FICHE DE COURS : The United States of America in the 19th century

Place dans les programmes du lycée : l'histoire des États-Unis au XIX^e^ siècle ne fait pas partie des programmes d'histoire en langue française. En DNL cependant, les États-Unis peuvent fournir une très bonne occasion d'étude de cas de l'industrialisation (« La civilisation industrielle »), ou de nationalisme (« États et nations »). Dans ces deux chapitres, les particularismes de l'histoire de ce pays fourniront un élément de comparaison au cours en français, et une occasion de se pencher sur des éléments peu connus de la culture américaine.

Place dans le plan du cours : je propose ici de développer le thème du nationalisme ; comment se construisent la nation et l'identité nationale au XIX^e^ siècle ? En deux séances d'une heure chacune, j'aborde successivement les étapes de la construction territoriale du pays, puis la représentation de la relation entre l'homme et la nature, thème central de l'identité américaine dans le premier siècle de son histoire :

I – The Shaping of the Territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific

A – The five major stages of the conquest of the territory

B – The progressive control over the territory

C – The role of the frontier

II – Mark Twain and the Mississippi – [Séance en interdisciplinarité]

Objectifs de contenu et linguistique : le cours a pour but de montrer les caractères originaux de la construction de la nation américaine – conquête et extension du territoire, rôle de la frontière, place de la nature. Par ailleurs, il propose un travail interdisciplinaire en collaboration avec le professeur d'anglais, autour de plusieurs extraits du livre de Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883).

I – The Shaping of the Territory from the Atlantic to the Pacific

A – The five major stages of the conquest of the territory

First settlements began in the early 17th century. The **13 original states** (not exactly today's), with 3 million inhabitants by 1776, found their western limit in **the Appalachian range**. The **Appalachians** were not that big a hindrance for communication, and could be rather easily crossed through **the Cumberland Gap** since the middle of the 18th century ; but they were **deliberately set as a frontier** by the British crown's "**Western Proclamation**" of **1763**, as it couldn't cope with the security of the territory. This decision, in part, was a major reason for the American War of Independence : it provoked the discontent of speculators, among which Benjamin Franklin and George Washington (working for the Mississippi Company), whose job it was to **purchase land** and get rid of Indians to sell it at a higher bid, and who claimed the right and necessity of grabbing land along the Ohio River. **The conquest of the territory**, seen as an Eldorado of some kind (either for the alleged presence of gold, or for the vastness of its territory), **was therefore intimately linked with the quest for profit as well as with the original identity** of this newly founded country.

Doc. 1 – Historical map of the gradual shaping of the American Nation

According to this map, **what are the main steps** of the shaping of the US territory ?

1 – **1783** : the **treaty of Paris** established that the English abandoned all their posessions **between the Atlantic and the Mississippi**. They still owned northern regions (present day Canada) and western regions (Oregon). In **1812-1815**, the English and the Americans fought **3 years of war for the conquest and defense of northern borders**.

2 – **1803**, **Louisiana was purchased from Napoleon** : 2 million sq. km annexed in 1682 by **Robert Cavelier de la Salle** who discovered the mouth of the Mississippi starting from the Great Lakes. It became Spanish for a time, but then French again in 1800. Jefferson feared the French might be eager to control Mississippi trade, and offered to purchase it from Napoleon, who accepted the deal for 60 million francs (which was a good price : one fifth of the French budget).

3 – **1819** : **Florida** was purchased from Spain.

4 – 1845 : **Texas** wanted its independence from Mexico. US president Polk declared war, and in **1848** Texas was annexed to the US, **along with New Mexico**, taken by force in 1846. In 1849 **Arizona**, **Nevada**, **California**, **part of Colorado**, **Utah** were bought from Mexico. In 1853, the frontier with Mexico was settled with **the Gadsden purchase**, when a stretch of land composing southern Arizona and southern New Mexico was finally purchased from Mexico as a possible railroad route.

5 – **1846** : Oregon was **ceded** from the UK. The **48 continental states were eventually established**. In **1867**, Alaska was bought from Russia (but didn't become a state before the 1950s, along with Hawai).

B – The progressive control over the territory

Doc. 2 – Map of canals in 1825 and 1860

Doc. 3 – Map of railroads in 1870

Doc. 4 – Map of overland routes in 1860

C – The role of the frontier

• The vastness of the territory was seen as a power in itself, and also a gift entrusted by God to man, whose role it was to master it. In 1845 journalist and diplomat **John O'Sullivan** wrote :

Doc. 2 – O'Sullivan's 'The Manifest Destiny', 1845

"It is the United States' manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated government entrusted to us".

United States Magazine and Democratic Review, July-August, 1845

• Within that context, **the moving frontier had a prominent importance** in mentalities, and caused American development :

Doc. 3 – Frederic Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, 1893

In a recent bulletin of the Superintendent of the Census for 1890 appear these significant words : "Up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line. In the discussion of its extent, its westward movement, etc., it can not, therefore, any longer have a place in the census reports". This brief official statement marks the closing of a great historic movement. Up to our own day American history has been in a large degree the history of the colonization of the Great West. The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession, and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development.

The peculiarity of American institutions is the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people, to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life. Said Calhoun in 1817 : **"We are great, and rapidly growing !"** ; So saying, he touched the distinguishing feature of American life. All peoples show development. In the case of most nations, however, the development has occurred in a limited area ; and if the nation has expanded, it has met other growing peoples whom it has conquered. But in the case of the United States we have a different phenomenon. Limiting our attention to the Atlantic coast, we have the familiar phenomenon of the evolution of institutions in a limited area, such as the rise of representative government into complex organs ; but we have in addition to this a recurrence of this process of evolution in each western area reached in the process of expansion. **Thus American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line**. **American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier**. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. **The true point of view in the history of this nation is not the Atlantic coast, it is the Great West**.

Frederic Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*, Chapter I, 1893

II – Mark Twain and the Mississippi – [Séance en interdisciplinarité]

A major character and writer, Mark Twain's life (1835-1910) is also intimately connected to some of the fundamental topics of 19th century American history : born in Missouri as Samuel Clemens, he fled from his native land in the wake of the Civil War in protest against slavery, has been a gold searcher in Nevada, then a journalist in San Francisco, traveled to Europe, and eventually a novelist in Connecticut. But prior to all that, he was a steamboat pilot in his youth on the Mississippi. In *Life on the Mississippi*, 1883, he recollected his memories of this experience in a very inspiring, spirited way, mixing natural, economic and social descriptions of the Mississippi along with personal impressions and literary accounts of various anecdotes of a time when the big river still was both a significant western frontier to the country, and a major economic route. His pen name, Mark Twain, derives from this period of his life : as the river flow constantly changed, it was what steamboats copilots used to shout to signify sufficient water level for the boat to proceed. This is not the only book by Twain related to the Mississippi river : his most famous, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) also binds together the topics of the frontier, slavery and emancipation.

Life on the Mississippi offers infinite possibilities of study ; following excerpt number 4 is a description of how the river changes its course over time, thus transforming the rural and urban landscape, and raising serious land ordinance problems… The study of this excerpt can be continued and illustrated thanks to modern satellite views of the area, clearly allowing to comment on the phenomenon. Excerpt number 6 is an alternate possibility in place of document 4, describing the same phenomenon in the livelier way of a funny dialogue. Excerpt number 7 is a description of the city of New Orleans in the 1840s providing excellent material for the study of a 19th century American city. Finally, excerpts number 8, 9 and 10 are more literary pieces which could be read and studied in English class. They deal with Twain's personal period as an apprentice on board of a steamboat ; the memories of an old sailor ; and a very humourous description of the Southern accent and slang.

Doc. 4 – Mark Twain : How easily the river changes its course

The Mississippi is remarkable in still another way : its disposition to make prodigious jumps by cutting through narrow necks of land, and thus straightening and shortening itself. More than once it has shortened itself thirty miles at a single jump ! These cut-offs have had curious effects : they have thrown several river towns out into the rural districts, and built up sand bars and forests in front of them.

The town of Delta used to be three miles below Vicksburg : a recent cut-off has radically changed the position, and Delta is now *two miles above* Vicksburg.

Both of these river towns have been retired to the country by that cut-off. A cut-off plays havoc with boundary lines and jurisdictions : for instance, a man is living in the State of Mississippi today, a cut-off occurs tonight, and tomorrow the man finds himself and his land over on the other side of the river, within the boundaries and subject to the laws of the State of Louisiana ! Such a thing, happening in the upper river in the old times, could have transferred a slave from Missouri to Illinois and made a free man of him.

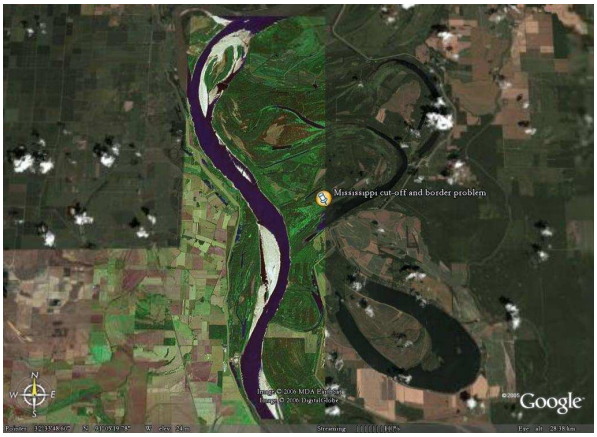
The Mississippi does not alter its locality by cut-offs alone : it is always changing its habitat *bodily* – is always moving bodily *sidewise*. At Hard Times, La., the river is two miles west of the region it used to occupy. As a result, the original *site* of that settlement is not now in Louisiana at all, but on the other side of the river, in the State of Mississippi. Nearly the whole of that one thousand three hundred miles of old Mississippi River which La Salle floated down in his canoes, two hundred years ago, is good solid dry ground now. The river lies to the right of it, in places, and to the left of it in other places.

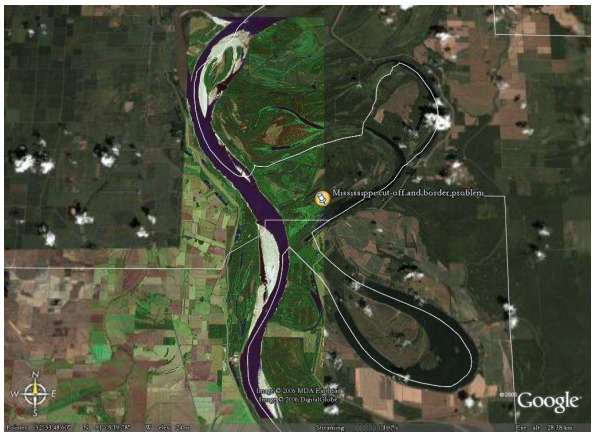
Although the Mississippi's mud builds land but slowly, down at the mouth, where the Gulf's billows interfere with its work, it builds fast enough in better protected regions higher up : for instance, Prophet's Island contained one thousand five hundred acres of land thirty years ago ; since then the river has added seven hundred acres to it.

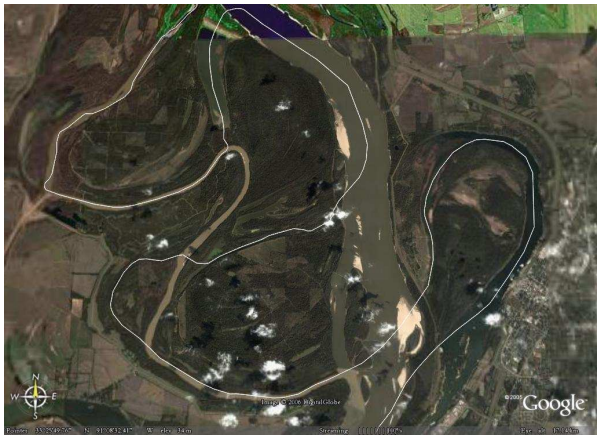
Mark Twain, *Life On The Mississippi*, Chapter I "The river and its history", 1883

Doc. 5 – Google Earth – The Mississippi, a presentation

- The source : extreme North of the country, Minnesota, North to Saint Cloud.
- The river course : Saint Paul / Minneapolis ; Saint Louis ; Cairo (where the Ohio river pours into the Mississippi) ; Memphis. **How wide** is it ?
- The 200 last miles, from the Red river to New Orleans : the **bayou**, marshes, lake Ponchartrain to the North of New Orleans. The French toponymy.
- The way the river changed its course : pictures 5b and 5a, with and without the legal frontier between the states of Arkansas and Mississippi shows this move. They also show the **oxbows** formed by the former location of the river :







Doc. 6 – Mark Twain : The river washes a town away

Several decades after he left his position as steamboat pilot, Mark Twain came back to the Mississippi and took a boat.

"Go ashore *where* ?"

"Napoleon."

The captain laughed ; but seeing that I was not in a jovial mood, stopped that and said :

"But are you *serious* ?"

"Serious ? I certainly am."

The captain glanced up at the pilot-house and said :

"He wants to get off at Napoleon !"

"*Napoleon ?*"

"That's what he says."

"Great Cæsar's ghost !"

Uncle Mumford approached along the deck. The captain said :

"Uncle, here's a friend of yours wants to get off at Napoleon !"

"Well, by ____ !!"

I said :

"Come, what is all this about ? Can't a man go ashore at Napoleon if he wants to ?"

"Why, hang it, don't you know ? There *isn't* any Napoleon anymore. Hasn't been for years and years. The Arkansas River burst through it, tore it all to rags, and emptied it into the Mississippi !"

"Carried the *whole* town away ? Banks, churches, jails, newspaper-offices, court-house, theatre, fire department, livery stable, *everything?*"

"Everything. Just a fifteen-minute job, or such a matter. Didn't leave hide nor hair, shred nor shingle of it, except the fag-end of a shanty and one brick chimney. This boat is paddling along right now where the dead-centre of that town used to be ; yonder is the brick chimney, all that's left of Napoleon. These dense woods on the right used to be a mile back of the town. Take a look behind you – up-stream – now you begin to recognize this country, don't you ?"

"Yes, I do recognize it now. It is the most wonderful thing I ever heard of ; by a long shot the most wonderful – and unexpected."

Mr. Thompson and Mr. Rogers had arrived, meantime, with satchels and umbrellas, and had silently listened to the captain's news. Thompson put a half-dollar in my hand and said softly :

"For my share of the chromo."

Rogers followed suit.

Yes, it was an astonishing thing to see the Mississippi rolling between unpeopled shores and straight over the spot where I used to see a good big self-complacent town twenty years ago. Town that was county-seat of a great and important county; town with a big United States marine hospital; town of innumerable fights – an inquest every day ; town where I had used to know the prettiest girl, and the most accomplished in the whole Mississippi Valley; town where we were handed the first printed news of the "Pennsylvania's" mournful disaster a quarter of a century ago ; a town no more – swallowed up, vanished, gone to feed the fishes ; nothing left but a fragment of a shanty and a crumbling brick chimney !

Mark Twain, *Life On The Mississippi*, Chapter XXXII "The river washes a town away", 1883

Doc. 7 – Mark Twain : New Orleans, the Metropolis of the South

The city itself had not changed--to the eye. It had greatly increased in spread and population, but the look of the town was not altered. The dust, waste-paper-littered, was still deep in the streets; the deep, trough-like gutters alongside the curb-stones were still half full of reposeful water with a dusty surface; the sidewalks were still--in the sugar and bacon region--incumbered by casks and barrels and hogsheads; the great blocks of austerely plain commercial houses were as dusty-looking as ever.

Canal Street was finer, and more attractive and stirring than formerly, with its drifting crowds of people, its several processions of hurrying street-cars, and--toward evening-- its broad second-story verandas crowded with gentlemen and ladies clothed according to the latest mode.

Not that there is any "architecture" in Canal Street: to speak in broad, general terms, there is no architecture in New Orleans, except in the cemeteries. It seems a strange thing to say of a wealthy, far-seeing, and energetic city of a quarter of a million inhabitants, but it is true. There is a huge granite U. S. Custom-house--costly enough, genuine enough, but as a decoration it is inferior to a gasometer. It looks like a state prison. But it was built before the war. Architecture in America may be said to have been born since the war. New Orleans, I believe, has had the good luck-- and in a sense the bad luck--to have had no great fire in late years. It must be so. If the opposite had been the case, I think one would be able to tell the "burnt district" by the radical improvement in its architecture over the old forms. One can do this in Boston and Chicago. The "burnt district" of Boston was commonplace before the fire; but now there is no commercial district in any city in the world that can surpass it--or perhaps even rival it--in beauty, elegance, and tastefulness.

However, New Orleans has begun--just this moment, as one may say. When completed, the new Cotton Exchange will be a stately and beautiful building; massive, substantial, full of architectural graces; no shams or false pretences or uglinesses about it anywhere. To the city, it will be worth many times its cost, for it will breed its species. What has been lacking hitherto, was a model to build toward; something to educate eye and taste; a *suggester*, so to speak.

The city is well outfitted with progressive men--thinking, sagacious, long-headed men. The contrast between the spirit of the city and the city's architecture is like the contrast between waking and sleep. Apparently there is a "boom" in everything but that one dead feature. The water in the gutters used to be stagnant and slimy, and a potent disease-breeder; but the gutters are flushed now, two or three times a day, by powerful machinery; in many of the gutters the water never stands still, but has a steady current. Other sanitary improvements have been made; and with such effect that New Orleans claims to be (during the long intervals between the occasional yellow-fever assaults) one of the healthiest cities in the Union. There 's plenty of ice now for everybody, manufactured in the town. It is a driving place commercially, and has a great river, ocean, and railway business. At the date of our visit, it was the best lighted city in the Union, electrically speaking. The New Orleans electric lights were more numerous than those of New York, and very much better. One had this modified noonday not only in Canal and some neighboring chief streets, but all along a stretch of five miles of river frontage. There are good clubs in the city now--several of them but recently organized--and inviting modern-style pleasure resorts at West End and Spanish Fort. The telephone is everywhere. One of the most notable advances is in journalism. The newspapers, as I remember them, were not a striking feature. Now they are. Money is spent upon them with a free hand. They get the news, let it cost what it may. The editorial work is not hack-grinding, but literature. As an example of New Orleans journalistic achievement, it may be mentioned that the "Times-Democrat" of August 26, 1882, contained a report of the year's business of the towns of the Mississippi Valley, from New Orleans all the way to St. Paul--two thousand miles. That issue of the paper consisted of *forty* pages; seven columns to the page; two hundred and eighty columns in all; fifteen hundred words to the column; an aggregate of four hundred and twenty thousand words. That is to say, not much short of three times as many words as there are in this book. One may with sorrow contrast this with the architecture of New Orleans.

I have been speaking of public architecture only. The domestic article in New Orleans is reproachless, notwithstanding it remains as it always was. All the dwellings are of wood--in the American part of the town, I mean--and all have a comfortable look. Those in the wealthy quarter are spacious; painted snow-white usually, and generally have wide verandas, or double-verandas, supported by ornamental columns. These mansions stand in the centre of large grounds, and rise, garlanded with roses, out of the midst of swelling masses of shining green foliage and many-colored blossoms. No houses could well be in better harmony with their surroundings, or more pleasing to the eye, or more home-like and comfortable-looking.

One even becomes reconciled to the cistern presently; this is a mighty cask, painted green, and sometimes a couple of stories high, which is propped against the house-corner on stilts. There is a mansion-and-brewery suggestion about the combination which seems very incongruous at first. But the people cannot have wells, and so they take rain-water. Neither can they conveniently have cellars, or graves; the town being built upon "made" ground; so they do without both, and few of the living complain, and none of the others.

Mark Twain, *Life On The Mississippi*, Chapter XLI "The Metropolis of the South", 1883

Doc. 8 – Mark Twain, On the difficulty of learning the river

At the end of what seemed a tedious while, I had managed to pack my head full of islands, towns, bars, "points," and bends; and a curiously inanimate mass of lumber it was, too. However, inasmuch as I could shut my eyes and reel off a good long string of these without leaving out more than ten miles of river in every fifty, I began to feel that I could take a boat down to New Orleans if I could make her skip those little gaps. But of course my complacency could hardly get start enough to lift my nose a trifle into the air, before Mr. Bixby would think of something to fetch it down again. One day he turned on me suddenly with this settler :

"What is the shape of Walnut Bend ?"

He might as well have asked me my grandmother's opinion of protoplasm. I reflected respectfully, and then said I didn't know it had any particular shape. My gunpowdery chief went off with a bang, of course, and then went on loading and firing until he was out of adjectives.

I had learned long ago that he only carried just so many rounds of ammunition, and was sure to subside into a very placable and even remorseful old smooth-bore as soon as they were all gone. That word "old" is merely affectionate; he was not more than thirty-four. I waited. By and by he said,--

"My boy, you 've got to know the *shape* of the river perfectly. It is all there is left to steer by on a very dark night. Everything else is blotted out and gone. But mind you, it has n't the same shape in the night that it has in the day-time."

"How on earth am I ever going to learn it, then?"

"How do you follow a hall at home in the dark? Because you know the shape of it. You can't see it."

"Do you mean to say that I 've got to know all the million trifling variations of shape in the banks of this interminable river as well as I know the shape of the front hall at home?"

"On my honor, you 've got to know them *better* than any man ever did know the shapes of the halls in his own house"

"I wish I was dead!"

"Now I don't want to discourage you, but"--

"Well, pile it on me; I might as well have it now as another time."

"You see, this has got to be learned; there is n't any getting around it. A clear starlight night throws such heavy shadows that if you did n't know the shape of a shore perfectly you would claw away from every bunch of timber, because you would take the black shadow of it for a solid cape ; and you see you would be getting scared to death every fifteen minutes by the watch. You would be fifty yards from shore all the time when you ought to be within fifty feet of it. You can't see a snag in one of those shadows, but you know exactly where it is, and the shape of the river tells you when you are coming to it. There 's your pitch-dark night; the river is a very different shape on a pitch-dark night from what it is on a starlight light. All shores seem to be straight lines, then, and mighty dim ones, too; and you 'd *run* them for straight lines only you know better. You boldly drive your boat right into what, seems to be a solid, straight wall (you knowing very well that in reality there is a curve there), and that wall falls back and makes way for you. Then there 's your gray mist. You take a night when there 's one of these grisly, drizzly, gray mists, and then there is n't any particular shape to a shore. A gray mist would tangle the head of the oldest man that ever lived. Well, then, different kinds of *moonlight* change the shape of the river in different ways. You see"--

"Oh, don't say anymore, please! Have I got to learn the shape of the river according to all these five hundred thousand different ways? If I tried to carry all that cargo in my head it would make me stoop-shouldered."

"*No!* you only learn *the* shape of the river; and you learn it with such absolute certainty that you can always steer by the shape that 's *in your head*, and never mind the one that 's before your eyes."

"Very well, I 'll try it; but after I have learned it can I depend on it? Will it keep the same form and not go fooling around?"

Before Mr. Bixby could answer, Mr. W--came in to take the watch, and he said,--

"Bixby, you 'll have to look out for President's Island and all that country clear away up above the Old Hen and Chickens. The banks are caving and the shape of the shores changing like everything. Why, you would n't know the point above 40. You can go up inside the old sycamore snag, now."

Mark Twain, *Life On The Mississippi*, Chapter VIII “Perplexing Lessons”, 1883

Doc. 9 – Mark Twain, Uncle Mumford's impressions

Uncle Mumford said :

"As long as I have been mate of a steamboat,--thirty years--I have watched this river and studied it. Maybe I could have learnt more about it at West Point, but if I believe it I wish I may be WHAT *are you sucking your fingers there for?--Collar that kag of nails!* Four years at West Point, and plenty of books and schooling, will learn a man a good deal, I reckon, but it won't learn him the river. You turn one of those little European rivers over to this Commission, with its hard bottom and clear water, and it would just be a holiday job for them to wall it, and pile it, and dike it, and tame it down, and boss it around, and make it go wherever they wanted it to, and stay where they put it, and do just as they said, every time. But this ain't that kind of a river. They have started in here with big confidence, and the best intentions in the world; but they are going to get left. What does Ecclesiastes vii. 13 say? Says enough to knock *their* little game galley-west, don't it? Now you look at their methods once. There at Devil's Island, in the Upper River, they wanted the water to go one way, the water wanted to go another. So they put up a stone wall. But what does the river care for a stone wall? When it got ready, it just bulged through it. Maybe they can build another that will stay; that is, up there--but not down here they can't. Down here in the Lower River, they drive some pegs to turn the water away from the shore and stop it from slicing off the bank; very well, don't it go straight over and cut somebody else's bank ? Certainly. Are they going to peg all the banks? Why, they could buy ground and build a new Mississippi cheaper. They are pegging Bulletin Tow-head now. It won't do any good. If the river has got a mortgage on that island, it will foreclose, sure, pegs or no pegs. Away down yonder, they have driven two rows of piles straight through the middle of a dry bar half a mile long, which is forty foot out of the water when the river is low. What do you reckon that is for? If I know, I wish I may land in-- HUMP *yourself, you son of an undertaker!--out with that coal-oil, now, lively, LIVELY!* And just look at what they are trying to do down there at Milliken's Bend. There 's been a cut-off in that section, and Vicksburg is left out in the cold. It 's a country town now. The river strikes in below it; and a boat can't go up to the town except in high water. Well, they are going to build wing-dams in the bend opposite the foot of 103, and throw the water over and cut off the foot of the island and plow down into an old ditch where the river used to be in ancient times; and they think they can persuade the water around that way, and get it to strike in above Vicksburg, as it used to do, and fetch the town back into the world again. That is, they are going to take this whole Mississippi, and twist it around and make it run several miles *up stream.* Well, you 've got to admire men that deal in ideas of that size and can tote them around without crutches; but you have n't got to believe they can *do* such miracles, have you? And yet you ain't absolutely obliged to believe they can't. I reckon the safe way, where a man can afford it, is to *copper* the operation, and at the same time buy enough property in Vicksburg to square you up in case they win. Government is doing a deal for the Mississippi, now--spending loads of money on her. When there used to be four thousand steamboats and ten thousand acres of coal-barges, and rafts and trading scows, there was n't a lantern from St. Paul to New Orleans, and the snags were thicker than bristles on a hog's back ; and now when there's three dozen steamboats and nary barge or raft, Government has snatched out all the snags, and lit up the shores like Broadway, and a boat 's as safe on the river as she 'd be in heaven. And I reckon that by the time there ain't any boats left at all, the Commission will have the old thing all reorganized, and dredged out, and fenced in, and tidied up, to a degree that will make navigation just simply perfect, and absolutely safe and profitable; and all the days will be Sundays, and all the mates will be Sunday-school suWHAT-*in-the-nation-you- fooling-around-there-for, you sons of unrighteousness, heirs of perdition! Going to be a YEAR getting that hogshead ashore ?*"

Mark Twain, *Life On The Mississippi*, 1883

Doc. 7 – Mark Twain : On the Southern slang and accent

I found the half-forgotten Southern intonations and elisions as pleasing to my ear as they had formerly been. A Southerner talks music. At least it is music to me, but then I was born in the South. The educated Southerner has no use for an *r*, except at the beginning of a word. He says "honah," and "dinnah," and "Gove'nuh," and "befo' the waw," and so on. The words may lack charm to the eye, in print, but they have it to the ear. When did the *r* disappear from Southern speech, and how did it come to disappear ?

The custom of dropping it was not borrowed from the North, nor inherited from England. Many Southerners-- most Southerners--put a *y* into occasional words that begin with the *k* sound. For instance, they say Mr. K'yahtah (Carter) and speak of playing k'yahds or of riding in the k'yahs. And they have the pleasant custom--long ago fallen into decay in the North--of frequently employing the respectful "Sir." Instead of the curt Yes, and the abrupt No, they say "Yes, Suh"; "No, Suh."

But there are some infelicities. Such as "like" for "as," and the addition of an "at" where it is n't needed. I heard an educated gentleman say, "Like the flag-officer did." His cook or his butler would have said, "Like the flag-officer done." You hear gentlemen say, "Where have you been at?" And here is the aggravated form--heard a ragged street Arab say it to a comrade: "I was a-ask'n' Tom whah you was a-settin' at." The very elect carelessly, say "will" when they mean "shall"; and many of them say, "I did n't go to do it," meaning "I did n't mean to do it." The Northern word "guess"--imported from England, where it used to be common, and now regarded by satirical Englishmen as a Yankee original--is but little used among Southerners. They say "reckon." They have n't any "does n't" in their language; they say "don't" instead. The unpolished often use "went" for "gone." It is nearly as bad as the Northern "had n't ought." This reminds me that a remark of a very peculiar nature was made here in my neighborhood (in the North) a few days ago: "He had n't ought to have went." How is that ? Isn't that a good deal of a triumph ? One knows the orders combined in this half-breed's architecture without inquiring: one parent Northern, the other Southern. Today I heard a school-mistress ask, "Where is John gone?" This form is so common--so nearly universal, in fact--that if she had used "whither" instead of "where," I think it would have sounded like an affectation.

We picked up one excellent word-- a word worth travelling to New Orleans to get; a nice limber, expressive, handy word--"Lagniappe." They pronounce it lanny-*yap*. It is Spanish--so they said. We discovered it at the head of a column of odds and ends in the Picayune, the first day; heard twenty people use it the second; inquired what it meant the third; adopted it and got facility in swinging it the fourth. It has a restricted meaning, but I think the people spread it out a little when they choose. It is the equivalent of the thirteenth roll in a "baker's dozen." It is something thrown in, gratis, for good measure. The custom originated in the Spanish quarter of the city. When a child or a servant buys something in a shop--or even the mayor or the governor, for aught I know--he finishes the operation by saying,--

"Give me something for lagniappe."

The shopman always responds; gives the child a bit of liquorice-root, gives the servant a cheap cigar or a spool of thread, gives the governor--I don't know what he gives the governor; support, likely.

When you are invited to drink,--and this does occur now and then in New Orleans,--and you say, "What, again?-- no, I 've had enough;" the other party says, "But just this one time more,--this is for lagniappe." When the beau perceives that he is stacking his compliments a trifle too high, and sees by the young lady's countenance that the edifice would have been better with the top compliment left off, he puts his "I beg pardon,--no harm intended," into the briefer form of "Oh, that is for lagniappe." If the waiter in the restaurant stumbles and spills a gill of coffee down the back of your neck, he says, "For lagniappe, sah," and gets you another cup without extra charge.

Mark Twain, *Life On The Mississippi*, Chapter XLI "The Metropolis of the South", 1883