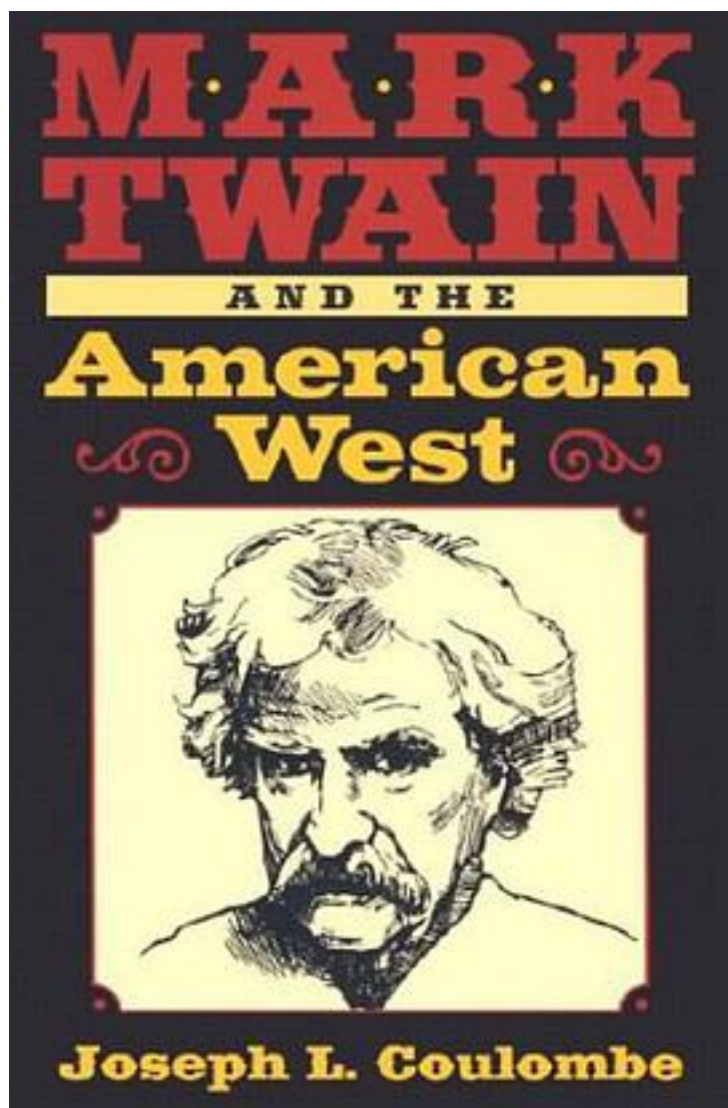


Mark Twain and the American West



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In *Mark Twain and the American West*, Joseph Coulombe maintains that for more than twenty-five years, Mark Twain deliberately manipulated contemporary conceptions of the American West to create and then modify a public image that won worldwide fame. He establishes the central role of the region in the development of a persona that not only helped redefine American manhood and literary celebrity in the late nineteenth century, but also produced some of the most complex and challenging writings in the American canon. Coulombe sheds new light on previously underappreciated components of Twain's distinctly western persona. Gathering new evidence from contemporary newspapers, letters, literature, and advice manuals, Coulombe shows how Twain's persona in the early 1860s as a hard-drinking, low-living straight-talker was an implicit response to western conventions of manhood. He then traces the author's movement toward a more sophisticated public image, arguing that Twain characterized language and authorship in the same manner that he described western men: direct, bold, physical, even violent. In this way, Twain capitalized upon common images of the West to create himself as a new sort of western outlaw--one who wrote. Coulombe outlines Twain's struggle to find the proper balance between changing cultural attitudes toward male respectability and rebellion and his own shifting perceptions of the East and the West. Focusing on his unpredictable treatment of American Indians, Coulombe links Twain's enigmatic use of racial stereotypes in the West to Huck's treatment of Jim in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. He argues that the repeated pattern not only illuminates the great moments in Huck's journey, but also clarifies inconsistencies within one of America's most important novels. *Mark Twain and the American West* is sure to generate new interest and discussion about Mark Twain and his influence. By understanding how conventions of the region, conceptions of money and class, and constructions of manhood intersect with the creation of Twain's persona, Coulombe helps us better appreciate the writer's lasting influence on American thought and literature through the twentieth century and into the twenty-first.

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