

# LAST DAYS OF LOCKDOWN



## DOWNTOWN MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

Within days I will be rolling out a new website highlighting to my trip across the country from May 15 to June 15, 2021. I am glad I could make the trip to visit cities across America. Thank my benefactor, Manny DeMutis, for letting me work on creative projects.

I took special care to visit friends along the way as we shared stories of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Hazy memories of hazy times added to the lure of the visits. Being in Charleston, WV, where I went to school, and Memphis, Tennessee, where I was a union organizer, made me a little nostalgic.

I took maybe 7,000 pictures of 70 towns along the way and reduced them to 70 videos. I was not going to do much with the photos initially, but my wife, Kitty, stepped in and said she thought I should somehow make a documentary of the trip. I am minimally dangerous with Adobe Creative Suite but could not imagine trying to put a documentary together.

I went over to the Phoenix Media Group in Kimberton and asked them about it. They were not keen on the documentary idea and told me to keep the videos short and sweet. After careful consultation and negotiation, I decided to run the pictures in the order I took them with a music background. Some of the images are provocative, and I did not want to draw them out but instead blend them in so they would be offered in context.

I also thought I should say something, so I created 12 videos of me talking about what I saw in the cities and did a little bit of analysis. I have nothing to gain from this, and I am not looking to "monetize" my work but instead make a site for posterity.

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## DOWNTOWN MARKETING AND DEVELOPMENT

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I reflect on American Heritage and American Circumstance.

The lockdown killed a lot of businesses. The vacant and boarded storefronts across America represent the death of the American dream for many entrepreneurs — The so-called “mom and pop shops.”

You don't think of the people behind the counter in towns across America when you do business in some of the stores you visit. People who have saved and borrowed to make their lives better are business owners. Perhaps they can pass along some generational wealth to their offspring.

We were trapped in our homes with the outpouring of caution that we were warned that we might be killing our grandparents if we visited even our relatives. Welcome, Amazon! Delaware even blocked off the border at one point, so I could not buy wine with the commonwealth state stores closed.

The pictures I took will remember those times as they were... desolate and eerie. Even if the small business owner bucked the trend and opened beside the

online chiding that they were a super spreader, there was no office traffic on the street. The offices had moved to remote work. Welcome, Zoom!

I also looked at the impact of the protests on the cities. I hit all of the hot spots and recorded the damages done to the cities. I went down to the Federal Courthouse in Portland, where the Thompson Elk was set ablaze. I spent two days in Portland as I tried to get a grip on the condition of the city. I was able to go to a restaurant both nights and eat a real meal rather than takeout. I had to break the Portland Photos into two different videos because of the volume of photos. I also did two analysis videos on Portland, one about the town and one about the art.

I tried to chronicle the condition of public art. What I found was an explosion of art painted on the boards that covered the windows of downtown Portland. Some of it was impressive.

With no one in the downtowns during the lockdown, it occurred to me that some people took advantage of the opportunity to riot. I am not sure that if there had been no lockdown, the rioting



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would have taken place to the extent that it did. Maybe someone recognized that and planned the riots around them, or maybe it was just a stochastic series of events near existing pallets of bricks... not sure.

Some towns had a lot going for them, even if there were not many people around. There were a couple of them that stood out in my mind. The fact that all of the towns had only a minuscule number of people in them evened the playing field to assess a sense of place. I found that one town in Idaho and another town in Texas were on the opposite end of the income and maintenance/upkeep scale and offered the same good feeling about the space.

One of the videos is entitled "sense of place," and I compare and contrast Sanderson, Texas, with Wallace, Idaho. One town was the center of the silver mining trade, and the other fell into ruins after a flood. Both were very impressive, and both had the look of abandonment. Idaho because of the lockdown and Sanderson because it is in ruins. The sense of place stood out in ruins.

As "placemaking" becomes a profession, I see people all the time talking about making a place. I am not sure that

it is well understood. As many know, I like to use lighting poles as a solidifying factor in identifying a place. You know you are visiting the South Street Headhouse District because there are red light posts; as you know, you are in Phoenixville by the blue.

I do not seek to be iconoclastic, but I think my interpretation will add a different viewpoint to the folks offering cookie-cutter solutions. I don't think some of what it takes to create a sense of place involves a "Mother May I?" proposition. Each space or series of spaces must exist on its own with whatever enhancement of intrinsic value offered in the modification.

I am not sure you can be an engineer and create a place. I do not say that to win friends and influence people, but more from experience.

So, I invite you to look at my American Heritage style website that offers no political view but is more technically oriented to themes in cities across America and how they have been impacted by the virus lockdown: [www.lastdaysoflockdown2021.com](http://www.lastdaysoflockdown2021.com).

*Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at [barrycassidy@comcast.net](mailto:barrycassidy@comcast.net).*

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