A Place of Happy Retreat: Benefiting Locals and Visitors Through Sustainable Tourism Practices at Beale Street, Graceland and the National Civil Rights Museum

Cathryn Stout

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A PLACE OF HAPPY RETREAT: BENEFITING LOCALS AND VISITORS THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES AT BEALE STREET, GRACELAND AND THE NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS MUSEUM

A Thesis
presented in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi

by
CATHRYN STOUT

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ABSTRACT

This interdisciplinary work examines Beale Street, Graceland, and the National Civil Rights Museum through the lens of sustainable tourism. It specifically examines the value of integrating the culture and history of the host community into the attraction, and using tourist attractions to provide personal and economic development for locals. Chapter One is titled “Can I Live’ on Beale Street,” Chapter Two is titled “Opening the Gates of Graceland,” and Chapter Three is titled “Creating a Public Forum at the National Civil Rights Museum.” Memphis has been predominantly African American since 1986, and African American history was significant in the creation of each attraction. Thus, incorporating the concerns and culture of African American Memphians is essential to the sustainability of each site. Guided by measures at the National Civil Rights Museum and other tourist destinations, this work proposes sustainable tourism practices that could help strengthen relationships between African American Memphians and the tourist attractions Beale Street and Graceland. In turn, these sustainable measures could increase the dollars and time spent by African American Memphians at these tourists attractions.
DEDICATION

To my parents, for always indulging me when I asked, “Why?”
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS

BSDC  Beale Street Development Corporation
EPE   Elvis Presley Enterprises
NCRM  National Civil Rights Museum
ICSC  International Coalition of Sites of Conscious
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am much obliged to my rock star thesis committee Dr. Adam Gussow, Dr. Zandria Robinson, and Dr. Charles Wilson, chair, for raising provocative questions that made my work stronger. I am indebted to the faculty and staff at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture and the Southern Studies Department, who made my time at the University of Mississippi engaging and enriching. To my mentors, Dr. David Wharton of the University of Mississippi, Dr. Lawrence Rosenwald of Wellesley College, and Ms. Helen McCauley of Central High School, thank you for never losing faith in me.

I would be remiss if I did not thank my community of faith, Christ Missionary Baptist Church in Memphis. I thank all the saints for their prayers, well wishes, and pocket change as I journeyed through graduate school. I am grateful for all who encouraged, challenged and guided me along the way, but I owe my deepest debt of gratitude to the greatest friends a girl could have—Yolanda, Millicent and Raymond—and to my amazing family for showing me love that knows no bounds.
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INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the twentieth century, Memphis was an established regional hub where visitors came to conduct business, buy goods unavailable in small towns, and patronize local entertainment districts. However, with the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Memphis in 1968, this booming tourist trade slipped into a precipitous decline. Like many Southern cities scarred by battles over integration, white flight, and the reduction of the U.S. manufacturing industry, the ‘Bluff City’ on the Mississippi River banks actively searched for new industries and a new image. Ironically, it was another death that injected new life into the Memphis tourism industry. When rock n’ roll icon Elvis Presley died at his Memphis home in 1977, fans flocked to the gates of Graceland to mourn collectively, and to get a glimpse of the place where their King spent his final moments. The transformation of Graceland into a museum in 1982 served as the catalyst for the city’s contemporary tourism industry. Later, the rebirth of Beale Street in 1986, and the opening of the National Civil Rights Museum in 1991, joined Graceland in forming the pillars of this revitalized music and heritage tourism industry.

In 2010, 10 million tourists visited the city’s 64 recognized tourist attractions and contributed more than $20 million dollars to the local economy. The Memphis Convention and Visitors Bureau tracks these tallies in its annual economic impact study. The study measures the number of hotel rooms in the market, the demographics of those visiting Memphis, and jobs created through tourism. What is missing from this annual study, however, is the social and
cultural impact of these 10 million guests on the host city. While recognizing the important role of tourism in creating 51,000 jobs in Memphis and Shelby County, it is important to look at the industry’s contributions and potential value beyond this figure. Such a pursuit is critical since tourism relies heavily on low-wage, service industry jobs. In the Memphis metropolitan area, non-managerial jobs in food services, hospitality, and retail paid an average salary of $20,910 in 2009, which was roughly $1,000 below the federal poverty level for a family of four (Labor Statistics 2010).

Over the years, I have heard stories of relatives who once worked minimum wage jobs at tourist attractions, and I have shared my own experiences growing up near a busy tourist site. Reflecting on these discussions propelled me to ask: How can tourism do more to improve the quality of life for the local community? To construct this thesis, I analyze how three Memphis sites integrate two of the tenets of sustainable tourism: creating tourist attractions that meaningfully incorporate the culture and history of a locale, and using the resources of the attraction to provide opportunities for economic and human development for those within the host community. Chapter One is titled “Can I Live on Beale Street,” Chapter Two is titled “Opening the Gates of Graceland,” and Chapter Three is titled “Blending the Local and the Global at the National Civil Rights Museum.” Memphis has been predominantly African American since 1986, and African American culture and history were significant in the creation of each space.

As the unofficial capital of the Mississippi Delta, the issues long associated with the “problematic South” are exacerbated in Memphis. Poverty, uneasy race relations, and the struggle for identity in a postbellum economy are all a part of the Memphis narrative. City
leaders supported music and heritage tourism as ways to create jobs, aid racial reconciliation, and foster a new municipal brand. Yet, the Memphians I interviewed for my research felt that the redevelopers of Beale Street and Graceland constructed attractions that appealed to white tourists at the expense of black locals. The Memphians that I interviewed also felt that the National Civil Rights Museum is responsive and relevant to black locals. Examining tourist spaces from a local perspective is significant because literature from the growing field of sustainable tourism reveals that, over the long term, the attitudes of locals directly impact the viability of a tourist locale. As a qualitative, interdisciplinary work, this study encompasses historical records, political science, interviews, and art and music criticism.

**Literature Review**

In researching this thesis, I assessed several published works for their historical value. I reviewed the following secondary sources about Beale Street: *In Search of the Blues* by Marybeth Hamilton, *Beale Black & Blue* by Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall, *Mississippi Blues Today* by Robert Nicholson, *Blue Chicago* by David Grazian, *A Change is Gonna Come* by Craig Hansen Warner and *W.C. Handy* by David Robertson. Collectively, these books trace the evolution of blues culture from its origin as an expression of African American creativity and entrepreneurship into its contemporary state as a commodity with softened appeal to African American audiences. Additionally, I found three books by Memphians particularly valuable, *Images of America: African Americans in Memphis* by Earnestine Lovell Jenkins, *Beale Street* by George W. Lee, and *beale street* by former Beale Street manager John Elkington. Although Elkington’s book is not a scholarly work, the pages are a diary of Elkington’s thoughts and actions during a critical period in Memphis history. Incorporated scholarly essays in Chapter One.
include, but are not limited to, “Make My Getaway: The Blues Lives of Black Minstrels in W. C. Handy’s Father of the Blues” by Adam Gussow, the contemporary Master’s thesis “Creating a Blues Playground: A Comparison of Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee, and Farish Street in Jackson, Mississippi” by Sandor Gulyas, and “The Negro in Banking” by Arnett G. Lindsay. Of the three noted essays, an article on banking may seem like the least obvious research source for a discussion on Beale Street. On the contrary, through excellent banking records, Lindsay illustrates Beale Street’s significance as a former financial district for African Americans.

Like Beale Street and the blues, Graceland and Elvis Presley are the subjects of numerous books and essays, and one can suffer research fatigue in trying to review them all. In researching Chapter Two, I assessed the key works Race Rock and Elvis by Michael T. Bertrand, When Elvis Died by Neal and Janice Gregory, Graceland: Going Home with Elvis by Karal Ann Marling, Elvis Presley by Bobbie Ann Mason, and Elvis Culture by Erika Doss. These works tell the biography of a man who grew up influenced by and appreciative of his debt to African American culture. Bertrand and Doss go the extra step of eloquently explaining why that appreciation is unreciprocated by contemporary African American audiences.

Memphis-area authors contributed significantly to this chapter, as well, because their research on the history of Whitehaven aided my examination of the relationship between Graceland and the predominantly black neighborhood of Whitehaven where the mansion is located. Those valuable reads were Rowdy Memphis by journalist John Branston, Racial Politics at the Crossroads by political scientists Michael Kirby and Marcus Pohlmann, Tales of Old Whitehaven by historian Anna Leigh McCorkle, and Memphis and the Paradox of Place by sociologist Wanda Rushing.
The last chapter is an analysis of the National Civil Rights Museum through the lens of sustainable tourism. There is a growing field of scholarship on reflections of the Civil Rights Movement in contemporary memory and memorials. Some noted books assessed from that exhaustive list include *The Civil Rights Movement in American Memory* by Renee Christine Romano, *Going Down Jericho Road* by Michael K. Honey, and *The Southern Past* by W. Fitzhugh Brundage. Three essays that deserve recognition are “Monument on the Mississippi,” a comprehensive Master’s thesis by University of Memphis graduate Kenneth Roger Adderley and, to a lesser extent, “Between Rooms 307: Spaces of Memory at the National Civil Rights Museum” by Mabel O. Wilson and “Selling the Civil Rights Movement” by Glenn Eskew. When taken together, these works raise a difficult question: Do static memorials and the monetization thereof intended to sustain the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement actually derogate it? The writers arrive at different conclusions.

Because this chapter also examines the evolution of sustainable tourism, I consulted a collection of resources in that nascent field. The industry guidebook on the subject is *Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry*, published collaboratively in 1996 by the World Tourism Organization, World Travel & Tourism Council, and the Earth Council. A secondary source worth noting for its comprehensive overview is *Hosts and Guests Revisited: Tourisms Issues of the 21st Century* edited by Valene Smith and Maryann Brent. Here, Smith defines sustainable tourism as travel practices that 1.) Encourage economic development 2.) Protect natural resources 3.) Teach the history and culture of a destination, and 4.) Enhance the quality of life for the host community. In this paper, I examine the value of integrating the culture and history of
the host community into the attraction, and using tourist attractions to provide personal and economic development for locals.

**Biographical Information**

To talk about Memphis locals without identifying myself as one would seem deceptive. Thus, I am deconstructing the fourth wall in an effort to disclose the influences that go beyond the scope of a literature review. Raised just blocks away from Graceland, I am a lifelong resident of a tourist zone. As a child, I attended Graceland Elementary School, a public school in Memphis associated with the mansion only in name. I was literally raised on both sides of the tracks. I spent weekdays with my mother who lived two miles east of the Illinois Central railroad line and spent weekends with my dad who lived a half of mile west of the same tracks. For such a short distance, there was a noticeable socioeconomic drop from the east side to the west of the tracks.

During my three decades in Memphis, I have visited almost all of the city’s tourist attractions, including Beale Street and the National Civil Rights Museum on multiple occasions and Graceland once. I do not contend that my various experiences with these three spaces reflect the experiences of every black Memphian, but I do think that my perspective is relevant. This view is affirmed by American Studies icon Paul Lauter who encourages cultural studies scholars and aspirants to use “an eclectic methodology which borrows from literary criticism, art history, psychology, anthropology, among other disciplines, and even from autobiography—since cultural meanings emerge in the particular yet diverse ways individuals perceive and act” (82).
exercise restraint as to when and where I enter this contemporary scholarly work, but invisibility is impractical.

This work deliberately traces events up to the present moment. Submitted in April 2011, it captures events unfolding as late as March 2011. Capturing current events makes the writing process challenging and exciting. The challenge lies in identifying source materials. Since secondary texts have yet to record these moments, I rely on newspaper articles, interviews, and government documents to plug some holes in scholarship. I evaluate these primary sources using my background as a lifelong Memphian, my skills as a former daily newspaper reporter, my education in Southern and American Studies, and my networks as the daughter of a government official. Education sociologist Jonathan Jansen calls such a collection of tools “knowledge in the blood” or “knowledge embedded in the emotional, psychic, spiritual, social, economic, political, and psychological lives of a community” (171). The application of this knowledge in a contemporary scholarly work is exciting because all three attractions analyzed are spaces in transition. A recently formed advisory board is charting the future of Beale Street, executives are fine tuning redevelopment plans at Graceland, and the National Civil Rights Museum is scheduled to start renovations in the summer of 2011. And what engenders excitement in these transitions is the underlying knowledge that transitions breed intervention points.

**Brief Historical Review of the City of Memphis**

An informed discussion on the future of these three locations requires some knowledge of the city’s past. The area now known as Memphis was originally home to the Woodland Native Americans who developed city-states and an organized civilization as far back as 1500 AD
In 1789, real estate speculator John Rice purchased the first tract of land in the territory dominated by the Chickasaw and Choctaw nations. For nearly the next 100 years, white transplants from Louisiana, North Carolina and other parts of the Southeast pushed into Tennessee. Through the Treaty of 1818 and the Removal Bill of 1830, the federal government aided these white transplants in buying some Chickasaw and Choctaw-owned property, and forcefully taking other Native American land (McCorkle 15-27). Real estate investors John Overton, James Winchester and Andrew Jackson claimed the southernmost section of West Tennessee, and incorporated it as Memphis in 1826. The city grew in population as it became known as a “well-watered,” fertile city on the banks of the Mississippi River (Magness 88).

Shortly after white politicians and businessmen incorporated Memphis, it “became a center for trading enslaved African American laborers to work nearby cotton plantations in Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee” (Rushing 12). Between 1830 and 1870, the city’s population swelled from 663 residents to 40,226 residents (Kirby 7).

Surviving the Native American resistance movement and minor damage during The Civil War, the city’s seemingly unstoppable growth was only halted by the yellow fever outbreak of 1878. During this epidemic, the city’s population plummeted from more than 40,000 residents to about 33,500 residents in 1880 (Kirby 8). From 1879 to 1891, the city lost its charter. Rushing describes this period as the “yellow fever disruption” because it interrupted the distribution of culture, humans and natural resources (16; 23). The 19th century yellow fever epidemic not only led to thousands of deaths and a mass exodus from the city, but the effects of the outbreak may still be evident today. Pohlmann and Kirby theorize that one of the reasons for the Bluff City’s historically high poverty rate and high percentage of African Americans is because a quantitative
mass of well-off, upwardly mobile white residents fled Memphis during the outbreak, permanently relocating their families and their wealth (8-9).

In addition to the poor white citizens who were essentially stuck in the city during the outbreak, a significant number of poor black residents have called Memphis home since its inception. The 1840 Census records the city’s population as 7,654 whites, 7,040 enslaved blacks and 27 freed blacks. Since the 1870s, displaced black farm workers from the nearby Mississippi Delta have migrated to Memphis seeking employment opportunities and an escape from racial oppression. Once they arrived, these early black migrants found slim opportunities for economic and social advancement. A few notable African Americans were able to accumulate wealth and status, and these black business and cultural leaders made their headquarters on Beale Street.
Works Cited


“The truth of the matter is that no tourist ever said that a destination was spoiled because its environment was still clean, its culture was still vibrant, its people were living healthy lives proud of their cultural heritage, and the authenticity was still intact. In other words, sustainable tourism means good business practice because, at the end of the day, those destinations that do have those traits I just described, they are destinations that succeed on tourism’s world map.”

-Costas Christ at the Tourism for Tomorrow Awards
Dubai, United Arab Emirates, April 2008.
Figure 1: Partial map of Memphis. Marker A is Beale Street. Marker B is Graceland. Marker C is the National Civil Rights Museum.
Illustration Credit: Google Maps.
Chapter One:

‘Can I Live’ on Beale Street?
At the corner of Second and Beale Street sits a display of black cotton t-shirts bearing a seemingly innocuous slogan. The t-shirts are near the door of the Beale Street Gift Shop and within eyesight of a salesclerk who greets a steady flow of customers as they walk into the store on a bustling Friday night. Declaring “No white, No black, Just the Blues, Beale St. Memphis.” The t-shirts are popular souvenirs for tourists who for $18 can take home a mass produced relic from Beale Street made in Honduras. Shirts with the same slogan hang in a few other souvenir shops on Beale, and the t-shirts appear to spread an uplifting message about a post-race society until one ponders the t-shirts’ message in the context of the history of Beale Street as a segregated commercial district for African Americans from the 1890s until the 1970s. When and how did Beale shift from a venue of racial uplift for African American Memphians through arts and commerce into a tourist strip lined with souvenir shops and faux juke joints? The first half of this chapter details the early days of Beale as the town square for Black Memphians and outlines how a riot, integration, and urban clearance destroyed historic Beale Street. The latter half examines the impact of real estate developer John Elkington, whose leadership and vision fashioned Beale Street into the tourist playground of “No white, No black, Just the Blues,” and subsequently, diminished opportunities for sustainable tourism.

Beale Street has undergone three significant shifts from 1890 to 2010 that I call: The Grandest Time from 1890 to 1967; The Difficult Days from 1968 to 1981; and the Elkington Era from 1982 to 2010. These descriptions are used to easily differentiate among three of Beale Street’s most prominent historical periods. The name Beale dates back to 1841, when white
Shelby County real estate developer Robertson Topp founded it (Madajczyk 3:3). Several theories exist on the origins of the name, but none are conclusive (Lollar 2011). Following the city’s recovery from the yellow fever epidemic of 1878, black real estate developer and entrepreneur Robert Church, Sr. bought land cheaply on Beale Street. Church’s business ventures helped to increase Beale’s appeal as a destination for African Americans, a process that may have started in the 1860s when the Union government captured Memphis from the Confederacy and established a freedman’s headquarters and school at 533 Beale (Lester 2009) [Figure 2].

The Grandest Time

During The Grandest Time, from 1890 to 1967, homes, shops, and night clubs lined the avenue that served as “the center of African American community” in Memphis (Madajczyk 3:3). A few elite black families, discussed later in this chapter, owned businesses on Beale Street, but working class blacks were not excluded from patronizing Beale. One of the leading texts on Beale Street, Beale Black & Blue, describes the variety of nightclubs on Beale that appealed to different classes. “One club would have nothing but the kind of music white people wrote for whites. Its customers would be blacks who were trying to put the blues and anything else Negroid behind them. … In contrast, were the places for the average working man, where the musicians created their music as they played” (McKee 34). Although smaller in number, “low whites”\(^1\) were also a fixture on Beale in its heyday. In an often quoted line, Memphian Lt.

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\(^1\) Although I did not find any specific references to white people on Beale Street being referred to as “low whites,” this term is found in several historical texts referencing poor whites or recent European immigrants. In “The Freedmen’s Bureau Report on the Memphis Race Riots of 1866” that documented incidents near Beale, investigator T. W. Gilbreth listed the cause of the uprising as “a bitterness of
George Lee summated, “Beale Street, owned largely by the Jews, policed by the whites and enjoyed by the Negroes, is the Main Street of Negro America” (Lee 13). Officially named Beale Avenue from 1908 to 1955 (McKee 83), the strip had a lively spirit throughout the first half of the 20th century, and the song “The Memphis Blues” captured that excitement. Composed by W. C. Handy in 1909, and later revised by songwriter George Norton, the upbeat ditty announced:

Folks I’ve just been down, down to Memphis town,
That’s where the people smile, smile on you all the while.
Hospitality, they were good to me.
I couldn’t spend a dime, and had the grandest time.
I went out a dancing with a Tennessee dear,
They had a fellow there named Handy with a band you should hear
And while the folks gently swayed, all the band folks played (qtd. Robertson 135)

The songwriter noted that he had the “the grandest time” in this fringe community that provided African Americans a respite from discrimination, opportunities to own businesses, and deals on goods and services (Lovett 2009).

This acknowledgment of goods and services and the long list of businesses that once called Beale Street home prove that, in The Grandest Time, Beale Street was far more than “just the blues.” In the 1860s, former slave turned slave master Joseph Clouston owned a barbershop and grocery store at 145 Beale Street (Jenkins 14). He is one of the first documented black business owners in the city. During this era when blacks went from being someone else’s property to renting and owning their own property, the federal government started the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company Bank to help former slaves and black Civil War veterans establish financial independence. From 1865 until the system’s collapse in 1874, there was a Freedman’s Bank branch on Beale. It had $96,755 in deposits, ranking 12th in overall feeling which has always existed between the low whites & blacks, both of whom have long advanced rival claims for superiority, both being as degraded as human beings can possibly be.”
deposit amounts among the nation’s more than 30 Freedman banks (Lindsay 166). Also, in the 1860s and 1870s, Beale Street Baptist Church took shape. Founded in 1863 by freed and enslaved African Americans, the church evolved from a brush arbor and opened an enclosed sanctuary at 379 Beale in 1878 (Bond; Jenkins 21).

The church and bank were walking distance from the home of Beale Street belle Lucy Jane Wright who lived from 1835 to 1906. A black seamstress and landlord, Wright’s home at Beale and Hernando served as a hub for influential and fashionable black and white Memphians alike. Wright’s guests included abolitionist Frederick Douglass and Memphian Jacob Goldsmith, proprietor of Goldsmith’s Department Store. (Jenkins 12). Another place frequented by the black elite of Memphis was Hooks Brother Photography, a black owned studio at 162 Beale which opened in 1907. Brothers Robert and Charles Hooks started the business, and cousins Henry and Charles Hooks later continued it. The business was a staple on Beale Street for more than 40 years, and the studio photographed black elite families in the city, including the Church family on several occasions.

Church family patriarch, Robert Church, Sr., was the real estate speculator credited with reviving Beale in 1880s following the yellow fever epidemic, and Church was the first black millionaire in the South. He was born in 1839 in Holly Springs, Mississippi and died in 1958 in New York City. The son of an enslaved black seamstress and white ship captain, Church learned about business from his father, Memphian Charles Church, and served as a steward and cabin boy on his father’s ships. Robert Church Sr.’s contributions to Memphis history are many, but

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Δelta State University, which houses some photos from the Hooks Brothers Photography studio, lists the address as 164 Beale, but all other sources give the 162 address.
one of his most prominent achievements was Church Park and Auditorium, which he opened on Beale Street in 1899.iii With a banquet hall beneath the stage and soda fountain near the door, this 2,200-seat Carnegie Hall of the South embodied the spirit and prestige of The Grandest Time. Church Park and Auditorium hosted convocations for the Church of God in Christ, and welcomed President Theodore Roosevelt in 1902 (Walter, Robert Church Sr. 2009).

In addition to his other businesses, Church, in 1908, also founded Solvent Savings and Trust Bank in the 300 block of Beale near his civic center (Tucker 150; Walter, “Robert Church Sr.; Jenkins 15-16). Solvent had 20,000 depositors, mostly black men and women, and was the first bank owned and operated by blacks with more than a million dollars in deposits (Lindsay 185). After the patriarch’s death in 1912, his equally influential son, Robert Church Jr., continued the family’s Beale Street enterprise until he was run out of the city in 1940 over a political endorsement that upset white city leaders. As part of a political power play organized by Mayor Edward “Boss” Crump, the city confiscated the Church family estate allegedly due to unpaid taxes. Robert Church Jr. fled to Washington D.C. where he remained a key figure in Republican politics until his death in 1952 (Walter, Robert Church Jr. 2009).

From speeches by black orators to blues shows by Delta musicians, Beale Street was a space where rural and urban blacks of all classes gathered. There were white and Jewish patrons and business owners on Beale Street during these early decades, but what made Beale distinctive in the city was the concentration of well-capitalized, black-owned businesses on the strip. These black business owners established a camaraderie and network that helped to cultivate other entrepreneurs and civic leaders. This synergy and organization helped the city’s African

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iii Contrary to other records, in Figure 4 the building’s name appears as “Church Park and Community Center.”
American community defend against the undercurrents of racial violence that were ever-present during The Grandest Time. For example, Beale Street Baptist Church housed the *Memphis Free Speech and Headlight* newspaper where the preeminent African American journalist, Ida B. Wells, published her earliest editorials against lynching in the 1880s and 1890s. The outspoken Wells, who was part owner of the newspaper, was particularly vocal on the evolving power dynamic in the postbellum South (Goings 2009, DeCosta-Willis 2009). Like they later repeated with the junior Church, white city leaders, angered over political stances, threatened Wells, and forced her out of town. After she moved, she continued to give them hell by writing damning commentaries about racial hostility and sexism in the South for newspapers in Chicago and New York, and later giving lectures in Europe that specifically denounced Memphis lynch mobs (Tucker 118-119).

The principles of collective responsibility and cooperative economics that permeated Beale Street during the turn of the 20th century also boosted the career of Beale Street’s most famous resident, William Christopher (W. C.) Handy. Born in Florence, Alabama, Handy moved to Memphis at the age of 33 in 1907. The “Father of the Blues” received private music lessons at the Hooks School of Music inside Church Auditorium by Julia Hooks, the “Angel of Beale Street” and mother of the original Hooks Brothers (Lewis 2009; Sharp 94). Her pupil, Handy, went on to become the orchestra leader for Church Auditorium. Solvent Bank on Beale, also owned by the Church family, is where the musician met a cashier and aspiring producer named Harry Pace (Robertson 150).

Handy and Pace became fast friends and later formed the Pace and Handy Music Company on Beale where they published a collection of songs, including Handy’s most well-
known tune, “The St. Louis Blues” (Biddle-Douglass 2009). According to blues scholar Adam Gussow, Handy’s 1914 tune was about more than heartbreak. It was an “overt and coded racial revolt against the harsh conditions Southern life imposed on him” (Gussow 6). Deconstructing Handy’s most famous song, Gussow explained:

Handy made his get-away in this double sense: He lived for most of his adult life off of the profits of a song, “St. Louis Blues,” in which he coded his own remarkable escape from a near-lynching in Tennessee. …

At no point in the account of the song’s composition does Handy explicitly refer to his near-lynching in Murfreesboro. The only evidence is the escape word itself, resurfacing as it does near the beginning of “St. Louis Blues”:

```
Feelin’ tomorrow lak Ah feel today
Feel tomorrow lak Ah feel today
I’ll pack my trunk and make mah get-away
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These lines are both a memorable evocation of the troubled African American mind in the age of Jim Crow and, I would suggest, an unconscious recapitulation of Handy’s brutally specific encounter with “hard conditions” in central Tennessee (11).

Statements by Handy’s brother, Charles Handy, support Gussow’s theory that “St. Louis Blues,” and much of Handy’s work, was “coded.” Charles Handy described his brother as a race conscious musician who “gave two of everything” (Handy n.d.). Handy’s skill at code switching allowed him to maintain his popularity with white fans and credibility with black fans. Charles Handy went on to say that his brother wrote “St. Louis Blues” in slang to preserve the black dialect of the day and to communicate with the common man. In that song, W. C. Handy recorded the pain of unrequited romantic love and, it appears, the pain of unrequited love for one’s country as well. Handy’s musical genius often overshadows his role as a scholar and activist, but Handy’s music was simultaneously playful and political. His Beale Street family
nurtured his early career, and this foundational support helped him build a nationwide following. In turn, Handy’s presence and pioneering work helped Beale Street earn the moniker ‘The Birthplace of the Blues.’

Handy, like other Beale Street legends of The Grandest Time, converted the stages, shops, offices, parks, clubs, sanctuaries and studios of Beale Street into spaces where blacks could experience uplift through cultural arts, commerce and civic engagement. The biographies of these legends provide a critical counter-narrative to the *Uncle Remus* characters and mammy lore that gained in popularity during this same period. These pastoral plantation narratives where whites were kind bosses and blacks were willingly subservient and powerless ignore the defiance of an Ida B. Wells, the creativity of a W. C. Handy, the artistry of a Lucy Jane Wright and the intelligence and ingenuity of families like the Churches and the Hooks.

Despite its important cultural work of providing a respite for African Americans in the Jim Crow South, Beale Street had vices and critics. Some of that criticism was racially motivated. In 1916, Handy recorded a song that publically exposed the underbelly of Beale. The blues tunes exclaims:

You’ll see pretty browns in beautiful gowns,
You’ll see tailor-mades and hand-me-downs,
You’ll meet honest men, and pick-pockets skilled,
You’ll find that business never ceases ’til somebody gets killed!

If Beale Street could talk, if Beale Street could talk,
Married men would have to take their beds and walk,
Except one or two who never drink booze,
And the blind man on the corner singing “Beale Street Blues!”

The line “if Beale Street could talk, married men would have to take their beds and walk” may allude to the brothels and prostitution rings that once peppered Beale Street. In 2006, while
covering a news story on the excavation of a site that is now home to the Westin Memphis Beale Street Hotel, I witnessed the evidence of Beale Street’s red-light district. During this dig, archeologists uncovered the remains of three suspected Beale Street brothels. Artifacts included fragments of porcelain penny dolls that researchers believe belonged to the children of prostitutes that lived with their mothers at the Beale Street boarding houses, symbols of a mother’s desire to maintain a semblance of normality amidst a crude environment. According to Craig Werner, the Beale Street brothels “condoned black men’s access to white prostitutes, though only after three a.m., by which time white men had presumably had sufficient time to exercise their racial privilege” (62).iv

The presence of brothels on Beale Street is not surprising because the Memphis strip is one of several historic black business districts associated with the sex industry. Prostitution dollars helped to sustain some black saloons in Birmingham (Wilson 596). Between World Wars I and II, Chicago’s Belt Black was a red-light district (Vaillant 33). During the Harlem Renaissance, cabarets stocked with black women openly solicited the white male patrons and their wallets (Osofsky 235). And the country’s most notorious red-light district, Storyville, was an adult playground located in the predominantly black New Orleans’ neighborhood of Tremé. Here, white women and women of color entertained men from across the county. Like Storyville, Beale Street was a popular place for slumming, the act of white thrill-seekers venturing into the black side of town to fulfill their illicit desires. Slumming allowed white neighborhoods to

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iv I did not find this historical nugget repeated in other sources, but if true, it indicates that, within a controlled environment, black men on Beale Street were able to penetrate segregation’s most fortified boundary.
maintain their Puritan façades because immoral acts were systematically concentrated, and often legally restricted, to the darker side of town.

Dice rolled, liquor flowed, and sex sold on Beale Street. This combination occasionally became a dangerous cocktail that exploded into violence. However, some believe that reports of violence were exaggerated and part of a politically and racially motivated conspiracy to close Beale Street. Entertainer Rufus Thomas said, “(Beale) was no worse than any other street, but it was penned to be a bad street because a lot of black folk came together there” (qt. Vance 5). As historians Margaret McKee and Fred Chisenhall noted, the policemen assigned to patrol Beale also instigated violence at times.

Churches that labeled the blues “the devil’s music” deemed Beale Street a den of iniquity and they worked to shut it down (McKee 33). To sway “the good Christian voters,” two-time Memphis Mayor and political kingpin Boss Crump organized crusades against Beale Street including a fierce crackdown in the 1940s (Werner 62). Yet, Crump’s relationship with Beale was complicated. Beale Street legend W. C. Handy wrote Crump’s 1909 campaign song “Mr. Crump,” which was later rerecorded as “The Memphis Blues.” Furthermore, Crump capitalized on political ties with the Church family until his feud with Robert Church Jr. in 1940. Despite his partisan crusades to cleanup or shutdown the area, Crump ultimately failed to get the upper hand in his tug of war with Beale Street merchants. Crump died in 1954 at the age of 80, but The Grandest Time on Beale Street rolled on into the sixties [Figures 3 and 4].

The Difficult Days

Shortly after Crump’s death, the Memphis political machine found a new leader named Henry Loeb, and he too faced battles on Beale Street. When Loeb first took office in the early
1960s, Beale Street had a commercial core that included Lansky Brothers clothier, the legendary Nathan Novick’s Music and Pawn Shop, Beale Street staple A. Schwab’s dry goods store, the Hooks Brothers photography studio, and Ernest Withers’ studio, where the doyen of civil rights photography processed some of the most iconic images of the Civil Right Movement for newspapers, magazines and possibly the FBI. Under Loeb’s tenure as mayor, Beale Street’s business district crumbled, suffering through disintegration, riots, and urban clearance.

Born into a wealthy Memphis family in 1920, Loeb grew up to serve as a naval officer during World War II. As a young veteran, he worked in his family’s business, Loeb Laundry-Cleaners, which was well-known in local political circles. With Crump’s endorsement, Loeb began his political career with an appointment to the Park Commission in 1950. Five years later, Loeb gained a seat on the City Commission, and then, in 1959, he won a landslide victory for mayor (Cordell). Loeb served two nonconsecutive terms as Memphis mayor: from 1960 to 1963, and from 1968 to 1971. During Loeb’s first mayoral tenure, Memphis parks, libraries, museums, and zoo desegregated. The journey to integrate public facilities included lawsuits, sit-ins, boycotts and arrests, but historian Beverly Bond notes that Loeb “avoided much of the violence and animosity found in other parts of the South” (135).

As exclusively white establishments in Memphis began to welcome, or at the very least tolerate, African American customers, the need for a black business district lessened and the commercial core of Beale Street destabilized. In 1966, federal officials declared four blocks of

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On September 12 2010, The Commercial Appeal newspaper in Memphis released a lengthy article titled “Photographer Ernest Withers doubled as FBI informant to spy on civil rights movement.” Written by investigative reporter Marc Perrusquia, the placement of the article on the paper’s editorial page speaks to the controversial nature of the reporter’s claims. As of winter 2011, the FBI refused to comment on the allegations, and the Wither family denies them.
Beale Street from Main to Fourth Street a National Historic Landmark because of their blues heritage, but the designation noted, “Deterioration, neglect of maintenance, and incompatible usage are threatening the landmark district.” Along with the socio-political shift, the U.S. marketplace also underwent an economic shift around the same period. Since the heyday of five-and-dime stores in the 19th century, some white men affirmed their fragile claim of superiority by perpetuating the myth that white women were too uneducated to be trusted with the family budget and African Americans were too wasteful to become responsible shoppers (Ownby 44-45, 62). Attempts to bar white women and blacks from then-mainstream consumer culture ultimately failed because these two minority groups circumvented unwelcoming, white-male dominated general stores and instead found agency in department stores, mail order catalogues, big box chains and new shopping centers on the outer rings of cities.

From 1945 to 1975, the city of Memphis grew fivefold from 51 square miles to 280 square miles (Rushing 130). This aggressive annexation shifted the city’s center away from Downtown. During this era, the Memphis metropolitan area welcomed two new malls: Southland Mall in the then-suburb of Whitehaven opened in 1966 as the first indoor mall in the metro area, and Raleigh Springs Mall in 1971 opened just north of the city. Both siphoned business from Downtown. Beale Street hit a low note in the 1970s in part because of a nationwide decrease in downtown traffic and black customers’ enthusiasm in exercising new shopping freedoms.

Another factor that contributed to Beale Street’s demise was the 1968 sanitation workers’ strike and assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In February of 1968, after unsuccessful attempts to negotiate with Mayor Loeb for better pay and safer working conditions, 1,300 Memphis sanitation workers, along with some other unionized public employees, began to strike.
In the spring of 1968, King made two trips to Memphis, a city where more than 50 percent of the black population lived in poverty in at the time (Honey 4). This widespread poverty was one of the reasons that King came to Memphis on March 28, 1968, a week earlier than his tragic April 4 visit. He was in the city on March 28 to not only lend support for the strike, but also as a “dress rehearsal” for his Poor People’s Crusade on Washington D.C. scheduled for April 22, 1968 (BeVier). The march wound through Downtown Memphis, including Beale Street, until a riot erupted that led to one death, 62 injuries, 218 arrests and $400,000 in property damage, according to The Commercial Appeal newspaper. Disappointed by the failed march, King flew back to Memphis the following week in hopes of leading a well-organized, peaceful protest. That march was scheduled for Monday, April 8.

On April 3, he delivered a speech to a packed house at Mason Temple in Downtown Memphis. Warning the crowd of potential danger, he said,

> And then I got to Memphis. And some began to say the threats, or talk about the threats that were out. What would happen to me from some of our sick white brothers? Well, I don’t know what will happen now. We’ve got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn’t matter with me now. Because I’ve been to the mountaintop (1968).

This message proved ominous because the following day James Earl Ray shot King on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel less than a mile away from Beale Street. Local news reports recap April 4th and 5th as bloody days with no fewer than 80 arrests and 28 injuries attributed to riots ignited by anger over the assassination (Lentz 1968). In the days after King’s death, law enforcement officials in Kansas City, Baltimore, Washington D.C. and Chicago, among other cities, worked to douse flames of anger. With his hand forced by the tragedy and at the insistence
of President Lyndon Johnson, Mayor Loeb relented, granting the workers’ requests. The three-month long strike ended on April 16.

As King predicted, difficult days lay ahead for the nation, the city and Beale Street—the place where the icon led his last march. King’s assassination was a traumatic blow for Memphians. Beverly Robertson, who later took over the upkeep of the former Lorraine Motel as executive director of the National Civil Rights Museum explained, “After King died there was sort of this embarrassment of Memphians to even say they were from Memphis because people would always respond, ‘You know you guys killed Dr. King’ ” (2009). Echoing this sentiment, local music legend Michael Dobson added, “We got the reputation that we could not unify” (2010). The one place that black Memphians had unified for decades was Beale Street, but the bullet that killed King symbolically shot through the heart of Beale Street.

Beale was one of several business districts for people of color that declined in the sixties. Treme, one of the oldest African American neighborhoods in the country, boasted homes, shops and jazz clubs until it went into economic decline in the 1960s partly because of highway construction. The Beale Street of Dallas was Deep Ellum, home to the now-shuttered Grand Temple of the Black Knights of Pythias which was the first building designed by a black architect in Dallas. Like Beale Street, it had a blues tradition, yet the music stopped in 1969 when a railroad line sliced through the community. Then there was Farish Street, two hundred miles south of Beale in Jackson, Mississippi. The Mississippi neighborhood was the business and entertainment hub for the African American community in Jackson, but waned in the 1970s (Haimerl 2009). Although each district has a unique history, they share two similarities: Deep Ellum, Treme, Farish Street and Beale Street were all districts that catered to African American
consumers during the first half of the twentieth century when blacks had limited choices for housing and shopping. Likewise, they all declined in direct proportion to the swell of the civil rights era as black consumers found it increasingly possible to practice freedom of choice in the American marketplace. Farish Street shares another tie with Beale Street. Like Memphis city leaders, Jackson city leaders initially turned to real estate manager John Elkington to restore the area’s commercial vitality, but the partnership between Elkington and Jackson later dissolved.

The disintegration of the city’s black community was the coffin; the riots were the grave; and urban clearance was the cement slab that seemed to seal the fate of Beale Street. Urban clearance was a preliminary and unnecessary step in Beale Street’s renewal. Urban clearance is the destruction of aging structures within a central city in an attempt by government officials or developers to eliminate eyesores or prime the targeted area for redevelopment. This process robs a community of valuable memoryscapes that help that community connect to and learn from its past, and such demolition is the polar opposite of preservation.

In his book *The Southern Past*, historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage details instances across the country when officials razed areas important to African Americans while simultaneously preserving and restoring areas important to the white community. Such a scenario unfolded in Memphis as the preservation society Memphis Heritage formed in an unsuccessful attempt to save the former home of author Napoleon Hill while bulldozers rolled down Beale. Brundage called the demolition of black historic sites during the 1960s the “bulldozer revolution” where “federally funded renewal projects destroyed more than 300,000 housing units as highway builders and downtown redevelopers joined in a national frenzy of urban clearance in the name of eliminating ‘blighted areas’” (228). Urban clearance on Beale Street started in 1969 under the
Loeb Administration and continued into the 1970s under Mayor J. Wyeth Chandler who served from 1972 to 1982. Reflecting on the clearance and renewal efforts, a 2010 report authored by city attorney Jill Madajczyk concluded:

Under that program, the Street essentially was closed, with the exception of (A.) Schwab’s. Some would say there was an effort by the then City Administration to move the African American community farther south of Union (Avenue) so that Beale Street could become an economic and unwritten barrier between the predominately white population on the north side of Beale and the predominant African American population on the south side. It was reported in the June 10, 1979 Memphis Press-Scimitar that “urban renewal destroyed Beale Street” as the City had undertaken the demolition of 474 buildings along with an expansive condemnation process commonly referred to as the Urban Renewal Projects, Beale Street I and Beale Street II. (3: 3-4)

Although the theory that racial politics played a role in the bulldozing of Beale Street may never receive official confirmation, it is telling that in its own review of the era the City does not refute these allegations. This reckless destruction forever compromised the authenticity of Beale Street.

A source of embarrassment and public outrage, mold and pests were Beale Street’s primary tenants during The Difficult Days as the strip digressed from a black Main Street to Shame Street. Joni Mitchell captured the sad state of Beale Street in her 1976 folk song “Furry Sings the Blues.” The song tells of the decline of Beale Street as seen through the eyes of real life Beale Street blues guitarist Walter “Furry” Lewis who was born in Greenwood, Mississippi in 1893 and died in Memphis in 1981. In the song, Mitchell moans,

Pawn shops glitter like gold tooth caps
In the grey decay
They chew the last few dollars off
Old Beale Street’s carcass
Carrion and mercy
Blue and silver sparkling drums
Cheap guitars eye shades and guns
Aimed at the hot blood of being no one
Down and out in Memphis Tennessee
Old Furry sings the blues

In the song, inspired by Mitchell’s visit in 1975, the folk singer opines that Furry sings the blues in tribute and in sorrow while sitting on the “shanty street.” Although Lewis expressed displeasure at the use of his name in the song (Seal 1977), “Furry Sings the Blues” remains a significant contribution to the canon of songs about Beale Street because the lyrics and Mitchell’s rich alto voice capture the somber mood of one of the street’s darkest era. Beale Street’s demise and the destruction of many of its original buildings is a devastating loss for American history because Beale was a borderland where many native-born aliens turned naturalized-citizens learned the tenors of American citizenship. On Beale Street, first and second generation American citizens experienced the political process, property ownership, entrepreneurship, and freedom of expression. This is not to suggest that blacks on Beale escaped the omnipresent hand of racism that hovered over American society in the 19th and 20th centuries, but Beale did provide a preview of what the American dream could mean.

Conceptualizing Beale Street as a borderland for new citizens broadens the conversation about what Beale Street was and should become. In its simplest form, a borderland is a region and surrounding area where concrete or abstract entities meet. Scholar Bradley Parker presents a more nuanced, cross-disciplinary definition of borderlands as “regions around or between political or cultural entities where geographic, political, demographic, cultural and economic circumstances or processes may interact to create borders or frontiers” (80). This definition is applicable to Beale Street because it was a space where two cultures—black Memphis and white Memphis—divided. Looking at early Beale Street within the context of borderland theory
illuminates Beale Streets pivotal place in American history beyond music. Historic Beale Street was a geopolitical black borderland that nurtured the creative arts, business ownership and political participation for African Americans that later faded because of cultural and population shifts, riots, and urban clearance.

**The Elkington Era**

A year after urban clearance claimed its first building on Beale Street, a 22-year-old student named John Elkington moved to Memphis to start law school. Although Beale was boarded up when he first walked its streets, he saw something “magical” amongst the ruins, and later dedicated his career to showing others that magic as well (Elkington 2011). Elkington’s influence over Beale spanned seven mayoral administrations. Many people in the public and private sectors played a role in the redevelopment of Beale Street, but none were more pivotal than Elkington. His longevity and the scope of his influence warrant critical attention. Thus, in the remainder of this chapter, I will document and analyze Elkington’s personal history, and how Beale Street evolved under his leadership in ways that were both constructive and problematic. I will discuss how his vision of a commercial music center with “no barriers” led to the “no black, no white, just the blues” slogan that challenges Beale’s future as a sustainable tourism development.

Elkington arrived in Memphis in 1970 after residing in several other U.S. cities. The man who early-on aspired for a career in politics was born in Washington D.C. on December 14, 1947. His father died when he was very young, and because of this foundational loss, he said, he developed his own rules for life while growing up without the benefit of male guidance (Elkington 2011). His mother later remarried a man who he described as abusive, and he spent a
significant part of his youth in Florida. Elkington was a high school football player at a segregated private school named Pine Crest School in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. He later attended Vanderbilt University on a scholarship. While studying in Nashville, the music lover would hang out at clubs near the historically black college Fisk University where he would catch live shows by R&B and soul singers. He graduated from Vanderbilt in 1970 and from law school at then-Memphis State University in 1973.

He was thrust into politics from the beginning of his law career, joining the politically connected Apperson, Crump, Duzane & Maxwell. The firm, started in 1865, is the oldest continuously operating law firm in Memphis. Now known simply as Apperson Crump, partner Charles Metcalf Crump was a relative of political kingpin Boss Crump. As a rookie attorney with Apperson Crump, Elkington worked on behalf of Downtown property owners suing the city and its housing authority over eminent domain seizures. These cases connected him with the power players in Memphis politics, gave him a crash course on the history of Beale, and foreshadowed his future.

In the 1970s, several tributaries merged into one collective movement to revitalize Beale Street, and Mayor Wyeth Chandler was instrumental in directing this current. Chandler appointed Elkington to the Beale Street National Historic Foundation in 1975, after Elkington left Apperson Crump to go into development (Elkington 2011). Although this quasi-governmental committee was biracial, the black members played only a ceremonial role. White members dominated the discussion and the discourse often centered on race. Some board members tried to calculate the racial tipping point for Beale Street, defined as the maximum percentage of black patrons that Beale could sustain without scaring away white visitors.
Consistent with this discourse, the architects for the redevelopment project, R.P. Barassi and Associates, designed entryways to Beale Street only on the north side of the street to deter residents from the predominantly black neighborhoods on the south side of the street from flowing into the gentrified area. Vocal members of the foundation accused board members of removing racist comments from their committee notes in order to avoid conflict with black leaders when the reports became public. Ultimately it was not infighting, but lack of financing that led to the demise of the Beale Street National Historic Foundation in 1977 (Doyle; Wurzburg 2011).

In 1977, Beale earned its Congressional designation as “Home of the Blues” and two years later, the Chandler Administration acquired tracts of land on Beale under the Beale Street Urban Renewal Area Project No. TENN.R.77. In a separate effort, a circle of black civic leaders organized the nonprofit organization the Beale Street Development Corporation (BSDC) in 1973 and by 1979, the group had secured millions of dollars in state and federal grants to jump start construction in the area. The city owned the land—specifically three blocks on Beale from Second Street to Fourth Street— but the BSDC had the needed capital to improve the land. Thus, on July 28, 1982, the city leased its property to BSDC with the understanding that the group would use the $21.6 million in local, state and federal funds to develop the three city-owned blocks of Beale (Madajczyk 3.4).

Black ministers had a leading role in the BSDC and their involvement serves as a counter narrative to the blues as the devil’s music diatribe preached by some members of the cloth. Rev. James Netters was president of the group in 1979 and 1980 during the pivotal years when it secured the funding and negotiated the terms of the deal with the City. Netters was one of three
African Americans on the City Council during the 1968 sanitation workers’ strike, and he used his office and pulpit to advocate for the strikers. Rev. James Smith also wielded his role as a civil rights activist into political prominence serving as chairman of the BSDC in the early eighties. Smith gained recognition during the 1968 strike as frontline protestors. In 1976, he started a 16-year post as executive director of the public works union.\textsuperscript{vi} And Smith is responsible for connecting Elkington with the reenergized Beale Street redevelopment efforts. When Smith and Elkington met in 1982, Elkington was partners in an innovative commercial real estate development company called Elkington & Keltner. As Elkington remembered,

As I tell people, it began in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel. I was there to be on the panel talking about how are we going to redevelop Memphis. Gov. (Lamar) Alexander had this thing. That’s where I met Rev. Smith and Smith was kind of holding court in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel and that was the only thing that was really there (in Downtown Memphis).

I was very good friends, good friends with a woman named Sonia Walker who used to be on television and she said, “I want you to meet Rev. Smith. I want you to meet my friend John Elkington.” And we’re there and he was telling me he ran Beale Street, and I said, “Look man, that’s like a long shot. And I know a little bit about it because I was on this committee, and good luck to you because you’re going to need every bit of luck you could possibly have.” (Elkington 2011)

There was indeed a forum called the Memphis Jobs Conference in 1979 and 1980 sponsored by the Governor’s Economic and Jobs Conference (Rushing 104). Sonia Walker, a popular African American news anchor, turned minister, confirmed Elkington’s account. When asked about it in 2011, she replied, “I vaguely remember that. I think I did introduce them that day in the lobby, vi

\textsuperscript{vi} Smith resigned as head of ASCFME in 1992 amidst a scandal that he falsified the union’s accounting documents in order to privately settle a sexual assault allegation against him. A judge convicted him of three counts of falsifying records in 1995. He served four months in a halfway house and lost much of his political influence.
and they became fast friends that day.” With Walker’s introduction in 1982, The Elkington Era on Beale began.

Though politically influential, the BSDC lacked the real estate expertise to coordinate the complex redevelopment efforts, and it handpicked Elkington to create and execute a plan. BSDC agreed to sublease the city property to Elkington’s company in exchange for a share of the profits. But before the final contract was signed between the City, BSDC and Elkington, leadership of the City of Memphis changed hands—twice. On October 1, 1982, ten-year mayor Wyeth Chandler resigned to accept a judgeship on the Circuit Court. As chairman of the City Council, Church of God In Christ Bishop J. O. Patterson Jr. served as mayor for 20 days, which also earned him the distinction of being the city’s first black mayor. Following Patterson’s 20-day tenure, the City Council appointed chief administrative officer Wallace Madewell to serve as interim mayor from October 21 until after a special election and runoff on November 30. During this forty day window of Madewell’s tenure as mayor, Elkington, BSDC and the City finalized and signed the contract that made Elkington the manager of Beale until the 2034, a 52-year contract. With that new title Elkington also gained the BSDC’s $21.6 million in grants to use for the redevelopment project.

Viewing the signing of such an extraordinary deal by an interim mayor with curiosity, I made sure to question Elkington about this during our 78-minute long conversation in January 2011. He explained:

What happened was Chandler resigned, became a judge, and there was a void. There was going to be—J. O. Patterson was mayor for three or four weeks. We were ready to start. I mean we were ready to actually start signing leases and so, they didn’t know when the election was coming. That was really kind of a disaster so. I mean all these people had spent a year working together. We had a
weekly meeting where the City met, we met, BSDC met. We had this really close relationship and suddenly everyone panicked and went, “Wait a minute. What if Mayor (Dick) Hackett,” now Mayor Hackett, “Who has a very conservative base, what if he says, I don’t want to put any money in Beale Street? I don’t want to be involved in Beale Street. I’m going to shut it down.” So we were very concerned about that. So they went ahead and all the lawyers for the city who had been working on this for so many years pressed to get all the documents signed.

... And I think truly, in the beginning, in the beginning of this, I should have mentioned this before Cathryn, uh, the agreement was so one-sided that I think the city just wanted someone to take it over and get it done. They really didn’t believe that it would ever happen either. I think, there was so much, in this city at the time, there was a culture here that we can’t get things done.

Some details corroborate Elkington’s account of events. As chief administrative officer under Chandler, Madewell would have been involved in, or at least intimately familiar with, the Beale Street negotiations while Chandler was mayor. As one official told me, Madewell was simply carrying out Chandler’s unfinished agenda.

Elkington’s reason for the admittedly one-sided deal also has support. Foremost, the city’s most seasoned commercial developers had their hands tied up in other projects in the early eighties. In 1981, Jack Belz of Belz Enterprises reopened the Peabody Hotel. In 1982, Avron Fogelman of Fogelman Properties opened the city-owned Mud Island River Park. As Jeff Sanford, former head of the Memphis Center City Commission and a longtime voice in the Memphis tourism industry, explained, “Nobody wanted (Beale Street), and this crazy guy Elkington came up with a plan, and not only was it the best deal the city could make at the time, it was the only deal the city could make” (qt. in Maki 2011). For people inside the political loop, Elkington was the consensus choice as Beale Street’s manager and developer, perhaps if only by
default. Yet, outside of City Hall, there were rumblings. “Black people were concerned that this was a ‘white takeover’ of Beale Street, our historic place of music and entertainment,” said Rev. Bill Adkins, who was a popular radio host at the time.

Elkington was aware of the conspiracy criticism, and made attempts to understand some of the worries of black Memphians. In his 2008 memoir, beale street, he describes meetings that he scheduled, mostly with other white men, to learn more about the culture and concerns of African American Memphians. He walked away from these futile conversations realizing that “the white community had no clue who the leaders or the future leaders in the black community were” (beale street 50). His admitted knowledge gap illustrates one of the fundamental problems Elkington faced in redeveloping the place that was once the cultural center of black life in Memphis. As a Memphis transplant, the D.C. born developer had no lived experience of Beale’s heyday. As an upper middle class businessman who ran in political circles, his connections to the masses of working class Memphians that anchored the city, and once filled Beale, were shallow. And as a white man with no background of local civil rights activism, he was viewed as an unwelcomed outsider and potential enemy by some black Memphians.

Also creating tensions were the competing memories of Beale. There was the image of black Beale as a segregated, seedy, black side of town for drunkards, gamblers, and prostitutes. Then, there were nostalgic memories of it as a place of commerce, entertainment, and empowerment for black Memphians. Elkington attempted to reconcile these polarizing opinions by coming up with a new, all-inclusive slogan for Beale: “no barriers.” As he explained, “I wanted to make sure there were no barriers—real or imaginary—where people of either race felt uncomfortable” (Elkington 2011). Elkington’s revisioned Beale would “celebrate diversity”
because he thought this would be the most lucrative endeavor (*beale street* 16). Furthermore, as a fellow white developer warned him, “If you can’t attract white Memphians to your property, and Beale Street becomes a black development only, it’s over for you” (*beale street* 70). Elkington, a commercial developer, not a preservationist, esteemed the street’s economic value as an entertainment district over its historic value as a cultural landmark. His three goals for the gentrified Beale were to make it the music center of the region, eliminate all racial barriers, and return commerce to the area (Elkington 2011).

With the bottom line top of mind, the project started with a cost-saving measure. Boarded up for a decade or more, the city-owned buildings bore the scars and stench of neglect. Some of the interior walls were so fragile that they needed steel braces to keep them from collapsing. Architects walked gingerly as they surveyed each building to avoid the gaping holes that peppered the floor like craters. The second and third levels of some buildings had completely collapsed. Basic amenities like air conditioning, heating and a functional toilet were distant memories. The buildings were a fire hazard, a health hazard and a legal liability. Instead of hiring the expert labor necessary to excavate and properly clean the historical sites, Elkington convinced government officials to send out inmates from the county jail to do the dangerous job (*beale street* 53-57). This use of laborers untrained in the field of preservation compromised the authenticity of the future Beale Street tourist development.

Despite some construction blips, Elkington opened the first wing of Beale in October 1983, just 11 months after taking over the street. Beale Street sputtered along the first few years. One of the earliest businesses on the new Beale was Mama Josie’s ice cream parlor, which Sonia
Walker, the woman who introduced Elkington and Rev. Smith, opened with three other women. Her partners were Patricia Walker Shaw, one-time president of Universal Life Insurance Company; Joyce Blackmon, an administrator who helped to integrate the city’s public utility company; and Dr. Bonnie Thornton Dell, founder of the Center for Research on Women at then Memphis State University.

The women approached their new business venture with optimism and turned it into a family affair. They chose the name Mama Josie as a tribute to Walker’s husband’s grandmother who once owned an ice creamery. The owners’ children made up the staff. On the peach colored walls, the owners hung a group picture of themselves with their mothers. The four friends hoped that the parlor would become a profitable business to pass along to their children, but frustration soon drifted into their dreams. As Walker recalled,

It went well on weekends as we first opened, but as the winter came we just didn’t have anything to draw people down there … Everybody was struggling. People were kind of suspicious. Black people didn’t know if they wanted to come down there, white people didn’t know if they wanted to come down there. There was some of that racial stuff (2011).

Too far ahead of the parade, businesses like Mama Josie’s came and went during the first few years on Beale Street (Gulyas 33). This instability contrasted with a nationwide economy that was rebounding from the recession of 1982. Locally, in 1984 in Downtown Memphis, the Orpheum Theatre reopened, and developers renovated three major apartment high rises. In 1985, a $43.5 million hotel opened at 300 North Second Street in Downtown Memphis. A year later, another hotel opened at 185 Union Avenue, after undergoing $25 million in renovations (Greaney n.d.). In addition to struggling businesses on Beale Street, Elkington’s split with his original business partner, Steve Keltner, in the mid to late 1980s, and lawsuits over unpaid
contracts added to the mounting skepticism over Elkington’s vision and ability. Elkington rebranded his business into Performa Entertainment Real Estate during this time. In his book, Elkington recounts how at the height of his financial woes, he worked to convince B. B. King’s manager, Sid Seidenberg, that a B. B. King’s Blues Club could become lucrative on Beale Street. Elkington wrote:

There was only one problem. I did not have an operator or the money and Beale Street was not yet a success. This added to the fact that I had just spent four years working from near bankruptcy, a divorce, a breakup with my partner and our investors, and I was just starting to eliminate lawsuits and liens that had been filed against Elkington & Keltner. … I was in bad shape in 1988. Elkington & Keltner’s cash was taken away by our controlling partners, and we were left with $120,000,000 in debt and $18,000 in the bank. (81-82)

Despite these woes, B. B. King’s manager said that he would take a chance on Beale Street, and the opening of B. B. King’s in 1991, said Elkington, made it official that Beale Street was back. According to the accounting records of Elkington’s firm, sales on Beale Street have climbed from $2.1 million in 1986 to $31.8 million in 2009 (Ashby 2010). As of 2010, the street had an occupancy rate of 98 percent, employed more than 800 people, boasted an annual payroll of $10 million, and contained 11-minority run businesses (Madajczyk 3.5).

Elkington succeeded in turning the strip into a profitable venture, but at whose expense? Per the terms of his contract, Elkington could recoup his initial investment, plus 15 percent of the rent collected on the strip’s city-owned buildings. The contract stipulated that Beale Street Development Corporation and the City receive the remaining revenue to invest in other redevelopment projects. The City benefited from the sales tax revenue, but in litigation that spanned several years, the City and BSDC claimed that they never saw their share of the profits from the three-way venture. Elkington countered that there were no profits because he was still
recouping his initial investment. The legal battles heated up in 2009 after audits by two different companies. The City appointed accounting firm alleged that Elkington’s company failed to report $6.4 million of profits from Beale (Maki 2009). Elkington’s lawyer countered that their own audit showed that the amount was inflated and that his client did not knowingly deny the City or BSDC their share of the revenue, but rather made some accounting errors which were favorable to Performa (Ashby 2010).

Accountability and stewardship of resources are two components of sustainable tourism that this period of insufficient bookkeeping jeopardized. The paper trail between Elkington and the City is long, unorganized and inconclusive. One major source of the conflict is the City’s failure year after year to oversee the entertainment district’s financial records. Multiple mayoral administrations bear the blame for this abdication of responsibility, and this lapse was detrimental to both the city and Elkington. The City potentially lost valuable dollars that could have been invested in economic and personal development projects for Memphians, and Elkington became bloodied in a preventable battle.

With trust wounded on both sides, the terms of the unusually lengthy lease haunted city administrators as they sought to end their agreement with Elkington. In a 2010 letter, City Attorney Herman Morris said that the contract was imprudent from a municipal standpoint, and specifically cited a provision that made it difficult for the city to seek damages or legal judgments from Elkington, even if proven that he breached the contract. Morris wrote:

This language places a significant limitation on what assets would be available to satisfy any judgment which might be awarded in litigation. The same language also serves to protect the assets of PERE and its principal John Elkington. In hindsight this provision though detrimental to the City, is what was agreed to in 1982 and a court would be bound by its terms and limitations today. (4)
Thus, the city could only penalize Elkington for mismanagement by collecting his future profits from Beale, but city leaders could not seek Elkington’s personal assets to settle any debts.

In addition to the “detrimental” financial agreement, Elkington’s creative influence over the entertainment district also proved lucrative and problematic. Both critic and champion of Beale, Rev. Bill Adkins expressed,

> Overall Beale Street was saved, revived and restored. John must receive some credit. It’s now a national attraction. Everyone that comes to Memphis eventually journeys to Beale. Therefore it must be a success. Culturally, I wish we had a blues museum on Beale and I wish there were more efforts to share the true history of the street (2011).

Interestingly, there once was a museum on Beale dedicated to the history of the street. The Center for Southern Folklore operated an interpretive center inside the Historical Daisy Theater at 329 Beale Street from 1983-1985, but “the traffic wasn’t there to support it,” said Beale Street Development Corporation executive director Randle Catron (qt. in Dries 2011). The BSDC runs The Historical Daisy Theater where the walls of the banquet hall and occasional club are filled with photos, album covers, posters, and some memorabilia from Memphis musicians. These interesting pieces serve as decorations and are not organized in such a way that tell a narrative about the city’s musical history or Beale’s black history. The Memphis Daily News reported that the Interpretive Center was scheduled to reopen for the first time in two decades in February 2011, but Catron, the colorful head of BSDC, has since said that the center would not open until late spring or summer 2011.

If well executed, the museum could be an instrumental component in illuminating the black history of Beale Street and building a greater connection between Beale Street and local
residents in Memphis who are majority black. A well developed interpretive center also could serve as an additional attraction for tourists. An interpretive center has elements of a museum, but is traditionally smaller and places a greater emphasis on education than preservation. Other centers in the region include the B. B. King Museum and Delta Interpretive Center 150 miles south of Memphis that opened in Indianola, Mississippi in 2008, and the Alex Haley Museum and Interpretive Center 50 miles north of Memphis that opened in Henning, Tennessee in 2010.

The Delta Center, Haley Center, and the proposed Beale Street Center could fit together brilliantly to present different slices of African American life in the Mid-South over time. However, a Beale Street Center would have a financial advantage over the other two centers because it is located in the heart of one the most visited streets in the South. The need for a Beale Street Interpretive Center has been long recognized by BSDC, the City and Elkington (Madajczyk 8.2). Explaining its absence, Elkington said, “That was supposedly the role of the Beale Street Development Corporation. Now they never did that. … I think that we had counted on the Beale Street Development Corporation to do it. They let everyone down” (Elkington 2011). Similar to the rent and management contract, inefficient records make it difficult to determine who was creatively and financially responsible for such a center.

Through the efforts of several organizations, some of the history of Beale Street is presented on the avenue. There are markers and brass “blues notes” along the sidewalk that give tidbits of information on the street’s storied history. In 1983, the Blues Foundation moved W. C. Handy’s home to a hidden pocket on Beale Street that is today blocked from view by the New Daisy Theater, a gate, and a makeshift parking lot. Statues of Handy and Elvis Presley decorate Beale, and the green space known as Robert Church Park on Beale Street hosts the annual
African in April festival sponsored by an unaffiliated organization. These nods to history are the product of many disjointed efforts and organizations; subsequently, they lack cohesion and are scattered along four blocks. Furthermore, these static monuments have failed to keep up with the interactive digital age where Quick Response codes allow statues to talk and video game technology allows the curious to copy the sounds and moves of their favorite entertainers.

Blues enthusiast Robert Nicholson’s poignant account of the 1990 Handy Awards at the New Daisy Theater on Beale illustrates another way in which Beale Street struggles to remain relevant. Nicholson recalled,

> It was certainly a strange crowd for a Memphis blues gathering—unusually white and unusually old. They chit-chatted throughout and the music might as well have been background entertainment at their latest charity dance or garden party. Where were the hardcore fans, the white kids in their ‘Delta Blues Festival, 1990’, T-shirts or the black, middle-aged city slickers with shiny suits and processed hair? Not here, with the tickets at $50 apiece. They were probably in a club somewhere watching a better band for a tenth of that price. Instead it was society fatcats (sic) in sports jackets and plump hostesses in cocktail dresses, flashing their stuffed wallets and expensive jewelry. (70-71)

His statement is a critique on the Handy Awards and the state of the blues. Once well-known as the creative voice of the black American struggle for mobility, it has largely fallen out of vogue with black urban young adults, which is problematic in a city where the average resident is an African American between the ages of 25 and 34 according to US Census data. Recognizing the bleaching of blues culture, music writer Dwight Hobbes lamented:

> In the ‘60s, when labels were signing acts like The Paul Butterfield Blues Band, Big Brother and the Holding Company (fronted by Janis Joplin), Johnny Winter and such, the question used to go, “Can white folk sing/play the blues?” Considering how drastically the number of black blues artists has dwindled and that black audiences have abandoned their own music in droves, one had damned well better hope so (2006).
Isaac Tigrett, a white Tennessee native who founded House of Blues restaurants, voiced a similar frustration that black Southerners turned their backs on folk culture when they turn off the blues (Kinnon 88). On the contrary, this tradition has simply evolved into a newer genre. As music scholar David Jones noted, “hip hop is widely presumed, in fact, to be the musical style with the most current relevance to everyday African American life. Blues, on the other hand, is widely thought to be anachronistic as black cultural expression” (668).

Deserving a place on Beale Street, hip hop fills the symbolic role as the blues of the 21st century because this art form steeped in contemporary black culture, laces entertainment with sharp social commentaries. The members of the blues generation had limited opportunities for economic and social advancement, but they found self-healing and joy in their music with songs and juke joints providing restoration and escape. The hardships that the blues generation faced parallel the uncertainties that the hip hop generation faces today in this era of downturns, detainments, and lingering discrimination. Rap is a balm for these challenging economic times because, like the blues and juke joints yesteryear, rap and hip hop clubs provide a release and encouragement to persevere.

Despite its importance to African American culture, Elkington was particularly cautious of hip hop music on Beale because he believed that “teenagers with no money just hanging around the area with their high-powered boom boxes” doomed the Atlanta Underground shopping center after it reopened in 1989 (beale street 45). Although this criticism does not specifically use the words hip hop or rap, the coded language of “high-powered boom boxes” and the image of “bass vibrating” describe a short-sighted stereotype often used to depict the hip hop generation. Contrary to Elkington’s claims, scholarship states that the downfall of
Underground Atlanta was the loss of 10,000 jobs in the business district surrounding the shopping center from 1989 to 1992, and a 1992 riot following the acquittal of the Los Angeles police officers who beat Rodney King (Rutheiser 326).

Crowd control was one of Elkington’s recurring issues, and he instituted several measures to steer weekend crowds off the street and into Beale’s bars and nightclubs. To protect the old cobblestone and revelers enjoying a reprieve from the open container law, barricades prevent vehicles from driving through the historic district. Crowds are discouraged from loitering outside and cruising in their vehicles around the barricaded area. To push business towards the clubs, the district regulates street performers. Entertainer Rufus Thomas complained that these crackdowns disrupted the indie atmosphere that Memphians once enjoyed. “Beale Street is tourist now. It’s not for the people who live here,” said Thomas (qt. in Vance 5).

To deter cruising on Beale, in 2004, the Memphis City Council created a “no cruising zone” around Downtown Memphis, and police continue to issue tickets to drivers caught encircling the strip repeatedly. Police guard the entrance of the historic district on weekend nights, and turn away anyone who is under the age of 21. To further prevent guests from congregating in the streets, rather than patronizing bars and clubs, in 2010, the Beale Street Merchants’ Association proposed charging a fee on weekend nights to simply walk down Beale (DiPrizio 2010). From personal observations, the cruisers and loiterers are overwhelming black, and the club patrons are majority white. Sustainable tourist developments strive for balance and inclusion, yet the opposite unfolds on Beale as the image of blacks on the outside and whites on the inside gives the appearance that the descendents of those who created the Beale Street brand have been displaced, and now, find themselves on the periphery of Beale Street culture.
The racial politics of the anti-cruising and anti-loitering campaigns are not lost on locals, who have complained that the crusades unfairly target young African Americans (Cherry 2004). Scholarship supports their claims that the leisure activities of black youths and young adults are more heavily policed, criminalized and monitored than other groups. In a response to the constant state of surveillance and profiling that many innocent African Americans face, New York rapper Shawn “Jay-Z” Carter popularized the phrase “Can I live?,” which means can I embrace my culture and define myself on my own terms without harassment. Jay-Z’s pointed question echoes a criticism of the 21st century blues scene noted by music historian Marybeth Hamilton. She argued:

(Blues) revivalists privileged an obsolete form of rural black culture in an era when most African Americans lived in cities, and toward contemporary black music they displayed at best ambivalence, more often hostility. That kind of purism has led some black musicians to a blunt conclusion: whites are prepared to laud black creativity only when it is old and decrepit. (239)

While Beale Street has more vitality than the blues revivalist music scene in Hamilton’s description, as manager, Elkington failed to create a venue for the contemporary sounds of hip hop amongst the blues bars and soul music clubs he promoted. By allowing this void, he blocked a significant aspect of contemporary local culture from the city’s entertainment district.

Memphis is the hometown of Three Six Mafia, who, in 2005, became the first rap group to win an Oscar Award for Best Original Song for their track “It’s Hard out Here for a Pimp,” yet the city’s music district snubs hip hop. The one club in the historic district known for hip hop music, Club 152, is one of the two buildings in the historic district not owned by the City. At different points in recent years, clubs with hip hop nights have opened on Beale Street, just

\[\text{See “Not Just for the Fun of It!’ Governmental Restraints on black leisure, social inequality and the privatization of public space,” Southern California Law Review, May 1998, 667-714.}\]
outside of the city-owned, Elkington-controlled zone. The two most popular ones were The Plush Club at 380 Beale and a venue at 126 Beale which experienced several name changes.

Elkington’s last public opposition to a hip hop club came in 2009, when established nightclub manager Curtis Givens, and his family’s company CGI Entertainment, sought to take over the lease of a failed French Quarter style bar. Although the leaseholder approved the transfer, Elkington voiced his concerns that a hip hop club would be a dangerous addition to Beale Street, and won a judgment in court that deemed the proposed Club Liquid financially unviable (Perusquia 2009). Givens, who has owned or managed several clubs during his more than a decade-long career, has indeed run establishments that were dogged by financial struggles and violence. Yet, he has also proven to be an unstoppable force in the Memphis nightlife scene.

In addition to his nightclub ventures, in 2001, Givens started an annual citywide event called “Can I Live, Celebrity Weekend.” The slate of parties, shows, family events, and service projects take place the third week of July and the series is one of the largest African American cultural events in the city. The title of the event, “Can I Live?” is borrowed from the Jay-Z song. While the phrase is a declaration of self-determination and self-expression, there is little tolerance for self-expression through hip hop on Beale Street. The building that the then 31-year-old Memphian pursued as a hip hop club remained vacant for a year before opening as Ground Zero Blues Club in April of 2010. The Morgan Freeman-backed nightclub chain with a faux juke joint décor was short-lived because six months later Ground Zero closed, ironically, due to financial woes.

The summer of 2010 brought closure to the Elkington Era on Beale Street. Hours before the trial between Elkington and the City of Memphis was scheduled to start, the two sides
announced an out of court settlement. Per the terms of the settlement, Elkington relinquished his control as landlord and manager of Beale. He was held faultless, owed no money to the city, and received a brass note on the Beale Street Walk of Fame [Figure 5]. In the most controversial part of the settlement, the City reduced Elkington’s rent commission from 15 percent to five percent, and he will continue to collect this five percent until 2032 (Madajczyk, 11.2). Responding to public outrage, the chairman of the Memphis City Council called for an independent review of the settlement. In a five page response, City Attorney Herman Morris replied, 

It is the view of the Administration that after years of litigation clouding the horizon and its future, Beale Street could best take advantage of the present and future opportunities if the litigation were removed from the equation. (1)

With Elkington and the litigation in the rearview, Beale Street is now entering the fourth phase of its 170 year history. In 2010, Memphis Mayor AC Wharton appointed the Beale Street Strategic Planning Committee to help determine the future of the historic district.

The opportunity to reclaim Beale into a space where its history is just as appreciated as its profitability appeared diminished when Wharton suggested selling Beale Street to private developers in order to return the land to the city’s property tax rolls. Because of its critical role in American history, selling the Beale Street Historic District would be tantamount to selling Angel Island or Ellis Island. Serving as a black borderland after the abolition of slavery, Beale Street was the place where millions of newly recognized Americans could discuss politics, own land, open bank accounts, shop with less harassment, worship freely, and create their own art. The challenge of the Beale Street Strategic Planning Committee is to maintain the street’s tourist draw while championing Beale as a place where Black Memphians have a history, a voice, and hopefully a future that extends beyond “just the blues.”
There are three critical lessons from the Elkington Era that future overseers of the tourist district should consider. First, while continuing to promote the rich heritage of the blues, it is important that the musical line up in the city’s musical district expands to reflect the interests of the majority demographic of the present age. With hip hop being one of the most popular forms of music amongst African Americans, Beale Street must carve out a space for hip hop in order to remain relevant and responsive to the local community. As the Curtis Givens nightclub proposal illustrated, there is an uncomfortable relationship between hip hop clubs and violence, but there are several Memphis disc jockeys and club promoters who have a history of peaceful events that counteract that stigma. Some established ones of note are former University of Memphis basketball player turned promoter Marcus Moody, legendary “old skool” disc jockey Stan “the Man” Bell, and the event team of Brothers Incorporated. A partnership with these individuals, or someone with an equally respected standing in the hip hop community, could help Beale Street diversify its entertainment options so that the district more broadly appeals to African American locals.

The second takeaway is that municipal or other government entities that operate public-private ventures must provide the oversight and build-in the proper checks and balances required to protect public assets. We may never know if Elkington pocketed more money than he was due as manager of Beale because the City’s record keeping on Beale and its finances were haphazard, at best, and multiple mayoral administrations failed to provide the proper oversight. Valuable tourists’ dollars that could have been used for neighborhood reinvestment were potentially lost. Such mismanagement of resources is antithetical to sustainable tourism.
An equally critical lesson from the Elkington Era is the value of historical preservation both for tourism and for facilitating a connection between citizens and their history. Today, there is an urgent need for a world class Beale Street Interpretive Center that will present a cohesive and comprehensive narrative of the Grandest Time, Difficult Days and Elkington Era on Beale. Such a space would help Elkington’s legacy because it would show generations of Memphians born after the 1980s the state of disrepair that once inundated Beale Street, and the courage and prowess Elkington demonstrated in taking on the Herculean task and making it a commercially successful. By balancing these gains with an acknowledgement of what was lost during the era of urban clearance, an interpretative center could serve as a local and national reminder for the importance of preservation. If the cultural history of Beale Street is meaningfully incorporated, an interpretive center could educate and entertain tourists while engaging locals in community events and programming that create living examples of Beale Street as a place of entrepreneurship, empowerment, and expression through the arts.
Figure 2: Drawing of the Freedmen’s Bureau on Beale Street in Harper’s Weekly June 2, 1866. Credit: Photo courtesy of the Memphis Public Library and Information Center.
**Figure 3:** Parade on Beale Street in the 1950s.
Photo Credit: Ernest Withers/ Courtesy of the Memphis Public Library and Information Center.

**Figure 4:** Church Park and Community Center during a 1959 campaign rally on Beale Street.
Photo Credit: Hooks Brothers Photography/ Courtesy of the Memphis Public Library and Information Center.
Figure 5: Officials installed John Elkington’s brass note on the Beale Street Walk of Fame in 2010. It lies at the entrance of Handy Park, near the foot of the W.C. Handy statue. Photo Credit: Cathryn Stout.
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Chapter Two:
Opening the Gates of Graceland
For more than a decade, the Memphis neighborhood of Whitehaven has hosted separate Christmas events each year for separate audiences. A collection of Whitehaven neighborhood associations started the Whitehaven Christmas Parade in the mid-1990s, and the group has held the event almost annually, with November 2009 marking its 12th parade. With bands, majorettes, a visit from Santa and all the traditional parade trappings, the yearly celebration showcases schools, churches, organizations and businesses that make up the neighborhood. Yet, in that lineup of businesses, there is traditionally one noticeable absence. Fewer than two miles away from the parade route, another long-time Christmas tradition takes place each holiday season in Whitehaven. At the annual “flip the switch” ceremony, invited guests turn on the Christmas lights at the Graceland mansion, and the night is capped with hot chocolate, photos with Santa Claus and other activities for the dozens of Elvis Presley fans who gather on the Graceland lawn to view the King’s personal holiday decorations. The strings of blue holiday lights that dot the estate are an overture to the singer’s 1957 remake of “Blue Christmas,” and the oversized nativity scene is a seasonal staple that graced the lawn during Elvis’s Christmas celebrations at the mansion (“Santa Claus is Coming” 2006). The Presley family, now represented by Elvis Presley Enterprises, has been a resident of Whitehaven for more than 50 years. Despite this longevity, neither the family nor the corporation participated in the first 11 Whitehaven Christmas parades.

November 2009 marked the start of a new era as one of the biggest businesses in Whitehaven took part in one of the community’s biggest events. The parade, which traditionally
ends at the intersection of Elvis Presley Boulevard and Raines Road, ended on the lawn of the Graceland mansion. Organizers marketed the Friday evening “flip the switch” gathering at Graceland, the Saturday morning parade, and a Sunday afternoon concert at a local high school as the inaugural Whitehaven Winterfest. The collaboration brought together city officials, Graceland management and neighborhood residents for a rare combined event, said Memphis City Council member Harold Collins:

Traditionally, Graceland will light its Christmas lights on a Friday and they would just do it because Graceland is Graceland. Then there’s a group of people who would have the Whitehaven Christmas parade and they would do it because they just do it. This year we decided to incorporate all of it together. One, to demonstrate that Graceland can be a good corporate partner, citizen, neighbor in Whitehaven. And that the citizens of Whitehaven could be good neighbors to Graceland. Because, let’s just be honest, Graceland white, Whitehaven black (2009).

The 2009 event was a symbolic start in the effort to build neighborly relations between two divided entities that share a common space.

The confluence of tourism, race relations, and urban decline unite in this essay. In the first section, A Place Fit for a Crossover King, I historicize the evolutions of Graceland and Whitehaven. In the second section, Whitehaven Flight, I examine the relationship between the corporation and the community, and analyze how business practices by Elvis Presley Enterprises and cultural misunderstandings created a division between the two entities. Taken from the title on an Internet post, the title of the closing section is In the Ghetto. Here, I discuss how the disconnect between Elvis culture and the Whitehaven community is indicative of a larger disconnect between Elvis culture and African Americans, which is detrimental to both the King’s legacy and the Elvis brand. Although much has been written about Graceland as an international
tourist draw and Southern symbol, I believe that the relationship between Graceland and Whitehaven merits its own serious consideration. Thus, this paper explores the interaction between Graceland and its neighbors in order to demonstrate how sustainable tourism practices could foster a better relationship between the two.

A demographic sketch of the two entities provides a framework for the analysis. According to 2000 Census data, Whitehaven contains 51,000 residents with a median household income of $33,000. The median home value is $80,800, which is $8,000 above the median home value in the city of Memphis. The racial makeup of the neighborhood is 91 percent black and seven percent white. Whitehaven encompasses the 38116 ZIP code and is bordered by Brooks Road on the north, Airways Boulevard on the east, the Tennessee state line (Stateline Road) on the South, and a set of Illinois Central railroad tracks on the West [Figure 6]. The neighborhood includes the distribution hub for FedEx, the Memphis International Airport, and headquarters for medical device companies Medtronic and Smith&Nephew.

In the geographic heart of the neighborhood sits Graceland, the second most visited private home in the United States behind the White House. It employs about 330 people. Collectively, the campus spans more than 118 acres, including the mansion, the accompanying shops, and the headquarters of Elvis Presley Enterprises (EPE) which is located in a converted church. EPE is now part of a multinational conglomerate, called CKx based in Los Angeles, but the Memphis headquarters still handles day-to-day tasks such as hiring at Graceland, organizing the annual Elvis Week in August, and some of the promotional efforts. In 2010, Elvis Presley Enterprises earned $57.3 million. Graceland accounted for 63 percent of that revenue, or $36.1 million. The average Graceland guest spends $55.00 per visit, a figure that the company is
constantly trying to increase by offering unique merchandise and special tour packages. The remaining 37 percent of EPE’s earnings come from its more than 250 licensing agreements, royalties from movies and music, and the Viva ELVIS Cirque du Soleil show at Aria Resort and Casino in Las Vegas (Ferrel 2011).

The expansive Elvis empire sits in stark contrast to the rest of the neighborhood that has experienced significant demographic and landscape changes since the 19th century. White residents from South Carolina, North Carolina and Virginia relocated to the area starting in 1836 (McCorkle 23). By 1860, the neighborhood’s population consisted of 653 whites, 1,671 black slaves and 1 freed black resident (Meeks 31). Locals named the neighborhood in honor of 19th century real estate tycoon and Confederate army veteran Colonel Frank White. The Colonel donated the land for the community’s first school, which opened in 1885. Despite its ironic moniker, the population of the community was predominantly black during its early history and Whitehaven has been a haven for people of color since its inception. In the 1930s and 1940s, “three beautiful homes were built along the highway” by prominent white businessmen and “Whitehaven was proud of beginning to attract these professional men,” said local historian Anna Lee McCorkle (139-140). One of those families was Dr. Thomas and Ms. Ruth Moore, who built a “comfortable country home” in 1939, and named it Graceland in honor of Ruth Moore’s aunt, Grace Toof.

A Place Fit for a Crossover King

The early owners of Graceland enjoyed the amenities of the city without the congestion of urban life. In the 1930s and 1940s, Whitehaven was an established community outside the
Memphis city limits with about 5,000 residents. The neighborhood had its own utility district, volunteer fire department, and weekly newspaper called *The Whitehaven Press*. Whitehaven High School served the area’s white children. Starting in 1919, the segregated grammar school Geeter, in the neighboring community Levi, served the area’s black students. Geeter added a high school in 1931. A testament to the school’s prominence, Geeter was the first black school in the county school district to provide a school bus for its students, and it was the only black school in the district to boast a uniformed band. To accommodate Whitehaven’s rapid growth, the district opened new schools for black and white students during the middle of the 20th century. In 1950, Whitehaven had 10 subdivisions, and homes in the neighborhood typically cost between $9,000 and $17,000 (Meeks 127-128).

While Whitehaven’s population surged, the Moores were looking to downsize because they found it difficult to maintain the overhead on their massive Graceland estate. During this same period, Elvis Presley began to rack in the royalties for his covers of “That’s All Right, Mama” in 1954 and “Hound Dog” in 1956, and the Presley family wanted a new home where they could escape the swarms of fans that staked out their East Memphis carport in hopes of catching a glimpse of the rockabilly heartthrob (Marling Graceland 128). Attracted to the large front lawn that could serve as a buffer zone, Elvis made an offer on the Moores’ property. The other potential buyers were Sears Roebuck Company, a restaurant developer, and Graceland Christian Church, which wanted to buy just five acres of the 19-acre lot. Elvis was the only buyer willing to share five acres with the church, so in 1957, the devotedly Christian family sold the church five acres and Elvis the remaining 13.8 acres of Graceland for $102,000. The fieldstone wall and iron gates with twin Elvi were two of the earliest additions to the property,
but there would be many more additions to the Elvis Presley empire over the next 50 years. Although the wall and gate that fortify the property were initially built to serve as a barrier between Elvis and his fans, tourism specialist Derek Alderman described them as part of the pilgrimage landscape that lure Elvis devotees to Graceland (Writing on the Wall 30).

During their years at Graceland, members of the Presley family were regular faces in the Whitehaven community. Elvis frequented the Gridiron restaurant, a 24-hour diner less than a mile away from his home. Here, one of his favorite meals was a hamburger with pimento cheese (Jennings 1997). It is commonly known that Elvis was a regular customer at the swank Lansky Brothers clothier in Downtown Memphis, but Elvis and his family shopped at more humble neighborhood retailers as well. The Presleys visited Southland Mall which occasionally allowed them the privilege of afterhours shopping (Who all Worked at Southland Mall 2010). Elvis reportedly enjoyed private showings at the Whitehaven Plaza movie theater (Another piece of Whitehaven Plaza 2011). One longtime Whitehaven resident recalled fond memories of seeing Elvis cruising down the street that bore his name on his three wheel motorcycle (Wright 2009). These sightings and recollections, along with the many others that I have heard as a 30 year resident of the neighborhood, confirm that Elvis was not confined to the Graceland compound. On the contrary, he engaged with the businesses and people in his neighborhood, and Whitehaven was a community “that gave Elvis and the Presley family great comfort,” said an executive with EPE (Kern 2010). This admission by the company is critical because in the latter half of this chapter I discuss how the comfort that Whitehaven once gave Elvis is not reciprocated by the keepers of his legacy today through their tourism practices.
Elvis’ relocation from the inner city to the suburbs is one example of the urban sprawl that transformed neighborhoods around Memphis, and the country as a whole, after World War II. Whereas privacy prompted the Presleys’ move, cheap loans, advances in technology and infrastructure, and school integration anxieties motivated millions of other white families to race to the suburbs. During this period, the Federal Housing Administration promoted mortgage loans for new construction, and the suburbs absorbed the bulk of the building spree (Whalen 109). Moreover, the introduction of credit cards, the housing benefits of the GI Bill, and improvements in the production and popularity of cars, all made life in the suburbs more affordable and accessible. Consequently, the postwar period was the first time in U. S. history when more families lived in single-family suburban homes than in single-family homes in the rural and urban America (Cohen 123). The Georgian styled house at 3764 Bellevue, the King’s new palace, was situated right in the middle of that suburban boom. In her memoir, Elvis as We Knew Him, Jennifer Harrison describes Whitehaven in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s as the ‘lost’ neighborhood consisting of “a peculiar (white) subculture harboring innocence and ignorance that has been forever lost” (66). Yet there was a quantitative mass of black residents in Whitehaven that Harrison only knew as “the help” (63). As Memphis historian Ann McDonald Meeks wrote:

In 1960, the Whitehaven and (neighboring) Levi communities had a combined population of 45,734; and 16,834, or 36.8 percent of these were black. In 1963, it was determined that if Whitehaven was incorporated, it would be Tennessee’s fifth largest city, behind Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Knoxville (138).

Literally and figuratively, Elvis most likely felt right at home in this bustling, biracial community because since boyhood Elvis had lived in close proximity to African Americans.
Gladys and Vernon Presley delivered Elvis Aaron Presley in their modest home on January 8, 1935. In order to dodge landlords and stretch their limited budget, the family lived in several houses in and around Tupelo, Mississippi during Elvis’ youth. When Elvis was a toddler, his father spent a year and a half in jail for check forgery. The loss of Vernon Presley’s income worsened the family’s already precarious financial situation. For a while, Elvis and his mom stayed with relatives. After Vernon Presley’s release, they lived just steps away from Shake Rag, a black section of Tupelo. The family later moved to a working class, predominantly black neighborhood (Davis).

The family came to Memphis in 1948 when Elvis was in eighth grade, and a year later, they moved to apartment number 328 in Lauderdale Courts. For four years, they made their home in this two bedroom apartment in a public housing project. Although it was government-provided housing, Lauderdale Courts represented social mobility and stability for the Presley family because the new complex was a step up from their previous shared space with relatives and arrangements at boarding houses. For Elvis fans, Lauderdale Court serves as a critical “middle landscape” that provides a bridge between baby Elvis’ roots as a rural, transient house guest and the King’s glamorous final resting place at the Graceland mansion (Alderman Politics of Saving the King’s Court 52-53). A plan in 1995 by the Memphis Housing Authority to demolish Lauderdale Courts led to a successful counter-protest by Elvis fans to preserve apartment 328. Elvis Presley Enterprises initially supported demolishing the project by stating that the city did not need another shrine to Elvis. Yet, after the city decided to preserve the apartment, EPE crafted a way to commercialize the preservation movement by renting apartment 328 for overnight stays to fans as the Elvis Suite at Lauderdale Courts (The Politics of Saving
62). By eventually siding with preservationists, EPE created a unique tourist experience and protected a piece of history in the Downtown neighborhood where the suite stands.

Today, apartment 328 sits in Uptown Square, a predominantly black, mixed-income development. During Elvis’s teenage years, apartment 328 was one unit in a segregated housing complex for poor whites. Although the complex was segregated, Elvis was in close proximity to African Americans, living just one mile away from the city’s black commerce and entertainment district, Beale Street. The family would later live on an integrated street where a teenage Elvis played sandlot football with the black boys in the area (Bertrand 198). Interactions with African Americans even influenced his spiritual life. As a teenager, the budding singer occasionally attended services at East Trigg Baptist Church, and he had a special fondness for the church’s minister Rev. William Herbert Brewster, a prolific singer and songwriter. Rose Howell Klimek, Elvis’s classmate at Humes High School, remembers seeing a relaxed Elvis at the East Trigg sanctuary. She said:

    After church on Sunday nights, my friends and I liked to go to Leonard’s Barbecue on Bellevue, and then to East Trigg Baptist Church to listen to the spirituals. The church had a special section for white visitors. Elvis was often there, and occasionally sang with the choir. (n.d.)

From the earliest days of his music career, Elvis performed at shows that featured black artists and covered songs by black singers. Elvis was appreciative of his debt to African American musicians and culture (Doss 2010). The song selections, church services, football games, integrated neighborhoods, and stints in public housing all illustrate two aspects of Elvis’s background: he grew up poor, and he grew up feeling at ease around African Americans.
The kind of poverty that Elvis experienced during his childhood and teenage years was a familiar foe in Memphis, particularly among the city’s black residents. As historian Michael Honey noted:

African-Americans constituted nearly 40 percent of a Memphis population of 500,000 in the mid-1960s, and 58 percent of the city’s black families lived in poverty-10 percent above the national average and almost four times the rate of poverty among Memphis’ white families. Many black families shattered under the pressure; the unemployed and people with marginal jobs suffered disproportionately from diabetes, sickle-cell anemia, high blood pressure and cancer (4).

Acute hepatitis and heart failure took the life of Elvis’s mom, Gladys Presley. She died in 1958; just one year after Elvis bought Graceland. Although he went on to have 18 number one hits over the course of his career, his humble upbringing and empathy for the poor were always a part of his ethos and his appeal. A song that captured the strife of being the son of a convict and a child of poverty catapulted Elvis from the wings back to center stage in 1969. That year, his soulful release of “In the Ghetto” became his first Billboard Top 10 Single in four years. In a haunting, almost mournful tone Elvis sang:

Well the world turns and a hungry little boy with a runny nose plays in the street as the cold wind blows In the ghetto

And his hunger burns so he starts to roam the streets at night and he learns how to steal and he learns how to fight In the ghetto

With a call for social justice and reform woven into each verse, the Mac Davis remake was a sharp departure from Elvis’ typical apolitical style (Mason 134).
It must have been a feat for any American to remain apolitical in 1968 and 1969 amidst continuous news reports of the assassinations of Robert Kennedy, the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., urban race riots, war in Vietnam, campus protests, and President Lyndon Johnson’s surprising announcement not to seek reelection. Elvis’s performance of “If I Can Dream” in his 1968 comeback special, and the release of “In the Ghetto” a few months later, “affirmed that the singer was aware of the world around him,” said historian Michael Bertrand (226). By opting to record “In the Ghetto,” Presley revealed that he was also aware that the world that he overcame as a child remained a toxic and bleak environment for those who were unequipped to escape it.

In some ways, the ghetto also serves as a metaphor for the South, a word that has evolved from merely denoting a geographical direction or region into a sociopolitical term that connotes a place where citizens of a region face economic, health or educational disparities due to the scars of war, civil unrest, institutional oppression, or the resource curse. Literary scholar Scott Romaine argued that the south, like the ghetto, is any place where the setting is an opposition force. In this theory, a “southerner” achieves success by overcoming the hardships of his or her location. When examined through this lens, Elvis’ escape from the ghetto also represented a psychological escape from the South. As noted Elvis scholar Bertrand put it,

By redirecting old certainties and stereotypes into new, creative outlets and images, Presley confirmed that the South did not have to follow the discriminatory, destructive path of its past. He and his music symbolized a long dormant and rarely realized promise of what the region could become (226).

Elvis further promoted this promise of racial reconciliation by choosing to spend the second half of his life in a neighborhood that was one-third African American. To some, Elvis was the
“white nigger” who owned the “peckerwood palace” or “hillbilly Hilton” in a backwaters city. To others, Elvis was the ultimate underdog role model whose antebellum home on a hill symbolized the potential of social mobility. However you describe the King and his castle, both were and remain undeniably popular. In 1971, the Memphis City Council renamed the southern leg of Bellevue Boulevard that transverses Whitehaven to Elvis Presley Boulevard. This act officially linked Elvis Presley to the Whitehaven neighborhood in perpetuity.

**Whitehaven Flight**

While the city rushed to recognize Elvis, black landmarks in other neighborhoods slipped into decline. The Lorraine Motel, once a popular destination for black entertainers, actors and civic leaders, literally decayed following the assassination of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the motel’s balcony in 1968. It morphed into a haven for the working poor, squatters and prostitutes (Branston 110). As detailed in Chapter One, the commerce and entertainment district Beale Street also struck a low note during this time. An equally tragic fate struck Stax Records in Memphis, the recording studio where Otis Redding recorded “(Sitting on) The Dock of the Bay” in 1968, Isaac Hayes recorded the “Theme from Shaft” in 1971, and Elvis recorded one of his lesser known albums, *Promise Land*, in 1973. Just two years after Elvis’s recording session, Stax collapsed. As the organization’s Web site explained:

> With the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King in Memphis in April 1968, the closing of Stax Records due to forced bankruptcy in 1975, and general suburban sprawl that left many of America’s inner cities in the shadows, Soulsville USA fell into an era of decline (“About Soulsville” n.d.).

The 1970s and 1980s were a time of transition for black landmarks, the city of Memphis and the Presley family. On August 16, 1977, Elvis Aaron Presley died of a suspected drug overdose and
mourners and journalists flooded Elvis Presley Boulevard. “Those inside the mansion clearly were apprehensive that the growing crowd of people outside the walls might decide to storm the gates and tear the place apart,” said one news reporter describing the chaos (qt. in Gregory 76).

During the months after his death, Elvis-related merchandise sold feverishly. Demands for Elvis albums, movies and souvenir newspapers all outpaced production, and fans continued their pilgrimages to Whitehaven to pay their respects to Elvis at the shuttered gates of Graceland (Gregory 195-213). Despite the high level of interest in the fallen star, the Graceland estate struggled in the years immediately after Elvis’ death. It was burdened, in part, by the $500,000 annual bill for upkeep and taxes. From 1977 to 1981, the estate was “flat broke and couldn’t pay the federal estate taxes,” said investment manager Jack Soden (qt. in Williams 2007). Finally deciding to capitalize on the curiosity, estate executive Priscilla Presley hired Soden to help with new business opportunities. Soden, born in the mid-1940s and a Kansas City, Missouri transplant, was a self-described Beatles fan with little emotional attachment to Memphis or Elvis before joining the company in 1981 (Ellis 1997). Priscilla Presley had fled from Memphis to California after divorcing Elvis in 1973, and never returned to live in Memphis. Under the management of the Los Angeles-based “professional widow” and the Midwest venture capitalist, the Graceland mansion opened for tours on June 7, 1982 (Marling, Graceland 225).

From its inception, the museum was a financial success drawing upwards of 300,000 visitors the first year (Marling, Elvis Presley 72). The Presley family’s fortune furthered increased after a series of favorable lawsuits upheld EPE’s commercial rights to the exclusive use of Elvis Presley’s name and image. In 1984, the Tennessee Legislator reinforced the legal opinion by enacting the Personal Rights Protection Act that extends any benefits associated with
a person’s name or image to his or her heirs postmortem. The landmark law became the bases for similar statues, including the 1985 California Civil Code 990, commonly called the Celebrity Rights Act (Doss 229). The company’s involvement in the 1984 legislation also established EPE as a lobbying force, a strength that the company continues to utilize as detailed in later sections of this essay. Throughout the 1980s, EPE slowly took over the leases at the shopping center across the street from the mansion, and later, opened and operated Graceland Plaza (Ellis 1997). With its car park, ticketing kiosk, restaurants and souvenir shops, Graceland Plaza greatly expanded the company’s footprint in Whitehaven.

Visitors to Graceland have always been overwhelmingly white (Gibson 175). While masses of mostly white tourists flocked to Memphis to visit the Presley palace, masses of white residents were fleeing the Whitehaven neighborhood and the city of Memphis at large. The city’s annexation of Whitehaven in 1969, combined with anxieties over school integration, led to an exodus of whites families. Writer Michael Lewis identifies one example of the white flight that shook Memphis in the 1970s. He wrote:

In the year after the court decision, (January) 24, 1973, that forced the city to deploy 1,000 buses to integrate public schools, the parents of white children yanked more than 7,000 children out of those schools. From the ashes arose an entire, spanking new private school system (41).

That spanking new private school system included a prominent addition to Whitehaven. Southern Baptist Educational Center opened in Whitehaven in the fall of 1973 with 780 students its first year (History n.d.). An oral history with a former white resident of Whitehaven offers further evidence of this abandonment of Memphis public schools by many white residents. Explaining why she pulled her children out of public schools, the former resident stated:
Vic Started off at Graves Road Elementary School and when they declared busing Jimmy and I decided that we did not want our children bussed to another school out of our area. And the church, some church members started a school in the Whitehaven Presbyterian church called Whitehaven Presbyterian School and all four children went there. … We did not object to our children going with African Americans to school. We did not object to them having an African American teacher. We refused to accept to have them bussed. (Aaron 2010)

Bussing is the practice of transporting students from their neighborhood school to a school farther away in order to achieve a more racially balanced student body at schools across the district. The resident’s stated objection to bussing, but not to integration, offers a nuanced view of a dynamic era when some white Southerners protested the onslaught of changes thrust upon by government agencies and civil rights changes.

Although admitted and unacknowledged racism certainly caused some white parents to withdraw their children from the public school system, something other than racism and inconvenience drove other parents’ decision— a primal sense of fear. Fear of the unknown effects of bussing. Fear of the violence that accompanied school integration in many cities. Fear that taking drastic measures to ensure school diversity “wasn’t the best thing for education,” as the mother quoted above expressed (Aaron 2010). The psychological response to fear is ‘fight or flight,’ and, across the South, millions of white Americans fled. They fled from public schools to private schools, and from racially mixed urban centers to the racially monolithic suburbs. This era of flight created a dramatic shift in the racial make-up of cities across the South. For example, in 1959, African Americans made up 36 percent of Atlanta’s population. During the 1960s, the white population of the city declined by 60,000 people, and by the 1970 Census, Atlanta was a majority black city. In 1960, Memphis was about 35 percent black. By 1980,
Memphis was 48 percent black. For the first time since the yellow fever epidemic of 1878, Memphis’s population actually declined between 1981 and 1990, losing more than 27,000 residents (Kirby 6-13). One would think that an area like Whitehaven—home to Graceland, the Memphis International Airport, and offices of three Fortune 500 companies—would be immune to the vicious cycle of flight and blight. Yet, Whitehaven’s once thriving business district disintegrated, and today, the second-most visited home in the country sits in the midst of retail decline.

For about a decade, Whitehaven thrived despite its shifting demographics. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, it was a highly sought after area of town for single black professionals and young black families. The first major blow to the neighborhood’s business district came in 1987. That was the year that Dillard’s, a major retail department store in the Whitehaven Plaza, closed its doors. Postwar commercial real estate developer John B. Goodwin opened the shopping center, less than two miles south of Graceland, in 1956 with Lowenstein’s as the anchor store [Figure 7]. Dillard’s bought Lowenstein’s in 1982, and ran the location for five years. The giant piece of real estate in the heart of the neighborhood’s business district remained vacant for 24 years until the Memphis Wrecking Company demolished the 100,000 square foot building in March of 2011. Sometime in the late 1980s, the movie theater in Whitehaven Plaza also closed. The neighborhood’s commercial core continued to absorb blows throughout the 1990s. The years 1998 and 1999 were particularly unfriendly to commercial real estate in Whitehaven. Red Lobster, which had served Whitehaven diners since 1971, closed its doors in 1999. The Southbrook Four movie theatre, which opened in 1972, closed in 1999. Also closing in 1999 were Target, Shoney’s restaurant, and Burlington Coat Factory. All five of these
businesses had entrances on Elvis Presley Boulevard, and all were within three miles of Graceland.

Many of these businesses headed south to a nascent development in Mississippi planned by University of Mississippi graduate Carl Whitehead, Jr. As writer John Branston explained,

Whitehead understood white flight and the lure of low taxes, he understood politics, and he knew Memphis was on an annexation kick, taking in Frayser in 1958 and eyeing Raleigh and Whitehaven. Thousands of future residents of DeSoto County would come from the other side of the Tennessee state line in Whitehaven—so many that Whitehead almost named the new town South Whitehaven until deciding to lop off a syllable (166).

Whitehead named his development Southaven, although historian James Loewen notes that it was once called White Haven, Mississippi (385). Southaven incorporated in 1980. Sensing that they could capture two audiences—south Memphis customers and north Mississippi customers—several businesses packed up shop in Whitehaven, and headed south to Mississippi. In 1988, Southern Baptist Education Center, which opened in Whitehaven the same year as school desegregation, moved to Southaven because, according to the school’s literature, “the community where the school was located was undergoing significant change. The area was losing professionals as well as families who could afford to send their children to SBEC” (History n.d.). Two years later, Oliver Drug Store, a Whitehaven staple since 1960, moved its entire operation to Southaven. The Burlington Coat Factory and Target store that closed in Whitehaven in 1999 also relocated to Southaven. The rapidly growing “White Haven, Mississippi” opened a mall in 2003, and, shortly thereafter, a movie theater. All of this growth took place in the Mississippi town that shares a border with Elvis’ former neighborhood.
Although today there are a limited number of casual dining restaurants and major retailers, the Whitehaven neighborhood has the people and income to support such businesses. It accounts for roughly eight percent of the city’s total population. The median income and home prices are higher in the neighborhood than the city as a whole. It also enjoys greater home ownership rates than rates citywide. Add in ZIP code 38109, which is the neighboring Levi community, and the area’s number of residents and buying power doubles. A 2003 retail and market analysis by The Chesapeake Group of Baltimore, Maryland showed that Whitehaven residents spend $1.1 billion on goods and services annually, and that the neighborhood was underdeveloped and prime for investments that would benefit both tourists and residents. On the issues of Whitehaven residents’ perception of Graceland, the study noted, “It is believed that they (EPE) only care about themselves and do nothing for the area” (Chesapeake Group 34; 4).

Despite the mounds of scholarship on Graceland, its relationship to its neighbors has received inadequate scholarly attention. In her 1999 cultural studies text Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith and Images, Erika Doss briefly commented on the seeming disconnect between the two entities (195; 203). Wanting a greater understanding of her experience, I discussed the subject with Doss in August of 2010. “My observation is that African American tourists don’t feel welcomed as a part of Elvis culture,” said Doss, referencing the demographics of the neighborhood. “You see this white house, with white fans, and assume that a whole lot of money is being made, and that we’re not in on it, and resentment builds,” she added (Doss 2010). An art historian, Doss noted that Elvis flags with the Stars and Bars motif carried by white fans provide a subconscious link between Elvis and the pro-slavery Confederacy. Ku Klux Klan members fly this relic from the nation’s past at rallies, segregationists waved it at counter protests during the
Civil Rights Movement, and many African Americans and civil rights organizations view it as a symbol of racism. In my 30 years as a Whitehaven resident, I have occasionally seen the Stars and Bars bumper stickers and license plate covers attached to cars parked in front of the Graceland gates. Despite my intellectual understanding of the complex history of the Stars and Bars banner, there are some images that trigger an emotional response no matter the rationale. In my eyes, the Elvis flags with the blue X and 13 white stars crisscrossing it are a skull and crossbones warning of danger ahead. Doss added that intertwining such symbols with Elvis culture displays “a certain amount of out and out American racism and Graceland has a responsibility to educate its audience” (2010). A gentle rebuke of Graceland guests who display Elvis’s image intertwined with this racially charged symbol could yield the positive effect of making Graceland a more hospitable environment for its neighbors.

Several writers, including Doss, have done substantial research on Elvis and race relations. This rich amount of text spans several decades. In April of 1957, Sepia magazine ran an article titled, “What Negroes Think about Elvis,” and attributed the following statement to Elvis: “The only thing Negroes can do for me is shine my shoes and buy my records.” The misquote went viral. In August of 1957, JET magazine made an early attempt at debunking the myth in its response article, “The Truth About that Elvis Presley Rumour (sic).” This effort to correct the record was largely unsuccessful. Fifty years later, Elvis biographer Peter Guralnick penned The New York Times editorial “How did Elvis Get Turned into a Racist?” He surmised that some African Americans have lingering feelings of ill-will towards Elvis because of the

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social inequalities represented through a man who made millions of dollars from songs and a musical style that black artists performed with equal competency and flair, yet received substantially less media praise, fame and fortune (2007). The comprehensive 2000 scholarly text, *Race, Rock and Elvis* by Michael T. Bertrand, explained that Elvis’ tendency to rerecord songs previously released by black singers, like Willie Mae ‘Big Mama’ Thornton’s “Hound Dog,” was a common music industry practice. This custom, indeed, benefited the white singer, but reflected policies and decisions made by executives and not the entertainer (Bertrand 190). Moreover, Bertrand added, Presley enjoyed “early popularity with a black audience” (200).

Bertrand’s sentiment is supported by conversations that I have had over the years with black Memphians of the Baby Boom generation. One of those black fans remembered going to the Daisy Theater on Beale Street to watch Elvis movies (Wright 2010). Another wrote a love letter to Elvis. The hometown heartthrob never responded, but the smitten fan later met and married another king, of sorts, my father. In researching this paper, I too sent an unanswered letter to Graceland. Over the course of three months, ten emails, and five phone calls, my requests for an interview or further information were repeatedly rebuffed. In July of 2010, representatives from Graceland sent me a three sentence statement that included the following: “Today, Elvis Presley’s Graceland mansion sees an average of 600,000 visitors a year, welcoming the world to both Whitehaven and Memphis” (Kern 2010). The company’s spokesman, Kevin Kern, declined to elaborate when asked specifically how they welcomed guests to the world of Whitehaven beyond the Graceland estate.

While sustainable tourism attractions pride themselves on supporting area businesses, Graceland has not demonstrated wide support of neighborhood businesses. As of 2011, on its
page on Elvis.com that promotes attractions to visit in the Mid-South, Elvis Presley Enterprises spotlights Lansky Brothers clothiers in Downtown Memphis where Elvis once shopped, but not Southland Mall in Whitehaven which Elvis also frequented. In its dining guide on Elvis.com, the company recommends the Tops Bar-B-Q at 1286 Union Avenue in Midtown and the Hard Rock Cafe on Beale Street, but fails to mention restaurants near the mansion like the locally-owned national chain Lenny’s Sub Shop, the ever-popular Piccadilly Cafeteria, or the venerable Big Bill’s barbecue that occupies a building that Elvis once frequented. Marlowe’s Restaurant, known as the home of the pink Cadillac limousine, is the only Whitehaven restaurant recommended on the dining guide that is not on the Presley estate. Marlowe’s, which is about a mile south of the mansion, also operates a quaint Elvis souvenir shop. Thus, the restaurant is a revenue producer for Elvis Presley Enterprises which tightly controls the rights to Elvis’s image and likeness through its more than 250 licensing agreements.

Elvis fandom also seems to snub the Whitehaven area, which is particularly interesting given researcher Derek Alderman’s observation that preserving and identifying Elvis related spaces is an act of religious duty for Elvis fans (Politics of Saving 51-52). Nevertheless, there was no palpable uproar when the Gridiron Restaurant in Whitehaven, a 24-hour diner once frequented by the King, closed in 2009. Furthermore, as a Whitehaven resident for three decades, I can attest that tourists rarely pilgrimage to Southland Mall in Whitehaven where Elvis and the Presley family shopped.

This neighborhood blackout extends beyond the business community. A review of the 298 press releases Elvis Presley Enterprises issued in 2009 found that the company neither mentioned nor cross promoted Whitehaven schools, civic organizations, nonprofit organizations,
or youth activities outside of the 2009 Christmas parade. When Whitehaven residents talk of attending a neighborhood event at Graceland, they are typically referring to Graceland Elementary School, a predominantly black Memphis public school just east of the Graceland mansion [Figures 8 & 9]. The school has no partnership with its namesake. Instead, through the Memphis City School’s nationally recognized Adopt-a-School program, Graceland Elementary’s corporate partners include three churches and Southland Mall.

Elvis Presley Enterprise’s lack of involvement in the Whitehaven neighborhood is inconsistent with its outreach efforts in the Greater Memphis area and nationwide. Through its philanthropic arm, the Elvis Presley Charitable Foundation, the King’s estate is involved in numerous ventures. In 1995, the Elvis Presley Charitable Foundation started the Elvis Presley Endowed Scholarship Fund at the University of Memphis’ College of Communication and Fine Arts. The founding endowment was $25,000, and a generous scholarship is awarded annually to selected students who major in areas associated with the entertainment industry. The Presley family often lends its names and resources to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, a world renowned Memphis institution that pioneers treatments for pediatric cancers and rare childhood diseases. In 2001, Elvis’s daughter, Lisa Marie Presley, cut the ribbon on Presley Place, a 12-unit apartment complex for homeless families in Midtown Memphis. Additionally, in 2011, Elvis Presley Enterprises paid for Elvis fan and rescued Chilean miner Edison Peña to fly to Memphis to visit the mansion. These acts of outreach model the spirit of Elvis who throughout his career made substantial donations to Mid-South charities.\textsuperscript{ix} They illustrate EPE’s awareness of regional sustainability, but that knowledge has not translated into efforts towards neighborhood sustainability.

\textsuperscript{i}x See the authorized record book \textit{Elvis: Day by Day} by Peter Guralnick and Ernst Jorgensen, New York: Ballantine Books, 1999.
sustainability. Thus, these acts do little to soften the harden sentiment expressed by Whitehaven residents that the Presleys and Elvis Presley Enterprises “only care about themselves and do nothing for the area.”

These feelings of neglect are a response to three circumstances: first, as discussed earlier, lingering suspicions remain that Elvis stole and mimicked musical styles that African American artists created; secondly, EPE’s deliberate choice to invest its charitable resources in organizations based outside of the Whitehaven neighborhood; and finally, a commercial disconnect reflected in a missing component of the company’s marketing strategy— the African American consumer dollar. Among the key elements that a company can use to construct a comprehensive external relations marketing strategy are public relations, governmental relations, community relations and neighborhood relations. EPE uses public relations, governmental relations, and charitable outreach, but, as of 2011, it did not have anyone dedicated to neighborhood relations. The public relations department is the company’s media arm that helps with brand management, advertising, and promotions. EPE employs and contracts with an army of people to run this division. Most known in local circles is Kevin Kern, the company’s director of public relations as of 2011. The governmental relations arm of Elvis Presley Enterprises has been active on a local, state and federal level since its successful 1984 campaign that ensured that Elvis’ heirs and trustees benefited from his commercial trademark rights. This legislative pressure squeezed local government officials in recent years.

In 2007, the City of Memphis’ legislative delegation worked to cover the area around Graceland under Tennessee’s Tourist Development Zone Tax Act. The act allows local authorities to reinvest part of the state’s sales tax revenue in a defined zone back into that area
instead of depositing it into state coffers. In the late 2000s, the multi-million dollar company began to request “concessions from local and state authorities” for a proposed overhaul of Graceland (CKx, Inc. Annual Report 12). In 2008, Elvis Presley Enterprises employed a firm, The Ferguson Group in Washington D.C., to lobby Tennessee State Senator Bob Corker for earmarks to help with improvements on Elvis Presley Boulevard. The federal government delivered that gift a year later when the City of Memphis won the Streetscape Enhancement Grant, a $975,312 grant, that when combined with $243,828 in local dollars, sets aside $1.2 million in taxpayer funds for street improvements to benefit both the city and Graceland. In 2011, Memphis Mayor AC Wharton asked the City Council to add $1.8 million in the city’s strained budget to boost the funds for the Graceland area beautification project. Local government officials are “solid supports” of efforts to improve the area around Graceland because they sense a substantial return on the investment (Risher 2011).

A company’s community relations or charitable division oversees nonprofit efforts or service projects. Although philanthropy is often the stated purpose, a well executed community service strategy also yields publicity and greater affection for the respective brand. Elvis Presley Charitable Foundation, formerly known as the Elvis Presley Memorial Foundation, donated an average of $278,644 to nonprofit organizations in business years 2007, 2008, and 2009 (“Return…”). The foundation’s donations reflect a myriad of fields including healthcare, education, tourism, entertainment, and cultural arts. In the business year starting in August of 2009 and ending in July of 2010, the foundation donated $248,358 to 34 charities. MIFA, which operates the foundation’s shelter for homeless families, received $105,500 during that donation cycle.
Presley Place, via MIFA, accounted for 30 to 40 percent of the foundation’s annual contributions for the three years reviewed. The gifts for business year 2009 also included a $24,000 donation to the National Civil Rights Museum, and $3,000 to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, two organizations with a high profile among black Memphians. With the exception of a $2,500 donation to the Whitehaven Development Corporation in business year 2008, no Whitehaven area organizations, schools or businesses are listed on the foundation’s donation records in 2007, 2008, or 2009. This virtual blackout of Whitehaven organizations, combined with the fact that EPE does not employ anyone to handle neighborhood relations, fail to promote neighborhood sustainability through tourism and, contribute to the sentiment voiced by one Whitehaven resident that the managers of Elvis Presley Enterprises “don’t care about this neighborhood. They have done nothing to enhance their relationship with the residents of Whitehaven. If they could move Graceland tomorrow, they would” (Jones 2010).

Graceland’s approach to outreach starkly differs from the sustainable tourism model used by the Stax Museum of American Soul in a Memphis neighborhood dubbed Soulsville USA. Soulsville USA is a historic community that was once home to Memphis Slim, Memphis Minnie, Reverend Herbert Brewster, Aretha Franklin, and a half dozen other prominent musicians. Located in ZIP code 38106, the South Memphis neighborhood is 97 percent African American with a median household income of $20,000. It reclaimed the name Soulsville during a rebranding effort in the 1990s. After years of decline and neglect musician industry executives and local officials came together in 1999 to restore some of these homes, and erect markers at historical sites in the neighborhood. This movement resurrected the former Stax Records, where
Elvis once recorded, into the Stax Museum of American Soul. Later, the organization expanded to include the Soulsville Music Academy and the Soulsville Charter School.

In 2011, Soulsville Charter School had more than 300 students from across the city. In Stax Music Academy’s after-school program, artists and industry professionals teach music and performance skills to children who live in the community around Soulsville. One former Soulsville child who sang with the Stax choir in 2002 and 2003 said, “Stax actually bought the kids in, helped them in after school stuff; just to keep them off the streets and out of trouble. They would actually get a bus, and pick them up from school. Kids would actually learn how to play music.” A middle school student at the time, through her experience, she learned about the history of Stax, sang for humanitarian and rock star Bono, met rapper Kanye West, and received hands-on training inside of a recording studio. “Everybody was just really a family at Stax,” she remembered (Washington 2011).

Grammy Award winning jazz musician Kirk Whalum worked with the students serving as an artist-in-residence for the music academy early on. In 2010, Stax hired Whalum, who lived near Soulsville as a child, as its president and chief operating officer. Today, with the homegrown talent Whalum as its ambassador, the organization continues to mine its deep community roots. Likewise, the Soulsville youth choir and band serve as poster children for Stax as they perform at events throughout the region. A new shopping center that houses a small business incubator and expanded school building are scheduled to open in Soulsville in late 2011. Through its commitment to community-based management and attention to the social and cultural needs of the host community, Stax is a model of how tourism can facilitate neighborhood sustainability.
Another musical institution in the Memphis area, pop star Justin Timberlake, also made direct investments in his former neighborhood. Timberlake grew up in Millington, a working class town that borders Memphis. The town of 28,000 residents is 77 percent white, 19 percent black, and three percent Hispanic with a median family income of $52,000 per year. The Mid-South native, who is occasionally compared to Elvis in local chatter because of his working class roots and soulful sound, donated $47,000 to his former school, E. E. Jeter Elementary. He gave another $3,000 to its feeder school, Woodstock Middle, to furnish a music lab, instruments and music education program.

In 2009, Timberlake renovated and reopened a once-struggling golf course in his old neighborhood to serve as community gathering spot and spark future tourism as the site evolves into the headquarters for his musical empire (Bailey 2009). He spent $16 million to enhance the course and named the 18-hole course Mirimichi in honor of the community’s Native America heritage. Mirimichi, which means “place of happy retreat” in a Montagnais dialect, earned a nod from Audubon International for its eco-friendly design, and online, Timberlake earned repeated praise online for being “a fine young man who loves where he came from” (Mirimichi 2009). One Timberlake fan described him online as “the reincarnation of Elvis’ good intentions.” Another crowned Mirimichi as “Graceland with golf” (Justin Timberlake 2009). Through its emphasis on environmental consciousness and community inclusion, Timberlake’s Mirimichi fuses the ecological and social platforms of sustainable development.

Through Graceland, Elvis Presley Enterprises does invest directly in the neighborhood by hiring many Whitehaven area residents. Interviews with two former employees provide a glimpse into operations behind the Graceland gates. The former employees mentioned that the
pay was competitive for the line of work. One, who was a high school student at a Whitehaven school, served as a tour operator and made $8.40 per hour in 2008, or $2.55 cents above the minimum wage of the day (Washington 2011). The second employee, who was a college student and Whitehaven native, worked as a merchandise associate in the gift shop from 1998 to 2000. She also stated that the pay was “two or three dollars more than minimum wage” (Irby 2011).

Although their experiences with Graceland were a decade apart, both had similar observations. Neither had visited Graceland before landing jobs at the estate, and they took their first tours of the mansion as part of their job training. They described the mansion warmly as “super fly” and surprisingly interesting. Both described themselves as Elvis fans since working at Graceland, but neither has returned to the mansion alone or with out of town guests since leaving their entry level jobs.

They described their working conditions as pleasant. They noted that the Graceland visitors were generally friendly. Neither of the African American employees remembered any racist encounters or expressions of prejudices from Graceland guests. However, they both stated that the people in non-management positions were majority African Americans, and that the number of white employees in management was disproportionately higher than the number of white employees in non-management jobs. “There definitely weren’t any black managers across the street at the office,” said one employee referring to the headquarters where EPE executives work (Irby 2010). When asked, the Whitehaven native described Graceland’s relationship with her neighborhood as “nonexistent.” She added:

When you think of Stax you think of Memphis, and how they want to uplift the neighborhood. Graceland doesn’t have anything like that. You would think they would have something for the kids in the neighborhood. Some kind of program to rehabilitate old
houses. With all the money they’re bringing in they need some kind of something to just to give back to the neighborhood because Graceland is a cash cow (Irby 2011).

Two significant differences that account for the varying levels of neighborhood involvement between Graceland and Stax are the organizations’ founding purposes. Whereas Elvis Presley Enterprises is a profit-driven corporation now managed by a Los Angeles conglomerate and a Kansas City transplant, Stax is a nonprofit, locally managed organization started by public dollars, and headed by a leader who grew up near the neighborhood it serves. Secondly, Stax was a record label filled mostly with African American artists, located in a majority African American neighborhood. Elvis was a single, white entertainer whose home is located in a neighborhood where the racial demographics have changed from majority white to majority black since the singer’s lifetime.

Apathy and animosity from area residents because of these racial and cultural differences contribute to the disconnect between Graceland and Whitehaven. Graceland’s domestic visitors, which account for 80 percent of its guests, are overwhelming white. The Whitehaven neighborhood is overwhelmingly black [Figures 10 & 11]. Furthermore, Elvis’s legacy continues to be dogged by the “old - and wrong - statement that Elvis was prejudiced, and that he ripped off black music” said EPE chief operating officer Jack Soden. Soden called this alleged bigotry the biggest challenge to the King’s image (Levin 2004). Although racial demographics on who visits Graceland is not available to the public, firsthand observations over the last 30 years indicate that there has been little softening on Graceland among African Americans. One Whitehaven resident noted:

When I drive by Graceland during the year, the crowd is not very diverse. Every once in a while you’ll see a black person or a mixed
raced customer, but just from what I’ve seen from the vigils or seen from people who are strolling up and down the street during that time you don’t see a lot of black people (Wright 2009).

He remembers seeing Elvis ride his motorcycle down the streets of Whitehaven and walking through Southland Mall. He visited Graceland twice, but has never taken his family or an out of town guest to the museum. Although he does not own any Elvis CDs, he often hears the singer’s music. His house in the Bluebird Estates subdivision abuts Graceland’s property, and he can see the Heartbreak Hotel from his backyard. Describing Graceland as a “curiosity” he added, “It’s there. It doesn’t impact me per se, just more of a curiosity. Now I am curious about plans to redevelop the area by the guy who bought the place.” That guy was Robert F. X. Sillerman, the CKx chairman and CEO who pitched the redevelopment plan to government and business leaders in Memphis in 2006, then resigned from the company in 2010. To date, the company has spent $1.6 million in professional fees to create a master plan for a proposed overhaul of the area surrounding Graceland.

In addition to the racial divide, confusion and limited information over the announced redevelopment efforts have intensified frustrations directed towards Graceland by some Whitehaven residents. One resident of Tranquil Lane near Graceland voiced his concern that plans to expand the Presley empire may mean a loss of tranquility for him and his neighbors. He balanced this issue with the possibility that the redevelopment could increase the value of his property. He and other members of his neighborhood association discussed their concerns and expectations with EPE executives. “If it wasn’t for our initiative, I don’t think they would have ever talked to us,” the resident said. “What we talked about was that we wanted to be involved in
the redevelopment, and not just sitting on the sidelines watching it happen — participants not just spectators,” he added (Bell 2010).

His desire for greater communication and participation reflect the findings of researchers Hwansuk Chris Choi and Iain Murray in their literature review on locals’ reaction to tourist developments. Choi and Murray found that numerous studies have affirmed three statements. First, residents are interested in staying abreast of tourist developments in their neighborhoods. Secondly, community involvement improves the community’s perception of a tourist development. Third, “all (studies) have concluded that residents should be involved in community-based planning” (Choi and Murray 580). These findings are in line with the sustainable tourism movement discussed in depth in Chapter 3. Acting antithetical to the literature on the economic and altruistic value of community inclusion, representatives from Elvis Presley Enterprises did not attend a two-hour community forum on Graceland-area redevelopment in 2008. Politicians and 120 Whitehaven residents were in attendance (Dries 2008).

**In The Ghetto**

The local and national media have done an earnest job of keeping the public abreast of developments surrounding the second most visited private house in the nation. Piecing together these news reports provides some insight into the history of the redevelopment plans, and EPE’s real estate buying binge that expanded the company’s footprint in the community. CKx, Inc.’s involvement started in 2004 when the company paid $100 million for an 85 percent stake in Elvis Presley Enterprises. CKx, shorthand for Content is King, is a self-described specialist in
“ownership, distribution and monetization of world renowned entertainment brands” (Sillerman Slide 3) The company’s holdings include the television shows *American Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance*, and partnerships with Muhammad Ali, David Beckham, and Woody Allen. In 2006, *The New York Times* reported that CKx’s redevelopment plans for the Graceland estate included “two 400-room hotels, convention space, an entertainment complex, restaurants, shops, an outdoor amphitheater and a spa,” and a goal of doubling attendance to 1.2 million visitors annually (qt. in Heartbreak Hotel 2006).

Memphis-based sociologist Wanda Rushing argued that tourism development often comes at the expense of human development (194). Yet Stax illustrates how tourist development can stimulate human development. Upon discussion, Rushing acknowledged that a redevelopment project can serve as an intervention point for social good if the right questions are posed. “The number one question that I always ask for any economic development or redevelopment is who benefits? Will the new jobs pay any more than the old jobs that are already there? Will a new resort hotel pay any more than the hotel that’s already there? Will the jobs have benefits? Will there be opportunities for growth within the company?” she said. “Whitehaven residents might not get excited about Elvis or road construction, but jobs get everyone’s attention,” added Rushing (2010).

The estimated timeline for the Graceland overhaul from groundbreaking to ribbon cutting was three years. From 2004 to 2010, EPE and its affiliates spent more than $13.4 million buying real estate that surrounds Graceland in preparation for the expansion. In 2006, it paid $2.1 million for an auto dealership near the mansion, and it spent $1 million to buy the now demolished China Buffet restaurant that neighbored its Heartbreak Hotel. In 2007, Elvis Presley
Enterprises bought 9.5 acres of vacant land near the mansion for $1.1 million. In 2008, it bought Boulevard Souvenir Shop, for $465,000 in one of its most hostile real estate acquisitions. In protest, the tenants of Boulevard Souvenir Shop hung a large banner outside the store announcing that their lease does not expire until 2021. In 2008, the company bought Craft Manor apartments for $1.575 million and Royal Oaks Apartments for $1.6 million, both of which were razed in 2009. It also bought the Meadow Oaks Apartments, a 270-unit apartment complex that was once the childhood home of this author, and partially razed it in 2011. The construction at Meadow Oaks indicates that the company has plans to convert the remaining units into hotel suites. None of these properties are listed on the “Visit Graceland” section of Elvis.com.

Graceland planned to break ground on the massive renovation project around 2009, but a worldwide recession stalled the progress (Collins 2009). In March of 2011, the company announced that it was scaling back and postponing the renovation plans indefinitely due to a sluggish economy. The effects of this postponement were evident in the landscape surrounding Graceland in 2011 as large swaths of land purchased for the expansion sat lifeless and bare behind wire fences with no signs of a past or a future. The lack of beautification at these properties has been a point of contention for some who visit Graceland. Ironically, on online forums and Elvis fan sites, some Graceland tourists complain about the condition of the surrounding area unaware that Graceland owns the offending properties. These disparaging statements from Elvis fandom over the expressed lack of upkeep in the area surrounding Graceland contribute to the rift between locals and tourists. In a post called “Graceland was in the Ghetto…..” on TripAdvisor.com, a Graceland visitor with the screen name gretchenKeNtUcKy wrote:
I was really hyped up about my hero elvis and his home graceland. Man what a let down...I know it was built many years ago...but gesh, it was DoWnToWn...4 real. I thought this estate would just boast great places all around it...Nope. It was just a big house where my hero elvis lived, and what looked to be low to middle class income homes surrounding it. It was just not what I thought.

Her post generated dozens of replies. Two of the responses follow in their unedited form:

I live in Memphis and yes its in a bad part of town, but you also have to remember when Elvis was around that was like the very best part of the city, I guess after years things change, All i can say is just be carefull, theres always alot of security there.

-happynow Germantown…

I am really disappointed to read that so many people are so disgusted with the area surrounding Graceland. I am a resident of Memphis and have grown up in the Whitehaven area (around Graceland). To those visiting, I have to say that as a Memphian and more importantly a native of Whitehaven, I apologize that your standards were not met when visiting our part of town. Just like any city there are areas that need some work, but do understand that we love our area and we do not think of it as the “ghetto” the way so many viewers have named it. Trust me, I’ve seen “ghettos.” As an older part of town, investors have not realized how much potential the area holds and how they could benefit from revitalizing the area. The ones that they’re emphasizing on, will one day look like ours. Its also obvious that your dearly beloved Elvis’s company doesn’t feel as if they need to contribute to that cause either, because if so they would have done it a long time ago. Tourists keep coming and pouring in the bucks to see Graceland only, so why should they???? They’re making their money. Put some heat on them and give us a break.

-SpeakUp

The posting title, “Graceland was in the Ghetto,” is reminiscent of Elvis’ 1969 single “In the Ghetto” that earned him recognition for his musical commentary on economic injustice. Yet in the 21st century online posting “In the Ghetto” on TripAdvisor.com, gone are the calls for compassion and charity that Elvis sang about in 1969. Instead, this perceived ghetto is a letdown, and fans express anxiety towards it on the travel site.
In deriding and distancing themselves from what they perceive as the modern-day ghetto of Whitehaven, Elvis fans, in turn, distance themselves from their professed hero. The boy who would be King was intimately familiar with life in the ghetto. As his 1969 single, and multiple acts of charity reflect, even after success afforded him the opportunity to move out of the ghetto, he remained empathetic to the plight of those who lived there. Thus, in disconnecting from Whitehaven, Elvis fandom and Elvis Presley Enterprises are shunning an essential element in the narrative of Elvis.

Finding ways to build greater connections between Graceland and the public presents an ongoing challenge for operators of the mansion as its current trajectory makes it unsustainable. Visitors to Graceland fell from 542,728 in 2009 to 518,940 in 2010. Even when taking the five year average of 552,000 visitors from 2005 to 2010, foot traffic at Graceland is down overall. Attendance peaked in 1997 with 750,000 visitors during the 20th anniversary of the King’s death. The 30th anniversary year, in 2007, drew 612,541 visitors (“CKx, Inc. Annual Report,” 12; Lollar 2003). One way to prevent the continued dwindling of the tourist base is by opening the gates of Graceland to new audiences. Elvis Presley Enterprises CEO Jack Soden boasts that “53 percent of all visitors to Graceland are 35 years old or younger” (Levin 2004). Events such as the annual youth karaoke contest cater to the children of adult Elvis fans, and help to build a young fan base. My research did not uncover any domestic multicultural programs, or statistics on the racial demographics of Graceland’s domestic visitors. Cultivating a relationship with Americans of color is one way to spur growth in this increasingly multicultural nation. In 1977, the year Elvis died, one in five Americans was a person of color. Today, one in three Americans is a person of color. The U.S. Census Bureau predicts that minority races will make up more than 51 percent of
the population by year 2042. Additionally, Memphis is on track to become the first majority African American metropolitan statistical area (Rushing 5).

Evolving demographics have forced places that were once contested spaces to become more inclusive in their outreach. A prominent example is Stone Mountain Park in Stone Mountain, Georgia, home to one of the largest and most controversial bas-reliefs in the world. The carving of Confederate leaders Stonewall Jackson, Robert E. Lee, and Jefferson Davis was once at the heart of the park’s marketing campaign, which celebrated the Confederacy, and simultaneously alienated black visitors. Today, park keepers downplay the Confederate Memorial in its marketing campaign and tours. Instead, Stone Mountain bills itself as an outdoor amusement park complete with a train, sky tram, obstacle course, and an outdoor laser light show. Although some criticize the disneyfication of Stone Mountain, this strategy has proven successful at building a multicultural visitors’ base (McCollum 2011).

Unlike Stone Mountain that deemphasizes its controversial past, Monroeville, Alabama has discovered the commercial and reconciliatory value of recounting a once divisive chapter in history. Each year, thousands travel to the Southern Alabama city that is the hometown of To Kill a Mockingbird author Harper Lee. Maycomb, the 1930s fictional town in Lee’s book, is based on Monroeville. The plot revolves around the backlash a white lawyer and his family face when the father defends a black man falsely accused of raping a white woman in a segregated Southern community. In 2010, Monroeville held a festival to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Pulitzer Prize winning novel. Each year, community leaders organize reenactments of the book in a replica courthouse that is attended by locals and tourists alike. Monroeville resident and Southern literature enthusiast Mary Amelia Taylor said that the To Kill a Mockingbird plays are
“frequented by both black and white folks fairly evenly.” She added that the play helps to improve race relations in the town with a problematic past by building partnerships between white social clubs, black churches and the like, who come together to organize the annual showings (Taylor 2011). Other contested sites turned landmarks, like the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis and the Red Location Museum in Port Elizabeth, South Africa have taken sites of tragedy and turned them into financially solvent sites of consciousness that foster human development as discussed in Chapter 3.

As the place of death and burial of Elvis Aaron Presley, Graceland is a site of tragedy in the middle of a black neighborhood that has neither fostered racial reconciliation nor human development for those who live immediately around it. Heralded by some scholars as an artist who united the races, Elvis’ crown as the crossover king is in jeopardy because of Elvis Presley Enterprises’ inability to capitalize on this legacy, and attract a significant black presence to Elvis fandom and Graceland. In the 21st century, the crossover crown that once belonged to the King of Rock ‘n Roll was taken by the King of Pop. After his death in 2009, Michael Jackson overtook Elvis Presley on Forbes’ annual list of the highest paid dead celebrities. Like Elvis, Jackson broke down color barriers during his lifetime. Jackson’s masterpiece “Thriller” was the first video by an African American solo artist aired on MTV. Deejays played his songs on R&B and pop stations. The musical icons’ legacies intertwined when Jackson briefly married Elvis’ daughter, Lisa Marie Presley, in 1994. In an all too haunting similarity, Jackson, like Elvis, died of a suspected prescription drug, spending his last comatose moments at his eccentric estate. It remains unknown if Jackson can maintain his crossover appeal in death, and if Neverland will one day become the Graceland for all races.
Graceland’s appeal to Hispanic American, Asian American and Native American audiences is fertile ground for other scholarship. It is the intent of this paper to suggest a starting point for reclaiming former black fans, and introducing a new generation of African Americans to Elvis fandom. “Graceland probably does not market itself to the African American community,” said City Council member and longtime Whitehaven resident Harold Collins. He is working to bridge the gap between the predominantly white Elvis Presley Enterprises and the predominantly black Whitehaven community through projects like the now annual collaborative Christmas parade. Collins added:

That’s one way to increase your fan base: Open yourself up into the community in which you live, and let the people know that you are here for them, that you are a good corporate citizen, that you will support the projects that go on in your neighborhood, especially when 98 percent of the people who live in your neighborhood are African American. It only makes sense.

Collins’ offers a logical proposal: increase the African American consumer dollar at Graceland by first, integrating the African Americans who live around the mansion into Elvis culture. Elvis Presley Enterprises has taken small steps towards such integration by providing jobs for those who live in the neighborhood and participating in the Whitehaven Christmas parade, but part-time jobs and a once a year engagement leaves much to be desired. As Justin Timberlake’s Mirimichi golf course illustrates, it is possible for an attraction to be ‘a place of happy retreat’ for its neighbors and tourists. Likewise, the campus of Stax Museum of American Soul has become a hub for children in Soulsville through the museum’s sponsorship of the Soulsville Charter School and Stax Music Academy.
If Graceland’s 118 acre campus cannot accommodate neighborhood outreach efforts at this time, then its pending redevelopment of the area provides a prime opportunity for it to create spaces where organizations like a neighborhood civics club or a Graceland performing arts troupe can meet and host events. Using its resources to support programming for Whitehaven residents is one way for Elvis Presley Enterprises to foster positive associations with African Americans, and combat the sentiment that EPE does not care about the black community that surrounds it.

Hiring Whitehaven-based contractors and suppliers for the redevelopment, and incorporating community input into the plans would advance the company’s efforts beyond tokenism by demonstrating that EPE values the interests, concerns, and expertise of those who live around the mansion. Ongoing dialogue between EPE officials and Whitehaven residents could be mutually beneficial as both sides determine how best to provide the services tourists expect when visiting the neighborhood. Such discussions could yield neighborhood improvement initiatives like a collaborative small business incubator or Graceland beautification grants to local businesses. The multiple proposals suggested could build neighborhood buy-in, give Graceland greater inroads into the African American market, help shake Whitehaven’s stigma as “the ghetto,” and increase the amount of time and dollars that tourists and locals spend at and around Graceland. Collectively, these measures would heighten Graceland’s profile as a sustainable tourist development that uses its resources to improve its host community.
Figure 6: Map of Whitehaven. Memphis, TN. Photo Credit: Google Maps.
Figure 7: Postwar commercial real estate developer John B. Goodwin opened the Whitehaven Plaza shopping center, less than two miles south of Graceland, in 1956 with Lowenstein’s as the anchor store.

Photo Credit: The Commercial Appeal.
Figure 8: Graceland Elementary School, April 2011.
Photo Credit: Cathryn Stout.

Figure 9: Graceland Mansion, April 2011.
Photo Credit: Cathryn Stout
Figure 10: Tourists take pictures in front of the Graceland mansion, April 2011. Photo Credit: Cathryn Stout.

Figure 11: Diego from the cartoon *Dora the Explorer* takes a break from waving to drivers on Shelby Drive in Whitehaven to take a camera phone photo with the Williams sisters, Fall 2009. Photo Credit: Cathryn Stout.
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Chapter Three:

Creating a Public Forum at the National Civil Rights Museum
All I wanna be is understood
Respect my feelings so I feel good
All I wanna be is understood...

A robust blend of voices sang those words repeatedly during the choir rehearsal that stretched late into the night. *All I Wanna Be is Understood* by Denise Rich is the theme song for the National Civil Rights Museum, and on that particular spring night, the members of the museum’s choir were tuning up for a performance. Leading the chorus was O’Landa Draper, a caramel colored man with a warm smile, Clark Gable mustache, and a perfectionist’s temperament. With his Memphis-based singing group The Associates, Draper earned five Grammy nominations, multiple Dove and Stella Awards, and superstar status in the gospel music in the world in the 1990s. Some credit him with singularly reviving the Memphis gospel music scene after years of infighting following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Dodson 2009). Thus, it was a fitting honor that the National Civil Rights Museum invited Draper to head a poignant musical tribute in memory of King. Draper was the director for the National Civil Rights Museum Choir, a group commissioned to commemorate the 25th anniversary of King’s assassination.

Only 11 years old at the time, I was the youngest person to make the choir. Before auditioning with the committee, my theater coach told me to smile from the first note to the last goodbye, and I think that my fixed smile compensated for my questionable vocal skills. After weeks of late night rehearsals in the museum’s auditorium, the choir recorded the live CD “March On” in April of 1993 at Mason Temple, the church where King delivered his last speech.
I had visited the National Civil Rights Museum when it opened in 1991 to tour the various exhibits, but those late night choir rehearsals in 1992 are my earliest formative memories of the museum.

Today, the tradition of engaging locals into the folds of the museum remains an essential component of its work. In this chapter, I explore how some locals interact with this space originally built to meet tourist demands. I situate the National Civil Rights Museum within the growing field of sustainable tourism. It is admittedly an imperfect model for sustainable tourism, yet there is much to learn from how the space expanded physically and ideologically over the years to blend different voices. In recapping the museum’s history, the connection between the museum’s formation and a meaningful moment in Memphis’ political history will become poignantly clear in first section entitled 1991 The Pivotal Year. The next section, Global Expansion, traces how the museum raised its international profile, and increased its relevance with foreign tourists by linking the American Civil Rights Movement with the international human rights movement in ways very much in line with the global south paradigm. Continuing on this theme of connectedness, the final section, entitled Battles on the Front, details how the museum’s response to critics in 2007 led to reforms, strengthened community connections, and reflected the challenges and rewards of sustainable tourism. The goal of this pursuit is to highlight some practices at the National Civil Rights Museum that could benefit other local tourist attractions.

1991- The Pivotal Year

Like its Downtown Memphis neighbor Beale Street, the National Civil Rights Museum occupies a location that held significance to past generations of black Memphians. The museum
at 405 Mulberry Street was once the historic Lorraine Motel. A replica of the hotel’s marquee still graces the outside of the building. Constructed circa 1925 as the Windsor Hotel, owners later renamed it the Marquette Hotel. Memphian Walter Bailey purchased the building with his wife, Loree Bailey, in 1945. Inspired by his wife’s given name, and the jazz standard “Sweet Lorraine,” Walter Bailey renamed the building. The Baileys made significant changes to the structure. In an age where increased automobile ownership changed the travel industry and the American landscape, the Baileys converted the 1925 building from a hotel to a drive up motel. The Baileys updated the building, and added more rooms, including Room 306, where King would later spend his last moments. From 1942 throughout the early 1960s, the motel hosted many prominent African Americans who were denied accommodations in segregated facilities in the South. Guests at the Lorraine included Jackie Robinson, Nat King Cole, B.B. King, Aretha Franklin and, on multiple occasions, King (Fact Sheet 2010; Adderley 27-30). The Lorraine’s prominence as a headquarter for visiting black socialites began to wane in the mid-sixties because the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act created greater lodging options for African Americans.

Although some entertainers continued to trickle in during the lean years, this pool of elite travelers evaporated on April 4, 1968 when the Lorraine Motel suffered two tragic blows. The first strike was the assassination of civil rights icon Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on the hotel’s balcony. The second tragedy unfolded that day when co-owner Loree Bailey suffered a stroke. Undocumented local folklore says that Loree Bailey’s stroke was triggered by the shock of King’s death. She died a few days later. Sociologist Wanda Rushing described the city’s yellow fever outbreak in 1878 as the “yellow fever disruption,” because it interrupted the distribution of
culture, humans, and natural resources (13). For similar reasons, it is fitting to call the period from 1968 to 1991 the assassination disruption. The tragedies disrupted business at the Lorraine. Recalling those years of struggle, former Lorraine employee Jacqueline Smith said, “If it wasn’t for the prostitutes, and their efforts, then the Lorraine might have been sold and bulldozed long ago” (Branston 110). As detailed in Chapter One, the assassination and subsequent riots contributed to the disruption of the city’s music industry as Beale Street, Stax, and the gospel music scene folded in the aftermath of King’s assassination.

It also may have disrupted African Americans’ ascension to the city’s highest office. While other black voters in Southern cities were galvanizing to elect black mayors, infighting and distrust plagued the Memphis black political community. The polarizing Ford family political machine, led by patriarch Harold Ford Sr., contributed to contentious Memphis political scene (Wright 211-214). According to Marcus Pohlmann and Michael Kirby, no fewer than eight large cities elected their first black mayors since Reconstruction between 1967 and 1979. Included on that list were Southern centers like Atlanta, which elected Maynard Jackson in 1973; New Orleans, which elected Dutch Morial in 1978; and Birmingham, which elected Richard Arrington in 1979. Pohlmann and Kirby argue that this wave of black mayors rose to power because, “A civil rights movement swept the country knocking down barriers to black electoral participation, resulting in massive voter registration drives, and raising the level of black consciousness” (xix). Although in Memphis white politicians firmly held the mayor’s office throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the pinchers of exclusivity did loosen enough to allow one particular African American more opportunities for leadership positions in education. In 1968, a then political unknown named Dr. Willie Herenton became the first black principal of a
predominantly white school in Memphis. Ten years later, Memphis City Schools’ commissioners, after much lobbying by local black leaders, appointed Herenton as the first black superintendent of the Memphis public schools.

While Herenton was laying the foundation for his political future, many Memphis politicians largely ignored the deteriorating foundation at 405 Mulberry Street. Auspiciously, in 1982, a biracial coalition of corporate executives, activists, legal scholars, and local radio broadcasters formed to show the community and government officials the cultural, financial, and political value of turning the site of tragedy into a tourist attraction. “We’d approved projects for different constituencies, but this was the first time that I’d had the opportunity to take a strong stand for the African Americans in our community,” said Bill Morris, who served as county mayor at the time (qt. 71 Lauterbach). While some in the community criticized the idea of turning the crime scene into a tourist attraction, the motel’s bloodstained balcony instantly became a tourist destination after King’s death. Thus, there was a groundswell of Memphians who wanted to preserve the motel’s crumbling structure, and transform it into a more suitable tribute to King. Shortly after the assassination, Walter Bailey converted the room where the slain leader once stayed into a shrine, and visitors made pilgrimages to the makeshift memorial (Rushing 53) [Figure 12]. With the help of returning native Memphian D’Army Bailey, no relation to Walter Bailey, the hotel owner lobbied city officials to enhance the site.

Born in 1941, D’Army Bailey was a child of the Civil Rights Movement, and a community organizer. After graduating from high school in 1959, he attended Southern University, a historically black college in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. There, administrators expelled him for organizing boycotts against the school and area businesses. He continued his
education and his activism at Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, and went on to receive his law degree from Yale University in 1967. In 1983, his unsuccessful bid for mayor pitted him against incumbent mayor Dick Hackett. During these heady days, D’Army Bailey divided his time between politics, the law, and gaining support for a proposed civil rights museum, and eventually became the leader of the *Save the Lorraine* campaign. To broadcast his call to action for the museum, he partnered with Memphis-based WDIA, the nation’s first radio station with an all-black program line up. D’Army Bailey also effectively utilized print media to bring attention to the precarious state of the Lorraine Motel. In an editorial in the Memphis daily, *The Commercial Appeal*, D’Army Bailey contended that the “leaders in the black and white communities have not done enough to preserve the world-famous King assassination site at the Lorraine. It is one of the key places that concerned visitors want to see” (qt. in Adderley 31).

Throughout the 1980s, D’Army Bailey was the driving force behind the museum proposal. D’Army Bailey endured criticism from those opposed to the idea of spending taxpayers’ dollars to preserve a civil rights landmark because the riots, boycotts, and violence that accompanied the movement were still fresh pain for some Memphians (Adderley 48). Yet, D’Army Bailey persisted, and, in 1982, he convinced an eclectic group of community donors to purchase the foreclosed property for $144,000. The museum’s steering committee originally called itself the Martin Luther King Memorial Foundation, but changed its name to the Lorraine Civil Rights Museum Foundation, in 1984, after the King family protested the commercial use of Dr. King’s name (Lauterbach 69).

The nonprofit museum board was a biracial coalition of 20 members that included corporate heavy hitters like Paul Shapiro, head of the African American beauty line Lucky
Hearts Cosmetics; AutoZone founder Joseph “Pitt” Hyde; and Beale Street redeveloper John Elkington. There were legal scholars like D’Army Bailey, and A.W. Willis, the Memphis lawyer who represented James Meredith during his enrollment at the University of Mississippi. Naturally, there were civil rights activists including Rev. Benjamin L. Hooks, the executive director of the NAACP; Rev. James Smith, labor organizer for the union representing the local sanitation workers; and Rev. Samuel “Billy” Kyles, who was on the balcony with King that fatal day in 1968. The State of Tennessee took ownership of the Lorraine, and agreed to lease the building to the Foundation rent-free. The Lorraine continued to operate as a motel until 1987, when all but one guest willingly left.

Grassroots activist Jacqueline Smith was a literal barrier between construction crews and the motel’s transformation. Despite several requests from the museum’s organizers, the police, and the courts, Smith began her lengthy nonviolent protest and refused to vacate the premises. Smith’s protests and court battles have become a part of the museum’s narrative. The struggle between Smith and the museum has significant analytical value. Many of the museum’s organizers were lawyers, and the foundation’s response to the Smith controversy demonstrated the board’s respect for the constraints and spirit of the public forum to the success of the venture. According to legal scholar Martin Rooney, “where the government has fully dedicated property it owns and controls to expressive use, only the most limited and important interests support preventing expressive activities in that forum” (326). Known as the public forum doctrine, or the public forum analysis, this legal standard addresses freedom of speech issues on government property. Given the essential messages of individual rights and freedom of political expression that would inculcate the future of the museum, even if the property were not government-owned,
responding to Smith’s protest required a complex legal and public relations strategy. This was even more critical with the state owning the site, and a civilian board operating it in a quasi public-private structure.

Smith had a long history and an emotional attachment to the Lorraine Motel. Born in 1951, the native Memphian with “an extraordinary raw talent” in music aspired to become an opera singer. She graduated from high school in 1969. As she explained, she turned down a full music scholarship to the University of Southern Mississippi because “that was after Dr. King was killed and you couldn’t pay me to go to Mississippi” (qt. Thomas 1993). After working a few other odd jobs, in 1973, she landed a job at the motel where she received $10 a day plus room and board for her services.

Smith protested the motel’s transformation into a museum because she felt that the fee-charging “tourist trap” would defy the spirit of King’s 1968 Poor People’s Campaign. Instead, she wanted the space converted into a homeless shelter or social service organization. The museum initially took a passive aggressive approach to Smith’s defiance of an eviction notice, and disconnected the building’s utilities. During this time, allies aided Smith by bringing her food daily (Thomas 1993). On March 2, 1988, Shelby County Sherriff’s deputies physically removed a crying Smith from the motel to a nearby sidewalk so that crews could prepare it for redevelopment. Since that moment, Smith has spent her days in a tent near the premises in a display of homelessness, and her nights in a secure residence away from the museum.

Communications theorist Bernard Armada said, “By assuming the posture of homelessness, she capitalized on her marginalization to amplify her appearance as a victim of the museum” (222).
Smith, who repeatedly defied court and police orders, was not initially arrested for her protests, a reflection of the foundation’s restraint. In an odd turn of fate, Smith, in many ways, has now become the essence of her objection to monetizing Dr. King’s assassination, as her campsite is now a profit-generating tourist destination in front of the museum. She now gives speeches, passes out flyers, and offers photograph opportunities to visitors who care to listen and donate to her cause, telling some guests to her protest site that she does not want a donation that jingles, but rather a donation that folds. Her Web site, fulfillthedream.net, includes pictures of her with famous visitors like musicians Bono and Pop Staples, author Alex Haley, and President Jimmy Carter. Here, supporters can also obtain the mailing address to donate to her cause. While Smith staunchly criticizes the museum for its failure to use its donations to provide services for the poor, the money she raises seems to only fill her own pockets.

For the most part, museum executives respond to Smith with deliberate non-action. They only intervene when her presence directly interferes with construction plans. Such an occasion arose on July 16, 1990. That day, two female Shelby County Sheriff’s deputies removed Smith from the museum’s construction zone. As a reporter recorded:

> About 100 supporters and onlookers stood by at 7:10 a.m. as Shelby County sheriff’s deputies approached Ms. Smith’s sidewalk tent at 406 Mulberry. They asked her to leave, and when she refused, two deputies lifted her by the arms from a folding chair and carried her about 40 feet across the street. She offered no resistance (Hirschman 1990).

During the July 16 removal, which was most likely orchestrated by foundation board members and public safety authorities, two specific practices thwarted an uproar from nearby protestors. First, by using female deputies to remove a female protester, authorities employed gender politics to reduce the appearance of roughhousing and sexually inappropriate touching.
Secondly, despite once more defying police and court orders, Smith was not arrested, but rather relocated to a nearby post. Furthermore, authorities eventually dropped all charges and fines. The museum showed great deftness in its handling of the Smith controversy, and a keen understanding of the museum as a public forum. Protest marked the Civil Rights Movement and the early days of the Civil Rights Museum. In the spirit of nonviolent, noncooperation, curators have “integrated (Smith) into the interpretation of the site,” said museum executive director Beverly Robertson (2008). As one of the museum’s affiliates summated, “This is a civil rights museum, and we’ll let her exercise her civil rights” (qt. Hirschman 1990). With Smith removed from the construction zone, the conversion from motel to museum continued throughout 1990 and 1991.

While the crews worked to finish the museum, another groundbreaking event occurred in 1991. On April 27, 1991, thousands of black Memphians gathered at the Mid-South Coliseum for the city’s first and only African American People’s Convention. An estimated 4,000 people attended the historic event, including this writer. Though only nine years old at the time, I can recall a few details about that day. Weather records confirm my recollection that it rained most of the day. The Coliseum floor was so crowded that maneuvering around was difficult at times. A vibrant energy penetrated every inch of the 63,000 square foot arena floor. While sensing the excitement of the occasion, only in hindsight did I realize that these thousands of black Memphians (a few non-black Memphians) were embarking on what would become a defining moment in Memphis history.

That afternoon, after rounds of voting, black Memphians unified to select Dr. Willie Herenton as their consensus candidate for mayor. In the general election, Herenton squared off
against incumbent Richard “Dick” Hackett, who was seeking his fourth term. Hackett, a white Republican, was an early supporter of the museum effort, helped to stabilize Beale Street in the 1980s, and greatly improved the diversity at City Hall by appointing black administrators and black department heads to posts previously dominated by white staffers. As school superintendent, Herenton, a democrat, raised the average ACT score in Memphis City Schools by three points, and started a popular magnet school-style advanced program.

The Hackett versus Herenton showdown was a pivotal election, particularly for a city experiencing a demographic shift. As a result of the white flight that occurred in the 1980s in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, the city’s black population had increased by 7.2 percent, and the city’s white population had decreased by 6.4 percent. In 1986, Memphis became a majority black city (Wright 214). By 1991, the city of Memphis was 55 percent black and 45 percent white. Herenton received 99 percent of the black vote, and Hackett received 96 percent of the white vote. In the final tally, Hackett received 49.38 percent of the total vote. Herenton received 49.44 percent of the total vote. Herenton won by 142 votes in a race that was amazingly close and divided down color lines (Kirby 167). Herenton’s election was in stark contrast to the biracial coalition that came together to create the National Civil Rights Museum.

Despite its outward solidarity, the inner workings of the museum’s board were far from harmonious. D’Army Bailey served as board president from 1983 to 1991. His presidency was filled with “vilification,” “name calling,” “explosive meetings,” “screaming,” “politically charged” feuds, and, even by his own accounts, “tension.” Bailey said that the hard-nosed approach was necessary to keep the project progressing (Robertson 2008; Lauterbach 2008). After years of frustrations and fundraising, D’Army Bailey welcomed dignitaries to a soft
opening on July 4, 1991, and hundreds of celebrants to the museum’s grand opening on September 28, 1991. Former Lorraine Motel owner Walter Bailey did live to see the occasion dying in 1988 at the age of 73. The museum’s first director was Juanita Moore, a native of Wilson, North Carolina.

The final price tag for the museum was $9.25 million, which included $4.4 million from the State of Tennessee, $2.2 million from the City of Memphis, $2.2 million from Shelby County government, and more than a million dollars in private donations. According to historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage, the handsome infusion of public dollars into such a venture illustrates the gains “the civil rights movement secured for black political rights that enabled (African Americans) to prod elected officials to subsidize museums devoted to their heritage” (301). Yet, the museum’s construction had the uncalculated cost of damaging Bailey’s reputation, as a board coup led to the end of his tumultuous tenure as board president in 1992 (Lauterbach 2008). Civil rights icon Dr. Benjamin Hooks took over the helm, and Bailey severed all ties with the museum.

Three months after the museum’s opening, hundreds of Memphians gathered to witness the culmination of another hard-fought victory at the inauguration of the city’s first elected black mayor. The newly installed mayor acknowledged the achievement as a product of the Civil Rights Movement. In his inauguration speech on January 5, 1992, Mayor Willie Herenton said, “We stand at the dawn of a new era. Today is the first day an African-American man has stood before Memphis as its mayor. It is truly a new beginning for Memphis. I wish that Dr. King could have been with us today. I believe he would have been here; he would have participated in this historic celebration” (Herenton 1992).

The transformation of the Lorraine Motel into a world

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Footnote: Former City Council Chairman J.O. Patterson, Jr., who is African American, served as interim mayor of Memphis for 20 days in 1982.
class museum, coupled with the racially divided election make 1991 a pivotal year in Memphis history. The events showed that Memphians could form biracial coalitions for projects or short-term goals, but that the community remained divided when it came to political doctrines and long term visions.

**Global Expansion**

The museum has evolved in significant ways since 1991 to incorporate community input, current events, and its founding mission. In 1997, Memphian Beverly Robertson succeeded Juniata Moore to become the museum’s second executive director, a position she continued to hold in 2011. Robertson’s career into museum management followed an unusual path. Robertson received her Bachelor’s of Art degree in Education in 1973 from then Memphis State University, and, later, briefly, studied executive leadership at the Wharton School of Business, University of Pennsylvania. Robertson worked as a school teacher, a reservation agent for the tourism industry, and a marketing executive before joining the museum. In 1992, she and her husband, Howard Robertson, started Trust Marketing & Communications, Incorporated, one of the first minority-owned public relations and marketing firm in Memphis. Robertson came to the museum without a background or training in museology. The board tapped the Whitehaven resident for the position because of her business and marketing expertise (Robertson 2009).

The museum opened to much national media acclaim in 1991, but Robertson elevated its profile internationally. This integration of international causes was an important step in placing local events into a global context. The original museum structure brings together decades of American history in 34,500 square feet of space. It covers the Reconstruction era, The Great Migration, Memphian Ida B. Well’s anti-lynching campaigns, the Niagara Movement, Marcus
Garvey, the International Peace Mission Movement, and Malcolm X’s rise in the Nation of Islam. There is a small gallery that features rotating exhibits, but the bulk of the exhibition space details the American civil rights era from the 1950s to the 1970s. A 1987 contract defines museum creators’ objectives as follows:

The parties desire that an appropriate Interpretive Education facility, hereinafter referred to as the “project,” be developed in Memphis, Tennessee, as a tribute to men and women of all races and religions who gave of themselves in the cause of human rights (National Civil Rights Center 1987).

Despite this articulated mission, there are few references to the global human rights struggle in the museum’s original permanent exhibits.

The original exhibits remain on display, and tracing them shows the museum’s initial dearth of global consciousness. The museum’s first panel connects Europe, Africa and North America through the Atlantic slave trade by declaring “African slaves inhabited the English colonies in North America continuously after 1619.” The next minor global connection comes in a museum panel labeled 1876 about Noble Drew Ali. Ali was adopted by a Moroccan father and Cherokee mother. Ali founded the Moorish Science Temple of America, which was the predecessor of the Nation of Islam. The most overt international connection in the original museum space appears in statements from white segregationists who compare “race mixing” to communism and President Lyndon Johnson to “the Castro Brothers.” Understanding the role of communist propaganda in the civil rights counter-movement is an important historical link that several civil rights sites fail to make, according to historian Renee Romano. Romano visited the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, the National Civil Rights Museum, the Brown v. Board of Education National Historic Site in Topeka, and the Central High School Museum and Visitor
Center in Little Rock. Her survey found that of the respective institutions, the National Civil Rights Museum made the most noteworthy efforts in presenting artifacts and exhibits that show the anticommunist backlash that civil rights activists endured (40).

The original exhibits essentially end with the rise of the Black Power Movement in the 1970s. Decades removed from the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, museum director Beverly Robertson said that museum guests often left with lingering questions:

We started to notice lots of people coming from the U.K., coming from Africa, coming from other places as far away as Australia and also from the Asia Pacific region. And when they would come their questions were, ‘So okay what happened to the Movement after King died? You know, did the Movement die when he died? And what impact has the Movement really had elsewhere?’ So when we envisioned doing the expansion, we wanted to speak to the state’s investigation around King because there were always a lot of questions. There are a lot of conspiracy theories around James Earl Ray, and lingering questions yet remain today around that. But in addition, we also wanted to sort of answer the question how did the Movement impact global struggles? (Robertson 2009) [Figure 13]

The acquisition of additional buildings in 1999 gave the museum’s governing board the space to answer those questions. The museum expanded its campus onto the adjacent Main Street by purchasing the former Canipe’s Amusement Store, and the rooming house where King’s alleged assassin fired the fatal shot. Memphis-based distribution giant FedEx donated $500,000 to the new exhibit space, and Denny’s diners, who eight years earlier settled a $54 million racial discrimination lawsuit, donated $1 million dollars to the project. On September 28, 2002, staffers unveiled the $11 million expansion. Herenton’s landmark election, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and competing theories around the assassination of King became some of the contemporary topics covered in the Exploring the Legacy wing.
Included in the two-story expansion is a wall with portraits of the past recipients of the Freedom Awards. The Freedom Awards are one of several events where the museum calls attention to injustices abroad. Since its inception in 1991, the museum has typically honored a regional, national, and international visionary at the event. The trio’s work may span the fields of education, activism, philanthropy, sports, entertainment, the arts, and human rights. A free public forum always precedes the private, ticketed gala. With transportation and other costs covered by businesses like International Paper, each year, upwards of 3,000 schoolchildren attend the public forum. Museum director Beverly Robertson said that hosting the free event for students is an integral part of the museum’s work. She explained:

The value of what we do at the museum is that we’re here to educate. That’s our whole goal. So these kids see these videos and they hear about the lives of these folks. Many of them really sort of ordinary people who have done extraordinary things in their own battles. And they understand that the world is really more interconnected than we are divided because of the issues of poverty, and education and hunger, and economic disparity. You know, those issues don’t just resonate for us here in this country, they resonate for people around the world. (2009)

The Freedom Awards is one of the earliest ways in which the museum fulfilled its founding charge to explore both the national Civil Rights Movement and the global human rights movement.

The awards bring prominent activists to the city to share their stories, and raise awareness about current global crises. The inaugural recipients of the award were civil rights pioneers Rosa Parks, James Farmer, and Coretta Scott King. In 1992, the gala welcomed its first international honoree, Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa. Since 1992, dozens of international award recipients have accepted the prize, including Lech Walesa of Poland, a Nobel Peace Prize winner.
who organized noncommunist trade unions during the Soviet regime; Rigoberta Menchú, a
Central American freedom fighter who advocates restorative justice for Native Americans across
the Western hemisphere; and Bono, the Irish pop star who raises awareness about AIDS and debt
relief through his nonprofit organization DATA.

The Freedom Awards is just one example of how the museum connects the plight of
Memphians with contemporary issues that afflict communities worldwide, but it is worth
discussing in depth because the awards remain the museum’s premiere fund raising event
(Robertson 2009). The quintessential example of how the Awards help to bridge the story of
locals with the story of those around the world is illustrated in Nelson Mandela’s visit to
Memphis. Mandela was the sole honorary for the 2000 Freedom Awards. Mandela, one of the
most transformative leaders of the 20th century, spent 28 years in South African jails for his
aggressive stance against apartheid. Apartheid, like American segregation, was the byproduct of
the 19th century obsession with cheap labor. For South Africa, the commodity was gold
prompted by the 1886 Witwatersrand gold rush in Johannesburg, South Africa. For the U.S.
South, the dominant commodity was cotton, or white gold as planters commonly called it.

The resource curse plagued these two spaces in devastating ways. South African
*randlords* and U.S. planters appealed to their respective governments to secure laborers to
harvest the abundance of natural resources of their respective lands. What resulted were two
systems of race-based oppression that led to the disenfranchisement of millions of black citizens
in both countries for decades [Figure 14]. Inexplicably bound, blacks in the US South and blacks
in South Africa share the global south narrative of “disruption and demoralization” (Limón 14).
However, included in their parallel histories is a figure common to the human rights narrative—
the charismatic, selfless “great man” who helps to deliver his or her people from oppression and subjugation.

Because of his commitment to fighting institutional racism, Nelson, like King, suffered great hardships. Before his imprisonment in 1962, Mandela was a leader in Umkhonto we Sizwe, the militant wing of the African National Congress. He helped to organize an armed-revolt against the oppressive, white-minority controlled South African government because he felt that “fifty years of non-violence had brought the African people nothing but more and more repressive legislation, and fewer and fewer rights” (Mandela 1964). Mandela’s support of violence in the 1960s apartheid struggle directly conflicts with King’s insistence on nonviolence during the same period. Despite this philosophical difference, there are many similarities between the leaders of the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement and the American Civil Rights Movement.

Born 11 years apart, both King and Mandela were descendents of distinguished fathers, and both men triumphed professionally despite the racism of their eras and respective lands. Mandela, the elder of the two, was born in 1918, and is the son of a tribal chief. A lawyer by trade, Mandela attended the University College of Fort Hare in Alice, South Africa; and graduated from the law program at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 1942. King was born in 1929 to a family of Baptist ministers. King attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, and earned his doctorate degree from Boston University in 1955. He would go on to follow the footsteps of his father and grandfather by entering into the ministry.
Because of their family backgrounds and education, both King and Mandela seemed destined for corporate success. Instead, King was arrested more than 20 times, and Mandela spent 28 years in jail. Although the two men never met, they were conscious of one another’s work. In his last speech in Memphis, King noted:

The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee — the cry is always the same — “We want to be free” (King 1968).

Although he was more than 8,000 miles away, Mandela, like King, was aware of the war against inequality raging across the Atlantic. Museum director Beverly Robertson, who escorted Mandela during his tour of the National Civil Rights Museum in 2000, remembers her conversation with the dignitary. Robertson recalled:

Nelson Mandela said that when he was in jail—in jail for 28 years—that one of the things that kept him going was knowing his brothers and sisters where fighting in America. And so he felt immediately connected to America as a result of the Civil Rights Movement (2009).

Mandela shared the importance of connectedness, and his personal quintessential narrative of forgiveness with 3,000 Memphis schoolchildren during the museum’s annual public forum in 2000. For those students who could not attend the ticketed event, the museum provided downloadable worksheets on its Web site with the speaker’s biography, discussion questions, and essay prompts. Thus, the museum encouraged Memphis youth to understand how events in urban Memphis linked to a global south nation more than 8,000 miles away.

Giving Memphians the opportunity to hear leaders entrenched in past and contemporary struggles for justice and freedom is an essential component in upholding the museum’s purpose
and commitment to the community. The Freedom Awards and public forum, and other programs that the museum hosts, challenge the scholarly notion that the museum is a static memorial to a sanitized version of the history. In her critical review of the National Civil Rights Museum, architectural theorist Mabel Wilson argued that museum’s exhibits and construction exude a regrettable “spirit of placelessness” and “fixity” that exalt a bygone era without encouraging participants to actively engage in the present (23; 18). Historian Glenn T. Eskew described the museum as a “ubiquitous display of monochromatic life-cast mannequins riding on a bus, sitting in at a lunch counter, protesting with signs, or marching to freedom” (175). While it is true that the 1991 and 2002 structures do not include the state of the art, interactive technology that is now standard in gadgets as inexpensive as cellular phones, the museum compensates for this perceived static presentation through programming.

To measure the National Civil Rights Museum based merely on the exhibits on its walls is like evaluating a painting merely on the quality of its frame. It is what happens inside the frame that adds meaning to the work of art, and the museum is a mosaic that blends local, national, and international stories from great leaders and ordinary people alike. Whether its hosting a Hall of Fame induction service for the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals, providing performance space for the Memphis performing arts troupe Watoto De Afrika, showing streaming video of President Baraka Obama’s inauguration, co-hosting a film festival, or organizing a mentoring program where boys learn skills from men in the community—part of the museum’s value lies in its willingness to lend its auditorium and meeting rooms to local organizations. At times, this takes an act of courage. In 2010, the museum took on one of the most pressing American policy issues of the 21st century by co-hosting a rally on its lawn for
immigrant rights and immigration reform. The museum suffered some backlash because of the event. Answering the criticism, director Beverly Robertson, said “one of museum’s roles is to educate on timely issues” (qt. “May Day Rally” 2010).

It is because of such programming that sociologist and historian James Loewen deemed the National Civil Rights Museum as one of the “notable exceptions” of civil rights landmarks that tackle controversial issues (423). Locals also laud such engagements. After attending a 2011 public forum at the museum on the politically charged issue of city and county school consolidation, a Memphian said, “With this being the National Civil Rights Museum, and the Civil Rights Movement being so community based, it only makes sense that they would do programs like this.” As one of the museum’s neighbors expressed, “the museum is not a tourist site; it’s a mode of education.”

Its community outreach efforts have increased in recent years, but the museum established a pattern of community engagement early-on with its choir and other events. For example, when President Bill Clinton appointed Memphian Bernice Donald’s to the federal court for the Western District of Tennessee in 1995, the museum held a reception to celebrate her accomplishment as the first African American female appointee to that bench. The reception was part white gloves tea party and part career day for the daughters of dignitaries and girls from the community service club Sistahs, Inc. The museum documented the event by giving participants a children’s book chronicling Donald’s life story.\textsuperscript{xi}

\textsuperscript{xi} In full disclosure, I am the author of this book entitled, \textit{Paper Doll Dreams Lead to a Robe of Justice}. 129
Since its inception, the National Civil Rights Museum has used narratives from people like the Memphis sanitation workers, Mandela, King, and Donald to prick the conscious of its guests. As Robertson explained:

> While we are sort of anchored here, and we were created as the result of a struggle of striking sanitation workers, we also understand that the plight of the sanitation workers is also felt by many other people in many other places of the world. And so we use their story as an opportunity to sort of spin into other issues, other civil rights areas of the globe (2009).

This exploration of history through the stories of those who shaped it is described as the linking of narratives. Via this approach, psychologists Tatyana Kosyaeva, Shaw Rowe and James Wertsch state that museums and other public monuments provide a space “where personal, private or autobiographical narratives come into contact with larger-scale, collective or national narratives in mutually inter-animating ways” (98). These stories take on new significance as guests filter them through their own experiences. The original narratives outlined in the museum’s exhibit connected stories of different individuals, institutions, and towns involved in the American Civil Rights Movement, but today the museum works diligently to connect the national civil rights campaign to the global human rights campaign.

Prominently displayed in the 2002 expansion wing are several wooden benches that encircle synchronized televisions. The four screens hang from the ceiling and continuously cycle through a documentary called *We Want to be Free: The International Struggle for Human Rights!* The specially commissioned eight-minute clip opens with the narrator discussing First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt’s role in helping the United Nations draft the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Throughout history, various governments have ignored these inalienable rights to sovereignty, justice, citizenship, freedom of expression, and equal pay for equal work.
But as the film notes, it is the institution of American slavery that combined all of these inhumane practices into a debilitating system. The film continues with comments from past Freedom Awards recipients, and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, who warns against the danger of indifference and apathy. The short film intertwines clips of African-American entertainer Harry Belafonte, Asian-American activist Jane Bai, and South African constitutional court judge Albert Sach. Their sound bites are woven in between footage of the collapsing Berlin Wall and the Tiananmen Square Massacre.

Romano sees American civil rights museums’ expansion into the cause of global human rights as little more than a self-promoting game of Follow the Leader. As she explained:

Civil rights museums for the most part tell a triumphant story of political and social transformation. Their exhibits emphasize the movement’s success in ending legal segregation and opening up the political system to African Americans.

The narrative presented at civil rights museums suggests that the movement helped fulfill the promises of American democracy in a way that enabled the United States to serve as a model for others around the world. Although there is no question that the civil rights movement has served as a powerful example for activists around the globe, the choice of nearly all of these museums to stress the movement’s positive impact in the international arena serves to reinforce their celebratory narrative (45; 49).

In regards to the National Civil Rights Museum, this statement is problematic on many fronts. Foremost, it ignores or misinterprets the meaning of one of the most prominent exhibits in the Exploring the Legacy expansion, which Romano visited. In the expansion wing, a slick black wall more than seven-feet long features 26 names etched in tiny print, each illuminated by a small white light. The names are luminaries representing four continents, nine nations, 12 political movements, and more than 50 years of violent world history as each freedom fighter
was the victim of assassination. Far from a “celebratory narrative,” the martyrs’ names are symbolic specks of light pecking through a seemingly endless wall of dark injustice.

In a permanent exhibit called “Lingering Questions,” the museum challenges the comfortable notion that King’s assassin faced justice by outlining the various conspiracy theories that surround his death. These theories include a 1999 civil verdict that Loyd Jowers conspired with the United States government to murder King. For those who miss the subtlety of the wall of luminaries and “Lingering Questions,” there are two explicit examples of the museum’s stance on the current state of human rights. In large red letters, the first panel in the museum reads “The Unremitting Struggle.” Similarly, one of the final panels visitors see before they exit states, “The struggle will continue with determination and courage.” Such intentionality does not relay a triumphal story. Instead, the museum chronicles victories while reminding visitors that there are still unanswered questions and much difficult, and potentially dangerous, work ahead.

As for Romano’s point that the museum situates the American Civil Rights Movement as the model for political and social transformation, I contend that it presents the museum as a model for such work. As it exhibits, Mohandas K. Gandhi’s philosophy and actions in the Indian Independence Movement inspired the American model. King, a well-read scholar of history, adhered to Gandhi’s principle of Satyagraha, which means nonviolent noncooperation. Fittingly, the museum’s walls feature a timeline of milestones in Gandhi’s life sponsored by the Indian Fund of Greater Memphis. Invigorating this connection, the museum cosponsors the annual Gandhi-King Conference on Peacemaking, which has trained local and regional peace activists since 2004. In 2010, topics at the conference included searching for common ground in the Middle East. By teaching participants the skills and strategies to fight contemporary social
ills, the tourist attraction is directly investing in the local community through leadership development.

On an administrative level, the museum fosters contemporary cross-cultural partnerships through its participation in the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience (ICSC). Founded in New York City in 1999, the nonprofit organization is a network of museums and memorials worldwide that work to turn sites of tragedy into sites of transformation, and uses past tragedies to teach modern day lessons of cooperation and justice (Abram 8). Through its partnership with the ICSC, the National Civil Rights Museum is helping to “redirect the critical gaze of southern studies outwards” in order to better understand a global history of forced removal, slavery, segregation, and oppression (Cohn 13). As of 2011, the Memphis museum was one of only 17 accredited “Sites of Conscience,” a distinction it shares with renowned institutions such as the Gulag Museum at Perm-36 in Russia, the Liberation War Museum in Bangladesh, Corporación Parque por la Paz Villa Grimaldi in Chile, the Peace School Foundation of Monte Sole in Italy, and The District Six Museum in Cape Town.

Like King and Mandela, the leaders of The District Six Museum and the National Civil Rights Museum have similar challenges and goals. District Six was once a bustling, multicultural neighborhood in Cape Town. In 1965, the government disbanded and “racially cleansed” it to separate the races. The District Six museum foundation started in 1989. The museum officially opened in 1994, three years after the National Civil Rights Museum. The museum’s goal is to explore the politics of forced removal. This theme not only resonates in South Africa, but also in Memphis with the removal of the Choctaw and Cherokee Nations in the 19th century and the bulldozer revolution that struck Beale Street in the 20th century. Through the ICSC, staff at The
District Six Museum and The National Civil Rights Museum developed a relationship where they discuss how to measure effectiveness, and the possibility of future staff exchanges (Robertson 2009).

In 2009, leaders from the 17 institutions and peers from other non-accredited sites convened in Memphis for the ICSC’s annual conference. This was the first time the organization held its annual meeting in the United States. As part of the coalition’s proactive agenda, the members hosted a colloquium with Tennessee high school students where students drafted a mock proposal encouraging the U.S. and Cuban governments to transform Guantánamo Bay from a site of torture into a site of memory. The students’ ideas were incorporated into the growing international movement that focuses on the future of the military prison. An ICSC symposium on the subject is scheduled at Columbia University in April 2011. Unlike the now extinguished American Civil Rights Movement, the Close Gitmo campaign and the Middle East Crisis are contemporary problems that peace activists or colloquium participants from the museum may one day help resolve. This may seem like a lofty aspiration, but few would have envisioned that five months after receiving training at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee that Rosa Parks would go on to become the Mother of the Civil Rights Movement.

Museum director Beverly Robertson very much sees the museum as a training ground and change agent. Teaching younger generations about the Civil Rights Movement, the Indian Independence Movement, and other uprisings helps “young people today learn the strategies that were executed and implore those, and become activists in trying to really institute change,” she said (2009). More than a lifeless structure grounded in the politics of the past, through its 2002 expansion, Freedom Awards series, the Gandhi-King Conference on Peacemaking, and
membership in the ICSC, the National Civil Rights Museum is a site where international issues color a local canvas.

**Battles on the Home Front**

The first two sections of this chapter delved into the history of the museum, and its efforts at connecting the local with the global. In the concluding section, I pivot to how this global/local interplay, combined with the museum’s response to criticism and rich slate of events, make the attraction a model of sustainable tourism. Some background on the sustainable tourism movement is appropriate, followed by a discussion of the museum’s efforts at community sustainability through civic engagement. From there, an examination of the museum’s ties with the corporate community puts into context a 2007 controversy criticizing these bonds. Just like the protest and presence of Jacqueline Smith adds texture to the museum’s landscape, a 2007 rebuke from one of the museum’s founders spurred changes that will enrich the museum-going experience for tourists and locals alike in the 21st century.

Balancing the desires of tourists with the needs of locals is one of the principles of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism developments are relatively young projects rooted in the tenets most broadly described in the 1987 publication *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development* (Cole 629; Wilbanks 542). The document is often called the Brundtland Report after the commission’s chair and former Norway Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland. The report defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” The report comprehensively outlines the opportunities and threats tied to
population control, conservation, green energy, effective governance, and the pursuit of peace (WCED 1987). Sustainable tourism emerged from this sustainability movement, and gained a niche audience among tourism practitioners in the 1990s.

In 1992, representatives from more than 170 governments attended the United Nations’ Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and signed *Agenda 21*. This ambitious, nonbinding agreement was a “theoretical landmark” where world leaders begin to gradually shift away from a top down approach to development towards community based management of tourist locales, said tourism scholar Valene Smith (191). Smith defines sustainable tourism as travel practices that 1.) Encourage economic development 2.) Protect natural resources 3.) Teach the history and culture of a destination, and 4.) Enhance the quality of life for the host community. Four years after *Agenda 21*, the World Travel and Tourism Council, the World Tourism Organization and the Earth Council published the follow up document *Agenda 21 for the Travel and Tourism Industry*, which set industry standards for responsible tourism management. Today, the protection of natural resources is the most discussed tenet of sustainable tourism as an analysis by the *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* found (Lu 9-10). Thus, this paper’s examination of sustainable tourism from a social and cultural perspective helps to diversify this emerging field.

The growing zeal over sustainable tourism is not shared by all who work in the field. Australian tourism researcher Jim Macbeth said that “suicidal optimism” threatens its lofty reforms (383). Geographer Thomas Wilbanks called sustainable development an ambitious “slogan” not yet grounded in theory (541). Ecotourism expert Geoffrey Wall labeled sustainable tourism a “fuzzy concept” (30-46). Although more idealized than implemented, there are several examples of sustainable tourism at work.
One international example that found a local audience is the *Amani ya Juu* sewing and reconciliation network in Nairobi, Kenya. Swahili for “higher peace,” *Amani ya Juu* provides employment and training for refugee women displaced by war, famine, genocide, and political unrest. At *Amani ya Juu*, specialists teach the women coping skills to recover psychologically from their displacement and jobs skills to recover economically. The participants sell their handmade goods and meals in a campus store and restaurant, and these sales fund the nonprofit organization. By operating the businesses, the women learn the principles of entrepreneurship in hopes that they will one day implement them in their own businesses. American and European tourists frequent the craft store and restaurant. During a trip to Kenya in 2009, a group of Memphis-area women were so moved by the organization’s mission and the quality of the women’s work that they bought $6,000 worth of merchandise to sell at their Memphis church (Stout 2009).

Cities in the United States have much to gain from analyzing these types of sustainable tourism projects that are growing increasingly popular in the developing world. According to global south theory, the U.S. South mirrors regions of the “Third World” where high rates of poverty, poor healthcare, and low educational attainment hinder development. Sustainable tourism accounts for only a small market-share of the tourism economy in U.S. cities overall, but balancing the needs of the environment, locals and visitors is critically important in urban spaces because tourism in high-density areas is an intrusive practice with tremendous impact on a community’s employment, landscape, and social structure (Timur and Getz 220-232; Harrill 2).

Domestically, the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh is one of the leaders in merging neighborhood sustainability with tourism. In 2007, it won a $50,000 prize from the Bruner
Foundation in Cambridge, Massachusetts for its redevelopment projects in Pittsburgh’s Northside neighborhood. With a goal of turning the Northside into Pittsburgh’s family district, the museum houses six nonprofit agencies that focus on children’s issues including a Head Start program for children in the community. It and other cultural institutions in the area adopt nearby schools. The agencies work with educators to infuse unique curriculums in the classrooms in an effort to elevate the profile of area schools, and attract new families. It led a successful fundraising campaign to renovate a shuttered Northside theater. Also, it awarded micro-grants that funded public kayak lessons, community art labs, poetry nights, and bike tours that highlighted neighborhood history. Museum director Jane Werner said that the guiding question that inspired the multifaceted outreach was, “What happens if we just keep trying to build?” By exploring the answer to this question, the museum’s staff built stronger bonds with the community, built its visitor’s base, and furthered government efforts to rebuild a neighborhood.

In the 21st century, many museums are no longer spaces where visitors come to passively observe. Instead, some museums are expanding their outreach, technology, corporate partnerships, budgets, and missions to meet the changing expectations of their guests. The National Civil Rights Museum has undergone the described transformation. The museum evolved from a national site into a national and international site; and today, it more fully embraces its role as a national, international, and local site. The name, National Civil Rights Museum, announced the initial national scope of the space. It differed from the name of its contemporaries that evoked a local or regional focus like the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute that opened in 1992, and the Albany Civil Rights Movement Museum that opened in Albany, Georgia in 1998, and later, changed its name to the Albany Civil Rights Institute. Another early
indicator of the Memphis museum’s commitment to national and international causes is illustrated in its mission statement that reads:

The National Civil Rights Museum, located at the Lorraine Motel, the assassination site of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., chronicles key episodes of the American civil rights movement and the legacy of this movement to inspire participation in civil and human rights efforts globally, through our collections, exhibitions, and educational programs.

The Lorraine Motel is the only local place anchor in the statement, and the words Memphis, Tennessee, and South are noticeably absent. Through this statement, museum founders declared their intent of building an institution that was simultaneously “American” and “global.” Mission creep occurred as the museum began to turn its gaze to issues that affected the home front, and focused on local sustainability.

Noting its transition from national shrine into a community space, National Civil Rights Museum director Beverly Robertson said:

It used to be that people would walk into museums, look at what’s on the wall and then leave. Now museums are places of inspiration. They are safe places where people can discuss subjects that they may not be safe discussing anywhere else. You know, they are places where transformation literally occurs. So the role of the museum is a lot different. And there’s a lot debate sometimes among museums as to whether or not we ought to maintain in that sort of shrine moniker for museums. Or are we both sites of memory and places of active participation and involvement? And so, we understand that our role is not just that of a shrine or a place of memory. But it is a place where people can actually discuss, be transformed. It’s shared community space. It’s space that is owned not just by individuals who are of means, but people who have no means.

Maintaining the level of accessibility and programming that Robertson articulates is an expensive and sensitive endeavor. In 2009, the museum’s annual budget was $5 million. That
year, its revenues were $1.6 million from admissions fees (Return 2010). The museum derived the other $3.4 million dollars from a combination of gift shop sales, grants, and donations. The museum benefits from generous corporate sponsorship. As mentioned earlier, International Papers in one of the sponsors of the Freedom Awards Forums, and Denny’s and FedEx made substantial contributions to the 2002 expansion. As noted in Chapter Two, the Elvis Presley Charitable Foundation is another generous donor. The museum foundation awards these benefactors with appointments on its board. Throughout the years, the museum’s board of directors has read like a list of who’s who in corporate Memphis. AutoZone founder Pitt Hyde is one of the museum’s founding board members. Leonard James, corporate advisor to ExxonMobil Corporation, is a 2011 member. Because of its reliance on corporate donations and government grants, the museum must be provocative without being conspicuously controversial. Subsequently, one of the criticisms that the museum has faced over the years is that its dependence on corporate donors jeopardizes its autonomy. In 2007, long-held frustrations over this issue came to a head.

Like the battle with protester Jacquelyn Smith, the highly publicized debate over the museum’s finances started as controversy but ended with opportunity. The museum’s handling of the 2007 controversy reflects the challenging and occasionally uncomfortable collaborations that sustainable tourism requires. That year, the museum’s board of directors considered the option of buying its building from the State of Tennessee for the asking price of $1. What began as a conversation about leasing the building verses buying the building swelled into a feud over corporate control, the diversity of the board, overdue maintenance, transparency of operations, and lack of community oversight. Lobbing the attacks were D’Army Bailey, the wounded
visionary behind the museum. Bailey, who was serving as a Circuit Court judge in 2007, remained passionate about the state of the museum despite splitting with the board some 16 years earlier. In fierce opposition to the transfer of state ownership to a heavily white corporate board, the African American judge blasted the museum’s foundation as a Republican-leaning organization dominated by white blood money. He petitioned museum leaders to discontinue their partnership with AutoZone founder Pitt Hyde while the car parts company litigated a racial discrimination lawsuit filed by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Furthermore, he charged that continued government oversight was necessary to allow community control to trump corporate control (Democracy Now! 2007; Baker 2007).

Bailey raised legitimate concerns and was passionate, but not always tactful, as he railed against the museum in media outlets throughout the country. However, his fiery approach was effective at garnering political support from the Tennessee Black Caucus. In December of 2007, the State of Tennessee signed a memorandum of understanding with the museum’s board that, instead of selling the building, granted a lease extension until 2022. The memorandum also stipulated that at least 60 percent of the board should be African American, a figure roughly in line with the black population of Memphis. It created new positions on the board reserved for a state legislature, a laborer, a civil rights historian, and a civil rights activist. It produced more transparency by requiring the museum to post its records online, and to hold a regular stakeholders meeting with the public. Lastly, it charged the museum to create more educational programs for youth [Figure 15]. For its part, the State agreed to pay for costly maintenance issues that plagued the nearly 100 year old original structure.
Remaining community controlled and responsive to local stakeholders are two of the pillars of sustainable tourism. As director museum Beverly Robertson found, such engagement, even amidst controversy, has tangible benefits. She said, in hindsight, “One of the beautiful byproducts of this was that the museum raised more money after this was over because people understood the needs of the institution far better than they ever had” (2008). The museum welcomed 23,294 more guests in 2007 than in the previous year. In 2009, the museum’s visitor count was 216,808, the most ever up to that point. After implementing the changes listed in the memorandum of understanding, the museum’s rating raised from two stars to three stars with the independent evaluator Charity Navigator. Four stars is the watchdog group’s highest honor. Moreover, in 2011, the museum began the first phase of a $26 million renovation project that will add more space for community events, infuse exhibits with interactive digital technology, and give updates on recently solved Civil Rights cases.

In many ways, 405 Mulberry Street is a public forum that is strengthened through struggle. Here, adversities like King’s death, Smith’s protest, and D’Army Bailey’s battles become integral parts of the ever-evolving, compelling narrative of the site. Through his death, King momentarily brought a racially divided city together 23 years later to celebrate the resurrection of 405 Mulberry Street. Through her long-suffering protests, Smith reminds visitors that African American activists have never spoken with a unified voice. Through his legal prowess and political influence, Bailey accomplished substantive changes that make the museum more culturally enriching and connected to locals. These conflicts and gains reflect the pursuit of recognition, resources, and equity that characterize the Civil Rights Movement and sustainable tourism.
Figure 12: People gather in front of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis in on April 4, 1969 to commemorate the one year anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King’s death.
Photo Credit: Ernest Withers/ Courtesy of the Memphis Public Library and Information Center.

Figure 13: Visitors from China identify the spot where King was murdered, April 2011.
Photo Credit: Cathryn Stout.
Figure 14: Civil rights advocates march on Main Street in Memphis, TN in the 1960s while segregationists stage a counter protest. Photo Credit: Ernest Withers/ Courtesy of the Memphis Public Library and Information Center.

Figure 15: A docent at the National Civil Rights Museum leads children in an activity at the Target Free Family Fun Day in 2010. Photo Credit: The Commercial Appeal.
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Conclusion
There is encouraging news for the future of sustainable tourism in Tennessee. In 2009, the Tennessee Department of Tourist Development hosted educational workshops for officials and practitioners. In her presentation called “Sustainable Tourism: Next Steps for Tennessee Communities,” historian Heather Bailey challenged tourism executives to work towards “providing storylines that encourage travelers and residents to explore and discover heritage sites, landscape, crafts, (and) traditions” because “community-centered projects and programs create infrastructure for future development” (Bailey slides 6 and 7). At the 2009 Tennessee Governor’s Conference on Tourism, representatives from the U.S. Travel Association noted that public awareness of sustainable tourism is growing. According to the presentation, in 2007, nearly 60 percent of respondents in the organization’s survey said they were unfamiliar with sustainable tourism. In 2009, that number shrunk to 35 percent.

Well educated, upscale travelers were the most likely to be abreast of the issue. Additionally, one in four respondents said they would consider paying slightly more for socially and environmentally conscious travel experiences. The association concluded that travelers are “beginning to make decisions based on sustainability criteria” (Tourism Trends 2009). Much of the research in the state tourism commission’s “sustainability toolbox” emphasizes the importance of sustainability on the environment and in rural communities. The insufficient data from sociological and urban perspectives provides an opportunity for scholars to propel the industry towards more comprehensive studies.
What we have gleaned from the research and the three venues examined here is that the host community’s perception of a tourist development is affected by several factors including race, outreach, and inclusiveness. In a notable review, tourism scholar Rich Harrill found that cultural minorities express more negative attitudes towards tourist developments in their communities than white Americans (12). Although Harrill offers little explanation for these varying attachments, some research from the closely related recreation and leisure fields suggests that minorities perceive fewer opportunities than white Americans to interact with planned leisure and tourist attractions because the leisure and tourist industries are dominated by white developers, and the resulting products largely reflect the interests of those who created them. The ethnicity theory states that an individual’s ethnic background influences his or her choice of recreational activities. Further studies show that cultural identity is a stronger predictor than class in determining how individuals spend their leisure time (Knopf 487).

The National Endowment of the Arts found that, in general, white Americans adults are more likely than black Americans adults to participate in cultural and leisure pursuits like visiting historic sites and museums. Concomitantly, the aggregated data showed a few key exceptions to the overall trend. The gaps narrowed significantly when black survey respondents answered questions about attending and participating in jazz shows, attending and participating in dance recitals, participating in theater, and practicing creative writing. The cultural pursuits that African Americans were more likely to participate in than white Americans were writing music, performing choral music and purchasing art (“The Black and White Divide…” 13; Survey of Public Participation in the Arts 2008). As museums, entertainment districts, and other attractions increasingly compete for the leisure time of Americans, such racial considerations are
necessary when creating and marketing a tourist attraction that can garner broad support—especially in a city that is 61 percent African American like Memphis.

Concerts by the Stax Music Academy and dance performances by Watoto De Afrika at the National Civil Rights Museum align with two of the cultural pursuits that African Americans show higher rates of supporting. More closely coordinating attractions around the interests and needs of the local community are fundamental practice of sustainable tourism that could hold great potential in Memphis. Untapped possibilities for African American support and involvement lie in continuing to strengthen black Memphians’ connections with the National Civil Rights Museum, Beale Street, and Graceland through culturally appealing programming and partnerships. This author can easily envision a jazz tribute concert to Elvis, a Graceland charter school, a Beale Street blues academy, or a music writing workshop on Beale. Or, in the vein of Amani ya Juu, a Made in Memphis shop stocked and operated by residents who live around Graceland and Downtown Memphis, with the revenue funneled back into an enrichment program benefitting those in the respective neighborhood. In the short term, such an arrangement would require trading a slice of profits for community goodwill. In the long term, a positive social exchange of this nature is in the economic interest of all because, according to Harrill, without “the equitable distribution of tourism’s economic benefits (a community’s) envy can quickly turn into open hostility towards tourists, eventually contributing to the destination’s decline” (2). In contrast, positive associations are mutually beneficial to the quality of life for locals and the viability of the tourist attraction.

Through this work, I have attempted to show how local African American voices are critical to the future success of Beale Street, Graceland, and the National Civil Rights Museum. I
used the museum as a literary foil to Beale Street and Graceland because, although it is not a
perfect model, its history of outreach, and continued dialogue, even amidst conflict, allows it to
remain responsive and relevant to tourists and locals alike. It is this openness to community-
driven growth that representatives with Beale Street and those at Graceland should consider as
they chart the next stages for these important sites to ensure that both the attractions and their
host communities have a sustainable future.
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University of Mississippi, University, MS. Graduate Teaching Assistant, 2009-2010.

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Teen Appeal Camp, Memphis, TN. Guest Facilitator, 2003-2009. As a reporter for The Commercial Appeal, led annual workshops on feature writing for aspiring journalists. Additional highlights of journalism career include writing a weekly column called Chick Chat and covering the Inauguration of President Barack Obama in Washington DC.

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