

# INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

## Meridian Renaissance: Part I

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A few years ago, my husband and I purchased a winter home in Meridian, Mississippi, near our son and his family. We had never been in the Deep South before; our Northern view from afar had painted a not-so-nice mental image of what it might be like in Meridian. What we have found, however, is thankfully radically different from our preconceived notions: we enjoy a pleasant environment filled with people who extend trust as well as friendliness in a relaxed manner. When we pass strangers on the sidewalk, they say ‘Good Afternoon, how are y’all’ or some similar friendly greeting accompanied by a nice smile. Living is easy, and inexpensive. There is no Utopia, of course, and there are situations and issues that might be improved wherever one goes; many folks are open to constructive interaction coupled with the desire to communicate. Those acts are, of course, a two-way street as part of creative cultural interchange.

Over the course of two years, we have gotten to know a broad group, from around the country that hangs out with locals at a downtown craft beer bar. Often there is music or just the sort of chit-chat one might expect; but in addition, there is a strong educational component as we learn from, and teach, each other—about different American cultures, about geography, and even about mathematics. There are sessions with math tables, philosophy tables, and theology tables. There is live trivia with substantial prizes as rewards for those who exhibit both quick and occasionally deep knowledge on a variety of academic topics. There is a competitive team that plays interactive online trivia against other teams throughout North America; the Meridian team finishes consistently in the top 20 in North America and often First in that pool. Learning that takes place in creative ways outside of the formal educational setting, especially as it uses the many fabulous resources of the Internet, can be quite rewarding for all.

One topic of conversation that emerges fairly often involves development of the downtown in Meridian and related matters of urban planning. There are beautiful churches and municipal buildings; there is an ‘old town’ with historic buildings (including our host ‘Brewtique’), and there is the exciting prospect of watching the new state-funded Mississippi Arts and Entertainment Experience (the MAEX) unfold as this art museum begins to loom large along the downtown railroad track horizon. And, between the fine remnants of the past and the developing vision of the future, there are pockets of urban blight that are reminiscent of tougher times in the not too distant past.

The team of principal authors of this special issue comprises two northerners who lived in Detroit for part of the time during its continuing renaissance and two southerners who have lived for many years in Meridian and serve as significant local journalists with sensitivity and deep

knowledge of local history. Indeed, what are the lessons from one locale that might translate to another and shed favorable light on dark shadows of the past? That is an excellent topic, as an ‘urban solstice’ and springboard for further action, for a constructive series of special issues of the journal, Solstice!

#### About the Authors:

- Sandra Lach Arlinghaus. Link to full Curriculum Vitae: <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~sarhaus/> . She is, among other things, the Creator and Founding Editor of Solstice.
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