

# Mark Twain's Depiction of Northern Society

1-2 days

High School English/History

## DESIRED RESULTS:

What are the “big ideas” that drive this lesson?

- The relationship between African Americans and whites in the North in the late 1800s was a complex one.

What are the “essential questions” that students must answer in order to understand the “big ideas”?

- What was the essential nature of black life in the North in the late 1800s?
- Why does this contrast with the view that many students today have of black life during this period?

## CORE UNDERSTANDINGS:

Students Will Need to Know:

- Various ways that African Americans and white interacted in Northern society during this period.
- The perceptions that Northerners had of African Americans during the era.

Students Will Be Able To:

- Analyze sources and make connections.
- Extract factual information from primary sources.

## SUGGESTED ASSESSMENTS:

- Student groups will be graded on the quality of their completion of their group's written primary source report.

## LEARNING EXPERIENCES:

1. Students must first have finished learning about Samuel Clemens/Mark Twain, perhaps through research assigned by the teacher.

2. They now must be tasked with examining sources that are directly from Samuel Clemens himself, primary sources from shows that he enjoyed, and excerpts from his work of fiction, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (from which he drew upon real life experiences).
3. Divide the class into five equal groups and assign each group to one of the sets of themed sources:
  1. "A True Story" (short story by Mark Twain)
  2. Minstrel Shows (something that he enjoyed viewing)
  3. Reviews of Huck Finn readings
  4. Negro student at Yale University and background information (his own letter)
  5. CT caricatures of Blacks and Commentary on a CT baseball team (something that he would have seen and read himself)
4. Tell the students that their group is responsible for producing written responses to the following questions:
  - What are 5-10 *important* facts about each source? Why are they important?
  - How does this source connect to
    - Mark Twain/Samuel Clemens
    - Relations between blacks and whites in the North after the Civil War

#### "COMMON CORE" CONNECTIONS:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary determining political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

#### SUGGESTED LESSON EXTENSION:

Research the topic of nineteenth century minstrel shows in more detail; how did these shows help to form racial attitudes in this era?

#### MATERIALS AND ATTACHMENTS:

- See below

## PRIMARY SOURCES

1- A True Story (see attached)

2 a/b-Minstrel Shows



Minstrel Shows, which Samuel Clemens enjoyed, present us with a strange, fascinating and awful phenomenon. Minstrel shows originally emerged from pre-industrial European traditions of masking and carnival, but in the US they began in the 1830s with working class white men dressing up as plantation slaves. These men imitated black musical and dance forms, combining savage parody of black Americans with genuine fondness for African American cultural forms. By the time of the Civil War, the minstrel show had become world famous and respectable. Late in his life Mark Twain fondly remembered the "old time nigger show" with its colorful comic darkies and its rousing songs and dances. By the 1840s, the minstrel show had become one of the central events in the culture of the Democratic party.

White performers would blacken their faces with burnt cork or greasepaint, dress in outlandish costumes, and then perform songs and skits that mocked African Americans. Some of the most famous songs in American history-- *Dixie*, *Camptown Races*, *Oh Susanna*, *My Old Kentucky Home*--began as minstrel songs.

Source 2a: Song from Minstral shows that Mark Twain enjoyed.

I come from Alabama with my Banjo on my knee—  
I'se gwine to Lou'siana my true lub for to see.  
It rain'd all night de day I left, de wedder it was dry;  
The sun so hot I froze to def -- Susanna, dont you cry.

*Chorus:*

Oh! Susanna, do not cry for me;  
I come from Alabama, wid my Banjo on my knee.

2.

I jump'd aboard the telegraph and trabeled down de ribber,  
De lectrie fluid magnified, and kill'd five hundred Nigger.  
De bullgine bust, de hoss ran off, I really thought I'd die;  
I shut my eyes to hold my bref -- Susanna, dont you cry.

*Chorus*

3.

I had a dream de udder night, when ebry ting was still;  
I thought I saw Susanna dear, a coming down de hill.  
De buckweat cake was in her mouf, de tear was in her eye,  
I says, I'se coming from de souf, -- Susanna, dont you cry.

*Chorus*

4.

I soon will be in New Orleans, and den I'll look all round,  
And when I find Susanna, I' fall upon the ground.  
But if I do not find her, dis darkie 'I surely die,  
And when I'm dead and buried, Susanna, dont you cry.

*Chorus*

Primary Source 2b:

Mark Twain recalls the first minstrel show that he saw at about age 8. The performers were white men who were made up to appear black.

I remember the first Negro musical show I ever saw. It must have been in the early forties. It was a new institution. In our village of Hannibal we had not heard of it before and it burst upon us as a glad and stunning surprise.

... The minstrels appeared with coal-black hands and faces and their clothing was a loud and extravagant burlesque of the clothing worn by the plantation slave of the time ...

Standing collars were in fashion in that day and the minstrel appeared in a collar which engulfed and hid half of his head and projected so far forward that he could hardly see sideways over its points....: His shoes were rusty and clumsy and cumbersome and five or six sizes too large for him. . . .

Their lips were thickened and lengthened with bright red paint to such a degree that their mouths resembled slices cut in a ripe watermelon. ...The minstrel troupes had good voices and both their solos and their choruses were a delight to me as long as the Negro show continued in existence. ...

The minstrel show was born in the early forties and it had a prosperous career for about thirty-five years; then it degenerated into a variety show and was nearly all variety show with a Negro act or two thrown in incidentally. The real Negro show has been stone dead for thirty years. To my mind it was a thoroughly delightful thing and a most competent laughter-compeller and I am sorry it is gone.

Primary Source 3: Audience enjoys the sufferings of Jim (a slave in Huckleberry Finn) whom another white character represents. This occurs when Mark Twain goes on a tour trying to sell his Huckleberry Finn writings.

### **Performing the Ending of *Huck Finn***

"The next selection was from 'Huckleberry Finn,' a kind of sequel to 'Tom Sawyer,' and which is not yet published. It related the troubles of two prankish boys who freed a slave imprisoned in an old cabin. There were a hundred ludicrous incidents in it, which could but stir the responsibilities of a very appreciative audience. In his second call he continued the story of the boys' comical tricks and perplexities, which in spite of his inanimate recital, kept the hearers in a smile all the while he spoke." --

from *The Pittsburgh Dispatch*, 30 December 1884

"In his next selection he read a chapter of his unpublished book 'Huckleberry Finn,' explaining how 'Huck' and 'Tom Sawyer' freed the runaway 'nigger,' which created roars of laughter." --

from *The (Cincinnati) Enquirer*, 4 January 1885

"Perhaps the funniest thing of the evening was read by Mr. Clemens from the advance sheets of his new book, entitled 'Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer's Brilliant Achievement' in releasing the negro prisoner, Jim, from the log cabin where he is incarcerated. Mr. Clemens was encored and read 'Tom Bowlin's Encounter with the Governor of Massachusetts.'" --

from *The Minneapolis Tribune*, 25 January 1885

"The story of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer's brilliant achievement in rescuing a negro captive who was imprisoned in a cabin on the farm of Huck's uncle, kept the audience in a constant roar of laughter, while the stuttering story was unique and highly amusing."--

from *The (Madison) Wisconsin State Journal*, 28 January 1885

". . . Mr. Clemens convulsed the house with uncontrollable mirth. His account of the runaway slave's escape from the log cabin under the auspices of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn was irresistible." --

from *The Chicago Tribune*, 3 February 1885

"Mark Twain was as funny as ever. His encounter with the newspaper interviewer, in which he broke down that redoubtable personage with his atrocious burlesques upon fact, put the audience in a mood to be tickled to death with the story of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer in their arrangement of 'Jim's' escape from the cabin in accordance with the dramatic unities of history and romance . . ." --

from *The Indianapolis Journal*, 8 February 1885

"['The gifted humorist'] then told the story of Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer's brilliant achievement. Both were white boys. Tom's uncle had imprisoned Jim, a negro slave, in a log cabin for having run away. The boys visited Jim whenever they pleased, and could have released him by merely leaving the door open. But Tom had read of hairbreadth escapes from prison, and determined to get him out in the most elegant and romantic manner. They dug a hole under the cabin, sent him a rope ladder in a pie, and having read that noted prisoners always had pets in their solitude, brought him a large assortment of spiders, snakes and other reptiles and bugs. Fearing that his uncle's family was not taking enough interest in the matter to make it exciting, Tom wrote a series of anonymous letters, couched in blood-curdling language, which caused a reign of terror in the household. The last missive said: "A desperit gang ov cut-throats from Indian Territory will sneak down at mid-night to steal your runaway nigger. I am one of the gang, but I got religion." The result of this letter was that Tom's uncle had a number of armed men in readiness to prevent the escape. The boys were successful, however, and reached an island on the river, after Tom had received a bullet in his leg." --

from *The Philadelphia North American*, 27 February 1885

"Mark Twain gave an account of 'Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer's Brilliant Achievement' in rescuing in romantic manner the slave Jim . . ."--

from *The Baltimore Sun*, 28 February 1885

# A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It

By Mark Twain

Primary  
Source One

It was summer time, and twilight. We were sitting on the porch of the farmhouse, on the summit of the hill, and "Aunt Rachel" was sitting respectfully below our level, on the steps, -- for she was our servant, and colored. She was of mighty frame and stature; she was sixty years old, but her eye was undimmed and her strength unabated. She was a cheerful, hearty soul, and it was no more trouble for her to laugh than it is for a bird to sing. She was under fire, now, as usual when the day was done. That is to say, she was being chaffed without mercy, and was enjoying it. She would let off peal after peal of laughter, and then sit with her face in her hands and shake with throes of enjoyment which she could no longer get breath enough to express. At such a moment as this a thought occurred to me, and I said: --

"Aunt Rachel, how is it that you've lived sixty years and never had any trouble?"

She stopped quaking. She paused, and there was a moment of silence. She turned her face over her shoulder toward me, and said, without even a smile in her voice: --

"Misto C--, is you in 'arnest?"

It surprised me a good deal; and it sobered my manner and my speech, too. I said: --

"Why, I thought -- that is, I meant -- why, you *can't* have had any trouble. I've never heard you sigh, and never seen your eye when there wasn't a laugh in it."

She faced fairly around, now, and was full of earnestness.

"Has I had any trouble? Misto C--, I's gwyne to tell you, den I leave it to you. I was bawn down 'mongst de slaves; I knows all 'bout slavery, 'case I been one of 'em my own se'f. Well, sah, my ole man -- dat's my husban' -- he was lovin' an' kind to me, jist as kind as you is to yo' own wife. An' we had chil'en -- seven chil'en -- an' we loved dem chil'en jist de same as you loves you' chil'en. Dey was black, but de Lord can't make no chil'en so black but what dey mother loves 'em an' wouldn't give 'em up, no, not for anything dat's in dis whole world.

"Well, sah, I was raised in ole Fo'ginny, but my mother she was raised in Maryland; an' my *souls!* she was turrible when she'd git started! My *lan'!* but she'd make de fur fly! When she'd git into dem tantrums, she always had one word dat she said. She'd straighten herse'f up an' put her fists in her hips an' say, 'I want you to understan' dat I wasn't bawn in de mash to be fool' by trash! I's one o' de ole Blue Hen's Chickens, I is!' 'Ca'se, you see, dat's what folks dat's bawn in Maryland calls deyselves, an' dey's proud of it. Well, dat was her word. I don't ever forgit it, beca'se she said it so much, an' beca'se she said it one day when my little Henry tore his wris' awful, an' most busted his head, right up at de top of his forehead, an' de niggers didn't fly aroun' fas' enough to 'tend to him. An' when dey talk' back at her, she up an' she says, 'Look-a-heah!' she says, 'I want you niggers to understan' dat I



Primary source 4- Yale Student that S.L. Clemens supports

Following is the text of a letter written by Mark Twain to Francis Wayland, dean of Yale Law School, offering to provide financial assistance to Warner T. McGuinn, one of the first black students at the school.

Dear Sir,

Do you know him? And is he worthy? I do not believe I would very cheerfully help a white student who would ask a benevolence of a stranger, but I do not feel so about the other color. We have ground the manhood out of them, & the shame is ours, not theirs, & we should pay for it.

If this young man lives as economically as it is & should be the pride of one to do who is straitened, I would like to know what the cost is, so that I may send 6, 12, or 24 months' board, as the size of the bill may determine.

You see he refers to you, or I would not venture to intrude.

Truly yours,

S.L. Clemens.

### Background Knowledge on African Americans and Yale University

About 175 years have passed since a fugitive slave named James Pennington became the first African American to study at Yale. The university did not permit Pennington, a blacksmith by trade who had settled in New Haven, to matriculate or earn a degree. But he was allowed to audit classes at the Divinity School from 1834 to 1839, and his studies enabled him to be ordained. Pennington became a distinguished minister—in 1849 the University of Heidelberg awarded him an honorary doctorate of divinity—as well as a teacher, abolitionist, and author. In 1841, he wrote *The Origin and History of the Colored People*, which scholars have described as the first history of African Americans; in 1850, he published one of the most important slave narratives. In the latter book, *The Fugitive*

*Blacksmith*, he wrote: "There is one sin that slavery committed against me, which I can never forgive. It robbed me of my education; the injury is irreparable."

Yale would not officially enroll an African American until the 1850s, when Cortlandt Van Rensselaer Creed entered the medical school. Creed was born in New Haven in 1835; his father was a college janitor, steward of the Calliopean Society (a literary and debating society mainly for Southern students), and, from about 1822 to 1865, caterer for the commencement dinner attended by Yale alumni. After graduating from medical school in 1857, Cortlandt Creed developed a large practice in New Haven and served as assistant surgeon of the Thirteenth Connecticut Volunteers in the Civil War.

Because race and ethnicity were not noted on Yale records in the past, it is difficult for historians to identify early African American students. But it is clear that African American matriculation grew more common after the Civil War.

In 1870, Edward Alexander Bouchet became the first black person to enroll in Yale College. Bouchet, also the son of a Yale employee, was the valedictorian of the Hopkins School in New Haven. He was the first African American in the country elected to Phi Beta Kappa and ranked sixth in the Class of 1874. Bouchet went on to the Yale Graduate School to study experimental physics, calculus, chemistry, and mineralogy. When he received his doctorate in physics in 1876, he became the first African American to earn a PhD from an American university.

Even though Bouchet was only the sixth man to hold an American doctorate in physics, opportunities for him to teach at the college level were virtually nonexistent. He spent most of his career teaching physics and chemistry at the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia. A portrait of Bouchet now hangs in the transept of Sterling Memorial Library. Curtis Patton, one of Yale's first African American professors, encouraged Yale president Kingman Brewster '41 to commission the portrait. ("Everyone needs a personal hero," says Patton, a professor of epidemiology and public health. "For me it's Bouchet.")

While Bouchet was in college, Mary Goodman, an African American New Haven tradeswoman, provided the first gift to the university by a person of color. In 1871 Goodman bequeathed all of her property—\$5,000—to establish a scholarship fund for African American students of divinity. To honor her generosity, the Corporation voted that Mrs. Goodman be given a place in the Yale Lot in the Grove Street Cemetery.

Her scholarship was soon put to use. In 1874, James William Morris became the first African American student to graduate from the Divinity School. An 1871 graduate of

Lincoln University, Morris attended Yale for one year to earn his graduate degree. Solomon Melvin Coles, who had entered Yale in 1872, graduated the year after Morris.

During the next decade, the Law School graduated its first African American: Edwin Archer Randolph, Class of 1880. That July, he became the first black person admitted to the Connecticut bar. Randolph practiced law in his native state of Virginia, served as councilman and alderman in Richmond, and edited and published the *Virginia Planet*, an African American newspaper.

Because of an association with Mark Twain, Warner Thornton McGuinn, Class of 1887, became the Law School's best-known early African American graduate. After McGuinn finished his undergraduate work at Lincoln University, he attended Howard University Law School for one year before entering Yale. His major extracurricular activity (besides trying to support himself) was serving as president of the Kent Club. This student organization hosted debates about prominent social and political questions, and during the fall term, one of its speakers was Mark Twain. In the course of shepherding the writer around campus and introducing him to the audience, McGuinn made a positive impression.

On Christmas Eve 1885, Twain wrote to Law School dean Francis Wayland to inquire about McGuinn's financial circumstances and whether it would be prudent to offer to help out the young man. "We have ground the manhood out of them, and the shame is ours, not theirs, & we should pay for it," wrote Twain. (The letter, comments Twain scholar Shelley Fisher Fishkin '71, '77PhD, in her book *Lighting Out for the Territory: Reflections on Mark Twain and American Culture*, contains the "most direct, non-ironic condemnation of racism that we had from Twain himself.")

With Twain's support McGuinn became free to concentrate on his studies. He won the Townsend Prize for distinguished oration and went on to a prominent law career in Baltimore, where he held many public service positions and argued successfully in landmark cases against segregation. "He was one of the greatest lawyers who ever lived," said Thurgood Marshall, associate justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, when McGuinn died in 1937. Justice Marshall, who as a young lawyer in Baltimore shared adjoining offices with McGuinn, also said: "If he had been white, he'd have been a judge."

In 1926, Otelia Cromwell became the first African American woman to receive a Yale PhD. (She was the first African American to graduate from Smith College, in 1900, and every year since 1989, Smith has celebrated Otelia Cromwell Day in her honor.) Cromwell took her

doctorate in English, and her thesis, "Thomas Heywood: A Study of Elizabethan Drama of Everyday Life," was published by Yale University Press in 1928. Among her many scholarly works was one of the first anthologies of African American authors.

In 1931, 51 years after Edwin Archer Randolph graduated from the Law School, the first African American woman graduated—Jane Bolin. A mere eight years later, Bolin, at the age of 31, became the first African American woman appointed to a judgeship; New York City mayor Fiorello La Guardia named her to the Domestic Relations Court. In making the landmark appointment, La Guardia told an audience at the New York World's Fair that Bolin, "a student of social and economic conditions [who was] able to discern misfortune and exploitation from crime and sin," had "translated her knowledge and understanding into useful public service."

The trend toward greater numbers of African Americans at Yale continued, but it was not until the fall of 1964 that Yale College admitted its first substantial group of African American men. The 14 black students in the Class of 1969, and others who entered in subsequent years, organized the Black Student Alliance at Yale and worked with Yale to establish the Afro-American Studies Department in 1968 and the Afro-American Cultural Center in 1969..

Primary source 5- Connecticut Caricatures of African Americans/ CT baseball

"THEY ALL DO IT."

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*Hartford Courant- 1885*

**'Base Ball Notes'**

**May 18** - The Blue Stockings (colored) nine was defeated on the Capen Street grounds Saturday by the North Stars, 17-8, in five innings.

**May 29** - An interesting game tomorrow afternoon on the Ward Street grounds will be the set between the North Stars and the colored Blue Stockings nine, commencing at 4 o'clock. [ game was postponed to June 8]

*Lose Their Polarity: Blue Stockings Win 21-13.* The fun was fast and furious at the ball grounds yesterday afternoon. The North Stars started in with a determination to "pulverize those coons," but before they got through they found the shoe was on the other foot!

**June 11** - The Blue Stockings and North Stars are going to play another game soon, "for blood"...

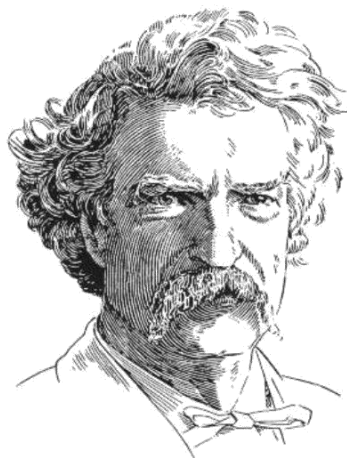




## BASE-BALL.

### Another Close Game Between the Hartfords and Cuban Giants.

The game yesterday was close and interesting, and generally well and brilliantly played, except in the sixth inning, when the visiting team played a little loosely. The features of the game were the fielding of Hackett and Farrell for the Hartfords and Harrison and Williams for the visiting team. Dowd's catching and the outfielding of Dowd and Boyd were also commendable. C. Williams, the unique coach, did not play, but his place in that respect was well filled by Boyd. There were 800 people present. The audience to some extent were in sympathy with the dusky ball players, and wanted all close decisions given them, but the umpire was generally correct. The score:—



## NEW BRITAIN DAILY HERALD

### DEFEATED BY THE CUBANS.

It Requires ten Innings, However, to Decide the Game.

A Fatal Bunching of Wild Throws Did the Work—Many Good Plays and Many Poor Ones—A Contest Full of Excitement—Johns Pitched Well, But Was Not Given Good Support—Collins Hurt—Other Games.



THE Cuban Giants who represent Ansonia and Derby in the State league paid their first visit to New Britain yesterday afternoon. Many of the base ball enthusiasts whose time is limited and who have been holding back for the purpose of seeing the great aggregation of colored ball tossers play had their ardor dampened by the shower which occurred about 3 o'clock. The weather cleared somewhat but