

University of Mississippi

eGrove

---

Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Graduate School

---

2013

## Last (Un)Fair Deal Goin' Down: A Case Study On The Racial Ideologies And Projects Advanced By The Blues Tourism Industry In Clarksdale, Mississippi

Kathryn Anne Radishofski  
*University of Mississippi*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd>



Part of the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Radishofski, Kathryn Anne, "Last (Un)Fair Deal Goin' Down: A Case Study On The Racial Ideologies And Projects Advanced By The Blues Tourism Industry In Clarksdale, Mississippi" (2013). *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 870.

<https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/870>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

# **LAST (UN)FAIR DEAL GOIN' DOWN:**

A CASE STUDY ON THE RACIAL IDEOLOGIES AND PROJECTS ADVANCED BY  
THE BLUES TOURISM INDUSTRY IN CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI

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

Kathryn Radishofski

April 2013

Copyright Kathryn Radishofski 2013  
ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

## ABSTRACT

Considerations regarding the mechanisms through which cultural commodification may be woven into the fabric of racial inequity are indispensable when conducting research on African American music tourism in the United States, as white consumers and producers may attach invidious racial mythologies to such heritage, while the industries themselves often take root in communities inhabited by multiple racial groups possessing disparate social and economic power. With these bearings in mind, this thesis assesses the impact of blues tourism development on the experiences of, and between, blacks and whites in Clarksdale, Mississippi, an endemically impoverished Delta city populated by a sizable African American majority. Taking the industry's racial configuration as a starting point—wherein whites predominate both as superintendents and tourists—I seek to expose blues tourism “sites” that occasion a translation of the symbolic elements of racism into more concrete manifestations. In an effort to limn the symbolic, I identify and unpack the racial perspectives of many of those helming Clarksdale's blues tourism industry, ferreting out moments in which white producers use African American musical heritage, and its capitalistic formations, to articulate racial ideologies. Where these systems of belief coalesce behind various racial projects, structural forms of racism take shape. The discursive regions anchoring the dual modalities of this process in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry include the diametric rhetorical strategies of color-blind racism and

authenticity; racial reconciliation; participation in the industry; beneficiary rights; and differences in black and white conceptual approaches to racial phenomena intersecting with, and generated by, the industry. At length, I show how the racial ideologies of Clarksdale's white blues tourism managers produce and support a number of racial projects emerging from these topical arenas that contribute to the economic and social marginalization of the city's African Americans.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Jodi Skipper, for her exceptional insight and unflinching criticality. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Katie McKee, Jeff Jackson, and Andy Harper, for their excellent feedback and recommendations. And finally, I would like to thank my parents, friends, and my dog Harry for putting up with the many neurotic and phantom concerns I conjured during the production of this paper.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
Activism, Intentions, And The Responsibilities Of Race-Based Research	10
<b>Chapter 1: History of Clarksdale and its Blues Tourism Industry</b>	<b>19</b>
Clarksdale in Black and White	20
Local Tourism and the Blues	22
Blues Tourism and Racial Tension	29
<b>Chapter 2: Authenticity and Color-blind Racism</b>	<b>38</b>
Keeping it “Real”: Authenticity and Blues Tourism in Clarksdale	40
Color-blind Racism in Clarksdale	46
Perspectives on Clarksdale’s Racial Dynamic	49
Perspectives on Clarksdale’s Blues Tourism Industry	55
“You’re all American here. You have the same passport ... you got same rights, too”: Abstract Liberalism, Cultural Racism, and the Stylistics of the Group/Individual Binary	62
Conclusion	68
<b>Chapter 3: Visions of Reconciliation, Fantasies of Public Space</b>	<b>72</b>

Defining and Engaging in Racial Peacemaking	73
Public Space and Racial Reconciliation	84
Conclusion	94
<b>Chapter 4: Who Should Participate, Who Should Benefit?</b>	<b>99</b>
Participating	101
Blues Tourism, The Myth of the Disorganized Poor, and Differential	
Racialization	111
Reproducing The Industry And Its Racial Structure: The Delta Blues Museum's	
Arts And Education Program	114
Benefitting	117
Conclusion	122
<b>Conclusion: The Social Costs of White Management</b>	<b>125</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>List of Appendices</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Vita</b>	<b>149</b>



## INTRODUCTION

Since the 1970s, residents of the Mississippi Delta have been making efforts to develop events, memorial sites, and accommodations catering to travellers seeking to engage with the region's blues heritage (King 56). In Clarksdale, Mississippi, the Delta's crown jewel of blues history destinations, the past decade welded blues tourism investments into a photogenic downtown infrastructure. Here, night clubs, restaurants, hotels, music and art retailers vie to service touristic cravings for the city's black musical heritage, while bringing monetary palliatives to the depressed Delta economy. Capitalizing on local African American musical heritage has also provided Mississippi with an opportunity to launch a public relations campaign that combats the state's popular image as a bastion of racial intolerance and conflict with claims that its participating communities are experiencing enhanced interracial harmony through an embrace of regional blues culture (King 9–11). However, as my research suggests, while some of the perspectives of the industry's white producers seem to align with the state's campaign, the racial ideologies instantiated through their actual activities are helping to produce a situation antithetical to it, in which the blues tourism industry contributes to a widening of the racial divide and reinforces a racial hierarchy crowned by whiteness.

At the helm of Clarksdale's nascent blues tourism industry is a mostly white cadre of civic leaders and entrepreneurs. Not surprisingly, the industry's racial structure has often been the focus of the body of extant research on Delta blues tourism. Both Stephen A. King,

author of *I'm Feeling the Blues Right Now: Blues Tourism and the Mississippi Delta*—the only full-length text on Delta blues tourism to date—and other scholars have speculated that the racial dynamic of the industry may attenuate regional African American support for blues tourism initiatives (King 8-9; Dempsey iv).

As a critical component of meaning making in place-based identity, narratives developed for tourists can contribute to the defining of local populations through a commodification of their culture and history in consistent and highly visible forms. As Clarksdale's blues heritage continues to emerge as the central focus of its tourism industry, the racial overtones of this tradition intertwine with the city's identity. Thus, blues tourism represents a high stakes cultural arena useful for divining responses to, appropriation of, and the desire to construct contemporary racial identities in the Delta. With these considerations and the industry's racial structure in mind, this study deploys race, tourism, and representational theory in order to illuminate how the white and black superintendents of Clarksdale's blues tourism industry conceive of and utilize race in constructing and promoting the city's African American musical heritage, and the way such constructions contribute to the development of racial projects that undermine, and underwrite, social, civic, and entrepreneurial agendas in the industry. Ultimately, I aim to glean a sense of the ways the racial ideologies dominating the blues tourism industry—as sourced from its white superintendents—are impacting Clarksdale's African American community through the allocation of fiscal and social resources, as well as a sense of the way constructing meanings of race may engender a waging of socio-cultural warfare on this group.

While some concerns regarding the relationship between Delta blues tourism, black-white race relations, and the socio-economic experiences of the region's African Americans have been critically illuminated and explored,<sup>1</sup> many arenas affecting this relationship remain un-, or under-, investigated. The following case study represents an effort to redress such issues by expanding the critical scope of Delta blues tourism. To this end, I have conducted a rigorous investigation of the racial ideologies held by white blues tourism producers, their understandings of local racial politics, the ways blues tourism racializes public space, and the racial motivations guiding decisions related to participating in, benefitting from, and educating through local blues tourism. Moreover, in some cases, as I will reveal, scholars themselves have drawn on the frames of color-blind racism to minimize the industry's fallout in terms of the experiences of local African Americans.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, this manuscript also occasionally acts as a counter-point to arguments put forward by Stephen A. King and other blues tourism scholars.

Nine of the ten individuals interviewed for this project are currently superintendents in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, seven of these nine producers are white. I have focused on this set of participants because, though nearly all of the researchers working on Delta blues tourism have documented the fear among musicians and locals that the industry's racial dynamic may serve as yet another mechanism through which the region's white population safeguards or reimposes its ascendancy,<sup>4</sup> no one has yet initiated a study that looks closely at trends among the racial opinions or motivations of the industry's superintendents in order to gain a clearer idea of their role in this process. And indeed, as overseers of the structure and functioning of blues tourism in Clarksdale, this group arguably remains in a unique position to wield a great

degree of influence on interracial relationships within the industry, and in the community at large. For, as Henrietta Lidchi has observed, “all cultural producers—advertisers, designers, curators, authors ... are involved in the creation of ‘myths’ in the manner in which Barthes defines this. As a consequence, these producers are inevitably the holders of symbolic power” (Hall *Representing*, 179). Additionally, sociologist Joe Feagin has averred that “much more research is needed” on “high level” white discrimination in “major institutional arenas,” and that the mainstream media shapes much of what Americans know about racial matters (139, 252). As it stands, my research will help to diminish this discursive lacuna by focusing on the racial attitudes of high-level whites in an industry that arguably acts as an arm of the mainstream media.

In the introduction to *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Stuart Hall illuminates what he later designates as the discursive approach to understanding cultural phenomena, noting that “cultural meanings are not only ‘in the head.’ They organize and regulate social practices, influence our conduct and consequently have real, practical effects,” including “mark[ing] out and maintain[ing] identity within and difference between groups” (3, 6). Insofar as this study seeks to elucidate the ways cultural meanings of race promulgated by Clarksdale’s blues tourism industry regulate practices that shape local group identities and social positions, I have employed Hall’s discursive approach. To wit, I conducted interviews with industry producers geared towards examining both the ways and the extent to which ideas about race may determine resource distribution and social experiences within the industry, and in Clarksdale in general. In this case, resources can include both the power to construct meanings for public consumption about blues music and the people who sang it, and to benefit financially or socially from

these historical narratives. Social benefits arguably accrue for racial groups (black or white, in this instance) from the institutionalization of promulgation of racial ideologies that make space for that group's dominance or promotion in the racial hierarchy, which can then contribute to that group's economic dominance.

As Chapter 1 will illustrate, and this thesis in general will reinforce, race has always been, and remains, of crucial significance to the experiences of African Americans in the Delta. Its simultaneous position as one of the foremost social structures underwriting blues mythologies contributes to the shaping of the region's blues tourism industry as a socio-cultural milieu with very different parameters of involvement for whites and blacks. The centrality of race to this research environment—and James Duncan's observation that "studies of the ... discourses of the Other have an important value in the problematizing and politicizing of the representative process; they point to the fact that this process always involves power relations" (53)—have informed my interest in giving racial theory precedence in the following analysis. Indeed, my aim here is to reveal the manifestations of power inherent to the blues tourism industry's processes of designing public narratives of place and people. I have therefore structured my project after race-based research in a number of ways. First, I employ a concept of race advocated by sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, anthropologist Leith Mullings, and any number of critical race theorists (See Delgado and Stefancic). According to these scholars, race is understood as both a social construct and a social reality "that has detrimentally affected the lives of millions of people" (Bonilla-Silva 9; Mullings 669). This definition invites a phenomenological understanding of race, wherein its status as a concrete reality derives from its function as a structure deriving from diachronic cultural, and not biological, origins, and shaping both subjective

consciousness and social, economic, and cultural experiences. Second, following Bonilla-Silva's research in *Racism Without Racists*, my analysis is largely built on qualitative data extracted from in-depth interviews with black and white superintendents in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry. Bonilla-Silva's research has demonstrated that extended interviews, as opposed to surveys, are generally more revealing of actual racial attitudes (11). Third, like *Racism Without Racists*, this research was not undertaken with the intent of identifying individuals as racists; rather, my aim is to "uncover [any] collective practices," and the perspectives and groups that support them, that may "help reinforce the contemporary racial order" (15).

Additionally, as a concept that aids in the illumination of how such practices promote a translation of the symbolic elements of racism into more concrete manifestations, Michael Omi and Howard Winant's notion of the racial project—which they use to identify collective movements that are "simultaneously an interpretation, representation or explanation of racial dynamics and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines" (56)—features prominently in this paper. In Clarksdale, blues tourism superintendents and the institutions they oversee take part in the shaping of both racial semiotics and the structures through which civic resources are channeled, drawing on racial ideologies to facilitate these racial efforts. Here, I am employing Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's definition of racial ideology, which he interprets as "the racially based frameworks used by actors to explain and justify (dominant race) or challenge (subordinate race or races) the racial status quo" (9). The various alignments between the racial ideologies of superintendents and their institutional praxes can be seen as the manifestations of competing, or at least distinct, racial projects. Opposition to

establishing “progressive” versions of the city’s blues history in public arenas (which would arguably take into account the idiom’s association with historical racial conflict), or to promoting blues altogether, as well as efforts to construct the present as post-racial—and therefore, as divorced from any need for racial-peacemaking—may represent the activities of one racial project. The celebration of the ascendancy of the Delta’s blues heritage in the social landscape, the publicizing of a version of the idiom’s history that includes an account of the oppressive racial atmosphere inhabited by the industry’s celebrated blues musicians, and the interest in using blues tourism to promote racial reconciliation, a possibility discussed in Chapter 3, may comprise the strategies of another. This research will highlight the racial projects articulated within several discursive regions of Clarksdale’s blues tourism industry, including white superintendents’ diametric rhetorical strategies of color-blind racism and authenticity; racial reconciliation and the racialization of public space; participation in the industry and its educational agendas; determinations regarding who has the right to benefit from blues tourism; and differences in black and white conceptual approaches to racial phenomena intersecting with, and generated by, the industry.

In order to orient the reader to the names, activities, and histories referenced in the forthcoming sections, Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the development of Clarksdale’s blues tourism infrastructure. My analysis also pivots around the discursive racial praxes orbiting blues music and its touristic formations, and potentially shaping economic experiences in the Delta along racial lines. I therefore offer an overview of Clarksdale’s and Coahoma County’s history of black-white relations in this chapter, paying close attention to the long-standing socio-economic disparities between these racial groups, and their more recent manifestations.

Chapter 2 reveals the existence of two contradictory racial ideologies used by white producers in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry, connecting this co-presence to the notion that the industry is comprised of both a representational site and a site to be represented—a locational dualism lending itself to two different racial strategies. The first of these strategies constitutes what Bonilla-Silva has termed color-blind racism, a form of racial discrimination that seeks to downplay the role of racism in the experiences of people of color, and which represents the dominant racial ideology in the contemporary U.S. (1). Because color-blind racism is a racial philosophy benefitting whites, the racial group dominating the upper echelons of the Delta's blues tourism industry, the frames of color-blind racism featured prominently in superintendent perspectives on racial phenomena occurring within Clarksdale and within the industry. The implementation of color-blind racism in these contexts reveals an industry-wide investment in downplaying the racial patterns evident in them, and in discouraging explanations of these patterns that impugn white involvement in blues tourism. The second racial strategy discussed in Chapter 2 involves applications of blues authenticity, an epistemology that stands in contrast to color-blind racism by invoking essentializing blues narratives foregrounding race for tourist consumption. This chapter's investigations instruct analysis based on these racial frameworks appearing in subsequent chapters.

Though Stephen A. King does not necessarily intend for his data to operate in such fashion, his work reveals a number of salient nodes of potential racial tension created or intersected by blues tourism activities. Chapters 3 and 4 take up these topical nodes. In Chapter 3, I use interviewee responses to investigate King's contention that some blues tourism producers believe the industry acts as a vehicle for racial reconciliation, as well as



the likelihood that it can. As conceptions of what the process of rapprochement entails, and the different roles blacks and whites play in it, remain central to the success of such efforts, these strands of inquiry are assessed in order to determine how attitudes about the process of racial reconciliation are revelatory of the ways the industry impacts race relations. Because, as my research shows, white superintendents consider the integration of public space, and the putative interracial conversations occurring as a result, to be the industry's greatest contribution to racial reconciliation, I therefore also explore the channels through which blues tourism precipitates the racializing of public space in Clarksdale, and how this organizing of public space along racial lines interferes with racial reconciliation.

A focus on the positions held by members of different racial groups within Clarksdale's blues tourism industry raises questions regarding the ways interracial communities seeking to capitalize on a specific racialized heritage make decisions about which groups should benefit from and participate in such cultural commodification, and in what fashion these processes should, or do, take place. As the current research on blues tourism stands, these questions remain largely unattended to. King's discourse on this subject is limited to an exploration of the notion that white producers are exploiting black musicians and co-opting African American heritage; not only is he inconclusive on these matters, but he admits to being "generally less interested in" these issues (xiv). Chapter 4 carries this investigation into new territory, examining how white superintendents understand their work, and the work of their black counterparts, in regards to questions of appropriate involvement and reward. This chapter reveals the ways economic positionality, cultural ownership, and the industry's educational agendas inform

understandings of who should participate in, and who should benefit from, blues tourism, and act as determinants of the industry's labor structure along racial lines in the process.

Collectively, these chapters will show how the racial ideologies of Clarksdale's white blues tourism managers produce and support a number of racial projects associated with the discursive sites identified, and the ways each project contributes to the economic and social marginalization of the city's African Americans. In other words, this research demonstrates how white perspectives, which predominate within Clarksdale's blues tourism industry, shape the industry in such a way that it functions in opposition to the interests of local African Americans within, and outside of, the industry. In the following section, I apply a similar critical lens to my own racial subjectivity, engaging in a self-reflexive documentation of the specific responsibilities and issues white academics conducting research on social phenomena impacting people of color must take into account, and how these considerations influence my intentions for this research with regard to its broader social implications and application.

## **ACTIVISM, INTENTIONS, AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES ASSOCIATED WITH RACE-BASED RESEARCH**

Invoking the belief in a unique "voice of color," critical race theory (CRT hereafter) takes on "issues of standing," questioning who has the right to redress the grievances produced by racism (Delgado and Stefancic 104). As scholarship dealing with racial politics can be seen as attempting such a feat in many cases (referencing CRT's discussion of the importance of historical revisionism and storytelling), some CRT practitioners are critical of white scholars working on non-white racial phenomena. Critical race theorists

themselves do not advocate the exclusion of white academics from such endeavors altogether, but believe such subject matter is “often better addressed by minorities” (104). As a white scholar researching racial ideologies as they pertain to constructions and experiences of “blackness,” certainly these considerations bear on my work. At the very least, a self-reflexive inquiry into the limitations and privileges my racial designation implies for this research is in order, and should address some of the concerns raised by issues of standing.

Part four of *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, entitled “Whiteness: The Power of Resistance,” has much to offer in terms of the self-reflexive portion of my research. Here, Joe Feagin and Hernan Vera advocate self-criticism for whites who want to be antiracist (122). As I aspire to be such, and intend for this research to act as a vehicle for antiracist processes, I offer an overview of my own sense of the ways my racial subjectivity has influenced some of the processes undertaken for this project, including the analyzing of data and the interactions between myself and the blues tourism producers, both black and I white, I interviewed. First and foremost, I found that my extended engagement with racial theory as it pertained to the requirements of this project has itself constituted an antiracist praxis by providing rhetorical and conceptual tools that allow me to think and talk about race without recourse to popular racial constructs and the frames of color-blind racism. Moreover, it has helped me to recognize opportunities (and develop the nerve to pursue them) in which to implement antiracist tactics. Second, I have become much more aware of the problematic racial thinking I do resort to, and the fact that overcoming these tendencies will require regular, extended, and committed efforts on my part. Indeed, at one point during the course of this project, I needed to reconsider and

rework several sections of my analysis that relied on monolithic and essentializing perceptions of African Americans in the Delta.

Most of the blues tourism superintendents interviewed for this research are white. Assumedly, the willingness of white producers to share racial perspectives with me remained somewhat related to my own whiteness (and perhaps to my youth and/or gender, where these structural designations carry connotations that could have engendered presumptions that I do not possess the desire to engage in, or the critical faculties capable of, decoding their responses in order to locate the problematic racial content therein). And indeed, the opinions revealed during my interviews, which were often remarkably indicting of the interviewees sharing them, imply a comfort level with me, or, at the very least, a cognitive distance from the ways their responses revealed racial attitudes demonstrating their investment in the Delta's current racial hierarchy, and the methods through which blues tourism helps to reproduce it. Moreover, they may have believed that as a white person, I shared their racial perspectives.

However, though no statements were made to suggest this was the case, my academic identity, and any criticality industry superintendents assumed this brought to our discussions on the racial politics of blues tourism in Clarksdale, likely compromised their willingness to be candid to a degree. Certainly, the oral consent script I read to blues tourism producers at the beginning of our interviews revealed the critical lens I was bringing to bear on their perspectives. Specifically, the following statement from that script was designed to make explicit my research goals as they pertained to the questions asked:

Previous investigators have also revealed a number of important areas of potential racial tension created or affected by blues tourism activities that relate to the process of shaping the structure of

the industry. My study looks closely at the perspectives or motivations of the industry's managers as they relate to these areas of tension in order to gain a clearer idea of their role in this process. This latter group will be the focus of my research (see Appendix for full script).

Additionally, my consent script offered interviewees the option of taking on an anonymous identity in order to protect their own identity vis-à-vis their responses to my inquiries.

Notably—with the exception of one interlocutor interviewed in the fall of 2011, a year and a half before the main interviews for the project were conducted—not a single interviewee accepted my offer of anonymity, suggesting that they feel comfortable sharing the perspectives detailed in this project with whatever audience they presumed would be privy to my work. What remains unanswered is the degree to which these producers would be willing to, or already do, disclose their racial ideologies to other members of the blues tourism industry, particularly those they identify as racial others.

On the other hand, while none of the white interviewees acknowledged my race, or how it factors/ed into the conducting of research for this project, both African American blues tourism superintendents referred to it during our interviews. For instance, articulating his awareness of the dictates of race-based scholarship, and the ways the statements of people of color help to buttress the claims of white scholars, Red Paden argued that I already knew the answers to the questions I was asking, that I “already knew what was going on, but [I] had to say that I interviewed blacks.” Adele Henderson used my whiteness as touchstone to calibrate his sense of the current state of racial affairs in Clarksdale. Illustrating his belief that there is still plenty of racial progress to be made in Clarksdale, Adele contended that if race weren't still an issue in the city, I wouldn't have been the only white person in his club when the interview took place. Conversely, evincing his understanding of the progress that has taken place, Adele observed that in Clarksdale's

not-so-distant past, he, as a black man, would have been inviting trouble by sitting and talking to a white woman.

Feagin and Vera also recommend that whites who want to be antiracist engage in actions that entail “risking one’s privileges and resources” (121-124). In *Racism in America*, Feagin makes an equivalent admonishment, urging whites to “ignore self-preservation” (283). Certainly, my task was complicated in this regard by the need to gain insight into the racial attitudes held by the white superintendents I interviewed; revealing my personal feelings about racial attitudes I found offensive during interviews would have proved obstructive to this goal. Moreover, assuming whites are more likely to share their feelings about race with other white people, I *used* my privilege during interviews, rather than *risking* it. Any real personal risks will arise with the publication of my research, as well as the public presentation of my documentary. In these cases, the significant risk I undertake will be alienating interviewees through a revealing of my critical assessments of their responses. Additionally, although I hope and intend for this project to be useful to African American communities in the Delta affected by blues tourism, I also stand to benefit personally from it, as it will contribute to the fulfillment of my degree requirements and provide me with material for publication and career advancement. In this sense, I can’t help but feel that this project has contributed to the perpetuating of my white privilege. Worse still, I am precipitating this process by studying the systemic racism responsible for the subordination of African Americans.

At the very least, I am attempting to, as Feagin adjures antiracist whites to do, create “conditions where more whites will have to confront the reality of the pain that systemic racism has caused Americans of color” (284). While I remain concerned that my silence in

response to the racism I came across in conducting my research did just the opposite, my hope is to encourage such conditions through the publication of my work, or the presentation of my documentary, to an audience comprised of members of Clarksdale's community. In this sense, I am guided by sociologist Howard S. Becker's afterward to the collection *Racing Research, Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies*. Following Becker's recommendations, I delayed my reactions to the problematic ways of thinking about race I encountered in Clarksdale in order to glean a better sense of the degree and forms of racism shaping the city's blues tourism industry; in other words, I remained, as France W. Twine and Jonathon W. Warren suggest, "quiet in order to learn more about what [I] am trying to change" (Becker 249). I believe, as do these authors, that with this information in hand, I will be able to more effectively use my research to combat structural racism created or reinforced by the city's blues tourism activities (247-249).

In the foreword to *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics and Methods of Activist Scholarship*, Craig Calhoun describes activist scholarship as being more than the "'application' of previously accumulated knowledge" (xvii). Rather, such work will only be able to "contribute all that it really can ... through [the] production and mobilization of knowledge" that can serve the "purpose of ... address[ing] public issues or help[ing] specific constituencies" (xxi, xxv). This project, and the "knowledge" I feel has been produced in carrying it out, marks the first instantiation of my desire to become an activist scholar. Drawing on Calhoun's work, I currently define this academic subjectivity through my commitment to using my work in a way that informs "social action in pursuit of social change," and to the production of "knowledge that can matter" (xxi). Indeed, as I am anxious to produce research that more immediately transcends the boundaries of

academia so that it may be of use to the communities I work with, I readily submit to an “activist” designation. In spite of the fact that some anthropologists believe an activist stance discredits the anthropologist,<sup>5</sup> I am guided by Leith Mullings’ insistence that anthropologists studying race must “address the issue of public engagement and praxis ... [because] no matter how well we research racism, it will remain largely irrelevant unless we are able to get our analyses out of the academy and into public discourse” (685).

That being said, this research is currently limited in its activist dimensions by the gap between producing knowledge encoded in academic jargon, and the translation of such knowledge into social agendas. While I plan to submit this work to those I interviewed, the academic language and “scathing indictments” (as my thesis advisor described them) contained in the following chapters likely ensure that it will fail to serve the ends noted in the preceding paragraph; instead, it is probable that these superintendents will not feel compelled to use this research to restructure their approaches to blues tourism such that they cease to work against the interests of local African Americans.

As I feel that I have come into this project with an interest in advocating for African American communities in the Delta, my hope is to embed this research, as a microcosm case study, into larger activist institutions and processes targeting the specific social experiences of this group. To this end, following my thesis defense, I intend to produce a documentary that may serve as a more practical conduit for my findings. Here, I am guided by Marianne Fulton’s assertion that “the public’s judgments about historical and contemporary incidents are often based on the photographs available to show them” (Hall *Representing*, 84).



Writing at the turn of the twenty-first century, Becker warns that activist research has rarely made a noticeable change in the situations it hopes to ameliorate, has mostly failed to fulfill the intentions of its practitioners, and that it can put the groups or individuals one is hoping to help at risk for collateral damage (247-254). Thus, any foray into the realm of activist research requires a careful consideration of the means through which one introduces analysis into non-academic settings. Accordingly, I plan to work with community members in Clarksdale, if there are any, interested in using this work to facilitate racial reconciliation. Such collaboration may help to avoid or lessen the negative impacts precipitated by the introduction of my work to Clarksdale's blues tourism community, as individuals with more nuanced understanding of the community's social functioning and vulnerabilities will help to shape this post-analytical work. Additionally, I aim to contact Rhondalyn Peairs, the former documentary projects coordinator at the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation, to discuss ways that this project might make practical and productive contact with Clarksdale's blues tourism community. Importantly, this post-analytical work will likely involve a refining of my findings as I collaborate with laypeople and my project's interlocutors. For, the

knowledge social scientists bring to activism ... is incomplete. It has to be communicated, and this always means rendering it in ways that foreground certain aspects more than others, that illuminate some dimensions and leave others in the shadows. Indeed, it is partly through the effort to communicate knowledge to nonspecialists that activists (like teachers) see new implications of what they know, new dimensions to issues they thought they understood fully, and sometimes limits to their own grasp of what they thought were established truths (Calhoun xix).

Considering antiracists' tactics, Liz Walz writes that "as white people, our organizing must be accountable to the people of color with whom we wish to stand in solidarity," and

should include “following and supporting, not taking over.” Granted that the interest in doing so actually exists, my ultimate intention for using this research to antiracist ends involves working with, and ultimately, being guided by, the African Americans I interviewed during the course of this study, as well as others in the industry, to determine the most effective way, if any can be identified, to bring the considerations noted herein to the attention of the industry’s white superintendents. Certainly, this research may serve a didactic function for this latter group, exposing how apparently benign (and sometimes overtly objectionable) racial attitudes may help to perpetuate Clarksdale’s extant racial hierarchy. At length, my hope is that this research will be an useful tool for combating “the rhetoric of multiculturalism and color-blindness ... [which] is employed to suggest that the [racial] playing field is now level, facilitating the widespread opposition by whites to affirmative action, redistribution, and other forms of compensatory justice” (Mullings 677).

## CHAPTER 1: HISTORY OF CLARKSDALE AND ITS BLUES TOURISM INDUSTRY

*“Overall, Clarksdale/Coahoma is one of the poorest localities in the nation in socio-economic terms, although, paradoxically, it is also one of the richest in terms of its Delta culture and intrinsic relationship with Blues music.”*

*-John Henshall*

Stuart Hall argues that a “combination of what is similar and what is different defines not only the specificity of the moment, but ... the strategies of cultural politics with which we attempt to intervene in popular culture, and the form and style of cultural theory and criticizing that has to go along with such an intermatch” (“What is this ‘Black’” 286). In addition to reinforcing the diachronic dictates of trenchant scholarship, such an assertion requires me to divine Clarksdale’s (and Coahoma County, where Clarksdale is located) contemporary socio-economic landscape within a context that highlights the singularity of the black-white racial moment, as well as its resemblances to older forms of this racial dynamic in the city. In the following chapter, I focus on the similarities and differences between white and black experiences of fiscal mobility within a specific local setting in the Mississippi Delta, between Clarksdale’s civic trajectory and region-wide trends, and between the city’s and county’s pasts and presents in these terms. Following this initial historical sketch, I explore the evolution of Clarksdale’s touristic persona, zeroing in on

four decades worth of initiatives to service travellers in search of regional blues experiences, and the more recent coalescence of these efforts into a fully-fledged civic and entrepreneurial project.<sup>6</sup> And finally, I give an overview of the industry's racial dynamics, as documented through both my own and other's research.

### **CLARKSDALE IN BLACK AND WHITE**

Antebellum Clarksdale, and the Delta in general, had comparatively small slave populations, though Coahoma County saw a significant influx of slaves during the last decade prior to the Civil War (King 119). Delta slaves, and later sharecroppers, farmed cotton, a great source of wealth for Clarksdale's white planter class. As in many southern states, white Mississippians deployed Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, convict leasing, prison labor, the exploitative practices of sharecropping and tenant farming, and lynching in the postbellum era to secure the social supremacy of whites (King 122-129). By the 1920's, Clarksdale "claimed more (white) millionaires per capita than any other town in America" (Rutkoff 137).

In "Preaching the Blues: The Mississippi Delta of Muddy Waters," Kenyon College professors Peter Rutkoff and Will Scott detail the conditions endured by black Deltans like McKinley Morganfield (aka, the celebrated blues musician Muddy Waters, who grew up five miles from Clarksdale on Stovall Plantation) as the result of early twentieth century racism and its institutional incarnation, Jim Crow (138). "In Clarksdale," Rutkoff and Scott write, "blacks could be arrested for walking down the street that ran by the white-only swimming pool or for being out after midnight." Moreover, Coahoma County had no African American

high schools until 1950, a reality which proved to be another means through which the racial hierarchy that benefitted whites was reproduced (134-35).

In the mid-forties, the International Harvester Company developed the mechanized cotton picker on Clarksdale's Hopson Plantation, a technology that, in tandem with later advancements in agriculture, eventually rendered much of the Delta's agricultural labor force extraneous. Black Mississippians were particularly vulnerable to this industrial sea change, which ultimately contributed to the series of great out-migrations by the region's African American population that helped to establish blues scenes in northern cities like Chicago (Giola 206-207; King 137; Rutkoff 146). As African Americans have comprised a large majority in many Delta counties since the early twentieth century (Rutkoff 137), their movements out of the region contributed to the loss of nearly half the population in Coahoma County between 1960 and 2010.<sup>7</sup> Extraordinarily, the racial profile of Clarksdale has remained stable. As in the late 1930's, in 2010, nearly 80% of the city's 17,962 residents identified as African American (State and County Quickfacts).

Clarksdale's economy has declined since its heyday in the opening decades of the twentieth century. In 2009, the median household income in Coahoma County was \$24,815, and virtually 40% of Coahoma residents lived below the federal poverty line (State and County Quickfacts). In spite of civil rights advancements, the dire state of the Delta's contemporary economy is ineluctably entangled with lingering structural inequities between whites and blacks in Mississippi. In the late 1980's, Allen Tullos observed "the disparities of white and black economic resources in the Delta resemble the Third World"(163), and current statistics show little improvement. While the city's population has retained a clear black majority, as of 2007, African Americans owned only a third of

Clarksdale's businesses (State and County Quickfacts). A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute also revealed that in 2010, the unemployment rate for blacks in Mississippi had reached 18%, well above the national average for African Americans. That same year, at 6.4%, white unemployment in Mississippi rated lower than the national average for that racial demographic, and far lower than that of the state's African American population (A. Hall). Moreover, as King highlights, in 2008, 44% of black Mississippians lived in poverty, while only 15.7% of white Mississippians suffered the same fate (10).

### **LOCAL TOURISM AND THE BLUES**

Katherine Osteen, a recent graduate of the University of Mississippi's Southern Studies Master's program, has called Clarksdale "a Delta city at the forefront of blues tourism development" (23), and uses Clarksdale to gauge the relative development of blues tourism in other Delta towns (38). Notably, the city has long used its African American culture as part of efforts to draw travellers. For instance, a 1930's-era Chamber of Commerce Brochure entitled "Clarksdale—Wonder City of the Delta," lauds the city's sizable religious infrastructure, including its "ten negro churches" (Rutkoff 137). Ironically, but by no means surprisingly, during that same era, the touristic accommodations available in Clarksdale, whose population was 80% African American at the time, focused on servicing white visitors. In this case, the city's attempt to promote its African Americans traditions, and simultaneous commitment to only meeting the needs of *white* tourists, suggests that advertisements of Clarksdale's black culture may have been aimed at white audiences intent on connecting with culture experiences associated with an essentialized racial "Other."<sup>8</sup>

As in the past, contemporary tourism interests draw on the city's rich African American heritage to construct an image of Clarksdale as a vital (and ostensibly, *the* vital) locus in the historical development of blues as a style. And indeed, in *The Land Where the Blues Began* (a title appropriated by the Coahoma County Tourism Commission to promote the blues heritage of both the city of Clarksdale and Coahoma County), Alan Lomax describes Coahoma County as "one of the capitals of the blues" (24). In point of fact, the city was home to some of the pre-war blues' most venerated musicians; W.C. Handy, Muddy Waters, John Lee Hooker, Charlie Patton, Son House, Bukka White, Pinetop Perkins, Robert Johnson, Howlin' Wolf, Elmore James, and Arthur Crudup either lived in Clarksdale at some point, or played music in its juke joints regularly (Rutkoff 145; Henshall 38). The lives and contributions of these African American musicians play a central role in the city's contemporary tourism industry, indicating a change in the community's relationship to its cultural past. According to King, the incorporation of Mississippi's blues history into the tourism industry "clearly indicates that the state now celebrates and embraces a cultural product that had once been dismissed as a pathological response by black poverty culture" (89).

The early period of blues tourism in Clarksdale arguably began with the opening of the Delta Blues Museum in 1979. When it became apparent that tourists were regularly arriving in Clarksdale hoping to access its musical heritage, Sid Graves—who had moved to the city in 1975 and was the director of its public library by this time—established a blues museum in the city's African American library, the Myrtle Hall Branch of the Carnegie Public Library (Delta Blues Museum; King 58). In 1999, twenty years after the museum's founding, it was moved into the former freight depot of the Yazoo and Mississippi Valley

Railroad (Delta Blues Museum). The building and its contents now embody The Delta Blues Museum, and represent a critical node in the city's sphere of influence shaping blues tourists' experiences.

As some of the oldest sources of live musical entertainment in the region, blues festivals and juke joints were also among the city's earliest blues tourism attractions. Clarksdale's longest-running festival, the Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival, was first held in 1988. According to Henshall, this three-day, live music event can bring in as many as 30,000 tourists (35). Red's Lounge, a juke joint located across the tracks from Clarksdale's downtown, has likewise featured prominently in the city's blues scene for some time. In a recent interview with Red Paden, owner of Red's Lounge, he informed me his club has been in operation for "thirty-five, forty years." Though Red's has retained a small local customer base, he describes his juke joint as mainly catering to tourists.

Since its inception in 1944, Clarksdale's Riverside Hotel has offered accommodations with distinct appeal for blues fans. According to the Blues Trail marker located in front of the hotel, the building formerly housed the G.T. Thomas Afro American Hospital, where legendary blues queen Bessie Smith spent her final moments after sustaining serious injuries during a car crash on nearby Highway 61.<sup>9</sup> Following the building's transformation into a hotel, the Riverside offered lodgings to traveling black musicians in the still-segregated U.S. South. Over the years, the hotel's visitors have included Sonny Boy Williamson II, Robert Nighthawk, Ike Turner, Mavis Staples, and John F. Kennedy Jr. Frank "Rat" Ratcliff, current proprietor<sup>10</sup> and son of the original owner, showcases his establishment's long affair with history makers through memorabilia displays (including an exhibit dedicated to Bessie Smith in the room in which she passed),



and a commitment to preserving the hotel's original décor (thus, one can see and stay in the Mavis Staples room as it appeared when the singer lodged at the Riverside).

Though no longer in existence, Stackhouse Mississippi Arts and Gifts/Delta Record Mart, a record shop and recording studio opened in 1988 and owned by blues scholar Jim O'Neal and his former wife, Patty Johnson, helped to anchor the city's budding blues tourism industry early on (65-66). And finally, since 1993, the city and county have relied on an official tourism institution, the Coahoma County Tourism Commission (hereafter CCTC), to promote, organize, and channel funding into blues tourism in Clarksdale (King 68). To this end, the CCTC and Kappi Allen, the commission's director, advertise the city as a blues tourism destination at international and domestic trade shows, and work with the state tourism commission and the Mississippi Association of Tourism (a collection of tourism trade agencies), and the Mississippi Delta Tourism Association (Allen).

The Mississippi Blues Trail likely represents the recognition on the part of the state that promoting its blues heritage may bring significant economic benefits. According to King, the trail also constitutes a more overt effort to "confront, rather than ignore, the state's dubious past" (151). The trail comprises a collection of historical markers located throughout Mississippi that commemorate musicians, buildings, and other sites associated with the state's blues history. Since establishing the first Blues Trail marker in 2006, blues scholars like Scott Baretta and Jim O'Neal have written text for, and helped to erect, over 150 blues markers in the Delta and outside of it, including nine in Clarksdale.<sup>11</sup>

In the last decade or so, a small cadre of local and transplanted entrepreneurs worked more intensively to develop accommodations and businesses catering to blues tourists in Clarksdale. Arguably, the most recognizable of these venues is Ground Zero

Blues Club, the juke-joint style restaurant and nightclub owned by actor Morgan Freeman, local politician and lawyer Bill Lockett, and Howard Stovall of the historic Stovall Plantation. Ground Zero opened in 2001 and hosts live blues music every week, Wednesday through Saturday (Ground Zero). Other recent additions to Clarksdale's collection of live-blues venues include the Delta Blues Room, Club 2000, and the Bluesberry Café. Opened in 2005 by native Clarksdalian Adele Henderson, the Delta Blues Room features live blues every other week, as well as a variety of other types of musical entertainment (Henderson).

In 2002, Roger Stolle, a former advertising executive from St. Louis, opened Cat Head Delta Blues and Folk Art in downtown Clarksdale. Cat Head now operates as a nexus of promotional activity for the local blues scene, as well as selling blues music, magazines, documentaries, books, and folk art. Roger noticed an absence of coordinated efforts to promote blues music when he relocated to Clarksdale, and is now highly instrumental in publicizing and organizing local blues cultural events (Stolle 2011). In fact, King considers Stolle's endeavors to be "more effective in disseminating blues-related information to a mass audience than the state's tourism organization" (Cat Head; King 73). In addition to his unofficial efforts to advertise the local blues scene, Roger conceptualized and established the Juke Joint Festival, a highly popular live music event occurring in April each year. Roger is also a member of the Clarksdale Downtown Development Association, and participates in the organization of a number of the blues events in the city (Stolle 2013).

The Shack-Up Inn, a hotel opened in Clarksdale by Bill Talbot and Guy Malvezzi in the late 90's, offers guests the option of "pass[ing] out in one of ... [the] authentic sharecropper shacks," or a room inside a former cotton gin. Located on Hopson Plantation,

the hotel has become a singular and popular element of blues tourism in the city. According to the Shack-Up Inn website, the hotel regularly hosts live blues music, and caters to “blues lovers making the pilgrimage to the cradle of the blues” who want to “glimpse plantation life as it existed only a few short years ago” (Shack-Up Inn). To be sure, the Shack-Up Inn capitalizes on Hopson Plantation’s history to appeal to blues tourists who want to relive the experiences of early Delta blues musicians, many of whom, including Muddy Waters, lived in sharecropper shacks, worked on plantations, and detailed these aspects of their lives in songs (King 152, 158). In a recent interview, Malvezzi asserted that in servicing over 20,000 guests last year, the Shack-Up Inn is a veritable “elder statesman of blues tourism” in Clarksdale.

Other recent additions to the city’s blues tourism industry, three of them 501c3’s, include Hambone Art and Music, the WROX museum, the Rock & Blues Museum, and the Clarksdale Downtown Revitalization project. The first of these, Hambone Art and Music, is a blues art gallery owned and operated by Stan and Dixie Street, a retired couple from south Florida. The gallery opened in 2003 and features original art by Stan, as well as weekly live music events. According to Stan, he mainly hires blues acts for this purpose “primarily because when people come through Clarksdale, they want to hear blues.” In 1999, Clarksdalian Bubba O’Keefe bought the WROX radio station building. It was in this location that Early Wright, Mississippi’s first African American D.J., transmitted his legendary broadcasts, and Robert Nighthawk and Ike Turner honed their musicianship through regular performances. “Sonny Boy Williamson, Elvis Presley and Sam Cooke,” Henshall writes, “were heralded at the local WROX radio station where Early Wright (who was at the microphone for 50 years) was probably the world’s longest-serving DJ” (38).

According to the station's Blues Trail marker, and notwithstanding Wright's multi-genre playlists, it was the "blues that brought the station widespread fame." Over the past decade, O'Keefe has transformed the building into a non-profit museum commemorating the station's contributions to local musical heritage (O'Keefe). And finally, though residing in the U.S. since 1978, it was only in 2006 that Dutchman Theo Dasbach opened the Rock and Blues Museum. This non-profit museum is a continuation of a public history project on blues music Dasbach started in Holland. Filled with Dasbach's personal collection of music memorabilia, the museum emphasizes the relationship between the blues and rock n' roll through references to musical phenomena occurring from 1920 to 1970. Dasbach believes that this was when "the best American heritage" developed, and when "the evolution started" from blues to rock. However, he notes this a personal opinion, and that he might be wrong. Dasbach also established and helms the annual 2<sup>nd</sup> Street Blues Party in Clarksdale, and initiated the city's Caravan Music Fest with Roger Stolle. He provides space in front of his store for music acts to play during the Sunflower River and Juke Joint festivals. Theo's wife Cindy sits on Clarksdale's Downtown Revitalization board, as does Bill Lockett of Ground Zero Blues Club (Dasbach; Lockett 2013). This non-profit program sees cultural tourism, which in Clarksdale is "primarily ... music" based, as "a point around which ... renovation and revitalization could occur." The board seeks to "resurrect ... the once vibrant downtown" through "building renovation, infrastructure improvement, amenity development, marketing planning and branding, business development and recruitment" (Clarksdale Revitalization Inc.).

In 2008, John Henshall, principal investigator for Essential Economics, an Australian-based development and research firm, produced an economic action plan for

downtown Clarksdale. In his study, Henshall notes that “the manufacturing sector in Clarksdale/Coahoma is not as dominant as it is in other parts of the State or elsewhere in the nation, as reflected in the relatively low share of total employment in this sector” (1, 17). Indeed, the prominence of the county’s service sector within its overall economy suggests blues tourism may play a significant role in filling the gaping economic hole left by the consolidation and mechanization of cotton and other forms of agriculture (Henshall 15).<sup>12</sup> King expresses doubt as to whether the region is yet experiencing any substantial remuneration from blues tourism (166-67), but because the industry is still in a relatively nascent stage of development, questions regarding its economic potential are difficult to answer. That said, Henshall argues that tourism in general “makes an important contribution to the Clarksdale economy, generating revenues for shops, venues and other Downtown attractions, as well as supporting motels located on State Street” (2), and estimates that the industry contributes over \$20 million annually to Clarksdale’s economy. Though he attributes the majority of recreational service sector employment to local casinos (17), in Henshall’s opinion, “the mainstay of tourism in Clarksdale is the support of tens of thousands of blues fans who come to the Downtown each year to seek out the music and culture associated with blues musicians dating from the early years of the 20th Century to the present time” (40). As blues tourism is largely dependent on a place-specific experience, making facets of the industry difficult to outsource, it certainly remains worthy of consideration as a long-term source of revenue and employment for the Delta.

## **BLUES TOURISM AND RACIAL TENSION**

While the body of research on blues tourism in the Mississippi Delta remains relatively small at present, analytical trends are already apparent, as this discourse is wont to focus on race and consider it a salient source of contention within the industry. On the other hand, King also underscores the tendency among many of the industry's promoters to assert that the state's burgeoning interracial commitment to celebrating Mississippi's blues heritage will provide Delta residents opportunities to make inroads in racial reconciliation. Such claims to the potential for increased racial harmony appear tenuous against a contemporary backdrop of widespread regional poverty and starkly divergent economic experiences between the state's white and black populations. Considered in this socio-economic context, the reality that whites are indeed "the primary promoters and consumers of blues" foregrounds the likelihood that the industry may, in fact, help to reinforce, and perhaps even widen, the racial divide (King 16).

Both King and Dempsey document the top-down structure of Mississippi's blues tourism industry, indexing its relative level of development through a detailed recounting of investments made at the state and national level. Since the 1980's, both the state of Mississippi and the federal government have supplied funding for blues tourism development, performed systematic investigations into the economic potential of blues tourism, and formed administrative bodies to oversee larger projects like the Mississippi Blues Trail. As Dempsey's research focuses more specifically on the state's effort to revise its negative public image (the product of a long history of racial conflict) through blues tourism, his work includes revealing perspectives on the tensions created through the interaction of actors at the local and state levels, who may have incompatible agendas. Following an observation that "communication gaps exist between important cultural

organizations, the state tourism office, and the [governor-appointed] Mississippi Blues Commission,” Dempsey notes that “some cultural organizations in the Delta” have accused the latter of being “too politically motivated” (Dempsey, pg. 13).

Both my own research and King’s offer further insights regarding the relationship between industry-produced racial tension and literature designed for blues tourists. Such literature (in the form of advertisements, pamphlets, museum plaques, websites, history books, journal articles, radio shows, and Blues Trail markers) often omits discussions of the connections between blues music and the history of racial oppression in the Delta, while drawing on blues mythologies that attempt to authenticate problematic racial constructions. King focuses on the latter aspects of blues tourism, demonstrating the power civic institutions hold in shaping the Delta’s public memory of blues music through myths he sees as products of “cultural authorities ... concerned with maintaining the status quo” (142).

Investigating racism through its functioning as a social construct, critical race theorists claim minority representations that uphold racial hierarchies through portrayals of people of color as docile and “industrious” constitute “model minority myths.”<sup>13</sup> While songs or advertising depicting former slaves wistfully remembering their life under bondage illustrate this concept vividly, less overt examples abound. King’s research demonstrates the ways Delta blues histories constitute such myths by celebrating the ubiquity of agrarian imagery in blues lyrics and describing the emergence of blues through reproductive analogies evincing soil/land as the ostensible “mother” of the idiom. To wit, these narratives imply early blues musicians, and the communities they lived in, existed in

harmony with the southern landscape, or at least not in a conflicted relationship with it vis-à-vis sharecropping.

Conducted in the fall of 2011, my early research on Mississippi blues tourism buttresses King's findings on the omission of racial oppression from blues narratives produced for Clarksdale's blues tourism industry. My investigation comprised an examination of material contained in the tourist packet distributed by the Chamber of Commerce, and a perusal of the city's civic websites focusing on blues history and blues tourism information. The CCTC's website is particularly exemplary of officialdom's relative ambivalence towards Clarksdale's emerging blues tourism industry. The links to both the Sunflower Blues and Gospel Fest and Crossroads Bikes and Blues Rally are defunct. Under the site's Culture and History tab, the Blues Alley page offers no information regarding Clarksdale's blues history, but rather acts as a space for advertising and leasing opportunities. The home page does include a brief reference to Bessie Smith's death at the Riverside Hotel, and claims the city possesses a "heavy dose of the blues." While the website maintains a "Blues" tab, the information contained therein consists of a two-sentence description of the Crossroads (the intersection of highways 49 and 61, where blues legend Robert Johnson supposedly sold his soul to the devil), a list of blues festivals in Clarksdale (none of which are organized or run by the CCTC), and some brief details from the city's Blues Trail Markers. Notably, none of the marker descriptions include any of the more controversial aspects of blues history. Additionally, the description of the Hopson Plantation Marker represents the sole evidence in any of the CCTC or Chamber of Commerce promotional material linking the plantation to blues history (a notable error of omission, considering that celebrated blues musician Pinetop Perkins lived and worked at



Hopson). The Hopson brochure included in the Chamber of Commerce tourist folder does mention its proximity to Clarksdale, which it describes as “the birthplace of the blues,” as well as the current owner’s appreciation for blues music. However, both the website and the brochure laud Hopson for its contributions to the mechanization of agriculture. Missing from this celebratory agrarian lore is any acknowledgement of the effects such development had on the state’s labor force, as well as the fact that mechanization contributed to out-migrations that eventually brought the blues to northern cities like Chicago.<sup>14</sup>

The CCTC and Chamber of Commerce promotional material mostly avoid any discussion of the source of the hardships faced by blues musicians, the racial milieu of the Delta over the last 150 years, and slavery or sharecropping, with two exceptions. First, the Hopson brochure mentions the Delta’s slavery and sharecropping history, but does not directly link them to the plantation itself. Second, the Clarksdale “Walk of Fame” brochure, produced by the Chamber of Commerce, notes Sam Cooke’s unwillingness to “perform before segregated audiences in the South,” and dubs him a “quiet leader in the Civil Rights movement” (Clarksdale/Coahoma County).

The first paragraph of the Chamber’s letter to tourists heralds local casinos for “regularly presenting ... world-class entertainment,” yet fails to mention the city’s blues clubs, or the quality of entertainment available at those venues. Indeed, the letter only includes two sentences in the third paragraph regarding the city’s blues culture in any form (Chamber of Commerce). Most egregious, the history page in the Chamber’s tourist folder gives no hint of the city’s black heritage at all (Weeks).

In the fall of 2011, I conducted a particularly revealing interview with a member of Clarksdale's blues tourism industry, who, wishing to remain anonymous, I shall refer to henceforth as Glen. Glen accused the CCTC of blatantly antagonistic attitudes towards blues culture and the development of blues tourism in the city. In one incident, a CCTC member described blues music and the objectives of Glen's institution using explicitly racist epithets, calling the institution's employees "nigger-lovers." In another instance, a local casino donated money to the city for tourism initiatives, and the CCTC managed the task of distributing the casino endowment. When a casino official asked Glen how his institution was putting their share of the donation to use, Glen admitted he was unaware of any such funding. The casino now donates directly to Glen's institution. Additionally, Glen pointed out that the state produces a tourism guide for Mississippi and receives its information regarding Clarksdale's events from the CCTC. Over the past decade, the tourism guide has regularly included incorrect information about the city's blues festivals. In several cases, tourists from across the country arrived in Clarksdale during the wrong week in accordance with state tour guide postings. Expecting to find festivals, these tourists occasionally aired their grievances and expressed considerable anger to Glen, thinking he was responsible for the misprint. Glen also averred that the Chamber of Commerce is unsympathetic to his institution's objectives, and has "siphoned off" funds designated for blues tourism, though he did not offer specifics on this matter.<sup>15</sup>

In his discussion of the CCTC's investment in blues tourism, King limits his critical gaze, acknowledging that such investment only followed the rise of the Delta's gaming industry, and that Clarksdale is known for its "infighting, backbiting and divisiveness." As evidence for the latter claim, King cites, among other instances, local journalistic criticisms

of the CCTC's preference for funding non-blues related tourism events (68-71). Here we see the forging of a trend in King's work, in which he limns subjects ripe for racial analysis, but stops short of launching a systematic investigation into this aspect of blues tourism phenomena. During the interview with Glen, a more penetrating take on the CCTC's funding predilections came to light. Glen insisted that the CCTC is antagonistic, specifically, to the development of *African American* heritage tourism in Clarksdale. In the past, the commission's board members have underfunded blues events while simultaneously providing ample funding for what Glen understands to be *white* heritage initiatives.<sup>16</sup>

The reaction of local police to the interracial crowd at Clarksdale's first Sunflower Blues festival in 1989 represents another example of officialdom's discomfort with the increased prominence of the Delta's black cultural heritage. King notes that the festival's attendees described the police, who "watched [the crowd] like prison sentries," as both "intimidating" and "glowering." One spectator goes so far as to speculate that the city's officials placed police surveillance around the festival's peripheries in anticipation of either Civil Rights activities or race riots (King 64).

In her coverage of Austin's South by Southwest festival, Katherine Osteen provides details from an interview with Mary Beth Wilkerson of the Mississippi Development Authority that reinforce King's findings. Speaking to the festival's inclusion of a night strictly dedicated to Mississippi music, Wilkerson gushes, "our state has so much more to offer than just the blues." Osteen suggests the night's blues performances prevailed "despite Wilkerson's best efforts to bring recognition to other music genres with roots in the state" (1-2). While Wilkerson's statement by itself does not reveal an explicit racial

agenda, it does demonstrate an official interest in constructing a state image that does not foreground what is, in fact, a racialized genre of music. Unfortunately, Osteen fails to question Wilkerson as to the motivations behind such an interest, or the extent to which this represents the state's tourism agenda.

King indicates that Clarksdale's business elites (many of whom belong to the Chamber of Commerce) have long shown discomfort with the town's white blues promoters, including Sid Graves. In an interview with King, long-time Clarksdale resident and blues enthusiast Skip Henderson averred, "people were looking down at [Sid] 'cause he's hanging out with black people ... [and] devoting too much time to the museum and to black people and to black culture" (66-67). Conversely, Patty Johnson, former co-owner of Clarksdale's Stackhouse Records, believes the city's white blues fans were not ostracized on racial grounds, but rather "viewed with skepticism because tourism was a completely new economic vehicle in the Delta" (King 67). However, Johnson does admit the blues heritage celebrations resulting from such enthusiasm produced interracial gatherings that constituted "stuff that hadn't happened," and forced the city's white blues promoters into a position where they "were up against changing some minds" (King 67). Jim O'Neal, Johnson's former husband and fellow owner of Stackhouse Records, recalled similar resistance early on in Clarksdale's blues tourism development. O'Neal posited those who were skeptical about blues tourism "were kind of disturbed that the tourists were going to the black parts of town and [the] pictures they were taking were of some of the rundown areas and not the nicer homes of Clarksdale" (King 63). These testimonies reveal both definitive impressions of official culture's (as represented by indeterminate groups, such as

“elites” and “skeptics”) racially motivated opposition to blues tourism, as well as several instances that, though not entirely unambiguous, remain similarly suggestive.

The racial dynamic of Clarksdale’s blues tourism industry may ultimately attenuate any optimism afforded by economic projections, and likewise remains both a ripe and poorly investigated subject of inquiry within scholarship focusing on the economic impact of Delta blues tourism. African American participation within the industry is largely limited to musicianship and club management, while whites hold a variety of positions. Furthermore, as Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will show, the opinions of white superintendents do much to reinforce this structure, while black superintendents call it into question.

## CHAPTER 2: AUTHENTICITY AND COLOR-BLIND RACISM

James Duncan has argued that the “representation of places and regions ... necessarily partakes of [a] dualism” comprised of “the *site to be represented* (a geographical place), and the *site* (the geographical, cultural, political, theoretical viewpoint) from which that *representation emanates*” (39; italics mine). Instantiating what Duncan sees as the dichotomy of place within representational praxes, this chapter explores authenticity, a racial ideology emanating from blues cultural narratives, the representational site, and color-blind racism, a racial stratagem employed when discussing the socio-environs of Clarksdale and its blues tourism industry, the site to be represented. The social geometry between these contradictory and coeval racial ideologies arises from dueling exigencies born of an exercise in commodifying racialized heritage via tourism. Indeed, tourism markets capitalizing on African American cultural history must so often take root in locations indelibly marked by both historically recent and contemporary racial strife, and interface with the social actors inhabiting them.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, depending on which touristic populations are targeted, those helming black heritage tourism initiatives may find their success tied to the promotion of invidious distillations of racial identity. The two frontiers arising in the process necessitate the simultaneous foregrounding of cultural racial constructs and the suppression of awareness of the social race relations within the industry.

Claims of the “real” or “genuine” carry the potential to attach credibility and value to cultural manifestations designed for tourist consumption, and thus, to the aesthetic and ideological content advanced by them. As authenticity is both central to the tourist experience and the consumption of music in general, and blues in particular, it remains an useful framework for understanding the interplay between racial fantasies, touristic endeavors centered on blues heritage, and local political economies. The particular constructions of blues history white tourists seek to engage with in visiting the Mississippi Delta often coincide with painful personal memories for the region’s African Americans. In designing experiences that both pander to and legitimate the notions of authenticity held by these white tourists, Clarksdale’s white tourism directors moor the city’s black community into a vexed position vis-à-vis its blues heritage industry.

As Mississippi’s blues tourism agenda is also a public relations project designed to combat the pall cast by the state’s history of racial conflict, connotations of place likewise inform the color-blind posturing white superintendents draw on in attempting to obscure their ties to white privilege. Certainly, such posturing reads as an attempt to bury the implications aroused when their participation and position in the blues tourism community is viewed through the lens of the region’s past and present racial hierarchies. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s landmark study on color-blind racism offers a number of analytic frames useful to the task of performing a symptomatic reading of the opinions white superintendents hold regarding both citywide and industry-based racial matters. Using Bonilla-Silva’s racial frames, stylistics, and stories in the following chapter, I trace out the locale and industry-specific linguistic paradigms used by white superintendents, and occasionally blues tourism scholars themselves, to discuss racial subject matter, again,

measuring the variance of the perspectives emerging from these rhetorical strategies against those of African American superintendents.

Through an analysis of the racial ideologies applied to *sites to be represented* (Clarksdale and the socio-environs of its blues tourism industry) and deriving from *representational sites* (the racial myths promoted by the industry's superintendents), the symbolic channels I limn and explore here will route the phenomenological work I do in future chapters, as authenticity and color-blind racism thoroughly infuse the discursive formations orbiting Clarksdale's blues tourism industry. This chapter's second objective is to conceive of how these two racial ideologies operate as racial projects that delimit the social connotations and applications of race within the industry and in the city. A discussion of these projects will serve as a bedrock for an investigation of the links between Clarksdale's blues heritage agendas, the racial perspectives of those managing these agendas, and the constitution of racialized power in concrete forms. For, as Duncan posits, it is not "simply that discourses of the Other 'distort' the nature of other people and places by representing them in ways that are alien to the residents of such places. ... rather, through its ideological distortions, [such discourse] operates in the service of power" (39).

### **KEEPING IT "REAL": AUTHENTICITY AND BLUES TOURISM IN CLARKSDALE**

Scholars consider authenticity narratives to play a central role in shaping tourists' estimations of their experiences with cultural heritage. Thus, much of the academic discourse on tourism scrutinizes the content authenticity legitimizes, the criterion used to make determinations regarding the authenticity of cultural fare, and especially, the nature of authenticity experienced by tourists as they come into contact with the products of



tourism initiatives. Several salient forms of authenticity emerge from tourism literature representing disparate interpretive models, each ostensibly produced to fill in the others' lacunae and therefore account for a wider range of tourist experiences. These include objective, constructed, and experiential authenticity.<sup>18</sup> For the purposes of this project, I draw on and advocate an understanding of authenticity as socially constructed. Proponents of constructed authenticity believe tourists access "legitimate" cultural experiences through social processes, a perspective suggesting authenticity is only ever embedded in mutable, semiotic connotations, and does not derive from inherent qualities. Thus, authenticity is seen as being shaped "in terms of points of view, beliefs," and "perspectives," and can entail "the projection of one's dreams, stereotyped images, and expectations onto toured objects" and, according to King, "toured others" (Wang 351; King 104).

Notably, authenticity analysis largely focuses on the experiences of tourists, often relying on generalizations about the interests or approaches of producers in cultural heritage industries, or not discussing them at all. Perhaps the assumption here is that the nature of commercial enterprise is such that capitalistic concerns overrule all other social ones, including personal feelings regarding what constitutes the real or genuine. However, Olsen's work does offer some method with which to make inroads into this arena of analysis. Drawing on Bruner's work to disengage from the real/not real dichotomy of the authentic, Olsen examines the social experience of authenticity, deducing that "ideas of authenticity are heteroglot" because "there are multiple answers produced by several competing voices relating to the same objects in overlapping social processes" (163). Such a reading implies a more active and multifarious understanding of the role of producers in heritage tourism, whose commercial cultural creations may impart a notion of authenticity

behaving in contestation or unison with both those of various tourists and other producers. Indeed, to greater and lesser degrees, those organizing, promoting, and producing cultural heritage tourism also inhabit the touristic gaze, likely accessing their own notions of authenticity in order to make cultural fare legible and appealing to tourists.

With these considerations in mind, this section deploys a constructivist notion of authenticity with the aim of illuminating how the white producers in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry conceive of and utilize authenticity in promoting the city's African American musical heritage. My intention is to limn the ways specific notions of authenticity popular among the upper echelons of Clarksdale's blues tourism industry operate collectively as a racial ideology by constructing a specific representational matrix around the social structure of race.

Largely constructed by and for white consumers, contemporary blues representations attach notions of authenticity to certain artists and social characteristics that in some ways contradict both historical and contemporary definitions of the genre as understood by black consumers and the style's pioneering musicians (Wald 27). Modern listeners often access conceptions of the blues popularized during the 1960's. White folklorists of this era revalorized the work of early rural, southern bluesmen like Robert Johnson and Son House, eventually pushing trends among the social and stylistic profiles of these musicians (or assumptions about their similarities) to the center of conversations regarding blues authenticity. Thus, blackness, maleness, indigence, acoustic instrumentation, rural provenance (especially the Mississippi Delta), and the country blues style endure as markers of the genuine within blues mythologies (King 45-46; Grazian 36).

Writing on Chicago's blues tourism industry, sociologist David Grazian goes so far as to assert that because "blackness connotes an extreme sense of authenticity ... the owners of tourist-oriented blues clubs almost exclusively hire black musicians." (33). This ostensible endorsement of blackness, however, and its incorporation into the semiotics of blues authenticity, remain entwined with rituals of discrimination, as African Americans in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry are wont to attest. Recounting a recent night in which Terry Harmonica Bean, an African American blues player, and Mark Muleman Massey, a white bluesman, performed at his club, a show he describes as "one of the best ... you ever seen," Red Paden became defensive about the fact that he hires white blues players. Insisting that while he tries to "keep a mixture" of black and white blues performers, some "people still prejudice. I know some musicians can't sing worth a damn, but people will come out and support them because of their color."

Combining the authenticity hallmarks noted above, blues authenticity myths trade on an intersectional construct of "blackness." In Clarksdale, white tourists and industry members rhapsodize about, revel in, and build notions of authenticity with the more squalid details associated with blues history. However, while the poverty and diminished social agency experienced by blues musicians lends cachet to blues authenticity myths, which often depict bluesmen as "childlike, poor, and illiterate," the historically contingent racial factors contributing to these socio-economic parameters are obscured, as the music itself is understood as "a 'natural out-pouring of a simple people'" (King 78). Thus, it comes as no surprise that both King and Grazian's authenticity analyses amount to critiques of essentialism, the "distinctive mark" of which, according to Michael Herzfeld, "lies in its suppression of temporality: it assumes or attributes an unchanging, primordial ontology to

what are the historically contingent products of human or other forms of agency ... [and] is thus also a denial of the relevance of agency itself" (Dungaciu 2). To be sure, both authors take issue with the tendency of blues tourism narratives to assess, and then attempt to preserve, the authenticity of blues musicians, performances, or songs based on racial, regional or stylistic specificities, ignoring individual talent and historical social structures in the process.

Elaborating on the difference between preserving and exploiting the blues for tourism's sake, WROX museum owner Bubba O'Keefe averred, "blues came as a product of the South, and the living conditions of that. So, we want to be sure that ... we keep it real" (O'Keefe). While authenticity remains of varying personal significance to Clarksdale's blues tourism superintendents,<sup>19</sup> many of the city's tourism venues and producers seek to preserve the time-tested and robust blues authenticity constructs described earlier. As a result, they suture into the present a romanticized and seemingly timeless vision of rural black poverty inspired by the marginalized milieus inhabited by the Delta's African American population during the post-Reconstruction, pre-Civil Rights era, when the region's and genre's most celebrated bluesmen developed and performed their singular country blues style. The sharecropper experience offered by the Shack-Up Inn; Roger Stolle's fetishization of the assumed degeneracy and economic desperation of blues musicians<sup>20</sup>; the Riverside Hotel's dilapidated exterior and commitment to maintaining its original décor; Ground Zero's "rag-tag" aesthetic<sup>21</sup>; the many states of disrepair in Red's Lounge,<sup>22</sup> and the labeling of it as "true" juke joint and a more desirable place to encounter blues culture than Ground Zero because of its "authentic" poverty, testify to the ways blues

authenticity functions as a racial ideology celebrating African American music culture when it is seen as the product of ahistorical and depoliticized social and economic marginality.

The responses of both African American blues tourism superintendents interviewed for this project reveal the ways actual experiences of “blackness” in the Delta situate blues narratives within both historical and political contexts that impede the accessing or endorsement of the authenticity racial ideology. In a recent interview with Adele Henderson, proprietor and manager of the Delta Blues Room, he explained, “a lot of people are offended” by the Shack-Up Inn because

that’s where they came from. Those little shacks were my grandmother, my great-grandmother... A lot of African Americans not going out there because they don’t want to see no backwoods shack. They know the story of [a] one room shack with seven, eight children growing up in it and ... sleeping in one room ... a lot of it is painful ... A lot of those songs these guys were singing when they were out in the fields ... the headmaster was having sex with his wife, he done drug his mama out there and beat her down, and drug his dad, ‘oh, lord have mercy on me.’ They don’t want to relive that. They lived that already. But the whites want to see the authenticity of it.

Having experienced this history first hand, Red Paden brought an acute emotional tenor to our discussion of white tourists’ interest in accessing “authentic” black poverty via blues tourism. Informing me that he used to farm, that he has “done the till,” Red recalled working until it was too dark to see, a labor experience he began at the age of six or seven. Red also remembered going out with his mother to pick cotton when he was a very young child, sitting on her cotton sack as she worked. When I suggested that white blues tourists are after this kind of story, Red angrily retorted, “You’re right they want that kind of story. Because this is shit that they can’t imagine. They can’t imagine going through this stuff.”

## **COLOR-BLIND RACISM IN CLARKSDALE**

As the primary racial ideology used by the majority of whites in the U.S. (and to a much lesser extent, by African Americans), color-blind racism can be understood as a strategy deployed by whites in the attempt to downplay the role of racism in the experiences of contemporary people of color, while constructing themselves as racially progressive through a denial of their accessing of racial frames (Bonilla-Silva 131). As the majority of Clarksdale's blues superintendents are white, such racism features prominently in the discursive formations surrounding the site to be represented, as accessed through discussions on the city's racial atmosphere in general, and its intersection with the blues tourism industry in particular.

My analysis in this section is guided by the theory of color-blind racism advanced by Eduardo Bonilla-Silva in *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and Racial Inequality in Contemporary America*. According to Bonilla-Silva, such racism is characterized by the tendency of "whites [to] rationalize minorities' contemporary status as the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks' imputed cultural limitations," relies on "practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial," and "serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era" (2-3). Bonilla-Silva's efforts to detail and describe these subtle practices have yielded a host of analytical tools useful for detecting covert racist attitudes guiding potential racial projects underway in Clarksdale's blues tourism community.

Significantly, whites need not believe they are participating in racist behavior or thinking to do so. This estrangement from the racial components of one's behavior is central to Marzia Milazzo's theory of "white knowledge," and its function within the "epistemology of disavowal." White knowledge, according to Milazzo, is a "discursive formation and literary tradition informing, and informed by, a vast body of texts that comprise the white supremacist canon." Through its antagonistic attitude towards racial consciousness, white knowledge constitutes a form of racial consciousness itself.<sup>23</sup> Milazzo argues that both white knowledge and a "rhetorical manipulation of ignorance" support an epistemology of disavowal, wherein "white ignorance [acts as] ... a cognitive dysfunction that is socially functional, systematically enforced, and psychically required for the maintenance of white advantage."<sup>24</sup> Thus, the epistemology of disavowal "transcends overt white supremacist discourse" by allowing whites to draw on and reproduce forms of racialized information that undergird their social dominance (white knowledge), while maintaining a cognitive distance from any awareness or recognition of the racial aspects of this process, their own racial privilege, and the structural disadvantages and institutionalized discrimination faced by racialized others. This process is streamlined when whites engage in a color-blind racism and other varieties of willful ignorance, which allow for the disregarding of systemic racism (what Peggy McIntosh calls "embedded forms" of oppression, which remain largely invisible), and a focusing on "active forms" of racism (overt acts that we are easily aware of) (101). Within the context of blues tourism in Clarksdale, white superintendents access an epistemology of disavowal through the frames of color-blind racism (forms of white knowledge) in order to maintain cognitive distance

from the industry's and city's racial hierarchies, their position within them, and any of the industry's activities that reinforce embedded forms of racism to the their own advantage.

Bonilla-Silva identifies four racial frames, or ideational constellations invoked in the processing of racial matters into non-racial phenomena, that act as vehicles for the articulation of contemporary color-blind racism. These include abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and the minimization of racism (26; 131). Abstract liberalism, while hard to pin down, is recognizable through its idealistic, bourgeois hallmarks: "individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, and meliorism (the idea that people and institutions can be improved)" (26). This frame relies on the notion that socio-economic success in the U.S. is tied to a meritocracy, free choice in general, and equal opportunity in particular, a corollary of which is "the idea that force should not be used to achieve social policy" because it would attenuate the ostensible balance of circumstances the law affords through an equalizing of the rights of racial groups. Simultaneously, it ignores or omits evidence that whites often have access to more opportunities than people of color (28). Naturalization advances the perspective that the structural inequality and segregation racism produces are actually the result of natural causes or predilections (28). Cultural racism attaches a pathological culture to racial identities, and assumes that this culture, instead of inherent biological faults (as more overt racism suggests), or the widespread existence of racism, is responsible for the diminished social position of racial minorities (28). And finally, the minimization of racism frame works to support the idea that racial discrimination is not really a problem in contemporary society, and concomitantly, no longer acts as a barrier to the social mobility or agency of racial minorities (29). As both Bonilla-Silva's work shows, and this study reinforces, whites use



*“linguistic manners and rhetorical strategies,”* or the stylistics of “race talk,” and racial stories, or anecdotes involving encounters with racial minorities, to access these racial frames (53; 131; italics author’s). In the following analysis, I draw on stylistics and stories identified in Bonilla-Silva’s work, as well as identifying new rhetorical strategies peculiar to the blues tourism industry and its geographical setting, to demonstrate the centrality of color-blind racism to the ways white superintendents, and in some cases, blues tourism scholars, conceive of race and local racial experiences, and the contrast between white and black perspectives on these matters.

#### **PERSPECTIVES ON CLARKSDALE’S RACIAL DYNAMIC**

During discussions on the city’s racial atmosphere, both Adele Henderson and Red Paden, two African American superintendents in Clarksdale’s blues tourism community, demonstrated an awareness of color-blind racism as a racial tactic used by local whites. Following the observation that “people are gonna be politically correct” and “go out of their way not to make it seem like [the city] is racist or its separated,” Adele mentioned that when whites are presented with an inquiry regarding the racial and socio-economic experiences of the city’s African Americans, they are likely to suggest that “they do alright.” Similarly, Red asserted that in Clarksdale, “there’s still a lot of racism. Lot of people, they don’t talk about it. They don’t want to be known as a racist, but they really are.”

In eyeing the interdependence between an unwillingness to discuss race and the desire to avoid being designated a racist, Red illustrates what Beverly Tatum has identified as the “white culture of silence” dominating racial discourse in the contemporary U.S., wherein whites have “little experience engaging in dialogue about racial issues” (117).

Indeed, Theo Dasbach shared a perspective that connected racial progress to the culture of silence, endorsing the nonuse and non-recognition of racial designations, and explaining that the provenance of racial problems lies in their continued use. “The problem is that we always want to put it in the color thing,” Theo argued. “If the color would be out of this whole thing ... it wouldn’t matter if you were Indian, or black, or brown, light brown, whatever.” According to Bonilla-Silva, color-blind racism precipitates this silence by leaving “little space for socially sanctioned speech about race-related matters” (55). The merging of color-blind racism and the culture of silence thus creates a strange situation in which whites use the former to share a number of well-developed racial perspectives, while the latter contributes to their failure to recognize that they access, or reveal their investment in, a racial ideology when doing so (Dasbach; Stolle).

Adele’s assessment of white perspectives on the racial experiences of local people of color proved highly accurate. When asked about the city’s racial dynamics, white tourism producers regularly displayed optimism, using phrases such as “pretty good,” “fine,” “much improved,” and “great” (Allen; Street; Lockett; Malvezzi). In some cases, when paired with the sharing of evidence of the continued existence of racial intolerance in the city, this optimism comprised one half of a rather patent engagement with cognitive dissonance (Street; Allen; Lockett; Stolle). Such dissonance is typical of those using the minimization of racism frame, who, in spite of admitting to the existence of racial discrimination and/or inequality, will often argue that the two are unrelated, or fail to see the connection between them (Bonilla-Silva 43). For instance, Bill Lockett mentioned that at the high school level, de facto segregation in Coahoma County remains in acute force. “We have a literally all black public school system in the high school grades,” Bill averred, while the local private

school is “literally all white [with] few exceptions.” Yet, when questioned about the city’s racial interactions, Bill didn’t hesitate to announce that they are “much improved and getting better all the time.” Additionally, though Stan Street has “heard some statements from people who [he] felt weren’t prejudice that kind of shocked” him, he believes that race relations in the community are “generally ... fine.” And finally, while Roger Stolle believes the racial problems he encountered in the past wouldn’t happen today in the city, he also shares that, regarding the city board, sometimes “some crazy stuff will sort of happen I would consider race-based.”

In several instances, white respondents minimized Clarksdale’s racial problems by inserting the city into a larger geographical context, whether through a comparison with the state, other places in the South and nation, or an undefined realm comprising “everywhere” outside the city. Bill claimed that while there is “somewhat” of a need for racial reconciliation in Clarksdale, “in Mississippi in general,” there is “somewhat more” of a need. Guy Malvezzi believes when “compared to the real world out there,” race relations in Clarksdale are “great,” and generally better in the South as a whole. Guy also shared racial stories that minimized Clarksdale’s racial problems through geographical contextualization with cities both within, and outside of, the South. In this case, Guy recounted instances in which white tourists from Baltimore and Boston insisted that they found Clarksdale more integrated and liberal, respectively, than their hometowns. Additionally, although she thinks the city’s race relations can still be improved, Kappi Allen argued that this is “not unlike other places,” because “there’s race relation problems everywhere, and [Clarksdale is] no different.”

As Bonilla-Silva explains, whites often use racial disclaimers, such as “I’m not racist,” as “discursive buffers” alongside racist comments (57). Theo Dasbach, a white transplant from Holland and owner of the Rock & Blues museum, was the chief practitioner of this stylistic. Tying what he saw as a progressive racial attitude to a lack of racial programming during his European upbringing, Theo regularly insisted that he was unable or unwilling to recognize or apply racial categories. In Theo’s words, he “tr[ies] not to see all this racial shit. Because it’s not me.” In this sense, he inverted the geographical contextualizing discussed above, writing his own place of origin as lacking a culture of racism, while insisting that racial lenses, and their attendant social problems, are an “American” preoccupation. Theo shared a racial story to buttress this perspective, explaining his difficulty and frustration with being forced to identify with a particular racial identity during his first encounter with U.S. customs.

Several interviewees minimized racism in Clarksdale by attributing social inequality between the city’s blacks and whites to economic, and not racial, causes, a rhetorical strategy, Bonilla-Silva argues, that whites have invoked at least since the 1970’s (43). This “anything but race” stylistic helps whites incorporate information that would otherwise challenge the assumptions of color-blind racism (62). For example, Bill Lockett disclosed that many African Americans are moving into the downtown’s formerly white neighborhoods, and that “flight to the county” is taking place out of this area. While the flight has been racially “mixed,” according to Bill, “it’s not mixed proportionate to the demographics,” and he has seen “a concentration of whites out in these newer growth areas.” Yet, Bill avoided connecting the white flight with African American relocation, contending that this is “a socioeconomic matter, not a race matter.” Theo Dasbach used

stronger language to make a comparable point, asking why it is “important that we have 70% here on welfare and most of ‘em is [sic] black people? Why is not that 70% of this town are [sic] American people without jobs and are on welfare? If it would have Indian people it would be 70 Indians, if it were Dutch people, it would be 70% of Dutch people.” Here, Theo also invokes the abstract liberalism racial frame, equalizing African Americans, “Indians,” and the Dutch, and consequently, failing to recognize the disparate likelihoods that members of these groups would find themselves in an economically disadvantaged position.<sup>25</sup>

Naturalizing Clarksdale’s racial asymmetries and discrimination proved to be popular among the white superintendents, who relied exclusively on linguistic stylistics, and not racial stories, when using this frame. White interviewees naturalized the racial motivations behind prejudice and exploitation by attributing more general origins to this behavior, including a raceless “people,” and the “world.” Kappi Allen insisted that the inability to achieve racial harmony, to “have everybody on the same page,” had “nothing to do with color, race, creed, anything.” Rather, she argued, “that’s just people.” Similarly, Bubba O’Keefe posited that although he thought everybody should be treated fairly, this “ain’t gonna happen,” because “that’s the world.” Another common method for naturalizing racial phenomenon included obscuring its geo-historical contingencies, thereby imbuing racial discrimination with a timeless quality. In practice, white respondents achieved this by maintaining that racism “will always happen,” “will probably always exist,” and will be around for “decades to come” (Dasbach; Street; Stolle). Roger Stolle also naturalized the racial segregation of the city’s neighborhoods, suggesting this reality is self-determined, and not the product of racism. To wit, Roger argued that “within the black and white

communities, there's a lot of self segregation still," and that neither group is "trying to exclude anybody."

Bonilla-Silva found that his white respondents often projected racism onto African Americans as a means of escaping a confrontation with their own culpability (63-64). In the context of blues tourism, white producers weaved projection into an abstract liberalism narrative that equalized whites and blacks as both victims and perpetrators of racism. For example, Bill Lockett declared that the city's racial milieu is characterized by "extremists on both sides," while Guy Malvezzi stated that racism in the city "swings both ways."

Viewed alongside the responses of white superintendents, Adele Henderson shared a markedly different perspective on the city's racial dynamics, contending that there are still people in the Clarksdale who think "everybody got his place," and that "most of the things that are owned in this town, the businesses, the whites own. If you want to sell a house now, who owns the realtor company? The white folk." In attempting to account for the city's lingering racism, Adele conjured white voices expressing racist perspectives by accessing the cultural frame and nostalgia for the security of white privilege in the past.

Adele explained that

Some of it is fear. 'Well you got black people. They gonna be down there shooting and cutting, busting them windows out.' Some of it is, I guess just mad. 'How can he open up a business? What he doing? He selling drugs?' [Laughs]. And for the other part, I guess they just want to be left alone. They just want to be able to still be good ole' boys, still get in their corner and feel comfortable where they go.

Adele went on to reveal that, notwithstanding the increased African American presence in local politics, the city's two black and two white commissioners still segregate themselves spatially during public appearances. Continuing his critique of the intersection between race and politics, Adele lamented that "In the back of ... all this black representation, you

still feel the master's hand. You can see in the paper. When we got a vote, it's always down racial lines."

## **PERSPECTIVES ON CLARKSDALE'S BLUES TOURISM INDUSTRY**

As detailed in Chapter One, the Delta's blues tourism industry has received criticism for its racial structure. In Clarksdale, whites fill most of the managerial and organizational roles, while African American participation at the upper levels of the industry is grossly underrepresented and almost entirely limited to venue ownership. Moreover, King, Rotenstein, and half of this project's interviewees contend that the Delta's blues tourists are almost uniformly white.<sup>26</sup> When asked directly about condemnations of the blues tourism industry's racial dynamic, however, white and black superintendents again diverged on their assessments.

Some whites denied the validity, existence, or foundation of these criticisms outright, while others equivocated. Bill Lockett proclaimed that he does not "believe anybody's profiting off of anybody because of race," then recanted, and, drawing on the abstract liberalism frame to equalize black and white opportunities to benefit from tourism, announced that "blacks are profiting because of whites too ... because frankly most of the tourists who come here are white." Roger Stolle first denied the prevalence of these types of criticisms, saying that he hasn't heard them often, and then dismissed them as baseless, reducing these criticisms to an economic issue and arguing that those participating in the industry "aren't exactly rolling in it." Kappi Allen attempted to avoid a definitive response on the issue, relying on a semantic move Bonilla-Silva calls the "yes and no" strategy (60). This tactic allows the user to appear to remain neutral on racial matters

while actually taking a stand. Though recognizing that “there are not enough African Americans that are a part of telling the history [of the Delta blues] ... and promoting” it, and that “historically, it’s the white person who’s doing that job,” Kappi stated that she doesn’t “think it’s a right/wrong issue or question.” As she continued on this topic, Kappi moved away from this spurious neutrality, taking an opposite stance on the issue. Implicating the Shack-Up Inn’s black poverty aesthetic as a salient target for the criticisms the city has received regarding the blues tourism industry’s racial constitution, Kappi claimed that the hotel’s décor is not done “at the expense of African Americans. It is telling the story of the history and the culture.”

Both African American, and one white, superintendents agreed that criticisms of the industry’s racial structure are valid. After indicating his alignment with such panning, Adele widened its scope, announcing that white people in general “capitalize on the advantages they have.” Red elaborated on the industry’s racial dynamics:

In years past there hasn’t really been any money in the blues because the way the situation’s set up. All the whites have most of the money. The blacks work for them... But they don’t pay them a damn thing ... you make enough just to pay your damn bills. No enjoyment money ... Most of the people who are really bluesmen aren’t involved in a lot of the decision making. You got a lot of assholes who think they know what’s best for you making these decisions. Like I said, don’t even have a clue.

As the sole white interviewee showing support for such critical perspectives, Theo Dasbach claimed that “a lot of people who [are involved in the blues tourism industry] came from somewhere else. That should tell you something ... Blues was originally called race music... I think that says it all. Also, you’re in the South.” However, Theo also repudiated criticisms of the industry’s racial dynamic as “American thinking,” maintaining that a focus on race keeps “the whole thing in motion.” By first agreeing that a racial problem exists within the



industry, and then pinning it to American culture, Theo circuitously worked to establish his own innocence. As a foreigner, he is ostensibly not subject to this problematic “thinking.”

Evidencing the tendency of whites to structure the present as post-racial, “the past is the past” storyline is used to controvert and minimize the notion that the blues tourism industry’s racial structure, or Clarksdale’s in general, is inequitable (Bonilla-Silva 77). For instance, while agreeing that the civil rights activism of Martin Luther King Jr. “was good at the time,” Theo Dasbach questioned the relevance of these tactics to contemporary settings, wondering with a strain of frustrated incredulity why “we still want to keep on going with this today.” Later, Theo remarked that although “there might be some not really pleasant heritage in” blues tourism, “as long as we put it in the heritage ... then it’s over and done with.” Both of these instances illustrate the effort to locate racism in the past, one of color-blind racism’s most commonly used narrative stratagems.

Five of the nine interviewees embedded racism in the past by associating any lingering discriminatory attitudes or problems in the city with an older, white generation. In the opinion of three of the respondents, the death of this population will apparently resolve Clarksdale’s racial issues (Malvezzi; Dasbach; Stolle).<sup>27</sup> This perspective rests on the assumption that the racial attitudes of older whites cannot be changed; consequently, some interviewees think it is not worth the effort to try. Because these narratives trade on references to the town’s actual residents, they resemble what Bonilla-Silva identifies as stories “about someone close being racist.” In his study, Bonilla-Silva found that respondents often attempted to exonerate themselves from a racist designation through disagreement or disassociation with a person they identified as racist (92). When asked

about the presence of local resistance to blues tourism, Roger's Stolle's "old white racist" story followed suit:

I remember being at a city meeting with the mayor and the commissioners just in the audience ...

There was an older gentleman, a white gentleman, who got up and basically was complaining that so much time and money was being spent on blues music, meaning tourism. I don't think you'd see that today. That's one of the things, with the Juke Joint Festival, we always talk about having this secret mission. And the secret mission is to mix locals with these international and national blues fans and tourists that wouldn't normally mix.

Roger begins by recounting the story of an older man's reluctance to spend civic funds on black music heritage tourism, carefully pointing out that the man was white to establish a racial motivation. He then arranges himself in opposition to the implied racial attitude of the old man, describing *his own* mission to expose "locals," which in this context likely references this older white generation, to the racial attitudes of blues fans. Here, blues fans, an identity (as a self-proclaimed "blues-purist") Roger wears on his sleeve, are written as racially progressive, and thus, arguably in a position to change racist minds. By introducing this story as an incidence that took place when he "first moved here" in 2002, Roger implies the implausibility that such opinions exist in the present; by connecting it to an older white man, Roger constructs racism as an almost obsolete phenomenon deriving from a generation he does not belong to. Roger later reinforced the notion that racism is the province of the elderly, arguing that young people are the primary holders of progressive racial ideology because they "are just more open to everything and less prejudice in general."

Guy Malvezzi impugned the racial perspectives of Clarksdale's, and Mississippi's, older whites more bluntly. Noting that he has encountered opposition from a group he

defines as the “older, white, plantation-mentality people that still think they’re better than a black or smarter than a black,” Guy connected this demographic to state tourism bureau’s lingering resistance to developing blues tourism, who “still don’t get it 100%.” Guy argued that these older whites either have “plenty of money, or they’re so set in their ways, some things they’re not gonna accept. Obama being president or even being born in the United States ... My whole deal is, I’m not gonna go to battle to try to get one of them to understand what I’m doing. They’ll eventually fade away.” Again, Guy tells a story that links older whites to racist attitudes, then places himself against the grain of these attitudes by claiming that racism impairs their ability to understand his work. At the same time, Guy ties racism to the past through juxtaposing older whites to contemporary developments in politics and the state’s economy. Finally, he suggests the opinions of these older whites cannot be changed because they are “set in their ways,” and thus, are not worth trying to combat. Rather, Guy believes the answer to these racial issues lies in the death of older whites, a perspective Theo echoed, and one that implies racism does not exist outside of this generation, and thus, has not been, and is not continuing to be, reproduced.

On this issue, the opinions of white and African American superintendents came closer to aligning. When asked about resistance to blues tourism efforts, Adele indicated that the older generation has a stronger attachment to racist ideas, while Red noted older whites still believe the Delta is “farm country,” that “cotton is ... king,” and that they “don’t want to give up the old life.” However, neither of these black interviewees failed to indict younger whites as well in other instances, nor did they make any other effort to identify with a position contradicting those of older whites—except perhaps, in Red’s case, through

the use of the word “white” itself; likely, they felt their opposition to the racial attitudes of the older white generation was self-evident.

Formulating early resistance to blues tourism as a problem born of a misapprehension of the socio-cultural value of blues music or, in Patty Johnson’s case, of tourism’s economic potential, instead of racism, constitutes another version of the “anything but race” stylistic specifically designed to obscure the blues tourism industry’s racial issues (King 67; Bonilla-Silva 62). White superintendents argued that initial efforts to develop blues tourism were met with “a lack of understanding of ... why people would want to come here ... [or] why we would be important to tourists,” indifference and skepticism regarding “how the blues would impact the town,” and “expression[s] of doubt that it would succeed” (Allen; Street; Luckett). This indifference, doubt and misunderstanding are believed to stem from the failure of locals to “appreciate what you have in your own backyard” or “how big of a world the blues world is” (Allen; Street). In each case, white superintendents avoided exploring the likelihood that the inability to appreciate the inherent value they ascribe to blues music was a matter of racial prejudice, instead opting for vague references to concern over potential impacts, proximity induced disinterest, and general ignorance.

Some whites launched into a variant of the “some of my best friends are black” racial story noted by Bonilla-Silva in an attempt to prove their irreproachability vis-à-vis scholarly criticisms of the industry’s racial dynamic. Instead of having black friends in general, these white superintendents offered up their friendships with African Americans associated with local blues culture. Bubba O’Keefe mentioned that “Ella Wright and Early Wright allow me to come into their house and talk to them,” and that he has “known Early

Wright all [his] life.” Bubba’s insistence on this friendship is particularly crucial to his efforts to create an aura of innocence around his participation in the industry, as he now runs the WROX museum where Early Wright aired his musical programming for decades, as well as the archives of Wright’s show. In addition to a confession that he has “a lot of black friends in the community,” Stan Street also communicated that he plays music with “a group with black folks,” that he and his wife play music at Red’s Lounge, and that he would “never put together an all-white band and play over there ... just because I like the idea that the place is integrated.”

In “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” bell hooks notes that whites are often surprised to discover African Americans hold critical stances about whites and whiteness (21). hooks demonstrates that a minimization of black subjectivity occurs in the process, where whites are unable to imagine African Americans possessing the full range of human emotions, including critical responses to their social environment. Though Clarksdale’s white blues superintendents are able to conceive of local African Americans as critically minded, as indicated through their lack of surprise when confronted by black criticisms of the industry, they discredited black subjectivity by writing these perspectives as baseless or founded on the contingencies of opinion, a tactic Bonilla-Silva describes as the tendency to assert that “blacks make things look racial when they are not” (46). For instance, Theo insisted that criticality on racial matters be equally applied to the “receiver from the treatment ... because for me, what could be an issue, might for you not be an issue at all.” Here, the mutability of individual perspective is used to discredit victims of racial discrimination, which, when viewed by a different subjectivity, ceases to be offensive. Theo went on to argue that although “some of these people say ‘because of my skin color I might

have had less chances,” he thinks this is “80% bullshit. If you don’t succeed where you are, you’re frustrated. You’re gonna blame it on something else. This a very human thing.” In this case, Theo invalidates the connection between socio-economic status and racism, and the subjectivity of African Americans who endorse it, by suggesting grievances drawing on this connection are nonsense.

Kappi Allen navigated this line of reasoning more carefully:

I believe that some African Americans may feel that they’re being exploited. And that’s a strong word. And I’m not sure that I mean it that strongly. But I’m not sure that an African American might not feel it that strongly.

When asked about how she feels about criticisms of the industry’s racial dynamic, Kappi went on to assert that though she doesn’t agree with them, she recognizes that there are “businesses out there that are profiting ... from African American history and culture ... Is that necessarily a bad thing or a negative thing? I guess that depends on who you ask.” Again, racial discrimination or exploitation is reduced to a point of view, and not a concrete ethical transgression, constructing black subjectivity as questionable.

### **“YOU’RE ALL AMERICAN HERE. YOU HAVE THE SAME PASSPORT .... YOU GOT SAME RIGHTS, TOO”: ABSTRACT LIBERALISM, CULTURAL RACISM, AND THE STYLISTICS OF THE GROUP/INDIVIDUAL BINARY**

In “The Possessive Investment in Whiteness,” George Lipsitz claims that contemporary whiteness, as immanent to and designed by color-blind racial ideology, exists as a post-Nixon-era construct (63). By focusing on white privilege (the flip side of racial oppression), and the denial of it, Lipsitz’s rendering fills out the picture of the contemporary racial atmosphere limned in Bonilla-Silva’s work, reminding us of the

necessity to determine the way racial ideologies construct, as Feagin puts it, “sincere fictions of the virtuous white self” (Feagin 90; Mullings 680). Thus, where whites will often impute black culture for the relatively diminished social position of African Americans (cultural racism), they are likely to attribute the elevated status of themselves and others to individual merit (abstract liberalism). Here, Lipsitz’s critique of liberal individualism emerges, a perspective overlapping with Bonilla-Silva’s abstract liberalism frame. “As long as we define social life as the sum total of conscious and deliberative individual activities,” Lipsitz avers, “we will be able to discern as racist only *individual* manifestations of personal prejudice and hostility” (83; italics author’s).

Lipsitz goes on to suggest that liberal individualism facilitates the obscuring of “collective experiences of power that relentlessly channel rewards, resources, and opportunities from one group to another ... because [benefitting groups] rarely announce their intention to discriminate” (77). Lipsitz’s identification of a rhetorical binary (individual/group) in racial thinking remains useful to the task of uncovering covert efforts to promote or preserve white racial dominance, which can include instances in which whites deny any group cohesion and/or group identity as benefactors.

Wildman and Davis believe that when invoked, for instance, to discuss the relations between racial groups (instead of between individuals and groups), the very form of the binary contributes to the problematic structuring of social issues. Through its rendering of social actors and social milieus as equivalent, this structuring recalls Bonilla-Silva’s abstract liberalism frame. Indeed, these authors assert that “the way we think and talk about the categories and subcategories that underlie isms allows us to consider them parallel parts, and obscure the pattern of domination and subordination within each

classification ... [making them appear] the same and interchangeable” (91-93). In actuality, as Bonilla-Silva points out, “blacks do not have the institutional power to implement pro-black agenda whereas whites have had this kind of power from the very moment this country was born” (221). By obscuring power asymmetry through a binary structuring of racial groups, this reality may be effectively occluded, and support for policies attempting to correct that asymmetry attenuated.

At times, blues tourism discourse itself has fallen prey to such tendencies to equalize the relative social standing of racial groups. Recalling the ways white superintendents discredit black subjectivity by denying the validity of African American criticisms, King uses standpoint theory to account for discrepancies between white and black perspectives on the blues tourism industry. Though King couches his understanding and use of the theory in the notion that the existence of divisions in viewpoints along racial lines is “not surprising because a group’s material conditions structure social reality,” seeming to account for uneven social terrain and racial agency (191), King fails to fully develop a critical take on assessments of the industry made by distinct racial groups.

Arguing, on the one hand, that black musicians’ self-designating as the industry’s “field hands” does not constitute hyperbole because it accurately reflects the contemporary reality of Mississippi’s social hierarchy, King goes on to observe that no strong evidence exists showing white promoters are gainfully exploiting black musicians (189). Three correlative aspects of these statements are notable. First, King indicts the state’s social structure, rather than the internal dynamics of the blues tourism industry, to vindicate the criticisms of black musicians. Second, Osteen notes “in the 2009 fiscal year, Mississippi had a seven percent loss in overall tourism dollars, but Sunflower County experienced a 12.5



percent increase” (37). If King is using statewide data instead of looking at specific Delta counties and cities, he may be missing evidence that shows *some* white promoters are financially profiting from the performances of black artists. To be sure, Henshall has concluded that compared to Coahoma County, in 2008 “all 13 other counties that comprise the Delta Tourism Region had significantly lower levels of non-farm employment supported by tourism” (34). Finally, King does not endeavor to account for or consider the ways that whites benefit from black exploitation in non-monetary capacities.

In his doctoral thesis, *Refuse to Fold: Heritage Tourism and the Mississippi Delta*, Middle Tennessee University’s Brian Davis Dempsey offers a similarly troublesome analysis. In what must be an attempt to appear impartial, Dempsey tends to diminish the differences between racial groups. Though he is apt to point out the glaring economic inequity between whites and blacks in Mississippi, he fails to extend this imbalance to social arena, instead equalizing the agency of racial groups in this context. Speaking of blacks and whites in the Mississippi Delta, Dempsey notes that “each is familiar *and* ignorant of one another” (1; italics author’s).

When King does acknowledge that the use value of standpoint theory goes beyond merely explaining differences of opinion, he makes a case for the preferential weighting of oppositional stances, which he asserts can “provide a richer understanding of the intercultural dynamics ... at play ... [as well as] a window into the structural imbalances that *may*, indeed, characterize Mississippi’s blues tourism industry” (188-191)(italics author’s). King, of course, does not give such preference to these oppositional stances in his own research. Instead, he spends much time treating black and white opinions of the

industry as if they operate with equal force in Delta social settings, all the while carefully avoiding endorsing one over the other. Furthermore, King's failure to make the Delta's interracial power relationship central to his standpoint theory discussion reinforces a post-racial interpretation of this relationship. And finally, his use of the word "may" attenuates a reading of the industry's racial power relations (which are perhaps implied, or evaded, by the term "intercultural") that accounts for white privilege, or impugns white participation.

Though blues tourism superintendents never directly used the group/individual binary in logics relating to the apparent "success" of whites in the Delta or blues tourism industry, they applied both elements of the binary to undermine the connection between the discrimination faced by African Americans as a group and individual success. Instead of relative racial privilege, Theo and Stan connected the success of racial groups to their aggression or the willingness to work, mixing the abstract liberalism and cultural racism frames. In response to my assertion that a strong race-class correlation exists in Mississippi, Theo surmised that while this could be the result of a lack in education, presumably on the part of African Americans, "it might be [that] some don't want to make any money ... they want the money, they don't want to *make* the money." Similarly, Stan argued that "it's just common sense that if someone is more aggressive than someone is, [is] able to do something, then they're gonna do it."

Theo and Stan also diminished the connection between the socio-economic status of African Americans and racism by noting that some individuals overcome these barriers and that everyone has an equal opportunity to do so, indicating that black social positionality results from personal choices and not group discrimination. Theo first used the abstract liberalism frame, dismissing the idea that social asymmetry exists at all, and arguing,

“You’re all American here. You have the same passport. You got same rights, too.” Later, he traded on the equal opportunity assertion of the frame, trying to incorporate the reality of disparate social provenances into his reasoning by claiming that people who come from bad circumstances, economic or otherwise, “still have a choice [to] get out of that thing. And some people do.” Stan shared a racial story to support a comparable stance, composing a profile of the “responsible” black artist in order to lend credence to the suggestion that the less fortunate (which in the local context, as Stan well knows, implies African Americans) find themselves inhabiting a lower social tier because they have not tried hard enough to move out of them:

I think some people manage themselves real well. I know a lot of black artists that ... travel all over the place. They manage themselves. They make the phone calls. They make the connections. If something doesn’t work, they don’t go back there. But, they’re really responsible. It’s just the same with some white people. If you’re lazy, then you’re not gonna make as much ... You can sit around and complain forever about certain things. But some people are making it.

Roger and Theo also drew on the cultural racism frame to support abstract liberalism perspectives, explaining the disparate social positionality of whites and blacks through group values, but not group experiences of discrimination. Speaking on impediments to the smooth running of the tourism industry, Roger noted that part of the problem is “a culture clash.” He went on to describe the nature of this clash through a racial story:

When you’re dealing with ... Well, I’ll just say Big George Brockman. He’s from here, he lives in St. Louis now. He’s 80 years old. You’re dealing with older bluesmen. Limited education. Completely different culture than I grew up in.

Theo took this line of reasoning further, imbuing African American family structures with a pathological element that acts as a barrier to group success. Speaking on race/class correlations, Theo admitted that “sometimes it is true” that personal success may be inhibited by social realities that are difficult to overcome. “The percentages are there,” Theo averred. “When you have the family together, the children have a better chance.” Together, Roger and Theo construct African American culture as disconnected from formal knowledge traditions and conventional family structures. As we shall see in Chapter 4, such constructions of black culture contribute to the marginalizing of African American participation in Clarksdale’s blues tourism industry.

## **CONCLUSION**

In one instance, the perspectives of Theo Dasbach demonstrated clearly the way white superintendents invoke racial ideologies of authenticity and color-blind racism in regards to the different representational sites, thereby using each for unique racial projects. Theo accessed and reinforced a class-based representation of the region’s historical black musicians from popular blues culture’s representational site, conjuring the timeless black poverty authenticity myth described earlier. When recounting a childhood memory about trading records with his friends in order to have access to more music, Theo insisted this was necessary because kids “would have no money. This is, again, a blues story” (Dasbach). Revealing the narrowness that this focus on poverty, and its attendant suggestion of desperation and diminishment of agency, brought to his formulation of “real” Delta bluesmen, he later suggested that the “the old black blues players ... obvious [sic] did it down there to get out of the misery ... or make a living. And they never probably did that

just for other reasons than making a living.” Conversely, when I shared this interpretation with Red Paden, a middle-aged African American from Clarksdale, and the owner of Red’s Lounge, he argued that:

There are a lot of old ... bluesmen who couldn’t feed their families. ‘Cause there wasn’t any money in the blues. So they had to leave these blues alone, work everyday. Go to church. Because their wives gave them ultimatums. ‘You leave this shit alone, or I’m gone.’ ... It wasn’t no way of getting out of sharecropping. It was a way of having a good time. Some of them stayed on out there because you could get drunk and meet a lot of women. Some of them had to go in because they cared more about their family than they did that.

When referring to the *contemporary site being represented*, Clarksdale’s blues tourism industry, Theo strayed from his original representational viewpoint of blues musicians’ motivations for playing. Though likely benefitting from the attention his museum receives as a result, Theo revealed that he doesn’t pay the blues acts that play in front of his store during festivals, declaring that they have to “generate the money by what they do.”

Recently, the celebrated blues musician Bobby “Blue” Bland offered to play in front of Theo’s store during a festival “for only five grand.” This elicited laughter from Theo, who “said, ‘well, sir, you didn’t read what we do here. People are playing for the love of the music.’” The blues musicians in Theo’s *representational site* inhabit such a dire economic position they can use music only for economic leverage. The ubiquity of this authenticity construct stands in contrast to, and thereby diminishes the use value, of some African American perspectives on blues heritage to the city’s blues tourism industry. On the other hand, by omitting monetary considerations from the reasons bluesmen play in Clarksdale’s present-day blues tourism industry, Theo forges a logic that allows him to neglect their

class-consciousness and positionality, and concomitantly, his economic responsibility to them.

In this chapter, I have shown how authenticity, as a discursive strategy emerging from representational sites, allows white blues tourism superintendents to partake in the long-standing tradition of commodifying a construction of African American musical heritage. The representational site of blues tourism, which forges timeless black poverty as the authenticity construct tourists seek, or are able to access, institutionalizes a perspective not shared, and excludes the constructions of race held by some African Americans in the Delta. Indeed, blues tourism authenticity shows scant consideration for the significances of blues heritage to this group, while potentially compelling a painful revisiting of historical injustices and their attendant sufferings.

I have also detailed here the many frames, stylistics, and stories of color-blind racism used to erect an ideological buffer between white promoters and the racial privilege that allows them to secure, and explain in non-racial terms, both their own, and African Americans', social positionalities in the city's blues tourism industry and Clarksdale in general. Along the way, in addition to those previously identified by Bonilla-Silva, I have identified several strands of color-blind racism with distinct relevance to the site to be represented. These include the "older white generation" and geographical contextualization stylistics, the latter of which has widespread applicability in the South. Through such mechanisms, the blues tourism industry, and on occasion, the academic discourse dedicated to it, aid in the reproduction of color-blind racism as a white racial and racist strategy, even proliferating its weaponry.

As this color-blind racism operates in diametrical opposition to the interests of African Americans, their contestations of its many discriminatory propositions warrant no measure of astonishment, while corroborating both Bonilla-Silva's and other researchers findings (Bonilla-Silva 151). However, refraining from overt racial discourse, as color-blind racism allows whites to do, hampers the agency of people of color by complicating their ability to effectively deal with the rampant racial discrimination and inequality they endure (Tatum 117-119). That this racial ideology achieves this while also acting as a vehicle for discrimination suggests it may act as a white racial juggernaut and racial project with a potent ability to contradict African Americans contesting its presumptions.

As we will see in Chapters 3 and 4, the superimposition of this double-bill of racial ideology onto the city's blues tourism industry aids in the orchestration of its social environment such that it discourages racial reconciliation and the benefitting of local African Americans, as well as encouraging the inhabiting of particular labor roles for both blacks and whites. In this sense, the escalating primacy of blues tourism to Clarksdale can be seen as facilitating black exclusion from, or limited participation within, certain social and economic arenas in the city.

### **CHAPTER 3: VISIONS OF RECONCILIATION, FANTASIES OF PUBLIC SPACE**

President Clinton's 1997 "One America" initiative on race relations induced some multiracial communities harboring traditions of racial hostility and inequity to turn to formal reconciliation measures to bridge these persistent social divides (William Winter). Notwithstanding this flourish of alacrity to redress past and present issues on race, the degree of commitment to such rapprochement, as well as conceptualizations of its processes, vary within communities, complicating, and even compromising, such efforts, and potentially exacerbating existing racial conflicts.

As researchers consider racial peacemaking central to the agendas of some cultural heritage and blues tourism projects in the Mississippi Delta, this chapter uses reconciliation as a discursive site in order to glean a sense of the way the industry's black and white superintendents, and the industry itself, are impacting Clarksdale's racial relations (King 11). To this end, I first draw on the strains of color-blind racism and authenticity limned in Chapter 2 to identify and unpack definitions of, and commitments to, racial rapprochement, as well as attempts to represent the blues tourism industry as both integrated and integrating. Building on this initial work, I explore the industry's tendency to precipitate the racializing of public space in Clarksdale, a phenomenon key to both white superintendents' visions of the industry's reconciliatory potential, and representing a significant hurdle to it.



## DEFINING AND ENGAGING IN RACIAL PEACEMAKING

According to King, the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation likely embodies Mississippi's most successful institution targeting both the accumulated inheritances of the state's racial conflict and the salient issues governing its contemporary racial divisions (169). During her tenure at the institute as its former documentary projects coordinator and educator, Rhondalyn Peairs was intimately involved with reconciliation endeavors in Delta communities, a number of which entailed working with local cultural heritage.

In a recent interview, Rhondalyn elaborated on the standard forms racial reconciliation takes, which include finding "ways to deal with" the historical impacts of racism, and striving to "create some kind of environment where reconciliation [and] restorative justice ... can happen." Assessing the difficulties encountered by those working in the field and the shortcomings of agendas limited to diplomatic interracial dialogue, Rhondalyn contended that

There are two roads towards reconciliation. And at every point in any kind of process or discussion, [they are] going to crop up. One is kind of, "see, we talked about it." It basically subjugates the voice for the sake of peace, or presumed peace. ... The other kind ... is the real kind of reconciliation. That speaks truth to power. That allows voices that have been marginalized or oppressed to be on equal standing, and actually gets some work done.

Rhondalyn also discussed issues she found to be of unique consequence to racial reconciliation projects taking place in Mississippi's Delta region. Unlike the rest of Mississippi, since the days of slavery

The power dynamics in those communities have not changed. The people who own all the lands, who used to own all the plantations, and all the black people used to work for them, are still the people

who have the money, have the power, own all the land, own all the buildings, and who really are the owners of the means of production.

As Rhondalyn's testimony shows, Delta whites have remained secure in their social ascendancy since the days of slavery. This security rests on enforcing an opposite experience for African Americans in the region, who have struggled more than other black Mississippians to gain equal social footing on account of the region's agricultural empire. Indeed, the mechanization of agriculture had a considerable impact on the lives and livelihoods of black Deltans, as the region had few other employment opportunities to offer "all the black people that used to work" in this sector (Peairs). According to Rhondalyn, although many African American families in Mississippi have received monetary reparations on account of being shorn of land through discriminative farming practices like sharecropping, their Deltan counterparts did not, leading to lower levels of black landownership in the region. Finally, the Delta remains acutely segregated, hosting a significant number of private schools "that were founded to keep the races separate" (Peairs). While these private institutions maintain entirely white student bodies with few exceptions, the Delta's financially neglected public school system services the region's black population (Lockett; Peairs).

The wealth and power asymmetry between whites and blacks in the Delta and elsewhere figures prominently in Rhondalyn's understanding of "real" reconciliation work. In addition to the promotion of "meaningful communicative behavior" between whites and blacks, and the "celebration of racial diversity" (King 11), reconciliation often involves restorative justice. This reconciliatory approach seeks to correct inequity, to "restore to people what they've lost," by attempting to close a "wealth gap based on unequal

treatment.” Rhondalyn contends that this represents a distinctly challenging aspect of racial reconciliation work

Because it’s not like people are gonna say “my wealth is built on the back of immigrants, or women, or people of color. Or my great, great grandfather stole this land from the Indians and then he enslaved people on this property. I’m going to give you some of my money back.” ... But, there has to be some restorative process where there’s some kind of wealth transfer ... that would build up the people who had been torn down by their exploitation in the system.

Restorative justice in particular, and reconciliation in general, require whites and blacks to play markedly different roles. As the inheritors of what Joe Feagin calls unjust enrichment, whites’ economic and social eminence is secured through exploitative relationships with marginalized racial groups. Consequently, white participation in racial reconciliation necessarily involves both an acknowledgement and a giving up of that enrichment, and the racial privilege that produces and sustains it, as well as making room for black voices and perspectives. Conversely, African Americans have long held a subaltern place in the economic and social landscape as the recipients of unjust impoverishment, a social positionality suggesting black participation in racial reconciliation be both self-determined, and representative of African Americans’ status as the aggrieved party.

As illustrated in Chapter 2,<sup>28</sup> white superintendents in the Delta’s blues tourism industry show a fundamental lack of understanding about, or willingness to acknowledge, the social relationship between blacks and whites, sometimes projecting racism onto African Americans as a means of disguising, diminishing, or exonerating the role of whiteness in racial conflict. This misunderstanding (or disavowal) extends to the implications racial asymmetry holds for reconciliation. For example, King asserts that the blues tourism industry’s racial reconciliation agenda in Mississippi includes an interest in

“chang[ing] how many religiously oriented African Americans perceive what they long considered a ‘devil worshipping music’” (170-171). Here, the significance of blues music to religious African Americans is seen as a major contributor to interracial strife, to the point that industry members believe *correcting* this cultural perspective will facilitate interracial harmony. Such intentions are arguably manifestations of cultural imperialism on the part of white producers, who understand the meaning of blues in black religious culture to be “wrong,” and its place in white secular culture to be “right.” In this sense, it is the portrayal of black religious perspectives on blues music in these terms, and not the perspectives themselves, that remains an impediment to racial peacemaking. Moreover, in seeking to discourage black counter-perspectives on blues music, the producers advocating this tack betray intolerance for racial diversity.

Overall, Clarksdale’s white blues promoters revealed a misapprehension of the places blacks and whites inhabit in racial conflict, as well as what is required of each group vis-à-vis the process of reconciliation. Stan Street and Kappi Allen did so by establishing racial wrongdoing as the province of both groups. Stan argued that “both sides have to try” because he has “seen” whites *and* blacks engage in racism, and “know[s] a lot of black folks don’t like white people either.” Kappi’s stance on the issue mirrored Stan’s, as she assumes that “trust has to be built on both sides,” or reconciliation won’t occur. Instead of construing local blacks as a group on the receiving end of racial discrimination, Kappi and Stan transferred a portion of the onus of making strides to earn racial trust to the shoulders of the city’s African Americans, equalizing their culpability in racial conflicts in the process.

Considering this white epistemology of disavowal and misinterpretation of the power relationship between whites and blacks, it perhaps comes as no surprise that the

white superintendents in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry remained largely averse to restorative justice, as evidenced through both a rejection of structural forms of reconciliation, and advocacy for versions of it that require only interracial dialogue, and "just ... getting people together" (Lockett). For instance, conjuring a resistance to city level peacemaking endeavors, which would necessarily involve structured approaches and officialdom's overt investment in reconciliation, Kappi shared that she doesn't "think you can just take a city or a county of 25,000 people and just say, 'okay, we're gonna have some racial reconciliation here.'" On the contrary, Kappi believes successful reconciliation involves "the smaller stories" and "just being in the same room and talking about the way that things were." Stan Street revealed a similar point of view, first decrying historical efforts to reconcile racial groups through social restructuring. According to Stan, school desegregation was "bad" because it failed, "made a lot of people angry," and because "a lot of neighborhoods were thriving before there was this forced integration." Stan then listed what he sees as his own contributions to racial reconciliation, drawing on the reductive notion that blues constitutes a racial language useful for overcoming discord with African Americans, and that consuming black culture is tantamount to racial peacemaking, a perspective King sees as central to blues promoters' arguments that blues tourism is effectively producing novel racial harmony (11). First noting that because he plays "music that black people wrote," he has "an 'in' in terms of communication," Stan explained that he is helping to overcome interracial conflict in Clarksdale by patronizing juke joints, attending his black friends' performances, and "buy[ing] some soul food." Stan also thinks racial reconciliation occurs when people "communicate" and talk "with each other on the street."

While Theo Dasbach argued outright that redistributing wealth should not be a part of racial reconciliation, both Roger Stolle and Bubba O'Keefe undermined the notion that this could accomplish rapprochement at all. Again, structural approaches to racial reconciliation were dismissed in favor of ones focused on conversation and abstract "understanding." Roger averred that though restorative justice is "a nice thought ... that isn't gonna bring reconciliation." Instead, Roger claimed that racial peacemaking comes down to "realiz[ing] we're all just humans at the end of the day and we need to be able to get along and talk about this stuff." Bubba likewise maintained that "it doesn't take an act of Congress or a revolution for people to get together." Recalling his church's request that he participate in its "racial reconciliation committee," Bubba disclosed that he told the "namby-pamby committee" that while he is "all for doing [rapprochement], ... to have this little program set up for race reconciliation ... [is] false," and that he was not interested in taking part.<sup>29</sup>

Both of the industry's black superintendents interviewed for this study, on the other hand, considered restorative justice and the redistribution of wealth as key to racial reconciliation. Red and Adele believe local racial peacemaking would be facilitated if Clarksdale's white citizens, and not just white tourists, were willing to spend money in their establishments. Red also argued that the first step in racial peacemaking should be to "go back and find out who all used to own this land here." Describing how the exploitative practice of sharecropping and tenant farming resulted in land loss for African Americans, Red avowed that there is a need for blacks to "go back and get what's due them." The notably disparate opinions of whites and blacks on the subject, coupled with the industry's majority white leadership, suggest that any racial reconciliation fostered by blues tourism

is taking place without an eye towards restorative justice, and in terms advocated by whites.

In addition to the effective navigation of region-specific hurdles, the success of blues tourism's reconciliatory agendas largely depends on the sense of obligation the industry's superintendents feel to endorse or enact such efforts. Responses at the state level indicate a resistance to doing so. During a blues tourism panel held at the University of Mississippi in the spring of 2012, a white member of the Mississippi State Tourism Board asserted that blues tourism was not an appropriate arena for discussing sharecropping. As Rhondalyn argues, racial reconciliation wholly depends on openly discussing racial injustice. Consequently, the state's ambivalence about bringing the state's history of racial conflict into blues tourism arenas, which serves to maintain the culture of silence surrounding race, can be seen as a barrier to dovetailing blues tourism and racial healing.

When asked if racial reconciliation ought to be a part of the city's blues tourism initiatives, Clarksdale's white superintendents showed varying levels of support. Though Kappi Allen and Roger Stolle demonstrated an interest in including racial reconciliation in blues tourism, Bubba O'Keefe thought it should only happen as the result of "natural feeling[s]," and not through an industry-based "agenda." Theo Dasbach minimized the problem of racism in general, asserting that racial reconciliation doesn't factor into his mission in Clarksdale because he doesn't "think it's an important issue in life." Guy Malvezzi rejected the efficacy of the process itself, insisting that "trying to make wrongs right ... only goes so far." Complaining that some people will never stop "grinding the ax of slavery," Guy held out that those with racial grievances "just got to move on." Stan Street was also opposed to a marriage of blues tourism and racial peacemaking, arguing that

reconciliation doesn't have a place in the industry because "that's a social thing." Like Guy, Stan is weary of hearing the complaints of exploited racial minorities, saying "too many things are hashed over and hashed over and brought up." Instead of using racial reconciliation to address racial issues, Stan suggested that "people just need to step up to the plate. Just try more." Here Stan draws on the abstract liberalism and cultural racism frames, arguing that while race relations do not factor into African Americans' social experiences, their willingness to "try"—which represents coded language connoting the work ethic of this racial group—does. With the source of racial asymmetry or conflict redefined, reconciliation no longer appears necessary.

Maintaining a hopeful stance in regard to the likelihood that blues tourism has had a ameliorating effect on the Delta's race relations, King points out that William F. Winter, founder of the aforementioned Institute for Racial Reconciliation, supports blues tourism, and has commented on its positive influence on the state's residents (60). King also shares a racial story about several of the state's black celebrities involved in blues tourism, noting that both B.B. King and Morgan Freeman, actor and co-owner of Clarksdale's Ground Zero Blues Club, "have come to appreciate and praise the state's progress on race relations" (165). King likewise observes that some white promoters think racial reconciliation is happening as a result of blues tourism (173). The responses of several of Clarksdale's white tourism producers support this contention. Kappi Allen claimed racial rapprochement is "definitely" happening as a result of the city's blues tourism activities, which create interracial "relationships ... that continue to grow and be built." Echoing this optimism, Roger Stolle argued that "blues tourism is ahead of the curve" in terms of racial reconciliation.



However, the responses of three of the industry's white superintendents stand in contrast to Roger's and Kappi's positivistic accounts of industry-produced racial reconciliation. Bubba and Stan attributed a neutral racial force to blues tourism, stating that though the industry is "not hurting" racial reconciliation, it is not causing it to occur "anymore than which would happen naturally." Moreover, Theo averred that it would be difficult to achieve racial reconciliation among local populations through blues tourism because the whites interacting with local African Americans on account of black musical heritage are tourists that come "from anywhere else but Mississippi," and only come for the music. At best, the collective responses of white producers indicate that only irregular racial mending is taking place as a result of blues tourism.

As racial reconciliation involves an active effort to confront racial issues, one possible impediment to producing novel interracial harmony by way of the industry is the tendency among its white producers to consider blues an inherently integrating force. Such perspectives invert Bonilla-Silva's naturalization frame,<sup>30</sup> drawing on blues authenticity constructs that minimize the subjectivity of blues musicians, and the historical and geographical specificity of their songs, by suggesting the genre "express[es] a universal set of emotions" (Grazian 33). Pulling from and reproducing such reductive assumptions, blues historian Adam Gussow, for example, argues that blues music creates a "powerful urge toward compassionate brotherhood" (King 11). Without exploring the racial implications of his research, King takes note of the inclination among white blues promoters to equate this essentializing blues myth with racial reconciliation, as they suggest that the latter occurs as a result of blues tourism simply because "empathy" is created "through aesthetic communication" (11). Though avoiding direct racial

identification, Bill Lockett sustains King's observation, declaring that blues music is "a great harmony-maker" and "a way to introduce people to people, and realize that they're not so bad or so mean after all. Both ways. It gets rid of any mistrust or distrust that people seem to have."

Stan Street shared a number of perspectives that show his investment in the myth that the blues inherently promote interracial harmony, contending that racial conflict will be resolved if "people who do love the music and who do play the music to just keep coming back, being a part of Clarksdale, and taking this music and going around the world with it." Stan also believes the universally harmonizing effects of blues music are immanent to blues fans themselves, who, in his view, comprise a veritable scene of benevolent and like-minded individuals. Through his assertions that blues fans are "blue collar people" who love "animals" and "the earth," Stan creates a liberal blues subjectivity that would be difficult to imagine as possessing problematic racial ideologies. Theo Dasbach followed suit, though doing so through a more general naturalization of music's social power to encourage complaisance. Sharing his belief that "music means communication ... [and] is always used to smooth things out," Theo also shaped a narrative that locates those engaged with blues and rock music activities outside of racist practices and beliefs. In Theo's view, music fans and musicians are endowed with an inherent morality, as "where's there's good music, there's good people." Theo believes this truism holds up to the point that "you can always say that the musicians in general don't" have the same racial hang-ups that other people do. Guided by these perspectives, formal attempts to institute racial reconciliation appear superfluous, as blues tourists themselves, and the development of a blues-based

infrastructure and community, appear to bring a naturally moralistic and progressive influence to bear on the city's racial milieu.

Of course, racial reconciliation, or the appearance of it, also serves an economic purpose. Rhondalyn observed that the state's investments in such efforts have always been tied to fiscal interests. Recognizing that part of tourists' reluctance to visit Mississippi, and corporations' hesitancy to establish business there, revolves around its history of racial violence, the state's leadership have taken strides to both "turn that perception around," and to "deal with it."<sup>31</sup> Rhondalyn also mentioned that historic preservation projects associated with racial reconciliation that can add to city beautification, such as those involved with blues tourism development, are often eligible for public funding.

Many of the interviewees shared positions reinforcing the notion that those participating in the industry, and/or its reconciliatory initiatives, are doing so for economic, and not racial peace-making, reasons. When asked whether blues tourism is facilitating racial rapprochement, Red Paden constructed a vision of the industry in terms of its haves and have-nots, designations, as I have shown, carrying racial connotations that link them to the city's white and black demographics, respectively. Red's class-based analysis revealed the motivations behind predilections to participate in interracial coalition building in terms of labor relations. "As long as somebody got some money," Red averred, "there's always gonna be some folks getting along. Cause folks that need money need to get along with ... the folks that's got money," who in turn need to "get along with the poor [so] they can get them to do the work." Theo and Stan offered sentiments that support a similar interpretation of the reasons locals participate in the celebration of black heritage via blues tourism. Stating that "in the last seven years" locals have warmed up to the idea of blues

tourism, these white superintendents believe Clarksdalians have come to the conclusions that there “must be something good with it because it makes money for people” (Dasbach), and that “the fact that there are a lot of people coming through” the city on account of blues tourism is “good for business” (Street). Roger Stolle unintentionally reinforced a top-down view of Red’s breakdown of the industry, recalling that in recent years,

The mayor, and the city attorney, and the police chief, and sheriff and the fire, we sit with them before every Juke Joint festival, and they’re just, “Whatever you guys want to do, you tell us. You know, we’ll relax open container laws, whatever we want.” Because they see what it’s doing. They can ... on Monday morning, look at the sales tax that came in that weekend.

King also notes that attempts to change the state’s racial image are among the blues tourism industry’s primary agendas (9). This, of course, calls into question the impetuses behind efforts to broach racial reconciliation, which also serve a public relations purpose by constructing a post-racial image of Mississippi, and according to one blues musician, racial identities along the lines of what Joe Feagin describes as “sincere fictions of the virtuous white self” (King 178; Feagin 90; see Chapter 2). Speaking on those funding blues festivals, Terry “Big T” Williams argued that “most of your supporters ... only support because of the publicity that they can receive as being recognized as one of the supporters” (183).

## **PUBLIC SPACE AND RACIAL RECONCILIATION**

Most white blues tourism superintendents in Clarksdale offered spatial integration, and the interracial communication that happens as a result, as the industry’s primary contribution to racial reconciliation in Clarksdale. Roger Stolle displayed much enthusiasm for this perspective, arguing that when you put “whites and blacks, locals and outsiders,

inside the same room at the same time, and ... music, maybe dancing, definitely drinking, barriers come down. Walls come down that were there whether we knew it or not.” Roger also tied his perception that integrated space has been expanding in Clarksdale to both blues tourism activities, and the time period over the last decade and a half during which an intensification of blues tourism development occurred, conveying this perspective through a racial story that took place when he first moved to Clarksdale in 2002:

When I first moved here, I volunteered for the Sunflower River Blues Festival. And after one of the very first meetings, one of the ladies who’s a long time member had everybody over for snacks and drinks on her porch, over in this neighborhood back here, which back in the day was traditionally a white neighborhood ... lot of mansions back here, buildings like that. So we’re sitting on the porch, enjoying ourselves, and it’s a mixed crowd, probably half black, half white ... and one of the ladies said something like “Oh, it really is nice over here.” And I’m like, “Oh, you’re not from here,” thinking [she was] somebody else who moved here. “Oh no, I’m from here.” “You were born here?” “Yeah.” ... And basically, she went on to explain, “Well, we were never comfortable coming over here, on this side of the tracks back in this neighborhood.” So I said, “Well, when did you start feeling comfortable to come in here?” “About three years ago.”

Five of the industry’s white superintendents implied that novel racial harmony is happening as a result of blues tourism because many of the city’s blues tourism venues host interracial crowds.<sup>32</sup> Ground Zero Blues Club and Red’s are seen as leading this integrating trend. The former is regularly written as an integrated and integrating space because of its multiracial workforce, a distinction no other venue or blues tourism institution in the city received from the interviewees (Stolle; Luckett; Malvezzi). Of greater significance, Red’s was often offered up as a paragon of integration to underwrite perspectives that blues tourism is a conduit of racial reconciliation in Clarksdale. After mentioning that he has witnessed racially mixed crowds at Red’s, Guy Malvezzi expressed

that he thinks having “more places like Red’s” could facilitate racial peacemaking, a sentiment Roger Stolle reiterated almost verbatim. After averring that Red’s is host to both the integrated bands and audiences, Stan argued that he hasn’t “felt one bit of prejudice over there.” Describing a change in the city’s white racial attitudes, Bubba noted that locals visiting Red’s are apt to see “people in there that you have never seen in these clubs before. Their grandmothers rolling over in their graves.” This overwhelming insistence that Red’s Lounge engenders novel interracial harmony in Clarksdale is notable, first because Red himself doesn’t believe blues tourism is contributing to racial reconciliation in the city, and second, because the club also featured prominently in white superintendents’ authenticity constructs. This latter correlation implies a conflating of these constructs, and all their racially problematic overtones, with racial rapprochement, again evidencing that the industry’s white promoters fundamentally misapprehend reconciliation.

As mentioned earlier, most of blues tourism’s racially mixed audiences are comprised of white tourists and black musicians or club owners; most white and black Clarksdalians do not often enter into the equation. In some cases, this is intentional, as Guy declared that the Shack-Up Inn does not “cater to the locals,” nor does it “want the locals.” When asked whether blues tourism is facilitating reconciliation between blacks and whites, Adele Henderson contended that “it is,” but because of “people that’s coming from out of town.” During an interview with Adele that took place at his club, the Delta Blues Room, I asked him if he thought locals were also making strides in racial rapprochement. Adele answered that “if that was the case, you wouldn’t be the only white girl sitting here right now.”

King has observed that though a considerable portion of blues festival crowds in the Delta are comprised of local African Americans from the region, the integration taking place at such events is fleeting (101; 182). Adele shared a story that both buttresses King's findings, and delivered a more intentional take on the lack of local interracial exchange occurring *between* festivals, and the ways it contributes to the reappearance of segregated space within the city. Adele stressed that during festivals

You see all the people walking around holding hands. "How you doing?" and stuff. And you got people just, "Man, this is the friendliest town I've ever been in in my life. All these people from everywhere." And it's good. It's lovely. We make a nice little piece of change from all that... The next time you come [for a festival], you stay 'til Sunday afternoon, around like 6 o'clock. The only thing you gonna see is the street sweeper... Then Monday, it's almost like a ghost town. And some of the local people that you met through visitors, "Hey Sally! Hey Joe! You know, I own a place round here on Delta. You need to come by and holler at me." After the visitors are gone, you don't see them anymore until the next Juke Joint Festival. Next Sunflower Blues ... It ain't the same on an everyday basis compared to special occasions.

In addition to the temporary quality of some forms of spatial integration, the notion that the industry is helping to encourage racial reconciliation by creating interracial space is attenuated by the reality that not all reactions to the integration of public space in Clarksdale have been positive. Stan shared that he has seen "people peeking in [his club who] ... maybe didn't feel comfortable that maybe there were a lot of black folks in here." Moreover, though Adele believes the opening of black-owned businesses and the presence of black home ownership in Clarksdale's historically white downtown represents a degree of racial progress, he explains that in some cases, these African American business- and homeowners have only been able to claim this space through racial disguise. To wit, Adele has "known people that opened businesses ... they would have to get somebody they know

that was ... maybe a Jewish lawyer... [to] buy the business for them. 'Cause the realtors wouldn't sell to them if they knew that they were black."

While King admits that omitting details of racial oppression from blues tourism narratives is a barrier to racial reconciliation, he connects this to "the pleasure principal of tourism," and not to the culture of silence surrounding race, or fear about how the inclusion of such details constructs whiteness (171-172). Rhondalyn directly controverted King's perspective, arguing that "There's this idea that, if you dig up this stuff," racial discord will intensify. Rhondalyn pointed out that in spite of a cultural pastime of suppressing dialogue about race, the historical wounds of racial conflict have "never healed," and that interracial discord is still "sitting right there. It's the big ole' elephant in the room. And you're thinking that just because people talk about that that makes it happen?"

The instantiation of the culture of racial silence in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry sometimes occurs as an attempt to construct narratives that generate correctives for contemporary racial inequality through spatial integration. The narratives in these cases are power evasive, failing to acknowledge the existence of racial asymmetry, or obscuring its provenances, thereby comprising their reconciliatory potential. The most salient example of the intersection of spatial integration and the racial culture of silence involves Roger Stolle and his "secret" mission to promote interracial gatherings through the Juke Joint Festival. Roger defended his wish to keep his reconciliatory agenda under wraps by arguing that unacknowledged reconciliation comes about more easily than overt rapprochement, because when you say racial reconciliation

to certain people, and probably more the white side than the black side ... people start to get, like, "What are you asking me to do? What, do you want me to get rid of the flag again? What?" ... As



opposed to, it's the secret mission. It's happening. Let's just keep doing this and it makes that happen. It just seems like it's easier to get stuff done more quickly then. You sorta get everybody in the same room having a good time and then, next thing you know. That's just my experience.

Roger attempted to reinforce the notion that covert racial reconciliation is more effective through a racial story involving Red Paden and Roger's white banker, Willis Frazier, who had recently been to Red's Lounge for the first time. Roger was optimistic about the racial reconciliation he believes took place merely because these two inhabited the same space, saying before Willis went to Red's, "they'd never find each other in the same room. Now they were. Were words exchanged about that particular subject? No. But absolutely, one would recommend the other now."

Of course, the fact that the overwhelming majority of blues tourists are white, and that the industry is catering to their aesthetic and symbolic preferences, indicates that rather than creating integrated public space in Clarksdale and the Delta at large, blues tourism is expanding what anthropologist Helen Page and D. France Oliviera have called "white public space." Historian David S. Rotenstein's early study on blues tourism efforts in the Delta city of Helena, Arkansas supports such a perspective. Though Rotenstein initially raises questions about the potential for blues tourism to exacerbate interracial conflict in Helena, which lies some 30 miles northwest of Clarksdale, he quashes this relevant line of inquiry with the rather facile and poorly supported conclusion that while the industry may precipitate the loss of "local color," "few would say that [blues tourism has had] a negative impact" on Helena (143).

In lamenting the loss of “local color,” Rotenstien grapples with the implications of Helena’s changing geo-social terrain, and the possibility that the commodification of black cultural heritage is contributing to the development of white public space. Following an assertion that Helena’s burgeoning commitment to servicing touristic experiences has precipitated the disappearance of spaces suitable for “local interaction,” Rotenstein explains that “recent photographs of the Cherry Street District show a great number of the juke joints that once made the district popular are now parking lots” that act as “open spaces for festival goers” (143). Moreover, the disappearance of the city’s juke joints has occurred in tandem with new construction designed to “meet the demands of increasing numbers of tourists” (140). Here, the term “local” takes on a specific racial connotation, both on account of the fact that the city’s population is mostly black, and through Rotenstein’s conflation of local space with juke joints. Considering that a survey taken at Helena’s King Biscuit Blues Festival in 1990 revealed the racial profile of patrons to be overwhelmingly white (77% of tourists identified as “white/Caucasian”), the reworking of Helena’s landscape central to its transformation into a blues destination has arguably increased the proportion of the city’s white public space (143).

Page and Oliviera claim such space indirectly or directly imposes an “exclusionary sanction” on perspectives developed in opposition to white, mainstream interests (86).<sup>33</sup> Moreover, they argue, white public space “is like the pink elephant that does not exist [because] ... we are expected to affirm that all public space is democratized and that its racial allocation is no longer an issue since the civil rights movement” (86). Page and Oliviera’s comments suggest that white public space, as an atmosphere that imposes an inhibitive force on overt challenges to the racial status quo, and whose very existence we

are discouraged from acknowledging (and therefore, questioning), may serve to support perspectives that write the present as post-racial, and what Omi and Winant have called the “unstable equilibrium” of the racial order. This state is achieved by minimizing disagreements over racial issues, and concomitantly, over institutionalized racial policy. Such a consensus in racial ideology, Omi and Winant argue, presents “formidable obstacles to ... oppositional political projects” that seek to expose the existence of the racial order and the state’s investment in it (80). White public space may aid in this process simply by reducing available space wherein counter-hegemonic racial projects, such as racial reconciliation, or attitudes can be comfortably aired or gain traction. Thus, blues tourism initiatives in the Delta may ultimately serve to stabilize a racial hierarchy that some claim the industry aims to restructure through racial reconciliation.

Clarksdale potentially faces a fate similar to Helena, as much of the blues tourism infrastructure in the city is located in what has historically been construed as its white areas (Rutkoff 138), a phenomenon King asserts is happening throughout the region on account of the racial profile of the industry’s promoters and tourists (16). A transition from traditionally black to white public space is also occurring as a result of blues tourism. Roger Stolle has noted increasing instances of “white nights,” or evenings in which white tourists make up the majority of the patrons at venues where blues music is performed (2011). These venues include some clubs formerly catering to local, largely African American audiences, such as Red’s (Stolle 2013). Roger claims that Red’s, the club most referenced as a site of integration by the industry’s white blues tourism promoters, no longer maintains “much of” a local African American clientele (2013). Theo Dasbach reiterated Roger’s take on the loss of black patronage at Red’s, and extended this observation to include Ground

Zero. Stan Street also mentioned that he would like to see the city's blues tourism industry expand into Clarksdale's New World District, a section of the downtown known historically as the center of black commercial and cultural life, and presently inhabited by a largely African American population. Stan revealed that a white friend of his recently purchased the Roxy Theatre, which is located in the New World District, with the purpose of turning it into a blues tourism venue; Stan stated that he gives her a lot of credit for employing African Americans from this "rough area." Roger also maintained that he would like to take on Queen of Hearts, a juke joint in Jackson servicing an entirely black clientele (according to Roger), as a blues tourism project in the same manner he did with Red's, changing their entertainment focus to one that has "regular live blues."

As the latter example demonstrates, a loss of black patronage is related to the music performed in blues tourism venues. Some researchers and industry superintendents, both black and white, claim that the Delta's African American population prefers soul blues and R n' B to country blues, the former two representing genres not included in the blues authenticity constructs supported by the industry's promoters or tourists, and generally not played in blues tourism venues or memorialized and celebrated by the industry (Henderson; Stolle; King 101).

Both the type of services offered by blues tourism establishments, which include clubs, museums, restaurants and blues paraphernalia retails, and the music played in them, also contribute to the likelihood that the industry is facilitating a racializing of public space on behalf of whites. Henshall notes that 2/3 of the downtown's businesses "have a close association with Blues music and Delta culture," and connects this usage of space to

development occurring in the last decade, during the more intensive period of growth of the blues tourism industry (29; 33). According to Henshall, most of these businesses do not “provide for the typical, day-to-day shopping needs of Clarksdale/County residents” (33). In a city with an 80% black majority, the peripheralizing of space dedicated to locals, and centralizing of space designed to accommodate white tourists, certainly evidences a geo-spatial structuring that reflects the region’s historical and contemporary racial hierarchy.

This racial organizing of space is fortified by, and fortifies, the region’s race/class correlations, as the blues tourism industry’s white public space is more expensive to occupy. Describing improvements to the city’s downtown that included the opening of Madidi and Rust, two restaurants both researchers and locals connect to blues tourism (Henshall 29; Luckett), an anonymous Clarksdalian from Henshall’s report observed that in spite of the addition of these “fine dining places,” the city “still need[s] a place for ‘ordinary’ people’ to dine in the Downtown” (46). Roger claims that the rising price of festivals may also edge out local African Americans from participating in them, as happened with the V.I.P. table at the 2012 Sunflower River and Blues Festival. Roger conceded that though the festival’s organizers have “tried to get it to stay a free festival, so that even the poorest people in the community can come ... last year they had some challenges because ... the VIP situation ... pretty much made it a paid festival.” In this case, a special area in front of the festival’s stage was reserved for patrons willing to pay \$10,000 for the privilege (Stolle 2013). While Roger disagreed with this perspective, claiming that it was an unintentional consequence of poor planning, he revealed that “a lot of white out-of-town attendees at the festival thought this was a racial thing ... because ... the people who could afford the V.I.P. tables were basically white.”

Roger also observed that black-patronized juke joints and clubs typically hire DJ's because they cannot afford the blues acts tourists want to see. In this sense, it is also more expensive to own the blues tourism industry's white public space. Adele notes that the "support" he gets for blues acts comes "from tourists," and not locals. Thus, he has to carefully consider when to have blues acts play in his club, as many nights during the year, the flow of tourists through the town isn't large enough to be "profitable for us as well as the entertainer."

Adele Henderson was the sole superintendent in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry who expressed an interest in designing public space specifically with both the city's African Americans and black blues musicians in mind. While he does have blues performances at his club two nights a month and during festivals, Adele maintains a venue that operates as black public space by distancing it from the blues tourism industry itself, rejecting its black poverty authenticity aesthetic, limited musical purview, and lack of concern for the social comfort of African Americans. In Adele's words:

My thing is a little different. When we opened the place, we actually opened it for people to have a nice place to go. Not necessarily a blues bar ... it was just a place where people came and felt comfortable. We do lot of other things. We do a lot of R n' B. A lot of comedy acts ... Matter of fact, we have a lot of blues entertainers that came through, not only just to perform ... cause they wanted ... for a nice place to go.

## **CONCLUSION**

In King's final chapter, he assesses the likelihood that blues tourism is enabling racial reconciliation, arguing that while the celebration of the state's black cultural heritage lends credence to an affirmative answer to the question, the industry's racial structure and

unwillingness to engage with the uglier parts of blues history remain key roadblocks to racial peacemaking. Again, King chalks up the latter issue to *tourists'* disinterest in such historical details, and their "desire [for] a fun-filled escape from the drudgery of daily routine" (172). Such analysis fails to account for the constructions of authenticity revolving around black poverty that blues tourists seek when visiting the Delta, and overlooks the possibility that these roadblocks service the racial agendas of white blues promoters.

Indeed, King backs away time and again from investigating the latter issue. Centering his chapter on racial reconciliation on the relationship between white producers and black musicians, King holds out that the racial strain inherent to conflicts between the two is a product of the way the problems are historically situated, and the state's contemporary power structure (188). Here, King leaves the racial perspectives and motivations of white blues tourism superintendents untouched. Instead, he argues that some blues musicians feel "slighted and unappreciated" because they receive "relatively meager financial compensation" for playing music, which "*may symbolize to some performers a certain level of disrespect,*" as they can draw on a personal history of racial exploitation specific to the Delta to frame their labor within (188; italics mine). Here, King employs a stylistic used to evoke color-blind racism's minimization frame, a tack Bonilla-Silva identifies as "blacks making things look racial when they are not."<sup>34</sup> To wit, he backs away from language that would attribute a concrete reality to black criticisms of the industry. Because he focuses on the monetary relationship between black musicians and white producers, King is able to attenuate the credibility of these criticisms by averring that "there is no empirical evidence to prove ... that whites are financially profiting from blues tourism at the expense of blacks" (189). Although he does concede that the *potential* for

black disenfranchisement exists because whites control the industry (189), in the end, King leaves the question about the industry's impact on regional race relations open, suggesting that the "structural imbalances that *may*, indeed, characterize Mississippi's blues tourism industry ... *may* ultimately result in ... nothing more than a twenty-first-century version of the Delta's feudal system of sharecropping" (189-191; italics author's).

This chapter has made clear that issues of interracial conflict and resolution extend beyond economics, and that the industry is poorly positioned to produce novel racial harmony because it is dominated by white producers who draw on color-blind racism and authenticity constructs when conceptualizing racial progress. Furthermore, this section offers a more penetrating take on how the industry's racial structure, which is overwhelmingly headed by whites, thwarts rapprochement efforts, a reality that some of its black superintendents, and even a few of its white, recognize.

Specifically, I have shown how the racial reconciliation believed to be occurring because of the industry is taking place on white terms, which often trade on the culture of silence on race to carry such agendas out, and the minimizing and abstract liberalism frames to rhetorically equalize the power asymmetry between whites' and blacks' social positions. Under the aegis of white leadership, the need for these groups to play different roles in the reconciliatory process, and for restorative justice and overt recognition of racial wrongdoing to be a part of it, is effectively obscured.

Moreover, the responses of white superintendents reveal only a small degree of support for including racial reconciliation among the industry's goals, and that no real consensus exists to buttress the notion that blues tourism is facilitating racial peacemaking in Clarksdale. Guided by authenticity blues myths that imply the transformative power of



music will take care of racial conflict itself, few white producers see the need to turn to structural or formal methods that institutionalize reconciliation or restorative justice.

When white superintendents do advocate racial reconciliation, because it also serves both economic and public relations purposes useful to the industry, it remains difficult to know if their investment in it is genuinely on behalf of racial minorities, or if they actually have any interest in recontextualizing their own understandings of race, or reconsidering their relations, within the industry and outside of it, with racial others.

My research has also made clear that the industry's white producers believe blues tourism's greatest contribution to racial peacemaking in Clarksdale is spatial integration, and the attendant interracial dialogues that take place in such spaces. However, that integration is temporary and mostly transpires between white tourists and African American musicians and club owners, rather than between local whites and blacks. Likewise, the industry is actually expanding white public space by designing locations that cater to white tourists, but not to local African Americans. As blues tourism continues to develop in Clarksdale, the city's considerable African American majority may encounter a spatial marginalization through a repositioning of black entertainment into both historically and newly claimed white public space, as well as through the encroachment of white public space into traditionally black arenas. In the end, the white superintendents helming the blues tourism industry in Clarksdale reinforce, and encourage the development of, racial estrangement and discord in the city through their engagement with the notion of racial reconciliation itself, and the activities they see as promoting it.

When asked if cultural heritage tourism's racial reconciliation efforts in Mississippi have been successful, Rhondalyn admitted that she didn't yet know, as those she is aware

of are still in developmental phases. However, Rhondalyn warned that when communities fail to “really do the reconciliation work” before starting these initiatives, including figuring out who the projects’ stakeholders are, “you’re going to have problems.” Rhondalyn’s insights reveal the ways issues related to who should participate in the industry, and who should benefit from it, are central to blues tourism’s ultimate impact on Clarksdale’s race relations. In the next chapter, I explore such issues in order to further reveal the blues tourism industry’s role in organizing social relationships between the city’s racial groups.

## CHAPTER 4: WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE, WHO SHOULD BENEFIT?

*Activities assumed to be 'creative' or 'cultural' have economic dimensions (not least in the conditions of work and remuneration), but so too are the 'economic' constituents of the cultural industries—firms, labour, spaces of production and performance—also sites that are culturally produced, about which discourses are made, enacted and contested.*

–Chris Gibson, “Cultures at Work”

In view of the potential correlation between local approval and the industry’s long-term economic viability, King highlights a recent survey that suggests white Delta residents are more apt to support Mississippi’s blues tourism initiatives than their black counterparts. Paraphrasing Alan Barton, the sociologist helming the survey, King notes that this difference in opinion along racial lines may stem from the “perception among the African American respondents that white business people profit from festivals that feature African American musicians” (8-9). In his doctoral thesis, *Refuse to Fold: Heritage Tourism and the Mississippi Delta*, Middle Tennessee University’s Brian Davis Dempsey shares a similar concern regarding the industry’s productive relationships, claiming “a key topic of consideration remains the degree to which local African American communities are part of the management and construction of blues tourism narratives in the Delta” (iv). Dempsey also argues that mismanagement of state tourism funds—which has included the failure to accord certain blues tourism institutions or events their fair share of public resources—attenuates the degree to which some non-official local actors can participate or succeed in the blues tourism industry, a phenomenon an anonymous interviewee connected to racial

motivations on the part of CCTC (13).<sup>35</sup> Carrying such indictments farther up the so-called chain of command, King unintentionally elucidates a top-down perspective of the industry's structure through an inverted analysis following insufficient capital flows. Specifically, King traces a hierarchy of blame beginning with blues musicians imputing underpayment to club owners, who then condemn city officials for unscrupulous distribution of tourism resources, and ending with city officials accusing the state of Mississippi of underfunding its blues tourism initiatives (70-73). Although neither King nor Dempsey carry their research far enough to *concretely* draw this conclusion, because the terms "musician" and "official" can often imply specific racial identities in these settings, these accusations of economic shortchanging again suggest the dovetailing of the industry's labor structure with African American disenfranchisement. Indeed, the prevalence of scholarly unease over the labor relations between racial groups involved in Delta blues tourism evinces the need to account for discursive strategies shaping the industry's emerging structure as part of the effort to uncover the means through which the region's African Americans are included or excluded.

In his essay on the role of 'cultural' labor in creative economies, geographer Chris Gibson "explores how social constructions ... mediate working relationships" (202). This chapter builds on existing blues tourism research to take up a similar task. In the following analysis, I explore the way race, through its intersection with the discursive trajectories of place and class, imbues ideations of appropriate labor and inclusiveness, as well as conceptualizations of beneficiary rights, in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry. I begin this effort by examining how white and black blues tourism producers make determinations about who should, or is able to, participate in the industry, and the constitutive function the

industry's educational agendas play in this process.<sup>36</sup> Following an investigation of the racial myths conjured by white producers during discussions in which they expressed support for these agendas, I look at the methods through which racial distinctions are applied, or occluded, during assessments of who can, should, or does benefit from the industry. Additionally, I consider the degree to which beneficiary rights are accounted for at all by blues tourism superintendents, and the racial implications of failing to do so.

## **PARTICIPATING**

Both the semiotic layers accruing to, and form of labor required of, different positions within an industry may determine the degree to which individuals can benefit from them. Chris Gibson has argued that the “sorts of ‘work’ that are generated in cultural economies vary enormously in terms of conditions and security, from those holding down stable waged occupations, through to various forms of casual and occasionally paid activities” (203). More importantly, those helming such economies wield a degree of control over the ability of those with less secure positions to participate and benefit. Again, Gibson notes that some

institutionalized ‘cultural’ industries, ... particularly those where ‘creativity’ underpins initial production, are often predicated on an especially vulnerable set of circumstances. Cultural production is channeled through gatekeepers, individuals in a range of settings who manage and promote certain flows of sounds” (205).

In the following analysis, I focus on the way these ‘gatekeepers,’ or the industry’s white and black superintendents, conceive of the qualifications they believe are required, or should be, of those involved in Clarksdale’s blues tourism industry. My analysis will show how such requirements align with the imagined skillsets of, or the concrete economic

and socio-cultural resources available to, different racial groups. Additionally, I examine education as a site of leverage useful to implementing the informal participatory schemata arising from these constellations of qualifications, an organizational influence that contributes to the production and reproduction of the industry's and region's racial structure.

Many of the blues tourism superintendents interviewed for this research implied that capital resources are a necessary prerequisite for participating in blues tourism.<sup>37</sup> In addition to possessing the initial capital necessary to open a venue, because the blues tourism industry in Clarksdale is still in a relatively early stage of development, the responses of some blues tourism producers suggest would-be entrepreneurs need enough outside resources to float them through the industry's seasonal fallow periods, and/or should rely on secondary sources of income. And indeed, many venues owned by the white entrepreneurs interviewed for this study are 501c3's, or non-profits. Bill Lockett also considers his blues tourism work "charity," reminding me that Ground Zero Blues Club is only now, after 12 years in business, getting close to breaking even. Theo described his role in blues tourism in terms of an avocation, mentioning that "the first five years that we did this was more or less to have some fun with it and do it when I wanted to," and that he has already had a corporate career.

Of course, as the responses of superintendents demonstrate, it is likely that Delta whites would have an easier time meeting this monetary precondition than local African Americans, a significant portion of whom endure a marginal economic existence. Though Guy Malvezzi argued that taking part in blues tourism has "little to do with how much money you have," he also explained that the Shack-Up Inn has no black partners because

“none came to the table with money on the front end.” Both of the African American superintendents interviewed can only participate in blues tourism because they have other sources of income. Red Paden works full-time installing carpets, and opens his club on weekend evenings, when he has a better chance of making sufficient remuneration. Adele Henderson can participate in blues tourism because his wife also has a full-time job, and because he hosts non-blues music in his club. Adele contended that he is unable to survive as a solely blues-based venue; without “a base of your regulars coming in,” Adele wouldn’t turn a profit. Adele also feels it would be harder for him, as an African American, to gain access to public funding for blues tourism because he doesn’t have the professional connections that whites do that could facilitate this process.

Adele connected the industry’s financial requirements to a racial luxury to participate, and to a degree, to fail. According to Adele, white people are gonna be on the front lines of things because of the fact that most of them can afford it. You got to look at the fact that this has basically gotten to be a welfare town. You don’t have a lot of black people that’s financially able to just invest in a business and give it four or five years to develop, or never make a profit ... You have a lot of people, they just can’t even miss work to go to a meeting talking about tourism.

Adele also discussed the white-owned Madidi and Ground Zero, observing that they weren’t, and aren’t (respectively), very profitable. Adele claims that he “can’t afford to do that. I can’t afford to just sit around and just let my business... I have to continue to try to think of things.” He also discussed Charles Evans, a local white investor who owns a substantial amount of real estate in downtown Clarksdale, and who has let these buildings languish for a number of years, only now beginning to develop them. Conversely, when Adele’s place was closed for a month after a fire last year, he was “almost in tears.”

Although the Delta Blues Room was insured, Adele's "employees was [sic] out of work for thirty days. The money that I was making off the door, people coming in, I can't recoup that." Furthermore, Adele isn't involved in blues tourism in any other capacity; unlike many of the white superintendents, he doesn't sit on boards that organize festivals, as the Delta Blues Room is a full-time job that doesn't allow for participation in those activities.

Clarksdale's white blues tourism superintendents focused on three main arenas of qualification when discussing who *should* participate in the industry. The first involved an argument that non-locals, or outsiders, bring a much-needed, fresh perspective to blues tourism, a remarkable proposition considering that over  $\frac{3}{4}$  of Clarksdalians are African American. Theo Dasbach mentioned that he knows what he is doing in Clarksdale because he lived in three different countries, and that those who participate in blues tourism "should not come out of a small community on general principal." Stan Street held out that the right people to work in the industry are those who have "taken those old ideals and thrown them all out and realized how important change is... Or somebody from the outside." Guy averred that he would "clear out" the tourism department if he could, and replace the CCTC's existing personnel with people who know "what's going on," who, in his estimation, include the "tattooed, earringed, pony-tailed people from New York or L.A. or Europe" that frequent his hotel. Though Bubba O'Keefe is a Clarksdale native, he believes his extraregional connections endow him with the perspectives needed to succeed in blues tourism. Bubba claimed that those who have had a hard time understanding why others would want to develop blues tourism weren't "on a daily basis dialoging with people, like I am, all over the world. Doing interviews with BBC or a German film crew."



Many white superintendents included a passion for the blues in their conceptualizations of who belongs in the city's blues tourism industry. According to Bubba, "If they're passionate about it, they're qualified"; neither would Bubba turn over the management of his WROX museum to a person who wasn't "true and passionate." Bubba considers both Sid Graves (who is, again, described as passionate), and Roger Stolle as prime examples of people who belong in blues tourism, saying of the latter that his willingness to "give up a six figure job and move to Clarksdale, Mississippi" demonstrate a great deal of passion for blues, making him a particularly favorable addition to the industry. Stan Street offered a similar perspective, connecting individual passion to a visible presence in the local blues scene. To wit, Stan contended that "a person that has a passion for it" should be involved in blues tourism, and that "if you don't see those people out listening to those performers ... as far as I'm concerned, they're not gonna be able to do their job." Stan also complained about the CCTC personnel's lack of qualifications in terms of passion and an interest in seeing live blues, saying that he'd "like to see somebody who really cared about blues and came and listened to blues music in there. Because at this point right now, that's not there."

Adele shared a perspective that complicates these white superintendents' passion-based standards in regards to black Deltans, arguing that not only do many African Americans have a conflicted relationship to the music that may preclude their having passion for the blues, but that the artists many adults in the black community do feel passionate about are not represented in the industry:

As far as African America... people don't realize, we say this jokingly among ourselves, the white community, they want to go back to the blues. We already had it! (Laughs). When they go whine

about 'my mama done left me,' the black community doesn't really get so into that. Because... my grandparents, and her parents, they actually lived it.... And you have a lot of African Americans, we like the sound because we like music, but ... more contemporary, Tyrone Davis, Denise LaSalle. I guess the people born in the 70's, late 60's, they don't really get into Muddy Waters, and the guy at the crossroad, Robert Johnson... and most of the venues that you go to, people that have that type of music, if you really look around, you have 80% white people. That's what they like. Red's is the perfect example. That's the atmosphere they want to be in.

Later, Adele mentioned that contemporary local African Americans don't want to hear the blues because they already have them as a result of declining employment opportunities in the city. Eventually, Adele concluded that some local African Americans might only want to participate in blues tourism to a limited degree:

When you really look at the way that some of our forefathers were treated ... I think we want to be a part of it as far as the decision making, as far as the financial part of it. But as far as the research... it brings back a lot of pain.

Business and academic credentials also factored into white superintendents' conceptualizations of what qualifies an individual to work in blues tourism. Stan Street mentioned that "a person that knows about it, a historian," would be a good fit for the industry. Speaking on a recently hired curator/archivist for the WROX museum, Bubba argued that he is glad to have this person working for him because

he knows how to handle [the museum's memorabilia]. I've had people before that would come in and volunteer and just ... start taking records out of sleeves and out of boxes and then not keeping up with it. And he is documenting, giving it a code and references and all that.

Theo touted his own scholarly and business credentials to justify his participation in the industry, arguing that he "can be only part of this music thing because I have knowledge

about it. What I do is all my experience in life, being a manager, I have a degree in marketing, I have a law degree... I managed multi-national companies.”

Two superintendents shared their opposition to using academic experience as a determinate of who should participate in blues tourism, in both cases connecting it to their own lack thereof. Adele spoke about participating in the city’s affairs through local committees, and being dismissed because he isn’t educated. Adele believes that even though a person may be “articulate,” or have “a certain degree,” they might not necessarily make wise decisions in terms of local issues. Countering white superintendents’ suggestion that outsider status qualifies a person to work in blues tourism, Adele advocated a familiarity with local socio-environs, averring that “when it comes down to doing things like [blues tourism], you need to get somebody from grassroots. This is a grassroots community. You need to get somebody who’s been through here.” Guy offered a similar sentiment, saying that “anybody” can work in the industry, and that Red Lounge’s, one of “the biggest draws for Clarksdale,” is run by Red Paden, whose “education is minimal. Such is mine.”

Claims made by academics or officials about the degree to which local black or white audiences are knowledgeable of, or passionate about, the region’s blues tradition carry implications regarding who in a community is perceived to have the right to participate in the blues tourism industry. Consider King’s recounting of the case of Sylvester and Mary Ann Edwards Hoover, an African American couple who currently operate a blues museum in Baptist Town, Mississippi, and self-identify as the “keepers” of Robert Johnson’s legacy. Steve La Vere, a white Californian responsible for a very commercially successful 1990 compilation of Robert Johnson’s music, argues Sylvester Hoover has “no authority to be

doing what he's doing," ostensibly because Hoover "has no education" and has "never studied the blues" (King 176). For La Vare, an assumed lack of a formal education in blues history sustains the logic for divorcing individuals from the right to profit from or participate in the designing of musical heritage sites for popular consumption.

If education and passion remain central to constructions of who qualifies to work in blues tourism, as a demographic often targeted by the industry's educational agendas because they are believed to be disconnected, dispassionate, or unknowledgeable about the blues, African Americans are arguably understood as unsuitable for such work. Indeed, King posits that blues tourism "hopes to change" local African American attitudes towards the blues, as the religious among them are wont to consider the genre "devil's music" (170-171).<sup>38</sup>

Both Dempsey and Rotenstein provide alternative perspectives on the relative knowledge base or passion of contemporary local audiences vis-à-vis the region's blues heritage. Dempsey maintains "everyone who lives [in the region] are [sic] at least familiar with the connection between blues and the Delta" because "blues festivals have been fixtures in small Delta towns since the 1970's" (2). Though Rotenstein initially contends "many blues artists and writers on the blues have recognized that African-Americans have become increasingly detached from the musical form they invented," imparting a synchronic understanding of blues music as a phenomena itself, he later states "blues has remained a consistent component of African-American folklife in the cultural hearth of the blues: the Mississippi Delta region of the American South" (133).

The responses of some white superintendents in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry support King's argument. Constructing an image of black Deltans as lacking in knowledge of, or passion for, the blues, white producers design this group as targets for the industry's didactic projects. Bubba O'Keefe followed suit, managing to make a distinction between the attitudes of racial demographics towards the blues through the region's school systems. Concerning visitors to his museum, Bubba observed that "private schools in Clarksdale come, but not the public schools." Because the private school system maintains almost entirely white student bodies, and the region's public schools generally service only African American children, Bubba's statement evinces a perspective that sees a lack of investment in blues heritage on the part of the Delta's African American community, a viewpoint he articulated overtly during our interview. In regards to local blues heritage, Bubba argued that "the black community takes it for granted. It just so everyday part of the history ... it's not really appreciated." Kappi Allen also nodded vigorously, saying "exactly," when asked if she thought the industry was trying to educate local African Americans about the blues because of their religious beliefs. In the same vein, Theo Dasbach identified the region's African American youth as susceptible to incorrect notions about blues heritage, a 'problem' he hopes to correct by bringing local schoolchildren to his museum:

I want the locals, especially the people from this communities [sic] here, the kids. I want to tell them that this is their heritage. And obviously when you go on this racial thing, most of them are black. So they should know that some people love this stuff... Then they can form their own opinion. Not what their surrounding says... related to certain not-good environmental music too... So it's not only what you hear today that's in because the kids at school think it's in. Or your parents don't like that. Make up your own mind.

Roger Stolle shared a number of perspectives and racial stories that singled out Delta African Americans as both lacking passion about blues music, and being in need of an education about the value of blues heritage. Roger believes that within the local “black community, there is a little bit of looking down on blues,” and that “it just took awhile for this to be something people are proud of.” Describing an African American filmmaker who had come to Clarksdale to make a documentary as “not Mississippi African American, you know, very sophisticated, very educated,” Roger also established a contrast between Mississippi African Americans and blacks from other regions, constructing the former as an un- or under-educated group. Additionally, Roger seemed to think that public funding for blues tourism initiatives could help to educate juke joint owners, a group he identified on other occasions as being African American, about the value of blues tourism, because they would

start to see, as they interact finally with tourists, ... what are they coming here for. Because a lot of them don't know either. Them being the juke joint owners. I remember Anniebelle's Lounge, when Billy Harton was alive, out here on State Street. He was trying so hard to understand. We'd involve him in the Juke Joint Festival, but he just couldn't understand ... when he should do the music and who it should be. Like he was just trying to get an idea of what are tourists really coming here for. Because he grew up with it. He likes it and everything, but he doesn't understand what really they are coming for. And sometimes you'll get like, they're booking a rock blues act, because it's like if they're white and they're coming here, they'd want to see this. And it's like, nah, nah, nah, they can see that back home. They want T-Model Ford, who's maybe not in tune half the night.

Roger made similar comments about the Queen of Hearts blues club in Jackson, which he describes as “a black juke joint” that “rarely has real live blues,” bringing a mix of authenticity assessments into play through the racial identity of patrons and type of music played. Roger claimed that if he lived in Jackson, he would help the owners see that the

Delta blues are “what people would come for.” In this case, Roger seeks to bring the club further in line with blues authenticity constructs by changing its musical line-up to include artists he believes white blues tourists would enjoy.

## **BLUES TOURISM, THE MYTH OF THE DISORGANIZED POOR, AND DIFFERENTIAL RACIALIZATION**

The La Vere-Hoover face-off, Roger’s sense that juke joint owners’ don’t understand the value tourists place on the Delta’s country blues traditions, and the general assumption among white superintendents that local African Americans need to be educated about the blues, call to mind anthropologist Charles Valentine’s critique of the myth of the disorganized poor, a tactic that, when applied to racial groups, draws on color-blind racism’s cultural racism frame. Valentine has decried the scholarly tendency to rely on this myth, which draws from “culture of poverty” stereotypes depicting the impoverished as “collectively weak and ineffective, incapable of organization, planning or sustained purposeful action, irresolute and lacking in will, dependent, helpless, and resigned” (Gregory 10). Notably, King used the disorganized poor myth in conjunction with the minimization frame to discredit the likelihood that blues musicians are being exploited through the industry, saying that their “financial situation may be attributed to a number of factors, including an inability to save and invest wisely or personal vices such as alcohol and gambling” (187).

Though referencing urban poverty, Valentine’s renderings of the disorganized poor myth describes the logic some white superintendents adduce to justify their rights or ability, over the region’s impoverished African Americans, to construct narratives about

blues heritage and/or occupy, or succeed in, certain upper level positions within the Delta blues tourism industry. For instance, in response to a question about African American complaints that whites are the major beneficiaries of blues tourism, Roger used the myth of the disorganized poor to access the “blacks making things look racial when they aren’t” stylistic of the minimization of racism frame. Here, Roger distinguished between the white-owned Ground Zero Blues Club, and Red’s Lounge, an African American-owned juke joint in Clarksdale. Roger believes the juke joint’s owner, Red Paden, isn’t making money because “He’s just not very efficient,” while Red himself offered a reading of his juke joint that belies Roger’s understanding of both him and his venue as based on the disorganized poor myth, calling Red’s Lounge a “professional blues club.” Roger also argued they while both venues are great,” the former is successful because it “is promoting itself,” while the latter “is relying on others to promote it.” Roger went on to apply this same logic to the white-owned Shack-Up Inn and the black-owned Riverside Hotel, saying that because the latter does “not have the same marketing prowess as the Shack-Up Inn, ... you sorta have to sell people on it.” Here, black superintendents are perceived as not being able to succeed in the blues tourism industry because they are seen as lacking professional and organizational skills their white counterparts use to precipitate managerial efficacy and, concomitantly, financial success.

As the myth of the disorganized poor is applied to Delta African Americans—who remain the region’s most impoverished group—in the context of the blues tourism industry, it works as a form of differential racialization. Central to critical race realists’ understanding of the allocation of social resources along racial lines, differential racialization posits that those at the top of the racial hierarchy will racialize different



groups at different times in response to the imagined needs of the labor market (Delgado and Stefancic 21). Certainly, Roger used the myth of the disorganized poor in many instances to suggest that the imposition of a black and white segregation of the industry's labor relations is necessary to its successful functioning. First, Roger claimed that he

can't do what Red Paden does ... Just like I can't do what Robert Bilbo Walker does. As Red would say, 'you get in where you fit in.' I can organize and I can promote ... I can't run a juke joint and make it a juke joint. That's just not in my background. I can emulate it and see what he's doing and try to fake it.

As both Red and Robert Bilbo Walker are black, while Roger is white, there is an assumption here that only African Americans "fit in" to certain positions within the blues tourism industry, namely running 'real' juke joints and playing the blues, while whites "can" play an organizational and promotional role. Roger used the disorganized poor myth to effect differential racialization when explaining his occasional informal intervention in the management of Red's Lounge, arguing that

If TV crews want to come through, things like that, it does not end well usually. I don't actually get involved and physically manage that situation ... but ... just the organizational ... What exactly are they paying? Is it cash or a check? These things that just become huge issues if they're not discussed up front. The kind of stuff I can deal with.

Roger's next story again involved the blues musician Roger Bilbo Walker, who Roger contended wouldn't

mind me saying he can't really read or write. He doesn't have a bank account. For example, I've got him playing in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for on the 15<sup>th</sup> of this month. He could never pull that off. He doesn't know how to facilitate that. Now, I couldn't go and do that show, but I can get him there.

In spite of his insistence that Red, and not himself, 'can' run a juke joint, Roger constructs himself as the only actor capable of 'dealing' with managerial responsibilities, activities he assumes Red and Robert Bilbo Walker are unable to navigate without his intervention. And indeed, by subtracting the ability to successfully navigate the "organizational" aspects of running a club from Red's professional qualifications, Roger leaves little outside Mr. Paden's racial identity to support his contention that only Red can run a juke joint.

### **REPRODUCING THE INDUSTRY AND ITS RACIAL STRUCTURE: THE DELTA BLUES MUSEUM'S ARTS AND EDUCATION PROGRAM**

The central didactic project in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry that functions as a form of differential racialization is likely the Delta Blues Museum's Arts and Education program, which "keeps the history of the Delta blues alive" by teaching students "to play the blues on the instrument or instruments of their choice" (Delta Blues Museum). Notably, many of the industry's white superintendents showed support for the program. Bill Lockett spoke favorably about the Delta Blues Museum "taking an active role in teaching youngsters how to play blues music," and Roger shared that he finds "what the Delta Blues Museum's doing with their arts and education program, what ... Mr. Johnny Billington has done through the years, teaching kids to play," to be "fantastic." Guy also declared that the "the Blues Museum's doing a good job trying to teach blues music" to "young African Americans," and that the program will help "put them to work ... playing music."

Guy's perception that the Blues Museum's program mainly targets African Americans, and can train them for a career in the blues, makes clear the program's role in reproducing the industry and its racial structure. As many of the older black blues

musicians die out, some of the African American kids tutored in the Arts and Education program have begun to take their place. This agenda constitutes an invidious racialization of labor that reinforces the blues authenticity myth that 'real' blues music is performed by African Americans.

The Delta Blues museum's blues music education program has also garnered criticism because of the adult lifestyle it makes available, and appealing, to black adolescents. In the process, the program potentially limits occupational prospects to members of an already marginalized racial group by competing for the time and energy these children are willing to devote to their education. When discussing a recent performance by a local thirteen-year-old African American blues player, Adele Henderson took issue with the way the Blues Museum's program encourages young black kids to participate in the industry:

You teaching these guys how to play in clubs ... But you come in clubs, what you got? You got drinking. Smoking. Cussing. You got a 13 year old kid ... you exposing him to this type of thing because you trying to keep blues alive. You bringing him into this atmosphere, and this is what he sees because he's a young man ... Even when you get seventeen years old, they start to get into this life. You keep a thirteen year old out until 1 o'clock, learning how to play a guitar, and then learning how to play in a band ... at that age. Yeah, the tourism stuff, they love that. Cause' he can play his ass off. But where he going from here?

Adele observed that some of the local African American blues players who start playing at a young age get into drinking and smoking, look haggard and old before their time, and don't finish school, or are home schooled. He also mentioned that some of these children have a hard time interacting with kids their own age because of their early exposure to the adult world, and that their age ill-prepares them for the types of decisions they face as a result of

being thrust into this world prematurely. In conjunction with the fact that this didactic initiative reinforces the racialized blues authenticity constructs invoked by blues tourism fans and white industry superintendents, Adele's comments reveal that those championing the museum's educational program are advocating an initiative that perpetuates a racialized distribution of labor channeling African American into musicianship, a position that represents the industry's most vulnerable, and likely least remunerative, form of labor. Moreover, it shows how the blues tourism's educational goals, and the racialized structure of the industry resulting from them, may undergird the Delta's racial hierarchy by encouraging black Deltans to consider occupational choices with little potential for stable income.

The industry's African Americans used different standards to determine who should participate in blues tourism. Red placed the interests of the community at the center of his perspective on this issue, saying that participants in the blues tourism industry should be "people who are doing stuff for the community to keep it going. People who are trying to bring money into the town, to enhance the town, make the whole town better." Though Adele largely focused on racial considerations, as did white superintendents, he did so without using authenticity constructs, or assumptions about any degree of education or passion, and refrained from assigning specific forms of labor to particular racial groups. Instead, Adele argued for the participation of African Americans in the industry in general on the premise that they are the rightful inheritors of blues heritage. Adele wondered why the living relations of deceased, or living, Delta blues musicians being promoted in Clarksdale, many of whom live in the area, including relatives of Muddy Waters, haven't been incorporated into blues tourism. Adele also argued that he believes African Americans

“need to be in the loop. I think Red needs to be at least questioned about the tourism ... somebody needs to come around here and ask me, ‘Adele, what you think about we do this [sic]?’” According to Adele, this involvement on the part of African Americans is founded upon the fact that “when you talking about the blues, you talking about black folk.”

## **BENEFITTING**

Scholars themselves seem to struggle with ascribing the proprietary rights of the Delta’s blues heritage to a particularly group. Some seem to make overtures towards recognizing the region’s African Americans as the legitimate heirs of its blues legacy, a status that can imply they are also the rightful inheritors of any benefits, monetary or otherwise, capitalizing on that heritage may bring. As those who “own” such heritage obviously remain in a unique position to benefit from it, in the absence of a formal statement, the use of proprietary language with regards to the Delta blues culture can be revealing of the ways scholars and the industry’s superintendents make decisions about who are the heirs of blues heritage, and therefore, who should benefit from blues tourism.

Dempsey twice makes reference to cultural ownership in contexts that, to greater and lesser degrees, suggest that the Delta’s contemporary African American residents possess an inherent claim to blues heritage. Two sentences prior to asking “how do those whose culture endured so much violence, oppression, pain, inequality and injustice perceive [blues tourism] development?,” Dempsey refers to blues as an “element closely ... identified with black culture” (3). Both the earlier usage of “black” with “culture,” and the mention of oppression, make it very likely that “those” whose opinions Dempsey seeks, and those he identifies in terms of their possessive rights to blues culture through the use of the word “whose,” are African Americans. However, he later worries that “if local communities

are not woven into planning and implementation efforts, heritage tourism can potentially corner a distinctive culture, sell it to outside visitors, and keep the treasure safely guarded away from those whose culture is packaged, commodified and sold.” (12). In this case, it seems as if the possessive “those whose culture” indexes the *non*-racially specific “local community.” Dempsey undergirds this multiracial take on cultural ownership in the next sentence, which begins with the assertion that “most Deltans, black and white, support heritage tourism” (12). Steve La Vere, on the other hand, makes more obvious his stance on whom he believes should benefit from commodifying blues heritage, assessing ownership in terms of personal investment, rather than cultural or ancestral lineage. When discussing the royalties he pays Robert Johnson’s relatives from the proceeds on sales of the blues singers’ box set, La Vere criticizes the Johnson family for being “simply the heirs that spend the money I make and send to them.” According to La Vere, “that’s the only thing they do, and that’s the only thing they’ve ever done” (King 176). La Vere’s apparent indignation can be seen to suggest that Johnson’s relatives have not rightfully earned the money La Vere gives them, while he himself has.

Some white superintendents in the blues tourism language used proprietary language in a way that insinuates they, as residents of Clarksdale, can justifiably claim beneficiary status vis-à-vis blues heritage. Speaking on early resistance to blues tourism, Kappi Allen claimed that one obstacle has been “the kind of attitude ... of not really appreciating what you have in your own backyard.” Here, Kappi constructs the notion that what takes place in one’s community occurs on a level of connectedness comparable to that which occurs on one’s property. Thus, Kappi’s logic implies that local whites would maintain a proprietary relationship to blues, even if they, or their ancestors, did not

actually produce it. Kappi also argued that it is necessary for members of Clarksdale's community to know about the blues because "it's part of who we are," a phrase Bill Luckett echoed almost verbatim, and in a similar context. The use of the collective "we" implies that blues culture derives from the city's multi-racial community as a whole, and is not specifically African American heritage.

This understanding that white Deltans are as endowed with justifiable claims to the region's black musical traditions as their African American counterparts may factor into their tendency to dismiss criticisms that the industry's racial structure has made it likely that whites are the main beneficiaries of blues tourism. Roger Stolle used the "black people making things look racial when they aren't" minimization of racism stylistic to combat such critiques. When asked who was resistant to developing blues tourism, Roger claimed that

more on the African American side ... Frank Ratliff, Rat at the Riverside Hotel, I think he felt for a period of time, and even Red Paden at Red's Lounge felt for a time that ... we're all promoting blues, but who are the beneficiaries? Well it looks like across the tracks. That's where everything's happening.

The train tracks Roger speaks of here have traditionally acted as a demarcation of the city's racial segregation. As both Frank Ratliff's and Red Paden's venues are located in the area known historically as the African American side of town, and are African Americans themselves, their assessment that the benefitting is taking place "across" the tracks, in Clarksdale's historically white downtown, where many white blues tourism superintendents have set up shop, indicates that Roger believes they are upset that the latter are benefitting from blues tourism, while they themselves are not.

Roger's suggestion that Red and Frank "felt" whites were benefitting reduces the content of such comments to mere subjective perspectives, and not objective fact.

Additionally, Roger's use of the phrase "for a period of time" implies that these men no longer hold these opinions. In another instance, Roger's attitude towards such perspectives was made clearer. Announcing that it is "really African Americans who don't go support the blues," Roger argued that the same local blacks who would "not ... pay a cover charge to go in Red's and see live blues" are the people "who would criticize [blues tourism] because it looks like somebody's getting theirs, and they're not involved." Here, Roger recriminates the African Americans he believes criticize the industry but do not support the blues, and in the process intimates that they do not deserve to benefit from blues tourism because of it. Moreover, the use of the word "looks" in reference to black criticisms that whites are benefitting again attenuates the notion that those criticisms accurately describe the industry. Considering both statements, Roger appears to be acting in defense of the ability of whites to benefit from the commodification of black musical heritage.

Bubba offered a perspective that similarly reads as a defense of white superintendents accruing benefits through the appropriation and marketing the Delta's blues heritage. In Bubba's view, whites can benefit at will granted they have permission from, or are working with, the African Americans, or their relatives, whose identities they are capitalizing on. Sharing a story about the unauthorized appearance of music from the WROX museum's digital archive on You Tube, Bubba claimed that he has

had other people come in—no offense, graduate students ... And then I find out it's on You Tube, the recordings ... And it's not that I don't want them to. It's mine, and I want to be in control of it. And more importantly, it's a recording of Early Wrights. And he was really hurt by things getting out without his permission. They thought he was public property. And so, even though Early Wright has passed away, and so has Miss Ella, his wife, he still has grandchildren. But he's a person to me. And I want to make sure that it is handled where the family is not hurt in anyway. Or thinking we're



making money on their name. And there's nothing wrong with that, as long as you're working with them, and that sort of thing.

After identifying himself as the owner of Wright's recordings, Bubba reveals concern for the property rights of the museum's archives first because he "wants to control" what he sees as his possession, and secondly because Wright was averse to such exploitation. Twice Bubba makes clear his wish that the Wrights not be "hurt" through activities that would allow others to benefit "from their name." However, Bubba doesn't seem to see anything wrong with his ability to capitalize on black music heritage if this can be avoided.

Clarksdale's tourism producers offered insight into the ways the industry works to establish beneficiaries by outlining who *can*, or *is*, benefitting from blues tourism. Reproducing his perspective on who can *participate* in the industry, Red contended that "The people that got access to money are benefitting," and that if "you ain't [sic] got no money to make money, you just spinning your wheels out here." Again, a monetary prerequisite is determinative of who can profit from blues tourism, a reality that would put many of the region's African Americans beyond inclusion among the industry's beneficiaries. To be sure, Red did not count himself among this group, saying that he isn't "making any money," and neither are the industry's musicians:

I hear so much crap how people are keeping the blues alive. Which is a lie. These folks are starving to death. One of these old blues guys that people are making millions, billions of dollars off, could be layed up in their home. And need a little help. You know they would not spend a quarter.

Adele singled out Ground Zero from among the city's venues as the sole beneficiary of blues tourism, arguing that the money that the industry does bring in is "just not trickling down to the venues." Although Adele recognized that blues tourism has helped to

bring some publicity and money to his club, he doesn't see "a lot of the local bands benefitting as much as you would like."

A number of the white superintendents maintained that people at various levels in the city's blues tourism industry, and outside of it, profit from the marketing of local African American music heritage. Guy contended that the industry's greatest beneficiaries are his own hotel, the Shack-Up Inn, as well as Ground Zero, local restaurants and alcohol distributors. Some white responses contradicted those of the industry's black producers through claims that both musicians and club owners are profiting. Kappi Allen averred that the Juke Joint Festival has gone a long way towards bringing the industry's benefits to musicians and local club owners, and Bill Lockett singled out the lower tiers in the industry as the sole recipients of its rewards, saying that "the people who make money, in the sense of earning a living, are our employees and our bands."

Notably, those superintendents, both black and white, who gave direct statements about who *should* benefit from blues tourism generally agreed that the industry's musicians, and the community as a whole, are the rightful beneficiaries (Allen; Paden). However, they remained in disagreement as to whether the former were benefitting at all.

## **CONCLUSION**

Shared understandings of who should participate in, and benefit from, the marketing of Clarksdale's blues heritage contribute to the organization of race relations within the blues tourism industry, and ultimately, the community at large. As the racial group with the least extenuating financial circumstances, whites remain in a better position to absorb the venture risk involved in participating in Clarksdale's not-yet consistently profitable blues tourism industry, and are therefore also situated as its likely beneficiaries.

Where white superintendents designate passion, professional credentials, and outsider status as the qualities required to work to in the industry, some also create educational strategies and narratives that construct local African American subjectivity as lacking passion for the blues, and the skills associated with the professionalism it takes to occupy organizational and managerial roles within the industry. Simultaneously, they engage with blues authenticity constructs to both explain and justify their own positions within the industry, and design criterion for blues tourism's various labors in such a way that certain racialized identities appear to be a perfect "fit" for particular positions within the industry.

To be sure, these educational strategies seem designed to fortify the industry by refreshing its talent pool with young African Americans, who satisfy the racial conditionality required of "authentic" blues players. In actuality, the misguided paternalism apparent in such didactic projects, ambitiously developed with the aim of offering "a way out" of the endemic poverty suffered by the region's African American population, can contribute to premature entry into scenarios that require adult sensibilities, as well as potentially severing other educational and career opportunities. In the process, the blues tourism industry internalizes and rebirths the Delta's extant racial hierarchy. Some connect the success of the blues tourism in Clarksdale to the industry's educational initiatives. For example, Bill Lockett made clear this connection when asked why the city's industry has grown in the last decade, claiming that he thinks this growth has taken place because "there's just more education locally about" blues tourism. The problem here is that such perspectives indicate the success of the industry relies on reproducing an invidious racial structure within the industry.

Finally, through discourses on benefitting that largely seek to avoid the oblique debates taking place in scholarly circles over which racial groups remain the industry's rightful heirs, while rewriting the blues as a multiracial heritage, white superintendents secure their ability to continue capitalizing on the region's African American musical traditions.

King believes both the La Vere/Hoover debacle, and what he sees as the "potential" financial exploitation of blues musicians, represent industry-produced interracial, and inter-occupational, phenomenon likely to act as impediments to racial reconciliation (174; 178). This chapter suggests an immense extension of the scope of considerations Delta blues tourism superintendents *ought* to bring to the table when contemplating how conceptualizations of who should participate or benefit from blues might impact local interracial dealings, and the socio-economic experiences of the region's African Americans. Moreover, the findings detailed here demonstrate that such contemplation should be a fundamental concern for the industry's gatekeepers, especially where white superintendents' go-to methods for answering these questions stand apart from those of the industry's African American members.

## **CONCLUSION: THE SOCIAL COSTS OF WHITE MANAGEMENT**

Building on the equivocating perspectives and fragmented analytical threads arising from early Delta blues tourism research, I have used this paper to pursue a more decisive and comprehensive position concerning the social costs attached to the white management of black musical heritage tourism. Indeed, this position became unavoidable as I was confronted with multifarious and abundant evidence that Clarksdale's white blues tourism superintendents—who dominate the industry's managerial class and cater to a monolithically white tourist audience—encourage the structural manifestation of invidious racial ideologies that protect white social ascendancy by using various topical and agenda-based footholds within the industry to launch racial projects serving this end.

In seeking to illustrate the processes through which white racism becomes embedded in the blues tourism industry's structure and functioning, I have dissected the rhetorical strategies comprising blues tourism's symbolic forms of racism. These include the racial ideologies issuing from both the representational site—the narratives and epistemologies of a consumer culture of blues constructed by and for white audiences—and from the social relations between blacks and whites in the site to be represented—the geo-social environment associated with pre-war Delta blues culture, and the the location in which the blues tourism industry now operates. The blues authenticity myths celebrated by white tourism superintendents consolidate into a racial ideology as these managers repeatedly advocate, and design touristic experiences that relay, a notion of the genuine

that trades on an ahistorical and depoliticized vision of black poverty remaining at odds with some local African American understandings of, and connections to, the city's black musical heritage. Conversely, these same white producers invoked a separate and contrasting racial ideology, color-blind racism, when grappling with contemporary racial issues. Where the city's blues tourism attractions foreground racial constructs in order to appeal to the fantasies of white tourists, the industry's white superintendents displayed an interest in obscuring any sense that the race factors into the power relations comprising the blues tourism industry, or the social structure of the city of Clarksdale. Such obscuring occurs as white superintendents use the frames of color-blind racism to suggest that racism in Clarksdale is a phenomenon of the past, normal or negligible when considered in relation to other geographical locations, produced through discussion of it, natural, a fantasy born of misguided black subjectivity, and not responsible for the group status of people of color or whites within the industry or outside of it, which instead they assume to be the product of individual merit or pathological African American cultural values. Together, both ideologies support a white epistemology of disavowal that allows white superintendents to draw on the *cultural* significance of race as it applies to the commodifying of blues heritage, while suppressing or denying any understanding of the way blues tourism intersects with or undergirds diminished social experiences of agency or economy for the city's African Americans. In this sense, these ideologies also work to secure a distancing of cognizance within the blues tourism industry of the way white privilege works in these settings, and diminish the ability to confront or effectively deal with any racism structured into the industry.

Where whites have spearheaded the development of blues tourism in Clarksdale, they have also confronted and constructed discursive sites, including racial reconciliation and questions of participation and benefitting, through which to activate these racial ideologies in service of racial projects that secure white privilege. Any real opportunity to use blues tourism as a vehicle for racial reconciliation is greatly limited by color-blind racism, which encourages an interpretation of the present as post-racial, and concomitantly, a flattened understanding of the racial terrain. Many of the white superintendents drew on the color-blind racism frame of abstract liberalism when defining the process itself, especially with regards to the roles whites and blacks play in it, as well as when contending that it must occur covertly to work, forming understandings of the racial peacemaking that bear little resemblance to the efforts of those actually working to promote rapprochement. Their investment in a conception of the blues authenticity myth that proposes the genre, or music itself, is naturally integrating, further attenuated the likelihood that blues tourism will contribute to racial reconciliation, which appears superfluous in the face of such beliefs. Additionally, few white blues tourism producers actually endorsed the process at all, or its inclusion in the industry; not a single white producer advocated for any form of restorative justice.

Instead, several white superintendents argued that the industry precipitates the integrating of public space, and thus racial reconciliation, as blacks and whites will dialogue in such settings. However, they collectively failed to consider how the content of interracial dialogue, or the disparate socio-economic experiences of whites and blacks, affect the success of reconciliation. Again, this problem hinges on an assumption of equal social power between whites and blacks, as it is taken for granted that racial conflict is improved

when these groups merely inhabit the same space and converse. Moreover, a closer look at how the industry racializes public space by catering to the authenticity constructs held by white tourists shows that those proffering the industry's reconciliatory potential in these terms misread the expansion of white public space as the spreading of integrated public space, and overlook that racially shared space developed through blues tourism exists only in a fleeting manner or through duplicity, isn't really inhabited by local racial groups, and sometimes elicits negative reactions. All-in-all, whites' (mis)understandings of racial reconciliation, and the racializing of space that is believed to be encouraging it, act as a racial project that contributes to a state of unstable equilibrium in Clarksdale and its blues tourism industry. This project comprises an edging out of space where contending African American perspectives can be voiced, allowing white racial ideologies to form the consensus on racial issues and racial reconciliation, and therefore, assure the latter's failure, and any real change in the racial status quo.

Questions regarding who should participate in the industry and who should benefit from it imbue the fears among blues tourism scholars that the industry is reproducing Mississippi's racial hierarchy. And indeed, participation and benefitting act as discursive sites from which white tourism producers set in motion racial projects that produce a racially organized labor structure, and protect the ability of whites to capitalize on the Delta's black music heritage, respectively. Notably, where participating in blues tourism requires outside income, a monetary prerequisite, and the ability to economically fail, it is shown to be a luxury whites can afford, but many local African Americans cannot. Additionally, white tourism managers considered outsiders, professionals, and passionate people as qualified to participate in the industry—all criteria blues tourism educational



agendas imply Black Deltans do not possess. To be sure, white tourism producers use the same conceptualizations of blackness central to blues authenticity constructs, wherein African Americans are as socially and economically powerless, when attempting to justify whites' positions as organizers and managers, and African Americans' roles as performers and juke joint owners. Constructed as the "disorganized poor," African Americans seeking to participate in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry are the targets of a differential racialization of labor, a racial project that sees whites and blacks as being "fit" for disparate roles with disparate opportunities to financially benefit, and funnels young African Americans, as would-be musicians, into economically marginal occupations that prematurely expose them to the adult world.

Simultaneously, this research has exposed the ways many white tourism superintendents do not directly configure a vision of the inheritors of Delta blues heritage, but sometimes use proprietary language that implies local whites belong in the fold. White producers also dismiss criticisms about their status as the primary beneficiaries of blues tourism, arguing that musicians and club owners are currently the recipients of blues tourism's payouts, or suggest that members of this group have given them permission to profit, and that they are not "hurting" anyone. In these ways, discussions on benefitting from blues tourism occasion an opportunity for white managers in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry to construct a logic that reinforces their right to profit from the industry.

This paper has shown how the racial projects white blues tourism superintendents initiate discredit the state's public relations campaign, contributing to the social and economic marginalization of African Americans in Clarksdale, and thereby creating new opportunities to widen existing racial divides, both social and economic, in the Delta. In this

sense, whites are using black heritage against contemporary African Americans, availing themselves of discursive sites within the blues tourism industry to sever a definition of whiteness from the conception of racial wrongdoing, secure their position as the holders of power through their role as organizers, controllers, and beneficiaries, and increase the public space that caters to their racial needs.

Such findings beg the question: what can be done to effect a change that would allow for blues tourism to act as a more equitable racial phenomenon? This paper limns many possible answers. The differences between white and black understandings of the cultural and social meanings of race vis-à-vis blues tourism are instructive along these lines; if the problematic racial attitudes of white superintendents are currently dominating the industry, the securing of leadership whose intentions are informed by the interests of local African Americans would allow for a reworking of the industry's initiatives and historical narratives that accounts for the ways local African Americans relate to blues heritage. Such a change would entail a replacing of the representational site to one that remains welded to personal histories, geo-temporal contingencies, and the politics of racial power. Moreover, this change would necessitate a new racial ideology to be applied to social phenomena taking place in the site to be represented, such that the current asymmetries between racial groups remain central to conceptualizations of blues tourism development. The institutionalizing of antiracist processes, including racial reconciliation, into the industry, could also go a long way towards reconfiguring blues tourism in this spirit. As the city's primary tourism institution, the CCTC would be a good place to implement such a process. In addition, an inverting of the industry's educational agendas, so that the scrutinizing of white privilege, racial ideologies, and racial projects that allow the racial dominance of this

group to gain traction and sustain in the first place remain its central didactic topics, could help to redesign blues tourism as a less inequitable institution. And finally, a formal racial reconciliation project tied to blues tourism should emerge from the conceptions of rapprochement, criticisms of the industry, and understandings of participating and benefitting revealed by the African American blues tourism superintendents interviewed for this paper, as well as others within the industry, and the city at large.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Allen, Kappi. Personal interview. 11 Feb. 2013.
- Anonymous member of the blues tourism industry in Clarksdale, MS. Personal interview. Oct. 2011.
- Becker, Howard S. "Afterward: Racism and the Research Process." *Racing Research, Researching Race: Methodological Dilemmas in Critical Race Studies*. Eds. France Winddance Twine and Jonathan W. Warren. New York: New York University Press, 2000. 247-254.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and Racial Inequality in Contemporary America*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010.
- Calhoun, Craig. Foreword. *Engaging Contradictions: Theory, Politics, and Methods of Activist Scholarship*. Ed. Charles R. Hale. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008. xiii-xxvi.
- Cat Head Delta Blues and Folk Art. Website. 1 Dec. 2011  
<<http://cathead.biz/CatHead/Home.html>>.
- Chamber of Commerce. *Dear Friend: Clarksdale Coahoma County*. Clarksdale: Chamber of Commerce, 2011.
- Clarksdale/Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce. *Clarksdale Walk of Fame Walking Tour*. Clarksdale: Chamber of Commerce, 2011.
- Clarksdale & Coahoma County Chamber of Commerce & Industrial Foundation. *Mississippi Development Authority*. Website. Nov. 2011 <<http://www.clarksdale-ms.com/>>.
- Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. 2009, 2012. *ClarksdaleNow.org*. Website. 14 March 2013 <[http://www.clarksdalenow.org/CRI/Downtown\\_Revitalization.html](http://www.clarksdalenow.org/CRI/Downtown_Revitalization.html)>.
- Cohen, Erik. "Authenticity and Commoditization in Tourism." *Annals of Tourism Research* 15 (1988): 371-386.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle et al. Introduction. *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*. Ed. by Crenshaw et al. New York: New Press. 1995. xiii-xxxii.
- Dasbach, Theo. Personal Interview. 17 Feb. 2013.
- Delgado, Richard and Jean Stefancic. *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. New York: New York University Press, 2012.
- Delta Blues Museum. Website. 20-31 Oct. 2011  
<<http://www.deltabluesmuseum.org/index.asp>>.
- Dempsey, Brain David. *Refuse to Fold: Blues Heritage Tourism and the Mississippi Delta*. Diss. Middle Tennessee State University, 2009. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2010.
- Dungaciu, Dan. "East and West and the 'Mirror of Nature': Nationalism in West and East Europe – Essentialism Different?" *A Decade of Transformation: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows Conference* 8 (1999).
- Duncan, James. "Sites of Representation: Place, Time and the Discourse of the Other." *Place/Culture/Representation*. Eds. James Duncan and David Ley. London: Routledge, 1993. 39-56.
- Feagin, Joe. *Racist America: Roots, Current Realities, and Future Reparations*. New York: Routledge, 2000.
- Forstall, Richard L. "Mississippi: Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990." 1995. U.S. Bureau of the Census. 28 November 2011  
<<http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ms190090.txt>>.

- Gibson, Chris. "Cultures at Work: Why 'Culture' Matters in Research on the 'Cultural' Industries." *Social & Cultural Geography* 4.2 (2003): 201-215.
- Giola, Ted. *Delta Blues: The Life and Times of the Mississippi Masters Who Revolutionized American Music*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.
- Grazian, David. *Blue Chicago: The Search for Authenticity in Urban Blues Clubs*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003.
- Gregory, Steven. *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Ground Zero Blues Club*. Website. 1 December 2011  
<<http://www.groundzerbluesclub.com/>>.
- Hall, Douglas and Algernon Austin. "Distressed Mississippi: Unemployment rate for African American Workers is significantly higher than for whites." *Economic Policy Institute Issue Brief #303* 28 April 2011. 1 Dec. 2011 <[http://www.epi.org/page/-/old/issuebriefs/IB303\\_Mississippi\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.epi.org/page/-/old/issuebriefs/IB303_Mississippi_FINAL.pdf)>.
- Hall, Stuart. "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" *Popular Culture: A Reader*. Eds. Raiford Guins and Omayra Zaragoza Cruz. London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2008. 285-293.
- . *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. London: Sage, 1997.
- Henderson, Adele. Personal interview. 22 Feb. 2013.
- Henshall, John. "Downtown Clarksdale: An Action Plan for Economic Revitalization." *Essential Economics* Sept. 2008. 28 Feb. 2013  
<<http://www.essentialeconomics.com>>.
- hooks, bell. "Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination." *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: Worth Publishers, 2002. 19-23.
- Hopson Plantation: The Past and the Present*. Clarksdale: Hopson Plantation, 2011.
- King, Stephen A. *I'm Feeling the Blues Right Now: Blues Tourism and the Mississippi Delta*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011.
- Kivel, Paul. "How White People Can Serve as Allies to People of Color in the Struggle to End Racism." *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: Worth Publishers, 2002. 127-135.
- Lipsitz, George. "The Possessive Investment in Whiteness." *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: Worth Publishers, 2002. 61-84.
- Lomax, Allen. *The Land Where the Blues Began*. New York: The New Press, 1993.
- Luckett, Bill. Personal Interview. 6 Feb. 2013.
- . ———. 21 Nov. 2011.
- M for Mississippi: A Road Trip through the Birthplace of the Blues*. Dir. Jeff Konkel, Roger Stolle, and Damien Blaylock. Broke & Hungry Records, Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art, and Mudpuppy Recordings, 2008. DVD.
- Malvezzi, Guy. Personal interview. 6 Feb. 2013.
- Mayes, Robyn. "Doing Cultural Work: Local Postcard Production and Place Identity in a Rural Shire." *Journal of Rural Studies* 26 (2010): 1- 11.

- McIntosh, Peggy. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: Worth Publishers, 2002. 97-101.
- Milazzo, Marzia. "White Supremacy, White Knowledge, and Anti-West Indian Discourse in Panama: Olmedo Alfaró's *El peligro antillano en la America Central*." *Global South* (Forthcoming publication).
- Mills, Charles. "White Ignorance." *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*. Ed. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana. Albany: SUNY Press, 2007. 11-38
- "Mississippi Blues Trail Celebrates 150<sup>th</sup> Marker: Furry Lewis Honored in Greenwood This Thursday." *Mississippi Development Authority* 17 Feb. 2012. 3 March 2013. <<http://www.visitmississippi.org/uploads/docs/cities/Abbeville/Furry%20Lewis%20150th%20Blues%20Trail%20Release%202-17-12.pdf>>.
- Mullings, LK. "Interrogating Racism: Toward an Antiracist Anthropology." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 34 (2005): 667-693.
- "Myrtle Hall Branch of the Carnegie Public Library." *Little Known Black Librarian Facts* 12 Dec. 2011. 28 Feb. 2013 <<http://littleknownblacklibrarianfacts.blogspot.com>>.
- O'Keefe, Bubba. Personal interview. 15 Feb. 2013.
- Olsen, Kjell. "Authenticity as a Concept in Tourism Research: The Social Organization of the Experience of Authenticity." *Tourist Studies* 12.2 (2002): 159-182.
- Omi, Michael, and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States from the 60's to 90's*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Osteen, Katherine D. "The Blues is Alright: Blues Music as a Root for Cultural Tourism and Public History." MA Thesis. University of Mississippi, 2011. Ann Arbor: UMI, 2011.
- Paden, Red. Personal Interview. 11 Feb. 2013.
- Page, Helen and D. France Oliviera. "Visual Images of the Postcolonial Blues on the Corner of Toulouse and Royal: Discord and Identity in *Songs of my People*." *Cultural Portrayals of African Americans: Creating an Ethnic/Racial Identity*. Ed. Janis Faye Hutchinson. Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1997. 75-111.
- Peairs, Rhondalyn. Personal Interview. 10 Mar. 2013.
- Ritter, Shelley. Personal Interview. 22 Nov. 2011.
- Rotenstein, David S. "The Helena Blues: Cultural Tourism and African-American Folk Music." *Southern Folklore* 49.2 (1992): 133-146.
- Rutkoff, Peter and Will Scott. "Preaching the Blues: The Mississippi Delta of Muddy Waters." *Kenyon Review* 27.2 (2005): 129-147.
- Shack-Up Inn*. 1 Dec. 2011. <<http://www.theshackupinn.com/>>.
- State and County QuickFacts*. United States Census Bureau. 20-31 October 2011 <<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>>.
- Stolle, Roger. Personal Interview. 3-5 Oct. 2011.
- . ———. 31 Jan. 2013.
- Street, Stan. Personal Interview. 11 Feb. 2013.
- Tatum, Beverly. "Breaking the Silence." *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: Worth Publishers, 2002. 115-120.
- Tullos, Allen. "Life as We Know It." *Sounds of the South*. Ed. Daniel W. Patterson. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991. 157-164.
- United States Census 2010*. U.S. Census Bureau. 20-31 October 2011 <<http://www.census.gov/2010census/>>.

- Visit Clarksdale: Coahoma County, Mississippi. Coahoma County Tourism.* Website. Nov. 2011 <<http://visitclarksdale.com/>>.
- Wald, Elijah. *Escaping the Delta*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004.
- Walz, Liz. "The Culture of White Privilege is to Remain Silent." *Fellowship of Reconciliation: Working for Peace, Justice and Nonviolence Since 1915*. Website. 21 Mar. 2013 <<http://forusa.org/fellowship/2008/winter/culture-white-privilege-remain-silent/11701>>.
- Wang, Ning. "Rethinking Authenticity in Tourism Experience." *Annals of Tourism Research* 26 (1999): 349-370.
- Weeks, Linton. *History*. Clarksdale: Chamber of Commerce, 2011.
- Wildman, Stephanie M. and Adrienne D. Davis. "Making Systems of Privilege Visible." *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*. Ed. Paula S. Rothenberg. New York: Worth Publishers, 2002. 89-95.
- The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation*. 2007. *The University of Mississippi*. Website. 24 Mar. 2013 <<http://www.winterinstitute.org/index.htm>>.



## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

## **APPENDIX A: NOTES**

## INTRODUCTION

1. See Dempsey, King, Osteen, and Rotenstein.
2. See Dempsey, King, and Rotenstein.
3. For this project, I defined “superintendent” as any individual inhabiting in a position of leadership or control in the industry via a managerial, proprietary, or organizational role. Such roles include owning and/or managing venues that regularly, or only, feature blues music, and institutions such as museums, hotels, and retail establishments that specifically cater to blues tourists. In addition to these duties, several of the interviewees also created, and/or help organize, one or more of the city’s numerous live-music blues festivals. Additionally, I use the terms superintendent, overseer, and producer interchangeably, the latter term denoting a person involved in producing historical narratives or sundry consumable experiences or products for blues tourists.
4. See King 177-192; Rotenstein; Dempsey 6.
5. Page and Oliviera note that “it is not widely deemed professional to advocate on behalf of the groups that we anthropologists study” (78).

## CHAPTER 1

6. In his 2008 study on the economic potential for downtown Clarksdale, John Henshall noted that the “majority of ... businesses [associated with the local blues culture] have established in the past decade ... [and] many are owned by people who have come to live in Clarksdale from other States”(2). Henshall goes on to observe that nearly 2/3 of downtown Clarksdale’s businesses “are associated with Blues music and Delta culture in some form or another” (2).
7. In 1960, Coahoma County was home to 46,212 residents. Henshall notes that in 1950, one third of Coahoma’s population was located in Clarksdale; by 2008, two thirds of the county’s residents were concentrated in that city ( Henshall 11; Forstall; United States Census 2010).
8. According to Rutkoff and Scott, “just before the outbreak of World War II ... [Clarksdale’s] finest hotel, the Alcazar, offered 125 rooms to any white visitor for between \$1.50 and \$3.50 a night.” On the other hand, the author’s note the existence of a single black hotel in the city during the same era (137-138).
9. According to the Blues Trail marker, “at the time of her fatal accident, Smith was in her Packard on her way from Memphis to Clarksdale to spend the night. She was to appear the following day with the travelling show *Broadway Rastus* in the community of Darling, about 20 miles northeast of here. It was widely rumored that Smith’s death resulted from her being refused admission to Clarksdale’s ‘white’ hospital, but the facts suggest otherwise.

The reality was that during that time local ambulance drivers would not have considered taking an African-American to a 'white' hospital in the first place.”

10. Frank Ratcliff passed away in April of 2013, during the months I was conducting interviews in Clarksdale.

11. For more information on the Blues Trail, see < <http://www.msbluestrail.org/>>, and “Mississippi Blues Trail Celebrates 150<sup>th</sup> Marker.”

12. In 2008, Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food Services accounted for 17.3% of employment in Clarksdale, a figure proportionally more than double that of the national sector. Henshall posits that regional casinos account for a portion of this employment (15).

13. This term is typically applied strictly to Asian Americans. In this case, I am extending it to include any representation of a racial minority that depicts the behavior of that minority as ideal because it does not challenge, but rather, reinforces, the racial status quo (Delgado and Stefancic 91-92).

14. Hopson Plantation; *Visit Clarksdale: Coahoma County, Mississippi; Clarksdale and Coahoma County, Chamber of Commerce & Industrial Foundation*; King 156.

15. Anonymous member of the blues tourism industry in Clarksdale, MS. Personal interview. October 2011.

16. In this case, Glen mentioned the disparate funding allotted to a blues festival and bluegrass festival, the latter of which received more money and in his mind, represents a specifically “white” heritage event.

## **CHAPTER 2**

17. As King observes, “the racial attitude of some whites in Mississippi makes it clear that Mississippi is still, in a very real sense, a “blues” state. He goes on to lament the existence “the insidious racism and discrimination that continue to consume of the lives of some of the Delta’s inhabitants” (xii-xiii).

18. See Cohen, Olsen and Wang.

19. For example, in an interview with the Delta Blues Museum’s Shelley Ritter, she claimed authenticity was not an important factor in her personal enjoyment of blues music, instead insisting on several occasions that she “like[s] good music,” and that what she values in any musical performance is the musician’s ability to express from experience. On the other hand, she believes the emotional and thematic content of the songs of Jimmy Rodgers, the singing brakeman, qualifies him as a bluesman, indicating that in some respects, Shelley does use the standard criteria identified by Grazian to evaluate whether or not a musician is a “real” bluesman. Place also figured into her construction of authenticity; when asked if a musician would have to come from the Delta for her to personally consider them a

bluesman, she said no, and that “there are plenty of fine players in Texas.” Theo Dasbach maintains a similar position, but one more firmly in opposition to typical formulas of authenticity, proposing that the state Mississippi alone did not ‘invent’ the musical style. Likewise, in criticizing blues purists for being unable to cope with the changing nature of music, Dasbach takes a more hardline approach than many of the industry’s white producers. “Some people are really purist,” Theo claimed. “Gotta be just from this time. And I said, ‘well, that’s not how life works... You do different things at certain times of your life, so it’s obvious that the music also will change.”

Shelley understands authenticity to be important to her work at the museum and to the museum’s success, directly relating the notion of authenticity to historical accuracy. That being said, she describes authenticity as an ongoing process, noting that with respect to the museum’s historical depictions, “we’re not finished,” because new information and historical interpretations require her to change the museum’s signs, as well as its website, regularly. In this sense, she seemed aware of the dependent nature of both history and authenticity on human designation, evoking a form of authenticity experience that combines elements of both objective and constructed authenticity. However, both Shelley and Roger admitted to feeling pressure to cater to blues myths. Demonstrating their attachments to objectivist authenticity, both hope to use the appeal of such myths to bring tourists into contact with the “real” history of the blues (Stolle 2011).

20. In *M for Mississippi: A Road Trip through the Birthplace of the Blues*, Roger Stolle and Jeff Konkel interview a number of aging blues musicians, often focusing on aspects of their lives that relate to experiences of poverty or moral degeneracy. In one scene, Jeff and Roger drive Wesley “Junebug” Jefferson out to Stovall Plantation, and ask the blues player to detail his labor experience on that farm. Here, Konkel asks Jefferson if he misses farm work. In another scene, Konkel and Stolle interview bluesman and folk artist Pat Thomas. Following a discussion of the clay Thomas uses for his art, Roger asks him if that clay is similar to that which he ate as a child as part of pica, a dirt-eating practice common among impoverished groups. Many of the scenes with T-Model Ford depict the bluesman swearing and detailing the more debauched moments of his life; at one point, Ford jokingly threatens to kill Konkel with a gun. The film also regularly depicts its subjects, and the directors, consuming alcohol.

21. The owners of Ground Zero Blues Club allow their patrons to write on the walls of the club. The interior and exterior of the club are thus thickly coated in signatures and sentiments. The exterior of the building has maintained its “distressed” appearance, complete with missing bricks, peeling paint, and old couches on the porch. Bill suggests that his club is an authentic reproduction of a traditional juke joint because customers don’t have to worry about spilling their drinks on the floor and because they “use an old building” (2011).

22. Though Roger Stolle advocates using public funding to make infrastructure improvements on the industry’s juke joints, using the leaking roof on Red’s Lounge as an example, Adele Henderson of the Delta Blues Room believes Red has intentionally allowed his building to moulder, arguing that he has “made enough money to fix the roof. But that’s

not what he's trying to do. He's trying to make it authentic as possible" (Henderson; Stolle 2013).

23. Milazzo draws from Crenshaw et al. here (xxviii).

24. In this instance, Milazzo is paraphrasing Charles Mills findings from his study on white ignorance.

25. Notably, during a later discussion on the political rhetoric of equal opportunity in the United States, Theo belied his seeming concern for Clarksdale's impoverished. Instead, he advocated a version of "diversity" dependent on inequality, wherein "if everybody would be equal, in the sense of having the same thing, and liking the same thing, then we all would be zombies ... [and] you would not have the diversity."

26. King 12; Stolle; Luckett; O'Keefe; Henderson; Paden; Malvezzi; Rotenstein.

27. In Roger's case, he quoted one of Clarksdale's white commissioners. Following the quote, he showed his endorsement for the commissioner's suggestion that the city's racial problems would be solved by about "a dozen funerals," arguing that Clarksdale needs to "have younger people coming up and the older people going out."

### **CHAPTER 3**

28. See "Perspectives on Clarksdale's Racial Dynamic" in Chapter 2.

29. Some of these same superintendents showed support for using public funds to support the industry. Guy believes the city's tourism budget should be used to subsidize nightly music performances in Clarksdale, while Roger talked about funding aging musicians and distributing matching grants to juke joint owners so that they can stay open because "that traditional customer has gone away and needs to be supplemented in order to keep going." Thus, they demonstrated an aversion to transferring funds to African Americans if it helps the blues tourism industry to survive, but not when it amounts to an act of reconciliation.

30. See "Color-blind Racism in Clarksdale," Chapter 2.

31. Among the state's endeavors to this end is Musgrove's campaign to remove the Confederate symbolism from the state flag. Musgrove saw this as an impediment to corporations' willingness to invest or take root in Mississippi, and tourists' willingness to visit it (Peairs).

32. Street; Luckett; Stolle; Malvezzi; O'Keefe.

33. In their discussion on white public space, Page and Oliviera use the terms "white" and "mainstream" interchangeably.

34. Bonilla-Silva 46. See chapter 2, "Perspectives on Clarksdale's Blues Tourism Industry."

### **CHAPTER 4**

35. See Chapter 1, “Blues Tourism and Racial Tension.”

36. My understanding of this process is in part guided by Gibson’s analysis, in which he draws on Straw’s work to declares “music activities ‘unfold within artistic communities ... constituted ... in the overlap between the educational system, sites of entrepreneurial activity (such as bars or recording studios) and the more elusive spaces of urban bohemia” (205-206).

37. Notably, producers offered this qualification not as *justification* for why anyone should participate, but as an *explanation* of who is able to.

38. Notably, both King and some white superintendents maintain a racial division regarding the educational potential of blues tourism for local attitudes towards blues music. Where Clarkdale’s white residents lack general knowledge about the musical idiom, the city’s African Americans denizens express ideas about the genre that King believes the industry seeks to *correct* (170-171). Roger reified a cultural segregation along racial lines when describing blues tourism’s goals for educating local whites, obscuring the role of white tyranny in Delta blues heritage. Roger maintained that the city’s “older white community ... has taken [local blues heritage] for granted [because] it’s not part of their culture directly ... and they just can’t understand why Europeans or whatever would come here for it.” Roger also advocated an economic approach to winning over “local, older white Deltans or Clarksdalians,” who he claims that, in order “to educate them about why this music is important to the region, it’s more of, okay, look at all the tourists I brought you and look at your sales tax that the city now has that, hopefully, will help your other taxes.” Again, African Americans are seen as holding erroneous understandings of the cultural value of blues, and whites are viewed as lacking a basic knowledge of it.

## **APPENDIX B: CONSENT SCRIPTS**



## Oral Consent Script

Hello, my name is Kathryn Radishofski. I am a graduate student at the University of Mississippi in the Southern Studies Department. I am in Clarksdale undertaking research that will be used in my Master's thesis.

I am conducting a research project that investigates the ways officials and managers in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry have come to hold the positions they do. This investigation stems from my interest in the processes through which Delta communities make decisions about constructing blues tourism narratives. Previous investigators have also revealed a number of important areas of potential racial tension created or affected by blues tourism activities that relate to the process of shaping the structure of the industry. My study looks closely at the perspectives or motivations of the industry's managers as they relate to these areas of tension in order to gain a clearer idea of their role in this process. This latter group will be the focus of my research.

The information you share with me will be of great value in helping me to analyze the impact of blues tourism on Clarksdale's community. Information collected during this interview may be used in my Master's thesis, in future research on African American music tourism, publications, and in a short documentary on my research in Clarksdale.

This interview will take about one to two hours of your time.

Participation is voluntary. You can, of course, decline to answer any question, as well as to stop participating at any time.

If you have any additional questions concerning this research or your participation in it, please feel free to contact my thesis supervisor, our university research office, or me at any time.

I would like to make a tape recording of our discussion, so that I can have an accurate record of the information that you provide me. I will provide you with a draft copy of the transcript of the interview, after the transcriptions are completed, so that you may review its content and add any clarifications and corrections you feel are necessary. While I would prefer to include your name in the written analysis, you may specify that your identity be kept confidential.

This study has been reviewed by the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

Do you have any questions about this research? Do you agree to participate and that I may record this interview? If so, let's begin.

Consent to Participate in Documentary Film  
Blues Tourism in Clarksdale, MS

**Investigator**

Kathryn A. Radishofski  
Master's Candidate in the Southern Studies Program  
Barnard Observatory  
The University of Mississippi  
katapple17@yahoo.com  
Southern Studies: 662-915-5993  
My Cell: 541-914-9948

I am conducting a research project that investigates the ways officials and managers in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry have come to hold the positions they do. This investigation stems from my interest in the processes through which Delta communities make decisions about constructing blues tourism narratives. Previous investigators have also revealed a number of important areas of potential racial tension created or affected by blues tourism activities that relate to the process of shaping the structure of the industry. My study looks closely at the perspectives or motivations of the industry's managers as they relate to these areas of tension in order to gain a clearer idea of their role in this process. This latter group will be the focus of my research.

I would like you to be part of this process. Beginning in early January 2013, I will be conducting video interviews with managers and officials from Clarksdale's blues tourism industry. Interviews will take place in a location and at a time of the interviewee's choosing, though preferably in a quiet place without the presence of others. The audio portion of these interviews will be taped and transcribed. Information collected during these interviews may be used in my Master's thesis, in future research on African American music tourism, publications, and in a short documentary on my research in Clarksdale.

If you choose to participate in this project, you will be asked questions about the role of your venue or institution in Clarksdale's blues tourism industry, your experience in and perception of the industry, your perception of the role of blues tourism in local racial politics, and your understanding of who ought to benefit or participate in the industry. The interview will take no longer than two hours and will help me to analyze the impact of blues tourism on Clarksdale's community.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Even if you consent to the interview, you may withdraw at any time, including during the interview itself. I will also provide you with a draft copy of the transcript of the interview, after the transcriptions are completed, so that you may review its content and add any clarifications and corrections you feel are necessary. While I would prefer to include your name in the written analysis, you may specify that your identity be kept confidential.

**IRB Approval**

This study has been reviewed by The University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study fulfills the human research subject protections obligations required by state and federal law and University policies. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at (662) 915-7482.

**Statement of Consent**

For valuable consideration, I do hereby authorize Kathryn Radishofski, as a student of the University of Mississippi, to:

- a. Record my participation and appearance on video tape, audio tape, film, photograph or any other medium ("recordings")
- b. Use my name, likeness, voice and biographical material in connection with these recordings.
- c. Exhibit, copy reproduce, perform, display or distribute such Recordings (and to create derivative works from them) in whole or in part without restrictions or limitation in any format or medium for any purpose which Kathryn Radishofski deems appropriate.
- d. I release Kathryn Radishofski from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of such Recordings including any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, rights of publicity, or copyright.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone No \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

# THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSISSIPPI

## Interview Release

Interviewer and Interviewee hereby individually enter into this agreement with the University of Mississippi and agree as follows:

For good and valuable consideration which I acknowledge, I consent to the recording (by audio, video, and/or any other means) of my statements ("Interview") by University of Mississippi, its agents and employees ("UM"). I grant to UM and its assigns, licensees, and successors the right to use in any way (including without limitation the right to reproduce, copy, prepare derivative works from, distribute, perform and/or display the interview) in any media all or a portion of the Interview for any purpose including without limitation advertising, trade or any commercial or non-commercial purposes throughout the world and in perpetuity.

I understand that the Interview will be housed at Archives and Special Collections at the John Davis Williams Library on the UM campus and that the Interview will be available to the public.

I grant to UM the right to use my image, likeness and name in connection with all uses of the Interview and waive any right to inspect or approve any use of my Interview, name, image, or likeness.

If I donate any property (for example, any photographs, writings, etc.) in conjunction with the Interview, I hereby grant to UM ownership of the property and a perpetual and non-exclusive license and right to use (copy, reproduce, prepare derivative works from, distribute, perform and/or display) the property in any manner and for any purpose.

I release UM and its assignees, agents, employees and designees, from any and all claims and demands arising out of or in connection with the use of the Interview, my name, image or likeness including but not limited to, any claims for defamation, invasion of privacy, or right of publicity.

UM is not obligated to utilize the rights granted in this agreement.

I understand that I retain any copyright I may have in the materials subject to the rights granted herein.

This agreement expresses the complete understanding of the parties.

PROJECT: \_\_\_\_\_

ACCEPTED AND AGREED BY **INTERVIEWER:**

ACCEPTED AND AGREED BY **INTERVIEWEE:**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

---

## VITA

Kathryn Radishofski studied Cultural Anthropology as an undergraduate at the University of Oregon, graduating Summa Cum Laude and with departmental honors. She finished a Master's degree in Southern Studies at the University of Mississippi in the spring of 2013. Ms. Radishofski will begin the Ethnomusicology doctoral program as a Dean's Fellow at Columbia University in the fall of 2013.