IF YOU LIKE OUR SOUND, STICK AROUND: BUSKERS OF THE FRENCH QUARTER

A Thesis by

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Submitted to the Department of Anthropology and the faculty of the Graduate School of Wichita State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

July 2015
The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in Anthropology.

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DEDICATION

For my parents;
Who from an early age instilled a love of learning
And my Grandpa Shurley;
for showing me the power of thinking about things from other peoples perspectives
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A massive thank you is in order to the Jackman Endowment, and the Ahmed Donation for the Advancement of the Social Sciences, without which both fieldwork trips that this thesis came out of would simply not have been possible.

Another big thank you to my New Orleans friends, Jonathan Shaw and Lesley Wells who housed me, gave great insights into the city, and were kind and gracious hosts. To all of the folks I met who helped me along the way, and of course all of the musicians, this would not have been possible.

To my buddy, William Silcott, that you for your friendship, encouragement that often looks more like scolding, for being a sounding board and my brainstorming partner. I honestly don’t know what I would do without you.

The debt of gratitude I owe to my adviser and mentor I will never be able to repay. Dr. Angela Demovic, without whom I would certainly not be where I am today. She was my Intro to Anthropology professor my first semester as an Anthropology Major, and has supported and encouraged me every step of the way, and all of my academic achievements have been directly influenced by and in a big way due to her. I am forever grateful.
ABSTRACT

New Orleans has long been associated with uninhibited revelry, historically unique attractions and architecture, and the rich musical tapestry woven by its inhabitants; all of which converge on the French Quarter. Of the groups found in the Quarter, those heard first are street musicians, or buskers, who come from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and have equally diverse goals in mind, from maintaining basic subsistence needs to trying to make it big and build their career. This study utilizes ArcGIS maps to find patterns behind busking locations in and around Jackson Square by marking where musicians play and how this relates to their background, style of music, group membership, use of technology, and presence of CDs for sale. This cultural geography is given deeper meaning through participant observation and interviews with buskers. These qualitative approaches provided a better understanding of the motivations behind performance site determination and the nuances of the multitude of interactions in the busking community, ranging from relationships with other buskers, other French Quarter folk, the authorities, and the city at large. This study makes visible the hidden life of buskers who comprise an important component of the informal sector of the tourist economy of the French Quarter.
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Chapter 1

Sounds of the Streets

Walking from Canal down Decatur Street toward Jackson Square in the French Quarter of New Orleans, Louisiana (particularly in the warmer months) can be an overwhelming experience for the senses. I passed panhandlers, homeless folk, and groups of children aged five to fifteen, with tap shoes made of crushed cans clapping and shouting “Five dollars! Five dollars!” and “Come on, a dolla ain’t gonna hurt nothin’!” The throngs of tourists made getting where I was going a little slow and difficult. Along Decatur, I passed a lone guitarist playing folk ballads, then a few blocks down, a group of transient, semi-homeless youth referred to as gutter punks or dirty kids playing bluegrass with a banjo and a washboard. There is a cacophony of smells; delicious restaurants purposely pump the aroma onto the streets, and garbage cans bake in the sun, as do some of the aforementioned panhandlers (the most impressive could be smelled from half a block away). As I approached Jackson Square for the first time, the boom boom of the bass drum grew louder and louder, and my heart soared as the sound of horns filled the Square, echoing off of the beautiful St. Louis Cathedral. All of these wonderful (and at times utterly bizarre) sounds, sights, smells and feelings seemed unusual and rare to a graduate student who had lived my entire life in Kansas. For me, one of the most interesting and strange aspects of this, is that it is life as usual, that this is the everyday grind in a highly unique space.

During the summers of 2013 and 2014, I made two field trips to New Orleans as part of a research team collecting historical records. We were also given the opportunity to conduct our own ethnographic or ethno historical research projects. My work detailed here developed when I set out to look at how homeless, transient young people referred to generally as gutter punks
utilize and think about the space of the French Quarter. This particular group was reluctant to engage openly with me; though visible in the public space of the French Quarter, they do not spend their days entertaining the public. As a music enthusiast, I was immediately struck by the variety, talent and skill that could be found at nearly any time of day in the Quarter. As I built a more natural rapport with street performers, and found musicians more willing to talk to me, I retooled my project to focus on street musicianship, with transient youth forming a smaller component of the Quarter more broadly.

**Research Objectives**

The goal of the study is to observe and map patterns in busking locations around Jackson Square, and to then unpack the reasons for these patterns, focusing on motivations of musicians for selecting these specific spots through interviews. The pilot study and mapping conducted in the summer of 2013 suggested that musicians with a greater technological and financial investment (either by using often home-made battery powered amplification systems, and/or selling CDs) tend to play around the higher end store fronts and art galleries on Royal Street, while individuals and small groups, oftentimes with acoustic guitars and hand drums, tend to congregate on Decatur, which is closer to the river and populated with more tourists and less expensive shops. Observationally, those who play near the high end shops were more locals (or in the process of becoming a local resident), as I saw them repeatedly in the same places again and again, and seem to be professional musicians.

In addition to observation, I aimed to build a map of a more quantitative nature using GPS points illustrating these busking patterns, with the idea of then shedding light on my findings through more qualitative ethnographic research during the summer of 2014 using semi-
structured interviews. I questioned musicians on their personal thoughts and experiences concerning how and why they select where they play, what that process looks like, and if there are any conflicts that arise due to competition or conflict with authorities. This has allowed me some insight into the emic view of everyday life in the Quarter for musicians who comprise and contribute to the meaning to that space. Additionally, I collected biographical information regarding individual busker’s motivations, goals and the path that lead them to play in the streets. Are they attempting to catch a break, get a record deal and become famous? For them, is playing in the streets a hobby they take up to earn a little extra money and have fun? Or are they using an instrument to collect spare change so they are not just begging for money, essentially hiding their panhandling behind a guitar?

Biographical information on the lives of musicians, as well as having them talk about what is important to their lived realities provided insight into what issues are significant for both street musicians and the city at large. In the wake of Katrina, a vast number of native New Orleanians migrated elsewhere with many never returningii, and there has been an influx of people moving in from elsewhere; what impact does this have on the music scene, and how does this affect notions of local New Orleans (or southern) authenticity in music? To what extent do racial/ethnic factors and tensions shape the lives of street musicians? What legal issues are there, and do these musicians have experiences with harassment from law enforcement? How do the aforementioned questions of authenticity impact relations between musicians and tourists?

In addition to the life history of musicians, I observed and asked questions about the tourist/musician interactions. I looked for tactics musicians use to attract passersby, engage with tourists, attempt to fill their tip bucket and keep people coming back for more. The French Quarter is both a destination for tourists and an area that has homes and shopping centers used by
residents. By talking to musicians and looking through some of the community literature such as blogs, Facebook groups, and local news, I found that conflicts occur between those who view the space as a place for tourism/ performance and those who have made the French Quarter their homes. Through this, the contested nature of space is revealed. I found disagreement concerning the question of who this space is for. Particularly in light of the significance of tourism for the economy, whose plans and desires for the space take precedence?

**Tourism and Music in the City That Care Forgot**

New Orleans reputation as a place where one can find all manner of entertainment, including ‘family friendly’ activities like parks, art galleries, museums, and sporting events grew throughout the early part of the twentieth century. Along with that, the night life, brothels, and the burgeoning jazz scene served as a major draw (Gotham 2007: 13). The French Quarter, which is the oldest part of the city, acts as symbol that represents aspects of the unique history and culture of New Orleans. Additionally, the Quarter is a significant source of tourism revenue, which is a major industry for the city. The top three industries in the 1950s were oil, those in the shipping industry (as New Orleans is a port city), and tourism (Gotham 2007: 13). A decade later, tourism was the second largest industry in the city, bringing about $170 million per year (Lewis 1976: 87). The trend has continued in the intervening decades, and in 2013, New Orleans welcomed 9.28 million visitors who spent $6.47 billion (City of New Orleans Mayor’s Office 2014).

Coinciding with what Selänniemi refers to as the *liminoid* nature of tourism, there are ample opportunities to engage in activities and behavior that a visitor would not do in their hometown or in situations where ‘everyday life’ rules applied (2003: 24-27). On Bourbon Street,
all year round, one can find dance clubs and strip-tease bars, all manner of strange street
entertainment including break dancing troupes, human statues and various other sideshow acts.
There are also antique shops on Royal, historical and architectural sightseeing such as Jackson
Square, the Cathedral, and walking tours that point out historic homes, as well as the fine dining.
There are artists, psychics, street performers and musicians that set up around the Square, and
much time can be spent taking in all the sights and sounds. If one gets hot and tired, there are
half a dozen horse and buggies lined up on Decatur more than happy to give one a tour of The
Quarter. Walking tours range in topic from the unique and beautiful historic cemeteries with
Save Our Cemeteries, INC to French Quarter Phantoms which offers tours called Ghosts and
Vampires Tour or True Crime Tour.

After being largely ignored by the rest of the city in the nineteenth century, in the
twentieth century, preservation and restoration of the Vieux Carré (meaning Old Square in
English, is another name for the French Quarter) became increasingly important. It began in the
1930s with the Works Progress Administration, which restored the St. Louis Cathedral, and some
of the buildings around French Market area. In 1936, the Vieux Carré Commission was also
created, which sought to maintain a similar look and feel throughout The Quarter. The VCC
played a major role in preventing the building of a major highway along the river front on the
grounds it would destroy the neighborhood and is considered a landmark achievement for groups
who seek to preserve history in the face of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ (Lewis 1976: 88-89).

Today, the VCC still has a connection with the Vieux Carré Property Owners, Residents
and Associates, INC, which is the neighborhood association that tasks itself with lobbying for the
interests of (some of) those who call the French Quarter home (VCPORA 2014). They are a
powerful group whose mission is to preserve their vision of what the city is and should be. On
their website, in a letter to the City Council with their comments (not questions or confusions such as those from the music community, but their suggestions) concerning a highly contested proposed revision to the city’s Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance, they state that they have:

“been advocating for the protection and preservation of the Vieux Carré for over 75 years, and we appreciate the opportunity to weigh in on this vital guide to development in the city…We know that you are aware of the profound importance of the French Quarter, not just architecturally and historically, but economically. It is the iconic neighborhood of our city, and one whose unique character and *tout ensemble* have been enshrined by the Louisiana Supreme Court and our state’s constitution” (VCPORA 2014).

Those involved in the preservation are not the only ones concerned with the proposed revisions to the CZO (Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance). The music community is also greatly concerned and has organized public demonstrations and parades under the banner ‘Music Is Not A Crime”. The CZO includes several proposed revisions that may alter one’s ability to run a night club, change how live music performances are hosted, and affect musical street performance. The actual proposed revisions to the CZO are rather complicated and convoluted.

David Freedman, the General Manager of the local Jazz and Heritage radio station, acting as a voice for the community of musicians and lovers of music, wrote a letter to the City Council with a list of questions asking for clarification on several aspects of the proposed CZO. In his letter, David writes:

“As one person who read the proposed CZO commented: It would take a rocket scientist with a lawyer in one’s pocket if you’re a musician to figure out what you can and cannot do. Since I don’t have those credentials, I can only say that I am a life-long resident who was born here and who has dedicated his life to encouraging an appreciation of this city’s rich musical heritage and the culture bearers who bless our city as nowhere else in the U.S. I am deeply concerned about this Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance and a process for its adoption that is to me obscure and confusing” (WWOZ.org, accessed October 8, 2014).
With the crucial and increasingly contested nature of the French Quarter in mind, I hope to gain an insight into the emic view of how this space is constructed, and is made the place that it is for those who inhabit the particular niche of street musicians. There have been a handful of sociological and anthropological studies concerning the lives of street musicians, the bulk of which concern other cities, such as New York (Paolo 1984, Harrison-Pepper 1990, Tannenbaum 1995) and San Francisco (Moore 1974). The academic literature that includes street music in New Orleans is limited, but has informed my own research. Leif (2008) interviewed musicians about their identity as street performers, and perceptions of busking as productive labor. Colby-Bottel (2012) conducted research on notions of authenticity and sincerity in the jazz scene, and has provided background information on a particular sub-group of street performers, the jitterbug bands who seek to connect with values and aesthetics they perceive as being authentic to early jazz. They do this by playing old timey trad-jazz honoring the improvisational spirit, embracing a DIY (do it yourself) attitude, and dressing old timey. She also discusses just how crucial the radio station WWOZ is to the music community, and how big their role has been in maintaining and preserving the musical heritage of the city. They call themselves “Guardians of the Groove” for a reason. It is my hope to add to this body of literature and to provide a more nuanced look into the lives of those who are responsible for the unique atmosphere one experiences when walking through The French Quarter.

**Why Street Music Scholarship Matters**

The lives of musicians are potentially fraught with dangerous interactions from the police, drug and alcohol abuse, the situational or cyclical poverty they may find themselves in, and often the history of racially based structural violence against marginalized peoples (Sakakeeny 2013). Through this study, I hope to contribute academic research on the way these
The social aspect of street musicianship is understudied, despite the overlap it has with other, more broadly researched topics in anthropology. The ebbs and flows of one aspect of the informal economy and how that intersects with tourism in the French Quarter will provide data on the less documented aspects of a city that thrives on the money tourists bring. Beyond the scope of academia, there are implications for policy concerning city ordinances on musicians and the impact these ordinances have on the lives of those who inhabit the French Quarter. The community of musicians has made itself loud and clear to city officials when it comes to their viewpoints, with a degree of success. The proposal has been benched twice now, and will soon be opened up for a third time. The previous two times, the music community and the residence groups failed to come to an agreement, and it is a testament to the importance of the musical community that they were not overruled (Webster 2015).

**Method**

There are three components making up this mixed methods research – mapping, interviews, and internet sources following the City Zoning Ordinance. My initial task was to create a map that illustrates busking patterns using GPS points that I collected. With map in hand, I then set out to unpack the meaning behind the points through ethnographic fieldwork including participant observation and interviewing. Throughout the research process, I have been reading news articles relevant to the City Zoning Ordinance, as well as following Facebook groups and web pages from groups in the community such as MACCNO and WWOZ.

In the summer of 2013 over a period of three weeks, I started observations and created a map. For map creation, I used a GPS unit to mark where a musician was busking, and made
notes and took short videos and photographs when possible. I made my way around the four square blocks surrounding Jackson Square two times a day in the summer heat, marking a GPS waypoint each time I came upon a musician playing in the street. I only included musicians in my study and chose not to include other forms of street performance, such as the groups of children tap dancing or human statues. Since New Orleans has a rich musical heritage which draws both musicians and visitors, I am more interested in life surrounding musical performance, and less so on other varieties of performance. Included in my notes are what genres of music, number of musicians, if they are amplified and selling CDs, and anything else of note. This serves to bring to light patterns of those who busk and where they do so.

The second portion, conducted the following summer of 2014 over a period of five weeks, was focused on ethnographic methods, including participant observation and interviewing. By walking around the Quarter, seeing musicians day in and day out, I was able to build rapport with them more so than the previous summer. Whereas previously I was trying to collect all the GPS points as quickly as possible, this time I spent hours sitting and watching the same groups and the crowds that stopped to listen and watch. Through this, I gained greater insight into the reason behind the patterns that emerge in the map and motivations behind spot selection. Additionally, I got a chance to see what the tourist/musician relationship is like. Biographical information, such as where they are from, what drew them to busking, what their goals are, and what some of their experiences have been were also collected through interviews.

I formally interviewed fifteen musicians through semi-structured interviews, asking them relevant questions from a list of prompts intended to encourage an open ended interview, as I wanted them to have the opportunity to tell me what was significant that I may not have asked about. The subjects prompted included the nature of the busking community, relationships within
said community, relationships and interactions with police or business owners, tourists, and the geography of the Quarter. I estimated that each interview would take approximately forty-five minutes, depending upon how verbose the individual musician happened to be, actual interviews ranged from twenty minutes to an hour and twenty minutes. I audio recorded the interviews, in addition to making written notes, and collected consent forms (approved by the WSU IRB, #2953) from everyone interviewed. While most interviews were with one individual at a time, I allowed groups to be interviewed together if they preferred. Of the fifteen musicians, seven were individual guitarists, typically of the folk/singer-songwriter style, or blues. Four were dirty kids in a bluegrass punk band, one percussionist/freestyle rapper, one played guitar with the brass bands, one tuba player with the younger traditional jazz bands, and one played washboard and wandered around while playing. Once I was in contact with musicians, snowball sampling allowed me to gain further contacts and increased the chances of both meeting musicians and that those musicians would agree to an interview.

In addition to these formal, semi-structured interviews, I had a number of brief, informal, and casual conversations with musicians, by-standers, and others working in the Quarter. These typically occurred if I was the only individual listening to a musician playing after they finished a song; they would often ask me where I was from, how long I had been in town, and what I was doing there. I held approximately twenty-five to thirty of these types of conversations with musicians, and twelve to fifteen with non musicians. This gave me the opportunity to make them aware of my project, which was received well, and earned me somewhat of a reputation. An accordion player I had not spoken with previously said he had heard of the girl writing a paper about musicians after I introduced myself to him, and directed me toward the musicians he felt that I needed to speak with.
My third method of data collection has been through websites, blogs, YouTube videos, Facebook pages, and news articles relating to the topic of ongoing legal issues between the city and the community of musicians. The Music and Cultural Coalition of New Orleans (MACCNO) is a group heavily involved when it comes to musicians’ legal issues, both in terms of advocating and lobbying for the rights of musicians, as well as acting as a hub through which musicians can be educated on the legal aspects of their profession (MACCNO 2014). Another very powerful and popular community advocate is the local jazz and heritage radio station, WWOZ. Organizations like these, as well as individuals active in the community have a wealth of information on noise ordinances, guides to being ethical and respectful while playing in the streets, as well as outreach programs to help musicians with issues ranging from health to housing. I am currently a member of both groups on Facebook and read articles they share about the CZO and related issues. By including community discussions about the CZO, I can see how they respond to and take part in city wide policy, and the discourses surrounding these changes to zoning.

This mixed method approach serves to create a stronger, and more complete picture of the lives of street musicians in the French Quarter. Through the process of triangulation, different aspects of the community and types of data lend credence and validity to the others. GPS maps reflect quantitatively what I observed and what musicians reported, and news stories and other media provide a look into the Zoning issue more broadly.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues that I had to take into account were possible discomforts that could arise from asking people intimate details about their lives. I inquired about topics of race/ethnicity,
economics, and socio-economic class. Additionally, maintaining anonymity for my informants as it relates to legal issues is critical. Similar to ethnographic research with musicians by Sakakeeny (2013), Ntarangwi (2009), or Feld (2012) who recorded, produced and distributed records with Ghanaian jazz musicians, I wanted to return the kindness of musicians by helping them in some way. I gave performers the opportunity for publicity and to get their names out by using their real names, the overwhelming majority of whom seized the opportunity.

**Map of this Document**

During the time I spent in the city of New Orleans, I was continually amazed, delighted (and on an occasion or two, frightened) by this beautiful city so different from any city I had experienced. Perhaps most surprising to me is the everyday nature of music in the city. It is so ubiquitous to life that no one is surprised by impromptu jam sessions, or the sounds of horns echoing off of buildings or seeing a second line parade through the streets.

While it tends to be that musicians who play in the clubs are more respected by the public as well as other musicians, have more prestige, and occupy a significantly larger portion of the limelight, that does not minimize the significance of those playing on the streets every day. Street musicianship is a crucial aspect of the larger musical community in a variety of ways, and it is my hope that through this research I can bring some of that to light.

In order to make sense of why busking is important when it comes to the tourism industry of New Orleans, we must first begin by understanding the history of tourism in the city, and its legacy as a destination for travelers. In chapter two, I will discuss that, along with a brief history of other industry, and how the city shifted from a word of mouth destination to the focused and intentional industry it is today, capitalizing on three major aspects of New Orleanian culture-
music, cuisine and history. Here, I will back up a little chronologically to discuss why the city has the musical reputation that it does, how jazz is branded and sold, and how the musicality has snowballed into this diverse community where all manner of musicians travel to earn their chops (skills, expertise).

Chapter three is where I compare the GPS maps I created of busking locations to various other maps of the French Quarter that demonstrates other, seemingly unrelated information such as city zoning, residential/commercial areas, population, and the locations of music venues. This is illuminated through interview data collected from musicians spending a significant amount of time around Jackson Square.

Chapter four explores the interpersonal aspect of the community of buskers. I asked them questions about their relationships with tourists, with other musicians, if they consider it a busking community, and how conflicts are mediated. Chapter five looks outside the community to examine structural relationships buskers have with the authorities, how different genres of buskers are policed differently. Fortunately it is not all conflict, and I here explore the harmonious aspects that exist between musicians and residents of the French Quarter, and I end with a discussion on the proposed changes to the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance which includes provisions that impact musicians both on the streets and in the clubs. To conclude with chapter six, I will discuss some of the anxieties and hopes for the future expressed to me through the words of those ‘on the front lines’ of the perceived battle echoed in the sentiments of my informants who had been in the city for the longest periods of time.
Chapter 2

From Port to Get Away Spot:

The Rise of Tourism as the Predominant Industry

“One of the jokes when I first got down here was... New Orleans, it’s the worst run city in America, but the best run city in the Caribbean” (Chris, interview, August 10, 2014). This along with other jokes in a similar vein was repeated time and time again. They always seemed to come up when the topic New Orleans relationship to America at large or discussions of governmental mismanagement arose. New Orleans is often lauded for being strikingly different from the rest of America, as a foreign place still easily accessible to Middle America. It is foreign and exotic, but no passport is required. The colonial history differs starkly from the rest of the United States. Initially the city was founded under French rule, then ceded to the Spanish in the 1760s, ultimately becoming part of the United States as part of the Louisiana Purchase in 1803 (Campanella 2008: 23, 26). Along with the breadth of European influence, the city also has strong African and Caribbean influences, all converging in this surprisingly small area. It is no surprise that this blending of cultures has led to a place as unique as New Orleans.

While it is true that to properly understand any cultural phenomena, the history of the region must be understood, this seems especially apt here. The Brass Band tradition does not make sense without understanding the history of military marching bands and colonialism (Sakakeeny 2013:18-19). In the words of Jelly Roll Morton, jazz required the ‘Spanish twinge’ combined with African music in Congo Square and the brass bands (Burns 2001). Mardi Gras Indians leave one baffled without the knowledge of the relationships between runaway and freed slaves and local Native American groups (Smith 1994). Similarly, the rise of New Orleans as a
destination for tourists from all corners of the globe must be placed in context with its relationship to geographic situation and industrial history to understand just how the French Quarter came to be the symbol of the city that it is. It may seem irrelevant to spend some time discussing the precarious geography of a city when the topic at hand is the inner workings of the community of street musicians, but in New Orleans it is all interconnected. To understand the significance of street musicians in the French Quarter, we must talk about the deep musical heritage and its role in the tourism industry. To explain the tourism industry, we have to talk about the decline of the river based economy and how the city focused on tourism to stay afloat. The unique nature of the city that has allowed for it to be the visitors site that it is would not be possible without the culture and history (music, food, etc), which have all been born out of the location and function of the city at its inception.

The geographer Campanella, in his book *Bienville’s Dilemma: A Historical Geography of New Orleans*, discusses all of the complications, quandaries, and difficulties that went into deciding where to build this city, and that exist purely due to the location of New Orleans. These include the fact that much of the city is close to or below sea level, and is subject to flooding. It is built on top of a swamp, and finding solid foundation to build upon was problematic. The city is currently sinking, which is evident in the potholes in the roads and uneven sidewalks. Prior to the 20th century, other swamp problems included the disease carrying mosquitoes, and the fact that it would have been possible for the river to change its course, leaving the city cut off (Campanella 2008: 177, Lewis 2003: 33-34). Despite all of this, the location was selected for a few specific purposes, further up river would have been far too difficult for large ocean ships to dock and would have made it more vulnerable to surprise enemy attacks, but placing it further down river would have made it even more vulnerable to the elements (Campanella 2008:111-
Positioning New Orleans between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain makes it the ideal place for shipping and transport. It is accessible from the Gulf Coast, and it grants access via the river to the interior of the United States. This makes it the ideal place to bring in goods from the Caribbean and Europe for shipment upstream to Americans, and vice-versa (Lewis 2003: 35). Campanella takes the name for his book, Bienville’s Dilemma, from the fact that deciding where to place New Orleans carried with it so many pros and cons, and the central themes for his book and Lewis’s are the fact that geography is complicated and has far reaching consequences. However, with all of the difficulties and struggles, Lewis states “One should not then feel too sorry for New Orleans, either in its early days or now, despite its appalling site. The very awfulness of that site gave the inhabitants a certain cheerful esprit de corps. They had conquered the swamp and were clearly pleased with themselves” (2003: 36).

Important City

The cities accessible location at the mouth of the river meant that during antebellum times, the city prospered through bringing in or shipping out goods. In the early part of the 1800s, both Europe and the New England area of the United States were keenly interested in cotton from the south and agricultural products from the Midwest, in addition to being the home to the largest slave market in the country and the port through which people arrived. At the time, shipping was all conducted via boats (Lewis 2003: 43). New Orleans was the most important port in the United States, and while competition did arise the port remained significant in terms of the impact it had on industry and culture. As canals were being built in New York, Chicago and the Great Lakes region to allow for greater access to waterways, and railroads were connecting the coasts, the reliance on New Orleans as the primary access point for the Mississippi River, and Atlantic shipping declined. The overall industry was still booming, but the
proportion of it dominated solely by New Orleans was not what it once was (Campanella 2008: 229-230). Into the 1900s innovation in methods of shipping continued to advance, and where once nearly everything was sent via river or ocean, in contemporary times, only 15 percent of goods arrive at their final destination by boat. New Orleans’ dependence on the freight industry for jobs took another hit in the 1950s and 60s with the introduction of containerized shipping, which made shipping far less labor intensive. Thousands of jobs were eliminated, and now most of the port activities are tankers or cargo ships, which employ fewer people than the containerized shipping industry does (Campanella 2008: 232). While the reliance directly upon the river for industry has risen and fallen over the centuries, the ramifications of its locality are far reaching.

**Cosmopolitan by Nature**

Being a significant port and a long history of colonial rule under French, Spanish and Anglo-Americans’ has led to cosmopolitanism as a defining characteristic of the city. It was through here that a huge number of people from around the world entered the country (some voluntarily, others not) and in the 1850s it was outranked only by Ellis Island in New York City in terms of new arrivals. Consequently, there were many languages spoken throughout the city. European languages including French, German, Italian, and Spanish were widely heard, in addition to Native American languages, various African languages, and Chinese. Additionally, various creole languages were imported or developed locally. Such linguistic differences reflected the broad cultural influences that have indeed had a profound impact on the city throughout time, seen in cultural celebrations, funerary processions, cuisine, architecture, and undoubtedly music (Campanella 2008: 168-70).
Since the early days of Louisiana, under French Colonial rule, there has been a strong African influence in the city, with the number of enslaved people outnumbering the population of French settlers up through the time that it came under Spanish control in four phases starting in 1762 (Campanella 2008: 23). Those brought into the Louisiana colonies from the Senegambia region (the majority of those shipped from Africa to Louisiana during the early period) played a major role in the cultivation of rice. In fact, the first few shipments of slaves came with the seeds for rice crops, and Africans with the necessary knowledge to grow it (Hall 1992: 9-10). In the 1780s, there was another flood of slaves brought from the shores of Africa, this time primarily from the Bight of Benin and Congo region. The second wave of Africans had a distinct culture from those already in Louisiana, creating a space for conflict to arise (Hall 1992: 319). African presence in New Orleans has had far reaching impacts on the local culture in almost every capacity, ranging from language, medicine, religion, food (see Hall 1992 chapter 6) and music, which I will discuss in more detail later. This was due in part to the differing attitudes toward their slaves and to the ‘free people of color’ that the French had as opposed to those in Anglo-America. Under French rule, they were allowed to engage in their cultural practices, and since the plantation business was not as profitable or hard driven in the early days, slaves were often given Saturday and Sunday in particular off. They would gather in Congo Square at the ‘back-of-town’ (Native Americans were also often kept as slaves and this mingling allowed for cultural exchange between the two groups). Originally called Place des Nègres, Congo Square was not only a cultural and social center, but also a marketplace where slaves could have their own businesses, and during the era of Spanish colonialism, proceeds earned from ones business could be used to purchase ones freedom (Smith 1994: 23-24). Congo Square, and the fact that African and Caribbean culture remained a part of people’s lives, undoubtedly have profoundly impacted
the trajectory of the city, and imagining what New Orleans would be like without it is an impossible question to answer.

**Rise of Tourism as the Leading Industry**

From the early days, New Orleans has had a reputation as a place for revelry, partying, drinking and all manner of disinhibition. Night life such as this often accompanies port cities, such as Boston and San Francisco in addition to New Orleans, with their “Sailors, travelers, visiting businessmen, and other transients, liberated by their anonymity and decoupled from the responsibilities and restraints of home, [who] gravitate to opportunities for immediate gratification, in which alcohol plays a primary role. (Sex is a close second – and, not coincidentally, accounts for another historical reputation associated with this city)” (Campanella 2008: 295).

Through the first half of the twentieth century, shipping, the petroleum industry, and tourism were the three most lucrative industries. Oil was discovered in the region which led to a boom in the petroleum and chemical field. Through the 1950s and 60s, city planners and others decided to give concerted effort to dreaming up ways to increase tourism (Gotham 2007: 13). Reliance on tourism revenues increased through the twentieth century as the shipping industry declined due to technological innovation and competition. When shipping became containerized, it required less space along the waterfront, allowing the no longer needed wharves and warehouses to be cleared away. In their place was built attractions for recreation and tourist enjoyment such as the Moonwalk and Woldenberg Park. Campanella notes that these leisurely activities along the river front are actually a process of returning the space to how it would have been popularly utilized by citizens of New Orleans in times gone by before the riverfront was
industrialized, where they would have taken nightly strolls along the river, enjoying the breeze coming off the water (2008: 232).

Further developments in the tourism industry occur in the latter half of the twentieth century, including the founding of organizations like the New Orleans Tourism Marketing Corporation, New Orleans Multicultural Tourism Network, the Mayor’s Office of Tourism and Arts, and the Convention and Visitors Bureau. During this time, the Superdome, a huge convention center, and the Riverwalk Outlet Mall opened. The Audubon Zoo was revitalized, and the Audubon Institute opened an aquarium in 1990. The effort continued into the twenty-first century with opening of the Audubon Insectarium in 2008 and the National World War Two Museum (Gotham 2007: 14-15). The Jazz and Heritage Festival was developed and introduced in the 1960s with the idea that it could turn a large profit, and the fact that it is held in May is in part to compensate for lull in the tourism season (which peaks around Mardi Gras), as there were no other reasons for people to visit during that time of the year (Sakakeeny 2013: 97). In the 1990s, a huge Harrah’s Casino was built near the Riverwalk Outlet Mall, and on land gaming was legalized through the state, meaning that gamblers were no longer required to take a ride on a riverboat if they wished to game. The concerted effort on the part of the city to bring tourists has paid off, with the number of conferences held going from 172 in 1960 to 3,556 in 2000 (Gotham 2007: 15). In a 2014 press release from the Mayor’s office, they stated that in 2013 9.28 million people visited and spent $6.47 billion dollars, which is 4.5% higher than 2012 (City of New Orleans Mayor’s Office Press Release 2014).
Place Matters: Marketing New Orleans

There are a myriad of specific and individual reasons people engage in leisurely travel, but a common thread is simply to get away from their daily lives – to escape. Selänniemi says this fits into what Victor and Edith Turner call a *liminoid* experience. Drawing from Turner and Turner’s glossary (1978: 253), which states that the *liminoid or quasi-liminal* differs from the divine nature of the liminality of ritual in that it is made by individual humans for other humans, Selänniemi applies their ideas of pilgrimage to leisurely travel. The *liminoid* experience is one that follows different rules of time, and has the effect of *communitas* building. People often go on vacation to get out of their daily grind and to not have to obey the rules of everyday life, and bond with their family/vacation mates. On vacation you can sleep when you want to, eat whatever you want, and people often take the opportunity to behave in ways they never would at home, such as drinking heavily, dancing with strangers, going to strip clubs, picking up a prostitute, etc (Selänniemi 2003:24-25). Selänniemi discusses the idea that for many tourist spaces, the actual location is not as relevant as one would think; place doesn’t matter, so long as individuals are making that break from their daily lives. Although differences are apparent to those who live there, one could swap out one sandy beach for any other and it would serve its purpose to tourists (Selänniemi 2003: 20). As long as the *liminoid* experience is achieved, location doesn’t matter. Scholars Gotham (2007) and Atkinson (1997) disagree when it comes to the case of New Orleans. As the history of the geography illustrates, location is crucial to making the city, and if the city is not what it is, tourists don’t come. My experience leads me to agree with Gotham and Atkinson on the unique tourist situation in New Orleans.
All of the above mentioned tourism organizations exist to develop the industry, and to market the city to the nation and the world, sending the message that New Orleans is a great place to come and visit. The strategy used is called *urban branding*:

“Urban branding is a process of transforming otherwise mundane and ordinary symbols, images, and experiences into evocative signs of place distinctiveness to expand the number of visitors and generate local support for tourism investment. In New Orleans, this narrative of distinction or brand strategy is constructed around three themes – history, music, and food – that constitute the ‘holy trinity’ of New Orleans tourism” (Gotham 2007: 20).

Urban branding would not work without something unique and interesting to brand. Many of these other attractions, like zoos, museums, casinos and outlet malls could have been built anywhere. Without the ‘holy trinity’ Gotham refers to, and the long tradition of people passing through, they would not have been built in New Orleans.

Along with urban branding, “place marketing strategies” were put into place. To market this complex and nuanced place with a deep history and culture, it had to be simplified into a symbol; a few images and themes that could be repeated in magazine spreads again and again. For example, the image of the St. Louis Cathedral, Louis Armstrong and his trumpet, a bowl of gumbo or red beans and rice. Along with this simplification came an idealized vision of the past and present, free of suffering. Tourists do not want to be reminded that New Orleans was home to massive slave auctions, or the poverty and structural issues that exist within a few miles of their beautiful hotel room (Gotham 2007: 95-96).

While the history is fascinating and the food is tasty, it is the third of the trinity that is of concern here, music. The reputation of New Orleans has been connected to jazz and music in general for at least a century, the history behind and reason for which I will discuss further momentarily. During the early days of jazz the city tried to distance its self from it, as jazz was
seen as something base and low brow due to its connections with Storyville (a legal red-light district that was open from 1898 to 1917) and the slums. In the June 17, 1917 edition of the local newspaper, *The Times-Picayune*, it was written;

“In the matter of jass⁷, New Orleans is particularly interested, since it has been widely suggested that this particular form of musical vice had its birth in this city – that it came, in fact, from doubtful surroundings in our slums. We do not recognize the honor of parenthood, but with a story in circulation it behooves us to be the last to accept the atrocity in polite society, and where it has crept in we should make it a point of civic honor to suppress it. Its musical value is nil, and its possibilities of harm are great (Rose 1974: 107).

A few short decades later, the city was singing a different tune, and not only recognized ‘the honor of parenthood’, but actively utilized it to bring in tourism revenue.

Jazz and music deemed to be authentically New Orleans utilized as a branding tool can be seen all around town and all through advertisements for tourism. For example, the bus passes are called ‘Jazzy Passes’, I saw banners up and down Canal Street along the street car line with pictures of trumpets on them, the airport is named after Louis Armstrong and its website is decked out with a music theme. Visitors are welcomed to New Orleans by a huge mural featuring local musicians such as Louis, of course, flying in the sky with tiny angel babies that are playing musical instruments as well. With their feet on the ground, we also see Fats Domino, Professor Longhair, several of the Marsalis clan, and a number of others. Musical imagery can be found all across the city, and in higher concentration in areas targeting tourists.

In her book chapter, Atkinson discusses several of the ways music plays a crucial role in the packaging and branding of the city. She talks about how the festivities are not just for indoor spaces, but also take place in the streets. There are street musicians, music can be heard pouring out of the open doors of clubs, even the ‘private’ events like second lines do not have divisive borders that separate New Orleans inhabitants from visitors. “Liberal drinking laws allow
outdoor drinking, extending the ‘tourist space’ into the streets. But music is used to assist in marking spaces where revelry is permitted. Music serves as a signal that a space is open for occupation. Within the French Quarter, where the music stops, tourists hesitate to venture” (Atkinson 1997: 94). In the 1980s, when the city wanted to make the Riverwalk area more attractive to tourists, to draw people over to the park, mall, and aquarium, the Natchez Riverboat was used to send the signal that this was a safe place. The calliope (which to the chagrin of others, I found greatly annoying) blasts old Dixieland tunes “…creating a corridor of sound that tourists can travel, marking out and extending their space from the Quarter to the river” (ibid).

As a part of the retooling of advertisement in the 1980s when the petroleum industry was falling apart, marketing groups and the tourism marketing board came up with the theme “come join the parade”. They hoped to send the message that New Orleans is not just a place to go to be entertained, but to take part in the entertainment for one’s self. Local New Orleans music pervades every aspect of the touristscape vi, which encompasses all aspects of the city connected to tourism (ibid: 96).

The significant role music plays in the tourism industry cannot be downplayed. The Jazz and Heritage Music Festival, along with several other music festivals like the Essence Festival or the Satchmo-Fest (celebrating Louis Armstrong’s birthday) bring in large numbers of people and money, with Jazz Fest having a higher economic impact than any other yearly event, including Mardi Gras (Sakakeeny 2013: 96) vii. The highest Jazz Fest attendance was in 2001 with 650,000 people, 2015 marks the highest since 2004 with 460,000. 2004 marked a twelve year low with 346,000 in attendance, and is indicative of the steady resurgence of Jazz Fest (Spera 2015). In the early 1990s, the music business accounted for 20% of tourist dollars, and in a 1992 report from the Greater New Orleans Tourist and Convention Commission the significance of data
concerning tourism and music was noted as “The history and culture of New Orleans music are key elements that attract visitors to the city” (Atkinson 1997: 92). To illuminate why music plays such a huge role in New Orleans tourism, and the very fabric of the city itself, I will back up historically for a moment to briefly overview the development and impact of it.

**Most Musical City**

“Jazz grew up in a thousand places. But it was born in New Orleans, which was in the early 1800s the most cosmopolitan, and the most musical city in America” (Burns 2001: Ep 1). Ken Burns’s massive ten part documentary called Jazz spends the entire first chapter, called Gumbo, and portions of later chapters in the city of New Orleans. Jazz music was born out of the interplay between all manner of music; militaristic horns from the Civil War era, European operas and orchestras, ragtime, minstrel tunes, gospel/spirituals, Caribbean music, and blues; the later three brought in by slaves from other parts of the American South, the Caribbean, and the Delta region respectively. Wynton Marsalis compares blues to the roux in a gumbo. Without a good roux, you do not have gumbo, and without the blues, you don’t have jazz (Burns 2001: Ep 1).

As mentioned earlier, the city attempted to keep jazz music from tainting its reputation, as the popular notion was that it was born out Storyville, and associated with all manner of disreputable folks. This remains a part of the mythos of the music that lives in the collective imagination. While Storyville did not create jazz, it certainly played a role by giving jobs to the early innovators such as Jelly Roll Morton, Sidney Bechet, Freddie Keppard, and Joe ‘King’ Oliver (Louis Armstrong’s mentor). Also the fact that audiences were there for a purpose other than critically listening to music, and the fact that the color lines were blurred here, meant that
people who typically wouldn’t play together had to learn to do so if they wanted to make money. Further, a semi-distracted audience meant that they were free to improvise and experiment without risk of backlash (Rose 1974: 107, 119).

During the first few decades of the twentieth century, New Orleans jazz musicians spread across the country, and took their music, styles and personality with them. As mentioned above in the quote at the start of this section, jazz ‘grew up’ all over the country; New York, Washington DC, Kansas City, Chicago, and St. Louis. New Orleans native son, Armstrong was hesitant to leave his home and play elsewhere on the grounds he had seen so many try and fail. It was not until his mentor, Joe Oliver convinced him to leave for Chicago that he took that leap (Burns 2001: Ep 2). Musical lineage is truly a tale of standing on the shoulders of giants, and through the course of this research, I have been truly impressed with just how giant Louis Armstrong’s shoulders are.

New Orleans musical influence goes beyond jazz, and has also produced influential soul, rhythm and blues, and rock and roll musicians over the years. The genres of quality music that can be found in music clubs today on any given night vary wildly, including brass bands, reggae, funk, soul, r&b, and fusion groups. In an interview with a musician who is a New Orleans native, in talking about the musical heritage of his city and the impact he felt that had on his craft, he felt guilty for not being true to that tradition. He busks with an acoustic guitar in a more singer/songwriter tradition, but was in awe of what has come out of New Orleans;

Of course I have a responsibility! This is my city. This is home. This is…. The birthplace of jazz. This is the birthplace of soul. This is the birthplace of rock and roll. Fats Domino is the original king of fuckin rock and roll. I mean, that mother fu…. 45 million records in…. 45 million records in…. 40…. I dono…..yeah. 45 million records in the 50s. In the racist fuckin 50s, where they didn’t allow, they segregated the audiences. They literally segregated the audience. They had a vote in between, and they still had black and white
people coming to his shows. 45 million records in the fuckin 50s! And then after him it went to Allen Toussaint. The Neville Brothers, the [inaudible], you know, they have all this thick culture of like, great musicianship here. Louis Armstrong. If it wasn’t for Louis Armstrong, nobody would actually be playing solos to this day. If it wasn’t for Buddy Bolden and them, like, and oh my gosh. Original New Orleans Jazz band. All these people came from here (Interview, Keynin, August 10, 2014).

Not only does the rich musical heritage, and the fact music is so pervasive in everyday life, attract tourists, but it also attracts other musicians. Of the non-native musicians I spoke with, a number said they were drawn to New Orleans because of the music scene. They wanted to learn the tradition; they wanted to connect with other musicians, form a band, and work toward a full time career as a musician. When asked what brought him to New Orleans;

“Well, I see the whole music… how to say this… in a polite way… corporate music is just total dog shit. This is one of the last bastions of real music left in America…. It just is… so if one is going to be a professional musician, you’re gonna get drawn here. Kinda like if you’re…. you don’t go drillin for oil where there ain’t no oil” (Chris, Interview, August 10, 2014).

Symbol of the City: The French Quarter

As Gotham (2007) discusses, a symbol that easily conveys all of the meaning of a place to people in a simple package is key to marketing a city, and New Orleans has that in the Vieux Carré. This is the oldest part of the city, being the original French settlement; before the 1900s it was a multi-ethnic/ multi-class neighborhood that had all the amenities one would need. These included grocery stores, laundries, bars, gambling halls, etc. Through the 1920s, the Quarter became rather fashionable with artists and writers like Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Tennessee Williams. Renovation in some areas sparked concern among residents that the look and feel would be lost, and so in 1925, the Vieux Carré Commission was created, and just over a decade later, granted the power to allow or reject architectural renovations, as well as the enforcement of land use rules and property codes. Tout ensemble (the full effect or appearance of
a thing) is the philosophy of the VCC, which seeks to preserve the entire look, feel, and way of life for the whole of the Quarter (Gotham 2007: 86).

The Vieux Carré Property Owners Association (VCPOA) was created a few years later, and has a strong connection to the VCC (it is currently known as the VCPORA, and the R stands for ‘renters’). They are major advocates for the preservation of the Quarter, and have lobbied for their various interests. They effectively sued the city to stop the building of a light show in Jackson Square in 1973, and influenced the City Council to put a moratorium on building new hotels in 1969, as well as stopped a proposed expressway in the early 1960s from being built along the River on the grounds that it would destroy the historic neighborhood (Gotham 2007:113-114). The expressway did end up being built through the Tremé neighborhood, and did indeed have a negative impact on it, cutting the neighborhood in half, and “reinforcing spatial apartheid… effectively isolating the tourist zone of the French Quarter from the mostly black residential neighborhoods” (Sakakeeny 2010: 6). As part of their preservation efforts, the VCPOA and the VCC take an interest in the city’s zoning regulations. They have been major players in the past four years battling back and forth with other interest groups (such as the Music and Cultural Coalition of New Orleans – MACCNO) on the proposed changes to the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance that was finally passed on May 14, 2015 (McClendon 2015). I will delve further into discussion on the recent conflicts over zoning ordinances and how they impact the community of musicians that earn their livelihood on the streets of the Vieux Carré in chapter 5.

The French Quarter is indeed vital to the tourism industry. A 1965 survey of visitors found that those who stayed within the Vieux Carré during their time there spent more money on average than those who did not. For the majority of them, the space that the French Quarter
occupies in the collective imagination influenced them to come. They reported a desire to see the French Quarter broadly, not necessarily a specific establishment or amusement venue (Lewis 2003: 86). While many local folks denigrate it on the grounds that it is dirty, smelly, full of tourists and assorted weirdoes⁸, “most Orleanians feel strongly about the Quarter because it is the real and symbolic core of the city and everybody knows it” (Lewis 2003: 86).
Maps can be a powerful tool to provide visual representations of various phenomena in the social sciences. Mapping allows the qualitative researcher to gain a different perspective, as well as revealing patterns that the researcher might not have noticed (for discussions and examples see Brennan-Horley, et al. 2010 and Matthews, et al 2005). This is particularly true in anthropology, as ArcGIS and the data manipulation that it makes possible becomes more widely used and utilized. With this in mind, I initially wanted to look at loitering locations of homeless youth, and to then do some cognitive mapping with their help to see how they think about the space. Though that proved to be untenable, it brought to my attention the uses of mapping for understanding street musicians in relation to where they choose to play, and the potential for uncovering patterns.

Figure 1 shows my research area in relation to the city at large. The yellow square with a star in the middle of it is the same yellow square on Figure 2. On Figure 2, Jackson Square can be seen in the middle, along with the four streets on which I have decided to focus. The purpose behind selecting these particular four square blocks around Jackson Square is the fact that they lie at the heart of the French Quarter; it is where the Upper Quarter toward Canal Street, which is primarily commercial, ends, and the Lower Quarter toward the Marigny, which more residential in nature begins (See appendix A for layout of neighborhoods). It is also the center of a number of sites that every visitor to New Orleans simply must see, including the St. Louis Cathedral, Jackson Square, Café du Monde, the Natchez Riverboat, and of course Bourbon Street. As with many places that attract tourists, the array of informal entrepreneurs that set up shop nearby adds
to the hustle and bustle. The space between the Cathedral and the fence surrounding the Square is filled on one side with typically a dozen or more psychics and tarot card readers, shown in Figure 3. Along the side and front, using the fence around the park as a makeshift art gallery,
artists sell their wares, often New Orleans themed. The front of the Square, along Decatur Street is lined with a rotating crew of horse and carriage tour guides shouting their prices at passersby.

Similar to cities in France and other French Colonial cities, the Square was initially built as a military marching ground, and called the *Place d’Armes*. This space was utilized as a cite of public executions for criminals and rabble rousing slaves. In 1848 Baroness Pontalba, a very wealthy woman born to Spanish parents in New Orleans, and married into a French family, returned to New Orleans from France. She was appalled at the state of the French Quarter, and since she had inherited a large portion of the surrounding property from her father. She hired experts to renovate the buildings, which resulted in the Pontalba Buildings, still there today. She also played a major role in making Jackson Square the park that it is today (Vella 1997).

![Figure 3. Jackson Square](image-url)
I selected the streets Decatur, Chartres, Royal and Bourbon on the grounds that they all either are themselves attractions, or they house things that attract people. From my initial observations during formulation of my research plan, they also had a higher concentration of street musicians. That is not to say no one busks outside of this zone, but those who do are not within the most highly touristed area. I limited the cross streets to within St. Louis and St. Philip for three reasons. In his survey of foot traffic in the French Quarter, Campanella (2014: 267) notes that St. Louis is the peak along Bourbon Street, and then dwindles toward the Lower Quarter. He also indicates high traffic on Decatur and Royal around Jackson Square. Pragmatically, the streets with saint names were easy to remember while I found my way around a new city, and I was hesitant to make my research area much larger due to the fact it is a great deal of ground to cover multiple times a day in the boiling Louisiana summer.

Using a Garmin handheld GPS unit, I recorded the GPS locations of all musicians I passed on the street between June 2, 2013 and June 8, 2013. I walked my beat twice a day, once between noon and 3:00pm, and a second time between 4:00pm and 8:00pm with the exception of one evening where the weather was not permitting and it is unlikely anyone would have been playing. I walked around making informal observations, finding my way around, and also
casually chatting with musicians and others on days before and after I recorded GPS points (waypoints) during the summer of 2013.

Displaying the waypoints with the Google Earth interface included in the Garmin program that comes packaged with the GPS unit used was simple and elegant, as seen in Map 1. They are sorted by genre and technological investment, discussed in detail later. Map 1 shows all collected Waypoints together, and a clear pattern emerges. The majority of buskers could be found scattered up and down Royal Street, with three reliable hubs on Decatur, and spot in front of the St. Louis Cathedral. I will discuss each category further alongside the relevant map.

Map 1. All GPS waypoints
Brass Bands

One of the most distinctive sounds one hears upon approaching Jackson Square is the seemingly ever present bass drum of the brass bands that play either on the steps of the Cabildo, next to the Cathedral, or on rows of benches in the open space between the Cabildo and the Square. Point number 61 by itself on Decatur sits at the foot of some stairs that lead up to a shopping area, housed in the former Jackson Brewery and the Steamboat Natchez. I observed groups playing there regularly, but only one Brass Band, and they happened to be a group of younger musicians (left photo below).

When asked why the Brass Bands owned the Square, a member of a folk-punk band said “Jackson Square is where the brass bands are cause that’s the only place they CAN play, and you don’t wanna go there cause they’ll blow you out real bad” (Clem McGillicuty and the Burnouts, Interview, August 2, 2014). The Square is the only place they feel can accommodate the powerful sound of a big brass band, and as Clem indicated, it is simply not possible for a small group, an unamplified group in particular, to compete with that.

Chris, who plays guitar and trombone with the brass bands and traditional jazz groups, when asked what it is he likes about Jackson Square said “Cause that’s where all the people at, so that means that’s where all the moneys at. Royal Street is also good” (Interview, August 10, 2014). Jackson Square has a high flow of traffic through the day, and has ample seating on the steps or on the benches for tourists who wish to stop and listen (right photo below).
Map 2, Brass Bands

There are restrictions for when the bands can play based upon when church is in session, which are indicated with a sign by the door. There are also signs posted in case of a weddings or other events.
“Professional” Groups

Here, I used the term professional to talk about musicians who have devoted a substantial portion of their life to the craft. These people have been playing for years, some hold music degrees. They also tend to have a financial investment in their career, in terms of either equipment, or recording and producing records. The red and orange points are groups that were either selling CDs, used battery powered amplification systems, or both. The lone green dot was a girl with an amplified guitar, but did not have CDs for sale. I have included them together on this map on the grounds that it later became clear that the use of amplification equipment proved to be somewhat of a false dichotomy. The bands that did not use amplification generally did not require it, or their instruments were such that amping them would have been more trouble than its worth such as horns or violins. It is also important to note here that the production value of the CDs for sale ranged from burned at home on a computer and using paper folders as cases, to jewel cases with colorful images printed on the disk. However there was no immediate way for me to know if they had rented recording studio time, used a home studio, or used live recordings from shows for their albums. With the advent of the home studio, and the fact that blank disks are inexpensive and simple to record on, the barrier of entry for a group or solo artist to have a CD for sale has drastically been reduced in the past decade. While I did not ask groups about their process of recording and producing CDs during this research, it would be interesting data to collect in the future.

The intersections on Royal Street have the highest concentration of these groups, with a few hubs on Decatur; the same spot at the foot of the steps leading to the Riverwalk seen with the young brass band earlier, and down the street in front of Café Du Monde. Sitting out Café du Monde provides a captive audience of mostly tourists who have come to eat beignets, and to
drink chickory coffee or café au lait. Unlike the rest of the Quarter, this side of Decatur requires musicians to have a permit (which is free) issued from the French Market District, and has two hour time limit to prevent one performance group from monopolizing a particular location (French Market, accessed July 1, 2015).


Royal Street is undoubtedly the most competitive street, and has been for several decades now. Brad, a washboard player, talks about Royal Street, and one intersection in particular, St. Peter and Royal.

“I was in several different bands that used to always play at the A&P, which is where the Rouses is. And that was like the best spot. Jackson Square… but that was the better Jackson Square… Yeah, the A&P we used to call it, cause that’s what it was for years,
but now it’s a Rouses. That corner, St. Peter and Royal, its like the exact center of The Quarter, and then you got the way the buildings are and stuff, to pin the crowd in back in the days. Pack them into a thing, and then the sound. Its good. But you had to be really good to be able to play there, or it’d just get taken away from you. If you were some girl playing Joni Mitchell songs, you weren’t gonna sit on that spot no matter what the rules were. You got this spot, oh you can’t get this spot. This spot can make money for fifteen people” (Interview, Washboard Brad, August, 10, 2014).

Another musician told me “How many people have said Rouses?.... That’s the spot” (Devon, Interview, August 6, 2014). Seven out of the fifteen musicians specifically quoted the Rouses as being the most competitive location (though not necessarily their favorite). Devon went on to explain that it is a great spot because it has a high traffic flow, being right next to Jackson Square, and with the market there it is convenient, and all the carriage tours go by, so tourists see you playing and may walk by later.

Each intersection on Royal Street saw high numbers of buskers, and generally starting up Wednesday and increasing on the weekends, bands can be seen up and down the street. In a foot traffic survey conducted by Campanella on Bourbon Street over the period of a year, he noted that the streets were 2.33 times busier on Fridays and Saturdays (2014: 269). Chris, who plays with the brass band and traditional jazz bands, like the group shown above (right photo), explained “Now anywhere on Royal Street is good, if you got a good band. And there’s, on a daily basis you gonna see all kinds of bands, all kinds of styles on Royal Street in the daytime…
doin uh…. Bob Dylan to opera. You’re gonna see that every day on Royal. You just never know” (Interview, August 10, 2014). Chris’s statements, along with Brad’s indicate the competitive nature, and that groups playing here must have the skill and showmanship to compete. Speaking to the competitive nature of these intersections, I saw one busker sell St. Peter and Royal to a band for five dollars, and up the street at the corner of St. Louis and Royal spoke briefly with a busker waiting for another to leave, and contemplating paying him twenty dollars to leave. When I asked him why, he said that Royal is a high end shopping center, and for a musician hoping to sell CDs, people shopping here are in the mood to spend a great deal of money and thus more willing to buy a CD for fifteen or twenty dollars than those walking on Decatur or other streets that house less expensive shops. Royal Street is home to shops such as the Gorin Bros. Hat Shop with hats in the $150-$250 range, and other high end clothing boutiques. At places like M.S. Rau Antiques or Waldhorn and Adler Antiques, one should expect to spend thousands of dollars. Similarly, Rodrique Studio – the art gallery for the world famous blue-dog paintings, along with other high end galleries, do not cater to the average shopper.

Figure 4 is a series of four maps created using Yelp.com, a website that shows locations, reviews, price ranges, and other information for shops, restaurants, and other establishments. Figure 4 below, is the top ten businesses listed under the ‘shopping’ category in the French Quarter sorted by price range. For clarity, I have placed a black line on Royal Street. Yelp does not give concrete numbers associated with their four shopping price categories of inexpensive, moderate, pricey, and ultra-high end. To give some idea of the numbers associated with price brackets, under the restaurant listings, for $ one can expect to pay $10 or less per meal. At an establishment listed $$, $11-$30 will get you a meal. $$$ restaurants average at $31 to $60 per
plate, and $$$ is $60+ for one meal. In the $$$$/Ultra-high end quadrant of the map in Figure 4, 70% of the shops can be found on Royal Street.

![Figure 4. Yelp Shopping](image)

**Small Acoustic Groups**

Musicians that fell into this category were typically either individuals with acoustic guitars, hand drums, and/or mandolins playing folk music, ranging from Bob Dylan to Tracy Chapman covers, as well as original compositions, or they were solo horn players playing a range of New Orleans standards. As shown on Map 4 they tend to follow a similar pattern with the previous group, but are spread a little more up and down Decatur, and the points recorded where the Brass Bands typically play were taken in the early evening after the Brass groups had called it a day. Four solo guitarists I interviewed mentioned, it is all about respecting people’s space, and so they were willing to fill in the blank spaces, even if it’s not a prime location, and Benji mentioned that sometimes being out of the way can net one “a good kick down” because
there is nothing else going on in that area (Mario, Interview, July 24, 2014 and Benji, Interview, July 30, 2014). This is related to the sentiments echoed by an older blues guitarist who plays on Decatur. He said his favorite place to play was on television, but that Decatur was good because the store front he sits in is empty so no one complains. Ultimately, “Some days I make money out here, some days I don’t” (Papa Kool, Interview, August 6, 2014).

Map 4. Acoustic Groups

Of the categories used to sort the Waypoints, this one proved to be the most complicated in light of ethnographic data and interviews, both in terms of geography and community affiliation. A few I fully realized were panhandlers holding guitars and playing a few chords over and over again, or sitting and tuning their guitar (very poorly and incorrectly) and never actually playing. I found it odd, but was unable to articulate what was occurring until stumbling upon the
same thing in Lief’s master’s thesis about identity in the busking community. “Spangers” as they are called (“got any spare change?”) do this to avoid trouble with the police, as street music is legal but panhandling comes with a higher risk of police harassment. There are specific rules concerning legal and illegal action connected to panhandling, including guidelines for how closely one can stand to a street, blocking public access ways, or proximity to ATMs, banks, or public transportation stops. Holding a sign asking for money is legal, but ‘aggressive pandhandling’ is not (Eggler 2011). Secondly, the line that exists between the gutter punk/ dirty kids and street musicians was made clearer in his discussion on how while gutter punks may play music on the streets and become buskers embedded in the community, there is still a criminal element, such as petty theft and nuisance crimes connected to transient, homeless youth (Lief 2008: 18, 28).

Decatur is the Dirty Kid Street

The geographic element of the distinction between the street music community and the gutter punk community (the finer points of the communities will be discussed further in the following chapter) did not become clear to me until I interviewed a band who revealed a great
deal about dirty kids to me. Their favorite locations to play were outside of Central Grocery, a famous little muffaleta shop that closes at 5pm, so there is no one to harass you at night. Another favorite spot they called the ‘spiky steps’, which is an empty store front with a series of doors under an awning that have metal spikes on the ledge specifically to prevent people from loitering on, again because there were no store owners to run them off (though they did report being told to not sit by police). When I asked them why they liked these spots so much, they said the foot traffic on Decatur was high, and the overhang provided shade. Darius, an honorary member of Clem McGillicutty and the Burnouts that filled in as a washboard player with the band while in New Orleans, said “And you still got people hangin’ out with you and shit, a lot of foot traffic and shit. Decatur is like the dirty kid street (the others all agreed)… you go to New Orleans, you’re a dirty kid, you’re hangin’ out on Decatur” (Clem, Interview, August 2, 2014).

This is consistent with the history of Decatur Street. Prior to the 1970s, Decatur Street was up against the docks, and was populated by bums, winos and other “unsavory” characters. In the 70s and 80s, people looking to open a bar or a shop could do so for very low rent, and a few bars were opened that specifically held on to the dingy and grungy look so as to not attract the same clientele as Bourbon Street (Campanella 2014: 284).
**Bourbon Street**

As shown in Map 5 (which is zoomed in compared to the others), all points taken of solo bucket drummers or percussionists were on Bourbon Street. During all of my time in the French Quarter, aside from drummers, I only witnessed one brass band playing on Bourbon, and it was young children. I saw two other groups of musicians sitting with their instruments, but they were not playing. I was taken aback by this, as I expected Bourbon Street to be a highly coveted spot to play due to the high traffic.

![Map 5. Percussion/ Bucket Drummers](image.jpg)
The musicians interviewed articulated several reasons as to why this is. They said it had to do with the fact that Bourbon is full of clubs that play loud dance music, and that it is full of drunk tourists who stumble around, making it difficult (Jane, Interview, July 31, 2014 and Benji, Interview, July 30, 2014). Or that it is not a place for bands, unless you play in a club (Devon, Interview, August 6, 2015). In 1980, the city council passed an ordinance that prohibited all manner of street performance at night on Bourbon Street (Campanella 2014: 232). Business owners on Bourbon Street pay taxes and have licenses, while street musicians do not require licenses, and may or may not pay taxes on their earnings (Lief 2008: 18, reports informants that do pay taxes on their income from busking). Combined with the fact that buskers are perceived as taking potential dollars away from the clubs, there is an animosity between them and club owners (Campanella 2014: 264). The 8pm curfew is strictly enforced on Bourbon Street, due to the powerful clout that the owners of clubs have.

Comparing to Other Maps

It is helpful to think about the Waypoint maps alongside other information concerning the French Quarter in order to answer questions about why particular sections of the Quarter are utilized by street musicians as spaces for performance, and why particular areas are not as heavily visited by tourists. Using data from New Orleans city website, https://data.nola.gov/ and ArcGIS, I have created the following maps. These maps display city zoning areas, the population of residents, and the location of clubs that have either live music, or have a DJ that plays recorded music, like most of the nightclubs on Bourbon Street.

Map 6 shows the city zoning codes for the French Quarter. Bourbon Street is zoned as the “entertainment district” (VCE, Vieux Carré Entertainment). In areas zoned VCE, the only
businesses allowed to operate are “places of amusement; theaters; restaurants (but not fast food or drive-ins); museums; flower shops; artist studios; residences; retail shops smaller than 2,000 square feet; and certain utility apparatus” (Campanella 2014: 225). Decatur is zoned for “commercial” use throughout most of The Quarter, and contains various small shops once you get past the first few blocks of the Audubon Insectarium, a hotel, the fire department, and the House of Blues. Commercial zoning means that any businesses or stores may operate, some examples include flower shops, Laundromats, locksmiths, museums, small retail shops (no pawnshops) with restrictions concerning the sale of liquor (City of New Orleans 2014: Article 8.4). The ‘Upper Quarter’ is mainly commercial, with the ‘Lower Quarter’ being residential, and when walking through the area, the shift between the zoning districts is immediately noticeable as the number of people on the streets fizzles out, and those out and about are clearly living their lives and not ‘touring’.

Map 6. Zoning in the French Quarter
This split coincides very closely with the distribution of street musicians seen in Map 1, with buskers being found in the sections of Royal and Decatur zoned for commercial use, and with the exception of Jackson Square, which is zoned residentially.

When I asked, four musicians explicitly indicated that part of the reason they do not play on Bourbon Street is the owners of clubs view them as competition, or that there is too much noise and other stimuli already. Other avenues of entertainment are pouring out of the doors of the establishments and onto the streets, and while there are all manner of other street performers like the human transformer, a dwarf dressed as a leprechaun, or break dancing troupes, the environment is not conducive to traditional jazz or a singer-songwriter. Illustrating the prevalence of this, Map 7 shows the locations of clubs that have permits to host live music, and it is not coincidental that very little busking happens right outside these venues. Along the streets where buskers are found, there are a few live music venues to be found.

While some areas are zoned for commercial use, as shown in Map 6, people still live in apartments on the second or third floors, which is why the areas zoned for commercial use still have a population as shown in Map 8 (Campanella 2014: 110). A few informants reported having positive relationships with individuals who lived above galleries or other establishments, and either positive or negative relationships with these people factoring into their decisions of where to play. Map 8 showing the population of particular blocks of the French Quarter corresponds to the amount of busking in a similar way as zoning. The areas with a higher number of residents mean fewer tourists, and that in turn means there is less pockets full of tourism dollars to collect.
Map 7. Live Music Venues

Map 8. Population
Conclusion

The geography of busking is not random. As illustrated above, in light of various cultural geographical aspects of the French Quarter, musicians’ play where they do based on a number of rationales. Some are playing with the goal of making money, and so they select spots based on what will yield the highest financial returns, while others have their own tangential communities that influence where they play. The interplay between these adjacent communities will be discussed in depth in chapter 4. Others have very pragmatic reasons for playing where they do, such as the Brass Bands, being too powerful and loud to play elsewhere in more confined areas. The personal motivations, as well as how musicians integrate into the community and earn the rights to claim spots were explained to me through interviews and will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 4

A Sword and a Shield: Interpersonal Relationships

Gut instinct told me that certainly those who play in the street feel some level of affinity with one another and view themselves as a community. People doing similar activities in the same area will have shared experiences. My goals in going beyond just the geography of the space were to look at various aspects of the community that inhabits it, starting with their status as a community.

In this chapter, I discuss the portion of interviews and observations that concern interpersonal relationships between street musicians and other groups found within the French Quarter. Do they consider themselves a community? How is competition for busking locations mediated and why are particular locations favorites? Such questions shed light on the GPS data discussed in chapter 3. From there, I wanted to know the role race and ethnicity play, and how that relates to tourists expectations and their ideas of what is authentic. Finally, how do buskers relate to tourists? I have attempted here to gain insight into the primary relationships within the peoples of the French Quarter.

The query “Would you describe buskers as a community?” elicited apprehensive and diverse responses, and proved to be one of the more difficult to transcribe, as many answered with long pauses, or various sounds of halfhearted to highly emphatic ‘yesses’. It was surprising to me how varied the responses were to a seemingly straight forward question that I nearly took for granted. In terms of communal orientation, a not surprising pattern did emerge; musicians that play with others in groups on a regular basis tended to say more about the communal nature of busking, while also addressing the fluid nature of musicianship. “Oh yeah! Pshh, oh yeah.
Well we all know each other. Once you been down here a few times, you start getting recognized” (Chris, Interview, August 10, 2014). Devon, a tuba player who plays with a number of groups, but typically played with an old timey band on Royal Street had this to say;

“Uh….yeah! I would say it is definitely it is. We all try to know each other, and we all try to play with each other if we can, so we can find somebody hopefully, I hope it works that way on all ends, not just with the people I play with. So I hope that more people I meet, more bands I play with on the street, and it’s kind of been working, but….. Yeah. It’s kind of a community ….I think. I dono about community, it’s a group of friends? (laughs)” (Interview, August 6, 2014).

My interview with Chris happened because I was sitting at the corner of Decatur and Barracks interviewing another musician, and they started bantering with one another. Exactly as Devon says, once I managed one or two interviews with those who were more embedded, I was put in contact with others or they happened by and agreed to talk to me. I saw the power that networking plays in the community firsthand, and how it is a community for some.

Those who do generally play solo still described it as a community, but they tended to not view it as tight knit as those who play with groups did. Both Benji and Curtis said it is kind of a community, but they do not all hang out after working and get drinks together or other activities they both felt were indicative of a community. Benji explained that similarly to any group of people, you might hit it off with particular individuals and become closer to them, but all street musicians were not best friends with one another (Interviews, July 30, 2014 and August 6, 2014). A blues guitarist that sits on Decatur and shares a ride between home and the Quarter with a saxophone player who plays in the French Market told me “Everybody down here doin their own thing. He’s down there doin his own thing… I guess it’s a community separate” (Papa Kool, Interview, August 6, 2014). Similarly, another solo guitar player; “I would describe this as… not
a complete community, but hey, if you need a guitar pick, here you got a guitar pick” (Bowman, Interview, July 28, 2014).

It was or was not a community to the level of investment a person put into it. Those who played with others and built that connection with other musicians felt more strongly about it being a community, particularly if they participated in the more traditional New Orleans music like brass bands or traditional jazz, which play together in large groups and have a longer tradition in the city.

“I Know They’ll Have Our Back If Some Crazy Shit Pop Off”

Playing on the streets day in and day out in a city like New Orleans is not a lifestyle free from risk, and one of the benefits that comes with being embedded in a community is the fact that there are more sets of eyes. The idea that everyone in The Quarter has a hustle, and the possibility of getting hustled was articulated to me on multiple occasions, along with the fact that musicians help each other out in a potentially dangerous town. As I was sitting with Kent William Bowman, watching him play before our interview, a younger man stopped to talk to Kent. He was new to town and his music equipment had all been stolen from him. Kent exchanged contact information with the young man, and told him to call him later and that he would help him get new equipment at a fair price. Several of my informants, after answering my question about if it was or was not a community would cite reasons why they thought it was. Several brought up the fact that being a member of the community affords one some level of protection;

We just, we all look after each other cause we all know that we can all get hustled in a heartbeat (laughs) and that’s the thing…. That’s kind of a …. This is dangerous town…but when people recognize you, even the thugs recognize you as being seen playin on Royal Street or Jackson Square, the thugs won’t mess with you. Even if you get caught
by yourself they won’t mess with you because they know… they probably know everybody you play with, and if you get hurt, they comin after yo ass. So they don’t mess with musicians. This (nods to his guitar) is kind of a sword and a shield…. (laughs)… in this town (Chris, Interview, August 10, 2014).

Similarly, Kenyin told me that what makes busking a community is “the fact that you’re out here hustling, the fact that you’re out here doin it. Doesn’t matter like your, your actual playin style or your playing feel, the fact that you’re out here doin it, and if someone tries to rob you or do something to you…” (Keynin, Interview, August 10, 2014). What prevented him from finishing his thought is an example illustrating his embeddedness in the French Quarter community. Nearly a dozen times during his hour long interview we were interrupted by people he knew going to and from work or generally about their business, both musicians and non-musicians.

Physical protection or protection of one’s equipment was not the only benefit mentioned. Both Kent and Benji discussed the loaning of guitar picks or strings. The New Orleans humidity is rough on strings, which I personally witnessed the breaking strings on two occasions. Walking around the Quarter one night, I ran into Benji as he lamented a broken string. He ranted about how unfortunate it is to break one after the stores have closed, and that you are at the mercy of any other buskers around to spot you one, which he seemed confident he would find. He said no one ever talks about breaking strings, and concluded his rant with “put THAT in your paper!”

The boys from Clem McGillicutty and Darius also spoke to the power of the community for protection, though for them it was more about the Decatur community looking after one another;

Jason: Out here bein on Decatur, it’s a whole nother thing, like,
Darius: It’s all dirty kids.
Jason: Like you seen us walkin, stopping every 5 minutes… I love that shit… cause some shit pop off you know, I might not know them that well, but I know they’ll have my back. I know they’ll have our back, if some crazy shit pop off.
Darious: Someone try to steal your instrument or whatever.
Jason: Exactly! You got eyes out here. If that happened inside the Quarter, it wouldn’t happen, it’d be gone. Like Jesse’s harmonica. Jesse’s harmonica, the whole rig. He had left it down here one night
Darious: And Danny brought it back, right?
Jason: Yeah, Danny, a dude that we know.
Darious: That’s who I got my guitar from. Danny. I left it with him, and I knew he was gonna be sittin there with it. You know.
Jason: Trustworthy. I wouldn’t do that with anybody else playin in there [inside The Quarter].
(Interview, August 2, 2014)

The musicians in Clem McGillicutty and the Burnouts felt that they could not trust the musicians who play on Royal Street to support them in a time of crisis. They felt an affinity with the gutter punks on Decatur, that there is a greater sense of loyalty and honesty.

A Series of Communities: Decatur vs. Royal

Prior to spending an afternoon and evening with Clem McGillicutty and the Burnouts, watching them play on Decatur and St. Louis, I had no idea just how different of a world Decatur is from Royal and Jackson Square. I had hypothesized a difference between the streets based on previous observations about the genre of musicians that played in each based on my maps, but I did not understand the full scope of it exactly. Those on Decatur had a different way of interacting with people, both other Quarter folk and tourists. A homeless man called Spin was with them when I initially met with them at Bienville Place, a small park that sits where N. Peters Street and Decatur converge. He sat with me and listened to the band play, chatted with the boys, and made funny comments to passersby. My personal favorite was when he told a woman she had a beautiful husband which elicited a surprised laugh from both of them. Spin told me he enjoys doing things like that, bringing a smile to strangers faces by turning typical comments and calls that someone in his position may have on their ear, the expectation generally being he would cat call women who pass by. After they played for a few hours, we all walked
down Decatur to try and find somewhere to get a snack and find a semi-quiet spot so I could
interview them. In the quote above discussing protection, Jason references the fact that we
stopped many times. The guys knew almost every group we passed, including one group of dirty
kids, selling art they had made from found items, and another group sitting with guitars, banjos
and their dogs. We finally ended up getting some chicken nuggets and cheesy fries from
Checkpoint Charlie’s bar, and then sitting on the roots of a tree in the neutral ground of
Esplanade Avenue and getting bitten by ants with a band at Satchmo Summerfest playing at the
Old US Mint across the street, on the edge of the Quarter.

When asked about the busking community, they revealed to me the nuanced nature of the
communities in The Quarter. It is not so much one community, but a series of communities that
have a degree of overlap with one another. The communities that I saw represented were the
homeless, street performers (the tap dancing children, the human statues, or dance troupes),
artists, dirty kids, and buskers. An individual may fall within multiple categories. For example,
there was one young man who was both a dirty kid and he taught his dog to do tricks as part of a
street performance act. I saw another homeless man who wore an absurd number of Mardi Gras
beads, a bright colored cowboy hat, and stood on a milk crate next to a donation bucket. Two of
my informants were homeless at the time, and four received food stamps due to being technically
homeless. When I first met Benji, he was sitting on a curb with his friend, a homeless man with
one eye, and the two split my leftover sandwich I gave Benji for helping me. Several mentioned
how beneficial it can be to be on good terms with the local homeless population. Chris felt the
relationship between street musicians and the homeless folk of the Quarter was mutually
beneficial;
… one of the first things I learned… learn the names of your homeless people down here cause they’ll look out for you while you’re playing. They’ll look after your gear, ya throw em a dollar or two, ya throw em a beer every now and again, and yeah… and they watch after you. They are the eyes and ears of the street because they’re on it all the time. And ya wanna be friendly with them. And the city has a certain respect for the old timers. They don’t mess with em too much if they aint too unruly” (Chris, Interview, August 10, 2014)

Other’s mentioned that the homeless can be sources of trouble and frustration for musicians in that their presence may deter some families from stopping on Royal to listen with their children, or they may start arguing and disrupting the music (Devon, Interview, August 6, 2014).

Four of the musicians told me that there were not rivalries between the various genres of buskers playing in the streets. Darios, however, who has travelled around a great deal, and to my surprise had spent time ‘flyin a sign’ (panhandling with a sign, often at intersections) in Wichita, is much more of a dirty kid than the street musician camp, spoke of tensions between the gutter punks and the street musicians. He passionately (and slightly drunkenly) described the judgment he felt from some of the old timey, boxcar kid bands that play on Royal Street and the other guys in Clem agreed;

Me: Would you describe the busking community as a community?
All: Ooooooh…
Darios: Well there’s the dirty kid community, you know what I mean. Everybody’s out here and you’re all together, and you got your scene… But like the thing is, goin back to what we were sayin about the douche bags and shit… people who play music a lot of times, they like to think we’re… we call em “upper crust” kids. They think they’re better than you cause they play music, like the [band name 1] kids, and the fucking [band name 2] kids.
Jason: There’s a lot of buskers in The Quarter that play, like with the fiddles and shit like that, they don’t fuck around with us.
Darios: I don’t associate with them, cause they think they’re better than you.
Jason: And they don’t try it. And they think they’re cooler than you. Me? I got no problem saying hi to somebody. “That’s awesome bro, I love what you’re doin” And they might talk to you for a minute, but that’s the furthest…
(Clem McGillicutty and the Burnouts, Interview, August 2, 2014)
It is important to note that another name for gutter punks are crust punks, or crusties, and so calling the other group ‘upper crust’ is not only literally defined as the elite of society, but is a play on the term crust punk. To further explain where they felt the source of this judgment came from, they went onto break down the taxonomy of dirty kids into the subgroups;

    Darius: …Ok you got oogles. Oogles are like “Hey I got a trust fund and I’m bored, so lemme go act like I…”
    Zack: Train hop
    Darius: Yeah “lemme go train hop so I got a story for my fucking yuppie friends”
    Jesse: (making a fancy sounding voice) and an oogles dog is a doogle
    Darius: Fucking oogles. And then you got the upper crust kids, who really are on the street, but they do shit like, they sell jewelry and they busk, and they have more money than the dude holding the sign so they think they’re better than you, and they can like rent out apartments and shit, and they don’t let you find out. For example, I fuckin, I went to jail for a few days ago for sittin on the fucking sidewalk… I leave; I come back out tryin to find my guitar, right. They have my guitar, which is great, thanks for takin my stuff and keepin it safe so some fuckin dude don’t step on it or whatever. But uh… they’re like “We have it, it’s in a safe place but we can’t tell you where it’s at” Ok, well…what do you? “You know, we don’t want it blowin up, this and that” look here, I’m not tryina hang out at your crib, I want my stuff back. And what’s dumb about it is, it’s always the same like three or four places. I’ve been here before you’ve been here! I was here last year hangin out at the same fuckin houses you’re tellin me I can’t be at. So fuck off! Give me my guitar! Know what I mean? Its shit like that. Upper crust kids’ man, they think they’re fucking cooler than you. It’s dumb.
    Jesse: And then you have us
    Darius: right. If you’re gonna play in a band, be able to hang out
    Jason: You know? What else you gonna do? Waste your whole life?
    Darius: It’s too much energy to be high priority like a woman, know what I mean? Like, know what I’m sayin? Oh, Oh! You’re a little too dirty for me! Stay away from my instrument, you’re gonna get it out of tune (laughs) fuck you.
    Jason: that’s ridiculous to me.
    (Interview, August 2, 2014)

Drunken, misogynistic language aside, Darius is saying that those who belong to the upper crust have elitist attitudes, and are unwilling to share their resources with others. He thinks that they are uptight, and is offended by the notion of individuals who have a safety net pretending to be on the streets. Jesse discussed a specific kind of criticism he has received personally;
Jesse: “Those old people, especially the old jazz and blues guys… they’re offended by punk rock. I’ve had multiple people tell me that they are offended by the music I play, because “that’s not music, that’s punk rock. You’ve ruined it, you’re ruined everything” and I’m like, I did, I ruined it, you wanna hear a fucking song? (the others talk about how music isn’t the same as it used to be)
Me: So you’ve had people tell you that? Wow.
Jesse: Yeah, especially up on like, Frenchman corner.
Darious: Frenchmen’s where the haters are.
Jesse: Of course a lot of them are cool. But, I’ve definitely had the older generation tell me they’re offended by the way I play banjo.
Me: would you say that’s a minority viewpoint?
Jesse: 50-50, 50-50 easily. Easily. Especially when I first moved here, like when I first moved here, I saw it a lot.

This is a prime example of where separate communities overlap with others, and is a part of the French Quarter, but while they share aspects with the street musicians or the homeless, they occupy a particular niche within the broader space. Several times throughout our talk, they spoke in terms of Royal Street (and Frenchmen to a lesser extent), in opposition or in conflict with the Decatur community, which came through in statements like “out here bein on Decatur, it’s a whole nother thing” or “Frenchmen’s where the haters at” or talking about how they would not trust people within the Quarter to guard or return their gear.

Ideas about difference between Royal Street and Decatur was not only felt by the gutter punks, but also by another musician who plays at the lower end of Decatur toward Frenchmen Street. As mention earlier, Keynin knew a number of individuals that passed by and bantered with all of them. He told me he preferred that end of the Quarter on the grounds that it was less touristy, less crowded and congested, and he was also able to sit out and have long conversations with friends of his who were painters or other musicians. He also liked that he could see trees from the corner he played at (next to Café Envie and across from the Old US Mint). He took a much more leisurely approach to busking, and was not in it for the hustle unless it was an emergency;
Yeah, Right by uh... Rouses… I don’t like that whole environment… I stay away from it... its money. Money… everybody gets hung up on money. When I wanna make money, I do. But besides that, fuck it. If I’m out here just workin on perfecting my craft, that’s what I’m doin. It’s not about money. When I wanna make money, I’ll make money. I’m just out here playin till I fuckin make money. If I wanna just…. (Another person comes by) Hey! I don’t like that shirt…. Cause it’s not on me! (We all laugh) I used to work for him. But go ahead… (Interview, Keynin, August 10, 2014)

Performers Respect

Like the Fugees said in Zealots, “Two MCs can’t occupy the same space at the same time” (1996) and similar to rappers, neither can buskers. The question that drove me to look for patterns in busking behavior was that of spot selection; how do people decide where to play, and how do they do so within the context of the community? How is competition between musicians for a finite number of locations mediated? The sentiment reiterated to me time and time again was that it is all came down to respect, and earning your place. Putting in the time around The Quarter to be recognized as a part of that space, and not merely passing through is key. Musicians must respect the space of others, both in terms of not acoustically overpowering someone and ‘blowing them out’, and in terms of not occupying a valued spot for too long and giving others a chance.

The first rule of competition for prime locations was “Whoever gets the spot first” (Interview, Devon, August 6, 2014). “If they’re playing, don’t sit down next to them, and if there’s nobody playing, sit your ass down and play…. That’s… competition” (Interview, Benji, July 30 2014). This idea encourages musicians to time their arrival to the Quarter, along with a few other tactics. The significance of respect for one another was reiterated time and time again, and transcends the New Orleans busking scene. Returning to the streetcar line on Canal Street from seeing a band on Frenchmen Street one night, I met a young man sitting on Decatur playing Tracy Chapman’s song, Revolution, on the acoustic guitar. He claimed to have arrived in the city
four hours earlier, to have travelled all over the United States, Australia, New Guinea, and Spain playing music in the street to supplement other jobs said this is how he selects where to play:

   “Places where I’m respecting other people’s space. Um… If I see that there’s a store, a restaurant, something like that, I’m not gonna play by the restaurant, people are tryin to eat. Or a store where people are tryin to like, really shop. I’m not gonna do it there, that’s not why they went into that store, not for some guy to play. So I try to go to a spot where I don’t feel like I’m gonna be an inconvenience to anybody, or if another artist is somewhere near, I’ll walk down where he can’t be heard and I’ll do it there. It’s nothing but a nuisance if you’re bothering….” (Interview, Mario Canto, July 24, 2014).

Musicians tended to be harmonious in their relations with one another, and I heard very few reports of fights between them. When asked if he had witnessed any conflict, Bowman said “No. We all have it pretty much together. And respect… It’s discussed before it even happens to get to that point” (Interview, Kent William Bowman, July 28, 2014). There is competition for spots, and conflict has the potential to rise out of that, but with respect for others space, and open communication with one another, that risk is minimized.

   Negotiating, taking turns, and respect are the keys to conflict reduction. I witnessed a handful of times a group of musicians waiting for another to finish playing and leave the corner (which was always on Royal Street. I did not see groups waiting for spots anywhere else). The group wanting the spot usually asked how much longer the currently playing musician intended on playing, and then decided if they were going to wait.

   A second way space was negotiated was through monetary incentives. On two separate occasions, I witnessed the tactic of buying a spot considered or used. The first time, a musician waiting for a spot to open up started talking to me, saying he recognized me from around (going back to the idea of time as a marker of non-tourist). He told me he was waiting for an accordion player to leave, and that if he was playing much longer, he planned on paying him twenty dollars to vacate the spot. It happened again when I saw a traditional jazz group pay Bowman five
dollars to leave the highly competitive Rouses Market corner. During our interview, I asked Bowman about it, and he does not consider himself a full time busker. He sees his real job as composing music and busks for fun and to earn a little extra cash. He is perfectly willing to give up a spot for a few dollars so another musician can earn money (Interview, Kent William Bowman, July 28, 2014).

As with any group of human beings, no matter how respectful everyone tries to be, conflict will occur at some point. Out of the fifteen musicians I interviewed, only one had a story about a conflict relating to competition for location (a few reported issues with homeless folk or a personality clash with another musician).

Me: Have you ever seen a fight over it [busking location]? Devon: Yeah! I’ve been in one... My first day on the street, we were setting up in front of the courthouse, supreme court… whatever it’s called… always on Royal Street and there were these guys who play buckets, the bucket drummers. And they said they were gonna be moving to a different spot at a different time. So my band said ok. So we sat there from 11, and they said they’d be done at 11:30. We sat there till 12, and they didn’t even play. They had like gone somewhere, so we were just like whatever. We’re gonna set up and start playing cause they’re wasting the day, we can make money, the streets are gonna open up in 4 hours. So we start playing, 20, 30 minutes later this guy comes back whose with them and he’s like “what are ya’ll doin, you can’t do that, you can’t disrespect me, I’m not a kid, I’m a grown ass man” and we’re like man, you weren’t here, you said you were goin to leave. And the cops… this guy was going off… and people started getting involved just walking by and then luckily the cops showed up, and I dono what the cop said to him, but he eventually walked away and we just started playing again. But I’ve never been in an actual fight, other than just verbally.

Me: Does that seem to be the minority? People freakin out like that? Devon: I would say so, cause it’s pretty understood, you get the spot, it’s your spot, and if you leave its not yours anymore. If you’re there you’re there, if you’re not, you’re not. That’s how I think about it (Interview, Devon, August 6, 2014).

In Devon’s incident, a verbal altercation arose when the shared ideas about the use of space was not being followed. The other group no longer had claim to the spot because they left and were not playing, but felt they still did for reasons unknown to Devon. It is interesting that the other group was one of bucket drummers, whose presence in my mapping of the Quarter seemed to be
limited to Bourbon Street, and based on what I saw did not seem involved with the rest of the busking community.

Through my interview with Brad, the washboard player who has been playing in New Orleans for nearly thirty years, I was able to get insight into how the lives of street musicians had changed over time. He talked about how there was a time when musicians were more aggressive about securing a location and had what he called “spot wars”. Prior to that, others had discussed the idea of hiring homeless folks to hold a spot for a band until they can get there in the morning, but they had not alluded how intense it had been in the past, or the idea of taking a spot away from someone.

Brad: …But you had to be really good to be able to play there [the A&P, now called Rouses Market], or it’d just get taken away from you. If you were some girl playing Joni Mitchell songs, you weren’t gonna sit on that spot no matter what the rules were. You got this spot; oh you can’t get this spot. This spot can make money for 15 people. Me: how do people take spots? Brad: well you just hold the spot. They used to have spot wars, it goes through periods where [in a sarcastic, singsong voice] this community, this wonderful family of entertainers are like, totally cut throat, and… spot wars. Where everyone has to go out and just sit on that spot like all night to hold it… Me: I’ve heard of people hiring homeless people to hold spots for them Brad: Right, and then you have people trying to cheat that system. It’s like no. You really should have somebody in the band… rotate. I used to not have to do anything like that in those bands cause I was such a little star, and if I was tired it wasn’t gonna do anybody good. But I’d show up early so they could go to the bathroom, and I did a lot of the driving, I just don’t wanna sit on the spot. Totally destroys my creative… by the time I sat out there since 3 o’clock, you know, at 7 or 8 when somebody else comes, dealing with so many drunk assholes… the mind ain’t right and you’re not gonna play well. Me: Do people do that anymore? Brad: spot wars? I dono, now I’m Brad, wandering minstrel guy. Well now its summer, so there ain’t a lot of motivation to sit on a spot because, other people make more money than me, they have an act, designed to make money, whereas mine is almost… makes that difficult. I just wanna make you jump through hoops to give me money\textsuperscript{x}. I dono. (Interview, Brad, August 10, 2014)

Brad did not know why the community goes through periods of greater cooperation and ones of more aggressive practices. He spoke of the fluctuations in other aspects of life that have occurred
over the years, including the tensions between the city/ Vieux Carré residents and the musicians and how tourists are sometimes conservative or reserved, and at other times more willing to “get a little funky”. I suspect these fluctuations are caused by a combination of factors including personality of those in the community since there are those who are for a season and those who are there for decades, economics, and seasonality. This discussion of changes in community would require a more longitudinal approach, which may be interesting for future research. Brad was the last interview I was able to conduct due to time constraints, so I was unable to ask any others if they could speak about spot wars.

Learning the Tradition: Disputes About Musical Style

Another place where tension arises within the musicians of the French Quarter is a tale as old as time itself. The first is between the older generation and the younger generation, and then between those who were born and raised or have resided in New Orleans for decades and those who arrived more recently. As Jesse alluded to earlier with his criticisms from older musicians about how upsetting punk rock is to them, there are tensions between older, more traditional style musicians and younger ones with newer styles. This seemed especially poignant within the brass bands, since the playing of brass instruments, along with second line parades and jazz funerals are themselves a tradition handed down through families and communities with an emphasis on the traditional training and learning the fundamentals of musicianship. The traditional image of a brass band playing at a funeral is a group of men dressed in pressed black slacks, white shirt, all pressed and creased, black dress shoes, and a white and black hat, typically with the name of the band embroidered in gold on the front. They play dirges such as Swing Low, Sweet Chariot or I’ll Fly Away at a slow marching tempo on the way to the cemetery. Once the body is ‘cut loose’ or buried, the spiritual songs are played up-tempo
Adhering to the tradition is taken so seriously by some of the older generation, that when Danny Barker passed away in 1994, his wife told the community there would not be a second line at his funeral because Barker felt that the tradition was being betrayed and that the younger brass bands were not dressing appropriately or playing traditionally. His wife did finally agree to have one when a student of Barker’s, Gregg Stafford, promised to make sure everything would be up to Barker’s standards. Stafford could not bear the thought of the man he felt had helped preserve and save the tradition not having a traditional burial (ibid: 122).

A number of ‘old timers’ take issue with the deviation from the way they were brought up in the tradition, which includes the incorporation of new styles of music into the brass band repertoire.

It started with the Dirty Dozen Brass Band in the 1980s. They broke from the tradition of previous brass bands by incorporating funk, modern jazz, and r&b rhythms and structure. Instead of just playing the traditional songs passed down, they composed new songs that discussed a broader subject matter. An early hit of theirs, “My Feet Cant Fail Me Now” comes from a 1978 Funkadelic song, and sounds like an Afrobeat, Fela Kuti song in terms of rhythm and the saxophone part. Dirty Dozen’s style also differs in that the songs are comprised of short phrases repeated throughout. Whereas previously, the tuba formed “the harmonic foundation by outlining the changing chord progression” (ibid: 119), it now tends to be the short, repeated phrases. Older brass band music was for marching; Dirty Dozen is danceable.

The Soul Rebels are heavily influenced by hip hop and r&b groups such as De La Soul, Tribe Called Quest, Rick James, and Earth, Wind, and Fire. Their music is not written to be marched to, instead is intended to be recorded and played through a sound system, utilizing electronic instruments. They use spoken word, rap style lyrics, and say specifically that they wanted to be like Public Enemy, a socially conscious rap group. This is seen clearly in their
biggest hit, “Let Your Mind Be Free”, which is a plea to young, black New Orleanians to “Free your mind with education/ Help to build a better nation/Stop killing for recreation/Let your mind be free” (ibid: 131-32). The innovation and break from tradition continues today, as two of the brass bands shows I attended had electric guitar in one, and in another had keyboard, a drum set (as opposed to one man with a marching drum and symbol, and another with a marching snare), and an electric bass.

Chris brought it up in discussing his favorite spot to play; “my favorite location to play… it’s uh…. I like… I like playing on Jackson Square. When the right cats are there. And it HAS to be the right players, cause there’s a whole bunch of young kids that’s not learning the tradition, that’s not learning the old school, and they just play loud” (Interview, August 10, 2014). The groups he speaks about are rather loud and powerful, and I witnessed the manifestation of this tension first hand. On three or four afternoons, I saw two different brass bands playing on Jackson Square. At one end, by the Cabildo, the traditional jazz group of four to six older fellows, sometimes they had an accordion or a guitar player with them. They played the standards everyone expects, such as When the Saints Go Marching In, or Ain’t Misbehavin’ and charmed audiences, telling jokes and bantering with them. At the other end of The Square was a group of about ten to fifteen young men (none looked older than twenty-five or so). They played songs by modern brass bands like Rebirth Brass Band, or the Hot 8 Brass Band, or they did brass compositions of popular radio hits like Crazy by Gnarles Barkley. They were powerful, they could be heard blocks away, and made it difficult for the traditional jazz group. In photographs of one of these instances below, we can see the two groups, and the size of the audiences that are gathered.
The young guys had a small crowd of about fifteen to twenty gathered when I snapped this picture, and they were overpowering the other group, who only had three people stopped at the moment. It was also rainy, and there was a small amount of construction taking place by the older group which certainly contributed to overall small turnout. This is still a good example of what Chris spoke of. Not only do the ‘old timers’ say the young guys play loudly, but also lament the fact that they are not learning the fundamentals;

Chris: ok, the younger kids, the younger brass bands, yes. There are issues with them. The old cats, I’ll hear em complain that they play too loud, and they’re playing too modern, and they’re eventually gonna shoot themselves in the foot because they’re not learning the trad’. Not learning the tradition. Because they’re not really learning how to play.
Me: they’re focusing on the flash, and not on the substance?
Chris: And not on the substance. Exactly” (Interview, August 10, 2014).

This is one place where tension among street musicians can be seen, though there are deeper tensions and conflicts unique to brass bands both within and without the community. Brass bands as a major force within the black New Orleanian community, and their relationship with the Second Line tradition and Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs are discussed in depth through anthropological studies conducted by others. While there is overlap between street music in the French Quarter, and brass bands, they are like musical ice bergs; what one sees in Jackson Square is just a fraction, and beyond the scope of this study. Sakakeeny 2013 & 2010, Regis 2001 discuss at length Second Line parades, jazz funerals, brass bands as a means to talk about issues of structural violence, and a reclamation of colonized spaces and bodies.

**Paying Your Dues: Disputes about Local Rights and Newcomers**

A second facet of the conflict between the older and younger generation is origin, location and time based. Musicians born and raised in New Orleans, or who have lived there for long enough to have become New Orleanians themselves experience some level of discomfort with those who have come to the city more recently. Papa Kool, a New Orleans native, understands this sentiment and explained it like this; “You go onto someone else turf, who have been playing there for years, of course they gonna feel uncomfortable about that. Come in from out of town and they know they from New Orleans, they know they New Orleans music, you can’t blame em. This ain’t they home. You can’t just come to nobodies home and bogart it, it aint right” (Interview, Papa Kool, August 6, 2014). Though his phrasing is somewhat convoluted, Papa Kool is saying that it is reasonable for those who are native, and know their New Orleans music to feel uncomfortable with outsiders. Those who have earned their place in
the community feel some discomfort or resentment when out of towners arrive in the city, “bogart” (selfishly monopolize) busking space and collect tourist dollars without having earned their place in the community through the proper channels. From the stories I was told by individuals who had either successfully integrated, or were on their way to doing so, the process seemed to be more nuanced than just that the old timers didn’t like these younger musicians coming in, all came back to respect. Respect for the older musicians, respect for the place, respect for the music and respect for the tradition. There is a massive difference between a new arrival who is humble and knows they have a great deal to learn, and one who arrives thinking they will own the town. This of course plays itself out very differently in the case of the gutter punks, as their transient nature and the fact they are a tangential community create a very different dynamic between them and the other musicians.

New musicians to the scene soon learn who the old timers are, and that they must show respect if they want to get anywhere. Devon, who had been in New Orleans for about four months when I met him, spoke about this;

Devon: I know that the old timers get what they… if they want it, they pretty much got it. Like there’s this person named Doreen who plays in front of Rouses, who stays. And she just literally will set her stuff up and leaves, and if we see it there we know not to set up there…. I don’t know all the logistics of it, but from what I understand she’s the reason we can still play on Royal Street, so that’s fine with me…
Me: But you haven’t felt any backlash or anything?
Devon: Nope, as long as you’re respectful, they’re respectful. And people who are older in this community like teaching younger people. So, that’s what it’s all about (Interview, August 6, 2014)

It is important to understand Devon’s attitude and goals “I came out here to learn, just to learn. Learn how to hustle my ass off, learn a bunch of music I’ve never played before, the whole New Orleans Traditional Jazz, Brass Band music, work on my classical chops” (Interview, August 6,
2014). He came to learn, and to pay his dues and to work hard. He is a good example of someone who integrates into the community and is not the source of the tension Papa Kool talked about.

Chris spoke at length of the process of becoming one of the Jackson Square musicians. Showing up continually, and being willing and ready to seize opportunities when they occur is crucial to playing with the groups.

Me: So seniority has a lot to do with who gets what?
C: yeah! But you keep showing your face enough on the street with a guitar case on your back eventually they might… Hey! Their guitar player might get sick that day, come here! And that’s when… that’s not an audition… they don’t audition you down here.
Me: it’s sink or swim?
C: Yeah, its sink or swim immediately. ‘Hey man I see you with that guitar on your back all the time, you ready to play?’ yeah I’m ready to! Your answer is always yes.
Me: Yes! Yes I am.
C: Yes I am! Don’t say you don’t know their tunes. Don’t ever say that! Fake it till ya make it. Make it happen captain! (We both laugh)
Me: so even if you’re fumbling along, play along man.
C: listen to the tuba, listen to the melody and fill in the parts.

Always being ready to jump in, showing up with an eagerness and willingness to learn. Similarly to not learning the tradition, which creates issues with the older and younger brass bands, paying ones dues is a significant part;

Chris: … these days I’m playing rhythm guitar with the brass bands down on Jackson Square. But I started out playing trombone with them. Two years ago. Then I got in with the old timers down there, had to pay my dues, had to play for about three days free before they started seeing enough improvement. Because that’s the way they do it down here. That’s just the way they do it. You gotta prove yourself, you gotta learn their material, and keep improving on each performance, that you’re learning their material. Cause it IS theirs. And if you are not worthy… nah… they’ll use ya… but you aint getting paid until you improve.
Me: I can see that. Those guys been down here a long time, huh?
Chris: oh yeah. Mark ‘Tuba’ Smith, you need to talk to him. Mark ‘Tuba’ Smith. He’s the oldest guy of the old guys. He’s been out there playing on Jackson Square since the 70s. You need to talk to him.

The songs, the space itself, and the tradition of playing traditional jazz music that was born in New Orleans is the cultural capitol of the ‘old timers’. It was handed down to them, and they are
the culture bearers. If a new player is not willing to put in their time and due diligence, they will
not share in the profits. They may be used to fill out a section of the band, but they will not get
paid until they play by the rules.

Later in our discussion, in a wonderful ethnographic moment that demonstrates the
process of becoming integrated, as well as the occasionally bizarre way things in New Orleans
happen, Chris told me his story about when he first showed up to play on Jackson Square a few
years previously. He was staying in the Busker’s Bunkhouse at the time, which was a commune/
squat house ran by Mrs. Pearl AKA The Silver Lady (she paints herself silver and stands in the
Square to collect money to run the Bunkhouse). I tried to find the Bunkhouse to interview Mrs.
Pearl and those staying there, but I couldn’t find it and everything I read about it said it was
closed down. When Chris first arrived, he had little success busking with his solo guitar act, and
so Mrs. Pearl encouraged him to take his trombone down to the Square to play with the brass
bands, where he was approached by Mark ‘Tuba’ Smith;

Chris: …he walks up to me, it was before the first set had formed up, he walks up to me,
this chubby, fat black fella with that tuba, that busted up tuba around him. He’s already
drunk at 10 o’clock in the morning. He walks up to me… (Chris acts out the way he
walks, a heavy footed, slow saunter) bum….bum….bum…. “I know you didn’t come
down here to just look purty with that horn in yo hand” I said “No Sir, I did not” and he
said “you wanna play on the next set?” I said “yes sir, I’d like to try to sit in” he said
“aight, you got the first solo”
Me: Oh shit.
Chris: (laughs, and did an excited little dance)
Me: Shiiiiit!
Chris: Hit the ground running! You gonna hit the ground running when you come to the
New Orleans school of music. You got first solo. I’m like “oh shiiiiit, here we go”. So we
get to the end of the set. There was this cat, Wolf. That’s another guy you need to meet.
You need to interview. He’s been down here forever. He’s travelled around the world.
He’s a mother-fucker. Good guy though. He’s the good kinda crazy.
Me: that’s my favorite kind. I love the good kinda crazy.
Chris: He’s the good kind. And uh…but he was on that set that morning, and I heard him
play, and I’m like… that’s what I gotta learn to play like? Oh shit. Cause I thought I was
a pretty good player till I heard him.
Me: What does he play? Trombone?
Chris: Trombone. So we get to the end of like two or three sets, and I’m like ‘thank you very much” and I go on about my business with my tail between my legs…
Me: Cause you just got schooled?
Chris: Yeah I got spanked. Now I know what I gotta do. So… as it turns out… as the fates would have it… there’s this brass band that used to rehearse at Mrs. Pearls camp every Wednesday night, and they would be, they would bring lots of food and lots of beer, and it was like a little social crew, club kinda thing. Before we even started playing everybody would get lit up.
Me: like ya do!
Chris: like you do down here. Good Children… that was the name of the group. And they found out I played trombone, that they had a trombone player stayin in the tent. “Boy, get yo ass up!” and I started learning the tunes through them, and we had a good ole time, and so I’m like ok, now I know what I need to do. I need to learn these old school trad tunes, and next time I show up on Jackson Square, I’m gonna be ready. So I show up about a week later, and I’m sittin on the same park bench, probably even wearing the same damn clothes. And Mark “Tuba” Smith, he walks up…. Bum… bum… drunk as fuck, same like the first time
Me: He has a distinctive swagger, I know the swagger.
Chris: He says “You’re that little white boy showed up with that pretty-ass horn last week, aint ya?” I said “yes sir, I am” he said “you been home practicing, haven’t ya?” I said “yes sir, I have” he said “let’s see what you got today” (laughs)
Me: Nice! This guy sounds awesome.
Chris: And so I played for three sets, we had a good ole time. He comes up to me after the third set, and he says “aight, from here on out, every time you show up, you’re gonna start getting a cut. You’re getting it” (Interview, Chris, August 10, 2014)

At another point in the interview, Chris said that if the band felt like a new player has not ‘payed their dues’ or earned it through practice, they may still be invited to sit in on a set from time to time to fill out the band, but they would not get a cut of the money. This story is an example of a new arrival figuring out, and playing by the rules of the community. This story would have gone very differently if he had been arrogant, or if he had been unwilling to admit he needed to improve and did not then go practice, or had he given up and not returned. Tension between the old timers and the new musicians come when those who have been there a long time, and established the community feel that their privileged position is being infringed upon. As Devon said, “no one messes with Doreen’s gear.” She is an institution and has been part of those
fighting for street musician’s rights to play. Some of these musicians have been out there their whole lives, and want the tradition to live on the way they grew up in it.

**If You Can Play, You Can Play: Race and Ethnicity**

The racialized element of a music scene has been a major theme when it comes to talking broadly about jazz, blues, rhythm and blues, and local New Orleans brass band music (see Burns 2001, Ryan 2011). Each of these were created by African-Americans, and then became popular with other groups. After my initial pilot study, before I had conducted interviews, other academics at conferences most often commented on the racial divide evident in the photographs presented in my presentation. In addition to race being brought up often to me through questions, it is bare minimum addressed in much of the literature. Sakakeeny’s work is about racism and structural violence in the African American community on New Orleans, and how that intersects with those in brass bands, and others have written about race as it relates to music and tourism in the city (see Gotham 2007, Watts and Porter 2013). With race coming up so often in the structural discussion of the music community, I expected musicians to agree that it was a major theme in their daily lives. I was greatly surprised when they told me it was not. The answers I received when I asked “Does race or ethnicity play a role in the busking community?” provoked almost the same response, verbatim from most musicians. They were; “I don’t think no race play any part in it, you know. Just musicians, that’s what I think. If you can play, you gonna know you can play. If you can play you gonna see dollars. Like you see in mine. That’s how you know you can do it” (Interview, Papa Kool, August 6, 2014).

My first interaction with Papa Kool came a week or so before our interview. I stopped on Decatur where he plays an amplified, beat up Fender guitar. An African-American man in his fifties and a New Orleans native, he asked me what I was doing in the city. Upon explaining to
him a little about anthropological research looking at local culture, he quickly came back with "you mean black people culture?" His remark caught me off guard, and I could not tell if he was teasing me or if he was offended. Judging by how much teasing he did during our longer discussion, the former seems more accurate.

Chris scoffed at the question of race, saying; “Absolutely not. If you can play, you can play. Usually it’s just about your ears, not your eyes. If you can play, you can play. They don’t care” (Interview, Chris, August 10, 2014). “I don’t think it does. If it’s good, it’s good, if it’s bad, it’s bad. Black people, white people, brown, yellow… I haven’t seen any brown or yellow people… But I see black people and white people that’s for sure. I don’t think it matters racially what you are, as long as you’re doing something well” (Interview, Devon, August 6, 2014). Benji said it plays a role for the listeners, but that among musicians it was not important; “Well, yeah everyone wants to hear a black jazz musician. That’s what they come here for. But I don’t see race having an impact on if you’re gonna get recognized if your good at music. They care about the music, they don’t care what color you are” (Interview, Benji, July 30, 2014). For the musicians, their priority was musicianship, and they did not feel that race played a big role in your place within it.

In a 2011 article by Jennifer Ryan, that influenced my own work, similar themes are discussed in the Memphis blues scene. She talks about how in the discourse surrounding blues music, particularly when it comes to academics and critics (read: not musicians in the scene themselves), there is the tendency to connect authenticity to a rural, impoverished and spiritual/mythical past, and to denigrate venues that are seen as too manufactured, clean, or sterile, which encompasses the tourist destination venues on Beale Street. Just think of the story of Robert Johnson, a poor Black man from rural Mississippi who met the devil at the crossroads
and sold his soul. In Ryan’s study, she spent time in Memphis, particularly on Beale Street, conducting fieldwork with the musicians there. She asked them how they felt about the more touristy clubs on Beale Street as opposed to the juke joints that are privileged by the critics, and about the roles ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’ played. She found they often preferred the Beale Street clubs because they can provide a safe and clean work environment; both spiritually, being more family friendly, and because they are regulated. They also provide a steady paycheck, and allow musicians to circumvent going on tour as to be near their families. In her interviews with African-American musicians, they understood the discourse, and knew how difficult it can be in a scene where being mistaken for being black based on one’s playing is about as high praise a white-boy can hope to get. Like Benji said, tourists come for one thing, but the color of a musician is irrelevant to other musicians if they can play. In an effort to minimize the impact of the authenticity discourse, African-American blues musicians would go out of their way to encourage and mentor promising white musicians (Ryan 2011).

Though race is not a major issue for musicians when it comes to relating to one another, it does play a role in the process of the French Quarter as a site of heritage tourism. Like Ryan’s critics, tourists also want to hear African-American’s play jazz and blues on the grounds that these genres of music were born out of those communities, and are thus perceived to be more authentic. Musicians are aware of this, and they are indeed selling a product. The ‘old timers’ that play on Jackson Square, which with the exception of five or so individuals I saw over two summers, were all African-American men. I am confident that they could play When The Saints Go Marching In or Ain’t Misbehavin’ or I Found A New Baby in their sleep at this point, but they keep playing it because it is part of the expected repertoire, and part of what they feel their role is. While many of the younger musicians break from that and innovate, they feel it is in their
interest to preserve the tradition, to keep playing in the style of early Dixieland and traditional jazz. That is their contribution to the heritage aspect of tourism here. Similar to the Vieux Carré Commission’s motivation in preserving a particular historic moment in the French Quarter, which is part of the attraction for visitors.

Tourists

Similarly to how Ryan talks about in the authenticity discourse of blues music and its impact on Beale Street tourism, there are varying ideas about what constitutes authentic New Orleans music, which certainly plays a role in tourist behavior. Those travelling to a particular location to consume a commodity (in this case, music), generally have particular expectations as to what they will see or hear upon arrival. There was something they saw, read, or heard that influenced their decision to visit, and as discussed earlier, the music of New Orleans has been marketed and packaged for tourist consumption. There are ideas about what authentic New Orleans music is, and what one should expect to hear. This ended up being my most convoluted question. It was sometimes difficult to explain clearly that I wanted to know what the musicians thought about tourists pre-conceptions, and what impact that had on them.

Me: how do you think that tourists perceptions of what is authentic New Orleans music… how do you think that impacts their interactions with musicians?
Chris:… Is this an algebra question?
Me: a little bit… maybe…. Cause there’s like the idea of what is authentic New Orleans music…
Chris: yeah, and there’s all kinds of interpretations of what that is.
Me: exactly, so what are kinda… your thoughts about that? About peoples preconceived ideas….
Chris: hmmm…. It…
Me: authenticity is tricky.
Chris: authenticity is a tricky one. If you go down to Spotted Cat, they’re specialty is, for the most part, producing bands that play old school blues, 20s and 30s music. Music before the record player. Some people consider that the real authentic New Orleans jazz. And other people consider anybody with an instrument in their hand, if you’re in New
Orleans, that’s authentic New Orleans music cause you’re here doin it now. So yeah, that’s a tough question to answer (Interview, Chris, August 10, 2014).

Chris had difficulty giving a straight answer, suggesting instead multiple authenticities. His response is where I would like to begin, in the discussion of musicians notions of authenticity, and how they feel tourist’s perceptions of what is authentically New Orleans impacts them. He acknowledges there are many interpretations about what that means exactly, ranging from a tight definition tied to a specific point in history, to the idea that if its music created in New Orleans it’s authentic to the city. Curtis is of a similar mind when it comes to the tricky nature of what authenticity means for himself. Tourist’s expectations will vary, which influences their listening behavior;

“Depends on their music education. The older crowd will know different styles, and everyone is particular to their own tastes and sensibilities… As far as authentic New Orleans music… that’s hard to peg, unless it’s in the jazz genre. Because I consider myself to play authentic New Orleans music cause I wrote it in New Orleans. Has some background in blues a little bit in jazz” (Curtis, August 6, 2014).

Of the musicians I spoke with, he was one of the few who held a more liberal view of authenticity. The general consensus was that the tourists who cared or knew about music came to New Orleans to hear traditional jazz bands play the set of standards or the brass bands, and to a lesser extent blues. “They [tourists] expect that right there (points to the jazz band playing down the street). Unless you’re on Bourbon where they just wanna hear rap or rock” (Interview, Benji, July 30, 2014).

Playing on Royal Street or Jackson Square, those who were able to stand out either through gimmicks (one person mentioned a violinist that wore a werewolf mask), or by appealing to tourists expectations and desires tended to be more successful. Sheer skill and talent is not the only variable in the amount of dollars in the bucket.
“I would say the better groups get paid better, but the more you play New Orleans music, the more money you make. So you could have like a really good funk band or something down the street, but if you have like a pretty good New Orleans, like clarinet, trumpet, trombone, sousaphone, that band will be killing it and this band might be way better than them, but they’re playing that music and that’s what the people wanna hear…. So... hope that answers that” (Interview, Devon, August 6, 2014).

People stop and listen (and drop some money) when they hear something they want to hear. As Curtis alluded to, what exactly that is depends on their expectations, musical education, or interest level. Not every single tourist comes to hear music specifically connected to the city. People do come to New Orleans for a number of reasons, such as the party atmosphere on Bourbon Street, the culinary traditions, or the non-musical history and architecture. While walking in The Quarter, making my rounds, I overheard a few teenage girls talking to one another while visiting the tourist knick knack shops on Decatur with their family. One of the girls was raving about this saxophone player she saw playing a cover of a Red Hot Chili Peppers song and that he was her favorite musician so far. This is not authentically New Orleans by any of the musicians’ definitions; it was not written there, nor do the Chili Peppers have a connection to the city. But she knew the song, and for a portion of visitors, that is all they care about.

Jesse:”I have a side note that I wanna say for the record: what I have learned about busking. People do not care about your original music. No one comes out.” Darious: “They wanna to hear a song they know played your way” (Interview, Clem, August 2, 2014).

The musicians of Clem McGillicutty learned that originals do not get them very far with most tourists, especially since they already fall outside of the jazz and brass tradition. Of course there are punk rock or folk fans that happen by, but by and large they felt greatly impacted by preconceptions about New Orleans music. They told me about the impact they felt tourists perceptions of New Orleans music was;
Zach: “considerable… cause we don’t have horns.. lacking what would be considered New Orleans music”
Darius: if they did their homework, they would know Decatur is the dirty kids. If you aren’t a black kid tapping or a black dude with a trombone, you’re a Dirty band. They know were here, or they don’t and are excited… or not excited at all (laughs)” (Interview, Clem, August 2, 2014)

While some musicians reported learning styles New Orleans is famous for, which is also what tourists want, giving people what they want, and catering to the audience is not something all buskers do. They do however tend to recognize the role it plays, and depending on what they hope to get out of their time playing on the streets, they will shape their act or not to fit that.

“well the cons are it’s the most insecure existence you can probably think of doing in this country. You’d have to go like sub-Saharan Africa or something to find a less viable business plan. Especially what I do. People make money playing in the street every day. Usually the same people that always make money. And not always the best. They may be really good technically sometimes, but even then they’re not up to my… I have weird eclectic taste anyway. If you wanna make money you really gotta give people a product that they want. If you wanna make money in the street, you gotta give them what they expect or want. Especially if you really polish it, shrink wrap it and sell it as a CD. It’s exactly like that. That’s not what I like about street music. I’m like a little anarchy, I play a friggin washboard as weirdly as I can, I’m like so… away. I’m totally giving nobody what they want. I’m giving me what I want. No, but I do have like, jazz drummers. The people who get what I’m doing… and sometimes its other people who have no real sense of rhythm, they just like the sound or whatever” (Interview, Brad, August 10, 2014).

Brad walks around with an elaborate washboard around his neck that has all manner of bells and chimes strapped to it, and a little tip jar hanging from the bottom. He wears gloves with thimbles tapped to the finger tips, and he walks around The Quarter listening to an mp3 player through headphones. He can be difficult to tip, as one must chase him down in order to put money in his box. He has not always worked this way, and used to play with various kinds of bands from brass to folk. Brad knows the ins and outs of busking in New Orleans well, and understands the relationships between musicians and tourists, but he chooses to play the way he does because it makes him happy. While what he does falls outside of the mold, he is a wonderful example of the musical spectacle and variety to be seen and heard in the French Quarter.
Most groups and individuals do however make an attempt to appeal to the crowds. They did this either through some of the gimmicks mentioned before, or by ‘hamming it up’. I saw this happen a number of times, usually with the brass bands or traditional jazz bands. One of my personal favorites was when I saw the famous Doreen Ketchens playing with a group, and Wolf, a trombone player was interacting with the crowd. He looked out at the decent sized bunch gathered on either side of Royal Street in front of the Rouses, walked over to the several buckets they had sitting out to collect tips, turning them over and tapping them on the ground one by one, showing us that they were empty. He then exaggeratedly counted the people sitting and indicated his disgust and confusion that the size of the crowd, and the amount of dollars did not add up. The groups that regularly play on Jackson Square would insist people come up and stand with them for photos, dance with tourists, let them hold their trumpet (it was usually the ‘lead’ guy who tended to be a trumpet player). One time, the band had just decided to call it a day, but saw a group taking their pictures from afar. The trumpet player beckoned them over, and insisted they come take a photo with them (pictured below left). The band picked their horns back up and played When The Saints Go Marching In just for that group. They also had humorous sayings they would use such as “the more you drink, the better you think we sound”. There were also many instances of musicians flirting with girls, bantering, dancing, and in one case, miming spanking a woman dancing provocatively (pictured below right).

The relationship between tourist and street musician is a nuanced one. For the tourist, the musician is part of the landscape, they are a part of the entertainment package one consumes when visiting New Orleans. They are something you take a few pictures with or of, throw a few dollars in their bucket, and maybe buy a CD if the mood strikes. For musicians, tourists are their life blood, but can also be an annoyance; “They make me my money, so I try to be nice as
possible…tourists can be fucking assholes, and they can be ignorant and dumb… They can also make your night” (Interview, Benji, July 30, 2014). Nearly all musicians reported that the bulk of their business came from tourists, while some said that it was not out of the question to be tipped by a local person; “People supporting street musicians are tourists. Usually never more than a buck from a local” (Interview, Curtis, August 6, 2014).

When I asked musicians how they relate to tourists, I received varied responses: frustration, indifference alongside acknowledgement of the relationship. One young man said you see many angels out on Royal Street – beautiful girls who stop for a few minutes and then walk out of your life forever. The idea that they can be surprising and you can never be sure who will connect with what genre was also articulated;

Jason: “To me it’s weird cause you can never pinpoint a tourist… no, not sayin if they are a tourist or not. Just what their mindset is when they listenin to our music if they’re gonna throw money in or not….. like the old Santa motha fucka, who stood there and listened to our music for three minutes and bought a CD. I would never have expected that man to buy our CD…Then you see the bougie motha fuckas or the younga motha fuckas, who won’t throw you no money. Once in awhile if they’re drunk enough” (Interview, Clem, August 2, 2014).

Drunk tourists are either musicians’ worst nightmare if they get belligerent or are nasty, but mostly, alcohol makes people want to party more, and they often become looser with their money. Some buskers plan their schedule around the blood alcohol content of tourists; “I’ve just
been coming out at night when it’s cooler and people have had a little more alcohol in their system” (Curtis, August 6, 2014). While sitting out on the street with the boys from Clem McGillicutty, one guy walked by and dropped a bill in their case, only to realize he had dropped a twenty dollar bill instead of the intended five dollar note. He switched it out, much to our chagrin. Later, when discussing the significance of alcohol and its role in money making, they were certain if it had been later in the night, and he had been drunk, he would not have noticed the larger bill he dropped. “You make more money in the daytime than in the night time. Until the drunk walk starts” (Interview, Clem, August 2, 2014). The ‘drunk walk’ is later in the night, after people have been drinking, and then stumble up and down Decatur and Royal going to and from the street car line on Canal Street over to the music clubs on Frenchman Street, or taking a detour after visiting the clubs on Bourbon.

As evidenced by the tone in a number of the quotes I have used throughout this chapter and the way musicians spoke to me about what they do, New Orleans street musicians are proud of what they do. If the idea of what they do not being a ‘real’ job was approached, the notion was immediately torn apart; “What the fucks a real job? This IS a real job. Trust me. You play guitar on the street from 6-8, 10 (sic) hours a day, it’s a real job” (Interview, Chris, August 10, 2014). They have a pride in the city, and a pride in doing what they do as a part of that musical heritage and in what brings visitors to their home. They welcome crowds from all over the world to their great city day in and day out;

Chris: Ok, I’ll tell you something. Playin on the streets in New Orleans, you are playing on a world stage… You are playing on a world stage.
Me: yeah, you got people from all corners of the world coming here…
Chris: All corners. They come here to see exactly what it is that we do. And this is why they come (Interview, Chris, August 10, 2014).
Chapter 5

Street Musicians and the City

In chapter 4, I illustrated how buskers are one in a series of overlapping communities within the Quarter. Not only do these communities all interact and overlap with one another, but they also have a relationship with the structures in place and those who enact, enforce, and lobby for them. The French Quarter is very much a shared space. It is a residential neighborhood where people live, it is a place of business, a vacation destination, as well as a loitering ground. All of these groups have differing ideology about what this space should be used for, and are impacted by city ordinances and policies concerning it. I asked street musicians about their experiences with the police and permit requirements, and I was surprised to find that the more contentious relationships were with residents and store owners.

Play Till They Tell You to Leave: Royal Street Musicians and the Police

During the summer of 2014, on one of the first few days I was in New Orleans I was chatting with a flute player when then two police officers rode by on horseback, and the flutist asked them if they still had to be done playing by 8 pm. The officers said “Eh, play till they tell you to leave. We don’t care, we won’t be here!” to which the musician responded “All right! I can make some more money!”

From what I had read and heard before hand, I expected that police would be much more concerned with buskers following the rules concerning curfews and permits than they were. The musicians generally told me that as long as you are not breaking other laws, and you are keeping your nose clean, the police tended to leave you alone, particularly on Royal Street or Jackson Square (refer to Figures 2 and 3, along with appendix B if needed).
Kent William Bowman reported that any problems with police have not been severe. Just minor, such as being told he could not play in a particular location. While walking with him to where we were going to do the interview, we passed a few officers, and he greeted them cordially and they seemed to recognize him and return the greetings. Kent said that they all know him and like him, and like to hear him play (Interview, Kent William Bowman, July 28, 2014).

Kurt sees it as a symbiotic relationship, or that it could be, and as long as;

“You aren’t a dick. I’d say that’s the way everything operates in New Orleans, across the board. From your relationship with the cops... If you’re tryin to cause trouble they’re gonna take you away. If you’ve done something wrong and they kinda understand they’re gonna let you go. I’ve seen people get busted for pot smoking out of an apple… and they let them go” (Interview Kurt, August 6, 2014).

None of the musicians that are usually found on Royal or in The Square said they had any issues with the police connected with music, and only one musician said they had ever dealt with permits. Permits are actually only required in the French Market District, which is on the river side of Decatur. I did not see many people busk in the area\textsuperscript{xiv}, except for in front of Café Du Monde, or the occasional street performer near the same area. “In front of Café Du Monde, you’re only supposed to play there for 15-20 minutes, and they require permits in the French Market district. It’s not sanctioned by the Vieux Carré entirely. Permits are free, but you gotta get there at a certain time” (Interview, Kurt, August 6, 2014). In fact, those who play within the Quarter in the traditional jazz bands were often unaware that permits even existed, and they were either baffled or kind of laughed when I asked about them. Again and again the idea of being respectful and not making any trouble being the key to avoiding any harassment came up in discussions of all manner of conflict. The police know that people come to hear street musicians, and that the street musicians are out there going about their business;

Me: Have you ever had to deal with like, getting a permit or anything?
Devon: I didn’t know…From what I understand, you don’t need one. I hear you might... you’re supposed to have one, but I don’t know anything about that, but I know the cops don’t ask for it, and I definitely talk to the police while I’m out there.
Me: have you ever had any issues with the police?
Devon: they know you’re out there to make your money, as long as you’re not out there causing trouble (Interview, August 6, 2014).

The only one out of the fifteen musicians I spoke with that had ever acquired a permit generally plays far down in the lower Quarter on Decatur. He did not sit on the side that would fall into the jurisdiction of the French Market, though he still acquired a permit as a preventative measure;

Keynin: No, police don’t really bother me. I don’t really bother nobody, so they don’t bother me. If they see that you’re just gonna do your thing, do your thing. Knock on wood; I never really had any problems with them.
Me: have you ever messed with getting a permit?
Keynin: yeah, I have my permit.
Me: cool, where do you get a permit? Everyone else I’ve talked to said they didn’t, and they didn’t care.
Keynin: It’s not that I care; it’s just that I don’t wanna get fucked with by the cops. And anything that prevents me from getting fucked with by the cops, I will go for.
Me: that’s smart.
Keynin: Um, but yeah, there is the French Market institute, and you get a permit over there, and it takes like 5 minutes (Interview, August 10, 2014).

Keynin took preventative measures so as to avoid any issues with the police, which he had not had thus far. None of the Royal or Jackson Square musicians I spoke with had acquired permits or had any issues with the police. Furthermore, they reported that it is a very “live and let live” world; if you are not causing major problems, not being rude to officers or others, and are just out in the Quarter, performing music, there was no reason for trouble; “People who have interactions with the cops tend to be troublemakers” (Interview, Benji, July 30, 2014). Worst case scenario, you were told that it was past curfew and it was time to pack it up. The story I heard from other Decatur Street buskers and gutter punks, however, was not the same.
Not Getting Arrested: Decatur Musicians, Gutter punks, and the Police

Darious, the more transient, honorary member of Clem McGillicutty and the Burnouts said that a successful day for him was “Not getting arrested” (Interview, Clem, August 2, 2014). The boys from Clem said that they had never messed with permits, and were aware of the rules of the French Market area if one wishes to not be harassed by the security guards. If caught loitering or panhandling on that side of the street, getting picked up by the police is fairly routine, and Darius had been arrested recently (at the time of the interview) for “obstructing a public walkway” (Interview, Clem, August 2, 2014).

Public disdain for dirty kids and all of the sub-categories (see chapter 4 for discussion) is fairly widespread. Though there are differing attitudes and motives between the various sub-sects of dirty kids, unless one is embedded in that community, they are all lumped together by outsiders. Unfortunately, some among this category who are polite and kind, and even may be community leaders and volunteers, get judged by the misdeeds of the younger punks, some of whom just want to destroy things. Some of the animosity stems from the fact that they are young, with working bodies, and in a city where almost any form of performance can earn one a buck, they beg – sometimes aggressively, belligerently, and on rare occasions, violently. Some are rumored to be young drop-outs with a trust fund who are bored with their privileged lives, and so people resent them for trying to take money from working class folks. Some ire stems from crimes, such as theft, and drug use that are associated with transient youths (Bentley 2012).

In an alternative magazine in New Orleans, Bentley (2012) explains just how differently the police handle gutter punks and oogles (which I am using almost interchangeably here as the police and those reporting them are unaware of the subtle differences described by Darius,
Almost every group of gutter punks contained bare minimum one dog. Many groups I saw had multiple dogs; I saw several panhandling with signs referencing the fact that they wanted money to feed their animals. The first gutter girls I spoke with had just found a paralyzed kitten and had decided to keep her and name her Misery; animal companions are a staple among transient youths. Some of this is due to the misinformation that police are less likely to arrest people because dealing with the animals is a nuisance. The truth is;

NOPD does whatever it likes to oogles, dogs or no. In January the NOPD major offense log noted Unit 502A, “responding to a complaint about gutter punks” along St. Roch dealt with the hassle of a dog by shooting it... Each police district has its own arbitrary and arbitrarily enforced rules about how many feet you must stay from a curb or stop light, what you can do and what your sign can say. No matter how nice you are or how scrupulously you observe the district’s policies, if someone calls 911 you’re likely to get arrested or at least hit with a hefty fine for “aggressive panhandling.” Oogles don’t know these rules, because they aren’t hooked into how New Orleans works. They don’t know a lot of things. As we learned tragically a couple years back, some don’t know not to build a fire inside a wooden building (Bentley 2012).

The gutter punks I interviewed did not have dogs, and any run-ins with the police they had in New Orleans were related to loitering offenses. Darious in particular had a contentious relationship with the police, and some interesting thoughts on reason that police targeted transient young people.

Differential Policing: Preserving the Image of the Quarter

Me: Do most cops that walk by harass you?
Darius: Here’s the way it goes, here’s the way it goes…during the day you have the tourists and the cops don’t wanna look like pricks. They wanna sell their city still. When there’s no one around, and they fuckin’ got the opportunity, and someone’s parked there. Boom! Fuck with you! Cause they can. But they don’t wanna look like assholes of New Orleans, the fucking prick cops, for the tourists cause they want you to come back to their city. This whole city’s a tourist trap” (Interview, Clem, August 2, 2014)
Darius feels that the reason the police harass them more than others is that the presence of gutter punks does not fit into the New Orleans brand discussed in chapter 2 as part of the effort of urban branding to bring in tourist dollars. The gutter punks who busk are not always playing something that fits in with the traditional jazz, blues, or old timey music that pervades Royal Street. I did not have the opportunity to explore this idea further in my interviews. It is more likely that it is a safety or comfort issue, as the biggest complaints are aggressive panhandling, harassing tourists (even I got irritated a time or two being asked repeatedly if I was going to eat any left-over’s I had), or petty theft (I did indeed witness a dirty kid take a water bottle off of someone’s chained up bicycle, stating that “they should have known that would happen”).

They are transient young people, who stay for a season and then move on. They are not becoming members of the larger New Orleans community, and earning that performers respect buskers spoke of in chapter 4, and there is a great deal of mistrust and irritation between them and the city. Chris summed up the situation with gutter punks, the French Quarter and the police with this;

Chris: Well gutter punks never last long here.
Me: they seem to move in and out a lot.
Chris: They move in and out a lot. They move with the seasons. There’ll be a flood of them during festival season, but the city has started cracking down on them. The word is out that you ain’t welcome here unless you dress a little better.
Me: yeah, the only people that I’ve talked to that have really had any run-ins with the police have been gutter punks.
Chris: yeah, exactly. Well there ain’t hardly no police out here. Only recently because of that shooting down on Bourbon where 9 people got hit, has Louisiana State Police called in. that’s why you see Louisiana State Police patrolling the streets. There just ain’t enough cops here. There just ain’t enough local cops. There just ain’t. But that’s a part of why it has a certain wild west, Caribbean mentality. As long as you carry yourself the right way, you ain’t got nothing to worry about (Interview, Chris, August 10, 2014).
Relationships with Business Owners

The group that stands to either lose the most money, or profit the greatest depending on if a nearby busker is entertaining or distracting are the business owners. If a group is a nuisance, taking up all of the walkway in front, or making it impossible for patrons to do what they came into the establishment to do, the business owners find this very frustrating and detrimental. Buskers as a group are aware of this and tried to be conscientious of this. Indeed, several told me that they are more likely to be run off or told to turn down by businesses than by the police. Mario, for example, takes this into great consideration when selecting a spot to play. He looks for spots where he is not infringing on others use of spaces or being an inconvenience (Interview, Mario Canto, July 24, 2014).

Mario plays with an acoustic guitar, so the threat of his sound being a nuisance is not as great as more powerful instruments. A lone saxophone player told me he has to keep his sound down, and face away from the art galleries because they had just told him he was being too loud and disrupting. The very same mechanisms that keep conflict to a minimum with other musicians perform the same function in the relationships between store and business owners and the musicians. They were well aware of the shared aspect of this space, and generally did their best to respect the fact that everyone in the Quarter is trying to make money.

During the first summer of my research, I often saw people bring 6 packs of beer out of Rouse's grocery store and set it down by the (usually) old-timey boxcar kid group playing there (which can be seen in the photo below). I suspected that perhaps the store was providing this to the band as an incentive, as the increased foot traffic, people stopping to listen, helped drum up business within the store as well. I later asked Devon about this, and he said that sometimes
people will buy beer for the band, but not the store. He however, prefers “water… that’s always nice. I’m not about the beer, I’m about the water” (Interview, August 6, 2014).

While musicians reported that businesses did not make a habit of offering them incentives to play nearby, Brad said he had been told he could play anytime he liked in front of a particular restaurant on Decatur Street;

…I’m playing there and I’m right in front of this restaurant, and they’re nice, I walk by this place a lot… I don’t usually stop in front of the thing. At some point, a guy from the restaurant, a waiter, something like that comes out, and he’s standing there with his arms crossed… but looking friendly, know what I mean? And I’m thinking they probably really would rather I move on, but they don’t wanna be mean about it, because they like me strolling around, but not, you know… And I told him, I’m sorry, I just thought, cause, you know. “It’s cool man” I’m being cool is what he says, I wasn’t sure if they sent him or not. Well about this time the waitress comes out, and a couple other people, and one of the owners. And I’m like “shit”, right? But they’re like “oh, no, we love it. Play here all the time, every Friday and Saturday. Go get him some water and a hat.” And I thought “well that’s cool”, cause I worry, I don’t want to upset them because I have to walk in front of them all the time, and if I stand here and piss them off once, it’s gonna annoy them forever, and I’m screwed. And like, next to him, at some point I was walking by and I stopped, and a guy from the store next to him comes out, and I went ‘I’m sorry, I’m moving”, and he said, “no, no, I love it, you should play here all the time.” Yeah, I got four shops in a row that want me to stand there and play, they want me to play in front of
their shop. I don’t really wanna stop, you know, I kinda like strolling, but it’s good to stop” (Interview, Washboard Brad, August 10, 2014).

Brad typically wanders around, and fittingly his narrative style is similar. His story was about how he had stopped to entertain a Guatemalan family and their little children, because he does not want to disappoint the kids, and ended up getting stuck in front of the same four shops on Decatur. He was worried he was upsetting the business owners, as people kept coming out from inside to listen to him. To his surprise, they loved him and want him to play regularly, and he was wearing the hat he had been given during our conversation.

Not all business owners are as excited or understanding of musicians. Particularly over on Frenchmen Street, a number of the bar owners are displeased about brass band that plays on the weekends, or anytime during the summer. The band is a large group of very young men (between age 13-20, though I saw some older guys out there, and once saw Derek Shezbie, a trumpet player in the Rebirth Brass Band down there with them. They are a loud group (shown above), to be sure, and often have a large crowd surrounding them. On the subject of the issues between
Frenchmen Street bar owners and musicians, Devon knew exactly which group it was that had received the most scrutiny, and he was baffled as to how they had not been shooed away;

Devon: They play fuckin’ loud, and they play really late at night. So the other night, it was like Monday or Tuesday, and they’re out there past 12 o’clock and I was thinking to myself ‘what the fuck are these kids doing out this late, for one?’ and two like,….

Me: (laughs) Where are your moms?
Devon: Exactly… probably at home, where you should be! I was wondering how they’re getting away with playing so fucking loud. You can go like five blocks away and still hear them.

Me: it’s the biggest brass band I’ve ever seen, there’s like 20 kids out there.
Devon: It’s called the Young Fella’s Brass Band. It’s just a bunch of young kids from the neighborhood (Interview, August 6, 2014).

I will elaborate further on the relationships between the city, ordinances and noise regulation in the next section, and the tensions and misunderstandings between those who have lived in New Orleans for some time and the newcomers who don’t quiet ‘get’ how things work. Chris understands the fact that this is part of the tradition, and it is for the betterment of the city. These kids may be loud, but they are not doing the harm that bar owners perceive them to be. I wanted to know his thoughts on why band’s don’t play on Bourbon (discussed at length previously), and why the only one I had seen was a children’s brass band (aged 7-15);

Chris: …I bet they got ran off pretty quick. Uh, yes, there are noise restrictions on Bourbon nowadays, but it ain’t because of, from what I understand, it’s uh, because of the new residence. And partially from the clubs, because it presents competition to the clubs, and then so they don’t like brass bands, they’ll shut ya down in a heartbeat.

Me: I’ve heard a similar issue on Frenchman with the kids that play out there.
Chris: Yeah… yes. So yeah, there is, like I said, it gets back to that love-hate relationship with street performers. And uh, I had to explain one night to a club that I play at on a fairly regular basis over… a place called The Apple Barrel over on Frenchman Street, the owner of that club after she had just taken it over, she said “man I hate that brass band, it’s always interfering with our band in the club” and I’m like no, no, no, here’s something you need to understand, me being a brass band myself, being a trombone player, whose played on the street, done second line. These kids, let me explain something to you, a lot of these kids come from broken homes, this is their way out of that. If you don’t let… allow them that, you don’t get the next Kermit Ruffins, you don’t get the next Trombone Shorty, what you get is a guy robbin’ your house. That’s what you get… So it’s better to just let them do their thing, in the long run. It serves everybody much better.
Me: What’d she say?
Chris: What could she say? She’s like “oh well I didn’t think about it like that” and this is the part of the tradition that was a lot… it was here a lot, far longer than you were.
Me: she a newer person to town?
Chris: No, she’s, she knows the town, but she’s newer to the bar business…And I’m like, no it’s not interfering with your bar business, trust me. If anything, those brass bands that collect on the corner, they only play for two hours at best, because being a brass player myself, you can only play for about two hours tops.
Me: You get tired, man.
Chris: yeah, you get tired fast. And, and if anything, it excites the crowd to go… once the band is done for the night, which is right around 10 o’clock, they are ready and primed for more!
Me: to party!
Chris: to party! Now they’re ready to come into yo club and spend mo’ money than they normally would have (Interview, Chris, August 10, 2014).

**French Quarter Residents: Newcomers, The Old Guard, and City Zoning**

Residents and street musicians do not always have a contentious relationship, and it seems that conflicts that do arise are from a vocal minority. Several of my informants said that they have formed relationships with various residents. One says their favorite spot to play is next to a particular art gallery because the man who lives above it will toss a joint down on occasion if he likes the music he hears\(^{xv}\). Another New Orleans native followed in her family’s tradition of helping musicians and artists by hosting a musician commune in a property she owned on Royal, near St. Louis Street. She created a little commune that housed musicians, and was the site of an old timey, lindy-hop swing scene (see appendix A) lead by the band The Loose Marbles. I did see The Loose Marbles (or rather some of their group, bands are fluid and membership changes, especially with the amount of impromptu jam sessions that happen) the first summer I was there and purchased their homemade CD, but with its height being in 2008, the scene seems to have fizzled out (Colby-Bottel 2012: 180-183).
VCPORA

There are some resident groups who are not as on board with the prevalence of night clubs, music, tourists and the interests of the bar/club/business owners, particularly when it comes to commercialization and things they perceive as inauthentic. I will discuss further how these groups and musician’s interest groups interact with the city council and work together or against one another to try to protect their own interests concerning the use and development of the French Quarter within public policy. The VCPORA is an old and powerful community group of French Quarter residents who have made it their task to preserve the tout ensemble (overall feel) of the neighborhood. They position themselves as arbiters of authenticity and as protectors of the real culture of New Orleans (which of course either side could argue for or against, depending upon one’s perceptions of ‘authentic’ New Orleans) and the members seem to fall into two different categories; those who were born and raised in New Orleans, or more recent transplants (VCPORA Board and Staff: 2015).

French Quarter citizens have an idea about what the space is, and the fact that it is their homes where many of them were born and raised, and they have a strong desire to protect that way of life. They remember when it was like living in a town and everything one needed was within a few blocks, and hold an idealized nostalgia for the past, and not undeservedly either. Older residents fondly remember coming up in the 30s and 40s, and the sense of community and harmony they felt; their stories often downplaying or outright denying the role racial inequality, segregation, or racism played in the history of New Orleans (Gotham 2007: 153). Who can blame people for fondly remembering their childhood home and desiring to preserve that? The shift toward a more tourism based economy and the concerted effort to attract people to the downtown has spurred these citizens to cling more strongly to their “claims of authenticity by
producing several narratives that emphasize themes of nostalgia, exploitation, victimization and neighborhood empowerment” (Gotham 2007: 150). Gotham (2004) discusses at length the process of New Orleans becoming increasingly tourist oriented, causing what he calls ‘tourism gentrification’ which transforms middle-class neighborhoods into a space that the average person cannot afford to live in. The demographics of the French Quarter residents have shifted to a less diverse populace; the percentage of Whites rose here, from 79% in the 1940 census to about 92% in the year 2000. Conversely, outside of the Vieux Carré, the opposite has occurred; between 1960 and 2000, the White population in the rest of New Orleans went from 62.6% to 28.1% (Gotham 2004: 1106). The census data show that the neighborhood has in fact changed, and the rise of tourism (t-shirt shops seem to particularly offend people) has coincided with the gentrification process (Gotham 2004: 1106-07). None of the musicians spoke ill of these folks, the ones who have been around since the preservation efforts first began, and it is the gentrifiers that draw the ire of musicians and other residents.

Gentrifiers

According to the musicians, those who are causing the most trouble for their community are the portions of the post-Katrina transplants in both the French Quarter, and particularly in the nearby neighborhoods of the Marigny and the Bywater who tend to be wealthier, white, more highly educated professionals (Campanella 2008: 273). They seem to want the prestige of the French Quarter home, or the hipster street credibility that comes with living in the Marigny or Bywater, as newly gentrified neighborhoods, and then have a specific line of thinking in terms of preservation, tending to focus on historical architecture, and less on the good of the community in terms of education, access to healthcare, etc. (ibid)xvi. Both Chris and Washboard Brad had strong words concerning these newcomers;
Chris: Noise ordinance. Well, it’s all these newcomers. They come down here to buy property in the Bywater and in the Marigny and gentrify… and they find out they just bought an apartment from a music club that’s been there for 25 years. And it’s like…get the fuck out… I’d blame your real estate agency… sue her. Sue your real estate agent, who didn’t tell you!

Me: Well that’s my last question… is there anything I didn’t ask, that you think I should know?

Chris: Ooooh… Ok…. Hmmm…. The culture is changing here because of the gentrification (Interview, Chris, August 10, 2014).

Brad, always one to place current issues within a longer range historical context, talks about how people go through phases;

Me: so the kind of issues with the noise ordinances, and people tryin to shut things down. Has that been an issue as long as you’ve been here?

Brad: off and on, it always goes through phases. It’s just now, its, it feels more threatening because everything’s got less… free. In the 80s and 90s, these uptight white people would come in, and they would relax, and they’d have a great time and they’d dance in the streets. Now that it’s harder and harder to do, you don’t really see a lot of… so now when the forces that, especially since Katrina, the whole dynamic of the city has changed, there’s more white people, or young people, which is good, the young energy, but they’re kinda yuppie, you know. It’s just not as real. And people are like “what about the real New Orleans” and it’s kinda the Disney-ized version of New Orleans. I dunno, its quiet, probably around, it’s underneath everything. Who knows? But it comes and goes. But these people now, cause they’re very rich, they are the rich people. Money ruling everything. And they don’t have a lot of funky soul, so they don’t like the funky stuff. And you get a lot of people like that. It’s kind of ridiculous. Some rich person comes in from Atlanta and buys a whole building on Frenchman street or somewhere, and then wants to shuts down the music because they want it all quiet. It’s like dude! There’s other neighborhoods. But you had to move right here. And live right above… and this happens. There’s apartments up there, I know [name] lives up there, but there’s people that will do this. They bitch and call the cops, and there’s music and they’re paying 5 thousand dollars a month, and they want it quiet. And it’s like, you’re in the grand central of the crazy French Quarter, and you’re insisting that has to stop.

M: If you don’t want the music, don’t move to New Orleans.

Brad: There’s places in New Orleans you can live. They have security guards that make sure nobody bangs on a cowbell (Interview, Washboard Brad, August 10, 2014).

Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance

While they generally leave street musicians be, the CZO issue is having an impact on the music scene outside of areas that are more touristed. One of the issues is that the VCPORA has
lawyers they have hired to routinely sue music venues. The Music and Cultural Coalition of New Orleans (MaCCNO) is a group that advocates on behalf of the music community, and has been very active in the debates leading up to the recently passed Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance. To give you an idea of the stakes, and the way the VCPORA fights, here is a recent discussion written up by MaCCNO. VCPORA uses scare tactics and alarmist language in emails, saying things like “RED ALERT! The French Market Rezoned to be the Next Bourbon Street!?!?!?” (MaCCNOadmin 2015) and then including the statement “The French Market already has loads of entertainment”. Why is this zoning change needed?” (ibid) The French Market area is currently zoned as a Service zone (see Map 6 in chapter 3), which technically does not allow for live music, but instead is a multi-use zone. The city’s zoning laws were never altered to reflect the actual uses of the area, and live music has been a fact of the French Market district for decades. The VCPORA has their lawyers attempt to shut this down, which has yet to be successful because of the outdated zoning laws. If the French Market area remains zoned for service, then live music will be illegalxvii. However if it is changed to an entertainment zone, the VCPORA’s lawyers can no longer threaten them. According to MaCCNO, the VCPORA is interested in not allowing any restaurants in the Quarter to host live music (MACCNOADMIN 2015).

It is tactics like this, the practice of repeatedly suing clubs, taking litigious action, etc. that have earned the VCPORA the negative reputation they have in the eyes of the music community. The group has the funds and resources to hire lawyers and those trained in reading documents that, to the average musician, is complicated and convoluted. The inequity of this is not lost on musicians. In the fall of 2014 when the debate was heating up again, David Freeman, the general manager of WWOZ, the Jazz and Heritage radio station in New Orleans, wrote an
open letter to Mayor Landrieu, which I mention in the first chapter. In it, he addresses the complicated phraseology and the fact that it is nearly impossible for a musician without access to a “rocket scientist with a lawyer in one’s pocket” to make sense of it (WWOZ: 2014).

The City Council has proven to be understanding of the concerns of those in the culture bearing community, giving them ample opportunity to make their voice heard. In fact the reason this zoning ordinance has taken as many years to approve is that the groups were debating over their interests, which put the council members in disagreement with one another. The council and administration said that a consensus from all parties was the goal, and that they wanted to increase participation and transparency (Webster 2015).

The VCPORA are delighted that the passed ordinance did maintain language that states their mission; "the historic character of the Vieux Carré shall not be injuriously affected" along with the blocking of the amendment that would have allowed all restaurants to host live music events. Their concern was that these eating establishments would become noisy bars (McClendon 2013). However, there were some last minutes amendments made, which infuriated the VCPORA, along with others.

The citizens of this city were told to participate in this process because our voices mattered. Because the CZO was going to be the embodiment of New Orleanians’ hopes and aspirations for our city… But, thanks to a flurry of last-minute amendments, the “process” was rendered a mockery (VCPORA-City Council Meeting: 2015).

The fact that the city had made a show out of involving all parties has made these amendments a slap in the face. The City Council even allowed the musicians to parade through city hall in demonstration, and then giving them a public forum to ask questions and make their voices heard (Alexander 2014). On January 17, 2014, MACCNO held a rally at City Hall. Councilwoman LaToya Cantrell held the open forum at the end of the second line led by Glen
David Andrews (brother of Derrick Tabb of Rebirth Brass Band, and cousin of Troy “Trombone Shorty” Andrews). Musicians and supporters marched under banners saying things like “music is not a crime” (Woodward 2014). The full impact of all this will continue to be revealed as the ordinances are put into practice. It is still unclear at this point exactly how this will affect musicians.

**Designed for Poor People**

In his discussion on the role of nativity in New Orleans, Campanella explains some of the fundamental differences that exist generally between transplants and natives. He says the native born folks are more likely to be less wealthy, educated, and more likely to be African-American. Those natives who are wealthy tend to be ‘old money’, and still do not share much in the way of ideology with most transplants. The concerns they have are of a more pragmatic nature like affordable housing, jobs, improvements in the educational system for their children, reducing violent crimes (Campanella 2008: 273-4). With the large profits that are brought in through the tourism industry that I discuss in chapter 2, one would think the revenue exists to fix these problems, or at least better address them. People come to New Orleans because of the history and culture of the people. Similarly to how Sakakeeny (2013) says that those doing the brunt of the cultural labor when it comes to Jazz Fest are not benefiting equally from the revenue they bring in, Keynin feels that the people of New Orleans are not sharing in the profits of tourism.

Keynin: yeah, it was very like, opulent. We have money and you don’t, so they’re flaunting it. And it’s not gonna work. It’s not. This city was designed for poor people. It really was. And the poor people actually dictate what happens and what doesn’t happen, see? So they have the opulence right now, but it’s not always gonna be like that. It’s just cause Ray Nagin said it’s always gonna be a chocolate city. He opened up his mouth too soon, but I kinda agree with him. This city will always be a chocolate city, it will. I’m not tryina be racist, but that’s the real about it.

Me: Say what you feel! That’s what I say.
Keynin: Say what I feel? I feel like they runnin this fuckin city in the ground. This is… this is home. Yeah. I remember being 7 years old and like, going to Mardi Gras, drivin all the way from Lafayette to here. We left here when I was 3, came back when I was 10. My grandfather would come and get me every once and awhile, he’d take me to Saints games, took me to Mardi Gras… what else he took me to? He took me to a few other events, like big events in New Orleans. And like, we moved back when I was 10. And when we moved back, we moved back into their house, and he set me up with a bike, so I used to ride everywhere. I rolled down to Fats Domino’s house where he was having a big cookout, and that shit was awesome cause they invited everyone in the neighborhood to eat. And this is my city. And they’re running it into the ground. Just because they have money and they have influence… Yeah. I mean we make over 10 million dollars a year. Mend our streets. And our sidewalks. Smell the air, our sewer. I mean, like you gotta breathe this shit. This place… there’s a lot of fucked up shit… I mean you got people workin 40 hours a week bringing home not $300.

Me: crime rate. Education.

Keynin: Education. Believe it or not, I taught myself to read.

Me: couldn’t rely on school to do it.

Keynin: Taught myself to read. No! and my mother was working 3 jobs, so she had time to come home, cook, sleep and go right back out. And so, I’m like in the 4th grade, and I’m like ‘I can’t read’. I literally got her albums that she bought, and went over every line, bought myself a dictionary and taught myself to read (Interview, Keynin, August 10, 2014).
Chapter 6

“It’s Fun Actually. It’s Not Exact Science.”

The geography of French Quarter buskers was simultaneously much more complicated, and far simpler than I expected it to be. In my imagination beforehand, I romanticized the life to a degree; you have the train hopping kids who are playing to keep travelling and to eat, or the young band who came to New Orleans from whatever Midwestern town to join the music scene and work their way up, eventually moving to Los Angeles or New York City to sign a record deal. Then there are the musicians that have been playing in the same spot for 50 years, and are cultural institutions of the Quarter. I thought that the interactions with police would occupy an equally large amount of brain space as other buskers and business owners. While I did find these things, as anthropology is want to do, the exotic and romanticized images I had beforehand were replaced with a deeper understanding of the normal, daily nature of what they do.

Through this mixed method approach of the GPS mapping presented in chapter 3, is given deeper meaning through interviews with those who play on the streets. This shows that the distribution of buskers is not happenstance. Musicians play where they stand to make the most money and where they are respecting those around them. The brass bands tend to stick to Jackson Square because the large, open space accommodates their big sound. Royal Street is closed at certain times, which allows for playing in the street; there is more space for bigger bands (five or so members) to play. It has high foot traffic and expensive boutiques where people are shopping, which increases the likelihood for selling CDs. Bourbon Street businesses take issue with the perceived competition street musicians create, and musicians do not like competing with the sounds from the clubs. Decatur Street is where the story became a little more complicated, and where the concept of overlapping communities was first revealed to me as this
is where the ‘dirty kid’ bands play because that is where they find the greatest affinity with the others in that space. Additionally, with limited space, high foot traffic, and a little less competition from the bands selling CDs, an individual with a guitar could make some money.

The mechanisms of selection were laid out very clearly by those I spoke with, oftentimes almost verbatim. Mutual respect for others in the area is the key. Again and again musicians told me that respect is the trick. When it comes to selecting a spot, being respectful to other musicians and communicating with them prevents problems and ensures that everyone gets an opportunity to make money. Putting in the time and earning ones place within the community; showing respect to those who have already done that. Respecting business and store owners, not blasting them out prevents buskers from being kicked out of spots. Being polite to police prevents being hassled. While I found that these authorities, along with the city ordinances concerning zoning and sound do not greatly impact the daily lives of street musicians, as the issue continues to unfold, that is subject to change.

In a city that relies so heavily on tourism in the contemporary moment, and with a tourism industry that is so heavily reliant on musicians and its musical reputation, buskers fill a significant niche in the market. As Atkinson (1997) states, music signifies where is a ‘safe’ zone for tourists to venture, and street music is a big part of that phenomena. While there are aspects of the busking community that are still relatively unclear and unaddressed, it is my hope that this thesis contributes to the body of literature on street musicianship.

**Avenues of Expansion**

There is always more work that could be done. There are always further avenues to explore, new developments, informants I did not get a chance to interview, and subsets of the community in which it takes longer to become embedded. Anthropology can be akin to Alice
falling down the rabbit hole. This, alongside the fact that the debates and ramifications about/of the Comprehensive Zoning Ordinance are ongoing means that there is potential to expand upon the work I have presented in this thesis.

Delving deeper into the relationships between the various Quarter communities would provide a much clearer picture of how the space is used more broadly; this might include talking to other genres of performers, homeless who loiter, or more gutter punks and transient young people. Busking makes up a significant portion of the informal aspect of the tourism economy, and due to its informal nature, it goes untracked. Getting a better idea of the amount of money tourists toss into buskers’ buckets would go a long way in explaining the extent to which they participate in the tourism industry. It would further nuance this study to find the numbers involved when it comes to the income of buskers and would be a way to uncover just how big of a piece of the tourism pie they are taking home. However this data may be difficult to collect, as some buskers are hesitant to discuss raw economics. I saw one musician shoo away, by swinging his trumpet, a man who was filming and pointing his camera into their tip collection bucket.

While I touched on the concept of authenticity and race during my interviews, it could be taken much farther. The musicians noted that for them, race, authenticity and musical skill were not connected, however musicians believed that tourists held preconceived notions that influence listening behavior. If taken further, I would expand this research to include interviews with visitors about what they feel is authentic New Orleans music, and the role race plays in that. Surveying them about who they stop to tip, and why, along with their thoughts on the issue of race and authenticity would deepen the literature, and would be especially interesting in light of Ryan’s 2011 article about a similar discourse in blues music.
An issue that surfaced in chapter 5 is that of those in organizations like the VCPORA, and the differences between native New Orleanians and transplants. Campanella (2008) seems to divide them into strict binaries, which does not fit with my own anecdotal observations, and what Gotham (2007) says about native French Quarter folks and their desires concerning preservation. Not only would I like to talk to those involved in that side of the City Zoning debates, and those who are opposed to live music in various venues, but addressing how they have arrived at their particular viewpoints would also help clear up some confusion in the literature.

**The Tension is What Keeps It Alive**

I’ve selected the following quote from Brad to end on because I think he has great insight and perspective. In the previous chapter, he spoke about how there are shifts in people, and how both people who visit and those who move to New Orleans either cut loose and have fun, or don’t. During my long talk with him, he told me about how there are good days and bad in the Quarter, and that the mood seems effect everyone he encounters, lamenting when he has days where he “having like a few days in a row where I only made like 2 dollars all day, I couldn’t get anyone to smile. One day I made 2 dollars and 3 smiles” (Interview, Washboard Brad, August 10, 2014). Brad was the last person I interviewed, and the following sentiment was the perfect note to have rolling around in my brain as I prepared to depart New Orleans and head back to Kansas to analyze my data and write up my research. We were discussing tensions between the older/native musicians and the younger/newcomers. He was talking about some of the bands that play on Royal Street, specifically the lindy-hop swing, old timey groups, who have been trained at prestigious music academies. They study the music from the 20s and 30s note for note, and have fabulous technical proficiency. However, he said they were missing the point, missing the
improvisational nature that made that music in the first place, and was why it was so revolutionary.

Through his discussion of this, he addresses tension that pervades other aspects of the tourism industry, as well as life in general in New Orleans. There is a desire for regulation, for structure, to streamline the process for greater efficiency, which does have positive aspects to it. There are pros and cons. However, there are also those with the desire to live and let live, to carry on has people have for generations and see what happens; to *laissez les bons temps rouler* (let the good times roll). As it is with many things in life, the truth is somewhere in between. Take us home, Brad;

Professional bands they should just get their damn music stands, that’s their attitude, right? It’s very superior. They have a great technical proficiency, but no heart. And it’s some of this, some of that, whatever. Having a wide view, I can see that. I can see the value of their point of view. Of focus, but a super focused person cannot even conceive of envisioning, you know, the validity of the wide view because they’re so focused that they never see the wide point of view. But that’s always been a tension. Tension is ultimately what keeps it alive, but it has to not get to much one way or the other, right? It’s kinda like bands, and you totally like, get down on, like the noise ordinance and everybody has to be quiet, and behaves with certain tight little rules, which completely squelches everything. But if you let them go completely wild, then the brass bands are gonna be getting so loud, you won’t be able to be anywhere within a quarter mile of the French Quarter to even be heard, know what I mean? You can’t go all the way, as you get old, you realize. Plus I’m a Gemini, so I’m always going this side, that side, makes sense to me. You don’t want all anarchy; you don’t want all total control. You don’t want it exactly in the middle. You gotta be… just… reasonable with this crap. It’s kinda like the stupid freshmen drunk kids with their relationships [referencing a story not included here where he musically mentored college kids]. It’s really, they’re over thinking it, and everyone is tryin to get their way. You can’t be rigid. And it’s not so hard. It’s fun actually. It’s not exact science, but it’s got a thing to it. It’s like surfin (Interview, Washboard Brad, August 10, 2014).
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Louisiana State Museum


MACCNOADMIN


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VCPORA


Vella, Christina


Waller, Mark

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Williams, Erica Lorraine


Woodward, Alex


WWOZ

APPENDIXES
APPENDIX B

GLOSSARY

Bounce Music – a genre of hip hop music native to New Orleans, came about in the 1980s. Makes heavy use of sampling of other songs, is high energy dance music with repetitive melodies and a fast beat. It is often highly sexual, and has a sub genre called ‘sissy bounce’ where the artists are gay men and drag queens, such as Big Freedia, Katey Red and Sissy Nobby.

Dixieland jazz – developed in the 1900s in New Orleans, combined aspects of ragtime, blues, and European brass music. ‘When The Saints Go Marching In’ and ‘Basin Street Blues’ are examples.

Chops – skills, expertise, usually of a musical nature

Crust punk – also called crusties, similar to gutter punks, but are associated with a more hardcore, anarchist subculture of punk rock. Crusties have a reputation for being more obnoxious and aggressive in their panhandling and interactions with people.

Dirty kid – the broadest term for transient youth, some train hop or hitchhike from city to city, staying in various squat houses.

Doogle – and oogle’s dog

Gutter punk – common term for a homeless, transient person, they often train hop or hitchhike around the country. They are different from dirty kids in that they affect a grunge and punk rock aesthetic, such as pants with patches sewn onto them, safety pins as a fashion accessory, tattoos, and piercings. Some find temporary work, such as harvesting crops, and others panhandle. Many travel with dogs.

Lindy-hop – a dance from the 1920s and 30s developed in Harlem, and went with jazz and swing music.

Old-timey – used to refer to anything from the early part of the 20th century. Includes Dixieland jazz, lindy-hop, ragtime, and trad-jazz.

Oogle – dirty kids who are rumored to actually be wealthy young people who are bored with their lives so they act like they are impoverished and travel around.

Ragtime – genre of dance music popular around the turn of the century that influenced early Dixieland jazz. Piano is the prime instrument and has syncopated rhythms. The Maple Leaf Rag is an example.

Squat house – an abandoned or unoccupied building or house where people will ‘squat’ or take up residence.
Trad Jazz – short for ‘traditional jazz’, this style of jazz is from the early 20th century, and has ragtime and Dixieland influences. Some artists of this style include Jelly-Roll Morton, King Oliver, and Louis Armstrong.

\[i\] Funded by Jackman Endowment, myself and a team of students spent three weeks each summer collecting historic court cases from the archives in the New Orleans Public Library, and the Tulane Law Library as part of an ongoing project for Dr. Angela Demovic.

\[ii\] The U.S. Census Bureau estimated in 2012 that the population of New Orleans was 369,250, which is 76% of what it was in the 2000 Census (Waller, 2013).

\[iii\] Old timey refers to aesthetics from the 1910s-1920s. Music of the era include Dixieland and lindy-hop swing.

\[iv\] Trad-jazz is a local, colloquial short hand for “traditional jazz” generally meaning an early, pre-bebop style, such as Fats Waller, Jelly Roll Morton, Kid Ory, King Oliver, and up to Louis Armstrong. See appendix B for glossary.

\[v\] All interviewees signed consent forms prior to being interviewed, which assures them of anonymity unless they indicated a desire to have their real names used. These forms are kept in a locked filing cabinet along with any documentation connecting pseudonyms to real names.

\[vi\] Jass is the original spelling of jazz. No one is entirely sure where the name comes from, or exactly why it was changed from jass to jazz (Burns 2001, Episode 1).

\[vii\] Touristscape, defined by Williams (2013) as the amalgamation of all the cites within a place where tourism is the main focus, including the establishments, as well as the people. It is not a static scape, and is subject to shifts.

\[viii\] Along with the incredible boon to the economy, and jobs provided for locals and musicians, Jazz Fest and the tourism industry in general has many problematic aspects for musicians. These range from unequal sharing in profits between the organizers, managers, etc, and those performing the cultural labor to the fact not-local acts are paid much higher than actual Jazz and Heritage musicians. For further discussion on this, see Sakakeeny 2013, Regis and Walton 2008, and Gotham 2005 for discussion on negative impacts in the community of the tourism industry.

\[ix\] I encountered many eccentric folks, at least one weird thing happened every day. It was fantastic. One young man told me about how someone had sent hyenas after him to attack him. A gutter punk said his dog was a vegetarian and so I could not give him part of my food I dropped. Another fellow tried to sell me video game themed jams and jellies he had canned himself, while wearing an elaborate steam punk leather outfit he had made himself.

\[x\] The Cabildo was the main colonial government building during Spanish rule. It was where the Louisiana Purchase ceremony was held in 1803, was the home of the Louisiana Supreme Court post-Civil War (Plessy v. Ferguson upholding the “separate but equal” approach to racial segregation took place here). In 1908, the Cabildo became the Louisiana State Museum (Louisiana State Museum, accessed July1, 2015).

\[xi\] The recently passed Zoning Ordinances has rectified the incongruities between previous zoning and current usages, however the map data has yet to be released, hence I am unable to display the new zoning.

\[xii\] By ‘jump through hoops’, he is talking about the fact that he is wandering around with his washboard, and listening to music through headphones that he plays along with. This makes it difficult for people to tip him, as his tip collection box is small and attached to the bottom of his washboard, and he does not always hear what is said to him.

\[xiii\] Bourbon Street has long been a reflection of popular music at any given time in history. In the contemporary moment, that is hip hop and rap, classic rock – like Jimmy Buffet, and various kinds of electronic music deemed to be danceable (Campanella 2014: 235).

\[xiv\] It was August, which is a low point in the tourism season, which could be related to not seeing other performers in the French Market Area. Still none of the musicians I interviewed spoke of it as a major location for busking.

\[xv\] I am opting to not directly quote or cite who said this on the grounds that some of my informants wanted me to use their real or stage names in this, and I will not risk linking anyone to illicit activities. As performers, it helps them to have their names out in the world, and so I gave them the opportunity, which some of them took.
Campanella creates a stronger binary between transplants and natives than is entirely reflected in my own observations, and what is noted by Gotham (2007) in talking about the preservationist efforts of French Quarter natives. This may be due in part to his approach as a geographer and not an ethnographer, or not addressing the nuances within groups. He makes it sound as though transplants do not care about local issues and do not take part in local culture, which is simply not true.

While the CZO was recently passed, the zoning district map has yet to be published at the time of this writing, and the CZO itself is unclear as to the boundaries of the various zoning districts, so I am unable to speak to the new zoning category of the French Market area along the river.