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Incorporating social justice in tourism planning: racial reconciliation and sustainable community development in the Deep South

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Tourism can serve as a vehicle for sustainable community development by contributing to equity and social justice. This happens as tourists learn about marginal groups through educational tourism, engage in development projects with host-area residents, undertake pilgrimages that bring greater meaning and cohesiveness to an ethnic identity, or encounter stories that transform their view of social injustice and spur further action to reduce inequities. Tourism planning can produce a sense of reconciliation when it brings historically divided groups together. An example is found in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, where a group of white and African American residents are collaborating to develop tourism projects designed around a narrative of reconciliation, while they use the process of tourism planning to work towards racial reconciliation within their community. This case illustrates strategies tourism planners employ and challenges they face when they envision tourism as more than merely a means of economic growth.

Keywords: heritage tourism; Mississippi Delta; racial reconciliation; social justice; sustainable community development

The advantages of tourism to rural communities are generally painted as economic: developing a tourism industry brings in "fresh" dollars, provides jobs and offers opportunities for local entrepreneurship (National Agricultural Library, 2008; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2008). When tourism focuses on local heritage, cultural advantages can accrue as well, as local residents learn about, take pride in, and conserve their own stories (Barton, 2005; Howard, 2002; President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, 2005). A growing body of literature argues that tourism can also contribute to social equity and justice in rural communities, and that social and cultural factors are important elements in sustainable community development in many rural contexts (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2008; Moore & Jie Wen, 2009; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). Recently, the social justice aspects of tourism have received substantial attention in the media as well (see, e.g., Gentleman, 2006; Lancaster, 2007; Markey, 2007; Popescu, 2007; Rao, 2009; Weiner, 2008).

We consider one aspect of social justice, the case of racial reconciliation in the Deep South. The Civil Rights Movement that emerged in the mid-twentieth century

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in America made substantial progress in the extension of political rights to African Americans, but economic disparities and cultural differences continue to separate black and white residents in much of the region (Andrews, 1997; Austin, 2006; Edelman, 2005; Hill, 2007; US Commission on Civil Rights, 2001). We draw on a case study of a rural county in the Mississippi Delta to examine how tourism might contribute to or detract from equality and social justice in rural communities, and the challenges that community planners face when promoting tourism as a means of addressing ingrained racial disparities.

Sustainable community development

When assessing tourism as a community development strategy, community planners must consider how tourism will contribute in a sustainable way to community well-being (Haywood, 1988; Richards & Hall, 2000). The literature on sustainable development has emphasized three crucial dimensions: economic efficiency, environmental integrity and social equity and justice (Edwards, 2005; Klein-Vielhauer, 2009; World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Finding a balance among these factors that is appropriate in a given context increases the chances for sustainability, and distortions arise when one of these elements dominates the others. In the tourism industry, economic considerations frequently drive decisions, while the potential for negative impacts such as environmental deterioration and increased inequity are given less attention.

Sustainable tourism

Tourism has the potential to produce social inequities in a variety of ways. Mass tourism organized along industrial lines is largely a product of modern society (Eadington & Smith, 1992; Malkin, 1999), and like many industries, tourism produces core-periphery inequities (Frank, 1986; Murphy & Andressen, 1988; Sharpley, 2001). When tourists travel from an industrial/post-industrial region to a less industrialized region, they tend to exacerbate the economic differences. Host (tourist-receiving) areas benefit economically, as tourists spend money locally on entrance fees, food, gifts and transportation; locals obtain jobs in tourism-oriented businesses; and tourists often pay special taxes. But tourists also purchase services from providers based in core areas, such as airlines, cruise lines, chain hotels and chain restaurants. As a result, the host region does not benefit fully from its hospitality, and often there is a net transfer of value from host to home (tourist-sending) region. One dimension of inequity, then, is the gap between the host and home regions.

Tourism often leads to greater inequities within a host region as well (Thomas, 2009). Some residents are better positioned to capitalize on entrepreneurial opportunities and capture a larger portion of tourist dollars. Others are relegated to low-paying service jobs, and still others are excluded from the tourism industry entirely. An influx of free-spending tourists may drive up prices of basic commodities like food and increase property values, leaving residents outside the industry in a squeeze. Another dimension of inequity is the increasing differentiation within host communities.

The inequities produced by tourism are not solely economic, however, as tourists extract other intangible, often unquantifiable values as well. Heritage tourists take

away knowledge and information from a unique museum; tourists on a pilgrimage to a sacred site feel an increased sense of pride in their culture; and tourists who work on a development project in a poor community experience a transformation in their worldview. Does the extraction of these non-monetary values ultimately benefit or harm the host community? Tourists can create relationships with host-area residents, which could lead to benefits to the peripheral area. Tourists who return year-after-year can create the basis for a sustainable local industry. But these factors are conditional, and difficult to quantify (Robinson, 2000). There is no systematic recipe for how a region can optimize its opportunities to capture intangible benefits or reduce intangible losses from tourism.

A similar dilemma arises with respect to culture. The tourism industry appropriates and packages cultural stories, often eroding their authenticity and cultural value (Robinson, 1999). All cultural stories are produced by winnowing through variation to create a meta-narrative (Hitchcock & King, 2003), but what criteria are used to produce that narrative? And whose interests are represented by the narrative that emerges? In industrial tourism, often the criteria and interests are commercial in nature, and the story that emerges is one that will sell to a mass public, bringing money to tourism providers (Cohen, 1988; Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004; Silver, 1993). A third form of inequity, then, is produced by how the tourism narratives are framed, benefiting cultural identities framed as mainstream, and sidelining or excluding others.

By increasing opportunities for local coordination and organization, tourism can build skills and capacities that can be applied in other areas. Organizational systems are a critical part of community development (Fischer, 1989; Flora and Flora, 2008). Tourism builds relationships, and under the right conditions, relationships can grow into institutions, which create the stability necessary for sustainability. Stable relationships and institutions are facilitated under circumstances of relative equality and justice.

Narratives in a tourism industry

The product that tourism providers and officials market is a narrative about the host community; this is the commodity that generates economic growth, as well as social and cultural meaning. The production of this narrative is a complex process of social construction, involving many voices (Edson, 2004). Inequities arise in the construction of the narrative, as some voices are better represented than others, and some may be excluded entirely (Porter & Salazar, 2005). As noted it is often the tourism industry that produces the dominant narrative for public consumption, driven by commercial interests. The narrative, as a result, is often a sanitary version of a much larger, more complex and possibly more uncomfortable story (Kelner, 2001; Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos, 2004; Silver, 1993). The distortions that arise from this process marginalize groups whose voices are ignored or underrepresented.

While the processes through which groups are marginalized are complex and context specific, the general process is one in which cultural identity is eroded. This may occur through homogenization into a broader commercial identity, loss of identification with a particular group, or a transformation of identity into something different (Brown, 2003; Edson, 2004).[1] Under some conditions, this refined story may take on new and empowering meaning to peripheral communities; under other conditions, it erodes cultural identity (Cohen, 1988).

Creating narratives of justice through tourism

Tourism contributes to equity and justice by increasing the wealth, power and/or prestige of marginalized groups, by raising awareness among privileged groups, and in some cases by challenging their sense of privilege and entitlement. Several models of tourism for justice have emerged. All are forms of alternative tourism, that is, tourism with a mission that is more than finding sun, sand and sea (Eadington & Smith, 1992).

One model is *Educational Tourism*, in which members of privileged core communities visit less privileged peripheral communities to learn about their reality. Tourists in peripheral regions often see poverty, but educational tourists intentionally visit impoverished areas with the specific goal of learning about them, and the impoverished people are organized to benefit from the tourists. Educational tourism allows marginal groups to tell stories from their own perspective, awakens awareness among members of core communities, clarifies misperceptions that privileged tourists may hold, and channels some money into marginal communities. One example of educational tourism is eco-lodges that take visitors to view the hospitals, schools and community centers that are sustained by their visits (Pearce, 1992). Another is visits to slum areas that have been organized to show visitors both the good and bad in their environment; the money they generate is then used for community development. This sort of tourism, dubbed "poorism," has been controversial, as some see it as exploitative (Lancaster, 2007; Weiner, 2008). Distinguishing community development from exploitation may be difficult, but generally depends on how much of the value created by tourism is controlled by the marginal community and how members of the marginal community view the overall enterprise. In the realm of civil rights, monuments to African American heroes are being erected around the southern US, to right historical wrongs and to take advantage of a growing interest in civil rights tourism (Parker, 2001). Monuments and historic sites provide tourists with opportunities to learn more about the South's civil rights stories. However, learning by itself does not lead to reconciliation nor even necessitate reflection.

A second model is *Development Tourism* in which privileged tourists visit less privileged groups to carry out community development projects together (Raymond & Hall, 2008). As they collaborate, they construct a narrative through interaction and working together, and become more equal as they partner for a common goal. While educational tourism is observational, development tourism involves more direct interaction, and as a result the narrative is not simply received by tourists, rather, the tourist participates in its construction (McIntosh & Zahra, 2007). One example of development tourism involves young people who participate in programs such as alternative spring breaks or "gap year" travel.[2] Another version is volunteers who travel to assist on a research project during their vacation (Clifton & Benson, 2006; Ellis, 2003). Despite its positive intentions, development tourism also generates controversy. Community development is a long-term enterprise, requiring extended commitment and a resiliency to failure. Idealistic youth may have good intentions, but lack the knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish something meaningful in a short time. Well-organized development tourism may generate personal and community benefits. But it may create a false sense of accomplishment among tourists, while members of the host community understand little will change when the tourist leaves. Development tourism may serve relief efforts well, however. Following Hurricane Katrina, a steady stream of volunteers traveled to the Gulf

Coast for short periods to assist in clean-up and recovery. Indeed, their labor made a significant difference in many people's lives.

A third model is *Pilgrimage Tourism*, in which members of defined groups travel to study and connect with their own story and heritage (Collins-Kreiner, 2006; Gatewood & Cameron, 2004; Hasty, 2002; Kelner, 2001). People engage in pilgrimages to experience first-hand places with sacred meaning, or because they feel a personal connection to a leader or story. Pilgrimage tourists are generally associated with religious groups (Povoledo, 2008), but non-religious pilgrims travel as well (Carrier, 2004). For example, African Americans carry out pilgrimages to visit their ancestors' homelands in Africa (Hasty, 2002; Pierre, 2009) and to visit meaningful sites in North America, including iconic sites in the Civil Rights Movement (Allman-Baldwin, 2006; Dewan, 2004; Grant, 2005). Cities with substantial African American populations, including Washington DC, Philadelphia PA and Atlanta GA have created African-American themed heritage trails, museums and other amenities to attract African American tourists (Carrier, 2004; Cobb, 2008; Grant, 2005). This approach to tourism can empower group members by extending a central narrative throughout a community, creating shared meaning even across large spaces, and by instilling a sense of transformation as group members connect to their roots in a deeper way.

A fourth model is *Reconciliation Tourism*, which involves using tourism as a means of reducing conflicts and constructing linkages between groups (Hemming, 1993; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2003, 2008). Conflict produced through stratification calls for reconciliation to ease differences and enable groups to construct a narrative that represents a wider range of voices. As such, reconciliation tourism frequently aims at providing transformational experiences to tourists (Hasty, 2002). For example, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC tells a tragic story "like it is," challenging visitors to think and act rather than sanitizing a narrative to make them more comfortable.[3] Examples from the American Civil Rights Movement include the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, TN (http://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/home.htm), and the Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site in Atlanta, GA (http://www.nps.gov/malu/index.htm). Building tourism enterprises can also lead to reconciliation among those organized to provide the tourism services. For instance, Lang (2004) chronicles how the construction of the Gateway Arch in St. Louis, MO, led to a new social movement among African Americans who were displaced from their homes and excluded from the project's higher-paying jobs.

Method

This study began with informal discussions about racial reconciliation and its role in tourism development, which led us to conduct a formal literature review on the topic. A serendipitous series of events then connected us to the Emmett Till Memorial Commission (ETMC) in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, an organization working to create racial reconciliation through tourism. Our observation began with a visit to one of the Commission's monthly meetings in early 2008, followed by a series of exchanges with ETMC leaders, and an invitation by one of the Commission's chairs to observe the next monthly meeting. At this meeting, we were introduced to the members of the ETMC, who agreed that we could continue to observe their activities as part of a formal research project.

Research questions

Our initial interest in the subject of racial reconciliation and tourism stemmed from current conditions in the Mississippi Delta. From its settlement, racial disparities have shaped the character of the Delta. Since the late 1970s racial roles have been changing, and opportunities have been opening for African Americans that historically were proscribed (Austin, 2006), particularly in politics and education. At the same time, the region's economy is shifting from agriculture and small industry to services. A substantial push towards tourism has been growing since the early 1990s (Austin & Middleton, 2006). Since 2003 heritage tourism has grown, focusing on the Delta's claim to be "the birthplace of the blues" (Barton, 2007). Efforts to promote other aspects of the Delta's heritage, including the role of Delta residents in the Civil Rights Movement, are in their early stages. In many Delta communities, tourism is still a cottage industry, but a stronger tourism industry is emerging in some of the larger towns, in the region and in the state.

From these circumstances, our initial question in this study was whether tourism could expand opportunities for social mobility among the region's African Americans, and provide a sense of healing in race relations. Our on-going study of the Emmett Till Memorial Commission has led us to question how reconciliation comes about and what reconciliation means, beyond simply healing fractured relationships.

Methodological approach

Our research uses an interpretative approach. Interpretive studies aim for contextual understanding, gaining insights about theoretical and policy issues from close attention to specific cases (Greene, 1990; Yin, 1984). Interpretive researchers generally rely on qualitative data, and follow an inductive path to discovery (Patton, 1990; Ragin, 1994). An interpretive approach is appropriate for case studies as its focus is on context rather than universal application, so data collection is fluid and researchers have flexibility to follow changing circumstances (Babbie, 1986). Interpretive research also allows for more depth of understanding and nuance, as researchers can observe attitude and expression in addition to content.

Interpretive research is useful in community settings, where relationships are more rooted in emotional than instrumental ties. Where science and technology form people's worldviews, quantitative methods may be more appropriate (Berg, 2004). In communities, where people know each other and establish personal bonds, the flexibility inherent in an interpretive approach allows researchers to shape and mold their understanding and account for inconsistencies and changes. The ETMC had been in existence for nearly three years when we began our observations, so we opted for a non-participant approach, and have resisted taking an action research stance so as not to interrupt the progress the Commission has made on its own.

Data collection

We have employed three techniques to gather data: observation of ETMC activities, a review of documents, and open-ended interviews with ETMC members. These are the three most commonly used forms of data collection in qualitative studies (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Observation

Our observation has focused primarily on the monthly meetings of the ETMC. At least one of the authors has attended all of the Commission's monthly meetings since we initiated the study. We took detailed notes during the meetings and completed field notes following the meeting as a way of filling in details and additional information, including our perceptions.

In addition to the monthly meetings, we also observed other events carried out by ETMC members in Tallahatchie County communities. ETMC members have participated in events organized by our campus as well. For events that we could not observe directly, we have observed artifacts, such as the signs posted for the Emmett Till Trail, discussed below.

Document review

As part of the observation of artifacts, the authors reviewed documents produced by the ETMC and others related to the case. Principal among these were minutes of ETMC meetings that occurred before we began our study, which produced insight into the early days of the Commission. We also reviewed websites produced by the ETMC and by the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi, an ETMC collaborator. Also, we collected newspaper articles and other sources of information in the mass media pertaining to the ETMC, and to the Emmett Till case. Finally, we reviewed the Commission's organizational documents, such as by-laws.

Interviews

When we began our study the ETMC had 18 members, nine white and nine African American. The membership included co-chairpersons, one of each race. Other collaborators occasionally attended the group's meetings, including representatives from the William Winter Institute and an attorney who works with the ETMC.

Our goal was to interview all ETMC members and some collaborators. Commission members were personally contacted at the monthly meetings, and the authors explained the project and extended an invitation to participate in an interview. We completed interviews with fourteen Commission members and one knowledgeable partner. Interviews were conducted between April and September 2008. Two members declined to be interviewed; and two were unavailable during the interview period.

All interviews except one were conducted in person. An open-ended questionnaire was sent by e-mail to one informant who was unable to participate in a face-to-face interview; the informant used this questionnaire to respond in writing. We carried out one additional interview with two members, and later interviewed each individually. Face-to-face interviews typically took place in the respondent's home or office, with a few occurring in public places such as a park or City Hall. Interviews typically lasted about one hour.

Role of the researcher

Given the complicated nature of race and class relations in the Delta, the authors recognized that some interviewees might be less forthcoming than others. We are

both white and represented universities at the time of the interviews, and neither of us is from the South. Going in, we recognized that African American informants might feel uncomfortable talking about race relations with white researchers and that white informants might try to demonstrate their open-mindedness; that informants might feel uncomfortable sharing cultural information with outsiders; and some might be hesitant to provide information to people who were university-affiliated. However, we found informants to be candid in their responses, speaking openly and (for the most part) on the record about their feelings, thoughts, and experiences. At the same time, these interviews only provide a snapshot of race relations in the Mississippi Delta. The issue runs much deeper, and a single interview with an individual only scratches the surface of the nuances that are so entrenched in the culture.

Data analysis

We recorded and transcribed all interviews, and independently reviewed each transcript to identify topics and themes in the conversations, then compared our individual results. In our discussions, we further developed the topics and themes, and drew in observational and documentary evidence to triangulate our interview findings. We then went through and coded the interview transcripts. We have extracted quotes that are illustrative of concepts pertaining to racial reconciliation and tourism, and built the description of our case study based on these quotes and themes.

Once we had completed the analysis, we shared the results with our informants and asked for feedback. Specifically, we asked them to assess whether the description of the case study accurately represented their perspective, and whether anything was omitted that should be included. We revised our analysis based on the comments provided by informants.

Case study: the Emmett Till Memorial Commission

Located in the Deep South, Tallahatchie County, Mississippi, has a stark, persistent and entrenched racial divide between the county's black and white residents (Austin, 2006). The pervasive effect of race on social structure and social interaction in the region is hard to overestimate. In 1955, Tallahatchie County gained international attention when a local jury acquitted two white residents accused of murdering a black teenager named Emmett Till, who was visiting relatives in the area from his home in Chicago.[4] The trial verdict left a pall of fear and shame on the county that continues to shape race relations today.

The context

Tallahatchie County is small, rural and remote. The western part of the county lies in Mississippi's "Delta" region, and the eastern portion is in the region known locally as the "Hills" (see Figure 1). These two regions have distinct cultures, and there is substantial competition between them (Adams & Gorton, 2006; Asch, 2008). As they described their community, the informants in this study took pains to distinguish themselves from "the other side." The distinction has immediate ramifications for the ETMC, related to the restoration of the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, discussed below.

Countywide, nearly 60% of the population is African American, but in the western part of the county, almost 80% is black (see Table 1). Like most of the Mississippi Delta, Tallahatchie County reached its highest population in the 1920s and 1930s, surpassing 35,000 residents, but the numbers have steadily declined since (US Census Bureau, 2009a). The 2000 census counted 14,903 residents and today the population is estimated at slightly more than 13,000 (US Census Bureau, 2009b).

Politics in Western Tallahatchie County center around the Board of Supervisors, other county offices, and on the municipal governments of the region's four towns: Tutwiler, Sumner, Webb and Glendora. There are two county seats in Tallahatchie County, Charleston in the East (Hills) and Sumner in the West (Delta), each with its own functioning courthouse. The county offers a variety of services, but has
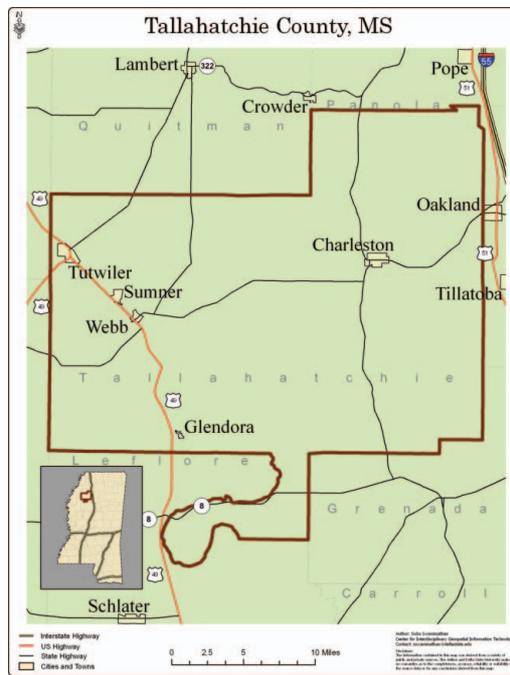

Figure 1.   Tallahatchie County, Mississippi.

Table 1.   Population and race in Tallahatchie County, Mississippi and its towns.

Place	Total population	White	Black
Tallahatchie County	14,903	5867 (39.4%)	8784 (58.9%)
Western Tallahatchie County (Census Tracts 9403 and 9404/Block 3)	5704	1106 (19.4%)	4491 (78.7%)
Eastern Tallahatchie County (Census Tracts 9401, 9402 and 9404/Blocks 1 and 2)	9199	4761 (51.8%)	4293 (46.7%)
Sumner Town	407	236 (58.0%)	158 (38.8%)
Tutwiler Town	1,364	160 (11.7%)	1186 (87.0%)
Webb Town	587	206 (35.1%)	360 (61.3%)
Glendora Town	285	13 (4.6%)	254 (89.1%)
Charlestown Town	2198	852 (38.8%)	1299 (59.1%)

Source: US Census, 2000.

relatively little in the way of public infrastructure. Up until the 1970s, all of the political offices were held by white residents, even though the majority of the population was African American. Beginning in the late 1970s, black residents have occupied more of the town and county offices. Today, the mayors in three of the four towns are African American, and several positions in the county are held by African Americans, including, since 1994, two of the five seats on the County Board of Supervisors.

Outside of agriculture, Western Tallahatchie County has little in the way of commerce. There are a few small businesses in the towns, but residents typically travel to one of the larger towns in adjacent counties to shop. There is no chamber of commerce, but there is a public Industrial Authority organized to attract business to Tallahatchie County. A private prison in the northwest corner of the county provides one of the largest sources of employment for residents, and a state prison in an adjacent county is another source of employment. A public Prison Authority, derived from the Industrial Authority, coordinates the prison. Landownership is a significant indicator of economic power, and in the absence of other institutions, a few churches, the local country club and a service organization function as the seats of economic power.

Social life is largely based on families and churches, and the pace of life is slow and rooted in personal relationships. Like much of the rural South, interaction between black and white residents is generally cordial but strained, and occurs in the context of substantial racial stratification (Schultz, 2007). African Americans often serve as laborers on white-owned farms, or as domestic help, much as they have for generations. Some black and white residents develop genuine friendships, but economic and cultural differences intercede in many cases. A small number of well-to-do African Americans do intermix with the white elite. A Habitat for Humanity chapter founded in 1984 created the county's first interracial board, largely through the efforts of its founder. Since 2005, the ETMC was created, and two of the county's historically white organizations have added African American members.

The Emmett Till Memorial Commission

The initial impulse for the Emmett Till Memorial Commission was to restore the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner, where the trail of Emmett Till's murderers was held. The County Board of Supervisors decided to create a biracial commission of concerned citizens to take on this task, bringing black and white residents together in a spirit of racial reconciliation. The supervisors and town mayors appoint members, who are diverse in age, gender, income, length of residence in the county and most notably race. One member who has lived in the county for several decades explained that this was the first time white and black residents have sat down to work together as equals. The ETMC has decided that the courthouse restoration should include a museum on the Emmett Till case, and have found other ways to use heritage tourism as a vehicle for racial reconciliation. This case illustrates some of the social justice benefits, as well as the challenges, of heritage tourism.

The ETMC started slowly. Few of the white residents who were appointed got involved in the beginning. Tallahatchie County operates on an informal basis, and some explained that they were not notified that they had been named to the Commission. Participation among black members fluctuated initially as well. After a few months, the ETMC formed a partnership with the William Winter Institute for

Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi. The Winter Institute helped the ETMC develop goals and a working procedure. The ETMC settled on a racially balanced membership, and increased their numbers to nine white and nine black members. Participation stabilized. Staff and students from the Winter Institute brought expertise in reconciliation, as well as experience with other groups in the state who have similar missions. The ETMC was able to draw on the work of these other groups, reviewing by-laws and other documents to help craft their own. The Winter Institute has operated mostly "behind the scenes," however, and has not been directly involved in facilitating meetings.

Reconciliation and tourism projects

The project to restore the courthouse has grown into an effort to develop local tourism opportunities, primarily oriented around the story of Emmett Till and the Civil Rights Movement. This has been driven by an interest among local leaders to honor Emmett Till, by a still-small but growing demand from tourists, and by the growth of the tourism industry in the state. The ETMC is currently engaged in three tourism efforts. The first is the courthouse restoration of the Tallahatchie County Courthouse in Sumner; the second is the Emmett Till Interpretive Trail and driving tour, which was initiated with a Public Proclamation to the Till Family; and the third is the development of a tourism infrastructure in the county, including a tourism specialist housed within a newly created county Department of Recreation, Parks and Tourism.

Courthouse restoration

The Sumner courthouse is picturesque and historic. It was built in 1909 in the Richardsonian Romanesque style and in 1990 it was declared a state landmark by The Mississippi Department of Archives and History (Mississippi Department of Archives and History, 2009). However, the building is structurally deficient and inadequate for current administrative needs. Residents of Sumner are aware that the courthouse supports a legal profession and employs many residents. Residents fear that if the courthouse is shut down, even temporarily, they will lose their legal infrastructure to the courthouse in Charleston, and Sumner might slip into the same doldrums as other impoverished Delta communities. The ETMC has raised money and coordinated the courthouse restoration. Current plans are to configure the courtroom to look like it did during the 1955 trial, and to add a Civil Rights Museum to commemorate Emmett Till. The restoration would accommodate heritage tourists who want to visit the site of one of the most important incidents in the Civil Rights Movement.[5]

Restoring the courthouse is one step toward achieving racial reconciliation. The story of Emmett Till has been told many times, but owing to local residents' reluctance to discuss the topic, their voices have been muted in shaping how America understands this story. The courthouse and museum provide an opportunity to present these voices, crafted by a biracial commission. Thus, the ETMC's activities construct reconciliation tourism by contributing a local perspective on the wider narrative and meaning of the Emmett Till case in American society.

The value of this project toward reconciliation at a local scale is more complex. The project brings black and white ETMC members together to work on a common

project, although as one member explained, the motivation of the two groups is probably different:

> In this instance, I think [reconciliation] specifically has to do with the fact that both races are trying to attain the same goal. Now, the motivation on each side might be different. I think for the white part of this Commission, probably the strongest motivation is saving the courthouse. And the black motivation is probably honoring or memorializing the Emmett Till trial.

Although the black and white members have different motivations for involvement in the courthouse restoration, according to some members the process of working together on the project engenders racial reconciliation as a by-product. One lifelong resident of Sumner said working together on the Emmett Till Memorial Commission has "enhanced mutual respect among the races," and this has led to a more positive tone in interracial interactions.

Not all members agree, however. Some believe the African Americans on the Commission are marginalized, and that interactions between black and white members follow the same stratified patterns that have long existed in the county. As one member said:

> The beginning of the Emmett Till Commission—it started out, basically, all African Americans, and there were a few Caucasians on the Board, about three or four and about eight or nine African Americans. The first or second meeting, it was proposed by a Caucasian member that the body should be fifty-fifty. We're talking about racial reconciliation and so forth, and we ought to be nine African Americans and nine Caucasians. And the body voted for that, and that's what took place. But, after that, no more participation by the African American community, as far as being open, and expressing whatever they talked about or wanted to see or was hoping for. Basically because, what happened was, when they changed the Commission, and brought on the additional members, everybody was from the affluent—everybody was the bossman.

This quote suggests that the structure of the Commission affects the level of trust felt by members. Because white residents historically have held virtually all power in Tallahatchie County, and continue to hold substantial economic power today, black members of the ETMC still feel like a minority, even if the membership is racially balanced (Gallardo & Stein, 2007).

Additionally, the emphasis on Emmett Till in local tourism development is not wholly supported by all ETMC members and other residents of the county. Some members believe the county is doing too much to honor Mr. Till, while others are uneasy because they believe their actions exploit a family tragedy (Jubera, 2007).[6] On the other hand, some members believe the name "Emmett Till" has come to transcend the personal tragedy of one 14-year-old boy, and carries an iconic status, particularly among African Americans. Outsiders will come to visit as educational, pilgrimage and reconciliation tourists, and the county should provide for their needs and tell the local version of the story. These contrasting views impose barriers to reconciliation that the ETMC must address.

Emmett Till interpretive trail

This driving tour consists of historical markers located at eight sites in the county, which chronicle events in the death of Emmett Till and the subsequent

trial. Members worked with historians to ensure that the locations and the information on the signs were as accurate as possible. A ninth marker, erected by the State of Mississippi, commemorates the trial at the courthouse in Sumner. A brochure that describes the historical background of the Emmett Till murder and trial, with photos and descriptions of each site on the trail, is available on-line.[7] The interpretive trail was inaugurated in October, 2007 with a ceremony that included a public "Statement of Regret," expressing the county's regret to the Till family for the injustice committed fifty years earlier (Jubera, 2007). The text of the Statement of Regret was crafted with assistance from the Winter Institute, and it was signed by all members of the ETMC.[8] Surviving members of Emmett Till's family attended the event. Public statements like this are a common practice in reconciliation efforts. This was a significant step in racial reconciliation, as it broke a long-standing silence regarding the murder and unjust trial in Tallahatchie County.

The historical markers along the interpretive trail have generated interest from tourists, but have also produced controversy in the county. One marker was vandalized in October 2008, and the ETMC is responsible for replacing it (Associated Press, 2008). It is unknown if the vandalism was racially motivated. Another marker has generated a backlash for referring to the Ku Klux Klan; many local residents refute the claim that the KKK was ever active in Tallahatchie County. This is a source of pride for them, and they feel that to have alleged Klan activity publicly displayed on a sign projects an undeserved negative image.

Members of the ETMC feel the interpretive trail and the story it tells are important for a variety of reasons. "It's all trying to understand where we were and where we've come, how far we've come, and have we come very far at all? I really do think we've come a long way," one member commented. Another member explained how some sites on the interpretive trail have the potential to generate a sense of healing:

> It has been my experience [that] whenever we have [visited the site where Till's body was pulled from the river] it was a negative feeling but it was a positive, it was a healing, or it was a connection. And I think that each site is a connection to some part of each individual. Where the body was pulled out is the most negative [site on the trail], but it can be the most positive also, because that's the site that will make you think the most, make you feel the most. So if you're gonna get it, you're gonna get it there. You're gonna feel the loss, you're gonna feel the pain, and maybe that will inspire you—never again, never again.

These comments illustrate the idea that while reconciliation and healing are difficult, often painful processes, acknowledging and confronting that pain may be a way to move past it. While the driving tour is marketed to visitors, the process of discussing the sites and their meaning has brought greater understanding and healing to ETMC members as well.

Tourism planning

A third project, initiated at the beginning of 2009, is the creation of an administrative structure for tourism planning and management in the county. The County Board of Supervisors requested that the ETMC act as an advisory council on tourism development. During 2008, Tallahatchie County developed a parks and recreation program. The initial impetus was to provide after-school activities for the county's youth. The county acquired a building near Sumner as a headquarters and recreation

center, named in honor of Emmett Till, and they hired a part-time recreation manager. In early 2009, the supervisors added tourism to the mission of this program. The County Administrator was named interim director of the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Department, and they began developing a means of recording tourist visits. They also began fundraising to hire a tourism professional to run the county office, and guides to take tour groups around the Emmett Till Interpretive Trail. These efforts are in their early stages.

One town in the county has been working to build a local tourism infrastructure as well, in conjunction with Mississippi Valley State University. Glendora has its own Emmett Till Museum, a park named in honor of Emmett Till and a small bed and breakfast, the county's only lodging. Glendora was where one of Emmett Till's murderers resided, and four of the eight markers on the Emmett Till Interpretive Trail are in Glendora. The town also recently inaugurated a marker on the Mississippi Blues Trail to honor Sonny Boy Williamson, a noted harmonica player who grew up on a plantation near Glendora (Barretta, 2009). However, Glendora is a very poor town; over 68% of the families live in poverty (US Census Bureau, 2009c). The shop fronts on its main street are mostly boarded up, and a visit to Glendora would likely appeal only to a select group of tourists.

Tourism as an engine of reconciliation

The Emmett Till Memorial Commission provides an interesting study of the relationship between tourism and reconciliation. The most compelling aspect is that the planners are not only developing a story of reconciliation as a tourism narrative, but as they do so they are also engaging in a process of reconciliation among their members and in their community. One example is the Statement of Regret the ETMC prepared and read in public. The statement itself opened a door for reconciliation between black and white Americans, as the Emmett Till story has national significance. But the process of crafting the statement also required ETMC members to confront various issues, think about definitions, and express their sentiments about Emmett Till and the trial. Certainly, this process did not resolve the issues that make race such a significant divide in Tallahatchie County, but black and white members did sit down and discuss the issues, something that was inconceivable not long ago in this context.

In many places in the US today, different racial groups working together may seem mundane, but in Tallahatchie County, with its long history of strict racial segregation and exclusion, residents consider it remarkable that black and white residents can hold equal positions on a public commission, and can sit down and work together in a climate of equality. The personal stories of some members illustrate this. Two of the African American members grew up on plantations owned by two of the white members. From subservient child to equal partner, this is truly a transition for these individuals and for this community. On the ETMC, black elected officials sit beside the landed white gentry, and all have an opportunity to shape how the county creates its story, to decide how it builds its tourism industry, and to engage in the processes by which reconciliation may occur.

During our interviews, some members expressed the positive repercussions the ETMC's work could have on reconciliation not only within the membership, but within the greater community.

I think that by restoring the Sumner Courthouse to its condition in 1955, creating the Emmett Till Interpretive Trail, and hopefully also creating a visitors center for potential tourists is a great step in the process of healing race relations in Tallahatchie County. For too long, the story of Emmett Till has been suppressed and neglected by the general population of Tallahatchie County. It is as if the people here have remained in denial about what happened, hoping that if it was ignored and not spoken of it would somehow disappear. The formation of the Emmett Till Memorial Commission has no doubt shown the people of Tallahatchie County that the murder of Emmett Till, and especially the injustice that followed, is not to be ignored. The Commission sends the message that not only is it time to accept this black spot on our county's history, but it's time to memorialize the name of Emmett Till to give him the respect he deserves.

As this member explains, telling the story of Emmett Till through heritage tourism has the potential for tourists and residents alike to experience reconciliation. Heritage tourism allows residents to tell their own story, and to share their experiences with others. Through this process, acknowledgement, acceptance, and healing can occur.

Challenges to reconciliation

While the ETMC has made some strides toward racial reconciliation, they still face several challenges. As previously noted, some members of the ETMC question the notion that the Commission operates on an equal playing field. The ETMC has tried to create a sense of racial equality on the Commission by maintaining a balance in the number of black and white members. However, this does not take into account the historically produced perceptions of the relative power held by each member. Several of the white members come from the elite ranks of Tallahatchie County, including families that have owned plantations for generations. Several of the black members hold important political offices, but all of them have risen to these positions relatively recently, as these positions were unavailable to African Americans in the past. Residents have become accustomed to particular codes of conduct that subtly and perhaps unintentionally enforce racial stratification in the county, and these rules do not fully disappear when the county supervisors create a commission. The statuses that have existed for generations outside the Commission continue to shape how people interact at ETMC meetings.

Other members have highlighted cultural preferences that impede reconciliation. One expression of cultural differences is in ideas about what reconciliation means. To some, reconciliation is produced through black and white members interacting with each other. Under this view, the racial divide was created because blacks and whites were raised differently, and thus have different cultures. The solution is to find ways to get to know each other and appreciate each other's cultures. As one member stated, "If I can't be around you, I can't get to know you." To other members, reconciliation is a by-product of working together toward common goals. Those who expressed this view believe that ETMC members need not focus explicitly on their differences, on building friendships or respect, or on openly discussing cultural differences. Rather, they need to take on common tasks and work together, and through these activities they will build common values and respect for each other. To illustrate this point, one member said, "I think the reconciliation is starting out with the [ETMC] board and I think that we're working together to get things done and I think we're going to get things done because of that working together."

For the most part, these distinct approaches represent cultural differences in the black and white communities. African American members of the ETMC are more likely to see reconciliation as happening through interaction and discussing racial issues openly, while the white members tend to see reconciliation as stemming from common work. These differences are also represented in other preferences expressed by ETMC members. For example, one topic raised in interviews was how their monthly meetings should be run. The African American members are comfortable with an informal meeting structure, in which everyone can talk and which covers a wide range of topics. One gets the sense that the product the black members wish to produce is as much a sense of community as specific outputs. The white members, on the other hand, demonstrate a clear preference for a business-like meeting, following procedures such as Roberts Rules of Order. Privately, some white members have expressed dismay at how the meetings ramble and stray off-topic, and during the meetings the white members are much more likely to enforce established procedures. It is white members, for example, who typically make motions to vote on matters, and who require that new business be formally submitted one month before it may be officially considered. Before there was a strong white presence on the ETMC, the black members ran the meetings in a much more fluid manner, admitting non-members to participate and even vote, and not taking into account set procedures to resolve issues.

In addition to differences in preferred and observed behavior, there are underlying tensions within the group regarding racial issues. Some white members of the Commission stated that they felt unfairly blamed, both at the time of Emmett Till's murder and subsequent trial, and now during the reconciliation process. They recounted how Tallahatchie County, though not the site of the kidnapping or murder, became known as a hotbed of racial tension, the site of a brutal murder where the Civil Rights Movement began. One member explained, "What we don't like is the fact that it was committed by two [men] who were citizens of Leflore County and [Emmett Till] was kidnapped in Leflore County, and Tallahatchie County got blamed for it." This idea of the community being blamed for such a gruesome act is in contrast with how some Commission members described Sumner, which may be why they feel the focus on their town paints it in an undeserved negative light. As one member commented, "Sumner is a wonderful, wonderful place. We have virtually no crime. It's just, you know, a pretty free place to raise children. [In the past] it was just Mayberry. I mean, the policeman really didn't have any bullets. He kept one in his glove compartment." Another Commission member explained what the community was like around the time of the trial, saying, "It was a very prosperous farming community with lots of people, lots of young people, lots of families, vigorous economy, and a lot of educated people. Sumner's always had a high percentage of people who were well-educated. That's always helped it."

So why was this seemingly idyllic community selected as the site for the murder trial? As one member explained the situation, Emmett Till's body was pulled from the Tallahatchie County side of the Tallahatchie River. When neighboring Leflore County, site of the kidnapping, refused to indict the suspects, authorities in Tallahatchie County stepped in. This member went on to explain that Tallahatchie County did not deserve the reputation is has acquired. "At least we indicted them. We didn't convict them, of course, but at least we indicted them and there was a trial, which we should get some credit for."

With regard to feelings of blame, some white members of the Commission also made attempts to remove themselves from any responsibility for wrongdoing. "As far as I know, nobody from Tallahatchie County was in any way remotely involved in that murder. Yet we inherited the stigma of being the place where it happened because the trial was held here," one member explained. Another commented that the trial, "absolutely tore this community apart. The white people felt like they were—I didn't live here then, but I've heard stories—the white people felt like they were unfairly blamed and the press was horrible and negative." The interruption about not living in Tallahatchie County at that time indicates that this member may feel separate from any repercussions that have resulted from the trial in the ensuing years as the community has struggled to redefine itself. Maintaining removal from the problem may make it difficult for this member to be part of reconciliation efforts.

Another member expressed the concept of blame in relation to the Statement of Regret that Tallahatchie County extended to the Till Family in October, 2007:

> I had problems with the first statement and then we had to kind of regroup. [A member of the Commission] took the statement and reworded it and then we discussed it in the meeting and really kind of picked it apart and changed some things and came up with the Statement of Regret. The first one was a Statement of Apology and all of the white people said, 'We're not going to apologize for something we did not do.' We regret very much that it happened, but I'm not going to say that I'm sorry for what happened. I wasn't even living here at the time.

Again, there is the idea of distance from the actual events removing all blame, when in reality there are systems and cultural norms embedded in Tallahatchie County and the Delta region that perpetuate racism to this day. An individual may not have directly been responsible for an act, but at the same time can benefit from and participate in systems that are racist and oppressive. This is why the focus on reconciliation through the ETMC becomes so important. If Tallahatchie County is to truly move beyond these horrible events and find some sense of peace and healing between the races, community members must recognize and transcend these systems that perpetuate oppression and segregation.

Conflicting goals and objectives among members is another challenge to the reconciliation process. Early on in the life of the ETMC, members determined a list of priority activities, which included restoring the courthouse, tourism initiatives, and creating a community center, among others. It became clear through these interviews, however, that many members are divided over what their priorities are or should be.

These conflicts seem to be divided primarily along racial lines. "I think that we both think we have different agendas and it's probably true," one member commented. White members showed a preference toward restoring the courthouse to ensure economic viability. "There's a lot of fear on some of the people that if we lose the courthouse we really will lose [our community]," one member explained. This member went on to add, "There's always something going on, it employs a lot of people, and it's sort of a symbol for the town. We want to have the courthouse redone and we want it to be a viable, working courthouse." Another echoed this sentiment, saying, "[I think] the reason the white people signed on is because of the restoration of the courthouse. And we see this Till thing as a way to get the funds to restore the courthouse, which it needs."

While recognizing the importance of restoring the courthouse, African American members tended to favor a commemorative focus through projects such as the interpretive trail, museum, or reconciliation activities. "Most things is about the restoration of the courthouse, but for me it's more about the museum and the community and the youth. It might even be further than that as far as relationships," explained one member. Another added, "At first they were just in terms of talking about the courthouse, but now we're working on civil rights, education, recreation, and everything that we can add in to help promote this county other than just the courthouse." Someone else suggested that telling the story as accurately as possible might be the most profitable outcome in terms of understanding. "I think Emmett Till, his life story, would be something good to help people see how important it is to value people and that type of thing. My priority is that we learn from history."

Recommendations for community planners

In part stemming from the publicity generated by the historical markers and driving trail, interest in tourism to Tallahatchie County has grown. While the number of visits remains relatively small, the supervisors and others have fielded telephone calls from groups interested in touring the Emmett Till Interpretive Trail and other landmarks. Members of the ETMC and other town residents lead the tours on an informal basis. Tallahatchie County stands on the cusp of taking tourism from a cottage industry to a diversified and professionalized enterprise. But getting to the next level requires planning.

Building tourism, building reconciliation

The most significant impediment to building a tourism industry, to date, has been a lack of understanding on the part of county residents as to the value of the story they can market to tourists. The Emmett Till story provides an opportunity for Tallahatchie County to create a sustainable tourism industry, based on its status as "ground zero in the Civil Rights Movement," if residents are willing to overcome the legacies of the past and take ownership of the story. The starting point is an honest accounting of the county's role in the Emmett Till case and the extent of injustice manifested by the verdict. The ETMC has started this process with the public Statement of Regret, but there remains a "culture of silence" in the county regarding the case, and reluctance, particularly among white residents, to acknowledge the iconic status that Emmett Till has in the struggle for civil rights in the US. The county's leaders and the ETMC have taken an appropriate step in linking tourism to reconciliation. In this case, though, reconciliation is not just the nature of the story the county is marketing, it is also necessary for the county to undergo a process of reconciliation before they can truly create a sustainable tourism industry.

Mississippi has recently undergone a similar story in relation to the blues. For a long time, the blues was viewed by many Mississippi residents, both black and white, as "the devil's music," and blues culture was seen as an embarrassment. Recently, however, Mississippi has created the Mississippi Blues Trail and has established a series of historical markers around the state, which have been widely supported by local residents as well as tourists. Today, many Mississippians, even if they are not blues fans, recognize this music's significance in American popular culture, and are

proud to see its practitioners recognized. Many other Mississippians appreciate the markers because they attract tourism and build economic development at the local level. The story of Emmett Till could provide similar benefits to Tallahatchie County if the residents could come together and agree to honor Emmett Till and the Civil Rights Movement though open, honest dialogue about race. This could truly become a means of community development. The central need is for people to eradicate racial divisions and co-exist respectfully and appreciatively. Reconciling the pain and injustice is essential for this community and others like it to move beyond the past and embrace a collective future.

The ETMC probably missed an opportunity early in its existence to build a form of reconciliation in relationships on the Commission itself, for example, by sitting members down and having facilitated discussions that drew out the diverse perspectives in the room. Members likely would have benefited from taking time to understand each other, and particularly the various notions that members have about how to put reconciliation into practice. Instead, the Commission forged ahead with its projects, and by default, adopted one version of reconciliation, which is that it will emerge as a by-product of working together. This limits the potential for reconciliation, because it channels the activities of the ETMC away from visions of reconciliation that focus on healing through interaction and understanding, instead expressing a vision favored by white members of the Commission, reinforcing the existing power structure. An initial attempt at creating new relationships may have been strained in this context, however, since many of the members already knew each other well and had long-established patterns of interaction. One member thought an initial exercise was probably unnecessary, and said he was pleasantly surprised at how amicably the members were able to work together on the Commission. But without skillful facilitation and thoughtful reflection, efforts like the ETMC run the risk of simply reinforcing entrenched patterns of discrimination, and can deny a voice to the full range of perceptions and positions. In effect, this could delay or even impede reconciliation.

Of course, to truly benefit from this tourism program, Tallahatchie County has to build a tourism infrastructure, including lodging and food options. Right now, the county is only positioned for pass-through tourism, as visitors will have to stay and eat in adjacent counties. Nearby Tunica County provides an example of how a county can go from little infrastructure to a multi-million dollar tourism industry; through the 1980s, Tunica was one of the poorest counties in the US, but today it is a major gaming destination, with hotels, restaurants, and other amenities. Civil rights tourism in Tallahatchie County will probably not be as significant a draw as gambling in Tunica, but Tallahatchie does have a unique heritage resource. With vision and collaboration Tallahatchie County can develop its own tourism-based industrial development, and in the process contribute to how Americans view the extension of civil rights to all citizens.

Conclusion

Tourism for reconciliation is a relatively new idea and a difficult undertaking. It requires a cohesive narrative that can be marketed to a target audience. More importantly, and thornier, reconciliation tourism requires a willingness to challenge people's perceptions and demand that people consider a civil rights perspective and a worldview that represents society's disenfranchised and marginalized members.

To do so, tourism planners, managers, and providers, as well as residents in the host area may have to ask themselves hard questions. In the process, though, both the story and the process of reconciliation can lead to a transformative sense of healing to accomplish what Freya Higgins-Desbiolles (2003) defines as the task of reconciliation tourism: "tourism healing divided societies!"

Overall, Tallahatchie County has initiated a tourism effort that should contribute to reconciliation in the global sense—they have the means to tell a compelling civil rights story representing the local perspective. People who visit Tallahatchie County can view first-hand the environment that both produced the Emmett Till verdict, and that has resulted from that case. The Commission's actions may also lead to reconciliation at the local level, which is equally important in conveying the narrative of Emmett Till's legacy. Both elements of reconciliation contribute to equity and social justice in the county and in the nation, and as such build the foundation for a sustainable tourism industry in the Mississippi Delta.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. Michaels (2006) argues that attention to culture comes at the expense of structure. A focus on diverse identities ignores the real issue, economic inequality. We do not mean to detract from the importance of economic equality, but we view equality as multifaceted, involving more than just economics.
2. In alternative spring breaks, common at many American universities, students forego a week on the beach to engage in community development projects (Bermudez, 2008). The gap year, a concept more common in Europe than North America, refers to a year of travel between high school and college, and some "gappers" are finding time to work on community development projects in lieu of or while backpack touring through places like Southeast Asia or South America (Simpson, 2004).
3. On the USHMM's webpage (http://www.ushmm.org/museum/mission/), part of the description of the museum's mission is: "With unique power and authenticity, the Museum teaches millions of people each year about the dangers of unchecked hatred and the need to prevent genocide. And we encourage them to act, cultivating a sense of moral responsibility among our citizens so that they will respond to the monumental challenges that confront our world." This call to action exemplifies the transformative experience that the museum seeks to provide for visitors.
4. For more information on the Emmett Till case, see Beauchamp (2005), Beito & Beito (2004), Huie (1956), Popham (1955), Russell (2006), Segall & Holmberg (2003), Sparkman (2005), and Whitfield (1988).
5. About three months after the verdict was handed down in the Emmett Till murder, Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Alabama bus, which led to an extended bus boycott by the city's African Americans. Mrs. Parks' actions have been widely recognized as sparking the civil rights movement, but Mrs. Parks also acknowledged that she was inspired by Emmett Till as she remained seated on the bus (Segall & Holmberg, 2003).
6. One complaint we did not hear, but that was common during the 1950s and even part of the strategy used by the defense lawyers during the Emmett Till trial, was that the NAACP and other outside groups were using the murder of Emmett Till as a way of undermining "the Southern way of life" (Popham, 1955). While some residents are concerned about the appearance of exploiting Emmett Till's personal tragedy, the

notion that outsiders are exploiting it for political gain does not seem to be a prevalent view in the county today.

7. The brochure can be viewed at http://www.etmctallahatchie.com/pages/et-brochure.htm
8. The text of the statement can be viewed at http://www.etmctallahatchie.com/pages/news-archives.htm

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