

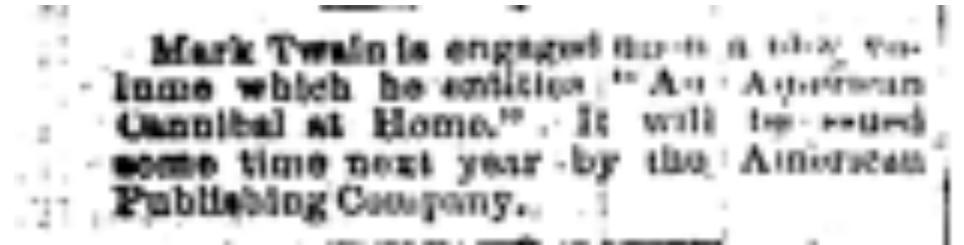
“An American Cannibal at Home”: Comic Diplomacy in Mark Twain’s Hawai’i

Todd Nathan Thompson

May 23, 2018

“An American Cannibal at Home”

“The new book is to be an account of travel at home, describing in a humorous and satirical way our cities and towns, and the people of different sections. No doubt the volume will be very droll, and largely infused with the shrewd common sense and eccentric mode of thought for which the author has become famous.” —Chicago *Republican*, August 28, 1870



Mark Twain is engaged to write a volume which he entitles "An American Cannibal at Home." It will be issued some time next year by the American Publishing Company.

Twain's Hawai'i Writings



Sacramento Union (1866)

New York Tribune (1873)

Lectures, sometimes titled “Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands” (1866-1873)

Roughing It (1872)

Following the Equator (1897)

Unfinished novel (1884)

Tonight's un-earnest analysis

I will talk about how Twain:

- 1) Parodied travel writing, travel writers, and tourists in general
- 2) Set himself up as a classic comic fool and rogue (including as a cannibal)
- 3) Created comic comparisons of Hawaiian and American cultural and political norms that tend towards cultural relativism
- 4) Used caustic irony in self-undoing, “fake” proclamations of imperialism

Some previous scholarship on Twain's Hawai'i

James Caron, *Mark Twain, Unsacred Newspaper Reporter* (2008)

Jeffrey Alan Melton, *Mark Twain, Travel Books, and Tourism: The Tide of a Great Popular Movement* (2002)

Amy Kaplan, "Imperial Triangles: Mark Twain's Foreign Affairs" (1997)

Don Florence, *Persona and Humor in Mark Twain's Early Writings* (1995)

Franklin Rogers, "Burlesque Travel Literature and Mark Twain's *Roughing It*" (1993)

Walter Francis Frear, *Mark Twain and Hawaii* (1947)

Savage Laughter: Nineteenth-Century American Humor and the Pacific

"Jonathan's Talk With The King of the Sandwich Islands: Or Young American Diplomacy."

Yankee-Notions,
February 1, 1854. 36-360.



Jonathan's talk with the King of the Sandwich Islands ; or Young American Diplomacy.

"Yer see, General—yer Majesty, I meant to say—I'm sent as a depitation, I am, from Young America. We want to buy you eout, we do, stock, lock, and barril. Say, now, what'll yer take, old feller, for them ere melon patches of Islands, with all the improvements? Yer know yer can't hold 'em long—must give up. Now, we'll give yer a nice annuity, and send yer the Notions free, and take the hull consarn off yer hands. Come, now, what will yer take?"

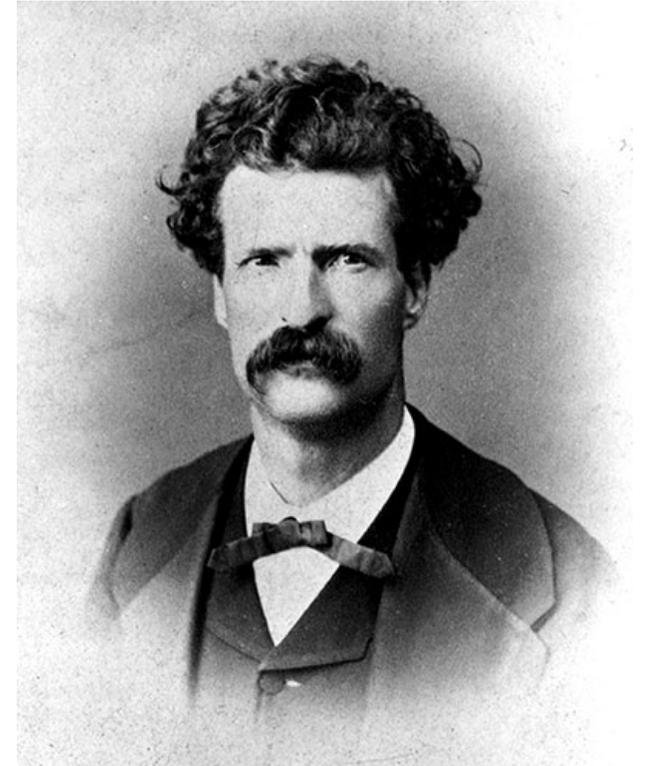
Twain and Travel

“Today we often assume that the traveler goes abroad to learn something and to be transformed by the experience of travel, but the antebellum American was often suspicious of any transformative experience arising out of travel abroad of foreign influences. The goal of travel and travel writing thus became a greater appreciation of one’s home and country. The antebellum travel writer is generally more likely to lecture than to learn, more likely to preach the gospel of nationalism than to become a convert of foreign enthusiasms of any kind. These underlying biases shape what their travel books cover and what they exclude.”

—Alfred Bendixen, “American Travel Books about Europe before the Civil War” (2009)

Twain, 4th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)

“I saw cats—Tom-cats, Mary Ann cats, long-tailed cats, bob tail cats, one-eyed cats, wall-eyed cats, cross-eyed cats, gray cats, black cats, white cats, yellow cats, striped cats, spotted cats, tame cats, wild cats, singed cats, individual cats, groups of cats, platoons of cats, companies of cats, regiments of cats, armies of cats, multitudes of cats, millions of cats, and all of them sleek, fat, lazy, and sound asleep; in place of roughs and rowdies staring and blackguarding on the corners, I saw long-haired, saddle-colored Sandwich Island maidens sitting on the ground in the shade of corner houses...”



Twain, 4th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)

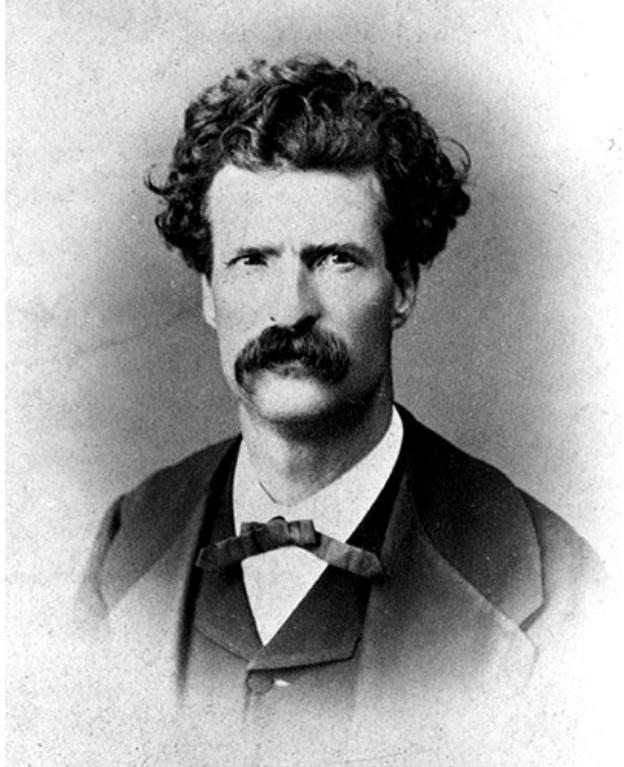
“At this moment, this man Brown, who has no better manners than to read over one’s shoulder, observes:

‘Yes, and hot. Oh, I reckon not (only 82 in the shade)! Go on, now, and put it all down, now that you’ve begun; just say, ‘And more “santipedes,” cockroaches, and felas, and lizards, and red ants, and scorpions, and spiders, and mosquitoes and missionaries’ —oh, blame my cats if I’d live here two months, not if I was High-You-Muck-a-Muck and King of Wawhoo, and I had a harem full of hyenas!’ (Wahine [most generally pronounced Wyheeny], seems to answer for wife, woman and female of questionable character, indifferently. I never can get this man Brown to understand that ‘hyena’ is not the proper pronunciation. He says ‘It ain’t any odds; it describes some of ‘em, anyway.’)

I remarked, ‘But, Mr. Brown, these are trifles.’

‘Trifles be—blowed! You get nipped by one of them scorpions once, and see how you like it.

Twain, 4th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)



“I am glad Brown has got disgusted at that murdered spider and gone; I don’t like to be interrupted when I am writing—especially by Brown, who is one of those men who always looks at the unpleasant side of everything, and I seldom do.”

Twain, 7th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)

“I gave voice to my thought. I said:

‘What a picture is here slumbering in the solemn glory of the moon! How strong the rugged outlines of the dead volcano stand out against the clear sky! What a snowy fringe marks the bursting of the surf over the long, curved reef! How calmly the dim city sleeps yonder in the plain! How soft the shadows lie upon the stately mountains that border the dream-haunted Manoa Valley! What a grand pyramid of billowy clouds towers above the storied Pari! How the grim warriors of the past seem flocking in ghostly squadrons to their ancient battlefield again—how the wails of the dying well up from the—’

At this point the horse called Oahu deliberately sat down in the sand. Sat down to listen, I suppose. Never mind what he heard. I stopped apostrophising and convinced him that I was not a man to allow contempt of Court on the part of a horse. I broke the back bone of a Chief over his rump and set out to join the cavalcade again.”

Twain, 7th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)

“The conversation at this point took a unique and ghastly turn. A gentleman said:
‘Give me some of your bones, Miss Blank; I’ll carry them for you.’

Another said:

‘You haven’t got bones enough, Mrs. Blank; here’s a good shin-bone, if you want it.’

Such observations as these fell from the lips of ladies with reference to their queer newly-acquired property:

‘Mr. Brown, will you please hold some of my bones for a minute?’ And,

‘Mr. Smith, you have got some of my bones; and you have got one, too, Mr. Jones, and you have got my spine, Mr. Twain. Now don’t get my bones all mixed up with yours so that you can’t tell them apart.’

These remarks look very irreverent on paper, but they did not sound so, being used merely in a business way and with no intention of making sport of the remains. I did not think it was right to carry off any of these bones, but we did it, anyhow.

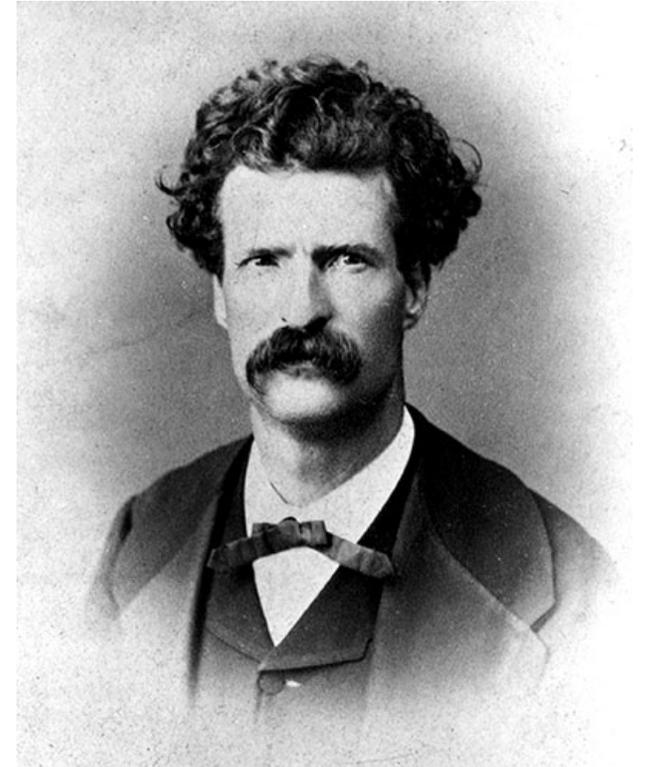
Twain, 25th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)



“I was disappointed when I saw the great volcano of Kilauea (Je-low-way-ah) today for the first time. It is a comfort to me to know that I fully expected to be disappointed, however, and so, in one sense at least, I was not disappointed.”

Twain, 5th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)

“Here his feelings were too much for him, and he swooned away. I pitied this poor creature from the bottom of my heart. I was deeply moved. I shed a few tears on him and kissed him for his mother. I then took what small change he had and ‘shoved.’”



Twain, *Roughing It* (1872)



“...all Sandwich Island historians, white and black, protest that cannibalism never existed in the islands. However, since they only proposed to ‘eat him raw’ we ‘won’t count that.’ But it would certainly have been cannibalism if they had cooked him”

Twain, “Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands”

“It used to be said that the Kanakas were cannibals, but that was a slander. They didn't eat Captain Cook--or if they did, it was only for fun.”

“At this point in my lecture, in other cities, I usually illustrate cannibalism, but I am a stranger here and don't feel like taking liberties. Still, if any one in the audience will lend me an infant, I will illustrate the matter. But it is of no consequence--it don't matter. I know children have become scarce and high, owing to the inattention they have received since the women's rights movement began. I will leave out that part of my program, though it is very neat and pleasant. Yet it is not necessary. I am not hungry.”



MARK TWAIN, a California humorist about to visit the Atlantic states, in the printed programme of a lecture he was lately to give in San Jose, proposed to illustrate the cannibal propensities of the ancient islander, by devouring a child in the presence of the audience, if some lady would furnish him one for the occasion. That part of the programme, however, was necessarily omitted, no maternal relative coming forward with a spare infant to enable him to carry out the illustration.

Mark Twain, Cannibal

MARK TWAIN, the California humorist, in a printed programme of a lecture he was lately to give in San Jose, proposed to illustrate the cannibal propensities of the ancient islanders, by devouring a child in the presence of the audience, if some lady would furnish him one for the occasion.

MARK TWAIN, lecturing on the Sandwich Islands, offered to show how the cannibals eat their food, if some lady would hand him a baby. The lecture was not illustrated.

Daily Evening Herald, March 1, 1873



“Mark Twain, in speaking of cannibalism, grows serious for once and solemnly declares that, for his own part, he ‘would rather grow hungry for two days than eat an old personal friend.’”

“Good morning, brother! How do you like my style? Mark Twain says sometimes I wear a coat, sometimes a plug hat or a pair of spectacles, but, generally speaking, that I wear a smile.”

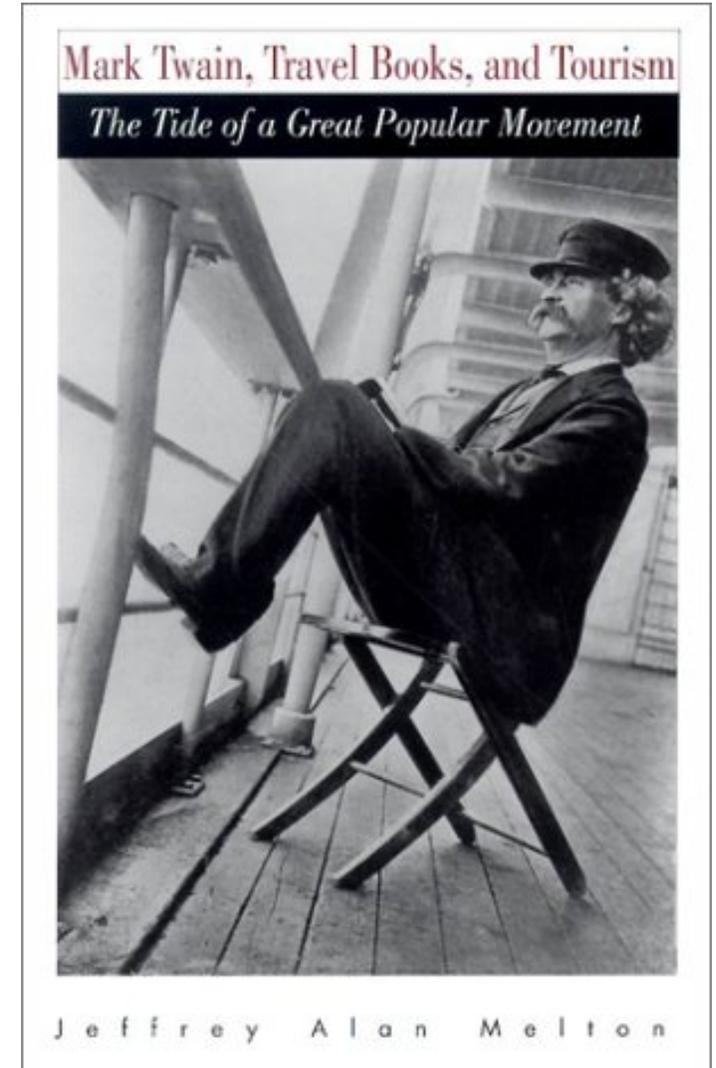
—New York World.

Twain, “About a Remarkable Stranger, Being a Sandwich Island Reminiscence” (1871)

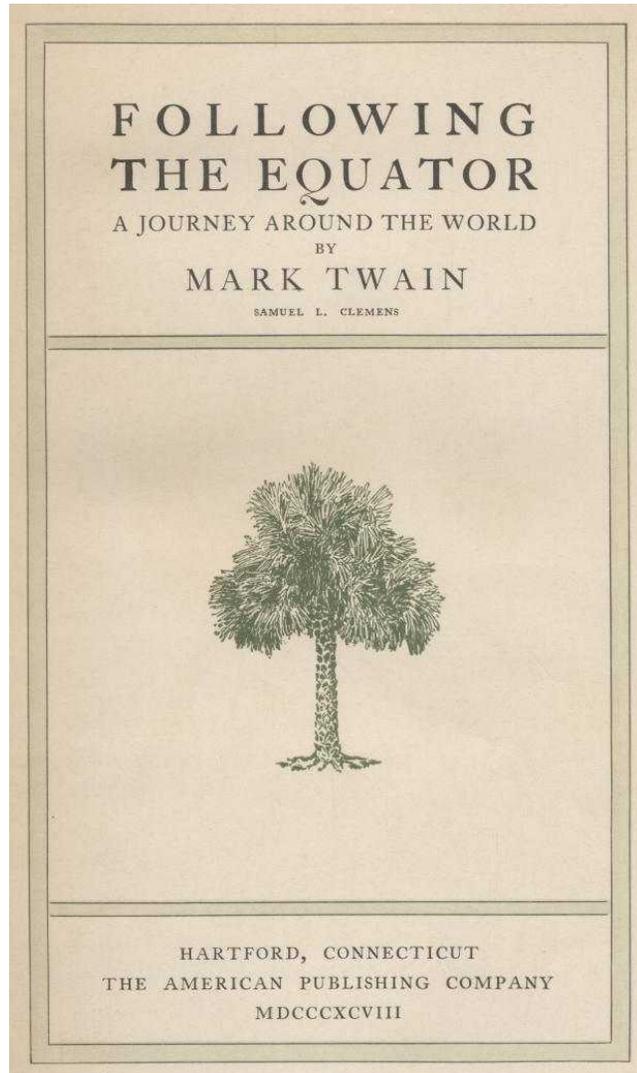
“Somehow this man’s presence made me uncomfortable, and I was glad when a native arrived at that moment to say that Muckawow, the most companionable and luxurious among the rude war-chiefs of the Islands, desired us to come over and help him enjoy a missionary whom he had found trespassing on his grounds.”

Jeffrey Melton, *Mark Twain, Travel Books, and Tourism: The Tide of a Great Popular Movement* (2002)

“The simplest and most powerful strategy for comforting readers was to compare the foreign with the familiar. There is a practical reason for making direct or indirect comparisons between tourist sights and home sights, of course. By juxtaposing the known with the unknown, writers could provide a clear, common point of reference...”



Twain, *Following the Equator* (1897)



“There are many humorous things in the world; among them the white man’s notion that he is less savage than the other savages.”



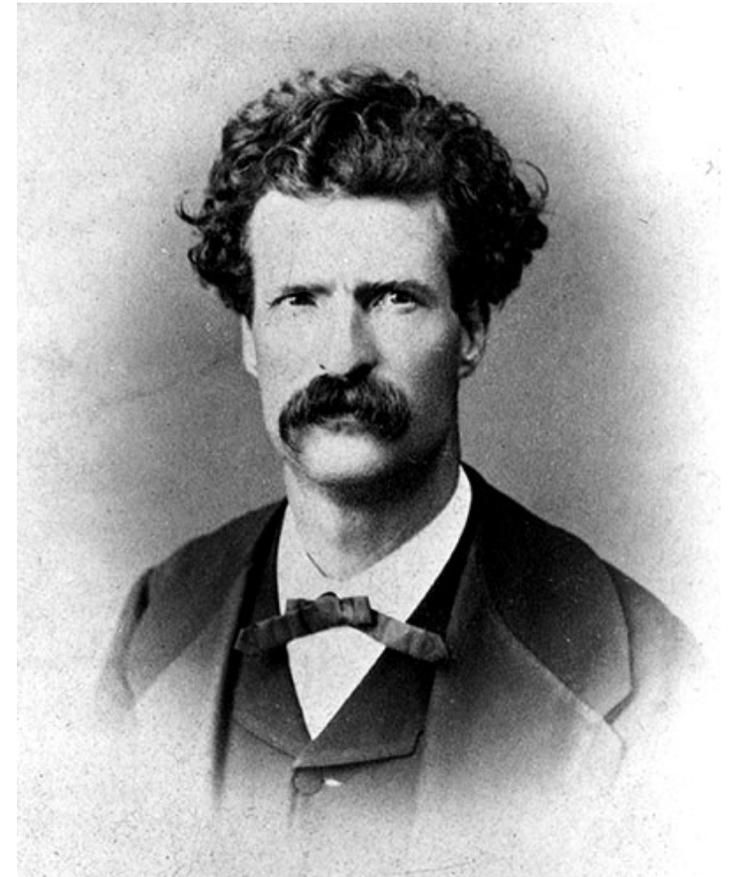
“Mark Twain says that the Sandwich Islands dish of plain dog is ‘only our cherished sausage with the mystery removed.’”

“Fact and Fantasy,” *Day’s Doings*,
Dec. 18, 1869

Twain, 12th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)

“The mental caliber of the Legislative Assembly is up to the average of such bodies the world over—and I wish it were a compliment to say it, but it is hardly so. I have seen a number of Legislatures, and there was a comfortable majority in each of them that knew just about enough to come in when it rained, and that was all.”

This Legislature is like all other Legislatures. A wooden-head gets up and proposes an utterly absurd something or other, and he and a half a dozen other wooden-heads discuss it with windy vehemence for an hour, the remainder of the house sitting in silent patience the while...”

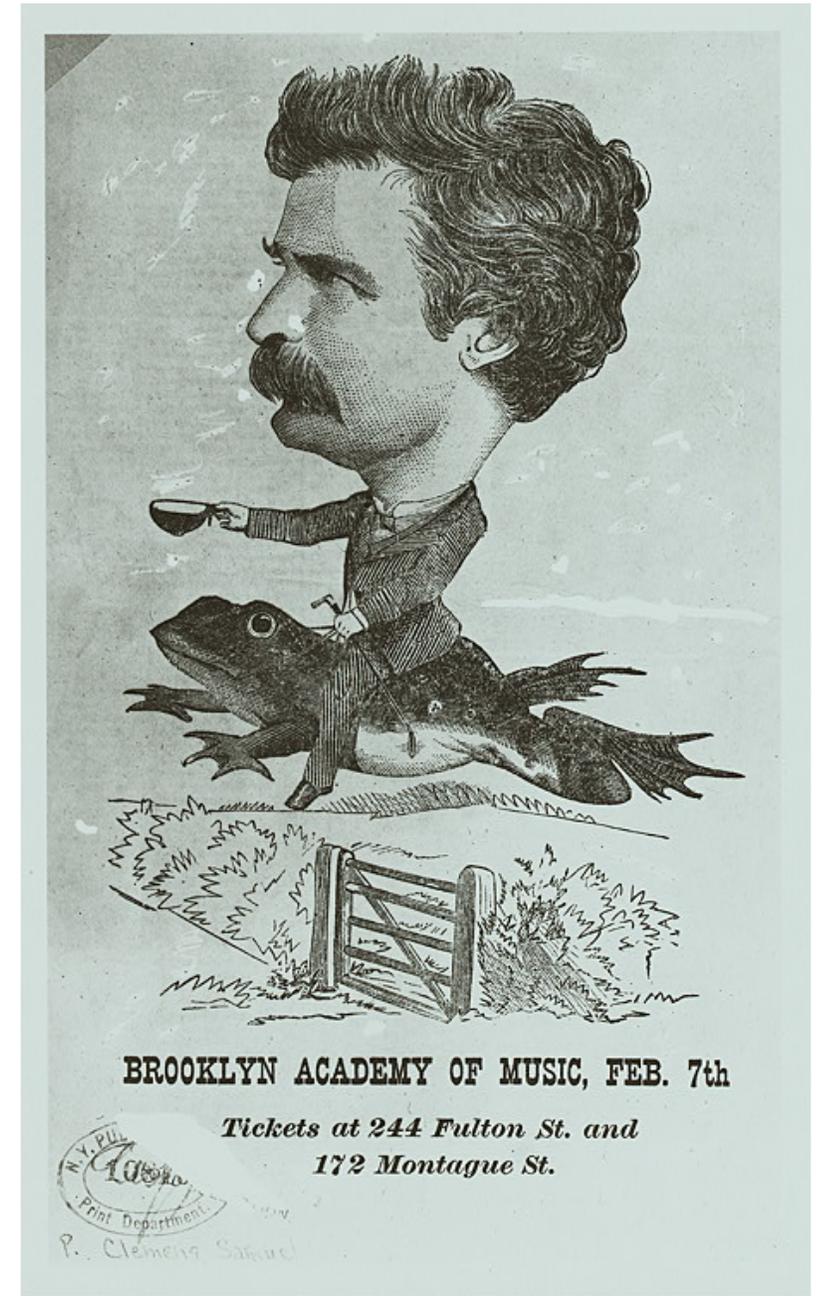


Twain, 12th letter to the Sacramento *Union* (1866)

“Now, on one occasion, a Kanaka member, who paddled over here from out yonder in the ocean—some scalawag who wears nothing but a pair of socks and a plug hat when he is at home...got up and gravely gave notice of a bill to authorize the construction of a suspension bridge from Oahu to Hawaii, a matter of a hundred and fifty miles! He said that natives would prefer it to inter-island schooners, and they wouldn’t suffer from sea-sickness on it. Up came Honorables Ku and Kulauui, and Kowkow and Kiwawhoo and a lot of other clacking geese, and harried and worried this notable internal improvement until some sensible person rose and choked them off by moving the previous question. Do not do an unjust thing now, and imagine Kanaka Legislatures do stupider things than other similar bodies. Rather blush to remember that once, when a Wisconsin Legislature had the affixing of a penalty for the crime of arson under consideration, a member got up and seriously suggested that when a man committed the damning crime of arson they ought either to hang him or make him marry the girl! To my mind the suspension bridge man was a Solomon compared to this idiot.”

Brooklyn *Eagle*, Feb. 8, 1873 account of lecture

“These people do nearly everything wrong end first. They buckle the saddle on the right side which is the wrong side; men mount a horse on the wrong side; they turn out on the wrong side to let you go by; they use the same word to say ‘good bye’ and ‘good morning;’ they use ‘yes’ when they mean ‘no;’ the women smoke more than the men do; when they beckon you to come toward them they always motion in the opposite direction; they dance at funerals, and drawl out a dismal sort of a dirge when they are peculiarly happy. In their playing of the noble American game of ‘Seven up,’ that’s a game, well, I’ll explain that by-and-by. Some of you, perhaps, know all about it, and the rest must guess [Laughter]—but, in their playing of that really noble and intellectual game the dealer deals to his right instead of to his left, and what is insufferably worse—the ten always takes the ace! [Prolonged laughter.] Now, such abject ignorance as that is reprehensible, and, for one, I am glad the missionaries have gone there. [Laughter.]”



Brooklyn *Eagle*, Feb. 8,
1873 account of lecture

“Now, you see what kind of voters you will have when you take these Islands away from these people, as we are pretty sure to do one day. They will do everything wrong end first. They will make a deal of trouble here too. Instead of fostering and encouraging a judicious system of railway speculations, and that sort of thing, they will elect the most incorruptible men to Congress. [Prolonged laughter and applause.] Yes, they will turn everything upside down.”



BROOKLYN ACADEMY OF MUSIC, FEB. 7th

Tickets at 244 Fulton St. and
172 Montague St.

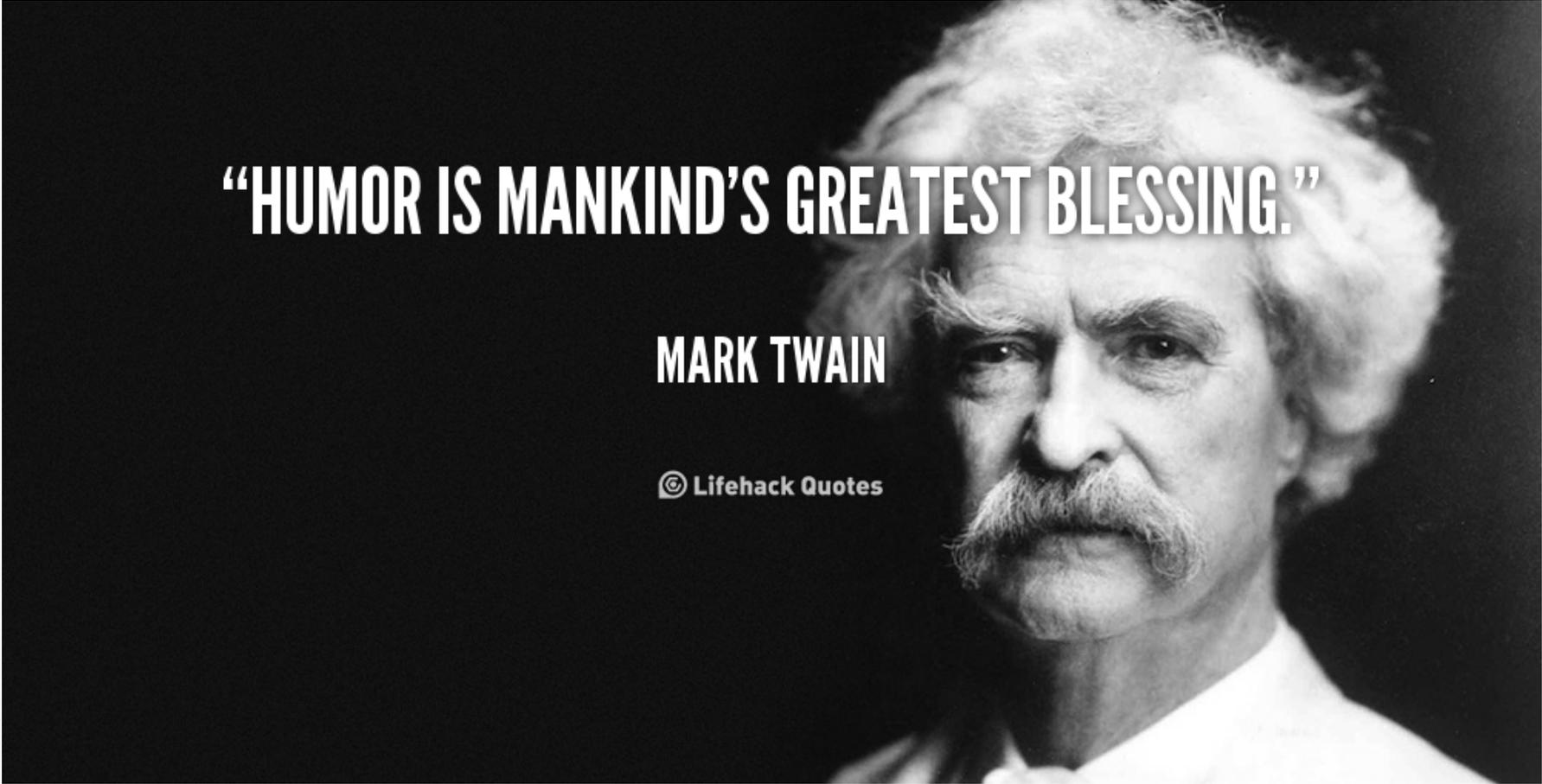
N.Y. PUL.
10/10/73
Print Department
P. Clemens Samuel

Twain in New York *Daily Tribune*, Jan. 9, 1873

“Now, let us annex the islands. Think how we could build up that whaling trade! (Though under our courts and judges it might soon be as impossible for whaleships to rendezvous there without being fleeced and ‘pulled’ by sailors and pettifoggers as it now is in San Francisco—a place the skippers shun as they would rocks and shoals.) Let us annex. We could make sugar enough there to supply all America, perhaps, and the prices would be very easy with the duties removed. And then we would have such a fine half-way house for our Pacific-plying ships; and such a convenient supply depot and such a commanding sentry-box for an armed squadron; and we could raise cotton [500] and coffee there and make it pay pretty well, with the duties off and capital easier to get at. And then we would own the mightiest volcano on earth—Kilauea! Barnum could run it—he understands fires now. Let us annex, by all means. We could pacify Prince Bill and other nobles easily enough—put them on a reservation. Nothing pleases a savage like reservation—a reservation where he has his annual hoes, and Bibles and blankets to trade for powder and whisky—a sweet Arcadian retreat fenced in with soldiers. By annexing, we would get all those 50,000 natives cheap as dirt, with their morals and other diseases thrown in. No expense for education—they are already educated; no need to convert them—they are already converted; no expense to clothe them—for obvious reasons.”

Twain in New York *Daily Tribune*, Jan. 9, 1873

“We *must* annex those people. We can afflict them with our wise and beneficent government. We can introduce the novelty of thieves, all the way up from street-car pickpockets to municipal robbers and Government defaulters, and show them how amusing it is to arrest them and try them, and then turn them loose—some for cash and some for ‘political influence.’ We can make them ashamed of their simple and primitive justice. We can do away with their occasional hangings for murder, and let them have Judge Pratt to teach them how to save imperiled Avery-assassins to society. We can give them some Barnards to keep their money corporations out of difficulties. We can give them juries composed entirely of the most simple and charming leatherheads. We can give them railway corporations who will buy their Legislatures like old clothes, and run over their best citizens and complain of the corpses for smearing their unpleasant juices on the track. In place of harmless and vapping Harris, we can give them Tweed. We can let them have Connolly; we can loan them Sweeny; we can furnish them some Jay Goulds who will do away with their old-time notion that stealing is not respectable. We can confer Woodhull and Claflin on them. And George Francis Train, We can give them lecturers! I will go myself.”



“HUMOR IS MANKIND’S GREATEST BLESSING.”

MARK TWAIN

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Thank you!