

5-16-2008

Musicians Who Busk: Identity, Career, and Community in New Orleans Street Performance

Aram Parrish Lief
University of New Orleans

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td>

Recommended Citation

Lief, Aram Parrish, "Musicians Who Busk: Identity, Career, and Community in New Orleans Street Performance" (2008). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. 683.
<https://scholarworks.uno.edu/td/683>

This Thesis is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by ScholarWorks@UNO with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this Thesis in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/or on the work itself.

This Thesis has been accepted for inclusion in University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks@UNO. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uno.edu.

Musicians Who Busk: Identity, Career, and Community in New Orleans Street Performance

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Science
in
Urban Studies

by

Aram Parrish Lief

B.A. University of New Orleans, 1993
M.M. Southeastern Louisiana University, 1996

May 2008

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis committee and thesis advisor Dr. Martha C. Ward at the University of New Orleans, and the faculty and staff in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Memphis. Special thanks goes to my family, Tom, Dona, Shane, and Mirella.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	vi
Abstract	vii

Chapter I – Introduction, Methodology, and Background

Introduction	1
Methodology	3
<i>Research Boundaries</i>	3
<i>Data Collection</i>	3
<i>Participant Observation</i>	5
<i>Operational Definitions</i>	6
Literature Review	7
<i>Busking</i>	7
<i>Occupational Identity and Community</i>	10

Chapter II – Identity

New Orleans Street Musicians	14
<i>Buskers Aren't Beggars</i>	16
Earning Money Outdoors vs. Indoors	19
<i>The World Is My Stage</i>	21
Part-Time and Ad Hoc Buskers	27
Musical Style	28
<i>Gumbo Music</i>	29
Supporting a Family	33
<i>The Family Band</i>	35
Summary	36

Chapter III – Career

Job Training	38
<i>Learnin' By Ear</i>	40
Tools of the Trade	43
<i>Portable Rigs</i>	44
Performance Setting	49
<i>Making a Living on the Move</i>	52
Getting to Work	54
<i>Chopper Bicycles</i>	54
Job Performance	55
<i>Unwritten Code of Conduct</i>	57
<i>Hierarchy</i>	61
Street Economics	62
<i>Tourists Are Our Clients</i>	63

Summary	64
Chapter IV – Community	
<i>Mutual Support Network</i>	65
<i>New Orleans Street Performers Association</i>	66
Family Support	68
<i>Finding Shelter and Aid in the Aftermath of Katrina</i>	68
Greater French Quarter Community	71
<i>A Busker’s Paradise Lost</i>	74
Power of the State	77
<i>Police, Politicians, Pontiffs, and Persnickety people</i>	79
Group Honor	83
<i>Serving the Community</i>	84
Summary	85
Chapter V – Summary and Conclusion	
Summary	86
Conclusion	88
References	93
Appendix	99
<i>Map A</i>	99
<i>Map B</i>	100
Vita	101

List of Figures

1. Photo of Jackson Square	53
2. Photo of Jackson Square Pedestrian Mall	53
3. Photo of Café Du Monde.....	54

Abstract

Street musicians in New Orleans are one of type of contemporary performers or *buskers* who represent an occupational community located in the French Quarter. Though often marginalized or seen as deviant, these urban troubadours regard themselves as professional entertainers who adhere to ethical standards and business practices. This study is an analysis of these performers that includes a description of their cluster of performing activities, the concomitant artifacts used in the performances, and the cohesiveness of this group during times of difficulty. Because of a dearth of published research on this specific topic, this study will contribute a new dimension of cultural knowledge.

Key Words

Busk; busker; busking; minstrel; musician; troubadour.

Chapter I

Introduction, Methodology, and Background

Orleanians know very well that their native city occupies a special niche in America's small chamber of urban delights. It has been so for two and a half centuries.
– Pierce F. Lewis

Introduction

The New Orleans street musician is but one of many types of contemporary performers, also called *buskers*, who frequently appear in urban settings in North America and Europe. Buskers are involved in a variety of activities, from the use of creatively altered instruments, to ad hoc group formations on the street, to dance and comedy routines, which regularly involve their audience as active participants. They entertain tourists and residents alike, but are sometimes considered a nuisance by local merchants and law enforcement. Buskers are often confused with other groups who inhabit Jackson Square, and are stereotyped as marginal people. However, rather than being beggars on the street or homeless transients, they are professional musicians who set their own time and place of employment on a daily basis. They are musical entrepreneurs who contribute to the character of the New Orleans French Quarter.

This thesis will focus on the activities and narratives provided by individual performers in order to demonstrate that buskers are indeed a distinct occupational community in New Orleans. The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of their career path and is based upon field observations of their cluster of performing activities, including the artifacts used in the actual performances, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. The findings of this research will be separated into three chapters, each focusing on a specific aspect of the busker's life: Identity, Career, and Community. Since self-identity and group identity formation involves

a reflexive process, the subtopics and concepts discussed in this thesis will overlap in all three chapters of the findings. Within these three chapters of findings are subheadings containing the participant data. They are italicized in order to distinguish them from the analysis.

Busking is a profession that shares many characteristics with other traditional jobs. Like other professions, it requires a knowledge base consisting of practical skills and techniques for applying those skills. In this instance, those skills are applied to street music performance. Buskers develop professional-client relationships and techniques to solve work-related problems, such as licensing issues and conflict resolution with other occupational groups. Other hallmarks of professional behavior exhibited by this occupational group include a sense of identity, honor, pride in one's work, and adherence to a code of ethical conduct. The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate these and other similarities of the busking profession with what social scientists might expect when observing any other professional occupational group.

Throughout their career, buskers experience challenges similar to those which face other professionals. They have to deal with job-related issues and drudgeries, moments of excitement and periods of boredom, feelings ranging from satisfaction to disappointment. Moreover, the musicians who busk must develop certain skills that set them apart from the other types of buskers, which gives them entrée to the larger occupational category as professional musicians. This professional development allows them to broaden their associations with other music-related guilds, thus advancing their mobility in multiple ways, intensifying their socialization with others, and increasing the possibility of other fringe benefits acquired by those additional associations. Like other occupational groups, they are able to apply their skills to earn sufficient income to sustain themselves.

Methodology

Research Boundaries

The geographical scope of this research is restricted to the French Quarter and nearby areas in the city of New Orleans, Louisiana (see Map A in the Appendix). Jackson Square and its Pedestrian Mall is the central location, acting as a center of gravity which pulls in tourists and artists alike. From there, the areas of activity spread into the surrounding areas, forming smaller clusters of activity. One such area where street musicians have been performing for many years is located a few blocks north of Jackson Square at the intersection of Royal Street and St. Peter, but one can find even smaller clusters of activity just south of the Square along the Riverwalk to Woldenberg Park near the Aquarium of the Americas (see Map B in the Appendix). A slightly more distant location where street musicians perform is about seven blocks to the east of the Square in the adjacent neighborhood called the Marigny (on the east side of Esplanade Avenue), where many of the prominent buskers live, but street performance in that area is normally limited to special occasions such as holidays, especially Mardi Gras. The same can be said of Congo Square in Armstrong Park, where public performance is arranged around specific events and holidays.

Data Collection

A total of ten structured interviews were conducted in the course of this investigation, two of which took place in the French Quarter before hurricane Katrina in October 2004. Of the two pre-Katrina interviews, one was followed-up twice, once in the Marigny neighborhood in June 2006 and again in Audubon Park in June 2007. Three in-depth interviews were conducted in Memphis during the evacuation of the city, two of which took place at a small independent

music store, and the third in an urban park, the last of which was followed-up in June 2007 at a private residence on Bourbon Street.

Throughout the course of this investigation, over a dozen informal interviews of street musicians took place before and after Hurricane Katrina. The lengths of these interviews range from a few minutes of informal conversation immediately before and after street performance, to thirty minutes or more of asking pointed questions. The formal interviews vary in length, depending on the informant, from thirty minutes to three hours. One informal interview that took place on the Pedestrian Mall in Jackson Square, right in front of the St. Louis Cathedral, in mid-October 2005, led to an in-depth follow-up interview in June and July 2007.

The pre-Katrina research for this thesis was conducted over the span of a few months one year before the storm. Some data regarding street music was collected in Memphis, Tennessee during which time I could not return to New Orleans. No formal interviews were conducted during Mardi Gras 2006, as I was busy performing in Mardi Gras parades and on the streets of the French Quarter and the Marigny. During this time, some of the street musicians in this study were the author's audience, a role reversal that occurred on a few occasions, by chance. On other occasions, when I went to the French Quarter for the sole purpose of doing research, I would always carry an instrument with me, whether it be a small egg-shaped shaker or a guitar strapped to my back, I would engage buskers in a musical dialogue to break the ice or just to entertain.

One-on-one and group interviews were sometimes conducted according to schedules that often reverted to whenever and wherever possible, using video equipment as the primary instrument for recording data. I also used a handheld voice recorder, small notebooks for writing down key terms, and a digital camera for recording still images. Data was later uploaded to a computer and edited according to content and then archived on CD and DVD ROM disks. The

bulk of the written notes, mostly detailing short informal interviews before the storm, were destroyed during Hurricane Katrina, but two formal interviews survived because they were preserved on film and on a computer hard drive. All the identities of the participants in this study have been replaced with pseudonyms to protect their privacy.

Participant Observation

As a musician and part-time street performer, I found communicating with the informants to be relatively easy. Moreover, most performers indicated a sense of respect upon learning that I am a native of New Orleans – I was not treated as an outsider. As I mentioned above, I brought musical instruments out into the field in order to do participant observation as a means of gaining entrée to new groups of musicians. A few street musicians knew me as a member of the samba percussion group called “Zabumba!” which has often played in the French Quarter during special events such as Mardi Gras. This recognition among street performers greatly facilitated my work. In order to prepare myself for engaging in participant observation, I drew upon the work of other researchers such as Setha Low, who used participant observation regarding the use of public space in the plazas of San José, Costa Rica (Low 1996:864), and William Whyte who did the same while working on Street Corner Society. By living with an Italian family in a slum neighborhood of Boston for three years and getting involved with the activities of the young people on the street level, Whyte provided critical insights into their microcosmic network. His hands-on research provided a starting point and sparked helpful ideas for this thesis.

Not unlike the people described in Whyte’s work, New Orleans street musicians focus their activities in the public domain, on the street. Their lifestyle is centered on their career as street performers and their daily contact with others in the French Quarter. This location is ideal

in that they have the freedom to perform what and when they want, which is highly desirable in the busking profession, and they are able to earn a living without having to answer to a specific boss. This distinct occupational world is further identifiable through their lifestyle choices, use of professional argot, and pattern of resource sharing, such as housing, food, medicine, legal advice, and ground-level peer advice.

Operational Definitions

Reflecting a centuries-old tradition, the terms *busk* and *busking* are synonymous with street performance. Various dictionaries refer to *buskers* as those who entertain by song or reciting on the street or in a pub, usually while soliciting money. An English word, it has early roots as a cognate with other Latin-based languages, all of which mean *to seek* or *prowl*: French - *busquer*; Italian - *buscare*; Spanish and Portuguese - *buscar*. The word *troubadour* is derived from the old Provençal word *trobador*, refers to any traveling or strolling minstrel (Randal 1986:877). The meaning of the French word *jongleur* has narrowed from a broad, imprecise definition in the Middle Ages, to a more specific designation as *juggler* (Reese 1940:202-3).

According to Randy Hodson and Teresa A. Sullivan, “An occupation is a cluster of job related activities constituting a single economic role that is usually directed toward making a living. Occupation refers to the type of work someone does” (Hodson and Sullivan 2002:47). To define *occupational community*, Dona Lee Davis recalls Seymour M. Lipset stating, “the concept of occupational community was introduced by Lipset in his study of the printer’s union,” where “high occupational status, prolonged apprenticeships to learn complex skills, and pride in work led to a high level of job involvement” (Davis 1986:129). This can be expanded to include the following: autonomy from employers and supervisors, attachment to members of the workgroup,

a sense of belonging and pride in one's occupation, and the reliance on mutual aid, and an "us against them" attitude (130).

Literature Review

Busking

The troubadour, jongleur and allied street performance traditions in Europe embody a cultural phenomenon that has stood the test of time (Page 1978). Now commonly known as busking, these activities have been chronicled for posterity, from the early writings of ancient Grecian philosophers to modern newspapers like the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) that have published articles about Piccadilly Circus in London or busking in the English Channel Tunnel. Nevertheless, the busking phenomenon has rarely been covered in a social science context. The vast majority of the books written about public music performance have been historical (McNamara 1975; Chase, 1990; Taylor; 1992) and musicological (Cole, 1988; Sims, 1991; Rouse, 1999) in nature, and busking is rarely mentioned. In consideration of its appearance in various historical records, spanning more than a millennium, the lack of literature on this topic is curious.

No matter the living conditions in urban centers, humans want to be entertained by humans who want to entertain, and quite often performance occurs in public places. In most European capitol cities, one sees a variety of street performers, such as acrobats, ballad-singers, bagpipers, hurdy-gurdy and organ grinders, and puppeteers. For centuries, a Mecca for street entertainment has been London, England. In his article "An Interview with Percy Press and a Portfolio of Buskers" Brooks McNamara asks Percy Press, "whom he calls the greatest modern Punch and Judy showman," to describe the buskers performing on the streets of London in 1918:

There were some very good acrobats and jugglers on the streets then. There was an excellent juggler, for example, who worked with his two daughters and presented a whole street circus. Animal acts were popular, and novelty music acts—street harmoniums, one string fiddles made from cigar boxes and that sort of thing. There were ventriloquists and conjurers, and of course Punch and Judy was always a favorite. Theatre queue entertainers were popular. Most often they did a fast little act, shorter than the usual street pitch. (McNamara 1975:315).

Today, busking is a thriving business in England, from Covent Garden's official busking area to the tunnel at South Kensington to Leicester Square. Even the BBC has a guide for where and how to busk, including local laws, dangerous locations, and tourist information. According to one busker I interviewed, “there are a hell of a lot of them in London right now because unemployment is so high. They hang out where the tourists go, like Piccadilly Circus and Trafalgar Square, or any place like that,” referring to the entrance to the *Chunnel* (the tunnel under the English Channel). Like countless jazz musicians who claim to have performed in New Orleans, famous musicians like Sir Paul McCartney of Beatles fame claim to have busked in London, though London buskers have challenged this tidbit of trivia. Outside of Europe, Canada is also a country that promotes the busking business, hosting numerous festivals and venues for street performance in the larger cities such as Toronto and Halifax.

Like his father, Alan Lomax traveled North America collecting and recording folksongs, many of which were performed by traveling minstrels and itinerate workers, some whom became famous like Woody Guthrie. Though Lomax made significant contributions toward developing a taxonomy of folksong styles and rubrics for comparing cultures by subsistence systems and folk music production, he did not specifically address, by name, the *busking* phenomenon in print. However, he was well aware of this micro-economy of music production, as he frequently talked about socio-economic systems and patterns of subsistence (1968, 1974, and 2002). Nevertheless, only two books on busking in North America have thus far been published by social scientists. One that stands out is Sally Harrison-Pepper's Drawing a Circle in a Square: Street Performing

in New York's Washington Square Park (1990). She spent four years observing buskers and how they interact with their environment, detailing the vivid personalities and how they negotiate space. The other significant work on this subject is Underground Harmonies - Music & Politics in the Subways of New York (1993), by Susie J. Tanenbaum. Her account of subterranean music production, or underground economics, complements Harrison-Pepper's work in New York. These uncommon works are the first serious attempts toward an analysis of the busking phenomena, but New York is not the only city where buskers perform regularly. Numerous passing references to street music performance can be gleaned from a variety of historical works (Reese, 1940; Wright 1967; Grout 1988), but none detailed how street performers actually ply their trade. For example, music historian Henry A. Kmen recounts how a visitor named Henry Didimus "protested at being jolted awake early on a Sunday morning in 1835 by the crash of fife and drum enthusiastically playing 'Yankee Doodle' right under his window" (Kmen, 1966:202). However, references like these do demonstrate the existence of street performance, in particular New Orleans, but they do not provide a complete context nor explore socio-cultural dynamics of New Orleans buskers. Similar references can be found in more recent newspapers; when reviewing extant literature on the subject, more recent articles about busking were produced in Boston newspapers.

In popular magazines, newspapers, and websites, one may find articles that cover various facets of busking, but none of the above are scholarly or peer-reviewed works. Nevertheless, a lot of information may be gleaned from these resources, since they themselves are artifacts produced vis-à-vis the busking phenomena. The Internet is a new mode of communication for street performers since they are able to organize their activities, share information about best and worst locations for busking, and instruct each other about local laws and regulations very rapidly.

The new busking websites are like mini-clearinghouses for street performers and those involved in advocacy of the profession. Though not highly organized yet, it appears development toward a more formal system is likely in the near future.

Occupational Identity and Community

The dearth of literature regarding the busking profession required me to peer into other areas of research regarding occupational identity and community. Howard S. Becker wrote a few articles that addressed the formation of occupational identities and a book, The Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance, which looked at the culture and careers of a deviant occupational group (Becker 1963). Becker's contemporaries Robert A. Dentler and Kai T. Erikson concerned themselves with the functions of deviance in groups, observing that "deviance is induced, preserved, and sustained by a given group" and that "deviant behavior functions to help maintain group equilibrium" (Dentler and Erikson 1959:107). Regarding deviant and marginal groups, David A. Snow and Leon Anderson found that "homeless street people construct and negotiate personal identities" that "provide them with a measure of self-worth and dignity" (Snow and Anderson 1987:1338), while Wilensky and Ladinsky maintain that "a deviant occupational specialty recruits marginal men" (Wilensky and Ladinsky 1967:559). In their article "How Can You Do It? Dirty Work and the Challenge of Constructing a Positive Identity," Blake E. Ashforth and Glen E. Kreiner take up the topic of "dirty work" and how occupational members construct esteem-enhancing social identity despite negative stigmas attached to certain jobs (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999; Heyl 1977).

Chad Gordon investigates the function of role identities "as key components that inter-connect persons and social systems by providing both location and motivation of the individual

within the role-taking and role-making processes” (Gordon 1976:405), stating that occupational identity and “related self-conceptions (such as “honest person” or “hard worker”) are among the most important in the individual's pantheon of idealized role identities” (407). David L. Westby writes about the career path of symphony orchestra musicians, seeing them as dependent craftsmen who have an “idealized self-image as a gifted and highly skilled artist” (Westby 1960:223).

Pierre Bourdieu’s article “The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups” was my starting point for understanding concepts on work organization and how occupational groups are formed and maintained (Bourdieu 1985). His idea that, “the group can only exist through delegation to a spokesperson who will make it exist by speaking for it, i.e., on its behalf and in its place,” relates directly to the busking phenomenon; all of the participants in this study referred to a single person, at some point, as the quintessential busker representative of the profession (740). William G. Ouchi and Alan L. Wilkins address how occupational groups are managed in the article “Organizational Culture.” They emphasized Thomas S. Kuhn’s idea “that a socially constructed point of view strongly influences the behavior of scientists, and it tends to be consistent within professions and across organizations” (Ouchi and Wilkins 1985:468). Maryan S. Schall sees organizations as a communication phenomenon, where entities are “developed and maintained only through continuous communication activity - exchanges and interpretations - among its participants” (Schall 1983:560). Ellen Koskoff ties this idea of organization through communication directly to the music profession, exploring how shared concepts, regarding music, create networks and how they explain “individual music behavior” (Koskoff 1982:367).

D. Knights found that “highly militant collective action is evidenced in the absence of any strong feeling of community” (Knights 1975:295). Though buskers did not evince overt,

militant behavior, the participants in this study described other French Quarter groups in this light. They did, however, explain the necessity of networking among themselves and the need for a professional code of conduct to prevent conflict and maintain a positive image (Jehn 1997), as well as demonstrate the existence of a ranking system (Zetterberg 1966; Katz 1977). The freedom of choice regarding their occupation was a common theme for this group (Simpson and Simpson 1960), as well as job satisfaction and pride on one's work (Shepard 1970; Baxter and Margavio 2000).

Lastly, articles that were based on case studies of other occupational communities were helpful in understanding the busking phenomenon. Dona Lee Davis's research on an occupational community in a Newfoundland fishing village included the best definition of occupational community, and described gender roles in the formation of occupational identity (Davis 1986). Trevor Lummis used oral evidence gathered in an East Anglian fishing community to demonstrate whether it conformed to the sociological concept of occupational community (Lummis 1977). On the topic of occupational adaptation of migrant workers, Christine Finnan demonstrated the influence of a local community on Vietnamese refugees, which is salient to this study since buskers are often moving from one place to another (Finnan 1982). Rob Van Ginkel wrote about a Dutch maritime community and the division and reunion of opposing factions within the group (1991), while Geoffrey Hunt and Sandra Satterlee found cohesion and division in an English village pub (Hunt and Satterlee 1986).

Though most of these references are not addressing specifically the busking profession, they were useful in constructing a body of literature to explain the components of the phenomenon. Constructed from these constituent parts, a model is created which demonstrates

how New Orleans street musicians who busk in the French Quarter embody the concept of occupational community.

Chapter II

Identity

New Orleans Street Musicians

Professional buskers are full-time street entertainers who derive their livelihood from their performance. Though often perceived as unorthodox by outsiders, these musicians are professional entertainers; they are entrepreneurs who do not answer to an employer like the average employed person. Their lifestyle is centered on their career as a street performer, and their daily contact with other people living, working or visiting the French Quarter. Their overall public image is as important to them as is sustaining a good rapport with their audience because their economic survival relies upon unfettered exchange. Vern Baxter recalls Bourdieu regarding the “emphasis on reciprocity in gift exchange,” and the “tact and social grace required to maintain ‘face’ and uphold honor codes” (Baxter and Margavio 2000:400). A negative or dishonorable image of buskers would hurt business for everyone in the profession. Buskers must maintain a balance in their public zone of contact in order to keep their income steady, and therefore do not like members of other groups to interfere or negatively impact their public appearance. Since their identity as musicians and social position is achieved (though positions within the group can also be ascribed) group identity is protected and distinguished from others who occupy and work the streets of the French Quarter (Becker and Carper 1956).

As well as maintaining control of their immediate surroundings, buskers must regulate their routines or else lose income. Sally Harrison-Pepper describes a scene where visiting buskers discuss a local busker’s routine. They made comments like, “you gotta speed up that part or else it won’t be funny,” or “that’s really good. You should put it sooner in the show”

(Harrison-Pepper1990:80). Not only are performance routines constantly improved as the individual musicians hone their craft, they are often altered on the spot to suit their audience, not unlike the Mariachi performers of Mexico. In fact, the Mexican influence on French Quarter culture has long roots, as “large numbers of Mexicans” lived “in the Northeastern section of the French Quarter at the turn of the century” (Narváez 1994). These ad-lib routine changes are influenced by the ad hoc nature of temporary group formations as much as it is an economic necessity. Not only are musicians playing to the whim of a passing audience, they are creating fusions of style that are given names by the performers to accommodate their own tastes. Tanenbaum says, “Fusion is a combination of apprenticeship and improvisation” and likely the result of “routinely changing partners” (Tanenbaum 1993:54). This could also explain the fusion of styles in the French Quarter, though I would emphasize the economic necessity of being flexible in addition to the co-mingling of styles and skills.

Tanenbaum mentioned gender discrimination and sexual harassment issues regarding the buskers she interviewed (Tanenbaum 1993:50). Though I did not pursue this line of questioning, as I did not observe overt gender bias in my research, which does not mean it does not exist in this busking community. Further research might uncover gender as well as racial bias, but this topic is not within the scope of this study. I did, however, observe both females and males working together, some of which were married couples, and multi-racial groupings. Rather than exhibiting racial bias, I observed on many occasions conversations and comments by buskers that indicated mutual respect for each other regardless of race. This does not mean buskers are not conscious of racial issues nor do they shy away from discussions about it. One post-Katrina interview, in October 2005, of a couple of musicians who had returned demonstrated great empathy for the others who could not, and attributed this to an extant national problem of racism.

Finally, buskers are entrepreneurs, their own boss, and tend to exhibit a high self-esteem, as they take pride in their work and appear to enjoy it most of the time (Gerstl 1961). This finding is not unlike the findings of Morris Rosenberg where “business students that planned to enter the business fields tended to stress extrinsic rewards” (Simpson and Simpson 1960:117). So, the rewards of this profession are more than just the economic freedoms mentioned earlier, but are also derived from the periods leisure afforded by this choice (Whyte 1957), and the type of the contact they have with other people. Buskers exhibit a bohemian spirit (Frith 1980) and like to reach out to their audiences. As Tanenbaum pointed out, “Some of my survey respondents affirmed that subway space gives them a unique opportunity to reach out, musically and personally” (Tanenbaum 1993:72). These qualities were also apparent in the individuals I interviewed.

Buskers Aren’t Beggars

Of the buskers I interviewed, the one with whom I spent the most time was Carl. The interviews with Carl, as he prefers to be called, were entertaining as he often launched into one of his gag routines in order to demonstrate a point. Carl is originally from Memphis, Tennessee but made New Orleans his home in the late 1970s. Doug, from Scotland, is the only European busker who I interviewed, although he did state that he has more in common with Americans and American culture. Ted is the most elusive of the buskers with whom I never had an opportunity to do a structured interview. My earliest recollection of seeing him perform hammer dulcimer on Jackson Square was during Mardi Gras 1979. When I recently asked him how long he had been playing there he smiled and said, “forever.” Originally from Slidell, Sergio nevertheless identifies himself as a New Orleanian. Though he is primarily a musician who performs indoors

in clubs, Sergio has subbed for street musicians who have regular gigs in a particular group and/or locale. Since he was married to a Dutch busker named Sabina, who regularly busked on Royal Street for a few years, he was able to provide insights regarding the profession. Louis and Lily, a married couple from Minnesota have performed on Jackson Square and on Royal Street on and off for the past thirty years. If they are not touring in Europe or stateside, they are performing in the French Quarter. Hank and Hannah are another husband and wife duo that primarily performs in front of the Presbytere on Jackson Square Pedestrian Mall. Hank is originally from east Texas, but has considered New Orleans his home since the mid 1970s. While I was in Memphis I interviewed two local buskers, John and Robert. John is a part-time busker who owns a small music store where he also makes busking instruments: guitars made from cigar boxes. His wife runs a bookshop in the other half of the building. His friend and favored customer is Robert Johnson, one of the last buskers to play on Beale Street, where the performance of street music is nearly non-existent, and highly regulated when it is allowed.

During the interviews, one of the first questions I asked was “what is a busker?” Everyone asked was familiar with the term and provided me with a variety of detailed explanations. When I asked Hank this question he made a hand gesture and said, “You know where the word *busker* comes from? It’s the sound of a brush hitting a shoe.” After a brief pause he continued with a more direct answer, “A busker is somebody that does something on the street for money without being in any way connected with anything but the person they’re workin’ with.” He continued, “Somebody can busk shining shoes. Somebody can busk playing music. Somebody can busk as a mime... you know standin’ on a soapbox and be a busker.” He finally stated, “Anything that you do with the public that puts money in your pocket out here on

the street, outside the realm of [makes balancing gesture with hands, then quotation marks] a normal job.”

Hank surprised me with a question and a new word when he said, “Now I don’t think that a *spanger* can be a busker.” “What’s a spanger?” I asked. Smiling Hank responded, “spare change?” His posture and tone of voice became more rigid, “Beggars aren’t buskers; beggars are beggars.” He acknowledged that beggars may “hold a guitar” but was adamant in clarifying the difference. According to him it is a matter of “intent to give or take.” A busker provides entertainment, a service, whereas a beggar is “out to shame somebody” into giving some money so they can “go get high.” In other words, the busker is someone whose intent is to come out and do work. “I pay my 27% tax. I pay my self-employment tax,” concludes Hank. Hannah, his wife and colleague, pulls up in their white Dodge van and parks right in front of the Presbytere in preparation for dismantling the music equipment and readying it for transport. Loud church bells overpower the sound of Hank’s explanation about how he pays rent, car insurance, maintains his vehicle brake tag etc. and that he is a full-time busker. We are finally interrupted when his son Leo leaps out of the van, runs over, jumps over the bench and gives his dad a big hug.

Louis commented in an interview that he had not heard the term *busking* until he went to Europe. He defined the term as, “performing in a pedestrian area with the intention of earning some money.” His wife and colleague Lily laughed and agreed. Their first experience busking occurred on Jackson Square in 1975. At that time they did not perform on Royal Street, though Lily recounted encountering a busker sitting in a wheelchair playing a guitar and singing at the corner of Iberville and Royal streets. Since Doug is from Scotland and has busked in places like London’s Trafalgar Square he was intimately familiar with the term. He identifies with the carefree aspect of a busker’s life stating, “I’m a gypsy man. I’m just like, carefree and footloose,

you know.” He continued, “Here I am almost fifty and I’m looking for... I still feel like I’m a youngster.” When I asked him if he had traveled around Europe busking, he shook his head and said, “not really,” but then started listing places where he played like France, Holland, Italy, and Spain. His preference for busking on the Continent was Spain, stating that, “Spain’s a good environment. People let you come stay in their house after you’re out on the street late at night.” He ended his thought by acknowledging Madrid as the “best place” and by strumming a flamenco tune on the guitar.

Though Sergio does not busk often, his wife Sabina does so on a full-time basis. He likened buskers to farmers who bring into the city their own produce stating that a busker is, “someone who is directly responsible for their own livelihood... It’s a really respectable thing to be wholly responsible for your own survival and doing it though a means, something you are passionate about.” Carl corroborates this point stating, “It’s survival. Sometimes there are days where you can make up for times when the income is sparse.” Though Carl acknowledges that economic aspect of busking, he has a broader view of the term and its meaning. He likens it to “today’s version of vaudeville,” where the busker “uses the world as a stage, and they take their talents, whether it be music, juggling, contortion, tightrope walking, mime,” and “they take it around the city where they’re at, around their country, or around the world.” Carl concluded, “For the most part, a true busker is out there doing it for the excitement of his craft and the energy, and it’s an exchange between the performer and the audience.”

Earning Money Outdoors vs. Indoors

The buskers I interviewed made clear and numerous references as to the differences between playing music outdoors versus playing indoors in a club or restaurant. This dichotomy

forms a basis of their identity by differentiating themselves from other musicians, who essentially do the same thing: perform a variety of styles of music to entertain others. They have a number of reasons for playing outdoors, such as the freedom to set their time and place of work, no employer to answer to or with whom to share profits, a smoke-free environment, more direct personal interaction with the audience, and other practical reasons. Furthermore, street musicians rely upon the indoor-outdoor distinction, whereas clubbing musicians tend to use other markers to distinguish the two groups. The latter group often relies upon negative stereotypes regarding street performers, seeing them as deviant or less talented (Becker 1963:86).

Buskers recognize that they are sometimes considered deviant by outsiders, as they are often treated as such by the police, city officials, or other musicians, but this is not entirely due to the behavior or activities of buskers. Becker states that, “Occupational identities contain an implicit reference to the person’s position in the larger society, tending to specify the positions appropriate for a person doing such work” (Becker and Carper 1956:346). So, by virtue of the fact they are performing out in the “dirty street,” they are seen as the type of person or economic class that have no other recourse but to work the streets like beggars (Ashforth and Kreiner 1999). Tanenbaum says that the New York City government passed ordinances in the 1930s that prohibited “actively soliciting donations” because city officials saw street performers as “vagrants who were too lazy to hold a job” (Tanenbaum 1993:42). By February 1935, Mayor LaGuardia had made it almost impossible for street musicians to work, even after public outcry in the form of letters to the New York Times. According to Pete Seeger, a ban on street performance remained in effect for over thirty years, so it went underground (1993:43).

The confusion between buskers and beggars is problematic for the prior group because the latter has experienced an assault on their civil liberties in the form of a district court decision

that bans them from exercising free speech. According to Tanenbaum, in February 1990 Judge Altimari of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit “wrote the majority opinion for the court of appeals upholding the right of the MTA and TA to ban panhandling. He concluded that panhandler’s speech is not entitled to constitutional protection because their activity is a form of assault and the prior court decision upholding panhandling had failed to consider the ‘common good’” (Tanenbaum 1993:165). There have been similar assaults on the busking profession in New Orleans, but that will be discussed in Chapter IV. Nevertheless, bias and stereotyping have had a negative impact on the identity and economic success of buskers and their trade, no matter the location. Even if performers are trained in a conservatory, are very talented at what they do, and own their own cars and homes, street performance carries with it the age-old stigma of poverty and homelessness. Becker attributes this to a general lack of understanding of music and the way of life of those who possess the talent for it. Indeed, musicians are often misunderstood, but even the busker’s colleagues who play indoors support and continue the stereotype due to their lack of understanding and experience regarding the busking profession (Becker 1963:89).

The World Is My Stage

Drawing a distinction between busking and playing music in a nightclub, Carl says “the person who’s indoors is pretty much dealing with more of a select audience, a confined audience, in a more confined environment, and you’re not dealing with the natural elements, or people bustling to and from work or the grocery store.” He balanced this statement with what he thinks is a positive virtue of busking: using the world as a stage. “The excitement of using the world as a stage,” he continued, “is being able to take the magic of what you’re able to contribute and

bring that person to a halt for that brief moment in time.” He says that buskers not only perform for others, they also “commune.” Whether indoors on a stage or out on the street, both types of musicians form groups who often share temporary states of mind, or to borrow Victor Turner’s term *communitas*, but it is more pronounced with buskers, according to Carl, as busking performances tend to involve the audience, urging them to dance and sing along without fear of criticism from the musicians. Of course, this often occurs at music concerts in large venues, many of which occur outdoors like the Woodstock Music Festival, but the difference may lie in the transitory nature of the busker’s audience. Carl certainly prefers the outdoors and interacting with strangers, the “exchange between the performer and the audience.”

I asked Carl what would make someone choose busking over another type of job that provides healthcare, vacation, and retirement benefits. He responded, “It is an adventure. You’re not confined in the 9-5 box. You’re in an environment filled with wonderful imagination, with all different forms of talents.” According to Carl, “people find out” where to go for healthcare, but added, “I was in the Air Force, so I’ve got the VA.” For Carl, the freedom to choose the place and time of work is more important than the benefits of traditional jobs, but acknowledged that the “busker is on his own, and he has to deal with all of the elements, including whatever the laws are in that city, pertaining to being able to do that” (busk). Since Carl does not have a car or a van, and must rely on his bicycle for transportation, he does indeed have to deal with the elements as it often rains in New Orleans. Carl has always lived near or in the French Quarter since he moved here, so he never had far to go for work, though he did show a fondness for streetcars.

Carl says despite inclement weather people busk anyway because, “You do it for love. It’s a heart and soul drive that is geared towards the beauty of the rustling of the trees, or the

sound of the boats on the river, or the train going by, or the bicyclists, pedestrians, the joggers. You don't get that when you're indoors." Carl says that "freedom of expression" combined with the "country element" of being outdoors "supersedes all the other benefits that people expect or look for when they're working a nightclub, or working under contract for some entertainment venue." Carl believes that an outdoor environment "lends itself to letting the creative juices flow." He acknowledged that while there are other occupations that involve working outdoors, but the "nine to five jobs are within the confines or the box of that company." For him, busking "is a freedom. It's a freedom of using literally where you're at as being the place where you're going to express, so long as you're not stepping on the toes of local businessmen, or your crowd's blocking traffic, or you're playing too loud."

Like Carl, Hank likes the freedom to choose when and where he works on any given day, though he has consistently busked with his wife Hannah in front of the Presbytere in Jackson Square for many years. The main reason he likes busking he says, "I don't have a boss." He realized at fourteen years of age, after his first experience earning money busking in Austin, Texas that he "would never sack another bag of groceries at the Piggly-Wiggly," or "flip another burger in a hot, A&W root beer, burger stand." Though he had the opportunity to work for his grandparents on a dairy farm, or at his grandfather's "cabinet shop," or even work with his father in construction, he preferred to play music. Once he had that first opportunity to earn money playing music, grinning he said, "I was ruined." He continued, "I do it because I love it."

Hank said that many years ago he turned down a recording contract because of the limitations placed on his creativity, though he did rue the loss of possible income. At eighteen he had a "signed recording contract" and began a career as a "professional musician" [gesturing quotation marks] that lasted sixteen years, but it was not what he wanted to do because he did not

want to be a “Michael Jackson or Britney Spears.” He continued, “I don’t want someone playing my guitar and taking all the money.” Obtaining a recording contract that pays well, according to Hank, is very difficult. He said, “I don’t want to be a part of a record label and a recording contract where I get... I’ve got a CD out there where I am supposed to get fourteen cents a CD, and I’ve never gotten anything out of it.” He commented that he has turned down “valid contracts,” adding “it was the same old, we take the money; you might get famous.” Holding his infant son Gabriel on his lap Hank concluded by saying, “Man I don’t want fifteen cents per CD, I want fifteen dollars a CD.... Plus, out on the road, as a musician, I’m gone. I don’t get to have him,” pointing to Gabriel. Hannah chimed in, “even though five minutes after we get home, if we figured out how to get away, we’d miss him awful much!”

Playing nightclubs was not a good option either because they “take a percentage from what they sell” in order to pay him. Hank explained the difference the difference in playing on the street and in a club is “intent.” He continued, “If you’re playing in a bar, you are selling drinks.” In other words, he says, “the focus of a bar or restaurant is sales, their sales. My focus is my sales.” He added, “If I’m good at what I do, then people respond to that.” Hank does not think buskers should spend their time asking for people’s donations stating, “I say one thing at the end of the set: thanks for listening, thanks for your support we can use it. I’ve got CDs if you want to talk to us, in nice little handy take home packages.” For Hank, this is all that is necessary as long as the product is good, declaring, “If I gotta beg, then I’m not good enough.”

Sergio said buskers are “professional musicians” who make money on the “dirty street, the dirty sidewalk,” and may be viewed as having a lower status, or “for whatever reason seen as less legitimate” when compared to clubbing musicians. He added, “Some people look down on musicians in general.” Even knowing this, musicians nevertheless chose their profession. When I

mentioned that there is little to no safety net for musicians Sergio stated, “I think we all make that decision at some point when we go down the path of dedicating our lives to playing music.” Continuing he added, “Sooner or later we have to come to terms with the fact that we may never own a house, we may never own a new car, or a car at all, and probably won’t have a safety net when we get older.”

After Sergio saw Sabina “making three hundred bucks a day by herself,” he reevaluated the busking profession commenting that, “This is a legitimate, viable way to make a living. Hell, I was working all night in a club, thinking I’m better than these lowly street musicians, making fifty bucks and they’re laughing all the way to the bank.” Whether or not musicians actually make more money on the streets or in clubs is not the focus here, but that legitimacy is tied to economic success. There is, however, a downside to playing in clubs: Sergio explained that, “A clubbing musician has to put up with a lot of bullshit from the club owners, like getting harassed about taking too long of a break,” while making only a fraction of what was made at the bar. In contrast, the busker is a “free agent” who does not have to “put up with a lot of shit” while earning “a little bit of money from the club.” Sergio lamented having to “beg for tips... really begging more for tips in the club than a street musician does on the street.” The “stage on the street” is a more relaxed one where there are “people out enjoying the day” who may stop and enjoy some music for a few minutes, the busker can choose the repertoire, and no booking agent is necessary to obtain a gig (performance). According to Sergio it is a matter of working it out with the other street musicians who play in the area, and “targeting your audience.” In addition to not having the freedom to take breaks whenever desired, the small percentage earned by clubbing musicians is a sore spot for Sergio, as he contemplates why he remains playing in clubs. The reason he continues, he said, is because there is “the potential to make some money, and if

you have a project that you are trying to build up in the eyes of the ‘legitimate world,’ [gestures with hands making quotes] of the New Orleans music scene, publications, you gotta be out there on the club scene... WWOZ *Live Wire* doesn’t advertise who’s playing on the corner of Toulouse and Royal.”

Lily commented that musicians in general do not have health insurance or regular salary unless they have membership in a union. She described buskers as “self-employed” vendors who “take their chances.” When she and Louis started out they were performing at colleges, fairs and festivals, but became buskers by accident. It was 1975 and they were passing through New Orleans when the transmission in their van had broken down, so they ended up living temporarily in their vehicle on the grounds of an auto repair shop in Jefferson Parish. Though they did not have to pay rent, they were “quickly running out of money” for “food and busses.” Their first busking experience happened by accident. According to Lily:

I don’t know where Louis was because I was by myself. I was just sitting in Jackson Square close to St. Ann, sitting on the grass playing the guitar. The guitar case was open and I wasn’t thinking about it. Busking had never occurred to me... I would have probably thought of it as *déclassé*. But I was broke and I was sitting there singing and playing the blues, and people started throwing me money.

Louis said he “had never dreamed of playing on the street” other than the occasional street festival. Before busking he had taught anthropology and played music in dance halls. Lily worked as a legal secretary, commenting, “I made more in a half an hour singing the blues than I did as a legal secretary in an hour.” She shouted, “Hey! We got money to eat!” At this point, Lily explained, they had discovered a new way to earn money stating, “So, we started sitting on the fountain, directly in front of the church, and people would come and sit all around. It was just marvelous.”

I asked Louis and Lily why they prefer playing outdoors instead of a nightclub. Lily responded, “When you finish doing a gig in a club at night all of your clothes will be smoky, and another thing, when you look under your chair there will be half a dozen bottles or glasses of booze, some of them almost full, some of them empty.” Customers often want to buy drinks for the musicians, according to Lily. She said, “People really like to buy you drinks,” but they would prefer money instead, “because the bartender is making money and being tipped and the money...” Louis, nodding off in his chair, perked up and said, “just put the six dollars in the bucket.” Lily interrupted laughing, “put the twelve dollars in the bucket... just give us ten dollars and give the other two to the bartender.” Lily summed up her feelings about playing on the street versus in nightclubs: “You don’t have to call to book it. You don’t have to make up flyers, or go on WWOZ, or try and get people to come and see it. You don’t have to put up with drunks... well you do if you are sitting in front of the A&P because they congregate there.” She said that she does not like to waste her time “making five calls in order to get a gig.” Nevertheless, Louis and Lily work part-time as buskers because they play in clubs and other venues in New Orleans, and also when they are touring stateside or abroad.

Part-Time and Ad Hoc Buskers

There are a few sub-categories of New Orleans street musicians that bear mentioning. Probably the most notable of these groups of are the marching brass bands that perform “Secondlines” (street parades) and the occasional jazz funeral that sometimes rolls through the French Quarter. Another sub-group are the part-time buskers who play mostly during Mardi Gras or other holidays, or on an occasional weekend, or because they have to divide their time with another income producing activity. These may be professional buskers or musicians who like to

perform on the street to get away from the routine of club gigging or just to have fun, though some of these may be dilettantes who want to perform in public in a non-threatening, relaxed atmosphere. Yet another sub-group of buskers to consider are the beginners looking to become full-time buskers, who have to learn to negotiate the current busking scene or “pay their dues,” according to one busker, in order to be accepted. The last sub-group, mostly made up of transient youths called “gutter punks” by buskers and other French Quarter inhabitants, including the gutter punks themselves, is known to occasionally busk in the area. Though some may be musicians to a degree, and sometimes welcomed by the professional buskers, they are, according to the street musicians I interviewed, of a roguish nature and sometimes cause trouble. Police superintendent Warren J. Riley in an interview commented that gutter punks are known for violent behavior and participation in petty crime such as pick pocketing tourists, and are often involved in taking and selling illegal drugs (Drew 2006:1). The line between acceptance and nuisance is only clear to the regular buskers at the time of contact, as these relationships are very fluid and unpredictable in nature.

Musical Style

Fusion of musical styles is common in the realm of street music. As one busker put it bluntly, “there are no rules.” Formally trained musicians who play in clubs, while free to choose the pieces in their repertoire, are generally restricted to a specific genre of music, whether it is jazz, blues, funk, rock or classical music, whereas buskers can play whatever they want whenever they want. Like their clubbing counterparts, buskers often take an existing song style and add to it intangible qualities thus making it their own, but according to them, they feel less inhibited by having to play to a captive audience that expects a dominance of a certain style.

From what I observed, buskers tend stick to a particular style, usually governed to some degree by the instrumentation at hand, but there is flexibility to play outside a genre, thus giving rise to hybrid forms of music.

Tanenbaum's survey of subway buskers included numerous genres, but all of the genre names she listed are common to commercial music categories, such as jazz, gospel, blues, funk, folk, and country. "Fusion music" is mentioned, but that has been considered a commercial genre for at least a couple of decades (Tanenbaum 1993:55). Whimsical names like, "swamp music" or "whiskey jug band blues" are often used to describe a hybrid genre in New Orleans. Descriptive names such as these may not conform to commercial music industry nomenclature, but the styles of music heard on the street do coincide with more familiar, broader categories. The naming of their songs and the music genres is spontaneous and diverse because they share the technical argot of formally trained musicians, as well as the word usage and phraseology of other street denizens. Not only are the buskers enjoying the freedom to name their own categories of musical style, they are at the same time asserting their independence through resistance to what Bourdieu calls the "monopoly of legitimate naming" (Bourdieu 1985:731).

Gumbo Music

I asked Louis and Lily what they call the style of their music. Lily smiled and said, "eclectic." Louis said, "We play good music. We play New Orleans style, which is anything you want to play." Laughing Lily elaborated Louis's point, "Well, yeah. If you think about it, New Orleans is famous for their gospel music, for their jazz, for their classical, for their blues, for their soul music, for rhythm and blues, zydeco, for Creole.... The Creole music out of New Orleans was a very specific type of music, and it owed a lot to the French classical influence, and

the art music. So, you can sing just about anything and it's New Orleans style." At this, we all laughed. Louis continued, "If it's a good song we might learn it. We've learned good songs that other people have done." Lily followed this clarifying, "We've learned songs because people asked us to learn something for a wedding." Wondering about tourists and audience attention span I asked them about the length of the songs they play, and if they play mostly songs that last for a couple of minutes. Louis said, "Well, we have one song that takes seventeen minutes to perform, but we don't do it on the street." Lily added, "Unless someone really begs us to... We do songs that are popular, but we also do songs people have never heard before and it stops them cold too. We just do what we really want to do... Do what you wanna!"

Louis and Lily listed some their musical influences: Bob Dylan, Sonny and Cher, Kingston Trio, Grand Ole Opry, Burl Ives, Roy Rogers, Gene Autry and the Sons of the Pioneers, Josh White. Lily said, "We also played classical music in high school. Louis played in a marching band and a Dixieland band in high school. I played in a string quartet, classical music." When Lily mentioned Louis "also played Brahms and Bach" I asked him about classical music. He said, "Yeah, in brass choirs. They were wonderful." Lily continued, "I also sang in the choir at school and the choir at church, so I would say that our musical backgrounds were similarly eclectic."

Since Carl mostly plays percussion I did not ask him specifically what he calls his musical style, but he demonstrated the ability to play along with various genres. In a music store I saw him play blues and rock rhythms on a drum kit, accompanying Doug, and again later on when another busker happened by, sat down at an electric piano, and played an original tune. On other occasions, I heard Carl play along with recordings, such as salsa and jazz, so it appeared he could play just about anything or accompany anyone to some degree. Doug had a myriad of

influences, from the folk music of Scotland, to the funky styling of Lightnin' Hopkins, which I heard him play in the store before he sold his guitar. As we were talking about the places he played he commented about how he really liked Spain, then launched into a flamenco-esque piece. "Just a little doodle on El Dorado," said Doug. "I call that 'Andalusian Sketch.' You know this part. [Strumming a flamenco chord progression] That's actually Ladino." He continued explaining his concepts about the history of the oriental scale he was playing, "You know, the Kabala and all that. They have a strict brand of music in that region, which evolved into Flamenco, which uses a Jewish scale. That's the way, I guess, of getting around the Inquisition... it's kinda Moorish." Doug's facial expression changed after beginning to strum another tune. After a few bars he stopped to explain the new piece he had begun playing:

It's kind of a French "nightclub" song that I picked up and fooled around with. An English... in England they had this thing called "Skiffolk." It's a type of music after World War Two that everyone was playing. It's like folk music. This is kinda how it sounds. [Demonstrating the style on guitar], but it's borrowed from French. French are very influential on the English. [Smiles] They just don't like to admit it but it's true.

Hank says his main influences growing up were, Pete Seeger, Woody Guthrie, and "old black sharecropper" music. I asked him where he was raised and how he came to know sharecropper music. He said, "I got that straight from the fact I was living on my grandparents farm and the closest people to interact with were the sharecroppers." I said, "Was this in East Texas?" He responded, "Yeah... migrant workers... I mean, those were the kids I played with, and at night on the weekends after hard work, you know, there's music that they play." He paused for a moment, then wiggled his fingers saying, "It was open tuning, claw style blues, they had an old beat up piano that came from who knows where." Hank said he had a lot of influences, but "quit learning other people's material in the late seventies." He elaborated, "I was off creating my own material and had been all my life anyway, so it became less important

to me to listen to other people's stuff. I had my own path to follow." Before I could ask him about where his music might be heard or what he loosely considers to be the genre of his style, he said, "Where would I work? Concerts, coffee houses, festivals, those are the kind of places where I can work."

Regarding concerts, Hank made sure I understood an important difference stating, "I'm not talking about the big mosh pit fests. That's more juvenile music." Before getting back to my questionnaire schedule, I asked him to explain this. Pulling on his beard Hank explained what is "juvenile music" and why it exists:

The focus of the music industry is to sell music by and large to its market. Do you realize that almost all top forty popular music is targeted at and intended for twelve to fourteen year olds? That's ok, but I'm not twelve to fourteen years old and I don't want to write for them. I'm almost fifty years old, and my thought processes are different than when I was eighteen. I'm an adult and I want to play adult music. Ninety percent of what you hear on top forty radio is juvenile music, set up for a very juvenile audience, generally promoting something fairly negative. I'm not interested.

Though Hank's music would likely be enjoyed by all types of people, he does recognize that he has a core audience. He said, "I do find that my core fan base is about the same as Cher: bikers, gays and lesbians, and people with post-grad work." Hank smiled, "That's the people that listen to me." As his infant son Gabriel was on his lap, gnawing on his left thumb Hank continued, "You know what, I do appeal to just normal folks." He said that Stevie Ray Vaughn became famous because housewives knew his music. Hank paused for a moment to let the anecdote sink in, and then explained how it related to him:

I understand that if I don't appeal to a broad enough segment of society, I can't make a living out here. I don't always do exactly what I want to do. I do what I want to do tempered by the thought that I need to appeal to enough people so that they'll take my music home with them, which means I can keep on playing my music.

At the risk of sounding rude, I asked Hank more directly to identify his style. He answered, “gumbo.” Though, he was tired and the work day was over he was kind enough to elaborate:

I take all those pieces that I like, things like punk rock, Celtic, flamenco, classical conjunto and Spanish styles, rock and roll, ballad music, jazz... I just stick it together in a way that pleases me. I can't make anybody else happy. I gotta make myself happy. I do consider every time when I'm writing material its viability as a... ok see all these people out here? They are diverse within a certain range of diversity. And in a good gumbo you can still taste the individual things in it – it's not soup. So you say [referring to musical style], well that's got a little of that style, that style, and that style, and its recognizable as that. I try not to put my music in a blender, but I don't know what else to call it. Folk music? Maybe. “Adult contemporary”... what the hell does that mean?

What I derived from this explanation was that buskers not only play what they feel, but they also cater to their audience. In order to be successful, a busker must straddle an invisible line between their tastes and what they perceive to be the tastes of their audience, the difficulty of which is compounded by the transience of their clients. Like the musicians who play indoors, prestige is often based on the ability of the performer to perform in deference to the whims of the audience while successfully entertaining them. This resistance to or deviance from the norm helps solidify a positive image of one's independence from the corporate music world, an aspect of their identity buskers seek to reinforce.

Supporting A Family

During the interviews I did not ask specific questions about family origins and kinship, nor did I delve into mundane domestic tasks carried out at home because I was more focused on job related rituals for this research. I avoided questions about religion, and for the most part political views, though the latter did come up during conversations regarding city ordinances and hurricane Katrina. Nevertheless, I did make a few observations and occasionally asked a

question or two. This thesis primarily concerns the occupation and career choices of the interview respondents, but I also recognize they have a home life too, and the scope of this work could be expanded to include other factors such as the impact of this type of career on the family of the performers (Noble 1970; Kingston and Nock 1985; Keith and Schafer 1980) or gender roles and segregation (Davis 1986; Wharton and Baron 1987). Like most others who are employed, buskers have families, children, in-laws, and numerous, daily domestic tasks. The buskers I interviewed, who were also married couples, had raised or were currently raising children. They had devised various strategies for sustaining their families while maintaining their jobs as performers (Moen and Yu 2000:291). Like any other dual income earning households, these buskers had to come up with solutions regarding childcare, often improvising whenever external forces caused a change of routine (Keith and Schafer 1980).

Most pertinent to this study, regarding family life, concerns the continuance of the profession and its traditions in the next generation within the busking family. The family orientation has a profound effect on the education of the children (Dryler 1998) and their future vocation (Schulenberg, Vondracek and Crouter 1984). According to Helen Dryler, “children's interest in and knowledge about specific subject fields is parental education and occupation. We can presume that parents represent specific role-models linked to their type of occupation and education” (Dryler 1998:378). While structural features of the family such as size, birth order, and age separation influence vocational outcomes in predictable ways, according to Schulenberg, Vondracek and Crouter, “the family's influence upon vocational development operates along two interdependent dimensions. The first entails certain opportunities provided by the family for the developing individual (e.g., educational, financial, role models, knowledge sources). The second entails family processes, specifically socialization practices and parent-child relations”

(Schulenberg, Vondracek and Crouter 1984:139). These opportunities and processes were present in the busking families I interviewed.

The Family Band

Louis and Lily have adult children in college, Hank and Hannah have three small children, Sergio was married to a busker but is now separated, John is married and owns a business with his wife Beverly, and Robert had a companion at the time of our interview in Memphis. Carl, Doug, and Ted were single at the time of our respective interviews. One of my early interviews with a busker from Italy named Ricardo is now lost, but at the time he was living with another busker named Funky Minnie. The last time I saw Ricardo I was playing with my samba band on Frenchmen Street during Mardi Gras 2007. In the few moments we were able to exchange pleasantries he informed me that he and Ragtime Minnie were no longer in a romantic relationship, but were still living together and were still friends.

The married couples I interviewed have children, some of them whom are already working as musicians or in training. More data and a lengthy analysis would be required to delve into the dynamics of intergenerational tutelage, but we have, at least, a couple of examples that it occurs within the busking profession. Louis and Lily supported four children and put two through college, at least one at Harvard University, by busking. One of their daughters, Daughter, is an accomplished professional jazz singer in New Orleans. Lily herself grew up in a family of professional musicians. She relates a story about family expectations:

My grandmother was mad at me [for stopping piano lessons] because she wanted me to become good at the piano so I could play organ at the church. My mother was much less... she didn't have her ego invested in me. She was very busy being her own person [performing music].

Hank and Hannah have three small children, all of who are expected to join the “family band.” Not only are one, two, or all three children at the jobsite on a daily basis, Leo, their son and oldest, helps out with the setting up and breaking down of the equipment. The children are often shuttled back and forth to their home in the adjacent neighborhood, and cared for at home by their grandmother who has moved in with them. Hank explains the history of raising his family on the Square:

Leo came out with us for the first eighteen months of his life until he got big enough and fast enough to flip out of his playpen and run away. When we played up on the river in the summer, and there was the river and the train tracks, that’s when we had to get a babysitter, and for a year after that the babysitter was onsite. Then, our second child Antonia came along so we started having babysitters at home. And now we got three. When they’re small [like Gus]... Hannah nurses our son so he comes with us. Yeah, they come out with us when we work.

Until Hank’s mother moved in with them finding consistent and trustworthy daycare was difficult, especially on the weekends. Sometimes Hank has to send Hannah and Leo home because he often becomes “too energetic and too distracted” interfering with their work. I asked him about his plans for his children regarding the busking profession. Hank hopes Leo will soon mature to the point where he can participate in the family band stating, “I want him to be my bass player.” A tourist came up and started asking questions, then pointed to Gus sitting in the baby stroller. Hank said, “That’s my horn player. We’ve got our bass player and keyboard player-singer at home.” Not only are their children expected to learn the trade, one of them, their daughter Antonia is named after two Jackson Square buskers.

Summary

This chapter concentrated on identity. It included a description of New Orleans street musicians, their outdoor activities, part-time busking, musical style, and supporting a family. As

full-time entrepreneurs, they have adapted a lifestyle that is centered on their career as a street performer in the French Quarter. Their musical style is often spontaneous and responsive to their creative whims, and their perception of the audience's desires. They do this with an economic goal in mind while maintaining their freedom to choose what and where they play.

Chapter III

Career

Job Training

Buskers often learn music and improve their musical technique or *chops* while performing on the street (Harrison-Pepper 1990; Tanenbaum 1993; Kapchan 1995). Though most professional musicians do the bulk of their practicing at home or in a studio, a lot of learning takes place while performing for the public. Harrison-Pepper observed that, “street performance provides an opportunity to test one’s skills and routines” (Harrison-Pepper 1990:10). Jazz musicians frequently talk about improving their chops while trying to tackle John Coltrane’s “Giant Steps” in front of a live audience (Becker 1963). However, formal and informal musical training does not necessarily separate buskers from their colleagues who perform in the clubs. Punk rockers, for instance, usually have little to no musical training before getting up on a stage (Hebdige 1979; Becker 1989), while classical music pianists, for example, typically receive training at formal institutions and in private lessons. The majority of buskers I met during this research had little to no formal music training beyond high school, and all of them had at some point taught themselves how to play a particular instrument or song.

Formally trained, clubbing musicians view buskers as: colleagues, desperate colleagues, dilettantes, beggars, or beginners that use street performance as an opportunity to improve musicianship in order to gain entrée into the club scene (Becker 1963; Harrison-Pepper 1990; Tanenbaum 1993). While the latter may be true in some cases, the majority of buskers I met had other reasons for starting out in the street. Freedom to perform what, when and where they want is a most desirable characteristic of the busking profession and is often what attracts buskers to

their profession in the first place. Club owners are not often sympathetic to the wishes of the musicians they hire, and according to Becker, “sometimes the employer applies pressure which makes even an uncompromising jazzman give in, at least for the duration of the job” (Becker 1963:94). Tanenbaum found that, “the street setting facilitated highly democratic forms of expression and exchange” (Tanenbaum 1993:12). Some clubbing musicians assume buskers lack formal training and therefore look down on them, while others judge them based upon unorthodox techniques. On the other hand, I have met formally trained musicians who envied the freedom buskers have in choosing their performance repertoire and place of employment.

Musicians born and raised in New Orleans can receive formal musical education in elementary and secondary schools, at NOCCA (New Orleans Center for the Creative Arts), at community colleges and universities. Four local universities have bachelors programs in music performance, and community colleges also offer formal music courses. Beyond the school grounds there are ample opportunities for learning music in New Orleans. There are numerous nightclubs offering live music throughout the week, music and food festivals, large indoor and outdoor concerts, and of course, live music on the street in Jackson Square. The children who grow up in this environment, many of whom have gone on to professional careers in the music industry, are raised on a diverse diet of phonic food. From neighborhood brass bands performing at Maple Street Bar, jazz ensembles at Preservation Hall in the French Quarter, rockabilly jams at the Rock N’ Bowl, funk bands at Jazz Fest, to *musica camerati* performing erudite pieces at Trinity Church, the city is full of musicians.

Playing in school bands often affords the aspiring musician the chance to play in the most important seasonal event – Mardi Gras. Donning elaborate costumes and carrying their precious instruments, these kids typically begin their music careers *in the street*. From this point, the

career paths dynamically diverge (Westby 1960; Dryler 1998; Schulenberg, Vondracek and Crouter 1984). Some go on to professional careers, participating in various subfields of the music industry in such varying capacities as symphonic concert performers, studio musicians, record producers, recording engineers, music teachers, and bandmasters, or perhaps as street musicians in the French Quarter (Hart 2000). In the findings below, the street musicians demonstrate how they acquire their technical skills, organize, and maintain their work-related equipment and jobsite, adhere to a code of ethics, and develop their clientele. In other words, how they do their job and where they do it.

Learnin' By Ear

Carl is completely self-taught. He exemplifies the type of busker who learns solely by ear, whether by electronic recordings or live performances, he relies on an innate ability to reproduce sound without that aid of written music notation. His first musical inspiration came via radio in a friend's garage while playing Monopoly when he happened to hear the Beatles for the first time. Carl explains how his musical training began:

I've always played by ear. My inspiration for getting off into the drums was when the Beatles came out. I wound up getting a radio, and within five months a set of Slingerland drums. And two years later, in 1966, I saw the Beatles live.

Neither Carl nor Doug mentioned formal training in elementary or high school, but the latter did say his mother taught him songs when he was a small boy living in Aberdeen, Scotland. Doug did not start playing guitar until he was seventeen, and he too was self-taught on his instrument. When I asked him if he ever learned any traditional Scottish instruments he said, "I *hate* bagpipes." In order to learn songs he said he listens to a lot of recordings, noting on more than one occasion that Lightnin' Hopkins, the famous blues guitarist from Houston, Texas, was

one of his favorites. Doug also spent time learning how to play music by listening to live music on the street in different countries in Europe. The Spanish guitar riffs, or musical passages he performed for me was evidence he had indeed learned this music by ear and by demonstration. This kind of gypsy music is not learned through books, but instead in the barrios of Sevilla or Granada in Andalusia, or many other places throughout Spain, or else it is learned in intensive one-on-one lessons from a specialist in flamenco.

Hannah had on-the-job training learning to accompany Hank on percussion. Every time I heard her when I returned to Jackson Square after a hiatus I could discern progress in her playing. When I complimented her, she demurred, but even her modesty could not hide the fact I saw her playing a bass drum and high hat with her feet, a new skill. Hank was self-taught before he majored in music in college. He said, “I was already done learning music before I ever had any formal training. I spent a couple years in college as a music major, but really I’ve tried to unlearn all that.” He switched to engineering in order to help his father, who was a union carpenter.

Louis and Lily both had formal and informal musical training starting at childhood, with slightly different emphases. Growing up Lily sang in church choirs and had a stronger gospel and blues background, while Louis had a stronger Dixieland influence. Louis also played in concert bands and marching bands in high school, and Lily had encountered big jazz band music through her father. She said, “My dad played big band trombone, and when I was a little girl I used to go to the rehearsals where I would get to direct the band, and they would follow me!” Pointing to herself and smiling she continued, “I had sat watching them so I knew how to direct them, and they all got a big kick outta this little kid directing the band.” Her father was a professional big band musician and her mother played classical violin, thus exposing her to those musical

performance environments, which she had in addition to her formal training and academic experiences. From age four to seven she had formal piano lessons, then played violin from the fourth grade through high school. Lily explains her ability to hear music and learn it commenting, “I’m a sponge. I hear it and it sticks.” She said in her elementary school children learned folk music this way, by ear. She says this ability to hear and immediately learn a song has come in handy because it helps her improvise new songs on the spot in the Square, similar to a mariachi improvising in a zocalo.

In addition to formal training, both Louis and Lily learned to play music by ear listening to recordings and going to live performances. During the nineteen sixties they lived in Berkeley while Louis was attending college, where they were exposed to yet another folk music scene. Since Louis could not practice the trumpet by night in the married student housing they both ended up learning to play guitar, starting with a few lessons from a local music teacher who sold them a guitar. Louis said he showed them “some finger patterns, and four or five or six chords,” enough to get them started. I asked them about learning how to play new instruments because Lily taught herself how to play banjo, and what constituted the learning process. Louis said, “We know how to read books.” Roslyn added, “and listen to records.” One thing Louis left out of his answer is the fact that he can read music notation. This skill greatly broadens the type and sophistication of the music books available to those who want to learn how to play not only an instrument but also the music composed by others. Lily said this type of learning is supplemented with hands on learning on the street commenting, “or watching other people play and say: Hey! How’d you do that?”

Tools of the Trade

Musical instruments used by buskers range in quality, though many performers play secondhand instruments that have apparent flaws due to wear and tear. Some performers, like Carl, make their own instruments out of scrap metal, refuse, and broken instruments, sometimes creating a new class of instrument all together. Buskers often decorate their instruments by painting them or drawing inscriptions on them to include their name or pseudonym, or a short poetic phrase that encapsulates a certain philosophical point of view. Sometimes the decorations are such that they match an overall theme related to the busker's costume and street persona. While decorations are often born from the process of renovation and a need to cover unsightly scars on instruments, they are nevertheless creative and clue the observer to the busker's personality. Harrison-Pepper quoted Patricia Campbell's description of San Francisco's famous outdoor performers: "Hokum Jeebs playing the can-can to a cacophony of dozens of chattering mechanical false teeth." Harrison-Pepper added, "these acts are not only on the edge of nuttiness, but also represent the spirit and personality of San Francisco" (Harrison-Pepper 1990:28).

Formally trained musicians, on the other hand, do not often decorate their instruments as a matter of practice, and tend to play new or very expensive instruments handmade by professional instrument makers. Unlike buskers, these instruments and the chosen repertoire dictate the stage personality of the performer, restricting them to determined and inflexible roles. Despite their advanced training and technical skill, giving them the freedom and extraordinary power to improvise in astonishing ways, they are not free, however, to pursue unorthodox manners of expression. Occasionally buskers will go to great lengths in order to use orthodox instruments for performances. According to Harrison-Pepper, a busker in San Francisco "hailed his piano around in the back of his pickup truck (Harrison-Pepper 1990:28).

The findings below demonstrate how New Orleans street musicians acquire, modify, and maintain their equipment in order to do their job. Sometimes their instruments are conventional, run-of-the-mill guitars or drums. However, they are often adapted to conform to personal style, and most importantly, to the performance setting. Since they perform outside, they need to make sure they are heard over the din of traffic and passersby. This often requires specialized, battery operated electronic equipment, or instruments modified to project their sound more efficiently in an open setting. Unfortunately, the use of amplification sometimes creates conflict with law enforcement. Tanenbaum noted an instance where New York park police made an “erratic discretionary” decision, and “confiscated a Mouse amp of a jazz ensemble that had been performing peacefully along the transverse for ten years” (Tanenbaum 1993:236). These small amplifiers range from 5 to 10 watts, which means they have about the same volume as a cell phone ringer.

Portable Rigs

Hank and Hannah set up their rig in front of the Presbytere on the Pedestrian Mall. It includes a tent, so they had to acquire a license in order to place it in that particular location. This not only keeps them cool when the sun is directly overhead, but also protects the instruments and electronic gear when it rains. Since there are no electrical outlets, Hank has devised a system of using car batteries to power a keyboard amplifier, mixer, and outboard guitar effects. When I asked him how he came up with this system he said, “If you know electronics everything runs on DC. It all gets converted. I used to take and convert 110 keyboard amps to run on 12 volt, and then hook them up to a car battery.” He elaborated on his current set up: “You get a trickle charger and keep it at home. You get a couple of deep cycle marine batteries, the kind you use

for trolling motors, boats, that allow that deep discharge.” This reminded him that he had forgotten to charge one of the batteries the night before, so they were relying on only one fully charged battery for that particular day. Hank then pointed to the two smaller speakers mounted high on stands and said, “I use the two satellite Crates, the Limousines, which have internal batteries. I’ve taken those out in the woods, to Rainbow gatherings and things. I’ve got solar panels and charge them up, so I can sit out in the woods for months and have performance without even being on the grid.”

The mixing board Hank uses allows for other musicians, such as a bass player, to plug in and join the group. It has onboard digital effects and feedback reduction, which reduces the amount of gear he has to bring in order to dial in an optimal sound. He said, “Our little rig will run pretty good on guitar and three mikes. I wouldn’t mind miking the kick drum, but even her mike [Hannah’s vocal mike] will pick up enough of the kick drum that it’s ok.” As Hank was talking I looked to my left to gauge how far away the front of the Presbytere was from our location – perhaps twenty-five feet – and asked him about acoustics sound since parallel surfaces often cause unwanted feedback. He said, “This is a great spot to play,” motioning back and forth with his hand toward the Presbytere, “because that’s such good sound. It’s a great place to play,” referring to the natural reverberation. Hannah added, “The only place where it was better was up on the river. The river has good acoustics, but you had to play loud to get it to go down to bounce off the back of the amphitheatre.” Then Hank lamented, “I like playing up on the river at night, but they’ve messed that up so much.”

Hank’s music is written for the main instrument in his set up, a steel string, acoustic guitar. I asked him about guitars in general and what were his preferences. He started naming brands he has used throughout his career, “For a long time I played Ovation, before I got my

Guild.” Since I am also a guitar player I was curious about sound production and onboard electronics; I wanted to know how the sound was transmitted to the amplifiers. He explained, “My Guild has both a Fishman and AKG mini-mike that’s really good for recording.” Curious to know if he installed it himself, I asked what specific model and system he was using. He said, “I had it done at the Guild shop. I don’t know if mine was the first, but I had never seen one done like that before I did mine.” He continued, “That was years ago, but now this guitar is just what I could get after the storm. I played the Same Guild gospel one-piece violin back guitar until the water and the heat of the storm made it totally non-functional.” Hank demonstrated a high degree of knowledge about guitars and how to maintain his equipment. From my point of view as a guitarist his methods seemed orthodox, while others I met made more radical changes to their instruments.

Doug’s guitar had apparently been damaged in a way that he had to make cosmetic changes. Not only did it appear that he had glued an electric guitar neck on the body of an acoustic guitar, installed an electric guitar bar pick-up in the sound hole, he also painted designs and words the front of the guitar. This set-up is rather unorthodox from a professional guitarist’s perspective. Generally, the soundboard or table (front of the body) where most of the sound production occurs is left alone and cared for in a way to maintain its original condition. Any type of paint, sticker, or attachment will dampen the sound at best, lowering and muffling the sound. Nevertheless, Doug had turned an acoustic guitar into an electric guitar, adorned with Greek Muses and musical symbols. He had come to the music store to sell it before he left for Florida stating, “If I sell this I’m gonna want to get cash immediately.” Carl, who was working there at the time minding the store for the owner, interrupted saying, “Yeah, you’ve developed a relationship with this. Man, that’s a sweet lookin’ set of strings right there, the way you got it all

fixed up.” This guitar looked like it would fit right in with Carl’s menagerie of used or broken percussion and string instruments. Nevertheless, Doug did restore the guitar’s functionality. He explained the process:

I filed the frets and set the intonation of the strings. I added the electronics from another guitar. There was a big hole in it when I found it, knocked out, and I patched it back up. This part was knocked out all the way around, so I patched it up with a one by four and wood glue and door veneer. The only reason I painted it was just to cover up the patch, so it wouldn’t be so obvious. [Smiles]

Carl has the most unorthodox complement of instruments I had seen in the French Quarter. Wherever he ends up living, one can find a large assortment of every instrument that has been thrown away or donated to his eclectic museum. Carl used bits and pieces of drum sets, for example, and mounted them on a rolling dish rack, and another on a wheelchair, and adorned them with what he calls “cosmic debris.” When I asked him about these highly decorated, composite musical contraptions, he pointed to one and said, “I call that my *musical necklace*.”

I asked Carl about the figurines and decorations that adorned the musical necklace. Some of the figures were playing musical instruments. Carl elaborated:

Basically, these are street musicians. You know, I’ve got kind of a one-man band extravaganza. This busker has his piano is on wheels... he can go in a circle and play. He’s also got a kazoo that he puts in a snorkel mask, and he plays while he’s wearing a gas mask and he’s got a kazoo that’s coming out the end of it. [Laughs] It’s dedicated to, like a preservation of vaudeville.

There were so many figurines and knickknacks on this rolling instrument it took Carl quite a long time to explain the meaning behind each item. He told me that he likes cartoon imagery and likes to play the court jester, and had an answer for every question I asked regarding his creation. He even remembered the figurines that were missing stating, “my mother collects frogs and I think I’ve got, I used to have like a lot of frogs on here.” He explained this musical necklace was dedicated to his mother who was paralyzed in a car accident in the early 1960s, and

therefore bound to a wheelchair. He interrupted himself when I pointed to another figure on the instrument and then to his wrist, “oh yeah, I bend forks and make them into bracelets, so there’s my fork guitar player there. It’s just a mix-match of life, you know, it’s life, fantasy, the jester that comes out of Mardi Gras.” This particular musical necklace was undergoing the process of renovation, so I asked Carl if he was preparing it for a particular event. He said, “I’m going to have to fix up the whole wheelchair to where it’s part of the whole sculpture, because I don’t want people to even see it as that. I want it to be one solid unit. Then I tie all to me.” He indicated that he might have it ready for Halloween. “I’m able to walk and meander about and I develop kind of a nice rhythm that way,” he said. “When I do it like that,” he added, “I call it the ‘Synergistic Sonic Sensor Shuttle,’ dealing with the synergy of sight and sound and the connection with the people.”

Since I only saw Louis and Lily playing unamplified acoustic instruments, I did not ask about electronic equipment at the time of our scheduled interview, though Lily did at one point mention the use of amplification. I asked what instruments they play and Louis responded, “We both play guitar, she plays mandolin and African thumb piano,” Lily trilling her R’s chimed in, “The Rumba Box.” Louis continued, “and I play harmonicas and trumpet.” Lily described the origins of her thumb piano stating, “It’s a Marimbula, a version of the African thumb piano which originates from Western Africa, but mine comes from Jamaica.” Commenting further on instrument maintenance Lily said, “Actually, the one from Jamaica wore out, and I had some cabinet friends make me another one when we were out in California about twenty-four years ago.”

Performance Setting

Professional busking primarily takes place in the French Quarter, though occasional street performance may also occur in the adjacent Treme and Marigny neighborhoods during Carnival season and other holidays. The two areas most likely inhabited by professional buskers are favored locations along Royal St., behind St. Louis Cathedral (Fig. 1), and the Pedestrian Mall on the north side of Jackson Square Park (Fig. 2), to the left and right of the of the Cathedral entrance. For the latter, busking activity is centered around two spots; one in front of the Cabildo to the west, and the other in front of the Presbytere to the east. The second most frequented area by buskers in the French Quarter also occurs at specific nodes along Royal St., usually at or near street corners. Before hurricane Katrina, busking often took place along the Riverwalk, the walker's promenade along the Mississippi River, from Jackson Square past Woldenberg Park to the Aquarium of the Americas. Other buskers have played there too, but this location is not preferred at the time of this writing because of the lack of tourists.



Fig. 1 - Jackson Square. December 2005.



Fig. 2 - Jackson Square Pedestrian Mall. July 2007.

On the south side of Jackson Square, just across Decatur Street there is a small, semi-circular amphitheater facing the Square. Break dancing buskers who perform on the weekends to large crowds often occupy this outdoor theater. Wearing uniform costumes, they have a regular routine choreographed to music, played on a portable sound system. They do acrobatic tricks requiring audience participation, which often elicit loud cheers and laughter. Adjacent to this structure just to the east is Café Du Monde. Street musicians take regular shifts performing in front of the café, while clowns make balloons for children a few yards away (Fig. 3). For many years on clear autumn nights, a person sometimes sets up a telescope in the same area normally occupied by the clowns and mimes, or *living statues*, to the west side of the café.



Fig. 3 – View of Café Du Monde. December 2005.

The most visible spot for buskers is on the Pedestrian Mall, on the north side of Jackson Square. Tuba Fats used to play in the spot in front of the Cabildo (he also played in other locations), where the brass bands set up. According to buskers, this is the traditional spot for the brass bands, which can vary in size from a few to a dozen members, but has not been the same since Tuba Fats passed away in January 2004. On the east side, in front of the Presbytere, is the favored location for buskers who mostly play acoustic string instrument music. There is camaraderie between the two groups and occasionally a member of one group might sit in with the other, but both have a routine they stick to. Most performances take place on the weekends, depending on the season and holidays, starting on Friday afternoon. New Orleans buskers can be seen performing any day of the week, but weekends draw more visitors or potential customers, especially near holidays and festivals. Generally, they will play whenever weather permits.

The other popular location to busk is along Royal Street. On weekends, from the morning until late afternoon, a designated segment of Royal Street is closed to vehicular traffic. This allows pedestrians to walk freely in the street without fear of speeding cars and bicycles while they snap photos and browse the art galleries and antique stores. Buskers are therefore able to set

up in the middle of the street and play for most of the day until the street opens again at dusk. Here you will find any number of buskers who form ad hoc groups. These groups tend to form around core performers who have sets of songs memorized. Upon invitation, less experienced buskers may join in as long as they can carry a tune, otherwise they may be told to stop playing or leave. The line between novice musician and street denizen is blurry, as some who gather around the buskers seem to want a piece of the action. So, the groups will vary in size depending on the core member's tolerance of the groupies. Sometimes the more experienced buskers will keep the membership to a minimum so as to maximize profits and minimize dissonant harmonies. For this reason, some prefer to play solo or only in duets or trios. The smaller groups earn more money per individual and have less problems associated with maintaining a larger group. In turn, larger groups attract more attention because of higher volume and greater visibility.

Making a Living On the Move

Buskers are often on the move from one location to another in the French Quarter, but they also travel to other cities and countries. It was outside scope of this study to include data from buskers interviewed in other cities, but as a result of hurricane Katrina I was able to find out what happened when New Orleans street musicians were forced to change their venue. In the interviews I asked them how they earned a living in new performance settings, and how they adapted to their surroundings.

Lily commenced working immediately after the storm, taking advantage of the opportunity to use a computer where she and Louis were staying. She set up some tours, not only to earn money for themselves, but also to help raise money for all the victims of the disaster.

Their tour of the West Coast included performing in clubs, open markets and at least one Unitarian church. Hank and Hannah also toured and performed, though their trips were not as extensive. They “went from being in hell and desperation to being on vacation” once they left Baton Rouge and left for Galveston, Texas. According to both Hannah and Hank, they were treated very well in Galveston. With the threat of a second hurricane, Rita, headed their way, Hank and Hannah had to evacuate Galveston, so they went to Austin. Unfortunately, their time in Austin did not go as well as Galveston. Hank became angry as he recounted the corruption at a musician’s co-op where local musicians were encouraged to lie about being street musicians from New Orleans stating, “I saw people saying ‘I’m a street musician from New Orleans,’ but I’ve never seen them before.” Hannah added, “Where did you play?” as if talking to the “hucksters.”

Hannah reported, “We could not get any help in Austin at all. Oh, come back again for the next open mike, when we don’t have to pay you.” The one gig that did pay a little was a “benefit show they did for ACORN” (The Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now). She continued, “It was a benefit, so we didn’t expect to get paid for anything. We were expecting to make a few CD sales, and whenever we play a benefit we sell the CDs for fifteen; it costs five bucks to make the CDs, we give five bucks to whoever the fundraiser is for, and we keep five bucks.” Hank observed, “there were some nice, sweet people,” such as a “gay couple,” who put them up in their air-conditioned guesthouse garage. Hank concluded they tried very hard, working every night playing gigs, but they received little response from people. He said, “I showed up every night to go out and play something. I’m just a musician. I’m not begging. I’ve come out to do what I do. Just respond to it.”

Hank gave an example comparing Austin with New Orleans regarding buskers making a living and supplementing that income by playing clubs. In New Orleans a busker can go do an “acoustic night” gig at Checkpoint Charlie’s, and if there are any tourists in town, one can earn “a hundred bucks.” In Austin, said Hank, “I walked out with nothin’.” So, Hannah and Hank booked more gigs in Galveston and headed back to familiar spots where they previously had success.

Getting to Work

According to all the buskers I interviewed, the French Quarter is a “walker’s paradise,” for tourists, local residents, and buskers alike. Though bicycles are not permitted on the Pedestrian Mall or barricaded streets zoned for pedestrians only, people are often seen riding bicycles throughout the Quarter, as well as to and from adjacent neighborhoods. Buskers are avid bicyclists and often have complex contraptions attached to their bicycles in order to move equipment to and from a busking locale. Though some buskers own cars or vans, the majority of them travel around the French Quarter by bicycle, including those who own automobiles. The bicycle enables them to move from one location to another very rapidly without having to look for parking, which is either very difficult to find during weekends or expensive. Since buskers often go back and forth from home to work, bicycles are the most affordable and practical form of transportation.

Chopper Bicycles

I noticed quite a few buskers have bicycles that have been modified to resemble choppers akin to modified motorcycles; they have “ape hanger” handlebars and long, extended front

wheels. One busker showed me how he welded the bicycle frame to create a “low-rider chopper bike.” Carl has traveled cross-country on quad-cycles and other contraptions, carrying all his gear. Some of his bicycles are specialized for local transport, as well as highly decorated:

I call it a “flycycle.” The propeller kind of keeps me cool on a really hot day, the faster it spins you know. Actually, this propeller right here helps [me] get off the ground. One day I was going up St. Ann and all of a sudden I wound up lifting off the ground about a thousand feet. I got about a thousand feet off the ground and then I realized it was only a dream. I woke up and I wasn’t in flying, you know. But it takes at least two cans of Garbanzo beans to get this, you know. I don’t know if you are aware of this, Garbanzo beans produce more flatulence than all other beans. So, that’s a little bit of trivia there, dealing with flatulence.

Job Performance

Like other professions, busking in New Orleans is governed by rules of ethical conduct, though there is difference: the rules are unwritten. Nevertheless, the lack of codification of these rules does not mean they are not effective or not enforced (Becker 1963; Heyl 1977; Harrison-Pepper 1990; Tanenbaum 1993; Hodson and Sullivan 2002). Becker says that rule enforcement by core members of the group ensures steady workflow stating that, “Cliques are bound together by ties of mutual obligation, the members sponsoring each other for jobs, either hiring one another when they have the power, or recommending one another to those who do the hiring (Becker 1963:104). Regarding the buskers, these informal rules of ethical conduct are based upon economic considerations. The bottom line is they must earn a living, and have therefore developed informal rules of conduct to insure success.

Though most buskers did not appear inebriated while working, for example, I did observe the consumption of alcohol on many occasions. There is no rule against drinking alcohol while on the job, but I observed buskers shun those who drank excessively. Those who exhibited drunken behavior, were not the full-time buskers I interviewed. On occasion, the buskers become rule enforcers. According to Becker, members of a group “responding to the pressures of their

own work situation, enforce rules and create outsiders in a selective way” (Becker 1963:161).

This response functions as a mechanism for maintaining their identity, thereby demonstrating to others, i.e. shop merchants and law enforcement, who is a busker, and who is a beggar or drunk. If buskers are seen as part of the problem, they could lose their social position and income.

Preventing trouble and keeping a low profile has benefits such as, reducing friction with the merchants, local residents, and the police. Even though street performers attract tourists and bring in more clients to local stores like the former A&P Grocery, they are sometimes perceived as attracting beggars and petty thieves (Becker 1963; Harrison-Pepper 1990; Tanenbaum 1993). The local merchants have a legitimate concern regarding the latter in that they do not want to lose business, and prefer to keep their storefronts free of debris and loiterers. Some cities have required licenses for public performance in order to mitigate these types of problems, but effectiveness of licensing for this purpose is questionable (Tanenbaum 1993). Ordinances requiring a license regulate public performance is a complex issue, especially in large cities like New York. Though it was required at different times in the past in the New Orleans French Quarter, it is not at this time an issue for street musicians. Garbage and broken glass is not uncommon on the streets of the French Quarter, but it tends to be worse wherever large groups of people gather on a regular basis. Buskers take care of their performance sites and often they will pick up garbage and ask members of the audience to do the same. The audience tends to respond favorably to requests by the performers to do this, but it is not always possible to control large crowds of inebriated people. This is a problem during Mardi Gras and whenever a large festival takes place in the city or in the downtown area.

Sharing public space is not an easy task, because there are many unwritten rules that govern each location. This is necessary if buskers want to sustain their symbiotic relationship

with the local merchants as well as maintain amicable relations each other. If someone is misbehaving or causing a scene that has a negative impact on their performance, a busker might take drastic measures to keep the peace (Heyl 1977; Katz 1977). Street musicians have been involved in conflicts in the past with other types of buskers and artisans in the Square, but they demonstrated effective skills in conflict resolution. This will be discussed in part here, and in more detail in the findings of chapter IV.

One of the ways buskers prevent conflict is by maintaining a social hierarchy or pecking order (Becker 1963; Katz 1977; Tanenbaum 1993). By enforcing primacy of seniority, buskers are able to regulate the opportunities for earning income, and therefore ensure that those within the core group of professional performers take precedence. According to Becker, “A network of informal, interlocking cliques allocates the jobs available at a given time. In securing work at any one level, or in moving up to jobs at a new level, one’s position in the network is of great importance” (Becker 1963:104). New arrivals or those who are not considered part of the core group will likely experience conflict. Tanenbaum states that the nature of the public space itself impacts social interaction, recalling the work by Paul Chevigny on the “controlled community ideal” versus Jane Jacob’s idea that “busy streets are not disorderly,” and that social order is maintained by the people themselves (Tanenbaum 1993:119). Absent the external forces of government control, as in the controlled environment discussed by Chevigny, the buskers will figure out a way to create and enforce their own rules through a self-imposed hierarchal system.

Unwritten Code of Conduct

One day in while observing a “jug band” on the corner of Royal and St. Ann streets, an important busking locale, a member of the audience became rather rowdy. This person appeared

very disheveled and inebriated, and seemed to be familiar to the buskers performing there. One busker referred to him by name and told him to calm down. Instead, the intoxicated man grabbed a beer bottle and broke it over the head of another person, who also appeared to be intoxicated, sitting near the buskers. Verbal threats from a couple buskers and audience members quickly calmed the situation, but the damage was done. About one half of the audience, mainly tourists, became scared or upset and left immediately, though a few did seem interested in the possibility of a fight. Washboard Jed and Funky Minnie both related how angry they were at such rude behavior. A few other intoxicated regulars also chimed in their disapproval, though most of them were laughing or smiling.

There are rules governing the street scene in Jackson Square. To the west of the entrance of Street Louis Cathedral one will find a brass band, formally headed by Tuba Fats for many years, while on the east side one will find blues players such as Hank and Hannah, or Louis and Lily playing trumpet and banjo, respectively. This paradigm is part of a regular overall pattern of space occupied by all the artisans of Jackson Square, who have, over time, painstakingly negotiated a set of unwritten rules of conduct. This is true in most circumstances throughout the French Quarter where street musicians or other types of buskers such as tap dancers, mimes, jugglers and clowns perform. Sergio described how Sabina had a conflict with another busker over a particular spot, and even though the dispute nearly became violent after Sergio heard that he had threatened Sabina, the two buskers eventually worked it out and developed an amicable relationship. Sergio concluded, “She had to learn her way, you know, Grandad kinda took her under his wing. She had run-ins with other buskers until she figured out the system, who’s got what spot.” Eventually Sabina was able to work her way into the busking scene, finding her place in the hierarchy.

Though the particular designation of space, and musical style of the concomitant performers are relatively fixed on the Pedestrian Mall, brass bands on one side in front of the Cabildo and blues guitar-based bands on the other side, there is much interaction between the two major musical venues in front of the cathedral. Regular, if not daily, communication between performers in the Quarter keeps everyone informed about the current conditions while maintaining a status quo. Hank explains this:

Look, we need each other. We have sorta rules of behavior. If somebody else shows up [another busker], as long as they're not being... out of behavior or, if you show up to a spot and it's your spot, you should share. That doesn't mean if you sat out here in the heat all damn day, and come time that it's cool, and somebody shows up and says, "I wanna sit now,"[play here] you can tell them to "go fuck off. Asshole, if you want a spot get your ass up early and get here." It's first come first serve.

In some cases the status quo is backed by legal permits obtained at City Hall that allow the holder of the permit to set up a certain type of structure in a specific location. Carl says there are no permits required at this time, but there had been battles over requiring busker licenses in the past. Hank and Hannah have managed to retain their favorite location not just by arriving early, but also because they set up a tent, which requires a permit. Not only does having a tent permit help insure a spot on the Pedestrian Mall, it also protects their children. Hank explained, "We need this. We have children." Pointing to his infant son Gabriel on his lap, "He and before him Ruby and before her Liam needed shade in the summertime." Otherwise, street musicians cannot obtain a permit for playing in Jackson Square. Having familiarity with the laws and statutes governing the French Quarter, Hannah stated, "You can't get a permit anymore. There's a grandfathered ... I'm the one who did the research. There is a permit that is grandfathered in. If you have been playing out here since before nineteen fifty-something, then you can get a permit. But, you cannot get a permit for anything else." Lily gave a practical reason for not requiring permits: it would create an economic barrier for traveling musicians and other nomadic street

performance acts. Yet a different angle to the idea regarding busker permits came from Sergio; he said the city and merchants would rather keep it the way it is, where no busking permits are required.

Carl has never had any conflicts with other buskers or artisans in the French Quarter because he is mobile, never staying at one spot for very long. He elaborated, “I would take my musical contraptions (which have wheels) and move about, so I was more of a troubadour in that sense.” Other buskers, according to Carl, normally remain in a fixed location for longer periods of time. He commented on this style of busking, “but for other musicians who find their spot, and that’s where they’re going to play for an hour, couple hours, then, they’re the ones who pretty much have to deal with the business owner, or the police, or some kind of a thorn in the foot because they are pretty much in that location for a good bit.” Carl draws the inference that immobility might be a liability for buskers; he may have a good point. He also states that, “A lot of the conflict has to do with amplification, or it might be about blocking a public passageway. It might be about blocking the sidewalk, and you can’t control your crowd, and they’re spilling out into the street.” From this example one can see how this could cause a busker to get in trouble with the police, even though the busker may not be doing anything wrong. If the busker is at fault, and perhaps even belligerent, it could cause a lot of damage to the reputation of the busking community. Carl concluded:

All it takes is one situation. There’s always the bad apple or the person who’s performing might have a drug or drinking problem, or whatever, and they get abusive towards somebody in the audience, or a business owner. And the conflict gets out of hand and the police are called. That one person basically represents the busker community and that can bring down everybody.

Hannah described the history behind the various conflicts between the painters and the tarot card readers and the city council, which will be addressed later in this study. Regarding

musicians she said “they were more cohesive” during the political battles with the city council during the nineteen eighties and nineties, and were not embroiled in the battle between the painters and tarot card readers. Choosing at random the name of another Jackson Square group I asked Hank if he ever encountered any problems with the painters. He responded, “I don’t. They’ve hired me to come play their benefits. I don’t have any problems with painters. Why would I?” I mentioned the disputes between painters and tarot card readers. Hank perked up, “They don’t like tarot readers! And you know why they didn’t like tarot readers? They didn’t like tarot readers bringing a set up like this,” pointing to his tent, “dropping walls behind it and setting up in front of them all the way around,” motioning his arm in the shape of a square, “and setting their set up so elaborately that you couldn’t even see the paintings. And would not allow people to just come look at the paintings without being totally harassed.”

Hierarchy

When I inquired about who gets to play where and when Hank responded, “That’s my spot. I put twenty-five years of my life making it my spot. Now, if Louis and Lily show up it’s *our* spot. If Butch Mudbone showed up from Memphis, you know what, there’s the pole baby.” He motioned to his right toward the other side of the light poll, where I saw Louis and Lily playing earlier that day. Hank continued, “That’s the way it was for a lotta years. One act would set up on this pole, and another act would set up on that poll.” He was interrupted by a few loud trombone blasts coming from the Cabildo side of the Mall. He looked in that direction and continued, “The brass bands have always been large enough they don’t have to share ‘cause they’re already sharing.” Laughing he concluded, “When there’s fourteen of them down there, there ain’t any room for two bands. They are two bands!” Regarding a pecking order for who

gets to play and where Hank said, “If we don’t come show up, then it’s not our spot. The only rule there is, the only legality involved is, if you get here first it’s your spot,” continuing, “Not only are we willing to get here first... when we get here first the police know who we are, and the business owners know who we are.” Hank summed up his thoughts on Jackson Square and his role there by saying, “This is my spot because I paid my dues to make it my spot.”

Curious as to whom he considered his peers to be, I asked him about other buskers. I started out by mentioning Tuba Fats and Ben, the latter who was warming up to play just fifty yards or so away. Hank continued, “Butch Mudbone, The Tumbleweeds, Grayson, and some of the guys who are dead and gone, Chef and brass players. Yeah, that’s my family, really my family.” Looking again to the Cabildo he continued, “Ben and Robert and them, I love those guys.” Smiling he said, “Ben still owes me twenty bucks.”

Street Economics

Tourism is the economic driving force that keeps the local economy afloat. For many buskers, tourists are their main source of income, the consumers of their musical product. How they behave with their potential customers, how they perform on any given day, and many other variables such as weather, crime, or harassment by law enforcement, may affect the outcome at the point of sale (Harrison-Pepper 1990; Tanenbaum 1993; Low 1996). Work may also be affected by illness or work-related accidents (Hodson and Sullivan 2002). Earlier in this chapter in “Making a Living On the Move” I reported how buskers earned a living right after hurricane Katrina, and in the previous chapter in the section “Musical Style,” I discussed how buskers create their routines and modify their style of performance to encourage donations and potential

customers. In the last section of findings in this chapter, I will briefly touch upon what happened when the French Quarter street economy was upset by another variable.

Tourists Are Our Clients

Hank knows how to reach out to his potential customers. He has worked out his banter so that he can improve the possibility of a sale at any given time. Even when customers asked impolite or even rude, personal questions, Hank answered them in a way that charmed them, which often resulted in the sale of a CD. Throughout the years playing on Jackson Square, he had learned to balance his personal, musical tastes with what he believes the average tourist might like. This had worked out very well financially, until September 11th, when tourism came temporarily ceased, causing their income to shrink “by about forty percent,” compared to what it had been before the terrorist attack on New York City. “Before 9/11,” said Hank, “we had an income.” Hank explained how changes that affected tourism had an impact on their income:

Before 9/11, you know what, we made a good living. We had money in the bank and we were progressing towards our little version of the American Dream. You know, home ownership, always paying our bills on time, owning something, improving our lives. We had a kid, and you know what, it was a pretty bright life. Now, it wasn't real easy, but it was doable. After 9/11 it dried up.

Tourists have trickled back into the city, but buskers are concerned not enough will come in order to sustain the street economy. Nevertheless, Carl evinced an optimistic view of New Orleans. He said it will remain a popular tourist destination as long as the French Quarter remains as it was noting that, “The French Quarter is an international, interplanetary city within a city, and there's the spontaneous combustible energy that comes with the parade.”

Summary

This chapter focused on the components that constitute a street musician's career. It included a description of job training, equipment used on the job, and the nature and location of the jobsite. It also covered how busking in New Orleans, as a profession, has an unwritten code of ethical conduct, licensing issues, a hierarchy of seniority, and how performers adapt to changes in their work environment that affect their income.

Chapter IV

Community

Mutual Support Network

As with any group, in order to survive, buskers formed a support group called the New Orleans Street Performers Association. This network of street musicians was created to respond to crises that threatened the livelihood of its members. It coalesced around core members, who were the most active and visible performers in the French Quarter and who organized meetings to take place in various participants' homes or mutually agreed upon locations. At these gatherings, buskers related stories about how specific, local events were having an impact on their profession. They used these meetings to organize a response to meet the challenge of the day, which were often related to harassment from law enforcement and local shop owners. "Police harassment is one of the main reasons," according to Tanenbaum, the busker in New York named "Robert Turley founded the United Street Artists, also known by its patriotic acronym, USA." She continued, "Turley learned that a number of hip hop street performers were abandoning their calling and turning to drug dealing. Money they explained, was not the only incentive; they also found that police harassed them less as drug dealers than as street performers" (Tanenbaum 1993:212). Tanenbaum also found that the government and private interests were putting pressure on the hip hoppers:

In the winter of 1993, for example, a break-dance troupe set up outside of Bergdorf Goodman, an elegant clothing store in Manhattan's "gilt-edged" commercial district, in the same spot as Christmas carolers had been welcomed. Police told the dancers that the store's management "doesn't want you here." Street robot dancer Mega Flash Martinez was also arrested for performing on Fifth Avenue. According to Martinez's report, police officers threw him against a store window with such force that the glass shattered, then they detained him

in jail for two days. They charged him with kicking the window himself, but an eyewitness corroborates Martinez's account (Tanenbaum 1993: 215).

Buskers in New Orleans are familiar with this type of treatment, since police harassment sometimes occurs in the French Quarter. According to buskers, the harassment often begins with a complaint from a store owner or manager, or a Quarter resident who does not like street music. Becker says, "enforcement occurs when someone blows the whistle," and by blowing the whistle they make "enforcement necessary, when they see some advantage in doing so" (Becker 1969:122). This behavior was also apparent among other artisans who occupy Jackson Square, most notably the Tarot card readers and the painters.

New Orleans Street Performers Association

Regarding the difficulties a colleague was having, Hank explained, "When he was in the pits after Tuba died and the storm came, and he was all kinda messed up, you know what, I slapped him on the back of the head and said 'will you please straighten up. We love you and don't want to see you die.'" Lily said buskers had a "crisis-oriented organization" that met at "various homes in the French Quarter, various coffee houses, or bars, or Jackson Square," in order to work out solutions. She said, "We'd write letters to the city council, letters to the mayor, and the government, and we demonstrated against the businesses that were hassling us too much, set up picket lines." After numerous interviews it was apparent Lily was a driving force in the French Quarter busker community. Hannah identified Davis and Lily, and Tuba Fats as the core members who maintained busker unity. She said they "were pretty much the spearheads. They were the coalition back in the eighties that fought and fought and fought, and made sure they didn't get rid of buskers down here." Hank jumped into the conversation, "I was around for some of these fights too. I stood with them. I went and did the protests, and did the city council thing. I

stood out here and said, ‘well arrest me asshole.’” He said “there have been multiple attacks [against the buskers from the city council] back in the mid nineteen nineties it was tough. When I first started coming back regular [to busk on the Square] it was a fight.”

The buskers of Jackson Square are not only colleagues, but some consider each other “extended family.” Hank concluded our conversation by recalling his relationship with his former colleague and friend Tuba Fats:

Anthony James Lacen was my friend. When I first was in this town I scrapped with him over spots, a long time ago. He and I fought over spaces, but you know what, mutual respect and friendship, I loved that man. We became really good friends. He taught me how to play in B Flat. I really miss him. He was our Ambassador at City Council. He was a musician that was respected by a whole lot of people. If there was a problem in the Square he could usually work it out. If there was a problem with a cop being a jerk, he could get it calmed down. If there was a situation among musicians he would mediate. He was probably one of the best tuba players in the whole world... and I miss him.

I asked Carl how buskers support each other. He mentioned the Internet as a viable resource stating, “There’s a couple sites online that give a low-down on what’s going on around the country, and there’s also performers.net. Those sites are very valuable for finding out licensing in different areas or going across the border in different countries.” He continued, “New Orleans buskers use it as well as people coming down to New Orleans. Yeah, it’s a very valuable site.” I did Internet searches at various times during this research. Many of the busking links I found were no longer in existence, but the two websites Carl mentioned were still functioning at the times of this writing.

Perhaps the most practical of the websites for buskers is the *users forum* at performers.net. I observed numerous conversations between buskers regarding current conditions of busking locales, advice about portable equipment, costume design, and travel advisories. Another web site that provided valuable and rare data about Tuba Fats and busking in New Orleans was communityartsadvocates.org. On an another Internet web page there are memorials

to Tuba Fats by various authors and musicians, and a history of the legal battles between New Orleans street musicians and the city government. Also listed were the current statutes regarding public performance, and rules pertaining to street vendors who work in the French Quarter.

Family support

In times of crisis, the support of other family members can often mitigate serious problems, and provide life-saving help. This was made apparent, even highlighted, by the hurricane Katrina disaster. The buskers who were couples as well as colleagues had the advantage of extended family ties through marriage. In her article, “Community Influences on the Occupational Adaptation of Vietnamese Refugees,” Christine R. Finnan observed a high degree of support that extended beyond the nuclear family. Their work ethic was highlighted by the fact they often refused outside aid, but instead looked to familial support in concert with expectations that each able-bodied person would support the entire family. Finnan states, “Refugees wanted their entire family to be self-sufficient. This meant that parents cared for their children, and children cared for their parents. Income was pooled so that no one, including the elderly, had to rely solely on public assistance” (Finnan 1982:165). The street musicians I interviewed who had strong family ties also followed this pattern of mutual support within the network of their extended family.

Finding Shelter and Aid in the Aftermath of Katrina

Hank was upset at the poor treatment they received in Baton Rouge. He said, “When we were there, I found out something about Baton Rouge. If you’re poor in Baton Rouge you will live a week or so without [electrical] power, ‘cause that’s the way they treated us. We spent the

first week, where we were, in the exactly the same conditions as anybody that was here.” Hannah interjected, “But we could go shopping. We were at my aunt’s itty bitty one bedroom apartment.” Hank continued, “Yep, we went to her aunt’s apartment because it was somewhere to go. Then we had some friends who came from Houston who said, ‘we’ll come get you and help you. We have a place for you in Houston.’ They came and got us, but we had to go in a rental van, because our van needed a new radiator and water pump. We got screwed in Baton Rouge.” Hank and Hannah wanted to leave Baton Rouge and go home because the living conditions, according to them, were not much better for many including them. Hank said, “We didn’t have television for five or six days. Hannah interrupted, “Which was a good thing.” Hank continued, “We lived like everybody else: hotter than hell all day long, and at night you either left the windows up, which didn’t have any screens, or slept outside and let the mosquitoes eat you, or you did sauna.”

Hank wanted to come back a day after the storm, but most people were not allowed back into the city at the time, although a few did sneak in. He and Hannah finally returned to their flooded home in early October, and began cleaning out their house. Since the downstairs was completely inundated with deadly mold, they moved what they could salvage upstairs and put up plastic “to keep the mold from coming up,” and made accommodations for their children and Hank’s mother. He said, “My mom got the kids bedroom, and all the rest of us shared our bedroom. We had a generator which I got cranked up.” Hannah added, “we had to go to the West Bank to get gas for it.” He continued, “I got some gas cans and I’d go get thirty-five gallons of gas every two days.” This allowed them to return to some normalcy at home. “We had our television, our one little refrigerator, our satellite still worked and we had a grill.” Though life was difficult they were able to accommodate their basic necessities, including the needs of

family guests who lived in a camper outside. Motioning with her hand over her head Hannah was grateful to have running water stating, “The water was still on, so we could flush the toilet and we took jug baths.” They also found sustenance and aid at Red Cross facilities that had been set up in strategic locations.

Sunday morning, just before the arrival of hurricane Katrina, Lily received a frantic call from her daughter Autumn at six thirty in the morning demanding her to leave. Lily told her daughter the hurricane would likely turn away going around New Orleans and not have an effect on them. “But Mother,” Autumn replied, “The storm’s as big as the entire Gulf of Mexico! You gotta get outta there!” Lily wasn’t convinced until Autumn said, “If you don’t get outta there and you get killed, I’m gonna kick your coffin!” Louis and Lily stayed with family in Alexandria, “in the house, stuck in front of the television for a week.” After the shock from the traumatic event subsided, Lily got right back to work lining up gigs using a household computer. She said, “It was obvious that we weren’t going to be going back home any time soon, and it was obvious they were not going to stop charging us for rent [mortgage], and the water bill, and the electric bill.” Lily commented that they enjoyed the visit with her family despite the circumstances.

Some buskers, such as Carl, stayed throughout the entire storm and the aftermath. He told me he stayed because, “I don’t have kids, or dogs or cats, and I didn’t want to leave. Where would I go? I had all my water and food and provisions and radio, everything I needed.” He had just moved into his new abode in the Marigny when the hurricane hit. The building was made of corrugated tin and was severely damaged. About half of the roof was ripped away as Carl climbed inside a metal filing cabinet to protect himself from flying debris. He said it was “quite a ride. The building was shaking like a seven-point-one earthquake.” Lack of provisions and protection from the elements forced Carl to take up temporary residence at a store in the French

Quarter, where he had worked on occasion and had developed a friendship with the owner. He had given Carl permission to stay there in exchange for watching the store. Carl did not rely on family, but instead his friendships he had developed while working and living in the French Quarter.

Greater French Quarter Community

The street musicians have an incentive to maintaining boundaries and group identity because the numerous battles between Tarot card readers and the painters, as well as feuds within each of these respective groups, have often brought negative attention to Jackson Square artisans and performers. Though there have been numerous disputes between various groups that inhabit the Square, the musicians I interviewed spoke favorable about them, noting a few exceptions regarding specific events. In general, the musicians and others I spoke to evinced a strong desire to maintain peace and prosperity in Jackson Square.

Painters have occupied Jackson Square for many years. According to Doug MacCash, “French Quarter legend has it that wildlife artist John James Audubon sold his work on Jackson Square in the 1820s” (MacCash 2007:1). Once the Vieux Carré Commission was founded in 1936 and tourists flocked to the city, there were also many bohemian types and artists (Lewis, pg. 146). Currently there is a battle raging among the painters over selling prints on Jackson Square. Those who do not sell less expensive prints of their art recently won a court battle halting the sale of prints, but since this may become a First Amendment issue it may end up going to federal court. The many battles between the painters and tarot card readers gave rise to organized factions of artists and tarot card readers, as well as smaller factions within the artist and tarot card groups. The buskers are intimately familiar with these battles, though they have

tried to stay out of them. Rob Van Ginkel, in his research on factions within a Dutch maritime community, discovered that, “opposing parties which originated as factions amalgamated when, as a result of the coming to power of a new generation, the differences between their members eased” (Ginkel 1991:704). Their reunion was, however, made difficult by ideological disagreements. The conflict within the community of Jackson Square painters may ease with the passage of time, but they, too, are embroiled in an ideological battle over artistic legitimacy. This may prolong the conflict.

The most visible and popular acrobatic act for the past decade or so has been the Dragon Masters; four men who break dance in front of the steps of the Washington Artillery Park on Decatur Street. Every now and then I would run across young boys tap dancing using tennis shoes and bottle tops or tap plates they fashion from metal along this street or in other locations closer to Bourbon Street. In locations scattered about Jackson Square or right in front of Café Du Monde, there are usually a mimes or human statues, or clowns making balloons for children, or the occasional juggler. I have not observed jugglers in Jackson Square on a regular basis since the nineties, except for holiday season, during the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival or Carnival.

Hanging out on the Square after observing busking activity, I had many opportunities to converse with others who regularly occupy the area, and became familiar with a few of the gutter punks. They are a transient group largely comprised of teens dressed in “post-punk rock” regalia, who may or may not be originally from New Orleans. At times I got the impression they were also members of the street musician peer group, as they either acted like they were working with the buskers, or were indeed helping them by taking down the tents, putting away equipment, and carrying instruments. An invisible line exists between the professional street musicians and this

particular group. The buskers know them and often share pleasantries, but do not want them to interfere with the busking unless they have worked out a deal to let the newcomer play in that location for a designated period of time. As I mentioned in the section “Part-Time and Ad Hoc Buskers” in Chapter II, the unpleasant fact that certain individuals in this group are also known for dealing and using drugs, and thievery has led French Quarter residents and the local workforce to see them as a nuisance, tarnishing the overall image of Jackson Square. In 2006, Peggy Wilson vowed to rid the area of the gutter punks and crack dealers, adding them “to her list of unwanted residents at a French Quarter fund-raiser last week, according to a news release distributed by her campaign.” (Russell and Donze 2006).

Though tourists initially come to New Orleans to see main attractions like Jackson Square, the Aquarium of the Americas, and Bourbon Street, many are charmed by family friendly entertainment by street musicians and other types of buskers like acrobats, palm readers, and balloon-toting clowns. The *genre de vie* in New Orleans is more than just a romantic picture of a port city with early architecture, a few famous cafes, music clubs, and a cathedral; it is also the people who live there. As institutions and businesses returned to the French Quarter area after hurricane Katrina, so did the opportunity to busk in previous locations favored by the musicians. This dependency on certain businesses on the part of the buskers demonstrates the symbiotic nature of their relationship with the greater community. Since tourists returned, businesses in the French Quarter were able to hire more employees. This increased the downtown workforce, which attracted even more tourists as the services improved, thus creating a larger audience and potential customers for the buskers.

A Busker's Paradise Lost



Carl said, “New Orleans is a free spirit city,” and “it breeds the largest visible art colony probably in the world.” Carl compared New Orleans to other cities stating, “You really won’t see a large art colony of thirty, forty or more artists at any one given time like you do here in the French Quarter. And they also allow the freedom of the readers, which has been back and forth in the courts.” When I asked Carl why he thought so many varieties of busker acts coalesce in the French Quarter he said it had to with the history of tolerance in the city:

The history of New Orleans is, the *city that care forgot*, in the sense that there’s really not a major concern or care about how you express so long as you’re not interfering with the passageway of traffic, or volume levels, or being rude and abusive. There are laws, but New Orleans is a very free-spirit city.

Hannah and Hank lamented the loss of the “circle acts” in the middle of the Pedestrian Mall, in front of the cathedral entrance. “The church ran off the circle acts,” Hank sighed. Hannah overheard and chimed in, “the magicians, the acrobats, the jugglers...” Hank continued, “the magicians, the acrobats, the jugglers who used to set up right there because that gave us all of it.” In other words, it was a busker’s paradise where all types of acts were represented on the Square in one area. Hank referred to other buskers, artists, and locals as “our friends.” He explained:

You know, our sound brings people. There are Tarot readers, even though it’s a little harder to talk to people with us playing, choose to set up close to us because they know we bring people. People stand here and listen to us, and they’ll do other things too. If they want a piece of art maybe they’ll buy a piece of art. Maybe they’ll sit down and get a reading. And maybe while they’re getting a reading they’re listening to us, and then come tip us and buy a CD. That’s the way it should work. That’s the way it can work.

Recounting a famous feud that took place at Jackson Square Hank said, “The tarot readers and artists got into a really big controversy that never really involved the musicians. We didn’t do anything. We’re just playing music and drawing people [in], but the tarot readers would set up in front of the artists and block their view.” Since space is limited around the

perimeter of Jackson Square the painters convinced the city government to issue licenses in order to limit the number of painters in that area as well as other locations around the cathedral. Lily said there were at one time, “some four hundred artists around Jackson Square, and so they decided in order to keep the numbers from getting outrageous they set it up with the city to have licensing.” Both the artists and tarot card readers are engaged in conflicts from within and without. Hannah explained:

The tarot readers, when they were fighting city council they had a thing going, but there were also things coming from two or three directions; there were two or three groups of tarot readers that had formed their own little groups and hired their own lawyers who were working at odds against each other. The other thing was they wouldn't police their own... It was out of the artist's hands then, and the city council's hands, and it was out of the tarot reader's hands to be able to police each other.

The tarot readers, in their zeal to obtain and hold a particular location along the Pedestrian Mall, had begun paying others to watch their set-ups, but other tarot card readers did not say, “No, you cannot do that.” They just called the police and had their competition's belongings confiscated instead of trying to fashion an agreeable compromise. Nevertheless, Carl makes an interesting point that only in New Orleans can one find large groups of tarot card readers on the street in a given location. “I've never seen them anywhere else,” he stated.

Buskers are quick to point out that they are not to be confused with the aforementioned gutter punks, or the street beggars, homeless, though on occasion, buskers may hire a local, or ask for or even receive unsolicited help from a Square denizen. They don't like beggars trying to “bum a cigarettes” off them or asking them for something without offering to do something in return. Hannah offered this anecdote:

There was this one guy who came up and he was like, “Hey man! Can I get a cigarette?” It's like, “No!” But this other guy came up and said, Hey, can I have a cigarette? I'll jump up and down and tell you a joke.” We're like, *cool!* Go for it! So he jumped up and down and he's like, “How do you get a nun pregnant?” I don't know, how? “You fucker her!” [Hannah laughed and made a gesture

extending her hand] Cool man! There you go. You got a cigarette. ‘Cause it’s like, don’t just expect to get somethin’ for nothin’.

Hannah added, however, some gutter punks are buskers too: Though a musically inspired gutter punk may not be able to play a musical instrument well, “at least they’re trying.” She continued, “They’re the ones that travel around. They’re buskers that are *there*...” Hannah continued, “and that’s like in Key West, San Francisco, Venice Beach, Atlantic City. That’s where they busk.” Hank added, “Some are just beggars holding a guitar.”

Around Jackson Square one might encounter any manner of entrepreneur. Hannah mentioned that a man named Weston used to go around with a sign that said “jokes for a dollar.” Though this character had not been seen for over a year, new arrivals have already taken his place, in a perpetual parade around Jackson Square. At one point in the mid nineties, according to Hank, this parade on the Pedestrian Mall included teenaged prostitutes disguised as tarot readers:

You know what, it got to the point where sixteen-year-old female prostitutes would be down here calling themselves tarot readers, setting up a little table and turning tricks. [Hank adjusts his cowboy hat as all of us were trying to contain laughter] That wasn’t a tarot reader! That was a hooker! That was a teenaged hooker with a table and a set of cards. [Laughter breaks out everywhere] ... but when you start setting up bigger and bigger set-ups so you can hide more and more bad behavior... and then there are people who call themselves tarot readers [who] come down here to sling dope. They ain’t tarot readers! They’re drug dealers!

Hannah interrupted, “but that was because the tarot readers refused to police themselves.” Both Hannah and Hank again reminded me they do not like being confused with beggars or some other type of charlatan. Professional buskers dislike any misconception about them or their profession. Sergio touched on the point about confusing buskers with beggars:

I think some people look down their nose at street musicians, see ‘em as little more than panhandlers. In some cases, if you’re a guy who’s obviously dug up an old, beat-up ukulele out of the garbage, and saw other people, who may have actually studied music and put some time and work and passion into their craft,

thought that ‘oh, there’s a way I can try to get some money outta people.’ You occasionally see characters like that, but you can tell the difference.

Strolling around the Square, sometimes I could not tell the difference between local hangers-on who gravitate toward the buskers and transients because I was not there everyday. Perhaps for the visitor there is a hazy distinction between those who are helpful and those who are there only to panhandle; it takes constant and consistent observation to know the difference.

Power of the State

The interests of the established institutions and certain powerful figures that govern the district sometimes conflict with the interests of the people who inhabit the Square and work in the general area. Some of the groups, such as the painters or buskers, had united at times to confront certain injustices that directly affect their livelihood. Michel Foucault postulated, “To govern a state will therefore mean to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising towards its inhabitants, and the wealth and behavior of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods” (Foucault 1991:92). Recent events and changes in the American system of government indicate a trend toward paternalistic control, accompanied by increased surveillance of the civilian population and draconian application of law.

The street musicians I interviewed were acutely aware of this trend. Even though I avoided, for the most part, asking politically charged questions they, nevertheless, made sure I was informed about their opinion regarding political matters. On one hand, buskers were consistently telling me that they just want to get along with others, including those who have political or economic power, and make a decent lining. On the other hand, they often spoke

disdainfully of powerful individuals, especially when political or law enforcement decisions negatively impacted them. Top-down decisions that were detrimental or even perceived as detrimental caused the buskers to coalesce as a group, forming a temporary buttress against the threat. This reaction formation not only protects the group, i.e. safety in numbers, it feeds back into their identity as a community of shared goals and ideals. Other times buskers appear amused at the conflicts that occurred around them, regarding the musicians as being out of the loop of most Jackson Square conflicts. This, too, is a safety mechanism that Bourdieu might characterize as “the world view of the dominated; functioning as a sort of socially constituted instinct of conservation, it can be seen as conservative only in terms of an external, and therefore normative, representation of the ‘objective interest’ of those whom it helps to live, or survive” (Bourdieu 1985:729).

Since the interests of French Quarter merchants and property owners is supported by politicians and law enforcement, buskers are always worried they will be driven out. Even though they consistently demonstrated how buskers support the local economy, pay taxes on their income, which is minimal compared to the profits earned by local merchants and property owners, and contribute to the local economy by purchasing local products and items of necessity, they are not often perceived in a positive light (Tanenbaum 1993). Tourists, for instance, who make up the bulk of their audience, are attracted to the areas where buskers play. This increases the chances a store will receive patronage by the sheer number of people brought into the area. The symbiotic relationship between buskers and the local merchants is known to the performers, but often overlooked by the merchants and local residents, especially those who live outside the immediate area.

Residents who live in the greater New Orleans area could be regarded as visitors when compared to the residents who reside in the French Quarter, even though the latter group is partially comprised of transplants while the former group may include more people who were born and raised in the city. Since the scope of this thesis is too narrow to address the complexity of these two groups, it nevertheless should be noted that buskers are in constant contact with both groups, whether it's someone who walks past the loci of busking activity on their way to work, or a French Quarter resident on their way home. I observed buskers exchanging salutations with French Quarter residents on a number of occasions.

Police, Politicians, Pontiffs and Persnickety People

There is one Quarter resident, however, who is notorious for her antipathy toward buskers. Carl said, "There's one resident, there's always one bad apple ruining it for everybody, and there was this one resident that doesn't want musicians playing right below her balcony, and she's in the center of the French Quarter. She speaks for herself, because people want the music to be happening in the street." Sergio said Sabina would try to avoid this person stating, "She's not always in town. She travels a lot, but when she was in town it became a thing where Sabina would look up to see if her lights were on, or play more quietly than she would.

I did not observe the St. Louis Cathedral monsignor nor the priests interact with the buskers, but I did, however, discover that the buskers are well aware of the church's weekend schedule, as they often have to accommodate it. Hank said, "The church has planned more weddings and more events than I've ever seen since we got our new monsignor. He has, I believe, a vendetta against the tarot readers that very definitely negatively impacts us." Hank explained why:

It works best for us when there are circle acts working in front of the church, a band down there and a band over here, and tarot readers and artists all the way around. The Square fills up with people who have something to do, something to see, something to participate in; they get in a good mood and when their wallets loosen up we all make some money.

Lily and Hannah started going to City Hall meetings in order to defend the interests of all the buskers. She told me that she stayed out of the political battles regarding the tarot readers after she consulted Tuba Fats. Hannah asked him, “Is this something we should be concerned with?” According to her he said, “No baby, it doesn’t bother us.” She responded, “Alright, I’m not going to stick my nose in and bring us [Buskers] into it when right now we’re not an issue.” Remembering what Hannah told me a few days before about putting on a pantsuit and going to City Hall, “I clean up real well,” said she laughingly. I asked her to tell me what happened:

I got a desperate call from Lily: “There is something on the City Council’s agenda having to do with noise ordinances. Get down there; Louis and I will be down there as fast as we can. I’m digging out all the paperwork of the court battles.” I said, “Alright!” I got down there, and Peter, the glass harp player, was there. Lily said, “Sign me up to speak.” I said, “OK” and signed myself up to speak. So then, Peter and I got a copy of the ordinance and read it. I said, “It sounds like they actually want to raise the decibel level.” It turned out it was only for during Southern Decadence.

Hannah concluded, “We’ve actually had the cops out here with the decibel meter.” One time a police officer, who Hannah knew on a first name basis, came by and “shot them with a decibel meter,” informing Hannah and Hank that they were a little too loud. Hannah said, “Ok, let us reset our levels, and come back in five minutes and shoot us again so we can make sure that we’re within the guidelines, because we want to be legal.” Hannah, like all the other buskers I met, want to remain in good standing with the police and the merchants, so that everyone can get along while earning a living.

I asked Hank and Hannah if there was any particular politician, a “nemesis,” who posed a problem for buskers. Both answered me in unison: “Jackie Clarkson!” Hannah busted out

laughing and Hank responded, “Ding dong the wicked witch is dead!” followed by Hannah, “The Wicked Witch of District C.” While Jackie Clarkson was apparently disliked by many buskers I interviewed, Hank rejoined, “But you know what? We had a working, talking relationship with her. She knew who we were. We sent emails and letters to her, and she responded.” Clarkson, according to Hank, was focused on helping out the wealthy property owners who had sunk too much money into French Quarter real estate in the eighties and nineties, and were trying to divest their interests. Hank continued, “So, her plans were all for trying to make this look like Disneyland... what do you do when you got no music playing in Disneyland?” Hank had concluded that Clarkson was also participating in nepotism: “She had family who were artists [painters]. She took the artists’ side on anything.”

Lily and Louis, and Tuba Fats sued the city a few times and the state once in order “to get rid of laws that were going to impact busking.” According to Lily, City Councilperson Jackie Clarkson and State Senate member Paulette Irons had set up an anti-busking law that would permanently remove musicians from the French Quarter streets, even after Irons promised to support buskers during a meeting of the New Orleans Street Performers Association.

Just before one of my interviews with Hank and Hannah one Sunday morning I saw Hank talking to a police officer temporarily parked right in front of the Presbytere. Since I was observing from about twenty feet away, and Hank was talking to the officer through the car window I could not discern what they were saying, but Hank’s body language indicated familiarity with the officer. He later told me he gets along, for the most part, with the police and tries to maintain friendly relations. He reported, “I’ve always gotten along with the police, because you know what, they’re my friends. They know me. I asked him if he ever had any problems. Hank continued, “We have law and legislation on our side to do what we do. After

years of doing it [busking] they leave me alone, because they know I have a good attorney.”

Hannah added, “He [attorney] used to be a tarot reader and a busker.” She continued,

“Occasionally when we get a new cop out here they’ll try and hassle us, then we refer them to their superiors who know us, and they’re like, no leave them alone.”

However, some police officers are not always willing to work with the citizens whom they are paid to protect. Lily and other busker were arrested for busking on Royal Street, which according to her was unnecessary and a violation of her civil rights, and that “the relationship with police is always iffy.” Louis said their relationship with the police has evolved for the better. Lily said, “Always obey police officers.” She has, though, taken her tact with the police to another level, giving them a civics lessons on civil rights. If they are being abusive, then “they are violating their oath of office,” and must “uphold the articles of the first ten Amendments of the Constitution.” Even if Lily already agreed to pack up and leave, she takes the opportunity to teach the police officer about the American system of government, who according to Lily, “have no clue.”

According to Lily, “some store owners decided the reason they’re going broke is your [the busker’s] fault.” She gave an example of a typical conflict with a merchant:

They prefer to blame the street performers instead of something else [the economy]. They’ll get on your nerves. Sometimes you’ll have people say, “I can’t talk to my customers you’re making too much noise!” People will be standing right beside us talking away, having no problems at all just chattering, chattering, chattering, standing right beside us, and we would wish they would go away.

This came to a loggerhead one day when Lily and other buskers had enough guff from certain merchants in the 1980s stating, “We closed a couple of places down on Royal Street. We just put around-the-clock pickets there asking people not to [patronize certain stores]. We had a whole parade, and we marched down the street with signs. I had a blow horn and a cop came up

and wanted us to disperse.” Before the situation got worse, an attorney intervened and called the officer’s superiors.

Group Honor

Buskers not only make a living for themselves, they also serve the economic interests of the city and help maintain a positive public image. The concept of honor, as it pertains to an ethical code of conduct has been covered earlier, but I want to briefly emphasize the concept again. Verne Baxter presents two ideas regarding honor that applies to the street musicians as a group and as individuals within the group. He states, “When a person presents a particular line of action that successfully meets the expectations of others, a sense of pride is felt from upholding status honor and making a contribution to the reproduction of an expressive order.” And secondly, “The presentation of a successful public ‘face’ is also an act of self-control that upholds established rules and functions as a form of social control” (Baxter and Margavio 2000:400). I had observed on a number of occasions buskers who, even though they may have been talking negatively about local power brokers and institutions, turn right around and make strident efforts to meet the perceived expectations of those same people. Likewise, the “public face” is used not only as a method for self-control and social control, it also functions as means for self-preservation. By appearing to be honorable servants of the greater community, buskers not only establish themselves and their profession as a worthy and honorable one to outsiders, they also reinforce their group identity as something positive. This normative behavior not only insures group cohesion, but also serves to legitimize busking as an honorable profession.

Serving the Community

Carl believes the city government wants productive citizens to remain living here, “The city is always looking for anybody who wants to stay, and if you’re contributing to the energy of the city, they see that.” Indeed, the contributions of buskers and other artisans that work around Jackson Square are visible for all to see. Carl describes how they contribute to the overall ambiance of the city’s image:

New Orleans is actually unique in the sense that with Jackson Square, there’s an art colony that flourishes. At sunrise, and actually before sunrise on any given morning, you can look down Chartres Street; you can look down Decatur, and can look down St. Ann and see people pushing their art carts out. So, when it comes to freedom of expression, the French Quarter is right at the top of the list around the world.

According to Carl, it is not just the art and the music produced, but the people themselves; they are essential to the image of the city and therefore the economic interests of the tourist industry, without which the economy of New Orleans would collapse. Carl sees those who are able to freely express themselves, the manifestation of which translates into creative output, as more than just an economic asset to the city, but as an expression of altruism. He continued:

My point is, is that when any community allows the outside environment to become a place for excitement to flourish, it allows wonderful forms of character to evolve. You see it during Mardi Gras, you see either the break dancers or you might see chalk art on the sidewalk. You might catch Louis and Lily who are out there playing, and you will see Rocco and Ragtime Minnie, like Ted, who gets out there with his hammer dulcimer; he’s been doing that for twenty years or so.

During an interview on the Pedestrian Mall in the Square, Hannah dispelled a “common myth” about buskers:

People have this stereotype; they think dirty, smelly hippie, gutter punks, that those are the street musicians, those are the people who can’t do anything else. You know, they can’t get a club gig. They suck.

In fact, I witnessed quite the opposite. What I observed appeared to be a group of professional musicians who are not only dedicated to producing art for consumption, but conscientious citizens who help maintain a positive image of and for the city. Hank evinced self-pride in the service he does for the city stating, “Everybody who stops and looks knows that the only people who pay me are them. You know, the city doesn’t support me. I support the city. I pay my taxes, you know, whatever permit they say I gotta have I’ll have.” Everyone with whom I spoke throughout this investigation said they felt buskers were essential to the identity of the city, and that their profession was an honorable one.

Summary

This chapter covered the mutual support network of New Orleans street musicians, the role of family as a means of support, the other groups of people with whom buskers make daily contact, and briefly reiterated the importance of the concept of honor. The interviews demonstrated how these concepts play a role in the formation, cohesion, and survival of the busking community. New Orleans street musicians, as professional entertainers, exhibited pride and honor in their work despite negative stereotypes.

Chapter V

Summary and Conclusion

Urban public space plays an important role in communicating and articulating cultural meanings that move from the public realm of political parties and economic control to private, individual reactions and behaviors that change, counter, and redefine those meanings. – Seta Low

Summary

Professional buskers are full-time street entertainers, members of an occupational community associated with a street lifestyle predominantly located in the French Quarter. They are part of an established network of kindred performers who share musical themes, songs, folklore and contacts for personal assistance – a mutually supportive group with shared occupational opportunities, living arrangements, and social services. Though a loosely structured network exists among the street musicians, a hierarchy exists among them from the young, new arrival to the older, established performer. Though perceived as unorthodox by outsiders, they identify themselves as a special occupational group of musical entertainers who are career-minded. As urban nomads they are self-employed with no permanent occupational ties, no overseers, and are highly mobile; they are entrepreneurs who do not answer to an employer. Frequent experimentation with different musical genres often leads them to create a fusion of styles and the creative naming of those styles, which often results in the manufacture of new instruments in order to meet the demands of certain street performances.

Buskers gravitate to settings of high tolerance for personal and creative expression and are usually supported by street donations. This is a category of public entertainers whose career path provides a rewarding way of life outside of conventional occupations. Popular conception of

street performers varies from place, time, and context in written records, but buskers must often contend with negative stereotyping of their profession, such as the confusion between buskers and beggars. They work diligently at maintaining a positive image, sustaining a good rapport with their audience, while making ad hoc adaptations to regulate their performance routines. Exhibiting a professional discipline, New Orleans street musicians have cultivated a career out of playing music publicly, linking them to others in society. Street performance enables the performers to have a direct, personal interaction with the audience. Their code of conduct distinguishes them from others inhabiting Jackson Square who sometimes pose as buskers and frequent their performance sites. They are not merely ad hoc performers or desperate people - their identity as musicians and social position is achieved. Though some of their musical colleagues, those that play indoors in clubs and theaters on stage, negatively stereotype street performers, seeing them as deviant or less talented, other musicians recognize the benefits of self-employment.

Some of the buskers included in this study support families in dual income earning households. They developed strategies for sustaining their families while maintaining their jobs as performers. Childcare sometimes includes bringing the children to the jobsite, which is a strategy for continuing of the profession in the next generation, thus affecting the trajectory of their children's education and vocational development. This forms a basis of their future job training, much like the training of their busking parents. The children of busking parents have an opportunity to develop musical technique at an early age, including practical skills like instrument maintenance. As well, the city New Orleans has numerous musical institutions where they can continue to develop their talents, while the streets of the French Quarter provides yet another venue for learning to take place. Not only do the children of buskers learn the technical

skills required of their trade, they also receive lessons in the economics of trade, and how to develop and maintain clientele. They learn how to ethically treat each other and their clients, and how to negotiate their position in the street performer hierarchy. The young busker will also learn to develop a mutually supportive network in order to deal with job-related problems and emergencies. These skills will help the next generation of buskers integrate themselves with the greater community while continuing the profession.

Conclusion

The manifestation of busking in New Orleans demonstrates a high degree of tolerance for spontaneous and creative forms of public behavior. The fact that it is tolerated suggests that busking performs special, if not essential services such as, troubadour entertainment, street-level interaction with audiences, and experimentation with innovative styles of music. Not only are buskers accepted because the city is libertine, but also because they fill an integral niche. Motivated by a variety of reasons for remaining in New Orleans, despite numerous hardships brought about by hurricane Katrina, they help sustain a micro-economy that occurs on the streets of the French Quarter in the heart of the city. They are integral to the city because of the occupational nature of their activity.

When I evacuated to Memphis, Tennessee during hurricane Katrina, I spent several months learning the history and demise of street performance on Beale Street. One factor that contributes to the pull of New Orleans is the high degree of tolerance for public forms of behavior in the French Quarter. This was noticeably absent on Beale Street. According to the last remaining buskers in the Memphis area that I interviewed, busking is highly limited due to draconian control of Beale Street by one person who owns and controls most of the clubs.

Tightly regulated club performance with a controlled stable of musicians is supported, while street performance is made nearly impossible, buskers are shunned on a regular basis, and on occasion threatened with physical violence. Though Carl had not performed in Memphis, his hometown, in a long time, he recalled what it was like on Beale Street:

Beale Street is really only just a few blocks and you got the police department right in the heart of it. And they're gonna stifle any amount of creativity. I've been to Beale Street and I know. I've been stopped in my tracks just walking with my musical necklace. They would find some reason to bring it to a halt, even with my moving. Memphis is not a preferred location for busking

Buskers in New Orleans had voiced their concerns to me, worried that this sort of scenario may take place in New Orleans. Not only street musicians in the French Quarter, but many others have verbalized their fears regarding long-term, monumental changes to the city and its population.

The most urgent problems for the troubadours of the French Quarter pertain to laws and city ordinances that govern vehicle and pedestrian flow, and the constant threat that they could change at any time. After years of complaining, the management of the former A&P Market, the owner of the building, and the tenant above the store had, according to buskers, taken advantage of post-Katrina conditions and lobbied the city to re-open Royal Street to vehicular traffic at all hours, including the weekend, thus ending a decades tradition of busking at this prime location. Lily pointed out that in locations where buskers had played for years on Royal Street by the courthouse space has already been restricted. She said, "so now the Supreme Court has moved back in again and won't let you play on the grounds anymore, and they've taken two blocks away from the mall." At the time of this writing it had not been confirmed, but a busker also said the New Orleans City Council and Board of Tourism want to permanently remove all busking activity from the French Quarter and move it to the Riverwalk, away from the businesses and most of the tourists, their primary source of income. This includes buskers like Hank and

Hannah, or Louis and Lily who perform on Jackson Square's Pedestrian Mall. Of course, this would dramatically change the long tradition of sharing a most unique public space that derives its character from the pedestrians and artists who inhabit it. Closing down art and music production in Jackson Square and Royal Street would, according to one busker, "blow away the personality of the city like Katrina blew away its people."

There is no way to tell how many buskers have left as they are intrinsically part of a fluid, nomadic group, but longtime New Orleans buskers have roots in the city because they live here. I was fortunate to meet up with some of these regular street musicians. When they returned to New Orleans they went right back to work on Jackson Square, though I heard comments regarding their reservations about staying in the city, mostly because of the economy. However, Hank pointed out that, "New Orleans is a town where you can be poor and still enjoy good food for a low price." A few buskers I encountered had returned to participate in Mardi Gras and to busk for the tourists that came for the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival. Those events are especially lucrative for street performers, as they rely on the consumptive behavior patterns of French Quarter visitors. Nevertheless, some stated that they planned on going back to their new, out-of-state residences in order to take advantage of better job opportunities and access to healthcare.

The change of police personnel, from local law enforcement officers to personnel from other regions of the country, those who were unfamiliar with local customs and unsympathetic to local musicians, had a deleterious effect on buskers. Policemen who were not on their regular beat arrested Carl for "playing music on the street after 8 pm during Lundi Gras, just hours before Mardi Gras." He was subsequently locked up for five days until well after Carnival, thereby "stealing my Mardi Gras!" he said with an embittered tone. Though leery of what might

happen, when Carl returned to busking he came across a police officer who had returned to his original beat. This officer, according to Carl, was sympathetic and even gave friendly advice, also indicating that he would leave Carl alone. For a few, however, busker life has not appreciably altered; they are doing what they had done before. Nevertheless, change has occurred that threatens the future of street performance in the New Orleans French Quarter and surrounding areas. Just a month before this writing, a prominent New Orleans busker was arrested in his own neighborhood of Tremé, for performing in the street, a tradition that is centuries old. Though the buskers were able to parade again in honor of their colleague who passed away, they were only able to do so after a neighborhood group convened and someone donated money to pay for a special permit. Reckdahl reported that, “Some neighbors said buying a permit was a cop-out, arguing the traditional parades should be unencumbered by the bureaucratic formalities” (Reckdahl 2007).

Though some of the key street music performers had returned to New Orleans after the hurricane, Louis and Lily said buskers’ income had been reduced to “less than fifty percent.” Lily said gigs actually paid more in 2006 because “all these affluent people came down here to work on helping, and they’d go to the clubs and spend money. Now, there aren’t that many coming down to work, and New Orleanian people don’t have money.” Louis smiling said, “It’s coming back to normal. People are bitching about street performers.” Just after the storm they were getting gigs, according to Louis, but more recently had started using canned music. Louis concluded, “Thirteen weeks later after being on the road, when we came back they said, oh we don’t need you anymore, we have *muzak*.” Carl said, “The state of busking now is pretty much getting back up on its feet in a slow way. The central location for busking on Royal and St. Peter, right where the A&P is at, has recently been opened up where traffic goes through, and people

can't just perform in the street there." He said that, "busking is not as vibrant as it was pre-Katrina, but people are getting out there and doing it." He concluded, "It's definitely a changed landscape. There's a lot of people sitting on the fence and all it takes is a little something to send them off on the road."

New Orleans street musicians are an occupational group worthy of future study and comparative analysis with similar groups in other cities. Future research could go deeper into the ecology, history, political economy, and semiotics of the busking phenomenon throughout the entire continent. Many cities like Boston, New Orleans, New York, Toronto, and Mexico City have their own micro-economy of street performance. The buskers who perform in these and others are producers and transmitters of culture, often traveling from one location to another, who may share as well as follow their own patterns of subsistence.

Despite their contributions to the musical history of New Orleans, buskers are underrepresented in social science literature and receive only cursory recognition in popular media. Only a handful of musicians who had their humble beginnings in the street, like the famous jazz trumpeter Louis Armstrong, have been acknowledged in print and film. While the street musicians of New Orleans are part of the larger mosaic of this city's emphasis on musical expression, they have yet to be recognized as an occupational group and have not been thoroughly researched. They are, in fact, important contributors to the cultural fabric of the city. As nomadic transmitters of culture, New Orleans street musicians are but one example of a larger occupational group that appears on the world stage.

References

- Ashforth, Blake E. and Glen E. Kreiner
1999 "How Can You Do It?": Dirty Work and the Challenge of Constructing a Positive Identity." *The Academy of Management Review* 24(3):413-434.
- Baxter, Vern and A. V. Margavio
2000 "Honor, Status, and Aggression in Economic Exchange." *Sociological Theory* 18(3):399-416.
- Becker, Howard S. and James Carper
1956 "The Elements of Identification with an Occupation." *American Sociological Review* 21(3):341-348.
1963 *Outsiders: Studies in Sociological Deviance*. London: Free Press of Glencoe.
1989 "Ethnomusicology and Sociology: A Letter to Charles Seeger." *Ethnomusicology* 33(2):275-285.
- Boyer, Mark, and Kaethe Ellis, Dolores R. Harris, Anne H Soukhanov, ed.
1983 *The American Heritage Dictionary: Second College Addition*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Bourdieu, Pierre
1985 "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society* 14(6):723-744.
- Campanella, Richard
2006 *Geographies of New Orleans*. Lafayette: Center for Louisiana Studies.
- Chase, Malcolm
1990 "From Millennium to Anniversary: The Concept of Jubilee in Late Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century England." *Past and Present* 129:132-147.
- Cole, Hugo
1988 "Jonathan Lloyd's Music," *Tempo*, New Ser., 164:2-11.
- Davis, Dona Lee
1986 "Occupational Community and Fishermen's Wives in a Newfoundland Fishing Village." *Anthropological Quarterly* 59(3):129-142.
- Dentler, Robert A. and Kai T. Erikson
1959 "The Functions of Deviance in Groups." *Social Problems* 7(2):98-107.
- Drew, Christopher

- 2006 "Police Struggles in New Orleans Raise Old Fears." *New York Times* 13(155):A1-A17.
- Dryler, Helen
1998 "Parental Role Models, Gender and Educational Choice." *The British Journal of Sociology* 49(3):375-398.
- Duany, Andrés, and Emily Talen
2002 "Transect Planning." *APA Journal* 68(3):245-266.
- Finnan, Christine R.
1982 "Community Influences on the Occupational Adaptation of Vietnamese Refugees." *Southeast Asian Refugees in the U.S.A.: Case Studies of Adjustment and Policy Implications. Anthropological Quarterly* 55(3):161-169.
- Frith, Simon.
1980 "Formalism, Realism and Leisure: The Case of Punk." *The Subcultures Reader*, edited by Ken Gelder and Sarah Thornton. London: Routledge: 163-174.
- Foucault, Michel
1991 *Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Burchel, Graham, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller, Eds. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gerstl, Joel E.
1961 "Leisure, Taste and Occupational Milieu." *Social Problems* 9(1):56-68.
- Ginkel, Rob van
1991 "The Sea of Bitterness: Political Process and Ideology in a Dutch Maritime Community." *Man, New Series* 26(4):691-707.
- Gordon, Chad
1976 "Development of Evaluated Role Identities." *Annual Review of Sociology* 2:405-433.
- Grout, Donald J., and Claude V. Palisca
1988 *A History of Western Music*. 4th Ed. New York: Norton.
- Harrison-Pepper, Sally
1990 *Drawing a Circle in a Square: Street Performing in New York's Washington Square Park*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- Hart, Jeremy
2000 "A New Orleans Street Musician Tells All." Electronic document, <http://www.jazzreview.com/articleprint.cfm?ID=557>.
- Hebdige, Dick

- 1979 *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. London: Routledge.
- Heyl, Barbara Sherman
 1977 "The Madam as Teacher: The Training of House Prostitutes." *Social Problems* 24(5):545-555.
- Hodson, Randy and Teresa A. Sullivan
 2002 *The Social Organization of Work*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.
- Hunt, Geoffrey and Sandra Satterlee
 1986 "Cohesion and Division: Drinking in an English Village." *Man* 21(3):521-537.
- Jehn, Karen A.
 1997 "A Qualitative Analysis of Conflict Types and Dimensions in Organizational Groups." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 42(3):530-557.
- Kapchan, Deborah A.
 1995 "Performance." *Journal of American Folklore* 108(430):479-508.
- Katz, Jack
 1977 "Cover-up and Collective Integrity: On the Natural Antagonisms of Authority Internal and External to Organizations." *Social Problems* 25(1):3-17.
- Keith, Pat M. and Robert B. Schafer
 1980 "Role Strain and Depression in Two-Job Families." Family Stress, Copying and Adaptation. *Family Relations* 29(4):483-488.
- Kingston, Paul William and Steven L. Nock
 1985 "Consequences of the Family Work Day." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 47(3):619-629.
- Kmen, Henry A.
 1966 *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Years 1791-1841*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Knights, D.
 1975 "A Classificatory Scheme for Occupations." *The British Journal of Sociology* 26(3):294-308.
- Koskoff, Ellen
 1982 "The Music-Network: A Model for the Organization of Music Concepts." *Ethnomusicology* 26(3):353-370.
- Lewis, Pierce F.
 2003 *New Orleans: The Making of an Urban Landscape*. Santa Fe, New Mexico and Harrisonburg, Virginia: Center For American Places.

Lomax, Alan

- 1968 *Folk Song Styles and Culture*. Washington, D.C.: AAAS Publication No. 1988.
- 1974 *Mister Jelly Roll: The Fortunes of Jelly Roll Morton, New Orleans Creole and "Inventor of Jazz."* Berkeley, California: University of California Press.
- 2002 *Land Where the Blues Began*. New York, New York: New Press

Low, Setha M.

- 1994 "Spatializing Culture: The Social Production and Social Construction of Public Space in Costa Rica." *American Ethnologist* 23(4): 861-879.
- 1996 "The Anthropology of Cities: Imagining and Theorizing the City." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 25:383-409.

Lummis, Trevor

- 1977 "The Occupational Community of East Anglian Fishermen: An Historical Dimension Through Oral Evidence." *The British Journal of Sociology* 28(1):51-74.

MacCash, Douglas

- 2007 "Art on the Fence." *Times Picayune* April 13:1-2.

McNamara, Brooks

- 1975 "An Interview with Percy Press and a Portfolio of Buskers." *Educational Theatre Journal: TDR* 18(1):312-322.

Moen, Phyllis, and Yan Yu

- 2000 "Effective Work/Life Strategies: Working Couples, Work Conditions, Gender, and Life Quality." *Social Problems* 47(3):291-326.

Noble, Trevor

- 1970 "Family Breakdown and Social Networks," *The British Journal of Sociology* 21(2):135-150.

Hodson, Randy and Teresa A. Sullivan

- 2002 *The Social Organization of Work*. Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing.

Narvaez, Peter

- 1994 "The Influences of Hispanic Music Cultures on African-American Blues Musicians." *Black Music Research Journal* 14(2):203-224.

Ouchi, William G. and Alan L. Wilkins

- 1985 "Organizational Culture." *Annual Review of Sociology* 11:457-483.

Page, Christopher

- 1978 "A 12th Century Street Musician." *Early Music* 6(2):309.

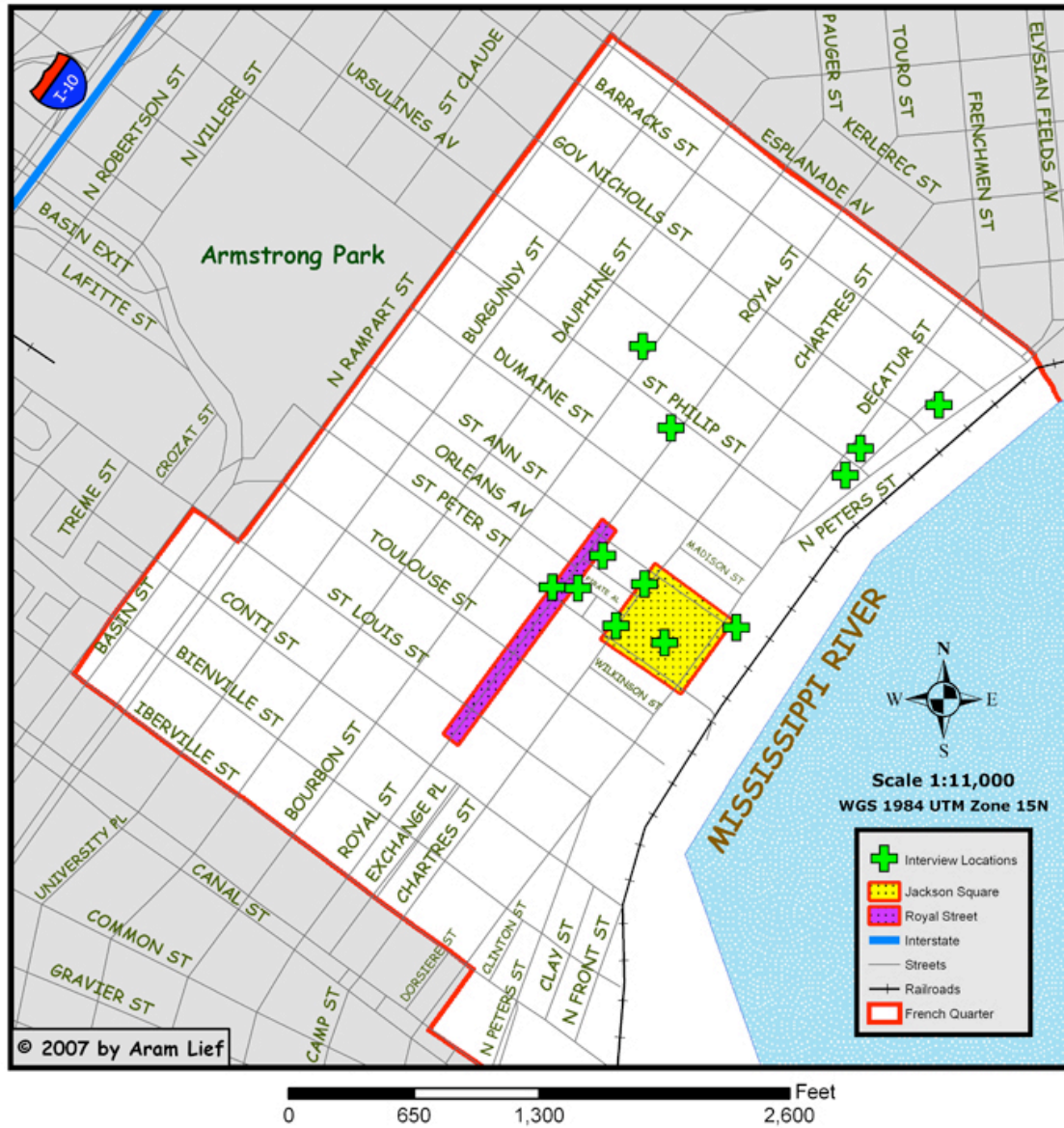
- Pogrebin, Robin
 2006 "An Architect With Plans for a New Gulf Coast." *The New York Times* May 24:1.
- Randal, Don Michael
 1986 *The New Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Reckdahl, Katy
 2007 "Culture, change collide in Treme." *Times Picayune* October 2. Electronic document, http://blog.nola.com/updates/2007/10/culture_change_collide_in_trem.html
- Reese, Gustave
 1940 *Music in the Middle Ages*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.
- Rouse, Andrew C.
 1999 "The Forgotten Professional Popular Singer in England." *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, T. 40, Fasc. 1/3:145-158.
- Russell, Gordon and Frank Donze
 2006 "Something's Fishy on Campaign Trail." *Times Picayune* March 22. Electronic document, http://www.nola.com/newslogs/topnews/index.ssf?/mtlogs/nola_topnews/archives/2006_03_22.html
- Schall, Maryan S.
 1983 "A Communication-Rules Approach to Organizational Culture." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 28(4):557-581.
- Schulenberg, John E., Fred W. Vondracek, and Ann C. Crouter
 1984 "The Influence of the Family on Vocational Development." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 46(1):129-143.
- Shepard, Jon M.
 1970 "Functional Specialization, Alienation, and Job Satisfaction." *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 23(2):207-219.
- Simpson, Richard L. and Ida Harper Simpson
 1960 "Values, Personal Influence, and Occupational Choice." *Social Forces* 39(2):116-125.
- Sims, Ezra
 1991 "Reflections on This and That (Perhaps A Polemic)." *Perspectives of New Music* 29(1):236-257.
- Snow, David A. and Leon Anderson

- 1987 "Identity Work Among the Homeless: The Verbal Construction and Avowal of Personal Identities." *The American Journal of Sociology* 92(6):1336-1371.
- Taylor, Andrew
 1992 "Fragmentation, Corruption, and Minstrel Narration: The Question of the Middle English Romances." *The Yearbook of English Studies* 22:38-62.
- Tanenbaum, Susie J.
 1993 *Underground Harmonies - Music & Politics in the Subways of New York*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Turner, Victor W.
 1964 "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in *Rites de Passage*," *The Proceedings of the American Ethnological Society*, Symposium on New Approaches to the Study of Religion: 4-20.
- Westby, David L.
 1960 "The Career Experience of the Symphony Musician." *Social Forces* 38(3):223-230.
- Wharton, Amy S. and James N. Baron
 1987 "So Happy Together? The Impact of Gender Segregation on Men at Work," *American Sociological Review* 52(5):574-587.
- Whyte, William Foote
 1943 *Street Corner Society: The social structure of an Italian slum*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
 1957 *The Organization Man*. New York: Doubleday and Company.
- Wilensky, Harold L. and Jack Ladinsky
 1967 "From Religious Community to Occupational Group: Structural Assimilation Among Professors, Lawyers, and Engineers." *American Sociological Review* 32(4):541-561.
- Wright, L. M.
 1975 "Misconceptions concerning the Troubadours, Trouvères and Minstrels." *Music & Letters* 48:35-39.
- Zetterberg, Hans L.
 1966 "The Secret Ranking." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 28(2):134-142.

Appendix

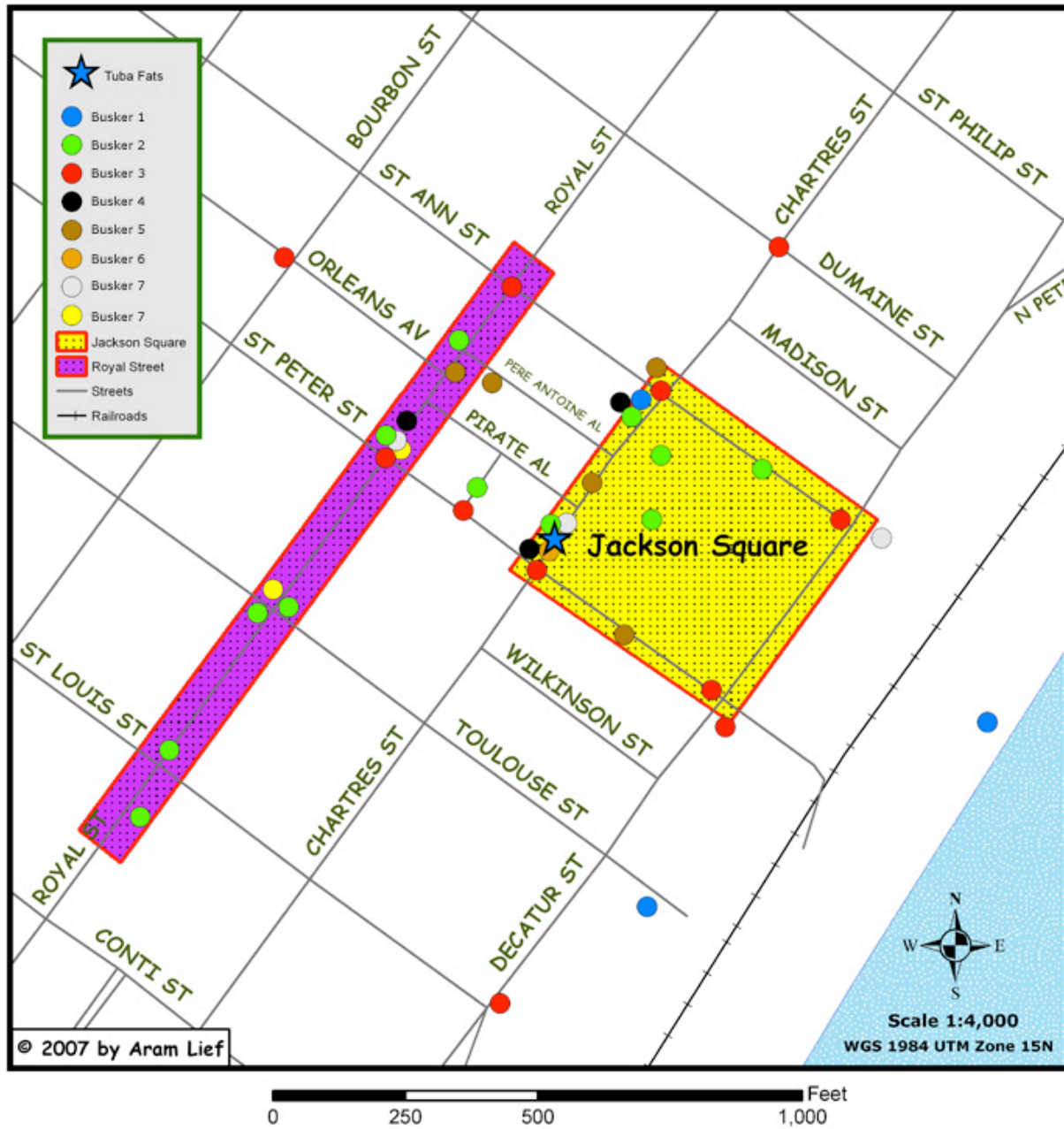
Map A

Busking Research Boundaries



Map B

Cluster of Busking Activity



Vita

Aram Lief earned a Bachelor of Music in performance at the University of New Orleans in 1993, a Master of Music in performance at Southeastern Louisiana University in 1996, and completed two years of doctoral studies in historical musicology at Louisiana State University. When he is not performing music his interests include art, foreign languages and literature, and world travel. Since Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005 his research has focused on the recovery and preservation of the city's cultural resources.