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A sense of community and community change: an ethnographic study of a contemporary Louisiana juke joint as it compares to historical literature on the subject

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A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITY CHANGE:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF A CONTEMPORARY LOUISIANA JUKE JOINT
AS IT COMPARES TO HISTORICAL LITERATURE ON THE SUBJECT

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

in

The Department of
Geography and Anthropology

by
Kristopher Ian Debnam
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ABSTRACT

The rural juke joint is a phenomenon that has been mentioned quite frequently in literature pertaining to blues music, but has not received the amount of scholarly attention that it deserves. This social institution is an integral part of the Mississippi Delta's cultural landscape. Over time, it has developed a dual reputation as a fun place for weekend entertainment, and also a dangerous place for sin and vice. Using qualitative methods, this thesis explores a modern-day juke joint located in Waterproof, Louisiana, a small town in the northeast part of the state. It is the goal of this research to show how this particular establishment, The Disco 86 Lounge, compares to narratives and other historical literature written about juke joints in the early part of the twentieth century. In doing so, it addresses broader issues relating to changes in the surrounding community and landscape, such as out-migration and economic decline. This thesis also seeks to understand what the bar means to this local community. By using techniques such as ethnographic interviews and participant observation, I focus on the social activities of the local residents and the roles that the bar plays in the community. I also show how its patrons use this gathering place to form a meaningful sense of place and identity. Overall, this thesis provides a holistic picture of the social, historical, and cultural aspects surrounding this contemporary Delta juke joint.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

On a hot and muggy typical Louisiana summer afternoon in mid-July, I found myself driving north through Tensas Parish in search of a place that I was not sure even existed anymore. The view from the two-lane highway, if not obstructed by thick swaths of hardwood forests, consists of seemingly endless rows of cotton or soybean fields dotted with an occasional house or storage shelter for farm equipment. In a few months the edges of this road would be lined with a snow-like coating of small pieces of cotton lint that fall off of the trucks and tractors, but the harvest had not begun just yet. After pulling into the small town of Waterproof, I turned off of the highway and eventually into the gravel driveway of the Disco 86 Lounge. My directions had been correct so far, but I still could not tell if the place was open for business. A car in the driveway, however, did give me a certain degree of hope. At least there might be someone around to ask.

As I pushed my nerves aside, I got out of the car and made my way toward the entrance, still not sure about what I was going to say to whoever might be inside. Reaching for the door, I heard a faint voice, but could not tell who was speaking or from where it was coming. I eventually realized that it was coming from an older lady who I did not even notice sitting at a picnic table under a large oak tree on the side of the building. I walked over to the tree in what seemed like an extremely long period of silence before finally saying hello when I got close enough. I introduced myself and asked if the bar was going to be open that night. She looked at me strangely and said that it was. I briefly told her my reason for being there before finding out that she was, in fact, the owner. She quickly and without hesitation told me that I was welcome at her place anytime. After inviting me to sit at the table while she enjoyed her cigarette, we began the first of many conversations about her bar and the surrounding community while

waiting for the air-conditioning units to cool the place down for the evening. We talked for a while before several other people showed up and joined the conversation. As the sun began to go down, she asked if I would like a cold beer from the bar. I took her up on her offer, and went inside with the others for my first Saturday night at the Disco 86. At this point, I was still unsure as to what I would find, or even what I was looking for, in this place, but was definitely looking forward to the beer while I sorted it all out.

This thesis seeks to explore the ways in which the Disco 86 Lounge, a contemporary juke joint located on the Louisiana side of the Mississippi Delta, compares to the literature written on early-twentieth-century juke joints in the form of blues narrative and other historical sources. The data gathered during this research will be used to assess how both the community and the establishment have changed over the course of time. In addition to this comparison, I will also address what this particular bar means to the community in which it is located and to the patrons who use it regularly as a social gathering place. In doing so, I hope to show how broader community and regional issues such as out-migration and economic decline are reflected in the contemporary status of this Delta juke joint.

The juke joint has historically been called by many names including barrelhouse, chock-house, jukehouse, juke, jook, and supper. These different names all refer to the same type of establishment: the rural gathering places where blues music was born and incubated among the socialization practices of its inhabitants. The word “juke” is thought to have originated from an African Bambara, and later, Gullah term meaning wicked and disorderly (Gussow 2002). These places have always had a reputation for being true to both of these descriptions. Gambling, drinking, prostitution, and violence are some of the activities that have often been associated with the patrons of juke joints. They were traditionally a place where the poorer inhabitants of the Delta with little opportunity for social or geographic mobility came to socialize on the

weekends. Historically, serving as one of the only social outlets other than church, these Delta juke joints are extremely important to the history and culture of the region.

During the twentieth century however, the abundance and popularity of these establishments within the Mississippi Delta has slowly declined. Juke joints, which have been called “the most significant development in American popular dance and popular music history” (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 76), are a fading aspect of the Delta landscape. Juke joints no longer play the same roles in the lives of these people and communities. It is one of the goals of this research to explore what role a modern juke joint does play in the town of Waterproof, Louisiana. In the process of contrasting the social and cultural functions of The Disco 86 Lounge to those of other juke joints in the past, I hope to ascertain the importance of the establishment within this community and region while also tracing the ways in which it has changed over time.

The significance of this project lies in the fact that the rural juke joint as an avenue of cultural expression, as well as a social gathering place, has changed over the years. Some would argue that the juke joint, like the small communities in which it is located, is slowly dying. Another perspective is that it is adapting to modern influences from outside the region, and therefore, should not be held to standards of the past that are no longer relevant in its definition. Either way this is a social and cultural phenomenon that needs to be documented in order to be preserved. The juke joint has a special part in the heritage of the Mississippi Delta region. Although there has been a relatively large body of writings on blues music and culture, the juke joint has not been explored to the degree that it should. Most people who have written on the topic are historians or music writers that only mention the juke joint in passing. In my opinion, this creates great opportunity for a cultural and historical geography of one of these places, with emphasis on the community in which it is located and the people for whom it serves. After all,

in the words of Herbert (2009), it is the goal of qualitative research in human geography to gain “a comprehensive understanding of what a place means to those who inhabit it” (2). By studying the way that this juke joint and community have changed over time, and also by examining the broader socio-cultural and regional issues reflected in this change, I hope to reveal what this place means to those who inhabit it, and in the process, make a unique contribution to the field of geography.

I will begin this thesis with a literature review covering some of the multi-disciplinary work written about juke joints, the Mississippi Delta, and also relevant literature from the field of geography that addresses issues related to the two. I will then give a brief overview of the methods used to put together this research project in order to explain my reasoning behind them and what effects they may have on the results. Chapter 2 will address the historical juke joint of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Through narratives and historical writing on the subject, I will construct a somewhat holistic picture of the behavior and social activity that have contributed to the construction of the early juke joint’s reputation, thus providing a basis for comparison to the contemporary juke joint upon which my work is focused. In Chapter 3, I will introduce the setting in which my research takes place in order to contextualize the people, places, and events surrounding the Disco 86. In addition to showing how different processes have affected the local community members in Tensas Parish, this will also provide a deeper understanding of their lives and behavior which are inextricably tied to these historical and geographic events. Finally, Chapter 4 will explore the Disco 86 Lounge as a contemporary social gathering place within the community of Waterproof, Louisiana. Through describing the historical, cultural, and social elements associated with this drinking establishment, I will show what this bar means to the surrounding community, how that has changed over its existence, and how its current patrons use it to form a sense of place, identity, and community. In Chapter 5, I

will tie all the different elements of this thesis together by making some final comparisons between this contemporary juke joint and the earlier, historic juke joint tradition, which will provide insight into the changes in juke joint culture and social behavior over the course of the twentieth century.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature needed to put together a research project such as this one is broad. It spans a variety of academic disciplines and subfields. The literature reviewed in this section represents the types of sources that have discussed the phenomenon of the juke joint, as well as other works on topics that relate directly to themes of my research. The first, and perhaps most important, category contains sources written about juke joints and other drinking establishments as social gathering places. The second category contains information about the history and physical geography of the Mississippi Delta. The third and final category contains sources that engage with the social and cultural processes that have affected and are continually affecting the region, community, and people. These include things that range from topics such as migration from places like Waterproof to topics such as the formation of identity among the patrons of the bar.

The sources about juke joints have mostly been written by music scholars, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists about the history and culture of the blues and the juke joints where it was expressed. There is also much information that may not have been written by scholars, but nonetheless contains invaluable information about the historical phenomenon of juke joints in the form of interview narratives from bluesmen and other inhabitants of the Mississippi Delta. This being said, these works tend to focus primarily on juke joints located on the east side of the Mississippi River. There is little or no focus on establishments in Louisiana which was, and still continues to be, similar in many respects to the more popularly mentioned

Mississippi side of the Delta. Most of the works written about more modern drinking establishments have been by academics in the social sciences, but tend to have more of an urban focus. The rural bar or contemporary southern juke joint is, for all intents and purposes, absent from this vein of the literature.

The anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston (1994) was one of the first people to write about the juke joint. In her 1934 work, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," she describes the social lives of the patrons inside of a juke joint in great detail with descriptions of musical and dancing styles. This serves as a valuable peek inside of a juke joint in the early twentieth century. Hurston (1935) also describes her own personal experiences with violence and socialization within the setting of the juke joint in her book, *Mules and Men*. There are also many other works from early-twentieth-century scholars that engage with the rural social gathering practices of the southern communities in which they were studying. In her work conducted in Indianola, Mississippi, in the 1930s, anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker (1993) addresses the cultural and social practices of the African American inhabitants within the community. This is regarded as the first relatively long-term, self-consciously ethnographic field study of a rural American community whose population was not Native American (Ibid, XIV). She describes gatherings that she calls "Saturday night balls" which exhibit many characteristics of a juke joint such as the selling of whiskey, prostitution, music, and dancing. Other works from the first half of the twentieth century from sociologists like Odum (1910) and Johnson (1943) describe the same type of social gatherings in small, southern towns. These most often occurred in different people's homes in the forms of house parties, or in the back of local black-owned cafes, both of which fit into a loose definition of juke joint. Although most of these early social scientists do not mention the juke joint by name in their writings, they do describe the patterns of interaction

within these rural gathering places which are united by common characteristics and social functions.

Another more recent scholar, who has written extensively on the juke joint, is Katrina Hazzard-Gordon. Her book, *Jookin': The Rise of Social Dance Formations in African-American Culture* (1990), situates the juke joint as a place of importance, not only for local African-American social functions, but also for the role it has played in the evolution of American popular music by diffusing cultural elements such as music and dance throughout the rural south and later, the rest of the country. She defines these places as “secular institutions of social interactions and entertainment, usually associated with some quasi-legal activity such as liquor sales or gambling” (Ibid, 76). Hazzard-Gordon traces the various roles of the juke joint from its roots in slavery to its explosion in popularity in the first half of the twentieth century. In her elaboration on the behavior patterns and cultural practices usually found within these establishments, she also explains how these juke joints related to the local communities. The way in which Hazzard-Gordon traces the somewhat linear evolution of the juke joint, however, can also be seen as problematic. In following the different manifestations of African-American dancehalls, she seems to leave the juke joint behind while focusing on its progression to less-rural honky-tonks, and eventually rent parties and after-hour clubs in northern urban areas like Chicago. While following the migration patterns of much of the southern black population, her work does not acknowledge the juke joint as a cultural institution that still remains today in the region where it was born, leaving the need for investigation into its contemporary social functions .

Other significant works on the historical functions of juke joints come mainly from music writers and historians, mostly in the area of blues. Because blues music played such a monumental role in the early activities found within them, these authors are naturally interested

in the juke joint as an avenue of both musical and social expression. One such historian of the blues is Paul Oliver. His books (1984, 1997, 1998, and 2001) discuss the development of the blues music and culture and how this related to juke joints in the past. In addition to being seen as definitive works on the subject, his books also address changes in juke joints, which is extremely valuable to this topic. Other works (Ferris 1978, Barlow 1989, Spencer 1993, Oakley 1997, and Charters 2004) contain useful information about the history of the blues, specifically how blues culture is related to the Mississippi Delta. They demonstrate the importance of the region by showing why the blues and early juke joints are inherent to it. In addition to sources related strictly to the blues, several works (Lomax 1993, Tilton 1994, Tracy 1999, Pearson 2003, and Van Rijn 2006) address issues related to the social structure of the juke joint. These works provide descriptions of the different behavior that has taken place within the juke joints, as well as how this relates to lives of the people. Pearson (2003) and Lomax (1993) explore gender in the juke joint setting by showing how women have fit in this historically male-dominated culture. A few of these works (Tilton 1994 and Tracy 1999) convey the importance of the juke joint as a social gathering place other than the church. They also show how the juke joint was not just for observing blues music. According to these sources, other activities such as dancing, gambling, prostitution, and drinking (mostly illegally due to prohibition and county drinking laws) were commonplace in most juke joints with the bluesmen fueling the fire with their music.

Others such as Gussow (2002) and Finn (1986) discuss in detail the violence that has been associated with juke joint culture, which is a fairly common theme in other descriptions of early establishments as well (Odum 1910, Hurston 1935, Ferris 1978, Hazzard-Gordon 1990, Patterson 2005, Pearson 2005, and Hamilton 2008). These sources show that these establishments were not friendly neighborhood pubs, but rather places that had to serve beer in paper cups so that bottles and glasses would not be used as weapons. Gussow argues that the

availability of guns after the civil war, the white man's approval of the black on black violence, and heavy alcohol consumption, created a place that was in reality an extremely dangerous environment. Evans (1987a) brings up the issues of local law enforcement as it related to these historical juke joints. He explores the interplay between local sheriffs and the illegal activity that was (or was thought to be) occurring in juke joints such as illegal liquor consumption, gambling, and violent confrontations.

Yet another source of rich and valuable data about juke joints of the past comes from published, first-hand accounts of those who have visited them or have memories of them from childhood. This is mainly from the perspective of blues musicians interviewed by the same music critics and historians mentioned above. There are hardly any accounts of juke joints from the perspective of average community members. These interviewers obviously saw importance only in musicians as they were writing about blues music to an audience that was concerned primarily with the experiences of the creators of it and not with the social aspects of the juke joint as I am here. Nonetheless, works such as Oliver (1997) and Pearson (1984 and 2005) use blues narratives to create vivid descriptions of juke joints based on the memories of the bluesmen that played in them. Pearson's book, *Jook Right On: Blues Stories and Blues Storytellers* (2005), is a collection of interviews that he has collected over his career of talking to blues musicians. Spanning decades and dozens of artists, this work contains numerous interviews that span a range of different topics. One recurrent theme that is of particular interest to my research is the discussion of these people's early careers spent playing in rural juke joints, as well as growing up in communities where it was a common weekend occurrence to frequent such an establishment. Many of these accounts provide details about juke joint activities that can only be found in such primary sources of data. Similarly Jim O'Neal and Amy Van Singel's work (2002) provides much of the same type of information. Following the tradition of many popular blues

periodicals, it is a compilation of interviews from *Living Blues* magazine with blues musicians about many of the same issues relating to past experiences with juke joints.

In addition to historical information, there are also other sources (Evans 1987b, Imes 1990, Bennett 1996, and Nardone 2003) that contain information about more modern juke joints in the Mississippi Delta. These works discuss the phenomenon of the juke joint in the later part of the twentieth century in what Evans calls the “contemporary community blues tradition” (Evans 1987b, 322). This period is characterized by small electric blues bands playing in the types of establishments still found in the Delta today, and also by the emergence of blues tourism in places historically associated with the blues (see Lieberfeld 1995, Grazian 2003, and Gutierrez et al, 2006 for a discussion of blues tourism as it relates to authenticity and place). Of particular importance is the work of Jennifer Nardone (2003), who carries out her study of contemporary juke joints from the perspective of vernacular architecture. Her chapter entitled “Roomful of Blues: Jukejoints and the Cultural Landscape of the Mississippi Delta” analyzes several juke joints in the Delta, bringing up issues of social space within the establishments, as well as their place within their respective communities and the regional landscape as a whole. Nardone addresses issues such as the historical anonymity associated with the outside of a juke joint, such as lack of signs or advertisement, and contrasts them with the familiarity associated with the regular patrons within the walls of the establishment, revealing an unusual paradox rooted in segregation, illegal activity, and social connections among the community. While this literature on contemporary juke joints is helpful and insightful, it is primarily based in a small geographic area. Most of the work is centered in northwest Mississippi around the more popularly described part of the Delta. It repeatedly leaves out semi-peripherally located places in the region such as northeast Louisiana, leaving opportunity for original research on the juke joints and communities located in such places.

Other sources of importance here contain information not necessarily about juke joints, but about modern drinking establishments in general. The drinking establishment is a subject that has been largely neglected by historians. Powers (1998) has argued that it has either been dismissed as “too frivolous for serious study,” or at the opposite end of the spectrum, has been narrowly-perceived as a location of problematic behavior (3). In other fields, however, sociologists and anthropologists have made noticeable contributions to this branch of the literature, with many of the early works firmly rooted in the Chicago School of urban sociology. These works use ethnographic methods to examine bars, clubs, and taverns as social gathering places within specifically defined communities in a similar manner to my own research goals. One of the earliest is Sherri Cavan’s book (1966), *Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behavior*, in which she, drawing heavily from Erving Goffman’s work (1963) on public spaces in general, explores the social behavior within numerous bars in downtown San Francisco. Cavan brings up detailed analyses of gender and class relations within the bar setting, and also classifies different types of bars based on how they are used by the patrons. Later works (LeMasters 1975, Anderson 1978, May 2001, and Breunlin 2004) use the same types of ethnographic methods to answer questions about social activity within drinking establishments, but narrow the scope of the research topic, focusing on only one establishment in order to gain better insight. This being said, however, these sources are exclusively written about bars in large urban areas such as Chicago, New Orleans, or, in the case of LeMasters, an expanding suburban section on the outskirts of a larger city. The presence of information about modern, rural drinking establishments is almost non-existent in the literature. An exception to this, one could argue, is Sexton’s work (1990) in southwest Louisiana on Cajun bars as social institutions and manifestations of place among the local Cajun patrons. Even Sexton’s bar, although not located in an overly large urban area, exists in a setting, the city of Lafayette, that is not completely rural,

but rather lies somewhere between a larger city and the small community in which my research interests lie.

The second major category of background information for this project will come from sources about the physical and social history of the Delta and its inhabitants. These will help me to construct a setting in which these juke joints exist. Saikku's work (2005) is an environmental history of the region that explores the importance of the rivers and agriculture. Other sources (Stone 1902, Brandfon 1967, Woodward 1971, Birdsall and Florin 1992, Cobb 1992, Woods 1998, and Willis 2000) add the socio-economic factors of the past to the landscape, and explore the lives of the farmers and sharecroppers of the Delta at a time when blues culture and juke joints were at a peak in popularity. In addition to these works about the past environment, Rogers (2006) supplements them by providing information about the modern landscape of the Delta and its inhabitants. Other sources, such as Kniffen and Hilliard (1988) and McGinty (2007) narrow the focus even further by addressing the history and geography of Louisiana, while Fontenot and Ziegler's book (1987), *The Tensas Story*, is specifically aimed at the historical and geographic elements of Tensas Parish, including the town of Waterproof.

The third and final major category of sources relates to broader patterns and processes related to the juke joint, the community, and the region as a whole. One such process that has affected the community over the past century is that of out-migration to other parts of the country, as well as larger urban areas within the South. Although much (Grossman 1989, Marks 1989, Harrison 1991, Leman 1991, and Gregory 2005) has been written about this "Great Migration" in general, few of these works focus extensively on the impacts that it had, and continues to have, on the rural southern communities abandoned in this process. There are, however, exceptions to this such as Goldfield (1982) and Holley (2000). These works do in fact

address this outflow of people from a southern perspective while focusing on the various “push” and “pull” factors and how they affect the south as a region.

Because migration is inherently a geographic concept, geographers have written frequently on this topic as well. John Fraser Hart’s (1960) and Davis and Donaldson’s (1975) work are excellent early overviews of the migration trends of southern blacks from a spatial perspective. They are important because, in addition to other topics, they focus in part on the declining population patterns in the rural south. Similarly, Prunty (1970) diverges from popular thought on the subject, arguing that agricultural mechanization was not a cause of these migration patterns, but rather a result of them, thus revealing another way in which this population movement affected the South. In addition to the flood of migrants out of the region, others such as Cromartie and Stack (1989) and McHugh (1987) have addressed more recent issues of return migration to the South, including the patterns and even reasons for doing so. There have also been studies by geographers on smaller, poverty-stricken communities in the modern South that can be seen as results of this process. These are what Charles Aiken (1990) calls “a new type of black ghetto.” Although Aiken’s work identifies these types of towns as spatially distinctive and significant, he does not focus on a particular place, nor does he examine community or personal-level issues associated with out-migration, which is one of the goals of my research.

Other topics which geographers have written extensively about over the last several decades are those of place, identity, and the social issues involved in the formation of both concepts. In many respects, my work has been influenced by the humanistic-turn in geography, following the early works of Entrikin (1976) and Tuan (1977) in the recognition that geographic space is not an objective phenomenon, but is experienced differently by each individual who instills it with personal meaning. It is also firmly rooted in the attitudes of some of the so called

“new cultural geographers” (Jackson 1989, Duncan and Ley 1993, Cresswell 1996, and McDowell 1997) of the latter part of the twentieth century in that I see place as being actively constituted through culture instead of static and already-formed results of culture (Cresswell 1996, 13). Culture is, therefore, a process that creates meaning, which is then embodied and embedded in the material and social world (Hubbard et al, 2002, 59). Place, then, is a significant aspect of any study of social behavior because “social action is *always* embedded in place” (Herbert 2009, 1). Therefore, social action can be seen as an important geographic phenomenon. Cresswell (1996) explores issues of place from a social perspective, showing that it is formed by an interaction between people, such as friends, family members, and community, and locations, creating a combination that is both spatial and social. Linda McDowell’s edited volume, *Undoing Place: A Geographical Reader* (1997), also addresses the socio-spatial issues related to place, focusing on how places are given meaning, and also how people are constituted through place.

Similarly, Holloway and Hubbard (2001) make the connection between the phenomenon of place and the creation of identity in their explanation of how places are made and sustained in different ways through the emotional attachments between people and spaces. Meaningful places, then, can be seen as belonging to individuals or groups of people, thus helping them to create identities. Other works also engage with ideas of identity formation around particular places such as Hetherington (1998). Hetherington claims that “a sense of belonging and community may come to be ordered around the social centrality of particular places,” allowing such places to become ideal for “adopting and expressing an identity” (Ibid, 72). Further, Stokes (1994) provides useful insight into how music fits into the process of place and identity formation, which is extremely relevant to a social setting such as a juke joint in which music is one of the primary foci for the people involved. Further, Smith (1994) points out that sounds in

general and music in particular have been neglected as ways of understanding places, claiming that “the majority of human geography remains devoted to seeing the world, or speaking about it, rather than listening or hearing” (Ibid, 233).

Finally, recent work by geographers (Maye et al, 2005 and Valentine et al, 2007) adds to the literature on drinking establishments and that of place-related issues by exploring the social and cultural aspects of drinking-related behavior in bars and pubs mainly in the United Kingdom. In fact, Jayne et al, (2008) have called for more geographic inquiry into the study of alcohol-related issues. They claim that, although there has been attention paid to this topic, “space and place are mainly addressed as passive backdrops to the issues being considered. Location, context and the relationship between the people and places tend to be considered as peripheral issues (Ibid, 253). It is my aim to bring these issues out of the background in my research involving this particular drinking establishment.

In addition to raising the issue of relatively little attention being paid to spatial and social drinking patterns, other geographers (Philo 1992, Little 1999, and Woods 2005) have emphasized the problem of “neglected rural geographies” in their work. They point out that there is not one, homogeneous rural population made up of white, middle-class, heterosexual individuals who experience things in the same way. In a mildly post-modern fashion, my work, along with others (Cloke and Little 1997 and Milbourne 2001), follows these calls to try and give a voice to the rural “others” that make up an important part of the landscape in regions like the Mississippi Delta. With these deficiencies in mind, it is in these two areas of the current literature that I plan to situate my own research project that will stem from the multi-disciplinary range of sources mentioned above, and eventually, add to the existing body of geographic knowledge within the field.

METHODS

The methods for this research are fairly straight forward, as it is mostly a qualitative study of cultural patterns and social processes. Much has been written recently on the use of qualitative research methods (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, Crang 2002, Flick 2006, and DeLyser et al, 2009). My main purpose for using techniques that are collectively described a qualitative is to gain a deeper and more personal understanding of a particular place, as opposed to a wider-ranging project that lacks depth and context. The specific methods that I used were archival research for primary and secondary sources, and also ethnographic methods such as interview techniques and participant observation within the juke joint and community at hand. I will meld the data that I have collected using these techniques with information that already exists in order to portray the Disco 86 Lounge and its surrounding community in a manner that sheds light on the social, cultural, and historical factors associated with their complex relationship.

The archival research material covers things written on juke joints in general, such as sources like the ones mentioned in the literature review, but also include materials about the history of Waterproof and the region of Tensas Parish more broadly. The avenues which I have used to obtain this data are mostly library stacks and newspaper collections at LSU's Hill Memorial Library and a few sources from the Tensas Parish Library. My analysis covers sources spanning from census data and Sanborn maps of the town of Waterproof to the microfilms of the local newspaper, *The Tensas Gazette*, from the early-1870s to the present. This information has given me a clear historical context in which to place my research.

The second method of data collection was through ethnographic interview techniques consisting of primary accounts taken from my interactions with local community members. These were in the form of both longer, more formal interviews that I recorded, and also shorter, spur-of-the-moment interviews that took place in more informal conversations with people both

inside the bar and in other places within the town. After several instances of using a digital recorder, it seemed apparent that most people, whether they admitted it or not, were a little uncomfortable when I took it out. I, therefore, eventually stopped using it, and relied primarily on unrecorded conversations for information, which I later wrote down in my field notebook after the fact. This, of course, leaves the likely possibility that I misremembered or simply forgot certain parts of conversations, but compared to the alternative, I think that this method of data collection was much better overall for this research setting. Using first-hand accounts of people who have lived in the area for extended periods of time, I have attempted to create a vivid picture of the changes in the Disco 86 and the landscape of the area from its establishment in the early-1950s to its state of existence in recent years. These conversations and interviews have allowed me to ascertain some sense of the place as a whole. They have also allowed me to find out what issues are important to the community members, and how these issues relate to my research, thus giving the local inhabitants a voice in this process.

The information about the social and cultural occurrences within and associated with the bar were collected through my final main method of data collection, participant observation. Through ten trips to the town of Waterproof, and eight to the bar itself, over a period from July of 2008 until January of 2009, I observed and participated in some of the various activities within the Disco 86. I took part in conversations with numerous patrons about their experiences with the bar, and community, and the relationship between the two. I attempted to use this method of participant observation “as a means of developing *intersubjective* understandings” (Crang and Cook 2007, 37) between myself and those with whom I am centering this research project around. I tried to gain an understanding of the issues that were important to them instead of what I thought needed to be addressed. This being stated, however, I was never covert or dishonest about my reasons for being there or asking questions. Most people, in fact,

interrogated me about this before I had a chance to willfully explain myself. Although some people came to recognize me after a while, there were several factors that prevented me from becoming one of the “regular” patrons. In fact, my role as researcher in this situation is worth reflecting on for a moment here. Much has been written by geographers on the issue of the relationship between the researcher and those *with* whom the research is being conducted (England 1994, Nast 1994, DeLyser 2001, Meyers 2001, Parr 2001, and Sangarasivam 2001). The fact that I was a white, college-educated stranger from out of town in an all-black, small-community social atmosphere no doubt created barriers to my research, even though most people were more than nice to me. It is uncertain the degree to which my presence changed the behavior or atmosphere in the place, or even how my position affected the validity of what people told me, but is nonetheless a valid caveat to my experiences.

Finally, my use of ethnographic techniques in conducting this research, as an extension of my purposes for using qualitative methods in general, is an attempt to make use of what I regard as one of geography’s best attributes, its broadly-focused array of perspectives and subject matter. Indeed, Atkinson et al, (2008) have claimed that qualitative research has become too fragmented and thin. Through increased specialization, it fails to address what it sought out in the first place, the “cultural and organizational complexity of everyday social life” (Ibid, 31). Indeed they call for a more complex ethnography in which researchers use a variety of perspectives and aspects when explaining the social world instead of using one “specialized method” (Ibid, 45). With the advantage of its wide-ranging point of view, I believe that geography is well suited to provide such a complex ethnography of everyday social life. After all, “geography has always been concerned with documenting the things people do on a day-to-day basis, noting variations across space in the way that people work, rest, and play” (Holloway and Hubbard 2001, 1). It is my goal in this thesis to explore a complex social environment in

which people do all of these things, using a variety of qualitative methods to gain a richer understanding of localized patterns of human behavior and interaction.

CHAPTER 2: THE HISTORIC JUKE JOINT – ITS ROOTS AND REPUTATIONS

INTRODUCTION

Musically speaking, the jook is the most important place in America. For in its smelly, shoddy confines has been born the secular music known as the blues, and on blues has been founded jazz. The singing and playing in the true negro style is called ‘jooking’. The songs grow by incremental repetition as they travel from mouth to mouth and from jook to jook for years before they reach outside ears. Hence the great variety of subject matter in each song. (Zora Neale Hurston quoted in Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 83)

There is little doubt that juke joints have left their mark on the face of popular culture in the form of the blues music that was associated with them in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. This music, in addition to becoming extremely popular in its own right, also played an important role in influencing later global popular music styles such as jazz and rock & roll. However, it is not my aim here to focus on this export-oriented role of the juke joint as it relates to the popular music that it has influenced. Nor am I concerned with the role that juke joints have played in the development of the blues. Early blues music is a topic that has been heavily addressed by music writers and historians (Ferris 1978, Finn 1986, Barlow 1989, Lomax 1993, Tilton 1994, Oakley 1997, Oliver 1998 and 2001, Davis 2003, Wald 2004, and Hamilton 2008). I am only interested in the blues music and performances within juke joints as they relate to the patrons of the establishment or the social atmosphere of the place. This being stated, music is still an important part of juke joint culture as Zora Neale Hurston points out above, but has been given too much emphasis in writings about early juke joints. Indeed, this thesis is an attempt to gain a deeper and more holistic understanding of the historical juke joint by focusing on the many factors that combine to make it a social and cultural institution, not just a place that is vaguely summed up as “the home of the blues.”

The juke joint has taken several different forms over the course of its development. It has also been talked about in an even greater number of different ways with a wide variety of terms

used, each with its own connotation to different groups of people at different times. Most juke joints are thought to be in rural areas, but people have described places as urban juke joints when wanting to convey a scene of an older, run-down establishment in a bad part of a city (see Grazian 2003 for example). As I will show later, a rural juke joint can be a single-use and free-standing structure, or it can be a temporary space constructed out of someone's home or restaurant. There is also a regional factor that plays a part in defining just what a juke joint is. Some people think that they can only be found in the plantation South, but there have been, in fact, places in Florida logging towns and outside northern cities like Detroit that would also qualify as juke joints. In addition to rural/urban and regional aspects, there are other factors that further cloud the issue of what does or does not constitute a juke joint. These include an all or mostly black patron population, the presence of live blues music, and the appearance of the actual establishment. This issue has all been made a bit more convoluted with the relatively modern phenomenon of some juke joints marketing themselves as tourist destinations (Lieberfeld 1995, Grazian 2003, and Gutierrez et al, 2006).

But it is not my goal in this chapter to engage in a lengthy debate about what is or is not considered a juke joint. I will simply define the characteristics of these places which I will call juke joints and argue that these are the historic patterns of cultural behavior in one particular region in which my research is set. If socio-cultural institutions such as churches and sporting events can vary over space, than there is no reason why one like the juke joint cannot. I, therefore, am not arguing that these are the only types of juke joints that have existed, but rather that these are the types that have been written about and been mythologized the most. For the purposes of this chapter, I will define a juke joint as a rural, secular social gathering place that is inhabited by a lower class and predominantly black population. I will be examining such places in various parts of the U.S. South, but with a specific focus in the Mississippi Delta region.

It is important to note that the region that I am referring to as the Mississippi Delta is not the region around the geographic delta of the Mississippi River where the water and sediment run into the Gulf of Mexico. I am instead referring to the areas of fertile soils located along the river, especially the lower portion, within its alluvial floodplains. A. R. Mangus, working for the Works Progress Administration in 1940, defined the Mississippi Delta to include the bottomland counties of Mississippi and the neighboring states of Arkansas and Louisiana, as well as Shelby County, Tennessee which is the location of the city of Memphis (Oliver 1998, 143). This once densely settled farmland has historically grown much of the nation's cotton. Therefore, it has also had a high number of plantations using slaved labor and later a large free black population that was segregated well into modern times. This, in turn, led to a great number of the types of juke joints with which I am concerned being found in this region. In fact, the juke joint reflects one of the ways in which the regional African-American population has dealt with this forced patterns of segregation. It is a physical manifestation of segregation that, in many places, can still be seen on the cultural landscape of the Delta today (Nardone 2003, 167). The Mississippi Delta, then, is a culture region that is defined by similar characteristics among the places comprising its territory, instead of one based on the physical features of the river like its name falsely implies.

It is also worth mentioning a few words about the etymology and spelling of the word *juke*. As mentioned in the introduction, the most common origin of the word is the claim that it is evolved from the African Bambara term *dzugu* and then the Gullah *joog*, meaning wicked and disorderly, respectively. This stems mainly from the linguist Lorenzo Turner's 1949 work, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*, in which he makes connections between the two words, and claims they are the root(s) of the English word jukebox (195). It is unclear, however, how the Gullah term was incorporated into English, or to what degree later blues writers used this

etymology to strengthen the argument that these juke joints, and the music within them, were authentically rooted in African traditions.

There are also possible European origins such as the French verb *jouer*, which means to play, and the Scottish word *jouk*, which means a place of retreat or shelter. W. C. Handy in 1913 also refers to the term *jogo* being a synonym for another Gullah word, *jigawawk*, meaning colored or not white. He claims the usage is as a verb meaning to do things such as dancing in an African-American way. Indeed by the late 1920s and early 1930s, the term *jook* had begun appearing in song titles such as Walter Roland's 1933 *Jook it*, *Jook it* (Pearson 2005, 214). The bluesman Johnny Shines claims that jookin' was a type of dancing, and that's how these places got their name: they were a place where a person would go to jook. While the singer Mamie Davis extends it further by saying that her understanding of the word *jook* is a verb meaning "going to have fun, which can include partying, dancing, getting drunk, or whatever" (Pearson 2005, 47).

Most people who used this term prior to the 1940s seem to be more familiar with this spelling, but this is difficult to ascertain because it is not a word that was probably written or read as often as it was spoken. The spelling of word as *juke* began with the popularity of the term *jukebox* to refer to the coin-operated record machines that were increasingly found in these jooks during the period between the two wars, especially the late-1930s and early-1940s. This was, thus, where the jukebox got its name (Pearson 2005, 214). Prior to the 1930s, these machines would have been referred to by the name of the manufacturer or more generally as an automatic phonograph (Lynch and Henkin 1981, 9). It seems to me that this does in fact reflect a shift in the spelling of the word, as multiple people must have interpreted it to be spelled this way. It was probably also the first example of spelling the word in print on a large-scale which, in turn, reinforced the second version of the word, as in Turner's writing. Whatever the reason

for change was, these early writers did not write about the *jookbox*. I have chosen to use the second spelling in my work also because it simply reflects a more modern form of the word. It is also the most popularly used name and spelling in the modern literature and discourse on the subject. In this chapter, therefore, I will refer to this broad variety of social gathering places as juke joints even though they almost all existed before the 1940s.

This chapter will then explore this phenomenon of the historical juke joint. I will outline some of the basic circumstances that led to the development of early juke joints. In doing so I will show how they came to be on the landscape, and also the functions that they served. After this, I will go over some common general characteristics of juke joints in the Delta before focusing more narrowly on specific types of characteristics that appear most commonly in the descriptions of these places. Things such as violence, dancing, and various forms of illegal activity seem to constantly reappear in writings and remembrances of early twentieth century Delta juke joints, thus reinforcing a particularly specific type of reputation of such places as being extremely fun and exciting, but at the same time corrupt and dangerous. This is not to indicate that these establishments have ever been completely homogeneous, even in this specific culture region. But despite the fact that certain degrees of variation have existed within the Mississippi Delta, it is possible to recognize some broader themes of activity. It is my goal to piece together the different narratives about these places in order to expose some of these commonalities in how they have been portrayed. These commonalities will then, hopefully, help produce a somewhat accurate sense of what a historical Mississippi Delta juke joint was like.

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF RURAL JUKE JOINTS

In discussing the roots of Delta juke joints it is perhaps only appropriate to trace their development to the period of slavery before the Civil War. Just because the enslaved people at

this time were not free, does not mean that they could not participate in social activities on the weekends under certain circumstances. In fact, some plantation owners were known to build structures called praise houses. These got their name because they served as the location of prayer meetings for Sunday church services. But on Saturday nights some of the masters would allow secular gatherings in these places as well. Although mostly supervised, this gave the slaves a chance to socialize and also dance to music that was played by their peers on mostly homemade instruments (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 18). These dances in the praise houses were the earliest forms of what would become juke joints. They were secular gatherings of African-Americans for social and entertainment purposes. They also helped to establish a tradition of doing these things on a Saturday night, a tradition that would continue to be characteristic of such gatherings well into modern times.

After emancipation, many rural blacks were still not necessarily free to move about and socialize as they pleased. Landowners further asserted their control over newly freed populations by the use of labor contracts which restricted the movements of blacks who worked on their land. These contracts were simply old black codes that substituted the word *negro* or *servant* for the word *slave*, and often forbade nighttime gatherings or journeys to urban areas without the permission of the landowner (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 66-7). These strict limitations on mobility and behavior helped to establish another tradition of the juke joint, that of secrecy. Things like labor contracts created a need and an atmosphere for social gathering places that were secretive in nature. Because gathering on the weekend was essentially an illegal activity, what Hazzard-Gordon calls “covert patterns of social activity among the black community” became an obvious necessity (1990, 77).

It was essentially this rural, black, and agricultural labor force that created a need for the juke joint as they were excluded from mainstream American life at the time, and forced to form

tightly-knit cultural groups and communities. It was the juke joint that catered to these groups who needed a place to socialize and unwind during the evenings and weekends. It was out of this setting that juke joints become common parts of the regional landscape. They steadily became more popular in the post-reconstruction period before peaking and declining in the years following World War I when many of the black owners and patrons moved out of the rural South on a large-scale (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 80-1).

During this period of early juke joint popularity, many of these places were established in boarding houses. Landowners would usually have these on their property in order to house workers who were not, for whatever reason, involved in the sharecropping system. These people were called drifters, and would travel to certain areas and work for short amounts of time before moving on to another place. These boarding houses would then double as juke joints on the weekends when the landowner would allow the workers to have parties and socialize. In addition to the drifters, this is also where traveling blues musicians would come when in town. They would provide entertainment for the gathering while securing a place to stay in the same venue (O'neal and Van Singel 2002, 232).

In addition to being located in these boarding houses, many early juke joints were established in converted barns or warehouses. Others were actually in people's houses and the back rooms of cafés in an almost speakeasy-like setting. This was simply because there was not usually the economic opportunity to own a separate building that served for social purposes on only a few nights a week. The secretive nature of these juke joint settings was also a reaction to the increasing laws in many states that regulated the closing times of bars, and also required liquor licenses that were difficult to obtain for African-Americans at the time for a variety of different economic and racially-inspired reasons (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 89).

The juke joint in the back of the café would have been found in more populated areas such as small towns. These places would have served food during the day like any other restaurant, but used the available space at nights and on the weekends for parties (Evans 1987a, 144). In more rural areas or places without black-owned businesses for public use, the residential or house-party manifestation of the juke joint would have been more common. All that was required was that the furniture be removed from usually the living room to provide room for dancing, and that extra seating be brought in to accommodate the crowd (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 89). Indeed, this is why these establishments are sometimes referred to as juke houses, because they, at least for the time being, were inside people's houses. According to some folks who remember these events (Pearson 2005, 46), such gathering places were not called juke joints until a later period when they began to be built separately from people's homes in structures that were used solely for bar-type activities. These rural juke houses were not always in the same house either. They would rotate locations among the different participant's houses with the size of the community deciding how often any one house would host an event. This was typically around once or twice a year with these house parties happening usually every single weekend. According to blues singer Sandra Hall it was a frequent event well into the 1940s and 1950s. She remembers, "Back in those days everybody partied in their homes. That's what we did. That's all we did" (Pearson 2005, 40).

As the twentieth century progressed, the juke joint became more common as an independent structure, although buildings were hardly ever constructed for that purpose. One of the common characteristics of rural juke joints is that they tended to inhabit buildings originally intended for other purposes. In this sense, juke joints exemplified "the fusion of seen and unseen elements of the landscape" (Nardone 2003, 167-8). The house parties and backrooms of cafés became less necessary in a post-prohibition era when drinking was once again becoming legal in

the South. It was also becoming easier for black people to legally own and operate social gathering places like juke joints. This is not to say that these different manifestations of the juke joint progressed in a simple linear timeline with one conveniently replacing the other. They all co-existed differently in different times and places, all playing the same basic role in society. I will next move on to some characteristics that have been associated with juke joints.

SOME GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE JUKE JOINT

As I have already mentioned, early juke joints were at times secretive in nature, and were of course located in rural areas. These two factors often contributed to the unique methods of advertisement about activities occurring in different places at different times. This was historically carried out by a word-of-mouth method of informing local residents in which the owner would only tell those who were to know about it with these people sometimes having the option of also inviting a few others. More traditional methods of advertising were not used for two primary reasons. The first is that these juke joints were often times associated with various forms of illegal activity such as illegal liquor sales, gambling, and prostitution. The owner would, of course, not want to alert local law enforcement authorities to the location of these types of activities. The second main reasons is that many of the possible patrons during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would have been illiterate, so things such as posters or newspaper articles announcing the time and date of events would not have been very effective (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 85).

In addition to these two, most juke joints were small spaces that would not have held more than fifty people. It would not have been wise for the owner to encourage large numbers of people to come to their juke for reasons dealing with both overcrowding and possible exposure. These also took place in rural communities where there would not have been a large number of

possible patrons to solicit that the owner did not already know of. Besides, from most accounts, these juke joints were not establishments desperate for business from customers, but rather social institutions created out of necessity for local community members. It is also important to point out that the early juke joints served as a place of refuge for many patrons. They served as private space in which a person could relax and not worry about the watchful eye of the white members of society. This element of privacy and comfort further contributed to the secrecy associated with the locations of these establishments.

An extension of this word-of-mouth type of advertising would be the owner of a local juke joint sending young boys door to door to inform the members of the community that there was an event at their place on a certain date. In addition to actually spreading the word about certain places and events, owners eventually developed certain symbols that would signify these things to those that were informed. One such example is of places where gatherings occurred regularly putting a red light outside of the establishment on the nights when they were “open” (Zur Heide 1970, 37). In other cases, huge bonfires would be lit outside the place that was to be used as a juke for the night (Oliver 1999, 111).

All juke joints, however, were not always so secretive about things. Juke joint owners did indeed make profits and were not shy about trying to attract business if given the opportunity. In fact, the blues musician Muddy Waters used to own a juke in Mississippi and remembers using a more traditional form of advertising, the radio, to his advantage. In the early 1940s, he would drive to Helena, Arkansas, just across the river, and pay the D.J. on the newly established radio station, KFFA, to announce when he would have live music at his place, thus bringing in patrons from a much wider area (O’Neal and Van Singel 2002, 162).

As I have alluded to already, juke joints, because they were located in lower-class rural areas, have always had a reputation for their derelict exteriors and equally unappealing confines, as Mamie Davis describes here:

A jook house or a jook joint is unlike the clubs. It's just a joint. It might be an old building, and they got some homemade chairs and some tables in there and they got some old raggedy shades. It's not sophisticated like at all, but its where people go and they just have fun. They aren't places that when you go in you suppose it's a beautiful place because it's not; but once you are in there, you have a beautiful time. So you forget about what it looks like. (Pearson 2005, 46)

Most juke joints were made from raised shotgun types of wooden houses or buildings, but there are descriptions of some that were simply wooden shacks that could barely be classified as more than a barn as they had dirt or sometimes sawdust floors (Pearson 2005, 52-3). Despite the rough appearance, many people, like Davis above, seemed to remember the juke joint as a place to have a beautiful time, or a fun occasion that included singing and dancing. Musician Frankie Quimby remembers walking by juke joints as a child, either in the late-1930s or early 1940s, and being able to see inside because the doors and windows were open due to a lack of air-conditioning. She says that is always seemed like the people in there “were having so much fun,” and that the people in the community who did not go to the juke joints “seemed dull” (Pearson 2005, 48-9). But this, however, seemed to not be the case with all members of society.

There was also a type of social stigma that was attached to those who chose to spend their time in the juke joints of a given community. This was born out of the church's opposition to the sinful behavior that was rumored to occur there, even though a significant number of people would spend Saturday nights in a juke joint and Sunday mornings in church with no public controversy occurring. There was an underlying idea, however, that “those kind” went to juke joints on the weekend (Pearson 2005, 48). In fact, it has been said that even a description of such

an event would be “repulsive” (Odum 1910, 229). Rudi Blesh, a music critic writing in 1946, describes a barrelhouse, one of the juke joint’s many names, outside of New Orleans:

The barrelhouse was the refuge of the tragically destitute, the blindly rebellious, the abjectly sodden...For this was the haunt of the blues, music of tragedy, dull despair, flaming revolt. Through the foul, smoky air loud with the clatter of cups, the shrill-edged laughter, rowdy shouting, and drunken snores and weeping, rang incessantly day and night, the stark, simple blues. (Hamilton 2008, 186)

Blesh uses incredibly evocative language to paint a picture of this barrelhouse. He further contributes to this dichotomous view of the juke joint as a place of fun and laughter, but also one that is destitute and full of sodden weeping. It is on this two-part reputation that I will continue to build as I focus more narrowly on popular elements of the almost mythic reputation of the historic juke joint.

MUSIC AND ENTERTAINMENT

The juke joint is, perhaps most famously, known for its tradition of live blues music. It was after all the destination of the infamous rambling, drinking, and womanizing bluesman who traveled from town to town in the first several decades of the twentieth century with nothing but his guitar on his back. This character has probably been even more successfully mythologized than the juke joint itself, but nonetheless, the juke joint was also a part of this reputation as it was this person’s environment, and supported the behavior from which this reputation stems. It was also, however, a place of work. We must keep in mind that in temporal context, the blues music was not a romantic lifestyle or an aesthetic form of artistry like it is often thought about today. Indeed, the early blues musician’s primary job was to entertain the patrons of the juke joints. This meant playing music that the audience could continually dance to for extended periods of time, or familiar songs that inspired audience participation. If not accomplishing these two things, the musician was out of a job (Hamilton 2008, 120). The atmosphere of the juke joint

was a two-part relationship between the performer(s) and the audience. It is often not recognized that the patrons of the juke joints were just as, if not more, important than the musician(s).

In fact, the whole experience of the juke joint revolved around dancing. It is, after all in the name of the place. There are several memories of so many people dancing in the living room of poorly-built raised houses that the floor actually collapsed (Pearson 2005, 42-3). Even this did not stop the festivities as the people just “kept on dancing,” and waited to attempt to fix the floor at a later time. These dance floors were remembered as spaces where people could go and have a good time regardless of their social status. They were places where a poor field worker and a reverend could co-exist and “rub elbows” on the dance floor with no attention paid to their social differences (Pearson 2005, 45).

A common theme among descriptions of this dancing and socializing in early juke joints is that it literally went on all night long, especially on Saturdays. Most of these places, when open on weekday nights, would shut down at a relatively decent time, usually between 10:30 and midnight (Zur Heide 1970, 19). The weekends, however, were a different story. The musician Doc Barnes remembers playing at juke joints on Saturday nights from about eight in the evening until eight in the morning. Often times, musicians would be compensated with free food or alcohol all night, paid in cash, or a combination of the two. Barnes claims that in the early part of the twentieth century, he used to get paid around three dollars to play all night on a Saturday during a time when a person made about three dollars for working all week (Pearson 2005, 32). But there was not an actual set time for these events. It simply depended on the people involved, lasting “from can to can’t” (O’Neal and Van Singel 2002, 164). In fact, some of these juke joints, especially when held at people’s houses, were said to last the entire weekend in a situation where “people would pass out, sleep for a few hours, and then wake up and continue to party” (Pearson 2005, 29).

The actual performances within the juke joint, in addition to the dancing, were also heavily involved with the patrons in other ways. This was not a situation in which the audience sat quietly and watched the musician(s) perform. The performance would have been more of an interaction between the musician(s) and the audience, rather than just a one-sided show. It would have been a situation in which the listeners influenced the length and structure of each performance, thus forcing the musician(s) to integrate the songs with their responses (Ferris 1978, 101-3). The length of the songs performed in the juke joints depended primarily on the enthusiasm of the dancers. These songs were not carried out in a short three or four minute, pre-planned manner like they were on recordings. The audience's response would determine whether the song would last for only a few short stanzas, or if it would go on for numerous verses and musical breaks. This, after all, was a performance, and improvisation and the ability to read and cater to the audience were important qualifications for being a successful blues performer (Ferris 1978, 58).

In addition to responding to the music by dancing and giving responses to the performer's calls during certain parts of songs, the audience also helped encourage, and to a certain degree judge, what were known as cutting contests. In these competitions, musicians would go back and forth playing different guitar riffs or singing verses to a song. This would usually last until one could no longer go on with the verses or riffs, or until the audience declared one to be the unanimous winner by cheering and encouraging their favorite competitor. These types of competitions were entertaining to the audience, but also helped younger musicians learn skills from the older, more experienced ones. They also helped musicians gauge their abilities and build reputations on which their careers were based. In areas where multiple juke joints existed, people would often times go to the one with the performer who was rumored to be the best. This of course meant that the performer could demand more money from the owner

because he would bring more people into the juke joint. This aspect, then, created an environment of competition and innovation among musicians that was on one level serious and intense, but on the other playful and extremely entertaining for audience members (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 111).

Juke joint musicians had to become not only good at improvisation in performances, but also had to provide a wide-range of songs in their repertoire. Just because these people lived in rural areas did not mean they were listening to only local musicians. Juke joint patrons would have been influenced by personal record collections and songs played on the radio. The crowd would often demand certain types of music such as slow jazz numbers or smooth urban ballads. As professional musicians, these performers in rural juke joints would have had to play things other than local, Delta blues in order to make a living, as many audience members would have wanted to hear a wide variety of songs from recorded artists with which they would have been familiar (Hamilton 2008, 120).

It was only a matter of time before these actual recordings began finding their way into southern juke joints in the early forms of the jukebox. Indeed some, like the anthropologist Zora Neal Hurston, feared that the introduction of recordings into the rural South in the 1920s was a threat to black folk music, and that it would not be long before there was no longer an oral tradition of music, just people copying what they heard on these recordings. This, to a certain degree, was the case, but recordings could not compete with the live performance of a musician in the juke joint setting. It was true also, however, that the records in these jukeboxes could bring popular musicians into a juke joint instead of local bluesmen who, even if they did have a record, chances are that it was not very popular (Hamilton 2008, 11-15). Towards the end of the 1930s jukeboxes had made their way into many rural Southern cafés and juke joints. Even though jukeboxes before World War II could hold little more than twelve records at a time, these

machines offered much more versatility than any one musician or band could ever hope to replicate, and as a result, began replacing or supplementing live performers at many establishments throughout the Mississippi Delta. By 1940, the jukebox industry had already made 65 million dollars in sales (Oliver 1998, 162-3). This process was not completely universal or quick for that matter. There are still juke joints today that have live performances. It was rather another influence that contributed to the slow phasing-out of live entertainment in the rural South, a region that was already losing a vast majority of its population at the time.

FOOD AND DRINK

Another central characteristic of the historical juke joint is that it was a place where there was always food and drinks available. These would sometimes be free when people would pool money together to buy different elements of a meal, but most of the time the food and drinks were for sale. This is usually the area in which the owner of the juke would make most of the profits. There was always a steady cash flow at juke joints, with the patrons paying for food and drinks, and the owner paying the musical entertainment with some of the profits (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 82). Food and drinks were just as much of a regular juke joint occurrence as music and entertainment were. This is also where the juke joint gets several of its nicknames. They were often referred to as a suppers, juke suppers, country suppers, or Saturday night fish fries for the very fact that food was such an integral part of the event.

The food provided at juke joints was usually items that were fairly cheap and easy to prepare in large quantities such as fried chicken or catfish (Pearson 2005, 30). Because so many early juke joints were located in houses and cafés which would have both already had a kitchen within a few feet of where the actual partying was going on, it is not surprising that food became so closely associated with these events. In fact, many later juke joints that were built or bought

for strictly bar room-type activities would often times have a kitchen in the back, even if they did not sell food during the day like a restaurant or café. At juke joints taking place in houses, a table was usually placed perpendicularly across the door to the kitchen which temporarily converted the area into a makeshift bar where the food and drinks could be purchased. The drinks that were usually served ranged from water and lemonade to stronger beverages such as whiskey and beer (Oliver 1998, 154). As most people remember, alcohol was indeed the drink of choice at most juke joints. A typical pattern was that an establishment would sell beer and allow patrons to bring their own personal liquor, although the sale of liquor was also quite common. Johnny Shines remembers drinking patterns in juke joints during the late 1920s and 1930s: “as far as you would serve drinks in a bar or in a tavern, no, it wasn’t like that. Beer was served in cups; whiskey you had to drink out of a bottle” (Pearson 2005, 79). Although drinking has been a behavior heavily associated with historical juke joints, it has often times been considered illegal for various reasons. I will explore this issue in more detail in the next section.

ILLEGAL ACTIVITIES: BOOTLEGGING, GAMBLING, AND PROSTITUTION

I have already mentioned the secretive nature of the juke joint, but have not elaborated on one of the main reasons for this secrecy: the presence of illegal activities. The most common of these by far were the illegal sale and consumption of alcohol, various forms of gambling, and prostitution. These three alone contributed greatly to building a reputation of juke joints being places of sin and vice that were immoral and in opposition to the church. This is not to say that all juke joints exhibited this type of illegal behavior or even that most of them did, just simply that these types of activities have been thoroughly engrained in juke joint lore, and do indeed have some type of historical groundings in their associations. Many juke joints may have very well

only taken part in illegal activities as they relate to drinking, as gambling and prostitution do not seem to be quite as common in the literature.

The legalities surrounding drinking alcohol can best be described as situational. Of course, during the prohibition era it was illegal for anyone to sell alcohol, juke joints included. Before this, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was extremely difficult for African-Americans to obtain permits or licenses to sell alcohol for reasons already mentioned. This, however, did not curtail the sale to the degree that it was noticeable. In addition to this, many places, as a result of the strict segregation of the times, passed local laws prohibiting the sale of alcohol to African-Americans in white-owned saloons. An example is a Louisiana statute passed in 1908 requiring separate saloons for white and colored people (*The Tensas Gazette* Jul. 10, 1908). Even before things like this officially became the law, it is highly unlikely that a white-owned establishment in the South would have served many black customers, thus forcing those customers to buy it from local juke joint owners who probably did not have a liquor license (Johnson 1943, 170). It is safe to assume, then, that the majority of drinking in juke joints before the repeal of prohibition was considered illegal under the laws of the time. This was also the most popular period for the juke joint. In the decades after prohibition, it became easier for black owners to obtain liquor licenses in “wet” areas, but by that time, the juke joint was already beginning to decline in numbers due to regional population losses.

The illegal alcohol that was most popular in the juke joint, especially during prohibition, but also in the earlier years as well, was without a doubt, moonshine, or illegally distilled corn liquor that was extremely potent and could be cheaply produced. It went by several names including smoke, white whiskey, white lightning, or even simply whiskey or liquor with most people being aware that it was the specific liquor being referred to (Zur Heide 1970, 37 and Pearson 2005, 30). This illegal liquor was usually distributed in covert locations

such as back rooms or even sometimes outside behind the establishment. It was usually done by bootleggers who would be paid by the owner, but remained covert or even physically removed from the actual juke joint so that the owner could claim that he or she was not formally associated with such activity in the case of a police raid (Evans 1987a, 144). In addition to owners selling alcohol illegally, others who actually had a permit to sell alcohol before national prohibition would use strategic planning to locate their juke joints in a way as to take advantage of the legal situations in the area. Due to the fact that counties or parishes at the time had the option of allowing the sale of alcohol within their territory, many chose to make it illegal and became “dry.” This created a spatial pattern of juke joints being located along many county or parish lines in the bordering areas where it was legal to sell and consume alcohol. People would travel to the jukes that were located just far enough from the boundaries to remain open and then return home at the end of the night (Pearson 2005, 52-3).

Gambling and prostitution occurred in a similar fashion to bootlegging in that the owner of the juke was not involved in promoting the illegal activity, but was always aware of its occurrence. Just like with the distribution of moonshine, gambling and prostitution would have been carried out in a secretive manner either in backrooms or in separate buildings located nearby (Evans 1987a, 145). The gambling usually took the form of card or dice games in which the owner would get some sort of a cut for allowing the behavior on the premises (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 82). A type of backgammon game known as tik tak was also said to be a popular juke joint gambling activity (Gussow 2002, 246). Both gambling and prostitution were no doubt frequently associated with a given night at many juke joints. It is, however, difficult to find detailed accounts about this behavior, other than a brief mention of its occurrence (Finn 1986, Evans 1987a, Oakley 1997, Tracy 1999, and Pearson 2005). This seems to be the case because both of them, for the most part, are still considered illegal in modern society. In addition to this,

they seem to be, especially in the case of prostitution, behavior that would be heavily frowned upon by many people. It is, therefore, unlikely to find many accounts by people willing to admit to participation in such behavior. This being said, the anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker, observing society in the Mississippi Delta from an outsider's perspective in the early-1930s, claimed that prostitution was an important activity at these Saturday night balls, as she called the juke joints taking place in people's houses (Powdermaker 1993, 168-9). It seems to me that prostitution must have been somewhat common for an outsider like Powdermaker to even be aware of its occurrence, much less make a statement about what an important activity it was to the event.

The counterpart to this illegal behavior associated with juke joints was the law enforcement whose job it was to prevent the activity. The police would often come on unannounced raids to shut the places down, as they could usually find at least one excuse to do so, but were also reported to allow them to operate in peace on certain occasions (Zer Heide 1970, 37). Again these raids were the reason why certain behavior, even within the confines of the juke joint, was carried out in secrecy. Tom Rushing, a deputy sheriff of Bolivar County, Mississippi, from 1928 until 1932 describes the relationship between juke joints, using the name honky tonk, and local law officials:

Being the deputy sheriff, we had to systematically watch these places, and we were welcome at any place to go in if we wanted to. In those days we got by with it. I don't know how we did it, but we never had to have a search warrant. We just went ahead and did things our way. The honky tonk is a big room. It's got a little café in connection where they would serve hamburgers and coffee and so forth. Then they had a big area where they could dance, and they had a side room for monkey business. (Quoted in Evans1987a, 146)

This monkey business in the back rooms could have been any of the above-mentioned activities, all illegal during this time period, but most officers would have been looking for bootlegging or

gambling. In addition to these raids, sometimes the law officials would be called to shut down a particular function if it got too loud or out of hand in a more densely-populated area where the music and shouting could be heard blocks away (Powdermaker 1993, 169). In fact, the police presence at juke joints should probably be thought of as more of breaking up a party. The police just shut the whole thing down and made everyone go home. According to several accounts (Powdermaker 1993, 168-9, O'Neal and Van Singel 2002, 232, and Pearson 2005, 50), it seems that hardly anyone ever got arrested. Indeed, the rural law enforcement would have not had the capabilities to arrest people on a large scale. The one exception to this policy was in the case of violence.

VIOLENCE

No single element of behavior associated with juke joints has contributed to the reputation of a dangerous and unpredictable place as much as violence has. This tradition has led to the most violent juke joints being referred to with nicknames such as “buckets of blood” (Gussow 2002, 202). The presence of unpredictable violence in a lawless atmosphere has almost come to define the juke joint as a rough place with rough patrons, not a friendly neighborhood pub. But in reality this violence, although very much present and dangerous, was not as random as it is thought to have been. In fact, most instances of violence would occur over jealousy issues from people dancing with or making passes at other people's spouses or from disagreements over card games or other gambling situations, both of which would have been fueled by alcohol consumption (Pearson 2005, 41-2). This, however, does not diminish the fact that fights, and often time murders, did occur in rural juke joints. Howard Odum, a folklorist who spent a good bit of his time in the region recording blues music, claimed that the majority of violent crimes committed among the black communities in rural areas took place at these

gatherings (Odum 1910, 230). It is unclear, however, how much personal observation Odum used to formulate this opinion, but does attest to the fact that a violent reputation existed. These violent crimes were not just fist fights, but would often have more severe outcomes as a result of the fact that many people were known to carry either guns or knives to juke joint settings (Powdermaker 1993, 169). From his experiences in the 1920s and 1930s, the blues musician Sam Chatman recalls that when the police would come into juke joints, there would be pistols and knives lying everywhere that there was a hiding spot like underneath tables and heaters. He seems to portray a place where it was almost necessary to carry a gun stating that if the law confiscated their pistols, “they wouldn’t have nothing to act with” (Oliver 1999, 112).

Police intervention was required if a violent conflict got too out of hand, but more often, order was kept by the owner of the establishment with the help of patron intervention and sometimes a hired bouncer in extreme situations (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 92). These bouncers would sometimes be used to check for weapons at the door, and also supervise the night’s events with an obviously exposed gun that would have been meant as a signal of deterrence to anyone thinking of starting an altercation (Pearson 2005, 52-3). It would have been worth it to the owner of a particular juke to enforce strict policies of non-violence because people would often be reluctant to frequent a particular establishment if it got the reputation for being too violent. Owners were rumored to even pay-off local police to stage some of the “random” raids in an attempt to try and eliminate some of the firearms in the place (Gussow 2002, 218). It is not clear, however, how effective these means were towards actually curtailing violent behavior. Indeed, this self governing or owner-provided security was necessary because it was sometimes the only type that would have been available.

Further, the violent behavior among African-Americans was often seen as breaking the rules in an acceptable way by many rural white southerners, including law enforcement officials,

when it occurred in a juke joint on a Saturday night. It was easily tolerated because it added to the perception of blacks as being amoral and animalistic, which, in a way, helped to legitimate segregation. In addition to this, it was not that big of a deal because the whites were never around when and where it occurred, so they considered themselves in no real danger (Hamilton 2008, 135). It was often times an unspoken rule in rural juke joints at the time that a person could kill anyone they wanted with little or no repercussions as long as they were black and a poor worker (Davis 2003, 47). In this regard, then, violence in juke joints can be seen as a result of willful ignorance on the part of the civil structures that were meant to deal with and prevent it.

In descriptions of violent activity in the juke-joint setting some form of weapon is almost always mentioned, usually a gun or a knife, but also ice picks and straight razors as well. There was an expectation that angry patrons might use other objects as weapons as well. This is one of the reasons that beer was often served in paper cups, because it was said that people would have used mugs as weapons (Gordon 2002, 22). In fact, this behavior became so common that the act of fighting was usually meant to imply that at least one of these weapons was being used. As bluesman Yank Rachell remembers, it was common that people “would get to fighting and shoot the windows out” (Pearson 2005, 41). This goes along with the fact that many of these places relied on oil lamps for lighting before electricity was common. Often times the lamps would be knocked over in the commotion of a fight, and in one account all that could be heard were gunshots in the dark (Pearson 2005, 50). Stories like these often make the juke joint seem like a scene out of a western movie with every person having a gun and bullets whistling by from all directions. A story from a local musician which probably took place in the early 1940s contributes to this reputation:

So they got to fighting up there that night. A fellow went and got some shotguns and came back and started shooting towards the house. So that lady didn't have a husband. She got her shotgun and went out in the yard and she started shooting back at them. She ran two men away with that shotgun. Both of them had guns. I will never forget that. I never would come back there 'cause there's a danger of getting shot in the face when there's a lot of people dancing and there's a shooting in the house. Lots of people got killed like that. (Quoted in Ferris 1978, 101-2)

Another account of an incident which probably took place sometime in the 1920s shows the grim realities of this violent activity, and also the effects that it had with people running and scattering in the aftermath:

I seen a woman git shot one night when I was playing at a juke joint way out in the country...just broke her neck. It was a forty-five bullet shot alright enough. It broke her neck and she fell with her head about that far from the edge of the porch. I was sitting down playing and I jumped out the back door and run around the side of the house. (Quoted in Ferris 1978, 102-3)

The fact that this was a woman who got shot could be taken to mean that she was an innocent victim of crossfire, a casualty of a fight between men who were obviously the instigators and shooters. This, however, was not always the case.

Women were probably not as likely as men to be involved in juke-joint confrontations, but this does not mean that they never took part in the violence. Zora Neale Hurston, in fact, describes one of her experiences in a rural juke joint in the early-1930s accompanied by a female who was known as Big Sweet. Hurston tells the story of an incident in which Big Sweet is involved in a tense confrontation with another woman named Lucy over the affection of a man. The altercation begins with just words and threats, before escalating into a full-on brawl that seems to involve the entire juke, in which she narrowly escapes:

Slim stuck out the guitar to keep two struggling men from blocking my way. Lucy was screaming. Crip had hold of Big Sweet's clothes in the back and Joe was slugging him loose. Curses, oaths, cries, and the whole place was in motion. Blood was on the floor. I fell out of the door over a man lying on the steps, who either fell himself trying to run or got knocked down. I don't know. I was in the car in a second and in high just too quick. Jim and Slim helped me throw my bags in the car and I saw the sun rising as I approached Crescent City. (Hurston 1935, 228)

The scene which Hurston describes here is almost a blur of chaos, but does highlight the degree to which a juke joint can quickly become a violent environment nonetheless. After spending time in several of these establishments, she comments on what she interprets as an always present possibility of violence in the atmosphere by saying, “Some little word, look, or gesture can move them either to love or to sticking a knife between your ribs. You have to sense the delicate balance and maintain it” (Quoted in Patterson 2005, 145).

It must be pointed out however that, despite the common occurrence of violence in rural juke joints, there is no clear indication that these places were that much more dangerous than other drinking establishments during the same time period. In fact, the singer Mamie Davis recalls that, from her experiences, rural jukes were much safer environments than were night clubs in urban areas (Pearson 2005, 47). This opinion echoes McGrath’s work (1984) on Western mining towns of the late-nineteenth century that, while acknowledging the reality of crime and violence in this frontier area, also shows that this violence did not directly affect all activities or people, and in most categories was considerably less than larger, urban areas during the same period (247-260). It is reasonable to assume that juke joints were similar in that they were not as ubiquitously violent as they are now remembered to have been.

But regardless of this fact, juke joints have nonetheless retained their reputation of relentless violence, whether it is completely accurate or not. Indeed, DeLyser (2003) reminds us that the notions of truth and falsity take on new roles when issues of social memory, or the way that people think about places or events in the past, are being addressed (288). She notes that the sometimes exaggerated reputations of violence and lawlessness in many of the mythic Western ghost towns were attributed to these places after their decline, rather than during their “boom” periods of popularity, but were nonetheless rooted in a certain degree of accuracy (Ibid, 279-80). This after-the-fact development of overly violent behavior has certainly occurred, to an extent, in

the creation of the juke joint's mythic reputation. It must be remembered that most accounts of historical juke joints are related by musicians, not average patrons who would probably have a different account of the atmosphere within these establishments. Accounts of violent behavior would have been likely told more often than stories of just plain, uneventful evenings. This could have created a misconception about the frequency of violence overall. Also, musicians could have exaggerated their experiences with violence in order to give themselves a certain degree of authenticity or a sense that they had paid their dues in a rough place before becoming famous in a manner similar to present-day rap musicians who view violence from an almost romantic point of view.

CONCLUSIONS

The jook was in full play when we walked in. The piano was throbbing like a stringed drum and the couples slow-dragging about the floor were urging the player on to new lows. 'Jook Johnnie...jook it Johnnie! Throw it in the alley!'...Somebody had squeezed the alcohol out of several cans of Sterno and added sugar, water, and boiled-off spirits of nitre and called it wine...The pay-night rocks on with music and gambling and laughing and dancing and fights. (Zora Neale Hurston quoted in Bastin 1986, 56)

At the most basic level the juke joint has historically served as a community social outlet for its patrons. It has also served as a cultural institution, a place where cultural elements such as music and dance could be displayed, blended, shared, and also diffused throughout the rural South (Hazzard-Gordon 1990, 82). It has served as a business for the owners of the establishments and a gig for the musicians who played there. It has been a party for the dancers and a bar for the drinkers. The early juke joint has also, for better or worse, been associated with certain types of behavior. These behaviors that characterize the historical juke joint are, of course, rooted in actual events, but also have been exaggerated over the years to an extent that may never be known. Whatever the combination of the two, these elements have combined

create a mythologized reputation for these types of establishments, one in which its patrons have “a predilection for drinking, slow-dragging, and murderous mayhem” (Gussow 2002, 219).

In this chapter I have pieced together the different components that comprise this reputation in an attempt to create a somewhat accurate picture of early juke joints in the Mississippi Delta. It turns out that early juke joints were complex in nature, often taking on different forms and hosting a variety of different activities simultaneously. They were also remembered in different ways that were often times contradictory. These establishments were an integral part of community life, but they were also viewed as “undesirable havens of vice” (Patterson 2005, 80). The juke joint was, at the same time, a place of fun and dancing, and a place of sin and risks. Its reputations have far exceeded its realities, but that does not mean that the realities are lost. The true juke joint lies somewhere in between. It is, at the same time, a place of both historical fact and historical fiction. I will next introduce the setting of a contemporary Delta juke joint in an attempt to form a basis for understanding it and how it compares to its predecessors described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 3: WATERPROOF, LOUISIANA --- A SETTING OF HISTORICAL AND SITUATIONAL CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

It would be impossible to tell the story of The Disco 86 Lounge without also including the story of the place in which it lies. The town of Waterproof, like the people and the bar itself, plays an important role in this multi-faceted narrative of modern social life in a particular part of northeast Louisiana. In addition to simply being the contextual setting for everyday events that occur in the lives of the people, Waterproof also helps to shape the lives, attitudes, and actions of its inhabitants, just as they in turn help shape the town. According to Tuan (1974), it is difficult to distinguish between culture and environment, as they provide “complementary perspectives” on perception and attitude (59). Thus, it is important to have a solid understanding of Waterproof’s current situation and how that has changed over the years in order to fully grasp the ways in which it affects the cultural and social behavior of its inhabitants, whose lives are inextricably bound to the fate of the town.

Just as the residents are connected to the town, so is the town of Waterproof geographically connected to other places. It does not exist in a vacuum. It is, therefore, also impossible to tell the story of Waterproof without acknowledging its interconnectivity within regions of various scales. The story of Waterproof, then, is also the story of Tensas Parish, the story of Louisiana, and the story of the more general southern United States at different times throughout their respective histories. This at first may seem like stating the obvious, but, perhaps because of its rural nature, the area within which Waterproof is located has historically been tied to the trends of Tensas Parish. The small towns in the area are of course self-sufficient to a certain degree, and carry out many tasks on their own. This being said, however, these towns are also extremely reliant on events that happen to their neighbors. None of the small towns in

Tensas Parish has significantly prospered or declined without the others following the same route. In fact from personal interaction I have noticed that people who live in the area are just as likely to refer to themselves as citizens of *Tensas* as opposed to citizens of the small towns in which they live and interact. The discourse of its citizens seems to reflect an attitude that Tensas Parish is a homogeneous place. Indeed, this is rooted in historical events and geographic realities. As with other places in general, Waterproof's current geographic situation is the result of complex and fluid circumstances which have left their marks on the landscape and in the minds of the people who still reside in the town.

In this chapter I will explore the various factors and influences which have helped to construct the modern setting of Waterproof, Louisiana. In doing so, I attempt to reveal the causes and, perhaps more importantly, the deeply felt effects of change in the community over time. I will start with an overview of the physical geography of the region, showing how the town and its people affect and are affected by the natural surroundings and processes of the area. I will then move on to an overview of the history of settlement in the area, as well as the early development of the town of Waterproof from its foundation to its more modern situation as it still somewhat exists today. In the next section, I will trace the industrial development of the region over the latter part of the twentieth century. It is the shortcomings in this type of development or lack of industry altogether that I argue is the main factor in the economic decline resulting in the current state of the small towns in Tensas Parish. Lastly, I will examine some of the ways in which this has affected the area and its inhabitants. These include issues such as out-migration, poverty, and a lack of available employment. Because most of the data in this chapter comes from my personal correspondence with residents of Waterproof or from the local parish newspaper, *The Tensas Gazette*, much of this chapter reflects the ways in which the residents of Tensas have in the past viewed their situation, and also the ways in which they still continue to

do so. In a sense, it is an attempt to tell the story of a community and its residents in the words of the people who lived the experience. I will also include more quantitative data such a census records in order to show evidence of some broader trends. Nonetheless, it would be naïve to assume that all the people in or around Waterproof feel the same about their town and its changes over the years. I have tried to find as many voices and opinions as possible, but do realize that even data of that nature is susceptible to my own (mis)interpretation and (mis)representation. Indeed, this place that I am trying to understand is always ultimately based on my perception of the objects and events at hand. Similarly, Meinig (1979) has pointed out that “any landscape is composed not only of what lies before our eyes but what lies within our heads” (34). This is, therefore, just one version of the story.

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

As stated earlier, Waterproof, Louisiana is located in the parish of Tensas in the northeast corner of the state. Tensas is bordered on the north by Madison Parish, on the south by Concordia Parish, on the west by Franklin and Catahoula Parishes, and on the east by the Mississippi River (see Figure 3-2). All three of the main towns in Tensas Parish are located in the eastern part of the parish in close proximity to the river. Newellton, currently the largest in the parish in terms of population, is the northernmost town. Waterproof, the smallest, lies in the southern part of the parish. And St. Joseph, the parish seat, claims a central position between the two.

The land which makes up Tensas is part of the greater system of the Mississippi River’s alluvial plain which runs parallel the river with varying degrees of width throughout most of the state of Louisiana. This land has been shaped over time by the dual processes of the river changing course to create meander belts, and also by the deposition of sediments during periods

of high water when the river overflows its natural levees. The river's meandering is a relatively long process that can take from decades to hundreds of years to produce noticeable changes, although it is always occurring. Flooding, on the other hand, is a process that would occur every spring if not for the man-made efforts to control the river through various methods of diversion and artificial levees (Yodis and Colten 2007, 15-31). The effects of these two processes can still be seen in Tensas Parish today. The changing course of the river has created the massive series of oxbow lakes such as Lake Bruin, Lake St. Joseph, and Yucatan Lake that are a vital part of tourism and recreational activities of the parish. The historic flooding and constant replenishment of soils has caused the land in Tensas to be extremely fertile for naturally-occurring vegetation as well as planted crops in more modern times.

Life in this part of the state, from time of the original Native American inhabitants, has always been closely tied to the naturally fertile land. Agriculture remains the single most important economic activity in the parish. The majority of land in Tensas is in fact devoted to agriculture, which is a direct result of the physical geography of the region. The land gradually slopes down away from the main settlements that were established on the natural levees. It drains westward into the Tensas River, the parish's western border, creating attractive farmland throughout much of the parish. Cotton has historically been the main crop grown in the area with just enough corn grown to feed the animals on hand. Over the twentieth century, agriculture changed dramatically in Tensas, but never strayed too far away from its original cash crop. In the second half of the twentieth century soybeans, wheat, corn, and livestock became major parts of the agricultural landscape. Early on, cattle and then soybeans were wildly popular among local farmers, only to lose prominence to corn in more modern times. None of these alternatives has rivaled cotton in terms of income. However, they do seem to supplement it quite well. Another major economic activity in Tensas resulting from fertile soils has been the timber

industry. The multitude of hardwoods has brought several lumber companies to the area. This activity however has declined over the twentieth century as available forests have been exploited, causing the timber industry in Louisiana to move on to other parts of the state to take advantage of more pine-dominated paper-production enterprises (Yodis and Colten 2007, 166).

In addition to giving the people of Tensas distinct advantages, the Mississippi River has also served as a destructive force to those who have chosen to settle on the alluring real estate near its banks. Despite serving as a vital means of transportation for goods and people, the river has also made settlement difficult during times of high water. The river waters have been so treacherous at times as to force a change in the actual location of the town of Waterproof on more than one occasion before the implementation of the modern levee system. Since the town moved to its current location in the late 1870s, there have been three major overflows that have severely disrupted life in Waterproof and much of Tensas in general. These occurred in 1883, 1912, and 1927, resulting from the failing of levees at several points. These floods were especially high. There were, in fact, reports of boats the size of small steamships navigating the streets of Waterproof in 1912, and boats again were the primary mode of transportation for several weeks in 1927 (see Figure 3-1).

There have also been numerous floods to the area that were not as large-scale as these, but did damage nonetheless (Goldman unpublished). Times of high water, of course, damage buildings and property of citizens in and around the small towns, but these flood waters also can incur longer-lasting damage. The amount of water from a heavy flood was often too much for the farmland in the parish, thus disrupting the people's agricultural production and economic well-being for the entire year or longer. This was the case as recently as 1973 when high waters caused much economic disruption despite the fact that homes and towns were not inundated. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has also had to periodically sink concrete revetment mats in



Figure 3-1: Downtown Waterproof during the flood of 1927
(Source: Carneal Goldman)

the water near Tensas in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s in attempts to keep the river from changing its course and encroaching on the nearby development. Even in more modern times of river control, flooding in Tensas Parish continues to be a major issue for other reasons. Water from torrential rains during frequent storms, usually occurring in the winter months, collects in many low-lying parts of the region. These resulting drainage problems show that the people of the parish are still, for better or worse, affected by the physical features of the landscape, both benefitting from the advantages and also suffering from the consequences just as they have been since its inhabitation.

A BREIF HISTORY OF EARLY WATERPROOF, LOUISIANA

The history of Waterproof begins not with the Anglo migrants who established the settlement that would later become the town, but must also include their predecessors. There was indeed human inhabitation of the area that did not become permanent, but existed nonetheless. Reports of the Tensas Indians, a Natchezan-speaking tribe that were settled in an area along the river that would later become the parish bearing their name, were recorded during the time of European exploration of the Mississippi Basin as early as the mid-sixteenth century.

These initial explorations and the subsequent settlement by the French and Spanish did much to disrupt the lives of the Louisiana Indians, mainly in the form infectious diseases (Kniffen and Hilliard 1988, 111-123).

Although there is some evidence of Spanish expansion into the area in the late eighteenth century (Yodis and Colten 2007, 116), there does not seem to be any large-scale permanent settlement in Tensas until after 1810 when the land would have been U.S. territory. During this time there were two main changes that allowed for a boost in cotton production which made the land and location appealing to prospective settlers. These were the perfection of the cotton gin, allowing cotton production to be a less time consuming process, and the introduction of the steamboat to river traffic, allowing for cheaper and easier shipment of cotton to new urban markets, as well as transportation needs for the settlers (Kniffen and Hilliard 1988, 138). While it is probably true that there were a few people around the area that would become Waterproof prior to this time, the area would not have been classified as a settlement, but only a small landing for flatboats and keelboats navigating the river.

The settlers coming to the area steadily increased throughout the early part of the nineteenth century, with most permanent residents arriving in the decade of the 1830s. During this time, the region was seeing an influx of migrants either coming down the river on flatboats, or coming from the northeast in covered wagons, mainly from Kentucky. These pioneers were expanding westward into unclaimed territory on what was known as the Old Texas or Spanish Road. They would cross the river by ferry at Rodney, Mississippi before traveling through north Louisiana via Waterproof and further on to Natchitoches eventually continuing into the territory of Texas. Many of these settlers, both tired by the journey and attracted by the fertile soils, decided to stop along the way making the land around the small river towns in northeast Louisiana their homes (Guice 1941).

The origin of the town's name is somewhat contested even though both possibilities convey similar meanings. The first stems from the fact that the original site of the town was located, at the time, on the highest piece of land on the west bank of the Mississippi River between New Orleans and Memphis. The name was given to the town in order to establish a sense of security in encouraging people to settle in the area during a time of constant threats of flooding (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 5, 1930).

The other possibility is more rooted in the oral tradition of the people of Tensas. It claims that in the early days of steamboat traffic to the area, a resident name Abner Smalley owned a wood yard on the highest point on the riverbank. During a time of high water a steamboat captain came to pick up a load. He found everything to be underwater except for Abner's wood yard. Upon docking his boat, he is said to have exclaimed, "Well Abner, I see you're waterproof." Liking the sound of the name, Smalley gave it to his plantation which would later become the location of the town (Guice 1941).

These two accounts of the origin of the town's name are, of course, not mutually exclusive. It is probably more accurate that the truth lies in some combination of the two. No matter how it came to be, however, the name Waterproof truly *is* a misnomer. The town is rumored to have changed location at least seven times over the course of its existence. This number seems a little high, and probably includes the relocation of several buildings or houses as opposed to the actual town. There have, however, been two well-documented movements of the entire town in its history (see Figure 3-2). Waterproof's first location was about three miles south of where it is now which has at least partially been overtaken by the river. After several years of dealing with the undesirable circumstances of repeated overflows, the residents moved the town up the river to just east of its contemporary location sometime shortly after the Civil War (Harrell 1981). The land for the new town was located on James Miller's property, which is

now on the river side of the present-day levee. The first relocation only provided a temporary solution to continuing problem. After more problems the process of relocation was again begun in the late 1870s to a more inland location on the property of Thomas McAllister's Lisbon Plantation (Fontenot and Ziegler 1987, 177). Articles from *The North Louisiana Journal*, the precursor to the *Tensas Gazette*, report that a new levee was being built in between the new location of the town and the river by about 140 convicts. It was to be the biggest built in the parish since the war. During this time, the town grew rather quickly with many new buildings being erected, as well as people moving their homes from the old location. The paper reported that "in a few short months, Waterproof of former times will be no more" (May 17, 1879). Finally in the summer of 1880, there was a ball held to celebrate the inauguration of the new town site, where it has remained since.

Despite the early movements of the town, Waterproof, like its neighbors, continued to serve the same function which was essentially its reason for existence. It was a part of a larger system of towns located along the river that served as trading posts and export centers for the agricultural activity of the farmlands to the west (Birdsall and Florin 1992, 228). These shipping-and-transportation hubs located in the newly formed Tensas Parish, which was created out of the northern portion of Concordia Parish in 1843 (*The Tensas Gazette* Sep. 30, 1910), exhibited a distinct linear geography along the river. The towns of Waterproof, St. Joseph, Newellton, and Lake Bruin were all located about fifteen to twenty miles apart, and all had similar characteristics because they all played a similar role in the regional economy. The main role was as a port facility for shipping out initially cotton bales, but also lumber in the later part of the nineteenth century as almost everyone of these towns had at least one sawmill. But these towns also served as places of interaction where people from the surrounding countryside would come to buy or trade supplies. The trade circulating through these towns, as well as the labor-

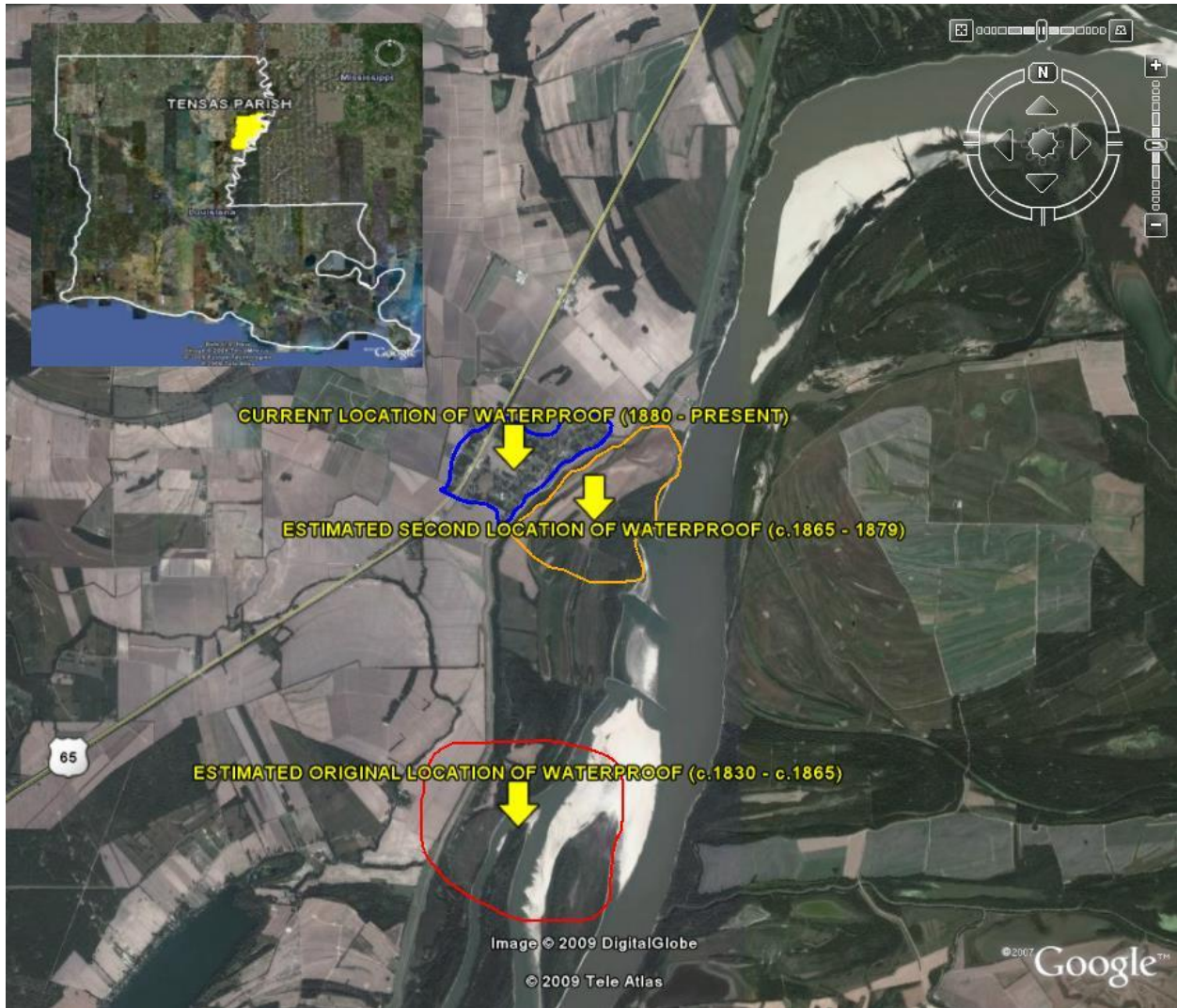


Figure 3-2: Map of Waterproof's Changing Location. The areas represent the estimated widest possible boundaries of the town based on local descriptions.

intensive ginning and sawmilling industries caused immense growth and expansion during the 1880s and 1890s. In a multiplier effect, the growth caused more jobs in the form of blacksmiths, brickmakers, builders, shop owners, and laborers in general.

This economic boom for the Tensas towns like Waterproof continued well into the twentieth century, and was only increased by the introduction of the Missouri Pacific railroad which came south into the parish in 1902. Citizens greatly anticipated the extra shipping capacity that the railroad would allow, thus boosting the economy even further. Although the

rail lines would slowly and eventually displace the steamboats as faster and more efficient means of travel and shipping, the period of their co-existence in the early 20th century brought about great prosperity for Waterproof. A reflection of this optimism can be seen in a 1905 letter in *The New Southwest* published in San Antonio in which a recent visitor of Waterproof praises progress in the town:

A steady growth has been manifested, since the completion of the railroad, new people are coming in, and if activity in business circles indicate anything, Waterproof will one day ere long become a commercial center of importance...Shipping facilities are unrivaled, and access to the world's markets unsurpassed. (Quoted in *The Tensas Gazette* Apr. 27, 1962)

As this description shows, Waterproof had fully made the transformation from a small port town to a locally import center of commerce, and was indeed still growing. Its location relative to river and rail shipping facilities, as well as the cotton and lumber that were in high demand, gave it obvious developmental advantages. It was during this time that the height of the existing levee to the east of the town was increased to twenty-five feet to further protect the reported twenty or more businesses in downtown Waterproof (Fontenot and Ziegler 1987, 179).

The next major step in Waterproof's development was the improvement of its road system. Waterproof had established a relatively good network of roads early on in its history. There is in fact a newspaper article from 1872 proclaiming that St. Joseph was losing shipping traffic to the port at Waterproof simply because Waterproof had superior roads which the farmers preferred to travel in order to get their crops to the river (*The Tensas Gazette* Mar. 2, 1872). This early intra-parish road transportation was only a means of moving goods to other points of shipment, but there were, however, reports locally of shipping goods out of the parish by means of a trucking industry as early as the fall of 1911. The roads at this time were primitive, but were sufficient enough to support this early automobile traffic. Over the next few years there was an increase in taxes to support the improvement of roads. By 1921 Highway 65, a gravel-topped

road running north and south through the parish, was opened for traffic. By the end of the 1920s, despite the devastating flood and an equally destructive fire to downtown Waterproof in 1927, roads had improved dramatically. In the early 1930s, the state of Louisiana paved the section of Highway 65 running through the town. This development continued throughout the decade with federal help from the Works Progress Administration, in which several main streets and sidewalks in Waterproof were paved. Like the railroad before it, the road improvement in the area was welcomed with great optimism for the future of the town with an article of the time reporting that “Waterproof is destined to become one of the leading towns of north Louisiana” (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 5, 1930). This increase in transportation was indeed accompanied by more growth for the town.

During this period of increased connectivity via the system of roads in the parish and the state, Waterproof exhibited a large growth in not only population, but also facilities and services to serve these citizens. In the last few years of 1920s, the small towns in Tensas Parish received electricity through the Louisiana Power and Light Company, allowing for further improvement in the quality of life. It also received a much needed branch of the Bank of St. Joseph and an impressive new high school. The town also boasted a spot for watching moving pictures and hosting dances in the Castleman Theatre. It even established an airport in the summer of 1928, which was seen as a sure sign of a promising future by residents. One local writer exclaimed, “Indeed the Deason Field is so happily situated that it bids fair in time to become recognized nationally as a port of call for commercial and military aviation” (*The Tensas Gazette* May 3, 1929). These expectations of national recognition seem to capture the optimistic zeitgeist of life in the growing town. By the end of the decade Waterproof, a town with a little less than 500 people, had two public cotton gins, two saw mills, a lumber corporation, a large number of privately owned cotton gins, sixteen general stores, five drive-in filling stations, and numerous

specialty shops and businesses in addition to the agriculture and livestock production which was still the main economic industry in the parish (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 5, 1930).

Waterproof continued on its path of prosperity over the next several decades, and experienced a building boom in the late 1940s that expanded the town to accommodate its growing population. In 1945, the land to the north of Waterproof, which was a part of Myrtle Grove Plantation, was sub-divided into building lots with streets laid out to provide access to the expanded areas. The construction began almost immediately, and was almost completely residential. Finally, in 1946, the town passed an Ordinance Number 101 that officially enlarged its borders to include the new development (*The Tensas Gazette* May 3, 1946). The next improvement came in 1948 when the citizens of Waterproof got an underground, piped water system. Prior to this, downtown was the only place where running water could be found. The following year, citizens received gas pipe lines which brought natural gas to the town. By around 1950 Waterproof had become, for all intents and purposes, the modern town that exists today as it slowly began its struggle with further development.

(A LACK OF) INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS

An article from the *Tensas Gazette* on December 10, 1954 stated that Waterproof had seen “considerable growth” over the past several years, and is “now effectively working towards getting new industry.” Indeed, industry would become the buzzword for the citizens of Tensas Parish over the second half of the twentieth century as they unanimously agreed that in order to continue the growth and prosperity of decades past, they would have to find some way to plant the seeds of industrial development, and thus economic progress like they were seeing in other parts of Louisiana and the South in general, along with their agricultural exports. Tensas was entering a period for the South in which the small, semi-urban areas could no longer be sustained

by the sole production of a staple crop such as cotton. In order to survive, they would be forced to rely on industry and service activities like the large urban areas of the region (Goldfield 1982, 144). Industrial development would prove to be difficult task for the area for various reasons even though, judging from attitudes in the local newspaper, the people never lost a sense of persistence that the next proposed project would be the spark to relight the progressive fire underneath the parish.

Tensas had always had industry to a certain degree, but had been able to rely on its agriculture for economic prosperity. By industry here, I am mainly referring to secondary-level economic activities that turn raw materials into commodities through some type of manufacturing process. The saw mills of the parish were the earliest examples of a manufacturing industry, which continued to be successful well into the twentieth century. By the 1920s, large-scale gravel companies were also locating in the parish to take advantage of the expansion and improvement of state highways and local roads. At this time, both of these industries were located in close proximity to the railroad because it was the primary means of shipment (*The Tensas Gazette* Nov. 2, 1928). Both of these industries, although initially successful, were not sustainable in the long run. The gravel for the roads was not needed in such bulk supply once most of the roads were paved over the next two decades. The timber industry in Tensas Parish also eventually screeched to a halt with the two mills in Waterproof closing in the early 1940s. The parish did continue to have a timber industry throughout the twentieth century, but its output was never again equal to that of earlier times (personal correspondence with local residents).

There was, however, development shortly following this downturn. Oil was discovered in southern Tensas around the Holly Ridge area in the early 1940s. This, along with an unspecified type recycling company located just south of Waterproof, was said to be responsible

for the tremendous growth that occurred over the latter part of the decade. By in 1954, there were over 600 oil wells and an abundance of natural gas located around the town (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 10, 1954). Despite the initial positive outlook, neither of these two industries would provide enough stability to produce a lasting effect on the local economy. In fact, maps of industrial expansion by parish, which were printed on the front page of *The Tensas Gazette* around the beginning of each year during most of the 1950s, seem to pinpoint the exact year that the growth in the area came to a halt. Until 1954, Tensas showed minimal, but steady growth in the industrial sector. The four maps published after 1954 show no industrial expansion for the parish, a trend that would continue, for the most part, throughout the remainder of the century. During the decade of the 1950s, the biggest growth occurred on the corridor following the Mississippi River in between Baton Rouge and New Orleans. In addition to this area, the maps also reflect a significant amount of expansion in two large bands running across the northern and southern parts of the state. The growth of the parishes containing the urban areas of Monroe and Shreveport in the north and New Orleans, Baton Rouge, Lafayette, and Lake Charles in the south no doubt corresponds to the newly developing Interstates 20 and 10, respectively, and would continue over the next few decades. These new means of transportation for both goods and people were providing increasing access to places in north and south Louisiana, while at the same time, isolating other places like the river towns of Tensas. Even though the parish was producing record agriculture numbers in the early 1960s, there was still a public awareness that industry, and thus jobs, were not locating in northeast Louisiana like in other parts of the state (*The Tensas Gazette*, Mar. 20, 1963). This is reflected in the large volume of newspaper articles and parish meetings held on the subject during this time.

In the mid-1960s, Tensas began to take a different approach in order to bring money into the parish by establishing a tourism industry. They aggressively tried to market the land and

nearby attractions as places of interest for tourists from mainly within the state, but also from neighboring Mississippi as well. These attractions included the numerous plantation homes, and also area museums such as The Plantation Museum, The Old Barn Museum, The River Road Antique Automobile Museum, and The Music Museum. There was also a quarter horse race track outside of St. Joseph known as Delta Downs. By far the most successful of these was Dutch Gardens outside of Newellton. It was marketed as an authentically Dutch community with gardens of tulips and other attractive plants on display during their bloom in the spring, which was the high season for Tensas tourism. There was also carnival-type food available and a “Kiddie Land” for small children which included rides such as a carousel. Dutch Gardens even went as far as to have a Dutch windmill shipped in from Europe, and even sold wooden shoes to willing tourists. A ferry running in between St. Joseph and Port Gibson, Mississippi was also put into service to try and attract day trips from across the river to the various attractions and recreational activities on the Louisiana side. This newly created tourist industry was extremely successful for a short period of time, with the Tensas Tourist Commission reporting that over 100,000 tourists visited the parish in March of 1966 alone (*The Tensas Gazette* Apr. 1, 1966). The tourism industry in Tensas had fizzled out by around 1972 by which time almost every attraction was either closed or on its last leg. The end of these tourism years was largely blamed on competition with places along Interstate 20, with reports that “the completion of the network of interstate highways was fast drawing today’s traveler to them” (*The Tensas Gazette* Feb. 24, 1972).

In 1968 it was announced to the parish that Louisiana led the South in industrial growth for the year of 1967, mainly in the petroleum and paper-producing industries which were, again located in the southern and northern parts of the state (*The Tensas Gazette* Feb. 9, 1968). Based on a study by the Gulf South Research Institute, local officials decided that Tensas needed to try

and develop niche-based industry based on its strong points. These would include agriculturally-related industrial activities like soybean processing plants. The report concludes that it also needed to focus on more sport and recreational-related aspects of tourism instead of the previously promoted museums and theme parks. This would take advantage of the impressive lakes and natural wildlife of the area. According to this study, a “balanced combination” of these two things would “keep the younger and more productive segments of the labor force from migrating to towns and cities that offer more substantial and stable job opportunities” (*The Tensas Gazette* Apr. 3, 1969). It was also decided that a modern port facility in St. Joseph would help attract industry to the area by providing a cheap and reliable way to ship goods.

The early 1970s showed signs of hope for the citizens of Tensas. A new grain elevator was built on the river to ship out mainly soybeans, but several other types of grain as well. Also The Hanover Modular Homes Factory was established near St. Joseph that was to employ over 400 people (*The Tensas Gazette* Apr. 29, 1971). It was expected that this development, along with a new thirty-room hospital near Newellton and the securing of the funding for the new port facility, would attract other plants and small businesses to locate close by. The new port was proposed to be the only one of its kind on the Louisiana side of the river in between Baton Rouge and Lake Providence. The people of Tensas had high hopes that this new port would lead to “a new period of economic growth and opportunity,” and also lead to “a reversal of a recent trend of economic decline” (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 16, 1971). This, however, was not the case. By the middle of the decade no significant industry or business had located in the parish, and the port funding had been revoked because a suitable location could not be determined due to the high water over the last few years. By 1980, the situation had not improved. State Representative Lanny Johnson claimed that he was trying to convince industry to locate in the area, but the lack of a proper port was more and more becoming a deal breaker. He remarked to the police jury:

If we don't face up to reality and do something, Tensas is going to dry up...Farmers in the area have always been against industry coming here because they felt and industry would force wages too high. But now, most farmers only employ three or four people so I don't think it would really hurt them now. If you don't do anything, nothing is going to come here. You know, no one likes to live without a town and while everyone says it won't happen – it will. In ten years, St. Joeseph probably won't be a town. There's already evidence of the problems in the parish. (*The Tensas Gazette* Mar. 26, 1980)

After Johnson's pessimistic diatribe, he continued to work on finding industry while the Tensas Port Commission continued to try and again obtain funding for the project. They also received some dismal news from their northern neighbor. Madison Parish had just completed a similar port to the one Tensas was trying to acquire. This facility, located just north of Tallulah, was, according to its manager, losing money and struggling to pay its employees because there were no businesses using it. He advised that Tensas should first secure guaranteed industry, and then build a port to facilitate, not the other way around unless they wanted yet another failing business in their parish. Ironically, while these parishes in northeastern part of the state were experiencing such a lack of business and high rates of unemployment, much of the rest of the state was experiencing "the greatest economic boom to hit Louisiana in modern times" (*The Tensas Gazette* Apr. 29, 1981).

Despite the rapid progress in other parts of Louisiana, Tensas' hopes of industry and expansion never came to fruition. By the late 1980s, Tensas Memorial Hospital was closed due to lack of funding, and the Missouri Pacific Railroad had informed citizens that if things did not change they would be forced to shut down the line of tracks in between Tallulah and Vidalia which runs right through the parish. They claimed that there was a lack of viable shipping business in this area, and that they had been losing money on operation costs ever since 1983 (*The Tensas Gazette* Mar. 5, 1986). The line was eventually abandoned in late 1988. The 1990s did bring industry to the parish in the form a detention center and several other small developments mostly to the northern part of the parish. Overall the parish of Tensas, despite

constant effort, could never quite pin down the elusive economic benefits of industrial development. Unfortunately, it is now stuck facing the future without the resources or facilities to prosper in a more modern service and information economy either. The past few decades have mostly been characterized by small business operations in or around the towns of St. Joseph and Newellton. This is not to say that they are growing by any means, but that they are faring better than their southern neighbor. Waterproof has been, for the most part, left out of this process. It is here that the effects of this declining situation are most obvious.

A COMMUNITY IN DECLINE

The glaring example of this community and, more broadly, parish in decline is the effects seen in the form of population decline or out-migration. There have been several patterns of population movement over the history of this area, but in recent times all reflect a net loss of people as there has been little to entice them to stay in terms of steady employment with economic opportunity. There have also been further negative effects felt by the citizens of Waterproof in the form of a lack of funding for basic needs and services, as well as tensions and feelings of abandonment for those who have remained in the town. Through conversations with various people, I have found that these residents are well aware that the situation in contemporary Waterproof runs much deeper than a simple decline in the number of people who live in the town.

The population of Tensas Parish, just like its economy, has historically followed a pattern of early growth followed by a constant decline in the more modern period. In 1850, seven years after its designation as an independent parish, the population of Tensas was 9,040 with all but 900 being black due to the enslaved-dominated nature of the area plantations (Fontenot and Zeigler 1987, 4). The results of this massive influx of enslaved labor during the antebellum

period can still be seen today as Tensas' population still retains a black majority. By 1880 the population had almost doubled to 18,000 (*The Tensas Gazette* Oct. 2, 1980). As Figure 3-3 shows, the population in the parish peaked in 1900 at 19,070 people. It then fluctuated somewhat over the first half of the twentieth century, losing numbers during the first two decades, and then rebounding for significant gains during one of its biggest periods of growth, the 1920s. Finally, by the middle of the decade, which almost coincides exactly with the beginning of the problems with industrial growth, Tensas' population began its steady nosedive of decline that has yet to be reversed. Indeed, in the early 1980s, Tensas Parish became the least populated parish in the state, a title which it still holds to this day.

Although these numbers reveal a startling pattern of population loss, a deeper examination of migration trends is required in order to fully understand the situation at hand. It is important to take a look at who was moving during certain periods, and also at the places to which they were going. It is some of the broader trends associated with these movements that is responsible for the status of modern towns like Waterproof.

The out-migration of Tensas' black population is one such trend. One of the earliest instances of migration from the area occurred in the mid-1870s when a substantial portion of the black community left to relocate to parts of Kansas for unspecified reasons. This caused great alarm among the white landowners, as they feared a continuation of this pattern would result in them losing their source of labor (*The Tensas Gazette* Oct. 2, 1980). This was not to be the case, however. Although a certain degree of migration surely continued, it was not on a scale that affected the local labor supply. In fact, at the beginning of the twentieth century, 90 percent of the blacks in the United States still lived in the South, with 84 percent living in rural areas such as Tensas Parish (Aiken 2001, 54). It would not be until after this time that the majority of blacks

YEAR	POPULATION	PERCENT CHANGE
1900	19,070	-----
1910	17,060	-10.5%
1920	12,085	-29.2%
1930	15,096	+24.9%
1940	15,940	+5.6 %
1950	13,209	-17.1%
1960	11,796	-10.7%
1970	9,732	-17.5%
1980	8,525	-12.4%
1990	7,103	-16.7%
2000	6,618	-6.8 %
2007(est.)	5,865	-11.3%

Figure 3-3: Population change in Tensas Parish over the Twentieth Century
(Source: U.S. Census Bureau)

moved out of the plantation South in what many scholars term The Great Migration (Davis and Donaldson 1975, Grossman 1989, Marks 1989, Harrison 1991, Lemann 1991, and Gregory 2005). Indeed, this process was largely begun around the time of the First World War when a series of push factors in the South, such as violence, poor economic opportunity, and oppressive Jim Crow laws, combined with pull factors from the urban North, such as perceived better treatment and economic opportunity due to a lack of European immigrant labor during the war, to entice many young black migrants into moving to places like Chicago, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, and Detroit. This process continued to escalate well into the 1940s. Then in the years following World War II, when many growing areas in the South began to industrialize and provide viable employment for local workers, much of this migration began to shift to large urban areas within the South (Birdsall and Florin 1992, 240-6).

One fact that underlies this migration was a change in agricultural practices during these times. The system of sharecropping, which had taken the place of slavery after the Civil War, kept many rural black families tied to the land in a system of debt to landowners that was similar

to feudalism. This continued serving as a barrier to mobility well into the twentieth century. The death knell of this system came in the unexpected form of the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1933, which subsidized southern farmers for the cotton that they intentionally did not plant in an attempt to increase its national price, and thus the farmer's income. The one stipulation was that a landowner must share this money with any of the sharecroppers working on the subsidized land. Not wanting to share any of the subsidy payment, most farmers abandoned the slavish system and hired the ex-sharecroppers as wage-laborers who were not effectively tied to the land. This, according to Goldfield (1982), "was as if the federal government had issued a second emancipation edict" (140). The subsequent abandonment of the rural farmland created a need for the other main change in agriculture in the rural South in the decades following World War II: mechanization.

The traditional view of mechanized advancements in agriculture as they relate to The Great Migration is that the development of the technology *drove* the workers from the fields, essentially putting them unhappily out of work and forcing a move to other locations. Scholars such as Prunty (1970) and Goldfield (1982) have, however, challenged this view by arguing that mechanization was an answer to the problem of a lack of labor. This argument is built on the fact that the economic incentives of the pull factors in a time of increased industrialization dominated or at least equaled the social push factors. This situation does seem to be complex, and cannot be easily summed up by a single cause and effect type of analysis. The mechanical cotton picker may have been introduced out of some labor necessity, but eventually did also put many of the workers, who chose to stay in the region for whatever reasons, out of a job. Regardless of the causation, mechanization was introduced, and by 1963, nearly 90 percent of cotton in Tensas Parish was mechanically harvested (*The Tensas Gazette* Aug. 23, 1963). The

fact that there were increasingly fewer jobs in the rural areas of the parish is one of the primary reasons behind another migration trend in Tensas at this time.

Intra-parish migration during the period following World War II also contributed to shaping the modern landscape of Tensas. While this movement would not have been considered part of The Great Migration because the people were not moving to large urban areas, it was movement nonetheless, and it changed the settlement patterns of the area tremendously. In 1908 Waterproof had a population of about 400 people (*The Tensas Gazette* Jan. 17, 1908). Because of the size of the parish at the time and the fact that Waterproof was one of the three most successful towns within it, this number reflects the fact that the majority of Tensas' citizens lived in rural areas during this time. Over the next five decades the town of Waterproof continued to expand and grow in population. By the time 1960 census data was released, it showed that Waterproof had grown to a little over 1,400 residents. This growth was not tremendous, but was interesting when compared to the trends for the whole parish. Indeed the census showed a net loss of population in the parish, but a substantial growth in the three major towns within it over the last decade (*The Tensas Gazette* May 27, 1960).

This suggests that the rural people of Tensas that did not choose to leave the parish were relocating to the principal towns of the area. The rural parish was becoming even less rural with people moving from the farms in the outlying areas to the small towns near the river. This trend would continue over the next few decades, and was not unique to Tensas Parish or even the South for that matter. In fact, the U. S. farm population declined by more than one-half during the period from 1960 to 1987, falling from fifteen million to only six million (Birdsall and Florin 1992, 59). But all rural farm residents were not moving to the towns at an equal rate. As with the populations that were leaving the parish, the groups of people coming to towns like Waterproof were predominantly black (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 24, 1965). This was eventually,

for various reasons, shortly followed by a white migration out of the town. This was clearly, at least in part, for economic reasons due to lack of job opportunities (just like the black out-migration), but in talking with local residents, it seems that there were also underlying racial tensions involved, which had their roots in the implementation of the civil rights policies of the time. Regardless of the reasons, by the 1970s, a previously small, mostly white community in the early twentieth century had been transformed into a small, mostly black community. This is reflected in the fact that by mid-1974, the town of Waterproof had elected an all-black administration of a mayor and city councilpersons. This is also around the time that the town's population crested and began to decline. It would follow the same pattern as that of the parish two decades earlier, going from about 1,400 in 1970 to an estimated population of 731 in 2007 (U.S. Census Bureau).

This settlement pattern was not unique to Tensas parish, but occurred in many rural areas across the southern part of the United States with poverty being a common thread between them. According to Aiken (1985), places like Waterproof found themselves “in the shadow of the new Sunbelt South” (404). He refers to the small rural towns as types of agricultural ghettos which are characterized by majority black populations, high poverty rates, and levels of segregation are in many cases worse than 1950 (1990, 223). Although there has been a period of return migration to the south from northern areas starting in the late 1970s, it has largely been to urban areas such as Atlanta and Memphis (McHugh 1987, 181). These small rural towns like Waterproof have little to offer in terms of economic opportunity:

Despite their persistence, rural black communities have become “places left behind” in many respects. Although much has been written about the return of African-Americans to the South, and the southern economic boom of the 1970s and 1980s, these developments have not rejuvenated rural black communities. There is ample evidence that economic development in the South is highly uneven, concentrated in urban areas, bypassing African-Americans in rural places. (Snipp quoted in Woods 2005, 285)

This southern economic boom that Snipp mentions was obviously, I have already shown, occurring in other parts of the region as Tensas was considered to be the poorest parish in Louisiana by 1970 (*The Tensas Gazette* Jan. 22, 1970). There were, of course, attempts to remedy these problems of poverty as Waterproof received several million dollars worth of funding over the last three decades of the twentieth century. This was mainly in the form of grants and loans for the several projects sponsored by the federal and state government. This funding, however, was used almost completely to maintain infrastructure-type problems that had been neglected for years such as sewer systems and street repairs. There was little left for improvement on valuable things like education and local business for the future of the town. By 2006, it was reported that of the 2,435 households in Tensas Parish, over 55 percent have a total income that is below the poverty line which at the time was set a \$18, 250 (*The Tensas Gazette* Nov. 29, 2006).

The effects of the community decline are not just financial. There are also social tensions as well. A good example of this is the situation of the schools in Tensas parish. There was historically a public high school and elementary school in each of the main three Tensas towns, with the private Tensas Academy opening later as, according to some, a response to the integration of the public school system. This pattern of private schools opening for affluent white children in reaction to desegregation occurred on a large scale in all parts of the country during the late-1960s and early-1970s (Davis and Donaldson 1975, 184). This has often times, in places like Tensas Parish, left the public schools under funded and under populated.

As a result of these declining numbers, public school consolidation has been a big problem in the area in recent times. In Waterproof, as early as the spring of 1985 residents were complaining to the school board that the 60 year old high school was in serious need of repairs and was deteriorating in some places (*The Tensas Gazette* Feb. 20, 1985). There was never any

serious action taken mainly because the school board had insufficient funds. As an article in 1997 stated, the enrollment for Tensas Parish schools was down for the fifteenth straight year (*The Tensas Gazette* Sep. 17, 1997). By the next school year Waterproof High School had closed down and the students were sent to Davidson High School in St. Joseph, which was also dangerously low on students (see Figure 3-4). The school situation did not make an improvement and the closing of Lisbon Elementary in Waterproof was announced in early 2005. One parent remarked at a school-board meeting, “You have stripped our children of their home, pride, and of their spirit. You have put them in places where they are uncomfortable...the decision you make is going to affect our students, the parents, and our community.” To which the school board official responded, “It is a sad thing that this has to happen...We are going to lose students every year. It is just a fact. The parish is dying” (*The Tensas Gazette* Feb. 9, 2005). In fact, the following year when Newellton High School was also combined with Davidson High School, this lack of comfort turned to physical violence when a large-scale fight broke out that “escalated into a near riot” according to a local news article (*The Tensas Gazette* Nov. 8, 2006). One local resident admitted that he did not think the students would ever get along.

It is apparent in the discourse of the residents of Waterproof that they are very aware of the dire situation facing their town. Many feel abandoned or mistreated by various levels of government, from the parish to the federal. Many feel motivated to make a difference such as a recent mayor of Waterproof who used the state of the town to try and convince residents to make a change in it. In her inaugural address written in the newspaper, she claimed that “all of the run down houses in the town is (sic) a hazard to our community.” She goes on with her rhetoric, “Have you taken a look at Waterproof lately?...We have lost and we are constantly losing...losing our high school, doctors, drug stores, and business. As these things were being



Figure 3-4: Abandoned Waterproof High School Building, 2008
(Source: The Author)

lost, we sat idly by as if in a daze” (*The Tensas Gazette* Feb. 10, 1999). Still, others just feel plain sad about the whole situation. One local resident related his view on the contemporary status of the town: “It’s a very sad story. It’s a ghost town. Let’s see...right now in Waterproof there’s the bank, there’s the grocery store, there’s the filing station, there’s the post office and that’s about it. And the rest of it is a ghost town” (personal interview with local resident).

Looking down Main Street in Waterproof does indeed somewhat resemble a ghost town from the decades of the early twentieth century (see Figure 3-5). Now the storefronts that number over a dozen stand empty and abandoned with the exception of a small grocery store.

Without a doubt, almost every Waterproof resident that I spoke with was adamant that the situation in the town was a direct result of the lack of jobs available to the local people. It is clear that many people must drive to other places on a daily basis, as it is one of the only ways to find steady employment. This includes places like St. Joseph and Newellton, but also places outside of the parish such as Ferriday or even Natchez. One person whom I interviewed seemed to sum up the employment situation facing Waterproof in a succinct and realistic manner:

“There’s (sic) no jobs here but the farming and the detention center...There’s nothing here, and it

don't (sic) look like they're trying to get anything here. They've got more people working out of town than they do in town." This current problem represents a circle of causation in which there are few people in the town because of a lack of development and employment, and there is a lack of development and employment because there are few people in the town. Indeed, the most recent development in the town has been the construction of an eighteen-unit low-income-housing complex that is only a few years old. It is, however, hard to see this as a sign of progress amidst the backdrop of decline. In 2005 it was announced that Entergy, the local power company, would be removing several street lights in the town in order to help reduce expenses (*The Tensas Gazette* Mar. 11, 2005). This was certainly a fitting metaphor for a community that has been declining for some time now.



Figure 3-5: (Top) Satellite photograph of Main Street in modern Waterproof as compared to an aerial photograph of the same area in 1940 (Bottom) View from the ground in 2008
(Source: Carneal Goldman and The Author)

CONCLUSIONS

The processes of decline that have affected this area over time have been complex to say the least, just as are the many factors involved. Thus the story of Waterproof, Louisiana has proven to be one of immense historical and situational change. I have shown how the delicate human-environment relationship has played a role in Tensas' history. I have also argued that the lack of viable economic alternatives to modern agriculture that does not provide adequate employment has resulted in the out-migration of area residents, and multiple levels of community decline for those who remain. An article titled "The Death of a Delta Town" that ran in the local newspaper in the late 1980s seems to sum up the situation of Waterproof while at the same time, acknowledging the local awareness of the issue that still remains today. It shows the decline of the community beginning in the years immediately following World War II when the town's future, based on revenues from agricultural exports, was "looking bright as the nation recovered from the war." During this time the town boasted three grocery stores, three gas stations, a bank, a hardware store, movie theater, and several clothing stores. The article attributes the community's downfall to the combined clearing of timber, increased mechanization of agriculture, and advancements in agricultural chemicals that allowed for increased quality and yields. The three of these allowed the farmer to cover more acreage with less labor. Because of this opportunity, the farmers with land and money "didn't invite any manufacturing industries to come to the area and set up shop." This decrease in farm labor with no other employment opportunities, according to the article, "began the steady downtrend in population that would ultimately contribute to the town's death." It goes on to mention racial tensions as well, "The Civil Rights Movement came through the town like a tornado, splitting it into separate parts. Old hatreds and bitterness further divided the town with no one wanting to work for the town's good...not wanting to change caused the town's demise. The town will not actually cease to

exist because people will always live there, but the living, happy, exciting being that the town was in years past has been lost and can probably never be reclaimed” (*The Tensas Gazette* Apr. 27, 1988).

My purpose in trying to tell this story is not just to draw awareness to the sad situation of a delta town, although that is one of the outcomes. But it is rather an attempt to convey a sense of how these events and processes have shaped the residents of the area in order to try to gain a better understanding of their lives. Because the community plays a vital role in shaping the lives of its inhabitants, it is impossible to understand the people of Waterproof without first understanding their community in its entirety. It is with this in mind that I now move on to social aspects within the town of Waterproof.

CHAPTER 4: THE DISCO 86 LOUNGE – A CONTEMPORARY DELTA JUKE JOINT

INTRODUCTION

When driving north through Tensas Parish on U.S. Highway 65, one can see the Disco 86 Lounge on the right side of the road just after entering the town of Waterproof. From the highway, it does not stand out from the surrounding landscape of similar-looking buildings, houses, and farmland to any noticeable degree aside from the Old Style Beer brand sign that stands at a slumping angle in front of the gravel driveway. This building, however, is unique from the others in the fact that it is the oldest bar in Waterproof that is still in operation. It is, at once, a modern-day juke joint and a remnant of the juke joint tradition of times past. It has changed a great deal over its history. This change, in many ways, mirrors that of the town in which it is located. Indeed the place's story, as well as the exterior façade of the building itself, can be seen as a microcosm of the decline that has occurred around it in recent years. These patterns that have affected the region as a whole have been reflected in the Disco 86 Lounge in obvious ways.

However, this is but only one part of the story. This bar is not just a random establishment whose patron base has decreased over the years as area population has declined. It is more than just a statistic representing out-migration or the slowing of business. Disco 86, as it is known to the locals, is a deeply personal place of meaning to its owners, regulars, and community at large. It has, in fact, had the same name and owners, Henry and Annie Mae McKeal, since the mid-1980s, but has been around for much longer than that. Although it has gone through changes over time, this bar continues to play vital social roles in the community and in the lives of those who frequently hangout there on the weekends. Indeed, Disco 86 is usually the place to be on a Saturday night in this small Delta town. It is a place where the

drinks and music flow steadily throughout the night providing an atmosphere to be enjoyed by all of its patrons.

In this chapter, I will examine all of the different parts that help create the atmosphere and social dynamics of the Disco 86 Lounge. In doing so, I will reveal the social and cultural elements that make it distinctive and also meaningful. This will then allow me to compare this contemporary juke joint to the early juke joint image created in Chapter 2, thus showing how juke-joint culture has changed over time in the Mississippi Delta. I will begin by going over some patterns of drinking establishments in Tensas Parish in order to try to show what conditions were like in this specific area during the period of the historic juke joint in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I will then move on to the history and physical description of the place that is now Disco 86 before discussing some the patterns of behavior and social interaction that occur in the bar in modern times. Lastly, I will explore some of the roles that the bar plays in the community, and also the ways in which its patrons use it to form a sense of place and identity. My goal in this chapter is, then, to produce an intimate look at one aspect of life in this community, and in doing so, to reveal what this place means to those local people who call that community home.

SOME PATTERNS OF EARLY DRINKING ESTABLISHMENTS IN TENSAS PARISH

To the extent that it is reflected in the local newspaper, Tensas Parish has historically tended to be quite conservative when it comes to laws and attitudes towards drinking establishments in the area. This attitude has subsided in more recent times with a number of local bars opening and closing rather frequently in the second half of the twentieth century. In the parish's early days, however, a number of laws and ordinances attempted to control public drinking. By their nature, these laws had the effect of making it difficult for the local African-

American population to open and maintain social gathering places that would have provided the sale of alcohol or even entertainment to a certain extent. It is unclear to what extent these laws were enforced, but they do, nonetheless, provide a setting in which the previously mentioned secretive nature of the juke joint would have likely been necessary for those seeking secular forms of socialization on the weekends. There are, of course, no documented records of such places, but from conversations with local residents and accounts of traveling musicians (Zur Heide 1970, 19-20 and Oliver 1997, 67), it is fairly certain that they existed in a similar fashion as they did in other rural areas and small communities in the Mississippi Delta region.

As early as 1885, there is evidence of dissatisfaction with the public drinking situation in the parish. This appears in the form of a local newspaper article that heavily criticizes the current liquor license law. It calls for stricter regulation of the sale of alcohol, which will result in the reduction of the number of bar rooms. The article sums up the local problem with drinking establishments by claiming that “under our license law, any man with a few dollars and a keg of whiskey can open a gin shop, dispense his vile liquors, and sow the seeds of nearly every crime committed in the state” (*The North Louisiana Journal* Dec. 12, 1885). The prevailing attitude seemed to be that only men with larger amounts of money possessed the judgment to dispense alcohol in non-vile manners that would not hurt the community. This attitude must have been somewhat consistent throughout the rest of the state as well because the following year, the state senate proposed a bill that would require at least 100 dollars to obtain a liquor license and 300 dollars for those who were selling whiskey in quantities less than a gallon which would dramatically increase the expense for those bar owners selling drinks to individuals. This bill would, according to one article, increase revenue for the state, and also force “the country jug and crap shops to close up” in hopes of eliminating disorder and crime among the lower classes (*The Tensas Gazette* May 21, 1886). Again, there is the attitude that the lower

classes are not responsible enough to have access to alcohol. This legislation did not pass, however, causing much disappointment in Tensas Parish, and public calls in the local paper for voters to elect officials that would make sure it passes in 1888 (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 6, 1886).

In addition to these proposed laws that regulated financial aspects of drinking establishments, there were also efforts in the early part of the twentieth century that attempted to regulate the race and behavior of patrons at drinking establishments. In 1908, lawmakers in the state of Louisiana passed the Gay-Shattuck Liquor License Bill. As mentioned previously, it made it illegal for the owner of any type of drinking establishment to serve “whites and negroes in the same building for consumption on the premises,” with a violation being punishable by a fine of 50 to 500 dollars, or a term in jail not to exceed two years. The bill also made it illegal for owners to “use or exhibit any musical instrument in an attempt to encourage the sale of alcohol” (*The Tensas Gazette* Jul. 10, 1908).

Although these regulations were extremely restrictive, there were also many parishes in the state of Louisiana that were “going dry” at the time and choosing not to allow the sale of alcohol at all within their territory in response to a rather large movement for state-wide prohibition. This left the only “wet” parishes being located along the Mississippi River and in the southwestern corner of the state (*The Tensas Gazette* Jan. 1, 1909). Again, these laws would have been enforced differently in different locations. It is unclear how authorities in Tensas Parish would have tolerated, for instance, a musical instrument in a drinking establishment. What is clear, however, is that these restrictions, combined with universal prohibition beginning within the next decade, contributed to the circumstances that would have allowed juke joints to be common elements of social life in Tensas Parish during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

After the repeal of prohibition, the regulation of drinking establishments in the area was carried out on a much more localized scale. In 1936, local residents passed an ordinance that regulated the sale of alcohol, and once again the behavior of patrons. Section nine states that it is “unlawful for any person, firm, or corporation issued a permit under the provisions of this ordinance to allow or suffer or permit or authorize or foster directly or indirectly through himself, itself, or others, any gambling or dancing” (*The Tensas Gazette* Jan. 17, 1936). The regulation of gambling in this law makes sense in light of the fact that gambling was prohibited in almost all other situations.

But dancing being made illegal at drinking establishments seems a little extreme, and also seems to be implicitly directed at the lower-class, African-American members of the community. In fact, it had always been, and continued to be after this time, widely common for the white members of society in the area to hold various balls and dinners as social functions that revolved around dancing until the early hours of the morning. The addition of dancing as an unacceptable behavior at drinking establishments seemed to be an excuse for local authorities to shut down local places that they did not see as respectable, thus giving them another form of power to regulate the behaviors of the lower-class members of society. Indeed, the same ordinance allowed for a permit to be revoked if the place of operation “has been or may be conducted as a dive or disorderly place in such a manner as to constitute a nuisance.” This part of the law shows further evidence that the operation of social institutions at the time, such as drinking establishments, was always at the mercy of the subjective opinions of those enforcing these types of laws who decided whether a place was a dive or operating in a disorderly manner. It is likely that many upper-class white citizens of the time would have thought of most juke joint-type of establishments in this way, which would have made possessing a liquor license even more difficult, and contributed further to this need for the secretive local juke joints.

MRS. ANNIE MAE'S PLACE

The Disco 86 Lounge is located at the west end of Church Lane on the edge of what has historically been a cotton field (see Figure 4-1). This field is no longer used for agriculture, however, due to the fact that a law was passed a few years ago, stating that it is illegal to spray pesticides or fertilizers within city limits (interview with local resident). It has since been allowed to grow unimpeded, and is presently a collection of grass, weeds, and small shrubs, which all stand about chest high. This part of Waterproof lies between the downtown portion closest to the river and the agricultural land on the west side of Highway 65. It was once known as Milltown due to the fact that it was the location of the two sawmills in the town during the first part of the twentieth century. They were located on each side of the railroad tracks, which ran parallel to and just to the east of the current highway. The land in this part of Waterproof was further divided with Church Lane almost exactly representing a hedge line that served as the east/west axis of division. The land to the south of this hedge line was known to some locals as Guffy Quarters, while the land to the north was a part of Myrtle Grove Plantation. The majority of the housing in this neighborhood was built on the north side of Church Lane during the 1920s and 1930s to accommodate employees of the local sawmills. It was further expanded in the boom period of the late 1940s to provide housing for a growing population (*The Tensas Gazette* Jun. 4, 1948). The houses in this area are representative of both of these periods with a mixture of older, raised construction-type houses and somewhat newer, ranch-style houses as well. It was during the latter period of the development that the building that would become the Disco 86 Lounge was established on the south side of Church Lane. It would be the only structure located on that side of the street for well over 50 years until a portion of the field was cleared around the turn of the twenty-first century for the construction of a small apartment complex. It is uncertain

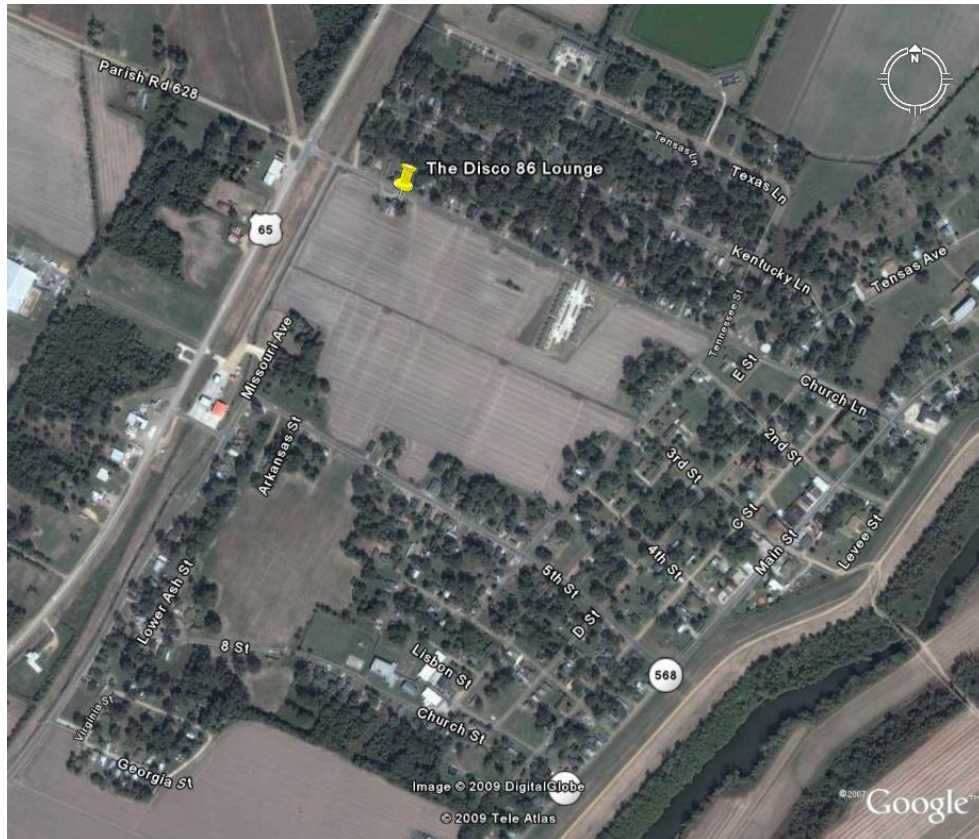


Figure 4-1: Location of the Disco 86 Lounge

as to whether this pattern of development will continue, but there is certainly, as Figure 4-1 shows, an obvious abundance of land in the middle of the town.

The structure that is now the Disco 86 Lounge was originally a seed house on land belonging to the Goldman Plantation. It was bought by a local resident and used as a lumber shed for several years before being moved to its current location for the purpose of establishing a bar. In the early part of 1951, its first owner applied for a permit to sell alcohol “at his place of business” (*The Tensas Gazette* Jan. 12, 1951). Over the next decade and a half, from what I am told, the place was extremely popular. It enjoyed great success for many years before changing hands for unspecified reasons in the late 1960s. At the beginning of 1967, the second owner applied for a permit to sell alcohol at what was then being called the Church Lane Café (*The Tensas Gazette* Feb. 17, 1967). This period would unfortunately not be as successful as the last,

as I am told that he shot someone and was sent to Angola not long after this, even though this event does not seem to have been recorded in the local newspaper. His wife took over and tried to save the place in the fall of 1968, but it was largely unsuccessful. According to local residents, the establishment had already acquired a bad reputation by that time, and not many people wanted to go there.

This instability carried over into the 1970s with the public applications for alcohol permits in the newspaper showing an almost constant change in ownership over the decade. In fact, the bar changed hands at least thirteen times in almost the same number of years, with there being three different owners in the year 1973 alone. The name of the establishment changed from Church Lane Café to Church Lane Lounge, and then High Chaparrel before going back to Church Lane Café. In 1976 it became the People's Choice Café, followed by the Player's Lounge, the Birdcage, and the Church Lane Bar by 1980. In the early 1980s, it was known as the Warehouse Lounge, and then finally in 1986 it became the Disco 86 Lounge. Beginning in February of 1986, Henry and Annie Mae Mckeeal revived the place to a level that, according to local opinion, finally compared to its initial popularity in the 1950s and 1960s, and have been running it ever since. Its name reflects the year in which it was founded. I am told that the initial plan was to change the name each year so that it would correspond to the current one, changing to Disco 87, Disco 88, and so on. This, however, never happened and it retains its original name.

These name changes and choices do reveal an interesting cultural pattern in the area drinking establishments. *Café*, *Lounge*, and *Inn* all seem to have been popular endings for the names of various bars in the region with many places opening, closing, and re-opening under a different one of these in random orders. The word *Club* has been popular throughout the 1990s and 2000s, as well as more unique names such as *Midnight Star* and *Diamonds*. It should be

mentioned though that these names only reflect what name was registered on the application for an alcohol permit, and not necessarily what the patrons would have called these places. In talking with local people, it is clear that hardly anyone calls them by the entire name. Most either leave the words like Lounge off, call it by some other nickname, or refer to it as (the owner's name)'s place.

Just by looking at the applications for alcohol permits for the town of Waterproof, it would seem that there were a tremendous number of bars in the town over the last half a century. On a per capita basis, this was arguably true, but from looking closer at the addresses given for these permits, it becomes clear that there were about five or six locations that experienced a similar situation to that of Disco 86 where the same structure frequently changed names and/or owners. This process of establishments closing and re-opening, however, has not continued at the same pace in more recent times as it once did. Most of these locations that have historically been drinking establishments have closed and never re-opened. They have been abandoned, and have, as they once existed as social institutions, disappeared from the landscape.

Currently in the town of Waterproof, there is only one other open bar, the Timeout Lounge. Timeout has been open on 5th Street, just across the old cotton field from Disco 86, since 2002 in a location that has been the home to several other previous bars. Although these two remaining bars serve somewhat similar social functions, they are completely different physically with Mrs. Annie Mae's place being an older building with a much more unique appearance both inside and out.

The actual structure that is the Disco 86, as mentioned before, used to be a lumber shed, but has been modified a great deal since its early establishment at the west end of Church Lane. It is now an amalgam of this original structure and several additions over the years that have expanded it. These additions, for the most part, match the original building so that it looks as

though it were originally built where it stands as one contiguous structure. The whole place is a raised, wooden building. To protect the wooden frame and roof, the entire exterior is covered in corrugated sheets of metal, which in some places are a slightly different pattern or color giving it a unique appearance. Also, some pieces of this siding are more rusted than others, especially on the roof. This reveals the parts of the building that are the oldest, and makes the newer additions somewhat stand out. Figure 4-2 shows the Disco 86 from several key angles. From these photographs, the nuclear core of the structure can be seen with three major additions attached to each side but the back side of the building. These were added over several years in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The addition on the front is the smallest. It serves as the front entrance and the pool table area. When looking at the building from the road, the addition on the right was built to create space for a new bar area and extra seating. The addition on the left was added as a new kitchen area. These areas are distinctive within the bar because the ceiling is several feet lower than in the main room. Before it was expanded, the main room was the location of both of these elements, as well as several other functions which I will explain more below. The exterior of the building also has two hand painted signs declaring it the Disco 86 Lounge and several window air-conditioning units emerging from the few windows that have not been covered. It does not have central heat and air, and thus relies on these during the warmer parts of the year and also a floor heater in the corner when it gets cold to keep the place comfortable.

The layout of the building is similar to that of many other drinking establishments due to the fact that it is one rather large and open room (see Figure 4-3). The front door enters into the small pool table area which also serves as the place to collect a cover charge if it is required on a given night. This further opens up into the main room that is about three or four times as long as it is wide. This area mostly contains long rectangular tables that are combined to form adequate



Figure 4-2: Exterior Photographs Showing the Additions to the Disco 86 Lounge
(Source: Author)

seating space for the patrons. On the opposite end of this main room lies the area that serves as a dance floor and a place for a band to play depending on the situation. There is a small raised D.J. booth directly behind this area that looks out into the main room through an open window in the wall separating it from the dance floor. The seating area around the bar, located on the right side of the room, is also slightly raised so that barstools are not required. The few seats at the bar area are the same as the others found throughout the place. They are either folding metal chairs or solid-framed metal chairs with padded seats and backs. There are a few booth seats in a dimly-lit section in the back right corner of the building. The other back corner serves as an entrance to both the D.J. booth and the men's restroom.

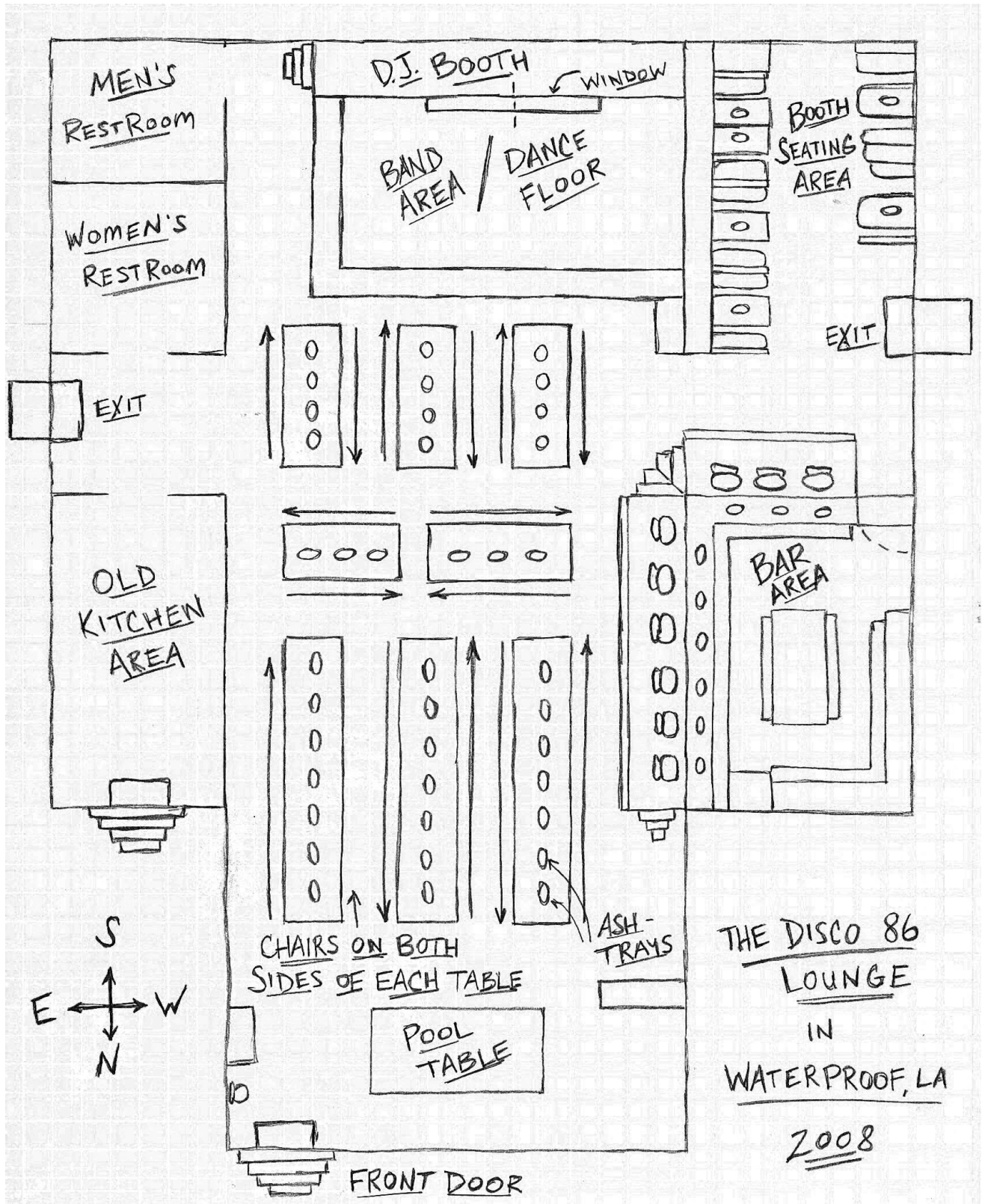


Figure 4-3: Floorplan Sketch of the Disco 86 Lounge
 (Source: Author)

The interior of the bar is in many ways the complete opposite of the outside. While the exterior of the building displays a plain and rustic appearance that almost blends in with the surrounding rural countryside, the inside is heavily decorated with bright colors and materials that are almost representative of a different world. It is, in fact, much bigger than it looks from the street. The main color of the inside of the place is definitely red, but there is also an abundance of silver, white, gold, and black accent as well (see Figure 4-4). Just about the only part of the room that is not decorated is the floor, which is completely unfinished wood except for the dance area, and also the bar top, which is covered with brown-and-white linoleum. With the exception of these two things, most of the place is lit up with colorful decorations. Shiny red paper that is comparable to wrapping paper covers many parts of the walls and the poles around the bar and dance areas. In addition to this, red table cloths cover the many tables in the main part of the bar, further contributing to the red tint of the room. Shiny strands of red and silver tinsel also line open doorways and other features along the walls. These are illuminated by the numerous strands of flashing Christmas lights strung up throughout the place. The tinsel, lights, and paper make the Disco 86 resemble a parade float in the form of a room. On top of this, there is an emergent theme of glittering white and silver cut-outs of different-sized stars, moons, and overflowing champagne glasses covering the walls and ceiling.

Mrs. Annie Mae proudly takes responsibility for the decorations in her bar, claiming that the place was plain on the inside before her efforts because it was run by a series of men who did not care about its appearance. The design is based on the theme of Waterproof High School's prom from the same year she opened the place. She, with the help of her daughter and several others, used the stencils to make the cut-outs that matched the other decorations, and customized the room to look like there was always a party in progress.



Figure 4-4: Photographs of the Interior of the Disco 86 Lounge
(Source: Author)

In addition to this main theme, the place is also decorated with more standard alcohol-related promotional materials that are found in most bars. These include posters advertising certain brands of beer and other things such as mirrors or neon signs with the name a particular type of liquor on display. There are also, however, more personalized decorations that have collected over the years, and give the place a certain character. These are mostly in the form of sections of pictures on the wall displaying numerous people from past parties and random nights at the bar. There are also larger, sometimes autographed, pictures of performers who have been in the place over the years. There are several of these behind the bar area, along with a picture of Mrs. Annie Mae in her younger days. These wide varieties of decorations, when taken as a whole, create an atmosphere within the room and among the patrons that constitutes a unique space for social activities.

Music and Entertainment

Music, then, provides a rallying point around which the members of a society gather to engage in activities which require the cooperation and coordination of the group. Not all music is thus performed, of course, but every society has occasions signaled by music which draw its members together and remind them of their unity. (Merriam 1964, 227)

Music is one of the most important components of social interaction at the Disco 86 because it is constantly a part of everyone's experience there. In the bar's early days, the music was provided by a jukebox. Starting in 1986, the McKeals began booking live bands to sometimes supplement this on the weekends. This would happen several times a year during the bar's heyday in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Occasionally some of the more famous names in blues music such as Little Milton and Bobby Rush would come to the bar. From what I am told, Milton was friends with the current owners, and would usually come play there about once every year. He even wrote a song inspired by the place called "Annie Mae's Café," claiming that there was a place like it in every town where you could go get a drink after hours. On the nights when a band would play, people would pay a cover charge at the door to help pay the musicians who would entertain them.

The frequency of live music, however, has slowed over the years. Little Milton was, in fact, the last person to play at the Disco 86 prior to his death several years ago. In talking to people, it does not seem like there are any expectations that live music will ever come back to the place. This cessation of live entertainment stems from several possible reasons including a lack of a sizable audience and a lack of touring blues musicians. Despite the fact that there are several patrons at the bar who still enjoy the blues and still a number of musicians, the problem is probably a combination of the two, with not much money available for music acts in rural areas. According to Mr. Henry, the out-of-town bands expect more than is reasonable for a place like the Disco 86 to pay them. He claims that "now they've [the musicians] gotten so expensive that you can't afford them."

The music at the bar is now solely provided in CD format through the house PA system. The type of music that one hears in the place, however, is largely dependent on what night it is, and also what time of the night it is. On nights when there is a party at the bar, there is also a DJ

in the booth to make the song selections and entertain the crowd all night. When there is no party, Mr. Henry acts as the DJ, and plays the music that he wants to hear. Regardless of the situation, most given nights begin the same with the owners and two or three regulars sitting around the bar area with the music softly playing in the background. The music is usually some form of R&B or soul music that sometimes sounds older in nature, but is usually a modern variation of the two with more contemporary-sounding beats in a similar style. The lyrics are usually about partying and having a good time because it is the weekend, or drinking and relaxing because it is the weekend, but they are usually upbeat and familiar to almost everyone in the bar although it is not popular music per se. The music progressively gets louder as more people enter the place until by the end of the night it is difficult to have conversation with someone more than a few feet away. When there is no DJ, the same type of music generally continues all night with classics by popular artists like Aretha Franklin, Al Green, and B.B. King played periodically throughout.

However, when there is a party, the music generally turns to contemporary rap music that would be heard on a hip-hop radio station. This usually dominates the music variety by around midnight with notable exceptions. It should be noted also that the DJ caters to the crowd, intentionally employing different songs to create what Leppert (1998) calls a “sonoric discourse” (292). The music for each party therefore is not the same. It is somewhat reflective of the group of people who are present. Because this is just about the only place to socialize in this small town, the patrons vary from just old enough to drink to over 60 years old. If a younger person were having a party with many of his or her friends there, the DJ would play more rap music. If there were not as many young people there on a night, there may not be much played at all. Indeed, with the older generation there is a general agreement among the people I have spoken to that they prefer other types of music. They do still tolerate, and sometimes even dance to, the

rap music because there are a good many people in the place that do enjoy it, therefore it is often played, and I have never seen a negative reaction to any song played in the bar. There are many others also that do not place a value judgment on the type of music played at all. They see it all as equally good music, and do not bother trying to categorize it with labels other than good. As one patron told me, "If you've been around black folks, you know good music."

The measure of good music is generally whether or not it makes the people want to move or dance. While there are those who are entertained by the music by simply listening to it or by singing it out loud, dancing is prevalent throughout the place for most of the night. Even when no one is on the dance floor, there are usually people dancing in the space around their tables, dancing by themselves in a chair at the bar, or even dancing around the pool table after having just made a shot. Dancing is, indeed, a way for the patrons to express emotion, skill, and group unity without engaging in verbal communication. At the same time, it is a way for them to embody enjoyment in a social setting. In addition to expressing emotions, dancing is also important in identity formation. Malbon (1999) points out that

dancing is based largely upon notions of spatio-temporally bounded belongings and group dynamics and is strongly implicated in processes of identity creation and in the formation, consolidation, and fragmentation of identifications through the embodied and performed nature of its techniques and skills. (89)

The dancing activity picks up as the night wears on. Couples mostly dance for a few songs, and then go sit back down for while. There are also individual dancers who dance by themselves or with different combinations of others upon the start of a new song. In addition to this, there are also sometimes groups dancing collectively to certain songs that have particular routines or moves which are repeated throughout in a manner that can most closely be compared to line dancing. For the most part, dancing usually continues as long as there is music playing, with the

patrons using it to have a good time, but to also make a statement about who they are both individually and as a group showing collective social bonds.

Food and Drink

Another aspect of social activity in the Disco 86 that rivals music in its ubiquity is drinking. As with any bar, the consumption of alcohol is an important part of socialization. It is also something that contributes to the social and cultural distinctiveness of the bar. As some geographers have noted, drinking patterns are not uniform across space, but rather are “embedded within wider historical, social-economic, and cultural contexts (Valentine et al, 2007, viii). There are, of course, a few people who choose not to drink and instead sip on cups of soda or bottles of water all night, but the vast majority of the bar’s patrons drink some form of alcohol. The selection is quite typical and includes beer, shots of liquor, and mixed drinks. The form of payment, however, is cash only, as there is a large, homemade sign behind the bar warning that they do not accept credit even though almost every person that is in the place knows this already. By far the most popular selection on any given night is the sixteen ounce can of beer, which costs two dollars. The available choices are the standard domestic beers such as Bud Light, Miller Lite, Coors Light, Budweiser, and Miller High Life. There are other beers that do not come in the large can size, as well as these standards, available in a bottle. The two being the same price, most people choose the can because it contains more beer with the bottle only being twelve ounces. Almost all of the men, and a few of the women, who drink beer do so straight out of the can. Indeed, this is what I did, as beer was my drink of choice while spending time in the bar. There are many women, however, who get a cup from the bar and pour the beer into the cup a little at a time. While drinking, they put a wadded up napkin in the mouth of the can to keep the rest of the beer from getting hot, flat, or contaminated.

Various forms of liquor are also popular drinks throughout the night. Shots can be bought in small plastic cups, as well as other drinks such as a vodka and cranberry juice. There is also a somewhat more unique way of serving liquor in the Disco 86. Unlike many other bars, it routinely sells liquor by the bottle to its patrons. Behind the bar are not only the opened bottles for making drinks, but also a large shelf with a selection of unopened bottles in various sizes similar to what could be found at a liquor store. These range from small half-pint and pint size bottles for individuals, to larger fifths for groups. They also provide cans of soda and cups or buckets of ice depending on the situation, thus allowing people to make their own drinks. It is not uncommon to see someone walk away from the bar holding a tray with a fifth of Crown Royal, several cups, and a bucket of ice. They would then take this back to the table and share a drink with their closest friends or whomever they choose. It is also, however, not uncommon to see a groups of older men sitting by the pool table sipping on half-pints of Seagram's gin in between drinks of their beer. The drinking activity, like the music, usually starts out slowly, and then picks up throughout the night lasting until the place closes.

Food, like alcohol, is usually an integral part of a night at this bar. Its presence and quantity also depend on the night. In the bar's early days, it was a café-type restaurant during the day serving foods like hotdogs and hamburgers. The kitchen area was in the main room directly across from where the bar area is located now. Mrs. Annie Mae continued this tradition when she took over, using the newly added kitchen area to prepare her own meals. She expanded the menu to provide people with what she describes as being "soul food." This would have included "a little bit of everything" from fried fish and french fries to chicken with various sides. The food could be called in to go, but many people also came to eat there in the evening times right before the café would transition into a bar setting at night. She stopped serving food two or three

years ago because she was having problems with her hands while cooking it, but food still remains an important part of social activity at her bar.

On the nights when there is a party, people associated with the party bring home-cooked food to the Disco 86. The food varies greatly depending on the group of several women who usually prepare it. I have seen everything from gumbo and spaghetti to barbeque type meals that include chicken, ribs, pork, beans, and potato salad. There are also usually several different side items, as well as things for dessert, but it does again depend on the scale of the celebration. The food arrives around seven or eight o'clock before the majority of the people get there. It then sits on one or several tables by the dance floor until later in the night when it is time to eat. The dishes are mainly in disposable aluminum pans, crock pots, or simply on covered trays. On these party nights, someone always sits by the door to collect a cover charge, which is used to help cover the cost of the food. This food is eaten as a late-night meal or snack depending on how hungry a person is. Usually a little before midnight, people will begin heating up the food, which in turn causes an aromatic scent to circulate around, and before long the entire bar smells like a restaurant or kitchen preparing dinner. Shortly after, using styrofoam plates or bowls, people begin to eat in a buffet-like manner, eating as much or as little as they choose as long as they have paid the cover charge. Right before the bar closes, the same people who brought the food pack up any that is left and take it home with them.

In addition to this outside food, there are also certain things to eat at the bar on nights when there is not a party, or to supplement other food when there is. From behind the bar area, Mrs. Annie Mae sells small bags of chips for 50 cents. They seem to become more popular towards the end of the night when people have had a few drinks. She has also, more recently, begun selling garlic sausage hotdogs to hungry patrons. These cook throughout the night in her crock pot behind the bar, and also contribute to the pleasant smell in the room when standing

near it. These food customs have seemingly grown out of a necessity in rural areas like Waterproof. In the late hours of weekend nights, there are no places such as restaurants or even stores where people can go get something to eat. It makes sense, then, that a place like the Disco 86 would serve the role of both a bar and a restaurant-type setting at the same time.

Bootlegging, Gambling, and Prostitution

I have added this category of social activity only for comparative purposes to the historical juke joints. Even though some of this behavior is said to have occurred in this bar's early days, none of it, to my knowledge, still goes on in present times. It is obvious that bootlegging is no longer applicable since it is completely legal to sell and consume alcohol in Tensas Parish. In fact, ever since the bar's establishment in relatively modern times, each respective owner has legally obtained a license to sell liquor, and, therefore, has not had much of a reason to sell bootlegged liquor. There are, however, still somewhat secretive drinking activities among some of the patrons who occasionally bring in their own alcohol. On one occasion, I witnessed a group of men near the pool table drinking from a half-gallon of gin which was hidden behind the heater in the corner. They would take turns filling up their cups of ice and putting the bottle back in its hiding spot, which was conveniently out of sight of the bar area. On another occasion one man would make trips outside to get cold cans of beer which apparently came from an ice chest in the parking lot, and bring them back inside to give to his friends around the pool-playing area. This was convenient because this area is right by the front door. When I asked if they did this all the time, one replied "yeah, but don't let her [Mrs. Annie Mae] catch you, or she'll kick you out." While this behavior is far from bootlegging, it is nonetheless secretive, and follows a pattern that is representative of many other modern juke joints in the

Mississippi Delta that will serve only beer, encouraging their patrons to bring their own hard liquor (Nardone 2003, 169).

Prostitution and gambling were once said to have been common activities at the bar, even though they do not come up as often as other elements of past activities such as drinking and dancing. I was told by one older resident that under the establishment's first owner in the 1950s and 1960s, during, and perhaps contributing to, its great popularity of that time, prostitution was a common activity. He claims that there used to be rooms used for that purpose in the back of the bar where the dance floor and DJ booth are now located. It is unclear as to when this stopped. He claims that it went on for several years after the place transferred owners. The claims of this activity are not very well substantiated, but are, nonetheless, probable as several other people remember the room(s) in the back as being used for another purpose, gambling.

Gambling was the other widely remembered activity during the bar's early period even though it too was technically an illegal activity. In fact, Mrs. Annie Mae says that it was still occurring in the time right before she took over in the early 1980s. During these years, her husband co-owned the place with several other men. According to her, they occasionally used the bar as, what she called, "a poker room." Starting in 1986, she decided to take advantage of a more modern and legalized form of gambling known as "gaming" in the state of Louisiana. She put several video poker machines in a closed-off area near the pool table. These subsequently became profitable for the bar over the next few decades. Although these were popular among the patrons of the bar, machines like them were not always popular among other members of the surrounding conservative community. In 1996 a vote in Tensas Parish narrowly decided to continue allowing this gaming in the form of video poker machines. The closeness of this vote reflected the mixed reactions and divided attitudes of the local residents. Many believed that the "Christian people of Tensas did not make a stand," and that the decision would hurt the parish

morally (*The Tensas Gazette* Nov. 13, 1996). Others were happy with the decision, and believed that it would help the economy of the parish like it did in the case of Mrs. Annie Mae's bar. The economic boost, however, would not last indefinitely because it was dependent on people playing. Several years ago, the company through which she licensed the machines went out of business. She never bothered to get anymore largely because of a lack of people playing them on a regular basis.

There is currently a certain degree of gaming and gambling at the Disco 86, but it mostly revolves around the pool table. In fact, the bar used to host a pool tournament every Sunday night until it stopped because there were not enough people to participate. There are still several trophies proudly displayed behind the bar area. On a more recent weekend night, the pool table is hardly ever empty. Pool games are a very male-dominated activity, even though I have seen two women playing a few games. This, however, was early in the evening when there were not many people in the bar. Usually women will go near the pool table area to congregate with the groups of men standing there, but they hardly ever play. One person will play as many games of pool as he can before losing, with the challengers paying for the games each time until one finally wins and attempts to defend his position against the next person in line. Although small amounts of money are often wagered on pool games, it is not really a form of organized gambling. More often than not, if something is bet on the game, it will be a beer for the winner at the expense of the loser, all carried out in good fun.

Violence

Violence is a fairly common outcome in a bar setting where there is often tension created by male and female interactions, which are sometimes further exacerbated by emotions, egos, and alcohol. Rural bars in places like Waterproof are no exception. It is, however, difficult to

gauge past confrontations in these places because only the most violent with the most extreme outcomes would have been recorded in the local newspaper, and it is debatable to what degree these would have been accurately reflected. This being acknowledged, there are reports of at least two violent incidents occurring inside Waterproof drinking establishments. In late 1982, there was a report of a Concordia Parish woman who was shot in bar a located off of Highway 65 south of Waterproof. She was found unconscious in the bathroom, and later died in the hospital. There were no witnesses or suspects in the case (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 15, 1982). A decade and a half later, there is another article about a man who entered the Disco 86 Lounge around midnight on a Saturday night, and shot his wife, an unidentified female, and a man who later died in the hospital (*The Tensas Gazette* Dec. 10, 1997). Although tragic, these cases of violence seem to be isolated incidents that happened to have occurred at drinking establishments instead of representatives of some wider pattern of place-rooted violent behavior. Indeed from reading the area newspaper for many years, it seems that violence has been much more prevalent in domestic situations with most reports of attacks and murders occurring in or around people's homes. This stated, I do realize that most altercations at drinking establishments in the region would not have warranted even the police, much less press coverage, so evidence in the local newspaper is probably not the best way to dispel the presence of violence.

From personal experience and discussions with local residents, however, there still does not seem to be an underlying or undocumented pattern of violent or dangerous behavior. In my many trips to the Disco 86, not once did I ever feel threatened or in danger. There were those who were suspicious of my motives, and even some who suspected me of being an undercover police officer, but none that ever became violent or overly confrontational. On one occasion I did witness an altercation that came close to becoming a fight over a pool game in which a group of people became loud and somewhat unruly. The DJ immediately stopped the music as Mrs.

Annie Mae flicked the main lights on and off several times from behind the bar as a warning. Almost as soon as it started, it was over. Several people left while others stayed, and afterwards, Mr. Henry walked over to figure out what had happened and make sure it would not continue later. I have been told that things like this happen on a rare occasion, but that there are never any problems. As one man put it, “most people around here are good people.” He told me that because most of the patrons at the bar know one another, disputes like the one at the pool table are usually settled quickly and without violence. From my time spent at the Disco 86, it seems to me that the majority of the patrons are usually too busy enjoying themselves to entertain the idea of violence. The place is, in fact, considerably less violent than many predominantly white, college-aged bars that I have visited in which it is not uncommon to witness several fights on any given night.

COMMUNITY AND PERSONAL SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

The Disco 86 Lounge is obviously quite different than it used to be in its early days. Although it still provides some of the same basic social functions as it always has, these have been scaled back considerably over the past few years. This is a change that is reflected in the bar’s current hours of operation. When Mrs. Annie Mae first established her place in the mid-1980s, it was open every night of the week. She would open each evening to serve food, and then leave the place open as a bar until there was no one there or she was ready to go home. Operations remained that way for many years with a usually steady crowd on most nights. Several years ago, however, around the time she stopped serving food, she began opening the place up on only the weekend nights of Friday, Saturday, and Sunday due to a lack of business during the rest of the week. This is “when things started to slack off” according to Mrs. Annie Mae. In more recent times, Saturday has become the only consistent night of the week, with

people scheduling some kind of party just about every weekend. She occasionally opens the place on a Friday or Sunday, but will often close up early on those nights if there are not many people in the bar.

It is not difficult for community members to tell if the bar is going to be open on a given night. Because she usually arrives early, people driving by in the evening can look for her car to be out front or for the lit-up string of Christmas lights across the front of the building that she turns on when she gets there. News of events at the bar also spreads by word of mouth within the community because they are usually planned well in advance. In addition to these, many people will simply call around seven or eight o'clock to find out if the place will be open, and plan their night accordingly.

The Disco 86's hours of operation have also changed over the years to adapt to the more recent enforcement of a parish law that mandates all establishments must be closed by two o'clock. Prior to this, there were no enforced curfews for local bars to worry about. I have heard many stories about past times at the bar which begin with phrases like "we don't party like we used to here anymore" or "we used to do it all night long until the sun would come up." I was told by one local resident that because the area establishments never closed, groups of people would spend the entire night traveling around to different places, staying for a while, and then moving on to the next one. This would continue until daylight or, in this case, until a man was finally busted by his wife at one of these places. Now, the only time Mrs. Annie Mae is allowed to stay open passed two is on holidays such as New Years Eve or the Fourth of July. On these special occasions, the curfew becomes four o'clock, but she says that the crowd has usually died down before then, allowing her to close earlier than that. She regards this as a good thing because she is usually tired and ready to go home well before two o'clock. Although Mr. Henry usually sips on beer throughout the night, Mrs. Annie Mae sticks to drinking her Vitamin Water.

She says that there was a time when she would have been on the dance floor partying with everyone else, but not any more. This is important because it clearly shows how Mrs. Annie Mae, as the owner and employee of the bar, experiences the place differently than its many patrons. According to Oldenburg (1999), places of social leisure like drinking establishments can be considered “third places” because they act as neither of the two dominant settings for everyday life. They exist outside the structured and sometimes demanding world of work and the more private world of home and family life, thus allowing people who gather in such places to enjoy themselves in a setting that is different from their everyday lives (14-19). For those like Mrs. Annie Mae, however, all of these three “places” bleed together in a world that is not neatly separated into these categories. In her case, her bar is at once a part of her family life, her work, and also a social gathering place in which she spends time socializing with her friends and neighbors just like the other patrons that make up the local community (Grazian 2003, 96-7).

Social Roles in the Community

At the most basic level, the Disco 86 serves as a place in which local people can gather together and socially interact with one another in various ways. Indeed, this is one of the main functions of this place, which provides a “communal experience within its walls” that amounts to more than just the sum of the building and its inhabitants (Nardone 2003, 172). In this sense, the bar serves the community by providing an outlet for temporary escapism from their everyday lives (See Tuan 1998). This is not meant to imply that the average patron has a miserable everyday life from which he or she cannot wait to escape. In fact, just the opposite is probably more accurate, with most people I have encountered seeming to enjoy other aspects of life just as much as the time spent at the bar. The Disco 86, then, fulfills a social need within the community, but is not necessarily a source of contentment for each one of its members. These

social interactions are quite obvious in the early evening time when patrons sit around the bar area watching football or basketball games on the small television in the corner. The conversations that occur between them reflect their rootedness in the community. They may range from light, casual topics such as the status of one's children or gossip about locals who are not present, to more serious issues like parish government problems or a collective increase in everyone's gas bill for the month. This is not just small talk, however. They serve an important social role. According to May (2001), these exchanges between patrons allow them to make sense of their "real-world" experiences in a "private" setting that provides a sense of familiarity and comfort (31). The Disco 86 is, of course, this setting.

Indeed, this familiar setting found in Mrs. Annie Mae's place is an important foundation for the socialization that occurs there. LeMasters (1975, 144-5) identifies three main conditions that must be met in order for social intimacy to be present in a drinking establishment. The first is long-term continuous operation by an owner who is well liked by the steady customers. This obviously applies to the Disco 86, as the McKeals have been running the place for over two decades. The second condition is that there must be occupational and/or social class homogeneity among the regular patrons. Of course all people who inhabit this particular bar do not work in the same place, but they do share a common situation in which there is a scarcity of steady jobs. This being the case, there is not much social class differentiation among the local patrons. Lastly, an establishment must have stable residential patterns to promote primary group relationships. This, in the case of Waterproof, is technically not true considering the number of people who have moved out of the town. But because there is not an influx of new residents to the area that disrupts the social conditions, this third condition is still valid in the case of the Disco 86. The resulting intimacy then results in one of the bar's primary community functions, that of a place for social interactions between the local residents.

Another social role that the bar plays in the community, in addition to simply providing an outlet for interaction among patrons, is that of a location for the parties that I have mentioned so far. These usually take place on a Saturday night, as it still remains the main night for celebrations in rural southern areas. Although these parties are held for a variety of different reasons including anniversaries and Waterproof High School reunions, the most common type of celebration is a birthday party that can sometimes be held for multiple people whose birthdays are close to one another. Without places like the Disco 86, adult birthday parties would have to take place at people's homes which would not be nearly as convenient or commodious most of the time. For each of these parties, the patrons at the bar act almost as if they were one large family. People of all ages celebrate the birthdays of everyone else with little regard to whether the person is turning twenty-two or forty-two. This is representative of behavior in general on any given night, as the social behavior in the bar is not overly divided by age. Routinely, there are playful encounters between young men and men old enough to be their grandfathers, with each jesting about what they see as an unfortunate aspect of the other's age. This seems to be rooted in the rural nature of the place. It would be unlikely to find such a wide range of age groups interacting at a drinking establishment in a more populated area.

In addition to parties on a Saturday night, the bar also hosts several other events throughout the year. These include celebrations for holidays like New Year's Eve or St. Patrick's Day which sometimes will occur in the middle of the week. There is also a Super Bowl party each year in which many of the locals gather at the bar for a tradition of watching the game with friends, drinking, and eating the homemade hot wings.

A third social role that this bar plays in its community is that of a meeting place for those who no longer live in the area. These are mostly people who still have family in town, but also those who come back periodically just to catch up with old friends and neighbors. This is

important considering the large amount of out-migration that the region has seen in recent years. This activity increases greatly during the holidays as would be expected. I encountered one woman around Thanksgiving who was a prime example of someone who had moved away to a bigger city, and come back temporarily. She was just “passing through for a day” on her way to Houston from Memphis to visit more family members. This woman was using the Disco 86, like many do, as a hub for both reuniting with people who still live in Waterproof, and also those who were temporarily in town just like herself. Without such a place to encounter people on the weekends, it would be much harder to go by each person’s house individually to see them, or to even know that someone else was in town on the same weekend. In this way, the bar serves the vital purpose of providing an avenue for social encounters between current and past community members. It is, in fact, the actual bar as a place deeply regarded by its patrons that helps to initially create this bond between and among the community members. This is shown in Hetherington’s (1998) statement that “sense of community and location carries with it attachment to particular places” (72). These particular places can be cities, neighborhoods, or on a smaller scale, rural drinking establishments.

A Sense of Place and Identity

In addition to serving these important functions within the community as a whole, the Disco 86 is also personally meaningful to its patrons who use it to form a collective and individual sense of place and identity. This stems from one aspect of the bar’s dialectical nature, the fact that it is an intimate setting in a seemingly public space. Indeed Goffman (1963) would refer to the space that the bar occupies as an “open region” because it is technically a public area where one complete stranger could start a conversation with another, and no one would think strangely of it (132-35). But drinking establishments in general, and the Disco 86 in particular,

also have certain characteristics which make them function more as private spaces largely due to the more personal atmosphere and behavior among their patrons. The very nature of most bars, especially juke joints, is that they are shielded from outside observation. This thus creates a setting in which an individual's behavior cannot be scrutinized by someone unless they make their presence known and subject themselves to the group by entering the establishment (Cavan 1966, 76). Cavan calls bars like the Disco 86 "home territory bars." She claims that the patrons of these types of establishments "share one or more features of their social identity" and that "this common bond forms the basis of defining those who are welcome in establishment." These patrons, then, define the space in their establishment as if it "belonged" to them (Ibid, 205-11).

This can be seen in the behavior of regular patrons who are frequently at the bar early in the night before it gets too busy. If Mrs. Annie Mae or Mr. Henry are busy doing something or sitting down and resting, people who know them well will often walk behind the bar area and get a drink for themselves. They will usually hand the money to one of them afterward so they can put it in the register next time they get up. This not only reflects a familiarity with the setting, but also a mutual respect of the space around the bar. In defining this space as if it belonged to them, the patrons in Mrs. Annie Mae's place are giving it meaning, and thus thinking of it as a place.

In fact, many of the aspects of social activity that occur at any given time on any given night contribute in some way to the patrons establishing the bar as a meaningful place. This includes the history of the bar itself, the memories that have been created within its walls, and the various objects placed on those walls that evoke feelings of both. These contribute to what Tuan (1974) would call a sense of 'topophilia', or "affective ties with the material environment" (93). He argues that people develop this love of place because of its familiarity, but also because it incarnates the past. The patrons of the Disco 86 have, over their many experiences, developed

a relationship with the place that influences the way they perceive it (Ibid, 247). In this way, the bar embodies the personal history and meaning that the people have put into it, but it is also through this interaction of people and place that the patrons develop a “deep psychological association with a specific place,” in this case the Disco 86 Lounge (Carney 2003, 205). This sense of place that each patron creates is a personal and emotional concept that is fluid in nature. It is always being produced, renegotiated, and replaced based on interactions with other patrons and physical aspects of the bar. The social interaction, then, is partially responsible for constructing the place, just as the place is partially responsible for constructing the behavior of the people (Holloway and Hubbard 2001, 7). It is a mutually constructive process.

As the photographs and decorations on the wall show, the creation of place is not just about interaction with physical things at face value, but objects that represent experiences. Place also has a symbolic aspect. As Richardson (1984) has pointed out, there are distinct dualities in the concept of place: “Place becomes, then, something both fixed and fleeting, something you can walk on and something you can speak, a curious and uneasy product of both experience and symbol” (1). This bar room does, of course, exist as a physical place, but is also transformed into a social and experiential place by the very patrons who inhabit it.

Another aspect of the Disco 86 that allows the patrons to form a sense of place around the bar is the shared music and dancing that occur within it. Stokes (1994) has argued that music is the most evocative element of social interactions, and that it allows people to go through a process of relocating or re-embedding themselves in places that become distinct from the current physical spaces that they also occupy at the time. He claims that “the musical event, from collective dances to the act of putting a cassette or CD into a machine, evokes and organizes collective memories and present experiences of place with an intensity, power, and simplicity unmatched by any other social activity” (3). I witnessed this power and intensity late one Friday

night while sitting around the bar area with a group of patrons. They collectively experienced the place as more than just a raised wooden structure on the edge of an old cotton field. I watched them each personally enjoy the fleeting moment as a soft but intense Al Green song to which they all knew the words slowly seeped out of the Peavey speakers in the corners of the room. Some closed their eyes and rocked back and forth in their chairs, while couples dance slowly on the danced floor. Others mouthed the words while nodding their heads and sipping on their drinks. The rather intoxicated man who was sitting next to me loudly and intently exclaimed every lyric just a few seconds before the words actually occurred in the song. Through a shared love of this particular song, these patrons were forming unspoken social bonds with each other, and, in turn, giving meaning to their drinking establishment, which is also their shared place.

This song highlights the unique and often hidden role that music plays in establishing a “sensuous production of place” (Cohen 1998, 287-8). As Cohen (1998) points out, music is something more than can be found in conversations. Through its embodiment of collectivity, it acts upon and conveys emotion in a way that offers an alternative discourse to everyday speech and language (286). Acting in this way, this song is also an example of the intimate role that music plays in the social atmosphere of the place. It is almost like a friend or familiar face to those patrons who have been listening to it for a portion of their lives. It then becomes, after several years or even decades, “as familiar as the voices of a neighborhood or extended family” (Berland 1998, 140). The familiarity of the music, then, further strengthens the community and social ties among the patrons.

In addition to helping form a sense of place, the time spent at the Disco 86 contributes to the creation and validation of collective and individual identities among the local patrons. I have already touched briefly on the ways in which dancing helps those at the bar to create a sense of

identity. But the simple act of socializing at the bar with other members of the community helps them build a sense of identity as well. Mrs. Annie Mae's place allows its patrons a location to be known and to know others intimately in a social setting, which forms the basis for this process (Anderson 1978, 179). The racial and social homogeneity among the patrons at this establishment is important here because it contributes to this intimate setting. It also, according to May (2001), allows patrons to "establish an individual identity that escapes the confines of the racial stereotypes held by larger society," and thus gives them an opportunity to "be recognized for their individual personality characteristics, rather than for their membership in a socially constructed racial group" (105). The interactions and exchanges among this closely-bonded group of patrons, whether in the form of narratives about everyday topics or emotions in reaction to a particular song, help shape the way that each member views the world around them. Indeed, much of the way in which people understand the world around them is shaped by these interactions with those people who are most frequently around. These understandings can then build positive individual and group identities among those who share them (Ibid, 163-5). This can be seen as one example of a way in which a place, a particular drinking establishment, can contribute to the creation of people, just as they, in turn, help to create the place. The concept of identity, however, is just as fluid as that of place. Therefore, patrons' identities are never set in stone, but are always changing with social interactions between other patrons and the bar itself.

CONCLUSIONS

As I have shown in this chapter, the Disco 86 Lounge is, following in the tradition of the rural juke joint, much more complex than it first appears to be. It is physically rooted in the historic laws and attitudes of the region in which it lies. It is also a continuation of drinking establishments that were created out of a reaction to these attitudes. The building itself, like its

patrons, is an amalgam of different elements that are still similar enough to act as a cohesive unit. The history of the building has at times been chaotic and seemingly distant from the community, but in other periods like the most recent one, it has been almost familial and an inseparable part of community life. This is reflected in the social behavior that occurs on the weekends. Even though the bar has changed greatly over the last few decades, it still remains an important outlet for local social activities.

The people of Waterproof use the Disco 86 for a variety of social functions from a place to dance to a favorite song, to a place to flirt with members of the opposite sex. It is a place to find a late night meal or drink a few cold beers. It is also place to watch a football game among friends, or to simply vent to someone who may or may not have similar problems. Through this behavior of various means of social interaction, the patrons of the bar give the space surrounding them a deeply personal significance. This process, then, produces the drinking establishment as a place of meaning, which further allows them to form a sense of identity and community based around it. It is, in a way, similar to the music that some patrons refuse to try and classify into confusing categories, simply referring to it as good. To the local patrons, it does not really make a difference what one calls Mrs. Annie Mae's place, whether it is a juke joint, a club, a drinking establishment, a lounge, a bar, or a café. To the patrons who spend their time at the Disco 86, it will always simply be their place, a good place.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

As the night winds down in the Disco 86, so does the crowd. People begin leaving, sometimes in large groups, sometimes individually. Others remain talking at the bar while they finish their last drink, or dancing to the last few songs of the night. On the outside of the place, cars empty out of the gravel circle-drive as they head home, which is usually only a few blocks away. On a cold night sometime in early December, I found myself standing outside talking to an older local resident after all the cars had gone. In the midst of our conversation about the town and the bar, we found out that we had something in common: we both played the bass guitar. This led to an even longer and livelier conversation that would have probably bored anyone but the two of us (and our fellow bass players). We chatted for a while longer before we mutually decided it was time to go. Before I got in my car, he asked me when I was planning on writing this book about Waterproof anyways. I told him that it was not quite a book, but a thesis. It was more like a paper for school. As he started to walk down that street towards his house, he turned back to me laughing and said, “hey man, make sure that you put *me* in your book.” And so, I thought I would keep my promise.

COMPARISONS TO EARLY JUKE JOINTS

As this thesis has shown, the Disco 86 Lounge in Waterproof, Louisiana is a contemporary Delta juke joint that exhibits both similarities and differences in comparison to the historic juke joint and the reputation that it has acquired throughout the years. There is little doubt that this establishment serves the same basic function as its predecessors. It remains an important social gathering place in a rural setting where, in the words of a few local patrons, “there’s not much else to do.” Much of the behavior and social activity that occur within the bar could be considered modern variations of things that have always (or always thought to have)

occurred within juke joints in this region. Still, other patterns of interaction completely contradict and, possibly contribute towards dispelling, certain aspects of the historical juke joint's reputation.

With respect to music and entertainment, people still go to places like the Disco 86 to listen and dance to music that they enjoy. As I have already shown, all of the music at this particular bar is in CD format, but there are also modern juke joints that still have live music. Even though the juke joint is popularly characterized by performances by blues musicians, recorded music within these establishments has been a common method of entertainment since the 1930s when it became widely exploitable because of the jukebox. This music performed and played in juke joints has always been based on the tastes of local patrons. It is, therefore, not practical to expect the juke joint to be continuously tied to the musical trends of the period in which it developed, or to exist in a state of arrested development that has been ignorant of the changes in music since that time. Blues is no longer popular music, even in the region where it developed. It is certainly not what the majority of young or even middle-aged African-American patrons of drinking establishments would choose to listen to on a regular basis. In this sense, it is to be expected that rap or R&B would be the predominant musical genres played in the majority of modern juke joints.

The fact that the juke joint has continuously catered to its patrons' preference of changing popular-music styles has, perhaps, been overlooked in search of a romanticized blues tradition that still exists in some places in more modern forms, but not on the same level that it did in the first half of the twentieth century. Indeed, the romanticization of blues performers within juke joints has become so intertwined with the establishments themselves that it sometimes seems difficult for people to separate the two in their minds. It then becomes strange to imagine a juke joint without a blues performer on stage. It is this enduring image that draws many tourists from

around the country and the world to juke joints throughout the Delta in search of mythical blues performances reminiscent of the 1920s. These are, of course, unrealistic expectations rooted in antiquated musical traditions that are, for the most part, only memories in this region today.

The moderns patterns of drinking and eating associated with the Disco 86 are perhaps the most firmly rooted in the historical juke-joint tradition. The presence of food at these modern drinking establishments is unique in that it blends the functions of the bar with those of the personal kitchen. This is partially due to the lack of restaurants in the rural setting, but could also be a cultural element tied to the fact that many early juke joints did exist in a café-type setting or in someone's home where food was a readily available part of social activities. Consumption of alcohol is also still an integral part of socialization in this modern juke-joint setting, although the behavior is not as secretive in nature as it once was because it is no longer illegal. Juke joints now mostly operate as modern-day bars.

In addition to illegal drinking, gambling was another popular use of the space within a juke joint. This, for a while, was continued in the form Mrs. Annie Mae's slot machines and occasional card games. But certain laws and facilities, however, have changed the overall locations of this type of behavior. With the allure of relatively close casinos in places like Natchez, Vicksburg, and Marksville, as well as a number of smaller truck-stop-style casinos in the area, there is no longer a need for the rural juke joint to serve as an outlet for local gambling. In fact, most of these larger casinos provide food, drinks, and entertainment, many of the social activities that used to be primarily found in the juke joint. These, in addition to more modern clubs in bigger towns, seem to be one of the main factors that have contributed to the decline of patrons in places like the Disco 86.

Finally, violence in this drinking establishment is, for all intents and purposes, nonexistent. I have already stated that it pales in comparison to places in more urban areas. This

is, of course, different from the reputation that has been described and collectively attributed to the historic juke joint of the Mississippi Delta. It is highly unlikely that the atmosphere of these places has changed that dramatically over the last century. It is, however, plausible that, due to the population decline over the same period, the amount of violent incidences is considerably less, but they were probably never that great in the first place. This is not to say that the juke joint environment was overly-friendly or accommodating by any means. But it seems to me that the myth of danger and violence in early juke joints has been exaggerated over the years in part due to an excitement factor associated with accounts of these places, and also as a result of violent, and sometimes racial, stereotypes applied to those who inhabited them.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Juke joints are interactive spaces, between people and people, people and spaces, spaces and music, music and dancing, public and private, and individual and communal, constantly moving and blurring the lines between the tangible and the ephemeral. (Nardone 2003, 173)

As the above statement points out, juke joints are in a state of continual change. I have shown them to exist both ephemerally among the local patrons, and also in a slower-moving, more tangible state as physical structures that continue to be visible in different manifestations on the landscape. These buildings are also socio-cultural institutions that have changed greatly over the course of their existence, but still continue to play the same basic role for which they were established, that of a secular social gathering place for the surrounding communities. Thus far I have dichotomized the phenomenon of the juke joint into two arbitrary periods of existence for purposes of comparison, the “then” versus the “now.” It should be noted that this was done in order to more simply show the changes in this cultural institution. There is, however, no break in this juke-joint continuum. It is perhaps better to think of the juke joint in this way, as one

complex, continuous, and slowly-evolving element of the landscape, the communities, and the lives of the people in the Mississippi Delta.

One interesting pattern that appears in this focus on one specific community is that the phenomenon of the juke joint has been directly related to the population patterns in the area, thus further highlighting its specific function as a social institution. Indeed, the main period of modern growth for the town of Waterproof was from the early part of the twentieth century until the late 1940s. This coincides almost exactly with the popular period of the early juke joint, and is also the period when the majority of African Americans would have been in the area, as well as other parts of the U.S. South. In the second half of the twentieth century, as the population and economic opportunities slowly declined, so did the number of drinking establishments in the area, as it is reflected in the public applications to sell alcohol listed in the local newspaper. Today, the fact that there are only two such places remaining, reflects the continually declining population, and also the fleeting status of the juke joint as a cultural institution in rural parts of this region.

While my research here has sought to address calls for greater attention to neglected rural perspectives, as well as a focus on drinking behaviors and establishments within the field of human geography, it has only scratched the surface of potential endeavors into such topics. There are still many questions left unanswered about drinking establishments in the Mississippi Delta, not to mention other regions of the globe. It would be incredibly valuable to bring a geographic perspective to the spatial and social aspects of patterns of alcohol consumption and the behaviors associated with drinking in general. This could, in addition to recognizing cultural patterns in different times and places, provide useful information for policy makers as well. There are numerous socio-spatial aspects of drinking that demand more attention, such as age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, income level, proximity to urban areas, and so on.

With regard to juke joints, I have only focused on one particular establishment. There are still unanswered questions beyond the scope of my research that would explore differences between a modern juke joint in Tensas Parish, and those in other parts of the Mississippi Delta, the South, or maybe even regions outside of the South. There is also room for inquiry into the locations of these remaining rural juke joints: why are they located where they are, and why are these establishments the ones that are still in operation? An extension of this is the phenomenon of juke joints in many parts of northwest Mississippi that market themselves as tourist destinations. This brings up issues of authenticity and the selling of the region as the “home of the blues.” How do these places that cater to mostly tourists compare to places that cater to mostly locals? In addition to issues relating to only juke joints, there are also obvious similarities between these places and Cajun dance halls in the southern part of Louisiana (Sexton 1990 and Comeaux 2000) that have not been addressed, but would make for an interesting comparison. These are some of the valid research areas pertaining to this important historical, cultural, and social institution that have yet to be explored. As I have stated previously, the juke joint is an integral part of the past and present landscape of the Mississippi Delta. In order to more fully understand this region as a whole, more scholarly attention needs to be focused on its changing role within it.

This thesis has engaged with many aspects of the Disco 86 Lounge and its surrounding community on both a local and regional level. I have linked this place with its historic roots in exploring the ways in which early juke joints have been remembered and written about. I have also contextualized the local residents and their experiences within the processes and changes that have affected the area over the last century, showing, in turn, how these have affected the local residents. My contemporary focus on the behavior and interactions of the modern patrons at the bar has accentuated the complexity that exists within it confines. The different elements

that comprise this establishment as a whole, from its physical structure and unique decorations to its colorful history and loud music, all contribute towards allowing its patrons to define it as an important place of meaning, both personally and communally. This, I have shown, allows them to create a sense of place and identity around the bar. Overall, I have portrayed a sense of community and community change. I have shown how the Disco 86 Lounge and its surrounding environment have changed over time, and how this has affected and been reflected in the social interactions of the local inhabitants. The end result, then, is that I have, hopefully, contributed to a fuller and more in-depth understanding of this small Delta community.

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VITA

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