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Memory of American Classics: The Legacy of Mark Twain in US School Textbooks, 1930s–1940s

*Tsuyoshi ISHIHARA**

COMMEMORATING MARK TWAIN: THE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

The public memories of literary classics and their authors are preserved in a variety of ways. Although the works of canonical authors are often respected and celebrated through the years, they are sometimes revised, distorted, and even neglected for various reasons. In the case of Mark Twain, the period between the 1930s and the 1940s was one of the greatest eras in the development of his legacy. Although more than twenty years had passed since his death in 1910, Twain's significance in public memory was visibly increasing in many spheres of American society. In the field of literary criticism, Bernard DeVoto, editor of the leading literary magazine *The Saturday Review of Literature*, fired his famous attacks at Van Wyck Brooks for his interpretation of Twain as a crippled genius. In DeVoto's 1932 book *Mark Twain's America*, he argued that Twain's originality was deeply rooted in his experiences of the American frontier. DeVoto was not alone in contemporary literary circles in proclaiming Twain's significance. Specifically, in 1935, the year of the centennial celebration of Twain's birth, influential authors and literary critics such as Ernest Hemingway, Owen Wister, and Mark Van Doren all proclaimed Twain's literary pre-eminence.

*Professor, Waseda University

In that year Hemingway made the world's most commonly quoted statement on Twain: "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*," which is perhaps the highest compliment ever paid to that work, even today.¹

Twain was not, however, an author of interest solely to those in literary circles. Already in the 1930s, the imaginative world found in his works had become a widely shared public memory among Americans. For example, an article entitled "Who Reads Mark Twain?," published in the *American Mercury* in 1934, asserted that the number of copies of Twain's works held in major public libraries was usually far greater than works of other significant American writers, such as Sinclair Lewis, Henry James, and Ernest Hemingway.² The centennial year 1935 was a golden year for Twain's legacy. The celebration was a year-long event, during which Twain was accorded immense respect and admiration by people in a variety of fields.³ In the field of politics, for instance, President Franklin D. Roosevelt accepted the honorary chairmanship of the Mark Twain Centennial Committee.⁴ He was not a chair in name alone: he announced in a radio speech the official beginning of the year of events, and he theatrically manifested his support by turning on the telegraph switch in the Oval Office that lit the beacon of the Mark Twain Memorial Lighthouse in Twain's hometown of Hannibal, Missouri. The President also dedicated the Mark Twain Memorial Bridge over the Mississippi River in Hannibal and even visited the town to deliver his speech at its opening ceremony (fig. 1).

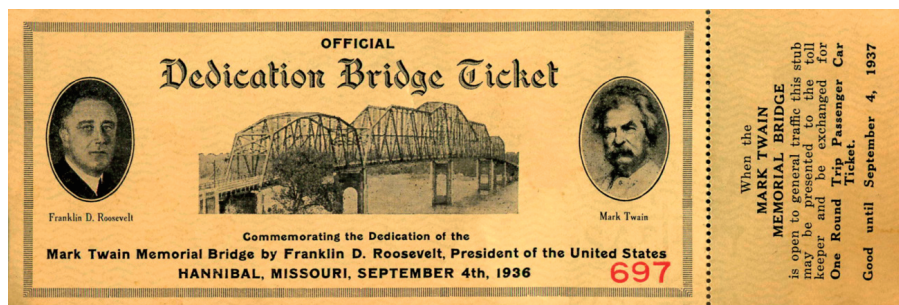


Figure 1. Ticket to the dedication ceremony of the Mark Twain Memorial Bridge over the Mississippi River in Hannibal, Missouri. President Franklin D. Roosevelt delivered a speech at the ceremony and cut a ribbon, formally opening the bridge to traffic. Courtesy of the Dave Thomson Collection.

Even politicians who were not Americans were eager to contribute to the celebration. For example, the *New York Times* reported that the International Mark Twain Society received a letter from the Italian fascist dictator Benito Mussolini enclosing a two-hundred-dollar personal check to be applied to the proposed project to build a Mark Twain memorial in St. Louis, Missouri.⁵ Mussolini wrote:

His genius is the synthesis of the sparkling and useful characteristics of the people of the United States. Mark Twain has been and remains one of my preferred authors. To the intellectuals of America I send my cordial greeting as well as the greeting of all Italians who follow with sympathy the dynamic spiritual life of the Republic of the Stars and Stripes.⁶

Mussolini had just initiated the invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Perhaps he had neither read nor heard about Twain's anti-imperialist writings; or he may also have simply ignored them, hoping to gain support from the American public by expressing admiration for a beloved American author. Of course, it would be naïve to assume that these political leaders supported the celebration of Twain solely because they were genuinely fascinated by his works. We need to take into account the political benefits they expected to reap from their actions. As suggested by Mussolini's supreme compliments to both Twain and Americans, such politicians were trying to win favor by developing an emotional connection with the American public through actively joining in the celebration of a cherished author. Their responses to the centennial celebration clearly demonstrate that already by the 1930s Twain was remembered as America's favorite author and was too significant to be ignored by even the highest leaders, both at home and abroad.

TWAIN AND THE NEW TEXTBOOKS

School textbooks, generally, cannot survive without accommodating to the policies of the school systems in which they are used. If American education changes, American textbooks must also change. In the first half of the twentieth century, American education changed tremendously. As Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz demonstrate in their study of the so-called high school movement that took place from 1910 to 1940, enrollment dramatically expanded in US secondary schools. They found that although only around 15 percent of fourteen- to seventeen-year-olds were enrolled in

secondary schools in 1910, the number had increased to around 50 percent in 1930 and 75 percent in 1940.⁷ Although the enrollment rate decreased by nearly 10 percent in the first half of the 1940s because of World War II, the rate bounced back to around 75 percent immediately after the war.⁸ Because a large percentage of American teenagers were attending high school in the 1930s and 1940s, the term “high school student” no longer necessarily meant an academically oriented student interested in literature. It was therefore inevitable that school textbooks would have to be adapted to accommodate this new and challenging situation generated by the democratization of American high schools.

This democratizing trend as it affected textbooks of the time can be detected in their titles. Before the 1930s, literature textbooks usually had bland titles like *American Literature*, *Literature for Junior High School*, *Readings in American Literature*. During and after the 1930s, however, many textbook publishers started titling their new literature textbooks using a variety of exhilarating words such as *Hidden Treasures*, *Adventures*, *Enjoying*, *Best-Liked*, and *Pleasure*.⁹ Twain was obviously one of the “best-liked” American authors, famous for his “adventure” stories, which provided great “pleasure” to millions of Americans, and it was therefore inconceivable that these new textbooks would not welcome works by Twain and many of them included his works among their selections as they were certain that students would love his writings. In the preface to the newly revised 1947 edition of *Adventures in American Literature*, the editors specifically referred to the inclusion of more writings by Twain:

Probably the most pleasing additions from the students’ point of view are two new Mark Twain selections, one from *Roughing It*, and one from *Innocents Abroad*. Following the chapters from his *Autobiography* and from *Life on the Mississippi*, which have been retained from previous editions, they build up a fascinating picture of the early life of this distinguished American.¹⁰

Clearly, this statement commenting on the popularity of Twain’s works with students was not groundless. One of the most dramatic changes found in the textbooks of the 1930s and 1940s was the incorporation of extensive student surveys about the literary selections. For instance, in 1934 the editors of Harcourt Brace’s literary anthology textbook, which included Twain’s works, highlighted the use of such a survey in its preface titled “How the Selections Were Chosen”:

In the development of this series, about 1,500 selections were submitted to about 100,000 students for the expression as to whether a selection was “very interesting,” “fairly interesting,” or “uninteresting.” This testing program went on over a period of three years. Merely because a selection was rated as “very interesting” did not assure its inclusion. . . . Even so, 80 per cent, by pages, of the material in this series was rated “very interesting” by eight out of ten students.¹¹

One junior high school textbook even claimed that its selection of Twain’s work was based on objective data about the popularity of his work among children. In the introduction to the selection from *Tom Sawyer*, the editors reported the results of an extensive survey on the work: “You will be interested to know that when 36,000 children were asked which book they liked best, *Tom Sawyer* ranked first. According to the *Winnetka Book List*, ninety-nine out of every hundred boys and ninety-eight out of every hundred girls enjoyed it, and it was in grade seven that it was liked best of all.”¹² Such surveys demonstrate that the shift to student-centered textbook editorship encouraged the inclusion of Twain’s works in the 1930s and 1940s. When Twain was alive, the general public was the most reliable and greatest supporter of his works, and the new textbooks prove that this continued to be true even decades after his death.

SELZNICK’S TOM SAWYER FILM

Although Twain was already popular among students of the time, this does not mean that textbook editors did not take any new action to further develop students’ interest in Twain and his works. Their instrument was film, the new medium that fascinated tens of millions of young Americans at that time. Various references to film are found in the textbooks’ discussions of Twain. For instance, Rand McNally’s 1942 textbook reprinted the opening segment of the filmscript of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, directed by Norman Taurog and produced by David O. Selznick in 1938,¹³ which differs significantly in its representation of humor from Twain’s original. The textbook chose one of the most famous scenes in *Tom Sawyer*, in which Tom is told by Aunt Polly to whitewash the long stretch of wall to punish him for being absent from school. In the film adaptation, Tom, noticing that his young brother Sid is peeping through a hole in the wall, whitewashes his brother’s face to get revenge on him because Sid had revealed to Aunt Polly

that Tom tricked her into believing that he attended school when in fact he was playing truant. In Twain's original, Tom takes his revenge on Sid by throwing dirt clods at him when he is off guard. The scene in which Sid's face is comically whitewashed is not present in the original. As Perry June Frank comments, "Slapstick variations on Tom's abuse of Sid . . . occur throughout the film."¹⁴ Filmmakers needed to attract audiences in an already competitive film market. To do so, they often squeezed exciting, dramatic scenes with exaggerated characters into limited-length films. Although we can understand their motivation to produce an exciting movie, we cannot call their product a respectful adaptation of Twain's story.

In the introduction to their inclusion of the filmscript of *Tom Sawyer* Rand McNally explains to students what it considers the usefulness of film adaptations of literature, writing that they "help you to understand and enjoy literature of the past [and] become more familiar with good literature."¹⁵ How is it possible, however, to "understand and enjoy" literature if the film version is significantly different from the original? The film version could even lead students to misunderstand the original, if they do not bring comparative perspectives to bear on the adaptation and the original source. In the late 1930s, however, when this *Tom Sawyer* film was made, it was not politically easy for filmmakers to shoot films that were faithful to the original stories they were based on. In 1934, the Motion Picture Association of America implemented a self-censorship code, generally known as the Hays Code, which restricted the use of various depictions in film. Most films were scrutinized by the Hays office before their release, and Selznick's 1938 film adaptation of *Tom Sawyer* was no exception. As Frank reveals, although the PCA (Production Code Administration) approved the basic story based on the submitted filmscript, they objected to some of its depictions, including the inebriation of the town drunkard, Muff Potter; Aunt Polly's use of biblical quotations; the characterization of a minister as a hypocrite; comic elements in the church scenes; the gruesomeness of the graveyard murder scene; Tom's whipping at school; and the boys swimming nude.¹⁶ After the filmmakers made adjustments to overcome the objections, the film was given a PCA certificate of approval for release.¹⁷

Thanks to the heavy bowdlerization of the original *Tom Sawyer*, the film was welcomed by the educational establishment. In Frank's words, "nowhere is the profoundly conservative nature of the 1938 *Tom Sawyer* better illustrated than in the reaction of the educational establishment to the film. In February of 1938, *Photoplay Studies*, a magazine used in schools as an aid to the study of film, published an issue devoted entirely to the

Selznick *Tom Sawyer*.”¹⁸ As indicated on the cover, the issue was prepared “in cooperation with a committee of Greenwich, Conn., high school students” and “recommended by the Motion-Picture Committee of the Department of Secondary Education of the National Education Association.”¹⁹ It is unimaginable that either textbook publishers or editors would have been unaware of this influential educational film magazine’s special feature on the film that was so highly recommended by the NEA. One of the follow-up questions after the selection in Rand McNally’s 1942 textbook asks students: “Why does the story make an especially good motion picture?,” wording that attests to the editors’ confidence in the quality of the film.²⁰ It is highly possible that the endorsement of Selznick’s *Tom Sawyer* by *Photoplay Studies* gave the editors confidence in its quality and encouraged them to use its script in their textbook, although, as we saw earlier, the film was both a sensationalized and a bowdlerized version of Twain’s original.

Even if textbook editors believed that it was an “especially good motion picture,” they still could not use the full text of the original version of the film. They revised a few exchanges between Tom and Amy to make them acceptable. In the film, when Tom meets Amy after her recovery from chickenpox, he asks her, “Where you been? I haven’t seen you since we’ve been engaged.”²¹ Perhaps because the editors thought their being engaged sounded inappropriately precocious. Tom’s words were thus changed to the following: “Where you been? I haven’t seen you for ages.”²² In the same scene, when Amy expresses her hatred of her rival Becky, this is what she says in the film: “Maw sent me over to play with her, but I wouldn’t. She’s too ugly. Nobody around here is going to like her.”²³ Again, textbook editors must have felt the need to tone down Amy’s cruel comment about Becky to make it more appropriate. They thus eliminated the last sentence, “Nobody around here is going to like her.”²⁴

Although textbooks from the 1930s and 1940s seldom attributed the difficulties of teaching literature to either the rapidly expanding number of less academically oriented students, many of whom were uninterested in literature, or the general shift in students’ interests from literature to the new visual and audio media, increasing references to film (and radio) in textbooks indicate the challenges literature classes were facing. As evidenced by textbooks’ introductions that addressed the new media, including discussions of filmed versions of Twain, his work was suitable for the new educational environment, as both his fiction and the film adaptations of it appeared in numerous textbooks of the time. No matter how difficult

the times were, particularly for older, classic writers, Twain's works were capable of meeting the new demands and expectations of US textbooks.

WARTIME NATIONALISM AND TWAIN

During the period between the late 1930s and the mid-1940s, the world experienced the most disastrous war in human history. In order to achieve victory in this difficult world war, people were mobilized to support their governments' war efforts and encouraged to express their patriotism and loyalty to their countries. As we will see, the field of education was no exception. Because the United States did not enter the war until the early 1940s, the representation of Twain in textbooks in the 1930s was somewhat mixed in terms of patriotism. In the 1930s, one textbook openly rejected patriotic perspectives on American literature. As Mark Van Doren, a respected poet and English professor at Columbia University, explained in the preface to his 1932 anthology textbook, the *Oxford Book of American Prose*: "I never to my knowledge read any special meaning into the word American. Any prose written in America I took to be American prose, and I judged it merely as prose. I was not patriotic."²⁵ In the early 1930s, one textbook even took a critical view of Twain's anti-European, America-centric tone. Houghton Mifflin's high school American literature textbook warned students:

The tendency that Mark Twain fostered [in *The Innocents Abroad*], namely, to regard older civilizations as outworn jokes, had its effect in narrowing the outlook of Americans. All the best civilization is not summed up in good plumbing, steam heat, and a conviction that the present is the perfect state. After a hundred and fifty years of isolation from Europe, America can still learn from the Old World as well as teach.²⁶

This does not mean that nonpatriotic textbooks did not include Mark Twain. For example, Mark Van Doren selected for his textbook three pieces from *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi*, the highest number of selections among authors apart from Abraham Lincoln. As for Houghton Mifflin's textbook, it reprinted an unusually long, fifteen-page, excerpt from *Life on the Mississippi* with detailed follow-up questions.²⁷ Thus, the early 1930s textbooks show that Twain's works were popular even without the assistance of patriotic editorial policies. From this we can also infer the

increasing recognition of Twain's works as belonging to world literature during the 1930s.

Indeed, internationalist views tended to be included in the textbooks of the early 1930s. For instance, as educational historian Gerard Giordano has documented, the nationalistic biases in social studies and history textbooks were already recognized in the 1920s,²⁸ and concern about them led the League of Nations to approve in 1930 the International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation's proposal calling for schoolbooks to be revised "with a view to the correction of passages harmful to a mutual understanding of the peoples and to a spirit of international amity."²⁹ Responding to this call for international friendship, some history textbooks in the 1930s condemned the US decision not to join the League of Nations and included materials that promoted the significance of peace through global unity.³⁰ We do not know the exact reasons why some early 1930s literature textbooks incorporated internationalist perspectives in their discussions of literature and of Twain in particular, they obviously shared the liberal internationalist tone of contemporary US textbooks.

As Giordano documents, the popularity of the internationalist tone of the 1930s "diminished as the public became preoccupied with national security."³¹ From the late 1930s to the early 1940s, when the world order deteriorated as a result of the wars in Europe, Russia, and East Asia, which led to the eventual full participation of the United States, the internationalist tone in American literature textbooks was rapidly replaced by nationalistic editorial policies. In the field of social studies textbooks, for example, textbooks that were thought to criticize America were severely attacked by an organization called the National Association of Manufacturers and were threatened with removal from schools as "un-American."³² Because American literature textbooks were not openly critical of America, there was no need to attack them. However, some of them went out of their way to demonstrate their patriotic views at this time, when America faced both potential and real enemies around the world. For example, Scott Foresman's high school American literature textbook of the late 1930s contains the following in its preface:

The understanding of what it means to be an American is of special importance to our secondary students as coming citizens. . . . In a period of rapid change like our own, when confusion bordering on bewilderment reigns in many quarters, it is highly salutary that the youth of our land form enlightened convictions about what America

essentially stands for and that they cherish the ideals which have made us a mighty nation.³³

It should be noted that these students were soon to be drafted to go to war against various nations.

Various textbooks published after the late 1930s shared this patriotic fervor. For example, a 1920s textbook that claimed in its introduction that “no course in American literature can ever justify itself unless it stimulates the pride of young America” and called American literature “a record that should be familiar to every loyal American,”³⁴ did not change these patriotic words in its 1939 edition. Furthermore, the textbooks’ patriotic editorial policies were also reflected in their titles and selections. In 1941, just months before Pearl Harbor, MacMillan began an unprecedented multivolume American literature textbook project called the Democracy Series, which consisted of books with highly patriotic titles suggesting that America was a great nation and a model of democracy, such as *Working for Democracy*, *The Growth of Democracy*, *The Way of Democracy*, *Pioneering in Democracy*, *Toward Freedom*, *Your Land and Mine*, and *Enjoying Our Land*. This emphasis on democracy was in line with the direction taken by one of the most influential educational organizations in America, the National Education Association. The NEA published a highly influential book of educational guidelines, *The Purpose of Education in American Democracy* (1938), as well as “an extended series of materials [from 1937 to 1952] that affirmed the need to teach the principles of democracy.”³⁵ In addition, *Adventures in American Literature*, one of the largest single-volume American literature textbooks of the time, added to its 1936 second edition a new section of more than 120 pages entitled “The Growth of the American Spirit,” which included a variety of patriotic writings by famous political and military figures such as Washington, Patrick Henry, Jefferson, Hamilton, Thomas Paine, and Lincoln.³⁶ In its 1941 third edition, which came out when the prospect of US participation in the war had become likely, the section was not only retained but also expanded to more than 400 pages, in which numerous American writings thought to show “the growth of American ideas and ideals” were newly included.³⁷ Selections deemed to be unsuitable for this patriotic textbook were excluded from the revised edition. An example of this was the elimination from the 1941 edition of the account of transatlantic flight by Charles Lindbergh, who was publicly (mis)remembered at the time as a Nazi sympathizer and who was one of President Roosevelt’s most prominent enemies, despite his patriotic contribution to US

military aviation in the Pacific front during the World War II.

Once the US officially entered World War II, the impact of the war became more easily discernible in American literature textbooks. Echoing Roosevelt's "national pleas that effectively transformed democratic education into patriotic education,"³⁸ a variety of literature textbooks voluntarily expressed support for America's war effort. For instance, a wartime teacher's manuals for Scott Foresman's high school American literature textbook emphasized that the textbook aimed to help students understand difficult questions related to the war, such as "Why did people like Uncle Dan and Joe's brother Bill and Miss Collins break up their way of living, leave their jobs and their families, and go half way around the world into most deadly danger?"³⁹ To help students understand the meaning of America's participation in the war, the textbook added to its revised wartime edition selections that "portray the significance of democracy in crisis,"⁴⁰ such as an excerpt from William L. Shirer's *Berlin Diary*, the American journalist's famous firsthand critical report about Hitler.⁴¹

In this nationalistic atmosphere in literature textbooks in the late 1930s and early 1940s, multidimensional, nonpatriotic readings of Twain's work were sometimes restricted. For instance, Scott Foresman's high school American literature textbook from the late 1930s to the 1940s presented a one-dimensional patriotic interpretation of *A Connecticut Yankee*, arguing that the ideas suggested by Twain in that book "show the superiority of democracy over monarchy; they reveal the long strides which Americans have taken in removing cruelty, superstition, and tyranny."⁴² It is true that Hank Morgan, the protagonist of the story, believed in "the superiority of democracy over monarchy" and launched his revolution in order to build both a democratic and an industrialized society. Whatever he believed, Hank Morgan was not, however, a true democrat, but a dictator with supreme military and political power who skips the time-consuming democratic process of decision making. In addition, his revolution ended in complete failure, with atrocious mass killings, after he mobilized his superior weapons. The novel vividly shows that even a leader who fights against tyranny with a strong belief in "the superiority of democracy" can become tyrannical and resort to cruelty when trying to implement democracy. This prescient view brings to mind today some of the controversial incidents that took place during the later wars against tyranny that the United States engaged in such as the nuclear bombing at the end of World War II, the My Lai massacre, the use of Agent Orange and Agent Purple in the Vietnam

War, and the torture of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay during the Iraq War. The novel does reveal the “long strides which Americans have taken in removing cruelty, superstition, and tyranny.”⁴³ Ironically, it also demonstrated its prophetic nature in regard to the unimaginable suffering the United States has since engaged in in the name of instituting democracy. This patriotic textbook never mentioned the possibility of reading Twain’s novel as a warning about the future of American democracy. Nationalistic textbooks in the 1930s and early 1940s, instead, chose to represent Twain not a skeptical observer of American democracy but as an ardent supporter of its superiority.

TWAIN AS AN AMERICAN ICON

As we saw earlier, public responses to the 1935 centennial celebration of Twain’s birth demonstrated his tremendous popularity among the general public. At the same time, the celebration also revealed that people viewed him not only as a beloved author but also as the embodiment of distinctively American experiences. People’s desire to view him as an American icon is evidenced by such headlines as “Mark Twain The American,” the title of a leading magazine’s (*The New Republic*) essay that featured his centennial celebration in 1935.⁴⁴ Even if all essays did not have such straightforward titles, the centennial essays on Twain often suggested that he was an undeniable symbol of America. As Mark Van Doren wrote in 1935 in *The Nation* magazine, “Mark Twain was almost indissolubly attached to America, and America to him; and this is still the case.”⁴⁵ Similar views on Twain were expressed in another article, “Hunting Mark’s Reminders,” which appeared in *The Saturday Review of Literature* in the same year:

[Twain] fitted perfectly into a Great American Legend (we’ve seen it lately in Will Rogers). That is, that a man risen from rough and tumble pioneer circumstances can make merry at Kings and Emperors, outwit philosophers and scholars. . . . To the American mass, the largest articulate mythopoetic group, this doctrine is wafer, wine and hassocks.⁴⁶

In this environment, in which Twain was seen as an American icon, it was simply unimaginable for American literature textbooks to ignore him. From the 1910s to the 1920s, twenty-two selections from Twain’s works and thirty-two introductions about him can be found in literature textbooks. The

total number of both selections and introductions is at least 55. However, that number more than doubled to at least 108 in the 1930s and 1940s. Among Twain's writings, the most frequently excerpted works were *Life on the Mississippi* (twenty-four times), *Roughing It* (eleven times), and "Jumping Frog" stories (nine times), all three being popular works depicting American settings. None of the 1920s textbooks selected stories from Twain's *Autobiography*, although it was published by Harper's in 1924. In the 1930s to the 1940s, however, Twain's *Autobiography* was excerpted nine times in textbooks, becoming one of the most popular choices of the time. Like the extracts from his other works that were most frequently included in the period's textbooks, all selections from his *Autobiography* were episodes with American settings, particularly from his Missouri childhood.

Although Twain had already been dead for over a decade in the 1920s, Vernon Louis Parrington, the Americanist who wrote one of the most influential American literary histories in the 1930s and 1940s, must have been satisfied with the selections made by the textbook editors. His views on Twain were obviously shared by many editors. The following words on Twain from Parrington's *Main Currents of American Thought* (editions 1927–30) were among the most popular in literature textbooks from the 1930s to the 1940s. Just as textbook editors did in making their selections, Parrington emphasized the American elements in Twain: "Here at last was an authentic American—native writer thinking his own thoughts, using his own eyes, speaking his own dialect—everything European fallen away."⁴⁷ The selections of Twain's works in textbooks echoed Parrington's view of Twain as "an authentic American." For instance, Harcourt Brace's highly nationalistic revised literature textbook of 1941, which quoted these words of Parrington, dropped a European episode from *Tramp Abroad* that had been included in its previous edition, instead choosing an excerpt from *Life on the Mississippi*. This selection was placed in the text's newly expanded patriotic section, "The Growth of the American Spirit," side by side with the works of legendary American political and military leaders such as Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln.⁴⁸

Some textbooks took Twain's works as a means for understanding the essence of America and its history. For instance, one of the 1940s high school literature textbooks that selected "Jumping Frog" introduced it as a work helpful to understanding the American character. The textbook's follow-up section, entitled "The Panorama of America," asks students the following question: "Two American types were met in 'The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County': Simon Wheeler and Jim Smiley. Try to

find in your family albums or in magazines or newspapers pictures of this type.”⁴⁹ A variety of textbooks also attempted to connect Twain’s life and work with the public memory of American experiences. One of the 1940s textbooks, for example, introduced a selection from *Roughing It* as being material suitable for understanding the development of transportation in America: “His entertaining narrative of the hardship of travel is an interesting reminder of the part which changes in transportation have played in the growth of America.”⁵⁰ There was even a textbook published in the 1940s in which Twain’s eventful life was used as a source for an American history quiz. One of the questions about the selection from *Life on the Mississippi* was “Can you understand why Mark Twain quit a profession that so fascinated him? The answer lies in the year that he quit, 1860, and the location of the Mississippi River.”⁵¹ As Sarah M. Corse writes in her book on nationalism and literature, “national literature” is expected to provide citizens with “national communion” and “common experiences” and help them “construct common images of the nation.”⁵² The increasing number of selections from Twain’s works with American settings, the repeated employment of the words of authoritative figures praising Twain as an authentic American writer, the placement of his works in highly patriotic sections alongside the writing of historic American figures, and the use of his life and work as a means of understanding the American character and history all suggest that the textbooks of the 1930s and 1940s began viewing Twain as the icon of an American national literature that would be helpful in constructing common memories of the nation.

The image of Twain as a Westerner was particularly emphasized in the 1930s and 1940s textbooks, largely in line with influential books of literary criticism of the early 1930s. As we have already seen, Parrington’s *Main Currents of American Thought* was one of the most popular references used in textbooks in the 1930s and 1940s, and its chapter title on Twain, “The Backwash of the Frontier,” clearly demonstrates the basic framework of Parrington’s understanding of Twain as “an embodiment of three centuries of American experiences—frontier centuries . . . the child of frontier past.”⁵³ Bernard DeVoto’s *Mark Twain’s America* (1932), one of the most influential books on Twain of the time, is known for its emphasis on Twain’s frontier experiences for the development of his originality. DeVoto obviously shared Parrington’s view of Twain as an embodiment of the American West. In many cases, Twain’s works no longer solely appeared in sections associated with the West, since Twain had already been widely recognized as a representative American writer. He was, nevertheless, often referred to as

the writer who best revived public memories of the American frontier. For example, a textbook from the 1930s called DeVoto's *Mark Twain's America* "an excellent account of frontier life in Twain's day" and depicting Twain as an incarnation of the frontier spirit. It claimed: "[Twain] did more than any other writer to bring into our literature the real spirit of the West."⁵⁴ Another textbook from the 1930s, describing Twain not as an outsider but an insider in relation to the West, said, Twain "was pre-eminently the voice of the West rather than a voice about the West."⁵⁵ Other textbooks of the time agreed and called Twain "the West's first great writer" and "the first great American writer who was indisputably of the West."⁵⁶ One of them even juxtaposed Twain with such a famous figure from (what was then considered to be) the West as Abraham Lincoln and wrote: "As Lincoln brought the spirit of the West into our statesmanship, so Mark Twain put it into our books."⁵⁷ Just as DeVoto saw the essence of "Mark Twain's America" in Twain's close cultural ties to the American frontier, so the West was viewed as the source of America's cultural originality. Because Western heroes were often viewed as emblematic American heroes as well, the West was easily associated with American national pride. As we have discussed, a nationalistic atmosphere was evident in textbooks from the late 1930s to the 1940s, when America faced both potential and real foreign enemies; thus, it is not surprising that textbook editors regarded the elements of the American West in Twain's life and literature as a convenient tool for demonstrating Twain's authenticity as the American artist who resonated with the patriotic feelings of the American public at that time.

CENSORING THE MEMORY OF RACE

The secondary school textbooks of the 1930s and 1940s sometimes censored Twain's works, and race and slavery were two of the most targeted elements. Although Twain's *Autobiography* provided the most numerous textbook selections, the editors did not always view the portions referring to slavery in Hannibal and at his childhood summer retreat at the Quarles farm in Missouri as suitable for their textbooks. Although the nostalgic tone in his recollections of the Quarles farm and Hannibal is obvious, Twain never shirks from talking about the existence of slavery, which many of the local people uncritically accepted as an institution approved of by God. Twain wrote: "The local pulpit taught us . . . that the doubter [of slavery] need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind—and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure; if the slaves themselves had an

aversion to slavery they were wise and said nothing.”⁵⁸ This section is immediately followed by a vignette of Twain’s mother’s heartfelt answer to young Sam, who had complained about the irritating vocal noise made by their household slave, Sandy. His mother, her eyes welling with tears, told him that she felt thankful when Sandy was singing because it made her think that at that moment he was not remembering his mother, whom he would never see again. Twain said that after hearing her “simple speech,” “Sandy’s noise was not a trouble to [him] any more.”⁵⁹ These vignettes reveal local people’s hypocrisy in trying to justify an unjustifiable and inhumane institution as well as Twain’s mother’s genuine sympathy toward the victims of it, which might have been highly educational for students wishing to learn about how slavery was viewed almost a century earlier. Yet two of the major junior high literature textbooks of the 1930s and 1940s entirely erased this segment from their selections.⁶⁰ In his *Autobiography*, Twain also recollects his childhood memories about slaves at the Quarles farm, where his family used to spend long summers. He writes the following: “All the negroes were friends of ours, and with those of our own age we were in effect comrades. *I say in effect, using the phrase as a modification. We were comrades, and yet not comrades; color and condition interposed a subtle line which both parties were conscious of and which rendered complete fusion impossible.*”⁶¹ Yet the passage that I have italicized clearly shows the reality of the racial division between whites and blacks in a slave-holding society was completely eliminated.⁶² The reason for these eliminations is obvious if we look at both the introduction and the follow-up questions prepared for this selection about the farm. The introduction says: “In this selection from his autobiography, Mark Twain tells you what it was that made his uncle’s farm in Missouri seem such ‘a heavenly place for a boy.’”⁶³ Then the follow-up question asks students: “What made his uncle’s farm a ‘heavenly place for a boy’?”⁶⁴ In short, what the textbook editors wanted their students to learn from this excerpt was not the harsh reality of slavery but the nostalgic world of “a heavenly place for a boy.”

Even *Huck Finn* was not spared similar editorial interventions concerning references to slavery. Although slavery infuses the whole story with an inevitable social context, a high school textbook from the 1940s wiped out all reference to slavery in the episode excerpted from *Huck Finn*. Ginn and Company’s 1949 high school literature textbook chose one of the novel’s best-remembered humorous scenes in which Huck, disguised as a girl, fails to conceal his gender from Mrs. Loftus, who is alert enough to try a few tricks on Huck to make sure he is a boy. Even in this episode, which is

seemingly unrelated to the issue of slavery, there are clear references to that institution. For instance, Mrs. Loftus innocently tells “Huck” that her husband has left for Jackson Island to hunt a runaway slave named Jim, a suspect in the alleged murder of Huck, hoping to win the \$300 reward for a successful capture. The episode would be utterly misleading if all the references to slavery are taken out. Huck “got so uneasy” after he was informed that her husband had just started the search for the runaway slave on Jackson Island where Jim was hiding, and this unease gives Mrs. Loftus a chance to become suspicious about his real gender, eventually enabling her to uncover Huck’s identity as a boy. Without reference to slavery, students would misunderstand and think that Huck felt uncomfortable at Mrs. Loftus’s place simply because of her long tiresome talk. Yet, surprisingly, the textbook’s editor took out the whole section that refers to Jim as the runaway slave, including Mrs. Loftus’s references to the ongoing search for him as the suspected murder. With this complete elimination, the episode is turned into a humorous but innocuous episode entirely unrelated to the atrociousness of slavery.⁶⁵ There was also a byproduct of this editorial elimination. Because, in Twain’s original, Jim was repeatedly addressed as a “nigger,” in the deleted sections, the textbook could safely avoid facing potential controversy over the use of this racist term.

Ginn and Company’s textbook was hardly the only textbook in the 1930s and 1940s to censor what is now called the “n-word” and to fail to introduce Jim as he was presented in Twain’s original. Even the Harper and Brothers high school literature textbook of 1936, whose selections from Twain’s works were usually faithful to the originals—at least in comparison with other textbooks—failed to reveal the full depth of Jim’s character as a loving father. The textbook excerpted chapter 23 of *Huck Finn* almost in its entirety. This chapter includes one of the novel’s most memorable scenes, in which Huck notices Jim sitting alone at night with his head between his knees and overhears him mourning his separation from his wife and children. Unfortunately, the selection cuts off there, omitting the last part of this chapter, in which Jim remorsefully recollects his thoughtless action of smacking his innocent daughter for ignoring an order he has given her before he realized that scarlet fever had left her deaf and dumb.⁶⁶ In this textbook, there is no indication that the original ending of the chapter is not included. Therefore, students who did not pick up the original had no way of knowing Jim’s complete story about his family. Although this textbook is far more faithful than those that erased all references to Jim being a slave, it unfortunately missed a great chance to introduce students to the depth of

Jim's humanity as it appears in the original novel.

The period between the 1930s and the 1940s was a transitional era in terms of censorship of the word "nigger" in Twain's works in US literature textbooks. As almost all textbooks did in preceding decades, most of the textbooks in the 1930s retained "nigger" as it appears in Twain's originals, as the level of sensitivity to the word was clearly not very high at that time. For example, in its introduction to *Huck Finn*, a 1930s textbook insensitively used the words "Nigger Jim,"⁶⁷ a phrase popularized by Albert Bigelow Paine's Twain biography but which Twain himself never used in his own work. In the 1940s, however, the position changed dramatically. Both the word "nigger" and sentences that included the word were meticulously censored in various textbooks. For instance, the following words of Tom Sawyer's became an easy target for censors, and the parts I have italicized were eliminated from the textbook excerpt: "They'll all lie. *Leastways all but the nigger. I don't know him. But I never see a nigger that wouldn't lie. Shucks!*"⁶⁸ The offensive word was replaced by a variety of neutral terms, such as "he," "fellow," "negro," "runaway," "man," "person," and "colored person."⁶⁹

We do not know precisely why American textbooks started avoiding references to slavery and racist terms from the 1930s and into the 1940s. No explanation regarding this censorship can be found in the textbooks of the time. None of them even mentioned that their selections were in fact censored versions. There was, however, a cultural atmosphere that welcomed such editorial interventions at that time. As we saw earlier, patriotic editorship was widespread in school textbooks in the 1930s and 1940s, when America faced global enemies and went to war. Being surrounded by nationalistic sentiment, it is plausible that publishers and editors would be reluctant to introduce any negative aspects of American history such as slavery and racism to students who might soon enlist in the US military. Moreover, particularly in the 1940s, as demonstrated by Asa Philip Randolph's March on Washington movement in 1941 and the outbreak of large-scale racial riots in multiple cities during World War II, African Americans could no longer be ignored as citizens. With Imperial Japan trying to cooperate with black organizations in order to disrupt America from the inside, this was a time when the perceived mistreatment of African Americans could be considered a threat to US national security. In light of the increasing attention given to racial inequality, various studies were conducted to detect racial biases in school textbooks, particularly in the 1940s, and these provided educators with valuable resources to help them

nurture classrooms that respected racial equality.⁷⁰ In this atmosphere of heightening sensitivity to racial prejudice, objectionable ethnic terms could not be expected to be easily handled in classrooms. No wonder many textbooks decided to stay on the safe side by expurgating the word “nigger” altogether, although we cannot be sure whether the decision was effective in helping students understand the dark memory of racism in America.

RECORDS OF MEMORIES

Thomas Edison once said: “An average American loves his family. If he has any love left over for some other person, he generally selects Mark Twain.”⁷¹ Love is noble, but it is blind. People often idolize the objects of their love and draw fascinated but untruthful images of those loved ones. The more a person is infatuated, the more difficult it becomes to see a loved one objectively. Sometimes, people try to see in their love objects only what they want to see, and they refuse to recognize what they actually are. In a way, in this article I have collected and organized many of the scattered “love letters” to Twain written by those who wrote the textbooks, and attempted to explain why they wrote those letters in this or that way. Often, textbook editors idolized, distorted, and blindly accepted Twain, and even tried not to see what they did not want to see in him. Although their treatment of Twain was sometimes untruthful to both what Twain wrote and who he was, it was at least truthful to what many Americans expected him to be. Therefore, every piece of material about Twain in US textbooks is an invaluable record with the potential to help us understand how the public memory of this American icon was formed. Whether we agree with the views taken by editors of these texts or not, they memorialize the development of the American people’s love of Twain. This love story never ends. It will certainly long continue to leave its mark in the textbooks of the future.

NOTES

¹ Owen Wister, “In Homage to Mark Twain,” *Harper’s Monthly*, November 1935, 547–56; Mark Van Doren, “A Century of Mark Twain,” *Nation*, October 23, 1935, 472–77; Ernest Hemingway, *Green Hills of Africa* (New York: Scribner, 1935), 22.

² Charles H. Compton, “Who Reads Mark Twain?,” *American Mercury*, April 1934, 465–71.

³ Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 26–27.

⁴ “Mark Twain Centennial,” *Literary Digest*, April 20, 1935, 31.

⁵ “Duce Honors Mark Twain: Mussolini Also Pays Tribute to America; Aids Memorial Fund.” *New York Times*, November 19, 1935, 21; According to *The Literary Digest*, Mussolini was honorary president of the memorial fund for the St. Louis project. “Ever This Twain Is Met.” *Literary Digest*, November 30, 1935, 19.

⁶ “Duce Honors Mark Twain,” 21.

⁷ Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz, *Why the United States Led in Education: Lessons from Secondary School Expansion, 1910 to 1940*, NBER Working Paper No. 6144, August 1997, 41.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Their full titles are: *Hidden Treasures in Literature*, *Adventures in American Literature*, *Treasury of Life and Literature*, *Widening Horizons*, *Best-Liked Literature*, and *Pleasure in Literature*.

¹⁰ Rewey Belle Inglis, ed., preface to *Adventures in American Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1947), v.

¹¹ Luella B. Cook, et al., eds., *Hidden Treasures in Literature*, vol.3 (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1934), vi.

¹² Luella B. Cook, et al., eds., *Hidden Treasures in Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1934), 406.

¹³ Mark A. Neville and Leonidas Warren Payne, eds., *Broadening Horizons* (New York: Rand McNally, 1942), 570–87.

¹⁴ Perry June Frank, “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer on Film: The Evolution of an American Icon” (PhD. diss., George Washington University, 1991), 231.

¹⁵ Neville and Payne, *Broadening Horizons*, 570.

¹⁶ Frank, 256–59

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹⁹ Max J. Herzberg, ed., *Photoplay Studies*, vol.4, no.2 (February 1938), cover. Also see Frank, 262n38.

²⁰ Neville and Payne, *Broadening Horizons*, 587.

²¹ *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, directed by Norman Taurog (Selznick International, Warner Brothers, and United Artists: 1938).

²² Neville and Payne, *Broadening Horizons*, 585.

²³ Taurog, *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

²⁴ Neville and Payne, *Broadening Horizons*, 585.

²⁵ Mark Van Doren, ed., *Oxford Book of American Prose* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), vii–viii.

²⁶ Thomas H. Briggs, et al., eds., *American Literature* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1933), 667.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 56–71.

²⁸ Gerard Giordano, *Wartime Schools: How World War II Changed American Education*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2004), 31–35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 40–44.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 130.

³² *Ibid.*, 126–30.

³³ Dudley Miles, et al., eds., introduction to *Literature and Life, Book 3: American Literature* (New York: Scott Foresman. 1936), vi.

³⁴ John Lewis Haney, ed., *The Story of Our Literature: An Interpretation of the American Spirit* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1923), x.

³⁵ Giordano, *Wartime Schools*, 121.

- ³⁶ Harry Christian Schweikert, et al., eds., *Adventures in American Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936).
- ³⁷ Rewey Belle Inglis, et al., eds., introduction to *Adventures in American Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1941), iii.
- ³⁸ Giordano, *Wartime Schools*, 122.
- ³⁹ Dudley Miles, et al., *Teaching Literature: A Handbook for Use with the Literature and Life Series* (New York: Scott Foresman, 1943), 3.
- ⁴⁰ Dudley Miles, et al., eds., *Literature and Life in America* (New York: Scott Foresman, 1943), v.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 446–51.
- ⁴² Dudley Miles, et al., eds., *Literature and Life in America* (New York: Scott Foresman, 1936 and 1943), 293.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁴ Robert Morss Lovett, “Mark Twain The American,” *New Republic*, November 20, 1935, 50–51.
- ⁴⁵ Mark Van Doren, “A Century of Mark Twain,” *Nation*, October 23, 1935, 89.
- ⁴⁶ “Hunting Mark’s Reminders,” *Saturday Review of Literature*, November 2, 1935, 15.
- ⁴⁷ Inglis, *Adventures in American Literature* (1941), 1142; Inglis, *Adventures in American Literature* (1947), 678. Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, vol. 3 (New York: Harcourt, 1930), 86.
- ⁴⁸ Inglis, *Adventures in American Literature* (1941), 1011–16.
- ⁴⁹ Luella B. Cook, ed., *America through Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1948), 657.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 595.
- ⁵¹ Inglis, *Adventures in American Literature* (1941), 1017.
- ⁵² Sarah M Corse, *Nationalism and Literature: The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 22–24.
- ⁵³ Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought*, vol. 3, 87.
- ⁵⁴ Orton Lowe, *Our Land and Its Literature* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1936), 43.
- ⁵⁵ Percy H. Boynton, ed., *Literature and American Life, for Students of American Literature*. (Boston: Ginn, 1936), 637.
- ⁵⁶ Inglis, *Adventures in American Literature* (1947), 678; Schweikert, *Adventures in American Literature* (1936), 1142.
- ⁵⁷ Inglis, *Adventures in American Literature* (1947), 678.
- ⁵⁸ Albert Bigelow Paine, ed., *Mark Twain’s Autobiography*, vol.1 (New York: Harper and Bros., 1924), 101.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.
- ⁶⁰ Cook, *Hidden Treasures in Literature*, vol.3, 349; Luella B. Cook, et al., eds., *Adventures in Literature: Challenge to Grow* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1941), 138–39.
- ⁶¹ Paine, *Mark Twain’s Autobiography*, 1:100.
- ⁶² Cook, *Challenge to Grow*, 137.
- ⁶³ *Ibid.*, 135.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 144.
- ⁶⁵ Elizabeth Collette, ed., *Writers in America* (Boston: Ginn, 1949), 223.
- ⁶⁶ Lowe, *Our Land and Its Literature* (1936), 605.
- ⁶⁷ Harry Christian Schweikert, et al., eds., *Adventures in American Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1930), 984.
- ⁶⁸ Rudolph W. Chamberlain, et al., eds., *Beacon Lights of Literature, Book 7* (Syracuse, NY: Iroquois, 1940), 432.
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 432; Ethan Allen Cross, et al., eds., *Literature, Heritage of American Literature* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 255, 258, 259; Leo Broening, ed., *Best-Liked Literature: Book*

I, (Boston: Ginn, 1944), 218, 219.

⁷⁰ Gerard Giordano, *Twentieth-Century Textbook Wars: A History of Advocacy and Opposition* (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 70–72.

⁷¹ Barbara Schmidt, “Quotes, Comments, and Poems about Mark Twain by Himself and Others,” www.twainquotes.com, accessed August 15, 2017, <http://www.twainquotes.com/Twain.html>.