

The Golden Era
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On Boot-Blacks

The boot-blackening facilities of Sacramento are unsurpassed by those of any city in the world I should judge. There is a boot-blackening stand in front of every saloon—which is to say, there are boot-blackening stands all along. All these prominent localities which, in other cities, are usually sacred to the peanut interest, are here seized upon and held by the boot-black. These mute facts tell the stranger that Sacramento, which is now so irreproachably cleanly, has long and fearful attacks of alternate mud and dust. In further evidence of this, I remarked that out of the one hundred and eighty-four gentlemen who lounged about the front of the Orleans Hotel when I came down and asked for breakfast at ten minutes past 12 o'clock today and didn't get any, a hundred and seventy had their boots blacked. The other fourteen were undergoing the boot-blackening operation in chairs backed up against the neighboring walls. Now there was not a particle of dust in the air, and no mud under foot; and nothing but inveterate habit could have made these people all go and get their boots blacked with such singular unanimity when there was no real necessity for it. I never saw a place before where everybody, without exception, had their boot blacked. Every time I noticed, today, that my boots were attracting attention, I went and got them blacked. And I learned something. I learned that a Chinaman has no talent for blacking boots, and makes a miserable job of it. When you desire the services of a real artist, always choose one of the three naturally gifted species of boot-blacks—a freedman, or a colored citizen, or a nigger. They understand the business.

(Source: *Twainquotes.com*, <http://www.twainquotes.com/Era/18660311b.html>.)