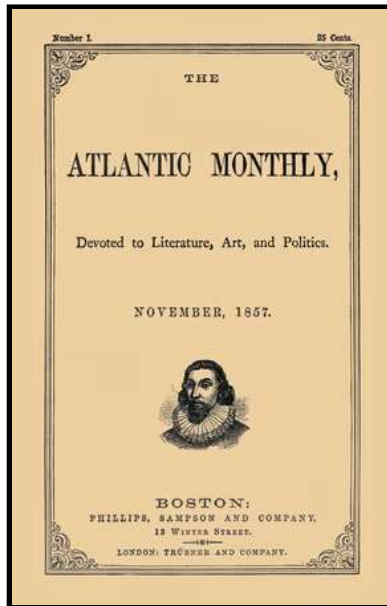


## The Back Pages pg.2

Something truly wonderful on the web.  
 The Atlantic Monthly Digital Archives



### *The Atlantic Monthly First Issue, November 1857.*

Long before Facebook clouded our brains with hot blooded reactions to whatever hot mess of an issue was the hot topic of the day, learned people exchanged information, ideas, and opinions by putting ink to paper. Beginning in the 15<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe, wide availability of printed texts brought a new and specific class of people who were immersed in the written word. This unique new class was thought to be comprised of people who were **"educated, instructed, having knowledge of letters."** The class of the well educated with the ability to craft stories, essays, and other works shorter than a full novel were labeled **"the literati."** By the 1620s, **"men and women of letters; the learned class as a whole,"** were considered among Europe's elite. As Western societies became ever more egalitarian, the word literati itself became a noun. In 1894, the literati came to mean anyone who **"one who can read and write."** And in America, since 1857, the major authors, essayists, and commentators, the American literati, filled the pages of the Atlantic Monthly.

The Atlantic Monthly is still publishing; still going strong. What we, *the 21<sup>st</sup> century* equivalent of the literati, *the digerati*, or those well versed in digital communication, can immerse ourselves in is the old world tradition of the printed word by spending time at the [Atlantic Monthly Archive](#). This body of written works spanning and documenting the last 2 centuries of American life is nothing short of astonishing.

Historians differentiate between **primary and secondary sources**. These are the primary sources for the study of American culture. Most of America's most prominent essayists and commentators of the past can be read here — from the actual manuscript as it was printed — if you so choose.

What makes this archive so fascinating is that you can search the archive. Who doesn't love Mark Twain? Heck, they even named the **Windows scanner driver after him**. So a search of the archive for "Mark Twain," sorted oldest to newest, returns first two essays from the 1860s, wherein Twain or his works are mentioned. **The third entry is a review of a Twain work. (ed. Three things in life guaranteed: taxes, death, and critics. Some things never change.)** After those three entries, we come to original printed manuscripts of original short works by Master Clemens, himself, as well as clean and easy to read digital reproductions of the same Twain works.

The screenshot shows the top navigation bar of The Atlantic website with the logo, a search icon, and links for 'Popular' and 'Latest'. On the right, there are 'Sign In' and 'Subscribe' buttons. Below the navigation, there are three radio buttons for sorting: 'Relevance' (selected), 'Newest to oldest', and 'Oldest to newest'. The search results show 633 results. The first result is 'Lion Llewellyn' from the 'NOVEMBER 1859 ISSUE'. The second result is 'The Life and Times of John Huss; Or, the Bohemian Reformation of the Fifteenth Century' from the 'MAY 1864 ISSUE'. The third result is 'The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrim's Progress' by 'WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS' from the 'DECEMBER 1869 ISSUE', with a sub-heading 'A review'. The fourth result is 'A True Story, Repeated Word for Word As I Heard It' by 'MARK TWAIN' from the 'NOVEMBER 1874 ISSUE'. The fifth result is 'Old Times on the Mississippi (Part I)' by 'MARK TWAIN' from the 'JANUARY 1875 ISSUE', with a sub-heading 'The first installment in a seven-part series about the author's youthful training as a riverboat pilot' and a small image of a riverboat. The sixth result is 'Old Times on the Mississippi (Part II)' with a sub-heading 'The second installment in a seven-part series about the author's youthful training as a riverboat pilot'.

In the nineteenth century, and it may be self evident to say so today, race was an even more hot button issue than it is now. The second issue of the Atlantic Monthly published an article urging Northerners to fight to abolish the "peculiar institution." On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its first publication, the Atlantic published a compendium of its Civil War essays, from The Atlantic's second issue, **Edmund Quincy**, "When will It End?" (December 1857) to Barack Obama, "Perfecting Our Union," where "The president of the United States reflects on what Abraham Lincoln means to him, and to America."

Along a similar historical vein, a search on "reconstruction" returns a number of articles from the period of the 1860s to 1870s. Perusing the titles and years written, we can begin to recognize the intellectual and sociological antecedents of today's issues and controversies.

DISCLAIMER: After a small number of "free articles," enough to get a feel to the value of the site, there is a free 30 day trial and a subscription cost \$10.00. Of which, I receive ≤ 0%.

I don't have any interest here other than to point out the entire World Wide Web is NOT ALL DRECK. Just most of it.

[Gerald Reiff](#)

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