

Delta Jewels

Oral History Partnership 2015-2016 Report



The Delta Center for Culture & Learning
Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area
National Park Service
Delta Jewels Support Foundation

**The Delta Center for Culture and Learning
Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area**

DSU Box 3152
1003 West Sunflower Road
Cleveland, MS 38733
ph: 662-846-4312
www.deltacenterdsu.com
www.msdeltaheritage.com

Delta Jewels

Oral History Partnership 2015-2016 Report





Over 300 Mississippi Delta residents and visitors attended the Delta Jewels Community Gathering at Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church, Mound Bayou, MS, where 32 of the 54 Delta Jewels were honored.

Contents

- 8 Overview: The Delta Jewels Orals History Partnership
- 14 Milestones: Creating the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership
 - 14 Delta Jewels at Winning the Race Conference 2015
 - 15 Phase 1: Telling the Delta's Story: Delta Jewels Community Gatherings
 - 21 Phase 2: The Partnership is Official
- 24 Voices of the People: Participant Feedback and Evaluations
- 31 Reflections from Community Partners
- 34 Reflections from Alysia Burton Steele
- 35 Credits and Acknowledgments

Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area

The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (MDNHA) is a partnership between the people of the Mississippi Delta and the National Park Service. It is one of 49 National Heritage Areas in the United States designated by Congress that tell nationally important stories, celebrating our nation's diverse heritage through community-based partnerships and local collaboration.

The mission of the MDNHA is to foster preservation, perpetuation and celebration of the Mississippi Delta's heritage through collaboration and sustainable economic development. Toward fulfilling this mission, the MDNHA focuses on developing five interrelated cultural heritage themes:

- (1) The Mississippi River and the Land It Embraces;
- (2) The Culture of the Blues and the Birth of an American Sound;
- (3) Moving Toward Freedom: Changing America's Character in the Struggle for Rights;
- (4) Growing More Than Cotton: The Delta as a Wellspring of Creativity; and
- (5) The Delta Divide: Creating the Delta's Diverse Communities.

The MDNHA was designated by Congress in 2009. The MDNHA is managed by The Delta Center for Culture and Learning at Delta State University and is governed by a 15-member board representing agencies and organizations defined in its Congressional legislation. The MDNHA includes 18 counties that contain land located in the alluvial floodplain of the Mississippi Delta: Bolivar, Carroll, Coahoma, DeSoto, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Panola, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tate, Tunica, Warren, Washington and Yazoo.

For more information about the MDNHA, visit www.msdeltaheritage.com.



The Delta Center for Culture and Learning

The mission of The Delta Center for Culture and Learning is to promote greater understanding of Mississippi Delta culture and history and its significance to the world through education, partnerships, and community engagement.

The Delta Center is a “Center of Excellence” at Delta State University, one the eight public universities in Mississippi governed by the Institutions of Higher Learning. The Delta Center is an interdisciplinary program that focuses on the humanities and social sciences as they relate to the Delta.

The Delta Center advances Delta State University’s participation in promoting and celebrating the unique heritage of the Delta while also addressing the longstanding social, economic, and cultural challenges that inhibit regional advancement. The Delta Center has fulfilled this role since its inception and continues to do so by serving as management entity for the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area, a partnership with the National Park Service.

For more information about The Delta Center, visit www.deltacenterdsu.com.



2016 National Park Service Centennial

The National Park Service turned 100 years old on August 25, 2016. The goal of the National Park Service Centennial is to connect with and create the next generation of park visitors, supporters and advocates.

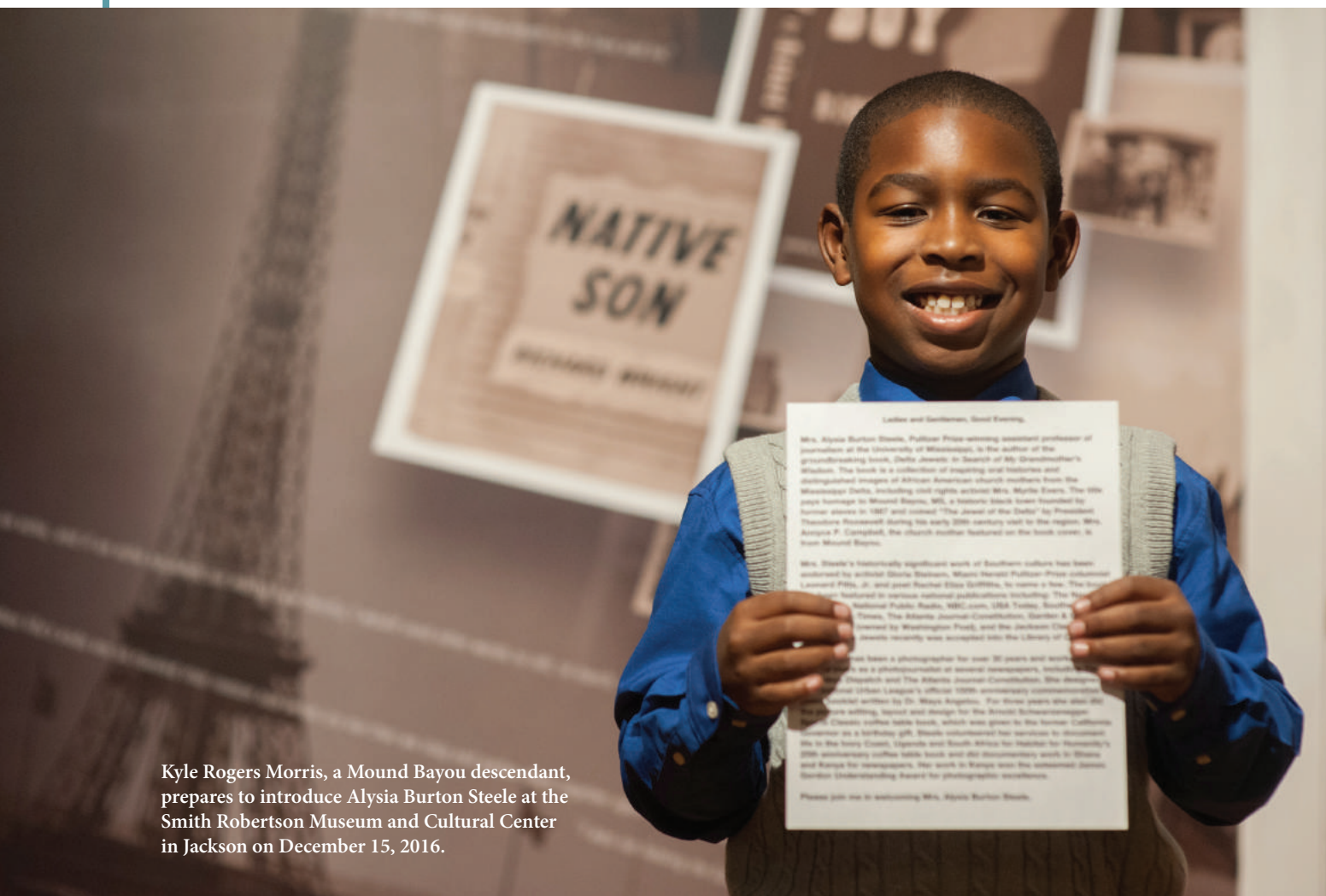
The National Park Service Centennial kicks off a second century of stewardship of America’s national parks and engaging communities through recreation, conservation, and historic preservation programs. In its second century, the National Park Service will fully represent our nation’s ethnically and culturally diverse communities. To achieve the promise of democracy, the National Park Service will create and deliver activities, programs, and services that honor, examine, and interpret America’s complex heritage. By investing in the preservation, interpretation, and restoration of the parks and by extending the benefits of conservation to communities, the National Park Service will inspire a “more perfect union,” offering renewed hope to each generation of Americans.

Source: A Call to Action: Preparing for a Second Century of Stewardship and Engagement, available at www.nps.gov/calltoaction/



Overview: The Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership

“Telling The Delta’s Story”



Kyle Rogers Morris, a Mound Bayou descendant, prepares to introduce Alysia Burton Steele at the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center in Jackson on December 15, 2016.

In September 2014, Dr. Rolando Herts, Director of the Delta Center for Culture and Learning at Delta State University which serves as the management entity for the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area, read about University of Mississippi journalism professor and Pulitzer Prize-winner Alysia Burton Steele’s book, *Delta Jewels: In Search of My Grandmothers Wisdom*, in *The New York Times*. Tourism planning expert Dr. Briavel Holcomb, Dr. Herts’ dissertation adviser at Rutgers University, had referred him to the article weeks after he had taken the helm of The Delta Center. Dr. Holcomb, a 40-year veteran professor at Rutgers and British grandmother of three, was impressed to learn that Delta Jewels was a book-in-progress about African American women who, as reported in *The New York Times*, were “lifelong residents of the Delta” that “had lived through segregation and struggle and liberation.” Based on her knowledge of The Delta Center and its role as management entity for the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (hereafter referred to as MDNHA), she encouraged him to connect with Mrs. Steele.

Telling the Delta's Story: What is *Interpretation*?

The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area Management Plan defines interpretation as “the process of identifying and documenting important stories and developing methods to share those stories in a variety of ways. Interpretation is the art of telling the story. Interpretation is an opportunity to engage residents in the process of finding, saving, telling, experiencing their own stories, and to promote increased awareness and pride in the Delta’s culture and heritage as well as attracting more visitors to the heritage area by creating new experiences” (2014, p. 137)

Methods of interpretation identified in the Management Plan include exhibits, programs, signage, brochures, guided or self-guided tours, performances, events, or other ways to communicate the story to the public.

Interpretation creates an experience around cultural heritage themes such as agriculture, cotton, the Jim Crow Era, the Civil Rights Movement, culinary traditions, and expressions of faith. The Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership has been a powerful and effective vehicle for interpreting Mississippi Delta culture and history.



Delta Jewel Herma Mims Floyd, of Sumner, MS., attends the Clarksdale Delta Jewels program.

Dr. Herts contacted Mrs. Steele about presenting her work at Delta State University’s 2015 Winning the Race diversity and race relations conference. During their conversation, he learned that none of the rural Mississippi Delta communities that many of the Delta Jewels church mothers called home were to be included in the Delta Jewels nationwide book tour. Over several weeks, Dr. Herts sought input from Mrs. Steele; Hachette Book Group, the publisher; MDNHA Board of Directors; and Delta Center colleagues, Mrs. Lee Aylward, Program Associate for Education and Community Outreach, and Mrs. Heather Miller, Program Associate for Projects, about the possibility of expanding the book tour to include Mississippi Delta communities. The following mutual interests were clarified that supported expanding the book tour into the Mississippi Delta region:

- *Delta Jewels* features oral histories and portraits of African American church mothers who reside in Mississippi Delta communities along with family, friends, and supporters who would be interested in acquiring books signed by Mrs. Steele.
- The Delta Jewels’ oral histories articulate several of the MDNHA’s cultural heritage themes, including sharecropping, the Jim Crow Era, the Civil Rights Movement, foodways, folk traditions, and expressions of faith, allowing the MDNHA a unique opportunity to “Tell the Delta’s Story” by interpreting these themes through community-based experiential learning programs.

With these mutual interests defined, and seed funding approved by the MDNHA Board of Directors, The Delta Center and MDNHA worked collaboratively with Mrs. Steele and Hachette Book Group to identify six Mississippi Delta municipalities where Delta Jewels Community Gatherings would be held: Clarksdale, Charleston, Indianola, Yazoo City, Ruleville, and Mound Bayou. The community gatherings were organized in partnership with a diverse array of local sponsor organizations. Mrs. Steele also presented sessions at Delta State's Winning the Race conference on March 30-31, 2015.

The Community Gatherings phase of this growing partnership concluded with "A Gathering of the Delta Jewels," a presentation held in conjunction with the 128th Founders Day Celebration of Mound Bayou. Proclaimed "The Jewel of the Delta" by President Theodore Roosevelt during his turn-of-the-20th-century tour of the Mississippi Delta, Mound Bayou is an historic black town founded by former slaves in 1887, the height of the post-Civil War Reconstruction Era. This special event attracted over 300 attendees, including 32 Delta Jewels church mothers, the largest gathering of Delta Jewels to date. It was held at Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church, pastored at the time by Reverend Andrew L. Hawkins who was instrumental in helping Mrs. Steele gain access to interview many of the church mothers featured in the book.

"The importance of this work truly came to life for me when I attended the Mound Bayou program to meet the real Delta Jewels," said Dr. Myrtis Tabb, chair of the MDNHA Board of Directors. "This remarkable group of strong women inspired me and others with their wisdom and humor. What an honor to be in their presence and hear their stories. I am happy the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area could play a part in promoting and celebrating their legacy."

Over 500 Mississippi Delta residents and visitors attended the Delta Jewels Community Gatherings. Barnes and Noble at Delta State University served as the bookseller. Delta Jewels church mothers participated in all of the Community Gatherings and received special certificates of appreciation from the Office of U.S. Congressman Bennie Thompson, the longest serving African American elected official in the state of Mississippi's history.

Continued demand for the Delta Jewels Community Gatherings led to the official creation of the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership in October 2015. The Delta Center collaborated with the MDNHA Board of Directors and Mrs. Steele to craft the terms of the partnership. Using the model established for the Delta Jewels Community Gatherings, the MDNHA Board of Directors agreed to provide up to ten Delta Jewels oral history programs in the state of Mississippi. MDNHA funding covered Mrs. Steele's honorarium and a professional or student photographer to document the oral history programs. Partner organizations throughout the state that expressed interest in hosting the programs agreed to publicize them and engage community members to attend, as well as provide event venues and funding for up to three Delta Jewels church mothers to participate in the programs.

Mrs. Steele also donated a curated collection of twelve *Delta Jewels* portraits to the MDNHA for educational and interpretive purposes. These donated portraits were exhibited at various Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership events.

Nine partner organizations throughout the region and the state offered Delta Jewels programs in their communities under the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership agreement, resulting in over 500 additional residents and visitors becoming aware of the MDNHA, the National Park Service Centennial, and the power of oral history and photography.



DELTA JEWELS

In Search of My Grandmother's Wisdom



Delta Jewels: In Search of My Grandmother's Wisdom has proven to be an effective interpretive resource for The Delta Center and the MDNHA to engage, educate, and inspire diverse communities across the Mississippi Delta region and beyond. This educational pamphlet provides details about the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership as a model for engaging groups from diverse backgrounds – racial, geographic, socioeconomic, age, and gender – through interpretive experiential learning programs that raise awareness of cultural heritage preservation and inspire pride of place.

The Power of Place:

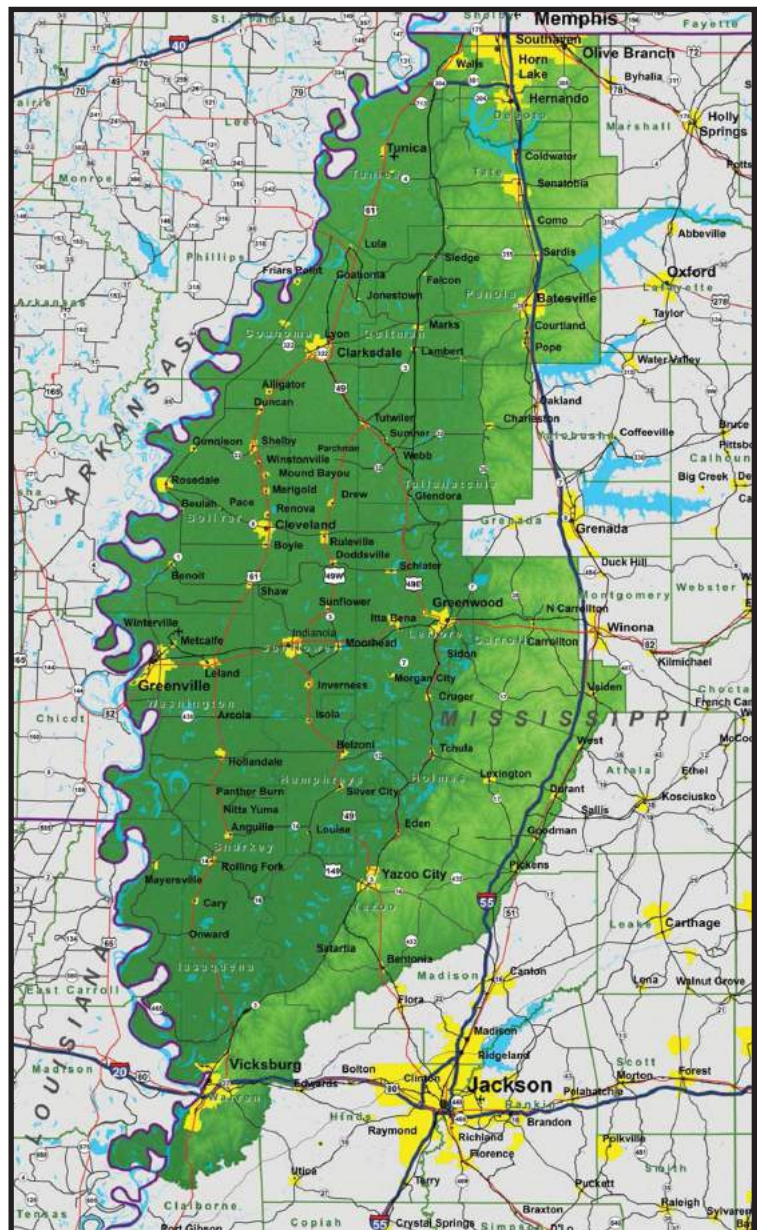
Identifying and Creating Welcoming Venues for Delta Jewels Community Gatherings

The Mississippi Delta is known globally as “The Birthplace of the Blues” and “The Birthplace of the Modern Civil Rights Movement” via the murder of Emmett Till. These nationally significant and sometimes controversial themes have defined social interactions and spaces in the region for over a century. Issues surrounding race relations and diversity are ever-present in Mississippi Delta communities, even today.

Given this social context, compounded by the related subject matter of *Delta Jewels*, it was critical to find venues for Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership events where people from diverse races, age groups, and socioeconomic backgrounds would feel welcome. This intentional effort was in keeping with the National Park Service Centennial’s goal of “creating the next generation of park goers and supporters” and the National Park Service Call to Action to “welcome and engage diverse communities through culturally relevant park stories and experiences that are accessible to all.”

The Delta Center team worked strategically to identify community partners that were sensitized to highly nuanced and deeply embedded social dynamics that could impede diverse engagement. This entailed having honest conversations built on trust and mutual respect about how to effectively bring together diverse populations. Essentially, The Delta Center and the MDNHA had to trust that community partners would work earnestly to identify spaces where diverse populations would intermingle and feel comfortable engaging with the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership program’s subject matter. Likewise, community partners had to trust that The Delta Center and the MDNHA were creating events that, indeed, would bring community members together to listen, to share, and to learn.

The Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership not only has attracted hundreds of residents and visitors; it has created safe spaces for hundreds of people from diverse backgrounds to learn about the lives, hopes, and struggles of African American church mothers from the Mississippi Delta; to take pride in the rich cultural heritage that they helped to shape; to interact with them as primary oral history sources; and, ultimately, to understand the value of cultural heritage preservation in their families and communities.





Left to right: Delta Jewels Tennie Self, Rena Butler and Herma Mims Floyd enjoy the Clarksdale program. Next to Mrs. Floyd is her son Dr. Tracy Mims, Mayor of Webb, MS.

What is a Church Mother?

According to *The New York Times* article featuring Alysia Burton Steele, “Whether by formal investiture or informal acclamation, nearly all the women in [Delta Jewels: In Search of My Grandmother’s Wisdom] held the title of ‘church mother,’ a term of respect and homage in black Christianity.”

Church mothers have served as vital members of African American church communities for generations. They usually are appointed by church pastors based on years of dedication, study, worship and prayer. A church mother often has deep knowledge of the Bible, may serve as a member of multiple church organizations, and may even possess singing and oratory talents. They are considered leaders within their congregations.

What, then, exactly are the responsibilities of church mothers? As writer Marie Baptiste reports, “In some predominantly African-American churches, pastors and congregations acknowledge older women who exhibit deep understanding of their faith and ability to communicate their knowledge with reverence and respect for their wisdom. These ‘church mothers’ serve in a variety of roles, some more theologically oriented than others.”

The roles of church mothers generally involve interacting with youth and families, modeling good spiritual practices and acceptable behavior for them, encouraging them, praying for them, and sharing their wisdom with them. Church mothers also perform educational work for their churches, which can include facilitating Bible study groups, teaching from the pulpit, and even leading ministries in the broader community.

Source: <http://peopleof.oureverydaylife.com/>



In February 2016, Alysia Burton Steele received the Preserver of Mississippi Culture Award from the Mississippi Humanities Council. Mrs. Steele was nominated for the award by Dr. Rolando Herts based on the success of the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership. The Mississippi Humanities Council is represented on the MDNHA Board of Directors.

Milestones: Creating the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership

Delta Jewels at Winning the Race Conference 2015



Delta Jewel Rosie Bynum's quilt presented at the 2015 Winning the Race conference, Delta State University.

On March 31, 2015, Alysia Burton Steele led a two-part lecture series detailing a fascinating behind-the-scenes overview of the *Delta Jewels* book project, from initial inspiration to ultimate completion and amazing storytelling by the Delta Jewels church mothers from the book.

The first lecture, “In Search of Treasured Wisdom: Discovering the Delta Jewels,” detailed how Mrs. Steele was inspired by memories of her grandmother, making the writing of the book a personal journey. During the summer of 2013, she traveled over 6,000 miles to photograph and collect oral histories from over 50 African American church mothers who live in Mississippi Delta communities.

In the second lecture, “May the Delta Jewels Shine!: Telling the Stories of Mississippi Delta Church Mothers,” Mrs. Steele revealed why and how the Mississippi Delta church mothers that she featured in the book truly were cultural treasures. In the session, Steele was joined by a few of the Delta Jewels whose powerful life stories of surviving harsh conditions of the Jim Crow Era and social upheavals of the Civil Rights Movement appeal broadly across racial, geographic, and generational divides.

At the end of the lecture, Mrs. Steele was presented a quilt made by Mrs. Rosie Bynum of Leland, MS. Mrs. Bynum had passed away recently at the age of 101. Mrs. Patricia Ware, daughter of Mrs. Bynum, brought the quilt to the lecture for Mrs. Steele as a token of appreciation, stating that Mrs. Bynum stuffed the quilt with Mississippi Delta cotton that she had picked by hand.

Phase 1: Telling the Delta’s Story: Delta Jewels Community Gatherings

The MDNHA’s Delta Jewels Community Gatherings provided six Mississippi Delta towns – Clarksdale, Charleston, Indianola, Yazoo City, Ruleville, and Mound Bayou – with access to an intergenerational cultural and social awareness exchange that was interpretive, educational, and celebratory. These Delta Jewels Community Gatherings were free and open to the public. Each Delta Jewels Community Gathering included presentations from Alysia Burton Steele and Dr. Herts; a community feedback session moderated by Pamela Junior, MDNHA board member and director of the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center, and Jacqueline Dace, Project Manager for the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum; and a book signing reception that provided guests an opportunity to meet Mrs. Steele and Delta Jewels church mothers from the book. Several MDNHA board members attended these Community Gatherings including Kappi Allen of the Clarksdale Coahoma Tourism Commission; Spencer Nash of the Delta Foundation; Dr. Stuart Rockoff of the Mississippi Humanities Council; and Dr. Myrtis Tabb who, at the time, was Delta State University’s representative on the MDNHA Board of Directors. In 2016, Dr. Tabb was appointed chair of the MDNHA board by Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant.

Municipality and Event Date	Venue	Local Partner Organizations
Clarksdale, MS, April 27, 2015	Clarksdale Convention & Visitors Bureau	Clarksdale Coahoma Tourism Commission
Charleston, MS, April 28, 2015	New Town Missionary Baptist Church	Son Edna, CARE
Indianola, MS, April 29, 2015	Henry P. Seymour Public Library	Sunflower County Library System
Yazoo City, MS, April 30, 2015	Triangle Cultural Center	City of Yazoo City, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Yazoo County Convention and Visitors Bureau
Ruleville, MS, May 4, 2015	Ruleville Community House	City of Ruleville
Mound Bayou, MS, July 11, 2015 128th Founders Day Celebration of Mound Bayou	Mt. Olive Missionary Baptist Church	AARP-MS, AARP-Mound Bayou Area Chapter, City of Mound Bayou and Historic Mound Bayou Foundation, Inc., Mound Bayou Civic Club

The Delta Jewels Community Gatherings fostered collaboration among an array of community partner organizations throughout the Mississippi Delta. In addition, the Community Gatherings contributed to economic activity throughout the region, providing support to local retail and catering/restaurant businesses including: Peter’s Pottery, Mound Bayou; Dutch Oven, Clarksdale; Blue Biscuit, Indianola; Pat Chatem Catering, Yazoo City; and 1933 Restaurant, Ruleville.



The Delta Center, as management entity for the MDNHA, received the Georgene Clark Diversity Champion Award at the 2016 Winning the Race conference at Delta State University. The Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership was cited as one of several programs that The Delta Center manages that advance diversity and positive race relations at the university and in the regional community. During the previous year, The Delta Center arranged for Alysia Burton Steele to present at the March 2015 Winning the Race conference. The presentations engaged dozens of Delta State University students and faculty members, as well as community members along with several Delta Jewels church mothers.

Oral History Session for University of Illinois Laboratory High School Visitors

In the midst of hosting Delta Jewels Community Gatherings, The Delta Center collaborated with Mrs. Steele and Delta State University and Coahoma County Community College's Coahoma County Higher Education Center to host an oral history session in Clarksdale, MS, for Dr. Janet Morford history teacher and director of the WILL oral history internship program at University of Illinois Laboratory High School.

Dr. Morford, a June 2014 alumnus of The Delta Center's National Endowment for the Humanities "Most Southern Place on Earth" workshop, brought 11 of her high school oral history interns to the Mississippi Delta to conduct research. She learned about Mrs. Steele's oral history work from Dr. Luther Brown, retired founding director of The Delta Center who remains in contact with the "Most Southern" workshop's 500-plus alumni network.

Dr. Morford realized that her team of oral history interns would be visiting the Delta during the same time as the Delta Jewels Community Gathering in Mound Bayou. She seized the opportunity to connect her students with Mrs. Steele for an intimate conversation about oral history research. The group also rearranged their schedule so that the students could attend the Mound Bayou Community Gathering, allowing them to secure autographs from many of the Delta Jewels church mothers in their books.

The Delta Center brought together Dr. Morford and her interns, Mrs. Steele, and Jen Waller, director of the Coahoma County Higher Education Center. The session yielded a rich conversation about the importance of connections in oral history work. Dr. Herts, director of The Delta Center, facilitated an overview of these connections, highlighting the roles and contributions of all session participants. Ms. Waller gave a brief historical overview of the CCHCEC complex and its relationship with Delta State. The Delta Center's Lee Aylward discussed how the group's visit helps to fulfill and sustain the educational impact of the NEH workshop. Mrs. Steele made a special trip from the University of Mississippi to Clarksdale to share the joys and challenges of oral history research with the high school group.

"Today's session demonstrates that the circle of influence keeps widening for the NEH Most Southern Place on Earth workshop," said Dr. Morford. "That's the true spirit of the workshop and of doing oral history work. The more that we talk to each other, the more we learn from each other, and the more we realize that we still have much more to learn.

"The WILL Interns have had such a meaningful exchange with Alysia Burton Steele. Being able to come to the Mississippi Delta with the support of our school, and to engage with the resources of Delta State through this session, has been extremely valuable for our students. This truly has been a transformative educational and cultural experience for all of us."





Students from University of Illinois Laboratory High School engaged in an oral history education session.

A Gathering of the Delta Jewels

Mound Bayou, MS



Rev. Dr. Andrew Hawkins

As part of Mound Bayou's 128th Founders Day celebration, The Delta Center and MDNHA collaborated with Mrs. Steele to present "A Gathering of the Delta Jewels" on July 11, 2015, at Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church, located in the heart of the historic black town of Mound Bayou. The event was jointly sponsored by FedEx, AARP-MS, the City of Mound Bayou, the Historic Mound Bayou Foundation, Inc., and Mound Bayou Civic Club.

As with all Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership events, this special Community Gathering commemorated the National Park Service Centennial. The event also strengthened connections with Mound Bayou, the "Jewel of the Delta," the inspiration for the title of Mrs. Steele's book. Mrs. Annyce Campbell, the Delta Jewel featured on the cover of the book, is a Mound Bayou native.

"Our Founders' Day celebration is and has been about African American history and stories being told," said Mayor Darryl Johnson of Mound Bayou. "Mound Bayou is one of the oldest African American towns in the country, so it is our duty to tell these stories for the benefit of our region and our country. The Delta Jewels event inspires us to research and tell stories that have not really been told, stories of nationally significant figures who have connections to Mound Bayou like Isaiah T. Montgomery, Dr. T.R.M. Howard, and other unsung heroes like the Delta Jewels. "I thank all who worked to make this Founders' Day celebration a great one — the Delta Jewels and their families, The Delta Center, the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area, President LaForge and Delta State, and, last but not least, Alysia Burton Steele."

In addition to Mrs. Steele and 32 Delta Jewels church mothers – the largest gathering of the Delta Jewels to date – the program featured Keith Beauchamp, creator of the Emmy Award-nominated documentary film “The Untold Story of Emmett Louis Till.” Beauchamp was joined by Fred Zollo, producer of the critically acclaimed films, “Mississippi Burning” and “Ghosts of Mississippi.” The event attracted over 300 guests from throughout the Mississippi Delta region and the nation, including New York, Illinois, Texas and California. Delta State University’s President William N. LaForge brought remarks on behalf of the university, referencing the institution’s commitment to cultural diversity and improving race relations in the Mississippi Delta. Dr. Stuart Rockoff, Executive Director of the Mississippi Humanities Council, brought remarks on behalf of the MDNHA Board of Directors.

“It was a pleasure to be a part of the celebration of Mound Bayou’s 128th birthday and the occasion of a special tribute to the ‘Delta Jewels,’ many of whom were in attendance,” said President LaForge. “Delta State was proud to be a sponsor of the program through our Delta Center for Culture and Learning.”

“This was an extraordinary opportunity to pay homage to these living figures of American history,” said Dr. Rockoff. “One of the reasons that the Mississippi Delta was designated a National Heritage Area by Congress is due to the fact that this is an active cultural landscape with traditions and customs that residents still practice. The Delta Jewels church mothers and their oral histories exemplify important aspects of the Delta region’s rich, living culture.”



Keith Beauchamp and Fred Zollo



President William N. LaForge



Dr. Stuart Rockoff



Left to right, top to bottom: Delta Jewels Rachel Scurlock and Lela Bearden in Charleston, MS, Program guests at Fannie Lou Hamer Institute at COFO, Jackson State University, Dr. Herts, Keith Beauchamp, former Mound Bayou Vice Mayor Herman Johnson and current Mound Bayou Mayor Darryl Johnson, Delta Jewels at the Yazoo City community gathering, Dr. Herts speaking at Alcorn State University

Phase 2: The Partnership is Official

The MDNHA and The Delta Center forged the official Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership with Mrs. Steele in October 2015. Through the official partnership, the MDNHA and The Delta Center were empowered to work with Mrs. Steele to present oral history programs and workshops with regional, statewide and even national organizations in commemoration of the 2016 National Park Service Centennial. Modeled after the Delta Jewels Community Gatherings, the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership aimed to continue to make oral history education and awareness accessible to diverse communities, as well as to promote Mississippi Delta culture and history on a broader scale.

Mississippi Valley State University in Itta Bena, MS, was the first organization to host an oral history program under this new partnership. The university is represented on the MDNHA Board of Directors.

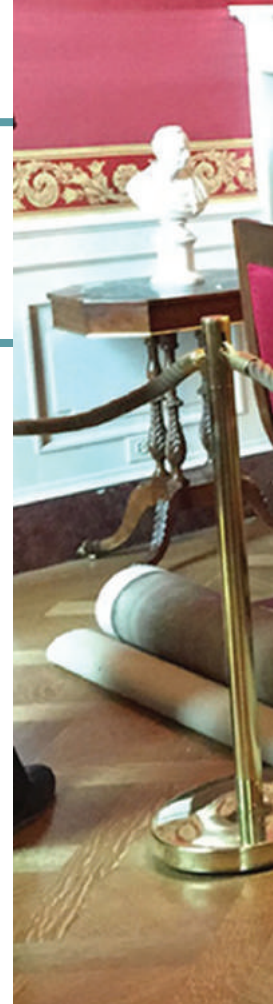
“Mississippi Valley State University is honored to host the inaugural program for the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership,” said La Shon Brooks, Chief of Staff at the university and MDNHA Board Member. “Providing a space where these culturally enriching oral histories will be shared with our students, faculty, staff and community members aligns with the public education mission of our institution.”

“The partnership will help the MDNHA to fulfill various aspects of its management plan approved by the National Park Service, including oral history education, promoting Delta culture and history, and telling Delta stories,” said Dr. Herts, Director of The Delta Center and the MDNHA. “The partnership also serves as a vehicle for the MDNHA to offer expanded Delta Jewels programming in the Mississippi Delta and beyond.”

Indeed, the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership contributed greatly to the MDNHA’s interpretive “Telling the Delta’s Story” message. Nine partner organizations throughout the Mississippi Delta region, the state of Mississippi, and in the nation’s capital offered Delta Jewels programs in their communities between October 2014 and December 2016. Over 500 Mississippi Delta residents, visitors, and supporters were engaged during this phase. Several MDNHA board members also attended and/or participated in these events. Bill Justice, Superintendent of Vicksburg Military Park and MDNHA National Park Service liaison, also attended.

Municipality and Event Date	Host and Partner Organizations
Itta Bena, MS, October 29, 2015	Mississippi Valley State University’s Office of the President and Department of English
Jackson, MS, November 12, 2015	Jackson State University’s Fannie Lou Hamer Institute at COFO and the Margaret Walker Center
Cleveland, MS, February 17, 2016	Delta State University’s Diversity Committee
Vicksburg, MS, February 25, 2016	Southern Cultural Heritage Foundation
Lorman, MS, February 26, 2016	Alcorn State University’s Wesley Foundation
Hattiesburg, MS, April 21, 2016	University of Southern Mississippi’s School of Mass Communication & Journalism, Center for Black Studies, and Center for Oral History & Cultural Heritage
Cleveland, MS, May 15, 2016	St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church
Grenada, MS, October 27, 2016	Holmes Community College’s Department of English
Jackson, MS, December 15, 2016	Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center

Delta Jewels goes to the Smithsonian and The White House



On March 13, 2016, Mrs. Annyce Campbell was recognized for her strength and commitment as a Mississippi Delta church mother. The Mound Bayou resident, Delta Jewels book cover lady, and proud nonagenarian was a featured participant in a special Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership presentation at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum in Washington, D.C. The presentation commemorated Women’s History Month and the National Park Service Centennial.

Mossi Tull of Jackson and Tull, a Washington, D.C.-based engineering firm, and member of the Smithsonian Anacostia board, sponsored travel for Mrs. Campbell and two of her daughters to be a part of the program.

The Smithsonian presentation attracted over 70 guests who were eager to hear from Mrs. Steele and Mrs. Campbell, as well as to learn about the MDNHA. In addition to receiving words of wisdom directly from Campbell, audience members were treated to a presentation from special guest and Mound Bayou native Reena Evers, daughter of civil rights activists Myrlie Evers-Williams (a Delta Jewel) and Medgar Evers.

“Mrs. Evers’ family has endured, struggled and fought through things no family should have to face,” Tull said. “Having her speak with such grace, strength and aplomb was a reminder and inspiration for all of us that face difficult situations to endure as well.”

During Mrs. Campbell’s visit to Washington D.C., she was given a tour of The White House. Through the efforts of Maggie Tyler, Southeast Region National Heritage Areas Program Manager, Campbell was able to participate in the tour with her daughters, Emily Harris and Alma Campbell. Dr. Rolando Herts, Director of The Delta Center and MDNHA, accompanied them.

“That moment — visiting The White House with my daughters — was more than my mind could conceive,” said Mrs. Campbell. “I held my ID in my hand for so long. How many more stops do I get to make? Where do we get to go next? Who do we get to meet? I can’t fully express the joy of that trip. Everyone should have an opportunity like this in their lifetime.”

“I was so excited to walk up to The White House gates with them and give Mrs. Campbell her tour ticket and introduce her to the NPS ranger working that day,” said Tyler. “Everyone was so gracious to Mrs. Campbell and her daughters and they were all beaming from ear to ear. It’s these small moments that make me proud to work for the National Park Service.”



The special program at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum commemorating Women’s History Month and the National Park Service Centennial was featured in the National Heritage Areas Newsletter, first quarter 2016 edition. Pictured here are Dr. Herts; Reena Evers, daughter of Delta Jewel Myrlie Evers Williams; Maggie Tyler of the National Park Service Southeast Regional Office; and Martha Raymond and Kathleen Durcan of the National Park Service National Heritage Areas office in Washington, D.C.



Delta Jewel Annyce Campbell inside the Red Room at the White House



Reena Evers signs the guest registry for the Delta Jewels event at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum



Dr. Herts ushers Mrs. Campbell into the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum



Voices of the People: Participant Feedback and Evaluations

Qualitative and quantitative data from post-event evaluations indicate that the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership is an effective community engagement and educational program centered around the interpretation of MDNHA cultural heritage themes.

Post-event evaluations played a critical role in shaping, modifying, and improving each Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership event. Evaluations also documented the extent to which the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership impacted residents and visitors who attended the events.

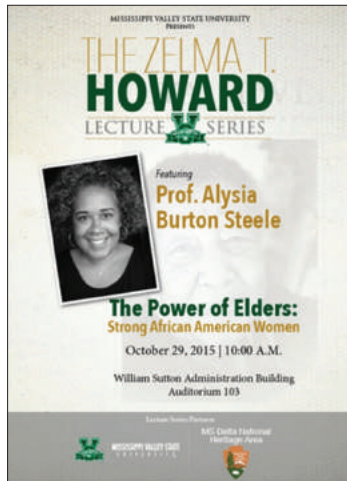
The table below provides cumulative ratings from 288 post-event evaluations completed between October 2015 and November 2016. This veritable report card suggests that, on a five-point scale with 5 being the most positive rating and 1 being the most negative, the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program has had very positive impacts on program attendees.

Alysia Burton Steele greets program attendees and signs books at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum



4.85	Program attendees have a better understanding and appreciation of oral history research
4.85	Program attendees understand the value of community cultural heritage and history
4.77	Program attendees feel empowered to collect oral history stories in family and/or community
4.71	Program attendees feel influenced to become a leader educating and enlightening others about significance of elders' stories to youth
4.81	Program attendees are willing to encourage community members to attend future Delta Jewelers Oral History Partnership Programs
4.90	Program attendees' overall experience rating

Feedback from individual program attendees also suggest that the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership has had positive impacts on them. Below are selected comments from each event held between October 2015 and November 2016.



MISSISSIPPI VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

In October 2015, LaShon Brooks, Chief of Staff at MVSU and MDNHA Board Member, hosted the first Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership event in collaboration with the Department of English's Zelma T. Howard Lecture Series.

Feedback:

"Great session: inspirational; enlightening."

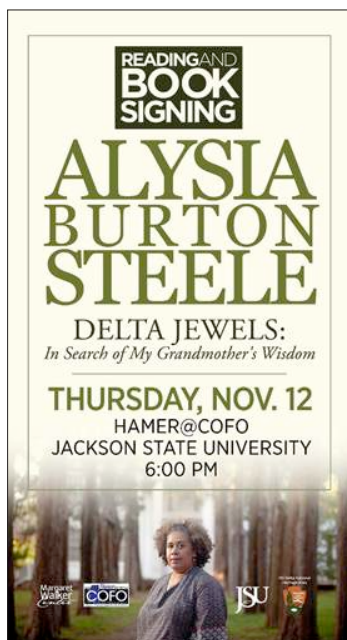
"This was a very informative presentation. I would love to purchase this book. I want to know more about these stories."

"This is amazing. It really changed my perspective of my culture."

"This presentation has enlightened me on how I should cherish and preserve my elders' past/history."

"This was an excellent, inspiring presentation."

"I had a great and warm feeling after this presentation. The stories are a glimpse into history and make me want to know more."



JACKSON STATE UNIVERSITY

In November 2015, Dr. Rico Chapman and Keith McMillian Academic Director and Program Director, respectively, of the Fannie Lou Hamer Institute at COFO, served as lead host for the second Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership event at Jackson State University in collaboration with Dr. Robert Lockett, Director of the Margaret Walker Center.

Feedback:

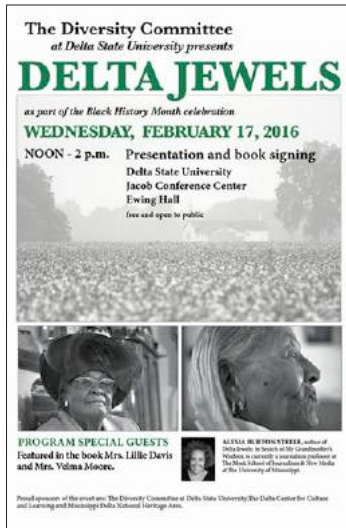
"This a wonderful program and I think this shows how good things can come from the South and the state of Mississippi. When I moved here from Miami, FL., my mother wondered why did I want to go to that awful state. Well, I've been here since 1991 and love it here."

"Outstanding!"

"She was very knowledgeable and passionate. It inspired me to be more appreciative."

"Her story has/will inspire me to take pictures as well as get oral histories from my family members."

DELTA STATE UNIVERSITY



Ms. Arlene Sanders, Chair of the Diversity Committee and political science instructor, hosted the third Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership event at Delta State University in honor of Black History Month, February 2016.

Feedback:

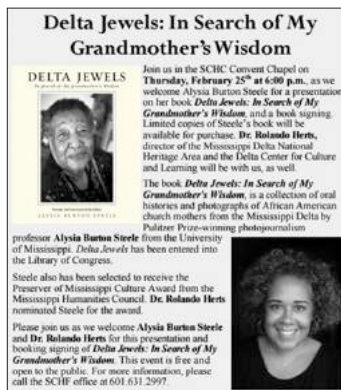
“I enjoyed the program and loved to hear what the mother had to say. Makes one appreciate their elders more and value their input.”

“This program was detailed, very organized, and inspirational.”

“I was very pleased and enjoyed both mothers.”

“I loved everything, especially the oral history stories.”

SOUTHERN CULTURAL HERITAGE FOUNDATION



Ms. Stacey Massey, Executive Director of the Southern Cultural Heritage Foundation, hosted the fourth Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership event in honor of Black History Month, February 2016.

Feedback:

“This is my second presentation to attend. Each time has left me in tears. I’m thankful to have all my stories. It reminds me to consider everyone’s importance, don’t be so fast to judge, and communication is time sensitive.”

“I’ve been photographing, videoing, and recording all of my grandparents for 13 years, and I am 22. Keep up the great work.”

“One of the great regrets of my life is that I never took the time to record my father’s stories. Keep up the great work.”

“This was a very good presentation. I like the reading of the stories, the audio of the women and the photos.”

Between April 2015 and December 2016, over 1,000 Mississippi Delta residents and visitors experienced the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership programs. Of the 288 attendees who completed post-event evaluations, 100% rated their overall experiences as “Excellent” or “Good.”





ALCORN STATE UNIVERSITY

Dr. Cassandra Vaughn, Chair of the Alcorn Wesley Foundation, hosted the fifth Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership event at Alcorn State University in honor of Black History Month, February 2016. Dr. Stephen Hall, Program Coordinator for the History Program and MDNHA Board Member, gave reflections on the importance of oral histories and cultural heritage preservation. Alcorn University students performed live renditions of traditional gospel selections.

Feedback:

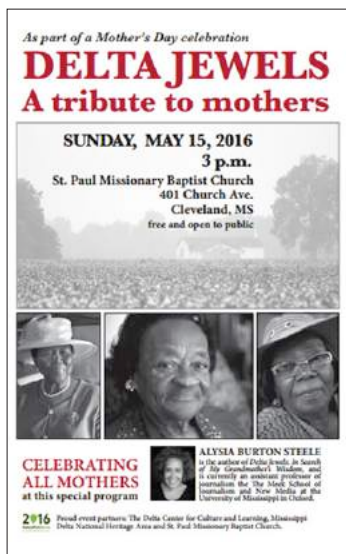
“I was really expecting a totally different presentation. I am so glad I was able to come and hear Mrs. Steele and the stories of these great women.”

“I truly enjoyed this because I have had the experience of learning some of my grandparents’ history. I wanted to study African American history but Alcorn no longer has the program anymore.”

“After this, I will definitely learn more about my grandma.”

“Nothing but positive feedback the program went very smoothly, and it was so educational as well as inspirational.”

“I wish more faculty and staff and students could have attended. Maybe the time could have been different.”



ST. PAUL MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH, CLEVELAND, MISSISSIPPI

The seventh Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program was hosted by Ms. Arlene Sanders at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church honoring Mother’s Day, May 2016.

Feedback:

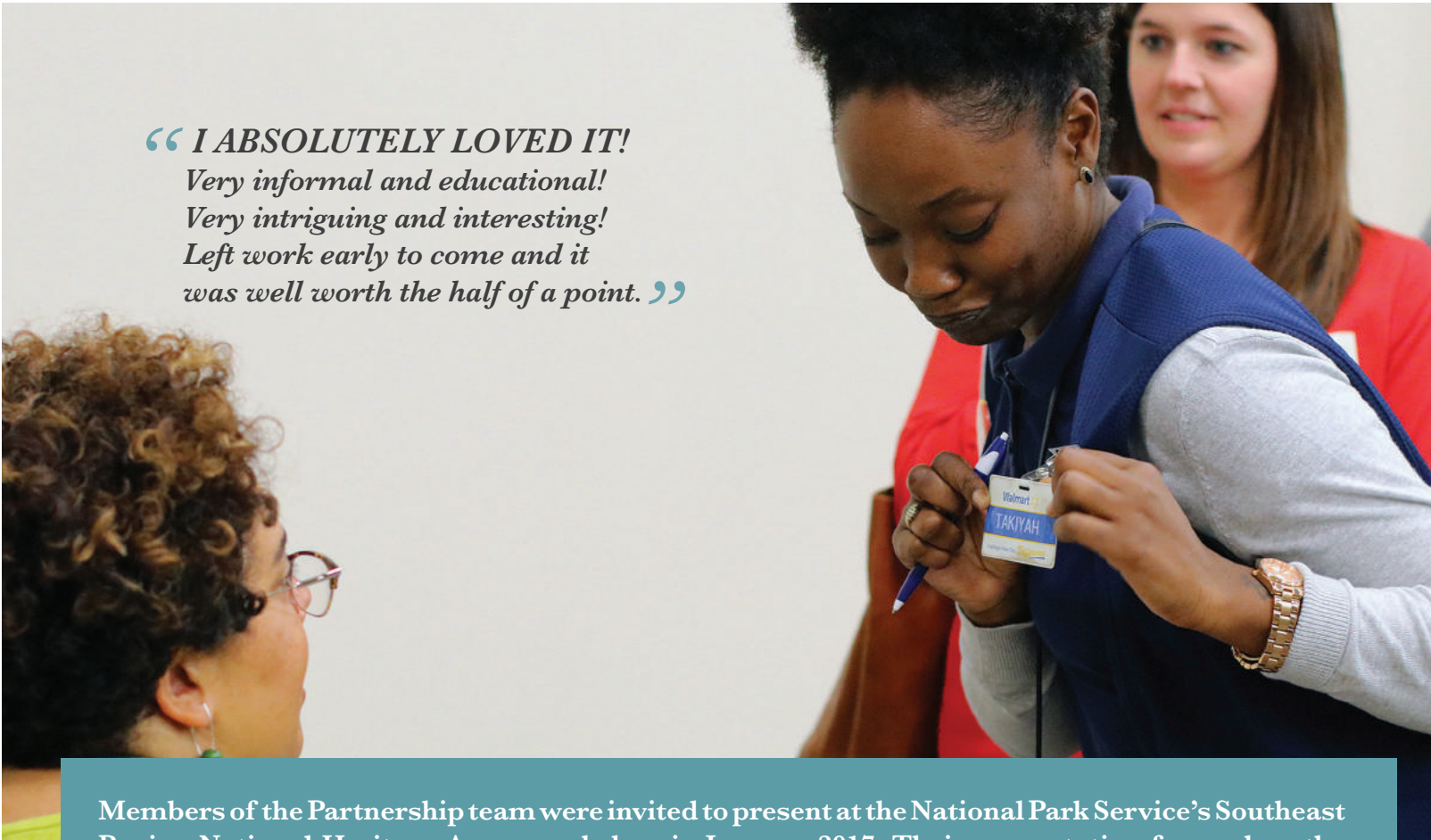
“This tribute to mothers needs to be shared in schools throughout the community.”

“I was raised in a family that values storytelling so this program really touched me and also inspired me to do more recording along with still pictures.”

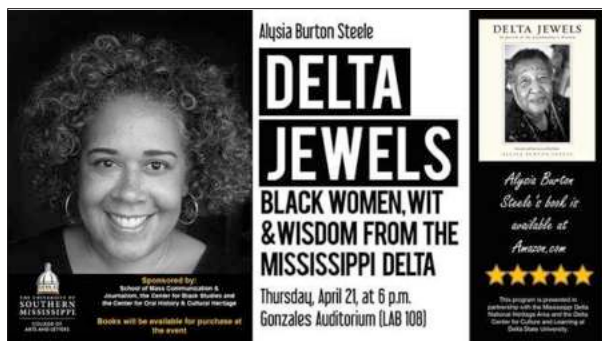
“Attending the program is empowering in that I was able to enjoy the oral history presentation with my mother, aunts, female cousins, and my daughter. I am proud of and grateful to Professor Steele for her diligence and ‘stick-with-itness.’”

“My only feedback is how well I enjoyed this program. Also, I did video some of my elderly relatives years ago. 100 year old, 94 year old, and so on. I just loved the entire program.”

“ I ABSOLUTELY LOVED IT!
Very informal and educational!
Very intriguing and interesting!
Left work early to come and it
was well worth the half of a point. ”



Members of the Partnership team were invited to present at the National Park Service’s Southeast Region National Heritage Areas workshop in January 2017. Their presentation focused on the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership and how it has promoted diversity in the MDNHA by aligning with the National Park Service Centennial. Representatives from National Heritage Areas throughout the Southeast Region attended the workshop.



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

Dr. Loren Coleman, Assistant Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications, presented the sixth Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership event in collaboration with The Center for Black Studies and the Center for Oral History at the University of Southern Mississippi.

Feedback:

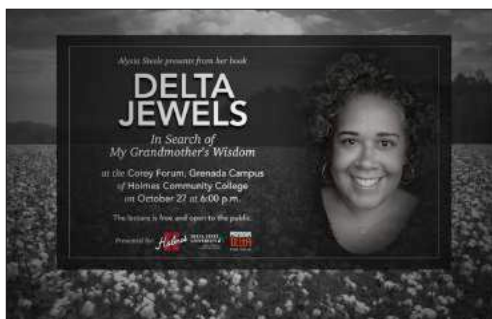
“I attended this lecture and the morning lecture. I am so inspired!”

“I always wanted to tell stories. I am starting a blog soon.”

“Alysia is awesome. We must have her back at USM!”

“Wonderful program.”

“It was truly amazing to meet someone invested in preserving the history of her family.”



HOLMES COMMUNITY COLLEGE

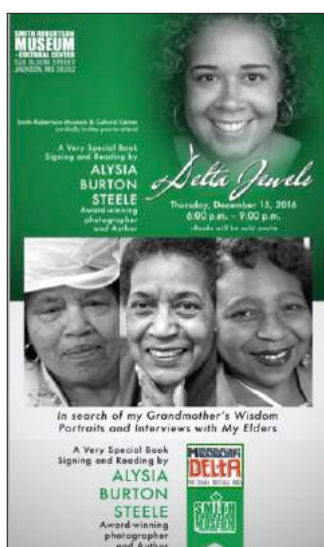
Mrs. Gwen Graham, English faculty member, presented the eighth Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership event.

Feedback:

“Enjoyed it very much. Such a sense of nostalgia. My parents are from the Delta along with husband & his family. My uncle does this with my large family & my dad videos & has taken pictures & audio long before camcorders & now digital video. This really inspired me to keep that tradition.”

“This was absolutely wonderful. It brought tears of joys to my eyes. I thank you for this. I will cherish this and try to go back home & interview my grandparents. Thank you again!”

“This program made me appreciate my grandparents more. I loved it. Happy that I came.”



SMITH ROBERTSON MUSEUM AND CULTURAL CENTER

Pamela Junior, Director of the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center and MDNHA Board Member, presented the ninth and final Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership as a holiday celebration for the community. The program included local jazz performer Pamela Confer and a special introduction of Mrs. Steele given by 10-year-old Kyle Rogers Morris, a descendant of Mound Bayou, MS, residents.

Feedback:

“After a long day of work, I almost skipped the event. I thank God that He allowed me to listen to the voice that led me to Smith Robertson tonight. Hallelujah!”

“Mrs. Steele (and the Delta) are incredible.”

“I absolutely enjoyed myself. I hope one day she writes about the men of the Mississippi Delta.”

“Beautiful location - catering and music were very nice!”



Two local youth organizations, Delta Hands for Hope of Shaw, MS, and Rosedale Freedom Project, both received 2016 MDNHA grants to launch oral history projects focused on how Mississippi Delta residents' lives have been influenced by the region's musical heritage. The youth screened oral history documentary shorts at GRAMMY Museum Mississippi in collaboration with the MDNHA and The Delta Center as part of a public screening of the critically-acclaimed film "Take Me To The River." This is one way that the MDNHA's "Telling the Delta's Story" message has continued to spread in the region.

Reflections from Community Partners

Dr. Loren S. Coleman, Assistant Professor, School of Mass Communication and Journalism, University of Southern Mississippi

What did hosting the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program mean to you?

As a media scholar who engages in critical and cultural research, it is important to me to expose my campus community to the work of others that investigates the intersections of media practice, community, history and culture. The Delta Jewels program did just that. Professor Steele's book coupled with Dr. Herts' Center's emphasis on storytelling provided my students, colleagues and community members an opportunity to witness the importance of oral history. My research and teaching philosophies are grounded in service and community action. The partnership formed to sponsor this program at USM allowed multiple entities on campus to serve the larger Hattiesburg community.



A libation ceremony was held at the Smith Robertson Museum and Cultural Center honoring Rev. Hawkins of Mound Bayou and nine Delta Jewels who have passed away since the book has been published.



What did the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program mean to your institution/organization?

Delta Jewels was cosponsored by three main departments on campus: The Center for Black Studies, The School of Mass Communication and Journalism, and the Center for Oral History. University of Southern Mississippi encourages collaboration and partnerships across campus departments, and fully supports partnerships with outside organizations, like the Delta Center for Culture and Learning. Therefore, this program was one concrete example of the university's commitment to institutional and community collaboration. For each center involved, I can confidently say that this program shed light on issues that our respective research explores, and that our respective centers and departments teach and value.

What did The Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program mean for the community that your institution/organization serves (e.g., students, residents, employees)?

Faculty, students, staff and community members alike thoroughly enjoyed this program. The Delta Jewels showed community members that the University values the stories of our state within the Black community. For faculty and staff, the Delta Jewels program inspired us to think about the impact and reach of our work. Similarly, the Delta Jewels program opened up the possibility of future partnerships with The Delta Center for Culture and Learning. For students, this program was an opportunity to learn about history through oral histories. Students were also inspired to do their own interviews and preserve the stories of their family and friends.

Arlene Sanders, Diversity Committee Chair and Political Science Instructor, Delta State University and member of St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church, Cleveland, MS

What did hosting the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program mean to you?

I was honored to host the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program twice: once at Delta State University in honor of Black History Month and another time at St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church in honor of Mother's Day. These programs gave me the opportunity to share with the local community the importance of knowing and understanding the worth and value of our grandmothers, mothers, aunts, and local women who influenced generations of people.

What did the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program mean to your institution/organization?

The Delta Jewels Program meant so much to the Delta State campus and the congregation at St. Paul. It showed the local residents the power of ordinary women who relied on their faith in God to overcome institutional and social barriers erected to ensure that they remained powerless.

What did The Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership Program mean for the community that your institution/organization serves (e.g., students, residents, employees)?

The Delta Jewels Program meant so much to those attending the event. It was just another instance whereby students and residents could engage in conversation with Black women of faith, courage, and dignity. They were able to see the strength and determination of women featured in Delta Jewels: In Search of My Grandmother's Wisdom.



Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area Board of Directors and Delta Center staff members



Dr. Herts, Alysia Burton Steele, Delta Jewel Annyce Campbell, Bobby Steele, and MDNHA Board Member Kappi Allen at the Clarksdale Community Gathering

Reflections from Alysia Burton Steele

This partnership has been fulfilling on such a personal level because of connections we have made with diverse audiences across the Mississippi Delta, the state, and the nation. What a journey full of enrichment! I did this book because I missed a loved one. I had no idea this book would touch so many people, especially the youth, and it wouldn't have reached the audiences we targeted as well as it did had it not been for this partnership with the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area and The Delta Center for Culture and Learning. Everyone involved benefitted from this incredible partnership, which is the epitome of a successful collaboration.

In 2015, I founded our nonprofit Delta Jewels Support Foundation. Our mission is to record oral histories, document culturally and historically significant programs and educate people in oral history best practices. We are working hard to build professional relationships in Mississippi to pay it forward. We never work alone and I would like to thank my husband Bobby D. Steele, Jr., who has been instrumental in documenting the events, designing posters and producing a wonderful video that celebrates and educates viewers about this partnership. It is truly a team effort.

What really hit home for me was doing a presentation at Holmes Community College in Grenada, Mississippi in October 2016. At the core of who I am, I believe it is important to share with our youth so that they might learn more interpersonal skills and strengthen relationships with their elders. I never recorded my grandmother Althenia A. Burton's voice and it fills me with deep regret. So imagine my surprise and appreciation when I found out that professor Pam Moore at Holmes Community College used Delta Jewels as a class textbook. Students interviewed an elder in their life. When Professor Moore told me about this assignment, I asked if I could surprise the students and listen to their presentations in class. She agreed. It was one of the best experiences I have had throughout this partnership.

The very first young lady who spoke talked about how she didn't know her paternal side of the family, but that my book encouraged her to interview her grandmother. Another young lady broke down in tears because her grandmother passed away just days after she interviewed her for class. I encouraged her to appreciate what she had accomplished. The lesson is that we are all connected based on sharing stories about love.

The Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership has enriched my life immensely over the past 18 months. I thank the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area, The Delta Center for Culture and Learning, and Dr. Herts for reaching out to me and supporting the work for the betterment of our communities. This was bigger than any one person. Personally, I have grown as a storyteller, a journalist and as a human being. Together we have touched so many lives with the Delta Jewels church mothers. Their stories transcend age, race and gender.



Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership team members at the Ruleville Community Gathering.

Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership 2015-2016 Program Report Credits and Acknowledgments

The Delta Center for Culture and Learning Staff:

Dr. Rolando Herts
Director

Lee Aylward
*Program Associate for Education
and Community Outreach*

Heather Miller
Program Associate for Projects

Patricia Webster
Administrative Assistant

Moira Fair
Graduate Assistant

Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area Board of Directors:

LaShon F. Brooks
Mississippi Valley State University

Dr. Stephen Hall
Alcorn State University

Spencer Nash (Vice Chair)
Delta Foundation

Pamela Junior
Smith Robertson Museum

Dr. Myrtis Tabb (Chair)
Governor's Appointee

Bill Allen
Delta Council

Malcolm White
Mississippi Arts Commission

Kane Ditto
Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Dr. Stuart Rockoff
Mississippi Humanities Council

Dr. Charles McAdams
Delta State University

District 1: Kim Terrell
(Secretary/Treasurer)
District 2: Kappi Allen
District 3: Robert Moore
District 4: Paula Sykes
District 5: Meg Cooper

Report Research, Design, Writing, and Editing Team

Cotton Row Creative
Lee Aylward
Alysia Burton Steele
Moira Fair
Dr. Rolando Herts
Will Jacks
Heather Miller
Patricia Webster

Photo Credits

Will Jacks
Smithsonian Institution
Alysia Burton Steele
Bobby D. Steele, Jr.

The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area and The Delta Center at Delta State University acknowledge the support and cooperation of all local, regional, and national partners and collaborators involved with planning and implementing the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership.

We also acknowledge hundreds of Mississippi Delta residents and visitors who engaged with the Delta Jewels Oral History Partnership. We sincerely thank you for your interest in and passion for cultural heritage preservation through storytelling.

Last but not least, thanks to Alysia Burton Steele and the Delta Jewels church mothers for their dedication and willingness to share stories that have touched many lives throughout the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area and beyond.

**The Delta Center for Culture and Learning
Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area**

DSU Box 3152
1003 West Sunflower Road
Cleveland, MS 38733
ph: 662-846-4312
www.deltacenterdsu.com
www.msdeltaheritage.com

