaining among the educated handful; the manner obtaining among the vast uneducated multitude must be considered also” (CT1, 831). And yet, amidst the rich, polyphonic chorus of ethnic voices heard in his work, those of Indians are absent. This is a missed opportunity with fateful, far-reaching consequences. What if young Sam Clemens, who grew up to become “the Lincoln of our literature,” had played with native children rather than slaves at his Uncle Quarles’s farm and been mesmerized in the firelight by tales from their ancient oral tradition instead of the ghost stories spun by Uncle Dan’l? He would then have learned firsthand about the humor and humanity of these “savages,” their love of family and the moral cogency of their worldview. Ultimately, might he have also realized that the inferiority of American Indians so deeply ingrained in his imagination was, like that of African Americans, merely “a fiction of law and custom” (PW, 9)?