

How the State Failed

Jackson, MS

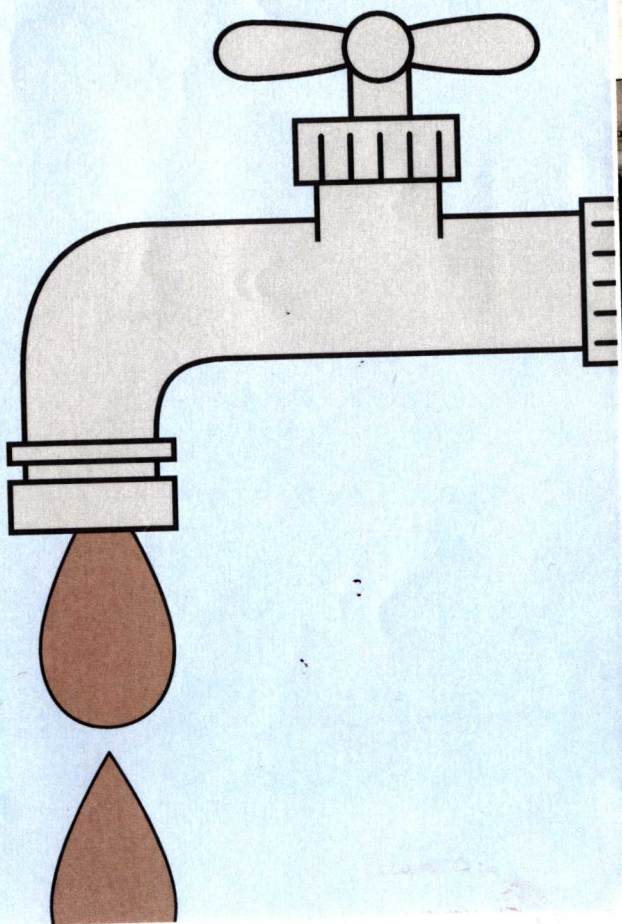


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Introduction:

For years the residents of Jackson, MS have been taken advantage of. From the horrible infrastructure and water problems to the direct discrimination by the state. The water crisis is nothing new to the residents of Jackson but to others across the US now is the first time they are hearing of this. A brief explanation of what is going on in the city of Jackson, MS residents are unable to drink the water coming out of their faucets, forced to either boil the water, or purchase bottled water. Packs of bottled water are available on a first-come-first-serve basis.

The water pressure in the city is so low, some residents are unable to flush their toilets and have sewage backup. The residents of Jackson, MS are suffering and the state of MS is doing the bare minimum to make it look as if they are helping. I have done extensive research on news articles from CNN and PBS as well as dissecting the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) document defending the people of Jackson against the state. This zine presents what caused the water crisis, who is affected, and what is being done to fix it and aid the residents along the way.



Firefighters passing out bottled water to residents in Jackson,

NAACP:

The NAACP is an organization whose vision is "an inclusive community rooted in liberation where all persons can exercise their civil and human rights without discrimination".

The organization was started on February 12, 1909, by Black and White activists in response to violence against Black Americans. The NAACP court document was made to explain the discrimination by the state impacting the drinking water system, and the health and well-being of the people of Jackson. It was made on September 27, 2022. Through a simple google search, this 25-page document is able to be read around the world. But, it was made so the residents of Jackson and people who have an interest in the area can gain a better understanding of the ongoing battle between the State and Jackson, MS. The document is an official court document meaning whoever reads it will read facts and claims that have adequate information and sources to back them up.



NAACP logo

Document Explained

In the next few pages, I will talk about specific parts found in the NAACP document.

Paragraph 7: "In addition to denying Jackson a share of federal funds proportional to its need for safe and reliable drinking water, the State has exacerbated the funding gap by repeatedly denying Jackson the ability to fund improvements to its drinking water system, to manage its debt, and to thereby protect its residents. For example, the Governor and the State Legislature: • vetoed infrastructure funding legislation, S.B. 2586, in 2020 that was vital to the Jackson water supply's future; • rejected a 1% sales tax that would have funded repairs to Jackson's water and sewage system; 1• excluded major sources of revenue from the existing sales tax • appointed a State Commission that restricts Jackson's Mayor and City Council in expending funds, leaving Jackson's elected officials a with minority representation on the Commission; and • refused to compensate Jackson for lost tax revenues from significant areas of state-owned, tax-exempt real estate, despite proposals for a "Payment in Lieu of [Property] Taxes" system."

Document Explained Document Explained

Throughout paragraph 7 there is interesting language and logos used to pull in the audience as they read the official complaint. Using language such as "denying" and "exacerbated" really calls to the audience. Using logos, appealing to the audience's sense of reason or logic, with examples of statistics is able to show the audience facts of how the State is harming Jackson. Explaining the details of the State denying Jackson funds, vetoing infrastructure funding, rejecting a 1% sales tax that would fund repairs to the water system, excluding major revenue from sales tax, appointing a State Commission that restricted Jackson's Mayor and city council, and refusing to compensate Jackson for lost tax revenue. While it is a lot to unpack in one paragraph it is one of the most important paragraphs in the document. The use of statistics is able to tune into the audience's sense of reason and use an eye-opening statement to explain all that the state is doing. Including the statement on taxation is a way for the document to pull in the political side that is showing through this crisis. The document is explaining that the State is choosing to veto taxes and exclude major revenue sources from already existing taxes. While the document is arguing the need for a tax increase to help fund the infrastructure and water system since the State will not give the designated funding money to help. It is obvious the state is trying to hold back these taxes to help those who are in higher-end predominately white areas keep their money.

Paragraph 10: "Funding for clean drinking water in Jackson should be among the State's highest priorities, yet the State has blatantly and repeatedly ignored the city's needs. Only one factor can explain the disproportionate underfunding and repeated sidelining of the State's largest city, with one of the largest Black communities in the country: racial discrimination. The State's pattern and practice of underfunding Jackson is so consistent and the disproportionate harm to a protected group—Jackson's predominantly Black population—so stark as to establish both discriminatory intent and an unlawful disparate impact. Accordingly, we believe that the State (including several of its agencies, instrumentalities, and officials, both separately and collectively) is violating Title VI and its implementing regulations. To remedy these violations, we request that your office immediately investigate, consider a Title VI enforcement referral to the Department of Justice, and bring the State into compliance with civil rights laws by directing the State, including all of its relevant agencies and instrumentalities to ensure that Jackson has equitable and non-discriminatory access to federal funding."

NAACP Document: NAACP Complaint:

Paragraph 10, uses a pathos, emotional, tone. Firstly, the document is pointing out that Jackson is not only the state's biggest city but that city holds one of the largest Black communities in the country. While doing so, it also points out the only factor that can explain the significant underfunding, racial discrimination. Second, it points out the state's pattern of continuous underfunding towards Jackson and introduces the thought that the state violated Title VI, exclusion, or discrimination based on race, color, or national origin. It then goes on to explain that the NAACP is asking the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to send an enforcement referral to the Department of Justice in hopes it will bring the state into compliance with the civil rights laws ensuring Jackson will have non-discriminating access to federal funding.



Throughout the document, it dives deep into the direct discrimination by the state. Paragraph 6 explains the state purposely has been divining funding to where predominantly white areas get the most money while Jackson, the capital of MS, is given very little funding. Specifically, when paragraph 7 goes into detail about how the state went out of its way to negatively affect Jackson, MS. Through, "vetoing infrastructure funding, rejecting a 1% sales tax increase which would have funded repairs for Jackson's water and sewage system, exclude major sources of revenue from existing sales tax, electing a new state commission that restricted Jacksons mayor and city council making them a minority representation, and refusing to compensate Jackson for its lost tax revenue ." Paragraph ten explains how the state has violated Title XI. The document explains not only how the state played a direct role in the start of the water crisis but also how it continues to allow the crisis to continue. Reading the document has been very eye-opening in seeing how the decisions made by the State officials have had such a negative effect on the residents. But, also to see how obvious it is the decisions were made with no intent of helping the residents of Jackson.

More Information:

Residents of Jackson are having to go to disruption locations to pick up one twenty-four pack of bottled water per family. They use this twenty-four pack to brush their teeth, drink, cook, flush their toilets, etc. No one knows how long the crisis will last and plan to be on bottled water for at least a year as stated in the PBS article.



National Guard passing out cases of water to residents in Jackson, MS.

The document and other news articles have stated many residents, hospitals, and businesses have moved from city water to private well systems. Residents say they are moving in hopes of not having to worry about boil notices, sewage backup, or altogether no water. While hospitals say they have removed themselves due to water quality concerns.



Jackson resident filling up their bathtub to store water just to flush their toilet.

Next Steps:

- The city is continuing to test the water and hopes the water will come back clean and drinkable without boiling it.
- As of October 31, 2022, the EPA has determined the water is safe to drink. However, many residents have stated they still feel unsafe drinking the water and remain to have discoloration.
- An Interim agreement is being drafted between the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Jackson officials. It has not yet been released if it was passed by the city council. The agreement would allow for the mayor to apply for grant money to aid in helping with the Jackson infrastructure.



Jackson, MS city council

Final Thoughts:

While the Jackson water crisis is nothing new to its residents or those who are native to the area. It was a very new topic to me and made me aware of a struggle I never had to face. I was able to find a lot of information because the topic is very prevalent in the news throughout the assignment. The Jackson water crisis is a very significant event to take place in the US. It showcased how the State failed at its duties to aid the cities/counties that need help, the physical/mental toll the water took on the residents of Jackson, and how bad the conditions became for the residents.

I picked this topic because as someone who is out of state and never had to worry about if the water I was drinking was going to harm me in any way, how my family would be able to share one case of water in the house or worry about making sure the water was boiled enough to use safely. I was not only able to see how privileged I am to never have to experience this but to see how badly the state failed to protect its residents, how long it went on, and how extreme the effects got.

Sources:

I used the following sources in my zine:

- NAACP requests civil rights probe into Jackson water crisis, saying Mississippi has long discriminated against majority-Black capital, CNN, McLaughlin, September 27, 2022
- In Jackson, the tap water is back, but the crisis remains, PBS News Hour, Rayasam, September 25, 2022
- Complaint Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. § 2000d, and 40 C.F.R. Part 7 Regarding Discrimination by the State of Mississippi Gravely Adversely Impacting the Drinking Water System for the City and the Health and Well Being of the People of Jackson, Mississippi, NAACP, Office of the General Council, September 27, 2022
- The water crisis in Jackson, Mississippi, has gotten so bad, the city temporarily ran out of bottled water to give to residents, CNN, Amir Vera et al., August 31, 2022
- Jackson City Council, The city of Jackson Mississippi

Resources:

Sources to consider if you would like to continue researching the Jackson water crisis.

- EPA determines water in Jackson, Mississippi, is safe to drink two months after treatment plant failure, CNN, Simonson and Wolfe, October 31, 2022
- Jackson, Mississippi, takes step forward in addressing water crisis, ABC News, Deliso, November 18, 2022
- Feds take over Jackson water after failures at the local and state level, Mississippi Today, Harrison, December 4, 2022.