The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area

a progress report

From Cain’t to Can: Lessons from Two Emerging NHAs in the American South

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Heritage Areas are defined by the National Park Service as being places “where natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources combine to form a cohesive, nationally distinctive landscape arising from patterns of human activity shaped by geography.”
The 27 existing National Heritage Areas
The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area meets the Park Service definition

"Much of what is profoundly American- what people love about America- has come from the delta, which is often called 'the cradle of American culture.'"  --from Stories of the Delta, The National Park Service Lower Mississippi Delta Symposium, 1996
The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area

All or parts of nineteen Counties that include portions of the alluvial plane known as the Yazoo-Mississippi Delta
The initiative to create the MDNHA is shepherded by The Delta Center for Culture and Learning at Delta State University.

The mission of this interdisciplinary program is *To promote the understanding of the history and culture of the Mississippi Delta and its significance to the rest of the world.*
Primary partner organizations include:

• The Blues Highway Association
• The Mississippi Blues Commission
• Delta Council
• The Mississippi Delta Tourism Association
• Mississippi Division of Tourism
• The Mississippi Development Authority
The Mississippi Delta National Heritage Area is unusually diverse in its heritage themes ---
• The River, which created the land itself and predisposed it to agriculture: floods, river boats, river rats, levees, the Army Corps, Mark Twain
• The clearing of the wilderness and frontier life that tamed this swamp forest: the final American frontier
• The Plantation economy that developed on this land, the planters who ruled it, and the blacks and whites who farmed it
• Civil War sites, especially the Vicksburg Campaign and battlefield
• Sharecropping and the issues of power and wealth that developed from that system
• Immigrant stories, and the arrival of Chinese, Jewish, German, Mexican, Italian, Lebanese, Syrian, French, and other people seeking “the good life”
• Artistic creativity that sprang from this cultural milieu, including
  The Blues
  Gospel
  Literature
  Poetry
  Painting
  Photography
  Sculpture

• The church and role of faith and family
• Jim Crow segregation and its consequences
• The Great Migration: Goin’ to Chicago and beyond
• The Civil Rights movement, local leadership, community activism, struggle, and eventual triumph
• The end of Jim Crow, and the current rise of Black political leaders
• Agricultural mechanization and displacement of farm workers
• Rise and fall of small town economies
• Roads, Rivers, and Railways as transportation corridors
• Folk medicine, voodoo, myth and mystique

• Modern precision agriculture and the production of enormous amounts of cotton, soybeans and rice, not to mention the catfish industry

• Nature tourism in the greatest migratory flyway in North America, especially bird watching, but also fishing, hunting, canoeing, and biking.
The Delta itself is also diverse. A list of potential stakeholders reflects this diversity

Delta State University
Mississippi Valley State University
Mississippi Delta and Coahoma County Junior Colleges
The National Forest Service
The BB King Museum Foundation
The Delta Blues Museum
Department of Archives and History
Audubon
The Army Corps of Engineers
The Yazoo-Mississippi Levee Board
The Mississippi River Levee Board
Department of Fish and Wildlife
Mississippi Department of Transportation
The Mississippi Blues Commission
The Blues Highway Association
Delta Council
The Mississippi Delta Tourism Association
The Archeological Conservancy
The Nature Conservancy
Mississippi Development Authority
National Park Service
Mississippi Heritage Trust
Casinos, Churches, Social Organizations
The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation
SNCC Alumni