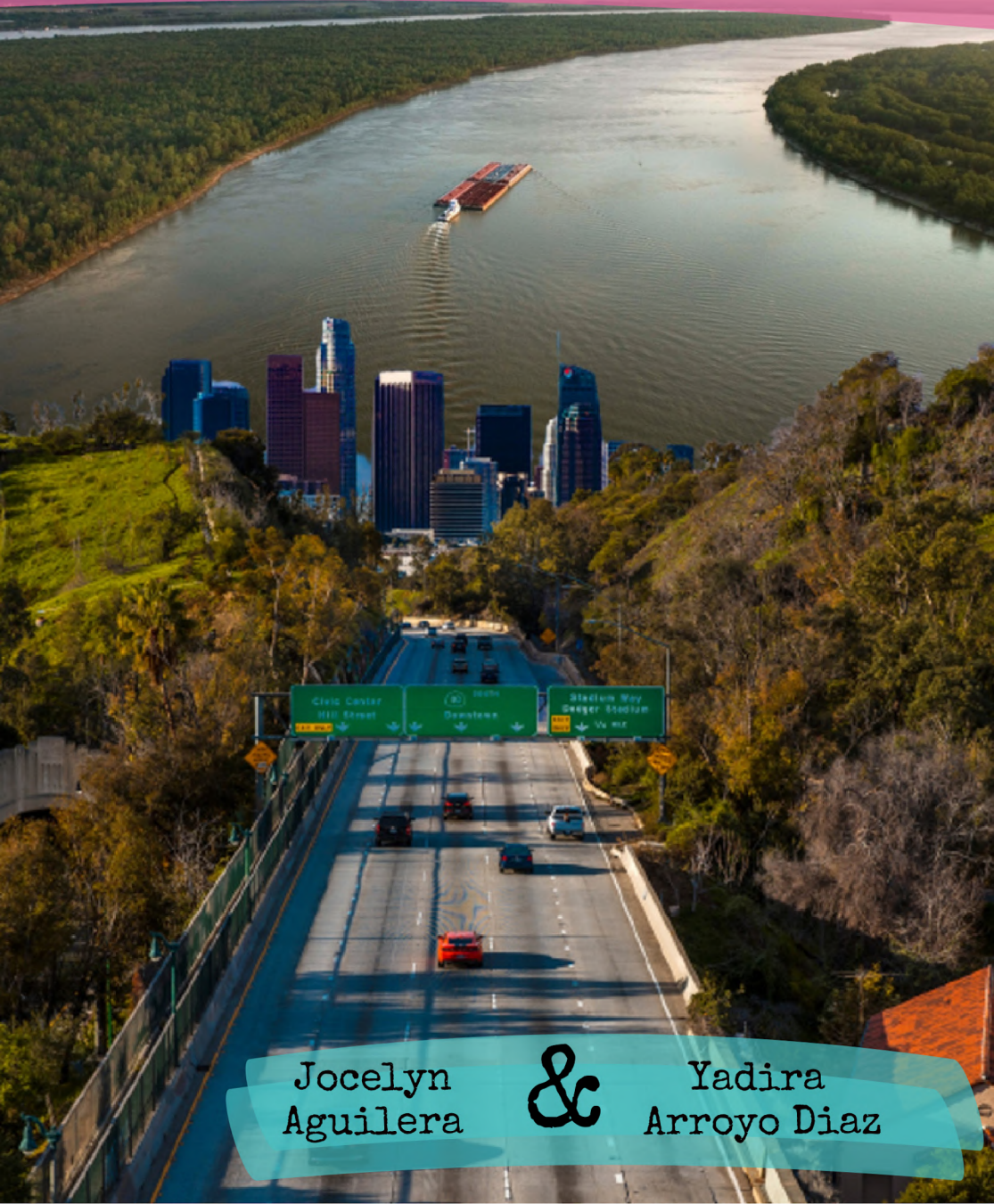


# From South Central to Mississippi



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# INTRODUCTION

**WHAT'S GOOD YA?!**

**THIS IS A ZINE CREATED BY TWO SOUTH CENTRAL WOMEN NAMED YADIRA AND JOCELYN. WE BOTH WERE BORN AND RAISED IN THAT COMMUNITY AND TEACH AT JOHN C. FREMONT HIGH SCHOOL ALSO LOCATED IN SOUTH CENTRAL.**

**WE TRULY NEVER THOUGHT WE WOULD BE IN THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA BUT WE MADE IT! THEREFORE, THIS ZINE CAPTURES OUR THOUGHTS, OPINIONS, REFLECTIONS, AND EXPERIENCES THROUGH THE PROGRAM. NO FILTERS.**



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

PG. 3 - 4 ..... THE RIVER: CREATOR AND DESTROYER OF THE DELTA

PG. 5 - 6 ..... IMMIGRANT STORIES

PG. 7 - 8 ..... THE BLUES: AMERICAN ROOT MUSIC & THE CULTURE THAT PRODUCED IT

PG. 9 - 10 ..... THE STORY OF EMMETT TILL

PG. 11 - 12 ..... THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

PG. 13 - 14 ..... THE DELTA IN DIASPORA



# THE RIVER: CREATOR AND DESTROYER OF THE DELTA

**JUNETEENTH LUNCH:** Performance by workshop participant was **beautiful**. Though **Juneteenth** is our nation's holiday, I did wonder about the decision to have white people introduce and present during this event...

**LALEE'S KIN:** Powerful post-film discussion with **Reggie Barnes** about the effects of structural abandonment and abject poverty in **Tallahatchie**. I began to make **connections** between conditions in the Delta and South Central. It was validating to hear Mr. Barnes assert, "**You lead by EXAMPLE.**"

**MOUNDS LANDING:** I got to dip my feet in the **Great River**! I think it will take me being home to process this. Horrified to learn from Reggie about the **ruthlessness** white people exhibited towards Black people when the levee broke. A white participant shared about his grandfather rescuing his grandmother from the flood on a horse; does this have any relation to the **overseers on horses** shown in the documentary?

**CATFISH SUPPER:** Oh my goodness... delicious meal! Great music. Inspiring and joy-inducing.

What happens when historical theft of BIPOC communities continues?

What happens when the problem policies are of gargantuan proportions and the solutions are squeezed out of the local?

# HOW CAN WE STILL CALL THIS LAND OF THE FREE?

BY: JOCELYN A. (DAY 1)



"I am in the Most Southern Place on Earth," I repeated to myself as the program facilitator said aloud. I would have never thought in a million years that this South Central Rockera would be here but here I was in the DELTA.

The past is present-- a quote that resonated with me as one of the fellow NEH participants read aloud. As I experienced day one in the delta, I began refer back to the quote.

Looking out the window passing field after field, I thought-- Who owns this land? With a quick research, I learned 95% of the land is owned by White people.

How is it possible that Black people who built this state (this country) from literally the ground up, only make up a small %?



This is literally the same enslavement but with a twist--Economic enslavement. There are no jobs, people are underpaid, and cannot afford basics to live.

Watching LaLee's Kin clearly supported my thoughts on the bus-- the legacy of exploitation and commodifying people has lead to many economic and social problems not only in the delta but around the US.

## How can we still call this land of the Free?

How can I appreciate the beautiful Mississippi river and fields when they also represent greed and land theft.

I guess that is why the program mentioned "a place of paradox"

Let's see what Day 2 has in store for my thoughts.



# IMMIGRANT STORIES

**DELTA CHINESE & DELTA JEWS:** I thought about what a small community they had in the Delta and how they protected themselves by disengaging from the Civil Rights Movement. This also made me think of groups who are able to survive and/or thrive via white adjacency. Senseless accumulation of capital will never be a value I hold, and I find it interesting how this was woven into the Italian narrative. Entering the Delta on Sunday, I thought about the way in which the land had been contorted and commodified; acres and acres of monocrops which have decreased biodiversity and relegated the land to the role of a tool. I mourn for it.

**RELIGIOUS HISTORY OF THE DELTA:** I felt this conversation to be a bit awkward. I think that it did not really clarify or expand on what I knew about Christianity in the Delta. I am used to thinking about Christianity in most instances as a colonizing religion. A fellow colleague's comments on the church's homophobic views was uncomfortable. I am still left wondering what other spiritual traditions may be alive in the Delta and what might be their intersections with local history.

**HISTORY OF THE BLUES:** I appreciate the attempt to link sounds with history. At the same time, one of the things that dawned on me during this workshop is the sacredness of artforms such as the Blues. Mr. Abel, because of his position as a white man, was not able to transmit this musically. I felt disconnected, as did many of my colleagues.

# AM I OVERREACTING?!

BY JOCELYN A. (DAY 2)

We had a lecture about religion, personally I do not BELIEVE in religion and growing up Catholic, I have experienced how religious institutions can be very **oppressive**. At the same time, I know that religion in the South for Black Folks meant a **space of community and organizing**, therefore I was eager to learn more. Although the lecture was insightful, I witnessed the manifestation of **HOMOPHOBIA** in many of our participants.

*IT TRULY MADE ME START RETHINKING IF I MADE THE RIGHT DECISION TO COME TO THE DELTA. I WAS QUESTIONING MYSELF. WAS I OVERREACTING?!? ARE THESE PEOPLE SUPPORTING HOMOPHOBIA?*

With many things on my mind, I was hoping the Blues performance might help me; however, I was **disappointed** to see that there was an issue of **cultural commodification**. But everyone seemed to enjoy themselves.

**Again, Am I overreacting?**

Then I made eye contact with another participants and it was as if, we read each others mind...



# THE BLUES: AMERICAN ROOT MUSIC AND THE CULTURE THAT PRODUCED IT

**DOCKERY PLANTATION:** While the presenter was a good storyteller, I find his presentation of the material questionable. As a historian, I know how to analyze primary sources for bias and his continued reference to a "good life" at the plantation was definitely part of a white perspective. No one who works from "when you can, to when you can't" is allowed to live a full life. The beauty of humanity is that we push to survive and to thrive, but this does not make the adversity any less. I encourage a continued dialogue with the professor.

**THE CROSSROADS:** A deal with the Devil sounds enticing...

**FANNIE LOU HAMER GRAVESITE:** I did not know too much about Ms. Hamer before this trip but I am inspired by her commitment to the struggle. At her gravesite, I gave myself space to commune with the grass and the trees. I thought that the site was beautiful and invited contemplation. I was a bit disturbed to hear a colleague's comments: "African Americans take off their shoes at X's gravesite. I wish we had time to take off our shoes." Why do we not have our own forms of respect and mourning? Why is there a need to fetishize Black culture?

**MOUND BAYOU:** Self-determination is the name of the game. I appreciate it as a historical site, but am more excited about what it means for the future. Revolutionary acts are those which break away from what is established. Over and over I heard this. I am inspired!

**MOUND BAYOU FILM & DISCUSSION:** I found out one of the Mound Bayou natives is from my block back home. This only added to the divinity and purpose with which I will approach my own organizing. Everything is connected.



# UNSPOKEN CONNECTIONS

BY JOCELYN A. (DAY 3)

I am so tired, waking up at 6:30 during summer vacation is no joke but we have a lot to do! As I sat at the Dockery Farm, I heard a story of “a good white man”— a man that paid 50 cents but I couldn't help but feel **discomfort**.

Again, in my head...Was I only asking more questions? Was I the only one not buying this? I saw smiles and people in awe. Then I looked at some of my participant friends and made the unspoken connection. Lately, I've only shared it with my colleague known as my “Soul Sister.” However, maybe others were feeling this?! I was not one to ask But thereafter, naturally we were drawn to each other and spoke about the **missing perspectives**. It was such a relief. It's weird but it was a validation. After a deep conversation and debriefing, we were angered and were hoping the rest of the program wouldn't be like this— **the same whitewashing of history!!!**

**BUT THE NIGHT ENDED WITH A VISIT AND FILM TO MOUND BAYOU AND THIS BECAME WHY I CAME TO THIS PROGRAM. I WAS INSPIRED. WE CAN ALWAYS BUILD SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING.**



# THE STORY OF EMMETT TILL

**VOICES FROM THE SIT-IN:** "Nobody can do everything, but everyone can do something." The elders' recounting of their participation in the Delta State sit-ins reminds me that all of our actions and efforts to make this a more just world are powerful. I was sad to hear that they were sent to Parchman. As the ordinary becomes extraordinary, I feel empowered in my vision to make a difference.

**CHARLES MCLAURIN:** Mr. McLaurin's storytelling made me realize the level of meticulous organizing and effort it takes to create a significant movement. It completely shifted my thoughts on how to movement build. Network, purpose and action!

**EMMETT TILL DOCUMENTARY:** Though I knew of Emmett's story, watching the documentary on the bus brought me to tears. As an educator and older sister, I am very protective over our little ones and hearing Ms. Till recount what happened to her son made me angry deeply sorrowful. The killers' reaction after the trial was grotesque. I am still processing this.

**EMMETT TILL HISTORIC INTREPID CENTER:** I understand that the community wanted to honor Ms. Till's bravery and decision to have the nation confront white supremacy head on, but it also made me think of why I stopped watching true crime. It is hard to stomach. At the same time, it speaks to the process of mourning that I don't know can ever be resolved. They tore a baby from the world.

**MONEY STORE:** A couple of white women colleagues crossed the marked line to take pictures of the inside of the store. I wondered what the need was to do so. This was an odd pattern from a few participants throughout the trip: snap, snap, snap at inappropriate times. I wonder how much time for deep engagement this practice left...

# MICROAGGRESSIONS

BY JOCELYN A. (DAY 4)

So much to process and so little time. I've been feeling better about this program and have learned so much. Although some of the participants have exhibited microaggressions against a few BIPOC folks, the overall program is doing great! However, I did have some thoughts I wanted to write down about microaggression that I experienced:

1. Several times I have tried to speak to many of the guests (presenters/professors) and as I am in mid-sentence, I would be rudely pushed aside and interrupted. Dismissed as if I did not matter. This was done 5 times to me with 5 different participants.

2. Also let's talk about the obsession with taking photos and doing "anything" for a picture, especially taking pictures of BIPOC participants without consent or disrespecting sites for a picture. Ideas of "owning anything" or wanting to "own" people's image or story is a tenant of white supremacy.

Beyond that, I do want to add that visiting the Emmett Till sites was difficult to process. I was shocked that many folks mentioned not knowing about the case; however, I was glad they learned about it and the panelists at the site were amazing. Every time we tell a story, it can be difficult and a lesson I learned is that— it is not BIPOC's job to educate people or tell our personal stories. We must learn to respect that and I realized many times, a few participants would ask to hear "my story." Sorry but if I do not want to share, please respect that! Maybe until I feel comfortable or I have built community but don't expect me to always accept an interrogation from you.

# THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

**NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM:** A story well told. The exhibit on the Middle Passage was impactful. The video of how the Lunch Counter Sit-In participants trained to resist nonviolently was powerful and again demonstrated the brilliance and sharp organization by movement organizers. I am still processing the archives. What I will comment on is the blood-stained KKK hoods. The fact that a white person had donated these anonymously infuriated me and spoke to the **performance** of a clean conscience. How much more powerful would it be for the donor to name the wearer? How can white people exhibit bravery by disrupting white supremacy within their own communities? Why is it that BIPOC have gone through so much, and white people refuse to give up the privileges this system has granted them?

**CENTRAL BBQ:** Great food! Here, I was able to build community with my colleagues who felt unsafe due to the numerous microaggressions we experienced throughout the week by some of our white colleagues. But the food was really good!!!

**STAX MUSEUM:** I was excited to visit since I am aware of the significance that Wattstax had on the Black community in Los Angeles and how it promoted Black Power. Beautiful museum.

**PEABODY HOTEL:** Liberate the duckies!

**HAIR THEATER PERFORMANCE:** I cannot believe I have never thought about how everyone has their own "hair story." Eurocentric beauty and professional standards make the hair stories of Black people even more layered and I appreciate the way the actors shared the stories. As my colleague and I waited to speak with the director afterwards, a white colleague asked if we were waiting to speak with her. We said we were, but then were swiftly 180'd with inquiries into our own hair stories. For never having spoken with this woman, I found it offensive to have my intimate and private information requested from me. I was not on stage giving a performance and don't understand why it was appropriate to ask this of me.

# RESIST!

By Jocelyn A. (Day 5)

I found a community within NEH and a place to reflect and debrief. There are many educators that are dedicated to anti-racist work and it is refreshing to see this. We have had meaningful conversations on the bus, during lunch, and at dinner. These are the people that especially got me through the Civil Rights collections. As I was horrified by the artifacts shown to me, my group quickly discussed how to dismantle this system. In all honesty, lately I have felt tired and burnout as I navigate through a **capitalist and white supremacist** system but after conversations and going through the Civil Right museum I kept going back to the quote, **"WE CAN ALWAYS BUILD SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING."** Also, I loved the STAX MUSEUM and felt joy. To end the day, watching the acting performances was incredible. **Hair is an act of resistance!** Shaping a culture through music, art, food, hair is also part of Civil Rights. Day 5 has been my favorite day. I feel empowered.



# THE DELTA IN DIASPORA

**GREAT MIGRATION:** I appreciated Dr. Willis' breakdown of racism in the North. It is a myth that racism only exists in the South and I agree with her that covert racism is often more harmful than overt racism since people can hide cozily behind "But I'm a good person!"

As for the white-adjacent participant who raised her voice at Dr. Willis, an elder: how dare she. It made me upset to think people can be so unaware of their positionality that they take it out on others. Furthermore, this same person and another participant expressed disdain at the fact that the BIPOC in attendance grew close during the workshop which felt to us unsafe over and over. Contrary to this participant's beliefs, **IT IS NOT THE JOB OF PEOPLE OF COLOR TO EDUCATE WHITE AND WHITE-ADJACENT INDIVIDUALS.** In this day and age where there are so many scholarly articles and free resources available, I refuse to provide theatrical fodder, therapy and racial education to grown adults who can do so on their own if they were so interested.

**Nonetheless, I am thankful for those who continue to do the work within themselves and for the beautiful people I was able to connect with on this workshop. You**

# REVOLUTION?!

BY JOCELYN A. (DAY 6)

The Great Migration lecture was amazing and connected to the history of my own community of South Central. It led to a great discussion; however, I learned a bigger lesson-You don't have to be White to uphold white supremacy.

We ended the day with making our own mojo and a reflection. I have learned a lot in this program, I enjoyed Mississippi but I also realized we still have sooooo much work ahead of us to create a more equitable world. We need to stop saying, "that we are color blind." The past is the present and we cannot hide, but some of us have the privilege of being able to. My only hope is that we all are ready to read, research, and ready for the next revolution.



# MEET THE WRITERS



Jocelyn Aguilera is an activist, educator, musician, and historian from South Central, Los Angeles.

**Yadira Arroyo is an educator and organizer with interests in decolonial spiritualities, critical pedagogy and horizontal praxis. She is inspired by collective fights for self-determination and "making a way out of no way" when it comes to healing and rebuilding her South Central Los Angeles community.**

