Delta State University
Cleveland, MS

Grant request: $20,000
Book selection: *Homegoing*

Project information:
Proposed programming start date: 12-01-2022
Proposed programming end date: 03-31-2023
Number of partner organizations: 10
Number of book discussions: 5
Total number of events: 11
Anticipated total participants: 1,000

Panelist notes:

Organization description narrative (one page)

Delta State University is a public institution providing a comprehensive undergraduate and graduate curriculum to approximately 2,700 students representing all of the states and 40+ different countries. Dozens of degree programs on the undergraduate level provide educational opportunities in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Business and Aviation, and Education and Human Sciences, and in the Robert E. Smith School of Nursing. Graduate programs on the master's, educational specialist, and doctoral levels provide advanced training in a broad range of disciplines.

Acknowledging its beginning as a teacher's college, the University sustains excellence in teacher education while continuing to expand offerings in traditional as well as unique programs of study. From the core disciplines such as arts, humanities, and sciences, to unique programs such as Commercial Aviation, the Delta Music Institute, and the nationally-recognized Geospatial Information Technology program, the University is committed to meeting the evolving needs of the students it serves.

DSU serves as the educational and cultural center of the Mississippi Delta. Delta State's continuing campus- and community-wide initiatives to improve cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion have resulted in award-winning racial reconciliation conferences (Winning the Race Conference), public events with nationally renowned speakers such as U.S. Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey, and private and public collaborations.

For example, in October 2021, Delta State University hosted a public screening of *Voices from the Sit-In*, an award-winning short documentary film created by Delta State students and faculty. On Monday, March 10, 1969, a courageous group of 51 African American students staged a sit-in at Delta State University as part of mounting efforts to advocate for recognition, inclusion and fair treatment on campus, and film shares the first-hand accounts of sit-in participants. The screening drew hundreds of people from the Mississippi Delta to share in this historic event. The oral history and documentary film project, supported in part by a grant from the Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area, a unit of the National Park Service, and the screening, supported by a grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council, demonstrates DSU's commitment to engaging campus and community groups in meaningful conversation about important issues.

Delta State University is the home of numerous centers of excellence in various fields, including:

- GRAMMY™ Museum Mississippi (https://www.grammymuseumms.org/)
- Delta Center for Culture and Learning (http://deltacenterdsu.com/)
- Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area (MDNHA), a part of the National Park Service
- Delta Music Institute (https://www.deltastate.edu/artsandsciences/delta-music-institute/)
- Center for Community and Economic Development, Center for Business and Entrepreneurial Research, and Women Minority Business Development Center
- America Reads – Mississippi, an Americorps program

In short, Delta State University is in a unique position as an educational center and an active participant in the Delta community to collaborate for a successful NEA Big Read project.

Project description narrative (no more than three pages)

RATIONALE

There are several reasons why Delta State University (DSU) and the Bolivar County Library System (BCLS) chose *Homegoing* as its NEA Big Read book.

1. DSU and BCLS conducted an online campus and community survey in December 2021 with all 15 choices listed. *Homegoing* was among the top 5 selections.
2. *Homegoing* is already taught at DSU as part in the Division of Languages and Literature as a selection in ENG 206: World Literature. This course regularly enrolls between 12 – 34 students per semester. The course is required for all students seeking a Bachelor of Arts in English with concentrations in English Education or Philosophy. Additionally, it is a popular elective for students earning degrees in Creative Writing and Literature and non-English majors.
3. Occupying the traditional homelands of the Choctaw (Chahta Yakni), Bolivar County has a history often paralleling and intersecting with the events of *Homegoing*. Ness, an enslaved descendent Esi, spent time on a Mississippi plantation before being sold to an Alabama slaveholder. There are references to Mississippians leaving the state, similar to Willie leaving Alabama, during the Great Migration. Reverend George Lee, a Mississippian civil rights activist killed in 1955 in the Mississippi Delta, is referenced in the chapter about Sonny. Our campus and community are still in the midst of unearthing, examining, and reflecting on the legacy of slavery in Bolivar County. It is our work to use *Homegoing* as another way to continue our engagement with difficult, and often painful, issues.

TARGET AUDIENCES

The target audience for our NEA Big Read grant is Bolivar County, the second largest county in the Mississippi Delta region. Historian James C. Cobb described the Delta as "The most Southern place on earth." The National Park Service has said, "Much of what is profoundly American- what people love about America- has come from the Delta, which is often called 'the cradle of American culture.'" Our goal is to connect Bolivar Countians of all identities together with a common reading of a book about interconnectedness. Specifically, we want to engage youth and young adults with older people to have intergenerational dialogues and book discussions.

PROMOTION

The NEA Big Read: Bolivar County Committee, the Friends of the Bolivar County Library System, and other campus and community partners will work diligently to promote this program. Traditional methods of publicity will include press releases, website and social media promotions, and email announcements, including the weekly Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion campus email blast and the monthly DSU alumni affairs and BCLS email newsletters. We will incorporate strategies, such as announcements at local high school and DSU athletic events, printed inserts for church bulletins, and participation at fall 2022 public events like Cleveland's Octoberfest. Also, Delta State's new students, both freshmen and transfers, will be targeted to attend through the required First-Year Seminar (FYS) course.

PROGRAMMING PLANS

PROGRAM PERIOD: December 1, 2022 to March 31, 2023

KICKOFF AND BOOK DISTRIBUTION: On Friday, December 2, 2022, the International Day for Abolition of Slavery, an official kick-off event will be held at Delta State University. Not only will this event distribute books to the community to begin reading, but it will bring greater awareness to issues of modern slavery, including forced labor, child labor, and human trafficking and exploitation, all present in *Homegoing*. Delta State University students will receive the books before their winter break from

December 1 to 9, 2022. Also, community members will be able to receive the books throughout the week from December 1 to 9, 2022, from the four branches of the Bolivar County Library System (Cleveland, Merigold, Shelby, and Rosedale). For homebound readers, a free delivery service will be provided by the DSU Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

FIVE BOOK DISCUSSIONS*:

1. Week of February 12-18, 2023 (Black History Month) - Faith Organizations in Cleveland
    - Bolivar County has a rich tradition of faith organizations; however, like so many regions of the United States, there are often few opportunities for communities of different faiths to worship together. Bolivar County is home to dozens of Christian churches of numerous denominations, a mosque, and a synagogue. By organizing an interfaith, multi-denomination book discussion, congregants can meet together to discuss the novel and share fellowship. DSU is home to numerous student groups with faith and spirituality connections, including the Baptist Student Union, Reformed University Fellowship, Wesley Foundation, and Canterbury Episcopal Campus Ministry.
2. Week of February 19-25, 2023 (Black History Month) - Bolivar County Library in Cleveland
    - The Cleveland branch of BCLS is the largest branch of the system. Cleveland is one of the county seats (the other is Rosedale, just 20 miles west at the edge of the Mississippi River). This book discussion will be in-person and also live-streamed via Facebook Live for those unable to travel, as a collaboration between BCLS and DSU's Roberts-LaForge Library.
3. Week of February 26 - March 4, 2023 (Black History Month) - Rosedale Freedom Project in Rosedale
    - The Rosedale Freedom Project is a non-profit education organization dedicated to developing young leaders in the Mississippi Delta. Its mission is to "Support the Mississippi Delta's young leaders in the development of critical consciousness and the practice of justice through community building, exploration, artistic creation, organizing, and the study of social history and grassroots democracy." In cooperation with the Rosedale branch of BCLS, the middle school and high school students of the Rosedale Freedom Project will lead a book discussion.
4. Saturday, March 25, 2023 (International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade) - High School Students
    - Bolivar County, in particular Cleveland, has a long, complicated history of segregation in its schools. Cleveland was embroiled in a five decades long, federal desegregation lawsuit, which was finally resolved by federal court order in 2016. The goal of this book discussion is to have students from now-consolidated public high school, Cleveland Central High School, and Bayou Academy, the private school with white segregationist origins from the 1960s, read a common novel. Currently, the published 11th and 12th grade curriculums of Bayou Academy do not include literature by Black, Indigenous, or People of Color. Cleveland Central High School has a majority of Black students. Bayou Academy has a majority of white students.
5. Monday, March 27, 2023 (Winning the Race) - Delta State University with Yaa Gyasi
    - In conjunction with the 2023 Winning the Race Conference, *Homegoing* author, Yaa Gyasi, will present a conference keynote presentation and participate in a separate book discussion/Q&A session. This will be the culmination of the programming for NEA Big Read – Bolivar County. The Winning the Race Conference is Delta State's award-winning conference dedicated to social justice and racial healing. This event will be livestreamed.

* The discussions listed do not include activities and discussions which will occur in the ENG 206: World Literature course at Delta State University.

THREE PRESENTATIONS (PANEL DISCUSSIONS, LECTURES, FILM SCREENINGS)

1. Week of January 29 – February 4, 2023 (Black History Month) – Delta State University

- Presentation by Dr. Mohammad Bashir Salau (University of Mississippi) about African diaspora history, particularly pre-colonial West African history. A misstep in learning about Black history is the misconception that African history started with trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonization. While slavery and colonization are important themes within the novel, it is the grant committee's belief that the campus and community would benefit greatly from learning about pre-15th century African history. This event can also be livestreamed.

2. Week of February 5 – 11, 2023 (Black History Month) – Delta State University
    - Presentation by Adrian Miller and the Simmons family about Black culinary history and screening of *High on the Hog* at DSU in Jobe Hall Auditorium. Mr. Miller is a James Beard Award-winning culinary historian specializing in African American heritage in U.S. culture. Mississippi Central Commissioner Willie Simmons and Mississippi Senator Sarita Simmons are the owners of The Senator's Place, a renowned soul food restaurant in Cleveland. Mr. Miller listed The Senator's Place as one of the best soul food restaurants in the United States. Mr. Miller, Commissioner Simmons, and Senator Simmons will lead a conversation about the culinary traditions, knowledge, and goods enslaved Africans brought to the United States and the rich culinary contributions that are their legacies. Of course, there will be good soul food for attendees to sample. Additionally, a screening of all four episodes of *High on the Hog: How African American Cuisine Transformed America*, will be held through the week. Mr. Miller is featured in the Netflix documentary series. Interesting Fact: Delta State's unofficial mascot is the Fighting Okra. Okra is native to West Africa and was brought to the United States by enslaved Africans, and is featured in *High on the Hog*.
3. Monday, March 6, 2023 (Independence Day in Ghana) - Delta State University and EducationUSA Ghana (VIRTUAL)
    - Delta State University and EducationUSA Ghana will host a virtual discussion via Zoom and Facebook Live about post-colonial and modern Ghana. Discussion topics will include a brief history of pre-colonial Ghana, independence, and Ghana today.

TWO PROJECTS (ART EXHIBITIONS, THEATRICAL AND/OR MUSICAL PERFORMANCES, POETRY SLAMS, WRITING WORKSHOPS, ORAL HISTORIES)

1. Week of January 22 – 28, 2023 – Delta State University
    - Musical performance and guest lecture by Dr. George Worlasi Kwasi Dor (University of Mississippi) about West African drum and dance. Dr. Dor will bring the Ole Miss West African Drum and Dance Ensemble to perform. This will be co-sponsored by the DSU Department of Music and Delta Arts Alliance. Chair Dr. Karen Fosheim studied West African music with noted Guinean djembefola Famadou Konate, Mamady Keita, Sekou Sano, Ballaket Cissoko, balafonist Ishmael Camara, and dancers Yamoussa Souma and Salimatou Camara. The performance and guest lecture will be an exploration in the similarities and differences in West African drumming and dancing. Also, since Delta State University is the home of the GRAMMY Museum Mississippi, the International Conference on the Blues, and the Delta Music Institute, there will be discussions of the influences of West African culture on genres of American music, including the blues. This event will be livestreamed.
2. Week of March 19 – 25, 2023 – Cleveland Central High School and Bayou Academy
    - DSU's Division of Languages and Literature will lead a creative writing workshop for high school students from Bolivar County and Delta State University students. Author Yaa Gyasi said that she started researching and writing *Homegoing* as a student at Stanford University. The workshop will offer the young adults the opportunity to engage their creative writing energy. The students' work will be featured at the annual Winning the Race conference. The conference has featured a spoken word/poetry slam competition for high school students.

Project partnerships description narrative (no more than two pages)

Delta State University has longstanding partnerships with Bolivar County libraries, community organizations, faith groups, and public and private schools. Working with our partners will ensure engagement with our intended audiences and reach our goal to bring together Bolivar Countians with shared literature.

Delta State's cornerstone partnership for the NEA Big Read grant is the Bolivar County Library System. This is a confirmed partnership (see attached document). The county's library system has served the area since 1917, although similar to the region, there were many decades of racial segregation preventing equal and equitable access. Today, the BCLS's stated mission is "to serve people of all ages and diverse backgrounds by actively promoting easily accessible information, materials, services and programs designed to meet the county's evolving educational, recreational, and cultural needs." DSU and BCLS has already partnered in the past year. Ms. Emily Bell, Director of BCLS, and Ms. Tamara Blackwell, Reference Librarian and BCLS Newsletter Editor, are on the grant application committee. BCLS received an Anti-Racism Book Shelf grant from the Mississippi Humanities Council to purchase books for all four branches in 2021. Also, during the summer of 2021, Ms. Bobbie Matheney, BCLS Youth Services Librarian, joined Delta State's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) summer book club to read and discuss *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir* by Asha Bandele and Patrisse Cullors-Khan. Ms. Rachel Guerry, BCLS's librarian at the Merigold branch, joined the Fall 2021, DSU DEI book club to read and discuss *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. With branches operating in the main population centers of Bolivar County (Cleveland, Rosedale, Merigold, and Shelby), the BCLS offer space for book distribution, hosting book discussions, and spreading awareness about NEA Big Read activities. Also, the volunteers and supporters of Friends of the Bolivar County Library System will provide volunteer hours at NEA Big Read events. The stated purpose of the Friends is "to provide funds and volunteers to support the library in its mission to serve people of all ages and diverse backgrounds."

Another important partner with for the NEA Big Read grant is the Rosedale Freedom Project (RFP). This is a confirmed partnership (see attached document). The Rosedale Freedom Project is a non-profit education organization dedicated to developing young leaders in the Mississippi Delta. Its mission is to "Support the Mississippi Delta's young leaders in the development of critical consciousness and the practice of justice through community building, exploration, artistic creation, organizing, and the study of social history and grassroots democracy." In cooperation with the Rosedale branch of BCLS, the middle school and high school students of the Rosedale Freedom Project will lead a book discussion. Also, the RFP students will participate in the creative writing workshop led by DSU's Division of Languages and Literature. The RFP has partnered with Delta State University previously for various literacy and social justice activities. In 2020, Delta State and the Rosedale Freedom Project received a $32,000 grant from the Phil Harden Foundation for a spoken-word/poetry collaboration between the RFP and DSU's Division of Languages and Literature.

The Delta Arts Alliance, non-profit organization, "serves as a bridge to connect diverse cultures through their contributions to the arts, to create a common vision, and to develop strategies for making the arts a more prominent part of daily life." If awarded support, NEA Big Read: Bolivar County would partner with DAA's school of dance to invite DAA's dancers to the performance of the Ole Miss West African Drum and Dance Ensemble. The DAA is a confirmed partnership (see attached document). Currently, one of DAA's artists-in-residence, LaToya Calhoun, teaches African drumming.

The greatest number of collaborations will come through various departments, organizations, and offices at Delta State University. First and foremost, DSU's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, made up of students, faculty, staff, alumni, retired employees, and community members, is fully onboard with this grant application. DEI Committee members formed a subcommittee for this grant, along with Ms. Bell and Ms. Blackwell from BCLS.

- Ms. Michelle Johansen, Coordinator for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
- Dr. Todd Davis, Associate Professor Health, Physical Education, and Recreation
- Ms. Laura Kate Fortner, Senior Secretary for Division of Languages and Literature
- Ms. Riley Hardin, Senior Secretary for Division of Social Sciences and History
- Dr. Valarie Morgan, Associate Professor of English
- Ms. Darla Poole, Coordinator of Academic Advising Services
- Prof. C.T. Salazar, Reference Librarian at Roberts-LaForge Library
- Ms. Holly Senter, Arts Education Director at Bologna Performing Arts Center

Also, Delta State's Office of Communications and Marketing, which includes press communications, web and social media services, graph design, and audio, video, and photography services, will work with the NEA Big Read Committee and community partners to create a comprehensive marketing plan. DSU Director of Communications and Marketing, Ms. Brittany Davis-Green, has previous NEA Big Read experience because she worked at Mississippi Valley State University when it was awarded a grant in 2018.

Pending partnerships include:

- Bayou Academy and Cleveland School District – If awarded support, the NEA Big Read: Bolivar County will work with Bayou Academy, a private school, and Cleveland School District, the largest school district in Bolivar County, to recruit 11th and 12th grade teachers and students to form a *Homegoing* reading club. High school students are one of the key target audiences for the NEA Big Read: Bolivar County grant. Dr. Valarie Morgan, a member of the planning committee, has strong ties to the schools since she administers DSU's English education program for DSU students seeking to teach middle school and high school English. These students are routinely interns in Bolivar County's schools as part of their academic curriculum.
- Faith Organizations – Calvary Episcopal Church in Cleveland has committed to working with other faith organizations to distribute books and hold an inter-faith book discussion. Also, faith organizations on Delta State's campus are pending partnerships. Calvary Episcopal Church is a current partner with DSU's DEI programming to work with faith organizations to participate in anti-racism workshops and explore the connections between anti-racism work and faith/spirituality. We anticipate at least five more faith organizations, whether in the community or on campus, will also partner with this effort.

If awarded, Delta State University will leverage its resources as an educational and cultural center of the Mississippi Delta to engage Bolivar Countians with meaningful programming centered on *Homegoing*.

NEA Big Read: proposal budget

				Match/Cost-share			Totals	
Expense	**Detailed description**	**Source(s)**	**NEA Big Read Grant**	**Applicant**	**Partner/Funder**	**In-kind**	**Match total**	**Sub total**
Personnel	*Detail the cost of staff for your NEA Big Read project. This can include fringe benefits.*							
Delta State University Graduate Assistant	A graduate assistant will work for 20 hours per week for the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters in support of this program.	Applicant				$9,100	$9,100	$9,100
Volunteers	Big Read Committee and Friends of the Bolivar County Library System (100 hours x $20 per hour)	Applicant				$2,000	$2,000	$2,000
Graphic Designer	Graphic designer from DSU's Office of Communications and Marketing to design promotional materials	Applicant				$500	$500	$500
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
Program expenses	*Detail costs associated with your NEA Big Read.*							
Speaker fees	Keynote speaker: Yaa Gyasi	Grant and Applicant	$11,500	$5,000			$5,000	$16,500
Speaker fees	Presenter: Adrian Miller (African American Culinary Heritage)	Grant and Applicant	$5,000	$1,000			$1,000	$6,000
Books	250 copies of "Homegoing"	Grant and Applicant	$1,500	$1,000			$1,000	$2,500
Speaker fees	Presenter: Dr. Dor and Ole Miss West African Drum and Dance Ensemble	Grant and Applicant	$1,000				$0	$1,000
Facility Space	Screening of documentary series, "High on the Hog" (4 episodes x $425 each)	Applicant				$1,700	$1,700	$1,700
Speaker fees	Presenter: Dr. Mohammad Bashir Salau (African Diaspora)	Grant and Applicant	$1,000				$0	$1,000
Facility Space	Yaa Gyasi keynote	Applicant				$2,000	$2,000	$2,000
Facility Space	African Diaspora presentation	Applicant				$425	$425	$425
Facility Space	Ole Miss West African Drum and Dance Ensemble performance	Applicant				$425	$425	$425
Facility Space	African American Culinary Heritage	Applicant				$425	$425	$425
Workshop Supplies	Notebooks, pens, etc. for high school and college students' creative writing workshop	Applicant		$500			$500	$500
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
Promotion	*Detail costs associated with advertising and promoting your NEA Big Read.*							
Facebook Ads (Includes Instagram)	Promotional advertising on social media for NEA Big Read events	Applicant		$500			$500	$500
Posters	200 11"x17" promotional posters	Applicant		$65			$65	$65
Handbills	1,000 5.5"x8.5" promotional handouts and church bulletin inserts	Applicant		$85			$85	$85
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
							$0	$0
TOTAL			**$20,000**	**$8,150**	**$0**	**$16,575**	**$24,725**	**$44,725**

If you'd like to offer further clarification on any expenses, please provide details below: