

# Jackson Residents Enter a Month without Clean Water

*New Orleans Organizations Continue to Help*



The Xavier University of Louisiana Chapter of Collegiate 100 traveled to Jackson, Miss. to deliver and volunteer at a water drive held at New Horizon Baptist Church International.

**Leah Clark**  
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When Kennadie Boykin first moved from St. Louis, Mo. to Jackson, Miss., she noticed how often the city was placed under a boiled water notice.

Five years later, in 2022, Boykin is in her junior year of college at Jackson State University, a Historically Black University. Now, after constant boiled water notices, by September this year, she found herself among thousands of residents without running or clean wa-

ter in what culminated as the 2022 Jackson water crisis.

In late August, heavy rainfall entered the central-Mississippi area that caused the Pearl River and Ross Barnett Reservoir to rise to dangerously high flood levels. The O.B. Curtis Water Plant, one

of Jackson's two water-treatment plants, receives its water from the reservoir and was shut down as a result of the flooding.

The failure of the O.B. Curtis Water Plant left over 150,000 Jackson residents without clean drinking water and low

Photos courtesy Xavier University Collegiate 100

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Collegiate 100 members unload water cases to give Jackson residents during a water drive.



Xavier students load multiple water cases into the back seat of a Jackson resident's car.

to no water pressure. The week of Aug. 29th, Jackson Public Schools, Jackson State University, Millsaps College, Belhaven University, and numerous businesses temporarily closed and opted for virtual operations while the city was placed under a state of emergency.

Peggy Seaton-Cain, 33, is a teacher at Reimagine Preparatory School in Jackson and mother to a small child. Living in Jackson, Seaton-Cain has had to alter her schedule and life around the water crisis to provide for her son.

"School provides him social networking in his age group. The water crisis negatively affected his life by forcing him to pause his friendships," Seaton-Cain said. "As parents, we were met with another financial strain on our household budget."

For those like Boykin, who now lives in the city of Byram just outside of Jackson, she does not have to rely on Jackson's water system at home but still deals with it while attending classes at Jackson State.

Jackson's water issues have become a "common occurrence" for Boykin, but the situation has been like none other for those new to the metro-Jackson area.

"It's confusing especially being a college student," Boykin said. "Because I know people from out of town that are literally depending on the school to act, the state to act, and people out of the kindness of their hearts to act."

Jackson State students living on-campus have used hanging Gatorade coolers to store clean water for showering. For bathrooms, portable toilets were parked outside of buildings.

Boykin said the measures students have to go for basic use of water are "embarrassing" in some ways.



A Xavier student and Collegiate 100 member loads cases of water into the trunk of a Jackson resident car as part of relief efforts.

"It's already one thing to live on-campus," she said. "You have to share dorms, share bathrooms, and share buildings, but now you have to go outside your building to use the restroom."

However, this is not the first time Jackson, the capital of Mississippi, has undergone a water crisis.

In February 2021, a winter storm swept through the state and caused water outages in the city. Freezing temperatures caused pipes and water lines to burst and left tens of thousands in the city without water for almost three weeks.

A year and a half later, Jackson residents are facing water issues again. The recurring water issue stems from the city's aging infrastructure.

State and city officials have been aware of the water system's need for upgrades for decades. In March 2020, the U.S. Environmen-

tal Protection Agency sent officials a report that found the city's water treatment plants failed to detect lead and copper.

While Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves has blamed city officials for their handling of updating the water system, Jackson Mayor Chokwe A. Lumumba claims state officials have not cooperated with their attempts to find solutions.

Many residents, such as Boykin, seem to blame both the city and the state. Trinity Johnson, a sophomore at Tougaloo College, has lived in Jackson her entire life and said she feels sad about how the crisis is being handled.

"This could have been avoided years ago. This isn't the first time Jackson has had water problems," Johnson said. "I feel that it plays along socio-economics really because you don't hear Madison and Rankin counties having water prob-



Xavier students' direct traffic as Jackson residents receive cases of water from a water drive held at New Horizon Baptist Church International in Jackson.

lems versus Jackson, where the majority of African Americans stay."

Some experts agree with this assessment of the socio-economic and racial aspects of the water crisis in the majority-Black city. The current situation has gained national attention including from President Joe Biden, who has offered emergency resources to the state. Organizations inside and outside of the city have poured in emergency relief efforts.

The Xavier University of Louisiana Chapter of Collegiate 100, on Saturday, Sept. 10th, volunteered to pass out cases of water at New Horizon Church International in Jackson. Isaiah Washington, a member of the chapter, said he felt it was important for their New Orleans-based chapter to be in Jackson.

"No one should have to go through a crisis where they can't get access to safe drinking water,"

Washington said. "I'm glad we were able to provide water for the people in Jackson."

As the water crisis approached its one month mark, Jackson residents are hoping that an end appears soon. On Tuesday, Sept. 6th, officials announced that running water had returned to the city. However, the boiled water notice issued by Mayor Lumumba in July remains as many have reported discolored water.

Until then, residents continue to live through the crisis. For Boykin, it has cemented her interest in making a difference, whether as a future lawyer or politician.

"It makes me just want to go harder in my studies," Boykin said. "Mississippi, as a whole, is a little backward – a little behind times, so trying to catch up has been a real struggle."