

Black August Freedom Rides

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As I reflect on my summer, I could not be more grateful for the unexpected opportunity to intern for Lift Louisiana, assisting in the organization and execution of the Black August Freedom Rides. The Black August Freedom Rides brought delegates from Southern states to Chicago to highlight the distance people in the South will have to travel to access reproductive and gender-affirming healthcare with the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and the continued prohibition and criminalization of gender-affirming care. In Chicago, reproductive justice and LGBTQ+ rights leaders and advocates from the South and the Midwest collaborated

and formed crucial connections.

I began in mid-July, about three weeks after the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. I knew that I would work with Lakeesha Harris, Lift Louisiana's new co-executive director, to help plan the Black August Freedom Rides, but I never anticipated how inspiring and transformative this journey would be.

After just four weeks of planning and organizing, I boarded the [22-hour Amtrak ride to Chicago](#) alongside Lift's Co-Executive Directors Michelle Erenberg and Lakeesha Harris and six other Louisiana Freedom Riders. I was responsible for documenting the journey with [photos and videos](#). From my arrival at the New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal, there was no shortage of content.

Lakeesha Harris kept spirits high throughout the train ride with poetry readings, passionate speeches, and freedom songs. In Chicago, participants formed connections with reproductive justice and LGBTQ+ rights leaders from Louisiana, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Illinois. Among these participants were representatives of [Chicago Volunteer Doulas](#), [Mississippi in Action](#), [Healthy and Free Tennessee](#), [The Martha P. Johnson Institute](#), [New Orleans Birthmark Doulas](#), and many other organizations. After a press conference at Union Station, we began the preliminary stages of drafting a [Human Rights Petition](#) to the United Nations. The following day, writer, educator, and activist Atena O. Danner read from her new book *Incantations* for Rest and Chief Diversity Officer and Associate Provost of Diversity and Inclusion at Northwestern University, Sekile M. Nzinga, delivered an inspiring Keynote speech.

It was an incredible honor and privilege to be in the presence of such dedicated, accomplished, and emboldened activists and to experience the radical Black feminist organizing that is and has been the -often unrecognized- backbone of our collective liberation. The Black

August Freedom Rides was an experience full of rage, frustration, and sadness over the treatment of women, trans, and GNC folks, particularly Black women Black trans, and Black GNC folks. At the same time, it was an experience full of music, love, laughter, community care, nourishment, and hope.

When the New Orleans City Train pulled back into the station, I returned home with invaluable connections to inspiring human rights advocates, new content creation and communication skills, and an invigorated passion for this work. More than anything, I came back with a newfound understanding of sustaining one's

involvement in this fight with love, laughter, and in communities of care.