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## Photo portraits of LGBTQ Mississippians (Summer 2022)

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*University of Mississippi*

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**Kevin Cozart, Operations Coordinator, Sarah Isom Center for Women & Gender Studies, made photo portraits of LGBTQ+ Mississippians**

I used the residency, plus a couple of extra days, to complete a ten-day road trip starting in Memphis and ending in Clarksdale. During that time, I visited Tupelo, Columbus, Laurel, Hattiesburg, Gulfport, New Orleans, Jackson, and Cleveland. During my travels, I realized that, while the residency was supposed to be about my creativity and me photographing queer Mississippians so that others could see them, it was also about me experiencing others' creativity and seeing Mississippi through a different lens.

Before I get to that, at the most measurable level, I was able to accomplish taking about a dozen portraits accompanied by a short interview during my road trip. The stipend was used to help cover the costs of travel.

After both of my Columbus-related photoshoots got postponed, I had some free time. I decided to visit Friendly City Books for the first time and was able to pick up a print copy of *Southern Voices*, the award-winning literary and arts magazine created by students at the Mississippi School for Mathematics and Science, and *How to Read*, a book of poetry by Thomas Richardson, a Mississippi native. While in the Delta, I visited the Grammy Museum and the Delta Blues Museum, the latter should be a must-visit for all Mississippians. All these experiences were windows into the creativity of fellow Mississippians.

My real epiphany during the trip was the opportunity to see Mississippi differently. I had never really been to Laurel, Hattiesburg, or the Mississippi Gulf Coast between Gulfport and New Orleans. I have driven Highway 45 several times, but often I was in a hurry to get somewhere. Because I only had short distances to travel each day, I was about to take my time and enjoy the journey and see Mississippi from a different perspective.

I'm grateful for the residency because it allowed me to focus on the journey and not the destination, whether that be traveling or taking pictures.