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Culture Heritage and Politics of Reconciliation: Reinventing the Blues in the Narratives of The Delta Blues Museum and the B.B. King Museum

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Abstract

"Mississippi Goddam," a song written and performed by the African American jazz singer and pianist Nina Simone, captures all too well the national imaginary of the state of Mississippi as racist backwater. The song was written in 1964 during one of the most turbulent periods of U.S. history. It was first released on her album Nina Simone in Concert, based on recordings of three concerts she gave at Carnegie Hall the same year. The song mirrors Simone's response to the racial violence in the 1960s, the anger she felt at the murder of African American Medgar Evers in Mississippi, and the 16th street Baptist Church bombing in which four black children got killed. Released as a single, the song became a national anthem during the Civil Rights movement. Today, the state of Mississippi is working hard to improve its image and reputation. It welcomes visitors with the sign 'Welcome to the Home of America's Music.' Formerly known as the Magnolia State, the state of Mississippi now officially boasts its reputation as the home of U.S.-American national music.

Keywords: cultural heritage, Delta Blues Museum, Blues, B.B. King Museum

The name of this tune is Mississippi Goddam
And I mean every word of it

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

Alabama's gotten me so upset
Tennessee made me lose my rest
And everybody knows about Mississippi Goddam

(Nina Simone)

"Mississippi Goddam," a song written and performed by the African American jazz singer and pianist Nina Simone, captures all too well the national imaginary of the state of Mississippi as racist backwater. The song was written in 1964 during one of the most turbulent periods of U.S. history. It was first released on her album *Nina Simone in Concert*, based on recordings of three concerts she gave at Carnegie Hall the same year. The song mirrors Simone's response to the racial violence in the 1960s, the anger she felt at the murder of African American Medgar Evers in Mississippi, and the 16th street Baptist Church bombing in which four black children got killed. Released as a single, the song became a national anthem during the Civil Rights movement. Today, the state of Mississippi is working hard to improve its image and reputation. It welcomes visitors with the sign 'Welcome to the Home of America's Music.' Formerly known as the Magnolia State, the state of Mississippi now officially boasts its reputation as the home of U.S.-American national music.

Paul Simon's song "Graceland" wistfully anticipated the newly courted imagery. With the lines "the Mississippi Delta is shining like a national guitar" from his song 'Graceland,' Paul Simon helped push an alternative imaginary of the Deep South (Graceland, 1986). As legend and history has it, the Mississippi region provided the cradle for an African American musical success story from blues and jazz to rock, soul, and hip hop around the globe. Cleveland, Mississippi is now home to the second Grammy Museum in the U.S., after Los Angeles. The state of Mississippi's new welcome sign underscores that fact that the local, regional, and national cultural industries have joined forces to promote perhaps the most tropicalized and demonized state in the nation as an attractive tourist site, home of American

cultural heritage and cherished part of the nation. Music museums, blues trails, and new juke joints have recently emerged to celebrate a new renaissance of the blues. Educational programs, cultural heritage foundations, cultural industry, and music festivals join hands to keep the blues legacy of the Mississippi Delta alive.

(official flyer of Indianola tourism)

Beginning in the mid-1990s, official tourist companies began to incorporate blues heritage tours into their marketing strategies for the state of Mississippi. In close collaboration with the Memphis Convention and Visitor's Bureau and the Mississippi Division of Tourism, the initiative America's Blues Alley has emerged to draw national and international tourists to Beale Street and music spots in Mississippi. As King describes it, "Since 2000, local and state organizations have emerged to begin the slow and tedious process of coordinating the state' blues tourism industry" (King 71). The United States Senate's designation of the year 2003 as the "Year of the Blues" provided additional support to promote a new blues culture in the American South, and King calls this year "the latest major blues revival" (3). With Martin Scorsese's documentary series The Blues (2003) including the work of seven internationally acclaimed film directors and the support of a national education program for schools, the blues gained new prominence on public broadcasting. The state of Mississippi founded its own Blues Commission, with the objective to create blues maps and blues trail markers along the highways and major roads, helping "travelers in locating blues-related sites" (King 68).

(copyright Raussert 2017)

The first blues museum opened its doors in 1979. It was founded by the local library director, Sid Graves. In 1999, the Delta Blues Museum was bought by the City of Clarksdale and became a "stand-alone" museum in the former freight depot of the Illinois Central Railroad. The Delta Blues Museum, a small budget museum, emerged from a grassroots interest to commemorate the blues heritage of the Delta. More endeavors by institutions and private citizens have emerged in recent years. Many museums have been added to the musical map of the state of Mississippi, including the Rock 'n' Roll and Blues Heritage Museum in Clarksdale, the Highway 61 Blues Museum (Leland), the River City Blues Museum in Vicksburg, the Greenwood Blues Heritage Museum and Gallery in Greenwood, and the elaborate $15 million high-tech B.B. King Museum in Indianola, King's hometown. (cf. King 17).

As Sharon Macdonald asserts, "Museum studies has come of age" (1), with Ruth Philipps also finding that "museums have become popular subjects of academic study and critique" (17). Museum studies, though, have paid little attention to museums of popular music. This is all the more surprising, as the flourishing of music museums in recent years shows how

much they have gained cultural, educational, and economic relevance. To put popular music into a museum may, at first glimpse, appear like trapping a songbird in a cage. How to combine textuality, performativity, visual and sonic texts to create a coherent narrative? A central objective of this article is to find out which types of narratives emerge in blues museums. How do they narrate music and how do they account for the music's historical context(s)? Referring to contemporary memory practice, Rosemarie Beier-de Haan mentions that "we can see changes in the ways in which history is staged, and in how societies (nations or smaller collectivities) remember the past" (186). For a state like Mississippi, and a region like the Delta with their loaded history, this seems all the more precarious. History always represents both past and present, and the history of Mississippi "must be understood as being about the present, and as embedded in a continuing cultural practice, as much as about the past" (Beier-de Haan 186). Whereas the study of history is generally dominated by textuality, "museums are shaped by a fundamentally different presentational mode" (Beier-de Haan 191).

This article departs from the premise that multimedia narratives are at the base of exhibits in blues museums, and with a cultural studies approach, looks at blues museums as multimedia narrative sites embedded in heritage and tourist politics. Museums are often devoted to topics and events that appeal to a particular audience. "While open to all, and usually keen to attract a wide section of society, these museums serve communities of interest who share specialist knowledge" (Watson 3). The visitors to the blues museums include scholars of music and cultural studies, nostalgic blues fans, tourists on Highway 61 package tours, global travelers, exotic gazers, and kids who take advantage of educational programs to learn how to play the blues. The range is as rich as the diversity of blues musicians from the Delta. The expectations and the level of acquired knowledge differ from visitor to visitor and, in general, a museum visit turns site into experience, since "the museum is more than a place. It is a network of relationships between objects and people" (Henning 11).

In this context, multimedia narratives serve a double purpose: they allow for the coexistence of orality, textuality, performativity, and interactivity. In addition, they provide a rich spectrum of different narrative modes to secure a high appeal level to diverse groups of visitors. The multimedia narrative enhances the options and maintains flexibility and mobility as key concepts for contemporary museum culture. Danielle Rice reminds us that "museums are dynamic, complex social institutions that are constantly reinventing themselves in response to self-scrutiny and external stimulus" (79).

In my reading of multimedia narratives in selected blues museums, I will bear in mind that "most effective studies of museums are those that are informed by history and theory and practice" (Philipps 17). As a scholar of African American culture and music, I visited a series of music museums in the Delta in March 2017, have traveled various blues trails, put myself in the shoes of the museum visitors, searched archives, and talked to visitors and staff in the museums. Research results affirmed that blues heritage is closely linked to cultural tourism, which includes both "tangible and intangible elements," from historic sites to sites of worship, folklore, and myth (Soper 96). Blues museums, like all sites of popular music heritage, walk a tightrope between the music as performance, entertainment, cultural heritage, political expression, educational tool, and a cultural industry. King expresses that in most of the museums in Mississippi, the blues is hardly remembered as a political medium of struggle and protest (140). "The social conditions," so he explains, "gave rise to the development of the blues, and the harsh realities experienced by many Mississippi blues musicians, are conspicuously absent" (140). The focus is on entertainment and escapism. Paige A. McGinley, on the other hand, reminds us,

> it may seem as though the front-porch-styled stage at Beale on Broadway, like the stages at the well-known chain House of Blues, represents something of a Disneyfication of blues—late capitalist fiction that bears no resemblance to the 'real thing.' But such claim only holds water if we neglect the intensely

> intertwined histories of blues performance and the popular theater—histories that throw into question the premise that the 'real thing' ever was. Far from descending from authenticity into theatricality, black vernacular blues have moved in tune and in time with theatrical conventions since the moments of their earliest emergence. (4)

While King emphasizes the importance of historical context, McKinley's comment recalls the close link between the blues, showbiz, and performativity throughout the history of the blues. The truth lies somewhere in between. One may contest that the blues looks back on a long trajectory of interpretations and reinventions. Ralph Ellison defined the blues as catharsis (Raussert 96). Thinkers like Amiri Baraka interpreted the blues as weaponry for resistance and political struggle. Musicians from the Rolling Stones to U2 claimed the blues as foundation of youth and rock culture. B.B. King considered the blues the very soul of America. These are metaphysical, political, and cultural enhancements of the blues beyond its sheer musicality. With respect to blues heritage cultures, it comes as no surprise, as Craik emphasizes, that cultural tourism also involves marketing "cultural sites, events, attractions, and/or experiences" (113). The blues museums in the Delta are no exception.

The history of tourism may have begun with the works of Alan Lomax. When he visited Clarksdale in the early 1940s, he described the town as "the cotton capital of the nation, locus of the biggest cotton plantation in the South" (28). People called the largely African American business area "the bustling 'New World'" and Clarksdale "the social and amusement center for all the plantation workers from 30 miles around" (28). The current visitor to the state of Mississippi faces a rich map and network of music museums, music sites, and blues trails that fill the former cultural gap between the cities of New Orleans, Louisiana, and Memphis, Tennessee. Whereas New Orleans - the Crescent City and mythic cradle of jazz - has held a high place in American tourism before and after Hurricane Katrina and Memphis lures visitors with sites such as Elvis Presley's Graceland and the famous Beale Street, Mississippi had been absent from the musical map of the cultural tourist industry for a long time. However, Mississippi has gained new momentum by being part of the Highway 61 blues trail that has become part of tourist package tours and locations like Clarksdale.

As King has said, "as a subset of a larger international tourism industry, blues tourism encompasses a complex series of often interrelated and multidimensional public- and private-sector organizations, from blues museums to chambers of commerce to local entrepreneurs which attempt to draw tourists to specific areas … (e.g. Chicago, Memphis, the Mississippi Delta) to experience the culture or heritage of the blues" (3). In King's analysis, blues tourism has become a pivotal example of cultural tourism. Indeed, "the growth of cultural tourism and the expansion of the heritage industry aim at satisfying a growing longing for the archaic and authentic in times of rapid global changes" (Raussert and Seeliger 43).

In its analytical part, this article selectively explores two intermedia narratives of the blues, by looking at the Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi and the B.B. King Museum in Indianola, Mississippi. Both museums form part of "transmedia storytelling," which is the creation of a narrative through multiple documents belonging to various media (Jenkins 17-19). These story worlds are channeled through narrative progression. Bharat Dave reminds us that "(h)eritage as a heterogeneous terrain is simultaneously framed by and frames the perspectives through which it is viewed. Some vehicles through which heritage are sustained include the preservation of material culture, emulation, preservation through surrogates and copies, documentation, simulation and rituals" (41). The story worlds in the selected music museum also include various sites like exhibit rooms, film sections, music auditoriums, music bar and/or coffee corner and not to forget the museum shop.

The narrative progressions in the selected museums show different ways of guiding the visitor through the exhibition spaces. Both museums share an agenda that writes a new history of the blues as quintessential American

music and creates an image of the South as a unity of land, music, and people. Both draw upon multimedia narration combining acoustic, visual, performative, and interactive material. Still they decisively differ in their narrative progression.

The Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi

(Photograph The Delta Blues Museum, Clarksdale, Mississippi, copyright Wilfried Raussert 2017)

As William Ferris put it, "If there is a musical navel or crossroads for Mississippi Delta Blues, it must be on the streets of Clarksdale, a city that lies in the heart of the region known for the blues" (143). From his own fieldwork, he gathers that "generations of young black musicians fled surrounding plantations and moved to Clarksdale, where department stores, restaurants, barbershops, and WROX radio station were beacons of hope and excitement" (143). The Delta Blues museum invites the sojourner on an imaginary journey into the blues world of the Delta. The narrative consists of multimedia and non-chronological narration that is the introduction to the many blues trails, markers, and sites that mark the effervescent and ephemeral history of blues. The Delta, with its unpopulated, open, and raw landscape, makes it difficult to provide solid touchstones to remember. Conversely, it provides the ideal setting for myth-making. The blues trail is an invitation to track the roots and routes of blues events, sites, and performers. It accepts the gaps and holes in the blues map and allows multiple gravesites, myths, and storylines to exist side by side. The basic structure of the Delta Blues museum shows the same conceptual approach to history and memory: it is fundamentally interactive. Through the exhibited props and costumes of performers, the museum becomes a dressing room for the sojourner to slip into their blues' persona. The exhibition strips the blues of a definitive history. Each tourist becomes a performer in their own right to revisit the Delta's musical contributions to the world of blues.

The Delta Blues Museum throws the visitor into an open museum space with multiple directions to choose from. As Hillier and Tzortzi point out, in reflecting space politics in museums, "(one) alternative is to design space in such a way that sequences are more localized, and interconnected so as to allow visitors to choose different paths and construct their own pattern of experience" (299). This also aptly describes the open choreography of the exhibits. Not surprisingly, the Delta Blues Museum marks the starting point of the blues trails and tours in the Delta. Its open structure invites the visitor to engage with the history of the blues imaginatively and creatively. The museum in its seemingly arbitrary arrangement of music instruments, paraphernalia, festival posters, photographs, and blues art work provides more simulacra than "the real thing." The costumes, T-shirts, and props create a theater setting in which visitors can imagine themselves in the clothes of the blues musician or blues festival participant. The visitor's performative acts are part of the exhibit's strategy to fill the absence of "the real thing". Upon entering the exhibit space, the visitor encounters a first textual message that states the unity of music, land, and people in its new imaginary of Mississippi. The opening walk leads the visitor through a sequence of showcases on the left that display musical instruments from Africa; on the right, the visitor is faced with a series of festival posters that display the recent blues festival history in Clarksdale (Sunflower Festival, Juke Joint Festival) in the 21st century. Past and present appear simultaneously to the viewer. Similar to the spatially open structure, the timeline follows no chronological sequence. The viewer's imagination wanders between African past and American present. With the juxtaposition of ancient African instruments and contemporary festival posters, the museum exhibits tradition

and variation side-by-side (reminiscent of Bantu sense of time that is essentially a place-time). As visitors enter deeper into the exhibit space, they can decide which direction to turn to next. Some photographs, many posters, paraphernalia, and music instruments point towards a male-dominated blues history (female blues musicians are conspicuously absent) and introduce the visitor to renowned blues musicians like Robert Johnson, John Lee Hooker, Charly Patton, and Muddy Waters in abstract fashion. A firm material grounding of the blues occurs in the extended section of the museum that is now home to the remnants of Muddy Waters' cabin. Opposite the cabin, there is a long glass window gallery with a series of portrait busts of blues musicians in the newly extended part of the museum, directing the visitor's gaze outward. Looking out through the window, the viewer faces a Robert Johnson mural in contemporary street-art-style. This view demonstrates that the Delta Blues museum is primarily designed to attract the visitor to the city of Clarksdale, the Delta region, and its related blues trails. Like the Muddy Waters sculpture whose gaze looks out to the urban surroundings, the extended window front marks another substitute of "the real thing." It points to the reinvention of the blues in the streets of Clarksdale. A street art painted Cadillac with Delta motifs and a mural of perhaps the most mythologized Delta blues musician, Robert Johnson, illustrate the new mobility of blues tropes.

(Photograph Looking outside the Delta Blues Museum, copyright Wilfried Raussert 2017)

(Photograph Street Scene in Clarksdale Mississippi, copyright Wilfried Raussert 2017)

Starting at the car, the viewer's gaze drifts to the porch, sign, and walls of the Ground Zero blues club, a site plastered with posters of recent and up-coming blues events. The Ground Zero blues club complements the museum with a performative space for regular local gigs and concerts during the the Juke Joint festival and the Sunflower blues festival. One of the owners of the recently created juke joint is the African American actor Morgan Freeman. The blues club carries a name with heavy symbolical reference: In the context of the new Mississippi Delta music culture it seems to signal that this is the location of a new beginning, showing visitors that they are just at very beginning of their journey into blues history.

(Photograph Ground Zero Blues Club, copyright Wilfried Raussert 2017)

The gift shop at the Delta Blues museum provides a map for the visitors that contains shops, galleries, other museum spaces, gig locations, hotels, and bars in Clarksdale that are intended to intensify the new blues experience. Memorial walls holding the names of local and regional blues performers and site markers throughout Clarksdale provide further information to fill the absence of a lost blues culture. A clear homage to the blues as the backbone of modern and contemporary popular music culture, the new blues in Clarksdale is more geared toward cultural production than cultural heritage. The objective is to culturally and economically create a new blues culture that cherishes its heroes in artistic production like blues painting, sculptures, and blues literature. This creates a new blues imaginary geared to uplift the region from its image of racist backwater and attract new business into Clarksdale and the surrounding region. The deserted Paramount Theatre, with one letter suggestively missing in its program announcement, hints, though, that "authentic blues" still remains a myth. It appears to be a slow process to create a new cultural industry and integrate it into the community at the same time.

(Photograph Paramount Theater, Clarksdale, copyright Wilfried Raussert 2017)

As McGinley points out, "the Delta is filled with sites that multiply the grounds upon which blues tourism stakes its claims of priority. These multiple birthplaces, multiple crossroads, and multiple headstones establish blues' historical sites as transitive or processual, rather than substantive or positivist" (199). The visitor to the Delta becomes a surrogate: "The irreducible profusion of transitive sites of blues tourism in the Mississippi Delta sets authenticity in motion, constructing it as always mobile and multiple" (199).

Authenticity itself, as David Grazian reminds us, "is never an objective quality inherent in things, but simply a shared set of beliefs about the nature of things we value in the world" (12). As Grazian explains, "authenticity … is always manufactured: like life itself, it is a grand performance, and while some performances may be more convincing than others, its status as a contrivance hardly changes as a result. … Like other kinds of stereotypes, images of authenticity are idealized representations of reality, and are therefore little more than collectively produced fictions" (11-12).

The B.B. King Museum in Indianola, Mississippi

(Photograph The B.B. King Museum, Indianola, Mississippi, copyright Wilfried Raussert 2017)

The B.B. King museum, however, is a different story. While the Delta Blues Museum and the Delta blues heritage trails lack a cohesive center, the B.B. King Museum established itself as the arguably most frequented tourist attraction on the Delta. The museum opened its doors in September 2008 and "reflects, in part, the vision of the B.B. King museum Foundation and Board, a heterogeneous group made up of whites and African Americans who wanted to develop a critical tourist designation in a struggling region'" (King 17). Economically, the B.B. King Museum project raised $15 million to install its multimedia, high-tech version of a blues museum. Its narrative concept provides a mix of a chronological and circular narration that aims for unity and cohesion. The museum is the result of an active engagement of B.B. King to commemorate and celebrate the blues as an African American cultural achievement. Throughout his music career, B.B. King artistically and economically supported academic programs

and cultural heritage endeavors to collect and preserve blues material. His collaboration with William Ferris helped build the Blues archive at the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi. King eventually donated his blues collection, thus providing the base for the largest blues collection in the world today and "an academic home of the blues" (Ferris xi). He also worked together with Ferris during Ferris' appointment as chairman of the Endowment of the Humanities in the 1990s and helped bridge the scholarly world and the world of music. The B.B. King museum, in part, draws on collections of texts, music, and paraphernalia from King's own collection. The floating signifiers that characterize much of the exhibition in the Delta Blues Museum find a solid grounding in the life story of B.B. King and the latter's awareness of the need to preserve one's oral culture during one's lifetime.

The museum's narrative also pays tribute to the well-intentioned but ambiguous overall state policy of reconciliation. While the history of the often state-sanctioned racial divide and racial violence in Mississippi before the Civil Rights movement is absent from the Delta Blues Museum and most trail markers, the B.B. King Museum does integrate pointed references to racial segregation. In B.B. King's memories, the years of rigid segregation remain alive, like in the "Jim Crow on the Road" section of the exhibit.

(Photograph Jim Crow on the Road, B.B. King Museum, copyright Raussert)

The overall narrative in the museum, though, emphasizes the blues as a national music and aims for a racial reconciliation by emphasizing an essential unity between land, music, and people. The narrative of the B.B. King Museum seeks closure; it does so through the incorporation of King's graveside into the terrain and through a circular structure that frames B.B. King's life story as a success story of the blues. The narrative of the exhibition emerges from the privileged position of the protagonist. It provides historical material such as citations, photographs, and material objects from B.B. King's guitars to tour bus fragments. In addition, the most recent B.B. King tour bus now serves as a vehicle for contemporary blues tours in the Delta and is parked outside the museum. Whereas the narrative in the Delta Blues Museum needs to compensate for the lack of material available to document the music and life story of Robert Johnson, the B.B. King Museum can select which pieces to show and in which narrative sequence. The B.B. King Museum thus occupies a unique role in the network of blues trails and sites in the Delta region: it represents the ultimate success story of the Delta blues on a global scale.

(Photograph 'Lucille' and B.B. King tour bus, copyright Wilfried Raussert 2017)

The B.B. King museum invites the visitor on a circular tour. The first room of the exhibit is a small movie theater that plays a documentary about B.B. King's return to Indianola, Mississippi, and his personal and musical links to the Delta. After watching the film, the visitor enters a room that travels back in time to B.B. King's childhood period and the cotton industry in the Delta region. The structural concept is a circular and chronological narrative. The narrative voice - spoken and written - is B.B. King's. Information boards spread throughout the exhibit rooms contain citations from B.B. King that allow a first-person autobiographical narrative to guide the visitor on his tour. The personal narrative is carefully linked to the history of the land and

the music. B.B. King's musical progression from the Delta through Memphis to Las Vegas and around the globe is embedded in a success story of blues as the musical backbone to the development of rock as global popular music. Each section is self-contained as part of a chronological life narrative. Each section welcomes the viewer with a particular design. If the visitor moves from room 1 to room 2, the optics signal a move from a rural to an urban setting. The visitor encounters a fragmented model of a tour bus which indicates the long years on the road. A replica of an early B.B. King recording studio links the archaic blues world to the music market, recording, and production.

The showcase holding B.B. King's Grammy awards marks a final point of recognition and fame. After leaving the section with two interactive stations that allow viewers to practice their own guitar skills alongside B.B. King, visitors enter a second small movie theater. The final film highlights B.B. King's recognition by the white music world, showing concert gigs with U2 and Eric Clapton. The film stories of the museum present a narrative from local recognition to worldwide fame. They connect B.B. King's global success story with his rural beginnings and create a story of interrelated roots and routes.

One could say that the B.B. King story gives a positive answer to the open questions and uncertainties along the blues trail through the Mississippi Delta. The B.B. King Museum presents a bluesman finally coming home, telling his own story, and presenting his own house of the blues. B.B. King's narration in the opening film is a conscious performance of (re)integration. It links the protagonist with his Mississippi birthplace as well as the Mississippi region with the nation at large. It shows B.B. King as a master of performance in musical and verbal skills. He gives his voice to an oral reenactment of the music's history in the Delta. 'The Thrill is Gone'—a reference to one of King's late blues titles—but the music's history continues to shape cultural, economic, and racial politics. B.B. King always favored a dialogical and relational approach to the white world. The narration in the autobiographical style speaks through B.B. King and his reconciliatory voice is certainly most welcomed by the state policy of reconciliation.

Heritage in Local and Global Commodity Culture

As Dallen Timothy and Gyan Nyaupane have argued, "Being inherently about power and control, heritage is often utilized intentionally by governments (and other institutions, addition mine) to achieve some measured ends and to demonstrate their authority over people and places" (44). The blues museums are part of a larger strategic use of music heritage to insert new economic and cultural life into the region and are bound in networks of different social actors. These networks also dictate in differing degrees the narrative and spatial politics within the museums. The tourist industry is a major factor in the process of promotion and conceptual orientation. It is also important to consider that "cultural commodification frequently results in the loss of control over cultural resources as outside agents begin to capitalize on cultural elements that belong to others" (62). Like most contemporary museums, the blues museums in the Delta include museum shops. For sale are CDs and scholarly books, but primarily musical paraphernalia, decorated cups and plates as well as T-shirts and posters picturing blues musicians and festivals. The racial exotic is sold neither in the B.B. King Museum nor the Delta Blues Museum. In tune with the overall conceptualization of the Mississippi blues map and trails, there is a tendency to sell merchandize—objects, texts, images—that reinforce the mystique about the holy trinity of land, music, and people and unresolved mysteries about the life of Robert Johnson and the like. Certainly, Mississippi blues tourism, with its multiple gravesites, also taps into what Philipp Stone describes as "dark tourism" that "may be referred to as the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering and the seemingly macabre" (146).

It is commonly shared knowledge that 'selling ethnicity' and 'selling the exotic' are both frequent economic manifestations as well as powerful marketing strategies. Both phenomena have emerged from a strong multiculturalism and pluralist cultural orientation in discourses within contemporary urban society. Various

discourses intersect when an increasing interest in postcolonial studies, the academic institutionalization of ethnic studies, the ever-expanding tourist industry, as well as consumer interest in ethnic products in terms of food, fashion and culture, meet, collide, and fuse in global economic and cultural exchange. The processes behind 'selling ethnicity' are manifold, as are the questions about agency revolving around the processes of commodifying self and other. As black feminist scholar bell hooks argues, "(t)he commodification of otherness has been so successful because it is offered as a new delight, more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling" (21). The tourist of blues tours is probably attracted by a mix of nostalgia, curiosity, and yearning for a rural black culture as the other to modern society. "Within commodity culture," as hooks has it, "ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can live up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (21). Although a racial dimension is conspicuously absent from the museum narratives, we can assume that for the majority of visitors on the blues tours, it is a given that the roots of blues lie in black music and experience.

A mix of heritage as invention, a new blues cultural industry, free-floating markers, and mysterious stories multiplied by speculative gravesites describe the Delta blues world as exotic. Foster reminds us that fully domesticating the exotic would limit its potential to create surprising effects, thereby assimilating it "into the humdrum of everyday routines" (21-22). Thus, while the exotic may be used to assimilate and neutralize cultural differences, it also signifies a comprehension of difference and diversity that is inevitably distorted and always uncontrollable. Hence, assimilation is necessarily limited and, as Huggan points out, "as a system, then exoticism functions along predictable lines but with unpredictable content; and its political dimensions are similarly unstable …" (14). Moreover, it is necessary to take into consideration that political as well as economic changes bring about shifts in agency that influence who, where, when, and how 'the exotic' is sold and for what purpose beyond simply gaining profit. In this context, Huggan speaks of a whole "cosmopolitan alterity industry" that relies heavily on selling not only ethnicity, but "exotic myths" (xiii). While the products of this industry are mainly geared for easy consumption, Huggan points out that the commodification of cultural difference is seldom only one-sided because it also, at least partly, aims to fulfil an educational function. But even though the alterity industry offers a space of agency to Huggan's "postcolonial exotic," its target groups are nevertheless "mostly, if not exclusively, […] the capitalist societies of the West" (68). In the B.B. King Museum and juke joints like Ground Zero in Clarksdale, we encounter sites of multiple agencies involving black and white actors. A common interest is certainly the economic push for the region combined with a sincere appreciation of the blues as cultural expression. It is true that "the simultaneous invocation and erasure of black suffering is as central to blues tourism as it was to the revival, as is a post-civil rights-era desire for racial reunion and reconciliation" (McKinley 185). This tightrope walk is a risky one. McKinley may be right in warning us that "the constant minimizing of the state sponsored history of violence toward its black residents" may ultimately undermine "the goal of racial reconciliation that many in Mississippi seek to achieve" (McGinley 185).

The concept of music museums in Mississippi tends to follow a complex set of politics. The museums are sites of heritage, nostalgia, educational centers, and sites of worship. Backed by museum awards and financial investment, they embody a long-due recognition of African American cultural achievement in the Mississippi Delta. The Delta Blues Museum, despite low budget, has gained national recognition by winning numerous awards in recent years. In 2009, the museum's website "was awarded a 'gold' certification in the Corporate Design, small budget, multimedia category, by the Southeastern Museums Conference. As the current director Shelly Ritter proudly shares, in 2013 the museum "was honored by the Institute of Museum and Library services with a National Medal for Museum and Library Service, the nation's highest honor for museums." In November 2014, Michelle Obama presented the National Arts and Humanities Youth Program Award (NAHYP) to Delta Blues

Museum and the Delta Blues Museum Band in a White House ceremony ("Acceptance"). The B.B. King Museum and The Delta Interpretative Center received a further economic boost with a grant from the Mississippi Arts Commission in the years 2011 and 2012 (Mississippi Arts Commission). These awards underscore that the blues museums in the Delta are not only past-oriented but decisively future-bound. The multimedia narrative designs provide story worlds that integrate the blues museums into a larger network of local and global music tourism. But beyond that, the museums are projections into the future on the level of educational training for younger generations and as generative sites for a growing entertainment and cultural industry intent on reinventing the blues one more time. The multimedia narratives draw on diversity, and at the same time, they open doors to think, paint, write, and perform the blues anew. After all, the blues, since its beginnings, has always been performative in both its musical and its political dimension.

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