INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY
The Mississippi Delta is roughly bordered by the Yazoo River to the east and the Mississippi River to the west and runs from northern Mississippi to Vicksburg, Mississippi. While technically not a delta but an alluvial plain the Mississippi Delta was built up by extensive flooding of the Mississippi River. The Mississippi Delta is comprised of 14 counties: Desoto, Washington, Bolivar, LeFlore, Panola, Humphreys, Quitman, Issaquena, Coahoma, Yazoo, Sunflower, Sharkey, Tunica, and Tallahatchie.

CULTURE
The Mississippi Delta is a place where you will find a unique culture unlike any other in the world. Culturally, the Mississippi Delta is best known for three things: being the birthplace of the Blues, its regional cuisine (catfish, barbecue, hot tamales) and its cotton culture. In general, the Mississippi Delta is a place where physical and human geography come together to create a unique area that is often said to be the best example of the South.

WHAT IS A VERNACULAR REGION?

Since this research is about a vernacular region, it is important to understand what a vernacular region is. A vernacular region is a region that is defined by a person's perception of place. It is a place that people believe exists due to shared cultural identities. People may use language or cultural characteristics to define a vernacular region. A vernacular region can convey specific meanings and emotional attachments have more meaning for those who reside in the region than for those who do not. Some examples of well known vernacular regions are: the South, Dixie, Up North, the Midwest, the Southwest and New England.

ABSTRACT

A vernacular region is defined by people's perceptions. This research project examined the Mississippi-Yazoo Delta to analyze vernacular names associated with the Delta. My preliminary hypothesis is that there is a presence of a vernacular region associated with the Delta area. The use of these terms in names of businesses will determine the presence or absence of a vernacular region. The data were mapped to analyze the intensity of vernacular names. Field work was conducted March 19-20, 2009 to check the validity of the conclusion.

METHODOLOGY

Prior to data collection, three regional vernacular terms associated with the Mississippi Delta were chosen to serve as the terms to be searched in names of businesses. A list of over 41 cities and towns throughout Arkansas and Mississippi was constructed to serve as the sampling pool. (Memphis, Tennessee and surrounding suburbs. Each city and town on the list was then searched using GoogleMaps (http://googlemaps.com). After the city or town was located, the regional term was then searched within or near the city or town to find businesses with the regional term in the business name. The addresses for businesses with the regional term in their name were then cut and paste and placed into a Microsoft Excel file. These addresses were then geocoded to assign each address a latitude and a longitude. The addresses were then placed on a map in ArcMap. The number of regional labels were then spatially joined by county and were mapped to determine the distribution and intensity of vernacular regional connection via naming practices.

RESULTS

NOTE: Prior to data collection, the decision was made to include business locations in Memphis, Tennessee as part of the Mississippi Delta due to Memphis's shared cultural attributes and proximity to the Mississippi Delta.

FIGURE 1
Number Of Delta Terms By County

The map shown in Figure 1 exhibits at the county level the frequency of "delta" vernacular terms used in business names associated with the Mississippi Delta. In both states the frequency of "delta" vernacular terms increases the closer the counties are to the Mississippi River. In Mississippi there is a stronger relationship with the "delta" vernacular term. The term is present in more businesses names in Mississippi, especially within the Mississippi Delta. There are some counties outside of the Mississippi Delta that have many "delta" vernacular terms. These counties contain the capital cities of both states and their surrounding suburbs.

FIGURE 2
Number Of Blues Terms By County

Figure 2 is a graph that shows the frequency of "delta" vernacular terms. There are 482 "delta" vernacular terms that lie within the Mississippi Delta counties. Outside of the Delta counties there are 301 "delta" vernacular terms.

FIGURE 3
Number Of Blues Terms By County

The map shown in Figure 3 exhibits at the county level the frequency of "blues" vernacular terms used in business names associated with the Mississippi Delta. In both states the frequency of "blues" vernacular terms increases the closer the counties are to the Mississippi River. The term "blues" helps to define a vernacular region due to the amount of business names with the term "blues" within the Mississippi Delta compared to the rest of Arkansas and Mississippi.

The maps made through the research show the distribution and intensity of three vernacular terms associated with the Mississippi Delta. In Arkansas and Mississippi the term "delta" was found in 783 business names. The majority of the business names are within counties that border the Mississippi River. 482 of the 783 businesses were businesses that were in the Mississippi Delta. By having so many businesses with the term "delta" in the Mississippi Delta, it shows that business owners want to give their businesses a name that their customers will identify with. It shows that they believe they have ties to the region and perceive themselves as being a part of the Mississippi Delta.

In Arkansas and Mississippi the term "blues" was found in 61 business names. 35 of those businesses were located within the counties of the Mississippi Delta. While the term "blues" didn't return as many results as the term "delta", it can be concluded that the term "blues" helps to define a vernacular region due to the amount of business names with the term "blues" within the Mississippi Delta compared to the rest of Arkansas and Mississippi.

In Arkansas and Mississippi the term "cotton" was found in 109 business names. 76 of those businesses were located within the counties of the Mississippi Delta. It can be concluded that the term "cotton" can be used to help define a vernacular region in the Mississippi Delta due to the amount of "cotton" terms that are used in business names within the Mississippi Delta.

After examining and analyzing the intensity of vernacular names associated with the Mississippi Delta my original hypothesis was confirmed and it can be concluded that there is a presence of a vernacular region in the Mississippi Delta.

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