Land, rurality, and region: the Mississippi Delta and Loíza (Puerto Rico)

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The Yazoo-Mississippi Delta and the Loíza region (Puerto Rico) are often—and misleadingly--viewed as uniquely black. The Yazoo Delta is famously known as “the most Southern place on earth” and the birthplace of the blues music; Loíza is often viewed the heartland of Afro-Puerto Rican culture and history. Although the Yazoo Delta is many times larger than Loíza, and other major differences exist, there are also suggestive affinities between the two regions. Both regions had an original ecology of forest and wetlands, both have an insular geography (the Yazoo a fluvial island, Loíza partly a barrier island); and both were of marginal importance during the 19th century peak of plantation slavery. In the late 19th-early 20th century, both regions were subject to large-scale drainage works and flood control that opened for production rich alluvial that are among the most fertile on earth; and both regions subsequently developed as major commodity producers (cotton in the Yazoo and sugar in Loíza) in large-scale corporate plantations.

At the same time, both regions had a history of black land ownership and occupation (more recent in the Yazoo, older in Loíza) that was overturned by the onset of plantation dominance, and which resulted in juridically complex and often violent struggles over landownership and titles. Both regions are characterized by specificity, not isolation, since both were part of wider regional settings, often left unexamined, that included close links to urban zones; and both regions generated distinctive cultural expressions (Delta blues and bomba) and iconic political and literary representations that were later adopted widely and thoroughly reified.
Perhaps most importantly, the two regions share an unfinished and perhaps unfinishable agenda of land reform (for lack of a better term) and environmental thought (ibid.) that has often strained to emerge in the Delta region --in counterpoint with the civil rights movement-- and in Loíza --in counterpoint with the environmental movement.