

Dear BR
by CH, KM, & JS

Baton Rouge,
city where summer sun cooks concrete.
Rain pounding city, thunders, city that sops up all the sweltering heat

Red Stick, city made on a history of white hands covered in our blood.

BR, your Chemical plants adorn riverbanks, offer up jobs to poor families
and rob our grandfathers' of their health.
I am the product of your "generosity"
And so is my grandfather's heart condition

Mother of the bus boycotts,
yet every summer brown children evaporate like water.
where Black children from around the block vanish, and we do not grieve
over pots of shrimp jambalaya

but sing in the kitchen
& in the backyard our bodies Zydeco until we beam light,
our feet dark enough, endless enough, to be confused for the night sky.

Baton Rouge, where children of the rainbow shine exuberance, until this city beats them black and blue.

Brec parks that once smelled of summer camps and family barbecues
Now reek of police patrols and tear gas

Daughter of Hurricane Alley,
city that tries to start new with every downpour
Country town of progress washed away by nameless flood waters.

A city of Contradictions
City with beautiful murals of women that look like my mother
Full of poor women that look like my mother
City brimming with Blues and Country music festivals
Full of people who refuse to listen to "our kinds" of music
A city of Southern hospitality that shuts down charity hospitals

Baton Rouge,
home of slip n slides, easter egg hunts, and hurricanes
The place where 6 year old me got lost at Blue Bayou and a stranger helped me find my way home
I hum and the Mississippi floods my mouth, breathe and I transform into an estuary.
Home to 38th Street, the perfect balance of love and violence that showed me right from wrong

City of lost love where, despite all the danger, I fell for a boy for the first time
At one time, my heart would have fluttered for a boy who offered me this city;
now I see the world is bigger than us,
bigger than this cajun, creole metropolis.

City where I came out to my mother, and despite her bible, found a way to tell me, "*I love you anyways.*"

Lakes that taught me to fish, to catch and release
showed me it's okay to let go of things hurting you even if you've worked hard for them

Jigga City

with speakers blasting the music my mom tried to hide from me at every corner store,
I thank you for singing a sweet song for every occasion,

Baton Rouge where I dug to swamp bottoms and fished out a family of friends,
fashioned bonds around my heart stronger than an alligator's jaw.
The City where the water's so brown it is our reflection

Red Stick.

Taught us to dance like the river,
move like the river,
tried to get us to leave like the river

City Park, **Goodwood Library**, thank you for being the best place to find peace at the worst time of my life
nostalgia awaits around every corner,
fond memories in hidden pockets around you, you city of the Mississippi.

Jewel of the Mississippi,

I thank you for the nights spent by the levee singing hymns my grandfather taught me, all the blues my father
instilled in me.

You taught me how to write all the things I dream to be and fear becoming.

Because of this bayou wonderland,
all of my poems are adorned in magnolia petals and pelican feathers.
All of the songs i compose sound like a levee breaking,

City of my Ancestors, you do not always want me,
may try to purge me out,
but you will always be, in spite of everything,
Where I have learned **there is nothing wrong with loving myself**
& the work it takes to do so.

French city,

where beauty eluded me.

Lucky for me, my story does not end where the tragedies you gift me began.

In this city my mawmaw and pawpaw built a house that burnt down and built another one that I was raised in.

In this city,
my tears have touched every road,
my family's blood runs through the sewer systems
a place that plucked the innocence from me like baby teeth.
This city, that tried to impress its name upon me,
turn me blood red and break me like a stick

Baton Rouge,

Scotlandville, **Baker**, **38th Street**
you taught me I am sturdy enough to collapse
and rise again.