

Mississippi Department of Archives and History

Learning Lagniappe: Educator Extras

1927 Flood Photograph Collection

PI/1992.0002

http://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/series/1927flood

The Mississippi River flood of 1927 inundated roughly 27,000 square miles of land and displaced some 700,000 persons. Property damage was estimated at \$400 million, and 246 people died in the flood waters. Particularly hard hit by the disaster was the Mississippi Delta region. The 124 photographs in this collection were taken by the flood committee of the Illinois Central Railroad Company in April, May, and October of 1927. Arranged geographically, north to south, the images document flood damage along the route of the Illinois Central Railroad from Memphis, Tennessee, to Delhi, Louisiana. The collection also includes one map of the Illinois Central Railroad throughout the flooded area.

Subjects that can be addressed within this Digital Archive:

The 1927 Mississippi River flood, railroads and transportation, flood control and levee construction, race relations in early 20th century Mississippi, emergency planning, and the 1928 Flood Control Act.

Teacher Discussion Guide on Reverse

Teacher Discussion Guide

Use images from the MDAH Digital Archive entitled “1927 Flood Photograph Collection,” (found at http://www.mdah.ms.gov/arrec/digital_archives/series/1927flood) to lead your class in a discussion analyzing and interpreting the following images:

1. Type in “African-American flood refugees stand in line at Birdsong Camp” (Item 8) in the “search for keyword” box: Why are these refugees standing in line?
 - They are waiting to collect things that they would have lost in the flood and which would be in short supply such as food, clothing, or medicine.
2. Type in “Two males standing on porch of house surrounded by flood water” (Item 21) in the “search for keyword” box: Some people did not evacuate the flood zone. What would you have to do to flood-proof your house and prepare your family to wait out the flood?
 - Put outdoor equipment such as cars, lawn furniture, and farm animals on the highest ground possible; roll up rugs and stack furniture and put in the attic; have food and water available for people and any pets/livestock and to ensure that you would be able to cook the food without running water or electricity; and build or buy a boat to keep at home and use for transportation.
3. Type in “Flood water surrounds depot at Egremont” (Item 50) in the “search for keyword” box: Why would railroad tracks make a good place to escape flood waters? Who and what are using the tracks in this image?
 - Railroad tracks were placed on elevated dirt embankments similar to levees. This higher ground made them natural places for small and large groups of refugees. In this image you see people, animals, cars, personal belongings, and boats. Very likely, there are people using the boxcars as shelters.
4. Type in “View of different water levels on either side of levee” (Item 61) in the “search for keyword” box: This image shows a levee with two very different water levels on either side of it photographed on May 2, 1927. What does this tell you about the status of flood waters two weeks after the levees broke?
 - It says that the Mississippi River (on the right) is still high and that it did rise higher than anyone thought it would (because it breached the levee and flooded the town (left). Because the river is still so high, the town was unable to drain. It would be August before water levels returned to normal.
5. Type in “Tracks lined with sand bags” (Item 67) and “Black males in rail cars filling sand bags” (Item 74) in “search for keyword” box: What is the purpose of the sandbags? Who put them there?
 - The purpose of the sandbags is to protect the railroad track from flooding and to allow as long as possible the evacuation of refugees and the import of recovery supplies and personnel. Sandbags also helped slow the erosion of the levees by protecting them from the swiftly flowing water. Many of the sandbags alongside railroad tracks and levees filled and stacked by African American workers. In many instances, these men and their families were forced to remain in the flood zone to provide labor that would help reinforce and repair levees.
6. Type in “Camp for flood victims, tents with occupants” (Item 71) and “Refugee camp for flood victims” (Item 103) in “search for keyword” box: What is this an image of? What would be some of the challenges of living here?
 - The image is of Tent City, a refugee camp setup by the Red Cross. Challenges of living here would have included overcrowding; lack of clean drinking/washing/bathing water; sanitation (no indoor, flush toilets) and an excess of mud, debris, and animal carcasses that floated downstream; minimal medical supplies and personnel; and scarce food and clothing.
7. Type in “Cotton bales on rail cars and floating in flood waters” (Item 104) and “Panoramic photograph of flooding in Yazoo City” (Item 105) in “search for keyword” box: How would the Great Flood have impacted Mississippi’s economy?
 - The flood destroyed farmland that was predominantly used to grow cotton. Because the flood waters did not completely recede until August of 1927, an entire year of crops were lost. In addition to that, any harvested crops (such as the cotton in this image), merchandise in stores, or machinery that was in the flood zone was either washed away or damaged so it could no longer be used.