



JOHN C. HENSHALL

DOWNTOWN REVITALISATION AND DELTA BLUES IN CLARKSDALE, MISSISSIPPI

LESSONS FOR SMALL CITIES AND TOWNS



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John C. Henshall
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This piece of work describing the achievements in the revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale, Mississippi has only been made possible by the efforts that local people and newcomers to town have made over the past 15 years or so.

To name two people in particular: Kinchen “Bubba” O’Keefe and Bill Luckett.

Bubba is described in an article dating back to 1999 in The Living Arts section of *The New York Times* (NYT; 26 October) as “building a bridge” to Clarksdale’s cultural past. Bubba has focused his efforts for over 20 years on recognising and building upon downtown Clarksdale’s cultural roots for the benefit of the local community and those who visit. As Bubba was quoted in the NYT article all those years ago: “*We’ve got gold in the stream that needs mining.*”

Bill Luckett is a Clarksdale lawyer with clients in the Delta and well beyond. He has broad and invaluable interests, from restoring old buildings and promoting the Blues to encouraging local business opportunities. Bill, during his time as Clarksdale’s Mayor, re-defined the importance of local development for the benefit of the local community. Ground Zero Blues Club is a fitting reflection of Bill’s interests and his support for Downtown.

Many other individuals have assisted the author, perhaps unwittingly, in the publication of this book on Clarksdale’s downtown revitalisation.

They include Charles Evans, owner of the Clark House which he restored as a residential inn and where he provided me with accommodation while I prepared the manuscript. Lois McMurchy, who has provided much welcome friendship and support over all of these years. Mac Crank, the inaugural “steward” who guided Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. in its early years and introduced important development initiatives to assist in downtown regeneration. Roger Stolle, owner of the Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art, who is an absolute promoter of Delta Blues and Clarksdale. Delta Bohemians, Billy and Madge Howell, who promote Clarksdale through their Delta Bohemian Tours and regular publications highlighting life and times in the Delta. Richard Bolen, who has spearheaded the digital and signage aspects associated with downtown’s defined ‘culture and arts’ precinct.

Also, Bill Talbot and Guy Malvezzi, owners of the unique Shack Up Inn accommodation and venue on the edge of Clarksdale, and James Butler, owner of the re-birthing Hopson Commissary, a popular venue also located just south of town. Stan Street, musician and artist, who has ensured his Hambone Gallery is a focus for locals and visitors alike. Panny Mayfield, an educationalist, photographer, and writer of matters-Delta. Gary and Carol Vincent of Delta Sound Stage, where true Blues is recorded for posterity. Mark Benson, developer of unique places of visitor accommodation in downtown, and with the artistic input of John Magnusson. John Ruskey, curator of the Lower Mississippi with his Quapaw canoe company. Shelley Ritter and Maie Smith, who are custodians and promoters of the Delta Blues Museum. Theo Dasbach and Cindy Huddock, with the Rock & Blues Museum transplanted from the Netherlands. Janet Coursin, California-born and now a local business consultant. Sarah Crisler-Ruskey and Janice Williams at the Clarksdale Library. And Mike and Mary at the Uptown Motel, who have ensured we Aussie visitors from the other True South continue to enjoy our downtown accommodation and in-house curries. Special appreciation goes to family, friends, and colleagues who have in so many ways encouraged this publication: thank you!

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Author's Note

I was driving from New Orleans to Memphis in my rental car, having attended an American Planning Association conference on urban planning and development. The drive up to Memphis to catch a flight to Los Angeles and home to Melbourne marked the end of this visit, my fourth, to the USA.

As I proceeded up Highway 61 and across to Highway 49 through the Delta, I checked my Lonely Planet guidebook for possible places to stay for the night, as I was totally new to this region. I simply did not appreciate that this was The Delta, writ large. My quick reference to the guidebook advised that if you like the Blues, you must visit Clarksdale, the fabled 'crossroads' in the mythology of Blues music. As the story goes, Robert Johnson went down to the crossroads of Highways 49 and 61 and sold his soul to the Devil in return for the gift of playing Blues guitar. With no second thoughts, I drove into Clarksdale, and that was the beginning of my relationship with this Mississippi Delta town. I have now been to the USA a total of 25 times, and 22 of those visits have been to Clarksdale. My close attachment to Clarksdale is now truly exposed.

I had no preconceptions of Clarksdale as a town or its place in Blues music. Although I had been a collector of Blues music for some 50 years, I had never delved deeply into the detailed back story of the genre; I knew the Blues I liked, and that was enough for me.

Driving into Clarksdale was an experience in itself. Approaching from about three kilometres south of downtown, industrial and highway commercial activities litter the landscape. 'Litter' is a fair expression, as the buildings along Highway 49 were generally in a poor state of repair, many vacant and unused, or simply lying derelict. As I drove closer into town, the gas stations and fast food outlets came into view, and the number of dishevelled buildings appeared to proliferate. This journey into the unknown led me along what I now know to be DeSoto Avenue and under a railway viaduct, with the signage directing me straight into East Second Street and downtown Clarksdale.

This was late afternoon in March 2001, and the downtown was deserted. No cars parked in the streets, no shoppers or others out on the sidewalks. No activity at all. Most of the shops and other buildings were closed and boarded up, or with cracked display windows filled with junk piled high in old cardboard cartons, along with other rubbish that had obviously missed the local municipal garbage collection for years.

I found a motel out on State Street, a couple of kilometres from downtown, and settled in for what I expected would be a quiet night before the short trip up to Memphis and the long flight home. The downtown intrigued me, so I drove in, and of course, readily found a carpark. Few people visit downtown at that time. Just one restaurant was operating and it was new to Clarksdale: Madidi, with its white tablecloths and fine dining. The owner, a tall and distinguished gentleman, asked why I was in town, and I mentioned the conference in New Orleans and its focus on urban planning and economic development. "Well, we certainly need some development around here!", he replied. That was Bill Luckett, local lawyer and property developer.

That evening, some young people who had been dining at Madidi were keen to show me around. The only place open was Sarah's Kitchen, a juke joint in nearby Sunflower Avenue. This was an unforgettable night, with Razorblade and 'The Deep Cuts' playing their Delta Blues in an almost-derelict shopfront building. Next morning a stranger on the street hailed me over and offered to show me around the downtown, providing some fascinating background to this place called Clarksdale. His name was Kinchen "Bubba" O'Keefe, a local building contractor and developer, and truly Clarksdale's "community statesman". Both Bubba and

Bill feature in this story about downtown Clarksdale, along with a cast of many who have injected energy, enterprise, and funds into the revitalisation of downtown.

After all of these years, I am reminded of what Charlie Musselwhite told me at a gig at the Corner Hotel back home in Melbourne. As he stood in front of the audience, the lid of his aluminium harp case was open, and across that lid were the words “I (heart) Clarksdale”. Charlie had finished up for the night and was now signing CDs, so I approached him, bought a CD and casually mentioned that I was going to Clarksdale in a couple of weeks’ time. Charlie smiled and simply responded: “[O]nce you’ve been to Clarksdale, life is never the same.”

How true.

In 2008 I spent three months in Clarksdale, and I went there with a plan to write what I was calling my Blues Odyssey, a story about this small town’s efforts at downtown revitalisation associated with Blues music and Delta arts and culture. This revitalisation was something I had observed during my visits since the first time back in 2001, and I was intrigued to document the changes that were underway. However, my objectives for the Odyssey were short-lived as a result of attending a public meeting in the Greyhound Bus Station. A group of townsfolk had gathered there to investigate the possibility of establishing an organisation to encourage and support downtown revitalisation. The chairman for the meeting, Bill Lockett, said: “[W]e know what we want, but we don’t have a plan.”

As much of my professional life has been involved in the economics and urban planning associated with small-town development, I decided to turn my work into an Action Plan for Downtown Clarksdale. I had no client as such, but proceeded with my work over that three-month period. Upon completion, I provided copies to the City of Clarksdale and to Coahoma County, and to those in the local community interested and involved in downtown development and revitalisation. For me personally, the positive outcome has been the friendship of many people who hold Clarksdale dear to their hearts. And I also very much value my “Key to the City”, which was formally given to me, totally unexpectedly, at a Council meeting by the Mayor of the City of Clarksdale before I left for home back in 2008.

The research from a decade ago piqued my interest in updating the Clarksdale material and actually presenting it in the form of a book—something readable and informative, and noting the impressive work undertaken by individuals in the community who enjoy the “sense of place” that attaches to this Mississippi Delta town.

This publication tells the story of the revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale. A story that is continuing today and well into tomorrow ...

Melbourne, VIC, Australia
2018

John C. Henshall

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1

Introduction

This is a story about Clarksdale and the economic revitalisation process that led to the rebirth of the city's downtown after many years of decline and dereliction. The special significance of Blues music to downtown revitalisation is highlighted through cultural tourism, with Clarksdale as the location of the Crossroads at Highways 49 and 61 and associated with the birth of the Blues.

Clarksdale is like so many other small cities and towns in America: at first sight it appears to be poor, desolate, and seemingly without a goal for future development and the well-being of its community. The same can be said about many small cities and towns in Australia, but a leisurely drive through the American urban areas—with derelict downtowns—highlights the issues that truly need attention. These aspects are recorded in this story.

Of course, much has been written about the economic revitalisation of downtown areas in cities and towns, including the role of cultural tourism and the so-called creative people in enabling such revitalisation to occur. However, less attention has focused on the importance of cultural tourism in promoting economic revitalisation in the downtowns of small

cities and towns. This story addresses this situation by focusing on revitalisation efforts in the long-established downtown of Clarksdale, Mississippi, where the town's resident population totals around 16,170 persons in 2018, a substantial decline on the 22,000-plus residents of the early 1980s. Lessons are provided for other small cities and towns where a decline in economic activities in the downtown has been in evidence over many years.

For decades Clarksdale, located in Coahoma County in the northern part of the Mississippi Delta as illustrated in Fig. 1.1, had lost its role as the centre providing a wide range of business opportunities, jobs, and community

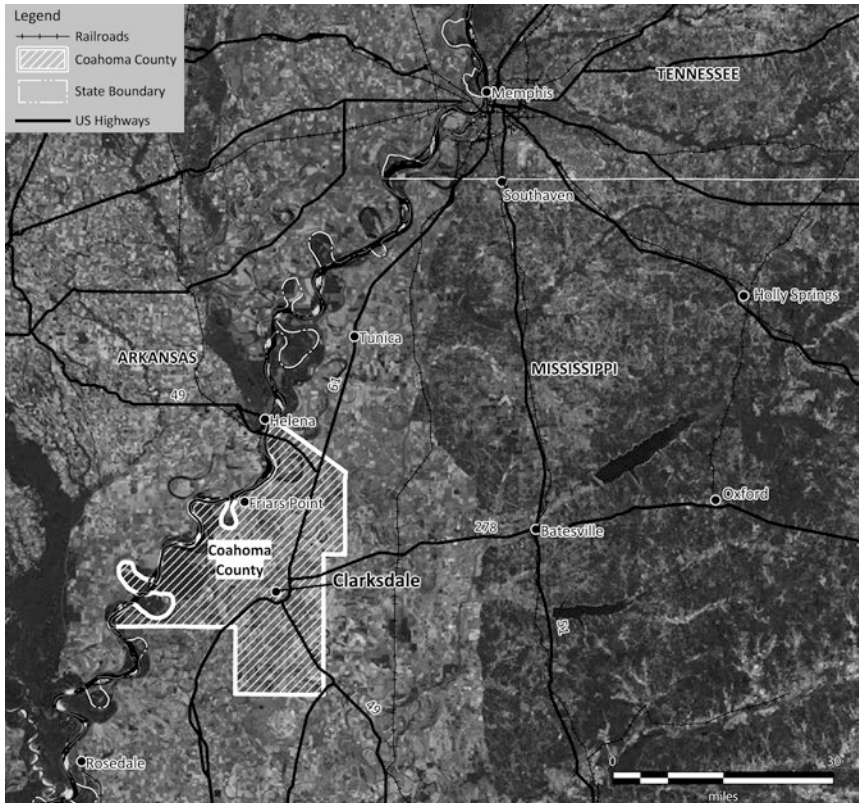


Fig. 1.1 Location of the City of Clarksdale and Coahoma County. (Source: Mississippi Geospatial Clearinghouse & MapInfo)

services to those living in the town and surrounding region. This situation was not uncommon for many cities and towns in America where downtown decline has been associated with the flight to the suburbs, out-of-centre retail mall developments, and the increase in personal accessibility provided through universal car ownership, among other factors.

In Clarksdale's case, downtown decline has been due to several specific factors, including the advent of big box retailing and the location of new retail and commercial businesses along South State Street on the edge of town; a declining trade area associated with the loss of population, jobs, and spending flowing from agricultural restructuring and manufacturing decline; the loss of workers and their families as they seek employment opportunities in (mainly) larger, northern cities; and the increasing level of competition from other cities and towns.

Today, however, Clarksdale has taken up the challenge to "revitalise" its downtown in the face of economic adversity. Recovery is underway and much of this is associated with Blues music and Delta culture—Clarksdale is situated at the fabled "crossroads" of Highways 49 and 61, and is also the home to national icons in literature, art and other cultural pursuits. These are key elements around which the downtown revitalisation effort is now focused, with growth in many new businesses associated with the Blues legacy, ranging from music venues and art galleries, to museums, cafes and restaurants, and specialist retailers.

This story charts the background, process, and progress through which the Clarksdale community has embarked on the road to downtown recovery. It highlights the town's indelible links with Blues music, borne out of years of toil, hardship, and socio-economic deprivation visited upon the African-American community. Emphasis is placed on the importance of "champions" and "creative people", drawing on community support in achieving downtown revitalisation.

Positive results are now evident, with increasing numbers of new businesses and jobs, improved levels of service, refurbishment of derelict buildings, a renewed sense of place, and an uplift in community confidence. However, some concerns are voiced in the community that much of the revitalisation has been achieved by private sector interests, particularly individuals setting up new businesses in downtown, with a lesser degree of involvement by local government. These aspects are discussed.

Consideration is also given to national trends in downtown decline and subsequent revival, including reference to the writings of Jane Jacobs and other observers of downtown change in American cities over the years. The role of “creative people” in fostering economic development—drawing on work by writers Charles Landry, Richard Florida, and others—is also assessed for its relevance to a small city like Clarksdale. An outline of the very significant place of Blues music and Delta culture in Clarksdale’s revitalisation over the past decade or so is highlighted, emphasising how Blues is the fundamental element contributing to downtown’s economic revival.

Lessons for small cities and towns are principally focused around recognising the importance of a particular theme or asset or other feature around which economic and community development can be pursued. These themes or assets include the importance of champions and creative people in fostering economic development; the need for good community organisation; the importance of having an “action plan” to guide progress; the need to have in place—or encourage the provision of—the supporting infrastructure and services; and the significance of supporting the viable operation of both existing and new businesses as a means of adding to investment and new job creation. The lessons are borne out of the Clarksdale experience, and they are applicable in other small cities and towns where the community wants to encourage new opportunities for local development, prosperity, and well-being.

In particular, the significance of cultural tourism to downtown revitalisation is highlighted, with emphasis on the global appeal of Blues music, but with the Blues roots firmly established in the fertile soils of the Mississippi Delta and Clarksdale.



Clarksdale Entrance on West Second Street



State Street Approach from Highway 61



Sunflower River in Clarksdale



The Bank in East Second Street

2

Downtown Decline and Revitalisation: National Trends and Clarksdale's Experience

While the focus is on the revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale, it is appropriate to examine the broad trends at the national level in America in terms of downtown economic decline and revitalisation over the years. This “global” view assists in placing Clarksdale’s issues and achievements in perspective.

Numerous reasons underlie the decline in the economic fortunes of downtowns over recent decades, especially the decline in downtown roles and functions, the “flight” to the suburbs, and the trend to “out-of-centre” commercial development. Downtown decline is counter-balanced by the trend to downtown revitalisation, with approaches that include “Main Street” and other programmes or processes aimed at downtown revival.

Since the first days of urban settlement in millennia past, the geographic centre of communities has been the place where civic, business, and other activities have located to serve community needs. In the American vernacular, the “downtown” emerged as the locale for a wide range of activities, and this was particularly so for retail and commercial businesses serving the local community, and with the extension of this servicing role to meet needs in the surrounding hinterland. Downtown

was regarded as the place where the lifeblood of business and the community was focused. This is the location where significant investment of many generations was traditionally directed, and where opportunities were to be found in developing properties and investing in new and expanding businesses and jobs, and participating in social activity.

However, a decline in the economic base of long-established downtowns in many American cities and towns has been in evidence for decades and with a multitude of contributory factors, ranging from suburbanisation and universal car ownership, to out-of-centre development and strong competition from larger centres.

The trend to suburbanisation was in evidence in industrialising England in the nineteenth century and with the Garden City Movement in the early twentieth century. However, it was the introduction and widespread adoption of the motor vehicle some 100 years ago that facilitated the substantial movement to the suburbs, and this was very much in evidence in America. Suburban land prices were cheaper compared with land prices in city centres and environs, and the car ensured that suburban land was more accessible in a transportation sense, giving people the opportunity to enjoy large blocks, new dwellings, and a sense of new opportunity (Jacobs 1961; Glaeser 2005).

In the American context, the move to the suburbs was also associated in many cases with the “flight from blight” (Mieszkowski and Mills 1993; Bradford and Kelejian 1973). This movement was characterised by city residents seeking opportunities to move away from what they perceived to be declining liveability as low income households moved into inner city neighbourhoods. These neighbourhoods had become congested and were experiencing a decline in local amenity. Race issues were a further factor in the flight from the city centres. Other factors exerted a “magnet” effect in attracting development to the suburbs and included such diverse influences as cheaper mortgages for suburban properties and improved access to better schools (Glaeser 2005). This outward movement of higher-income households away from inner city environs led to a loss of retail support to downtown businesses and contributed to the continuing downward spiral in downtown economic circumstances.

The trend to suburbanisation is also reflected in the view that “most of the fastest growing ‘cities’ of the late Twentieth Century – Los Angeles, Atlanta, Phoenix, Houston, Dallas and Charlotte – are primarily collections of suburbs, often with only marginal links to the traditional urban core” (The Planning Center 2005, p. 9). Under the heading of “Downtown Delusions”, The Planning Center states that “Despite much-ballyhooed accounts about a return of residents to the nation’s downtowns” the population movement into downtowns is insignificant, with downtowns forecast as having only a 2.3% share of metropolitan residents in 2010 compared with 1.6% in 1998. At least, according to these figures, the downtowns are increasing their share of metropolitan populations. However, just as importantly as absorbing more residents, the downtowns need to be supported for the business, civic, and community roles they perform for populations from the local level to the metropolitan level, and for the significant investment, economic activity, and jobs these downtowns typically represent.

Downtown decline was also a result of the development of new shopping centres established in the suburbs to serve the expanding suburban populations. A hierarchy of centres emerged, ranging from small neighbourhood shopping centres to large, drive-in regional shopping centres or shopping malls covering many acres of land. In turn, this development of larger centres in the suburbs and away from the city core led to a loss of business for the established downtowns. This trend followed the patterns observed earlier by Jacobs (1961) where suburbanites no longer needed to travel back into the downtown for their goods and services or other requirements, thus leading to the demise of many downtown businesses.

Out-of-centre development thrived, with major retail operations moving to large, affordable sites located away from downtown centres and suburban centres, yet remaining accessible to their retail trade areas through the convenience afforded to people due to universal car ownership and the development of major highway and freeway networks. Today, a common sight in American cities and towns is the development of these retail and commercial activities at freeway interchanges, often far from residential neighbourhoods they serve, but readily accessible by car.

These are the “edge cities”, as described by Garreau (1992), which are large areas of mixed-use urban development accommodating significant residential, retail, and commercial activities, typically located at the intersections of major freeways.

Development of suburban shopping centres and out-of-centre retail and commercial premises in American cities and towns has drawn valuable custom away from established downtowns, thereby adding significantly to the loss of business revenues and contributing to an increase in other commercial pressures on long-established downtown localities. However, some observers (including Garreau 1992) argue that the development of “edge cities”, now an international phenomenon, is important in driving economic development, jobs, and wealth.

A further contributor to downtown decline has been the movement of manufacturing activities to the suburbs and, additionally, the loss of considerable levels of manufacturing activity from American cities as they suffer severe competition from low-cost manufacturing operations abroad. Employment areas surrounding downtowns no longer provided the manufacturing base, jobs were lost, and families moved on to places where they perceived employment opportunities to be greater (Lemann 1991), and this was typically in suburban areas. Affordable and accessible land in the suburbs was attractive to both manufacturing activities and their labour force, compared with higher land prices in heavily built-up city centres (Mieszkowski and Mills 1993, p. 136).

While suburbanisation and car ownership are readily acknowledged as contributors to downtown decay, the urban planning profession has also failed to assist downtown prosperity. This view is readily supported by the lack of planning that consequently fosters out-of-centre developments. The failure of planning is also in evidence with the lack of effort in actually planning and developing the downtown as a comprehensive locale for work, shopping, and residential living, and as a place to engage in lifestyle and other interests. This situation was highlighted by Jacobs more than 50 years ago: Jacobs observed that “When a city heart stagmates or disintegrates, a city as a social neighbourhood of the whole begins to suffer ... It falters at producing something greater, socially, culturally,

and economically, than the sum of its separate parts" (Jacobs 1961, p. 177).

The failure of planning in America in regard to town centres is also noted in a submission by Westfield Limited to the Australian Productivity Commission (2011, p. 245) inquiry on the retail sector. Westfield, an Australian-owned developer of shopping malls in America, commented that: "[I]t is clear that a lack of planning regulation in the United States has led to an oversupply of retail space. This has led to the closure of a large number of malls. In fact mall closures are so commonplace in the United States that a website (www.deadmalls.com) contains descriptions and photographs of almost 400 malls that no longer function or are severely limited in function."

A particular factor at play in the South that contributed to downtown decline began in the early decades in the twentieth century when the African American population was under social and economic duress. Between 1910 and 1970, an estimated 6.5 million African Americans migrated from the South to destinations in the North, with 5 million migrating in the period following 1940 (Lemann 1991, p. 6). As Lemann states, "For blacks, the migration meant leaving what had always been their economic and social base in America and finding a new one."

Critically important in driving this outward migration was the mechanisation of the planting and harvesting of cotton. Notably in the case of Clarksdale, which was the centre of the Delta's thriving cotton industry, mechanisation was introduced in 1944 at the Hopson plantation, located five kilometres south of the town on Highway 49. According to Lemann, the cost-accounting system used by Hopson showed that a bale of cotton cost US\$39.41 by hand compared with just US\$5.26 by machine, and that "each machine did the work of fifty people" (Lemann 1991, p. 5). Later, the introduction of chemicals for the control of weeds also contributed to labour-saving on the plantations, especially following introduction of the federal minimum wage for farm labourers in 1967 and the consequential effect of a more-than-tripling in farm wages (Lemann 1991, p. 319).

While the “push” factors were present in terms of generating migration from the South, the “pull” factors from the North were also at work, especially in regard to wages: a cotton-picker or a servant could earn just US\$2.50 a day in the South in the 1940s, but in Chicago workers in places such as a laundry, a factory or a restaurant could earn around US\$7.50 for a ten-hour day (Lemann 1991, p. 8). Places like Chicago also offered the early Blues musicians the opportunity to earn a living from their music, with Alan Lomax noting that the vast majority of Black musicians in Chicago “originated in the Mississippi Delta. They gathered in Chicago because there were paying jobs for them in taverns and dance-halls, and also, for the first time, they could put their songs on record” (Lomax 1993, p. 441).

In summary, from a national perspective, the factors contributing to downtown decline are evident in suburbanisation and the impetus given to this force by universal car ownership, but with particular “push” and “pull” factors involved in the South associated with the movement of mainly black workers and their families to places in the North in search of economic and social opportunities otherwise not available to them. Clarksdale, as the main centre serving the northern part of the Mississippi Delta, also experienced these very same “push” and “pull” pressures.

While much of the above commentary highlights the demise of the downtown as a place of commercial and community activity over the years, this means that, today, the rich heritage associated with the built-form of many long-established downtowns largely remains in place. This heritage aspect provides the building blocks for the renewal and refurbishment of buildings and townscape, expanded levels of commerce, and an uplift in civic pride. This is the case in respect of opportunities now being developed in downtown Clarksdale where the slogan “Keepin’ it Real” is apt.

The question arises: What has contributed to the revival of downtowns in many instances, especially in view of the economic decline over past years? Clearly, a number of important factors have contributed to this revival.

New roles for downtowns have emerged, and many municipalities have encouraged streetscape improvements, heritage conservation and

refurbishment, and the introduction of new uses in old buildings. Other approaches involve support to local businesses and the implementation of marketing campaigns, while in many cases downtowns have regenerated through new and expanded residential development opportunities supported by attractive lifestyle and amenity attributes.

Many other factors contribute to downtown revival, ranging from the introduction of consultation programmes designed to encourage community action, through to “main street” development and promotion, descriptions of case studies and their attendant lessons, and the popularisation of the “creative class” movement in achieving positive economic development outcomes. Federal tax exemptions under Section 501(c)(3) of the US Internal Revenue Code have also assisted not-for-profit entities in funding the restoration of old buildings and associated works. In other cases, grants for façade restoration and improvement have been made to downtown property owners on the basis of “matching” funding. Local government is also very supportive of downtown revitalisation, but funds from the local governments have generally been limited in the face of other demands on scarce civic resources.

Two broad areas associated with revitalisation are worthy of attention, namely the focus on “processes” to achieve revitalisation, and the attention given to “creative” people.

In terms of “process”, the Main Street America™ programme has contributed significantly to the revitalisation of many downtowns, large and small, across the USA and internationally. The programme was developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and has been in operation for some 35 years. At the core of the programme is the “Four-Point Approach” (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2009). In short, this approach involves Organisation—“getting everyone working toward the same goal”; Promotion—“selling a positive image of the commercial district”; Design—“getting Main Street into top physical shape with an inviting atmosphere”; and Economic Restructuring—“strengthening existing economic assets and expanding and diversifying the economic base”.

Main Street also promotes “Eight Principles” which include, among others, the need to take a comprehensive approach (“no single focus can

revitalise Main Street”); the need to take incremental steps (“baby steps come before walking”); the importance of self-help (“no one else will save your Main Street”); the need for implementation (“Main Street must show visible results”); and the need to embrace change (“skeptics turn into believers and attitudes on Main Street will turn around”).

Since 1980 the Main Street programme has involved over 2000 communities nationally, securing US\$71.35 billion in new public and private investment, rehabilitating 267,800 buildings, generating some 131,970 new businesses, and creating over 583,800 new jobs, as highlighted on their web site (www.preservationnation.org).

The Mississippi Main Street Association (MMSA), since 1993, has generated more than US\$5.2 billion in private and public investment (including almost US\$1.3 billion in public investment), over 36,900 net new jobs, rehabilitated approximately 3300 buildings, and added over 2900 downtown residential units. In 2017, cities participating in the MMSA generated 325 net new businesses, 95 business expansions to existing businesses, 1460 net new jobs, 109 façade rehabilitations, and 86 downtown residential units, plus more than 50,300 volunteer hours. All of this effort is to fulfil MMSA’s mission “to provide visionary leadership, guidance and counsel to MMSA communities through organization, promotion, design and economic development to make our cities and towns better places to work, live and play” (MMSA, May 2018).

The Brookings Institution in the USA, through its Metropolitan Policy Program, published a paper entitled “Turning Around Downtown: Twelve Steps to Revitalization” (Leinberger 2005). Leinberger recognises that, although all downtowns are different and a customised approach is appropriate in view of the particular attributes that a downtown may have, it is possible to identify 12 steps that form a template for successfully rebuilding and revitalising downtowns. The first six steps focus on installing the “infrastructure”, including setting the vision, developing a strategic plan, establishing business improvement districts, and identifying private and public sector roles. The second set of six steps focus on land use and environs, including developing an entertainment district, establishing markets for rental housing and for-sale housing, and promoting real estate development through the retail and office markets.

Leinberger states that “Once the stage for downtown development is set, as outlined in the first six steps ..., the private real estate market begins to emerge” (Leinberger 2005, p. 12), and he sets out the sequential manner in which development occurs. Step 12 is finally reached when the downtown office market develops. While the 12 steps are individually and collectively relevant and each is helpful in promoting downtown revitalisation, the sequential nature of the 12-Step programme is a potential limitation on the timely re-development of downtown. A concern would be that if a downtown like Clarksdale was to wait up to 20 years for a sequential form of revitalisation to take place (Leinberger 2005, Fig. 2, p. 13), the downtown would likely have faded further into the moribund past.

In regard to “creative” people, researchers have shown over many years how creativity is important in fostering economic development, and they point to individual creativity and wider, community-based creativity.

Charles Landry (2000), a UK-based researcher in the forefront of promoting “creative cities”, recognises the importance of creativity and culture in encouraging the “continuous invention of the new”, as well as demonstrating “how to deal appropriately with the old” (Landry 2000, p. 7). This aspect is of special relevance to older-established downtowns where the revitalisation in business and community development is associated with cultural and other assets from past generations, and where the built-form that accommodates this revitalisation involves old downtown buildings largely left vacant as a result of economic and social change over the years. These aspects revolving around creativity are highlighted later in Chaps. 7 and 8.

Many individuals contribute to revitalisation and bring creativity to the downtown, and many are “creative” in the conventional sense of being involved in the arts, history, and cultural affairs. However, many others are likely to come from a diverse range of occupations, ranging from building and construction, property development and real estate, to law, health care, accountancy, food production, retailing, and public administration. These individuals are “creative” in the sense that they can see the potential in developing and promoting businesses, services, events,

and other features that build on a downtown's opportunity for economic revitalisation.

All of the activity in refurbishing old buildings and establishing new businesses is bringing a new lease on life to downtowns. Much of the initial impetus for this development lies with "champions", those individuals who can be described as providing leadership and ideas, being pro-active in getting their specific projects implemented, and providing support to community-wide initiatives. Examples of successful downtowns in Mississippi abound, many of which are the outcome of Main Street programmes and where creative people are involved.

While the focus is on the experience of downtown decline and revitalisation in America, it is worth noting the experiences associated with the decline and revitalisation of small towns in Australia, and to highlight important comparisons and contrasts. Small town economies and their communities were investigated in The Small Towns Study of Victoria (Henshall Hansen Associates) in 1988, undertaken on behalf of the State Government of Victoria, in an era of significant social and economic change in the structure of small towns. Subsequently, in 2005, this work was the subject of a State Government-funded review (Victorian Universities Regional Research Network and John Henshall), having regard for social and economic change over the many years since the original project was undertaken.

The original Small Towns Study in 1988 addressed social change and economic and community development issues in six small towns selected as a typology across Victoria, with findings applicable to other small towns in the State and nationally. Many of the issues are identifiable in the American context, just as many of the issues and lessons identified in the Clarksdale context are relevant to small cities and towns in Australia.

A number of issues identified in the Small Towns Study focused on the role of town centres serving small communities. Among key issues was the changing structure of the farm sector, with an increase in average farm size and a consequent decrease in farm-based populations. This change was also associated with declining levels of farm employment through the introduction of new farming technology and techniques. As a result of these farming-related changes, population numbers in the

rural hinterlands declined, and this had an adverse impact on levels of trade in the small towns. Similarly, regionalisation of government services into large regional cities and away from small towns also contributed to a loss of jobs in the towns, a decline in household spending, and a consequent decline in local business revenues.

In parallel with these changes, the ascendancy of retailing in large regional centres over local retailing in small towns, combined with the growth of national retail brands locating in large centres in regional cities and in metropolitan areas, also contributed to a decline in small town business revenues. Such change was hastened by improvements in personal accessibility of rural and small town populations to nearby regional centres and to metropolitan areas (e.g., through road and highway improvements) where an attractive range of goods and services could be readily accessed. A further concern was the lack of tertiary education facilities and employment opportunities in the small towns compared with metropolitan areas and large regional centres, with the result that the towns would face an indefinite future as their young people moved to the larger cities for education and jobs.

These issues are also identifiable in the Clarksdale context, and for other small cities and towns in the USA. However, one of the main contributors to the economic decline in American small cities and towns has been the growth in out-of-centre retail and commercial development, as exemplified in the Clarksdale case where such development continues to occur along South State Street, located 2–3 kilometres from downtown. This form of development has effectively decanted many retail and commercial enterprises and jobs out of the downtown, leaving numerous empty buildings. In contrast, urban planning regulations in the State of Victoria and in other Australian states have attempted to curtail or at least minimise such out-of-centre development.

One of the conclusions drawn in the Small Towns Study (Henshall Hansen Associates 1988, p. 66) was recognition that

[t]he major difficulty faced by most small town communities is not in accepting the fact of change, but rather knowing how best to manage it. During the course of the Study, some towns revealed a remarkable capacity to adapt to, and make the best of, changes they confronted. In general,

these were towns which see their role as not one of reacting to change, but of shaping its outcome.

The study highlighted that one of the measures for managing change involved the local community in terms of their support to local development initiatives and their support to community organisations in the delivery of local services. However, the study also recognised that many small communities were unprepared for the socio-economic, demographic and technological changes occurring around them. These communities lack information on their local capabilities for development; they lack the professional experience to identify opportunities and to capitalise on them, or to identify the constraints and minimise or overcome them; they usually lack the funds to thoroughly evaluate their options for the future, let alone address many issues of a day-to-day nature; and, importantly, they often lack an appropriate organisational basis from which to proceed in their efforts to galvanise local support and funding. The Small Towns Study also emphasised the need for local communities to develop their own strategic approach to planning and development, taking into account their locational and other attributes and resources, and encouraging local initiatives and entrepreneurial potentials.

These findings are relevant to the circumstances in small cities and towns in America today.

The downtown in Clarksdale is an interesting case that reflects many of the features of downtown decline, besides highlighting the exciting elements associated with downtown revitalisation.

Factors Contributing to Downtown Clarksdale's Decline to 2000

The literature shows that several key factors account for the decline in downtown activities across cities and towns, large and small, in the USA. Jane Jacobs, writing over 55 years ago, identified these underlying contributors to downtown decline, and pointed to the loss of local shops and a sense of loss for the wider community (Jacobs 1961). This has been

the downtown Clarksdale experience, where many shops either closed or moved to the edge of town over a period of 40 or so years, commencing from around 1970.

Others writing about downtown decline highlight the growth in suburbanisation in terms of a “flight from blight” (Mieszkowski and Mills 1993), the development of “edge cities” (Garreau 1992), and the simple desire to enjoy a comfortable suburban lifestyle, with access to good facilities, services, and amenities (Glaeser 2005). However, these particular factors have not been at play in Clarksdale, as the city with a 2018 population of just 16,170 people is of a relatively small size compared with the large cities experiencing suburbanisation and the growth of edge cities.

Although Clarksdale’s downtown did not experience the extreme “blight” that characterised many cities and towns (such as Detroit), Clarksdale’s downtown suffered from a lack of business interest and re-investment that, in turn, has contributed to almost 40% of its buildings lying vacant and in a state of disrepair.

In Clarksdale’s case, the demise of the downtown over recent decades has been due, in particular, to population decline in the city and in the rest of Coahoma County. Since 1950, Coahoma County has lost just over one-half of its population: at that time the County had approximately 50,000 residents; today it has approximately 23,700 residents. This loss of population has been mainly associated with mechanisation in agriculture and the consequent loss of farming jobs, the decline in manufacturing jobs, and the flight of many in the labour force to cities in the North where the prospects for employment and economic betterment were attractive (Lemann 1991; Clarksdale Chamber of Commerce 1953; Henshall 2008).

As a result of all of the above factors, retailers and other businesses in downtown Clarksdale suffered significant losses in household spending. For example, in the period 1970–2018 Clarksdale’s trade area population declined by 30,700 persons (net) and this has resulted in an effective loss of available retail spending in the order of US\$403 million annually, expressed in constant 2018 dollars. Indeed, over the longer-term period 1950–2018, downtown Clarksdale’s regional trade area has declined from 130,000 persons to just 60,000 persons. At the same time, and partly in response to widespread motor vehicle ownership and cheaper

land costs, out-of-centre retail and commercial development has brought new pressures to the long-established Clarksdale downtown and its businesses.

In respect of out-of-centre development, this trend commenced in Clarksdale in 1971 with the development of Walmart on South State Street and the movement of many businesses, large and small, to locate in this area where motor vehicle access was facilitated; free and plentiful parking was available on-site; and businesses could benefit from high levels of exposure to passing highway traffic. The availability of low-cost development sites also contributed to this movement away from downtown to the out-of-centre locations.

Other contributing factors in downtown Clarksdale's case relate to the increase in retail competition from other cities, and the high incidence of local poverty. As identified in local interviews and in the downtown retail analysis, Memphis and Southaven are dominant in terms of providing substantial retail competition for downtown Clarksdale—Southaven is, in effect, an outer suburban area abutting the southern part of metropolitan Memphis—while smaller cities that include Cleveland, Batesville and Greenwood, as well as factory outlet shopping in nearby Tunica, also provide keen retail competition. All of these localities are situated within a 30–75-minute drive of downtown Clarksdale.

In terms of the poverty factor, Clarksdale has a high level of distress, with 37.5% of all families living below the poverty line, or approximately 2.5 times the national average according to the Census. Downtown businesses therefore have a much smaller “pie” to share in retail spending terms compared with their counterparts in areas where poverty levels and low household incomes are not so significant as in Clarksdale.

Overall, the decline in economic activity in downtown Clarksdale to around the year 2000 can be attributed to factors that have affected many small cities and towns, especially in the South where outward population movements and the incidence of family poverty have been significant and remain as underlying issues associated with poor levels of economic development.



Alcazar Hotel Undergoing Renovation



Vacant Building in Issaquena Avenue



Vacant Shop in Issaquena Avenue



Vacant Shop in Yazoo Avenue



Vacant Site and Building in Issaquena Avenue

Factors Contributing to Downtown Revitalisation Since 2000

Two dominant factors assist in explaining the success of downtown Clarksdale's economic revitalisation since around 2000: the town's intimate association with Blues music, and the downtown development initiatives pursued by individuals and by Clarksdale Revitalization Inc.

Clarksdale's connection with Blues music over many generations is integral to the history of downtown as the place for entertainment for mainly poor households living in town or coming in from surrounding rural areas for respite from the labour associated with sharecropping, construction sites, and other places of manual endeavour. The importance of

Blues in this context is highlighted by fieldwork undertaken by researchers in the 1940s, including Lomax, Adams and Work, and by contemporary writers including Cobb, Guralnick and Palmer, and in the observations of relatively new residents, such as Roger Stolle. In addition, maps showing the locations of Historic Blues Markers and the birthplace of Mississippi Blues musicians also emphasise the important place of the Mississippi Delta, and especially Clarksdale, in the history of Blues music.

The popularity of Blues music and its contribution to downtown economic revival is reflected in the growth in visitor numbers to Clarksdale, as identified with reference to the growth in sales tax receipts (levied on visitor accommodation and restaurant meals), with much of this growth attributed to attendances at annual music festivals held in the downtown. Moreover, Blues music is the principal basis for much of the downtown business development over the past 15 years. Since 2000 at least 42 new businesses or attractions have established in the downtown, approximately 45% of which have been initiated by long-term residents and 55% by new residents, with most of the businesses associated in some way with Blues music and Delta culture. Examples include juke joints and other music venues, festivals, a recording studio, art galleries, dining establishments, a museum, visitor accommodation, and specialist retailers in music and folk art.

The individuals involved in these new enterprises can be described as “creative people”, those who have identified opportunities, invested funds, and provided many new attractions and features of interest to local residents and visitors alike. These efforts have been, and continue to be, instrumental in fostering confidence in downtown business development and in the restoration of old buildings.

A further consideration is that in the period 2008–2018 some 110 buildings in the downtown have been renovated or are planned for renovation, based on data held by the City. These renovations range from minor shopfront restorations to complete re-build where buildings were previously derelict. Prominent examples include the Woolworth building (now Yazoo Pass and the Lofts at the Five and Dime), the Holy Moly (former Masonic Lodge), the Greyhound Bus Station, the New Roxy, Stone Pony Pizza, Levon’s Bar & Grill, a number of restored shopfronts along Sunflower Avenue, extensions to the Delta Blues Museum, and

the upgrades to buildings that accommodate the Hambone Gallery and the Rock & Blues Museum. The Alcazar Hotel and the McWilliams building are slowly undergoing restoration, each of which is prominent in the downtown streetscape, although each has been vacant for several decades.

Importantly, a number of former derelict or vacant buildings have been restored, refurbished and re-purposed for visitor accommodation in recent years, including the Delta Cotton Company lofts, the Lofts at the Five and Dime, Blues Hound Flat, Bluestown Inn, Chateau Debris, The Squeeze Box, Delta Digs, and the Hooker Hotel. The Travelers Hotel in Third Street, constructed in the 1920s but derelict over recent decades, is undergoing restoration as a 20-room hotel and is due for opening by early 2019.

In turn, the growth in all of these businesses—and involving property renewal and refurbishment—has provided opportunities for expansion in construction trades and associated business and professional services in Clarksdale, bringing new jobs and incomes to the City.

* * *

In summary, the views expressed by Jacobs over 55 years ago in regard to suburbanisation and the adverse implications for downtowns continue to resonate today, and these negative outcomes are reinforced by continuing out-of-centre development in many cities and towns. More recent assessments in respect to “creative people” in the community contribute to the understanding of how economic development is achieved in downtown localities. The approach promoted in the Main Street programme is also a valuable tool in supporting revitalisation, while less relevant is the seemingly rigid or formulated approach embodied in the 12-Step sequential model promoted by The Brookings Institution.

Instead, a preferred approach focuses on the “organic” revitalisation of the downtown, with positive efforts to support downtown proceeding on a number of fronts and implemented in a non-sequential manner. This approach is demonstrated in Clarksdale’s case where revitalisation owes much more to local individual initiatives rather than a rigid adherence to “process”.

Overall, numerous factors account for the decline in downtown economies over past years, particularly loss of residential population, suburbanisation, and out-of-centre development, while the revitalisation of downtowns in more recent times can be attributed to creative people and their investments, combined with a supportive community and contributions from local governments.

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3

Delta Blues and Culture

Blues music is a force in popular culture and reflects the trials and tribulations of generations of people—African Americans—for well over 100 years, noting that the “blues” is also a condition that is not confined to any particular group. Blues is an essential part of the social and economic environment of those with roots in the American South, and especially in the Mississippi Delta, that expanse of fertile land which—as described in popular terms—extends from the front door of the Peabody Hotel in Memphis to Catfish Row in Vicksburg.

Clarksdale holds a special place in Delta culture, and today the town and the surrounding region continue as intrinsic components of the Blues heritage. This background to the music provides the context for subsequent assessments in relation to the economic revitalisation of the downtown, especially the discussion concerning “creative people” and their contributions to economic development.

Blues is important to Clarksdale and the Mississippi Delta, as the music underpins so much of the culture that marks this place in the geography, sociology, economy, and musicology of the Delta and is the catalyst in the rebirth of downtown Clarksdale. Peter Guralnick (1989, p. 14) describes Mississippi blues as “generally considered to be the richest and

most emotionally intense vein of a genre that began sweeping the South in the early days of the (Twentieth) century and then, much assisted by the new technology of the phonograph record, became a central strand in the diffusion of Afro-American culture over the next fifty years”.

Some 20-plus years ago, a listing of “Mississippi Blues Musicians” (Rooster Records and Delta Blues Museum 1995) highlighted the birthplace of 310 musicians, with some 180 individuals or 60% from the Delta. This high proportion is unlikely to have declined in recent times. In contrast, the Delta accounts for just 18% of Mississippi’s total population and only 22% of its land area, and is therefore well-endowed with the Blues. More specifically, the Delta Counties and Cities typically associated with Blues musicians account for just 10% of Mississippi’s population. Another 15% of musicians came from the adjoining “Hill Country” in north-eastern Mississippi, including RL Burnside and Junior Kimbrough from around Holly Springs; their offsprings continue to carry on the Blues music traditions today. In total, the Delta and adjoining Hill Country account for at least three-quarters of all Blues musicians born in Mississippi.

The prominence of the Delta as the “cradle” of Blues is also highlighted by the number of historical “Blues Trail” markers or plaques located in the Delta which commemorate the Mississippi Blues Trail, with the State described as “the birthplace of America’s music”. A map produced by the Mississippi Tourism Authority shows 31 markers in the Delta and in the immediately adjoining areas, representing 68% of all markers in Mississippi. This map is reproduced at Fig. 3.1, showing the location of Clarksdale and the historic markers in the Delta and in the rest of Mississippi. Other places, such as Chicago or Memphis, may lay claim to being the home of Blues music, but most would agree that the Mississippi Delta is the true place of origin.

The latest reference to Blues Trail markers (2018, www.msbluestrail.org/blues_marker_list) shows a total of 199 markers in Mississippi, with 88 markers or 44% located in the Delta. The listings are in honour of individual artists, clubs, record companies, radio stations, and historic events, and also reflect cities and counties that are notable for their blues activities, as well as plantations and individual street names. Examples of markers include those dedicated to Albert King, BB King, Big Jack Johnson, Delta Blues Museum, Eddie Shaw, Elmore James, Furry Lewis,

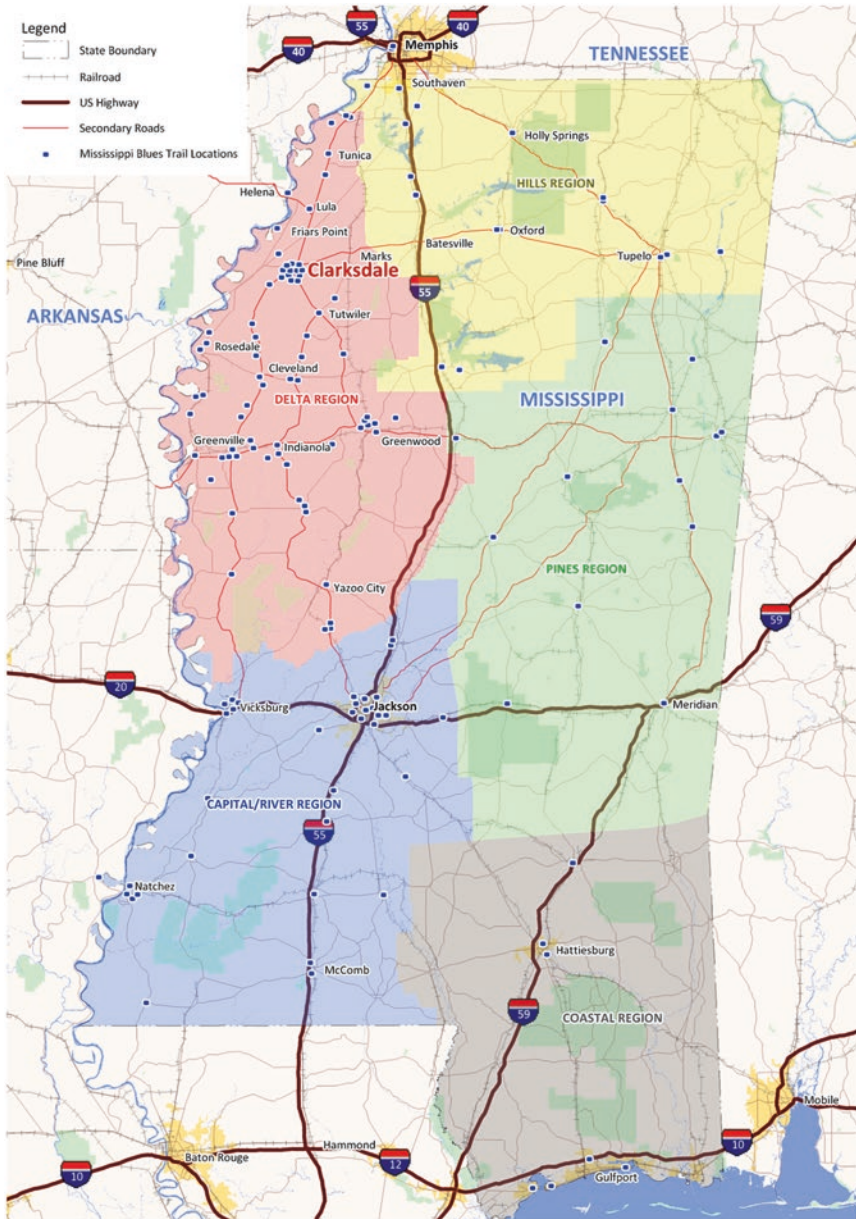


Fig. 3.1 Location of Clarksdale, the Delta, and Mississippi Blues markers—Mississippi Blues trail. (Source: VisitMississippi.org; MsBluesTrail.org; Mississippi Geospatial Clearinghouse; MapInfo)

Henry Townsend, Honeyboy Edwards, Hubert Sumlin, Ike Turner, James Cotton, Jimmy Reed, John Lee Hooker, Little Milton, Mose Allison, Muddy Waters, Pinetop Perkins, Robert Nighthawk, Sam Cooke, Son Thomas, Sonny Boy Williamson, WC Handy, WROX, Riverside Hotel, Po' Monkey's, and the list goes on. The 11 markers in Clarksdale celebrate the contribution to the Blues by Big Jack Johnson, Sam Cooke, Ike Turner, Wade Walton, Muddy Waters' Cabin, Delta Blues Museum, Hopson Planting Company, WROX, Riverside Hotel, Sunflower River Blues, and The New World.

In the words of John Lee Hooker, a Clarksdale-born blues musician interviewed in *Melody Maker* in 1964, "I know why the best blues artists come from Mississippi. Because it's the worst state. You have the blues alright if you're down in Mississippi" (Gioia 2008, p. 37).

And Robert Palmer, a recognised specialist researcher and writer on Blues music, highlights that Blues is

the story of a small and deprived group of people who created, against tremendous odds, something that has enriched us all ... Blues in the Delta was created not just by black people but by the poorest, most marginal black people. Most of the men and women who sang and played it could neither read nor write. They owned almost nothing and lived in virtual serfdom. (Palmer 1982, p. 17)

The "serfdom" to which Palmer refers is the system of sharecropping, whereby white landlords provided the black workers with the opportunity to work the plantations and to share in the proceeds at the end of each harvest—but, typically, the workers were in perpetual debt to the landowners. Although sharecropping was born out of a mutual dependency (the planters needed workers and the workers needed jobs), harsh living conditions and continuing indebtedness to the land-owner were the norm. As Cobb (1992, p. 282) describes the situation, sharecroppers were consigned to "a lifetime of hard labor with little hope of achieving either economic or personal independence from whites". He goes on to note that "the blues emphasized dissatisfaction and alienation as well as an ongoing struggle in the face of overwhelming odds" (Cobb 1992, p. 283). The black farmers became wage hands.

Ultimately, these struggles gave birth to the Blues as a means of expression in the face of adversity and hardship. Eventually, the struggles led to mass migration to the North, principally to Chicago, via the Illinois Central Railroad that linked New Orleans to Chicago—passing through Clarksdale—and provided Delta blacks with new opportunities far from home. This migration from the Delta was reinforced by the introduction of mechanisation on the plantations, with planters requiring less labour (Lemann 1991), while cities in the North required workers for expanding industries. Cobb observes that for those remaining in the Delta “there was anything but stability and promise in their existence. They became part of a forever shifting, essentially rootless farm labor force, more concerned about survival than advancement” (Cobb 1992, p. 284).

It was Blues music—enmeshed in miserable working and living conditions from cotton fields to levee camps—that gave vent to feelings associated with discrimination, violence, imprisonment, frustration, disillusionment, deprivation, incarceration, humiliation, denial, anger, personal loss, drunkenness, loneliness, and wanderlust. The music captures these feelings, just as Robert Palmer describes the “density and power” of Robert Johnson’s “Cross Road Blues”:

“The guitar rhythm is deliberate and driving, but Johnson repeatedly interrupts it to hammer and bend a single string, so forcefully that the instrument momentarily sounds like an electric guitar. Examined more closely, the guitar accompaniment is a complex, carefully constructed, mercifully shifting succession of two-beat and three-beat figures, and an equally complex, equally mercurial alternation of driving bass riffs and high, bottlenecked lead lines. The singing is tense, as if Johnson was forcing wind through a throat constricted by fear” (Palmer 1982, p. 125).

The words of Bukka White, quoted in Cobb (1992, p. 279), help to identify the Delta roots of Blues: “That’s where the blues start from, back across them fields ... It started right behind one of them mules or one of them log houses, one of them log camps or the levee camp. That’s where the blues sprung from. I know what I’m talking about.” Cobb (1992, p. 305) also observes that “the blues, a music born of incessant toil and demolished dreams on impoverished Delta blacks, exerted ... a formative influence on rock and roll” that was “to reflect and shape the sensibilities of successive generations”.

Roger Stolle (2011, p. 35), founder and operator of Cat Head Delta Blues and Folk Art shop in downtown Clarksdale, writes that “there is something distinctly uncomfortable about enjoying an art form born of such hard times (...). As the traditional, oft-repeated lyrics sing, it is about ‘laughing to keep from crying’. It is about picking one’s self up and moving on. Whether one is singing about the hard times in a cotton field or being dumped by a lover, the music is inherently about survival and making something good of bad.”

These culture-related attributes are relevant to the topic of Blues music in Clarksdale and the Delta, where poverty and unemployment levels are among the highest in the nation and where many downtown buildings lie vacant and derelict and reflect this engrained poverty. Importantly, and in a positive sense, Blues music contributes to Clarksdale’s cultural tourism effort and to the economic renaissance of the downtown through support to jobs, incomes, and improved services, while also celebrating the essence of Delta culture. Although this view relating to the positive aspects of linking Blues to cultural tourism and economic development in the Delta is a popular one, it is also the case that others see the connection as one of continuing exploitation of the heritage of African Americans and their tormented history as slaves to plantation owners and others, and subsequently as poor sharecroppers in an unequal partnership with white landowners.

Stephen A King (2011), a former professor at Delta State University in Cleveland, Mississippi, provides a detailed analysis of Blues and the manner in which it has been “co-opted” as a tool in the promotion of tourism in Mississippi and, in particular, in the Delta. King is also concerned about the “rhetorical representation of the blues” and dissects many aspects of Blues and its relationship to tourism through festivals, venues, retail activities, and marketing. In reviewing King’s work, an unavoidable conclusion is that—in King’s view—the African American legacy of Blues music has been captured mainly by the white community, and that today’s promotion of Blues bears little reflection on the torment the black community suffered—and, in many ways, still suffers—in regard to depravations inflicted upon them generations ago.

In the Clarksdale context, King states that “the Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival and other local blues festivals rhetorically construct markers of authenticity to satisfy the demands of some white blues tourists” (King 2011, p. 21). He notes that “some performance settings are

specifically constructed to satisfy the expectations of some of these white tourists who seek out representation of blues authenticity” (King 2011, p. 101), and he writes about “the typical tourist who might spend a weekend drinking beer and enjoying the sounds of ‘authentic’ blues” (King 2011, p. 182). While King at times tends to devalue and depreciate the Blues and its promotion through cultural tourism, he sums up by stating that “one can hardly deny the positive outcomes associated with blues festivals: these cultural events do create an aesthetic space for African Americans and whites (and other cultural groups) to collectively participate in enjoying a singular music experience, an event that temporarily, at least, inverts power relationships” (King 2011, p. 181).

Driving into the downtown area of Clarksdale is like entering a small southern town locked in the 1940s. The mainly late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century buildings have only survived to date because new commercial development over the past almost-40 years has generally located on the edge of town, mainly along South State Street, about 2–3 kilometres away, thus avoiding the pressure to demolish and replace the long-established downtown building stock and streetscape. To the visitor new to downtown, the general appearance of the local streets and buildings suggests that not much commercial activity is happening: around 40% of the buildings are empty, and many are in a derelict condition. Many businesses appear to be just making ends meet in terms of local sales turnover. In a word, much of the downtown appears moribund.

But the broken pavements and generally dishevelled edginess of the downtown also reflect the underlying strength of Clarksdale, rooted as it is in Blues music and Delta culture. This is the Crossroads where—as tradition has it—Robert Johnson made his deal with the Devil. This is the birthplace of Son House, Earl Hooker, John Lee Hooker, Ike Turner, Jackie Brenston, Sam Cooke, Willie Foster, and numerous other music icons. Muddy Waters grew up at nearby Stovall Plantation and started his early career in Clarksdale; Bessie Smith died there at what is now the Riverside Inn (it was previously an African American hospital), following a highway accident. And Sonny Boy Williamson and Elvis Presley were heralded at the local WROX radio station where Early Wright was the world’s longest-serving black DJ for his 50-year hold on the microphone.

Others have called Clarksdale “home” at some stage or another, and include Charley Patton, Bukka White, Pinetop Perkins, Frank Frost and Sam Carr. Jack Johnson, one of the Jelly Roll Kings, played weekly at Red’s Lounge until his death in 2011, as did Dave “Honeyboy” Edwards who died at 96 years of age; a regular in Clarksdale, Honeyboy had played in earlier times with Robert Johnson, Charley Patton, Johnny Shines, and other icons. Nearby, at the small settlement of Tutwiler, WC Handy in 1903 first came across the music he was to describe as “the weirdest music I had ever heard”, and which was to become the phenomenon of Blues music.

While much of the Blues is rooted in the Delta of past generations, Clarksdale today is “home” to many musicians and to those who come by on a regular basis, playing at the popular local juke joints and blues music festivals. Examples include Super Chikan, Terry “Big T” Williams, Big George Brock, R.L. Boyce, Bill Abel, Terry “Harmonica” Bean, Lucious Spiller, Anthony “Big A” Sherrod, Lightin’ Malcolm, Cadillac John, Jimbo Mathus, Watermelon Slim, Bill “Howl-N-Madd” Perry, Dick “The Poet” Lourie, Heather Crosse, and RL Superbad. Those who have passed away in recent times include Pinetop Perkins, T-Model Ford, Robert Belfour, LC Ulmer, Elmo Williams, “Big Jack” Johnson, CeDell Davis, Robert “Bilbo” Walker, Leo Bud Welch, and Josh “Razor Blade” Stewart. Younger musicians in Clarksdale are now coming to the fore and popular among them are Lee Williams, Jax Nassar, Shy Perry, and Christone “Kingfish” Ingram.

Many of Clarkdale’s young musicians are graduates from the Delta Blues Museum’s music education programme which provides young people with the essentials in Blues musicianship. The Berklee School of Music, out of Boston, is also an important promoter of Blues music among young students in Clarksdale and the Delta, and nationally (www.berklee.edu). Another important promoter of Blues among young people is the Pinetop Perkins Foundation which has as its primary mission “to provide encouragement and support for youth and young people at the beginning of their musical career”. The Foundation also helps provide care and safety for elderly musicians “at the twilight of their career” (www.pinetopperkinsfoundation.org).

Visits to the small towns and cities that surround Clarksdale confirm that these places—including Tutwiler, Rosedale, Indianola, and Greenwood—while having strong connections with Blues music over

many generations, are not embedded with the same strong legacy that Clarksdale continues to display with Blues today. The nearest “competitor” in a Blues tourism context is likely to be Indianola with its state-of-the-art BB King Museum, and also Cleveland as the location for the only Grammy Museum outside Los Angeles. But neither of these towns has such a wide array of Blues-related arts and cultural attractions or events that characterise Clarksdale. Moreover, many of the smaller towns in the surrounding Delta have lost their underlying economic roles and functions and are now either commuter settlements with their residents working in Clarksdale and other larger towns and cities, or are merely surviving in the midst of deep-seated poverty and unemployment.

Although Clarksdale’s downtown has been moribund for a generation or so despite this rich cultural vein, the place is changing in a new and positive direction, ever so slowly but surely. The downtown is now undergoing a renaissance in economic terms, and this is helping to form a new sense of place for Clarksdadians and for the many visitors who come to the town each year to appreciate the place that is, according to many ethnomusicologists, the cradle of Blues music (Lomax 1993; Guralnick 1989; Palmer 1982). The economic renaissance is reflected in the growth in new businesses in the downtown, bringing new investment, new services, new jobs, restored and refurbished buildings, and a revived sense of identity for the town.

Most importantly, the renaissance is also bringing new residents to Clarksdale who add to the creative talents of existing residents and thus help to revitalise the downtown economy and provide a catalyst for economic renewal and for business and community development. Although much is available in the academic literature about the “creative class” and “creative cities”, the revitalisation now underway in downtown Clarksdale is essentially home-grown. A number of opportunities were identified early in the past 15 years or so, with projects including the re-location of the Delta Blues Museum from the town’s library to the museum’s present location in the former rail freight depot, the establishment of the Ground Zero Blues Club, Cat Head Delta Blues and Folk Art, and the renewal and refurbishment of the historic Greyhound Bus Station, among other initiatives.

In April 2008 the local community came together in public meetings and identified their need to “revitalise” the downtown in a more

concerted manner. Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. was established with a Board and a co-ordinator, and a start was made on introducing further improvements to the downtown.

Overall, tourism is an important contributor to business revenues and employment in downtown Clarksdale, and also generates commercial benefits for the hotels, motels, and other businesses located out on State Street. This tourism is focused on Blues music and other aspects of Delta culture, particularly in literature and art, with many businesses involved in serving the needs of visitors drawn to the downtown as a place to spend some time exploring the streets and local shops, and attending night-time music venues.

Articles on Clarksdale and its association with Blues music have featured in such diverse publications as *The Economist*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *The Independent*, *Readers Digest*, *Popular Mechanics*, *USA Today*, *Bon Appetite*, *National Geographic*, and “*The Age*” in Melbourne. CNN has also presented news clips on how Blues music in the Delta is helping to revive local economies. Stephen Fry, celebrity UK actor and writer, included Clarksdale in his popular travel series on the USA, as did Rick Stein in his “food travel” series. And, increasingly, the internet is a source of countless articles on Clarksdale and its association with Blues.

Of special interest, Fodor’s Travel in 2018 voted Clarksdale as No. 1 of the “12 Best Music Cities that Aren’t Nashville”. The travel publisher notes that although Nashville has earned the nickname “Music City” for fostering country music legends, other cities are also recognised for their live music. Clarksdale tops the list and is described as the locale “where you’ll find the best places to catch live music” (Fodor’s Travel 2018).

An informative presentation of Clarksdale and the South in a music context is provided at the website www.americanamusictriangle.com, developed by Aubrey Preston (2018) of Leipers Fork in Tennessee and Birdsong Creative. The website highlights nine genres of American music that have developed, over time, in the triangle broadly formed by Nashville, Memphis and New Orleans. As the website states: The Americana Music Triangle, Where History Made Music ... Then Music Made History™.

Back in Clarksdale, and deserving of special mention, although not located downtown, is the Hopson Commissary and the Shack Up Inn, each of which is located on Highway 49, just five kilometres south of Clarksdale. These two entities—which comprise unique overnight

accommodation facilities, food and music venues—attract in the order of 7500 overnight visitors annually, and provide strong support to visitation levels in the downtown during Festivals and throughout the year. Of historical interest, Hopson's is the site where mechanisation was first introduced to cotton plantations in 1944, revolutionising the industry and changing forever (and not necessarily for the better) the socio-economic conditions of poor sharecropper communities. A more recent addition to this locality is the development of a dozen or so “shacks” that, together, comprise the “Shacksdale Motel on Highway 49”. These shacks replicate the sharecropper shacks from many decades past, but now have plumbing and electricity and are available for rental.

Festivals are an integral part of Clarksdale's tourism appeal (see Box 3.1). The Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival (established in 1998 and held every August) and the Juke Joint Festival (established in 2004 and held every April) are well-established annual events for locals and for increasing numbers of visitors from other states and from abroad. In total, at least 17 festivals are held annually in the town.

The Juke Joint Festival—which is promoted as combining a “small town fair” during the day and a “blues festival” at night—attracts some 7000 or so festival-goers on the Saturday of the festival in mid-April, including local residents as well as visitors from around 45 States in America and from around 30 countries. Each year the festival sells some 3500 wrist-band sales that permit entry to the 20 or so juke joints and other music venues at night, and free travel on the shuttle bus that links the various night-time venues. During the daytime and evening some 30 venues and stages present Blues music. The daytime activities are centred on several downtown streets where the focus is on providing a host of “family fun” attractions, ranging from racing pigs and monkeys-riding-dogs, to rock climbing walls and duck-calling competitions, with around 100 vendor stalls selling pulled pork BBQ, cold beer and lemonade, souvenirs, and art.

Juke Joints, of course, are a feature of Clarksdale's blues scene and provide a focal point for so many festivals through the year. Principal among the “juke” is Red's Lounge located on Sunflower Avenue, with Red Paden the owner/operator for over three decades. Red's is rather dilapidated in a physical sense, but no other structure in the world can provide the grit this place generates for live blues music. Live blues is a feature at numerous other venues during festivals, and with many continuing to

operate throughout the year. Popular venues, in addition to Red's, include Ground Zero Blues Club, New Roxy, Bluesberry Café, Cathead, Hambone Art & Music, Rock & Blues Museum, Delta Blues Alley Café, Levon's, and Messenger's (see Box 3.2).

The Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival is a popular three-day event held in August, attracting both locals and visitors. The festival is centred around the Delta Blues Museum outdoor stage and at various venues in downtown streets. It is the longest-running event in downtown Clarksdale (2018 marked the festival's twentieth anniversary) and features headline acts drawn mainly from musicians with Delta roots, including both blues and gospel. The headline act at the 2017 festival was Mississippi-born Charlie Musselwhite, with around 30 other musicians and bands on the programme.

Other popular festivals include the Tennessee Williams Festival established in 1992 and held every year in late September/early October, and the Clarksdale Film Festival established in 2011 and held every January. Each festival builds on Delta culture and heritage.

During these festivals, the restaurants, galleries, gift shops, and other stores are open for business, as are the several museums that include the Delta Blues Museum, the Rock & Blues Museum, and the historic WROX radio station/museum in Delta Avenue.

A personal interview survey conducted by the author involving attendees at the Juke Joint Festival shows that two-thirds (66%) of those surveyed are from beyond Mississippi, and attending the festival was the first visit to Clarksdale for the majority (60%) of these out-of-State visitors.

Of all survey participants, almost three-quarters (72%) say they are "very likely" to return for another Blues and culture event, and this was also agreed by the majority (60%) of those attending from beyond Mississippi. A significant majority of those surveyed (88%) "definitely" agree that "the Juke Joint Festival gives people a good appreciation of Clarksdale, Delta blues music and culture, and local hospitality". Of those visiting Clarksdale from other States, many (40%) indicate they will also be visiting other Delta towns during their visit, and this finding emphasises the tourism value that Clarksdale events generate for nearby localities in the Delta.

In addition to the two main music festivals, smaller festivals are also held at various times of the year. For example, the Clarksdale Caravan

Festival held in May features live music in front of Cat Head on Delta Avenue and in front of the Rock & Blues Museum on East Second Street. Another is the Hambone Blues and Art Festival held on the Halloween weekend in October in front of the Hambone Gallery, also located on East Second Street. Live music can be found every night of the week, and is available at the Ground Zero Blues Club, Red's Lounge and at the several other juke joints and downtown venues. Live music is also available at a number of downtown restaurants on a regular basis, and out at the Shack Up Inn and at Hopson Commissary. The Commissary holds the annual Pinetop Perkins Homecoming in October, with blues musicians paying homage to this locally born elder-statesman of the blues. Pinetop passed away in 2011 and is buried at Clarksdale.

Music events are also held regularly in nearby towns including Helena, Indianola, Rosedale, Leland, and Oxford. Importantly, many visitors at these events also take the opportunity to visit downtown Clarksdale to sample music, art, museums, and other features, as well as experiencing Southern hospitality, first-hand.

While Blues music is a catalyst for much of the downtown revitalisation, Clarksdale's heritage is steeped in other aspects of Delta culture that have substantial potential to contribute to downtown redevelopment, generating community benefits. The town has a wealth of arts and related activities, many of which are brought to public attention in the downtown and they contribute to street life and, importantly, assist in generating local business revenues and employment. Examples include Griot Arts, Spring Initiative, and Crossroads Cultural Arts Centre, each of which focuses on opportunities to bring arts and culture to young people in the local community, especially young African Americans.

The Delta, including Clarksdale, has its share of writers, painters, and other artists. Playwright Tennessee Williams spent much of his boyhood years living in Clarksdale where his grandfather was rector at St George's Episcopal Church. Williams' plays are embedded with local personalities and places, however thinly disguised, from his early years in the town. The Tennessee Williams Festival, which is celebrated each year to honour the playwright's birth date, takes place in the long-established residential heritage area on the northern edge of the downtown, around Clark, John and Court Streets. This area includes St George's Episcopal Church, the

Cutrer Mansion, the Clark House, and other homes that have connections with Clarksdale's early years.

Local galleries in the downtown exhibit the works of painters and other artists with a Delta association. One of Clarksdale's most revered artists is the late Marshall Bouldin III, internationally renowned portrait painter who lived in Clarksdale for most of his 80-plus years, with his studio located on Friars Point Road on the northern edge of town. Mr. Bouldin's work is represented in galleries nationally and around the world.

In recent years a number of small galleries established in the downtown, including galleries owned by young Clarksdale artists keen to provide a focus for creative talents and a place where other artists can exhibit. While not all have survived the economic vagaries of the Delta and national economic trends, these initiatives auger well for the downtown. The Hambone Gallery, established in 2004, continues to display local art and is also an intimate Blues music venue, especially the "jam" session on Tuesday nights and at festivals. Another gallery is artist/potter Joey Young's Lambfish Art Company in Third Street, while John Magnusson's art incorporating "found objects" adorns such places as the Hooker Hotel and the Squeeze Box.

Many of the gift shops also carry the works of local painters, potters, and other artists from this part of the Delta. Examples include Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art, Delta Creations, Oak & Ivy, Mag Pie Gift & Art, Nellie May's, Southern Expressions, and MS Design Maven. Locally, a children's art competition and an essay-writing competition for school students are held each year in connection with the Juke Joint Festival. And the Clarksdale Film Festival is now a well-established annual event in January, with its organisers highlighting "new, indie and classic films celebrating our region's music, culture and people, providing features, shorts, documentaries, live music and family fun at the crossroads!"

A unique business is the Quapaw Canoe Company, based in an old building in downtown that enjoys frontage to both the Sunflower River and to Sunflower Avenue. John Ruskey established the business in the late 1990s and provides canoe trips on the Mississippi River and other waterways throughout the Delta. Ruskey also established the "Mighty Quapaws", a group of young African Americans whom he skills-up in the

art of canoeing, canoe-making, teamwork, and personal fulfilment. Ruskey is recognised as a custodian of this part of the Mississippi River, with his in-depth knowledge and appreciation of the River providing the foundation for his interpretative tours. The company is a recipient of the Business of the Year award from the Community Foundation of Northwest Mississippi.

Vincent Productions is a specialised business, located in a refurbished building on Issaquena Avenue, that comprises a state-of-the-art sound stage and recording/editing studio. This hi-tech film and recording facility, covering a total of some 250 m² of floorspace, provides a “stage” for music recording and other performances, as well as providing the platform for editing and producing film, video, and sound recordings from around the nation. Actor Morgan Freeman has a “booth” at the Vincent Productions studio where he performs his voice-over roles for animated films and other productions.

A specialist tourism service is Birdsong Tours, in operation for over two decades by Robert Birdsong, a long-time resident with a passion for Delta history. Birdsong’s tours focus on downtown Clarksdale and small towns and farm lands that surround the County and further afield, focusing on what people are interested in regarding history and the place of Delta culture.

A more recent addition to local sightseeing is the service offered by Delta Bohemian Tours, an initiative of Clarksdalian Billy “Poor William” Howell. Billy provides personalised tours of Clarksdale and the Delta, highlighting the underlying history and intricacies of the place, and with a heavy dose of Southern charm and humour (www.deltabohemiantours.com).

Also of importance is the Coahoma County Community Education Center supported by Coahoma Community College, Coahoma County, and private donors. The Center is located in the historic Cutrer Mansion on Clark Street and is used as a cultural and educational centre offering a wide variety of programmes and events to the public. The Cutrer Mansion was built as a renaissance-style villa in 1916 by local attorney J.W. Cutrer and his wife Blanche Clark Cutrer, daughter of Clarksdale’s founder, John Clark. Cutrer Mansion, then named “Belvoir”, inspired characters and settings in a number of Tennessee Williams’ plays, including *The Glass Menagerie*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Orpheus Descending*, and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (www.cutrermansion.com).

Other places of interest from a cultural perspective are to be found within a short drive from downtown Clarksdale and include, for example, Helena, Greenwood, Rosedale, Friars Point, Indianola, and Tutwiler. And if Clarksdale holds the mortgage on blues music, the nearby towns of Greenville and Oxford hold the mortgage on Delta literature (and Southern literature in general), with writers like Cobb highlighting the Delta as having “more writers per square foot” than anywhere else.

* * *

In short, Clarksdale is rich in Blues music and Delta culture, reflecting the deep heritage of generations who toiled the Delta soil and endured huge social and economic hardship. Today, the town is building a new outlook, embracing the music and the heritage, and moving towards a new era based on cultural tourism. This is clearly evident in downtown Clarksdale where significant economic revitalisation is underway and which, in turn, is indelibly linked to initiatives introduced and supported by local individuals and with community involvement.

Box 3.1 Festivals in Clarksdale, Mississippi, 2018

26–27 January 2018 – Clarksdale Film & Music Festival, www.clarksdale-filmfestival.com

12–15 April 2018 – Juke Joint Festival & Related Events, www.jukejoint-festival.com

13–15 April 2018 – Second Street Blues Party at Rock & Blues Museum, www.blues2rock.com

15 April 2018 – Cat Head Mini Blues Fest I (post-JJF), www.cathead.biz

11–13 May 2018 – Clarksdale Caravan Music Fest, www.blues2rock.com

Late May 2018 – Ground Zero Blues Club 16th Anniversary Party, www.groundzerobluesclub.com

1–3 June 2018 – Goat Fest IV, <https://www.facebook.com/GOAT-FEST-III-568833646616346/>

1–2 June 2018 – Delta Jubilee (local carnival), www.clarksdale-ms.com

12–15 June 2018 – Pinetop Perkins Foundation Masterclass Workshop Experience, www.pinetopperkinsfoundation.org

16 June, 2018 – Birthplace of American Music Festival

10–12 August, 2018 – Sunflower River Blues & Gospel Festival, www.sunflowerfest.org

12 August 2018 – Cat Head Mini Blues Fest III – 16th Anniversary, www.cathead.biz

TBA September 2018 – Clarksdale Cigar Box Guitar Festival and Builders' Expo www.facebook.com/ClarksdaleInternationalCBG/
 22 September 2018 – Red's Old-Timers Blues Festival
 24–30 September – Clarksdale International Street Art Festival
 6–7 October 2018 – Second Street Blues Party (King Biscuit Weekend), www.blues2rock.com
 7 October 2018 – Cat Head Mini Blues Fest III (post-King Biscuit Festival), www.cathead.biz
 7 October 2018 – Super Blues Sunday – numerous venues around Downtown.
 11–14 October 2018 Deep Blues Fest and Delta Busking Stages, www.deepbluesfest.com
 10 October 2018 – Mississippi Tennessee Williams Festival, <http://www.coahomacc.edu/twilliams/>
 9–10 November 2018 – Mag Fest IV at New Roxy, www.newroxy.com
 2018, Halloween Weekend – annual Hambone Festival, <http://www.stanstreet.com/hambone-festival.html>
 Source: Roger Stolle, Cat Head Delta Blues, Folk Art and Books, Delta Avenue, Clarksdale, MS.

Box 3.2 Juke Joints and Other Venues at Festival Time in Clarksdale 2018

Bluesberry Café	Messenger's
Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art Stage	Meraki Coffee Roasters
Club 2000	Mr. Tater Memorial Stage
Coahoma Collective Stage	New Roxy
Crossroads Cultural Arts Centre	Our Grandma's Blues Bar
Crossroads Marker Stage	Paramount Theater Stage
Deak Harp's Mississippi Saxophone Shop	Pete's Grill
Delta Blues Alley	Quapaw Canoe Stage
Delta Blues Museum Stage	Red's Lounge
Delta Cinema Stage	Rock & Blues Museum Stage
Delta Furniture Stage	Shack Up Inn
Ground Zero Blues Club	Stone Pony Stage
Hambone Art & Music	The Bank
Hopson's Commissary	The Delta Byrd
Jerry's Tamales	The Holy Moly
Levon's Bar & Grill	Wade Walton Barber Shop
	Stage
	Yazoo Avenue Stage

Source: Juke Joint Festival Program 2018



Blues Alley and Street Art



Grandma's Sports Bar



Issaquena Avenue in the New World



Jukin' in Red's Lounge



Paramount Theatre



Red's Lounge in Sunflower Avenue



Riverside Hotel, Clarksdale

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4

Clarksdale, the Delta, and the Economy

The City of Clarksdale is located in Coahoma County in the northern part of the Mississippi Delta, readily described as the huge expanse of rich alluvial soils extending generally from Memphis, Tennessee in the north, to Vicksburg, Mississippi in the south, and which embraces the floodplains of the Mississippi River to the west and the Yazoo River to the east. Clarksdale is situated at the junction of Highways 49 and 61—renowned as the “Crossroads” in the anthology of Blues music—and 125 kilometres south of Memphis. Figure 4.1 shows the location of Clarksdale in its regional context.

Native Americans were the custodians of the land for thousands of years, and their place in the Delta can still be seen in the remaining mounds they constructed that provided a refuge from the perennial floodwaters of the Mississippi River. The mounds, in many cases, are also burial grounds for the Native Americans, and a number of the most impressive mounds are to be found in the Clarksdale area. In 1541, the Spanish explorer Hernando DeSoto trekked through the South and came upon the Mississippi River at Sunflower Landing, just 15 kilometres from today’s Clarksdale. However, it was not until 1836 that Coahoma County was established, and for which Clarksdale was to become the county seat. Clarksdale was founded in 1848 by John Clark, an



Fig. 4.1 Regional context—Clarksdale, Coahoma County, and the Mississippi Delta. (Source: Mississippi Geospatial Clearinghouse & MapInfo)

Englishman, and he purchased the first 100 acres of land in the following year. This early settlement was first named “Clarksville”, but the name was changed to “Clarksdale” in 1882 when the City was incorporated (Clarksdale—Coahoma County Centennial Edition, 1936).

The land around Clarksdale and the Delta was eventually cleared of forests and planted with cotton, thus capitalising on the rich fertile soils that were replenished yearly with the flooding of the Mississippi River. Clarksdale became the centre of the cotton industry in the Delta, and the town also developed an industrial base that was typically associated with agriculture. It was at the Hopson Plantation, just five kilometres south of Clarksdale, where mechanisation was first introduced to the cotton industry in 1944.

Mechanisation was followed by the exodus of many displaced workers and their families to larger cities, mainly in the north, in search of employment. Other changes, including a diminution in Clarksdale’s role in business and commerce, have also contributed to a loss in economic activity. Today, although cotton has been overtaken by other farming crops as the basis to the region’s agricultural economy, Clarksdale continues as a service centre for the surrounding northern part of the Mississippi Delta.

Along with economic change came a significant change in downtown activity. As noted earlier, over the years the downtowns of many American cities and towns lost their role as economic centres providing jobs and services for residents and those living in the surrounding hinterlands. This loss of economic influence is very much in evidence in the South where significant political, economic, and social changes have taken place over many generations.

Clarksdale has also been adversely impacted by these changes that characterise downtowns across America. While Clarksdale’s long-established downtown provides some of the services required by those living in the town and surrounding hinterland, over the past 40 years retail activities and many other facilities and services have mainly located on the edge of town on South State Street, about three kilometres away.

Until recently, most shopfronts in the downtown were vacant and derelict, businesses generated low levels of retail sales, and the downtown was a shadow of its former self. Although around 65 downtown buildings remain vacant (or 37%), recovery is underway and much of this is

associated with tourism, driven by the investment and effort associated with “creative people”—described later in Chaps. 7 and 8—involving both long-time residents and newcomers to the town.

Little is written about Clarksdale in terms of downtown decline in economic activity, or the downtown’s more recent slow but sure trend towards revitalisation. However, in terms of conditions in Clarksdale some 75 years ago, a major piece of investigative work was undertaken in the 1940s by a team from Fisk University in Nashville. Among the publications are works by Alan Lomax (*The Land Where the Blues Began*, The New Press, 1993) and by Samuel C Adams (“Changing Negro Life in the Delta” in *Lost Delta Found: Rediscovering the Fisk University—Library of Congress Coahoma County Study, 1941–1942*, Vanderbilt University Press, 2005).

With his reflections on the town some years later, Lomax (1993, p. 28) describes Clarksdale as

a pleasant shady place. White houses, set far back on cool green lawns, betokened a pleasant and easy way of life ... The business district might have been that of any prosperous Midwestern American city. I had to remind myself that it was the cotton capital of the nation, locus of the biggest cotton plantations in the South ... These quiet streets of uptown Clarksdale in no way prepared me for what I encountered when I crossed the railroad tracks and walked into Clarksdale’s black business district, the social and amusement center for all the plantation workers for thirty miles around.

Lomax (1993, p. 29) goes on to describe the bustling “New World”, as people called the largely African American business area located in downtown, south of the railway tracks:

Peanut vendors and Mexican hot-tamale salesmen peddled their wares. Fried catfish was proclaimed available in every restaurant window. Wagons bulging with huge green watermelons stood at every corner. Inside the bars ... juke boxes moaned and blasted. Blues, hot spirituals, jazz sweet and jivey—everything that Chicago had recorded to please Mississippi—washed across this pleasant, country crowd while they milled and gossiped on the sidewalk in the evening light.

Samuel C Adams, who was a Master's student and assisting Lomax and the Fisk University team in the Coahoma County study, focused his work on cultural change in the Delta and the urban influences on the Black community and its traditions. Adams' work centred on Clarksdale, which had some 12,000 residents at the time. He provides an informative listing of businesses in the downtown in 1947, totalling at least 150 businesses in the "New World" south of the railway tracks. Today, less than a dozen businesses are located there. Adams (1947, p. 251) paints a picture of bustling activities in Issaquena Avenue and Fourth Street in the early 1940s, the very hub of the Black business centre where workers from the plantations and sawmills and on the roads are

going to the town of Clarksdale on Saturday and there to dance, gamble or participate in other activities; in addition, there are radios, victrolas, and juke boxes to pick up popular songs. Through them, the world of the outside comes to plantation Negroes.

And so the picture emerges of the hive of activity that invigorated downtown Clarksdale in the 1940s and, more particularly, in this "New World", a name to denote the Black business community and centre of social activities located south of the railway tracks. This glimpse taken from the "pen pictures" of Lomax and Adams is helpful in that it provides a stark contrast against downtown Clarksdale today. Indeed, over the years this "New World" area has suffered very considerably in economic and social terms and more so than the decline in activities in the main part of downtown to the north of the railroad tracks.

While the New World continues to be the location for a number of African American businesses and is a focus for the community (it has eight or so churches, for example), this part of the Downtown has just a handful of businesses and accounts for only 3% of total occupied retail and office floorspace in downtown. In contrast, the main area encompassing downtown, located north of the railway tracks, accommodates 80 businesses or 69% of commercial activity in the overall downtown; the remaining 28% of businesses are located in the environs of DeSoto Avenue to the east and include a small Save-A-Lot supermarket, a Fred's supermarket, and a number of smaller businesses.

To place downtown revitalisation in today's context, it is useful to take a look at Clarksdale's demographic and socio-economic profile, the local economy and downtown businesses, and the role of tourism.

Like many small cities and towns in Mississippi and in the South in general, Clarksdale has been experiencing a slow but steady decline in population numbers. The city's population peaked at 22,220 persons around 1980 and since then it has been experiencing a slow decline in numbers. By 2018 the population had dropped to an estimated 16,170 persons. Thus, over the period 1980 to 2018 Clarksdale lost a net 6050 persons, representing an average annual decline of approximately -0.8% . During this time, the average annual growth rate in population in Mississippi was $+0.5\%$, and at the national level the average was $+1.0\%$ (US Bureau of Census).

Compared with the City, population numbers in the balance of Coahoma County declined at a faster rate in the period 1980 to 2018. In 1980 this area—which comprises small settlements and rural areas—had 14,700 residents, but the figure declined to 7550 residents by 2018. This decline represents a net loss of approximately 7150 persons, and an average annual rate of decline of approximately -1.7% . Population numbers in the rest of the County have been declining significantly since around 1930 when resident numbers peaked at 37,270 persons, as recorded by the US Census Bureau.

Having regard for recent economic and social trends, the loss of population numbers is expected to continue, with a total County population of 23,720 persons estimated for 2018. These population trends are shown in Table 4.1, covering the period 1890–2018.

Population decline could stabilise as downtown initiatives are implemented and if continuing efforts by the City and the County to expand manufacturing and service industries are successful, resulting in employment growth that helps to retain existing residents and attract new ones. However, the trend for an overall decline in resident population numbers is likely to continue, particularly in rural areas where de-population continues to take place for an array of “push” and “pull” factors, as described in Chap. 2. Overall, the long-term trend since around the end of the 1970s showing a continuing decline in population numbers in Clarksdale and the rest of Coahoma County appears to be well-entrenched (Fig. 4.2).

Table 4.1 Population levels in City of Clarksdale and Coahoma County, 1890–2018

Year	City of Clarksdale	Average annual growth rate	Balance of County	Average annual growth rate	Coahoma County	Average annual growth rate
1890	780	–	17,560	–	18,340	–
1900	1770	+8.5%	24,520	+3.4%	26,290	+3.7%
1910	4080	+8.7%	30,140	+2.1%	34,220	+2.7%
1920	7550	+6.3%	33,960	+1.2%	41,510	+2.0%
1930	10,040	+2.9%	37,270	+0.9%	47,310	+1.3%
1940	12,170	+1.9%	36,160	–0.3%	48,330	+0.2%
1950	16,540	+3.1%	32,820	–1.0%	49,360	+0.2%
1960	21,110	+2.5%	25,100	–2.6%	46,210	–0.7%
1970	21,670	+0.3%	18,780	–2.9%	40,450	–1.3%
1980	22,220	+0.3%	14,700	–2.4%	36,920	–0.9%
1990	21,120	–0.5%	10,450	–3.4%	31,570	–1.6%
2000	20,650	–0.2%	9970	–0.5%	30,620	–0.3%
2010	17,960	–1.4%	8190	–1.9%	26,150	–1.6%
2018^(*)	16,170	–1.3%	7550	–1.0%	23,720	–1.2%

Source: US Census, except ^(*) author

Note: Population figures rounded

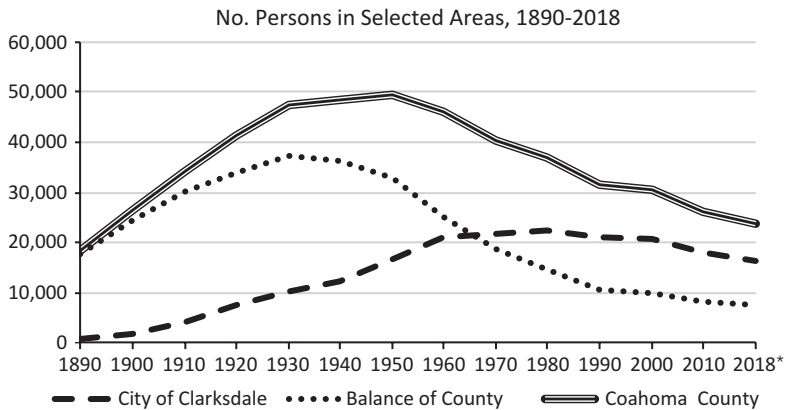


Fig. 4.2 Population levels in City of Clarksdale and Coahoma County, 1890–2018. (Source: US Census, except ^(*) author)

Many reasons account for these population trends, with the principal factors being the out-migration of rural-based families due to the introduction of farm mechanisation that contributed, in turn, to a decline in city-based population numbers as markets for local businesses declined. Downtown businesses either closed or relocated to the edge of town on State Street (Highway 161), leading to a loss of downtown jobs and the further exodus of families in search of employment elsewhere.

Population decline in surrounding counties, which form part of Clarksdale's retail trade area, has also been underway for several decades and has contributed to a loss in the downtown's business revenues. Other factors contributing to the decline in the downtown economy include the expansion in out-of-centre development; the competition from other towns including Cleveland, Batesville, and Greenwood; and the growth of businesses in Tunica County associated with the introduction of casinos and outlet shopping. The close proximity of Memphis as a destination for higher-order shopping and services, just a 75-minute drive from Clarksdale, is another important factor contributing to downtown Clarksdale's decline in business activities.

One of the objectives in the Action Plan for Revitalisation (Henshall 2008) is to achieve at least stabilisation of the County's total population level. This outcome may be difficult to achieve unless strenuous efforts are directed at the improvement of economic and social conditions in Clarksdale and wider afield in the County. An improvement in public education outcomes is important in this context, especially if young families are to be retained in the town. School educational standards are an important consideration for families who may be considering either settling in Clarksdale or, for those already living there, whether they should remain. Census data, combined with local opinion, indicate that local educational standards are low compared with national standards, as discussed later.

Overall, people living in Clarksdale and in the balance of the Coahoma County have, on average, a lower socio-economic profile than the State and national averages. This situation is reflected in the US Census Bureau data (2017) relating to education, household income, housing value, poverty levels, and other indicators summarised in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Socio-economic profile of City of Clarksdale and Coahoma County residents

Indicator ^a	City of Clarksdale	Total Coahoma County	Mississippi State	United States of America
(Data for five years 2012–2016 except where noted)				
Population (2018)^b	16,170	23,720	2,982,800	326,766,750
White persons	18.4%	22.3%	59.3%	76.9%
Black persons	80.8%	76.3%	37.7%	13.3%
Other persons	0.8%	1.4%	3.0%	9.8%
Median household income (US\$)	29,175	28,215	40,530	55,320
Median individual worker income (2016) (US\$)	21,140	22,330	26,190	30,815
Per capita income in past 12 months (US\$)	14,870	16,070	21,650	29,830
Social security/Public assistance Income				
% households with income assistance	34.8%	34.6%	35.8%	32.1%
Population in poverty	35.0%	41.2%	20.8%	12.7%
Unemployment				
% of male civilian unemployed aged 16 year-plus	15.9%	19.8%	10.9%	9.5%
% of female civilian unemployed aged 16 year-plus	17.1%	19.1%	11.0%	8.8%
Housing tenure				
% of housing units owner-occupied	47.9%	52.6%	67.9%	63.6%
% of housing units renter-occupied	43.5%	40.1%	26.5%	31.2%
Automobile access				
% Households with no vehicle available	15.5%	14.1%	6.9%	9.1%
House value				
Median value of owner-occupied houses (US\$)	62,100	62,500	105,700	184,700
Education (population aged 25 years and above)				
% with Bachelor's degree or higher	19.2%	17.2%	21.0%	30.3%
% who are high school graduate or higher	79.7%	77.5%	83.0%	87.0%

Source: ^aall data from US Census Bureau, *American Community Survey 2012–2016*, except ^bauthor for population estimates

Key socio-economic indicators sourced from the US Bureau of Census highlighting Clarksdale's socio-economic profile include the following:

• Median household income (US\$)	29,175 (USA: 55,320)
• Persons below poverty level	35.0% (USA: 12.7%)
• Per capita income in past 12 months (US\$)	14,870 (USA: 29,830)
• Unemployment	16.5% (USA: 9.1%)
• Education up to high school graduate or higher	79.7% (USA: 87.0%)
• Education up to Bachelor's degree or higher (25 years and older)	19.2% (USA: 30.3%)
• House value (US\$)	60,100 (USA: 175,700)

Clarksdale and the rest of the County 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, intrinsic relationship with Blues music, and its endearing Southern hospitality. These are important elements that contribute to downtown economic revitalisation and growth in business and employment.

Assessment of Clarksdale's socio-economic profile also leads to the conclusion that many priorities exist for funding aimed at enhancing local education, health and other services, expanding employment opportunities, and improving living conditions. In this context, opportunities for public sector funding contributions for downtown revitalisation can be expected to be under pressure when these other areas seeking public funding are considered. However, this relatively poor socio-economic situation should at least assist Clarksdale and the County in securing grants and other funding from State and Federal government sources and foundations.

Many factors have influenced Clarksdale's economic development over the course of its 180-year history since the settlement was first formed. Cotton was "king" in the Delta economy for generations, and most businesses and jobs were in some way related to the planting, harvesting, processing, and distribution of cotton to markets far and wide (Bearden 2005). Clarksdale was known as the "golden buckle in the cotton belt". Underlying change in the economy in the years following World War II was largely brought about by the mechanisation of agriculture which, although contributing to vast increases in farm productivity, resulted in large-scale unemployment among farm workers and led to a decline in

population as people migrated from the Delta to industrial cities, mainly in the North, in search of work. This was the experience in Clarksdale and in the Delta in general, and especially with regard to the cotton industry, as highlighted by Lemann (1991), Cobb (1992) and others.

Today, however, the agricultural base of the Delta is more diversified and includes soybean, corn, wheat, catfish, poultry, and forestry products. Clarksdale's economic base has also changed over the years. Whereas the city was the focus for the cotton industry and was the centre of trade and commerce for the surrounding region, Clarksdale today is essentially a service centre for residents and those living in the immediately surrounding district. Clarksdale also has a manufacturing presence and, in addition, provides highway services to traffic passing along State Street, which links directly to Highway 61 and Highway 49.

Other factors that have an influence on the local economy include the competitive trading role of nearby places, including Cleveland, Greenwood, Tunica, Batesville, and Oxford, all of which are shopping and service destinations for many living in Clarksdale and environs. Tunica, for example, now has factory outlet shopping, while Oxford where the University of Mississippi is located provides higher-order shopping opportunities in clothing, household merchandise, books, and the like. Southaven, located in the northern part of Mississippi, is effectively an outer suburb of Memphis and provides a wide range of comparison shopping and business services that are located within a convenient 75-minute drive of Clarksdale.

Although Clarksdale developed a manufacturing role with elements that continue to the present time, the local economy has come to focus increasingly on the provision of services in health, education, retailing, and government. This focus is reflected in the statistic showing that 85% of all employed residents are engaged in service industries, as recorded at the US Census 2010, with jobs ranging from wholesale and retail trade to education, health, and public administration, as shown in Table 4.3. In contrast, the service sector accounts for 77% of employment in Mississippi and 81% at the national level. The significantly high share of Clarksdale's employment in the service sector is essentially accounted for by employment in Education, Health, and Social Services (34% of total employment), and in Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation,

Table 4.3 Distribution of employment by key industry sectors for City of Clarksdale and Coahoma County residents, 2010

Industry	City of Clarksdale	Coahoma County	Mississippi State	United States of America
Primary sector				
Agriculture, forestry, fishing & hunting, and mining	2.9%	5.3%	3.1%	2.0%
Secondary sector				
Construction	2.6%	3.6%	6.7%	6.2%
Manufacturing	9.9%	8.9%	13.1%	10.4%
<i>Sub-total, secondary</i>	12.5%	12.5%	19.8%	16.6%
Tertiary sector				
Wholesale trade	1.0%	2.2%	2.6%	2.8%
Retail trade	11.7%	10.6%	11.8%	11.6%
Transportation & warehousing, and utilities	2.5%	2.9%	5.6%	4.9%
Information	0.9%	0.9%	1.4%	2.1%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental & leasing	4.9%	5.2%	4.8%	6.6%
Professional, scientific, management, administrative, and waste management services	3.8%	4.0%	6.4%	10.9%
Educational, health and social services	34.3%	30.6%	24.4%	23.1%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	14.5%	14.7%	9.5%	9.5%
Other services (except public administration)	3.9%	4.4%	4.9%	5.0%
Public administration	7.1%	6.7%	5.7%	4.9%
<i>Sub-total, tertiary</i>	84.6%	82.2%	77.1%	81.4%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Total number of employed persons	5575	8650	1,198,830	132,741,030

Source: US Bureau of the Census 2010. Totals rounded

and Food Services (15%). Similar high figures apply for the County (31% and 15%, respectively) while the national shares are lower for both sectors (23% and 10%, respectively).

Much of the employment in the Arts and related sector for Clarksdale/Coahoma residents is associated with jobs actually located in nearby casinos and resorts in Tunica County and also at the Isle of Capri Casino at Lula in Coahoma County, with Clarksdadians and others commuting to these places for work. Nevertheless, the Arts and related sector is also expanding in Clarksdale in terms of activities and employment. With its background in Delta culture, it is not surprising to see that many of the existing jobs in downtown have a close association with Blues music, as demonstrated later in regards to tourism.

Today, the Delta Blues Museum and numerous music venues and events attract tourists nationally and from abroad. For example, the Museum attracts around 25,000 visitors a year, while the majority of festival attendees are attracted from outside the state of Mississippi, as shown in the Juke Joint Festival survey results. Similar visitation patterns are evident in data collected from wrist band sales at the annual festival, with patrons in 2018 coming from more than 45 States and from around 30 nations.

For Clarksdale, the high share of residents employed in the service sector (85%) is a reflection of the relatively low share of jobs in other sectors that comprise manufacturing and construction (12%). In contrast, manufacturing and construction employment is significantly higher at the state level (20%) and national level (17%). The current share of Clarksdale's jobs in manufacturing has further declined in recent times with the closure of Metso in 2016; the operation relocated to Mexico, involving the loss of almost 60 local jobs. Metso indicated that their closure in Clarksdale was due to a worldwide downturn in the mining industry, resulting in a reduction in customers' capital investments. However, another local firm, Standard Industrial which manufactures machine tools, has recently increased its employment to 75 employees after some eight years of experiencing a downturn in business and a reduction in jobs (Clarksdale Press Register [2018a](#), p. 34).

Clarksdale would need to exert considerable effort to capture a significantly higher share of manufacturing employment than the Census figures

indicate for 2010. For example, if Clarksdale, with approximately 10% of the resident labour force employed in manufacturing, was to achieve a similar share of employment in manufacturing as the state (13%), then the number of residents employed in this sector would have to expand from 550 persons in 2010 to approximately 725 persons, representing an increase of 175 new manufacturing jobs, or an increase of 32% on the 2010 number. Indeed, the number of additional new manufacturing jobs would need to reach some 235 jobs to match this target, noting that the loss of Metso's 60 jobs since the last Census. This raises the spectre of what types of manufacturing activities Clarksdale would be able to support to generate these additional jobs, and how quickly they could be created to meet local employment demand.

However, reference to earlier Census data shows that in 1980 manufacturing accounted for approximately 1010 jobs or 14.5% of employment in Clarksdale; thus, the Census 2010 figures indicate that the trend is for a continuing decline in the importance of manufacturing in the city in employment terms. This situation is likely to continue unless new firms can be attracted to establish locally and existing firms expand their operations. Although the Chamber of Commerce and Industrial Foundation has a goal to expand local manufacturing, this may be difficult to achieve in the face of trends showing a decline in Clarksdale's manufacturing businesses over recent years. Declining employment opportunities in manufacturing is a national issue.

Major infrastructure provision is likely to have some positive implications for manufacturing in Clarksdale and the Delta, particularly with projects such as the I-69 interstate highway which will link Canada and Mexico, passing through northern Mississippi. Sections of the I-69 have already been constructed, with the highway planned to traverse the Delta, thus adding to Clarksdale's locational attributes in potentially attracting business investment. In fact, the existing Clarksdale Bypass has been integrated into the future I-69 alignment as the bypass is already constructed to Interstate standards. In Clarksdale's regional context, the I-69 will pass from Tunica in the north, through Clarksdale, and link with Shelby and near Merigold to the south-west of Clarksdale.

Opportunities to develop new manufacturing pursuits may also emerge, ranging from the development of low-cost renewable energy, to

opportunities for Clarksdale to develop a centre for high-tech innovation. An example is the development, production, and promotion of “virtual reality” experiences and applications by Lobaki Inc., an enterprise that has established in Clarksdale. Lobaki Inc. is a social entrepreneurship which has partnered with a non-profit to create a VR Academy to provide graduates with the local opportunity to put their skills and capabilities to work; typically, the students are drawn from under-privileged and underserved high school and community college students in and around Clarksdale and the Delta. Lobaki Inc. recognises that “Clarksdale is just the start though ... the entire Mississippi Delta needs an economic development boost” (www.lobaki.com).

Another new business establishing in Clarksdale is Delta Southern UAS which manufactures drones (or unmanned aerial vehicles) and is understood to be planning for 60 jobs, doubling this number by 2019, and with further employment expansion thereafter (Clarksdale Press Register 2018b, p. 10).

Notwithstanding Clarksdale’s loss of population and decline in manufacturing employment, the underlying health of the Clarksdale economy is in contrast with the generally dire economic circumstances of smaller towns in surrounding parts of the Delta. Most of these towns have suffered a significant loss in resident population and a decline in their local economies. Examples include the settlements of Merigold, Rosedale, Tutwiler, Friars Point, Marks, Shelby, Duncan, Jonestown and Mound Bayou, all located within a 45-minute drive of Clarksdale. While most of the towns have a basic provision of services, such as a general store, car repairs and the like, many buildings in the commercial areas are vacant and have been in a derelict condition for possibly 30–40 years or more.

Helena-West Helena, approximately 55 kilometres from Clarksdale and located on the western banks of the Mississippi River in Arkansas, is a case in point. Helena, which is the eastern portion of Helena-West Helena (which merged in 2006), was a well-established commercial and transport centre for generations, serving the riverboat trade and the surrounding Delta in both Arkansas and Mississippi. However, changes in transportation—particularly the coming of the railway, followed by the construction of highways and interstate freeways and a reduction in the importance of riverboat trade—were followed by a steady decline in

the town's population and jobs, and a decline in its significant servicing role. In 2018 Helena has a population of less than 6000 persons, while Helena-West Helena has a combined resident population of around 10,400 persons; this reflects a loss of approximately 1880 persons between 2010 and 2018, or a decline of around 15% over the period.

Cherry Street, which is the main commercial area in Helena, is a shadow of its former self, with the majority of buildings lying empty and in poor physical condition. Those buildings that remain are mainly providing lower-order services to local residents. However, a number of new businesses and not-for-profit organisations have located in Cherry Street in very recent years, including two new restaurants, specialty retail and a KIPP school (these schools are typically provided in under-resourced communities throughout the USA). Walnut Street, which runs parallel to Cherry Street, was the commercial and entertainment centre for the African American community in Helena, but today the street mainly comprises vacant allotments, while the few remaining buildings lie dilapidated and empty.

Despite poor economic conditions, Helena continues to stage the King Biscuit Blues Festival in October each year, and this is one of the nation's most popular music festivals. The event, founded in 1986, supports five stages and attracts 100,000 or so people during the three-day event (<http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=599>). King Biscuit Festival was a local initiative to get people back into town, especially into Cherry Street as the town's main street, and also to promote the Blues. Like Clarksdale, Helena has its part in Blues heritage, with early "blues" residents, including Robert Lockwood Jr, Roosevelt Sykes and Sonny Boy Williamson II. "Sunshine" Sonny Payne, who was radio host for the King Biscuit Time radio show on KFFA in Cherry Street since 1951, passed away in 2018.

Importantly, Clarksdale also benefits from the King Biscuit Festival, with many of the festival-goers staying overnight in town, supporting local music venues and buskers, street vendors and other businesses.

Shelby, located 35 kilometres to the south-west of Clarksdale, is a small community of 2210 residents. The downtown area has few businesses, with most of the remaining buildings lying dilapidated. Merigold is located 45 kilometres south-west of Clarksdale, with just 420 residents; very few local businesses are to be found in the old downtown,

with the mainstay being Crawdad's seafood restaurant. Today, Merigold is essentially a commuter town, with residents travelling to work in nearby Cleveland and Clarksdale. Of keen interest for Blues tourists, Po' Monkey's, a traditional juke joint, is located nearby in the midst of former cotton fields; in July 2016 the owner, Willie "Po' Monkey" Seaberry, passed away and the juke joint is permanently closed.

Sumner is located 32 kilometres to the south of Clarksdale and features a town square, a number of businesses and vacant buildings, and a courthouse. The courthouse is where the notable Emmett Till case was heard in 1955 and which ultimately contributed in a significant way to the national civil rights movement. Emmett Till was a 14-year-old African American boy from Chicago, visiting his Delta relatives; he allegedly whistled at a young white woman in a local store in Money. Emmett disappeared over night and was later found murdered, his tortured body dumped in the Tallahatchie River. His two white killers—the woman's husband and the husband's half-brother—were tried for the murder in the Sumner Courthouse but were acquitted by the all-white jury. Protected by double-jeopardy, the two later admitted to the murder in a national magazine. The Emmett Till Memorial Centre is situated opposite the courthouse. The downtown now plays the role of a small community centre serving the town's 300 residents plus the surrounding rural areas, with many of the residents working in the surrounding rural areas or in nearby Clarksdale and Greenwood.

Friars Point, located approximately 25 kilometres to the north-west of Clarksdale, has a population of 1100 people and comprises just several general stores serving the day-to-day grocery and household needs of local residents, as well as a couple of bric-a-brac shopfronts. A similar picture is evident for small places that include Alligator (200 residents), Duncan (410), Winstonville (180), Mound Bayou (1480) and Tutwiler (3490); at least Tutwiler still has the Mississippi State Penitentiary as a source for local jobs.

A land use and floorspace survey conducted in several of these towns shows the generally low level of business activity in all of the localities and confirms that two in every three downtown buildings (93 out of a total of 141 buildings) are vacant and, typically, are in a derelict and dilapidated condition. The proportion of vacancies varies between towns.



Cherry Street, Helena



Friars Point



Merigold



Mound Bayou



Po' Monkey's near Merigold



Walnut Street, Helena

Overall, the small towns that surround Clarksdale are characterised by a loss of population and the associated decline in businesses and jobs over the years. In some cases, basic retail services exist, but this is the exception rather than the rule. Some of these small town communities also have residents who are in retirement, such as Merigold and Sumner. Those in employment typically commute to work in larger towns, including Clarksdale, Cleveland, and Greenwood, where they also undertake their regular shopping for essential household needs.

Residents' requirements for higher-order goods and services—ranging from upmarket homewares, clothing, and specialist health care needs—tend to be met in larger cities, particularly in nearby Memphis and in Southaven which is effectively a part of urban Memphis. The role of downtown Clarksdale in this wider regional context is described in the following chapter.

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5

Businesses in Downtown Clarksdale

This chapter describes the business sector in Downtown Clarksdale, noting the vagaries over time in terms of the numbers of businesses, the trade area and population they serve, their retail sales levels, and the move of many businesses to South State Street on the edge of town.

The location of the downtown in terms of the wider Clarksdale urban area is shown in Fig. 5.1, which also shows the location of South State Street situated approximately 2–3 kilometres to the south-west of downtown. South State Street has been a focus for retail and commercial development since around 1971, and is also defined as Highway 161 which links Highways 61 and 49 to the immediate south of Clarksdale.

In broad terms, the boundaries in downtown Clarksdale are defined to the north at First Street, to the south at Martin Luther King Street, to the east at DeSoto Avenue, and to the west at Sunflower Avenue, as shown in Fig. 5.2.

Two distinct components in the downtown are identifiable. One component is situated to the north of the railway which dissects the town, and is centred mainly on Second and Third Streets and on Delta, Yazoo, and Issaquena Avenues; this is the main locality in terms of existing businesses and other activities in the downtown. The second component is

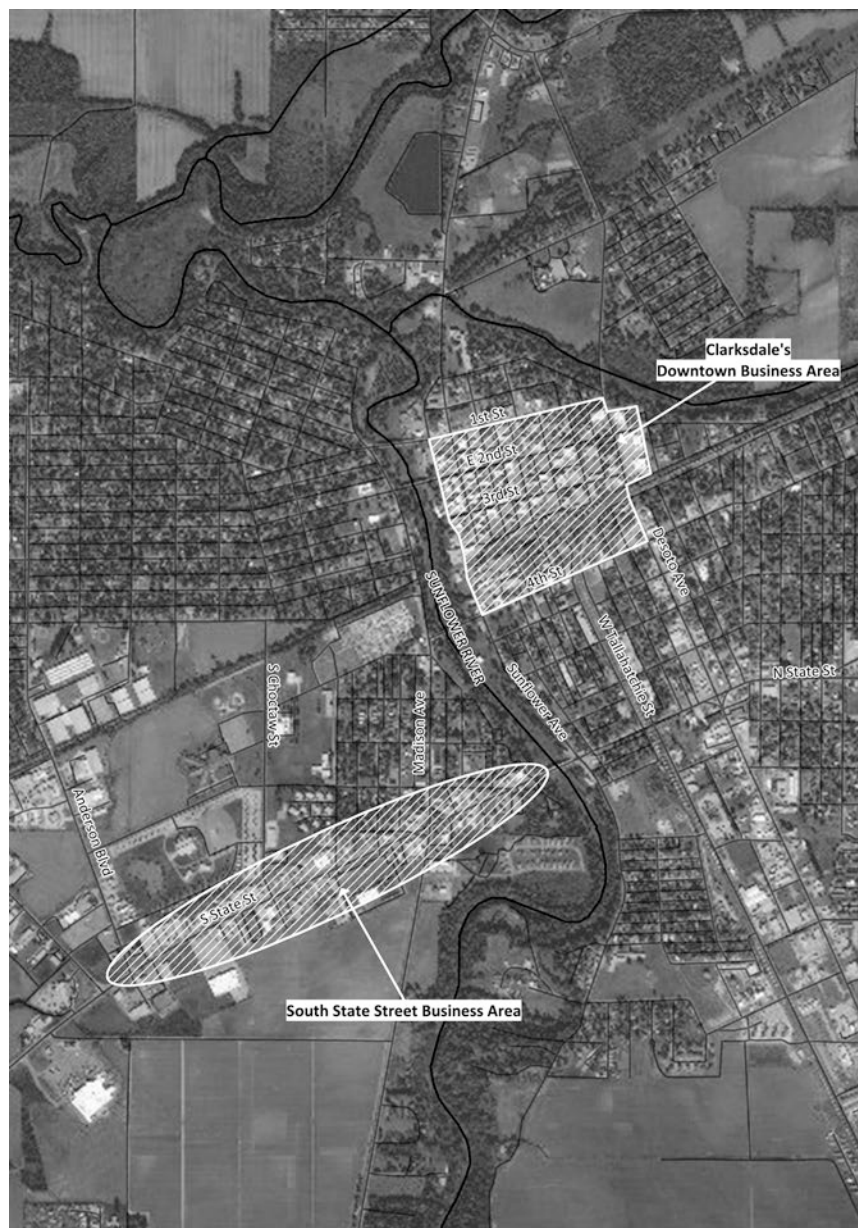


Fig. 5.1 Location of Downtown and State Street, Clarksdale. (Source: Mississippi Geospatial Clearinghouse & MapInfo)

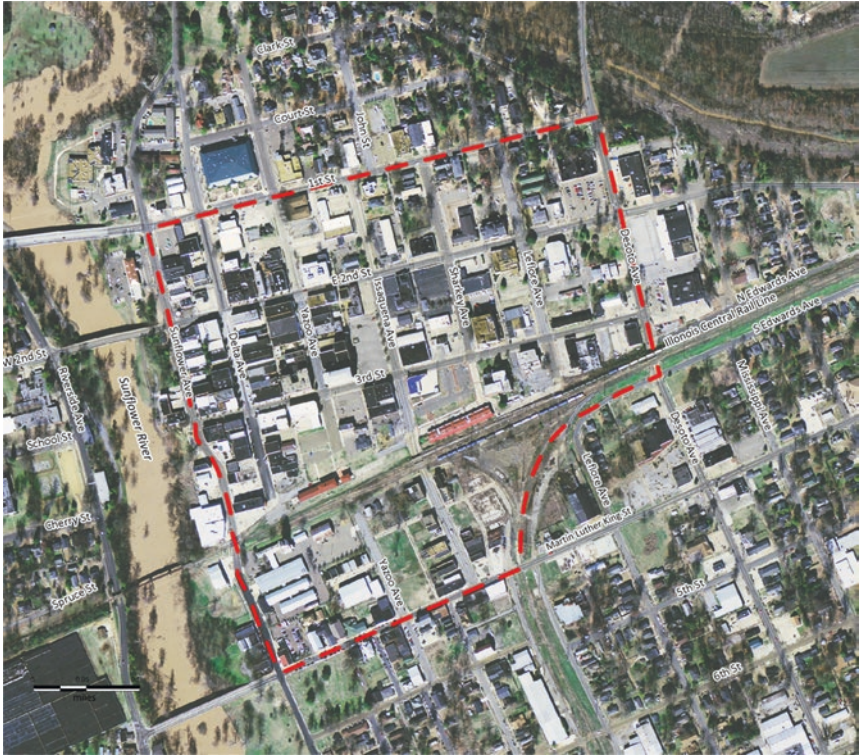


Fig. 5.2 Aerial view of Downtown Clarksdale. (Source: Mississippi Geospatial Clearinghouse & MapInfo)

situated immediately south of the railway and is focused on the southern part of Issaquena Avenue and Martin Luther King Street, with Sunflower Avenue as the western boundary. This southern part is smaller in terms of geographic coverage and extent of business activities than the northern part. In addition to these two definable areas, a number of commercial, community, and other uses are located in surrounding streets to the east, from Issaquena Avenue to DeSoto Avenue.

A further feature is that downtown's northern boundary abuts the city's heritage area focused on Clark, Court, and John Streets. This area is significant as an important attraction for people with an interest in local heritage and history, especially as the area is associated with local identities,

including Tennessee Williams, and where links exist within literary and artistic circles. The Clark House (1859) and the Cutrer Mansion (1916) are located in this heritage area.

In terms of business locations, the dominant part of the overall downtown is the area situated to the north of the railway, where 81 businesses or 69% of all downtown retail and office businesses are located. In contrast, the area south of the railway around Issaquena Avenue and Martin Luther King Street comprises just nine businesses and accounts for only 3% of businesses in the overall downtown. The eastern part of downtown accounts for the balance of commercial floorspace and this mainly includes two small supermarkets and a number of small offices.

The downtown developed over many years as the service centre for Clarksdale and the surrounding district and further afield. For many years it was the social and economic hub for the community through the provision of jobs, services and amenities. The advent of the railway followed by the construction of highway networks, reinforced Clarksdale's role as the centre of trade and commerce in this northern part of the Delta. By the early 1950s, according to the Chamber of Commerce (1953) at the time, the city had a total of around 650 retail businesses, most of which were located in the downtown area and were serving a trade area comprising some 130,000 residents. This important downtown role continued well into the 1960s and early 1970s and was reflected in the large array of shops and other businesses, community and civic facilities and amenities, churches, and schools which located there.

However, a number of new trends were becoming evident by the 1970s that were to lead to the decanting of business activities away from these long-established parts of the downtown. Principal among these trends was the relocation of many businesses to large sites located out on State Street, far from downtown, where exposure to high volumes of highway traffic was significant and where the trend for "big box" retailing could be more readily accommodated on large and affordable sites, with ample room for on-site car parking. Significantly, Walmart opened on State Street in 1971 and this led to strong competition for the small businesses remaining in the downtown area. Since that time many new and expanding businesses have sought locations in State Street as the focus for retail and other business activities.

Other forces were also at work that contributed to a decline in the fortunes of downtown businesses over time. As noted earlier, these trends included the loss of farm jobs and the movement by many individuals and families to big cities in the North where employment opportunities were perceived to be greater. As a result, a significant loss of trade area population occurred, leading to a loss of retail and other spending that was previously directed to the downtown businesses. Between 1970 and 2018, Clarksdale's trade area population declined from an estimated 91,000 persons to 60,000 persons, resulting in a net loss of 31,000 persons or 34% over the period. This decline has effectively meant a loss of US\$403 million on an annual basis (in 2018 prices) in the retail spending of trade area residents that would otherwise have been available to retailers serving the Clarksdale trade area, and this includes retailers located in the downtown and on South State Street, as well as retailers in other towns serving the catchment. When non-retail spending—including housing, health care, education, transport, and so on—is added to the total, the estimated “loss” in available household spending on retail and other goods and services due to population decline is in the order of US\$805 million on an annual basis (expressed in 2018 prices).

A further factor reducing downtown business prospects has been the advent of universal car ownership and improved roads, with people now prepared to travel further distances for their shopping and other needs. This outcome is reflected in the regular trips by Clarksdale and other County residents to Southaven, Memphis, Batesville, Oxford, Cleveland, and Greenwood for retail, entertainment, and other purposes.

Another consideration is that residents' socio-economic status is very low, with the result that a smaller volume of household retail spending is available to local shops compared with cities and towns that have a higher socio-economic status. For example, 35.0% of residents in Clarksdale are identified as living below the poverty level and this is in contrast with the nation's 12.7% (US Census Bureau).

As a consequence of the loss in sales revenues over past decades, it has been difficult for the downtown to attract and retain new businesses. Although the popular “Sunflower Mall” was developed in the downtown in the 1970s and involved a number of new shops, this development was largely destroyed by fire; the area never fully recovered until the 2016

redevelopment and renewal of the several affected premises occurred, and this included adjoining premises in proximity in both Sunflower Avenue and East Second Street.

Notwithstanding such positive developments and renewal of properties in recent years, 41% of floorspace in downtown buildings remain vacant and most of these are in need of repair and refurbishment. In the New World area, south of the rail line, 78% of floorspace lies vacant. The proportion would be much higher, but many dilapidated buildings have been razed to the ground—only vacant sites remain. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, a civil rights organisation founded in 1909, is actively pursuing funds to establish the North Mississippi Civil Rights Museum on the site where Aaron Henry's pharmacy was located in the New World. Henry was a prominent African American promoter of civil rights.

Overall, prospects for a return to economic prosperity have been difficult to identify for the downtown and for the surrounding Delta community. Nevertheless, in very recent years a renaissance in downtown business activity has commenced. Slowly but surely, revitalisation in the type and extent of activities locating in Clarksdale's downtown is underway. This is reflected in the purchase and refurbishment of many old buildings, the start-up of a range of new businesses, an expansion in visitor numbers, and the increasing popularity of events that attract local residents and visitors alike to the downtown.

A hallmark development in this context was the move by the Delta Blues Museum to its present site at the railway freight depot in 1999, followed by the opening in early 2001 of Madidi restaurant and, later that year, Ground Zero Blues Club. The Madidi fine dining restaurant involved the refurbishment of an early Twentieth Century building located towards the northern end of Delta Avenue, while a cotton warehouse at the southern end was refurbished to house the new Ground Zero Blues Club and, on the second level, the Delta Cotton Company Apartments. Although Madidi closed after a decade or so of service, many other businesses have established since that time, and all are significant for their contributions to downtown revitalisation. This outcome is particularly relevant in respect of the contributions to new business development by local "champions" and "creative people", as described later.

In 2018, downtown conditions in terms of business activities and employment are substantially different from the vibrant conditions of the 1940s through to the 1970s, yet demonstrate a marked improvement on the depressed conditions leading up to the late 1990s and early 2000s. This positive observation is supported by reference to changes in the trade area served by downtown businesses, the nature of new business activities, employment levels, and market shares.

Businesses in downtown serve a trade area that extends in a radius of some 20–30 kilometres to the north, east, and south, and to the Mississippi River to the west. This trade area, identified in discussions with local traders and other business operators in Clarksdale and illustrated in Fig. 5.3, takes into account the size and composition of the business sectors in other towns in the surrounding Delta.

In some cases, downtown businesses—such as a number of the law firms and insurance offices—serve much wider trade areas, while other businesses—such as galleries and gift shops—also generate sales to tourists and other visitors to the downtown area.

The trade area comprises approximately 60,000 people in 2018, as shown in Table 5.1, and this figure is based on the estimated share of population residing in each locality who would see Clarksdale as a main centre where they obtain their retail and other services. The trade area boundaries also take into account the competitive trading influence of other centres that include Memphis (125 km), Southaven (105 km), Tunica (55 km), Cleveland (60 km), Batesville (60 km), and Greenwood (85 km).

This overview of the downtown Clarksdale trade area identifies two broad trends: firstly, population numbers in the trade area have been declining over recent decades, and therefore the level of available retail spending has declined; and secondly, competition from retail and other businesses located in South State Street and from other nearby towns has further reduced the amount of trade captured by downtown Clarksdale.

Downtown Clarksdale today has a total of approximately 110 businesses, as shown in Table 5.2, and the split is broadly 49% in retailing (54 businesses) and 51% in office-based activities (57 businesses). The figures relate to shops and offices, but exclude workshops such as auto repair,

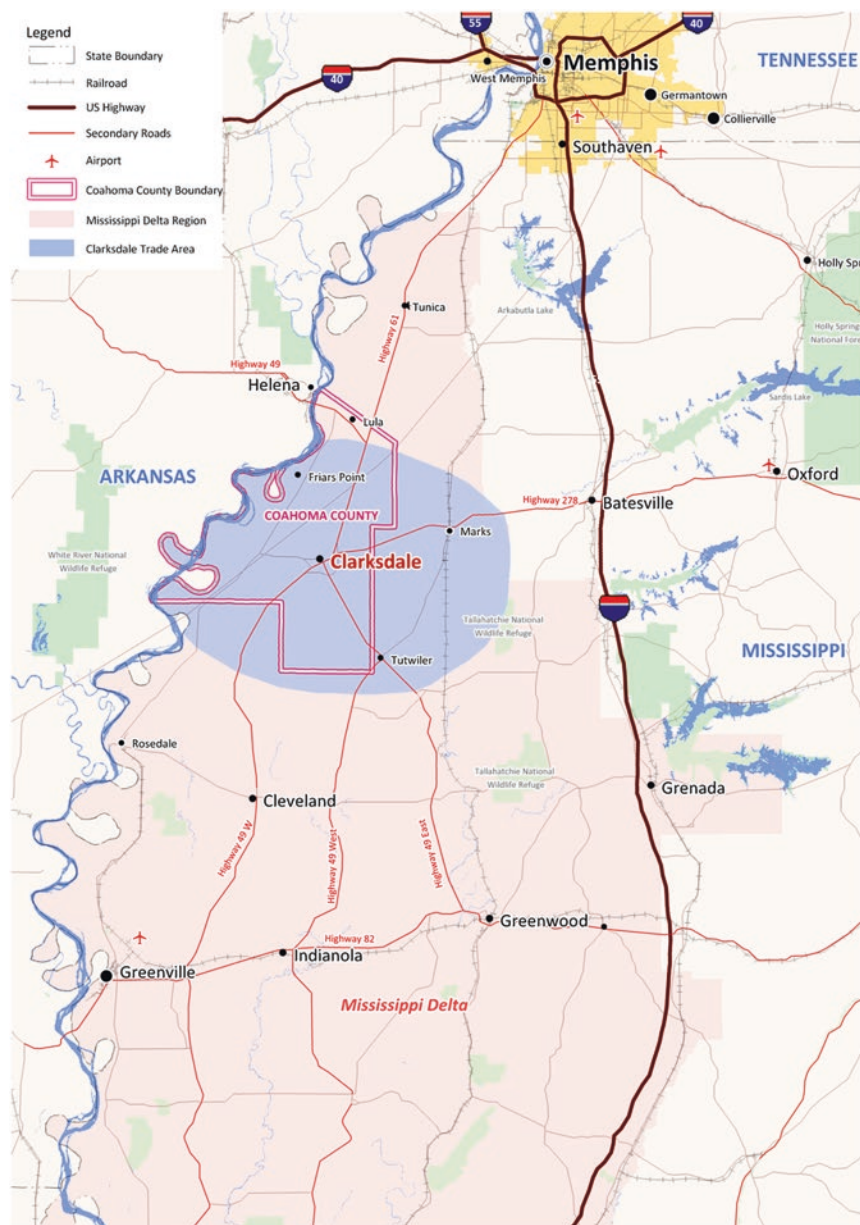


Fig. 5.3 Downtown Clarksdale trade area. (Source: Mississippi Geospatial Clearinghouse & MapInfo; author 2018)

Table 5.1 Estimates of Downtown Clarksdale's trade area population, 1970 and 2018

County	Estimated share of County population in Clarksdale trade area ^a		1970 Census County population ^b	1970 Estimated trade area population ^a		2018 Estimated County population ^b	2018 Estimated trade area population ^a		1970–2018 change in trade area population
Coahoma	100%		40,450		40,450	23,720		23,720	–16,730
Bolivar	30%		49,410		14,820	33,160		9950	–4870
Sunflower	10%		37,050		3710	26,560		2660	–1050
Tallahatchie	40%		19,340		7740	14,440		5780	–1960
Tunica	10%		11,850		1190	10,260		1030	–160
Panola	30%		26,830		8050	34,060		10,220	+2170
Quitman	95%		15,890		15,100	7350		6980	–8120
Total					91,060			60,340	–30,720
Rounded totals					91,000			60,000	–31,000

Source: ^aAuthor estimate. ^bwww.population.us extrapolated to 2018

Note: 2018 estimates based on estimated average annual growth rates for 2010–2018. Figures rounded

Table 5.2 Estimates of retail and office floorspace in Downtown Clarksdale, 2018

Business type	North of railway	South of railway	East of Yazoo Avenue	Total
<u>Retail</u>				
Businesses				
Number	42	7	5	54
Share	78%	13%	9%	100%
Floorspace				
Area	10,210 m ²	560 m ²	5530 m ²	16,300 m ²
Share	63%	3%	34%	100%
<u>Offices</u>				
Businesses				
Number	39	2	16	57
Share	68%	4%	28%	100%
Floorspace				
Area	8300 m ²	250 m ²	2000 m ²	10,550 m ²
Share	79%	2%	19%	100%
<u>Total retail/office</u>				
Businesses				
Number	81	9	21	111
Share	73%	8%	19%	100%
Floorspace				
Area	18,510 m ²	810 m ²	7530 m ²	26,850 m ²
Share	69%	3%	28%	100%
<u>Vacant floorspace</u>				
Buildings				
Number	39	26	1	66
Share	59%	39%	2%	100%
Floorspace				
Area	13,925 m ²	2800 m ²	2000 m ²	18,725 m ²
Share	74%	15%	11%	100%
<u>Total occupied and vacant floorspace</u>				
Area	32,435 m ²	3610 m ²	9530 m ²	45,575 m ²
Share of total downtown floorspace	71%	8%	21%	100%
Vacant floorspace as share of total floorspace	43%	78%	21%	41%

Source: Author's Land Use and Activity Survey, April 2018

Note: Figures exclude service industrial uses (e.g., auto repair, mufflers and air-conditioning services) and community-based activities (e.g., churches, civic offices). "Floorspace" is measured as the sum of frontage x depth of useable space in commercial buildings. Refer to text regarding use of this data

mufflers and air-conditioning services, as well as excluding community-based activities, including churches, civic offices, fire station, police department, and the like.

The floorspace estimates are based on measures of building frontage and depth, although in some instances it is not possible to comprehensively assess these floor areas due to the lack of access to verify building areas, especially in the case of vacant buildings. Nevertheless, the floorspace figures provide a useful guide to overall levels of business activity and also assist in the preparation of retail sales and employment estimates.

Some 73% of downtown commercial businesses are located north of the railway and most of these businesses involve shops, restaurants, cafes, and offices situated in Delta, Yazoo, and Sunflower Avenues and in First, Second, and Third Streets. In total, 43% of floorspace in this northern part of downtown is unoccupied. A smaller number of businesses, mainly offices, are located on Second and Third Streets. A mix of generally scattered retail, office, and other commercial activities feature further east, between Issaquena Avenue and DeSoto Avenue.

That part of downtown located to the south of the railway and popularly referred to as the “New World” has less than a dozen businesses. The area was once a very vibrant locality, with shops and music halls lining Issaquena Avenue and Martin Luther King Street, and providing the business and service focus for the African American community. The early vibrancy of the New World as a business centre in the 1940s is identified by writers including Alan Lomax and Samuel Adams. Today, this area has many vacant commercial buildings, with more than three-quarters of total floorspace lying unoccupied.

As noted, the area of vacant floorspace and the number of derelict buildings in the “New World” would be much higher except that over many years numerous buildings have been razed to the ground, now representing large areas of open space. However, in very recent times several buildings in Martin Luther King Street have been renewed and refurbished, and these are occupied by offices and service-based activities. The New Roxy—a former cinema in a derelict state—in the southern part of Issaquena Avenue has undergone rebuilding and repair and, with its stage now roofed and with a beverage bar in place plus other amenities, it is a very popular venue for festivals and for other live performances and film nights.

Many of the vacant premises, north and south of the railway, are in urgent need of repair and refurbishment, with poor roofing and water damage being a constant issue. This is also an ongoing issue for many buildings that are occupied. In total, a considerable area of vacant commercial floorspace exists in the downtown, estimated at 18,725 m² and equivalent to 41% of all occupied and vacant floorspace. Most of this vacant floorspace—amounting to 13,925 m² or 74% of the total—is located in the northern part of downtown. These figures exclude vacant floorspace above ground floor in the 7-level McWilliams building (formerly in use as offices and professional rooms) and in the 4-level Alcazar building (a former hotel), as the floorspace in these buildings is considered to have potential for mainly residential and visitor accommodation use. These two buildings have been vacant for around 40 years, and each is now undergoing gradual repair and refurbishment.

Downtown businesses directly support an estimated total of 540 jobs. These include retail activity which accounts for an estimated 330 jobs, with office activities accounting for a further 210 jobs. The figures do not include employment in service industry (e.g., car repair, mufflers, etc.), community activities (e.g., churches), or civic uses (County/City offices) located in the downtown. The average of approximately 50 m² of floor-space per job in retail (excluding the two supermarkets) reflects the low intensity of building usage. Thus, the deep allotments that typify downtown properties result in the construction of shops or offices with extensive depth, but which often only involve as few as one or two employees in the actual business activity. Typically, the back sections of these “shoe-box” type buildings are used for storage, or remain vacant. A recent initiative among some building owners is to develop the rear of these properties for resident/visitor accommodation.

Allowing for an employment multiplier of 1.75 (which is appropriate for service-type employment), these direct 540 jobs in downtown retail and commercial activity support an estimated further 400 indirect (or flow-on) jobs in the wider Clarksdale, Coahoma County, Mississippi and national economies, reflecting inter-industry links and the spending patterns of those in employment.

Taking just the retail component of downtown businesses, these entities generate total retail sales estimated at US\$38 million, annually, as

Table 5.3 Estimates of Downtown Clarksdale's retail sales, trade area spending and market share, 2018

Measure	Units
<u>Trade area spending</u>	
Estimated trade area population ^a	60,000 persons
Estimated average retail spend per capita ^b	US\$13,140/person
Estimated total available retail spend of trade area in 2016	US\$788.4 million/year
<u>Retail sales in downtown</u>	
Estimated occupied retail floorspace ^c	16,300m ²
Estimated average sales per square metre ^d	US\$2330/m ²
Estimated sales by downtown retailers	US\$38.0 million/year
Estimated retail sales to trade area residents (75% of total sales)	US\$28.5 million/year
Estimated retail sales to non-residents (i.e., Visitors, 25% of total sales)	US\$9.5 million/year
Market share (Sales to residents as share of residents' available retail spend)	US\$28.5 million/US\$788.4 million = 3.6%

Source: ^aEstimates based on US Census Bureau data and updated to 2018 by the author—refer Table 5.1

^bEstimate based on US Census Bureau data for 2014 and updated to 2018 by the author

^cLand use and floorspace survey data, 2018 by the author. Excludes entertainment venues, e.g., Ground Zero Blues Club and Red's Lounge

^dEstimate by the author based on local information—refer text

Note: These figures relate to retail spending in shops, restaurants and cafes only, and do not include expenditures on commercial accommodation, entertainment, clubs, gaming, transport, etc.

shown in Table 5.3. This estimate is based on total retail floorspace of 16,300 m² and an average sales ratio of US\$2330/m². This average sales figure takes into account building rentals, business costs, and profit.

Real estate agents indicate that average rentals for shops in Clarksdale's downtown are approximately US\$60/m², and this figure is generally within the rental range of US\$30/m² to US\$75/m², and in a few cases up to US\$105/m²; in contrast, typical retail rentals on State Street average around US\$110/m² or above in some cases. These average rentals are very low in comparison to rentals typically levied in modern shopping malls in large US cities. Allowing for rentals to account for 5% of total operating costs and allowing for sales revenues to equate to operating costs plus up to 15% for profit, the average sales turnover of US\$1380/m² is derived

for (small) shop retailing. Some businesses will trade below this average figure, while others will trade above it and this includes the two supermarkets on DeSoto Avenue that are estimated to trade at around US\$4500/m².

For downtown Clarksdale, the overall average trading level of US\$2330/m² includes both shop and supermarket trading; this average figure is understood to be low compared with downtowns that are trading in a healthy manner and where rents and revenues are up to four or five times the average figure for downtown Clarksdale.

The US\$38 million in annual retail sales in downtown is drawn from residents living in the surrounding trade area and from tourists and other visitors coming into the downtown. Precise figures on the volume of retail sales to residents and visitors are not available, but it is broadly estimated that 75% of all sales are to residents (US\$28.5 million), with the 25% balance (US\$9.5 million) attributable to visitors. Sales to mainly trade area residents involve retail businesses (such as the Save-A-Lot and Fred's supermarkets, gift shops and hairdressers) that serve essentially local and district residents, while music and art galleries (such as Cat Head, Hambone Gallery, and Rock & Blues Museum) will have a high share of sales to visitors.

On this basis, the estimated total retail sales of downtown retailers that are attributable to those living in the trade area is equivalent to a 3.6% share of the total available retail spending of the trade area residents which is estimated at US\$788 million, annually. This estimate of available trade area spending is based on the trade area population of 60,000 persons and average spending of US\$13,140 per person. The average spend per person is sourced from US Census Bureau data showing average retail spend per person in Coahoma County, which is approximately 75% of the national average, updated to 2018 prices.

* * *

Downtown Clarksdale's market share of 3.6% of available retail spending of trade area residents represents a very low level of performance for a downtown serving a trade area of some 60,000 residents. Typically, a downtown serving a trade area of this magnitude would be expected to capture 15–20% of available retail spending. Clearly, over the years the

downtown Clarksdale has lost market share to businesses located out on South State Street and to larger shopping malls located in Memphis and Southaven, as well as competition from businesses in Cleveland, Tunica, Greenwood, Batesville, and Oxford. But downtown Clarksdale attracts the tourists. This important market contributing to new growth in downtown businesses is highlighted in the following Chapter.

What Clarksdale has been experiencing in recent decades—particularly in terms of population decline and a shrinking role for downtown—is also evident in many small cities and towns in the Delta and elsewhere in Mississippi and in small urban areas across America. However, tourism is now an important component in the economic revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale, bringing thousands of visitors, nationally and from around the globe. Visitor spending is providing a significant injection of funds into local businesses and supporting more jobs, and at the same time providing an expanded range of facilities and services for the enjoyment of local residents. In economic terms, tourism is an important export industry for Clarksdale, attracting visitor spending that would otherwise not be available to downtown businesses.



Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art, Inc.



Clarksdale Downtown Street Sign



Ground Zero Blues Club



Marty's Barber Shop



Our Grandma's House of Pancakes



Quapaw Canoe Company



Third Street and Greyhound Bus Station



Yazoo Pass Cafe and the Lofts at the Five & Dime

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6

Clarksdale and Tourism

Tourism is a growth industry, locally, nationally, and internationally, especially with regard to cultural tourism, and it is important for Clarksdale to share in this underlying growth. Although somewhat depressed national economic conditions may have a downward effect on visitor numbers, it is also likely that an increase in the number and quality of Clarksdale's attractions, facilities, and services would lead to an increase in regional travel. In any event, the long-term trend is for continuing growth in tourist numbers, as evidenced by the growth in Coahoma County's tourist tax receipts.

Significantly, Tourism is an important industry in both Mississippi and Coahoma County, including especially the City of Clarksdale.

For Mississippi, in Fiscal Year 2017 an estimated 23.15 million visitors generated US\$6.3 billion in tourism and other visitor-related expenditures (including US\$1.40 billion in gaming), and tourism capital investment totalled approximately US\$299 million. Direct employment in tourism totalled 87,355 jobs or 7.6% of State-wide non-farm jobs, with a further 37,345 indirect and induced jobs created through the employment multiplier effect (with a multiplier of 1.43). Travel and tourism

state tax collection amounted to US\$626 million. These statistics are provided by Mississippi Development Authority (Tourism Division) in its annual report (MDA 2018).

The MDA report emphasises that travel and tourism is a driving force in the state's economic development efforts, with tourism identified as one of the top four employment sectors in the state, behind manufacturing, retail, and private health care/social assistance.

For Coahoma County, including Clarksdale, the MDA report shows that in 2017 tourism expenditures totalled approximately US\$66 million (including gaming) and supported 945 direct tourist jobs or 12.0% of non-farm employment in the County (MDA 2018). All 13 other Counties that comprise the Delta Tourism Region had significantly lower levels of non-farm employment supported by tourism, with the exception of Tunica where tourism employment accounted for 62% of all non-farm employment, and this is essentially associated with casinos. Although the Isle of Capri casino at Lula accounts for much of the tourist-related spending and employment in Coahoma County, tourism is also important in downtown Clarksdale.

A summary of key visitor-related travel and tourism statistics associated with Coahoma County is shown in Table 6.1.

Limitations exist in using data from the MDA report as the tourism expenditure figures are based on taxes imposed on accommodation and restaurant revenues, yet revenues for restaurant meals are paid by local

Table 6.1 Summary of travel and tourism impact, Coahoma County, 2009 and 2017

Measure	2009	2017	Change in Coahoma (no.) 2009–2017	Change in Coahoma (%) 2009–2017
Visitor spending (incl. Gaming)	US\$50.6 m	US\$64.7 m	+US\$14.1 m	+28%
Direct jobs	870	945	+75 jobs	+9%
Direct jobs as % of state-wide non-farm employment	10.3%	12.2%	+1.9 points	+18%
State and local tax/Fee revenue earned	US\$5.1 m	US\$7.5 m	+US\$2.4 m	+47.1%

Source: MDA, March 2018. Current prices (includes price inflation) expressed in US dollars

residents as well as visitors. Nevertheless, the figures assist in providing an order-of-magnitude to tourism spending.

In Fiscal Year 2017, Coahoma County Tourism Office received US\$392,200 in tax revenues (MDA 2018) and this comprised US\$279,300 from Restaurant Tax Revenue (representing a 1% tax on restaurant revenues) and US\$112,900 from Room Tax Revenue (representing a 2% tax on room revenues). Since 2010 a significant increase of 58% occurred in room tax revenues, indicating growth in overnight visitors over the six-year period. In contrast, tax revenues from restaurants over this period increased by just 5% (noting that these revenues are expressed in current prices that include price inflation). However, revenues from the restaurant tax account for 71% of these overall revenues from restaurant and room taxes in the County.

While official figures showing the number of tourists visiting Clarksdale and Coahoma County are not collected, an estimated 250,000 people visited Coahoma County in 2017. An estimated 132,000 persons visited Clarksdale, with the rest visiting the Isle of Capri casino. In addition, a small share of visitors at the casino would also visit Clarksdale, and vice versa. Table 6.2 shows the basis to these estimates, taking into account commercial accommodation in hotels, motels, and guest houses, and the likely share of visitors staying with family and friends, plus day visitors. Where possible, reference is made to official data sources on occupancy rates, length of stay and group size. Confidential information with regard to occupancy rates for particular accommodation establishments in Clarksdale has been aggregated. Accommodation details at the County level are not available, and therefore the figures provide an order-of-magnitude to the total number of visitors. The visitor estimates are considered to be on the conservatively low side.

Of the estimated total of 132,000 visitors to Clarksdale in 2017, approximately two-thirds or 88,000 were overnight visitors, with a further 44,000 counted as day visitors. While many of these visitors are drawn to the Blues attractions which underpin much of the city's tourism appeal, others come for their interests in the literary and arts fields, or to visit family and friends, or visit for business purposes. As noted, a small number of visitors to the Isle of Capri casino would also visit Clarksdale and they are included in the estimate for "day visitors" to Clarksdale.

Table 6.2 Estimate of overnight and day visitors to City of Clarksdale and Coahoma County, 2017

Type of visitor	City of Clarksdale	Isle of Capri and balance of County	Coahoma County
Visitors staying in commercial accommodation			
Number of commercial rooms ^a	560	450	1,010
Total number of available room-nights per year	204,400	164,250	368,650
Estimated occupancy rate ^b	40%	75%	57%
Number of occupied room-nights, per year	82,000	123,200	205,200
Average number of occupants per room ^b	2.5	2.5	2.5
Total number of visitor nights	205,000	308,000	513,000
Average length of stay ^b	2.9	2.9	2.9
Estimated number of visitors staying at commercial accommodation, per year	70,700	106,200	176,900
Visitors staying with friends or relatives, or camping^c	17,700	na	17,700
Total overnight visitors	88,400	106,200	194,600
Day visitors	43,600^d	10,620^e	54,220
Estimated total visitors (Rounded estimate)	132,000 (132,000)	116,820 (117,000)	248,820 (249,000)

Notes: ^aPublished sources and field observations by author

^bestimate based on Mississippi Development Authority state-wide data (FY 2017) and local information

^cestimate that 20% of all overnight visitors are staying with friends and relatives, or camping (excluding casino patrons)

^ddomestic day visitors comprise 33% of all visitors (MDA Feb 2017)

^edomestic day visitors at casino estimated to be equivalent to 10% of total overnight visitors to casino

Clarksdale is well-placed to attract visitors from among those attending the casinos at nearby Tunica which boasts 10 or so major casinos, a total of some 6,000 hotel rooms and accommodating around 800,000 visitors a year. This is a potentially large market for Clarksdale businesses to tap, although it is not necessarily the case that casino visitors have an interest in Blues music and Delta culture that is the key attraction of downtown Clarksdale. Nevertheless, it is a market worth investigating for the potential to attract a share of casino visitors to travel down to

Clarksdale, a short trip of up to 40 minutes along Highway 61. Even attracting a 5% share of these casino visitors would add a further 40,000 or so visitors to the town's annual visitor numbers.

Estimates for specific attractions and events in downtown Clarksdale indicate Delta Blues Museum attracts approximately 25,000 persons per year (including visitors and music students); the Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival attracts an estimated 3,500 persons per day over the long weekend, Friday to Sunday, in mid-August; and the Juke Joint Festival attracts around 7,000 persons on the festival date which is a Saturday in mid-April, plus people arriving a day or two ahead of time and also staying on the Sunday for the mini-blues fest at Cat Head and at the Rock & Blues Museum, both located in East Second Street. In total, these several main features—combined with the Tennessee Williams Festival, the Clarksdale Film Festival and several smaller festivals—attract at least 70,000 attendees annually. These estimates include both local residents and tourists. In addition, people visit downtown Clarksdale on weekdays and weekends throughout the year.

It is most likely that the large majority of the 132,000 or so visitors to Clarksdale visit the downtown during their stay, regardless of the length of visit or origin.

Survey information with regard to the origin of visitors to Clarksdale is limited, apart from a now-dated personal interview survey conducted during the Juke Joint Festival in 2008 (Henshall 2008, p. 96). At that time, 81% of those interviewed came from beyond Clarksdale and Coahoma County, including 15% of the sample from elsewhere in Mississippi, 58% from other States, and 8% from abroad. It is likely that with the growth of the Festival over the past decade a higher proportion of all festival-goers now come from beyond Mississippi and from abroad.

Returning to the economic development perspective, visitors spend money, and this spending in turn supports businesses and jobs, and benefits the wider community. Broad estimates indicate that some US\$46 million per year is generated by overnight and daytrip visitors in Clarksdale, as shown in Table 6.3. This estimate includes spending on accommodation, food and beverage, gifts/souvenirs, venue entrance charges, and incidental expenditures. Of course, the spending only occurs if goods and services are actually available for the visitor to spend their

Table 6.3 Estimate of visitor spending in City of Clarksdale, 2017

Visitor type	No. visitors ^a	Average length of stay	Total nights or days	Average spend per night or day ^d	Estimated total spending ^d
Total, Overnight visitors	88,400	2.9^a	258,130 nights	US\$169/night^c	US\$43.7m
<i>Incl. Motels/Hotels/BnB</i>	<i>70,700</i>	<i>2.9^a</i>	<i>205,030 nights</i>	<i>US\$200/night^b</i>	<i>US\$41.0m</i>
<i>Incl. VFR/ Camping</i>	<i>17,700</i>	<i>2.9^a</i>	<i>53,100 nights</i>	<i>US\$50/night^b</i>	<i>US\$2.7m</i>
Total, Day visitors	43,600	–	43,600 days	US\$50/day^b	US\$2.2m
Total, All visitors	132,000	–	301,730 nights and days	US\$152^b	US\$45.9m

Source: ^aTable 6.2; ^bauthor's estimate; ^cDerived average (figures rounded)

Note: ^dIncludes spending on accommodation, food, gifts, entry fees, fuel, etc., but excludes gambling

money on, and if the shops, galleries, restaurants and museums are open at appropriate hours to provide a service. In this regard, visitors passing through Clarksdale would spend very little in the downtown on a Sunday, as businesses (with one or two exceptions) are generally not open for trade, and so potential spending of visitors (and residents) is not captured.

In regard to potential expenditures of visitors actually spending time in the downtown, a broad estimate shows that of the US\$46 million in spending per year generated by all visitors, around 60% of this amount (i.e., US\$28 million) is directed to hotels, motels, restaurants, and fast food outlets located on State Street. While motels and hotels at that location account for some 70% of all visitor nights in Clarksdale, the downtown dining places and late night venues now attract a higher proportion of visitors' spending compared with overnight accommodation.

The remaining 40% or US\$18 million per year of visitors' spending is directed to businesses located in the Downtown and includes overnight accommodation, food and beverages, gifts and souvenirs, venue entry charges, and the like. An estimated 50% or US\$9 million of the US\$18

million of visitor spending is allocated to dining and other retail goods and services in downtown businesses, with the balance in spending directed to overnight accommodation and venues. The estimate for retail spending approximates US\$9.5 million for visitor spending on retail shops and dining and other services, as shown earlier in Table 5.3.

These tourism revenues directed to downtown Clarksdale can expand in a number of ways. Higher spending levels will be captured if visitor numbers to Clarksdale can be increased through a wider and deeper provision of attractions and services in the downtown. In addition, an increase in locally available services would also increase spending by local residents who visit the new restaurants and cafes, venues, shops, and the like. Visitor spending will also increase if Clarksdale's attractions and services are more vigorously promoted into the targeted visitor growth markets, and if additional hours of weekend trading can be achieved among retailers, cafes, and restaurants. This outcome is already in evidence over recent years with the introduction of new dining venues in the downtown that include Yazoo Pass, Stone Pony Pizza, Bluesberry Café, Levon's Bar & Grill, Our Grandma's House of Pancakes, and 3rd Street Bistro. Meraki Roasting Company is a relatively new addition on Sunflower Avenue, supported by Griot Arts; in addition to providing freshly roasted coffee beans, both retail and wholesale, Meraki's mission is to assist young people in the community in building their workplace skills.

Importantly, one of the aims of Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. is to increase the average stay of visitors in Clarksdale by one day so that greater levels of economic and community benefit can be achieved. If all overnight visitors to Clarksdale stay one extra day, visitor spending could increase by almost US\$14 million a year, based on the figures detailed above. This spending figure would increase by almost a further US\$7 million a year, or even higher, if the current 43,600 day visitors a year decided to stay overnight. And if all overnight visitors and all day visitors to Clarksdale were to spend one extra night in town, the additional revenues would be in the order of US\$21 million a year.

Forecasts of visitor numbers are difficult to prepare for a specific location such as Clarksdale, as future visits will be influenced by the range and quality of tourist attractions; the extent and quality of overnight

accommodation and available facilities and services; the level of competition from other towns; and the effectiveness of tourism promotion campaigns. A further variable relates to national economic conditions, although periods of national economic slowdown appear to have a less-adverse effect on places like Clarksdale and the South in general in view of their insulation from the national economy (and noting relatively buoyant conditions in agriculture which underpins much of the local economy).

Notwithstanding national and international economic trends, it is observed that Clarksdale is experiencing an increased penetration of the visitor market, as measured by the increase in downtown business numbers and the growth in tax receipts derived from accommodation and restaurant revenues. Even a moderate growth rate in visitor numbers averaging around 5% annually would see a total visitation approaching 170,000 in Clarksdale by 2023. This forecast represents an increase of 36,000 visitors or 27% on present visitor numbers, and these visitors would be mainly involved with downtown tourism, linked to Blues and Delta culture, as well as people visiting friends and relatives in Clarksdale or visiting on business. Based on average spending patterns shown in Table 6.3, these additional overnight and day visitors would bring a further US\$5.5 million a year (in constant 2018 prices) into downtown shops and dining places.

Of course, local residents also support many of the attractions that also appeal to tourists, and examples include the cafes, restaurants, and night-time venues. All of the popular businesses in downtown are supported by local residents, as well as visitors to Clarksdale. Around 10–15 years ago, downtown Clarksdale attracted few residents compared with today's levels of local patronage associated with local businesses.

In terms of employment, the annual level of sales in Clarksdale of US\$46 million attributable to visitors would support an estimated 655 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs, based on Coahoma County's average of approximately US\$70,000 in visitor spending supporting one FTE job (MDA 2018). This figure compares with known employment in visitor-related businesses in downtown and along South State Street, and also at the Shack Up Inn and at Hopson's located just five kilometres to the south of town. At least 200 visitor-related FTE jobs are located in the

downtown, based on the estimated share of visitor spending that the downtown attracts and estimates of employment in the various downtown retail businesses, venues and places of accommodation.

These jobs comprise, for example, venue operators, musicians, restaurant chefs, kitchen hands and wait staff, store owners and sales staff, gallery owners and artists, and cleaners and maintenance persons. Furthermore, as demonstrated later, many individuals involved in the promotion and development of downtown Clarksdale as a tourism focus centred around culture and arts are actually involved in such diverse areas as the building construction and restoration, health care, legal services, and retailing.

In addition to street-based and venue-based activities, downtown employment opportunities in construction trades are evident, with potential to significantly expand and enhance this particular sector by increasing the skill levels of local tradespeople. Numerous buildings in downtown are in need of repair and restoration, and local comment indicates that the number of experienced tradespersons in Clarksdale is in short supply. Employment opportunities in this sector could therefore be expanded where encouragement is provided through targeted training programmes to those interested in establishing a career in building construction and restoration.

A further consideration is that additional jobs are created in the local and wider economies through the employment multiplier effect which reflects the inter-industry linkages in the supply chain. Thus, the 655 visitor-related FTE jobs located in Clarksdale as a result of visitor spending would support a further 490 jobs in the local, County, State, and national economies through this “multiplier” effect. In this instance a service sector multiplier of 1.75 is applied—that is, for every 100 direct jobs a further 75 are indirect or flow-on jobs in the wider economy. A share of these indirect jobs, possibly in the order of 10%, would likely be supported in Clarksdale.

* * *

Overall, tourism is important to downtown Clarksdale in terms of visitor numbers and associated spending. The sector supports a wide range of

local businesses and jobs, and provides the underlying impetus for the restoration of vacant and often run-down commercial premises in downtown.

In Clarksdale's case, much of the economic regeneration of downtown in recent years has been, and continues to be, achieved through the efforts of what economists and social scientists call the "creative class" or "creative people". While the individuals involved may balk at the terminology, their contributions to downtown revitalisation are significant. The following chapter describes the "theory" underlying the involvement of 'creative people', while Chap. 8 highlights the "reality" as observed in the downtown Clarksdale experience.



Art & Culture Signage and New Roxy in the "New World"



Blues Alley Club, Delta Avenue



Clarke House Residential Inn (1859)



Clarksdale Cinema



Hopson Commissary



Shack Up Inn

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7

Creative People in Downtown Revitalisation: The Theory

An important consideration associated with the economic revival of downtowns is the role played by creative people. Over the past 15 years, and especially over the past ten years, it is clearly evident that Clarksdale's downtown has been attracting creative people—including long-term residents and newcomers—to invest in the area and establish new businesses. How is this “creativity” defined? And what are the benefits for the wider community?

Two writers on the topic of creative people and creative places are America's Richard Florida and the UK's Charles Landry, each of whom highlights the importance of encouraging creativity in the planning and development of our cities and in society at large.

Richard Florida (2002a, 2005, 2017) is an exponent of what he describes as the “creative class” and their contributions to economic development. Florida identifies that “creativity has become the principal driving force in the growth and development of cities, regions, and nations” (Florida 2005, p. 1). Using the Standard Occupational Classification System, he defines two broad groups: the first group is described as the “Super-Creative Core”, which comprises a wide range of occupations in science, engineering, education, computer programming, and research, as

well as occupations in arts, design, and media. People in these occupations are considered by Florida to be fully engaged in the creative process and in innovation. The second group is described as the “Creative Professionals” who comprise workers in knowledge-based activities in health, law, business, and finance, and they typically have high levels of education which assist in “creative problem-solving”. In order to provide a measure or indicator of the extent of creativity and the relationship with economic development, Florida devised a Creativity Index; this is based on several indices: the Innovation Index, the High-Tech Index, the Gay Index, the Bohemian Index, and the Creative Class Index. This methodological approach has attracted considerable debate, as noted later.

In his recent publication, Richard Florida continues his focus on large metropolitan cities and notes that “our clustering together in great cities has always been the underlying driver of innovation, wealth and progress. Despite their many challenges in these dark and divisive times, our cities remain our brightest hope” (Florida 2017, p. xv). Well may one wonder: if the emphasis is placed on “great cities”, are small cities and towns like Clarksdale simply left to wither away? Florida also comments that “the old urban crisis of the 1960s and ‘70s was one of deindustrialization, abandonment, poverty, and a loss of economic function” (Florida 2017, p. xi). In the twenty-first century, we can only observe that the Mississippi Delta has been left far behind, as have so many small settlements throughout America and other places, including Australia.

Charles Landry (2000, 2006) also identifies the importance of “creativity” in what he defines as the “creative city”. He states that in his experience “successful cities seemed to have some things in common – visionary individuals, creative organizations and a political culture sharing a clarity of purpose” (Landry 2000, p. 3). Landry does not base his assessments on mathematical analyses (in contrast with Florida’s indices), but describes in a narrative format—and with the support of numerous examples and case studies—how “key actors in those places that have exhibited growth share certain qualities: open-mindedness and a willingness to take risks; a clear focus on long-term aims with an understanding of strategy; a capacity to work with local distinctiveness and to find a strength in apparent weakness; and a willingness to listen and learn” (Landry 2000, p. 4).

An underlying issue with both Florida and Landry is that they focus on large cities and urban regions: from San Francisco and New York to Berlin and Barcelona and places like Sydney, Singapore, and Shanghai. Clarksdale, as a small town, does not fit comfortably in this approach. Nevertheless, both Florida and Landry highlight how creativity is important in contributing to economic development and, especially in Landry's work, a sense of place.

Although Landry does not provide a statistical description of his "creative" workforce, he mentions artists, scientists, and "increasing numbers of people working in social, business or political arenas whose way of addressing problems (is) clearly creative". He highlights how "creative people and institutions are willing to re-write procedures or principles and so to imagine future scenarios, conditions, inventions, applications, adaptations and processes", and their ability to "look at situations in an integrated, holistic way, laterally and flexibly" (Landry 2000, pp. 12, 13). Landry notes that "the more I defined creativity, the more it eluded me. Complications and qualifications emerged with every conclusion ... The problem with identifying new forms of creativity is that it is already an overused concept, often applied to things which are not creative at all, devaluing the concept, and neglecting real creativity" (Landry 2000, p. 15).

Montgomery (2005, p. 338), writing on "creativity", mentions that Landry's work "is arguably the closest anyone has come to defining the 'creative spark'". Montgomery also notes that "at its simplest (Landry's definition) involves the right people being in the right place, at the right time, with a body of knowledge and skills to draw upon, access to new technologies, a bit of healthy rivalry and the means of communicating with markets".

Despite differences in definitions, both Florida and Landry point to the importance of workforce creativity as a significant contributor to economic development in cities, towns and regions. However, the work of Florida, in particular, is the subject of much discussion in the literature, and the critiques revolve around issues of the size of the creative class, the methodology in measuring its contribution to urban development, and the outcomes of the analysis.

In terms of size, Florida states that "Globally, a third of the workers in advanced industrial nations are employed in the creative sector", and that

“this creative sector accounts for nearly half of all wage and salary income in the United States” (Florida 2005). On Florida’s count, the creative sector is certainly a large one. He acknowledges that a criticism of his work is that it is “elitist, snobbish and exclusionary”, but states categorically that the “single most overlooked element” of his theory is “the idea that every human being is creative”. In stark contrast, Landry (2000) puts the figure at 3–5% of the workforce in world cities, and Montgomery (2005) mentions 4.2% in the UK, while the New South Wales Department of State and Regional Development (DSRD 2008) identifies just over 5% of the workforce as “creative”.

In the Australian context, a recent report prepared for Creative Victoria (which is an agency in the Victorian Government’s Department of Economic Development) shows that in 2013 the creative and cultural sector accounted for 8% of the economy in Gross Value Added terms (The Boston Consulting Group 2015, p. 3). In 2018 prices this contribution would total around A\$28 billion per year and support 250,000 jobs.

Another report, published by Creative Industries Innovation Centre (2013, p. 10), indicates that creative occupations represent 4.4% of total occupations in Victoria and this share increases to 6.2% when “embedded” employees are included (such as a designer working for a mining company).

Estimates for downtown Clarksdale, highlighted in the following chapter, indicate that it has approximately 5% of its work force involved in the broadly defined “creative” industry. While recognising that definitional issues exist in regard to the composition of the “creative industry”, these various estimates contrast significantly with Florida’s high estimate that the creative sector comprises around 30% to 35% of the workforce, and is likely to confirm that Florida’s definition is overly expansive in its inclusion of a wide range of occupations as “creative”.

Moreover, to apply Florida’s definition of the “creative class” is not very useful at the small city or town level where a community may be simply too small for such a definition to have practical use, particularly as the smaller the city the less likely it is to attract and maintain the diverse range of occupations that comprise Florida’s definition. Clarksdale’s population in 2018 (16,170 residents) is not comparable with that of New York (8,670,000) or San Francisco (885,600), or Sydney (5,640,000) or Melbourne (5,170,000).

Despite the detailed statistical research, Florida's work does not assist in a practical sense in helping to explain the view that creativity and culture are important factors in the economic revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale. Gaps and analytical weaknesses have been identified in Florida's analysis. For example, Berry (2005, p. 385) highlights several main criticisms of Florida's work, and indicates that the argument about creativity and economic development "can easily descend into circularity – cities are successful because they attract creative people, creative people are attracted to successful cities", and that "two variables may be strongly associated ... without one determining the other. Both variables and their association may, in fact, be caused by one or more third factors."

As Berry indicates, trying to score high on Florida's indices may mean a city overlooks other opportunities to foster development in areas such as improvements to the regulatory environment and enhanced infrastructure provision. Berry is also critical of Florida's oversight of other dynamics in urban innovation and growth, such as the history of the city and its relationship to other urban centres and their hierarchies. Likewise, emphasis on "state-of-the-art telecommunications with time proximity to major markets and centres of enterprise" is also important in fostering city development but, argues Berry (2005, p. 387), this is not addressed by Florida.

In the Australian context, Berry (2005, p. 388) notes that a threat to Melbourne's ability to attract creative people and build a "self-reinforcing 'growth machine'" is associated with what he describes as systemic failures in the housing sector, with housing affordability falling sharply. This "makes it difficult for younger members of the creative class to 'get a start'". In a similar assessment, Florida (2005, p. 172) acknowledges that "as the creative economy takes root ... it generates tremendous pressure on housing prices, both forcing artists and other creative people out of their communities and further exacerbating social and economic inequality."

This pattern is evident in the metropolitan Melbourne context where the inner City of Yarra borders the Central Business District and includes neighbourhoods such as Fitzroy that were popular for artists and other creatives in the 1980s and 1990s. Yarra experienced a significant increase

in median house price by 2016 (A\$929,500) that was more than 11 times higher than the median dwelling price in 1986 (A\$83,000). In Fitzroy, a neighbourhood in the City of Yarra, the median house price is now A\$1,350,000 and in the adjoining area of Collingwood the median price is A\$880,000. As a result of these increasing inner city housing prices, the arts community has tended to move further away, towards middle-ring neighbourhoods where housing is more affordable, such as Northcote, Brunswick and Coburg to the north and to Yarraville, Seddon and Footscray to the west. Even today, the median house price in Brunswick is significant at A\$940,000, while in Seddon it is A\$895,000. This information is sourced from the Victorian Government (DELWP 2017).

In Clarksdale's case it is observed that the inward movement of "creative people" over the past 10–15 years, combined with the enhanced level of business activity in the downtown, does not appear to be reflected in social "gentrification", and does not appear to have led to adverse impacts on other members of the wider Clarksdale community. The continuing relatively high number of vacant buildings in the downtown, most of which have prospects for refurbishment and use for business activities as well as providing for domestic accommodation, tends to place a cap or restraint on increasing property values beyond normal market trends. No adverse impacts on the rental or leasehold opportunities for existing residents and businesses located in or close to the downtown area are evident at this stage.

The importance of having available affordable accommodation is borne out in the Clarksdale case, where low-cost property has been an important factor in attracting "creative people" to locate in the downtown. Affordability enables the "creatives" to buy or rent commercial buildings that provide space for a business at ground floor, and often with a residence located above or to the rear. This is evident, for example, in the art galleries that have established in the downtown, along with restaurants, cafes and other businesses that operate in old premises which have been refurbished in recent years.

Clarksdale also fits Berry's description of "creative industries" where he identifies the broader "cultural spillovers". For example, "a particular city or region may acquire a reputation for particular creative products or events – such as a music or performing arts festival – that

acts as an attractor for associated economic activities and skilled workers/performers, which further adds to the city's reputation and enhances its milieu, attracting further like developments – and so on, in a virtuous growth circle" (Berry 2003, p. 99).

It is not clear in Florida's work as to where social and community investments sit in terms of contributing to the prosperity of a city or town. The "common ethos" held close by Florida's "creative class" places value on creativity, individuality, difference and merit (Florida 2002a); however, assets that support or promote social cohesion, access to education, health and other attributes are not counted as an "index" in Florida's "creative" city. Yet, a city like Clarksdale desperately needs improved educational infrastructure and services, especially focused on the African American community, where educational standards fall well below the national average. Further investment in education in Clarksdale would be expected to significantly increase the employment and economic opportunities of many residents, thus contributing to the city's on-going development.

Montgomery (2005, p. 342) also highlights the importance for cities—in seeking to attract "creative people"—to have regard for aspects which are important to city development other than focusing just on "creativity": he states that "people also need to know that the city in question is convenient to live in and get around, that the schools are good, and that levels of crime and racial unrest are low. Otherwise the attraction of certain cities to the 'creative class' will be short-lived."

In terms of methodology, Montgomery (2005, p. 339) critiques Florida's approach, and observes that "there certainly appears to be a confusion in the direction of causality in Florida's indices" and, as an example, asks if gays "cause city economies to be more creative of themselves, or are they attracted to places that are lively and interesting". Montgomery concludes that "it would appear that what Florida has devised is a set of indices that simply mirror more fundamental truths about creative milieux or dynamic cities".

Glaeser (2005) undertook a regression analysis on Florida's data on "bohemianism" and concluded that "there is no evidence to suggest that there is anything to this diversity of Bohemianism, once you control for human capital". As such, Glaeser concludes, "[M]ayors are better served

by focusing on the basic commodities desired by those with skills, than by thinking that there is a quick fix involved in creating a funky, hip, Bohemian downtown”.

While Florida’s creative city promotes the culture of creativity, individuality, difference and merit, Landry (2000, p. 7) talks about culture as the “panoply of resources that show that a place is unique and distinctive” and that “creativity is not only about a continuous invention of the new, but also how to deal appropriately with the old”. This has special relevance to Clarksdale and the Delta, noting that Clarksdale is renowned as the cradle of Blues music, a cultural legacy from well over 100 years ago. Landry shows that culture can strengthen social cohesion, increase personal confidence, improve life skills, and develop new training and employment routes.

Landry also shows how many of the creative projects he has explored over time were introduced by outsiders and became mainstream once proven. Again, this aspect is critically important in Clarksdale where many of the initiatives that contribute to the economic revitalisation of the downtown can be attributed to newcomers. Landry (2000, p. 14) also highlights “the dangers of limiting creativity to the ideas stage of projects. It must run consistently from first insight to implementation, consolidation, dissemination and evaluation.” This is an important recognition in the Clarksdale context where the economic revitalisation of the downtown is due not only to the musicians, writers and artists, but also to the creative efforts of others whose “day jobs” are as shopkeepers, building contractors, health-care providers, local government officials and others. Similarly, the managers and venue operators associated with the juke joints and clubs, and those who manage the museums and galleries, all contribute to the future of the Blues and Delta culture. All these individuals provide services through project facilitation and implementation, and examples are highlighted in Chap. 8.

Landry’s “The Art of City Making” (2006, p. 422) sets out the “Ten ideas to start the creative city process”. Clarksdale has already implemented these ideas, and unwittingly so in terms of not having had reference to Landry’s publication at the time. Landry’s ten ideas are shown in the accompanying box, with the observations in regard to the

way in which Clarksdale has already implemented these concepts (refer Box 7.1).

Box 7.1 Initiatives Taken in Downtown Clarksdale Matched with Charles Landry's "Ten Ideas to Start the Creative City Process"

1. Landry: Precipitate a culture of crisis (which does not need to be negative).

Observation: In Clarksdale's case, 21 April 2008 was the date when the Mayor called a meeting of individuals and organisations to discuss Downtown which, at the time, was generating a sense of revitalisation, but needed a more integrated, community-based approach to renewal.

2. Landry: Identify project champions.

Observation: These individuals exist in Clarksdale, as highlighted in Chap. 8.

3. Landry: Undertake an audit of creative potential and obstacles.

Observation: These aspects were discussed at the public meeting and identified in the Action Plan for Downtown Revitalization (Henshall 2008), and in work undertaken by the Delta Bridge Project (2011) and by Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. (CRI).

4. Landry: Identify some key projects in your city that stand as examples of good practice.

Observation: See comment above, and especially the efforts of CRI.

5. Landry: Develop the evidence that proves your arguments about the value and impact of the nexus of culture, broadly defined creativity and the arts.

Observation: The Action Plan 2008 provides statistics and commentary on the importance of cultural tourism to Downtown Clarksdale, as does the Delta Bridge Project.

6. Landry: Seek to influence the city's "master" strategy, by inserting a cultural and creativity agenda within it; if this fails, develop a well-publicised alternative strategy.

Observation: In effect, this is the Action Plan for Downtown Revitalization 2008 that has been adopted by CRI and is also reflected in CRI's initiatives.

7. Landry: Create a series of pilot projects that can be seen as experiments.

Observation: This has been achieved through projects pursued by individuals and by CRI.

8. Landry: Assess how the story of your city is told internally and externally.

Observation: This is achieved through the work of CRI and others in Clarksdale and the County, including Coahoma County Tourism Commission and through community-based organisations such as Griot Arts, Spring Initiative, and the Crossroads Cultural Arts Centre (CCAC).

9. Landry: Create an advocacy lobby group that embodies (by its actions, meetings, seminars etc.) the creativity you are aspiring to.

Observation: This is reflected in the work of CRI, Griot, Spring Initiative and CCAC.

10. Landry: Do not call yourself a creative city; let others do that by respecting what you have achieved.

Observation: This is what is happening now as Clarksdale reflects on the past several years of progress in Downtown business, cultural tourism and community strengthening. New business starts, employment and tourist numbers are on the increase.

Landry, C, "*The Art of City Making*", 2006, p. 422, with "Observations" by the author

The most supportive and re-assuring evidence of the creative community at work is the observation that downtown Clarksdale has effectively implemented all ten "ideas" that Landry identifies as important "to start the creative city process".

In essence, Clarksdale is well on the way to further developing and enhancing its role as a focus for cultural tourism and associated development. Current steps towards promoting downtown revitalisation reflect many of the characteristics highlighted by Landry, including the importance of the creative elements in Clarksdale's population in establishing new businesses, supporting creative talents, and promoting the Blues and Delta culture for which the place is renowned. These contributions are made by creative residents (both locals and newcomers), the music- and culture-related businesses (juke joints, art galleries, dining, and the like), and heritage components (museums, historic markers and guided tours), all with the support of Clarksdale's services sector (retail shops, visitor accommodation, hospitality, building trades and so on).

In this context of “creative people”, Florida’s work is important for the contribution it makes to our understanding of the drivers of economic development and the need to attract creative individuals to a region, city or town. However, in Clarksdale’s case the downtown and its strong pre-existing legacy in Blues music and Delta culture is what attracts the “creative people” to live there, and so the place continues to evolve and develop. In this context it is useful to reflect on Landry’s observation that “creativity is a journey not a destination, a process not a status” (Landry 2000, p. 14), and his view that “the lack of key factors – like political will or an appropriate organizational culture – can put the creative process in jeopardy”. These are important considerations in assessing Clarksdale’s ability to capitalise on its rich cultural heritage as a significant contributor to economic and social progress.

So much for the theory behind the creative city and creative people: now to explore, in the following chapter, the reality of actually getting things done in downtown Clarksdale ...

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8

Clarksdale's Champions and Creative People: The Reality

In essence, a place must have some level of attraction or special appeal in the first instance to attract “creative people”. In Clarksdale, it’s the Blues and other aspects of Delta culture, and also the Southern lifestyle and hospitality. Affordable property is also important, especially where links to a bygone era are discernible and placed in the milieu of Delta Blues. An attractive provision of amenities is another factor, as is a range of interests that can be met locally, especially entertainment and the opportunity to establish a new business interest. Convenient access to national and international travel infrastructure via the nearby Memphis International Airport is also a factor attracting people to Clarksdale, as is the availability of higher-order goods and services in Memphis, an easy drive of just 75 minutes to the north on Highway 61.

In Clarksdale’s case, the Blues and other elements of the rich Delta culture have existed for generations. The fact that residents and newcomers are now building on these assets through the development and promotion of cultural tourism reflects the opportunities that have emerged from the rich underlay of cultural resources that pre-exist current residents. It also reflects the situation in which “creative people” have risen to the challenge of developing these opportunities through their own

enterprise, and in so doing they contribute to the enjoyment of the wider community, extending well beyond Clarksdale and reaching places across the globe.

Initiatives taken by local people are contributing to new and expanded business and investment opportunities in downtown Clarksdale, with individuals drawn from a wide range of occupations and industry sectors: property and development, business, local government, entertainment, and hospitality. The role of “champions” and “creative people” is important in this regard, and the focus for their attention is intrinsically related to building on the entrenched traditions in Blues music and promoting growth and development associated with cultural tourism.

Two prominent “champions” who provide the inspiration, drive and leadership in the Clarksdale community are WO “Bill” Luckett, a lawyer, investor, and developer, and Kinchen “Bubba” O’Keefe Jr., a local contractor with a long history in building restoration and refurbishment, local enterprise, and community service. Each individual, in his own way, has taken the initiative to identify and implement projects, with examples including Madidi restaurant, Ground Zero Blues Club, Yazoo Pass café and coffee shop, and the Lofts at the Five and Dime. While Messrs. Luckett and O’Keefe provide the necessary inspiration and leadership, many other individuals in town contribute their ideas, creativity, investment, business acumen, and personal time and effort in supporting downtown revitalisation in some form or other. All of these individuals can be described as being among Clarksdale’s “creative people”.

The definition of “creativity” in terms of the Clarksdale workforce is based on a listing of businesses that are closely involved in aspects of tourism, ranging from music venues and recording facilities, to visitor accommodation, restaurants, and specialty retail. The rationale for choosing the *business* as the basis to the employment measure is that the businesses can be readily identified and their employment numbers can be estimated. The outcome is still a measure of workforce, but the figure is derived from counts of businesses actually involved in tourism and related activities. This approach provides a more specific estimate of involvement in creative pursuits and in tourism rather than arriving at an estimate where one-third or so of the workforce is counted as “creative” (Florida 2002)

because they happen to be in such widely defined US Census Bureau occupational categories as “management, professional and related occupations”.

Moreover, if the definition rests on employment by “industry sector” as defined by the US Census Bureau, then the statistics for Clarksdale’s “Arts, Entertainment, Recreation, Accommodation and Food Services” sector only lead to distorted interpretations, since so many Clarksdilians recorded in this category actually work in the nearby casinos at Tunica and Lula, and not in Clarksdale. Furthermore, it is the *business* that creates the *occupation*, and hence the logic in this approach of adopting the type of business as the contributor to creativity.

In Clarksdale, where 35% of residents live below the poverty line and where educational achievement is significantly lower than at the national level, creativity is not exactly an anticipated feature in the local community. Yet, creativity is in abundance in the downtown and this has become most evident over the past 15 years or so. Since 2000, around 30 new businesses have established in the downtown, and these developments have also involved the renovation or renewal of a similar number of long-established buildings. Approximately 60% of these new businesses and other features involve long-time residents, while 40% are attributable to newcomers to Clarksdale who have arrived in the past 10–15 years.

In addition, around 10 downtown buildings are undergoing refurbishment at any one time. Overall, around 100 businesses, facilities and events in the downtown have an association with cultural tourism, some going back many years, and are listed in Table 8.1. Of these entities, 50 or so are businesses, most of which operate throughout the year, while several operate only at festivals and other events. The other 50 entities in the Table are specific places and events that attract downtown visitation, with examples ranging from the heritage area on the northern edge of downtown, to community groups that expressly build on the promotion of local community culture and aspirations, especially among Clarksdale’s youth.

Total employment in tourism-related activities in downtown Clarksdale involves an estimated 250 positions (i.e., full-time, part-time, and casual) and this is equivalent to approximately 5% of the estimated 5500 jobs located in the city in 2018. When tourism-related jobs located in places

Table 8.1 Businesses, events, and buildings in Downtown Clarksdale associated with tourism, 2018

Type of business	No. of businesses/ events/ entities ^a	Names of business/event/entity ^a
Museums	4	Delta Blues Museum, Rock & Blues Museum, WROX Museum, Tennessee Williams Museum at St George's Episcopal Church
Juke joints/clubs/ venues	13	Ground Zero Blues Club, Red's Lounge, Club 2000, Club Millennium, Delta Blues Alley, Bluesberry Café, Messenger's Pool Hall, Pete's Grill, Levon's Bar & Grill, Holy Moly, Hooker Grocery & Eatery, Our Grandma's Sports Bar, New Roxy
Art galleries/art shops/books/ specialty retail	13	Hambone Art Gallery, Lambfish Gallery, Cat Head Delta Blues & Folk Art, Clarksdale Collective LLC, Coahoma Collective, Deak Harp's Mississippi Saxophone store, Delta Creations, Mag-Pie Gifts & Art, Oak & Ivy, MS Design Maven, Nellie May's, Southern Expressions, The Latest Craze
Café, dining	12	Bluesberry Café, Ground Zero Blues Club, Stone Pony Pizza Restaurant and Bar, Yazoo Pass, Levon's Bar & Grill, Hooker Grocery & Eatery, Our Grandma's House of Pancakes, Dutch Oven, Meraki Roasting Company, 3rd Street Bistro. (plus Hopson's and Shack Up Inn on Old Highway 49)
Music/recording	8	Cat Head, Vincent Productions / Clarksdale Sound Stage, Blues Town Music, Studio 61, WROX Museum, Delta Blues Museum Stage, Ground Zero Blues Club, Griot Arts (2018 funding for a small facility for students' use)
Accommodation	13	Five & Dime Lofts, Delta Cotton Company Apartments, Riverside Hotel, Uptown Motor Inn, The Clark House Residential Inn, Blues Hound Flat, Bluestown Inn, Squeeze Box, Delta Digs, Hooker Hotel, Holy Moly Eastern Star Executive Suite, Chateau Debris, and Travelers Hotel. (Note: chain hotels/motels are located on State Street, while the popular Shack Up Inn, Shacksdale USA Motel, and The Loft at Hopson's are located on Old Highway 49, about five kilometres south of Downtown)

(continued)

Table 8.1 (continued)

Type of business	No. of businesses/ events/ entities ^a	Names of business/event/entity ^a
Other businesses/ buildings of tourism/ heritage interest	9	Clarksdale Cinema, New Roxy, Greyhound Bus Station, Quapaw Canoe Company, McWilliams Building, Paramount Theater, Alcazar Hotel, Episcopal Church, The Bank function centre (formerly the Bank of Clarksdale 1930 and more recently the Press Register building)
Heritage residential area	~10	The Clark House, Cutrer Mansion (Higher Education), and dwellings/church associated with Tennessee Williams and early townsfolk in Clark Street and environs
Events	15+	Clarksdale Film & Music Festival (January), Juke Joint Festival (April), Second Street Blues Party (April), Cat Head Mini-Blues Fest (April), Clarksdale Caravan Music Festival (May), Mississippi Saxophone Festival (May), Ground Zero Blues Club Anniversary Party (May), Goat Fest (June), Pinetop Perkins Foundation Masterclass Workshop (June), Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival (August), Cathead Mini Blues Fest (August/October), Hambone Blues and Art Festival (October), Deep Delta Blues (October), Tennessee Williams Festival (late September/early October), and smaller events throughout the year
Community groups that promote the arts	6	Griot Arts, Crossroads Cultural Arts Centre, Clarksdale Collective, Coahoma Collective, Meraki Roasting Company, Spring Initiative
Tours	2	Robert Birdsong Tours, Billy Howell's Delta Bohemian Tours

Source: Author's Land Use and Activity Survey, 2018

Note: ^aBusinesses may be recorded more than once, according to type of business. Other shops / businesses (15 or so) typically not directly associated with tourism include clothing, footwear, gifts, hairdressers, clothing alterations, a grocery store, etc. Note Hopson Commissary and the Shack Up Inn located on Highway 49, and the neighbouring Shacksdale Motel, also on Highway 49; these businesses are directly associated with tourism. Other businesses exist elsewhere outside Downtown Clarksdale and include Ramon's restaurant, The Ranchero restaurant and Abe's BBQ, and the national chain motels, hotels and fast food outlets located on State Street

of accommodation and in fast food outlets and restaurants on State Street are taken into account, Clarksdale has around 655 jobs or around 12% of its total employment associated with tourism and supporting facilities and services.

The importance of tourism—which is essentially based on *cultural* tourism and supporting facilities and services to downtown Clarksdale's economy—reflects positively on the creative community. Around one-half of the downtown positions associated with tourism are held by individuals who are mainly responsible for the uplift in recent years in the downtown's tourism role. Further indirect (or flow-on) jobs in Clarksdale associated with overall development in tourism are involved in construction trades associated with the on-going repair and refurbishment of buildings in downtown, plus local jobs in wholesaling, service industry, and the like.

Taking into account an employment multiplier of 1.75 (i.e. for every 10 direct jobs, another 7.5 indirect or “flow-on” jobs are created elsewhere in the local, state, and national economies), the 250 direct jobs in downtown Clarksdale that are associated with cultural tourism support an estimated further 190 jobs in the wider economy; possibly 10–15% of these indirect jobs (20–30 jobs) are likely to be located in Clarksdale. Overall, the town has a wealth of arts and related activities, virtually all of which are located in downtown where they contribute to active street life and to business revenues, and add to the town's attractions and amenities. As a result, downtown is enjoying a renaissance in local economic development that is reflected in new businesses, new development, more local jobs and incomes, and a higher level of service for the local community and for visitors. All of this development is associated with growth in cultural tourism.

A full listing of people involved in some way in the “creative” sector in Clarksdale is extensive, and their participation in the revitalisation of downtown is crucial to the renewal that is underway. These include, for example, accountants, tourism administrators, musicians, venue owners, writers, artists, accommodation providers, retailers, real estate agents, bankers, local government officials, individuals in community and economic development, building contractors, museum administrators, edu-

cators, and so on. Particular individuals, for example, include those involved in such diverse occupations as a recording engineer, a maritime engineer, a business consultant, an investment adviser, and a chiropractor. All demonstrate creative characteristics that are reflected in the revitalisation of downtown.

Evidence of the renaissance is found in the types of activities in downtown and their growth over time. In 2001 the only "fine dining" restaurant was Madidi, established by business partners Bill Luckett, Morgan Freeman and Howard Stovall. Together, around the same time, the group launched the Ground Zero Blues Club, a popular Blues music venue which also provides food and beverages. By 2018, a further eight restaurants/dining places had established downtown. Similarly, in 2001 no art galleries were to be found downtown; today, three galleries and the Cat Head folk art store promote Delta art, as do numerous gift shops.

In regard to visitor accommodation, the only establishment in downtown was the 1960s Uptown Motor Inn located in East Second Street, and the much older Riverside Hotel. The Riverside Hotel, located to the south in Sunflower Avenue, was a former hospital for African Americans that was converted to a hotel in 1944; it is steeped in Blues heritage. Today, quality accommodation is now available at The Clark House Residential Inn, the Lofts at the Five and Dime, the Delta Cotton Company apartments above Ground Zero, Chateau Debris, and in several small apartments that include, among others, the unique Hooker Hotel, Delta Digs, the Squeeze Box, Blues Hound Flat and Bluestown Inn. A new addition is The Travelers Hotel in Third Street, originally established in the early 1920s, and recently restored as a 20-room hotel and community space. National-brand hotels and motels are located on State Street, beyond downtown.

In addition, a unique Delta accommodation experience is available five kilometres south of town, accessed from Highway 49, at the Shack Up Inn where visitor accommodation is provided in original sharecropper shacks and in the original cotton bins. The accommodation has been "improved" with the addition of running water, electricity, and air-conditioning, and is a popular place of accommodation in and around Clarksdale. The Hopson Commissary is located next door and is a venue incorporated into the original plantation commissary, plus over-

night accommodation. Across the road—which is the original Highway 49—is the “Shacksdale Motel on Highway 49”, where a dozen or so individual shacks with traditional “shack” fixtures and fittings are also available as visitor accommodation.

All of these new businesses can be counted as the outcomes of creative people and their talent for establishing new or expanded enterprises. These individuals include both long-time residents and newcomers to Clarksdale. The newcomers have largely been drawn to the town by the Blues, having attended events such as the Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival and the Juke Joint Festival, or simply through discovering the place by happenstance. All make a positive contribution to the downtown.

Roger Stolle, for example, resigned from his senior marketing position in St Louis and set up the well-known Cat Head Music, Folk Art and Books shop in Delta Avenue in 2002. As a member of the Clarksdale Downtown Development Association, LLC, Roger is one of the co-founders of the Juke Joint Festival along with Bubba O’Keefe, and is also a co-founder of the Clarksdale Film Festival, as well as having a significant involvement in promoting Blues music through regular contributions via print, radio, and film. Nan Hughes, a long-time Clarksdale resident, is also heavily involved in organising and promoting the Juke Joint Festival.

For Gary and Carol Vincent, originally from around Chicago and more recently in Nashville, Clarksdale was their special destination: Gary, a singer-songwriter, is a sound recording professional and has established the Clarksdale Sound Stage as a state-of-the-art studio in Issaquena Avenue, while Carol is a publisher and a representative of performers in the music industry. Their respective businesses are national in coverage.

Another example is Theo Dasbach. Born in Holland, Theo retired from merchant banking in New York City and Europe and, with his Pittsburgh-born partner Cindy Hudock, decided to relocate his personal Rock and Blues museum from Holland to a suitable locality in the USA. Theo investigated Memphis, Nashville, Chicago and other places with a music heritage, and ultimately decided on East Second Street, Clarksdale “where people are enthusiastic about Blues”. Next door to Theo’s, the Hambone Gallery was established by Stan Street. Born in Rochester, New York, Stan is an artist and musician and plays with his Hambone band most nights.

A recent arrival in town is Deak Harp, a musician from New Jersey via Illinois with a background in farming and the construction industry. Deak arrived in 2013 having visited Clarksdale some 25 years earlier when playing in the James Cotton Band at the King Biscuit Festival in Helena. Deak has his music store in Third Avenue where he sells his hand-made harps, and has also established the annual Mississippi Saxophone Festival with performances from fellow harp musicians, including Paul Oscher, Lazy Lester and Billy Boy Arnold as guests.

Shonda Warner was born into a farming family in Nebraska and, following a number of years in merchant banking and finance in New York, the UK, and Europe, arrived in Clarksdale where she conducted, on an international basis, her rural finance and investment businesses. Shonda established "Miss Del's" general store in Delta Avenue, selling a variety of household specialties in books, homewares and "delectable treats", as well as local produce, including a plant nursery. Shonda contributed much to the town, including funding of the inaugural Clarksdale Film Festival and lending her support to many other local community events and causes. Shonda is also the founder of PORCH (Presence of Rural Cultural Heritage), a "community enrichment program designed to teach career preparedness through project-based learning" and dedicated to "preserving rural cultural heritage" (www.porchsociety.org). Shonda has now relocated to Kansas City.

The Bluesberry Café was established in 2006 by Art and Carol Crivaro from Miami. They first visited Clarksdale in 2005 and, after several more visits, decided to settle in Clarksdale and establish their café and music venue. While the Blues was a significant attractor for Art and Carol, they emphasise the friendliness of local people as the factor that keeps them in town.

Charles Evans, a property developer from Santa Rosa, California, came by Clarksdale in the mid-2000s when he was investigating potential investment properties on behalf of a client, and he could see the development potential in the downtown. Charles purchased a number of buildings, mostly dilapidated and in need of renewal. The Clark House (1859), home of the town's founder and located on the northern edge of downtown, had been vacant for some time; it has now been fully refurbished by Charles and is operating once again as a boutique residential inn. Among Charles' other redevelopments and refurbishments is the building now

housing Levon's Bar & Grill in Sunflower Avenue, together with several other newly restored buildings in Sunflower Avenue and Delta Avenue which will comprise a mix of retail and residential uses.

Another project initiated by Charles and his fellow Santa Rosa resident, Bill Bowker, is Radio XRDS.fm, which transmits blues and roots music from Clarksdale, reaching a global audience through FM radio (see Box 8.1).

Janet Coursin, born in California and living in Boston, decided a new beginning was in order so she left her business management consultancy and spent months traversing the USA in her campervan, seeking the best place to live. As Janet explains, she chose Clarksdale for its climate ("it doesn't snow"), affordable housing, "small business/non-corporate world" atmosphere, vitality and entrepreneurial spirit, combined with community leadership. Today, Janet consults to a list of clients, mainly in small business, located across the Delta and beyond.

John Magnusson, a New Jersey resident looking for a new outlook, came to Clarksdale in 2009 to work on Gary Vincent's Clarksdale Sound Stage. John was soon to establish his place in undertaking the refurbishment of old buildings that appropriately accommodate new businesses. Examples include the visitor accommodation enterprises in East Second Street, namely the Squeeze Box, Delta Digs and the Hooker Hotel, all established by Mark Benson, a resident of Franklin, Tennessee, and a frequent visitor to Clarksdale. John has also established his own visitor accommodation at Chateau Debris on the edge of downtown, characterised by his personal stamp of *debris style*. John has stayed on in Clarksdale because of his "extended family of ex-patriots" and because he gets "to meet the entire planet Earth seven days a week".

Box 8.1 Radio XRDS.fm

Charles Evans and Bill Bowker formed their non-profit corporation "Radio @ the Crossroads" in 2011, and applied for a Low Power FM broadcast license during an "open window" period for new radio station applications that had not occurred for the previous 20 years. The application was approved in early 2013, and Charles and Bill were allowed to choose a radio

frequency from a list of five choices. Among the frequencies available was 88.1, which was the obvious choice as it referenced the first Rock 'n' Roll record, "Rocket 88", accredited to Clarksdale's Jackie Brenston and performed by Clarksdale's Ike Turner.

Although the official call letters are WXXO, Charles and Bill identify the station as XRDS, referencing the historic "'Border Blaster" radio stations broadcasting from just over the border in Mexico, where broadcasters could have 100,000 to 1 million watt stations, while the USA had a 50,000 watt limit. Of course, XRDS is also a reference to the Crossroads where Robert Johnson sold his soul to the devil in return for the ability to play blues guitar. The fabled "Crossroads" of Highways 49 and 61 are located in the Delta, as told in lyrics by Robert Johnson.

In November 2016, Charles and Bill installed the 100 watt transmitter in Downtown Clarksdale in the iconic Bank of Clarksdale building (circa 1910), and with radial coverage of around ten kilometres from Downtown, covering the entire City of Clarksdale.

However, it is through the internet streaming of XRDS.fm that the radio station communicates with blues lovers around the world, telling them the musical history of Clarksdale, the Crossroads and the Mississippi Delta, and inviting them to travel to Clarksdale to experience the town for themselves. Typically, over 100 listeners are streaming XRDS.fm at any time during the day, in 70 or so different countries throughout Europe, North America, South America, and Australia.

Other contributors to downtown revitalisation are not necessarily involved full-time in the conventional notion of "creative arts". Dr. Patty Johnson, for example, is a local chiropractor who moved to Clarksdale from California some 30 years ago. Patty was one of the residents instrumental in setting up the Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival in 1988. She has also been involved in such diverse activities as record production at Delta Recording Service and an organiser of the Clarksdale Downtown Development Association. The Association is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organisation associated with the Juke Joint Festival and the Clarksdale Film Festival.

Another long-time resident, born in nearby Tutwiler, and who has a deep involvement in literary circles, is Panny Flautt Mayfield. Panny is one of the organisers of the annual Tennessee Williams Festival, with Williams' plays performed on the front porches of old homes in the heritage area on the northern edge of the downtown, drawing actors and festival-goers nationally and internationally. The Festival commenced in 1993, while the

Tennessee Williams Museum is soon to open at St George's Episcopal Church where Williams spent much of his childhood. Panny has recently published *Live from the Mississippi Delta* (University of Mississippi 2017), with text from Robert Plant who describes Panny as "a journalist, documentarian, collector of stories and fables ... Her photographs and ledgers are a testimony to the care and love of her peoples, their histories, and their mysterious homeland."

Lois McMurchy, also a long-term resident with a background in education and community development, is closely involved in promoting local opportunities. Lois is the President of the Griot/Meraki Board of directors, a community-based not-for-profit organisation which encourages and promotes opportunities for children and youth from low-income families. Griot has a small sound studio for the benefit of young people interested in music.

Shirley Fair was born in the same street as Ike Turner, and has lived and worked all her life in Clarksdale. For many years, Shirley has been involved as a business proprietor in Issaquena Avenue in the New World. As Shirley puts it: "[W]hen you hear the blues, you hear the story that's not all good, but it should be because you got through something – tears and sweat and hard times and pain is necessary to have the good times." Today, Shirley runs her Ooo So Pretty florist and accessories store and also owns several adjoining properties that she has recently renovated in Martin Luther King Street. She has witnessed revitalisation of the area in the last couple of years, long since its decline in the 1970s and 1980s. Shirley sees the need to do more for the New World precinct, but notes in a positive sense that this is happening with the restoration of the New Roxy and the repair and refurbishment several nearby buildings.

The New Roxy restoration was undertaken by Robin Colonas, a Seattle resident and a merchant mariner who spends her time between navigating freighters on the high seas and her interests in Clarksdale. The New Roxy in Issaquena Avenue in the "New World", south of the railroad tracks, is now firmly established as a Clarksdale venue for live music, film festivals, and community events. Clarksdale-born Ike Turner and Sam Cooke were well-known attendees at the New Roxy.

One business demonstrating particular resilience in downtown is Shankermans Menswear in Yazoo Avenue, a business that celebrates its 100-year anniversary in 2019. As Clarksdale-born Floyd Shankerman

explains in regard to retail opportunities, “[W]e have the properties in downtown; we just need the businesses.” His view on attracting new businesses is that they need to provide a range and quality of merchandise that people are looking for, and with a high level of personal service that the major retailers on State Street do not necessarily provide.

Roosevelt Wallace, a local sign-writer, sees the need to “hold onto this town” and improve social and economic conditions for the community. Roosevelt recognises that the Blues festivals make an important contribution to Clarksdale and the downtown, and sees the benefits flowing to the broader community. He also places emphasis on keeping the place tidy for both residents and visitors—an emphasis that reflects a strong sense of pride in downtown. Roosevelt celebrates what the community has developed over the years, and the way it is now pursuing the opportunities that lie ahead.

Interestingly, a number of Australians have been involved in downtown revitalisation over recent years. Tony Wood, from Melbourne, first arrived in Clarksdale in 1999, attracted by the Blues. After several journeys to Clarksdale, Tony purchased a building located at 332 Delta Avenue with local resident Rosalind Wilcox, an artist and musician. Together, they undertook extensive renovations to the two-storey building, covering some 1000 square metres, which had previously been earmarked for demolition by local authorities. Upon completion, the building incorporated an art gallery, performance spaces, and a commercial kitchen, as well as artist work spaces and accommodation. In 2014, the building was sold to The Education Foundation of America and occupied by the Crossroads Cultural Arts Centre, the purpose of which is to build a bridge, linking local communities and promoting the arts, reading programmes, and music education. In many ways, the new occupant of the building is carrying forward the original concept of promoting creativity in its various forms.

Another Australian involved in Clarksdale's revitalisation is musician Adrian Kosky from the small town of Daylesford, a popular tourist destination in Victoria, and his Memphian wife Carla Linkous Maxwell, also a musician. After several visits to Clarksdale, including participation as an artist-in-residence with Barefoot Workshops (a non-profit organisation involved in recording stories about the South), in 2012 Adrian and

Carla purchased the former Masonic Temple, located on the corner of Third and Issaquena and opposite the historic Greyhound Bus Station. The building is close to 100 years old and is listed on the National Historic Register. As Adrian describes their investment, “[W]e were making a commitment to the town, and to each other, to re-build an empty and weather-worn old building, and breathe life into it and, more directly, to add to the cultural economy of the town.” Tenancies on the ground floor now comprise two food businesses and three residential units, while the upper storey is Adrian and Carla’s residence, as well as a performance space, plus a commercial kitchen and an area for creative pursuits.

An addition to downtown Clarksdale is Meghan Maike, a self-described “Canaustradian”, reflecting her Canadian and Australian parentage. After visiting the “fatherland” in Australia, Meghan, with a friend from New Zealand, embarked on a three-month trip around Canada and America, and—based on a tip from an upstate New York cousin—visited “a little town called Clarksdale”. As they approached the Delta, Meghan commented to her travel companion that “there’s something about this place – I could live here”. But why Mississippi? “Sure, it was lush and green, but the little ghost towns left much to be desired. We pulled in to the Shack Up Inn, and immediately I ‘got it’”, Meghan recalls. She worked at the front desk of the Shack Up Inn and eventually moved into town where she engaged in other small creative businesses including the New Roxy, Oxbow Restaurant and Catering, the Deep Blues Festival, and now Oak & Ivy with the proprietor Erica Eason Hall. Today, Meghan is involved in her own creative works, including sign-painting, hand-drawn cards, seasonal and permanent window painting, and indoor murals. An example of Meghan’s work is the manner in which she transformed several dull bollards in Delta Avenue into a piece of art by over-painting the boring yellow structures with hand-drawn sketches of each of the four Beatles, accompanied by Beatles’ lyrics; a quirky “pop-art” touch in a Blues town.

Johnny Cass and Naomi Gapes arrived in Clarksdale from Sydney where they previously owned and operated a live music venue and restaurant. In 2016, Johnny and Naomi established Levon’s Bar & Grill in a newly renovated building in Sunflower Avenue.

Levon's has proven to be a popular meeting place for the local community and for visitors alike, with Naomi as the owner/proprietor. In 2018, Johnny established the Hooker Grocery & Eatery in a building adjoining the former Big Pink Guesthouse.

Conversations with many local people confirm the strong level of support for downtown revitalisation, whether they are intrinsically involved in some "creative" way or not. Nevertheless, the message has still to resonate with other sections of the wider community. As one resident observed, "Clarksdale needs to know what we've got; the rest of the world already knows." Another comments that "some locals just don't understand about downtown—they ask 'what do you guys actually do there (in downtown):'"

In terms of creative energies in Clarksdale, the entity known as Barefoot Workshops is of special interest. This is a not-for-profit organisation based in New York City which holds annual Documentary Workshops on digital video, film, new media, and the arts in Clarksdale. The organisation's goal "is to create responsible filmmakers who care about the world around them and who make it a point to give back to their communities" (www.barefootworkshops.org). The overall aim is to develop capacity-building in organisations involved in health, conflict resolution, youth empowerment, civic rights, and democracy-building. Each year the Shack Up Inn is booked out for two weeks as workshop participants gather from around the nation and abroad.

Another arts-related organisation is the Berklee College of Music, based in Boston, which provides scholarships for young Delta musicians. A number of young Clarksdale musicians participate in the five-week programme each year. This highly regarded, world-renowned programme was introduced to Clarksdale by Dick "The Poet" Lourie, a Boston-based musician, poet, and retired academic who has been visiting Clarksdale for many years and regularly plays saxophone at Red's Lounge and at other downtown venues.

A more recent "cultural" development is the quirky "Delta Bohemian", a web site at www.deltabohemian.com devoted to the promotion of life and living in the Delta, and established by Billy Howell and Madge Marley Howell, long-term residents of Clarksdale. Billy now operates personalised

guided tours aptly described as Delta Back Road Tours and “celebrating unity and diversity in the Mississippi Delta”. Billy and Madge also provide visitor accommodation at the White House and the Delta Bohemian Guest House in West Second Street, a short walk from downtown.

Other creative individuals have established important community organisations in Clarksdale that are essentially focused on providing support to children and teenagers, especially those from low-income homes, with after-school programmes. These programmes involve Spring Initiative, Griot Arts, and the Crossroads Cultural Arts Centre.

Spring Initiative was established in August 2011 as a 501(c)(3) non-profit organisation providing activities for local children and youth attending school in Clarksdale. In the first year the budget was around US\$60,000, with one-third of funds sourced from grants and two-thirds from individuals. In 2016, the budget increased to US\$450,000 and in 2017 it was in the vicinity of US\$600,000. The community group was set up by two young people who had come to Clarksdale for involvement in Habitat for Humanity, an organisation involved in constructing homes for the poor and under-privileged. Today, eight full-time staff are involved, with co-founders and directors Anja Thiessen and Bianca Zaharescu. They deal on a day-to-day basis with “unbelievable inequalities in this community”, as Anja describes their work, where education standards are low and where kids struggle academically or have behavioural issues. Many have been involved in fronting the juvenile justice system. The focus is on conveying to the children the fundamentals of living, ranging from reading and visiting the library, to sessions on theatre and the arts. They are exposed to the importance of engendering sharing, learning, and achieving academic outcomes that will assist in finding employment.

Griot Arts is another example of a community-based programme provided through a 501(c)3 non-profit organisation that works with under-privileged children. Cali Noland is executive director of the programme, and focuses on creativity as a tool to address community issues among young people and their families. Cali sees involvement in creativity as a “healing agent”, enabling participants to express their feelings in a positive way through music, dance, poetry, and art. The outcome for the

individuals—and some 30 are involved—is growth in self-confidence and a sense of accomplishment.

Griot Arts currently has two programmes, namely the Griot Youth Program (www.griotarts.com) which is an after-school arts programme, and the Meraki Coffee Roasters which engages young persons working in a local coffee shop in Sunflower Avenue (www.merakiroasting.com). Under the stewardship of Ben Lewis, Meraki specialises in the roasting of coffee beans for retail purposes associated with the coffee shop; the shop is staffed by young people from the local community, with the shop functioning as part of a wider programme that supports personal development and work-experience for individuals. The operation is supported by Griot Arts and by the Walton Family Foundation; once fully funded in its operation, Meraki will become a source of funding for other Griot initiatives aimed at supporting community development. A number of the older “Griot graduates” stay on as volunteers to assist in the programmes. “Town hall” meetings, or “circle time”, are held weekly where local youth-related issues and opportunities are discussed. Once per semester the young people are involved in a “service project”, such as collecting rubbish along the Sunflower River. Local artists are being recruited to serve as mentors, showing the participants how to make jewellery, wood-working, pottery, and the like. Financial support for the Griot programmes essentially involves the Walton Family Foundation, local businesses, and individuals.

A recent community organisation to establish in Clarksdale is the Crossroads Cultural Arts Centre, with funding from a number of sources including Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. and Coahoma Community College, grant funds from ArtPlace America, and donations from a number of individuals. ArtPlace focuses its work on creative place-making, promoting projects in which art plays a role in community development, and invokes the work of Jane Jacobs who promoted community development as “holistic”, with art alongside sectors like housing and transportation (www.artplaceamerica.org). The Crossroads Centre, under the directorship of Chandra Williams, celebrates African American arts and history in the Delta, with live music and performance central to the overall role of the Centre. The fundamental under-pinning of the Centre is to promote cross-cultural appreciation through the arts, and with a focus on the African origins of the melodies in Blues and Gospel music. Already, a

connection has been established between the music of Senegal, West Sudan, and the North Mississippi hill country blues recorded by Junior Kimbrough. Recognising that “melodies are vessels of oral history”, Chandra uses music to fill the gaps in African American history in the Delta and with “Blues musicians as modern day historians helping the community to understand their roots” and “reviving African American history for the future”.

A new community-based enterprise in downtown is the Coahoma Collective, LLC, comprising a group of real estate developers, non-profit professionals, and artists who are leading this arts-driven community and economic development project. The Collective concept, described as a creative place-making effort for downtown, is being delivered into reality by Ann Williams, formerly a resident of New Orleans. In essence, Coahoma Collective is based at the former Miss Del’s store, with the premises converted to artists’ live/work spaces, studios, performance space, and community meeting areas. As members of the Collective, the resident artists will manage and operate the 20-room Travelers Hotel in the restored and refurbished Webster’s Building in Third Street. The “re-born” building includes the hotel lobby and a community gathering space on the ground floor where people can meet and enjoy local art, music, and other activities, with hotel guest rooms above. Through this cooperative live/work model, each member will work at the Collective’s seed store and the Travelers Hotel for two or three days a week (covering their room and board costs), while devoting the rest of the week to furthering their personal artistic and community-based interests. As described by Coahoma Collective, “[T]he real gift of this model is reclaimed time and energy that is now available for making art, working with non-profit partners, going back to school, writing a novel.”

* * *

Clearly, the role of “champions” and “creative” individuals is important in the revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale. These people, whether as long-term residents or newcomers, contribute significantly to the development of new businesses and investment, the creation of new jobs, and the introduction of new facilities and services for residents and visitors alike.

While Blues music is a significant factor in attracting new residents to Clarksdale, it is also true that Southern hospitality and friendship is important. As Magdalena Solé (2011, p. 156), a New York-based photographer who has published a photographic essay on the Delta and has visited Clarksdale, explains:

I was drawn to the people I met in the Delta. (They) allowed me to slip into their midst as if they had known me forever; we could swap stories and laughter, sorrow and silence. This happened not just once or twice; it happened every day in every town.

The revitalisation process in Clarksdale's downtown is demonstrating, as highlighted by Landry, that "culture can strengthen social cohesion" among other positive outcomes, not least of which is the development of "new training and employment routes". As an example, the numerous dining establishments that have commenced business since 2001 now directly employ at least 60 staff in food preparation, table service, bar work, and front of house. The majority of these new jobs are held by young labour force entrants from Clarksdale's mainly African-American community. Many more are employed in such diverse but related areas of produce delivery, cleaning, building services, and the like.

The growth in new businesses over the past 15 or so years highlights the point made by Landry that many creative projects are "led by outsiders"—in downtown Clarksdale, approximately 60% of all new businesses established since 2001 are attributable to newcomers. Of course, the contributions by long-term residents are also significant in a small town where opportunities for the development of new enterprise otherwise appear limited. Clearly, the role of "champions" and "creative" individuals continues to be important in the revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale.

While positive efforts are evident, particularly on an individual or personal level, a recurring comment is that organisations in Clarksdale need to more closely align their downtown and community development objectives so that these collective efforts are focused on achieving positive outcomes. In the words of one local resident and echoed by others, "[T]here's no coordination between organisations in promoting downtown and supporting local businesses." And a need to ensure *sustainability* in

funding is another shortfall, according to those involved at a community level, with the further comment that “we need synergies between the various interests in Clarksdale and we need strong leadership and an avoidance of short-term outlooks”.

This aspect of community-wide involvement and support brings us to the topic of planning for economic revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale and the creation of community benefit.



Bluesberry Cafe



Deak Harp's Mississippi Saxaphones



Former Drug Store at Holy Moly



McWilliams Building



Oak & Ivy Flowers and Plants Shop

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9

Planning for Economic Development and Downtown Revitalisation

A number of plans have been prepared for Clarksdale over the years. One such plan was a conventional “urban planning and development plan”, while another documented “first impressions” on driving into Clarksdale. Yet another was an “action plan for downtown revitalisation”.

The “General Development Plan” (Barber 2010) was prepared for the City of Clarksdale in 2010, with the objective of reviewing, revising and updating the City’s planning and development goals and policies, and to provide a vision for the next two decades. This is the most recent plan for the city. The Plan acknowledges the “city’s roots as the Blues capital of the World” and highlights that “the Blues heritage of Clarksdale is one of its most positive cultural assets” (Barber 2010, p. 34). A key finding is that “the entertainment sector of the economy holds strong potential for increased economic activity” in Clarksdale (Barber 2010, p. 36). Furthermore, the Plan identifies that “the tourist resources exist to such a degree and in sufficient concentration to attract thousands of visitors to the City annually” (Barber 2010, p. 64), with such growth reflected in the increase in jobs in the service sector.

Recommendations in the General Development Plan focus significantly on introducing physical improvements to the downtown, including

new street lighting and landscaping programmes. Further, the adopted concept for future development focuses on “industrial accommodation, redevelopment, preservation and tourism” (Barber 2010, p. 40). However, recommendations for the development and promotion of cultural-related enhancements—whether associated with Blues music or other aspects of Delta culture, and which would provide a place-making focus for the town—are missing.

The Plan provides a number of important guiding principles and a strategic vision for tourism, highlighting that the vision “is to build upon the area’s heritage and historic resources to increase tourism and enhance visitor experience by developing new, sustainable and authentic tourism opportunities while enhancing the quality of life of local residents” (Barber 2010, p. 66). One of the principles is to maintain the “raw and organic character” of the tourist environment “consistent with an older Mississippi Delta agricultural community”. This is also emphasised by interviewees participating in the Juke Joint Festival survey (Henshall 2008), with many comments along the lines that they enjoy Clarksdale’s “small, southern town feel”.

Clarksdale’s General Development Plan provides recommendations in respect of improving access routes and wayfinding, avoiding “beautifying the organic context” of downtown, avoiding “overly modern or contemporary” building styles, and ensuring that the Sunflower River is integrated into the downtown area and accessible to pedestrians. These are important recommendations. However, the Plan would benefit from the provision of specific recommendations aimed at actually achieving business growth in the downtown, and in providing specific directions to meet the Plan’s stated goals and objectives. Detail in regard to what the Plan describes as “the entertainment sector” and how this can contribute to increased economic activity would also assist.

The downtown has for a long time lacked an Action Plan or a Development Plan to guide the economic and community well-being of the area. Of course, the existence of a plan, as such, does not guarantee the optimum development of downtown businesses or the provision of services and amenities for the community. However, such a plan, where appropriately prepared with community support and input, would provide guidance for the on-going progress of the downtown, just as a

business plan provides guidance for the continuing development of an individual enterprise.

In 2008, a plan was prepared entitled “Downtown Clarksdale: An Action Plan for Economic Revitalization” (Henshall 2008). The Action Plan was adopted by Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. for implementation, together with other initiatives identified by CRI. The plan contributes to the planning and development of the downtown through the assembly and analysis of statistics on demographic, social, and economic indicators, and an audit of retail businesses and employment. The plan also presents the results of a survey programme involving personal interviews with a sample of attendees at the Juke Joint Festival, and involves in-depth interviews with a wide range of local and other interested parties. An action plan is provided which aims at generating cultural tourism and economic activity in the downtown that flows through to the Clarksdale and wider Coahoma County communities. The plan recognises the very significant role of Blues music and Delta culture in supporting downtown revitalisation.

Box 9.1 provides a listing of objectives for pursuing revitalisation in downtown Clarksdale, and these objectives are sourced from the Action Plan. In the Plan, each of the 14 objectives is supported by a section on “rationale” that underpins the objective, as well as specific “actions” to be undertaken and guidance in regard to “implementation” and the parties who would be involved, such as the property owner and the City and County authorities and other parties.

Another piece of work undertaken in Clarksdale is the “First Impressions” study (Mississippi State University Community Action Team 2008). As described in the Introduction to the report, “First Impressions” is a programme designed to capture the thoughts and feelings of visitors as they observe for the first time the characteristics of a community. A remark by one of the team was that Clarksdale “has so much historical potential that is not being taken advantage of” (Mississippi State University Community Action Team 2008, p. 1), and that businesses do not appear to be marketing themselves to tourists or shoppers, with many buildings lying vacant and in poor condition. Although much has been achieved in the downtown since that report, it is also true many buildings remain empty and are in need of restoration.

In regard to entrances to the city, another remark in “First Impressions” is that the “crossroads” location of Highways 49 and 61

was not very impressive. This is one of the most famous blues locations in the country and there is one sign surrounded by gas stations and vacant property. This could be a real gateway into the downtown area and a monumental tourist attraction on the blues trail. (Mississippi State University Community Action Team 2008, p. 3)

Box 9.1 Objectives in Pursuing Downtown Revitalisation in Clarksdale

Objective 1: Recognise the Importance of Tourism and the Downtown: To recognise the importance of the tourism industry, especially associated with Blues music and Delta arts and culture, as the driving force behind the renaissance of the Downtown as a business centre, and with economic and social benefits for the wider Clarksdale/Coahoma community in terms of creating more investment, jobs, and improved services.

Objective 2: Promote Building Restoration as an Investment: To ensure that buildings in a poor state of repair, but with investment and re-use potential, are restored and refurbished as a priority so that the built form is enhanced and new businesses can be attracted to locate in the Downtown, bringing new investment, jobs, and services.

Objective 3: Address the Need for Area Renewal: To identify those parts of the Downtown that may require physical remediation (e.g. improved street lighting, landscaping of parking lots, safe sidewalk surfaces), but ensuring that the essential small town “edginess” and “feel” which is a feature of the Downtown is not lost.

Objective 4: Identify and Pursue Business Development Opportunities: To build on the significant potential that exists for Downtown business development, especially in terms of attracting to the area new and expanding businesses in tourism, retailing and commercial office activities which are appropriate to a Downtown location.

Objective 5: Encourage Residential Living in Downtown: To encourage the further development of residential living opportunities in the Downtown, having regard for the potential redevelopment of many existing buildings.

Objective 6: Encourage More Visitor Accommodation: To encourage the provision Downtown of a range of visitor accommodation that appeals to visitors, including individual travellers, small groups, and youth travellers.

Objective 7: Target Tourism Promotion and Development: To identify the optimum distribution of tourism funds for promotion and development,

having regard especially for Downtown business needs and the ability of local government to assist.

Objective 8: Apply for Funding Programmes: To identify funding programmes – Federal, State, and Local – which can be accessed for building repair, utilities upgrade, environmental improvement, and business development, and to target these funds at appropriate buildings, localities, and new or expanding businesses.

Objective 9: Build on Inter-Industry and Inter-Generational Links: To identify important links between various sectors (tourism, blues music, and education) so that opportunities for cooperation are strengthened and can generate expanded benefits for the wider community. Build inter-generational links so that Blues music and Delta culture are passed on to the next generation, reinforcing both old traditions and new directions.

Objective 10: Attract as Residents, Creative People and Their Investments: To recognise the economic and social value that new residents bring to Downtown and to Clarksdale/Coahoma, especially in terms of their creative skills and abilities which contribute to the strengths of the Downtown economy.

Objective 11: Provide a Central Focus Downtown for Delivery of Tourism Services: To recognise the value to tourism and businesses in having a central focus in the Downtown for the provision of tourism services associated with attracting visitors to the Downtown and supporting local businesses.

Objective 12: Encourage Community Support for Downtown Revitalisation: To re-acquaint the Clarksdale/ Coahoma community with the very special and appealing attributes of the Downtown, thereby encouraging a high level of community support for the personal and organisational efforts, financial expenditures, and other commitments that will be required in achieving the wider benefits associated with Downtown revitalisation.

Objective 13: Ensure Good Management and Implementation: To ensure that an appropriate management structure is in place to guide and direct the Downtown revitalisation efforts, and to ensure that the underlying recommendations for Downtown revitalisation are implemented as a matter of urgency.

Objective 14: Address Education, Health, and Other Urgent Fundamentals: To pursue excellence in the provision of a wide range of community services, especially in education and health, so that Clarksdale/Coahoma can attract the families and investments and businesses that are important in underpinning the economic and social progress.

Source: Henshall (2008)

However, the contentious issue that lies behind discussion on the “crossroads” revolves around whether or not this is *the* location in the longstanding fable associated with Robert Johnson and his deal with the Devil, with Johnson exchanging his soul for the gift of playing blues guitar.

In reality, the location of the intersection of Highways 49 and 61 has changed over time as Clarksdale's urban area has expanded and as highway alignments have moved beyond the urban fringe in the form of bypass routes. In any event, reference to the "crossroads" in Blues lyrics is a popular reference to life's choices; it does not necessarily apply just to Clarksdale.

"First Impressions" recognises that out-of-centre development on State Street "has pulled resources and businesses from the downtown, causing it to suffer" (Mississippi State University Community Action Team 2008, p. 11), and suggests that incentives for attracting new businesses to the downtown should be offered. Positive aspects include the Blues heritage (emphasising that "your niche is already here"), historic buildings, attractions for tourists, and positive attitudes and progressive minds. The "First Impressions" report identifies much of what ails downtown Clarksdale, and reinforces the analyses and recommendations in the 2008 Action Plan. Importantly, "First Impressions" also recognises the strong potential for renewal of downtown activities with an emphasis on cultural tourism.

A regional perspective is provided in the publication prepared by the Delta Centre for Culture and Learning (DCCL) at Delta State University and titled *Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area Management Plan* (2014). A National Heritage Area is defined by the National Park Service as "a place designated by the United States Congress where natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally significant landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography" (DCCL 2014, p. xvii). In the Management Plan the Delta is described as

the land where the Blues began, where Rock and Roll was created and where Gospel remains a vibrant art. It is an agricultural region where cotton was once king, and where 'precision-ag' rules today. It is a place that saw the struggles of the Civil War and the cultural revolution of the Civil Rights Movement. It is the home of the Great Migration, and a land of rich culinary, religious, artistic and literary heritage. (DCCL 2014, p. 2)

The 18-County region in the Mississippi Delta was designated by the US Congress as a National Heritage Area in 2009, recognising the Delta's role in "shaping the nation's character and culture" (DCCL 2014, p. 4). Goal #4 of the Management Plan is to "contribute to sustainable economic development through activities that will strengthen local and regional economies"

(DCCL 2014, p. P 55), and five strategies with associated actions are identified to achieve this goal. The actions include, for example, the documentation and publicising of the economic impact of heritage and heritage tourism, the provision of support to the development of cultural and heritage-based businesses, acting as a clearing house for grants and sponsorships that support Delta heritage, and advocating for wayfinding signage, increased visitor accommodation, visitor centres, and rest areas (DCCL 2014, p. 55).

Importantly, the Management Plan highlights the need to document the economic impact of culture and heritage in the Delta (DCCL 2014, p. 200), and points to a number of areas where positive outcomes have been achieved, ranging from the Mississippi Blues Trail markers and Blues Festivals, to cultural and heritage tourism, and jobs created through historic preservation. Clarksdale is identified as a town “engaged in revitalization efforts”, and noting that investments in culture and heritage in revitalising communities should be tracked (DCCL 2014, p. 201). The Management Plan also highlights that “the Delta has historically high rates of unemployment and households living below the poverty level” and therefore “increasing employment through the tourism industry and the creative economy would be a step in creating a sustainable economic climate” (DCCL 2014, p. 211).

Another regional perspective is provided by the Delta Regional Authority (DRA). The DRA is a Federal/State partnership established by Congress under the Delta Regional Authority Act (2000) and is charged with enhancing economic development in the Mississippi Delta region, which encompasses 252 counties and parishes across eight States. The DRA prepared a report on the economic prospects of the Delta, including areas located in Mississippi, in a publication entitled “Rethinking the Delta – 2008–2013 Regional Development Plan – A New Economic Model” (DRA, 2008).

Although the Development Plan was prepared some ten years ago, it is worth re-visiting. The theme which underpins the Plan is that

[t]he counties and parishes served by the DRA must approach economic and community development differently than in the past. Development is no longer about industrial parks, industrial recruitment and the quest for just any job. Today’s development is a function of local leadership that builds on a community’s attributes, fields of competitive workforce and attracts private investment. (Pete Johnson, [then] DRA Co-Chairman, covering letter accompanying the Plan, June 2008)

The DRA Plan (2008, p. 1) identifies that

[e]conomic development programs that encourage individual rural communities to offer cheap land, buildings, and labor have proven ineffective. To compound the problem, there are fewer and fewer prospects seeking industrial sites ... [Moreover,] without the ability to retain and attract talent, the region will continue to decline.

The Plan poses the question: “What attracts and retains talent?”, and with the response that it adds up to one thing: quality of place. The Plan emphasises that “quality of place” means providing options for people. The DRA plan provides a strategy for overcoming the negative growth prospects that otherwise would apply to the Delta, and focuses on education, health, information, transportation, leadership, and the like. The DRA’s assessment is encapsulated in the observation that

adopting the philosophy of quality of place will be crucial to (the) long-term economic competitiveness of Delta communities. Communities must invest in the amenities that will make them more attractive to new residents if they are to survive. (DRA 2008, p. 36)

The (then) Federal Co-Chair of DRA observed in the report that leadership is important: “With no leadership, visions or plans for growth, these communities will continue to struggle.” To reinforce the point, the DRA (2008, p. 101) plan states that

if small towns and rural communities do not actively attract and retain talented workers (they) will decline at an even faster rate.

The DRA’s plan sets out an approach to regional development for the Delta communities as a whole, while individual plans have been prepared for each of the eight States involved. The “2016–2019 State of Mississippi Delta Region Development Plan” emphasises the nature of the overall issue: 228 of the 252 DRA counties are classified as “distressed”, including 43 of Mississippi’s 47 DRA counties (Mississippi Development Authority 2016, p. 5). These distressed counties are characterised by below-average income, higher-than-average poverty, and below-average

educational achievement. Small communities are typically suffering from out-migration, declining tax bases, and eroding infrastructure. Coahoma County, in which Clarksdale is located, is one of these distressed counties.

The Mississippi Plan highlights that economic development should be community-based and should emphasise local decision-making (2016, p. 15). This is a readily supported position, having regard for the way that Clarksdale is revitalising its downtown, with support from local government, CRI, and other stakeholders keen to foster local economic development. However, the extent to which approaches in fostering such development are integrated is another issue.

In 2017, a new partnership between the DRA and global non-profit Operation Hope, Inc. provides access for low-income families and small businesses to a US\$500,000 programme aimed at improving financial literacy education and entrepreneurial training. The funds are available in rural communities in Mississippi, Louisiana and Tennessee, serving more than 3000 individuals and businesses. In essence, the programme provides “financial wellbeing coaches” in specified communities (Tate and Tunica counties in Mississippi, in the first instance) to provide one-on-one counselling and mentoring to assist people in managing money and credit, and helping business start-ups and development. The programme also includes community outreach, education and workshops, and networking and entrepreneurial training.

In a broader context, the DRA is supporting the promotion of the Delta region as a prime destination for international and domestic travellers, noting that these visitors “will shop, eat and stay in our communities if the infrastructure and opportunities to do so exist”, and that jobs supported by visitor expenditure “are meaningful in the overall growth of our region and especially impactful on smaller communities” (DRA, “Promoting Tourism & Cultural Economy” 2018, p. 1).

At the local level, an initiative undertaken in Clarksdale and Coahoma County in recent years was the Delta Bridge Project (which also focused on Phillips County in Arkansas). This community development project commenced as a partnership between the Walton Family Foundation and Southern Bancorp, together with Coahoma County. The Delta Bridge project involved a proactive approach to addressing issues in the

surrounding community where poverty and unemployment rates are high. Five main areas of activity in the project involved housing, health, education, leadership, and economic development. Preparation of the Strategic Community Plan concluded in 2011 and provided the basis for identifying new projects for funding and community support. The Walton Family Foundation continues to play a role in strengthening communities in the Delta, both in Mississippi and in Arkansas.

In terms of public sector support, local government has contributed to the promotional and other efforts of the Coahoma Tourism Commission and the Chamber of Commerce and Industrial Foundation. State government has also been supportive by making available assistance programmes to local businesses and through the resources of bodies such as the Mississippi Development Authority, particularly in a tourism development and promotion context. The Federal government has been supportive through the s501(c)(3) tax exemptions for “non-profit” organisations, and through the broader efforts of the Delta Regional Authority which is funded through a Federal/State partnership.

While this public sector support is important to Clarksdale’s downtown, the reality is that most efforts associated with downtown revitalisation and cultural tourism continue to involve the initiatives and investments of local individuals and local businesses.

Although the efforts of individuals are important, it is also necessary to have in place an appropriate organisation that can steer downtown revitalisation activities in a constructive way. The Main Street model (National Trust 2009) is high-profile in terms of downtown organisation, with the Main Street Program providing a franchise-approach in developing and supporting the local body. A fee is payable when a Main Street programme is established and as the individual components on marketing, business development and so on are introduced. Others promote a “stepped” or sequential approach in getting the overall revitalisation process underway, and this is exemplified in work undertaken by the Brookings Institution (Leinberger 2005) where a 12-step linear process towards achieving downtown revitalisation is highlighted, as earlier mentioned in Chap. 2.

However, the “organic” approach adopted in Clarksdale is considered appropriate, having special regard for the enthusiasm with which local people supported the concept of establishing a new organisation, and which is not an arm of local government. Clarksdale Revitalization Inc.

was established in 2008 through a process of community consultation and discussion, involving two public meetings and a call for nominations for the inaugural Board, and with the involvement of prominent local residents. Mac Crank was employed as the Co-ordinator, with skills in marketing, events promotion and management, and community organisation. An action plan was adopted for implementation (Henshall 2008), together with initiatives identified by the Co-ordinator and the Board, with a focus on the goal of developing downtown businesses and promotional events, and with an emphasis on tourism and economic development.

CRI operates as a 501(c)(3) or “not-for-profit” organisation (Internal US Revenue Code 2012), which means contributions are tax-free and this status enables the organisation to apply for grants and other supporting programmes. CRI is funded through contributions from the City of Clarksdale, Coahoma County, and other supporters.

During the early years of operation, CRI introduced a number of initiatives that have contributed significantly to downtown revitalisation. Underpinning CRI’s approach are economic development considerations, including investment incentives, infrastructure upgrading, amenities development, branding and marketing, and placing emphasis on the development of cultural tourism. The primary objective is to return downtown to its place as the cultural and civic centre of the community.

One of CRI’s first initiatives, under Mac Crank’s stewardship, was to have the downtown Census tracts re-defined by the US Census Bureau. This boundary change allowed the downtown area to be more representative in a socio-economic sense compared with the former situation where the well-established residential area immediately to the north of the commercial precinct was included; this inclusion effectively contributed to higher “average” incomes in the downtown. In reality, the commercial precinct located south of the railway tracks was characterised by very low incomes. As a result of the initiative to re-draw the Census boundaries, CRI could apply for the “new markets program” which provides opportunities for tax credits as investment incentives in low-income areas.

CRI has embarked upon numerous other projects. Significant among these is the Sunflower River Reclamation Project and Weir Construction

which involved works to enhance the river banks and the construction of a weir so that the higher water level can enable boating and other activities on the river and recreational uses along its banks. The Recreational Trails Grant has been implemented in conjunction with the weir project and involves a hiking and biking trail along the river. A recent project is the establishment of the Cultural Heritage Trail, which has received funding from the Mississippi Transportation Commission and from the City. This project involved the identification and marking of a cultural heritage walk along the downtown footpaths, highlighting Blues Trail markers, historic markers, and Walk of Fame plaques, and other buildings and sites that are important for their cultural and historic place in the downtown.

Other projects include the Clarksdale “Branding” project which involved the erection of banners displayed in downtown streets with the message: “Clarksdale: Keepin’ it Real.” This branding approach focused on cultural tourism as the economic engine for the downtown and for the City and County at large. CRI is also involved in Business Recruitment, which involves the on-going task of attracting business investment, focusing mainly on small businesses in retail and in hospitality, including cafes and restaurants.

CRI further developed its programme of assistance to small business in 2016 and 2017 through the promotion of entrepreneurship, innovation, branding, and marketing. This support is delivered through small business development programmes, with guest presenters from organisations that include the Delta Regional Authority, Carl Small Town Centre and successful business owners and innovators.

In 2017, the City commissioned Clarksdale resident Richard Bolen as a consultant to develop a website and provide contributions supporting local economic development in downtown. Bolen has a background in high-tech marketing and software development, and with previous involvement in the entertainment, healthcare, and real estate industries. He prepared the Clarksdale website which provides comprehensive links to the town’s history and its focus on arts and culture, together with information on local and district attractions, lodging, dining, and other features (www.cityofclarksdale.org).

Although Bolen’s contract with the City has expired, he continues to promote the highlights of the city, county, and wider Delta through his

own website (www.clarksdaleneews.com). The goal for Clarksdale News is to identify Clarksdale as an arts & culture community, with a focus on “remarkable, talented people from the past and those who live here today”, as well as highlighting the town as an affordable place to visit and come to live.

As part of the branding of downtown, Bolen has also developed some 80 downtown street signs that promote the artistic and cultural roots associated with Clarksdale and its place in the Delta. Honourees include musicians, civil rights campaigners, athletes, educators, and community advocates. As reported in an interview with Aallyah Wright from Mississippi Today (www.mississippi.org), Bolen emphasises that “this project is not just for the sake of tourism, attracting African Americans, or economic development, but it is also for the sake of social development and equal rights”, which he notes might be more important than anything else associated with the new signage.

Local business people express the view that many opportunities exist for small enterprise interests to work together more closely and to implement an integrated programme of support and encouragement for new start-ups and existing businesses. For example, vacant buildings could host pop-up shops. But opportunities need to be well-publicised. As a case in point, probably few people are aware of the incubator programme that operates in premises on Highway 49, on the southern edge of town. Similarly, some observe that relatively few local business people are aware of the mini-grant programme introduced in 2016, with small grants of around US\$250 each for use in printing of brochures and other marketing initiatives and the like. The need to align the vision of all players in business development also needs to be assured, including CRI, the County and City, Tourism Commission and others, according to local interests.

Despite many efforts focused on business development, it is also observed that most attention is focused on the well-established part of downtown to the north of the railway tracks. In contrast, little effort appears to be invested in the New World, south of the tracks, which has been the focus for the African American community for generations. The long-proposed development of a Civil Rights museum on the site of Aaron Henry’s pharmacy in the New World appears to be many years

away from achievement, judging by the rather limited level of public funding so far achieved, as indicated by the “donations” signage on the site. The development of such an attraction is supported: “if we want to move forward in regard to civil rights, then we need to tell the story”, says one local business person.

* * *

Clearly, a considerable volume of professional planning work has been undertaken in the past decade or so that spells out Clarksdale’s opportunities to develop its downtown into a vibrant centre for locals and visitors, with a common theme centred around Blues, arts and culture. Local and regional plans and development assessments highlight these opportunities, and they emphasise the role of local initiative in “making things happen”.

However, the need to “reach out” to local business is also highlighted, with a number of business owners observing that no one in local government has actually approached them and enquired about their needs to develop business opportunities. Again, the comment arises: “how do I start a business? No-one knows how to advise me!” Local banks also come in for a serve: “[T]he banks don’t get it – we need input from people with a *business* sense.”

Emphasis is also placed on the need for local businesses to work more closely together and to promote an integrated programme of support and encouragement for local enterprise, old and new. Again, it is commented by local business interests that the community needs to align with the vision of those organisations involved in local development and to indicate how their individual roles can be pursued in an integrated manner such that businesses, community representatives, and city-wide organisations are all pulling in the same direction.

And a most compelling view is that the New World area, south of the rail line, needs attention and investment from those interested and involved in downtown development, particularly in regard to reflecting African American interests and cultural attachments associated with this significant locale in the wider Mississippi Delta context.



Greyhound Bus Station Restored



Vacant shops in The New World

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10

Community Views on Downtown Revitalisation

Viewpoints of Clarksdale residents and business people, including newcomers to the town, provide insights into how people regard Clarksdale, the efforts to revitalise downtown, and the place of Blues music and Delta culture in promoting and encouraging tourism.

These viewpoints are drawn from the author's discussions with individuals representing a cross-section of the retail and commercial business sector, property development, finance, education, local government, community development, and tourism. Topics range from the local economy, investment trends and downtown revitalisation, to community attitudes, education, labour skills and community development, and the vision individuals have for the future of their downtown.

To quote one new resident to Clarksdale, "[A]ttitudes to downtown are as varied as there are numbers of people living here."

Local Economy

In regard to the local economy, the consensus view is that, over time, Clarksdale's economic base is changing. Although agriculture and manufacturing continue to be important industries in terms of output and

employment (and noting that the number of jobs in each sector is slowly declining), the main industries are now in the tertiary or service sector and this includes an increasing role for cultural tourism and the many businesses that tourism supports.

Agriculture is identified as the mainstay of the local economy and the Delta generally, but this sector continues to undergo restructuring, with increased levels of volatility and risk. For example, Ron Hudson, the former (now retired) Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce and Industrial Foundation, observes that the switch away from cotton and to soybeans, corn, and other grains in recent years due to movements in market prices has adversely impacted on Clarksdale. In this context, cotton requires more investment and servicing in terms of equipment, ginning, fertiliser, insecticides, storage, and the like compared with the grain crops; thus, a reduction in the land area under cotton leads to a reduction in spending on these numerous supporting components, and this contributes to a decline in local revenues for the businesses involved as local suppliers.

Manufacturing has also been important in Clarksdale's economy, although as one observer notes: "It's difficult to attract new manufacturing industry here as this is a small Delta community." Others point to the lack of a well-educated workforce and a lack of work ethic as significant constraints on manufacturing growth. However, others have expressed the view that "if there's a poor work ethic, it's because there's a lack of education; a lack of education breeds a lack of hope".

The closure of manufacturer Metso in late 2016 due to a worldwide downturn in the mining industry and the loss of some 60 local jobs was a blow to the community at a time when it is increasingly difficult to attract manufacturing and other investments to the Delta. In a broad sense, the difficulty in attracting investment is explained by many as a reflection of the local education system. As Census data shows, the proportion of persons aged 25 years and over in Clarksdale who have a Bachelor's or higher degree is just 19.5% compared with the national figure of 29.3%.

A leading industrial investor in Clarksdale commented that "in terms of economic geography, we have been extremely blessed here, with the Mississippi River on our doorstep, a transport hub in Memphis, proxim-

ity to the Gulf of Mexico, especially using the Mississippi River for access, and an excellent climate – so what holds us back? It's the human equation, and that's due to social conditions, especially in education and in historical social attitudes and obstacles."

With the closure or downsizing of some manufacturing firms, numerous local residents support the view that "tourism is a big industry now and we need to support it" and that "tourism is now recognised as an 'industry' by the City and the County". This reality is observed through the contributions local government makes to the operation of CRI and the contributions to projects such as the Cultural Heritage Trail, the upgrading and improvement works along the Sunflower River, support to shop façade improvements, the downtown signage project focusing on Clarksdale's icons in art and culture, and the like.

Downtown Trends

In past times, downtown was a vibrant place in which to operate a business, have a job and visit for shopping, entertainment, and other interests. This strong recollection of the earlier vibrancy of downtown is important insofar as people recognise the potential that lies ahead for downtown to generate more business activity and jobs and to re-claim its role as the centre for the community. In broad terms, people recognise that out-of-town commercial developments and the loss of 'anchor' retail stores from downtown have contributed to current conditions of low trading levels. And now they also see the 're-birth' of downtown.

One long-term resident observed that "downtown was a vital and vibrant place in its heyday, with the Alcazar and the McWilliams buildings, many shops, lots of people shopping and enjoying the downtown", and that "[y]ou'd have to drive around the block 4 or 5 times in the old days, just to find a parking space". Today, the Alcazar hotel and the McWilliams building remain vacant, but each (sporadically) is undergoing rehabilitation and restoration for a range of potential new uses.

An African American storekeeper noted that "Martin Luther King Street and Issaquena Avenue in the New World were very active; you couldn't drive there at the weekends because the streets were so busy. But

today, there are only a handful of stores". This "New World" located south of the railway line is slowly undergoing regeneration, with the New Roxy former cinema now in use as a performance/music venue and with a number of nearby dilapidated premises having been restored for occupation by businesses.

A main cause for the decline in downtown activities is attributed to the establishment of Walmart on State Street, three kilometres away. As a resident observes, "it was always busy downtown before Walmart established out on State Street", leading to the situation in which "over the years the downtown area declined in activity, especially about 40 years ago. Stores closed or moved away to State Street".

Some point to the decline in specific downtown businesses: "Major stores have closed, like Woolworth and JC Penney and auto sales, as have medical services and some offices that are now focused around the hospital." Associated with the decline in shops was "the loss of fine dining downtown, and growth in fast food on State Street". Not surprisingly, the "focus in activity shifted to State Street, and many shoppers also began to visit more distant places like Memphis, Greenville and Jackson".

One resident described the situation thus: "[D]owntown was cold and dead in the 1990s; it died at sundown when people went home from work." However, most residents note that the downtown is now coming back to life. "The situation is now slowly changing with new places to eat downtown." The addition of Stone Pony Pizza, Yazoo Pass, Levon's Bar & Grill, and Our Grandma's House of Pancakes have all added new dining appeal for local residents, especially those with young families, as well as places for visitors to frequent. As one person summed up, "There's a buzz in downtown now; things are happening."

Significantly, many recognise the 're-birth' of downtown and the high level of new energy is due to "new people with new ideas on business and development of downtown". They observe that "[t]he renaissance in downtown happened because many newcomers to town recognised the beauty of Clarksdale – they found freedom in their creativity here". This is a continuing theme: the importance of creative people concentrating their investments and efforts into new businesses which are typically associated with Blues music and Delta culture, and building on opportunities generated by growth in cultural tourism. As a result, "[c]ompared with a decade or so

ago, Delta Avenue is now full of cars most nights; we need to get Yazoo Avenue just as busy.” This is now happening, with the popularity of Yazoo Pass and Bluesberry Café, which are relative newcomers to Yazoo Avenue.

While downtown redevelopment and renewal is evident, many continue to observe that “we need more choice in retail goods and services on offer in the downtown”, noting that “many local people don’t shop in the downtown” and that “for big ticket items, local people seem to prefer to shop elsewhere, even if we have it here”. Others comment on the fact that many stores remain empty: “Store fronts in downtown need to be occupied and busy”. Approximately 40% of premises in downtown are empty, and many of these are dilapidated and in urgent need of repair.

Numerous solutions to the lack of activity in downtown, while acknowledging the recent “comeback” in downtown visitation levels, have been offered by local residents. Several comment that “development in downtown needs to tie in with the Blues heritage”, while others see the need “to acquaint tour groups with what’s available here in the downtown shops and galleries – they don’t know we exist”. An increase in downtown residential living is also highlighted: “Opportunities exist to substantially increase the number of people living downtown. This brings life to downtown”, and “more people living in the downtown will help to support more restaurants, grocery stores and the like in downtown”. Still others see a need for Clarksdale people “to support the downtown with their shopping”.

While this focus is on downtown, it is noted that Kroger, the principal supermarket in Clarksdale for 75 years and operating on South State Street since 1987, has now closed, evidently due to a continuing decline in profits, according to the president of Kroger’s Delta Division (press release 15 December 2017). This closure of a long-standing, major business in Clarksdale reinforces the whole question of “just where does Clarksdale’s future lie, and how can we reinforce new and positive directions?”

Physical Environment of Downtown

The physical environment of downtown has drawn consistent criticism over the years, but this has also led to the identification of opportunities for improvements and enhancement. People are critical of the

broken pavements and the derelict and vacant buildings, and point to poor lighting and signage. Others want to see the downtown retain its dishevelled appearance and not to “slick-tify” [sic] it, but to keep the charm. “We don’t have to be a quaint New England town.” Others want to see new development and the refurbishment of buildings in the “New World” south of the railway tracks, noting that “this is where the Blues began”. Many look for the assurance that downtown will not lose its “Southern flavour” or become another Beale Street, which is the highly commercialised tourism precinct in nearby Memphis that is largely associated with music. Others want to avoid a ‘Branson’ lookalike—the town in Missouri that has re-built its economy based on attracting fans of popular music to the many individual theatres where middle-of-the-road entertainers regularly perform, and where “shops sell Toby Jugs and rude T-shirts”, as one observer describes downtown Branson.

A number of the observations about the physical condition of downtown have been addressed in the several years since CRI was established and as downtown has become more popular among residents as a place to visit and spend some time. Old buildings continue to be restored and refurbished, with a number of them undergoing renovation at any one time. Action is also being taken to make entry points to downtown more attractive, especially with the removal of rubbish and derelict structures. The New Roxy building has been refurbished as a performance space, and is a popular venue, even with a roof that only covers the bar and with the main venue remaining un-roofed; the venue is unique. Improvements are planned for the cemetery on Martin Luther King Street. A ‘Kaboom!’ children’s playground and an open-air stage have been constructed at the corner of Martin Luther King Street and Sunflower Avenue. The Sunflower River has undergone improvements which include the construction of a weir in order to raise the river level so that recreational activities can be facilitated. And sidewalks and street lighting have been improved.

Pavements have been re-constructed in the block bounded by East Second Street, Third Street, Delta Avenue and Yazoo Avenue, although the engineering outcomes fell somewhat short of intentions, and underground street lighting was unintentionally severed for a period of time. The works involved the removal of street trees and this was not univer-

sally appreciated by many in the community. New planter ‘boxes’ have been introduced amid much community discussion in regard to style and colour, and noting that the boxes comprise unattractive sections of old concrete culverts; these have now been painted.

For many years, the Christmas decorations have been hanging from the overhead power and lighting poles in the downtown and included cute ‘snowflakes’; most of the year-round decorations were removed by the local Council but, in so doing, caused dismay among many townsfolk who enjoyed the rather quaint touch that the décor added, year-round, to downtown.

Overall, people generally want to see physical improvements to the downtown, but without losing the very charm and edginess of the place that makes it so attractive, especially having regard for Clarksdale’s legacy in Blues music and the contributions downtown has made as a centre for community activity over generations.

Empty Buildings and Downtown Improvement

As one observer notes: “Investment funds are available here from local firms and residents. But people need to be convinced that there’s a market for their investments, and that there’s a financial return on their investment.” Another comment is that “[s]ome people here in Clarksdale prefer to invest out of town, like buying a condo in Oxford”.

Others highlight a need for “banks to be able to devise a loan program to assist start-up businesses in the downtown or to assist in funding the refurbishment of buildings” and “a need for incentives to attract business investment here and to fix old buildings”. A criticism is that local banks “just don’t get it” in regard to the opportunity to provide loans that promote local business investment and the refurbishment of old downtown buildings.

The fact that so many empty buildings exist downtown (four in ten buildings are vacant) is a matter for concern. “Clarksdale has it all – we just need to attract investment and businesses to the empty buildings.” In some cases, empty buildings exist, but are not available for sale in the marketplace. “Empty real estate that’s not for sale doesn’t help the busi-

ness image of downtown”, a resident observes. This is an important consideration, noting that “people coming here seem to prefer to buy a building, not to rent or lease one, so buildings need to be available for sale”.

As for involvement in the wider redevelopment of downtown, many regard the private sector “as doing all of this”, and a view that local government does not achieve what potentially could be achieved. The outcomes associated with new sidewalks confirm this view in many eyes, where recent sidewalk reconstruction was, initially, less than desirable as street drains flooded and street lights were rendered non-operational.

Investment Availability and Business Opportunities

Numerous opportunities for investment and business development in downtown Clarksdale have been highlighted by residents and business people. However, they also identify circumstances where funds are not necessarily being invested locally, with a consequent loss in local opportunities for new and expanded businesses and employment. As noted earlier, some local residents would prefer to purchase a residence in Oxford, for example, rather than invest in Clarksdale.

The high incidence of vacant buildings in downtown is noted, as well as the opportunities these present for refurbishment and to accommodate new businesses, building on local entrepreneurship.

The link is also made between the need to have a good quality public education system as a feature in retaining existing families and in attracting new families who can contribute to the business scene with their investments and add their strengths to the labour force. Others comment that “property here is very cheap, and the cost of living is low. But we need to improve public schools if we are to attract young families.”

Others emphasise that “if we don’t have the businesses, we won’t attract the people”. Clearly, the prospects for economic and business development in downtown are intertwined with considerations of education and labour force standards. As a resident sums up the situation, “[W]e have

the locational and other attributes to attract more business, but education and training for the work force is critically important in achieving this.”

Entrepreneurship and New Business Opportunities

Tourism is highlighted by numerous Clarksdalian as a significant component in the development of new and expanded businesses in downtown. Others see an opportunity to attract those businesses into the downtown that both local people and visitors need. “Having a mix of businesses in the downtown is important in attracting people and contributes to the success of the area.” Suggestions include promotion of dining that has the ‘feel’ of the Delta and not a chain, wider trading hours for restaurants, the opportunity for an internet café, a bookshop, bike rentals, a youth hostel, and greater promotion of the long-established cinema. As one person summed up the situation: “[W]e need places to sit and relax in the downtown.” In very recent years this has been achieved with the development of businesses that include Yazoo Pass, Stone Pony, Levon’s Bar & Grill, and Our Grandma’s House of Pancakes. And the cinema in Third Street now hosts the annual Clarksdale Film Festival in January.

Another observer describes the attraction of downtown: “[I]t has huge potential for small business owners who have a creative edge and are willing to take a risk.” As another expresses the situation: “[I]t’s all here. It just needs organising and promoting.” The need for marketing is highlighted, with suggestions including advertising in popular publications and on billboards, the need to take a regional approach in promoting business, and the opportunity to sell Clarksdale and its opportunities to markets outside Mississippi. Web sites and even radio programmes that target the international visitor are highlighted as necessities.

Regarding radio programmes, an initiative of Charles Evans, a property developer involved in rejuvenation of derelict downtown Clarksdale properties, together with North California DJ, Bill Bowker, is the new

internet radio station, XRDS.fm, described earlier. The radio station broadcasts from downtown, 24 hours a day, featuring artists from the Mississippi Delta and the Mississippi Hill Country, as well as R&B and Americana. As the listening audience via the internet is across the globe, XRDS.fm brings downtown Clarksdale to a universal market.

Others in town see hurdles to overcome. The seasonality associated with tourism-related businesses is an issue, with visitation declining in the winter months. Other issues are connected with the need to develop entrepreneurship for minority groups and to introduce courses in setting up and running a business. Former CRI consultant, Tim Lampkin, recognises the importance of relationship-building between businesses and service providers, and the need to ensure that the ‘vision’ of all parties involved in downtown promotion and development are in alignment. This is not the case at present insofar as many entities pursue similar ambitions but in a freehold manner, without coordination of their common interests.

Local ambassador for entrepreneurship, Janet Coursin, a Clarksdale resident formerly from California, notes that local businesses may generally be good at attracting investment dollars but do not necessarily consider the sustainability aspects that ensure a *continuation* of business activity. Janet also sees the need for leadership to ensure synergies between community leaders—officials, businesses, and the wider community—are enhanced and working to the same positive ends.

Locally, a view that a pre-occupation with “politics” prevails means efforts are typically short-term rather than looking to the longer-term future. However, the efforts of community groups like Spring Initiative, Griot Arts, and Coahoma Collective are highlighted as positive in terms of encouraging a sense of community and promoting personal initiative and development among the town’s youth.

Blues Music

Blues music is the essential focus around which much of the renewal in downtown development has taken place over recent years. The positive link between Blues and tourism is supported by most of those with an

interest in downtown revitalisation and in community development, and particularly by those actually involved in businesses aligned with cultural tourism.

One local property developer observes that “we need to see Blues as the industry we can develop, and the benefits will circulate to the rest of the community”. Another comment is that “promotion of tourism and the Blues will get attention for Clarksdale and the Delta and attract new investment and business”. All of this is based on an appreciation that “Clarksdale needs to play to its strengths, including blues music”. Essentially, “we have it (Blues) here; we don’t have to invent it – we just need to preserve it and promote it”.

Recognition of the popularity of the Blues element in tourism is also highlighted: “[E]arly blues fans coming here were like hippies – now they drive BMWs and have credit cards” and “Blues fans today could be college professors!” Many observe that the Blues music scene in Clarksdale has expanded in recent times in terms of the actual number of events, venues, musicians, and supporters. “Fifteen years ago or so there wasn’t much live music in Clarksdale – mainly only on Friday and Saturday nights at Ground Zero. Nothing much at Red’s, and only on a Thursday at Sarah’s Kitchen. But now there’s a lot more to see and hear.” Today, Blues music is playing somewhere in town every night of the week, year-round, involving Ground Zero Blues Club, Red’s Lounge, the Bluesberry Cafe, Hambone Gallery, the New Roxy, and Levon’s, among others. In addition, out on Highway 49 a few minutes’ drive south from downtown, live music is provided at the Chapel at the Shack Up Inn and at Hopson’s Commissary.

Others observe that “some in the community don’t recognise the asset we have here in Blues music”. One frustrated resident exclaims: “they just don’t get it; they don’t understand that Clarksdale has the Blues asset to promote and build upon”. Most agree that “we must promote the history of the Blues here, with WC Handy and others”, and that “we must support local businesses that are wanting to breathe life into downtown”.

Another perspective is that popular blues and related events are “episodic”—the Juke Joint Festival, for example, is very popular but it only takes place once a year, and that “what we need here in Clarksdale is more industry” that operates daily, throughout the year. While the need to

continue to promote the growth of manufacturing in Clarksdale is well-recognised in the community, the reality is that cultural tourism is the generator of downtown development and renewal, as witnessed over the past 15 years, and this has promoted Clarksdale as a city of note, globally. Significantly, the promotion of tourism, particularly blues music and Delta culture, has brought growth in hospitality services, new attractions and events, and more downtown employment. Moreover, downtown development in recent years provides an expanded level of personal service for local residents who now frequent downtown cafes and restaurants, for example. Not long ago, Delta Amusement in Delta Avenue was the only place in downtown where one could take a meal, typically eggs and bacon, with coffee; the only dining option was to drive out to State Street where the (mainly) global fastfood eateries have located. Of course, this is not to overlook the cultural value of such eatery-icons as Ramon's located on Oakhurst Avenue since 1945, Abe's Bar-B-Q which established in 1924 and is located at the historic 'crossroads' of Highways 49 and 61, and long-established The Ranchero on North State Street.

Creativity and Living in Clarksdale

A significant theme emerging from local discussions is that creative people make an important contribution to the revitalisation of downtown Clarksdale. This contribution is well-recognised by those involved in downtown businesses, venues and property development, and in local government.

"Creativity" can be difficult to define. Nevertheless, most people recognise that developments in downtown in recent years have been undertaken by, or are associated with, individuals who can be described as "creative". These are the individuals with an insight into what makes for an attractive outcome, ranging from successful businesses to successful community development programmes and the introduction of street art. In regard to street art, Clarksdale in September 2018 hosted its inaugural Paint the Town festival, with Colombian artists as special guests.

"Success" need not be measured just in dollars, but in providing a service that people find of value, interesting, engaging and informative. It could be

a music venue, a gallery, a dance studio, a café. It could be a grant writer, attracting funds for local development. It could be a writer of fiction or travel blog. It could be the local accountant, a banker, a health-care professional, a building contractor, or the owner of a recording studio.

Those who are involved in the downtown, or who visit and spend time there, recognise that individuals, or groups of individuals, are key to the revitalisation efforts that are underway.

One long-time resident notes that “the renaissance in downtown happened because many newcomers to town recognised the beauty of Clarksdale—they found freedom in their creativity here”. Another comments that “once the artists start to move in, the community blossoms”. An artist, new to Clarksdale, notes that the town “is so accommodating to the artist’s frame of mind – not only musicians, but painters, writers, gallery owners, and others”. Another newcomer mentions that “I looked for somewhere to live and to set up a business that has tourists and a music connection and where people are enthusiastic”. A musician, also new to town, mentions that “story-telling and an appreciation of creativity is a feature of this place”.

Long-term residents also recognise the contribution of “creative” people in downtown revitalisation. As one business owner comments, “[W]e need to continue to attract ‘creative people’ here – writers, musicians, culinary chefs.” Another resident involved in the local community emphasises that “we need to expose these creative people who are not yet living in Clarksdale to the opportunities to be enjoyed here”.

A real estate agent notes that “people are coming here looking for a place to stay downtown and maybe the opportunity to set up a business. Some have bought property in the residential areas and undertake their (national or international) business by internet.” This pattern is also a reflection of the situation in which “senior management and professional workers tire of working in the corporate world in big cities and are now seeking new opportunities”, as one former senior management-now-small-business-owner mentioned.

The overall situation is summed up by the newcomer to downtown Clarksdale who comments that “it’s all about getting a business, a place to live and having the time of your life”. This view is confirmed by another who observes that “fifteen years ago people would ask of newcomers: ‘Why would you move *here*?’ It’s obvious now!”

In most cases people are attracted to come and live in Clarksdale for the town's association with Blues music, the opportunity to establish a new business and to invest in property, the ability to spend time with old and new friends, and to enjoy the liveability and ambience of downtown.

On the social side, a downtown resident observes the community as follows: "A snapshot of a regular dinner party in Clarksdale will show people ranging from 25 to 70 years of age, and ranging from born and bred Clarksdale natives, to Canada, Australia, Germany, or domestically, New Jersey, Seattle and California. What we bring to the table is our unique experiences and our shared love of this town."

Others note, however, that although "a new type of person is moving here to live, we're losing our younger couples with children, especially those who can't afford the private school education costs". That comment is also a reflection of the poor state of public education in Clarksdale. Another view is that "people leave; they go to Tupelo and Jackson, for example, for work and higher pay". Oxford, just an hour's drive away, is also a popular place for families to move to, with its array of quality facilities and amenities, especially in education.

On a positive note, a newcomer to town describes the community: "Clarksdale needs every single one of its citizens. It needs our renewed efforts at growth, and each of our perspectives to improve it. This is a place where I have found a sense of belonging and purpose more than anywhere else on the globe."

Another resident says "I call Clarksdale a 'Choose-Your-Own-Adventure' town, where you can have an idea and make it happen. You can be anything or try anything and, if it's a good idea, it'll be backed by the whole community, both with patronage and support."

A cautionary note is sounded: "[W]e need to be careful when we talk about 'culture' as part of business and enterprise development – what is positive in terms of 'culture' for one group may be negative for another." This comment needs to be kept in mind as downtown continues to redevelop and attract new businesses, new residents, and more tourists. The very essence of what makes downtown so attractive needs be carefully considered in the revitalisation process so that the attractive features are not lost, but are sensitively built upon, complemented, and enhanced.

Community Organisations

Several community organisations have established in downtown over the past decade and, as noted, these include Griot Arts, Spring Initiative, Crossroads Cultural Arts Centre, and Coahoma Collective. These organisations provide important services in education and community activity, focusing on low-income families, particularly African American children, “offering a sense of hope in people’s lives” as Cali Noland describes the role of Griot Arts.

Spring Initiative is now well-established in Clarksdale as a community organisation and is well-regarded for its importance in supporting youngsters and older youth. One senior Clarksdalian observes that “this is the children of the Blues today, and they’re at risk unless we work with them and support them”. In this context, Spring Initiative is “dealing with unbelievable inequalities in this community”.

Most of those involved in Spring Initiative came to the group via Habitat for Humanity, another organisation involved in local community work, namely the construction of dwellings for low-income families.

Across Clarksdale, these community groups are held in high esteem for the benefits they have brought to the city, especially with after-school programmes. The groups are non-profit 501(c)(3) organisations, but they also depend on community contributions. Their ongoing financial viability is a concern for many.

Leadership and Community Support

Leadership is of paramount importance in small town development and revitalisation. The leadership is typically formal, in the sense of local government’s role, but it should also involve the private sector and community interests.

Based on interviews with a broad cross-section of the downtown community, it is observed that the County and City administrations are co-operating more than in previous times: “[W]e now see increased cohesion and integration between County and City.”

Others are of the view that not enough is being done to actually assist downtown businesses and property owners in terms of addressing even day-to-day issues, such as ensuring the new sidewalks are actually constructed in a proper manner, and ensuring that local enterprises receive the support they seek in business development. Local government intentions are good, they say, but many see little action actually underway to enhance downtown in a sensitive manner, true to Clarksdale's small town image. This is a strong view held in some quarters that others may dispute, but the viewpoint is highlighted here as a matter of record.

Two entities are important in promoting development in Clarksdale and the wider community, and these are the Chamber of Commerce and Industrial Foundation and the Coahoma County Tourism Commission. Some downtown business people are of the view that the Chamber has a traditional focus on manufacturing and agricultural activities, and that it focuses on the interests of those members to the omission of tourism. Others are of the view that the Tourism Commission should promote all tourism businesses and not just the premier attractions of the City and County.

Jon Levingston, a Clarksdale resident of some 35 years, is the new Director of the Clarksdale-Coahoma Chamber of Commerce and his role is in promoting economic development in the community, including a focus on attracting new industry, as well as retaining existing businesses (Delta Business Journal, December, 2017).

As a matter of record, a local view is that the City and County need to spend more time and effort in actually becoming familiar with individual downtown businesses, assisting and promoting them where possible, as well as continuing to promote the overall importance of Clarksdale and the County as a location for investment, including investment associated with cultural tourism and the downtown. As a number business-owners have commented, no-one in local government has asked them what they might need to ensure their businesses can prosper.

A firm view is that "everything that's been achieved in projects in Clarksdale has been achieved by 'independents'; it's all *individuals* who make this place work." "Individuals have to go it alone" in getting things done; "if there's a problem, just *fix it!* I'm tired of all this shilly-shallying about who should do what to get things done." While such statements

could be construed as representing the views of disgruntled individuals, enquiries among many of those involved in downtown activities indicate that they have to “go it alone” in achieving the outcomes they seek.

Others note that little investment has gone into the New World area which comprises the largely African-American business area. The irony is that the New World is where most of the juke joints were located, historically, and which generated the strong Blues legacy that downtown now promotes, but with today’s investments and activities mainly focused north of the railway. This situation is now being addressed in a positive manner with developments that include the Cultural Heritage Trail, the construction of the weir on the Sunflower River which enables more recreational opportunities to be provided in this area, and the development of the nearby sound stage and KABOOM! children’s playground accessed from Sunflower Avenue. In addition, private sector efforts involving the restoration of the New Roxy, now a very popular venue, and individual buildings in this area are highlighted as positive outcomes for the New World precinct.

Over the years, a lack of community support for downtown’s operation and its general welfare may have reflected poor economic conditions and the decanting of downtown businesses to out-of-centre locations on South State Street. It is now observed that individuals are increasingly important in undertaking the refurbishment and renewal of old downtown properties that previously lay in a state of disrepair. These restored buildings are then made available to accommodate new and expanding businesses in the downtown. This movement has been supported by CRI and in conjunction with individual property owners. The wider community generally now observes these positive changes, and lends support to the movement for downtown revitalisation.

A degree of criticism is directed to the community interests in some cases. As one senior business person commented, “different bodies are involved in planning festivals and other events, and there are turf wars. We need to close the gaps and all pull in the same direction.” Another comments that “there are many factions in Clarksdale’s business and tourism sector, and the friction hurts the ‘big picture’ – we need a new line of communications here, as we are otherwise driving wedges between ourselves”. The comment was also made that “we need to get

more community support so that the people themselves become part of the solution in revitalising the downtown". Tellingly, it was recorded that "Clarksdale needs to know what we've got; the rest of the world already knows", and "Clarksdale has to start believing in itself".

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Consultation with local interests shows that Clarksdale residents are generally aware of underlying change in the local and wider economy, especially the changing nature of the agriculture and manufacturing sectors where employment opportunities are slowly declining. They also see the importance of the tertiary or services sector, with an increasing share of jobs in health, education, and other services. While many support the growth of cultural tourism, especially through Blues music, some residents have their doubts about this potential in Clarksdale. This situation points to the need for a promotional programme aimed at communicating to the wider community the achievements in downtown revitalisation and the positive contribution of Blues and other aspects of Delta culture.

The introduction in late 2017 and in 2018 of informative and colourful street signage that promotes the artistic, cultural, sporting, and civic achievements of individual Clarksdalian is certainly a huge step forward in this regard (www.cityofclarksdale.org).

Overall, many viewpoints on the existing and likely future role of the downtown have been forthcoming from a wide range of individuals living in Clarksdale. Some of these people have lived in Clarksdale for generations; others are newcomers. The over-riding conclusion is that people generally agree they want to see Clarksdale and the downtown succeed as a place to live, shop, do business, spend time with family and friends, and attract tourists and other visitors.

However, despite wide community support for downtown, some residents remain unconvinced that it can ever return to its former glory as a vibrant and thriving commercial centre. This situation is evident in public comments posted on the website of the Clarksdale Press Register in response to articles about proposed or suggested new

developments or local issues. As an example, the newspaper reported on a homicide case in which two men were shot and killed in a downtown club that, for some time, had been the focus of local protest in terms of the club's operation and management. A number of comments were posted, with one stating that "as the article mentioned downtown apartments, I can't help but wonder besides some naive [sic] bluesheads who would want to live there? ... downtown has very few amenities to offer potential residents."

In that regard, increasing numbers of apartments and condominiums have been built in the downtown in recent years and they currently number some 45 units; plans are in place for more of this type of residential development. Bringing visitors and residents into downtown is an excellent way to support local accommodation, with enhanced accessibility to services and attractions, and providing the all-important function of improved security through passive surveillance as people actually stay in and around the downtown. The increase in food and beverage places complements this growth in downtown residential and visitor accommodation.

Individual scepticism about local development prospects is common to most communities, universally, and Clarksdale is no exception. This situation highlights the need to address criticisms in a positive manner so that the community can understand and appreciate the benefits associated with downtown development and cultural tourism. While noting the criticisms that are made in some parts of the community, the downtown is, once again, a vibrant place and is progressing after years of complacency and decline. Downtown now provides the base for a wide range of new and expanded businesses, and improvements continue to be made in the provision of facilities and services across the fields of music, art, literature, history, cuisine, and community interests. All of this effort is helping to create new businesses and new jobs. The genesis for much of the progress is the development and promotion of cultural tourism which, in turn, is built upon the significant legacy of Blues music over the past 100-plus years. The "champions" and "creative people" have been instrumental in leading this revitalisation in downtown Clarksdale activities, and with the support of the wider community.



Cutrer Mansion



East Second Street

11

Clarksdale's Experience in Downtown Revitalisation: An Overview

Clarksdale's experience in downtown revitalisation over recent years generates numerous lessons that can be applied to other small cities and towns where the downtown, or town centre, is exposed to change. This is particularly the case where such centres need to "revitalise" their roles and outlook for development in meeting community needs and also attracting the economic contributions of tourists and other visitors.

These lessons range from the need to involve the community and to gain the support of local government, through to getting a Plan in place and encouraging a new and informed local attitude to economic and community development. It is also critically important to ensure the supporting infrastructure exists or can be readily developed, ranging from visitor accommodation, restaurants and cafes, to venues, museums, gift shops, and the like.

For those involved in downtown and activity centre renewal and re-growth, the lessons from Clarksdale should not be news; however, the lessons do reinforce the importance of supporting local champions and creative people, attracting community and local government support, having an Action Plan in place, and ensuring the implementation of initiatives that improve the economic, social, and physical conditions of downtowns and city centres.

In Clarksdale's case, a wealth of arts and related cultural activities had developed over many generations, and this was clearly evident in the strength of downtown as the focus for the community. However, over the past three or four decades new and emerging trends in agriculture, business location, and consumer interests resulted in the decline of the downtown, a loss of business and other activities, and a loss in employment and declining levels of service.

Clarksdale is now enjoying a renaissance in local economic development, as reflected in new businesses, more local jobs and incomes, and new and refurbished premises. Downtown investment is on the increase. And a new and diverse range of quality facilities and services is now available for the enjoyment of both residents and visitors.

Although much has been achieved in Clarksdale over a relatively short period of time, a number of issues remain. In particular, an important area for concentrated attention is the need to improve education levels and to enhance workforce skills in the community. This is important if the resident labour force is to be sufficiently educated and skilled to move into new employment opportunities that emerge in tourism, hospitality and other professions, and in trades and services generated by downtown revitalisation. An improved educational system that provides quality schooling opportunities will also assist in attracting young families to take up residence and also assist in retaining existing families.

Moreover, these benefits associated with downtown revitalisation, especially the job opportunities, need to be available to all in the community. As a priority, information about achievements in these areas—ranging from increased levels of downtown development and jobs, to improved outcomes in education and workforce skills—needs to be conveyed back to the community. This will assist in engendering further community support and, most importantly, assist in developing “home-grown creative people” who can continue the efforts to revitalise their community, just as the efforts in Clarksdale are demonstrating.

Revitalisation of Clarksdale's downtown commenced in earnest in the early 2000s, and this was mainly the result of initiatives by local business people injecting new investment and thereby “re-booting” the local economy so that further opportunities for local business, jobs and services might be created. During the past 15 years or so, many new

businesses and other activities have located in the downtown, with many associated with newcomers to Clarksdale, attracted by the town's heritage in Blues music and Delta culture. Today, around 60 downtown buildings, businesses, events, and cultural activities are associated with music and culture, with some 75% having been established since 2000.

Significantly, this revitalisation movement has taken place without reference to the writings of contemporary scholars such as Richard Florida or Charles Landry, who are exponents of the "creative class" and the "creative city", respectively. Clarksdale, as a case study, is therefore an illuminating one, as it assists in our understanding and appreciation of the importance of fostering "creativity" in our communities, and without necessarily developing and implementing formulaic recipes for success. Downtown Clarksdale has been successful in regenerating its economy essentially through local efforts aimed at building on the resources at hand, focusing on Delta culture, tied in with Southern hospitality. The resourcefulness of local people has been of utmost importance in fostering this revival, including the efforts of both long-time residents and the many newcomers from other parts of the nation, including those coming from abroad to contribute to, and enjoy, the experience.

While Clarksdale presents as a special case in the context of culture, creative people, and downtown revitalisation, the lessons associated with this revival are transferable to other communities where a particular feature or characteristic can be identified as the focus around which revitalisation efforts can be structured and promoted.

Strong community support is essential, especially where the creativity of individuals can be captured, whether they are involved in the so-called creative industries, such as music, literature, and art in Clarksdale's case, or in a supporting role as individuals with enthusiasm and foresight, and lending support with expertise in such diverse areas as law, property and construction, trades, hospitality, public administration, and so on.

In essence, when seeking to revitalise downtown, it is a matter of building on local attributes, recognising people's creative capabilities and enthusiasm, and achieving ongoing community support and encouragement.

12

Lessons in Downtown Revitalisation for Small Cities and Towns

In many ways downtown Clarksdale is an exceptional place where creative people and their talents contribute to local economic development, building largely on the association with Blues music and the promotion of cultural tourism. For example, no other cities or towns in the Mississippi Delta today have such an investment and deep ties with Blues culture. Certainly, significant cultural attractions exist in other cities, but Clarksdale has the Blues and other cultural assets in abundance.

Although Clarksdale is “exceptional” in many ways in terms of underlying factors that support new economic growth, the lessons that flow from the downtown experience are applicable to other small cities and towns. Indeed, the lessons are applicable to places that may have quite different foci for development, but which have the underlying ingredients that contribute to economic and community development.

Examples where small Delta cities and towns have built their downtown economic revival on particular themes or investments include Cleveland (home of Delta State University and now the location of the only Grammy Museum outside of Los Angeles), Indianola (BB King Museum), Vicksburg (Civil War battlefields), Tunica (casinos, outlet

shopping and a major expo centre), and Batesville (located just east of the Delta on Interstate 55, this is a major regional distribution hub and business centre).

However, smaller towns surrounding Clarksdale have not fared so well, and examples include Friars Point, Mound Bayou, Shelby, Rosedale and Tutwiler, among others. These smaller towns do not have the in-place history and infrastructure that Clarksdale has retained over the years, and they have very largely lost their economic role and function as centres. This does not mean the smaller towns are devoid of heritage: indeed, places like Tutwiler and Rosedale feature prominently in the history of generations past. However, they have not generated the critical mass that Clarksdale has achieved in respect of the development and promotion of the contemporary Blues scene, linked with cultural tourism.

Furthermore, these smaller towns have not been able to develop an industrial base, and many have experienced a loss in their service provision, such as the loss of downtown retailing to out-of-centre retail developments (as in Clarksdale's case) and to other larger centres such as Cleveland and Greenwood. In some cases, small towns continue to function through their commuter dormitory role, such as Merigold and Sumner, but their service roles are minimal.

In Sumner's case, the town now highlights its historic role in civil rights history in regard to the Emmett Till case, with a new and informative visitor centre that provides background to the ground-breaking 1950s civil rights case, as well as providing public access to the original court house in the Sumner town square.

For Merigold, one visitor-related business remains in downtown: Crawdad's, a steak and crawfish restaurant; the only other downtown business appears to involve a motor mechanic and repair shop. Similarly, Helena—located on the Mississippi River in Arkansas—lost its principal role in Mississippi River-related trade and commerce, and much of the downtown is now derelict, although efforts are underway to achieve economic revitalisation; for example, the Delta Cultural Centre has now established a firm presence in downtown, and two restaurants and a general store have opened in Cherry Street in very recent times.

Although Clarksdale is exceptional in its attachment to the Blues and Delta culture, the lessons from this downtown are applicable in other

small cities and towns where a particular asset or theme or other characteristic can be identified and capitalised upon. This will assist growth in downtown business investment and jobs to be achieved, and generate benefits for the wider community. Lifestyle considerations are also important in this context, as noted in the lessons that follow.

These lessons are identified for other small cities and towns taking on the task of promoting revitalisation of their downtown or activity centre. As a guide, the ten essential do's and don'ts for downtown Clarksdale are highlighted in Box 12.1. In the Action Plan (Henshall 2008) from which these “essentials” are sourced, guidance was provided in regard to specific objectives, actions, and responsibilities involved in implementation.

Lesson 1: Identify the Importance of a Particular Asset, Theme, or Other Feature upon Which Economic and Community Development Can Be Pursued

In Clarksdale's case, this “asset” is cultural tourism which is an expanding sector generated by the promotion of Blues music and other elements in Delta culture. This development underpins the continuing renewal of the downtown and contributes to the wider social and economic prosperity of Clarksdale. Cultural tourism is as a growth sector, nationally and internationally, and in Clarksdale's case at least 132,000 visitors arrive each year, mainly visiting downtown. The number of visitors is increasing, with conservatively low forecasts indicating that downtown could attract around 170,000 visitors, annually, over the five years to 2023. Further growth will come as new attractions are developed, possibly ranging from African American heritage and Southern culinary features, to travel associated with Highway 61 as the “Blues Highway”, and the Delta's association with the Civil War and with Southern literature. Potential also exists to promote effectively into the casino market where well over one million visitors to nearby Tunica and Lula are on the “door step” to Clarksdale. Capturing even a small percentage of these casino patrons would mean a significant increase in visitors and their expenditures in downtown Clarksdale.

The underlying lesson in this case is that the downtown has been able to build on its Blues legacy, steeped in the toil, hardship and struggles of Delta life over many generations. Benefits are emerging for downtown businesses and for the wider community in terms of more investment, more jobs, and improved services and amenities.

The question arises: what is the particular asset, theme or other feature that a small town might identify and pursue, just as Clarksdale has identified? It is of interest to note the achievements of a number of small towns located in the state of Victoria in south-eastern Australia. For example, Daylesford (population 2600 persons), located 90 km north-west of Melbourne, has developed as a popular “retreat” from the city, with visitors experiencing the local history steeped in the 1850s gold rush story, a wide range of overnight accommodations, cafes and restaurants, galleries, specialty shops, walking trails, and the like. And the town is just minutes away from Hepburn Springs, Australia’s largest concentration of mineral springs and spas, and where the renowned Lake House Hotel, Restaurant and Spa draws visitors from around the nation and internationally. Some 20 or so years earlier, Daylesford was struggling in economic terms, with many residents travelling to the nearby regional city of Ballarat for their weekly and other household needs, and with few tourists attracted to the town and district.

Beechworth (population 4300 persons) is another small town that has built its visitor economy on the historic 1850s gold rush era, with attractive heritage buildings featured in the town centre, along with a range of cafes, restaurants and specialty shops, magnificent walking trails through the Woolshed Falls area, the historic Burke Museum and, of course, the renowned Beechworth Bakery. A generation ago, the town was best known as the location of the Beechworth Mental Asylum and the Beechworth Gaol; much has changed in the interim, with the town now attracting around 600,000 tourists a year. Beechworth is located 286 km north-east of Melbourne.

Castlemaine (population 6800 persons) is another example of a small town—located some 125 km north-west from Melbourne and 40 km from the regional centre of Bendigo—that has progressed from the gold rush days to become a popular destination for visitors attracted by the main street heritage and range of specialty shops, cafes and restaurants, and access to features that include the Castlemaine Art Museum and

the Theatre Royal, which claims to be the oldest continuously operating theatre in mainland Australia.

Clunes (population 1750 persons), located 140 kilometres north-west of Melbourne and first settled by Europeans during the 1850s gold rush era, is an interesting small town. In contemporary times, the town's main role—apart from functioning as a small rural service centre—was associated with the establishment of the Wesley College campus for Year 9 students; Wesley is the nation's largest co-educational private school. More recently, since 2012, Clunes has become renowned as a “book town”, one of around 45 such towns internationally, and the first town in the Southern Hemisphere to be so designated. Today, Clunes is described as a “book town all year round”, with an annual book festival that attracts 18,000 people, writers' workshops, and the like, and has what is described simply as a “disproportionately high number of bookshops”.

Port Fairy (population 3340 persons) is located on Victoria's famed Shipwreck Coast, approximately 290 kilometres south-west from Melbourne and on Bass Strait. The town boasts wide streets, nineteenth-century architecture and old stone churches, coastal and heritage walks, and is internationally renowned for the Port Fairy Folk Festival. The festival commenced in December 1977, literally “on the back of a truck”, and in 2018 listed over 120 acts, including international, national and local performers. Since its inception, the festival has hosted over 2000 acts involving some 8000 artists.

A conclusion to be drawn from an appreciation of small towns in the State of Victoria and their particular “asset, theme or feature” is that people in the towns have reflected on their local history, built on local and regional attractions, and established ongoing events. Promotion of these features attracts visitors and new residents to the towns, supports local businesses, and generates new opportunities for investment in sectors that range from retail and hospitality to overnight accommodation and dwelling construction.

In regard to small town development, an issue arises as to how the special features of a town are recognised and supported by local and State authorities in the wider context of fostering tourism and economic development. These authorities have a responsibility in regard to ensuring the conservation of assets of note, ensuring those assets are suitably maintained

by their owners or custodians, and assisting in the promotion of the particular asset or feature to the wider community and to visitors. While much of the “asset development and maintenance” will be the responsibility of the private sector owner, local and State authorities still have a responsibility to encourage appropriate development, especially where a “private asset” is situated in the public realm and contributes to a “sense of place”.

Lesson 2: Support and Encourage the “Champions” and “Creative People”

These are the individuals who provide the momentum to drive the revitalisation movement. In the Clarksdale experience, these individuals have emerged in an “organic” or un-orchestrated manner, either as long-time residents or as newcomers to the community. These are the individuals who seemingly emerge at the right time, in the right place, and certainly have a body of knowledge and skills to draw upon in fostering local development.

The “champions” are the individuals who provide inspiration and leadership, and give direction to the overall revitalisation process and engender community support. A wider group of individuals comprise the “creative people” who invest their funds, business acumen, time and effort into developing new and expanded business opportunities and they contribute to initiatives that bring a net benefit to the community. One does not have to be a musician, an artist or a writer to be creative: the Clarksdale experience shows that many people in day-to-day positions—from building contractors and health care providers, to teachers, lawyers and accountants and those working in cafes—can be creative through their own ideas, enthusiasm and support to downtown revitalisation. Also important is the recognition that newcomers to town can infuse creativity into the local economy through their business and other interests. Of those involved in some 50-plus existing creative business pursuits in downtown Clarksdale (including events, venues, retail, and the like), 60% are “newcomers” to town, attracted by the Blues culture and by business and lifestyle opportunities.

Champions and creative people bring leadership to the community. They know how to network the community, attract investment funds and seek out grants. They provide advice on potential development opportunities, they support others in creating or expanding their own businesses, and—through their successes—they provide the “demonstration” effect that encourages others to invest in their own creative ideas and businesses, including building repair and refurbishment.

These innovative and creative community leaders are the ones who contribute to the “creative city”. They are drawn to cities and towns that demonstrate vitality and opportunity. In the Clarksdale case, they see opportunities in the old buildings available for redevelopment, the relatively low property rents and purchase prices, the Blues music and culture, the positive prospects for developing a new business, and the city’s proximity to metropolitan Memphis.

Lesson 3: Get Organised and Generate Community Support

Clarksdale Revitalization Inc. was established with a Board representative of downtown and local community interests, and the Board employed a co-ordinator to manage the organisation and to seek out and encourage new opportunities for downtown investment and promotion. Strong support for the establishment of CRI was forthcoming from the City and County local governments, and from businesses and other interests ranging from the regional hospital and the Delta Blues Museum, to many local firms and individuals. Newspaper articles focused on CRI activities and highlighted events and other activities that contribute to downtown development.

While community awareness of Blues music and its contribution to the local economy has further developed over recent years, it is also true that many Clarksdale residents still do not appreciate this important contribution. The promotion of community awareness in regard to the value of cultural heritage and tourism as drivers of local economic development, business investment and jobs is therefore an ongoing task for those involved.

Lesson 4: Ensure Everyone Is Reading from the Same Page

Everyone needs to be “in synch” in terms of wanting to achieve the same objectives and outcomes from the revitalisation efforts. This means coordinating various interests so that a well-supported and organised annual events programme is in place, “bringing all parts of the jigsaw together”, ranging from museums and galleries to businesses, libraries and schools, with all parties contributing to the “whole”.

Any “turf wars” between competing interests seeking to attract tourists or wanting to take different roads to revitalisation need to be overcome in the interests of having a coordinated approach in contributing to the development of the local economy.

Lesson 5: Prepare a Plan and Build a Data Base

“We know what we want, but we don’t have a plan”, was the call at the first public meeting in Clarksdale which led to the establishment of CRI. As a result, the Action Plan for Downtown Revitalization 2008 was prepared, and the Plan and other development-related initiatives were adopted by the new Board.

A Plan is important as it guides local government, informs individual investors and business people, and provides an overview of where the community wants to head in terms of revitalisation. Ideally, a Plan to revitalise downtown should encourage a positive and progressive attitude to economic and community development, and recognise and build on cultural tourism or some other appropriate element around which a theme can be developed for year-round promotion and local development.

The Plan should include a data base that identifies, over time, changes and trends in population levels and key socio-economic indicators, important industry sectors, employment trends and so on, with all of this information contributing to an appreciation of the revitalisation task.

In addition to published data, it is important to gather community viewpoints and this can include sample surveys and one-on-one personal

interviews with local government, businesses and other service providers, and members of the wider community. Economic assessments for the retail, tourism and property sectors, as well as identification of key issues, challenges and opportunities, are also important matters for inclusion in the Plan. Multiplier or flow-on effects to other local businesses and jobs need to be identified and acknowledged as part of the economic development process.

Monitoring and review of the Plan's progress over time is also necessary in order to keep the data base up-to-date and to ensure the community is kept aware of progress, and has the ongoing opportunity to contribute.

Importantly, preparation of the Plan, alone, cannot guarantee positive outcomes. The Plan needs to be supported by all parties with an interest and involvement in the Plan's over-riding goal or vision, its objectives, and its implementation mechanisms ("who" does "what" and "when").

Lesson 6: Facilitate the Availability of Supporting Facilities and Services

These components range from visitor accommodation, restaurants and cafes, to venues and recording facilities, museums and the like, depending on the features that the city or town is promoting as the underlying basis for promotion and development of the local downtown or town centre.

The precise types of supporting infrastructure and services required will be determined by the underlying cultural or other focus around which the revitalisation programme is centred. This infrastructure—together with retail outlets that include shops, cafes, restaurants and the like—supports the cultural tourism components which, in turn, attract the visitors and their spending, contributes to economic development and jobs, and ensures an enjoyable visit for the tourist. Local residents also benefit from this enhanced level of service provision; they dine at local restaurants and cafes, and enjoy the entertainment and other attractions!

Local government also has an important role, particularly as it is responsible for much of the infrastructure and services that support the

downtown businesses and annual events, and that provide for the enhancement of civic amenities. Local government can also leverage funds from other spheres of government for infrastructure development and services provision. However, in the Clarksdale case funds are relatively scarce compared with local governments in other parts of the nation, noting that Mississippi is the poorest state in the USA and, in particular, Coahoma County is among the economically poorest counties in the State. Encouragement for local investment by the private sector is therefore important in pursuing local development, especially in building repair and restoration.

Lesson 7: Hold Festivals and Other Events

Most communities have something they can “hang their hat on” as the basis for regular events to promote downtown to residents and visitors alike. For downtown Clarksdale, this includes the Clarksdale Film Festival (January), the Juke Joint Festival (April), the Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival (August), the Tennessee Williams Festival (October), and numerous other events spread throughout the year. Around 20 events are on the Clarksdale events calendar each year.

Preparing and disseminating supportive material—including posters, slogans, “must see” lists, visitor maps—is important, especially the task of attracting business sponsorship for special features and events. An up-to-date web site is also very important, together with links to social media, with most travellers using these tools for useful “must do / must see” information. The focus should also be placed on fostering business and jobs growth as an outcome of the efforts to promote tourism and thereby attract “export income” through the spending of out-of-town visitors.

Importantly, the underlying basis for the festival or event needs to be suitably communicated to the local community so that people develop an appreciation of the overall programme, lend their support to it, and can enjoy the resulting benefits of entertainment and service provision. Importantly, festivals and events contribute significantly to a community’s “sense of place”, quite apart from the economic outcomes.

In the Clarksdale context, a young high school student undertaking interviews with Juke Joint Festival visitors from far and wide exclaimed, after recording the positive views of visitors, “Hey, I didn’t know Clarksdale was such a cool place!”

Lesson 8: Recognise the Importance of “Comprehensiveness”: It’s Not Just About “Downtown”

While rehabilitating and renewing the physical form of the downtown and fostering new and expanded business opportunities is important, it is also necessary to ensure that social and economic conditions in the wider community are positively addressed. This need has been highlighted in Clarksdale, especially in encouraging the positive link between achieving improvements in education and finding jobs for unemployed or underemployed residents, and as a means of attracting new investment in industry and other businesses that require a skilled workforce.

As the Census data shows, Clarksdale and Coahoma County rate poorly relative to national statistics in terms of educational achievement and this is recognised among community leaders. While a lack of educational attainment has not been an obvious constraint on downtown revitalisation, the reality is that Clarksdale businesses regularly experience situations where a lack of a suitably-educated and skilled labour force prevails, with flow-on limitations to service delivery in local shops, cafes and the like. This situation has also led to the unwanted outcome in which manufacturing and other firms that would have considered a location in Clarksdale have not been interested to invest in the city.

In this context of “community development”, the lesson is not to lose sight of the needs and requirements of the broader local economy and therefore to avoid focusing on just downtown opportunities. As an example, education is important in supporting the thrust of economic change and the social benefits that flow to this wider community.

The establishment and operation of community-based organisations such as Griot, Spring Initiative and the Crossroads Community Arts Centre

are excellent examples of what a community can achieve for young people coming from low-income families living in economically-depressed parts of town.

Lesson 9: Encourage Building Renewal and Refurbishment

The renewal and refurbishment of once-decaying properties is important in re-establishing a “sense of place” for the downtown. Much of the renewal can involve time-consuming and costly refurbishment and restoration of old buildings, but this can be assisted with access to grants and other funding programmes for heritage conservation.

Access to 501(c)(3) tax exemptions has been important in some cases for not-for-profit entities in the Clarksdale case. In some cities and towns, Main Street and other programmes place a high value on heritage refurbishment, and this is evident in Clarksdale’s own façade improvement programme. Local examples exist where individual property owners recognise the value of heritage and take steps to conserve these important elements. However, in many cases the refurbishment of buildings has taken place without specific financial inducements other than tax exemptions.

It is fortunate in Clarksdale’s case that over the years many downtown buildings have been retained in their historic built form, as no incentive existed in previous times to redevelop the properties in a more contemporary architectural style; instead, the focus was placed on new business development out on State Street, some 2–3 kilometres from downtown. As a result, downtown Clarksdale now has the opportunity to authentically re-present its late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-century built form and cultural heritage to new generations.

Importantly, the authentic “small town” ambience and appeal should be retained, especially as this feature cannot be replicated in modern shopping centres and malls. Property renewal also supports local building trades, and generates jobs and incomes. Over time, property values increase and local government rate revenues expand, thus providing increased levels of funding for community projects and services. In Clarksdale, around ten

or so buildings are undergoing renovation at any given time, and they accommodate new and expanding businesses, community activities, and residences.

An important requirement in regard to the renewal and restoration of buildings is the need to attract the input of skilled and semi-skilled tradespeople and other service providers. In Clarksdale's case, skilled workers can be difficult to find and retain, as highlighted in local consultations. Clarksdale as a community needs to address this wide area of skills shortages, just as it needs to address issues associated with a generally poorly-performing school and higher education sector, as earlier noted.

Lesson 10: Encourage the Growth and Viability of Existing and New Businesses

Small businesses are typically the mainstay of a downtown economy and they provide jobs and services to the local community, as well as providing services for tourists and other visitors. Encouraging new businesses to establish in the downtown is instrumental in helping the up-take of vacant buildings. This also contributes to the "demonstration effect", whereby the renewal of existing properties and their sale or lease to new businesses leads to a new level of enthusiasm among other property owners to refurbish their own buildings and, in so doing, to generate an income. In Clarksdale's case, some 100 or so businesses, museums and events are involved in tourism and associated activities in the downtown, with around 60 having established since 2000.

In many strategies promoting economic and downtown revitalisation, emphasis is placed on attracting and supporting "new" businesses in "new" sectors of the economy, as in the "high tech" era and more recently described as the "knowledge sector" and the "information sector". While this is important, it can be easy to overlook the important and ongoing role of existing businesses and their contribution to output, employment and services. Like new businesses, these existing businesses also benefit from investment, innovation and general support and encouragement.

The lessons drawn from the downtown Clarksdale experience reflect on positive achievements and conditions in the downtown, such as building on and promoting particular assets, and the important role of “champions” and “creative people” in such development. It is also well-recognised that, in some instances, Clarksdale has certain shortcomings that tend to hinder or constrain downtown development, such as “turf wars” between competing interests and a lack of support in parts of the wider community for downtown revitalisation. These and other circumstances also provide valuable lessons in promoting downtown revitalisation in other small cities and towns.

Box 12.1 Ten Essential *Do*’s and *Don*’ts for Downtown Clarksdale’s Revitalisation

Do’s

1. Do restore vacant buildings and place them on the market for sale or lease.
2. Do attract businesses to locate downtown.
3. Do keep the community involved in downtown progress.
4. Do promote downtown as the focus for Blues music and Delta culture and arts.
5. Do encourage residents and visitors to “Shop Downtown”.
6. Do promote the enhancement of Education as being of paramount importance in achieving the social and economic development of the wider Delta and Clarksdale/Coahoma community.

Don’ts

7. Don’t “pretty up” the downtown in terms of introducing building improvements or new facades that are inappropriate to the “southern feel” of downtown Clarksdale.
8. Don’t meddle with the streetscape in a way that’s out of context with the special charm of a small southern town.
9. Don’t let downtown become another Beale Street as in Memphis, or another Branson, Missouri.
10. Don’t forget to have a *Plan* for downtown, and be sure to implement it!

Source: Henshall, John (2008) *Downtown Clarksdale – An Action Plan for Economic Revitalization*.

Note: In the Action Plan from which these “essentials” are sourced, guidance was provided in regard to the specific objectives, actions, and responsibilities involved in successfully implementing the Plan.

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Appendix: Blues and Culture-Related Businesses and Features in Clarksdale

Developments/Events Involving “Longer-Term” Residents

- **Alcazar Hotel re-development** – Bill Luckett, Charles Evans, others. The Alcazar is Clarksdale’s grand hotel comprising four levels, vacant for many years and now under-going renewal and refurbishment.
- **Birdsong Tours** – Robert Birdsong. Tours of the downtown and the rural areas, steeped in local history and stories. Birdsong will “custom-make” tours to suit a wide range of interests.
- **Bluestown Inn** – accommodation for visitors, located in Third Street
- **Bluestown Music and Studio 61 Recording** – Ronnie Drew. Music instruments and studio with Ronnie playing guitar in local venues and at Hopson’s. Ronnie’s son, Marshall Drew, is a popular folk-rock singer/songwriter around town and also teaches guitar for the Delta Blues Education Project.
- **Club 2000** – a juke joint located in Issaquena Avenue in the New World

- **Cutrer Mansion** – former home of the Cutrer family (Blanche Cutrer was the daughter of Clarksdale’s founder, John Clark). Now the location for the Coahoma County Higher Education Centre, and used for a range of higher education and community activities
- **Delta Blues Alley** – a juke joint located in Delta Avenue
- **Delta Blues Museum** – local government and community supported, with Shelley Ritter as Director. Now well-established at the former railway freight building, and with expansion of the museum recently achieved
- **Delta Bohemian Guest House and the White House** – established by Billy Howell and Madge Marley Howell, located in West Second Street, providing accommodation for visitors
- **Delta Bohemian Tours** – established by Billy Howell, providing personally guided tours around the Delta
- **Delta Cotton Company** – Bill Luckett, Morgan Freeman and Howard Stovall. Loft-style apartments above Ground Zero Blues Club
- **Greyhound Bus Depot** – the historic bus station was restored by the Coahoma County Board of Supervisors and used as a venue for community meetings and exhibitions. For a period of time it was also used as a non-profit “Information Station” set-up and operated by ‘Bubba’ O’Keefe.
- **Ground Zero Blues Club** – Bill Luckett, Morgan Freeman and Howard Stovall. A former cotton-grading warehouse, the building was re-birthed as a venue for live blues music, including food and bar.
- **Hopson’s Commissary** – James Butler. Former commissary for Hopson’s Plantation on Highway 49, five kilometres south of Clarksdale, now operating as a music venue and bar. Site of the first mechanisation of cotton plantations introduced in 1944
- **Juke Joint Festival (held annually in April)** – Downtown Development Association LLC. Commenced in 2004 as a combination of “small-town fair” in the daytime (about 100 vendors line the downtown streets) and juke joint festival at night. A US\$20 wrist band ensures access to the 20 or so juke joints, GZBC and shuttle bus.
- **Lambfish Art Company** – Joey Young. Potter and painter, Joey resettled in Clarksdale, drawn by the town’s creativity and links with music and culture.

- **The Lofts at the Five and Dime** – Kinchen “Bubba” O’Keefe Jr. and Jack Denton Modern loft-style apartments located above Yazoo Pass restaurant/café (former Woolworth Five and Dime store)
- **Messenger’s Poolhall** – Long-established and popular juke joint and poolhall in Martin Luther King Jnr Street
- **Nan Hughes** – responsible for the organisation and promotion of the annual Juke Joint Festival (with Roger Stolle and committee)
- **Our Grandma’s House of Pancakes and Bar** – established 2016 in Third Street by Carl Davis
- **Pete’s Grill** – in Sunflower Avenue, an establishment which operates mainly during festivals
- **Red’s Lounge** – Red Paden. Long-established juke joint in Sunflower Avenue, and popular venue for Delta blues musicians and music lovers
- **Richard Bolen** – involved in researching, preparing and erecting signage on downtown streets depicting well-known local musicians, civil rights activists, educators, community advocates, and athletes. Also responsible for web design and content promoting Clarksdale
- **Riverside Hotel** – Ratliff family, proprietor. Located in Sunflower Avenue, this former African American hospital (blues/jazz singer Betty Smith died here in 1937 after a road accident) was converted to a hotel in 1944, and has been host to many Blues musicians since that time.
- **Shack Up Inn and Cotton Gin Inn** – Bill Talbot and Guy Malvezzi. Located five kilometres south of Clarksdale on Highway 49. Former cotton plantation buildings and sharecropper shacks refurbished as visitor accommodation, and with music venue (“the Chapel”) and souvenir shop
- **Stone Pony Pizza Restaurant and Bar** – Buddy Bass and Joe Weiss, long-term residents of Clarksdale. A downtown restaurant popular with families (especially), and a popular bar in the evenings
- **The Bank** – former Bank of Clarksdale and more recently offices for Clarksdale Press Register, and now a function/catering venue. Owned and restored by Kinchen “Bubba” O’Keefe
- **Travelers Hotel** – renovation and refurbishment of the former Webster’s Building at 212 Third Street, Clarksdale, by Kinchen “Bubba” O’Keefe and Chuck Rutledge for the Coahoma Collective

- **WROX radio station** – owned by Kinchen “Bubba” O’Keefe. Original radio station where Ike Turner, Elvis and many other musicians were guests, and where Early Wright was the longest-running DJ for some 50 years
- **Yazoo Pass** – John and Robin Cocke and Mary Tenhet. Established in mid-2011 as an espresso bar, bistro, and bakery located on the ground floor of the Woolworth building in Yazoo Avenue (restored by “Bubba” O’Keefe, with visitor accommodation at the Lofts, above)
- **Sunflower River Blues and Gospel Festival (held annually in August)** – Commenced in 1988 and now a major event on the blues music circuit, and still “free” to the community and visitors
- **Tennessee Williams Festival (held annually in late September or early October)** – community-supported, with Panny Mayfield as one of the long-time organisers. A literary festival, with plays performed on the porches of historic homes and at Cutrer Mansion, and other celebratory events
- **Pinetop Perkins Homecoming (held annually in October)** – James Butler at Hopson’s. A music night in celebration of Clarksdale’s Pinetop Perkins, a Clarksdale-born blues musician and a former worker on Hopson’s Plantation. Pinetop passed away in March 2011 at 97 years of age

Developments/Events Involving “Newcomers”

- **Bluesberry Café** – Art and Carol Crivaro (Florida). Café and blues venue, and wholesale bakery products. Regular venue for Super Chikan, Delta-born musician and guitar-maker, and blues musician Watermelon Slim (Oklahoma).
- **Blues Hound Flat** – visitor accommodation located in Issaquena Avenue, with owners Sherry Henson and Norman Adcox from Memphis.
- **Cat Head Blues Music, Folk Art and Books** – Roger Stolle (St Louis). Former marketing executive, established Cat Head in 2002 and represents Delta blues musicians, bringing their live music to fans from

beyond Clarksdale and abroad. Publisher, writer (“Blues Access”), radio presenter, and documentary producer (“M for Mississippi” with co-producer Jeff Konkel).

- **The Clark House Residential Inn** – Charles Evans (California). Purchased and restored as a residential inn by Charles, a property developer from Santa Rosa, CA. The Clark House, located in Clark Street, is the original home built in 1859 by Clarksdale’s founder, John Clark.
- **Coahoma Collective** – a creative “place-making effort” involving live/work spaces for creative individuals who work part-time in the seed store and at The Travelers Hotel. Ann Williams is Executive Director, and is from New Orleans.
- **Clarksdale House Party** – This radio show, under the promotion of Gary Vincent, is held at the Clarksdale Sound Stage on a regular basis through the year to highlight local and visiting musicians, with live taping for airing on XRDS.fm radio, as well as filming.
- **Clarksdale Sound Stage** – Gary Vincent, singer-songwriter, musician and producer from Nashville.
- **Deak Harp’s Mississippi Saxophone Shop** – located on Third Street, owned and operated by musician Deak Harp from around 2015. Deak sells his custom-made harmonicas, along with other Blues souvenirs. Deak is from New Jersey, via Illinois.
- **Delta Digs, The Squeeze Box, and Hooker Hotel** – small, uniquely decorated one and two-bedroom accommodations for visitors, established by Mark Benson from Franklin, Tennessee and with interior décor by John Magnusson formerly of New Jersey.
- **Hambone Art Gallery** – Stan Street (Rochester NY and Florida). Stan (painter and musician) established Hambone Gallery with Dixie Swearingen (musician). The Hambone is also the venue for Tuesday and Thursday Night jam sessions and the annual Hambone Music Festival (October).
- **Hooker Grocery & Eatery** – a cafe and venue combined with fresh food market. Established and operated by Johnny Cass, chef and musician, from Sydney.

- **Levon's Bar & Grill** – a restaurant and bar owned and operated by Naomi Gapes from Sydney, Australia and accommodated in premises owned and restored by Charles Evans from Santa Rosa, California.
- **Holy Moly** – a unique combination of visitor accommodation, arts space, and retail located in Third Street, owned and developed by partners Adrian Kosky from Daylesford, Australia and Carla Linkous Maxwell from Memphis, Tennessee.
- **Mississippi Saxophone Festival** – an annual music festival established by Deak Harp and held in May, attracting harmonica players from the Delta and beyond.
- **New Roxy** – Robin Colonas (Seattle). The New Roxy is a former cinema in Issaquena Avenue in the New World, now restored as a venue for music, cinema, and other functions and events.
- **Quapaw Canoe Company** - John Ruskey (Colorado). Operates canoe trips on the Mississippi. Ruskey is a renowned “custodian” of the Lower Mississippi, placing emphasis on conservation of the river’s environmental assets. Also an artist and musician.
- **Rock & Blues Museum** – Theo Dasbach (the Netherlands) and Cindy Hudock (Pittsburg, via NYC). Theo and Cindy decided to “retire” to Clarksdale where Theo’s personal museum of music-related artefacts (brought from The Netherlands) are appreciated in an artistic and music-based community attracting visitors, both nationally and worldwide.
- **Shacksdale USA Motel** – developed by individuals from Denver and Memphis, the “motel” comprises a dozen or so “shacks” of modern construction, but with authentic “shack” fittings, chattels, and so on. The shacks, which are for rental, are located opposite the Shack Up Inn and Hopson’s Commissary on Old Highway 49, about five kilometres south of Clarksdale.
- **Vincent Productions recording and film studio** – Gary and Carol Vincent (Nashville). State-of-the-art music production and video studio by singer/songwriter/producer Gary, with partner Carol, an agent for musicians and writers.
- **XRDS FM Radio Station** – established in Clarksdale by Charles Evans (Santa Rosa) and Bill Bowker (Santa Rosa).

- **Cat Head Mini Blues Fest (April/August/October)** – Roger Stolle (St Louis). “Mini” music festivals held in front of Cat Head store during festivals and on other occasions.
- **Clarksdale Caravan Music Fest (May)** – Theo Dasbach (the Netherlands) and Cindy Huddock (New York). “Mini” music festivals are held in front of the Rock & Blues Museum during major music festivals and on other occasions.
- **Clarksdale Film Festival (January)** – Roger Stolle (St Louis), Shonda Warner (Nebraska) and others, and featuring (in particular) films associated with Mississippi and the South.
- **Hambone Festival (October)** – Stan Street (Rochester via Florida). A “mini” music festival is held in front of the Hambone Gallery during festivals and on other occasions, especially Halloween weekend in October.