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Into the Wild: A Journey Paddling the Lower Mississippi River With Quapaw Canoe Company

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INTO THE WILD: A JOURNEY PADDLING THE LOWER MISSISSIPPI WITH QUAPAW CANOE COMPANY

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who go beyond. The pioneers who forge a new path onward; who inspire us to open our eyes, hearts, and minds to the extraordinary possibilities that lie beyond what is known.

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I would like to thank John Ruskey and Mark River Peeples for their valuable wisdom and for their time on camera and in the canoe that contributed to this project's direction and success. I would also like to thank my primary advisor, Andy Harper, for his unfailing encouragement in guiding the creative process of this work and inspiring me to dream big with what story I would like to tell.

ABSTRACT

Humanity's profound relationship with water is undeniable. From our reliance on it for sustenance and transportation to the recreation it provides, water is a fundamental aspect of our existence. Yet, in our contemporary era, we find ourselves increasingly disconnected from this life-giving source that shapes us and our surroundings. The Mississippi River stands as a prime example of this detachment. Often overlooked as a lifeless river, nothing more than the backdrop to our daily lives, its significance as the heart of America is underappreciated and misunderstood by many.

This thesis embarks on a journey to share the true reality that there is more to the mighty Mississippi than what initially meets the eye. First, this paper dives into the intricate history of the river and the forces that have shaped its current state. Next, this thesis examines the interactions between the river and Quapaw Canoe Company, a river outfitter whose unique engagement with the Lower Mississippi challenges conventional perceptions and fosters a deeper connection with its waters. Lastly, the final section of the paper describes the creative process in making a short film that accompanies my written thesis. By documenting the choices I made in creating this film as well as my experiences on the Mississippi River, this section illuminates how an intimate encounter with the river changes you.

My short film is aimed at taking people on a journey of their own, perhaps inspiring them to consider an adventure similar to the one they are watching. Truly, facilitating meaningful experiences on the river, and exposing people to the Mississippi's true beauty and power in a way that is extraordinary, uncommon, and surprising is

essential to helping people make a connection with it. Only then through genuine connection, can a sense of appreciation and stewardship be fostered. This thesis serves not only as a call to action but also a testament to the bond between us and the natural world. As we confront the realities of our home's changing landscape, it is crucial that we rediscover the wild spirit of the Mississippi River and embrace our interconnectedness with her waters.

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CHAPTER I: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

"A place that ever was lived in is like a fire that never goes out. It flares up, it smolders for a time, it is fanned or smothered by circumstance, but its being is intact, forever fluttering within it, the result of some original ignition. Sometimes it gives out glory, sometimes its little light must be sought out to be seen, small and tender as a candle flame, but as certain." - Eudora Welty

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Rivers have always been the blood of Mississippi. In fact, this state alone has approximately 81,316 miles of river ("Mississippi"). The Mississippi River specifically, though, is the livelihood of its land: the heartbeat not only of its state or region but of the country, truly sustaining all things and dominating the landscape. This river's massive scale provides a challenge to pinpoint its exact beginning and end, and the length has even been known to change as it meanders, is dammed or altered by levees, or as deltas grow and recede. However, challenging as it may be, *The National Geographic Society* officially declares the Mississippi as the second longest river in America, short by about a hundred miles to the Missouri. The Mississippi is still considered the chief river of North America though, undeniably first in rank in all it provides as it flows 2,340 miles through the heart of the United States, from its source of Lake Itasca in Minnesota out to the Gulf of Mexico (Luo). The beautiful word *Mississippi* affirms its own prominent identity, as it is derived from the Ojibwe name misi-ziibi, meaning "Great River," or gichi-ziibi,

meaning “Big River” (Ruskey). The mighty Mississippi indeed makes her presence known “more proudly and pervasively than any of the many forces which combine, multiply & divide over the middle of America,” (Ruskey) which continues to demand our attention and remind us of our reliance on her and the true scope of her magic.

As it physically courses through 10 states: “Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Louisiana,” one can see how the Mississippi River earns its title as most famous (“Cultural Treasure”). The river has incredible breadth as well as influence, as its basin “spans from the Appalachians to the Rockies, Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, and covers about 40% of the continental U.S.,” touching a total of 32 states (“Mississippi River Basin”). The interconnectivity of this river is crucial to its character and why it has such a powerful and unique influence over much of our country. The Mississippi River is one of the world’s major river systems in size, habitat diversity and biological productivity, as the National Park Service explains, and close to 300 species of fish (25% of all fish species in North America) live in the Mississippi River. Moreover, it is one of the planet’s most important commercial waterways and one of North America's great migration routes for both birds and fish. Sixty percent of all North American birds (326 species) use the Mississippi River Basin as their migratory flyway (“Mississippi River Facts”). As we and a plethora of other life forms depend on this river and its valley in numerously unimaginable ways today, historically the Mississippi beckoned people as well. The main stem of the Mississippi River has truly connected life for millennia.

For more than 6,000 years, Native Americans, including the “Choctaw, Chickasaw, Quapaw, Osage, Caddo, Natchez, and Tunica” have lived along the

Mississippi River ("Cultural Treasure"). The Mississippi River Valley is considered to be the "richest earth in the world" (Barry 92) and drew Native American tribes inward as it promised abundant fertility, food, clothing, tool sources, transportation, and clean water. Thousands of years later, in 1541, the tribes' symbiotic relationship with the river was interrupted when Hernando de Soto, Spanish conquistador and explorer, paid a visit to the region. De Soto was reportedly the first European to see the river's magic, and he shared the news of rich resources along the river, enticing Europeans to settle in this paradise. Hernando de Soto and his expedition, though, had high hopes of having this paradise all to themselves, and desired to "plunder the southern tribes" ("Exploration") of the river. However, between the strategic attacks of the Native American tribes against the Spaniards, and the Mississippi floods that caught the imposters off guard, ironically, de Soto, the credited "European discoverer of the river," ("Exploration") was buried in its waters, and his expedition retreated to the Gulf.

The race to settle the river's shores heated up as increasing nations continued to learn of what this river could offer, and indeed, "Britain, Spain, and France all laid claim to land bordering the Mississippi River" ("Cultural Treasure") throughout the duration of several centuries. Ownership of the upper versus lower river shifted from country to country until 1803 when the "United States bought almost the entire Mississippi River Valley from France as part of the Louisiana Purchase" (Luo). Finally after the United States' victory over Britain in the War of 1812, the Mississippi River officially and permanently belonged to the Americans, establishing their dominance over the river region. The United States' purchase of this territory though, also ushered in an era of removal for the tribes that had settled there for millenia. Tribe after tribe reluctantly

ceded their homeland to the U.S. government, and they endured harsh relocation in the 1830s from the Southeast, to territory west of the Mississippi River, referred to as the Trail of Tears (Pauls). Tribes such as the noteworthy Quapaw of the Lower Mississippi River region, for example, were forced to move to the northeastern corner of what the United States established as Indian Territory ("The Encyclopedia").

The brutal past of this region only continues from there as the United States began to rise into a global power. The Mississippi River became the central thoroughfare of America's domestic slave trade, as the "waters brought slaves to ports along the river's banks in Mississippi" (Brown). Southern plantation owners negotiated the purchases of black men, women, and children, and the horror of being sold down the river "met the South's increasing demand for labor," as plantations were desperate for workers in their fields of cash crops, according to *Mississippi Encyclopedia*. It's imperative to note that by the start of the Civil War, the South was producing more millionaires per capita in the Mississippi River Valley than anywhere in the nation; this disproportionate wealth was built on the backs of slave trade enabled so rapidly and effectively by the river. The Deep South became truly established "by the watery highway that delivered slaves to their loathsome fates" (Brown), and this river was undoubtedly essential to America's early expansion and prominence.

The practice of selling slaves down the Mississippi River boosted the region's economy and was an enabler for wealth to thrive in this area. The Mississippi also suddenly became traversed by traders and settlers on rafts, boats, and barges, and then with the introduction of the steamboat, a new industrial era began on the Mississippi, as goods went up and down the river for shipping out of New Orleans to the rest of the

world. It's critical to also note that this same port in New Orleans is where slaves from West Africa first touched American soil and then were taken up the river, as aforementioned. The country's prosperity today is directly tied to many factors but especially modernization through the Industrial Revolution, and the disproportionate wealth amassed through the river's abundant slave trade.

It's fascinating to consider how the Mississippi has been dubbed the biggest navigation channel in North America, and in many ways, how the modern Mississippi is more a highway than a river. The river is maintained as a "navigable channel that carries more than 500 million tons of cargo annually," playing a crucial role in the last few centuries of trade and today's supply chain (Ossman). The massive agribusiness industry that has developed in the basin produces 92% of the nation's agricultural exports, 78% of the world's exports in feed grains and soybeans, and most of the livestock produced nationally today ("Mississippi River Facts"). Additionally, it is crucial to know that "18 million Americans get their drinking water from the river," (Klinkenberg) and the river serves as a recreational spot for wildlife enthusiasts, boaters, adventure seekers, and artists alike.

While the river heavily supports its namesake state and nation's livelihood, there are unfortunately many problems today that face the Mississippi and her people. Flooding is one such key conflict. Historically, the river had a perfect natural rhythm. The river's flow carried and deposited sediment in marshes, wetlands, and deltas, thereby constantly creating more wetlands and barrier islands that helped protect the coastline from storms and erosion, as the article "Mississippi River Basin" in *Feeding Ourselves Thirsty* explains. However, now the infrastructure of man-made levees cuts the river off from

these ecosystems, all but halting this natural process and causing the Delta to lose over "440,000 acres of land,"(Ossman) endangering the coastline by the Gulf where the Mississippi River spits out. Flooding, again, is natural, as The Nature Conservancy states, since historically, the Mississippi and the major rivers that flow into it (the Missouri, the Ohio, the Arkansas and others) flooded seasonally. These areas, dubbed floodplains, naturally absorb much of the floodwaters and take pressure off of what is downstream. In our modern world though, for the last three centuries, towns, farms, military bases and homes have been built on these very lands, thus communities have constructed levees along the riverbanks to protect themselves.

Jennifer LaVista writes that levees, or walls that block water, are commonly implemented to prevent flooding in cities, to increase land for habitation, or direct water in a specific path. LaVista also notes that levees are naturally occurring, usually made of earth, as water's natural flowing movement causes sediment to be pushed to the side. This therefore makes a levee, and river banks form natural levees composed of sediment, silt, and other materials. However, year by year there is a consistent rise in artificial levees. These man-made levees are strategically built by either piling soil, sand, or rocks on a cleared, level surface, or by metal, plastic, wood or concrete if there is a particularly vulnerable area that the levee is protecting (LaVista).

Unfortunately, this approach is the crux of a deeply debated modern peril facing Southern communities. Artificial levees do aim at preventing flooding, and work to an extent; however, a new issue arises as they put pressure on the natural flow of the river. As the levees constrict the river and the river's power is confined to a smaller space, the water flows faster and levels rise higher as more volume of water is pushed downstream.

The water becomes harder to control and if an artificial levee breaks, then the flood is even more challenging to manage. “To control the Mississippi River- not simply to find a modus vivendi with it, but to control it, to dictate to it, to make it conform- is a mighty task. It requires more than confidence; it requires hubris,” John Barry writes in his book *Rising Tide* (21). He explains further how this attempted control was the perfect undertaking for the 19th century, a time of progress and certainty, and a belief that man could rule over physical laws of nature. Barry also writes that “unlike a human enemy, the river has no weakness,” (156) showing how the Mississippi River indeed requires an intense, sustained effort to combat. Today, the levees are the current ammunition in what Barry describes as often seeming like a war.

The first levees were actually “built along the Lower Mississippi River in 1720, to protect the young city of New Orleans,”(“Paddling the Lower Mississippi”). During the 19th century whenever the river flooded, slaves were actually forced to build levees as the need for direct intervention rose. In 1879, the federal government took oversight of flood control, and things escalated rapidly after the devastating flood of 1927 when the “U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was forced to re-engineer the Mississippi to confine the river to a precise and regulated course” (“Promise Yazoo Pumps”). For over 40 years the Mississippi River Commission had “set standards and contributed money to build the levees” (Barry 156) and most people in the Mississippi Valley trusted the commission’s strategies. Upon the arrival of the massive floods though, voices of dissent grew, accusing the commission of flawed strategies that exposed the valley to danger and intensified the challenges that came with the flood.

The Sierra Club's article "Paddling the Lower Mississippi" explains how after the 1927 flood, dredge boats shortened the river by eliminating its curves. The once meandering and arching horseshoe bends of the river had become straight. During a flood, the water in the past used to pour over thin necks of land at the edges of the Mississippi's famous bends, but engineering feats now instead rush the water onward. Further measures of intervention were added after the flood, such as concrete mats to stop erosion, and new levees were built that now stretch in a nearly unbroken line from the Gulf of Mexico to the mouth of the Ohio River: "3,700 miles of levees in total that isolated it from its floodplain" ("Paddling the Lower Mississippi"). Today, in fact, about "85% of the Mississippi River from Davenport, Iowa, to the Gulf of Mexico" (Ossman) is leveed and disconnected from its floodplain. This has directly resulted in the backwaters, wetlands and sloughs that once spread out seasonally across floodplain ecosystems, to be cut off from the river, therefore degrading habitat, threatening wildlife, and increasing likelihood of dire consequences whenever the water threatens again. This is how the Mississippi is more of an "over-engineered canal prone to catastrophic floods" ("Cultural Treasure") rather than a river existing in its original, naturally dynamic system.

Indeed, infrastructure has accomplished its main job of keeping water inside the river for decades; however, "increasingly frequent floods, like those in 1993, 2008, 2011 and 2019, have made life on the river more dangerous" (Ossman). The 2019 flood for example, resulted in elevating water levels so high that the Mississippi River was actually measured at almost 18 feet, a height that had not been seen in over 40 years. Considering the 20 foot height of the levees, the Corps of Engineers deemed the closely impending water levels dangerous, and thus opened the gates to release the water. "The river

architecture, often all that stands between a town and tons of rushing water, is part highly engineered technology, part rickety old machine," and this is what not only controls the levees but also exacerbates it ("Can Mississippi River Handle").

The Corps originally thought that opening floodways would be needed once every 10 years, but the reality had become three times in 18 months. After all, floods that used to come every 100 years, we now see every five. Interestingly enough, scientists place lots of the blame with the constant battle to manage flooding on the Corps' own engineering. In addition to modern engineering that has been declared to both help and hurt the problem, climate change exacerbated by humans, has also influenced the picture.

One specific piece of evidence that suggests the river is not operating in its natural state, is through tree ring and mud core analyses that illuminate the Mississippi River's inability to store excess water ("Paddling the Lower Mississippi"). An overall warmer atmosphere holds more moisture in the air, which can be released suddenly, causing some regions to have heavier rainfall and flooding. Furthermore, water levels are varying in greater intensity, sometimes up to "30 feet in a typical year" ("Wild Miles"). Not only is flooding now more frequent but it is also more intense and unpredictable. Additionally, weather patterns are quickly changing and shifting in ways that oppose their natural rhythms. Decreasing river width caused by the levees, and decreasing soil from urbanization, all create the perfect storm making the Mississippi River harder to manage as it endures so much change.

Because of climate change, many communities are stuck in a cycle of flooding and rebuilding. This is clearly not a sustainable system. Flooding tangibly impacts

communities who live close to the river, dramatically altering their livelihood when the levees have reached their hold or when flood gates are opened. The 2018 Environmental Research Letters tell us that “nearly 41 million Americans are at risk from flooding rivers,” (Ossman) the Mississippi River making up a good part of this. Furthermore, the ramifications of flooding extend beyond immediate communities, affecting vast regions such as deltas. Deltas, the places where river sediments settle and rivers slow down, lead to land being built over time, and this land is extremely vulnerable to flooding. The Mississippi Delta in particular, is one such specific place that bears the brunt of environmental changes and sees waters that threaten to overtake their community. In a piece for *Knowable Magazine,* Boyce Upholt delves into the historical impact of flooding on these vital ecosystems. The article “Is This Age of the Delta Coming to an End?” states that human civilization started when modern river deltas started to appear, so it is alarming to consider what consequences will continue to arise in the ecosystem and within communities nearby, as we see the river deltas diminishing and threatening to fully disappear. Oil extraction, groundwater removal, and rising sea levels are a few examples of what accelerates the deterioration of such an “at risk” region (“Is This Age”).

Clearly, flooding is a tangible problem facing the river today; however, drought threatens the Mississippi as well. It is natural for the drier fall months to produce a receding level in the river, but in the last few years the water level has drastically gone down. So much so that gargantuan beaches have emerged on the river’s shoreline, revealing shipwrecks and Civil War artifacts, but most notably leading to islands appearing in the middle of what used to be a deep, flowing part of the river. Barges carrying multiple tons of essential goods have run aground and gotten stuck for weeks at

a time, in fact. “In October 2022, more than three thousand barges were actually stalled on the river because they couldn’t get through” (Florio and Doyle) resulting in billions of dollars lost. For a season, fishing was only possible in the main channel rather than oxbow lakes since they dried up. Successful dredging efforts allowed the river to flow again, but this band-aid fix is only temporary. The river will dry again.

The other main component of the Mississippi River’s challenges today includes water pollution. This water pollution mainly comes from the agricultural sector, as “agriculture pollutes more waterways than any other industry” (“How Agriculture Affects”). When excess nitrogen and phosphorus from fertilizer runoff, animal waste from livestock operations, farmland soil erosion, and other agricultural and wastewater discharges enter the Mississippi River from waters throughout the Basin, these chemicals travel down to the Gulf of Mexico, triggering rapid algae growth. The Mississippi River Collaboration explains that the process, called eutrophication, robs the waters of the Gulf of oxygen, creating a dead zone where aquatic life either relocates or simply dies. In fact “the Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone is the 2nd largest Dead Zone in the world and is directly related to the clearly traceable levels of nitrogen and phosphorus pollution entering the Mississippi River” (“Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone”). In addition to the Gulf’s hard hits, downstream lakes and reservoirs can experience similar harmful effects with eutrophication, algal blooms, and depleted oxygen that come from the agricultural sector; however this can be impacted even as a result of the river’s nutrient rich fresh waters being released and altering the lake’s brackish composition. “The Mississippi River itself can even be impacted by excessive salinity, turbidity, and toxicity,” leading to an environment that is forever changed (Laitos and Ruckriegle).

Overall, insufficient oversight has been the main contributor to this preventable problem, which is why ongoing lawsuits and petitions are in action. The Environmental Protection Agency has chosen to allow individual states to enact their own desired "nutrient reduction strategies, or the necessary regulations or control measures" ("Gulf of Mexico Dead Zone"). Each state is reliant on *voluntary* compliance from the individual farmers and unique industries, and this has led to unsuccessful results; essentially, no one is complying because they do not have to. The reason they don't have to comply is because "under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, it is unlawful to discharge dredged or fill material into waters of the United States unless the discharge is covered under an exemption specified in Section 404" ("Clean Water Act"). Agricultural operations such as the aforementioned fall into the exemption. The Clean Water Act was intended to "restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation's waters"(Laitos and Ruckriegle); how ironic then, that it exempts agriculture from being regulated, failing to achieve its intended purpose. The Clean Water Act labels "agricultural and silvicultural activities, including runoff from fields and crop and forest lands," as nonpoint sources of pollution, effectively removing these sources from federal oversight in doing so ("Clean Water Act"). Vaguely defined "best management practices" are encouraged but not enforced for controlling runoff. This policy of self regulation is seemingly synonymous with no regulation.

A multidimensional solution needs to be established for each critical, complex challenge the river faces. As it relates to the river's flooding, our society has completely changed the river through building levees. Some people want to build more levees, others want to continue to just plug holes and maintain upkeep; however, the best present

solution is to push the levees back. Colin Wellenkamp, executive director of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative, recommends this in order to reconnect the river to its natural floodplains, thus allowing silt to deposit in a more natural way and letting wetlands absorb polluted runoff. He expresses that “what we’ve been doing for the past 100 years isn’t working, so maybe we ought to do something else” (“Can the Mississippi River Handle”).

Many folks agree with this approach, including one notable Mississippi River advocate, John Ruskey, who shares his desire to see the wilderness expand. Pulling back the levees, he says, would “benefit the entire continent,” (“Wild Miles”) allowing landmass to accumulate, lakes to regenerate, the Gulf's dead zone to shrink, communities to be aided, and flood control to be simplified. Where the river would be allowed to expand, flood levels and water velocity could be effectively reduced. While this would initially impact some farms and communities in the area, the idea with this goal would be for compensation to be given to the smaller number of affected livelihoods that would be adjusted for the sake of everyone.

As a result of river expansion, the Mississippi would then be allowed ‘breathing room’ and be able to flow in a manner more closely resembling its natural state. The Nature Conservancy, in collaboration with state and federal agencies, is spearheading initiatives aimed at restoring wetlands, implementing flood warning systems, and enhancing flood insurance programs involving buyouts of the aforementioned vulnerable land (Ossman). Additionally, stakeholders are actively pursuing nature based solutions to address land loss and flood consequences, such as a plan by “The Nature Conservancy in partnership with the Army Corps and Natural Resources Conservation Service to restore

and reconnect 750,000 acres of historic floodplains" ("Mississippi River Basin"). Also, many diversion projects are underway that direct vital sediment to the Delta, in turn safeguarding vulnerable Gulf cities.

Despite these proactive measures, challenges persist especially in advocacy. The environmental nonprofit advocacy organization, American Rivers, is actively working to combat proposals by the Corps of Engineers to build new levees (or raise them) or proposals that promote unnecessary new locks at several dams which would cause habitat degradation. In one case specifically that American Rivers is fighting against, a proposed levee in New Madrid, Missouri would cut off a floodplain connected to the river, and it would drain an area of wetland the size of Washington D.C. ("Cultural Treasure"). This further illustrates the drastic impact that one singular action can have, and how unnatural creations have dire implications on the ecosystem that would in turn affect the population.

One specific element that has been a continuous conversation in regards to a solution for flooding in one region is the Yazoo drainage pumps, that would push "100,000 gallons/ second of flood water out of the vulnerable backwater area and into the big river" ("The Promise Yazoo Pumps"). Boyce Upholt explains in this article that the pumps were initially proposed since Yazoo is like a bathtub filled with water when it rains; so, nearly 40 years ago, construction on the pumps began. However, work was halted after a few months and the pumps were never actually installed in effort to protect a bordering hardwood wetland forest. The promise of pumps resuming was slashed in 2008 when the EPA decided definitely that the pumps would damage 67,000 acres of wetland habitat.

The majority of Mississippians are in agreement that this project is not smart; however, within the Delta, comments have been almost universally in favor. The residents have expressed their desperate need for any level of immediate relief, even though the 380 million dollar project would likely fall upon taxpayers and would not actually solve much. The desire for immediate relief is understandable, as the water level in the south Delta peaked this year at "98.2 feet above sea level," nearly two feet higher than the former record, according to the Mississippi Levee Board ("The Promise Yazoo Pumps"). However, The Levee Board admits that even with the pumps in place, 350,000 acres would have still been underwater during the 2019 flood, including over 100,000 acres of farmland. The pumps would help with excess flooding, yes, but the Corps establishes the fact that at least 91 residences and more than 400 miles of roads would still be impacted by flooding even at the stage to which the pumps would promise to hold the waters.

All in all, even if the Yazoo Pumps are ever revived, it would be decades before work may even begin again, as there is currently a nearly $100 billion backlog in Army Corps infrastructure projects. At the end of the day, we can try to strong-arm our way out of this as hard as we please, and engineer all the solutions we can dream up, but Mother Nature can and will do what Mother Nature wants. Ricky Boyett, of the Army Corps of Engineers, explains that they are just trying to do their best to hold that inevitable reality on pause ("Can the Mississippi River Handle").

As it relates to solutions that focus mainly on the challenges presented with pollutants impacting the river and beyond, The Mississippi River Collaboration is one organization striving to mitigate effects of such harmful pollutants. The group monitors

the causes and effects of pollution in the waters and helps manage programs to combat the issue. The Mississippi River Collaboration is a powerful advocacy group as it fights for "conservation compliance policies and heavier regulations, and the group largely educates the public, media, and decision-makers about the need for cleaner water" ("How Agriculture Affects"). The organization also participates in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's State Technical Committees, and leaders within the group even serve as experts representing environmental interests in multi-stakeholder policy processes.

The ultimate successful solution would be removing agricultural wastewater from the Clean Water Act's exemption but this is not likely to happen; therefore dependence on advocacy groups, educational groups, and state level solutions is key. The Mississippi River Collaboration's article "How Agriculture Affects the Mississippi River" delivers some suggestions in fact, for such state solutions that provide hopeful ideas for ramification. To begin, developing and establishing nutrient reduction strategies designed to meet clean water goals for local rivers, local lakes, and the Gulf of Mexico is crucial. Additional suggestions include adopting state laws that limit pollution in stormwater runoff from farm fields, improving enforcement of state and federal CAFO regulations, and targeting the available public funding for conservation activities to prioritize watersheds in order to have the greatest impact. Lastly, farm level solutions are useful to consider as well: including base fertilizer application rates on soil tests, minimizing soil tillage, using continuous living cover, applying fertilizer when it is needed by a growing crop, treating gully erosion, avoiding application of chemical fertilizer or animal waste on snow, ice, or frozen ground, and restricting cattle access to waterways ("How Agriculture Affects").

Preservation of America's rivers, especially the Mississippi River is clearly a crucial, yet challenging task. In 2022, "the Mississippi River was reported as the sixth Most Endangered River" in the United States (Amitay). For the last 60 years, it has been widely agreed upon that policies and attitudes are creating a crisis on this river. Therefore, "the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System was created by Congress in 1968 to preserve certain rivers with outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values in a free-flowing condition for the enjoyment of present and future generations" ("Mississippi"). How much preservation is actually happening is up for debate, but at the end of the day, the scenic Mississippi River is accessible and beckoning explorers of all types, even though it looks nothing like it did and will look nothing like it does. Despite all the river's challenges, and the fact that this is an engineered environment, there is indeed still a wildness to be found. You just have to accept the river's great invitation and go looking a little deeper.

The fact that the river's floodplain, which once spread as much as "50 miles in each direction, has been reduced to just 10 percent of its historical size," makes it seem impossible for any of the river to be wild ("Wild Miles"). After all, America's most famous river has become largely defined by levees made by human hands; however, humans have influenced every place on earth. Even the most remote corners of our planet have been affected. Our whole world has inevitably become engineered and controlled. Therefore, we must not truly think about measuring wildness by a state of being *purely* one hundred percent untouched, since all is directly or indirectly touched. Instead, it is more so about if an ecosystem is *intact*. This is how Ruskey considers nearly "two-thirds of the riverbank" along this southern stretch of the Mississippi, to be wild ("Wild

Miles"). Despite the rapidly industrializing and noisy South, this is some of the only wilderness that remains. Wild miles, as Ruskey explains, describe the places on the river where there is still little evidence of the permanent intervention of mankind. The river is indeed wild, then, and is trying to show us her unruly and unrestrainable glory as she endures through each season.

Early on in our species' history, we changed ourselves to fit a specific environment. As technology advanced though, we became able to manipulate natural spaces in a big way, which is when the problems started. Over the last few centuries, we've been taming the mighty Mississippi to fit into our desired lives. We've bent it to our own will and fooled ourselves into thinking we are completely in control. What we've been so quick to forget along the way, though, is that it is important to not be in control. Ruskey advocates for opening ourselves to all the possibilities of the universe when we let go. Instead of barring the Mississippi from functioning like a natural river, releasing total control is beneficial, he emphasizes. The river has surely been tamed but it has not been completely trashed. There is so much opportunity to dive into the realm of recreation and exploration and go deeper than the surface.

Despite its earned spot as a star in quintessential American literature and music, scientists call the Lower Mississippi "one of the least studied rivers in the country" ("After the Oxbow"). The Upper Mississippi is better understood due to more federal funding for research; the Lower Mississippi has been primarily focused on controlled efforts so the farmland does not flood and so shipping can stay unharmed. While the upper part of the river is more narrow, the Lower Mississippi has a mature fullness: "everything expands further South: the face of the river, the pools between shoals, the

size of the islands, the sweep of the sandbars, the length of the willow forests, the depth of the muddy banks," (Ruskey) therefore providing rich opportunities to seek and explore what's beyond.

This river dominates our world, yet it is a mystery to most of its closest neighbors. People have a certain type of experience with the river, commonly driving over a bridge and seeing the water from a distance; they do not have a tangible encounter up close with it. The lower river truly provides opportunities for a new type of refreshed encounter though, as it boasts an enlarged expanse of water rolling and tumbling, changing in sight and sound, and inspiring new attitudes towards the mother river. As Boyce Upholt suggests in his article "Wild Miles on the Big River," the Lower Mississippi could be called the *real* Mississippi, as it is a big river fed by the collected waters of many tributaries but it is also the place where the waters of the continent finally merge.

Truly there is a season for everything… the sun rises and sets, the moon waxes and wanes, the wind gusts and is still… but the river always dominates. It fluctuates in scale, from low water to high water, flood to drought, it changes in curvature, color, pattern, biology, and flow but its inherent character remains constant. The topography is constantly in a state of shifting from human hands and natural consequences, but the river is ever powerful, ever mysterious, ever alluring.

Our lives are not as directly intertwined as they once were with our mighty mother river, but they are certainly indirectly and infinitely wrapped up in more ways than people realize. We are currently in a time where we tend to forget the wild resource in our backyards, therefore the river must be intentionally sought out in order to be

appreciated. While this river bears scars and fresh wounds alike, as it has been shaped and changed through environmental circumstances (natural and unnatural) and bent to human will, it has truly endured *despite*. Our own experiences with the river have also shifted, our complex attitudes in a constant limbo of evolution, but the river ultimately maintains its integrity. The Mississippi River does not look like it used to and it will also never look the same again, but the river continues to show us proudly her strength and character. This very character of hers: recognizable and memorable, is what inspires return time and time again. When often, it seems like nothing more than a superhighway of water: gray- brown, ominous, overly engineered, resembling something dead, it is remarkably the opposite. It is a wild river truly alive. By embracing an attitude of appreciation and respect instead of anxiety or ignorance, we can securely place our hope in what lies beyond us, in what is greater than us: the truth that the Mississippi possesses a rhythm of its own and despite it all, she has and will continue to endure.

CHAPTER II: QUAPAW CANOE COMPANY

"Wherever you are, our heart is with you; we're all in this together. The river exemplifies the power in us all being together, working together, because the river, like water, connects all of us. Our heart goes out to your heart, wherever you are, and as we say around here: "may the river be with you."' - John Ruskey

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You could argue that the most noteworthy figure of our day in regards to the Lower Mississippi River is a man named John Ruskey. His connection to the river and his work on its mighty waters, is motivating a generation to consider taking a new approach in how they interact with it. In fact, he argues that "we're all part of the river; the river flows through all of us" (Ross). The Mississippi naturally touches more people in the United States than any other river, truly the circulatory system of this nation. While we all are innately intertwined with this powerful and beautiful life source, so many of us are disconnected; however, looking at Ruskey's lifelong pursuit and devoted mission of bringing the river to a new light, inspires hope.

Ruskey by nature is the definition of an artist: he brings things to life with his wild curiosity, creativity, passion, and imagination. He is a painter, a musician, a writer, a craftsman, and an outdoor adventurist. He is known for many things, but most notably for his work building "voyageur style stripper canoes for use on the wild waters of the Lower Mississippi River" and for guiding others into the wildest place remaining in the center of

North America (“Driftwood Johnnie”). Ruskey is a self proclaimed “worker bee in the colony of his queen, the Lower Mississippi River” (“Wild Miles”). Surprisingly enough though, he was not born in Mississippi; he is not even a native to the South, but rather his origin story is one from the Rocky Mountains of Colorado. Ruskey instead, was born in Bear Creek Valley at the headwaters of the South Fork of the Platte River (“Driftwood Johnnie”).

While the Platte River was surely no Mississippi, he grew up still with water always calling his name. When Ruskey graduated from prep school in Colorado in 1982, he ventured to the Mississippi River region. He moved to Clarksdale, originally inspired by the Delta for the blues music but continued to return because he fell in love with the river, despite a wild first encounter. Ruskey’s first river experience was a five month expedition at the end of 1982 on a 12 by 24 foot raft (“Driftwood Johnnie"). The raft that he and his friend built, wrecked, and the boys were submerged in the freezing winter waters of the river. Ruskey claims that that night he should have died; but he calls this his creation myth of sorts… his origin story. “He made a promise, to himself and to the river: if he survived the night, he would return to this beautiful place.”(“Wild Miles”).

Ruskey’s next step was offering tours of the magical and powerful river he had fallen in love with. He bought a 17 foot aluminum grumman canoe and offered tours for folks wanting an authentic river experience up close (“The Mighty Mississippi”). Over the years, Ruskey’s involvement in the region deepened and he actually became the primary curator for the Delta Blues Museum. Ruskey emphasizes this was a dream job, but working indoors made him feel claustrophobic and overwhelmed. Ruskey explained his connection to the river as a push and pull scenario: “Pulling me was the Mighty

Mississippi River itself," but the office job at the Delta Blues Museum was also pushing him away from the confines of an inside life and towards the great outdoors where he felt refreshed, recharged, reinvigorated and reenergized ("Driftwood Johnnie"). One day he finally decided "I had to go," and so he went to the river.

This transition enabled Ruskey to make life on the river his full time focus. Boyce Upholt, in his article *Wild Miles on the Big River*, details the brilliant way Ruskey interacts with the mighty Mississippi, providing a clear picture of his love affair with her waters: "If you see Ruskey there, on this river, you see a man come alive. His eyes sharpen. His posture loosens. He sings as he paddles. Every sight inspires a story" ("Wild Miles"). This is still the same river that nearly killed John Ruskey, but he was able to find peace and prosperity… and a career.

When Ruskey founded the Quapaw Canoe Company in Clarksdale, Mississippi in 1998, it was the first ever "wilderness outfitter and guiding service on the Lower Mississippi" ("Wild Miles"). His hopes were to share his affinity for river exploration and to be able to educate the community on The Mississippi's wild and powerful waters. As he knows the river like the back of his hand, Ruskey describes the Lower Mississippi saying: "down here it's a totally different river. It's wild and rambunctious and chaotic and turbulent and full of unknowns and extremes, and incredible flourishes of nature at her best" (Fisher-Wirth). Such qualities indeed make a river what it is, and are found in beautiful expressive abundance on the Lower Mississippi, which is why it is perfectly fitted for exploration.

The company name was chosen with careful intention, as the word Quapaw denotes the Native American tribe that inhabited the Lower Mississippi basin region in

the 17th century. The Quapaw people's name means the "downstream people" (Proctor). Ruskey describes his ultimate goal in Quapaw and his dedication to bringing people onto the river, saying "we seek to rebalance the imbalance of humanity. The big muddy river and her floodplain create an ideal environment for reconnection to Mother Earth"(Fisher-Wirth).

This connection he speaks about is made possible specifically through his work with canoes. It's important to Ruskey that Quapaw uses nothing else but canoes when they take people out: he says "it's the most essential way of getting on the water, the quietest, the most efficient, the most elegant, and the closest you can get to the spirit of the water" ("Driftwood Johnnie"). To Ruskey, being as close to the water as possible, is imperative, as proximity is what makes the river come alive. Thus, through 24 foot cypress canoes, Quapaw invites people into experiencing the raw, rich, and authentic Mississippi River.

Ruskey's admiration for the vessel of the canoe is not something he is alone in, though. There is in fact, a timeless legacy of canoes: "canoeing dates back 5,000 years in North America," and this is where they reached their most advanced form (Spartz). Civilizations across the globe have been building watercraft for utilitarian purposes for millennia indeed, but the canoe is specifically a North American treasure. Canoes are truly an "art that brings together the purist principles of form, materials and function into one integral and elegant vessel" ("Driftwood Johnnie"). The continent's water based culture as well as ease of materials available (correct type of trees for example) enabled this advancement and dependency on the canoe.

Not only is Ruskey an expert at paddling this vessel but also in its construction. He learned much of his canoe building skills from a man named Ralph Frese who had been building big canoes since the 1960s. In 1999, they built a 26 foot cypress strip voyageur canoe together called the Ladybug, later dubbed the "Queen of the Lower Mississippi River" inspired by her many successful journeys on the water. Describing his artistic and imaginative process in creating canoes, Ruskey says "the primary job of the carver is to find the spirit of the log and create a new life for it in the shape of a canoe" ("Driftwood Johnnie"). He explains that there was a certain feel to the logs he and Ralph brought in: after floating the logs to determine where the bulk of the wood mass was found, the log was moved to the carving shed to visualize possibilities for what it would become.

Ruskey's canoes are truly a unique and intimate work of art from beginning in process, to the end as a functional result. Throughout the last 2 decades, Ruskey has built dozens of dugout and stripper canoes for journeys down the river. Interestingly enough, the voyageur canoes built at Quapaw actually have no right angles on them; they are fluid with the water and the most equipped vessel to have on the river (Ross). He has honed his process over the years and experimented with the best materials and methods to make a craft that will provide transformative experiences.

While it is true that Quapaw builds magnificent canoes, more than anything, the company wants to advocate for people paying attention to the wildness around them. People are separated from the river, but Ruskey is in the business of reconnecting them. In this quintessentially American adventure, in watercraft made from cottonwoods and bald cypress trees, the canoes are paddled on the big river indeed "in search of wild

experiences in one of the most important ecosystems in North America" (Fisher-Wirth). Ruskey says he's fighting against people's common perception of the Mississippi, and striving to reverse their attitudes towards the sacred river system in their backyard. He classifies the river as a "criminally underrated" ("Driftwood Johnnie") place to explore, as people miss out on the opportunity due to preconceived notions. The way the river has been engineered plays a role in the disconnect, as many people who live along the Mississippi, for example, see a levee, not the river itself: it's a working river in many places, not a sacred space. However, Ruskey wants to show people that not too far away it *can,* in fact, take on a new life.

At the beginning of his Quapaw undertaking, Ruskey noticed that almost 1,000 miles of the river was unused. No one on the Lower Mississippi was engaging with her. Even people who did grow up in the South, close to her waters, never had an authentic and intimate encounter with her and never saw the other side of the levee. For locals and visitors alike who even *wanted* to see the river, and "experience it, touch its currents and learn its ways," there was "no one to guide them, to show them the way" ("Driftwood Johnnie"). Ruskey's work invites people to understand that they have access to this great and mighty resource, and he provides a new proper introduction.

Youth are a crucial part of Ruskey's mission to reintroduce people to the river. The Mighty Quapaws Apprenticeship Program was founded for the youth of the Mississippi Delta in the same year as the river outfitters opened. Ruskey has a heart for mentoring low income students and, in fact, most kids in this program come from severely distressed neighborhoods. The program provides one on one instruction that focuses on carving canoes and learning the ways of the river ("Driftwood Johnnie").

Ruskey explains that in this master to student program, the students hone skills of learning to sharpen tools, carve out canoes, steer canoes using proper technique, and set up camp in all conditions. Besides pay, Quapaw apprentices are also rewarded with their own canoe to name, paint, and paddle once accomplished in navigating all river conditions.

In 2011, Ruskey founded the Lower Mississippi River Foundation for "access, education, and the betterment of public outdoor recreation on the Middle & Lower Mississippi River" (Fisher-Wirth). In partnership with the Lower Mississippi River Foundation, Quapaw runs the only summer camp based on the Lower Mississippi River: a week long summer camp for boys and one for girls, that provides rafting and carving educational opportunities for underprivileged youth. Most kids in attendance are from Philipps and Coahoma Counties, and are locals who have the potential to make great impact through all they learn. While this camp is $1,000 in value, Ruskey only asks the families for a $100 commitment. Ruskey understands that seeing photographs, reading books, and hearing stories are valuable, but nothing has the ability to make an impact like immersing children directly in the environment (Fisher-Wirth).

Quapaw does lots of meaningful work with youth and Ruskey's hope in the future generation as well as dedication to providing equitable access for children of every background, are the driving forces of the operation. Ruskey explains that one of his mentors, Johnnie Billington, taught him the impact of teaching children how to take care of mother earth. As a result, Quapaw now "works to engage thousands of young people through hands-on learning, helping to foster in them a deep appreciation of the natural environment" (Ruskey). Indeed, the river can be dangerous and seemingly ominous at

times; however, with the right guide, it is an awesome adventure. This is why it's so important to Ruskey to get Mississippi schoolkids out on the water: “He wants them to *know* this part of their landscape” (Block). Once they paddle the Mississippi, they go home forever changed.

One of Quapaw’s most popular and frequently run river opportunities is the Community Paddle. All ages can sign up for an afternoon of canoe rafting on the Lower Mississippi River, guided by Ruskey. As this adventure is “free for children under 18 and one fourth price for educators,” (Fisher-Wirth) it emphasizes Ruskey’s passion for getting those who can make a big impact, out on the river. Ruskey also offers tours that groups can fully customize based on the occasion and their skill level. Whether a one day adventure, a month long trip, or a week long summer camp, Quapaw’s mission ultimately remains the same: to provide intimate experiences with nature and create a relationship with the river.

A true relationship with the river is a rarity, Ruskey explains, and not enough people get on it. “While more than 600 people summited Mount Everest last year and more than 700 through-hiked the Appalachian Trail, Ruskey believes only 50 paddled the length of the river” (“Paddling the Lower Mississippi”). While Ruskey has not himself paddled the entire length from Itasca to the Gulf, he has, though, “covered every stretch below St. Louis at least four times,” as Upholt writes. In 2011, he launched a series of expeditions and over a period of six years he covered this territory. This is what has enabled Ruskey to log more hours paddling the Mississippi than anyone alive.

Ruskey does not shy away at any part of immersing himself in the river. People do often approach Ruskey with concern, shock, and alarm when learning that

he camps on it, swims in it, and boils its water to make his coffee. After all, the Mississippi is supposed to be dismal, worthless, and foul. Charles Dickens even declared it an "intolerable river" in 1842 after a steamboat voyage, decrying its "slimy length and ugly freight" ("Beyond the Levee"). The stories we've always heard about this river set the scene in a grim light; historically, many of these ideas are not entirely wrong, but those which characterized the river hundreds of years ago need not do the same today.

Ruskey explains that one specific element, the 1972 Clean Water Act, really did help with the quality of the water, so he can safely enjoy the river in the ways he does and be confident in bringing others into it as well. Essentially, this act established a basic structure for regulating pollutant discharges and gave the EPA the authority to implement pollution control programs ("History Clean Water Act"). While Ruskey didn't come down to the Mississippi until after the regulations were in place and things improved, so he cannot speak on the water far in the past, he shares that he has seen things get better even in the 40 years he has been here. He knows that the water quality at one point before the CWA was so bad it smelled and made people sick. However, now you can swim on the Lower Mississippi in most any place. Ruskey strives to use every voice of opposition as an opportunity to change people's minds: not to prove anything, but to passionately encourage them and show them that this is *their* river too. Ruskey is indeed *so* passionate about the river that he even paints watercolor interpretations of the Mississippi, which he hands out on his journeys as a way to introduce wary locals to the wilderness that flows through their backyard.

While Ruskey is the foundation of managing Quapaw and its related resources, he does rely on other trusted employees who help make it all happen. Ruskey shares in an interview with *About Place Journal* that Quapaw has five full time guides, six part time guides, six shuttle drivers, and about a dozen retired on-call guides that can be relied on if needed. Furthermore, the operation, while based in Clarksdale, Mississippi, also has branches in Memphis and Vicksburg. As for Ruskey's "go to sidekick," in making everything happen, Mark "River" Peoples entered the scene a decade ago and has been by his side ever since. "River," as he likes to be called, was actually a "four year All American football player" (Ross) and played professionally for the New York Giants; however, despite his accomplishments he always felt that something was missing. As he grew up hunting and fishing near the big river in St. Louis, water was always a big part of his life, so he returned to what felt natural: going back to his roots of the river. In a story of "right place, right time," River ran into one of Ruskey's canoes being used by a friend at the time, and received an offer to come work for Ruskey. River at last found what was missing.

Ruskey was glad to be able to invest in River, as well as the numerous other guides and students of his that he has mentored, as Ruskey measures his impact through people he's been able to apprentice. Ruskey wants to be able to pass on his knowledge and unique skills so that not everything dies when he does. Mark River has been an integral part of trips down the river over the last decade and in research that the two have worked to complete. River's overall goal with his work at Quapaw, he says, is "systemic health of the river" and his greatest joy is to invest his time in mentoring Delta youth and educating them on the importance of "protection and preservation of our national treasure

for generations to come" ("Mark River Peoples"). With everyone who works diligently to keep Quapaw's mission alive and thriving, it's a prime example that it takes a village to serve a village.

Ruskey, with the help of trusted friends in his sphere, has spent the last several decades compiling all he knows about the river into resources for the community. His projects include *Wild Miles* and the *Rivergator: Paddler's Guide to the Lower Mississippi River.* "The Gator" as Ruskey informally calls it, is a "mile-by-mile paddler's guide written for canoeists, kayakers, stand-up-paddleboarders, and anyone else plying the waters of the Lower Mississippi River in human-powered craft" ("Wild Miles"). The name *Rivergator* is derived from Zadok Cramer's *The Navigator*, an early 19th century description of the Mississippi and other frontier rivers. This guide that Ruskey completed in 2015, is over 1,000 pages long, leading readers 1,155 miles down the Lower Mississippi River water trail from St. Louis to the Gulf of Mexico, which is the "longest river- based water trail in the United States" ("Wild Miles"). *Rivergator,* in its over one million words, also contains photos, paintings, maps and videos describing the Mississippi River as well as "plenty of history, some lovely storytelling and lots of philosophical wisdom," as Upholt explains.

Since Ruskey spent countless hours perfecting his massive murals recreating the river's topography for the *Rivergator* site, he explains in a short film created by Hamline University that "as I'm painting I try to relive some of my experiences." He recalls that he has in fact, always been attracted to the shape of the river even as a young boy, and how his imagination "was peaked by those beautiful meanders and curve lines," (Hamline University) since the rivers out in the western canyons where he grew up, lack

the same curvature. Ruskey's detailed depiction of the river and impassioned approach to capturing its magnificent glory, is a privilege for us all to look in on, and appreciate the work he has devoted to this project. Since the river is most often a mystery to even its closest neighbors, Ruskey hopes that this resource will inspire Americans to explore the opportunities that exist on the Mississippi. He hopes it will open the potential of the Lower Mississippi as a paddler's destination and bridge the gap between paddlers and this river.

At the end of the day, this river gives life to us; it gives us all we need externally and internally, but we do not appreciate it. Nothing will produce a response of empathy towards the river unless people physically spend time on her waters. Sure, more education on its "history, challenges and opportunities *could* make people more thoughtful about its future" (Spartz), but simply learning about the river or seeing it blur past in the car is not enough to truly have an affected heart and mind. Creating access and enabling people to have up close experiences, changes attitudes. Ruskey is excited about getting people to engage with the river so it doesn't become over-modernized in every part, and so it isn't only given a thought in the context of industry.

Ruskey is always dancing on the line of balancing how to invite people into a place that will impact them and create the potential for positive change in how the river is viewed and cared for, with also considering what happens when too many people are invited into a place that is cherished for its emptiness, solitude and wildness. Ultimately, Ruskey shares that the best place to be in, is one of appreciation and deep awe and respect of the river's power yet fragility. With all challenges currently presenting themselves to the river, he believes showing people what the river is really like, is the

best method to change. After all, you don't fight for something you don't care about, and you don't care about something you don't know. Getting to know the river is our solution.

"Americans need reconnection to the wilderness," Ruskey passionately believes ("Driftwood Johnnie"). He communicates that this need is inside of us; it's attributed to our heritage. As much as we need the river though, the river also needs us: the Lower Mississippi River, particularly, suffers from misunderstanding, as most people think of it as a drainage ditch or highway for commerce. However, it is a place that needs to be protected and cared for. It's a wilderness in the heart of the South. It's one of the biggest rivers in the world and it flows through our backyard. The ultimate goal at Quapaw, Ruskey shares, is "health through paddling and caring for America's Rivers" and "happiness through experience of the wilderness" ("Driftwood Johnnie"). On the river, you blossom. You become reconnected to the spirit that governs the Universe. Your spirit soars. Your imagination is opened. You become closer to the Creator. And you experience magic. Ruskey says confidently, "I've traveled all over North America and other parts of the world, but I've found closer spiritual and emotional interaction with what is the true feeling of wilderness here over the levee on this big river, this big wild river, than I've found anywhere else" (Fisher-Wirth).

Ruskey's compelling words encourage people in what an indescribably different feeling the Mississippi elicits; he shares that it is a whole different feeling to be on the edge of something so big and inscrutable. Ruskey compares this feeling to peering out over the edge of the Grand Canyon… you can clearly see what makes the Grand Canyon magnificent, he says, but on the Mississippi, e*verything is mysterious* (39). Ruskey shares how this mystery is in how the complete life stories of only a few thousand animals on

the river are known. He also shares that it's in how we know more about the "dark side of the moon than, for instance, the bottom of the river, in this mysterious landscape" (Fisher-Wirth).

While not every element of the river will be known, encouraging deeper exploration, adventure, and connection to the mighty Mississippi enables the river to have a future that is positively entangled with her people. While "it looks like a dead river when you drive over it on the interstate" (Hamline University), the Mississippi comes alive when you're on it. When you're out there on the river in a canoe, the magic happens and you leave changed. Nothing allows you to truly experience and feel the river like you do when you paddle. In a canoe, your arms are the motor, your eyes are the radar, and your heart guides you where the river ever calls.

Ruskey and Quapaw Canoe Company understand the wild beauty of the Mississippi River and desire nothing more than for people to know it personally. When we know the river, we are more apt to take care of the river, thus enabling the river to in turn take care of us. Quapaw's work with people locally from the Delta all the way to foreign visitors from across the globe, continues to make an impact on not only their lives and spheres of influence but also on the river itself. Truly, "the Mississippi is us; it defines who we are" (Ross) in years prior, in the present, and for generations to come.

CHAPTER III: THE CREATIVE PROCESS”

“Nature never did betray the heart that loved her; 'tis her privilege, through all the years of this our life, to lead from joy to joy: for she can so inform the mind that is within us, so impress with quietness and beauty.” - William Wordsworth

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When originally strategizing ideas for my thesis, diving deeper into some element of the Mississippi River was always an alluring choice for me. Growing up on the Atlantic Coast of South Florida, I’ve always had water in my backyard, and while North Mississippi can at times feel like a world away, it is quite similar in the sense that this place is closely intertwined with the nearby presence of big waters as well. My love for aquatic environments inspired me to look deeper into what was around me in Mississippi and consider what I could do, being just a short hour from the river’s mighty waters. I quickly became inspired by a keen awareness of the following reality: the Mississippi river is always speaking, but needs someone to amplify her voice in a fresh light.

From the beginning of dreaming up what this project could become, I felt excited by the prospect of creating a multimedia piece that would enable me to best tell a story that would focus on the river’s innate beauty and value, and allow it to speak for itself. I wanted to create a visual piece specifically that would elicit a sense of deepened fascination in the river, as well as a desire among viewers to think about it, talk about it, and maybe even experience it in a new way. While a paper can surely inform and

educate, nothing sparks curiosity and implores viewers to respond in the same capacity as a visual piece. I consider it a blessing to be able to create in a way that evokes such joy and creativity for me, as video storytelling is my greatest passion. I've had a long lasting love for crafting visually captivating scenes that focus on natural environments, as this has been a part of my life since I was in high school. Traveling to remote locations across the globe from Indonesia to Iceland, to places in between, surely has formed my appreciation for the natural world and capturing its story in an alluring way; however, places in my own backyard have a *unique* sense of mystery and intrigue to me.

In early 2023 when this thesis timeline began, I only knew I had hopes to focus a project on the river; by the end of my spring semester that year, I had a concrete idea of where I wanted to go. I learned about Quapaw Canoe Company one day in casual conversation with the owner of my favorite coffee shop in town. She had always wanted to experience one of Quapaw's river adventures, and was prompted to share her fascination in Quapaw's mission upon hearing some of my thesis ideas. I immediately realized that this was the missing piece that was finally found. Now, I had a specific lens through which I could look at this gargantuan river. As I began stages of researching and idea mapping, I recognized I wanted to treat my video component almost like visual poetry. At that point I had yet to go down to Quapaw Canoe or even see the Mississippi River for myself, but I knew already that I'd be leaving changed, and leaving with imagery that needed to be showcased in a unique way.

The first time I went down to Quapaw was the start of summer of 2023; I had elected to stay in Mississippi for a week longer after school let out, postponing my 13 hour drive back to my native sunshine state so I could venture down to the Delta and

begin to dig into this story. I had contacted John Ruskey at Quapaw and set up a time to interview him and his co-captain Mark River about their stories on the Mississippi. Excited, but nervous as I battled imposter syndrome, I readied myself for my first adventure on May 16th, 2023. I had never gone somewhere before, to explicitly just film by myself; it was an adventure of its own just preparing physically and mentally for my solo journey. I made sure to test all the audio and visual equipment before I headed into the field, and as I drove down to Clarksdale, Mississippi, I brainstormed questions for Ruskey and River. I felt like a real journalist.

Making my way to Quapaw, I drove through the flattest land imaginable on roads that felt like they stretched out towards infinity. I had ample time to gather my thoughts and open my mind for all I was about to learn when I parked my car in the sleepy delta town that was home to the renowned canoe shop. I entered the eclectic looking establishment, *Quapaw Canoe* written in a chalky font above the doorway, tattered prayer flags hanging from the rafters, brightly colored papers advertising events posted on every square inch of window pane, and just took it all in. Inside, it was vibrant too: 'River Gator' watercolor prints adorned the walls, polished 29 foot handmade voyageur canoes layed in every corner, five foot posters were tacked up displaying the mighty Mississippi, and magazines, journals, and guidebooks lay open on every surface. While I waited to meet the river professionals, I meandered into the back room where I marveled at the sight of row upon row of more canoes, both finished and unfinished. Other than the water crafts, their paddles, and essential river gear, the only thing in the room was just a countertop and one small cushioned stool … even so, I could tell this is where the magic happened.

As I finally met the personable John Ruskey and Mark River, I was eager to learn more about their lives so deeply intertwined with the river. I chose to film them outside behind the shop… a space complete with old canoes laying around in the grassy field, hammocks hung up in the surrounding trees, and a tributary of the river flowing gently past in the background. Setting up the camera, tripod, microphone with its unfolding stand, and ensuring everything was operating correctly was an exciting new experience I welcomed. I tested the volume of their voices with my headphones on, and then began the journey of diving deeper into the enriching stories of Ruskey and River. It proved challenging to navigate background noises when filming, such as wind gusts and work trucks clattering past on the nearby street. One other piece that I had to navigate was how I adjusted my questions since Ruskey's energy levels began to dwindle after about 20 minutes. I was able to prioritize certain questions that I knew I may want to include in my video component. As I listened, I had to balance many thoughts. I was conscious of the shot and framing, as well as outside noises and mine and Ruskey's dialogue; I wanted to listen with intentionality and respond with empathy and enthusiasm, but also guide the conversation to learn something that was new. I found myself nodding along with wide eyes as both river guides spoke of remarkable tales on the water and how this beautiful natural resource is what gets them out of bed each day. Between my interview with John Ruskey and Mark River, it was a remarkable privilege to be in conversation with people who are wildly impassioned and care so deeply about what they do and why they do it.

Before I left Clarksdale, I went through a worn book that was laying open in the shop, full of heartfelt notes and sincere thank you messages to Ruskey and River for their journey on the river with them. I noticed responses from people across the globe. I

remember wondering how people from The Netherlands, Australia, and Egypt for example, had come to the Mississippi; what could they be doing here and why would they care about this place? Ruskey explained to me that this is much like how we would think about, for example, the Amazon. It's a huge river, it has a rich history, our lives are entangled with it, and it's globally known. How wild that people traveled halfway across the world wide eyed and eager to get on the river yet it flows in my backyard… and while enthusiastic about it sure, my personal appreciation and eagerness paled in comparison to travelers from a different world. Where had I gone wrong and how could I, too, get to a place of deeper appreciation?

The next time I traveled back to Quapaw was the next semester after an entire summer away. I came back excited to finally get out on the river, and on September 23rd I got to immerse myself in a whole new landscape. That day I filmed the guides getting ready at the shop in Clarksdale before following them out to Helena River Park where we'd launch for our river journey. I was classified as the "student videographer" on the Community Paddle canoe trip that day, and I was with all different walks of life, from people my grandparents' age, to middle schoolers on a trip with their teacher, to a little girl with her dad, and to middle aged adults. My daily life as a University student involves minimal interaction with many of these age groups, so getting to experience this adventure from their perspective and listen to their comments was impactful. Being around the young kids especially opened my eyes to seeing the river through their lens. To begin, we dropped in two canoes on the Arkansas side of the river. Where we launched was nearby corn milling operations and industry lining the bank, but as soon as we paddled out for a few minutes it became quiet. Tow boats and fishing boats putt by

and the Helena bridge was still clearly visible in the distance; however, I could see how if we kept going deeper, this would fully melt away.

We hadn't gone far at all, and it was indeed already starting to feel different. Ruskey and River's voices calmly but forcefully commanding us when to rest and when to paddle, and their occasional recounting of tales from their lives intertwined with the river, were the only sounds we heard for a segment of time. Our paddles would dip in the coffee colored water and propel it silently forward. Much of the time I was trying to get shots with my GoPro (my elected waterproof camera since water was splashing everywhere in the canoe) but I was also striving to be deeply present. I was processing my first encounter with the Mississippi up close: gliding across her waters and witnessing my senses come alive in the most unexpected of places. It almost felt as if we were doing something we weren't supposed to do. It felt rebellious and as if we were actively pushing against the status quo. Who else is spending their Saturday like this, I thought. Even with nearby banks that bore signs of our modern world, there was still such a sense of pause and reset. I felt like we were all part of something bigger. It felt massive out there. I had never been in a space so vast in this part of the country, and it opened my eyes to think about how her waters carry on for thousands and thousands of miles…to think I'd only seen a few breaths of it.

After some time paddling, we pulled up to Buck Island. It was massive in scale, and it was exciting to watch the kids on my canoe step out and have freedom to explore a space that at least *felt* quite wild. There were signs of a few footprints in the wet mud, and lines carved in the clay-sand. We weren't the only ones who did this… but there were no other signs that anything had been there in a while. I wandered for a bit and got my

bearings on the land, and decided to fly my drone. I had packed it in a wet bag so I could get the footage I wanted, as I knew my drone would provide the essential visual pieces I needed to make a story come fully alive. Seeing the environment from an aerial perspective was enlightening. Seeing the river's character and how it meandered on forever into the distance was surreal. I flew it over much of the 1,500 acre island and felt a fresh wind of inspiration wash over me in what I could do with these visually poetic and beautiful shots; I felt connected to the river even from my camera hundreds of feet in the sky.

As soon as my battery was low, I steered my drone in the direction home; or at least I thought. It turns out, for the first time in over four years of drone flying, I got confused and piloted it up the river further and away from me, rather than closer. Somehow, as the massive island started to look the same, and as the river stretched on infinitely north and south, I had mixed the directions up. I realized this was happening after sending it about two miles further up the river. I had 10 percent left in the battery, and was able to get it as close back to me as possible, luckily landing it on the edge of the island about 1,000 yards away. As the camera still had two percent battery and was sending out GPS signals, I didn't say anything to the group I was standing near, but I just took off sprinting, determined to find it while it still showed me where it was on the map. Barefoot, I ran without stopping across the island's hot ground, the cracked, dry mud burning and giving me what I knew would turn into blisters the next day. Adrenaline pumping, I finally reached my drone that was sitting only a few feet from the river's edge. My drone signal died out just about a minute after I got to it, and I couldn't believe

my luck in rescuing it. I began the long, painfully hot walk back to the canoes, but feeling more than victorious after my unexpected, heart racing trek.

When I returned, everyone celebrated the happy ending to my story, and Ruskey suggested I take a swim in the river. I plopped in, and the well deserved swim after a sweaty and breathless adventure, connected me even deeper to the river as I slipped through the waters. I slathered the Mississippi mud on my skin and floated in the murky but cool water. The water, while brown up close, had a certain blue tint to it that seemed to reflect the sky when I looked out further. While I had my doubts at first of the safety in swimming in these waters, I looked confidently to Ruskey and River who had been swimming for years and showed no concern. In that moment I died to my fears and uncertainties and responded to the river's great invitation. That moment immersed fully in the Queen Mississippi's waters, I felt like I was finally really listening to what she was trying to say.

Reflecting upon my time traversing the river out in the canoe, I mainly remember how my attitude changed from beginning to end. It was an evolutionary journey of sorts and my ability to sit in peace and admire the river's beauty exponentially increased. I had the privilege to be up close and experience what the water felt like; not only to drift on the surface of, but to be submerged within. I could see the colors of the water and the vast islands with my own eyes, I could feel the mud between my own toes, I could witness the contrast of sounds between industry and stillness with my own ears, I could dip the paddle into the spiraling waters with my own hands. I let the waters seep deeper into my veins and impress themselves upon me. I allowed the sensory experience to bring me to new life. As Ruskey called it: this was my baptism into her wild waters.

In retrospect, I had only acquired merely a glimpse of this place, but even just that taste enabled me to better comprehend her power and mystery. Not only did I have a heart and mind change, but so did the rest of our canoe crew. While in the beginning, complaints sounded every so often from the younger river goers, the children eventually softened, becoming more willing to lend a hand to our trusted guides, more agreeable to the paddling directions, and even more curious in pointing out things or asking questions. The adults seemed to have a renewed sense of vibrancy in their spirit and listened with what seemed like a new intentionality and hunger to learn more about the aquatic environment they had come to deeper know.

By the day's end, all of us in those two long canoes had bonded. Barriers came down. It made me reflect upon how we grew closer even with nothing else in common; simply a mutual appreciation and better understanding of the Mississippi from time logged with her. I considered how our mindset shift on the river is indicative of how I hope other people may be impacted by it in ways they least expect. This experience up close and personal, diving deeper into learning about the ways of the river's mystique, undoubtedly grew us and freshly inspired a more comprehensive understanding of how our decisions affect the water and how we may fight for her.

Upon my last visit to the river this same fall, I perhaps had the greatest revelations. I scheduled a time to go back to film a few more specific drone shots on October 4th. I wanted aerial footage of the canoes moving in action, which was something I was unable to get when I, myself, was an active participant in paddling the week prior. I was thankful that Ruskey suggested I come meet himself, Mark River, and a group going down the river launching from the actual Quapaw landing that day. Getting

there was a backroads adventure that led to a ramp across from island number sixty-three just outside Farrell, MS. As I arrived, I was greeted by eight Italians donned with huge cameras around their necks. I learned that this group had flown in from Rome the day prior, and had arranged a customized river adventure with Quapaw. I was in awe of their desire to see the wild Mississippi, and their wide eyes as Ruskey unloaded the canoes and explained the journey ahead. I could not believe my luck that on a muggy Wednesday morning on the banks of the Mississippi, I was having conversations with Italians who were excitedly chirping as they prepared to embark on the river. Their enthusiasm and fascination inspired me.

It was a gloomy day; gray and brown both sky and water. However, what an opportunity to experience the same environment I had seen soaked in, in abundant sunshine the week before, in such a different light. As the crew took off, I followed them all out to the boat ramp and sent up my drone. I waved goodbye as all 10 river goers disappeared into the fog and around the bend. My heart always begins to race as I pilot my drone through the sky; I'm excited, adrenaline is pumping from my thrill of capturing such remarkable beauty from above, but I'm also nervous and chronically aware that a gust of wind or a system malfunction could swiftly alter my drone's safety status as it's suspended in the air. In this particular moment though, as I clicked away and chased the canoes from above, getting beautiful cinematic shots, my heart was racing for yet another reason.

As soon as the familiar canoes disappeared, a middle aged man pulled a small, worn boat up to the ramp where I stood. He got out with just a suitcase and did not say a word. He gave me no reason to be anxious, but I was still conscious of the fact that I was

a young female all alone on a rural riverbank, carrying thousands of dollars of technology with me, also having hardly any cell service. Everything ended up alright and he was kind when he eventually spoke, but I couldn't help but consider: what if he wasn't kind? What if something happened? It made me aware of future safety measures I want to take when I'm traveling by myself to remote environments, but it also made me think about the disadvantages that come with being a woman in this field. Having to think about your safety when you're simply trying to work, or having to factor in someone else's schedule and find another person to accompany you just to film, is an added barrier. Nonetheless, I am thankful for my safety that day, and thankful for the ways the situation opened my eyes.

My last adventure on that same day involved relocating to visit the Helena bridge that crosses the river between Arkansas and Mississippi close to Clarksdale. I chose this location to also capture more aerial shots, but this time of the industrial view. I wanted to showcase the river that most people commonly interact with. I pulled my car into a casino parking lot on the riverbank and stood in the parking lot to send up my drone. Although just a 30 minute drive from where I had just been, it felt like a wildly different world. The river buzzed with huge trucks driving over it and massive cargo boats chugging along, bringing me back to the reality of this part of the river and how it's used. I imagined what these people thought of the river, and I longed that they would someday get to experience even just a small glimpse of its true magic like I so recently did.

Driving back to Oxford, visualizing all the footage I now had, and reminiscing on my time spent on, in, and around the mighty Mississippi, I concluded that I wanted my

video project to yes, be a lens to educate my audience; however, most of all I wanted it to become an artistic piece focused on the river's innate beauty.

As the semester progressed, editing the video became my main focus. Sorting through footage from the past few months was tedious yet exciting, and I dove into selecting the best pieces from two, 40 minute interviews and organizing hundreds of clips from my GoPro, DSLR, and drone. Everything was formerly just files in different places but now these videos were ready to really become something in my Final Cut timeline.

The hardest part of this entire process was truly deciding how I wanted to structure the video… how I wanted to begin… I finally knew what story the river was trying to tell, but how would I convey that in a short visual piece? I wrestled with using the interviews as solely audio or showing Ruskey and River's faces briefly. I pondered over adding my own voiceover to introduce the scene. I especially grappled with the timing of how long to leave imagery on the screen, since I am used to catering to short attention spans in the world of social media video sharing. As my editing progressed, I encountered numerous choices aside from selecting clips and cutting storyline audio: I also had to choose appropriate music, create chapter transitions, color grade, and add ambient audio. My normal editing timelines are usually travel videos, so this project took a bit longer to get into flow state, as it was unlike anything I'd ever created in terms of environment and project scale. However, when I finally found a rhythm and became fully immersed in the process, it was one of the most rewarding challenges.

While my video is a narrowed glimpse of the river through the lens of Quapaw Canoe Company and people who share a special connection to the mighty Mississippi

River, the entirety of my project is really meant to be a visually poetic piece to inspire reflection. It's been enlightening to navigate what story needs to be told from the river as well as what *can be told* with the pieces I gathered. In the end, I do feel remarkably pleased with the film I was able to create, and I am hopeful that it prompts viewers to reconsider how they think about the life force in our backyard.

CHAPTER IV: WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

"In Wildness is the preservation of the World" - Henry David Thoreau

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John Ruskey talks about the Mississippi as the wilderness within. Although it's a river surrounded by cities, farmlands, and industry much of it truly does remain lush and beautiful, chronicled by "white sand beaches, sycamores, willow trees, deer, coyote, beaver, and eagles," ("The Mighty Mississippi") he explains. This environment of endless horizon is innately beautiful but truly inspires us to look inward ourselves. This actually ties into Ruskey's own personal guiding philosophy, borrowed from Henry David Thoreau: "in Wildness is the preservation of the World" (Thoreau). Ruskey considers a trip down the Mississippi River to be comparable to a journey back in time that unveils true wildness, and this is ultimately a journey he also wants others to experience. Exposure through a river journey to this wildness is what in turn leads to appreciation and preservation of our mighty Mississippi.

It's important to note that Thoreau's quote is often misinterpreted or mistaken to say "wilderness" rather than "wildness" and the two are not synonymous. What Thoreau, and also John Ruskey as he also adopted this outlook, are saying is that wildness is more so an attitude, than completely and fully an attribute. Wildness is a quality, whereas wilderness is a distinct place. The wild Mississippi is not defined at least in Ruskey's mind, therefore, by certain criteria or distinct lines. His goal in sharing his guiding

philosophy, similar to Thoreau's original intent, is to truly evoke in *us* a desire for a wild life. While this way of living is our origin story, it no longer is our contemporary lifestyle to most people. Rosemary Claire Collard shares valuable insight on this philosophy by imploring us to think about how "we need a post-wilderness concept of wildness" (Lamb). A wild life is characterized by openness and possibility, and the Mississippi River truly invites us all into this approach.

Our disconnection to the the Mississippi River has created undeniable problems for the river itself; however, ultimately it will prevail. The river flows in a state of constant change, yet it is always consistent… always the same strong mighty river. It will still exist without us. However, if we want to not just survive but truly thrive alongside this incomprehensibly powerful resource in our backyard, we must be inspired to protect it from a place of appreciation and respect. There are so many challenges it faces daily as we've been in the industrial age for centuries now, treating the river with disrespect and without any other thought; however, the river is so much more than the dumping grounds we've made it out to be. It is not just a place for transportation and industry… for shipping and waste removal. It is a biodiverse environment, boasting a rich history and beckoning to explorers to dare to go beyond and unveil more of her magic.

Quapaw Canoe Company is full of such explorers whose lives are radically intertwined with the Mississippi River in a vastly untraditional way. Their mission to educate people on the true Mississippi River and to get people on her waters to experience it themselves, has been in action since the late 1990s and to this day continues to shift people's perspectives and attitudes towards the flowing resource in our backyard. Quapaw and her worker bees, John Ruskey and Mark River most notably, pioneer the

way that people are becoming more apt to change the way they think about the river and want to interact with it. This shift enables an opportunity to connect with the waters, seeing it no longer as a dead river but one bursting with life. Quapaw's commitment to living with the land and setting an example of how to appreciate it is paving the way for how the conversation surrounding the river is changing.

This change in understanding is what enables our decision making to be impacted from a place of respect, awe, and concern. Building a connection and understanding the rhythm of the river… logging hours on her waters… being fully present in the landscape and getting a feel for your size in comparison to the great vastness of the mighty Mississippi, is the hope we have in order to impact people enough to care.

While undoubtedly focusing on people of all backgrounds, Quapaw indeed understands the unique influence that youth have in this present day and the truth in how this next generation will face perilous times with the river and our changing environment in unprecedented ways. This generation's decision making will be influenced by what matters to them, Ruskey understands; therefore taking care to shape youth's understanding of the river early on is crucial. Because we are in an era of disconnect, especially in relation to our natural environment, it's true that the very places that sustain us are not so much as a passing thought. Ruskey is deeply committed to changing this narrative.

As one of the most passionate and colorful people you'll ever meet, Ruskey lives a life interconnected to the river. Indeed, there's no one better to represent the mighty Mississippi; however, he understands that this mission goes way beyond his scope. This is why he is so dedicated to sharing his lifestyle and affinity for the water as well as

unique wisdom with others so that they may influence others in understanding the truth that this river is a wild vast place that needs to be preserved.

While I am pleased with what I was able to accomplish with this project, there are things I would add if this project had a longer duration. The topic of the Lower Mississippi has infinite opportunities for storytelling, therefore there are so many ways to expand this project. A few may be to go deeper with specific stories of the people who have been impacted by Ruskey's work. Specifically, it would be advantageous to quote voices of children who comprise the future generation who have been on the river with Quapaw and to get their perspective on how they changed from an immersive experience on the Mississippi. While children who have taken part in a community paddle or a specialized tour would definitely be a beautiful addition of primary sources to my writing, the most incredible perspectives would be those of children who have completed a Quapaw apprenticeship program and logged numerous hours hard at work developing river knowledge and technical skills. I am confident that with more time to expand this project, my first goal would be to amplify their voices and include them in my paper. Additionally, if I had more time to travel and visit the Delta more than the three times I did, I would have also loved to share what these children have to say in my video component and perhaps get them on camera, too.

Another fascinating direction that could be achieved with more time allotted to this project could be showcasing Ruskey bringing Quapaw's mission to people in the New Orleans region, for example, and expanding his influence beyond where the company's headquarters are in the Delta of Mississippi. The place where the river is most commonly considered to be dismal and where it is most unthinkable to be out on the

water could be an opportunity for Ruskey to radically shape mindsets in a way that would be wildly challenging but interesting and valuable to potentially approach. Seeing the response to Ruskey's uncharacteristic attitude and work with the river would be fascinating in the place where the Mississippi River enters the Gulf. Truly seeing if Ruskey could inspire folks to get on the river in a land particularly dominated by levees, would be an element worth exploring and documenting indeed. Lastly, it could be influential to expand this project beyond the Lower Mississippi region and compare Quapaw's experiences with an adventure outfitter on the Northern part of the river, much closer to its source in Lake Itasca. While the Lower Mississippi region has a greater sense of mystery, intrigue, and is more unknown, comparing the two regions would be helpful through the lens of recreational canoeing in hopes of inspiring locals and travelers alike.

The story of environmental catastrophe has unfortunately become a broken record in many ways. In every facet, that is a story that, yes, needs to be told but it isn't one that motivates as many people to action in the same way anymore. This is why I chose to showcase this powerful river in a more positive and intriguing light that can hopefully inspire people to be more open minded to the river. I hope it will inspire dialogue and move people to think deeper about all types of environmental impacts. I hope it will inspire to appreciate and in turn, preserve. All in all, the river is always telling a story. We must consider how we can tune our ears, open our eyes, and expand our hearts to be able to learn its language. Only then, when we hear her cry and her call can we be moved to protect her and go to fight for her.

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