

**Initial Report
on the
Marianna Revitalization
Project**

A summary of focus group
discussions

Interviews conducted March 1-3 and April 3-4, 2007

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A few acknowledgements are in order. First, we are indebted to the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation for its enduring interest in the economic and social conditions of rural Arkansas and specifically for a grant that makes the Marianna revitalization project possible. The Lee County Community Development Corporation willingly agreed to spearhead the project and provided the planning and staffing for its initial stages. Mayor Robert Taylor graciously allowed the use of the City Hall for the interviews and otherwise lent his support to the undertaking. Finally, we are grateful to the people of Marianna for their commitment to community improvement and specifically to the more than 100 residents who took the time from busy days to talk about their ideas for raising the quality of life and to others who were not seen but contributed.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

An organized community self-analysis such as this undertaking is neither unique to the city of Marianna nor is it even very unusual in the Delta. Communities large and small in the rural South and the urbanized North and Midwest have conducted self-examinations to see whether a new path, different strategies, might produce more vibrant communities and elevate the quality of life. They have had varying degrees of success. The most successful engage a grassroots representation of the community from the outset. Every part of the community must have a stake in the evaluation process as well as the eventual outcomes. The community itself must determine what those outcomes ought to be and could be, and the community — not a team of consultants — must settle on the strategies that might bring those outcomes to fruition. If it is a strategy in which everyone has a stake instead of a solution embraced by a committee or one entity, the chances of success are greatly magnified. The process is kept moving past setbacks and frustrations by the sheer force of community will.

So this is, first and last, a community endeavor. Nothing is attainable in this process unless the people of Marianna and Lee County come together, put aside their differences and self-interests and together imagine how the future of everyone in the community might be better. Together, people can generate ideas and goals for the city and form the teams that can make them all attainable.

A grant from the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation to the Mid South Delta Local Initiatives Support

Corporation finances the Marianna Revitalization Project. It builds upon a model that has been successful in neighborhoods of a number of cities. The premise is that a community can only build upon what it already has, unless it is lucky enough that providence delivers an economic miracle. So the process begins with identifying the town's embedded strengths and its inherent weaknesses, at least as they are seen by people in the community. Often with painful frankness, this first report on community discussions delivers that.

The summary of opinions gleaned from more than 100 participants in the focus groups, which follow in this report, is recommended to everyone. Many will want to pore over the entire recitation of comments, which follow in an appendix at the end of the report. It will be fascinating reading. The voluminous comments provide a snapshot of community attitudes. They may not always reflect the truth about Marianna — indeed, the comments often are contradictory — but they reflect what a cross-section of people *believe* is the truth or *was* the truth about Marianna at points in the past. But perceptions are a part of reality, and progress must begin with their recognition.

No one will be surprised by the major concerns of the community. They are all the usual elements of economic decline — the loss of factory jobs, the prospects of long-term joblessness, and the steady decline of local commerce — and the condition of youth. The latter, in fact, runs through the vast majority of comments on the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats facing the

community. People are alarmed about the education, recreational opportunities, jobs, upbringing and the bleak future that seems to lie ahead of their children, grandchildren and neighbors. People connect their own future rewards and happiness with the uncertain futures of the children.

While the comments reflect discouragement and sometimes anger, they also testify to strengths — mainly the good people of the town and their

public spiritedness — and dreams. They are enough foundation upon which to build a better and happier community.

The next stage is a community meeting where the strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats perceived by the community may be turned into a vision of a vibrant town and healthier neighborhoods and specific recommendations for achieving them.



THE COMMUNITY MEETING

With the results of the focus-group discussions as a foundation, Marianna residents will hold a communitywide meeting in June on the town square. They will engage in a dialogue on what constitutes healthy neighborhoods and what the community ought to try to do to restore a vibrant city life. From this summit will come a shared vision for the city and the surrounding vicinity.

A second stage of the summit will be breakout sessions, where the participants will explore specific approaches to various aspects of the vision: for example,

education, recreation, business development and social services. The sessions will pinpoint the roles that local groups might exercise in achieving the goals. In the months following the summit, a strategy group will lead the community through working groups that will refine issues and priorities that were identified at the summit and establish an agenda for continuing the communitywide discussion.

The Lee County Community Development Corporation facilitates the project.



THE INTERVIEWS

The Lee County Community Development Corporation, in collaboration with Mid South Delta Local Initiatives Support Corporation, conducted a series of focus groups with a wide range of Marianna residents on five days in March and April 2007 at the Marianna City Hall and Lee County High School. The participants included business and civic leaders, workers, retirees, young mothers, officeholders, grandparents, and two classes of eleventh graders — as broad a representation of the community as the sponsors could manage. Slightly more than 100 persons offered their perspectives.

Facilitators asked each focus group one question: “What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) for this community that you see today?” Strengths and Weaknesses are things that are under local control. Opportunities and Threats are not under

local control but exist in the environment and influence the potential for community development and the future quality of life.

Not unexpectedly, what some consider a strength others view as a weakness. Some conditions described by the participants fall into more than one category, occasionally in all four. The comments may not in every instance reflect the reality in the community, but they do reflect what various segments of the community *believe* is the reality or what the reality may have been at some point in the past. Even widely held false impressions are conditions that the community must confront.

Prolific notes were taken during the sessions and transcribed so that every participant’s points are recorded much as they uttered them although in truncated form. Those comments have been broadly categorized and form the basis for this report.



SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

Strengths (129 comments)

People were hard-pressed to identify strengths, perhaps because the discussions came hard on the heels of a run of bad news: the announcement that the last manufacturer in town was closing; Toyota's selection of a city in another state, again, rather than neighboring Marion for a new automotive plant; a grinding strike by public school teachers; and unsettling crime news. Fewer than one in five comments in all the focus-group interviews denoted a strength.

1. The people

The prevailing strength identified was the people of the community — their togetherness, civic-mindedness and volunteer spirit. Thirty-nine comments fell into that category. The Weaknesses section carries a sizable number of contrary comments about the civic-mindedness and neighborliness of people. But there was nearer unanimity that the people of the town constituted a valuable resource than on anything else.

A couple of typical comments about strengths:

- *“There’s a good group of men and women — black and white — who work really hard and care about the city.”*
- *“The people are our strength.”*
- *“We have a group of caring people who work together and try to make a difference.”*

But the comments often carried a tinge of pessimism about the daunting

conditions under which good people labored:

- *“A lot of gifted and talented people who have not found a venue for their abilities.”*
- *“Our strength is people with a high school education if they could get jobs.”*
- *“There are lots of talented people who don’t get a chance.”*
- *“We’ve got some passionate people in this community who want to do some passionate things but they don’t know how to get it done.”*

Quite a few of the comments about the civic nature of the people acknowledged past divisions in the community based on race, social conditions or economic status. They identified it as a strength that those relationships were improving. (See the Weaknesses and Threats sections for contrary views.)

Here are a few of the comments:

- *“We are learning to trust each other so we may be able to put things together.”*
- *“Some of the community members are coming together to try to make life better in Marianna. We haven’t had that in the past. Thinking people are coming together to try to make a difference.”*
- *“You get strength from unity. We can get together and if everything is negative it’s useless. But now it seems to be that we’re talking about things constructively.”*

2. Small-town quality of life

The only other attribute that merited more than a dozen comments was the quality of life and neighborliness of a small town. People viewed it as an inducement to community development.

A few typical comments:

- *“You can sit outside and not be bothered.”*
- *“It’s a good place to raise your family.”*
- *“If you’ve been to other places you can appreciate the quietness of Marianna.”*
- *“It’s an easygoing and laid-back town only five minutes across.”*

3. Transportation

Seven comments identified aspects of the transportation system as a strength that should aid community development. The existence of a major east-west Interstate highway fewer than 20 miles away was seen as a selling point for investment, although a few (in the Weaknesses section) view the distance as a competitive disadvantage for the city against cities located alongside the Interstate. Others saw strengths in the expanded municipal airport and programmed improvements in the north-south highway.

Examples:

- *“We’re only 17 miles from the Interstate and eventually there will be four lanes all the way so I don’t think transportation is a real detriment.”*
- *“River traffic is not far away and we have what amounts to a new airport, which was the Airport of the Year.”*
- *“We’re building infrastructure here with the airport and roads and the available buildings.”*

4. Teachers

No one listed the public or private school systems as a strength, but seven comments identified teachers as an asset, both native teachers and teachers from the Teach for America program.

Examples:

• *“Our educators are our strength. Most are from here and know the community and its culture.”*

• *“The Teach for America teachers give a sense of vitality to the town.”*

Two testimonials to the schools are worth noting:

• *“Extracurricular activities are a strength at school. The clubs and sports are a strength for the youngsters.”* (See the Weaknesses section for an opposing view of extracurricular programs.)

• *“Schools are not as bad as they say they are but teachers just need to get paid a good salary.”*

5. Hunting, fishing and other outdoor opportunities

Six comments suggested that the proximity of fishing, hunting and other outdoor recreational activities in the St. Francis National Forest and the streams, lakes and other natural habitat in the area was an asset that could be exploited to attract investment, tourists and new residents.

• *“We have tremendous potential because of natural resources in the area but we haven’t developed them as tourist attractions.”*

• *“I moved back partly because of the great hunting and fishing around here.”*

• *“I can go fishing and hunting in the morning and be at work on time.”*

Another said the city park was an asset though undeveloped and neglected.

- “We have Atkins Park. It just needs developing and people to organize. We had facilities there but there was no one to take care of them so they were torn up. It’s big but it has deteriorated.”

In a separate category, respondents mentioned the Gladlands tourism promotion, which embraces Marianna and Lee County in addition to other places along Crowley’s Ridge.

6. Scenery and the square

Several people nominated the town square, still one of the prettiest in the Delta in spite of the vacant storefronts, as a rare community asset. They mentioned pretty neighborhoods and scenic beauty in the area.

- “We’ve got scenic beauty and a pretty little downtown,” one said.

7. Civic organizations

Individuals mentioned a variety of local organizations as significant community strengths, sometimes by name — the Chamber of Commerce, the Lee County Community Development Corporation, Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Economic Development Committee, Concerned Parents and the Civic Monitoring Committee — and sometimes generically.

8. Other assets

Other strengths mentioned were the availability of housing and commercial buildings, a low crime rate, improving race relations, fertile soil, the farming tradition and workforce agencies.

STRENGTHS (129 comments)

People — togetherness, voluntarism.....	39
Small-town values and quality of life.....	13
Transportation.....	7
Teachers.....	7
Hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation.....	6
Scenery and a pretty square.....	6
Civic organizations.....	6
Low cost of living and housing availability.....	5
Low crime and police improvements.....	5
Availability of land and buildings.....	5
Strong churches and religious fervor.....	5
Lee County Community Development Corp.....	4
Gladlands tourism promotion.....	3
Improving race relations.....	3
Fertile soil and farming tradition.....	2
Promising children.....	2
No strengths at all.....	2
Workforce agencies.....	1
Good cooks.....	1
The community choir.....	1
Native Mariannans who want to return	1



Weaknesses (298 comments)

An overwhelming preponderance of comments in the general category of weaknesses related to the condition of children in the community: perceived failings of the educational system, the absence of recreational opportunities, the dearth of jobs now and for their future, parental failings, and a general sense of hopelessness. The sheer volume and the despairing nature of many of the comments would suggest that addressing the needs of children is the highest priority in the community.

We take up those weaknesses first.

1. General education

Forty-eight comments referred generally to poorly educated children and deficiencies in the schools as conditions that kept the community from progressing and that specifically hindered economic development.

Here are 10 or so representative comments:

- *“Our school system needs to be brought up to par.”*
- *“If we had a school system that really excelled then perhaps we could excel as a community.”*
- *“We always end up with two things — low employment and poor education.”*
- *“The lack of an educated work force drives everything.”*
- *“We had a small business that was going to build prefabricated houses but people did not have the basic skills to measure things and put them up.”*
- *“Our schools are messed up.”*
- *“It’s hard to get industry into the city until we get schools cleaned up.”*

- *“About a third of our folks can’t read and write above a third-grade level. I was shocked about that because it indicates a poor work force.”*

- *“There are weaknesses in the school system but the schools are what the community makes them. If we don’t demand something it’s not going to happen.”*

Quite a few criticisms were specific, most notably the schools’ lack of vocational-technical classes (seven comments), the lack of enriching extracurricular activities and field trips (cut to save money, according to several respondents), lack of pay raises for teachers, the short-time nature of the Teach for America cadre, and the physical deterioration of school facilities.

A few examples:

- *“Our kids don’t do field trips anymore and look at what they miss. There is so much to learn and to be seen, like museums.”*
- *“Kids don’t have exposure to things outside Lee County. Kids who are 18 years old have never been to a zoo because there are no field trips anymore.”*
- *“There needs to be vo-tech offered in the schools because everybody is not going to college and that is not being offered now.”*

2. Lack of recreational facilities and opportunities

Twenty-three remarks bore upon the lack of things for young people to do: recreational facilities, after-school activities, Little League baseball, a

swimming pool, a theater or anything to engage children constructively. The same theme recurred when people were asked to talk about Opportunities and Threats.

This remark was repeated over and over with variations:

- *“The younger generation is where the problem really lies because there’s nothing to do and they have nothing to look forward to.”*

Respondents ascribed crime, vandalism, drugs and the lack of good school performance to the idleness of children. Efforts to start recreational programs, they said, had ended owing to the lack of adult participation and volunteers.

An illustrative remark:

- *“We don’t even have a Little League in Marianna like they do in Hughes or Helena. You can’t get volunteers to donate their time to work with kids. We used to have Little League but kids get discouraged. Adults don’t show up after one or two practices.”*

3. Child-rearing

A number of respondents attributed the general condition of children — their educational attainment, juvenile crime, a lack of striving and a feeling of hopelessness — to poor or nonexistent parenting. Parents, they said, do not demand enough from their children, care enough about them or set good examples for them. Several suggested programs of parental education.

4. Apathy and malaise

The second largest number of comments, 33, regard what must be called a shared sense of hopelessness, apathy or aimlessness, characterized by remarks such as, “We aren’t getting

anywhere” or “It doesn’t look we’re doing much,” or “We start things but nothing ever gets finished.”

Other examples:

- *“One set of weaknesses is men who just sit back and say that’ll do or let others do it.”*

- *“People won’t get involved. If it’s not to their immediate advantage they won’t get involved.”*

- *“Everybody has their own agenda and don’t think about others.”*

- *“There are more people who aren’t civic-minded than there are who are civic-minded.”*

- *“People don’t care. They say ‘why should I vote because they’re going to put in who they want?’”*

5. Lack of employment prospects

Although only 32 comments on Weaknesses, the third largest number, specifically identified the loss of industry and lack of job opportunities, it was a subtext of a huge volume of comments in all four categories.

Aside from education and the general condition of children, jobs were far away the predominant concern of residents, and it cut across all walks of life. Many of the other comments reflected a belief about the reasons that the community had lost industry and business and had failed to attract substantial job-creating investment. Those are often listed under other weaknesses, such as distrust and disharmony, education, race and medical facilities.

In each focus group, a call for weaknesses usually elicited a jobs remark first.

- *“Our major problem is lack of employment.”*

- *“What little industry we do have is moving out.”*
- *“If people had good jobs and are making money they don’t resent each other and there are fewer racial problems.”*
- *“People have had to move away because there are no jobs.”*
- *“Manufacturing used to be a strength because we had four or five factories but now it’s a weakness because we don’t have any.”*
- *“People don’t have a job and don’t have anything to look forward to. A lot of them don’t have a high school diploma and they don’t feel like they have a future.”*
- *“We all recognize that we need more jobs but the weakness is that no one is standing up and saying what we need to do about it.”*

6. Disharmony and distrust

More than 30 comments reflected a concern that continuing distrust and disharmony in the community, derived primarily but not altogether from racial divisions, were a weakness that discouraged growth and investment and a better quality of life for everyone. Residents frequently harkened back to old disputes — school desegregation, the economic boycott of the late 1960s and early 1970s and the founding of the Lee County Cooperative Clinic — that they said had not healed sufficiently.

Typical comments:

- *“There’s a lot of animosity in the community.”*
- *“We try to work together and we’ve made strides but there are always forces that don’t want those strides to go forward.”*
- *“We don’t come together as a people — not as a race but as a people.”*

- *“The whites want to run things and they have the money.”*

Whether it is or was true or not, a substantial number of people believe that in the past the business and civic leadership of the county opposed industry and new business because it created competition for farm labor and wages for existing businesses. They listed the “plantation attitude” as a weakness in moving the community forward.

One respondent told this story, which was among several with that theme:

- *“Thirty or forty years ago D and L [Douglas and Lomason] came here and opened a plant and started hiring people. But before they hired anyone they had to put the names of people on a list that was posted at the chamber of commerce. Farmers and other employers came down and looked at the list and if their workers appeared on the list they did not get hired. The older heads from that time died but that mindset is still here. So Marianna cannot and will not grow. You have to deal with people who set this in place 40 years ago.”*

A dozen of the comments reflected a distrust of or disappointment in the elected or civic leadership of the community: the school board and superintendent, city officials and business leadership. A few respondents considered it a community weakness that elected leaders had failed to tackle the community’s transparent problems or else served an elite minority of the people.

7. Crime, law enforcement and the judicial system

While several people in the interviews celebrated what they saw as a low crime rate as a strength, others

viewed casual crime and occasional violent episodes as a significant weakness in the city. A considerable number spoke of lax or discriminatory police work, in the past if not the present.

Here are a few typical comments:

- *“It aggravates me to see signs put on streets and in weeks they are ripped off the poles just out of meanness.”*
- *“Children have no fear of getting in trouble.”*
- *“They arrest the same people over and over but they are never held accountable.”*
- *“Crime is a state problem, not just Marianna, and it may be a national problem but it is definitely a problem here.”*
- *“Anything you see in a big city is going on here on a small scale but it’s just as dangerous.”*

8. Retail commerce

A common complaint was that little retail commerce remained in the city. It was mentioned as a weakness 23 times. Residents recounted earlier days when one could buy clothing, shoes, groceries, medicine, furniture and appliances at competing stores in town. Now one must drive to regional retail hubs like Forrest City or Helena to shop. Residents said the lack of stores and good restaurants reduced the quality of life in the community and impaired the community’s competitiveness for industry, tourism and business.

- *“There’s no place to shop and no place to eat — that’s Marianna.”*
- *“We have only one grocery store and no transportation system so people can go someplace else.”*
- *“There’s not much availability of goods and services.”*

Others gave explanations:

- *“We don’t support local businesses because people just want to get out and go to Forrest City. We used to have a furniture store but people would go other places to buy their furniture. You get used to leaving town.”*
- *“If you need anything besides what they have at Food Giant you go somewhere else to another city. In Minnesota where I’m from, a small town will have a website and lots of local businesses that everyone is loyal to. Small businesses are the way to go. Stop giving your business to Forrest City and keep it here. That’s how a functioning community works.”*

9. Poor race relations

While the issue is a subtext in other categories, a dozen or so Weakness comments reflected a belief that racial tension dogged the community and that discrimination routinely existed in the delivery of public services from the schools to street repairs and garbage collection.

This was the extreme but a recurring theme:

- *“The older generation of whites and younger generations of blacks hate each other.”*
- *“Several people would not set foot in my club after I got the black members.”*
- *“We have had an African-American mayor for many years but there are big differences in services between white and African-American neighborhoods. Potholes will be fixed in white neighborhoods but not others on the same street.”*

A substantial number of comments, on the other hand, reflected a belief that relations had improved.

10. Lack of medical facilities

About a tenth of the people identified the lack of a hospital or round-the-clock medical facilities as a significant drawback, both to the quality of life and as an inducement for economic growth. Individuals praised the clinic and the physicians in town but said the lack of emergency and ready after-hours and weekend medical attention discouraged prospective businesses.

• *“The clinic closes at 5 p.m. so there is no 24-hour health care outside*

Helena and Forrest City. That’s not attractive to potential employers.”

• *“We don’t have the health-care facilities and that will keep even small businesses from coming here.”*

OTHER WEAKNESSES included low tax support for public services, low participation in elections, a long decline in population, poor communications, high local sales tax, poor credit availability, trash, the number of single parents, a poor image, the region’s weak political clout in state politics, obesity and apathy in the religious community.

WEAKNESSES (298 comments)

Weaknesses in the educational system.....	48
Lack of good vocational-technical education.....	7
General attitudes of hopelessness and apathy.....	33
Loss of industry and shortage of jobs.....	32
Disharmony and distrust.....	32
Crime, law enforcement and the judicial system.....	27
Lack of children’s recreational facilities/ programs.....	23
Lack of retail commerce in the city.....	20
Widespread parental failings.....	20
Poor racial relations.....	10
Feeling of hopelessness among children.....	8
Lack of medical facilities.....	7
Location away from the Interstate system.....	5
Poor city image.....	4
Trash and unsightliness.....	3
Poor credit and people on low fixed incomes.....	3
Poor work ethic.....	3
Declining population.....	3
Low tax support for public services.....	3
Misallocation of municipal and county resources.....	3
High percentage of single-parent households.....	2
Lack of transportation for many poor people.....	2
Poor community communications.....	2
Region’s lack of political clout at the state level.....	2
Churches’ lack of involvement.....	2
High incidence of teen-age pregnancies.....	1
Low voter turnout.....	1
High incidence of obesity.....	1
High local sales tax makes Marianna uncompetitive.....	1



Opportunities (171 comments)

The opportunities envisioned by the participants largely reflected the major weaknesses that they had identified. Opportunities were chances to reverse the shortcomings and failings. So the largest numbers of opportunities were in the fields of improving education, attracting industry and creating jobs, unifying the community behind shared goals, building recreational facilities and creating programs for children, and developing the area's natural resources for recreation and tourism.

Most of the remarks about educational opportunity dealt with specific ideas like vocational-technical courses in the secondary schools, after-school programs, field trips, extracurricular programs and enrichment programs, all of which would improve educational outcomes.

A comment or two on each of the major opportunities will suffice:

- *"If school were fixed up just a little, kids would enjoy school. Buckets are on the floor and you hear drips while the teacher is teaching. Things look so bad that kids vandalize them."*

- *"I would build new schools because a lot is wrong with the schools we have."*

- *"Opportunities are limited but education will bring opportunity to Marianna."*

On job creation:

- *"There's an opportunity for another company to come in and open a factory like Camaco did."*

- *"We need to break the mold so other businesses can come in."*

On community unity:

- *"We had 200 people at a chamber banquet and there's not anything that 200 people couldn't do if they could agree on what needed to be done."*

On recreational programs:

- *"We need recreational facilities with a pool and facilities like computers where kids and seniors can go."*

- *"Rodney Slater is giving us \$40,000 to develop the park to do Little League."*

People saw opportunities in the natural resources of the area, specifically the St. Francis National Forest and the two lakes there.

Others believed the community might realize great benefits from gas exploration in the Fayetteville Shale formation, which extends from northwest Arkansas through the Delta to the Mississippi River.

- *"They are finding natural gas here in Lee County and that is an opportunity for the community to grow."*

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES were seen in increasing voter registration, downtown redevelopment and neighborhood cleanup, parenting education and the development of small business.

OPPORTUNITIES

(171 comments)

Chances to improve education.....	19
Attracting industry and other job creation.....	19
Uniting the community on goals	18
Recreational facilities and programs for children.....	18
Developing natural areas for recreation/tourism.....	15
Child-rearing education.....	14
Tourism promotion.....	10
Developing small businesses.....	6
Developing shale gas production in the region.....	5
Clean-up of city and redevelopment of downtown.....	5
Availability of good vacant buildings.....	4
Developing better housing.....	2
The coming four-lane highway system and bypass.....	2
Improving voter registration.....	1
Combating teen-age pregnancies.....	1
Involvement of church leaders.....	1
Jobs/spin-off from ethanol plant in Phillips County	1
Powerful people like Rodney Slater.....	1
Develop better community leaders.....	1
Funding through the Community Foundation.....	1
Casinos if the law can be changed.....	1
Develop more day-care facilities.....	1
Elect a new school board.....	1
Attract another federal or state prison to the area.....	1
Choose better leaders.....	1
Hair styling.....	1
Non-specific aspirations.....	21



Threats (67 comments)

The threats looming over the community were altogether the mere continuation of current conditions: a continuing loss of jobs, status quo in education, increasing drug use and crime, weak community leadership, racial divisiveness and apathy.

The comments when people were asked about threats largely mirrored those uttered when they talked about weaknesses.

- *“The children are going to be leaving because the jobs left. We always said to go get an education and get a job. But not anymore. I used to tell kids*

to get an education and become a schoolteacher. I wouldn’t tell them that anymore.”

- *“A kid would tell me that he would become a tractor driver. I said, ‘do you think that an employer is going to buy a \$100,000 tractor and put you up there when you can’t read and write?’ They don’t have a future.”*

- *“Unless a lot of people change their minds there are no opportunities, only threats. If you are in charge of bringing something in and you don’t want anything brought in we’re not going to get anything.”*

THREATS (67 comments)

Loss of jobs and population.....	24
No improvement in the schools.....	9
Increasing drug use and other crime	6
Poor community leadership.....	3
Racial divisiveness.....	3
Poor community attitudes.....	3
Poor community image.....	2
General hopelessness of children.....	2
Small communities are just dying	1
Housing decline.....	1
No development for tourism.....	1
Apathy.....	1
More futile studies.....	1



STRENGTHS

1. People who want to see something happen for the community.
2. We have rich land and great potential for farming.
3. Our race relations could be better but they are good compared with some adjoining communities.
4. A plus for Marianna is that regardless of whether you are black or white if you are trying to excel and trying to do something, the community -- black and white -- they are behind you.
5. We've got good volunteerism in this city.
6. There's a good group of men and women — black and white — who work really hard and care about the city.
7. We're only 17 miles from the Interstate and eventually there will be four lanes all the way so I don't think transportation is a real detriment.
8. River traffic is not far away and we have what amounts to a new airport which was the Airport of the Year.
9. We're building infrastructure here with the airport and roads and the available buildings.
10. The people are our strength.
11. The cost of living here is hard to equal anywhere else.
12. The housing market is very low.
13. It's an easygoing and laid-back town only five minutes across.
14. We do have some good people.
15. If you need some help there are always people who will stop and help and you don't have to ask.
16. We've always had enough people if we could get jobs.
17. Our strength is people with a high school education if they could get jobs.
18. The ability of people to stay optimistic
19. A lot of gifted and talented people who have not found a venue for their abilities
20. There are lots of talented people who don't get a chance.
21. I moved back partly because of the great hunting and fishing around here.
22. I can go fishing or hunting in the morning and be at work on time.
23. All kinds of talented skilled people who left but who would love to come back.
24. We have two lakes nearby in Lee and Phillips counties.
25. We're going to add a lot of tourism in this area through the Gladlands promotion.
26. You can go to the web and see the hunting and fishing and farming that are available in this area.
27. We have tremendous potential because of natural resources in the area but we haven't developed them as tourist attractions.
28. We have great fishing.
29. We have a group of caring people who work together and try to make a difference.
30. We have a good quality of life — a little crime but not like other places.
31. You can sit outside and not be bothered.
32. It's a good place to raise your family.
33. If you've been to other places you can appreciate the quietness of Marianna.
34. It's a good place to raise your children and it's safe when you drop them at school.
35. We recognize our weaknesses and we continue to work at it and to eliminate it a little bit at a time.
36. We are learning to trust each other so we may be able to put things together.
37. Our chamber of commerce
38. The Teach for America teachers
39. The Teach for America teachers give a sense of vitality to the town.
40. This is a community that works together.
41. We all try to work together.
42. There are several committees that work for a better life in Marianna.
43. We've got some passionate people in this community who want to do some passionate things but they don't know how to get it done.
44. We've got scenic beauty and a pretty little downtown.

45. There's been group of people trying to improve downtown.
46. We have had Entergy people and Southwestern Bell people who visit and do perfunctory things at Forrest City but they really want to be in Marianna because they like people here.
47. People like us.
48. As a whole people in Marianna are neighborly and friendly.
49. Lee County CDC is one of our main strengths.
50. We have people who could do but won't do things.
51. Individual people
52. I can't think of a strength.
53. We have good housing.
54. We have good leadership in some places.
55. We have the buildings if stores would come.
56. Infrastructure is in place with all these buildings.
57. Schools are not as bad as they say they are but teachers just need to get paid a good salary.
58. Crime is not as bad as it is in other places.
59. Crime is exaggerated.
60. Lee County is like a sleeping giant.
61. There are strong religious people here.
62. It was proven during the Katrina situation that this community can come together.
63. The community is full of people who care and are willing to give.
64. It's an educated town not just in book learning but also in experience.
65. I want to applaud the Lee County CDC. They've allowed people to get into new homes and they've dressed this community up.
66. Most people take pride in the new homes built by the CDC.
67. We have a beautiful city and a beautiful town square.
68. A beautiful city compared with other rural towns where so much is run down
69. Looking at where I live we've got a beautiful city with a lot of potential.
70. Our low-income neighborhoods — people from Memphis come and say they are surprised at the beauty of our low-income apartments.
71. People have high potential.
72. I've always found potential reinforcement here — a sense of family and a helping hand.
73. I know everybody and everybody knows me.
74. People are friendly.
75. A nice community and a great place to live.
76. The Little League originally had little support but after it became a fixture in the community people would start to come out and support it.
77. People can take advantage of the resources like classes for parents.
78. We have an industrial park that has plenty of land. We have ample space and a large work force. We have enough for a strong work force if a company came in and offered adequate pay and health benefits.
79. No place is crime-free but the rate of crime in my perception is not as bad here as it is in other places.
80. I don't feel threatened by crime because statistically we have a lower crime rate.
81. The airport now lets larger planes land. We couldn't charter a plane here for Camaco. But you have to have something for them to come here for.
82. We get along well together.
83. We have a good geographical location 17 miles from Interstate and not too far from the Mississippi River if we needed to ship something.
84. The chamber works the hardest to bring things here.
85. The Economic Development Committee tries hard.
86. A new police chief because the old chief had questionable past.
87. One strength is our people.
88. You cannot find better people than in Marianna and Lee County because they're going to come out for you if you have a problem.
89. The people here are good solid people.
90. Our strength is the older generation.

91. There is a lot of land and property available that could be developed.
92. There are plenty of empty buildings so the facilities are here.
93. People do care for their neighbors.
94. We have an industrial park but the city has invested a lot of money frivolously in buildings out there like a hair gel factory and didn't properly oversee the investment.
95. We do have a national forest that is pretty.
96. The black-white situation is much better than it was in the past but it's still split.
97. Racial hatred has never been a problem with some of us.
98. Churches are the foundation of the town.
99. Every church and every denomination pulls together whenever something needs to be done.
100. When the teachers struck some churches cooked for them every day.
101. I don't know of any strengths besides the people.
102. Our educators are our strength. Most are from here and know the community and its culture.
103. We have room to grow.
104. It's hard to talk about strengths because there are so many weaknesses.
105. The workforce agencies are a strength but the agencies are just there and nobody is doing anything.
106. I have amazing kids in my classroom. They are exciting and they have great personalities and great character. They have so much potential.
107. We do attract smart aggressive young people to come here and teach.
108. Our ancestors are buried here and we don't want to see it die.
109. Big Brothers-Big Sisters and Concerned Parents are two good organizations if they stay in business and get cranked up.
110. This is a very small community where you can get a lot of support for some things. But a lot of people won't show up for something like this.
111. Bright kids with incredible potential
112. There's a lot of talent here.
113. The location of Lee County between the Interstate and the casino population on the south end. We're in a pretty good location for some business to take hold here. You may not think that the population is what companies look for but the potential is here for great things for young people.
114. Meadowbrook Homes is a strength.
115. There are a lot of great cooks around here.
116. We have Atkins Park. It just needs developing and people to organize. We had facilities there but there was no one to take care of them so they were torn up. It's big but it has deteriorated.
117. Some of the community members are coming together to try to make life better in Marianna. We haven't had that in the past. Thinking people are coming together to try to make a difference.
118. You get strength from unity. We can get together and if everything is negative it's useless. But now it seems to be that we're talking about things constructively.
119. We have people like Mrs. Wilburn who are bringing things together.
120. Our transportation is improving which may bring in industry.
121. The Civic Monitoring Committee has been formed. They're going to churches and telling them what's happening in our community. It got the mayor to provide an explanation of the one-cent sales tax. There are a few people joining forces trying to do something good for the city but it's not easy. SOME of the ministers are trying to work with the community.
122. Everyone knows each other and it's easy to communicate with each other.
123. Good church community
124. A lot of good teachers help kids out.
125. Extracurricular activities are a strength at school. The clubs and sports are a strength for younger people.
126. Our agriculture is good. We have fertile soil.
127. A majority of the town comes out for athletic events.
128. Community Choir is a strength.

WEAKNESSES

1. Our major problem is lack of employment.
2. 75 or 80 percent of our people are on some kind of fixed income.
3. Our school system needs to be brought up to par.
4. If we had a school system that really excelled then perhaps we could excel as a community.
5. The relationship between the races is not extremely bad but there's room for progress.
6. It's a fact that if you're fighting among yourselves industry is not going to come.
7. What little industry we do have is moving out.
8. We need a place for young people to go so they aren't on the streets. There is nowhere for young people to go.
9. When I was a little kid we had over 27000 people in Lee County and now we have only a few over 11000.
10. We always end up with two things — low employment and poor education.
11. We don't have an educated work force and that keeps industry out.
12. The younger generation is where the problem really lies because there's nothing to do and they have nothing to look forward to.
13. If the jobs came money would start circulating and things would be better.
14. If people have good jobs and are making money they don't resent each other and there are fewer racial problems.
15. There's a lot of animosity in the community.
16. Industry won't go far off the Interstates.
17. Our location won't attract a major plant but maybe we could get a few small plants....
18. We had our fingers crossed that Marion would get the Toyota plant and we would feel the ripple effect
19. We have the highest unemployment rate in the state.
20. We have five doctors or so but we don't have a hospital anymore and that is essential.
21. Not having a hospital has a bearing on industry not coming here.
22. It all comes down to one thing which is that we need better schools to attract industry and then everything else will come automatically.
23. The lack of an educated work force drives everything.
24. We need vocational education in our schools or some place if we're going to get jobs.
25. There needs to be vo-tech offered in the schools because everybody is not going to college and that is not being offered now.
26. Our weakness is there are no jobs.
27. People have had to move away because there are no jobs.
28. Manufacturing used to be a strength because we had four or five factories but now it's a weakness because we don't have any.
29. We have to go out of town for everything because the stores don't offer very much.
30. A lot of people don't have a vehicle and can't go anywhere because of age or infirmity.
31. People are reluctant to put money into establishing retail businesses here.
32. Young people particularly those who are athletic don't have good parks.
33. We put up some goals but tenants began to complain so we had to take the goals down.
34. If you try to do anything positive here there are tons of stupid things you can get into.
35. There are the thuggish kids and then those who are not really bad but since they don't have anything to do they get into worse trouble than the bad kids.
36. Kids don't have anything to do so they get into trouble.
37. You have to start kids in a job at school or someplace.
38. With youth when you are trying to do something for them you are hampered by federal legislation on the kind of equipment you can have and so forth.
39. We need for something for kids to do.
40. We don't have any sources of income to support activities.
41. We lose our top students — the cream of the crop — every year.

42. There's no place to shop.
43. We don't have the tax base to furnish things for our people because sales and property taxes have been declining.
44. We don't have positive things to set before kids.
45. Anything you see on big scale in a big city is going on here on small scale but it's just as dangerous.
46. Our young people have never seen or experienced a prosperous city.
47. We'll get a nice grant to set up a summer playground for one year but the next summer no grant so there's no continuity. What you try to build lasts for one summer because there's no continuity.
48. We've got to have an educated work force before industry will come in.
49. No jobs
50. There is very little shopping and no entertainment and only a few restaurants and no jobs.
51. There's not much availability of goods and services.
52. We can do a whole lot better with the schools.
53. The school did away with vo-tech classes and as a farming community where not everybody wants to go to college we desperately needed them.
54. Why did they take vo-tech out of the schools when we should be teaching people things besides college?
55. We should be teaching day labor in school.
56. I felt safer when I lived in Dallas.
57. We have only one grocery store and no transportation system so people can go someplace else to shop.
58. We have no clothing store except the Dollar Store.
59. Our educational system
60. We had a small business that was going to build prefabricated houses but people did not have even the basic skills to measure things and put them up.
61. We have come a long way in race relations but we have miles to go before we sleep.
62. We try to work together and we've made strides but there are always forces that don't want those strides to go forward.
63. We can't get information out to people because they don't read the paper and we have no television access.
64. The education system
65. We need to have some vocational training in school.
66. We have credit issues particularly in the medical area because people can't pay the doctor.
67. We've been battling the workforce issue for years.
68. Crime is a problem.
69. There's no place to shop and no place to eat — that's Marianna.
70. We had a wonderful store but it was not open on Saturday or Sunday when tourists come.
71. If you want to find souvenirs of Marianna there's no place to go.
72. The Teach for America people are white and they come in here but can't relate to our children.
73. A lack of unity as a community
74. We lack a lot of things.
75. We aren't getting anywhere.
76. I've been working and working and working and we're still in the same rut.
77. Our schools are messed up.
78. I don't know the strengths.
79. It doesn't look like we're doing much.
80. Two hundred cities are trying to get the same jobs we are.
81. It's hard to get industry into the city until we get schools cleaned up.
82. Trash
83. We work hard to keep the city clean but you've got too much against you.
84. They were going to fine people for trash but they won't fine them so you can't get it cleaned up.
85. Nobody is telling young people what they need to do.
86. We start things but nothing ever gets finished.
87. We're losing jobs.

88. Farming is all that is left and the schools.
89. If they don't pay teachers enough we won't have them.
90. The average young person finishes high school and leaves because there is no work here for them to do.
91. There are no young people in church so the churches are not growing.
92. It's hard to get jobs in east Arkansas but if you to a place like Rogers there are all kinds of jobs.
93. The only jobs are teaching school.
94. It's hard to get somebody to come in here.
95. We had our hopes hung on Marion getting the Toyota plant because they might be looking at some of the buildings here.
96. A lot of people don't have a strong work ethic.
97. I've been here 20 years and we've lost more than 2000 people, which are an awful lot in a community, this size.
98. We have a lot of teenage pregnancies.
99. Too high a percentage are single-parent households
100. We have a lot of single parents.
101. Kids are growing up without respect and it's coming from parents.
102. I don't know what to do with these children.
103. There's no work ethic because people aren't taught to work.
104. Kids now don't even know how to mow the yard.
105. There's no home training for kids.
106. People say our kids don't have anything to do so they get in trouble but there was nothing planned for us when we were children.
107. Kids don't go out and play and all their fun and entertainment now is inside.
108. Life is so different nowadays.
109. We haven't had enough successes and they don't even have to be big things.
110. There used to be lot of things to do over at Atkins Park.
111. In the '70s we had lot of turnback money from the state to do things but not anymore.
112. Several years ago someone came here to organize things and it just fell through because there were not enough volunteers.
113. We don't celebrate enough when we do get things done.
114. We need jobs.
115. We don't have nothing here — nothing at all.
116. The farmers don't want industry because it gets wages up.
117. We need eating places and shopping places.
118. There is so much here that needs to get straightened out.
119. People who are in power in Marianna seem to try to hinder those of us who are not in power from making progress and then they don't know why people leave.
120. People here go to Memphis or Forrest City to shop because we don't have anything here.
121. One set of weaknesses is men who just sit back and say that'll do or let others do it.
122. We don't come together as a people — not as a race but as a people.
123. The whites want to run things and they have the money.
124. You have to have perfect schools.
125. Your big companies want tax incentives and a whole lot of freebies.
126. We had some factories that wanted to come here a while back like Levi Strauss but three or four individuals did not want them to come and talked bad about Lee County and its school systems.
127. One person or two people have the bulk of the money and if another company wants to come in they will buy it to keep the competition out.
128. Nobody wants to work together.
129. People don't want to work with us.
130. We're labeled as lazy and that we don't want to work but that's not true.
131. I've been here 84 years and it's a shame the way Marianna went down because the people in power don't allow things to happen.
132. If something is going to be sold they price it too high for low-class people.
133. They didn't want jobs in Marianna because they wanted people out on the farms and then they bought all the machinery so they didn't need any manpower.

134. People drive all the way to Tennessee to find work.
135. We need money to do things and there's no money.
136. The city gets a lot of money but nothing is being done with it to actually help the city.
137. You see negative things that start other places and wind up here so we get the black eye.
138. When they finish college or high school there is nothing for them to do. We don't have anything to draw students back.
139. The judicial system hurts.
140. It aggravates me to see signs put on streets and in weeks they are ripped off the poles just out of meanness.
141. Children have no fear of getting in trouble.
142. They arrest the same people over and over but they are never held accountable.
143. Until law enforcement gets fixed industries won't come to this area.
144. Crime is a state problem not just Marianna and it may be national problem but it is definitely a problem here.
145. A lack of recreational facilities
146. On Martin Luther King Drive they keep all the mailboxes torn down. It's young men. Police know about it but won't do anything.
147. There should be penalties for kids when they do wrong. There should be consequences.
148. We have some adults who do it too and set bad examples.
149. The school system. People have to learn and adjust and compete because there is global competition now.
150. There is no more vo-tech in schools. They moved it to Crowley's Ridge [Community College].
151. Parents won't take responsibility. We need to make parents accountable.
152. Parents aren't allowed to whip children. They leave it to police and police kill them.
153. You can't discipline a child in school now. A little boy who was 9 cussed his teacher this morning. You got to be real with these kids.
154. Foster parents want a check but they won't do anything to those children.
155. I feel sorry for these foster children. All the foster parents want is money.
156. Some kids never had a birthday party in their lives. It's not all children's fault — it's their parents.
157. No jobs is the biggest weakness.
158. Lack of motivation
159. A lack of motivation. I started a part-time business. Trying to get people to do something new is hard. People don't want to try something new. People become accustomed to their surroundings and what they do day to day.
160. People are afraid of change and without change you become stagnant.
161. We have one of the highest tax rates in any direction. We have a higher sales tax rate than other towns around us — 9 percent here. If you go to Dollar General and buy a bar of soap I could go to Helena and buy it cheaper.
162. It was sad to see what happened in the [teacher] strike. I don't know what it was all about. We've lost sight of the kids. Kids have to be the main concern. I used to be a substitute teacher. Teaching should be the highest-paid jobs because you have to put in so much for children.
163. Lack of communications. We just don't know what all the things that are offered.
164. We don't have a creative outlet for kids that teaches them morals. If you give them something to do they wouldn't be getting locked up. We need to bring back programs for kids.
165. The city doesn't look attractive enough to industry because of poor schools and a lack of healthcare facilities though the clinic is wonderful. But the clinic closes at 5 p.m. so there is no 24-hour health care outside Helena and Forrest City. That's not attractive to potential employers.
166. the bad publicity that we seem to get
167. Transportation is a big problem.
168. Crime is a problem because there is no outlet like a job.
169. People don't have transportation to go out of town to a job.
170. We didn't need a bigger airport. My community didn't need it. Our airport was fine. It benefits my community not at all. A majority of people in this city won't use it. They could have put the

- airport on whoever's yard going to be using it. All that asphalt could have been put on the streets of Marianna. That could have fixed a lot of our streets.
171. The only streets being fixed are those of whites. If you going to fix one part of a street fix all of it. If you fix one pothole fix them all.
 172. Our kids don't do field trips anymore and look at what they miss. There is so much to learn and so much to be seen like museums.
 173. About a third of our folk can't read and write above a third-grade level. I was shocked about that because it indicates a poor work force.
 174. Lack of jobs
 175. It goes back to the home for not instructing kids to do the best they can in school so they'll have the foundation to go to college or trade school.
 176. People won't get involved. If it's not to their immediate advantage they won't get involved.
 177. The only thing that attracts people is giving away food or something.
 178. There is very low community spirit as shown by the fact that people didn't show up here.
 179. Everybody has their own agenda and don't think about others.
 180. There are more people who aren't civic minded than there are who are civic minded.
 181. People don't care. They say 'why should I vote because they're going to put in who they want anyway?'
 182. Our weakness is our children and parents. A good parent relationship with children is lacking. Parents don't have political or social awareness.
 183. Kids are our future and there are no opportunities for them.
 184. There are no job opportunities.
 185. Things are so negative and people can't see the positive.
 186. Kids don't have exposure to things outside Lee County. Kids who are 18 years old have never been to a zoo because there are no field trips anymore.
 187. Kids don't have anything to do.
 188. It's such a struggle to find anything.
 189. People say the chamber of commerce keeps things from coming here.
 190. We used to have chain stores like Sav-a-Lot and shoe stores but not anymore.
 191. It's cheaper to go to Forrest City for groceries so our money is going out of town.
 192. I don't mean to be ugly but there is no labor force.
 193. We've been bypassed because people do not want to work.
 194. The young people now aren't raised like we were.
 195. We used to be known for our volunteers — we were the volunteer community of the year in the state — but people now are afraid to get involved now.
 196. People don't want to be quoted anymore so they don't come to meetings like this.
 197. There's less volunteerism because people got criticized for expressing their views and they were labeled troublemakers.
 198. Police don't investigate crimes and if they arrest someone they get out the same day.
 199. Stores get robbed and they just slap them on the hands and turn them loose.
 200. There was a fire where a house had been robbed the day before and it was never even investigated.
 201. The police department was our greatest weakness until we got new police chief after the election.
 202. The policemen are so fat that they couldn't chase anybody down if they had to.
 203. The weakness is the young people on up.
 204. Teachers and parents can't whip their children now.
 205. Schools are a weakness.
 206. I have a friend who has a son with a high school diploma and he can't sign his name.
 207. It's sad to look across the street at the school and see no activity — they look like they're deserted.
 208. When I was coming up we had teachers who really cared but now they're fighting among themselves more often.
 209. When you have people leaving you can't have a good school system.
 210. Industries are not going to come in here if you don't have a good school system and a hospital.

211. Marion's not getting that Toyota factory was a big blow but the labor force in the area was responsible for that.
212. Everything that gets counted in Arkansas is from Cabot on up to northwest Arkansas because that's where the money and power are.
213. People outside the area don't care about us.
214. The municipality may not function like the community would like so people do it themselves.
215. We couldn't even keep a Coke plant here because it could get produced someplace else more cheaply.
216. There used to be a liquor store and pharmacy and a clothing store and a shoe store and other small businesses downtown but they are all gone.
217. There are no movies and only one little place to eat.
218. What is actually keeping me here besides my friends and my family?
219. Kids have nothing to do and no place to go.
220. We have a bad drug problem here.
221. There is nothing for the children to do and many don't have the money to go out of town to the movies which means they have to rely on street wisdom.
222. The older generation of whites and younger generations of blacks hate each other.
223. Several people would not set foot in my club after I got the black members.
224. From what teachers told me they struck because money was allocated but never delivered.
225. The only reason people come back is to the family farm so older people are left here to keep the town going.
226. It is a farm-oriented community and farm work is long hard work and kids get out there and realize that they don't want to work that hard.
227. We do not have interstate traffic like Forrest City.
228. We're in the middle of no-man's land.
229. People used to have class reunions every summer but no more.
230. This town has gotten a reputation as a speed trap with a policeman who watched Robocop.
231. Twenty-five years ago farmers were big men and they didn't want industry in here because they wanted that labor for themselves and then when they got all those big rigs they didn't need labor anymore.
232. They're not allowed to discipline kids like we used to.
233. A security guard stays pickled.
234. You can't tell students from faculty at schools because of the beards and talk.
235. One of the big weaknesses is that we don't have a hospital. If you go out and try to recruit jobs they want to know about your health facilities and your education and your recreational facilities. We don't have any recreational facilities.
236. The leadership in the community is woefully bad. We don't talk about the things that need to be talked about. I worked for the school system for 40 years but I can see things that are pitiful especially the way the superintendent has got things going. During basketball season the kids wanted to go to the finals of the regional tournament and he charged them 15 dollars a head to ride the public school bus to the tournament.
237. Kids don't have anything to do. The only things kids have to do are walk around and watch a fight.
238. There are weaknesses in the school system but the schools are what the community makes them. If you don't demand something it's not going to happen. My two sons got a good grounding here and have good jobs elsewhere but you have to demand things of the schools.
239. The same kids in my class who have so much potential have a limited capacity to dream big. They don't have big dreams pumped into their heads.
240. Several years ago those extracurricular opportunities were there for the kids. We'd have two or three busloads a week going to Memphis or other places to see things like the IMAX Theater at Little Rock or to go on outings with the Debate Club or the Spanish Club. But the leadership doesn't see the need for those things anymore. Now they just go to basketball games maybe and you get charged for that.
241. If you go to leadership about the need for after-school or extracurricular programs they talk about the money crunch. The first thing to be cut is bus trips. When I was in school it was

- exciting to be smart because you got to do all these things. Now why should you try because there's no reward for what you do?
242. Thirty or forty years ago D and L [Douglas and Lomason] came here and opened a plant and started hiring people. But before they hired anyone they had to put the names of people on a list that was posted at the chamber of commerce. Farmers and other employers came down and looked at the list and if their workers appeared on the list they did not get hired. The older heads from that time died but that mindset is still here. So Marianna cannot and will not grow. You have to deal with people who set this in place 40 years ago.
 243. The Interstate was supposed to come through Marianna. It went to Forrest City instead and so did the companies.
 244. Forty years ago Superintendent Kelly had secured a loan to build a swimming pool and recreation center along with offices for those who would run it. All the city or county had to do was pay one dollar as a token and the leadership would not let them pay one dollar for that facility. Our problem has been leadership. That was the problem then and it still is the problem. We have to get up ourselves and do something about it.
 245. When we had the teacher strike the decisions were made by the people in charge of our kids [the school board] when a majority of the members don't have anything invested in anything in our community. These people aren't meeting our needs. People need to be better informed and figure out how it works so we can get people on the school board who want to meet the needs of this community and who care about the public schools.
 246. You can't pass anything that benefits the schools. There are four whites and three blacks and everything is 4 to 3. Nothing is going to pass because there are four votes. The school district is zoned so that it will be 4-3. You don't hear anything about what's right for the students. It's what the superintendent says and not what is good for the students. But our weakness is that it's our fault because we don't make it happen.
 247. Some people do things out of the goodness of their hearts and others do things only because they will get the benefit.
 248. We're still living in Jeff Davis's day [Arkansas governor 1900-06]. You can run a good campaign but a man can come along with \$10 or \$20 and lay it out there and change some votes. We still have a ways to go.
 249. People say nothing has been done on our issues so why keep coming to things like this.
 250. The leadership in education here is not interested in kids who actually go to the public schools. The leadership represents other people. In the schools you have buildings that are not adequate. The schools are crumbling. Fixing up a school could change the entire environment. If something is nice and clean you keep it that away. Facilities are so crappy. You don't have leadership that wants to fix up the school.
 251. Teaching is a revolving door in Marianna. Teachers come here for two years and leave. I can't believe that's good for the community or the kids. There are no incentives to keep teachers here.
 252. Kids in Little Rock will have eight or nine computers in class and they are taking classes like German. Ours don't have anything. Teachers want to be somewhere where they see things growing. In our schools there are only a few computers in the computer labs.
 253. People don't vote. Teachers were out of school for four weeks and how much more catastrophic can it get than that? But it won't get people out to vote.
 254. If you need anything besides what they have at Food Giant you go somewhere else to another city. In Minnesota where I'm from a small town will have a website and lots of local businesses that everyone is loyal to. Small businesses are the way to go. Stop giving your business to Forrest City and keep it here. That's how a functioning community works.
 255. We don't even have a Little League in Marianna like they do in Hughes or Helena. You can't get adult volunteers to donate their time to work with kids. We used to have Little League but kids get discouraged. Adults don't show up after one or two practices.
 256. We don't support local businesses because people just want to get out and go to Forrest City. We used to have a furniture store but people would go other places to buy their furniture. You get used to leaving town.
 257. We don't have enough jobs. That is our downfall.
 258. People don't have a job and don't have anything to look forward to. A lot of them don't have a high school diploma and they don't feel like they have a future.

259. Recreation. There's no place to go after school or weekends. Nothing for them to do.
260. We look at the people who are going to run things and say 'I'm not going to be a part of that'.
261. People will complain but won't do anything.
262. People don't have the drive to do anything. I started a lunch-buddy program where leading people would come regularly and have lunch with a child and it lasted a month. They didn't come back.
263. I'm stuck here but you never see me here on a weekend because we're in Little Rock or Memphis.
264. Our children used to have things to look forward to in school like field trips but they stopped it. Children always looked forward to field trips.
265. School spirit was always the center of the community but not any longer. The schools were the life of the community. Students looked forward to rewards in schools but you don't have them anymore.
266. The lack of health care. We've got the clinic that does a great job but we need health care after hours. When kids get out of school the doctors offices are closed. If a clinic could open from 8 'til 12 on Saturday that would help.
267. We have to go to Forrest City or Helena for a hospital. And if you call an ambulance you have to explain how to get to your house.
268. My biggest concern is this school system. I'm trying to get my grandchildren educated.
269. There aren't any jobs. They find jobs in Forrest City.
270. If someone opens a business no one patronizes it. People don't like you so they won't come. We're not together. We've never been together in this town.
271. Kids are looking for the fast life. They want a \$100 pair of tennis shoes and they don't want to work to get them.
272. I really feel sorry for our children. They're going to find things to occupy their time and it's usually bad. We need a skating rink. We need a swimming pool. We need a movie theater. An idle mind is the devil's workshop.
273. My son wanted to go to college farther away because he wanted to get away from here. We need a lot of strong role models — people who are positive and have a vision.
274. The leadership in our educational system – the superintendent and majority of the school board. We used to have one of the best vocational departments in the state but our superintendent decided to cut it. We live in the Delta. You live by carpentry or bricklaying or electrical work. He'll buy cars for school security but he'll cut our vocational department.
275. Young people see the only way out is to sell drugs and it's tearing our young people to pieces. We need to educate our children that there is a good way out. The answer is not to sell drugs or do alcohol. Go and get educated so you can go out and get a job.
276. Mothers need to be trained to instill values in their children.
277. Kids are not getting any enlightenment out of the schools. School was where you got your education and where you had fun. The system is so terrible now with drugs and guns that teachers just go to school to get their paychecks.
278. A lot of mothers treat school like a babysitting situation. They don't love their children and they just want to get them out of their hair. The mindset at home must change. Their mothers don't have time for them. We need to create something to help mothers show their children love. Many children go to daycare sick.
279. Churches are supposed to be your leaders. Where are the preachers?
280. We don't have the health care facilities and that will keep even small businesses from coming here.
281. We don't have enough jobs and you don't get paid enough.
282. There are not enough extracurricular activities of kids.
283. The prisons around here are a weakness.
284. Drugs give us a bad image.
285. There's not a lot to do after school. You go home and watch TV.
286. There is a lot of racism in Marianna. You go around the neighborhood and realize how they look at you and treat you.
287. School funds are not being spent on what they should be spent on
288. So many talk negatively about Marianna and our school and community.

289. People don't have enough money for anything.
290. The police and others in authority. They are hypocrites. We are being endangered rather than being protected by the police.
291. We have had an African-American mayor for many years but there are big differences in services between white and African-American neighborhoods. Potholes will be fixed in white neighborhoods but not others on the same street.
292. They spend more money on prisons than on our schools.
293. Our obesity rates are very high.
294. The city does not help each other as a whole. We're not one big community. We're divided by race.
295. A lot of people are apathetic.
296. The mayor has been mayor for years and nothing has changed. If leaders don't do anything nothing will get done.
297. Most of the activities in the community are not appealing to people so people don't get involved in community activities.
298. We all recognize that we need more jobs but the weakness is that no one is standing up and saying what we need to do about it.

OPPORTUNITIES

1. We can tap the St. Francis National Forest right outside the city — a beautiful place with two lakes that could become a big tourist potential.
2. We keep hoping that a state park will be developed in the national forest.
3. If we could get three or four casinos in here people would come and spend money and we could have better roads and schools.
4. There are more people who left who would love to come back if they had a chance at a job.
5. You have to tailor jobs for youth.
6. There's been a group in Lee and St. Francis counties working under a Kellogg Foundation grant to promote tourism and business initiative for eastern Arkansas.
7. We're going to have a river park in the national forest sooner or later.
8. We should be able to have people in businesses on the highways tell people how to get to the scenic courthouse and our museum and other opportunities.
9. We should be promoting ourselves in a better way to let people know what our opportunities are.
10. We have a community foundation connected with the Arkansas Community Foundation, which can give grants to 501(c)3s.
11. We have a great potential to have a great city because there are people who care about the city.
12. We have opportunities to improve our education system that we just don't take.
13. There are opportunities for small business.
14. We complain about not having places to go and eat and shop but I wonder why when places open we don't patronize them like Subway.
15. Tourism: the state park we've working on for three or four years
16. The possibility of a state park at bear Creek and Stone Creek
17. Tourists already come through because you see trailers out there but there are no shops to get them here.
18. We could showcase ourselves better for tourists with the historical attractions.
19. We need an outdoor map to key things to do in Lee County and how to get there.
20. We need hospitality training.
21. We need some industry in Marianna.
22. We need to unite the community and don't let race be a factor.
23. We need unity.
24. We're not going to get anything until we clean our city up.
25. If I were going to come here I would look at the churches and schools.
26. Industries look at your school system and then the crime rate and then housing.

27. There has to be a starting point and you have to involve everybody.
28. We have to try to get young people involved because we're getting old.
29. We had 200 people at a chamber banquet and there's not anything that 200 people couldn't do if they could agree on what needed to be done.
30. How do we get people to agree that this is what we want our people to be?
31. Our natural resources maybe
32. We do have an opportunity for a state park but that's a 20-year plan.
33. There will always be people who like to live in small areas.
34. People in the South like to move back to small towns.
35. You need a government program to help parents.
36. There are government programs like human services but people won't take advantage of them.
37. There are opportunities for college and so forth but people won't take advantage of them.
38. People could agree on the kinds of things they wanted and put some elbow grease into it to make it happen.
39. We need jobs to come in and rebuild the city and county.
40. We do need some kind of industry.
41. If we could come together like other towns we could build it back up.
42. If we stay together we can climb the mountain.
43. You have a few people who are trying hard but you start fighting each other.
44. If we pull together and work together we could have factories and supermarkets and stores where we could shop because there are enough people here to support businesses.
45. We've been labeled as a town that doesn't want to work but that's wrong because they're just working other places like Forrest City.
46. There's an opportunity for another company to come in and open up a factory like Camaco did.
47. We need to break the mold so other businesses can come in.
48. We could start our own factory and make road and highway signs and sell them across the country.
49. Fishing
50. Bear Creek used to be a beautiful place but when we (blacks) started going down there they stopped taking care of it and it went down.
51. If you build your downtown you can pull in industry and tourism but when you come downtown and it looks dead nobody is interested.
52. You have to work on your downtown structure.
53. Marianna needs dressing up.
54. People would love to come back home if they had anything to do.
55. I'd like to see everybody come to the table and not have people say we don't want that here.
56. The CDC is working hard to make a difference but it's going to take everybody working together.
57. Potentials have to be nurtured.
58. There's plenty of potential for things to happen but the key is finding a way to open it up.
59. A lot can happen if people love each other and work together.
60. We can change a lot of things if we do things together.
61. There are some nice people here who have a good understanding but you have to speak to them nicely.
62. We can work together although we sometimes have to be pushed.
63. We need recreational facilities with a pool and facilities like computers where kids and seniors can go.
64. We need things for kids to do under supervision. If you turn them loose they'll be like a bunch of wild hogs. They need supervisors.
65. We need something to occupy their time and make them feel like they're somebody. They're standing around looking for a place to rob.
66. I couldn't find a job in the beginning. It took me a long time and I saw a lot of people but I did get a job.
67. We have a lot of empty buildings we could use.
68. We could get people to become braillists. Only 200 people in the United States can do that. We have good minds to do that.

69. We could improve voter registration and that would help.
70. Bear Creek is an opportunity. We need to get out of the plantation mentality.
71. The older people and younger people can be anything they want to be.
72. We need to work with the community. We segregate ourselves. It won't work if we want to improve. We're not working together.
73. We need something besides prisons and schools.
74. An ethanol facility is going in in Phillips County. It will accept milo and corn but a lot of it will come from the Midwest. There might be a few jobs over there for us. Not many.
75. We must instill confidence in kids.
76. I wouldn't be against another prison. It would create more jobs.
77. Helena and Forrest City have colleges. We need a higher-learning institution in Marianna. We need some business college or something here in Marianna.
78. A lot deeper than surface strengths is that we have to get across to young people individual responsibility and respect. You used to get a spanking. Now you can't look at somebody without worrying about getting into a lawsuit. From law enforcement to the school system people are worried about getting sued. Somehow children have to be taught individual responsibility at home if possible. Churches need to get involved too.
79. We've got to discipline those kids.
80. We need more recreational opportunities for children.
81. It's just a place now for retirement but the potential is great if we can get jobs in here.
82. I love to see change and things moving and new buildings.
83. Parents have to take responsibility too. In the strike I heard so much about racial this and that. I'm of the persuasion that the color of my skin does not make or break me. We have to stand up and take responsibility for our circumstances.
84. We have some of the most beautiful brick low-income housing. We have the mindset that we'll never get anywhere. But people here can actually realize that dream of owning their own home. That's a great opportunity in Lee County.
85. I work with a program that offers parenting classes for noncustodial fathers that improves the social capital throughout the city. There are a number of programs right now that people participate in where they can share ideas.
86. There are smoking-cessation classes and diet and nourishment classes and DHS [Department of Human Services] at City Hall. Everywhere you look we have a program that offers things to people but people in the community won't take advantage of them.
87. People are afraid of change. You can preach it and pass it around but they won't do it because they haven't been doing it. We need a catchy way of getting their attention and motivating them.
88. In the fatherhood program we give incentives like a free bag of groceries. We get information about available jobs and pass it along to our fathers. You ask a group to meet to clean up Miss Sally's yard and you get the same little group. Others won't get involved.
89. We need a factory.
90. Bear Creek State Park is an opportunity if it comes to pass. It could be attractive for people who like fishing and camping and water sports. An amusement park at Bear Creek would draw people.
91. We should bring back summer school classes. Summer school also keeps them occupied in summer and keeps them focused and learning.
92. We have a chance to build something that shapes kids' lives. Young adults now have missed out on things. There should be a fixed structure for kids like ballet and dance and drama and recreation. If we had something concrete that would catch on it would be part of growing up in Marianna. Like the Rec Center. I learned good morals from people who work at the Rec Center. Computer keyboarding — we need things like that.
93. I believe something will come along and we'll find a niche. Something that will be attractive to people so they will flock to it.
94. We are going to have to take action ourselves.
95. Children need to be taught to do their best to rise above where they are.
96. We really need vocational classes in our schools but the community won't get involved to get vocational classes in schools again.

97. If all this leasing of Fayetteville shale came into play in the next few years there would be lots of jobs available. Two big companies leased up all the land but then they went up in the northern counties to start drilling.
98. There are lots of government programs to help people but people don't know about them.
99. It's going to take the community to come together.
100. We lived in projects for 21 years until Mrs. Wilburn built me a home.
101. Children need to see that things are possible.
102. Schools have to be positive.
103. Parents need to give kids hope.
104. Kids need to see people work.
105. We're going to have to bring in something to motivate the children.
106. We're going to have to have some outside help.
107. If we got some industry in here we could survive.
108. I'd like to see downtown area back again like it used to be.
109. There is work to be done out there in the St. Francis Forest which will draw more people into town.
110. We have a good industrial park but we can't get them here and keep them here.
111. We believe that industry will come.
112. A four-lane highway from Walnut Corner to Jonesboro is in the works but it's going to take a few years.
113. They have been surveying for oil and gas here.
114. Natural gas may be in the future and that could mean jobs and cash.
115. The railroad been replacing ties and revamping which generated some funds but we need something besides pass-throughs.
116. Shale gas may be what we need — it could revive this community.
117. I do know that if we could get recreation for the young folks it would cut down on a lot of the problems young people get into provided that it is run correctly.
118. For years we've been talking about swimming pools and bowling alleys but it doesn't get done.
119. If we had programs for kids they wouldn't go out and get drunk.
120. We have people in the community who will not go anywhere. They can't go and they don't want to go. They're locked in. That's an opportunity to set up trades. Most of them are not going to college. But they could get training to be an electrician or another trade if we had employment programs.
121. We just think about how great it would be to have an after-school program for kids with potential but who have limited experiences at home. They don't have a chance to go on field trips or to the zoo or a museum or to have a nice sit-down meal at a good restaurant.
122. Some of the bright students want to live and build their community but why stay? If there was a recreation center I would volunteer time.
123. A state park around Bear Creek could put people to work.
124. Day care would be an opportunity.
125. I would start a learning program like the after-school programs that we used to have. So kids can see more and have bigger dreams.
126. We have to look at what the market is demanding — service industries and day care and laundry services and things like that.
127. After-school programs and a swimming pool or anything to keep people off the streets.
128. We have so many abandoned buildings that could be used for after-school programs and there are plenty of people who would put their time and money into them.
129. If school was fixed up just a little kids would enjoy school. Buckets are on the floor and you hear drips while the teacher is teaching. Things look so bad that kids vandalize them.
130. If I had all the money I needed I would use it to train the work force.
131. We need an economy.
132. You've got people and you've got land and you've got buildings.
133. I'd like to see evidence that people wanted things to change. I called 20 parents to set up parent-teacher conferences but only six showed up after I called them so they could get grades and talk about their kids' education. So only six people wanted to make a difference in their children's lives.

134. One different person on the school board could change the whole complexion of the schools. How can we make it happen?
135. The whole school system needs attention badly.
136. There aren't any opportunities here.
137. We could have a boys club and girls club but people won't commit to do anything. Nothing can happen until you get committed people.
138. The bypass will be good.
139. Older people who own property are moving or dying so there's a lot of property available.
140. We've got an industrial park if we could get a couple of businesses to come there.
141. If they could build a lodge out here in the park that would be wonderful.
142. If we pull together we can get more done for both blacks and whites.
143. If we had some jobs kids wouldn't get into trouble. There's nothing for them to do but get into trouble. When I was in school I got a job every summer. But there are no jobs in the summer now. I had something to look forward to every summer but these kids don't have anything to look forward to.
144. You have to have people in leadership to create jobs like cleaning and improving people's homes. If we could clean our city up someone might see it and decide to put a business here.
145. They are finding natural gas here in Lee County and that is an opportunity for the community to grow.
146. We are working on creating small businesses in Lee County.
147. We have people in places of power and we should be able to bring in money.
148. The Louisiana Purchase State Park may be an opportunity. The Gladlands program is on the Internet. You can find the Louisiana Purchase there along with the St. Francis Forest and every café and every old cemetery around here. All the bayous and all the lakes are on there for tourists to find.
149. There are a few faithful ministers but they are in a traditional mindset. They need to go out in the streets. It's not being in the pulpit every Sunday morning that counts. But ministers have to be pushed by the body of the church.
150. I would reinstate all the vocational classes we once had and make them better. That would give students something to look forward to. They could get a skill and have a career. You can learn a trade and be good at it.
151. Years ago we had seven or eight Little League teams. I would get those back together. That would give kids something to look forward to every summer.
152. Rodney Slater is giving us \$40000 to develop the park to do the Little League.
153. I would like to have a gym where people could work out.
154. We need more restaurants.
155. Girls in Marianna do hair.
156. Opportunities are limited but education will bring opportunity to Marianna.
157. Do something about teen-age pregnancies.
158. I would give teachers more money.
159. We could appoint tutors for students so they can get test scores up if we had the money.
160. There should be more businesses and corporations to offer well-paying jobs.
161. We need recreational facilities. I would have recreational facilities so that everyone can go and not just people of one race.
162. I would build new schools because a lot is wrong with the schools we have.
163. We need better leaders.
164. I'd like to see summer baseball.
165. We could do something with Bear Creek Park but it's dangerous now.
166. Tourism at Louisiana Purchase State Park could be an opportunity if you could open a place to visit to learn more historical information about the Louisiana Purchase.
167. We have a lot of history. A museum about civil rights and the boycott and the strike would help.
168. If we could get more stores to open then there would be more options for shopping and more jobs and more competition.
169. If we had a Wal-Mart that would be a start.
170. It would help if we had a movie theater here because we have to go to Forrest City.
171. We have abandoned buildings that could be fixed up for businesses.

THREATS

1. All the jobs keep shutting down so we're going to reach the day when we don't have any young folks and we'll be a community of old folks.
2. We have a potential to lose more young people because of lack of opportunities.
3. We continue to lose people.
4. Some kids do not want to work and there are others who don't think they will reach 25 years old and don't care.
5. We're just about studied to death — dozens of them the past 20 years — but not much ever comes of them.
6. People keep leaving so businesses keep leaving.
7. The educational system
8. Poor housing
9. The people who don't want something to happen have more authority than those who do want them to happen.
10. Crime: the same people are in trouble over and over and over.
11. There is a major disconnect with Teach for America and we don't acknowledge it because we need more teachers.
12. Unless something changes there are no opportunities or at least I can't see them.
13. Small communities like this may just be a thing of the past.
14. We need a trainable work force but our work pool gets more and more diluted.
15. More and more outmigration
16. Our untrained work force
17. Drugs are destroying our young people but that's probably true all over the world.
18. Biggest threat is kids.
19. I don't like to see a town die because it's home.
20. We've just got one grocery store and they have a monopoly.
21. If one set of people is going to run the town we're always going to stay right in this rut.
22. You're losing all your educated people because there's nothing here.
23. If we had factories and jobs here they think the blacks would take power but all we want is equal opportunity.
24. Unless a lot of people change their minds there are no opportunities, only threats. If you are in charge of bringing something in and you don't want anything brought in we're not going to get anything.
25. Young people say 'I don't want to be nothing.' Why do you say that? 'Because mama and dad told me I wouldn't be nothing.'
26. A total lack of industry
27. More crime without jobs and things to do
28. The strike publicity cast a negative shadow on Marianna and Lee County.
29. A lack of change. I hate to retire in Marianna and nothing will have changed from when I was a child.
30. We have a diminishing work force. The work ethic is not strong. At Camaco we had an older work force. We would have high absenteeism. Young people will get a job and get one or two paychecks and you may not see them anymore. Young people need direction and mentoring.
31. Power is a weakness and a threat. People in power take care of their own agendas.
32. The Camaco plant closing will affect everyone here.
33. Not enough activities to keep people here.
34. There are going to be just old people here because there are no jobs and no activities for kids when they get out of school.
35. I was devastated when we didn't get that plant in Marion because it would have helped our area through spin-offs.
36. If there are no jobs and no recreation they are going to find something to do and it won't be good.
37. Things are overwhelmingly negative so it's hard for people to see the positive.
38. Lack of everything

39. Lack of jobs
40. Kids say they will be glad when they can leave Marianna.
41. East Arkansas is not on the map — it's not even part of Arkansas as far as the media and the powers are concerned.
42. There's nothing here for tourists who will come to the national forest.
43. There still is a little problem with race and that may have a lot to do with the business problems.
44. A lot of people still have problems with blacks.
45. We are still polarized.
46. The church base is strong but they are losing members because children are leaving the town.
47. We're just going to become a retirement community if things don't change.
48. The children are going to be leaving because the jobs left. We always said go get an education and get a job. But not anymore. I used to tell kids to get an education and become a school teacher. I wouldn't tell them that anymore.
49. A kid would tell me that he would become a tractor driver. I said do you think that an employer is going to buy a \$100000 tractor and put you up there when you can't read and write? They don't have a future.
50. There are a lot of bright young people in Marianna but they are doing everything they can to get out of Marianna. It's a ghost town.
51. All the jobs here are held by people until they retire.
52. Nobody is going to locate a factory here. No one. You take the Toyota factory. Marion lost it. The tax base is lower here so you don't have money to do things in the way of services that might encourage someone to come here.
53. This is a farming community that never evolved away from that. Now machines do all the work and a few people own the land. Farming is no longer the opportunity so the community has evolved into something else. I'm not sure how realistic it is to expect a big factory here because they aren't interested in staying in the United States.
54. I graduated from college and came back home but I dreaded it. Most never came back. People don't think they have anything to look forward to if you come back here.
55. Our school population is falling and the dropout rate in high school is climbing. There is a lack of certified teachers and we have a superintendent who is not attuned to the community and does not have the children at heart.
56. The biggest threat to our community is our school system.
57. The drug trafficking is bad and getting worse. You've got these meth labs.
58. There's apathy about all issues.
59. Our school board. If it remains like it is it is a huge threat to our community.
60. If the school stays the way it is with the superintendent and school board we're going to hell in a hand basket.
61. Things are not going to change.
62. A lot of teachers are leaving and schools are running down.
63. Kids don't have the ability to stay away from drugs.
64. Elders are not trying to provide young people with anything.
65. Police are a threat because they are not doing anything.
66. There's not enough opportunity to stay here. I might come back to help the community but I won't stay here.
67. I won't come to a meeting because nothing will change.

Marianna, Arkansas: a brief portrait

Marianna, Ark., is a city of about 5,000 and the county seat of Lee County, which was named, of course, after the commander of Confederate forces in the Civil War, General Robert E. Lee. The city itself was named for Mary Ann Martin Harland, who sold the property for the town site. It was incorporated in 1878. Marianna is situated at the very heart of the Arkansas Delta along the western base of Crowley's Ridge, a slender hilly formation created by prehistoric forces that divides the Arkansas Delta down the middle for 150 miles from the Missouri border south to Helena on the Mississippi River. Most of the significant regional towns in the Delta formed on or alongside the ridge. Marianna, which occupies 3.6 square miles, lies near the ridge's southernmost reach at the confluence of two sleepy streams, the L'Anguille and St. Francis Rivers, which meander through farmland and the St. Francis National Forest on Marianna's southern border and then empty into the Mississippi.

The Delta boasts some of the deepest and richest topsoil in the world, which made it for more than a century after Arkansas statehood the region of the state most apt to be called prosperous by the standards of the day. In wealth, population and political power it was the dominant region. It produced and still produces much of the nation's cotton, rice and soybeans. But economic and social forces inside and outside the Delta, beginning with the Great Depression, changed all that so that the region has become the poorest part of Arkansas and one of the poorest sections of America. The mechanization of agriculture marginalized farm workers and literally emptied the countryside.

For a time after mid-century, a proliferation of light manufacturing plants provided jobs, albeit low-wage ones, in small towns like Marianna, but in the last quarter of the century those jobs fled abroad, and the migration to Memphis and cities in the East and North resumed.

Lee County and Marianna did not escape the descent, although Marianna fared better than most neighboring towns. Lee County's population fell from 28,852 in 1920 to 12,580 in 2000 and the decline continues into the new century. As the county seat and only city in the county, Marianna sustained its size if not its prosperity during the agricultural transition, actually reaching its peak of 6,220 in 1980, but since then its population, too, has been in steady decline. It was 5,181 in the 2000 census, and the estimate for 2003 was 4,889. In the 1960s, Marianna had landed an automobile seat manufacturer, Douglas and Lomason (later called Camaco Lorain Manufacturing), and P.M. Manufacturing, a clothing maker. In 1970, Coca Cola established a bottling plant. But 13 years later Camaco was the only manufacturer left. On Jan 31, 2007, it announced that it would close in March, leaving 91 employees jobless.

The Delta's political power both in Washington and Little Rock dissipated with every decennial reapportionment of the legislature and of congressional seats and with it the ability to get things done. The loss of population, primarily in the Delta, winnowed the state's congressional delegation from seven in 1952 to the current four in 1963. Political clout inside the state shifted glacially after the Depression to central and western Arkansas. Lee County once

had its own representative and senator at Little Rock but it now must share one with surrounding counties.

Marianna's demographics mirror those of nearly every Delta town, although the demographics are not quite so stark in the larger regional hubs to the north: Forrest City (17 miles away), Jonesboro, West Memphis and Blytheville. The salient demographics reflect pervasive poverty, a high rate of dependency, low educational achievement and all the other legacies of racial segregation and the vanished agricultural institutions of the South.

Thirty-seven percent of Mariannans lived in poverty in 2000, more than twice the rate for Arkansas, itself one of the poorest states of the union. Median household income in Marianna in 2000 was only \$17,643; for all of Arkansas it was \$33,445; for the United States it was \$43,318. Twenty-nine percent of the city's households had incomes of less than \$10,000. Income wealth was concentrated in 90 of the roughly 1,967 families in town. They had earnings of more than \$75,000 each in 2000. Unemployment in the county consistently runs around twice the state average. Since 2000 it has ranged from 8 percent to 15 percent. An unusually high percentage of the employed work force — more than 22 percent — work for government: the consolidated Lee County public school system, the large Cotton Branch Agricultural Experiment Station, local government or the Brickeys Unit of the state penitentiary 15 miles east of town. Those are some of the better-paying jobs in the community. But the largest employment, 27 percent, is in service fields. Notably, only 4 percent are in agriculture.

A significant factor in the employment and income picture is that

56.4 percent of the population is female, one of the highest percentages in the state. The ratio of females is even higher, of course, among the 15 percent of the residents who are 65 or older owing to the better longevity of women. That more than 56 percent of the residents are women may seem extreme but that seems characteristic of small towns in rural regions. Females account for 51 percent of Arkansas's overall population, but in small municipalities their ratio typically runs between 54 and 56 percent, and the percentage tends to be somewhat higher in the Delta. The phenomenon is a reflection no doubt of scarce job opportunities in those communities and of the heightened cultural mobility of males. Forty-four percent of the Marianna work force, according to a sample in the 2000 census, was women but only 35.8 percent of those actually employed were women.

One third of all the households in the city were headed by women with no husband present in the home. More than a fifth were headed by single-women with children under 18, a rate well over twice the state average but typical of the lower Arkansas Delta. Thirty percent of the households had someone over the age of 65. In 241 households, a grandparent was raising the children.

The homeownership rate in the 2000 survey was slightly under 50 percent. About half of all the dwellings in town were more than 35 years old, 9 percent predating World War II. Of people renting their homes, 43 percent were paying more than a fourth of their income on rent.

The bleakest portrait is of educational attainment, both the current reality and the prospects. More than 41 percent of Mariannans over 25 never

received a high school diploma, and 19 percent never reached the ninth grade. Only 13 percent received an associate or bachelor's degree. The schools mirror the existing reality more than offer hope.

Lee County has always had dual school systems, one for whites and one for African-Americans. That did not change de facto when the U. S. Justice Department forced the abandonment of racially separate schools in 1968-69. A private academy was established and nearly all white students attended it. Lee Academy, which is accredited by the Mississippi Private School Association, now has 325 students from preschool through high school. It is on Highway 243 on the western edge of town. Friendship Christian Academy on Highway 1 South, a small private school, enrolls another 70 in kindergarten through the 12th grade. The Lee County School District, one of only two countywide public school districts in the state, has 1,385 students in two elementary schools (one K-2, the other 3-6), a middle school and a high school. More than 90 percent of the public school students are black, the same percentage that is eligible for free and reduced lunches. In the state, by comparison, 53 percent of students are eligible for free or reduced lunches, one of the highest in the nation.

The division of the city — whites in private schools, African-Americans in public ones — leave the public schools peculiarly poorer than most of the rest of the state. School millage elections become pointless because white residents presume that they have no stake in the public schools and are unwilling to levy higher taxes on their property. The total school ad-valorem tax rate is only 26.30 mills, well below the state average, and it in fact ranks

249th among the state's 250 school districts. State foundation aid to schools was always supposed to compensate for wealth differences among school districts but not for the inability of some school districts to levy a reasonable millage rate. The shortcoming is especially poignant on school facilities, which depend upon a community's willingness to levy taxes for bonded debt. Teacher salaries in the district are not sharply lower than those of other lower Delta school districts (they are among the better salaries in the county) but discontent has been high. Three times in the past dozen years — 1995, 2002 and 2007 — teachers held brief "sickouts" or strikes to protest the lack of raises. In 2007, they maintained that they had not received a raise in three years except for experience step increases.

Performance in the public schools, measured at least by the standards-based state Benchmark Examination, has been so dismal that the school district was cited by the state Department of Education for unacceptable performance. The 2006 results on literacy and mathematics reflect the problem. In the third grade, 52 percent scored at the acceptable rate on literacy, not so far behind the state average (57 percent). In math, 54 percent scored acceptably compared with 67 percent for the state. But the higher the grade the farther behind Lee County students tended to fall. By the sixth grade, the literacy scores were 18 percent for Lee County and 59 percent for the state and on math 21 percent for Lee County and 57 percent for the state. On the separate end-of-course exams for algebra, 32 percent of Lee County students were passable compared with 65 percent of the state. It was slightly better on

geometry, 40 per cent to 60 percent. Delta schools as a rule scored below the state average on the Benchmark and end-of-course exams. (Little is known about achievement records in the private schools, although Lee Academy says that the ACT scores of its seniors are above the state average.)

Housing is both a dark and a bright spot. In the 2000 census, slightly fewer than half the housing units in the city were occupied by the owners. It was the 16th lowest homeownership rate of all municipalities in Arkansas. Owing to the heavy out-migration, there was a high vacancy rate — 11 percent — among the housing structures. Many are crumbling structures that still stand. Half the housing units in town were built before 1970. The city had 261 multi-family units in 2000. The formation of the Lee County Community Development Corp. has made some difference. Since 2000 it has helped 59 low-income families build new homes under the USDA Mutual Self-Help Housing Program or the Arkansas Delta Dreams program and others have acquired and refurbished existing homes. A couple of hundred families have completed the CDC's homebuyer education program.

The distinguishing demographic of the city is race. It has shaped and tortured the social and economic development of the city and county — and the whole region — for a century. The population of the city in 2000 was 74.1 percent black, 24.4 percent white, 1 percent Hispanic. The decline of economic opportunity and the out-migration over 70 years affected both races but it left the city blacker and poorer.

During the civil rights era in Arkansas, the '60s and '70s, racial tensions mounted and several

confrontations sparked a resurgence of political activism by African-Americans. In 1969, the community divided over the creation of Lee County Cooperative Clinic, a program of the Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) that provided medical care to the unserved poor of Lee County. Some white leaders and medical groups in the region opposed the clinic, run by a young man named Olly Neal. Pressures were put upon a new governor, Dale Bumpers, in 1971 to veto the program, a prerogative of the governor. Bumpers approved it and the clinic survived. African Americans demanded economic and political equality as well and staged a boycott of white businesses that lasted from June 1971 to July 1972. Black students boycotted school at Lee High School in the spring semester of 1972. Blacks began to assert their majority prerogatives. In 1990, Lee County elected its first black state senator since the 1870s, Roy C. "Bill" Lewellen. Olly Neal got elected to a judgeship and then to the state Court of Appeals. In 1994, Robert Taylor was elected the city's first black mayor. Among the movement's political legacies is Rodney Slater, a lawyer who became secretary of transportation in the administration of President Bill Clinton.

While Marianna has no hospital, it has two clinics, including the aforementioned Lee Cooperative Clinic (it has satellite clinics at Wabash, Madison and Hughes) and nine physicians. The cooperative clinic provides medical, mental health and dental services. Baptist Family Medical Center is 18 miles north at Forrest City.

In spite of the county's long economic decline, the signs of decay in Marianna are not so evident. The courthouse and town square and the tree-

lined residential streets are neat and orderly. The city maintains three public parks, a baseball field, four basketball courts and three tennis courts — but no swimming pool. There is evidence of unusual civic striving in the face of unrelenting economic adversity. The city was certified as an Arkansas Community of Excellence and there is a long list of small successful bootstrapping projects accomplished by local groups, individuals and the municipal government in the past 15 years. The city has a well-attended fall festival, Autumn on the Square, and an Arts in the Park Concert Series.

Lee County is not a tourist destination now, but for a vast agricultural region the community boasts rare fishing and hunting domains: the L'Anguille River, the cypress-studded bayous of the 21,200-acre St. Francis National Forest, and Bear Creek (640

acres) and Storm Creek Lakes (425) south of town, which are magnificent crappie, largemouth bass and bream lakes. It is not currently much of a tourist attraction but the site where the survey of the Louisiana Purchase began 200 years ago lies in the southwest corner of the county, at the intersection of the Baseline and Fifth Principal Meridian. The small state park there is poorly advertised, and even random travelers passing through the area are apt to miss it as they travel along Highway 49. A sign directs them onto a short road that takes them to the park, where a stone monument marks the base point of the Louisiana Purchase survey. A meandering elevated wooden walkway takes a visitor through a dense marsh out to the marker. The walk passes for about 300 yards under a cathedral-like canopy of towering tupelo and other hardwoods that were profuse in the Arkansas Delta.