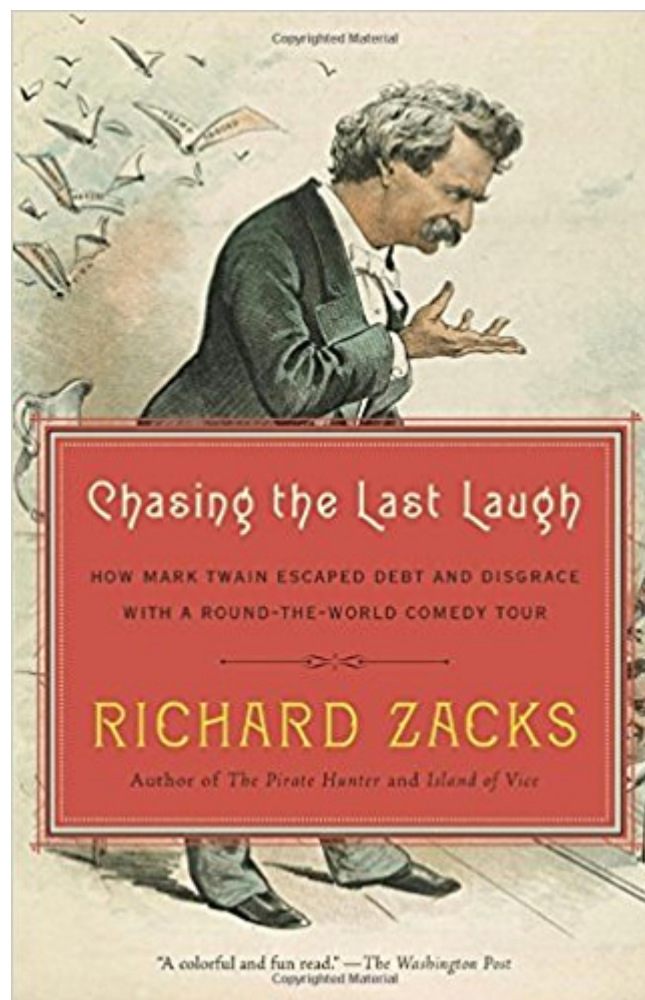




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# Chasing The Last Laugh: How Mark Twain Escaped Debt And Disgrace With A Round-the-World Comedy Tour



## Synopsis

In the 1890s, Mark Twain came back from the dead. The famous author's career was collapsing, his masterpieces were at risk of falling into oblivion, and he was even mistakenly reported dead. But Twain orchestrated an amazing late-in-life comeback from bankruptcy, bad reviews, and family disaster by setting out on an unprecedented international comedy tour to restore his fortunes. Richard Zacks's *Chasing the Last Laugh* captures some of Twain's cleverest and funniest moments—many newly discovered in unpublished notebooks and letters—as he rode elephants in India, sorted diamonds in South Africa, and talked his way out of hell ninety minutes at a time. This untold chapter in the author's life began with ridiculously bad choices and ended in hard-won triumph.

## Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Anchor; Reprint edition (February 21, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0345802535

ISBN-13: 978-0345802538

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 81 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #205,333 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #229 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Humor > Comedy #1188 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Arts & Literature > Authors #3515 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts

## Customer Reviews

"A colorful and fun read." —The Washington Post "An intimate and fascinating account of what was basically the world's weirdest book tour, starring the funniest writer America has ever produced." —Carl Hiaasen "An impossible-to-put-down book. . . . Zacks manages the nearly impossible feat of maintaining the momentum of his narrative while filling in the behind-the-scenes factors. . . . The result is a joy to read and a lesson in what can be done to bring an era to life." —Mark Twain Journal "Zacks's engaging account . . . shows the raconteur at his best and his worst: charming, childish, ribald, and intemperate." —The New Yorker "Zacks is a gifted storyteller in his own right, which is as it should be; a master storyteller such as Mark Twain deserves nothing

less. . . . A beautifully researched work. . . . A funny and revealing reminder of just how great he was. . . . Main Edge . . . "Twain could not have picked a better chronicler than Zacks. . . . Zacks's writing . . . shines. . . . St. Louis Post Dispatch . . . "Dense in action and experience. . . . Brings Twain's comedy close to its wider context, and enlivens both. By situating the writer in his world and his time, biography actually makes Mark Twain funnier. . . . Flavorwire . . . "Zacks's absorbingly detailed reconstructions of [Twain's] performances . . . the carefully honed timing, the shrewdly reworked and reshuffled greatest hits . . . will increase your appreciation of him as a show-biz craftsman. . . . Zacks packs page after page with the flavorful marvels he's culled. . . . Bookforum . . . "Zacks does an admirable job of giving us a taste of Twain's performances and quoting his best commentary. . . . Zacks also casts new light on Twain himself. . . . Washington Free Beacon . . . "Deeply entertaining. . . . Zacks's narrative is well-researched with rich detail and it will strike ardent Twain fans and history lovers as fresh and inspiring. . . . Publishers Weekly (Starred Review) . . . "An amusing, singular account of the world tour by the nation's most famous humorist. . . . [A] rollicking history perfect for Twain's countless fans. . . . Kirkus . . . "Fast-paced. . . . A diverting and revealing look at a neglected episode in Twain's life. . . . Booklist . . . "Impeccably researched and thoroughly engaging. . . . Zacks . . . is an accomplished guide through Twain's travel escapades. . . . Bookpage . . . "Funny and poignant. . . . Zacks has a brilliant eye for detail and the narrative gifts needed to bring out all that is strange, zany, and ultimately inspiring in this remarkable story of money, honor, and literary genius. . . . Stephen Greenblatt, Pulitzer Prize-winning author *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* and *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* . . . "Mark Twain's own notes and letters enrich every chapter, illuminating not only his cranky genius but the private fears and turmoil that compelled him to pack up his family and hit the road. . . . Carl Hiaasen, bestselling author of *Bad Monkey* and *Strip Tease* . . . "Chasing the Last Laugh is something of a miracle. This book will be a joy and revelation for Twain fans. There is a lot new here. Twain's trip around the world . . . in which he speaks truth, through humor, everywhere . . . is a wonderful lens through which to see the dawn of America, the collapse of the British Empire, the early stirrings of colonial discontent in India. A new world is just being born and we're along for the ride as the sharpest observer watches and narrates it all. It is, also, a really good business book. . . . Adam Davidson, Co-Host of

NPR's Planet Money. "If you read only one book on Mark Twain, I would recommend *Chasing the Last Laugh*. There is everything you could want here: Twain's infinite humor and forbearance, the glistening world of the British Empire at its peak, five years on the road with possibly the funniest and wisest American of his time. Richard Zacks manages this vast subject with enviable skill. It's a great read, entertaining as well as deeply moving." • Jay Parini, author of *Empire of Self: A Life of Gore Vidal* and *The Last Station* "A fresh and absorbing account (involving carbuncles, platypus jokes, and a surprising bottom line) of an aging Mark Twain's outlandish passage from ruin to glory." • Roy Blount Jr., author of *Save Room for Pie*

Richard Zacks is the bestselling author of *An Island of Vice: Theodore Roosevelt's Quest to Clean Up Sin-Loving New York*; *Pirate Coast: Thomas Jefferson, the First Marines, and the Secret Mission of 1805*; *Pirate Hunter: The True Story of Captain Kidd*; *History Laid Bare*; and *An Underground Education*. His writing has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Atlantic*, *Harper's Magazine*, and many other publications. He attended the University of Michigan and the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University. Born in Savannah, Georgia, he now lives in New York City.

Richard Zacks puts you right on the ship, right on the train with Mark Twain and his family on their trip around the world. The most amazing travel moment was the descent in a hand car from the Himalayas to the plains of India! The descriptions of the talks he gave, the stories he told were hugely entertaining. Great research and story telling!

The story line and personal aspects of this remarkable man are so expertly detailed that the reader will not only marvel at this rare glimpse into an author's mind and life but also the times in which he lived and wrote. On one hand is the depth and integrity Clemens displays and on the other is realizing this took place nearly a century and a quarter ago. To restore his honor, Clemens embarks on a journey not only at an age that even present day is reserved for retirement, but at a time when travel, accommodations, society and communications were far inferior in ease and safety to our present day world. The trek alone is enough to warrant praise, but the character that is revealed in this epic undertaking not only commands respect and awe, but also bespeaks the humanness and humility of an artist truly moved by his surroundings, his family and even his own views of himself. The book is well researched, balanced and insightful to the Samuel Langhorn Clemens behind

Mark Twain's ability to connect with others through his writing, words, life and deeds.

An excellent book about someone world famous in the early 1900's. Plenty of history about this era as well as insight into this historical figure. Even though Twain was a very accomplished speaker, writer and humorous, the book does not cover over his faults, of which he had many. All are explored and presented in a way that keeps the reader interested until the end.

I had never read a biography of Twain so only knew the gradeschool information. Not only was this a fascinating look into his personality, family and history but also into the Gilded Age society. The travel portions are eye opening. I am so glad I discovered this book

Outstanding. Zacks gives us a view of a Mark Twain we have not seen before, since most biographies (e.g.: Kaplan, Neider) concentrate on his major writing years Twain's final years were really an adventure.

Fun and lively. The author let Twain tell his own story through his notebooks and travel writings. A wise choice. I found it fun and eye-opening to go around the world in the 1890s with America's great writer. And then I found myself caring deeply about his wife and his daughters and the book became much more than a travelogue or performance tour.

I always thought that Twain's book "Following the Equator" just didn't have the edge that his other travel books, "Innocents Abroad", and the "Tramp" series had. Now I know why. This book is a terrific account of how he saved himself and his family from ruin. A permanent addition to my Twain shelf.

A very interesting look at a difficult period for our most celebrated author. He isn't deified, but shown as a man with great compassion for other people, regardless of his own mistakes and missteps...the descriptions of his lectures are wonderful and entertaining and the book is an insightful picture of both his life and the world at the end of the 19th century...

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