



The Lives of Chang and Eng: Siam's Twins in Nineteenth-Century America

Joseph Andrew Orser

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Connected at the chest by a band of flesh, Chang and Eng Bunker toured the United States and the world from the 1820s to the 1870s, placing themselves and their extraordinary bodies on exhibit as "freaks of nature" and "Oriental curiosities." More famously known as the Siamese twins, they eventually settled in rural North Carolina, married two white sisters, became slave owners, and fathered twenty-one children between them. Though the brothers constantly professed their normality, they occupied a strange space in nineteenth-century America. They spoke English, attended church, became American citizens, and backed the Confederacy during the Civil War. Yet in life and death, the brothers were seen by most Americans as "monstrosities," an affront they were unable to escape.

Joseph Andrew Orser chronicles the twins' history, their sometimes raucous journey through antebellum America, their domestic lives in North Carolina, and what their fame revealed about the changing racial and cultural landscape of the United States. More than a biography of the twins, the result is a study of nineteenth-century American culture and society through the prism of Chang and Eng that reveals how Americans projected onto the twins their own hopes and fears.

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