

Beth Ho reflection journal – Most Southern Place on Earth, July 2023, final project

July 10, 2023

When I signed up for this class and headed down to the Delta, I knew that I was in for a week of in-depth learning about the region. I read a couple of the suggested pre-reading books - *I Don't Like the Blues* and *Rising Tide* - and found both interesting, though the latter is the one that truly fascinated me. That said, even with the difficult and surprising pieces found in both books, I was not prepared for the effect that today had on me.

The morning piece, learning about each other and about the overall structure of the class, was helpful for getting us settled in and comfortable. When we returned to the class after lunch, however, and watched *Lalee's Kin*, I was truly drawn in. Lalee and her family broke my heart in so many ways, and I wished I could help care for each of them. Additionally, while I understood the struggle to bring up test scores (I, too, taught at a school on “probation”), the fight that Reggie Barnes and his schools had was far greater than my own; despite being at Title 1 schools, the place from which we were starting was far higher than where they had to begin in West Tallahatchie. My emotions were on a roller coaster throughout, moved by all that Reggie did for those kids, shocked by the utter indifference of the Mississippi Board of Education representative, giddy with excitement for the entire district when that 2.0 score came in, devastated by all that Lalee and her kin suffered through, joyous when Granny came home with a B+ average and a desire to become a nurse. Though I knew there was poverty, the depth of it is something that can't be imagined without actually seeing it.

When we were able to actually speak with Reggie, to ask him questions and to hear his story and perspective, my heart sank. How is it possible that, in the year 2023, there are still a number of families living this sort of life? How does the illiteracy continue? And to the question of how we can fix this, what can be done to make a difference, there wasn't really a solid answer. While I was happy to hear that Redman had grown into a bright, hardworking young man, and I was sorry to hear that Main had never really grown or changed, it was such a letdown to find out that Granny had a child while still in high school and effectively ended her dreams of higher education. And so the cycle continues.

When we were done speaking with Reggie Barnes, we headed out to the River. It gave me chills, seeing it and being able to put my hand in the warm water, watching it roll along rapidly and merrily. At the same time, this, too, affected me more than I expected – As we stood there, at the levee instrumental in the 1927 flood, enjoying the river and its beauty, I thought about the fact that so many Delta folk never get to see the River, despite this being their heritage. The whole situation with the hunting clubs buying up all of the land along the banks, privatizing access, making it available only to those with deep pockets, is like a wake-up call that things are not so different when it comes to economic disparity. There are people in the region who can't get running water or electricity, and at the same time, there are people dropping massive amounts of money for exclusive access to the Mississippi River, which has made this region what it is. How is it possible that there are so many people who live right on the Delta, have grown up on the

Delta, and yet have never had the chance to see the River's majestic beauty? As is often the case, the answer appears to be money and privilege and selfishness.

After a long bus ride filled with contemplation (and a phenomenal video about the 1927 flood!), we were treated to one of the best dinners I've ever had. Our meal was accompanied by incredible music, and we were lucky enough to have Dr. Brinda with us, sharing some history about the Blues and enriching the experience even more. I have always loved Johnny Lee Hooker, but understanding the background of the coding within the songs made it that much more meaningful and will cause my listening to become more focused and analytical. In all, I feel as though just this first day of this workshop has taught me as much as I would learn in any other full workshop I might attend.

July 11, 2023

Today's program was one I was eagerly anticipating. Learning all about the different cultures in the Delta was especially meaningful, considering we went to both a synagogue and a Chinese cemetery. I couldn't wait to take pictures and notes about both to tell my amazing daughter; she was so excited to hear about how the two parts of her identity fit in here. On the bus ride there, we watched a documentary about the Delta Jews. It was so fascinating and cool... until it wasn't. HOW could so many of these people – a highly persecuted people themselves – not be a part of the fight for civil rights? How could they resent those who DID choose to help? It was like a punch in the gut, to be honest. I have never understood persecuted groups showing prejudice against one another, as they should be able to empathize with each other. Sure, the Jewish community didn't actively work against the Black community, but in matters of civil rights, staying quiet and doing nothing is just a milder form of standing against; there is no such thing as neutrality in such situations.

Right about the time that came up in the video, however, we arrived in Greenville and headed over to the Chinese cemetery. I found Cindy, the caretaker, interesting and informative. I truly enjoyed hearing the stories about the history of the Chinese in the Delta, and I wanted to know more. It made me a bit sad to hear that they'd basically lost all of their traditions as time passed by and people passed on. The importance of the funerary rituals to the culture, for example, are not all based in religion, so a difference of religion shouldn't matter – it is a matter of... I guess superstition? Additionally, the loss of the language, both spoken and written, is a loss to the community. It was very noticeable to me that the newer tombstones had less and less Chinese writing on them, with the most recent bare of any characters at all. I hold no judgment toward the Delta Chinese community at all, as we adapt and evolve over time based on where we are and what is around us; it just made me a bit sad for what was lost there. I did find a tombstone with our last name on it, and I took a picture to send home.

When we'd finished up at the cemetery, it was time to head to the synagogue. It was absolutely beautiful. I was touched by the way they work hard to keep the religion alive, even holding religious school classes for the two children in the congregation. There were differences, of course – after generations in such a unique region, how could it be expected to be the same as any other Judaism? But I truly enjoyed looking around at all of the artifacts they had throughout, and I especially loved the talk by the temple leaders. As with the Q&A session at the cemetery, it was so cool listening to the history and the answers to all of our questions. I felt connected to these people through our similarities and fascinated by the divergences.

After a quick look around the Greenville museum – which was chock full of items ranging from fossils dug up in the area to someone's boy scout manual to an old-fashioned voting booth to a full (if non-functional) radio station set-up! – we hopped on the bus and headed back to Cleveland. Post lunch (and shopping for Fighting Okra gear!), we heard about the place of religion in the Delta. Charles Regan Wilson shared so much information that I had to take notes so I wouldn't forget. My favorite thing he said, though, was that "Religion is a way that people keep their dignity." I thought that was absolutely lovely. Then, I was able to learn more than I could ever have imagined about the various religions found throughout the region, getting a far

clearer picture of differences between branches (for example the Pentecostal use of music to spread their message, the Evangelical push to bring others into their community and beliefs, and the Southern Baptists' recent foray into political persuasion). We discussed declining religious memberships, and I was shocked to hear that those numbers are going down even in places like the Delta. Perhaps my favorite part of the lecture, though, was listening to *The Black Diamond Express to Hell*. I found it kind of amazing, and it reminded me a lot of the Puritan sermons I teach in American Lit classes. It was fun to hear, though I am going to guess it wasn't so much fun if you were sitting in the congregation!

After another break for food (or, in the case of a group of us, the Grammy Museum), we had the absolute pleasure of listening to and learning from Bill Abel. I had no clue there were different sub-genres of the Blues, but when he explained and then played the different types, I could hear it and actually make the connection between the contexts in which I'd previously heard each of these styles. The music was incredible – it felt real. I don't know another word for it. Bill answered all of our questions, shared some meaningful literature with us, and even passed around some guitars he'd made himself. He was funny and informative and open; I learned so much about what makes the Blues what it is, got the names of some books I'll need to check out, and made a whole list of artists to add to a Spotify playlist. I was disappointed that I had no cash (after having spent it all at the synagogue, getting myself a "Shalom Y'all" plaque), as I'd have loved to buy a cd for my dad. In fact, once I got back to my room, I did a search on how to order his music. I'm still looking, but I hope I'll find something. Sure, I could just stream it, but I'd rather buy his music to support him as an artist. Today was another packed, informative, meaningful day here in the Delta. With every step of the itinerary, I become more and more glad that I applied for this workshop.

July 12, 2023

This morning started bright and early (well, okay, dreary and early) with a visit to Dockery's Farm, aka the Birthplace of the Blues. Seeing the scene of that iconic image right in front of me was kind of surreal, to be honest. I immediately needed a picture before going inside. We went in and got some great stories about Dockery's history, the workings of the farm, and how it got its nickname. The story of those frolicking houses was great. I could close my eyes and see all the kids piled up by the bridge to experience it as best they could, while the lights blared and the joint was rockin'. It was a clever set-up, charging people to even cross the bridge, because it kept them from just listening for free. I loved learning how they got rid of all those trees when clearing the land, though I can't imagine what it must have been like in town with the smoke billowing up from acres of burning trees. I forgot to ask, though, how they kept the cotton from burning up when they burned the trees.

The part that was both interesting and kind of sketchy sounding was the whole idea of Dockery as this amazing savior type. Oh yes, he paid them 50c a day instead of 30c. And they loved working for him! He was soooo fair, they could use their company store tokens in two nearby towns as well, they could rent KINGDOMS. It was a great life! Except... They were still sharecropping. They still had nothing of their own, except, I suppose, for those who had, for lack of a better word, serfs working the land for them. Sure, they could spend the money in the nearby towns, but what if they wanted something else? What if they wanted a train ticket for their family to get there, or even just to send money home? I get that everyone talked about how amazing this guy was, but I'm just not buying the sainthood thing. Dockery did, however, have some of the best Bluesmen on the farm, with Howling Wolf, Charley Patton, Pops Staples, Robert Johnson... we'll come back to Robert Johnson. One of the last things we learned, which is also one of the most surprising and fascinating, is the influence of the Hawaiians and their music on the Blues. Who knew they were the ones who started the slide guitar? Sure it was different, but it was still a slide guitar. Heck, I wasn't even aware there were Hawaiian musicians playing around here that early.

After the talk, we were able to wander the farm. I had never seen a cotton gin, and I thought it was really cool to look at. I spent quite a bit of time in there before wandering the rest of the grounds. In the rain. Then we got back on the bus to head to the Crossroads. I was so excited to see it, even after hearing that he actually just went off, got married, and practiced a lot. I choose to believe the myth. This stop on the trip was one of those I was most looking forward to. Unfortunately, it was pouring rain, so I couldn't get out of the bus to stand there, or even take a picture. Slightly disappointing, but honestly? I got to see it (through a window), and it looked as though he could come wandering up that road at any minute. Satisfying, to say the least.

Our next stop was the Fannie Lou Hamer memorial. On the way, we learned interesting background from Vickie Roberts Ratliff, who is an expert on Hamer, and then began watching the Hamer documentary. It was still raining when we reached the memorial, but I made sure to see everything. So I got a little damp; so what? Honestly, I didn't know too much about Hamer prior to this morning. Between the lecture, the documentary, and the quotes found at the site, I truly admire her – she was a hero of the people. I absolutely love the fact that she wanted to open

up her land to anyone who needed a home, regardless of who they were. That shows such a caring heart. Her work for civil rights was... well, the fact that she allowed her arrest (basically just for being Black) and subsequent beating (just because they could) to make her even more firm in her resolve to change things? Admirable. I think that so many would have just... given up after that, spirits broken, but Hamer didn't give up until the day she died. An amazing woman!

Our visit to the BB King museum drew me in. I wanted to read every word, look at every piece of memorabilia, watch every video... I ran out of time, to be honest. I didn't even get to see the cars. But I DID make it out to see his gravesite and the beautiful pavilion of songs that contains it. I loved reading more about his history and his struggle. He used his music to change society, as well as helping to change the face of music throughout the world. I had always loved listening to him, and it was nice to see him as a great guy, too.

After a lunch break, it was off to Mound Bayou. Well, first it was Peter's Pottery, where I spent entirely too much on utterly gorgeous pieces, but that was mostly just shopping. I wish we'd been able to go into the Mound Bayou Taborian Hospital to look around, but it was neat hearing the story of the hospital and the clinic across the street. I enjoyed the stories we learned from the former mayor, and the sightseeing tour through town, but the most meaningful part of the afternoon was our visit to the medical center. It was a lovely facility, and I'm so glad the people of the town have that for their care. But being able to break bread with the community and come together to watch a beautiful documentary on Mound Bayou was something special. Roderick Red did a phenomenal job putting it together, and then the panel of experts from the film was so much fun in the interview session afterward! The determination of the Montgomerys to create this town, even after losing their legally purchased property to Jefferson Davis, is inspirational.

One of the members of our group stood up today and spoke about how special it is to be able to have all of these experiences we might not otherwise have, and it's true. This week has been, by far, the best workshop I've ever attended, and it's only half over. The wealth of knowledge and obvious love for their Delta home is obvious from both our fearless leaders, and that adds an extra layer to everything. I am so glad I was able to attend this program.

Tomorrow will be extremely emotionally difficult. It is centered around Emmett Till, and I know that it will affect me deeply. I expect it to be fascinating and informative, just as everything else has been, but I also expect to need a lot of quiet processing time once the day is through.

July 13, 2023

Confession: I'm writing this two days late, because I haven't felt emotionally able to do this any sooner. It threw off the entire journaling process, but I just... couldn't. I'm still not sure I'll be able to actually write about Thursday and Friday, but I'll try.

On Thursday morning, we began by watching a documentary about a sit-in at Delta State. None of these people had spoken about it in the more than 50 years since it occurred. They were all ashamed of it. They hadn't told family or friends, and they tried to go on as though it didn't happen. But it DID. And it was an important step they took, not something to be ashamed of. But it had been a traumatic experience for them – they ended up in prison. Not the country jail, but Parchman Farm, the actual state prison. It was powerful to watch, to hear their voices. Even more powerful, though, was the panel afterward, when two of the women from the sit-in came to talk to us. We were able to hear about the effect that it has had on their lives. Miss Maggie seems to have moved past it – she told us that she did, years later, get an apology from the University president. She seemed more at peace. Miss Lula, though, seemed just as raw about the situation, having never received any apology or even acknowledgment from DSU. It shows how important it is to us, that acknowledgment of pain caused that we get from those who've harmed us. More than that, though the story and the discussion helped make it clear just how many incidents we do NOT know of. How many sit-ins have there been that went unremarked? How many terrible abuses of power – situations where, instead of just threatening with those guns, the police acted violently, and people were killed or severely injured? It took bravery on the part of the students, but the way they were treated on campus isn't right. People getting beaten up for daring to sit in the cafeteria, teachers treating students as less-than, students being ignored in the halls by people who were friends at night, when no one else could see. The main lesson that I got from this, which was a confirmation of what I already knew, is something Miss Maggie said: Communication can stop anything – it's the most important thing.

Once the two women left us, we had a talk with Mr. Charles "Mac" McLaurin. Mac had been just a teen when he was caught up in the civil rights movement, brought in (by Medgar Evers!) to SNICK, to help with voter registration drives. Change comes through voting, and he was part of the group that pushed that idea. Eventually, due to a ridiculous chain of events, he was even brought in as the campaign manager when Fannie Lou Hamer ran for public office. His stories were interesting and shared some things of which I was not aware. I hadn't heard about COFO before, though it makes sense that all of these groups with common purpose would join together in the fight. I also loved hearing about the Freedom Summit elements – pushing voter registration, though it was difficult to actually have that registration accepted; Freedom Schools to educate the people and help them pass the voting tests; lawsuits charging racial discrimination with voter registration; and creation of their own Democratic committee, with the goal of unseating the standard Mississippi delegates at the 64 convention. It was seriously fascinating to get a more primary-source-based story of the events.

The afternoon, though, was the hardest of the entire week. We started at the Tallahatchie Courthouse; the town of Sumner was lovely, and then we went inside for a panel discussion involving Reverend Wheeler Parker, Jr., Reverend Willie Williams, Benjamin Saulsberry from

the Mississippi Historical Society, and Keena Graham from the National Park Service. It started with Rev. Parker's recollections of his cousin, Emmett Till. It helped to give Till more of a face, hearing Parker talk about his sassy humor and the fun they had together. It made me like Emmett, imagine a giggle, and feel as though I knew him; this added still another layer of horror (was there even room for more horror?) to the story. Rev. Williams reminded the room that we all have a soul, whether we believe it or not, while Benjamin Saulsberry spoke about remembrance and history. Keena Graham, I could've listened to another whole talk just from her - at a different time, of course. She spoke about what goes into having something declared a national park or national monument. She was humorous (extremely needed, honestly, after the rest of the talk and the weight of it), informative, and I learned so much I'd never realized - the effects on a community seem to make for a less beneficial venture in many areas. It's sad the way an attempt at commemoration can end up pricing people out of their own neighborhoods. A final takeaway from the discussion at the courthouse is that, honestly, some people are so gross in their greed. Why does the owner of the Bryant Grocery feel the need for millions to sell a broken-down structure being reclaimed by nature?

When we were done at the courthouse, it was a quiet ride for me, heading to the ETHIC (Emmett Till Historic Intrepid Center). I was... not okay after the ETHIC. It was lurid. It was a poorly created museum, but more than that, it didn't sit right with me that they were proudly claiming Glendora as the place where Emmett Till was killed; it didn't sit right with me that they went step by step through each weapon used on him, displaying actual examples of each; and regardless of whether or not it was donated by a big, fancy movie star, it didn't sit right that they had a mock up of his open casket. I found it truly upsetting from beginning to end. It didn't help my heart that they told the story of his last goodbye with his mother, of course, because as a mama it broke me, but it was the sensationalism that bothered me most.

Our question of the day was about whether things should be commemorated, and if so then how. This was not the way to do it. We can commemorate Emmett Till and the terrible thing that happened to him. We can share the story. We do not need THAT. The Reverend Parker shared his memories - both with us and in more detail within his book, and *that* is the right way to remember someone, to make sure a story doesn't get lost. Of course those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it, but it needs to be a mindful, purposeful remembering for a story so terribly traumatic. To be honest, by the end of the day, I wanted to be home hugging my kids. It was an important day, but so difficult.

* additional note: The discussions that were spawned from this clearly *wrong* method of commemoration show the value of the workshop visiting the center. If we are complacent in our viewing and our experiences, how are we to grow and learn and understand?

July 14, 2023

Ahhh the day of Memphis. I'm going to give my overall assessment before I go through each section: The bus rides were long – so long – but the discussions we had throughout the day were just incredible. I was dreading being on a bus for so long, but I just wanted the insights from my colleagues (and from Dr. Herts and Mr. Todd!) to continue.

Now that I've gotten that out of the way... we started our Memphis day in the Civil Rights Museum. Seeing the hotel, the room with a marker, started me off already feeling solemn and contemplative. We looked at the art exhibit and part of the slavery exhibit, and then it was time for my group to head in for our special archives session. I... am not really sure what to say about it. Hearing the story of the man who found his dad's KKK robes after his death, having never even known that his father had any part of such an organization threw us right on in, thinking about the things that we keep hidden and why. The photos of Bob Adelman were beautiful, but not as ... violent? Is that the right word? ... as the other pieces. There were the dippers for the water cooler, because the different races couldn't possibly use the same dipper for drinking (if you can't hear it in the tone, please know I'm rolling my eyes at the ridiculousness of it). There was the KKK recruiting poster. There were all of the little racist collectibles (on a side note? If I married someone and then found out he'd amassed a collection of over 300 gross, racist home items? That would be a mighty quick divorce. Donating it all wouldn't be enough, because he willfully, actively collected all of those things, which speaks to character). The hotel register, with King's and his brother's aliases signed up on there, was kind of sobering. The final item – the gurney – was the most affecting. It made my breath catch, imagining its use. I'm glad that the archivists and curators are respectful enough to have no interest in displaying it. Again, this goes back to how we commemorate. The museum did an excellent job of creating what seemed to me a respectful but vivid picture of the history of civil rights issues. I say history, but of course it is nowhere near over or truly *history*, is it?

After a delightful lunch (thank you again to the Delta Center for treating us!) filled with stimulating conversation, it was off to the Stax museum! While it was sad that the building wasn't the original studio, I had SO MUCH FUN in that museum! It was wonderful reading through the history of the museum and of the music. Everywhere there was a video screen, I stood mesmerized for an awfully long time, just enjoying the music. AND WE DANCED! I am not a dancer. I have zero ability when it comes to that, and it often makes me feel awkward. This, however, was a wonderful release after a rough day and a half – doing the Soul Train line dance together as a group brought joy to all of us. I'm glad that a bit of the dancing was included in the video for that day, because the whole museum was just what we needed at that moment. It was so appreciated.

There were ducks!! I love ducks so much, and they were adorable. The atmosphere was kind of ... I don't know, weird and uncomfortable? A few of our group were able to put the words to it – it fed right into the idea of a wealth-based class system. I felt very much pulled in two directions, because I did enjoy the duck part, but even there one could see that ingrained sense of privilege on display. That feeling by some that *they* were the most important, so everyone else could just be secondary.

When we returned to the bus, there were more intense conversations (seems like we barely had time to watch the phenomenal documentary, with all the discussion we had) as we headed to Clarksdale. Part of this was learning of Tunica and its fate, which was terrible and also sort of ties in with what Keena Graham said about the National Parks; the casinos in Tunica were an attempt to save the town, and instead they destroyed it. When we arrived in Clarksdale, I wasn't sure what to expect of the performance. We filtered into the space and got set, and then Jenna gave us a bit of background. I was intrigued, and then when these people got up to speak, to read their deepest thoughts to us, I was fully drawn in. I believe my favorite performance was Amana's, as I loved the way her story was told, with the offstage interjections, and I loved the fact that it ended with her finally doing what she'd been itching to do for years, and finding that it made her feel fully herself for the first time. Watching them inspires me to create a storytelling process with my students, where they create and share a narrative that is deeply, uniquely *them*. I chose not to stay in Clarksdale to club hop with the big chunk of those who did, but a nice quiet rest of the night to recharge my battery (introvert being non-stop social can be a bit draining!) is just what the doctor ordered.

July 15, 2023

So this is it. The last day. The morning began with Dr. Brinda returning to speak with us about the Great Migration. I have so many digressions in my notes, where she referenced something or other that I'll need to read or watch or research, but that helped to make it more interesting. I knew a bit about the Migration, and I teach it a bit in my APHG class, but there will be so much more to add going forward. It was especially meaningful because it was her own story and experience being a part of it. Rather than just an academic view, we could hear about the feelings and experiences first-hand. She mentioned that the caste system that has been around for centuries is still standing, and it's definitely something that can be seen in the Delta and elsewhere. Heck, look at the bridal magazine we were given – it was meant to be for/about Delta brides, and there were no Black brides, despite the fact that throughout the Delta, the racial makeup is clear. It was yet another uncomfortable moment within our week of learning, this realization that things are, as I mentioned earlier, not really history so much as ongoing.

When Dr. Krueger came in, my first thought was that his students must really find him engaging. We didn't even get through half of his slides, because we all had so much to say about each step of his discussion. When we did collaborative discussions, it was cool to see that Cathy and I had actually been thinking the same things about how to use what we've learned in the classroom. We built off of each other's ideas as we talked, and we were still going when he brought us all back to the larger group. I heard so many incredible thoughts and ideas from a group of 3 dozen unbelievable teachers. I appreciated the ability for us to do this, and I especially appreciated his offer to reach out at any time.

The Robertsons (and Vanessa!) showed us their final videos for each theme of the course, and they did an amazing job. I hope those videos aren't taken down, because I plan to bookmark them and watch them often.

The end of the day was making our mojo. I had no idea what that would mean, but it turned out to be a lovely tradition of creating a sort of memory pouch to keep us always connected to the Delta and what we'd learned. There were pieces of everything we'd done, and I will hold my mojo precious forever.

After we had finished our mojo (and a little hootenanny, thanks to our musicians bringing their instruments!), it was time for graduation! I almost didn't graduate, but Asha managed to get my certificate to present to me. The posters we were given as a surprise gift actually choked me up. I spent the week acquiring little souvenirs of everything we did (I am pretty sure people will now think that I graduated from DSU, considering all of the Fighting Okra stuff!), but those two posters, which will hold place of pride on my walls, were the best possible thing to take home from the Delta – the poster touching on all we did, so much fun looking like it was our own personal Blues festival, and that map. I don't know why, but the River seems to have become a part of me. It actually started when I was reading about the flood, prior to the visit, but it has grown stronger over the last week. To have such a special piece of Mississippi River history in that beautiful map is just... it leaves me speechless. I know that I will gaze at both of the posters fondly every day.

After our graduation, it was time to say goodbye. I didn't want to. I truly didn't. I made so many friends, and I wonder whether the combination of having to be a certain kind of person and teacher to take this, along with the deep and painful topics we discussed and shared together, caused a rare and special bond between us all. I wish I could keep learning from Lee and from Dr. Herts, as even the most random-seeming things turned out to be as purposeful as the more obvious lessons, contributing to growth and understanding.

Those of us who didn't leave until Sunday had a Saturday night last hurrah together. We went to some little artsy former juke joint that is now a sandwich shop run by a wonderful couple (Julia found the place, which is not at all surprising!). We ate, we laughed, we had a singalong. It was a wonderful final memory for the week.

July 16, 2023

So I guess this would be my epilogue? I'm writing this on Sunday night, from a hotel room in Memphis. I was melancholy all morning, stalling my departure. Finally, I hit the road, but I sure felt a kinship with all the Blues singers I listened to on my drive. When my GPS said "Welcome to Tennessee"? It felt like a little part of me was missing. It's silly – I never would have expected to feel so ... I don't have a word, to be honest ... in Mississippi. And yet I know I will be back, hopefully sooner rather than later. We have all spent the day group texting updates on our travel and arrivals home or to points beyond, and it's been wonderful to see everyone's reunion pictures with their families! When I got to Memphis, it was too early to check in, and I was feeling antsy. I wanted my River. So.... I crossed the pedestrian bridge from Memphis, TN to West Memphis, AK, and then I crossed back. She was just as beautiful from a view up high as she was when we were close enough to touch her. I am only here in Memphis for another day and a half, but I am positive I will find a way to see her again. I need to. I suspect my future travels will be to various cities along her winding length. Included in that, though, will be another visit to the Delta. To see the amazing people I met through DSU, and to revisit those things that impacted me so deeply. To just BE. I am so very thankful I was able to be a part of this week that has forever changed me.