

Proposal for Little Rock Ethnography

By Y. Hope Osborn

Little Rock, where I live, is the capital and largest city of the state of Arkansas. Over its approximately two-hundred-year history, it has grown from wilderness to thriving metropolis and from a population of four hundred in the 1820s to 182,000 today. It has a rich history that includes the Civil War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the beginning of a president. It embodies both the historical and the contemporary in its culture, including old and new architecture, music, art, traditions, and businesses. In the coming weeks, I propose to explore this rich and diverse culture.

I intend on visiting six events, exhibits, or sites to explore the Little Rock culture:

* “The Root” café is a locally-owned restaurant that resonates with me because according to its website it supports the community in using local foods, cooked locally and in its use of an eco- friendly environment in its building and setting.

* The River Market also supports the local community in being a market from which local farmers can sell their produce and local craftsman can sell their wares. It is a vital part of the downtown area of Little Rock in a time when downtown areas of many cities are suffering. The River Market reminds me of my teenage years when I lived in Arkansas and would frequent Arkansas farmers’ markets, finding them an interesting place to see a variety of produce and wares from the locals.

* The historic White Water Tavern is another location I intend on visiting to listen to a homegrown band called “Bonnie Montgomery and Montgomery Trucking.” According to the website, montgomerytrucking.com, the band uses a blend of locally significant folk and Americana style music combined with classical opera to entertain their audience. It will be an interesting experience for me as I love music and have always enjoyed sampling a variety of styles and cultures in music.

* “Digital Exposure” is an art exhibit currently housed at the Historic Art Museum featuring two local and relatively new artists using contemporary art medium. It was interesting to note that one of the artists graduated from UALR where I am currently a student myself. I also love photography, so the idea of using photography to create a totally different sort of art fascinates me.

* The Historic Arkansas Museum is a medium through which the local history can be explored. History fascinates me in its exploration of how people adapted in how they felt, what they thought, and what they did in response to the environment of their times.

* Finally, I intend on soaking up the sights, feelings, sounds, and smells of a very popular local recreational park at Pinnacle Mountain. I have gone there myself, and I know many local organizations frequent the site. Whenever I have gone in the past, there are always many people visiting.

In visiting these six events, exhibits, and locations, I will be supporting and seeing other people support the local community in a variety of ways which in turn encourages the friendships, jobs, culture, health, and happiness of its people. By attending these events and locations, people, including myself, build relationships with neighbors. Locally earned money goes back into the local community and local jobs are supported, contributing to a self-sustaining economy. The culture is enriched by locals being involved in local art projects. People are happy to see people they know supporting them, validating and showing solidarity with them. Better health is promoted in the community by people eating freshly and locally cooked foods using fresh, local produce and therefore obtaining more nutrients for their diet.

In the coming weeks, I will be involved in building a better community in Little Rock, Arkansas for myself and others by supporting the local economy and culture in immersing myself in its people and culture through a variety of mediums. In the process, I hope to learn more about the community in which I live and therefore become a more involved participant of its culture.