PARROTHEADS, CHEESEBURGERS, AND PARADISE: ADULT MUSIC FANDOM & FAN PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

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Jimmy Buffett’s beach bum lifestyle music was essentially solidified with his album *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes* in 1977, and it is his fans, collectively known as Parrotheads, who have continued to help him achieve such success. This dissertation examines not only Parrotheads, but also the ways in which this fan group has invested in, and engaged with, the “Margaritaville State of Mind” that Buffett and his fans have cultivated together. Derived from Buffett’s hit song, “Margaritaville,” Buffett’s beach bum escapism ethos has transformed his fandom into an experience and, further, a lifestyle – a state of mind and a state of being – to be enjoyed by his fans whether it is through their celebration of their fandom, or even in the goods and services they purchase. Moreso, this work explores various ways that a tropical escapism lifestyle is evoked and developed by Parrotheads through the many fan activities they engage with as part of belonging to their local Parrothead clubs. Parrotheads have chosen, as an integral part of their fandom, to raise money for local social and environmental charities, all in the name of their fandom. Another aspect examined in this dissertation investigates how Parrotheads are not only developing and becoming active participants, but also performing their fandom in social networking sites developed specifically for them. Ultimately, this project highlights how some music fans are embracing new types of music-centered leisure cultures in contemporary society. Parrotheads are a fascinating example of an organization functioning as a social club, united by love of a musician and his message; in this instance, a
literal and figurative investment in Jimmy Buffett and his trop-rock music, from which they have worked together to cultivate a mythical Margaritaville.
To music fans everywhere.
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INTRODUCTION

“Fandom matters because it matters to those who are fans.”

In the 1940s, Frank Sinatra was considered to be one of the top popular music singers, evoking an explosion of hysteria among his fans. Music fans also screamed for Elvis in the 1950s and would reach all-out hysteria again with Beatlemania in the 1960s. Similarly, the counterculture movement of the 1960s, and rock and roll music culture more specifically, began to understand that good things could happen through mass mediated culture – and that it had the capacity to change society in positive ways. Deriving originally from the word “fanatic” or in reference to fanatical behavior, fandom today has taken on a variety of meanings, and applies to different groups of people, with varying levels of commitment. Fandom and fan practices are not limited to the realm of music – they can be found throughout a variety of popular culture texts. Fandom can be expressed on an individual level as a personal passion or as, as is the focus of this work, as a participatory venture and part of a larger fan community. Today, music fans engage and enact their collective fandom in a variety of different ways – whether it is through face-to-face interactions at concerts and music gatherings, participation in official or non-official fan clubs, online in message boards, social networking sites, official band or musician websites, or fan designed websites online.

The focus of this work is on the collective fan practices and activities of Parrotheads, the adult music fans of Jimmy Buffett. I first came across Parrotheads in September 2004, shortly

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3 My focus here is on adult music fans as opposed to music fans in their youth. As Andy Bennett suggests, youth is often referred to the time between childhood and adulthood or sometime between the ages of 15 and 25. (Bennett, 2012). While in the United States persons over the age of eighteen are legally considered to be adults, the notion of youth often extends past this legal number and into a grey area loosely to be young adulthood. This work considers
after moving to Boston, Massachusetts to begin my Master’s degree in American Studies. Jimmy Buffett was performing at the local baseball stadium, Fenway Park, and the news was reporting that Parroheads were upset about the city prohibiting them from tailgating in the area surrounding the ballpark. Almost two years later, in June 2006, after having just turned in my final project for my Master’s program, I found myself at the Special Olympics volunteering alongside the group Parrot Head Club of Eastern Massachusetts (PHCOEM). At the time I remember being steeped in the haze that usually comes from finishing large projects. That work had looked at Dave Matthews Band (DMB) fans, and I remember contemplating how that particular fan group might continue to evolve. At the time, many DMB fans were in their mid to late twenties and early thirties and coming face to face with many of the adult responsibilities that that stage in one’s life can entail. As this was a group of fans which I belonged to, it seemed evident to me that the people with whom I had interacted with in my fandom group (and as I did my research) were arriving at an interesting time in their lives. They were graduating from college and changing from the jobs they had first gotten right out of college into more permanent long-term “adult” jobs. With this new phase of adulthood, it was also evident that people in this fan group were beginning to shift into a phase of life when many people began to establish and solidify serious romantic partnerships, which also meant some were getting engaged and then married. Moreover, they were beginning to consider buying houses, having children, etc. This group was very much in a transitory adult-life period and I found myself wondering how so much change might affect these fans as they began to mature alongside the band we so admired. If Dave Matthews Band continued to tour, would their follower’s fandom wane as adult

 adulthood, independent of youth, to be anything loosely beyond the age of 25. The name of Jimmy Buffett’s fans is commonly spelled both “Parroheads” and “Parrot Heads.” For the sake of consistency, this dissertation will use the word “Parroheads” as this is how it is spelled on Buffett’s website, though even Buffett himself has changed the spelling of the name over the years.
responsibilities started to become more central focuses in their lives? On that very same day, when I came across PHCOEM, I was presented with an adult music fan group dressed in brightly colored tropical themed outfits that appeared to be in their forties and fifties. These Parrotheads seemed to be an example of adult fans who had made that adult-life transition alongside their fandom, fans who sought out Buffett’s music while solidifying their responsibility-filled adult lives. These Buffett fans seemed ready and willing and, more so, able to balance their adult music fan culture with the demands of adult everyday life outside of their fandom. What struck me most about this interaction was that this was a group of adult fans who had come out to the event to volunteer their time helping to coordinate races and cooking, what else, cheeseburgers as a collective fan group – as Parrotheads – and they seemed to be having a lot of fun while doing it.4

When I began working on my PhD I knew that Parrotheads as an adult music fan group were something I was interested in pursuing further. Thus, this dissertation seeks to address more specific ways that fandom has been incorporated into the everyday lives of those adult music fans who engage with fandom by examining the case of the Parrotheads. While a new emphasis in recognizing the lived experience of fandom has begun to develop in the field of music fandom and taking of how it has increasingly become a lived experience for some, there are several areas where this project seeks to bridge some gaps that are currently unaddressed. The two main research questions driving this dissertation were: What is the nature of and function of adult music fandom? And, how does adult music fandom function in the daily lives of those who participate in it? I address these questions by historicizing and discussing many of the fan practices of the predominantly adult music fan group known as Parrotheads.

4 Special Olympics, www.phcoem.com/so.php (accessed October 21, 2007). Cheeseburgers have a special meaning in Parrothead fandom as it is the object lusted after in a Buffett’s song titled “Cheeseburger in Paradise” (1978) as well as a Buffett’s affiliated restaurant of the same name.
Fandom increasingly developed as a field of study since the early 1990s. Early scholarly work on fandom tended to concentrate on fandom in relation to struggles with power in the consumption of mass media texts. Moving into what Jonathan Gray et al. claim is the third wave of fandom studies, and while fandom in relation to struggles of power is still part of the general discourse, there has been a push to recognize and engage with fandom as a greater part of our daily lives. As Gray et al. contend, “Perhaps the most important contribution of contemporary research into fan audiences thus lies in furthering our understanding of how we form emotional bonds with ourselves and others in a modern, mediated world.”

The field of popular music fandom employs a very interdisciplinary approach. It engages with popular music studies in a more general sense, but also from cultural studies to help frame the scholarship in the field. The study of popular music fandom becomes further complicated and complex when fan interactions are studied not only in face-to-face interactions, but also as they play out and are enacted online. As the Internet is increasingly recognized as a site where music fandom is also taking place, research on Internet communities and new media has been incorporated into the field of popular music fandom.

Scholars such as Daniel Cavicchi have argued, “Fandom has become a vital element of rock and roll culture.” By claiming as much Cavicchi, like myself, is moving our focus away from the music itself and instead pushing us to seek to understand music culture’s consumers. Further, Cavicchi’s suggestion is encouraging us to not only invest in but also to engage in the ways in which music consumers, or fans, create ways of experiencing the music beyond the

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5 Gray et al., 10.
6 Gray et al.
performance of the stage. Cavicchi and others in this field have begun to explore and, further, to take seriously fandom as community. In work I have previously written on this topic, as well as in my work here, my aim is to continue this discussion. I agree with Cavicchi that fandom often functions as community, or further, an imagined community where fans imagine themselves as part of a larger group of people connected by a particular fan text.\(^9\) I borrow the term “imagined community” from Benedict Anderson who originally used the phrase to connote a larger understanding of the nation. He suggests that a nation is, in actuality, something that is imagined because its participants will never meet with, interact with, or know most of their fellow members and “yet in the minds each lives the image of their communion.”\(^10\) Anderson posits that communities beyond face-to-face engagement are imagined as community “conceived as a deep horizontal comradeship” as a result of their consumption of mass media (he uses newspapers as an example).\(^11\) In this context, imagined community members are committed to each other as well as to the community with which they engage with in face-to-face settings.\(^12\) Although not his original intention, like other fandom and Internet community scholars, we can push Anderson’s term “imagined communities” a bit further as it is also exceptionally useful as a way to begin to think of music fan communities, which largely exist in the minds of the individuals until they are realized either online or in person within the space of the concert event or other space where fans are meeting. Moreover fandom has become an integral part of fans

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\(^9\) Cavicchi, 174.
\(^12\) Anderson, 7.
everyday lives beyond the communities in which fans live and work and instead can be seen developing, cultivating, and flourishing in online spaces. In this way, in many cases engagement in music fandom has the potential to extend beyond youth, where it was previously thought to be left behind. Instead some music fandoms are actively engaged and have extended their engagement well into adulthood.

Much popular music scholarship tends to focus on music fans as being predominantly a youth-based cultural phenomenon but, as we see with music fans such as Jimmy Buffett’s fans, this music fandom is not necessarily limited to youth culture. Instead, fandom can be seen as either continuing into adulthood or being experienced for the first time in adulthood, though it is not often predominantly addressed in this way. This case study focuses largely on fans who consider themselves to be Parrotheads. Furthermore this case study focuses predominantly on Parrotheads who participate with and are active members in official Parrothead clubs. Adult music fandom entails several other topics to be investigated in this dissertation all of which center around various activities promoting the “Margaritaville State of Mind” that Buffett and his fans have cultivated together. Derived from Buffett’s hit song, “Margaritaville,” Buffett’s escapism ethos has transformed his fandom into an experience and further – a state of mind and a state of being – to be enjoyed by his fans whether it is through their celebration of their fandom, or even through the goods and services he sells. This state of mind experience, in terms of fandom more specifically, can be seen in a number of the activities they participate in as part of belonging to their local Parrothead clubs, whether that be tailgating, elements of which are incorporated into their pre-concert activities as well as parties they hold throughout the year.

13 There are some fans of Buffett’s music who consider themselves to be just that, fans of Buffett. This is consciously articulated so as to differentiate themselves from the fans that identify with the fan moniker “Parrothead” or moreso, that Parrothead is merely a title they do not identify with. Thus, this work specifically engages with Parrotheads who embrace the fan nickname as a part of their fan identity and their fandom.
Similarly, Parrotheads have chosen, as an integral part of their fandom, to participate in raising money for local social and environmental charities in their area in the name of their fandom. Another interesting aspect of adult music fandom is how these participants are developing and/or becoming active participants in social networking sites developed specifically for their fan base.

Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review is to familiarize readers with relevant scholarly work that has helped to shape this dissertation. Generally speaking, my project falls within the disciplines of Popular Music and Fandom Studies, both which oftentimes work within the framework of Cultural Studies, as well as Internet and Social Networking research. I used ethnography and cyber-ethnography as a way to research this fan community. I also conducted several surveys online which were posted to two larger online Buffett focused message boards. While these surveys shed light more specifically on the thoughts and ideas of the fans of the sites where they were published, the information I gathered from them was still exceptionally useful in my research. For this literature review, I will focus on the basic framework that will inform the major themes proposed in my dissertation.

Methodological Approach: Ethnography and Cyber-Ethnography

My methodological approach to the work in this study of Parrotheads uses ethnographic and cyber-ethnographic practices while investigating fan culture. I approach my research in a similar fashion as Daniel Cavicchi, who defines ethnography as “detailed and personal, yet serv[ing] as a basis for broader cultural and social understanding.”¹⁴ Ethnography, in a more traditional sense, focuses on participant observations of a group or individual informants who help researchers in turn to understand the culture or group with which we are engaging with. I would argue against the idea that I place myself as the all-knowing authority of the groups I

¹⁴ Cavicchi, 9-10.
study. In this instance my research challenges traditional ethnography by refusing to focus on the fandom as what Cavicchi calls, “exotic others.”15 In no way do I see myself as what Andrea MacDonald refers to as a “fan authority,” someone who is already deeply integrated into and an active participant within the fan group with which they study, especially since I had no previous connection to Buffett’s music or his fans until I began my research for this project.16

D. Soyini Madison highlights the sometimes-complicated combining of forces (of both people and situations) which shape ethnographies and addresses issues of privilege and power in critical research. In discussing ethnography Madison states: “I contend that critical ethnography is always a meeting of multiple sides in an encounter with and among the Other(s), one in which there is negotiation and dialogue towards substantial and viable meaning that makes the difference in the Other’s world.”17 Learning, understanding, and making meaning from the interactions between the ethnographer and the people or the place being studied therefore is a complex process (or at least it can be). Borrowing from Dwight Conquergood, Madison frames ethnography as a type of performance – an intricate game of give and take, of understanding, relating, and learning, between the ethnographer and the subject. Further, Madison entreats her researchers to begin to think about our subject position as ethnographers, and how that position has the potential to affect the people being studied, as well as the answers that they give. E. Patrick Johnson also approaches ethnography as a type of performance and similarly cites Conquergood and discusses ethnography as performance but also a type of performance of understanding – it can be seen as a performance of the body as well as a dialogic performance.18

15 Cavicchi, 9-10.
Madison and Johnson both implore their readers to take into consideration their subject position as ethnographers and how that role has the potential to affect the people being studied as well as the answers those being studied may give.

Cyber-ethnography has moved the more traditional models of ethnography into the world of the Internet. In her cyber-ethnography, which discusses users’ choice of online identities, Nancy Baym found that most people create online selves consistent with their offline identities. What Baym contends is that many of the people in the group she studied often arranged local meet ups with members from the boards so as to meet face-to-face or arranged special visits when a member was passing through the hometown of another member – thus they have an incentive to portray their authentic selves online, since they would be held accountable for their identity in face-to-face interactions. Applying Baym’s findings to my fandom study, I contend that many Parrotheads fans work hard to depict themselves sincerely as their authentic selves both online and in face-to-face interactions. Similarly Radhika Gajjala argues that “we cannot separate our being online from being offline, because online and offline are not discrete entities,” and further that “online and offline interweave.” This understanding is also useful when reading profiles on the Parrothead social networking site Meet the Phlockers, as in some cases this site served as a platform for users to make friends with other Parrotheads and meet up at various events held throughout the year and also to remember when reviewing profile pages to get a sense of what kind of the demographics of the site. Keeping in mind that there are certain groups, such as some Parrotheads, who interweave both of these social worlds, we are reminded that sometimes groups form relationships and communities online with the express purpose of

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eventually meeting in offline contexts at events such as concerts or festivals. The goal of such activities is to meet and hang out face-to-face, but these meet ups are organized online and given value, to some extent, because of the interactions that are also cultivated online and resume online once the face-to-face event is over. It is in these instances that it is particularly important to consider and collect data in both online and offline settings. Ultimately, both ethnography and cyber-ethnography are useful ways to begin to understand how and where fans are coming together to participate in various fan activities.

**Fandom**

Daniel Cavicchi's *Tramps Like Us*, which investigates Bruce Springsteen fandom community, has greatly influenced my own work. He writes, “It might be more useful to think about the work, rather than the worth of fandom, what it does, not what it is, for various people in particular historical and social movements.” 21 He suggests it is important to ask fans about their activities rather than to watch and make assumptions about the activities and their meanings. His work gives voice to a specific fan culture, investigating how music has helped some Bruce Springsteen fans shape their own identities as fans and create their own fan-based communities. My own research, similarly to Cavicchi’s, was strengthened by the thoughts, ideas, and sentiments of the fans I studied. By giving these fans a voice and asking them about their own activities, I was able to highlight how these fans create community and enact their fandom, as well as the various practices that are central to their fan community beyond the music, with other like-minded fans. From here I focused on the activities that they pursue together, as fans, to help to cement and solidify their bonds to each other as well as to the musician or band of which they are fans. One could ask, but why does this matter? When a group of people are actively participating in a group such as this they are suggesting a value of worth in the activities.

21 Cavicchi, 9.
Thus, it is also important to ask fans what they take away from being involved in these groups and activities as a way to uncover the complex web of meanings connected to fan activities.

Early images of fans were traditionally described with negative connotations – the two most common images being the “pathological fan” and the “hysterical fan.” Jodi Jenson discusses these descriptions of fans in her article “Fandom as Pathology.” The “pathological fan” is an obsessive loner with “psychic dysfunctions” who is fixated with someone within the realm of celebrity or known through the mass media. The second negative image is usually linked to the hysterical fan found in a crowd setting. An example of this would be the hysterical, crying girls who gathered in large crowds awaiting the Beatles. Jenson contends that these two images portray the fan as “being irrational, out of control and prey to a number or external forces.”

Lawrence Grossberg differentiates fandom from fanaticism, in saying that fanaticism is the “investment in particular cultural practices, which become the dominant structure of one’s self image.” While we might argue that fandom more generally could be seen as enacting similar tendencies, fans are usually construed or constructed in a much more positive way. In a more simplified definition, Mark Peterson observes, fans are “consumers who build social affiliations around media texts.”

Since the 1990s, scholarship in this field has worked to allow for a greater expansion of the concept of fandom as a normal, non-fanatical, everyday activity, and this more recent scholarship has produced several studies which counter the images of fans as negative, obsessive, and fanatical. Jodi Jenson calls for the acknowledgement and recognition of “fandom

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as a normal, everyday cultural or social phenomenon.” 25 She continues, “Fandom is an aspect of how we make sense of the world, in relation to mass media, and in relation to our historical, social and cultural location. Thinking well about fans and fandom can help us think more fully and respectfully about what it means today to be alive and to be human.” 26 Similarly, Cornell Sandvoss suggests, like many fan scholars, that fandom is a regular and normal activity. 27 Baym’s contention is very similar in that she sees fandom as “generally defined as an intrinsically social phenomenon in which a person becomes a fan, in part for the social connections or community that fandom entails.” 28 Grossberg recognizes fandom as a “positive relationship,” as “immediate and to a certain extent, unreflective,” and that “fandom is different from consumption or simple enjoyment.” He continues, “taste describes the quality and quantity of one’s relationship to particular practices, that it is a matter of the investment people make in particular things, of the way they matter.” Because of this, Grossberg writes that fandom describes a range of involvement, “but fandom is not reducible to a relationship between a text and an audience member, for it involves a more complex set of relations and investments between practices.” 29

Fans’ media texts often grow beyond the albums and music, as in the case of the fans in this study. As a result, Mark Peterson contends that they begin to fill in missing “gaps” or speculate about “problems left unresolved by a particular text... Fans tend to seek out others who are equally willing to invest time, energy and money in thinking seriously about media texts.” They share these discourses through “fan clubs,anzines, chat rooms, and websites creat[ed]” as

25 Jenson, 13. 
27 Sandvoss, 8. 
29 Grossberg, 6-7.
a “basis for sociality.” Cavicchi explains that “fans create community or a ‘sense of belonging together’ not with actual shared experience but with the expectation of shared experience,” and it is within these communities that the discussion and investment in media texts comes to fruition by not only consuming media but also by creating their own media and letting it speak to other work that fans develop or engage with.

In discussing the function of popular culture, Greg Harmon posits “it is through popular culture that the emphasis on ‘togetherness’ or companionship has been promoted in an age that has increasingly isolated the individual.” It is through this stress on togetherness, I would argue, that popular culture texts are encouraging fans to unite in a shared appreciation (or dislike) for a cultural product; they are creating fandom communities. This does not mean that they are always conflict free. In a perfect world some fan communities may seek to be viewed as “drama free” but this is not always the case. Whether these groups are willing to share their internal conflicts is another issue. Fandom communities range in size and interest. They can meet face-to-face or as it has been increasingly prevalent in the age of the Internet, they can meet online and form virtual fandom communities. Further, as Henry Jenkins suggests, taking fandom into the world of the Internet allows for the “forming of social ties within the geographically

30 Peterson, 152-153.
31 Cavicchi, 161.
32 Peterson, 152-153.
34 In doing earlier research on a Dave Matthews Band message board, The Gorgeboard, I found that, at least with this particular group, they were more interested in presenting themselves as a unified group than getting into the internal conflicts that I knew of as a member of this group. Even when I asked people confidentially to talk about conflicts within the group all members were unwilling to share this information. Kelly MacDonald, “Rock and Roll Fan Culture: How Fandom Expands Beyond the Music,” (M.A. Final Project, University of Massachusetts, Boston, 2006).
dispersed population of the Internet.” 35 The Internet has made it that much easier for individuals to locate other like-minded fans. In the virtual world they can come together and discuss their shared fandom no matter where they are in the physical world, and as a result they are creating fandom communities online. It also has opened the possibility for fans who may never have met in real life to have the opportunity to arrange face-to-face interactions.

Henry Jenkins is known as one of the leading scholars in the field of fandom studies. Taking a postmodern approach to media and popular culture, some of his work looks at how “grass roots movements” in an increasingly digital age involve fans reworking mainstream and commercial texts, such as *Star Wars*, to meet their own needs. Jenkins argues that this “fan appropriation and transformation of media content gets marginalized or exoticized, treated as something that people do when they have too much time on their hands.” 36 He seeks to place these fans and their activities of renegotiating popular media texts as being “active participants within the current media revolution.” 37 Further, for Jenkins, participatory culture refers to the type of consumption that comes from a developing media convergence. Thus as patterns of media consumption change participatory culture is also evolving. Consumers, and as will be discussed in Chapter 4, this includes Parrothead fans, are demanding the “right to participate in the creation and distribution of media narratives.” 38 Fandom, as a form of participatory culture, creates an alternative culture in which fans begin to question certain ideologies of mass culture. From this, Jenkins argues, we can see fans remaking or reinterpreting aspects of mass culture to serve their own interests and to pick up where a particular element of mass culture has left them

36 Ibid., 551.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 554.
wanting. Jenkins sees this as a reclaiming of mass culture. He posits that in a sense, these fans are taking a grass roots approach to remaking particular mass culture texts for themselves. In his more recent work on spreadable media, to be addressed in another section, Jenkins addresses this in terms of “fan labor” practices. The Internet, as a way to share and spread these newly interpreted texts, has allowed for materials and fandom itself to expand because the “forming of social ties within the geographically dispersed population of the Internet” allows for greater numbers of fans to connect with one another in online spaces and further, it has “fostered a new excitement about self-expression and creativity.”

Reimagined texts and products in the form of fanzines or fan fiction, or even some websites created or centered on certain texts, only reinforce the fan’s rejection of a “definitive version” of a product, and instead, provides a space where many fans have the opportunity to participate in this creative process. Jenkins ultimately suggests that media producers have begun to catch on and realize that, in many cases it is nearly impossible (and often detrimental) to attempt to stop fans from reimagining texts. Instead, producers are actively “building into their texts opportunities for fan elaboration and collaboration” and encourage participatory culture in relation to their products. The result is that products developed by new media cultures are often more complex. What we can see from Jenkins’ work is that along with new media develops deeper interrelationships between media convergence and participatory culture, the results of which can sometimes be conflict, critique, challenge, or even collaboration between the two.

Another scholar we have discussed above, Nancy K. Baym, is quickly becoming a leading scholar on music fandom as it functions both online and off. Baym highlights some of

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40 Ibid, 559.
the subtle differences between more general ideas about narrative fandom versus the more focused music fandom. She is careful to acknowledge and point the reader to the fact that narrative fan practices, which tend to be the basic go-to construct when talking about fandom more generally, should not be taken as “exemplary of all fandom.” Narrative fandom, she suggests, is based on certain texts, usually which have “characters, plots, and holes” which are to be filled in or reimagined by fans of these kinds of texts, whereas music fans are less inclined to “complete the music through interpretation and creativity… [Music] Fans can’t fix it or rebuild it in the same way they can with stories” because the music is intended to be presented as a finished, generally polished, product. She continues by acknowledging that there are different kinds of fans and different kinds of fan texts that fans negotiate and, sometimes, even produce. She suggests, “if we’re to build theories that encompass all of fandom we need to account for these distinctions as well as the similarities.” Various specialties within fandom are consistently being developed and the field is, in a good way, becoming more and more complicated by its expanding categorizations and definitions. Further, she points out that there are in fact differences, which is half the battle sometimes. Baym’s work also makes us aware that much of the initial fandom research is still working through this and thus finding specific research on music fandom, or Internet music fans, can be difficult.

What Baym found in researching Swedish indie music fans was that as more options for music based social networking becomes available to fans online; fans become more selective in the places in which they choose to spend their online time. She found that this specific group of fans was not necessarily gathering on one band or music label website but rather were weaving a more complex social music network that expanded across multiple websites. In doing so, she

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found that these music fans were creating a new form of online community that “extends beyond [any one specific music] fandom” but also allowed them to engage with their fandom in more than one space online. Fans overlapped and met up in a variety of different online spaces. Baym’s study is interesting in that it begins to challenge some of the more traditional ways that fandom scholarship has been perceived, in that traditionally it tends to look at participatory culture as it pertains to a single focused text/band. What the Swedish Indie fans in her study are showing us is that, as society is becoming more net savvy, music fans are choosing to expand and complicate their fandom by investing time on a myriad of fandom sites and activities, and picking and choosing what aspects they want to engage with in specific online sites. As we move forward this will continue to become increasingly complex, especially in terms of tracking what fans are doing and how they are building, creating, and maintaining connections. More importantly, Baym’s work speaks to the complicated ways in which fans are choosing to negotiate their fandom. Her work here will be interesting to take into consideration as more research is done on the Parrothead fan developed social networking site Meet the Phlockers (MTP). As mentioned previously, MTP is a Jimmy Buffett fan specific social networking site that was created when its founders felt lost in the crowd, so to speak, in other more general social networking sites online. Their participation and contributions to the site sometimes involved in fan activities, whether big or small, creative or not, brings about interesting questions about labor. The next section will discuss some of the scholarship based in fan labor that takes into consideration the work that fans do as a part of their fan activities.

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Fan Labor

Fan labor in the most basic sense can be understood as the work or labor (in varying forms, both creative and non-creative) that fans are producing for or as a part of the fan community in which they participate. Much of the scholarship on fan labor discusses the concept in terms of Web 2.0 participatory practices and how it plays out in online spaces. Fan labor generally results in texts that are produced by and for other like-minded fans and runs the gamut of fields, whether it is in terms of online and offline gaming culture, television, movies, comics, music, social networks and social networking sites to highlight a few areas. Fan engagement can range from developing and maintaining a fan website, writing and creating fan fiction wherein the producer of the new text works loosely within the confines of the defining text to develop or alter plot points found in the original text or any sort of variation on this, attending fan conventions (i.e. Star Wars conventions), making costumes as is done in costume play (also called cosplay), or making their own videos, video games, or music as part of their fandom activities. For music fans online, fan engagement can be something as minor as posting to an online message board about their favorite song. For music fans expressing their fandom offline this might mean putting a bumper sticker on their car or wearing the shirt of the band they love. Both acts thus promote the band in one way or another. It can also be much more complex and involve more extensive time intensive endeavors such as being an officer in a fan club, writing monthly fan club newsletters, and running online websites and message boards dedicated to their favorite band. As Nancy Baym and Robert Burnett suggest, we should keep in mind that these “fans are one manifestation of the ‘participatory culture’ in Web 2.0, in which user-generated content stands alongside professionally-produced content in claiming audience
attention.”\textsuperscript{43} Below I provide an overview of some of the theories about fan labor and will help to further frame how theories in this field have developed and will help set the stage for understanding how fan labor functions with Parrotheads in terms of charity and this fan group’s collective sense of social responsibility to be discussed in Chapter Three.

John Fiske approaches the concept of fan labor, although he does not articulate it in this way, in terms of what he calls “textual productivity.”\textsuperscript{44} He acknowledges that fans usually do not produce their fan texts for money; however, it does usually cost fans money, time, and labor to produce such texts. He argues that, “because fan texts are not produced for profit, they do not need to be mass-marketed, so unlike official culture, fan culture makes no attempt to circulate its texts outside its own community,” and writing in a pre-widespread Internet era (1992), he suggested that these were “‘narrowcast,’ not broadcast, texts.”\textsuperscript{45} Thus Fiske does not take into consideration the Internet and the ease with which texts produced by fans have the opportunity and potential to be shared in these spaces at a much higher level of visibility and circulation, and more so as the digital economy began to flourish.

Frisk’s concept of textual productivity would soon flourish in the realm of the Internet, as more and more people began to log on and participate in their shared fandom in various ways online. Some of the earlier rhetoric about fan activities online was explored in terms of the gift economy, free labor, and fan labor. These concepts were used by scholars to discuss the activities that Internet users more generally, and fans more specifically, are engaging with in their practices on the Internet, focusing on their creative endeavors and activities in online spaces. One question that has framed much of the discussion of this labor posits: Is the work that

\textsuperscript{44} Fiske, 39.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 39-40.
online users are doing a labor of love done voluntarily or conversely as a type of exploitation of workers in a capitalist system?

In its early stages of discussion, much of the activity that fans were engaging with online was discussed in terms of a form of empowerment for fans, and scholars oftentimes praised the activities that fans were bringing forth. One way to talk about the “work” that fans produced within their participatory fan culture is discuss as a type of “gift economy.” Jenkins et al. discuss the gift economy in conjunction with commodity culture, and they have taken cues from work of Howard Rheingold. Rheingold discusses the gift economy as a kind of reciprocal process online where people share things with one another under the guise and spirit of working to build, develop, and cultivate certain online texts. In an online community, for example, users are free to share without the expectation of the gift being reciprocated. Further, the gift economy, they suggest, is socially rather than economically driven. The exchanging of goods can be a literal exchanging of gifts, or involve the exchange of services such as maintaining a virtual space “as part of a larger system in which one’s contributions to the group are ultimately recognized and respected.”

Jenkins et al. argue that for a good to move from being valued within a commodity culture to a gift economy, there needs to be a point where the good is renegotiated and “value gets transformed into worth, where what has a price becomes priceless.”

Tiziana Terranova similarly suggests that laborers, in this case, fan producers, willingly give up financial compensation because they found the productivity pleasurable and, moreover, they saw it as voluntary labor in the digital economy. The digital economy, she posits, “is about specific forms of production (web design, multimedia production, digital services, and so on), but it is also

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46 Henry Jenkins with Xiaochang Li, Ana Domb Krauskopf and Joshua Green, “If It Doesn’t Spread, It’s Dead (Part Three and Four): Thinking Through the Gift Economy,” http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p_2.html (accessed March 27, 2009), 38.

47 Ibid.
about forms of labor we do not immediately recognize as such: chat, real-life stories, mailing lists, amateur newsletters, and so on.” Free labor as it is enacted in the digital economy, she claims, witnesses an interesting “experimentation with value and free cultural/affective labor.” Baym and Burnett suggest that the participatory culture of fan-produced content is actually a way to “celebrate this new found ability to wield power without industry support.”

Jenkins (2006) suggests that even though fans’ participatory culture is not new, “the web has pushed that hidden layer of cultural activity to the foreground, focusing the media industries to confront its implications for their commercial interests.” Eric Harvey notes that in fandom “on the web, the line between social and economic promotion is often blurred beyond recognition.” It is this sometimes-unclear distinction between the social and economic aspects of fan labor that has been the focus of much of the research. Recent scholarship on fan activities began to shift towards a more critical approach and posited that the free labor from fans was actually a type of capitalist exploitation. Many suggested the work fans and online users were producing was being used by the companies for whom they were creating the work. This was an uneven exchange of sorts – one rooted in exploitation rather than free and fair exchange. For example, Trebor Scholz argues that as “online, service platforms, rather than products are offered and users are encouraged to participate, communities become the brand. The Web makes it possible to ‘out–source’ many tasks to the users who can create in ‘self–service’ mode.”

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48 Ibid.
Mørk Peterson contends that even something as simple as sharing and commenting on photos posted to the online photo sharing community Flickr helps to “create significance and value,” which helps to explain “why a specific type of software and practices related to it can be participatory, exploitative, and create pleasure for its users at the same time.”

Further still, some scholars contend that those who participate in these activities are somehow being duped into doing so or are simply unaware of the value of their productivity and contributions to consumer culture.

More recent scholarship, however, seeks to find a more middle ground, one that works through some of the tensions between fan labor as an empowering aspect of fans activities versus their labor/activities being merely exploited by the companies, bands, and conglomerates who own the initial texts (and all potential forms that this entails) with which fans engage with. As John Banks and Sal Humphreys argue, “We need to move beyond marveling at the phenomenon of user-generated content and understanding its place in economic, business and socio/cultural circuits. We also need to move beyond commentary that frames user-created content that becomes commercially valuable as a marker of exploited labour.”

Terranova (2000) provides the guiding concepts Banks and Humphreys use as a “starting point for understanding transformed relations between the commercial and non-commercial by pointing out that this affective, immaterial labour is neither directly produced by capital, nor developed as a direct response to the needs of capital…This free labour has not been appropriated but voluntarily given.”

Thus, these fans/creators are not unaware that their work may be co-opted in some


56 Ibid, 407.
way by consumer culture, but that this happens is not necessarily because fans/creators are cultural dupes who do not know the value of their work or simply do not know any better.  

Chapters Three and Four in this work will address types of fan labor both in the charity work with which Parrotheads are engaging as well as in the online social networking sites such as Meet the Phlockers.

**Social Network Scholarship**

Social network sites have been some of the most visited online sites in recent years. Similarly they have begun to be discussed and included in the popular press and frequently crop up in popular culture references. Academic scholarship on SNSs is flourishing even as this chapter is being written. In the last five years alone the research in this field has begun to be published and more widely recognized as an important field of study. The section to follow will give a brief overview of some of the trends in this scholarship.

Some scholars suggest that the mainstream SNSs, such as Facebook, are more often used for seeking out, articulating, reinforcing, and maintaining existing offline relationships as opposed to building new friendships with strangers online. This is often done by seeking out real-life friends on SNSs or by using friend finding programs to recommend or locate friends who might be in their offline social network.  

Further, SNSs can help users to maintain online relationships with people they know from offline, even as their own offline communities are

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constantly shifting. Many scholars see SNSs as working to bridge offline and online connections. These SNSs allow users to gain and further build and maintain social capital through various communication strategies.\(^{59}\) Scholarship in this field has even noted the differences found between Internet users who participate on SNSs and those who tend to say away from them, but still spend time online.\(^{60}\)

In comparison, social networking does not often happen on many of the more mainstream SNS such as the now defunct Friendster, or on Myspace, or Facebook.\(^{61}\) The difference is generally distinguished by the fact that SNS tend to have members who link themselves together or “Friend” one another in online platforms, based on previously existing relationships in offline contexts. Social networking can generally be found in sites whose aim is to bring together users with similar interests outside of one’s offline social circle when there is a shared common interest, such as video game play, specific genres of music, musicians, or bands, or even when SNS are used in organizations or the work place (at companies where employees do not know all of their coworkers).\(^{62}\) Social networking could be seen in some of the earliest of online networks, CMC and online communities. Steinfield et al. found that in the SNS used by employees at IBM, workers shared both a balance of personal and professional information, and moreover they used the SNS as a way to help people in the company make new ties with fellow

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\(^{60}\) Hargittai, “Whose Space?”

\(^{61}\) With certain users on Myspace, however, this not always the case. There has been a slew of “Myspace celebrities” to crop up since the social network site hit the mainstream. These people become famous, in part, by actively collecting as many Friends as possible.

coworkers, thereby helping in the overall knowledge sharing and management. Social networking can also occur when members specifically seek out other users to connect for economic reasons, as is the case on Kiva.org, which matches borrowers and lenders with one another for non-profit monetary transactions aimed at aiding in the development and empowerment of the borrowers.  

Research on SNSs has also focused on user’s social network profiles as forms of online textual performances, whether it is through an articulated performance of identity or a performance of ones authenticity, presenting an authentic self to an imagined audience (which can be made up of their actual community of connected friends online, or in the case of public profiles, an anticipated imagined audience/community), or through a user’s construction “cool.” Along these lines, work has been done to understand how users enact performances of taste, whether that is through the adding of certain people or in the style and layout of their profile pages. Similarly, performances can be seen in how users construct their identity in SNSs (or networked publics as danah boyd suggests of SNSs), as well as their participation through linking with other Friends online.

Privacy in SNS has often been a concern of users as well as scholars. As mainstreams sites like Facebook change their policies they are in turn sometimes perceived as manipulating users information, privacy continues to be an issue. Occasionally, these changes have more to do with revealing more directly information or posts that were already searchable among one’s

64 Hugo Liu, “Social Network Sites.” boyd “Why youth (heart).”
friends. This was the case with Facebook’s implementation of the feature called “News Feed,” which displayed essentially every action that users on the popular SNS did, making users’ already accessible information feel much more public. Others have looked at the mediated public lives that many young people who use SNSs are leading and what this might mean for them in terms of privacy and their lack of it. Moreover, privacy in social network scholarship also focuses on more specific aspects of user’s information and privacy. Many users on Facebook, for example, did not realize that the information they were sharing with various applications on the site could be made public or used and shared by those application companies. Moreover, boyd calls Facebook’s privacy policy change in December of 2009 downright paternalistic. She argues that when Facebook changed its policies to make it a more public social network, it forced users to opt out of having their profile information made public. Many users, however, clicked through the new changes without reading them entirely, and thus did not realize that by not physically changing their settings to opt out, they were making their information public.

Lastly, and equally as important, as discussions about the digital divide have been reevaluated over time in studies of online usage and participation, several scholars of SNS have begun to talk about different racial and ethnic groups represented or not represented in social network sites more specifically. boyd, for example, has done research on differences in usage and preferences in SNS in youth groups, taking note of what she calls “white flight” from one

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popular SNS (Myspace) onto another SNS (Facebook).\textsuperscript{69} Others have chosen to focus on issues of race, ethnicity, development, and globalization as a way of giving voice to excluded groups and, moreover, of recognizing how these constructs function in social network and social networking sites.\textsuperscript{70}

Chapter Summaries

The first chapter of this dissertation presents an in-depth look at the career of Jimmy Buffett and explains at length the numerous business ventures that Jimmy Buffett is involved in. By historicizing Buffett and most of his business ventures, we can begin to understand how the Margaritaville state of mind is portrayed and further how it is then sold to his fans. In many ways consumerism and Parrothead fandom goes hand in hand, at least that is what drives the selling of the tropical escapism that Buffett promotes. While Parrotheads might argue that the buying of many of the items that Buffett markets to his fans is not required to make them a fan, the sheer volume with which the musician produces goods aimed at his fans would suggest that there are many Parrotheads who are enticed by the numerous items he has to offer them. Buffett’s empire is not without its critiques and as such this chapter includes criticism from fans regarding the commercialization of Buffett’s tropical themed empire. This chapter concludes with a larger critique of American consumerism and overspending as represented in the American television show \textit{South Park}, with a Margaritaville Frozen Concoction Maker serving as the symbolic product which propels this discussion.

The second chapter discusses the history of Parrotheads and the formation of Parrothead clubs, as well as the founding of the national Parrothead organization Parrot Heads in Paradise.


\textsuperscript{70} Gajjala and Birzescu, “Voicing Placement in Online Networks” and Gajjala and Birzescu, “Digital Imperialism through Online social/financial networks.”
This chapter begins to explore some of the activities that Parrotheads participate in by looking at how Buffett’s escapism ethos has, for some fans, transitioned into a state of being in their daily lives that moves beyond the fun-filled weekend once a year when Buffett comes to their area for a concert. This chapter concludes with a discussion of tailgating as an integral part of the Parrothead’s fan experience, so much so that they incorporate the fundamental elements into some of their parties and other fan activities. This section includes some first hand ethnographic fieldwork of a Buffett concert near Detroit, Michigan in 2010 and will conclude with a discussion of the problematic nature of the tropicalizations found in many aspects of Parrothead fandom.

Chapter Three addresses the Parrothead’s central motto of “partying with a purpose.” The primary focus of this chapter is to examine why Parrotheads have chosen, as an integral part of their fandom, to invest in volunteering and participate in various charitable acts as fans. What is interesting about Parrotheads is how this group of music fans has taken up charity work as an integral part of their fandom because Buffett does so much charity work of his own. Research in this chapter is based on an investigation of Parrot Heads in Paradise Inc., the main nonprofit fundraising group that serves as an umbrella/head organization for other more local Parrothead chapters. The chapter then discusses the Detroit Parrot Head Club’s philanthropic activities to give us a sense of how clubs more specifically are working to integrate “partying with a purpose” into their fan activities. Lastly, this chapter investigates how music fan groups enact, enhance, and develop their fandom identities through acts of participatory fan labor practices.

The social networking site Meet the Phlockers will be the central focus of the fourth chapter of this dissertation. This chapter examines how Parrotheads are developing and/or becoming active participants in social networking sites created by fans specifically for their fan
base. By reading personal profiles and analyzing and interacting with fans in this online social networking site, my goal was to examine the site to gain an understanding of how Parrotheads are constructing and replicating the mythical Margaritaville empire found in fan activities offline into their fan activities in online spaces. Ultimately this social networking site failed, but regardless of its final outcome, for the time that it was highly active it serves as a model to understand the interesting ways in which Parrotheads are actively performing their fandom – performing Parrothead throughout the site. The final chapter of this dissertation will not only summarize my findings, but will also add concluding thoughts brought about this research as a more unified study.
CHAPTER I. JIMMY BUFFETT: CAREER & CORPORITAVILLE

In a music career that has thus far spanned forty-some years, Jimmy Buffett has developed not only a distinctive type of lifestyle music, but also cultivated from that music a mythical “Margaritaville state of mind,” enjoyed by Buffett and his ever increasing fanbase: Parrotheads. This chapter will discuss Buffett’s career as well as the lucrative business empire he has built for himself over the years. By analyzing both his music and business ventures, this chapter will shed light not only on Buffett himself, but also the extent of his Margaritaville empire and moreso how that empire engages his fans in terms of all things Margaritaville – a subject which includes some fans’ criticism.

James “Jimmy” William Buffett was born in Pascagoula, Mississippi, on Christmas Day 1946. Not long after, his family moved to Mobile, Alabama, on the Gulf of Mexico. Buffett grew up listening to stories from his paternal grandfather, Captain James Buffett Sr. Captain Buffett had made a lifelong career of being a seaman and traveling the world, and he brought back many stories to share with his curious young grandson. Jimmy Buffett told Rolling Stone magazine in 1979, “My grandfather [a sailing master] told me sea stories, tales about the Caribbean and how exotic it was. That was a lure. I grew up in Mobile Bay and I knew [the ocean] would connect to white, sandy beaches and palm trees – which don’t exist around Mobile Bay.”¹ Buffett’s own father, James D. Buffett Jr., was a naval architect and one of his uncles, Billy Buffett, was in the Merchant Marines. It appears that growing up on the Gulf Coast, and being highly influenced by the men in his life with varying seafaring careers, instilled in Buffett a deep appreciation for the sea and further a grand sense of adventure from a very young age. These would be themes that would become infused in many of the songs Buffett would later write.

After high school Buffett attended Auburn University in Alabama, and then Pearl River Junior College after not doing so well at Auburn. He went on to graduate from the University of Southern Mississippi in 1969 where he studied both journalism and history. It was during his time at the University of Southern Mississippi that Buffett learned to play guitar after seeing his roommate successfully attract girls by playing for them. Buffett soon discovered he had found his calling when he realized he enjoyed performing and entertaining audiences. He found paying music gigs around campus and eventually began to do shows in New Orleans on the weekends. Upon graduating, Buffett played a variety of small cocktail lounges around Mobile. After getting a bit fed up with that scene, Buffett married his then girlfriend and they quickly moved to Nashville, Tennessee, so he could focus on his music. Buffett explained to reporter Chet Flippo, “So I went to Nashville and I couldn’t even get a job at a cocktail lounge there. I was writin’ songs but couldn’t plug the songs, couldn’t sell. I finally went to work for Billboard as a writer. That’s where I learned about the politics and the workings of the music business.”

Buffett signed with Barnaby Records in 1970, and recorded his first album, a country album entitled, *Down to Earth*, that same year. So as to avoid a conflict of interests with his position at *Billboard*, Buffett left the music magazine to pursue his music career full time. After leaving his job at *Billboard*, as he put it, “I did a record, hired a complete band, went on the road and was broke in two months.” *Down to Earth* did not do very well and subsequently his follow up album with Barnaby Records *High Cumberland Jubilee* was mysteriously misplaced and left unreleased for six years. It is believed that the record label was not willing to pay to

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3 Ibid.
produce albums if they were not going to sell well to begin with. Barnaby conveniently rediscovered the unreleased album once Buffett found some success in 1976. Much to the embarrassment of Buffett, the record label released the previously sub par album.\(^4\) Shortly after recording his second album Buffett divorced his wife and felt like Nashville was no longer meeting his needs. He came across old friend and musician Jerry Jeff Walker who convinced Buffett to travel to Florida for a change of scenery. The pair spent some time in Coconut Grove, Florida before eventually heading further south to Key West.

In moving to Florida, Buffet absorbed some of the sights and sounds around him and began to experiment with a persona that blended together his Gulf Coast identity with the Key West and Caribbean lifestyle he was living. This persona and lifestyle, combined with stories from his seafaring family, were then incorporated into the music he was writing, both lyrically and in its general sound. Eventually he developed “his very own beachgoing post-hippie subculture” that has continued to be a central part of Buffett’s music and lifestyle even to this day.\(^5\) During this time his musical sound still maintained hints of country as well as blending in a folk-rock style that also evoked the tropical imagery which he wrote about. After relocating to Key West, Buffett signed a deal with ABC – Dunhill Records, a record label located back in Nashville, and released several albums with this company. However the albums were, for the most part, only moderately successful. His second album to be released, *White Sport Coat and Pink Crustacean* (1973), featured the now fan favorite “Why Don’t We Get Drunk” (“and screw,” the chorus continues.) His next album *Living and Dying in ¾ Time* (1974) featured the song “Come Monday” and was Buffett’s first song to make it on to the music charts. This hit


single also helped Buffett begin to gather a fanbase other than locals in Key West. Buffett released another album in 1974, entitled *A1A*, and as *Rolling Stone* magazine biographers note with this album, “If you closed your eyes, you could practically hear the palm trees swaying on *A1A*.” In 1975, Buffett played himself in the film *Rancho Deluxe* after he was asked to write the soundtrack music for the movie, and in 1976 released his album *Havaña Daydreamin’.*

It was not until his album *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes* (1977) (hereafter *Changes*) featuring the hit single “Margaritaville,” that Buffett began to generate a stronger fan base and was considered a “commercial success” in the music industry as a direct result of the success of the single and the album.7 “Margaritaville” eventually reached number eight on *Billboard*’s Hot 100 chart and the album *Changes* reached number twelve on the *Billboard* 200 chart and number two on the *Billboard* Country Album Charts in 1977.8 This album is described in various music reviews as a mixture of “Caribbean-scented soft rock,” “folk-rock,” and country.9 What is interesting about the album is that while it evokes all of these styles of music, it achieves as much through a combination of not only the instruments used and themes and images that the songs address, but also from the visual aesthetic of the album itself in terms of the design, doodles, and symbols both outside and inside of the LP album cover, as well as the photographs of Jimmy Buffett and the band relaxing in some sandy location which can be found on the inside of the album.

To contextualize this album in the music era in which it was released, music scholar Reebee Garofalo explains that soft rock in the 1970s developed at a time when some artists and

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7 Ibid.
songwriters were turning inward and developing music that was much more personal. It was “at times intimate, at times introspective, at times confessional.” 10 Rock music in that era was really loud and aggressive, where as soft rock embraced a sense of vulnerability in its writing and its sound it – it was gentle. Furthermore Garofalo notes that soft rock “was the first style since the advent of rock ‘n’ roll that … encouraged men to try on new personas.” 11 In the case of Buffett we see a double embracing of personas – the soft and sensitive musician and the beach bum who constructed his own kind of fantasy paradise. Buffett’s music on Changes is a kind of soft rock to be sure; it is emotive, and he never raises his voice in an overtly aggressive manner. Instead his singing is, for the most part, soft and playful. In addition, Changes addresses themes that are meant to evoke a sense of tropical escapism and in his songs Buffett creates characters and uses imagery to get this vision across. This is evident not only in some of the aesthetic qualities of music on the album but also through many of the themes discussed in the songs themselves. There are songs about tourists, sailing away on a boat, or escaping to a far away land after being “called by the lure of the sea,” 12 drinking rum, drinking margaritas, and, really, just drinking in general. The instruments listed as being used on the album are: acoustic guitar, harmonica, organ, piano, bass, congas, drums, recorder, flute, and strings. Not all of the instruments used are listed in the liner notes however; the marimbas can be distinctly heard throughout Buffett’s hit song “Margaritaville” as well as in “Banana Republic.” On “Margaritaville” there is also an interesting blending of instruments that help to evoke a “tropical aesthetic” quality in the music. When the recorder is paired up with the marimbas on this track it gives the song an overall feel.

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11 Ibid, 244.
that evokes the steel drum, a popular Caribbean instrument many people associate with having a “tropical” sound.

Thus, Buffett’s beach bum persona and lifestyle were essentially solidified with this specific album. Proof of this can be seen in a review for his follow up album, *Son Of A Son of A Sailor* (1978). In describing Buffett, *Rolling Stone* reviewer Frank Rose wrote: “Buffett has become more than just another mellow singer/songwriter. He’s become the popular spokesman for an entire mellow way of life. His is the lassitudinous appeal of the vagabond on the loose in a sun-splashed, watery playland.”Buffett’s mellow lifestyle music was reaching larger audiences and became appealing for those fans who wanted a momentary escape from the reality of their jobs and responsibilities.

In late August of 1977, just after his song “Margaritaville” became a smashing success, Buffett found time in his touring schedule to take a break and marry Jane Slagsvol, a college student who he met in 1971 when Slagsvol was in Key West for Spring Break. The Buffetts would welcome daughter Savannah Jane in 1982. The couple separated in the mid-1980s, but Jane continued to work with Buffett on business endeavors. Buffett and Jane reconciled in 1991. Their second daughter Sarah Delaney was born in 1992, and the Buffetts adopted Cameron Marley in 1994. Buffett eventually tired of Key West, claiming it had changed drastically into a tourist destination from when he first moved there. In between touring and recording in the studio each year, Buffett purchased a variety of boats and airplanes to explore the Caribbean with friends and family. These many adventures would help inspire Buffett to continue to write the kind of lifestyle music for which he had become known.

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14 The couple was married at their home in Aspen, Colorado and their wedding band was the Eagles, who Buffett had been touring with.
His later albums continued to do well but they were not the gold that Changes had been. The industry, it seems, was not all that impressed with Buffett’s work. Even the Rolling Stone magazine review for Changes itself is not all that glowing though they gave it three stars. In his Rolling Stone review for Son Of A Son Of A Sailor, Frank Rose lamented “Buffett’s problem is his inability to transcend the limitations of his carefree environment.” Rose’s statement is an interesting one since it was this constructed carefree lifestyle which Buffett’s fans were drawn to. As Rolling Stone biographers of Buffett put it, “Much of the rest of Buffett’s ‘80’s output is music that only a Parrothead could love.” It seems that it was the fanbase that was pulling Buffett along. In 1984, Buffett partnered with Corona beer for his Feeding Frenzy Tour, and with the financial backing of this new corporate sponsor Buffett continued to flourish. In promoting Corona beer, Buffett’s face and voice were suddenly all over television commercials and radio advertising spots and as a result, he was able to reach a broader audience which in turn secured him larger venues and the opportunity to sell his Margaritaville wares to a bigger audience. Buffett continued to release albums, with an average of almost one every year.

In 2003, Buffett recorded a duet with country music star Alan Jackson called “It’s Five O’Clock Somewhere” for Jackson’s album Greatest Hits Volume II. The duet with Jackson brought Buffett a successful return to more traditional country roots and also scored a number one slot on the Billboard Country Music Charts. The song spent eight weeks at number one on the Country Singles Chart, and not surprisingly, has become a huge fan favorite at concerts as

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16 Rose, “Son of A Son Of A Sailor.”
17 Parke Puterbaugh and Mark Coleman, “Jimmy Buffett Biography.”
well. Buffett continued his country shift with his following album *License to Chill* (2004) by including duets with country musicians Clint Black and Martina McBride.

As of May 2011, Buffett has recorded twenty-six studio albums, released fifteen live albums, and nine compilations and specialty albums, and one and a half soundtracks (he recorded five songs to the soundtrack for the film *Hoot* in 2006), an impressive number to have achieved in his career thus far. In terms of music chart successes twenty-four of his albums have charted on the Billboard 200 Albums of the Year Chart. Buffett has had two albums make it to the number one position on Billboard 200 and Top Country Albums charts. His album *License to Chill* (2004) reached that position on both of those charts, while his album *Take the Weather With You* (2006) reached number one on the Top Country Album charts and number four on the Billboard 200. Buffett first began touring in 1973 with four concerts and has toured every single year since then. Between 1985 and 1999, Buffett performed an average of forty-eight shows a year. He hit a record number of concerts in 1992 when he played fifty-eight shows on his Recession Tour. As Buffett eased into the twenty-first century his concert tours were cut significantly by his previous yearly concert standards, however, he still averaged almost thirty shows per year between 2000 and 2010. Ultimately, *Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes* propelled Jimmy Buffett into the level of stardom he has attained, and continues to maintain to this day. Buffett eventually used *Changes* and the success it garnered as a launch pad for a series of lucrative businesses associated with the beach bum persona and image that he created. Even if the industry was not overly impressed with Buffett’s work, his fans’ support of his music and all things Margaritaville helped him continue to do exceptionally well on concert tours. Music and concert sales, paired with Buffett’s Margaritaville merchandise and restaurant franchises,

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continued to bring in fans who were gravitating towards the tropical living and escapist tunes that Buffett continued to write and sell to them.

“Corporitaville”: Buffett’s Budding Margaritaville Empire

Tropical themed shirts in any form or style have slowly become, for many of his followers, representative of visual markers for Jimmy Buffett, and his Parrotheads fanbase. Anthony Bourdain, upon entering a Hawaiian shirt store in the “Hawaii” episode of his television show, *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations*, remarked with severe criticism, “Every tropical place I’ve ever been to Jimmy Buffett has ruined.” As Bourdain suggests, Jimmy Buffett’s mythos seems to be present in some way, big or small, where tropical shirts and gear can be found, both at home and abroad. For Bourdain, Buffett has accomplished this in such a way that suggests it includes an over-commercialized and negative quality. Similarly, during an April 2011 baseball game between the Texas Rangers and the Boston Red Sox, when an anonymous baseball fan in the stadium reached to catch a foul ball, the television announcer remarked that the fan must be a Parrothead, merely because he was wearing a tropical shirt. Although it does appear that there has been a strong association made between “tropical” themed goods and Buffett, tropical themed shirts are not the only item in Buffett’s arsenal of Margaritaville goods, products, and services.

Early on in his career Buffett became aware of the buying power of his fans – and moved to take advantage of it. His first Margaritaville store (originally a simple T-shirt shop) opened in Key West in 1985 and it eventually expanded into Buffett’s first Margaritaville Cafe. In 1999, the *New York Times* stated that Buffett “has proved an innovator in the merchandising field...

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Through retail outlets, mail-order houses and his on-line site… he has outfitted Parrot Heads in T-shirts, zany tropical fare and outlandish Mardi Gras-style regalia.”

As Buffett once explained, “Margaritaville became [a symbol of] a combination of the romance of the ocean, the romance of history, and my impressions of a few places I’d been.” Buffett reconstructs these places in his songs and memories and even in the goods and services he sells to his fans and the general public. While Buffett is often understood as having a vested interest in the areas he visits, he is still reconstructing these places in his own image. A place that this is most evident and the central vain of this development can be seen in Buffett’s branding of all things Margaritaville. This mythical construction of paradise presents two distinct realities for his fans. Whether fans travel to the tropical locals vicariously through the songs that Buffett writes, for them Margaritaville is constructed as a state of mind – as a lifestyle, while others may be driven to purchase their Margaritaville state of mind which is made all that much easier by the plethora of goods Buffett has to offer. Further, Parrotheads can also physically visit and experience places like those described in his songs as tourists. Whether through a state of mind or in actual travels Buffett’s fans can still be considered consuming the exoticness that Buffett sets forth. While a more extensive analysis of Parrotheads will be a central focus of the next chapter, it is important to briefly take into consideration their role in the consumption of the goods and services made available to them by Buffett and his business empire.

In developing his lifestyle brand, Buffett has made it his business to sell the romanticized construction of paradise and the tropics that is based in his own beach bum image and ethos and combined with relaxation and leisure has become the central driving force of his lifestyle empire.

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Matthew W. Ragas and Bolivar J. Bueno suggest that “Selling *lifestyles* offers cult branders [like Buffett] the opportunity to bundle feelings of temporary escapism, self-fulfillment, and self-empowerment all together nicely into experiential ‘product packages’ for sale. Sell lifestyles – not products.”

The genius of Buffett’s restaurants, hotels, and concerts alike is that they become spaces where the Margaritaville state of mind and the tropical escapism that he touts can be realized. Ragas and Bueno suggest that this is like building (even if temporarily in the parking lots and concert venues) a mecca for evangelicals to visit. Margaritaville, then, becomes a constructed lifestyle meant to allow a relaxing break from the everyday life of its consumers.

If, as Buffett suggests, Parrotheads have patterned their lives after the lyrics found in his songs, one has to wonder about the undefined geographic spaces modeled after his constructions of the tropics.

The paradise that Buffett serves up for his fans is very much a homogenized construction and blending of places found in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. It can be seen as allowing the first world to romanticize, reconstruct, and then consume third world spaces which has subsequently been made “safe” to visit and care free. More on this tropicalized construction will be discussed at the end of Chapter Two.

Throughout his career Buffett has been involved in many different business ventures including corporate sponsorships with Corona, co-writing a popular music themed musical called “Don’t Stop the Carnival,” part ownership of a racehorse and racing stable, and even hosting an informal book club on his Margaritaville website where his fans can read his favorite books and share their opinions in a discussion forum on the site. He has often acknowledged and joked with his concert audiences about spending *their* hard earned money wisely. Buffett has developed an empire’s worth of goods and products marketed primarily to his fans. A Los

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Angeles Times article, in late 2008, titled “Buffett’s Booming Empire,” teases that Buffett’s “popularity and fortune grow greater even as his hair grows grayer.” The article continues, “But the exact scope of the Parrot Head empire is secret. Buffett’s privately held Margaritaville Holdings does not publicly disclose its finances, and his publicists declined numerous requests for interviews with the singer or anyone connected with Miami-based Margaritaville Holdings.” Indeed, it is hard to locate all of the hundreds of business deals that Buffett has been involved in over the years because of the sheer number of business transactions as well as Margaritaville Holdings and Margaritaville Enterprises LLC’s privacy policies.

This section will focus on many of the different businesses in which Buffett has been involved in over the years and in some cases is still currently involved, to get a sense of his massive business empire and the variety of goods and services that he aims at his fans, along with general consumers. By discussing many of the business ventures in which Buffett is involved, we can begin to understand how Buffett himself has created, developed, and cultivated all that is Margaritaville in its numerous forms. As Buffett has made clear over the years, he is also a very savvy businessman, capitalizing on his fame and fans buying power as much as, if not more than, the music they want to hear. One has to wonder, however, if Parrotheads feel the need to keep up with the constantly growing catalog of items Buffett develops and markets to his fans. Or more to the point, if tropical escapism and achieving the Margaritaville state of mind is the goal, do Parrotheads need all of this merchandise to get there? Not all Parrotheads are enthusiastic about the abundance of “stuff” Buffett sells to and at them. While they tend to be in the minority, there are Parrotheads who critique Buffett’s commercialization and promotion of what they feel is over-the-top consumerism. There are many other fans, however, who differ in

their opinion and support, if not outright enjoy, all that Buffett offers them. This section will conclude with a brief discussion of some of these critiques, including those presented more overtly in popular culture references – such as the appearance of Buffett’s Frozen Concoction Makers in an episode of the animated cartoon series *South Park* which sometimes serve as a larger critique of American consumerism and overspending.

**Buffett Business: The Early Years**

Thomas Ryan, author of *The Parrot Head Companion*, suggests that Buffett’s Margaritaville empire can “all be traced back to the simple idea of manufacturing and distributing a few T-shirts.”

In late 1984, a member of Buffett’s road crew brought some tropical themed shirts to his attention and Buffett, seeing a market for the shirts with his fans, commissioned the artist to create a few designs. This eventually expanded into a larger clothing line. As the merchandise continued to be successful, Buffett established his first Margaritaville store which opened in January of 1985, in Key West, Florida.

With the help of his long time friend, Donna “Sunshine” Smith, who ran the store, Buffett expanded this retail enterprise to include not only T-shirts but other Buffett-related paraphernalia and a variety of “beach trinkets” as well. In a 1985 interview with *Forbes* magazine, Buffett said, “When we first started doing it [designing Margaritaville wares], I thought, ‘Man, that’s gaudy stuff, I wouldn’t wear it, but there’s a lot of people that do.’” He continued, “Maybe there’s a certain amount of cheesiness to the whole thing but it’s Economics 101 --- like it or not these things sell.”

After all, Buffett had been working hard to foster the “Margaritaville state of mind” through his lifestyle music, and it seemed like a logical transition to selling music-related paraphernalia. In the development

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31 Ibid.

of his Margaritaville stores and eventually his overall brand aesthetic he was working to create a physical space where fans could purchase tangible artifacts that helped them to achieve that same state of mind.

The following month, in February 1985, Buffett started the *Coconut Telegraph*, a free newsletter mailing which became a way for him to keep in touch with his fans. Buffett’s album *Last Mango in Paris* (1985) was released around this time and contained a contest entry form for five lucky couples to win an all expenses paid trip to Key West. All the entries were used, of course, to help further build the mailing list for the *Coconut Telegraph*. The very first issue even went so far as to give a detailed description of the Key West Margaritaville store to its 650 recipients. Of the reasons he started the newsletter, Buffett stated, “Once the phenomenon of Parrot Heads started, I had to find a vehicle to keep in touch with them. We put together a newsletter to keep in direct contact with anyone who wanted to subscribe and we called it the *Coconut Telegraph*. It’s definitely for non-inquiring minds.” He adds, “I didn’t think anyone besides me really knew how to promote me in the first place, so I decided to make a connection with the people who enjoy my music… The *Telegraph* is a way to extend the 2-hour concert for the people who are true Jimmy Buffett fans. It’s a lot of fun – plus it’s great to have your own newspaper.”

While the newsletter served as a place for Buffett and members of the Coral Reef Band to occasionally share stories, it also served as a way to get news about upcoming tours, and information about albums and new merchandise out to his fan base. More importantly, the newsletter helped to maintain a connection to his fans every few months.

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34 Ibid, 164.
The *Coconut Telegraph* is still being distributed, though what once was a seemingly modest looking paper newsletter that consisted of only a few pages, is now a colorful glossy magazine/catalog of sorts. The newsletter is now published five times a year – Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall and Christmas (sometimes called the Holiday issue in print, though it is still listed as the Christmas issue on the website). In more recent newsletters approximately one-eighth of the material contained consisted of articles. These range from information about Parrotheads and Parrothead activities, stories about new artists signed to Buffett’s Margaritaville Records label, and recognizing a variety of philanthropic organizations or causes with which Buffett is associated. Initially used as a mass marketing tool, the *Coconut Telegraph* continues to serve as a catalog showcasing new Margaritaville merchandise, which includes everything from Margaritaville cocktail napkins, bags, charm bracelets, inflatable parrots, and flip flops, to banners, high end leather Margaritaville loafers, tailgating grills and numerous frozen concoction makers (there are even cordless versions for tailgating). These goods can be purchased through the newsletter, at Margaritaville stores, or through Buffett’s websites Margaritaville.com and MargaritavilleLifestyle.com.

**Margaritaville Online**

Buffett officially established his online presence in 1995 with “Jimmy Buffett’s Margaritaville.” Buffett’s own website was not the first Parrothead-related website online however. Buffett scholar Ryan suggests that by 1995 there were already several sites that had been developed by fans.36 Recognizing an opportunity when he saw one, Buffett used this online space as another more immediate way of connecting with his ever expanding club and “offering them easier access to material and merchandise.”37 The homepage from one of the

earliest manifestations of Margaritaville states in all capital letters to the site’s visitors,

“WELCOME TO MARGARITAVILLE. COME ON IN THE STORE, OR CHECK OUT THE
CAFE. PICK UP A PAPER AND HOP ON THE BUS, OR JUST WANDER DOWN DUVAL
STREET. ENJOY THE TRIP, AND COME BACK ANYTIME.”

Pictured just above this was a drawing of the original Margaritaville store in Key West, Florida. Even in his online presence, it seems, Buffett was imploring his fans to make connections between the online space and the physical store in which they could purchase their Margaritaville themed goods.

Today, Buffett’s Margaritaville website serves as his main hub for posting general information, news, and new tour information, to advertise merchandise, while also serving as a space where Parrotheads can go online and find official information about Buffett and his Coral Reef band.

In May of 2010, a new layout was revealed for the website. At that time, the new layout organized the front page of the website in such a way that allowed for even more information, news, and business ventures of which Buffett was a part. As is typical of many of Buffett’s business ventures, there is a marquee type banner at the top of the home page reminds the site’s visitors that, “true escapism is a state of mind.” Also along the top of the screen are easy access links to News; Shopping; Cafes; Concoctions (which takes visitors to a webpage with all of Buffett’s Margaritaville brand beverages and alcohol); Jimmy Buffett (which contains biographical information about Buffett and a few interviews); Parrotheads (which highlights a different Parrothead club in the Parrothead Spotlight from time to time, gives users access to a discussion board, downloadable computer wallpapers, and a photo gallery); Tour Dates; a link to Radio Margaritaville; and Buffett’s music videos. In different areas throughout the front page

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39 Ryan, The Parrot Head Companion, 131.
there are also links for all of Buffett’s shops, cafes, Radio Margaritaville, book club, surf museum, and the latest Buffett news which streams down the home webpage.

Margaritaville Lifestyle is Buffett’s primary website for selling many of the goods mentioned previously. Interestingly, though, until very recently, when a fan typed in www.margaritavillelifestyle.com, they were immediately redirected to www.margaritavilleRETAIL.com (capitalization emphasis mine). While this is no longer the case, lifestyle, at least temporarily, was conflated with retail in a way that makes subtle but clear connections to Buffett’s lifestyle music and also the brand he has created to sell to his fans, with all the obvious consumerism it entails. The website offers a wide variety of T-shirts for men, women, and children bearing several tropical and margarita themed designs, travel bags, home goods like salt shakers, coasters, and several kinds of alcoholic drinking glasses, golf bags, fancifully painted Adirondack chairs, and even Cornhole sets (a popular outdoor game). This website is also where fans can purchase T-shirts and other merchandise from Buffett’s Land Shark Lager beer company. More recently Buffett has also ventured into footwear. His footwear line, appropriately named Margaritaville Footwear, caters to both men and women and can also be found at Margaritaville Lifestyle. Margaritaville Footwear covers everything from dress to casual flip flops, dressy sandals, boat shoes, and loafers. These shoes are not only sold on the Margaritaville Lifestyle site, however, but are also sold through many other online shoe retail stores, as well as in brick and mortar stores like DSW, and even can be found at warehouse stores such as Costco.

Looking at this large array of products we can see that these items help to further promote and maybe even manifest Buffett’s branding of a lifestyle leisure culture – they might help them

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40 This site can also be accessed via the Shops link on Margaritaville’s main page.
to find, reach, or experience the mythical Margaritaville. This merchandise is presented in such a way so as to aid fans and consumers in adding to their leisure activities whether it is during a vacation away from home, tailgating in the parking lot before a Buffett concert, or even spending a few hours in one’s backyard relaxing and far away from the daily grind of work in everyday life.

Restaurants

In 1987, the Key West Margaritaville store was relocated to a more central location downtown. What began as a small luncheon grill attached to the T-shirt shop at the original location blossomed into a separate full service restaurant, nightclub, and bar called Margaritaville Cafe. This restaurant was Buffett’s first large scale endeavor into the food industry (and was conveniently located next to his first T-shirt shop). The Cafe was envisioned as a space that would serve some of Buffett’s favorite foods – Margaritas and cheeseburgers – as well as a music venue that could host local as well as touring musical acts. Buffett’s Margaritaville Cafes are described by the company as

…the only destination that delivers a distinctive dining, entertainment, and shopping experience with exceptional service. This unique combination is what makes Margaritaville a destination, not a theme. Margaritaville was conceived with the goal to recreate the experience of a Jimmy Buffett concert for people who have not attended or want to relive their past experiences.

By emphasizing the dining establishment as an experience they are transforming it from just another celebrity destination burger chain. They are not necessarily selling you just burgers (and margaritas) – they are selling you an entire Jimmy Buffett experience. On Buffett’s website, the

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text advertising Margaritaville Cafes echoes the now famous Las Vegas tag line with, “what happens in Margaritaville…” and the reader is persuaded to infer that like, “what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas” their vacation shenanigans and fun, whether innocent or lascivious, will not follow patrons back to their daily lives, in theory, and allow them an escape from guilt and consequences. The Margaritaville Cafe thus promises escape as well as anonymity and discretion. The website continues: “Visiting a Margaritaville Cafe is an experience unlike any other... it’s not just a dining destination, it’s an entire change of latitude. Whether it’s the Jumbies on stilts, the volcanoes erupting with margaritas, the pool slide that wraps around the bar, or the frozen concoctions, a trip to Margaritaville will not soon be forgotten.”\(^4^4\) One can only assume that, just like the carefree attitude involved in forgetting about what happens in Las Vegas, the Margaritaville Cafe encourages its patrons, at least for an hour or so, to experience a guilt-free escape from the stresses in their lives. Currently there are eight Margaritaville Cafes in the United States, located in: Key West, Orlando, and Panama City Beach, Florida; New Orleans, Louisiana; at the Mohegan Sun Casino in Uncasville, Connecticut; Las Vegas, Nevada; Glendale, Arizona; Myrtle Beach, South Carolina; and Nashville, Tennessee. Internationally these cafes can be found in Niagara Falls, Canada; two locations in Mexico, in Cozumel and Cancun; and in the Caribbean with locations in the Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos, Grand Cayman in the Cayman Islands; and lastly three locations in Jamaica – in Montego Bay, Ocho Rios, and Negril.

Not one to miss an opportunity to advertise, Margaritaville Cafes appear to be all about promoting Buffett’s escapist ethos in a variety of different ways. Even the menus for the individual restaurants, with their not so subtle brightly colored images of Margaritaville merchandise, alcohol, or Radio Margaritaville plugs, remind their clientele that purchasing a

piece of Margaritaville is only a few steps away. They literally beckon patrons to “Bring Paradise home! Look for Margaritaville in your local store.”

Even the restaurant’s alcohol menu, titled “Margaritaville: Booze in the Blender,” reminds customers that a Margaritaville brand blender is easy to procure and take home. In the mixed drinks served at Margaritaville Cafes, Margaritaville rum, tequila, or margarita mix is used and listed in each of the drink’s ingredients. Patrons cannot forget, even for a moment, what kinds of Margaritaville products are at their disposal. Conveniently, most cafes, just like the original store in Key West, feature their own Margaritaville store which is usually located next to or within the same building. This allows patrons to not only buy drinks and food from individual Margaritaville Cafes, but also to buy general Margaritaville merchandise or location specific trinkets which identifying the Margaritaville store where the item was purchased.

An interesting facet to the Margaritaville Cafes is that not only do they promote Buffett’s escapism ethos by being marketed as places to run away to, even if for a moment, but the cafes located in the United States also feature and promote “Day-Cations.” Day-Cations are Margaritaville’s answer to those patrons who cannot get away for a few full days of vacation and rest for whatever reason. The webpage ask, “Have you been yearning for an island adventure? Not able to get to the Banana Republics?? Well, you don’t need to change your latitude to change your attitude!” This entry point tagline thus refers to not one but two of Buffet’s songs and albums while claiming that escape from the daily grind of one’s life is not necessarily that impossible. The webpage suggests, it is as easy as changing your frame of mind. This main

46 Margaritaville Café Las Vegas, “Alcohol Menu,”
Day-Cation website of Buffett’s US Margaritaville Cafes explains further, “With Day-Cations, you can change your whole attitude without ever changing latitudes! Below, find an overview of Day-Cations in and around the Margaritaville Cafe of your choice, and be sure to visit that cafes site for full details on a fun-filled day!” Each restaurant recommends first and foremost several short vacation-inspired activities that patrons can do nearby or at that specific Margaritaville Cafe location. Further, each specific cafe website begins with the same slogan: “You can take a Day-Cation right here in Margaritaville…,” and ends with, “There’s always something to see and do at Margaritaville” followed by the name of the specific Café location. The websites then go on to suggest other day trip excursions in the vicinity of that Margaritaville restaurant. Many, though not all, of the restaurant Day-Cation pages continue with, “relax on the Porch of Indecision or dance the night away,” followed by some variation of “to the rhythm of the night club” or “to our live entertainment any night of the week,” reminding customers that Margaritaville Cafe is a place not only to eat and drink, but also to experience live entertainment.

For all intents and purposes, Margaritaville Cafes, through their promotion of Day-Cations, are attempting to make it easy for their patrons and families to enjoy the local sites. They never fail, however, to remind their customers that they should stop back into the Margaritaville Cafe for breakfast, lunch, or dinner in between visiting these other local sites. After all, Margaritaville Cafe touts itself as being a destination in and of itself. Thus, for customers who perhaps cannot afford to take the time off of work, or just cannot afford a vacation altogether, Margaritaville’s Day-Cations make that escape and relaxation possible. That is, if one can afford to take one day off to get away.

Margaritaville Cafe is not Buffett’s only restaurant however. Cheeseburger in Paradise, named after his second most famous song and a fan favorite, is a chain of burger restaurants found in the Midwest and parts of the Mid-Atlantic; there are currently thirty-four restaurants in seventeen different states. Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurants first opened in August of 2002 with Buffett partnering 50-50 with Outback Steakhouse Inc. In a press release for the restaurant chain Buffett has said of this venture, “Everybody has some kind of version of paradise… This is ours…we invite our guests to enjoy time away from the real world when they drop anchor at Cheeseburger in Paradise.”  

This restaurant chain, much like Margaritaville, focuses on giving its clientele a chance to “wave goodbye to the real world and escape to paradise.” It is advertised as “your local Island gateway! We all need an occasional dose of paradise. An oasis where we can leave the stress of everyday life behind and let the relaxing rhythms of the island soothe our senses” – even if that island is actually located somewhere in the Midwest. Once again we see the mythos of escapism as a driving force behind enticing customers. Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurants also feature live entertainment on an individual restaurant basis. It is rather difficult to track down information about live entertainment and performances at the individual locations as they are all linked to one main Cheeseburger in Paradise website which does not list the information for specific restaurants and suggests they may be individually franchised. Facebook pages for several of the franchises, however, serve as spaces where each individual restaurant pushes advertisements for events such as live entertainment and trivia nights hosted at their locations. Still, Cheeseburger in Paradise, like the Margaritaville Cafes,

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relies on the idea of paradise and a momentary escape from reality as a way to draw in its
customers. Similar to the Margaritaville Cafes, these restaurants are also tropical themed both
inside and out. Inside, the restaurants are decorated with island themed décor and generally
include nautical elements; outside they are described as being a “Key West-style structure
[which] features a tin and weathered wood water tower and brightly painted lattice work
reminiscent of the Caribbean.”

Comparable to some of Buffett’s other personal endeavors, the restaurant chain, like the
man himself, is invested in giving back to the community and many individual Cheeseburger in
Paradise restaurants participate in raising funds for various charitable organizations from their
surrounding area. But even in articulating their charitable donations, consumption-based ideas
about paradise are often evoked. The main company website explains,

> We want the paradise experience of warmth and caring to extend beyond our restaurant
walls and into every community where we live. Our goal is to partner with community
and charitable organizations that promote values similar to our own – Hospitality,
Quality, Appreciation, Simplicity, Courage and Fun. Investing in our communities is one
of the best investments we can make and one with an impact that will last for generations.

Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurants serve their community through a variety of local
efforts, such as fundraising events and sponsoring a range of charity and school events.

The chain as a whole has a national partnership with the Vh1 Save the Music Foundation. On
their website they claim to have “provided almost $40,000 to help keep music education alive in
public schools and provide musical instruments.”

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54 Cheeseburger in Paradise, “Community.”
Individual Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurants also raise money for local charities. Habitat for Humanity of Dade County in Wisconsin, in 2004, reported that a benefit hosted at the opening night of one Wisconsin Cheeseburger in Paradise helped to raise $74,000 for the organization. Tickets were sold for the event and the restaurant, along with a local radio station, and special guest Buffett himself, raised enough money to build three homes – one in the local area, one in Jamaica and in Trinidad/Tobago.\(^5^5\) Another example can be found at the opening of the Cheeseburger in Paradise in Secaucus, New Jersey, also in 2004. This restaurant hosted a special grand opening night, selling tickets to the event. Money raised at the opening was donated to the Northern New Jersey Chapter of The Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Tickets for this event ranged from $50 to $1,000 for special VIP guests. Speculating as to whether Buffett himself would make an appearance at this restaurant’s opening, the article suggested that regardless of whether Buffett showed up or not the charity aspect of this restaurant’s opening was still in line with Buffett’s philanthropy and Parrotheads philosophy of “partying with a purpose.”\(^5^6\)

In 2005, Buffett apparently wanted out of the burger business and chose to sell his half of the Cheeseburger in Paradise company to its partner, Outback Steakhouse Inc. Being the astute businessman that he is, however, Buffett was not one to give up an opportunity to continue to make money. Even though he sold his half of the company he retained rights to the license of the name of the restaurant chain; Buffett retained a royalty of 4.5% of the restaurants sales and allowed the restaurants the use of his likeness for promotion purposes and Cheeseburger in


Paradise merchandise. This royalty agreement was an increase of 2.5% from the previous agreement put in place with the founding of the company. The restaurant chain was sold again in 2009 but it is assumed that Buffett’s royalties are still safely intact. What is interesting is that both Margaritaville Cafes and Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurants are branded in very similar ways. Both restaurant chains serve American fare, are decorated in “tropical” aesthetics and have the capacity to host live entertainment. Further, both food chains construct their restaurants to be spaces where patrons can come and relax and enjoy “paradise” and serve as a temporary break from their busy lives.

In 2009, it seemed Buffett had a change of heart and decided to enter the restaurant business once again. He opened Jimmy Buffett’s at the Beachcomber, located just above the lobby inside the Ohana Waikiki Beachcomber Hotel on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. This restaurant, like the others, focuses on celebrating “the adventurous lifestyle of Jimmy Buffett and captivating the natural wonders of Hawaii” and promises to be a great place to enjoy food, alcoholic beverages, or “some nighttime fun” with the promise of free live entertainment on the same stage where the “late Don Ho used to play.” This restaurant also has its own shop where visitors can purchase a plethora of T-shirts and other Margaritaville wares.

The restaurant is also affiliated with the Honolulu Surfing Museum, owned by Buffett. The museum is posited as displaying “liquid history,” and part of Buffett’s “personal collection of historical surfboards and cultural memorabilia” is showcased in the museum, which is conveniently located just off the lobby of the hotel. Inspired by Buffett’s love of surfing,

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folklore, and history, the museum is free and open to the public. There is no doubt that he also sees some of the profit from the fully stocked bar which can be found inside the museum. “With cocktail in hand,” the museum encourages visitors to take photos and take in the history and artifacts on display of the surf culture in Hawaii, as well as from other locales.59

Niche market restaurant chains are nothing new. There are other theme restaurants similar to Buffett’s such as the Hard Rock Café franchise which opened its first location in 1971, and the Planet Hollywood restaurant, which started in 1991.60 The interiors and theme of Hard Rock Café’s tends to be an eclectic mix of rock ‘n’ roll memorabilia. Similarly to Buffett’s Margaritaville franchise, Hard Rock also has fifteen hotel and casinos around the world, several of which have music venues for live performances. Planet Hollywood restaurants (and their Hotel and Casino) present their guests with the allure of the film and television side of the entertainment businesses, and while their Hotel and Casino has a live entrainment venue, this is not the focus of their restaurants. What makes Buffett’s restaurants (and even his new hotel and casino) different is that in many ways they rely on music, the star power of Buffett as opposed to numerous rock stars or Hollywood actors, and live entertainment to draw in customers, combining the appeal of the other two restaurant chains. Thus these niche restaurants attempt to bring in customers with the mythos and allure of celebrity. There are other theme style restaurants such as ESPN Zone that caters to sports enthusiasts and is decorated with sports related memorabilia. Similarly there are theme park style restaurants such as Rainforest Café use ambient noise of rain storms, lush foliage, and animatronic animals make guests feel as though

they are dining in the rainforest. Buffett’s restaurants differ in that their appeal is based specifically on his own celebrity. Further, his restaurant franchises all promise the customer that their experience of eating or watching live entertainment will offer them a momentary leisure based escape from reality.

*Out and About*

Buffett has also been actively involved in attempting to develop several Margaritaville themed casinos and hotels over the years. In May 2007, it was announced that a Margaritaville Resort and Casino would be developed in Biloxi, Mississippi in partnership with Harrah’s Entertainment. Of the resort and casino development Buffett said, “I have seen the best and the worst of times along Mississippi Sound, and as a survivor of storms myself, I feel an enormous sense of gratitude and good fortune to be part of the re-birth of the region by joining forces with Harrah’s to bring the Margaritaville Hotel and Casino down around Biloxi.”

The project, expected to be completed by the spring of 2010, was anticipated to be one of the biggest casino projects to be built in post Hurricane Katrina Mississippi. The $704 million dollar casino, however, in the wake of the turn in the economy was put on hold in early January 2010 without much progress being made on the development. In May 2008, the *New York Times* reported that a company called Costal Marina, together with Buffett, had made plans to purchase Donald Trump’s Atlantic City Casino, The Trump Marina Hotel Casino, and rename it Margaritaville. The project, however, fell through a year later after Costal Marina claimed that the sellers, in

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light of the recession that took hold of the United States, refused to lower the selling price of the casino. The deal was officially off by June of 2009.\(^{63}\)

Since these two failed casino attempts, Buffett has still been looking for locales to host a Margaritaville resort. In March 2010, the *Miami Herald* reported that Buffett was in the very early stage of developing a Margaritaville resort for Hollywood, Florida, with Hollywood developer Lon Tabtchnick, a project that puts the resort in direct competition with plans being developed by Planet Hollywood for the same parcel of land. Additionally, in May of 2010 Margaritaville.com announced: “The Margaritaville Beach Hotel is Coming!” The plans include the development of a hotel only (though there is talk of a water park being added in the second phase of development) in Pensacola, Florida, with Margaritaville.com exclaiming, “We look forward to working together to promote Pensacola Beach as a great vacation destination.”\(^{64}\) The hotel officially opened in June 2010, just as the British Petroleum oil spill disaster was occurring off of the Gulf Coast. Buffett decided to go ahead with his hotel opening, recognizing that the community would work together to overcome the disaster and that the hotel, like other businesses in the area, needed tourists not to be scared off. He even donated money towards the development and construction of boats and other machinery that would aid in cleaning up the beaches. Buffett was featured in several television and newspaper interviews regarding both his dedication to helping to clean up the beaches, as well as his drive to help bring tourists back to the area to help local businesses bring in much needed revenue (which included his own newly opened hotel). Buffett also put together a charity concert called “Jimmy Buffett & Friends Live

from the Gulf Coast,” which gathered together a handful of artists in an effort to “to demonstrate support for the people, businesses and culture of the Gulf Coast.”

The concert was also broadcast on the Country Music Television station and revenue from the concert ticket sales, as well as the revenue brought in from a commemorative T-shirt sold both at the concert and online, was donated to businesses in the area.

Buffett ventured into the casino business in 2011. Margaritaville Casino at Flamingo in Las Vegas, Navada was opened next to its Margaritaville Café in October 2011 and at 15,000 square-feet, it houses 22 gaming tables, 220 slot machines and a 5-O’Clock Somewhere Bar. The new space held a grand opening with a week long street party which featured the world’s largest margarita which was Guinness World Record certified at the opening of the event. The concoction took 300 hours to fill a drum that was two-stories tall and came in at 8,500 gallons. It was expected to serve 181,333 12-ounce glasses to guests during the first week of operations.

The last few ingredients for the margaritas were added by veteran members from the Wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team, from the charity Wounded Warriors which is a group that Buffett often supports. For every gallon of the drink, nicknamed Lucky Rita, that was sold Margaritaville donated $5 to the wounded Warrior Amputee Softball Team making the margarita a “concoction with a cause.” Buffett was quoted at the event as saying, “It all turned out pretty well -- now we’ve opened our first Margaritaville casino, and the next one is already under construction in Biloxi. We’ll have several of them in gaming centers around the country.”

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68 Leach, “Jimmy Buffett wastes away...”
Buffett’s second casino to open was located in Biloxi, Alabama where plans for a hotel and casino were put on hold in 2010. The project was picked up again in January 2011 but it was scaled down from its original plans and moved to a different location in the town. The musician helped move development plans along by attending the meeting in April 2011 with the Mississippi Gaming Commission in an effort to secure approval for the business. The hotel began construction one week later. Jimmy Buffett’s Margaritaville Casino & Restaurant Biloxi held its grand opening in May 2012 with a concert hosted by Buffett. The project was also praised locally for bringing 1000 much needed jobs to the area.

These hotels and casino projects are examples of further expansions of Buffett’s business empire, but unlike his Margaritaville Cafes, these spaces serve as locales where Parrotheads and other tourists can spend expended periods of time relaxing and being deeply immersed in Buffett’s tropical lifestyle and Margaritaville state of mind. Buffett clearly saw them as a lucrative business opportunity as well as something that would strongly appeal to his fanbase. For those fans who have time to devote more to their vacation than a temporary escape afforded by visiting a Margaritaville Café, or spending the day at one of the Margaritaville recommended Day-cation destinations, Parrotheads can now travel to any one of Buffett’s hotels and essentially live out Buffett’s tropical escapism beach bum ethos for as long as their vacation time allows.

Throughout his career Buffett has also been partial owner of several different major and minor league sports teams. More recently he became part owner (one of many part-owners of the team) of the National Football League’s Miami Dolphins. In May 2009, Buffett struck a deal

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with majority owner Stephen Ross to rename Dolphin Stadium Land Shark Stadium, in honor of Buffett’s lager brand, for a short-term deal during the 2009 football season. Games in the 2009 season, aside from obvious signage changes, were said to feature a “Margaritaville experience” in the pre- and post-game tailgating areas, as well as Margaritaville inspired areas inside of the stadium itself, which included the addition of several Margaritaville and Land Shark bars decked out in tropical themes for guests, “providing a resort-like feeling for fans.” Buffett was said to have helped finance the arrangement, at least in part, by playing shows at the stadium. The renaming ceremony at the stadium featured Buffett playing a live concert for reporters and several hundred invited Parrotheads. At the event Buffett sang the new unofficial theme song for the stadium by rewording a version of his famous song “Fins” to play into the Dolphins football theme. A local paper interviewed several in attendance at the event and found a contrast in opinion regarding the stadium’s new change. Reporter Tim Elfrink, in his article “Wasting Away in Corporitaville: The Fins Sell Their Soul to Buffett,” noted that one Dolphin football fan shook his head in disdain and stated, “This is all such a farce,” while in contrast, a Parrothead explained, “It’s just natural. How can you live in Miami and not love Buffett and the Dolphins?” It seems that not everyone was on the same page about the temporary changes made to the stadium and Buffett’s sometimes over the top tropical lifestyle was not as exciting to all local sports fans. Ross emphasized though that in conjunction with the name change, the stadium was focusing on “creating a new fan experience” for patrons at the stadium.

senior vice president of media relations, Harvey Greene, was quoted as saying, “It’s really a partnership between Jimmy Buffett’s brand and the Dolphins, because obviously he represents a south Florida tropical lifestyle that’s unique.” It was hoped, by the majority owners, that Buffett’s involvement with the stadium, even if for a short time, would help to increase sales and interest in the stadium and the sporting events played there. Not all sports fans were happy about this name change, however, as Buffett’s lifestyle empire did not appeal to all of the Dolphin’s fans. A now defunct website www.changefinssong.com hosted an online petition that sought to persuade the Dolphins to change the new “Fins” Dolphin-ized fight song back to the original. There are also several Facebook groups whose goal was to gather support from Dolphin fans who did not like the Buffett marketing take over, including his version of the fight song. The renaming of the stadium was short lived, however, and it was changed to Sun Life Stadium just before the 2010 Super Bowl.

_Margaritaville At Home_

Buffett has also launched a line of foods and alcoholic beverages that consumers can purchase in their local markets and enjoy at home or on the road (some products are perfect for tailgating). The food portion of this venture, Margaritaville Foods, was established in 2004, as a division of the larger Buffett-owned Margaritaville Enterprises LLC. The company produces a dozen or so food products including a variety of chips and salsas, different flavors of hummus, a line of frozen seafood and chicken products, Paradise Key teas, Margaritaville coffee, alcoholic drink mixes, and even margarita glass salt rimmers. The Margaritaville Foods website reinforces

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76 To be fair, some Dolphin fans did not like the T-Pain version of the Dolphins fight song that was released in August 2009._
the mythical Margaritaville once again as a “state of mind,” and includes recipes that consumers of these products can create using Margaritaville food products.\footnote{Margaritaville Foods, “About,” http://www.margaritavillefoods.com/index.php?page=about (accessed April 13, 2010).}

Buffett is no stranger to working with alcohol companies, either. In his marketing of alcoholic beverages, \textit{New York Times} writer Anthony DeCurtis suggests that Buffett has been “a pioneer in corporate sponsorship.”\footnote{DeCurtis, “Jimmy Buffett, traveling salesman of leisure.”} As mentioned previously, in 1984, after some persuading from Buffett himself, the Mexican beer brand Corona signed on to help sponsor his annual summer tour and also made him a spokesman for the company. Buffett acted in commercials and radio spots for the company as well as advertising the beer at his concerts. Over the next four years Buffett helped to increase “Corona’s share of the beer market by 800 percent.”\footnote{Ibid. Also see La Franco, Robert. “Margarita Marketing.” \textit{Forbes} 155, no. 2 (January 16, 1995): 84. \textit{Academic Search Complete}, EBSCOhost (accessed February 22, 2010). Vinyl banners with Buffett’s face and Corona’s logo can still be seen hanging from trees and the backs of cars during tailgating before Buffett’s concerts.} With this much influence over his fans’ buying power, it makes sense why Buffett would eventually decide to go into the alcohol business himself. The Margaritaville alcohol line, aside from the beverages mixers mentioned above, is another venture into which Buffett has navigated. There are several flavors of Margaritaville Tequila & Spirits, as well as Margaritaville Premium Jamaican Rum. These alcoholic beverages can be ordered at almost every Buffett restaurant franchise and can also be found at many local grocery and liquor stores. For those at home who do not want to mix together all the ingredients involved in a margarita or mojito, Buffett came out with a line of ready to pour pre-made cocktail mixes, with the alcohol included, that can be found in many supermarkets.\footnote{Margaritaville Cocktails, http://www.margaritavillecocktails.com/ (accessed April 13, 2010).}

In 2006, Buffett even started his own beer brewing line when he teamed up with Anheuser-Busch brewing company to make Land Shark Lager. This company, like many of his...
others, has its own clothing line complete with baseball caps, flip-flops, T-shirts, men’s swim trunks, and beer cozies. In April 2010, Buffett released his newest live album *Encores* exclusively at Walmart (and through his website Margaritaville.com). Walmart stores had large end cap displays advertising his new album, as well as an entire aisle promoting clothing and outdoor accessories marked with the Land Shark Lager logo.  

At the store in my area, in northwest Ohio, this merchandise was conveniently placed at the front of the store, located in the seasonal section along with citronella backyard torches, margarita mix (though not Buffett’s brand) and other spring and summer outdoor supplies.

Buffett also has several other websites catering to more specific home goods manufactured by his ever-growing empire. Margaritaville Cargo, for example, sells “Frozen Concoction” makers (marketing them as not *only* for margaritas so as to not limit their use) so that Parrotheads, and Margarita enthusiasts can, much like Buffett’s famous song “Margaritaville,” make their own “frozen concoction that helps,” them “hang on” at home or on the road. This product line has developed several different frozen concoction makers, named after different tropical locales, for home but there is also a smaller version, named the Explorer that does not need to be plugged in, making it easy to take along to tailgating outings before concerts, on a boat, or even camping.

Margaritaville Cargo also sells a Margaritaville Tailgating Grill. This small, travel-size grill fits neatly on the back of a car with a trailer hitch and, as the name suggests, is marketed for

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81 The album would be released on iTunes a few weeks later.
84 At a Jimmy Buffett pre-concert tailgate on June 22nd, 2010 at the DTE Energy Music Theatre in Clarkston, MI, I witnessed many tailgating Parrotheads using both kinds of frozen concoction makers. It seems that those who had the machines which needed to be run on electricity by-passed this obstacle by bringing with them their own generators or plugging their frozen concoction makers into their cars. Of the 40 or so frozen drink machines I saw in the parking lot at this concert, I only saw a handful of frozen drink makers made by other brands. It seems that for the Parrotheads at this show, Buffett’s brand of frozen drink maker was worth investing in.
tailgating before Buffett’s concerts and before sporting events as well. The tag line on the website suggests that users can, “Bring along a Margaritaville Tailgating Grill and your party will go on and on. Everything you need is right at your fingertips and a breeze to operate, so let the good times roll– in any direction.”

It is clear that Buffett’s fans’ activities at his concerts, as well as at home, have been duly noted by his corporation, and jumped on as a possible avenue for selling more merchandise. As a further push to sell the lifestyle and to make the website not just about selling consumer goods, this particular webpage also has a “Party Planning” feature which allows users to develop an online party invitation, complete with RSVP capabilities, recipes, attire suggestions, and activities for the party. Buffett’s empire is essentially making inroads into as many possible avenues where it might be able to market goods to its fans/consumers.


As for music business ventures, Buffett began his own record label, Margaritaville Records, in 1993 but because of his contract with MCA he relied on the larger company for

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distribution. This opportunity gave him more control over the final releases of his albums.

When his contract with MCA ran out in 1996, Buffett had the label Island Records distribute his albums. After Island was absorbed into Universal Music Group, a significantly larger music company, and Buffett decided to venture out on his own once again. In 1999 he formed Mailboat Records to produce and distribute his music. At the time he “found majors [major record labels] to be too conventional,” and Buffett continues to release his own work, as well as that of other artists, on his own record label.

Record labels have not been Buffett’s only foray into do-it-yourself territory. After a trip to Australia in the 1980s, the singer was impressed with the variety of music played on the radio stations there. In 2001, Buffett was quoted as saying about the trip, “You never had to change the station… it was so well programmed for what listeners were doing.” Thus out of his frustrations with commercial radio in the United States, Buffett started his own radio station, Radio Margaritaville, in 1998. The station was initially hosted on his own website Margaritaville.com. Now partnered up with Sirius satellite radio, Radio Margaritaville streams for free on the Internet 24 hours a day. The station plays some of Buffett’s music and also airs all of his concerts live, which allows for fans unable to attend the concerts to listen and enjoy them at home. The station also “highlights other performers whom he believes Parrotheads will

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87 Ryan, The Parrot Head Companion, 11-112, 133, & 139.
88 Ibid.
90 Chris Morris, “Buffet in Indieville with Mailboat.” Billboard 111, no. 47, November 20, 1999: 105. Academic Search Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed May 13, 2010). Buffett, it seems, even occasionally has guests on his label stop by and sing a song with him. At the June 22nd, 2010 concert at DTE Energy Music Theatre in Clarkston, MI, Buffett brought Bret Michaels out onto the stage to sing “Margaritaville” with him. Michaels was releasing a solo album Custom Built on Mailboat Records shortly after his performance with Buffett. It was an easy and convenient marketing plug for both Michaels’s album and Buffett’s music record label though the explicit connection, nor a plug directly for Michaels’s album, was never mentioned.
93 Though if you subscribe to Sirius SM radio they suggest that the sound would be “crystal clear digital sound.”
enjoy. Listeners who tune into radiomargaritaville.com are just as likely to hear Lord Kitchener and Frank Sinatra as they are Cesaria Evora and the Beach Boys.”

By incorporating his song titles, lyrics, and tropical themes inherent in the Margaritaville lifestyle into his many business ventures, Buffett has made an empire that his fans can literally consume. As mentioned earlier, Buffett’s hit song “Margaritaville” became a launch pad for the state of mind at the heart of Buffett fandom and so it comes as no surprise that the song “Margaritaville” has inspired many products in Buffett’s lifestyle retail endeavors. In “Margaritaville,” for example, Buffett calls margaritas “that frozen concoction that helps me hang on” and should Parrotheads seek out their own frozen dose of relief, they can buy Frozen Concoction makers and a variety of flavors of Margaritaville drink mixes to help them enjoy their own cocktail at home. In this very same song Buffett is “searchin’ for my lost shaker of salt” and Parrotheads can be sure to never go without by purchasing their own salt and pepper shakers. Similarly, with the fan favorite song “Fins,” Buffett croons about a beautiful woman being surrounded by a group of men at a bar. He calls the men “fins,” in reference to the top dorsal fin of a shark. Thus these men are land sharks circling their “prey.” “Fins,” like “Margaritaville” inspired a handful of products which reference the song and themes found within. Those “lost” salt and pepper shaker are actually in the shape of a shark fin; we can see from this one product that it makes reference to two of Buffett’s most popular songs. Buffett’s beer company, Landshark Lager, correspondingly references “Fins,” in both the brand name and label art, and Buffett’s online store Margaritaville Lifestyle sells everything from hats, to T-shirts

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that play with the fin theme. In other food products are found themes from Buffett’s discography, whether products are named after song and album titles or evoke the tropical and beach lifestyle. One example of this is Margaritaville Coffee, launched in September 2011. The tagline for the product announcement read: “Escape the daily grind” and insinuates that Parrotheads can even escape a little at the beginning of their day by merely drinking their morning Margaritaville coffee. Each bag of coffee contains the slogan “Escape to paradise” and the flavors have been named after or make reference to Buffett’s songs such as “License to Chill,” “Latitude/Attitude” (in reference to the song “Changes in Latitude, Changes in Attitude,”) or some of the basic escapism and paradise tenets often espoused in Buffett’s music and tropical lifestyle such as “State of Mind,” “Sunshine in Paradise,” and “Pirate Gold.” Buffett has also used his song titles as the titles of chapters in many of the books he has written, further replicating and reinforcing the Margaritaville tropical beach state of mind throughout. These are just a few examples of Buffett tying together his music and his lifestyle fandom into the products he sells to his fans. Additionally, many of the service oriented Margaritaville businesses have carried out these themes on a larger scale. Buffett has thus made it possible for Parrotheads to spend a few hours in Margaritaville whether that is at one of his restaurants, a more extended time period at one of his hotels or casinos, or simply in their own homes.

Critiques of Corporitaville: Parrotheads and South Park

While Buffett’s business empire is predominantly aimed at Parrotheads, it does not mean that all of his fans attempt to keep up with the many products he offers to them. As John Mihelich and John Papineau found, there is a small contingent of Buffett fans who recognize and critique Buffett’s corporate and commercial endeavors. Mihelich and Papineau argue, “Buffett

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has found his corporate means to provide for escape and, in doing so, meet his and his corporate sponsors’ ends through choreographing Parrothead consumption.”98 Their research, in part, relies on the online website by an offshoot of Parrotheads who call themselves The Church of Buffett, Orthodox (COBO). COBO, whose website is now defunct, was established in 1995 by several Parrotheads who were disenchanted with Buffett’s increasing commercialism, rising from his ever growing Margaritaville infused business empire. COBO’s official “creed” suggests that they find Buffett’s commercial ventures to be highly “problematical,” but they contend they are “holding out” for what they call “his eventual redemption.” Thus, their critique of Buffett focuses on what they claim is his “slide towards commercialism.” For COBO members, this commercialism was evident not only in the mass marketing and merchandizing of all things Margaritaville but also, and more importantly to them, it also affected the music Buffett was producing. Because of this, they argue that his best musical work could be found in his earliest albums, and that that much of the music on the albums released since, beginning with Changes (which includes Buffett’s most influential song, “Margaritaville,”), do not match ideologically with what they call Buffett’s “core works.” The creed argues that the music “pre-neo-Jazz-caribbean-steel-drum-cum-backup-singers-Beach-Boy-lookalike days” (for the most part this is the music released before the album Changes) was the only thing that kept them, even if nostalgically, connected to Buffett.99 Mihelich and Papineau argue that this more overt “denunciation of ‘Margaritaville’” by COBO goes beyond the website’s creed and suggests that the “anticorporate sentiment runs much deeper.” They quoted one fan as offering,

99 Church of Buffett, Orthodox, www.cobo.org (site now discontinued).
We have all seen the changes in music (maturation?), and have all seen the dramatic changes (corporate in particular) over the past 10+ years concerning Jimmy. I remember when the music was #1, not corporate. I remember when Parrotheads were #1, not doughnuts or cafes. My life has been built on the ideals of what Jimmy used to be … the escapism, the fun, the lyrics, the simplicity of what life should be … Nobody is demanding corporate sponsorships, or Krispy Kreme doughnuts, or Margaritaville Tequila.100

Mihelich and Papineau point to fan discussions on Parrothead websites that suggest that many other Parrotheads feel that Buffett has “sold out” and as a result it has affected these fan’s desires to continue to support Buffett. This may also be a case of these fans being upset when Buffett’s music “matured” with his work in the post-“Margaritaville” era and shifted away from the folk and pared down aesthetic of his earlier work.

Mihelich and Papineau acknowledge, however, that not all Parrotheads feel this way about Buffett’s commercialization and point even to members on COBO who disregard or even disagree with the accusations of commercialism made by the founders of the site and some of the other members who participate there. These fans suggest that the marketing of the Margaritaville lifestyle is after all part of Buffett’s job and moreover, that he deserves the millions he brings in because he works very hard at doing so. Finally, Mihelich and Papineau contend that the “Parrothead critique of Corporitaville indicts both Buffett himself, and less directly, Parrothead participation in the consumption of commercialized Corporitaville. Corporitaville not only lines the pockets of Jimmy Buffett, it contradicts the movement towards alternative cultural forms by reproducing and maintaining dominant forms.”101

100 Mike Haszto, “COBO I, as quoted in John Mihelich and John Papineau, “Parrotheads in Margaritaville,” 186-7.
101 John Mihelich and John Papineau, “Parrotheads in Margaritaville,” 186-188.
Mihelich and Papineau’s study of the Parrotheads on COBO is not the only place that the commercialism critique has appeared. It pops up in varying degrees from time to time in other Buffett themed fan-developed websites and message boards, and even in a survey conducted by this author. One fan started a thread in a message board on Buffett News, titled “Has Jimmy become what his early songs denounced.” The original poster basically believed, similarly to some of the members on COBO, that Buffett’s current music was very different from some of the musician’s earlier work, suggesting that his newer stuff was “‘almost’ the polar opposite of where he was.” The poster even went so far as to posit, “he is still selling that dream [by writing about leaving behind the establishment, and escaping the chaos] even though he has sailed on it… he’s not the same guy, he is corporate, heck he IS the corporation.”

Interestingly, there was not one other post in this thread that agreed completely with the initial poster. Though there were some who were willing to acknowledge Buffett’s increasing commercialization over the years, they usually followed up such comments with notes of understanding, claiming something along the lines of “he is a businessman after all.”

Buffett’s commercialization of Margaritaville could be perceived as what this poster called “a double edge sword.” This fan continued by stating, like many others in the same thread, that he admired Buffett for “having the foresight to realize that one day the hits might stop coming.” Essentially, he felt, like others, that Buffett was justifiable in trying to capitalize on the fame and buying power of his fans while he could.

Another member in the post rationalized Buffett’s Corporitaville as a marker of Buffett’s “growing up.” This member wrote,

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103 Jahfin, “Has Jimmy Become what his early songs denounced.”
I think the Jimmy of the early 70’s wouldn’t like what he has turned into. But, times are a changing… Because, Jimmy’s old anti-establishment attitude has turned into him being the establishment. I personally like the old rock and roll attitude of “screw the Man”. But, that is just me. One thing I will give him though, is that he has brought more of Margaritaville to us by having the cafes and CIPs [Cheeseburger in Paradise]. So, it is a double edge sword. He jumped the shark, but that made his “Margaritaville” a lot closer for all of us.

For this member, even though he acknowledges that Buffett has changed over the years, claiming that Buffett was once thought to be more anti-establishment in his actions and music, the poster still appreciates Buffett for making some of the physical Margaritaville entities, such as his restaurants, more readily available to the fans, making it easier for them to attain their own Margaritaville state of mind.104

Buffett’s businesses were also seen as being a “proverbial Catch 22.” Buffett was generally understood by his fans as being anti-cruise ships. This did not, however, stop him from building a restaurant in a cruise ship terminal. In a critique of the new Margaritaville Grand Turks restaurant and shop this member continued,

Create a commercial establishment where you love it because there is no commercialism there-you become part of the problem. 😞 Add a commercial entity where there is already a ton of crass commercialism that feeds on and perpetuates itself to take advantage of it while you advocate the laid back island life-hypocrite or entrepreneur?

104 MargaritaMatt, “Has Jimmy Become what his early songs denounced.”
However, this member argued that the commercialization of everything Margaritaville by Buffett could be justified. In arguing this, the poster noted that Buffett is also extremely generous and dedicated to charitable giving (which will be discussed in more depth in a later chapter), and this, in turn, helped to balance out Buffett’s overt commercialism because in the end a portion of Buffett’s profits would be donated to charity.

Moreover, while there are clearly many fans who enjoy purchasing products at and visiting Buffett’s many establishments, there seems to be a larger sentiment among Parrotheads that buying from or buying into many of Buffett’s business ventures is not required to help them to achieve a Margaritaville state of mind. One fan explained it this way,

My two cents on all JB’s products and brand, he’s giving PH’s [Parrotheads] a broad variety of options on how they can create their own Margaritaville...whether it’s for a show, between shows, or just because. Each person defines it differently... And, it may very well be a symbiotic thing...if no options existed it would have been a lot harder to sustain that feel over the years...and JB might have moved on to playing beach bars long ago…

He followed with a sentiment that seems to be shared by many fans, “How much is too much?? It’s a personal choice. As long as people are buying (JB isn’t cheapening or diluting the brand...which is an intriguing balancing act), this is what Margaritaville.com will be. We each have to find our own Margaritaville....

There seems to be a larger concept at play, that Buffett has helped Parrotheads by giving them the idea of a Margaritaville state of mind to work with and develop into their own sense of meaning. For some fans, this means investing in

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Margaritaville products and visiting Buffett’s restaurants. For others, it might mean they attend a local concert or merely listen to a live Buffett concert that streams online.

When conducting my own research regarding Buffett’s businesses in late March 2011 I developed an online survey called “Buffett and Margaritaville Enterprises LLC.” This survey sought to understand how Buffett’s fans felt about his selling of products, restaurants and hotels, the cost of his merchandise and concert tickets, and whether or not they believed there were expectations on them as fans to purchase Buffett’s goods and services and/or to visit Buffett’s other businesses. I recruited responses from Buffett fans in a few different online spaces initially limited to the social networking site Meetthephlockers.com as well as the Facebook page for the Detroit Parrothead Club. A week or so later I posted the survey in the discussion board section on Buffettnews.com and Buffettworld.com. During the first week the survey was live I got only a trickle of responses. After posting the survey on Buffettworld.com someone who runs this site immediately reposted my surveys on the website’s Facebook page and Twitter account and the responses started to pour in for the next two weeks. In total, for this particular survey, I compiled eighty-six complete entries to my questionnaire. What I found was that the same sentiments about the commercialization of Margaritaville in research that Mihelich and Papineau conducted were expressed by the handful of respondents who answered my survey regarding Buffett’s businesses. I asked whether the respondents felt any amount of pressure in buying or not buying Margaritaville gear. Most of those who answered my survey were sympathetic to the fact that Buffett is a business man and so they did not begrudge the fact that Buffett was willing to tap into his large market of fans and felt little-to-no obligation to buy things to fit in and be a
Parrothead. One female respondent went so far as to state that as soon as she felt “expectations or pressure to buy Buffett stuff” she would no longer choose to be a Parrothead.  

There was one respondent who, like the COBO and the critical poster on Buffett News, felt that Buffett’s commercialization was over the top. Similarly, when with some DPHC members I had been part of a conversation that resonated with this respondent’s feelings, but when I tried to follow up via email regarding this (well before I set up the survey) my emails went unanswered. This particular fan from my survey, who was a male in his mid-sixties, said, “His commercialism makes us feel USED and Taken Advantage of. We made HIM and his Millions.” He followed up with, “What has he done for US?” (all emphasis is that of the respondent). This fan chose not to buy any of Buffett’s goods because he feels it did not make him any less of a Parrothead, and moreover had “no desire to see him” because he felt it was “too expensive” to attend a concert.  

Ultimately, what we take away from all of this is that there are widely varying opinions among Buffett’s followers about the degree of his commercialization and Corporitaville. There are fans willing to be vocal about their dislike and sometimes even disgust with Buffett’s transition into marketing Margaritaville throughout his career. Still, there are others who understand that Buffett, like any other artist, entertains his fans in part through the goods and merchandise he sells. Many of these fans seem to negotiate their own sense of what the Margaritaville state of mind means to them, and in turn, how much of it they need to buy into Margaritaville, both literally and figuratively, to feel satisfied with the negotiation of their fandom. While a Parrothead is not necessarily required to buy Buffett’s stuff to participate in this mythos, for some it helps them to feel more connected. Others, even still, believe that they

can construct their own Margaritaville state of mind without the specific help of the goods and services Buffett sells. To many of these fans, Buffett has helped them to discover a way of life that is independent from the pressure of buying all of the “stuff” he tries to sell to them.

As has been detailed above, Buffett’s business ventures span a number of different services and commercial activities. Overall, however, it becomes increasingly clear, as we saw with COBO, that some fans feel that the goods and services he sells are in opposition to the escapism tropical mythos espoused in Buffett’s music. After all, if the end result is to achieve a Margaritaville state of mind where “living is easy,” it seems contradictory that people would need so many things to achieve this ease. American overspending, especially in light of the ongoing recession, has been much in the news in recent years. Interestingly, the animated series South Park touched on the economic troubles in the US in a March 25, 2009 episode titled, perhaps not surprisingly, “Margaritaville.” The plot of this episode satirically addressed what creators and producers Trey Parker and Matt Stone felt were some of the larger issues of the American recession. A discussion of this episode provides an excellent conclusion to this chapter as it marries together critiques of Margaritaville while using a Margaritaville product as a symbol to the address larger issues public of overspending.

The show South Park revolves around the lives of the four main characters who happen to be elementary school aged boys; Stan Marsh, Kyle Broflovski, Eric Cartman and Kenny McCormick. These characters live in the small fictional town of South Park, located in Colorado. The show is aimed at adults and is known for its crude language, often dark humor, and satirical critiques. Its plots focus on a wide range of topics that occasionally play into real world events, political issues, and celebrity news. In writing the episode, Parker and Stone believed that most Americans think the economy, like religion, works as a sort of mysterious
entity, one that not many people truly understand. Thus much of the dialogue about the economy in this episode and the character’s solutions to solve the recession, are presented in a way that suggests a religious movement of sorts.\(^9\) In the audio commentary on the DVD version of the episode, Stone said, “We didn’t want to make an episode where it was like, ‘Oh, those Wall Street guys took our money.’ It was one of those things where we all screwed up and nobody really knows what’s going on, but it has something to do with buying shit like Margaritavilles.”\(^10\)

In the “Margaritaville” episode the people of South Park spend most of their time in chaos as the effects of the economic downturn take hold of the city in which they live. As panic begins to set in across South Park, people being to blame everything from the banks to the “materialistic hedonists.” One of the show’s adult characters, Randy (who is the father of Stan Marsh), steps forward and proposes a solution to fix the financial crisis in which everyone in the town suddenly finds themselves. The people of South Park follow his lead, and they attempt to live without participating in the economy directly at all. But as we learn, Randy too is confused by the economy and while he preaches one thing, his purchases suggest another.\(^11\) The central product or point of critique in this episode focuses on a Buffett’s Margaritaville Frozen Concoction maker (which at the most basic level is merely a fancy brand name blender that costs approximately $300 retail).

Out of the confusion sweeping over South Park regarding the economy, we see Randy explain to his son Stan his theory of the root cause of the problem. Stan asks, “Mom, Dad, how come there’s suddenly no money?”

Randy: [grabs a hot dog from the platter] I’ll tell you what happened, son! See, there’s a bunch o’ idiots out there who weren’t happy with what they had! [slaps the hot dog onto his own plate] They wanted a bigger house and materialistic things that they didn’t even need. [grabs his margarita glass and rises from the table] People with no money who got loans to buy frivolous things they had no business buying. [walks over to a Margaritaville margarita blender and loads it with ice. A margarita mix is already in place in the blender] And these assholes just blindly started buying any stupid thing that looked appealing, [puts the ice scooper back into the ice bucket] ‘cause they thought money was endless! [starts up the blender, which drowns out whatever he says for the next nine seconds] meaning less money coming in. [serves himself a margarita and places the blender back on its base] And the idiots couldn’t see that by doing all this frivolous spending they were mocking the Economy. And they made the Economy very angry. [goes back to his seat with his margarita] We’re all feeling the Economy’s vengeance because of materialistic heathens who did stupid things with their money! Do you understand, son? [sips from his margarita glass]¹¹²

The irony is that Randy’s solution to solving South Park’s recession problems calls for the townspeople to stop furiously spending and instead to only purchase the very minimum they

need to get by, and he preaches this idea to all who will listen to him. He proclaims, “Cut spending to only the bare essentials! Water and bread and margaritas, yea.”\textsuperscript{113}

Stan spends most of the episode trying to return the machine his father purchased on a payment plan. At the time this study was written (2011), most of Buffett’s frozen concoction makers ranged in price from $150 to $500. The blender, then, serves as an example of people spending money on luxury items they do not need (instead of saving money). Stan recognizes what his father cannot, that the purchase of the machine was one of extravagance rather than need, and Randy is lumped into those guilty of overspending but he is so unaware that he does not recognize the purchase as such. In the larger context of the episode the highly recognizable frozen concoction maker serves as a metaphor for American consumerism and overspending. In light of the current (2008 - 11) recession, Stone and Parker are critiquing the state of the economy, and, more specifically, the downfalls of overspending and consumerism. The fact that they use a Margaritaville product to convey that point is an interesting twist to consider. Did Stone and Parker pick this blender at random or might there be something more significant and direct in their choice of this particular product? Parker himself actually owns the Margaritaville Frozen Concoction Maker but is clear to point out that it “really is just a blender” and instead of spending over $300, he could have easily spend $25 on a blender which has the same functions, just without the Margaritaville label.\textsuperscript{114}

The Margaritaville state of mind, for many of Buffett’s fans at least, serves as a temporary escape from their hectic, work-filled daily lives. This escape is encouraged through the many products that Buffett sells including concert tickets, and merchandise, as well as the restaurants, hotels, and vacation spots he encourages his fans to visit. Buffett realized early on in

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
his music career that if he was to make a successful living playing music he could not achieve as much based on music sales alone and instead he brought together his skills as a businessman and a musician to help him to develop the vast Margaritaville empire that he has amassed today – something which oftentimes sees a shift away from music and towards lifestyle products, goods, and services. The music is still there, and it is the driving force of what brings fans to see him year after year as he tours and plays many of their same favorite songs, but he has also simultaneously developed a music based lifestyle that is highly constructed from an amalgam of the tropics that has been mashed up and repackaged to his fans. In this respect, Buffett has transitioned from a Margaritaville state of mind into a Margaritaville state of being and with this cultivated a lifestyle fandom for his fans – one that does not solely rely on his music alone, or music sales for Buffett. Whether Parrotheads support or reject the commercialization that Buffett presents his fans through the abundant goods and services offered in his Margaritaville empire, or whether they choose to make their own path through it, Buffett certainly gives them a lot of options from which to choose. The Margaritaville state of mind and the lifestyle that both Buffett and Parrotheads cultivate from it ultimately helps us set the stage for understanding how this ethos is evoked and developed by Parrotheads through the various fan activities that they participate in as fans. As will be seen the in the following chapter, however, this Margaritaville state of mind is at the heart of how Parrotheads construct themselves, as well as how they engage with one another as fans of Buffett.
CHAPTER II. “WASTING AWAY” AND LOVING IT: PARROTHEADS & ADULT MUSIC FANDOM

A state of mind is now a state of being. But how did Margaritaville come into a state of being? Better yet, how did Margaritaville become a state of mind? How could some guy armed only with writers instruments; a pen and a legal pad, create all that is Margaritaville? The answer is simple: Imagination.¹

In describing the song and how “Margaritaville” came to be written, Jimmy Buffett’s website explains that with a little imagination he was able to transport his fans to a tropical paradise, one that may exist in reality for some or may simply exist for others in their minds. Over the years Parrotheads have, in many ways, helped in cultivating this Margaritaville state of mind alongside Buffett. Buffett offers up musical classics such as “Margaritaville,” “Cheeseburger in Paradise,” “Fins” and countless other playful songs from his expansive discography. These songs combined with innumerable Margaritaville products, goods, and services, are aimed at helping Parrotheads embrace and develop this lifestyle. Buffett’s escapism ethos has, for some fans, become a welcomed state of being in their daily lives. Thus the mythical Margaritaville for this adult music fan group is no longer limited to joy-filled escapes during the one weekend a year when Buffett comes to town for a concert. Instead it has become integrated into their fan activities and more so into their everyday lives.

This chapter will discuss Parrotheads and their fandom as a type of imagined community or intimate public and will start by historicizing the adult music fan group. I will then move to discuss the nature and function of Parrothead clubs, and other activities outside of the concert setting. Lastly, this chapter will focus on tailgating in Parrothead fandom as it is an integral part

of their fan experience both in their daily lives as well as in annual concert settings. This section will include some first hand ethnographic work of a pre-concert tailgating event I attended near Detroit, Michigan in the summer of 2010. Finally, this chapter will conclude with an analysis of the inherent tropicalizations found in the Margaritaville state of mind at the heart of much of Parrothead fandom. These tropicalizations reinforce falsely constructed images and ideals of the tropics and subsequently its people, and can be found in many aspects of Parrothead fandom.

Parrotheads: Imagined Communities, Intimate Publics, and Everyday Fandom

Parrotheads across the board have a variety of beliefs, behaviors, and meanings that make up their identity as Parrotheads and as fans of Jimmy Buffett.\(^2\) Much of this identity is largely rooted in investing in Buffett’s Margaritaville state of mind, as it serves as a way to escape the doldrums of work and other responsibilities. I developed a two part survey called, “Parrotheads and Volunteering/Charitable Giving,” the first half of which focused more on understanding how Parrotheads self-identify and what, if any, activities they participated in as fans of Jimmy Buffett, if they participated in official Parrothead clubs and club activities, and other general questions about their fan based engagement.\(^3\) This particular survey was posted on two major Jimmy Buffett online message boards, Buffett News and Buffett World, and on the Facebook group page of the Detroit Parrot Head Club. It was then reposted on both the Buffett World Twitter account and Facebook page by a moderator at that site.\(^4\) The respondents were self-selected in so far as they represent those who chose to take the surveys when they came across

\(^{2}\) In the three different surveys I conducted I only had one person out of one-hundred and twelve people who clearly sought to identify themselves as a “Buffett Fan” rather than a Parrothead. This fan felt that the name Parrothead was reserved for those fans who were involved in “crazy antics” or fanatical behavior. This fan’s distinguishing himself from the widely used fan identifier terminology, however, is not shared by other fans.

\(^{3}\) The volunteering and charitable giving portion of this survey will be discussed in the following chapter.

them in the online forums where they were posted. This survey has the potential to reflect the ideas and attitudes about being a Parrothead from the users who visited the sites where they were posted. Portions of the results of this survey will be used in this chapter, as well as in Chapter Four of this work. One of my initial questions asked fans to explain what initially drew them to participate in this fandom. Many respondents suggested that they work hard both at their jobs and at home, and because of this hard-working lifestyle, being a Parrothead and embracing this fan identity helped them to escape a bit and relax, even if just for the night or weekend. As one person wrote, “Being a Parrothead means working hard during the week and letting loose on the weekends. It’s all about partying, but more about living your dreams and showing a side of yourself that you wouldn’t bring to the work place. I would explain a Parrothead as someone who is good natured and fun, someone who works hard at their job in order to be able to enjoy life after work.”  

For this fan, and others like him, being a Parrothead means being able to take a break from one’s daily life whether that be from the pressures of responsibility found in their jobs, raising children, taking care of aging parents and so on. In this context being a Parrothead is a lived experience which functions as something to retreat to where things feel relaxed and carefree. For others their fan experience as a Parrothead is not looked at as something they temporarily escape to, but more so as a way of life and a carefree lifestyle they seek to embrace. As one fan suggested, “Being a Parrothead is a way of life, maybe a mindset.” This sentiment was echoed by another respondent, “To me [being a Parrothead is] being a fan but it’s also a way of life. Kind of like aloha isn’t just hello, it’s a spirit; it’s an attitude for handling life. Being a Parrothead is kind of the same way.” For these fans, being a Parrothead and embracing the Margaritaville state of mind, can serve as a mantra for how to live one’s life and this was a

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sentiment I heard echoed by other fans with whom I interacted while doing research on this project. In other words, by embracing this mindset they are attempting to invest in a carefree lifestyle where these stresses from their own lives are made less, even if the escape is just temporary.

As Parrotheads, these fans more often than not tend to see themselves as a part of a collective group over which Buffett, the “Head Parrothead,” resides. As Jolie Ingersoll has suggested, they recognize that being a member of the Parrothead Nation works on two levels “both as an individual sense of identity and a sense of community.”8 Their collective fan community functions in part as an imagined community in that they can never know and meet everyone who is a part of the Parrothead Nation, but they understand that as Jimmy Buffett fans they share a sense of deep connection with other fans like themselves. The works of Benedict Anderson and Lauren Berlant are useful in further articulating the often intimate and deep comradeships that connect many Parrotheads to one another.

As discussed briefly in the Introduction, Anderson’s concept of imagined communities has been taken up by both Internet and fan studies scholars alike for its usefulness in allowing us to think about fan groups in a larger context, and further, how these fans as individuals think of themselves in relation to other like-minded fans.9 Similarly, as argued in the Introduction, I suggest that we can push Anderson’s original meaning a bit further, to encompass a way of understanding how fans perceive and conceptualize their fan communities. Fans oftentimes

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think of themselves as part of a collective group, whether they have had the opportunity to meet with other fans like themselves or not. When fans do get together to participate in fan activities, whether that is online or in face-to-face spaces, they are in essence experiencing their imagined community coming to life. The emergence of the imagined community can be seen in Parrothead themed spaces, whether that is through fan participation with other fans in Parrothead club and activities, or even within the spaces before, during, and after a Buffett concert.

Imagined communities do not only need to develop from face-to-face interactions. This same camaraderie can also be found with Parrotheads who interact with one another online. As Parrotheads, they see themselves as a part of a collective “Parrothead Nation” as they sometimes call themselves. Their collective fandom community is an imagined community in that they can never know and meet everyone who is a part of the Parrothead Nation but they understand that as Jimmy Buffett fans they share a sense of “deep horizontal comradeship” which is integral to the sense of nation that Anderson describes. One fan explained it this way: “When I try to describe the atmosphere of a Buffett tailgate and concert I tell people, it’s amazing to party with 40,000 of your best friends you’ve never met.”

Anderson’s conceptual framework on imagined communities blends well with Lauren Berlant’s construction of intimate publics. At the most basic level, Berlant suggests that intimacy “involves an aspiration for a narrative about something shared, a story about both oneself and others that will turn out in a particular way. Usually this story is set within zones of familiarity and comfort: friendship, the couple, and the family form, animated by expressive and emancipated kinds of love.” Intimacy for Berlant functions as an unpredictable and unexpected “thing.” This “wild thing,” as she calls it, is not necessarily strictly organized but

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instead much more mobile and creates itself or shows itself through various practices, and may not always “respect the predictable forms” (as will be discussed below in terms of Parrothead tailgating practices).\textsuperscript{12} Thus intimacy can develop in ways we might not always predict. She posits, “these spaces are produced relationally; people and/in institutions can return repeatedly to them and produce something, though frequently not history in its ordinary, memorable, or valorized sense, and not always ‘something’ of positive value”\textsuperscript{13} (emphasis in original). It is here within this interpretation and fluid definition of intimate spaces and intimate publics that I contend we can begin to read fandom and fan practices, and more specifically Parrothead fan practices, as speaking to Berlant’s work. Parrotheads in this case, can be seen as seeking the “inwardness of the intimate” as being “met by a corresponding publicness” as their very nature as fans gives them intimate insider knowledge of the practices and activities at the heart of their fandom. For example, they are likely to share at least one thing in common (their love of Buffett’s music) when they meet.\textsuperscript{14} They may be perceived by outsiders as a rowdy bunch of middle-aged adults who dress up in tropical themed outfits and party on the weekends or similarly dressed folks who donate countless hours and money to philanthropic endeavors, but they are drawn together as fans, because of the lifestyle music of Buffett and other trop-rock bands, and oftentimes formally organized Parrothead clubs.

Moreover Berlant argues that intimate publics function when certain mass mediated markets open up to consumers, “claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people’s particular core interests and desires.”\textsuperscript{15} Berlant seems to be suggesting that intimate publics are very much about varying markets (mass mediated or otherwise), the consumption of desires, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 284.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 285.
\item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 281.
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of shared experiences. It would be nearly impossible to argue that bands, and the texts that they produce for consumption by their fans, are not mass mediated texts since they are developed, presented, and marketed to these media consumers. As discussed in the previous chapter, Parrotheads can, on some level, choose whether or not to participate in consuming all of the goods and services that Buffett provides for them, or they can negotiate and pick and choose how much or how little they will buy such goods. In some cases they even prefer to outright reject these “things.” This allows them to interpret and cultivate their fandom on their own terms. Berlant continues, “When this kind of ‘culture of circulation’ takes hold, participants in the intimate public feel as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions” (emphasis in original). Fandom and fan practices very much work through a “culture of circulation.” In fandom, the intimate spaces of which Berlant speaks of often do materialize into actual physical face-to-face spaces, but they also can happen and become further developed through interactions on the Internet. In essence these fans are producing something. For many Parrotheads fans, online message boards, websites, social networking sites, the parking lot before Buffett concerts, or the monthly meetings of their local Parrothead club are just a few of the places where these fans with a shared collective fan identity can congregate, exchange stories and experiences, and enact their fandom. Further, it is in these spaces that they usually share their extensive and intimate knowledge about fan texts pertinent to that fan base. These spaces can be viewed as intimate publics unto themselves.

Parrothead Clubs: A Brief History

Parrotheads first got their name from Eagles’ bassist Tim Schmit. Schmit was touring with Buffett in 1984 as a part of the Coral Reefers Band and one night on stage, at a venue just

16 Ibid.
outside of Cincinnati, Ohio, he remarked to Buffett that the audience’s enthusiasm, combined with the costumes they wore, reminded him of Deadheads, the fans and followers of the Grateful Dead, except that Buffett’s fans arrived in more tropical themed outfits. Schmit thus dubbed Buffett’s fans “Parrotheads.” The very next issue of Buffett’s fan newsletter, the Coconut Telegraph, distributed in April 1985, made the first official reference to his fans as Parrotheads, and the name has endured.

While unofficial Jimmy Buffett fan clubs had existed in various forms for some time, the first Parrothead club to be officially recognized by Margaritaville LLC was assembled in 1989 by Scott Nickerson of Atlanta, Georgia. Nickerson met many fans while tailgating before Buffett shows and he believed that a more formally organized club would allow Parrotheads to get together more frequently than at an annual concert. Nickerson’s idea was to create an organization that would not merely function as a social or fan club, though that is important, but would also have an element of volunteering and philanthropy encourages members to help out their local community and environment.17 He worked on the idea for several months before placing an advertisement in a free local weekly entertainment newspaper soliciting members for the group. Around the same time he also contacted Margaritaville LLC with his idea for a Parrothead club and was given its blessing. The Atlanta Parrot Head Club held its first official meeting on April 1, 1989. The Parrotheads met up at a local concert venue Buffett frequented before heading off to a nearby bar to have a meeting and enjoy margaritas. To make the club more official they worked together to draw up a charter that would articulate the goals of the organization. This charter ultimately suggested that the Atlanta Parrot Head Club would engage in charitable activities, focusing specifically on various social and environmental issues in their local community. These were two things that were very much in line with the charitable

activities that Buffett himself has been involved with over the years. The club continued with bi-weekly happy hour meetings that grew in attendance. By the end of their first year the club had also volunteered at seven different charity fundraising events in their area.

Only three years later, the First Annual Parrot Head Convention (now called Meeting of the Minds) was held in New Orleans, Louisiana, in December 1992. The meeting brought together six different officially recognized clubs from the cities of Beaumont and Dallas, Texas; New York City, New York; Orlando, Florida; Detroit, Michigan; and New Orleans, Louisiana, and had eighty Parrotheads in attendance. Together the attendees visited the then-new Margaritaville Café New Orleans and donated the extra money raised from registration fees to a local charity. The conventions grew from year to year and focused on being a balance of fun activities and musical events for Parrotheads to “phlock” to every year, as well as having some element of fundraising for that year’s selected charities. By the seventh year, the convention permanently moved to Key West, Florida, and continues to be held there annually. Registration for the conference is limited to 3,500 Parrotheads, and, because of the high demand, all spots are usually filled well before the registration period ends. As one of my respondents suggested, this large-scale gathering of Parrotheads is like “middle aged spring break,” as thousands of Parrotheads descend on the annual event. The convention thus serves as a mass gathering of Parrotheads, outside of the concert setting, where Parrotheads come together to party for a long weekend, and escape to something akin to spring break from their youth. This fun and frivolity, however, is juxtaposed with philanthropy through the numerous activities they also participate in during the weekend of fun. This includes charitable giving on a massive scale. In 2011,

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Parrotheads who attended MOTM participated in local charity walks (205+ different clubs participated in this walk alone in 2011), donating blood 175 pints of blood and raising money through a variety of activities throughout the weekend, with funds being contributed to Wesley House Family Services, the KW Police Athletic League and the Florida Keys SPCA, and donating toys and school supplies to the Salvation Army for their annual holiday toy drive. So while the aim of the convention might be to get together with thousands of like-minded Parrotheads, they also are mindful to stay true to the organization’s mission to “party with a purpose.”

In 1994, as interest in Parrothead clubs began to develop in different regions of the United States, Margaritaville LLC asked Nickerson to oversee other newly forming clubs so that there was some semblance of continuity between them. As a result, Nickerson’s efforts morphed into the founding of Parrot Heads in Paradise Inc. (PHiP), a not for profit organization that serves as an umbrella organization which monitors and oversees officially recognized clubs. At the end of 2011, PHiP recognized 239 clubs. This includes clubs in forty-seven states in the United States, three Canadian provinces, and Australia. Nickerson was also asked by Margaritaville LLC to write up a set of guidelines to be used by all Parrothead clubs. This measure was to ensure that each club met a certain level of standards and practices. As a result, each Parrothead club is required to develop a mission statement outlining the goals and purposes of the group. They must also hold annual elections to elect officers ranging from president, vice president, and secretary to member-at-large. These officers help run and organize the club as well as schedule

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22 An example of a club’s mission statement can be seen on the Detroit Parrot Head Club’s website. They state their mission as: “The Detroit Parrothead Club is a non-profit organization whose sole purpose is to assist in community outreach programs and to provide for its members a means of social interaction and meeting people interested in Jimmy Buffett’s music & tropical spirit. An official chapter of Parrotheads in Paradise (PHiP).” The Detroit Parrot Head Club, http://www.detroitparrotheadclub.com/about.php (accessed July 1, 2010).
social and charity events. Membership numbers can vary from club to club but PHiP contends that the average club has about 150 members.23

PHiP stresses that Parrothead clubs are not merely Jimmy Buffett fan clubs but that they are also charitable, social, and environmental organizations. Many clubs hold 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations status. PHiP encourages all affiliated clubs to volunteer in a variety of different community, charity, or environmental projects in their local, regional, and national communities, and requires that each club participate in at least two of these activities per year to maintain good standing with PHiP. The charity work they do collectively as Parrotheads is done in an effort to “leave something positive behind.”24 Thus the central ideal that is the foundation of many of the Parrothead clubs is to “party with a purpose,” embracing a two-fold mission which combines “a love of partying with a desire to give back to the community.”25 This charitable aspect of Parrothead fandom will be the focus of the next chapter in this work.

Many clubs hold regularly scheduled monthly board meetings and host general membership gatherings such as monthly or even bi-monthly happy hours at a restaurant or bar. In addition to these regularly scheduled get-togethers, many clubs also host other parties and social events for their members which usually have some charitable aspect to them. In 2011, for example, the Detroit Parrot Head Club (DPHC), the fifth Parrothead club to be officially recognized by PHiP, hosted a party called One Particular Beach Party (which is a play on the name of a Buffett album and song, “One Particular Harbour”). The event, held in March, was a day-long party around the indoor pool of a local hotel. The club advertised the event through

PhiP so that members of other Parrothead clubs were invited to attend.\textsuperscript{26} The event consisted of several tropical rock bands in the evening and Parrotheads were invited to play games and escape the cold of the wintertime by lounging around an indoor pool, and pretending for a while that winter was over. At this event, DPHC also raffled off dozens of gifts, with the money raised going to a local non-profit organization that helped the families of military veterans in the area.\textsuperscript{27} In many ways this indoor party imitates many of the social and camaraderie-building activities that draw Parrotheads to tailgating before concerts. The DPHC also holds other social events such as a group camping trip and a road rally, and announces when trop-rock bands will be playing in their area to encourage club members to socialize outside of DPHC sponsored or official events.

Living the Lifestyle: Adulthood Meets Escapism and Beach Bums

“Someone once said that Parrotheads are just deadheads with jobs and frequent flyer miles,” – Wayne Myers, Atlanta Parrothead Club member.\textsuperscript{28}

The general consensus among the few scholars who have written about Parrotheads, as well as my own observations of this group, suggest that this fan group ranges in age from small children to Baby Boomers (which includes those entering or happily retired).\textsuperscript{29} The average age of the respondents in my online surveys was forty-four years old, with my youngest respondent being nineteen and my oldest was sixty-six. Fifty-two of my eighty-one respondents were over the age of forty.\textsuperscript{30} An interesting aspect of Parrotheads is that a portion of them seem to have

\textsuperscript{26} This includes members from the Parrothead Club on the St. Clair located in the Sarnia area just over the Canadian border in Canada.

\textsuperscript{27} Chapter 4 will discuss some of the DPHC’s philanthropic work in more detail.


\textsuperscript{30} This number included two fans that were nineteen years old and went up to respondents in their mid-sixties. Inevitably, the younger fans skewed the average a bit.
also drawn their children into the mix. While not everyone indicated how old they were when they became fans (twenty-five people left this question blank) nineteen respondents reported a parent, aunt or uncle, or grandparent introducing them to Buffett’s music; and families with children both young and old can be seen at concerts enjoying Buffett’s music together. Similarly, twenty-two people reported being introduced to Buffett by a sibling, friend, or significant other – in other words, someone close to their own age at the time. On the other side, there were quite a few respondents who indicated that they had been Parrotheads since birth or were introduced to Buffett’s music at an early age by their parents, another close relative, or by a family friend. Remarking on the wide age group that this fan group brings together, one twenty-four year old respondent posited, “There is no age restrictions for Parrotheads, and they are a very welcoming bunch [sic]. Retirees can be partying with college students, and everyone would be having a blast.”

My respondents reported a range of different occupations which included fans who were unemployed, undergraduate and graduate students in college, people in the childcare field, nursing, independent business owner, and in a variety of managerial positions, just to list a few. Six people listed themselves as retired. The range of jobs my respondents have in many ways echoes what the Christmas 2004 issue of Coconut Telegraph observes about Parrotheads, suggesting that they “are firmly ingrained in all levels of society; young and old, rich and poor, lawn section and front row.” PHiP further supports this, as well as my findings in my surveys, by stating, “Club members come from a variety of backgrounds. Most are professionals, with an

32 Author’s Surveys, “Parrotheads & Volunteering/Charitable Giving,” & “Buffett and Margaritaville Enterprises LLC.”
average age range between the mid-twenties and mid-fifties.”

Though Parrotheads include people from all economic levels, a large segment of the Parrothead population is a part of the middle and upper middle class and they tend to be predominantly White. The most Parrotheads are overwhelmingly white is something that I noticed in my own work both in face to face situations as well as in online spaces, and is something that has been observed by other scholars who have written about Parrotheads as well. Of my eighty-one respondents in this survey, only one person identified as something other than White. Similarly, in my own face-to-face observations of Parrotheads in the Detroit Parrot Head Club as well as during the 7+ hours I spent tailgating at a concert venue near Detroit in 2010, I did not see any people who I could identify as non-white. The only people of color I saw all day at the concert venue were the people working there.

The foundation of Parrothead fandom is rooted in the lifestyle music of Jimmy Buffett. Parrotheads enjoy socializing, which often involves some combination of drinking, dressing up in tropical themed shirts or outfits, listening to Buffett and other trop-rock bands, and celebrating this beach bum ethos and laid back lifestyle. Closely tied to this, many Parrotheads also embrace the escapist mentality and tropical imagery that Buffett’s music projects. In this sense, as John Mehelich and John Papineau have noted, Buffett has allowed his fans to fashion “their own understanding and meaning of this constructed paradise through buying Buffett’s albums and cultivating ‘Margaritaville.’”

36 This does not mean that there could have been people I observed who actually self-identified as non-white.
Margaritaville state of mind. Similarly, Ingersoll argues, “Parrotheads may dream of giving it all up to live on a sailboat in the islands, but Parrothead ritual gives them just enough time in that ‘one particular harbor’ to allow them to keep it all together in the structure of the real world.”

In this respect, many Parrotheads see their fandom as being part of a laid back attitude that remindsthem to not take themselves too seriously. Even after his thirty-seventh consecutive year of touring, Parrotheads continue to gravitate towards the tropical living and escapist tunes that he keeps writing, as demonstrated by Buffett’s high annual touring revenue.

What is interesting about this fan culture is that many music scholars talk about music fandom as being closely tied with youth culture. They argue youth have more time to engage with leisure cultures because they are not as busy or invested in jobs, family, etc., as their adult counterparts. Parrotheads provide a different model of music fandom in that while there are young Buffett fans, most seem to have sought him out when already cemented in adulthood, and in some cases aging right alongside the musician. These Parrotheads transitioned from early adulthood and are now moving towards or already nestled into retirement. Others have been drawn to Buffett somewhere along the way in their adult lives, or as discussed above, some who were born loving Buffett’s music and the lifestyle he promotes. More than half of those who took my survey indicated that they became fans of Buffett sometime in adulthood, suggesting that Buffett’s lifestyle music and fandom provides something for this group of fans, whether that is an all-out means of escape or a bit of relaxation from work and responsibility. Could it be that

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39 Ingersoll, 262.
this is when Buffett’s escapist “no worries” ethos appeals to them the most? Several survey respondents wrote that Buffett’s lifestyle music and their participation in Parrothead Clubs and activities helps to “keep them young at heart” or gives them the “burst of energy (to) stay young.” Youth cultures are generally identified as having leisure time and extra money to spend, but as we have seen, so do many Parrotheads. When the weekend rolls around or if Jimmy Buffett or another trop-rock musical concert is in town, these fans are somehow negotiating their work and play. Adult fan cultures have the potential to be much more complicated when compared to youth cultures because they must also oftentimes negotiate their fandoms between work and family, as well as other responsibilities. We must remember, as Ingersoll suggests, that in order for these fans to maintain their middle class lifestyles, and to participate in many of the activities that Parrotheads engage with as fans, it seems certain that they must also keep up with their work and responsibilities outside of their fandom in order to continue to be able to afford to participate.

On the surface it appears that Parrotheads are longing for some of the carefree living that they possibly once experienced in their youth. Maybe this is why the respondent above suggested that the convention MoTM was like spring break for adults. And yet these Parrotheads are somehow making the time to incorporate concert attendance, tailgating, and Parrothead get-togethers, as well as hours of fundraising and charity work into their fandom. Chapter Four will discuss the central motto of “partying with a purpose,” wherein Parrotheads, under the guise and framework of having fun, simultaneously work to raise money and volunteer man hours for local and national charitable and environmental organization.

Parrotheads are dedicating a significant amount of time to their fandom, which can be seen in the many activities they commit themselves to and engage with, whether it is online or in

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face-to-face activities. Some of these participatory activities include, but are not limited to, participating in local Parrothead clubs’ social and charity fundraising events as mentioned above, tailgating before and after concerts, and participating in online communities. Ingersoll posits that Parrothead fandom can be seen as a longing for something that is essentially human, that speaks to people’s need for “meaning, purpose, ritual, community and transcendent experience” as they create and make meaning with the cultural texts Buffett laid out as a foundation. What I found interesting in the fans that I observed, as well as respondents to my surveys, was their often clear articulation of their Parrothead fandom as being not just something that they engage in on the weekends, or in the work they do together in their Parrothead clubs, but as something woven throughout their daily lives. Many respondents stated that being a Parrothead meant not only being a fan of Buffett’s music, but more so participating in a lifestyle that Buffett helped them to initially seek out. One survey respondent stated, “A Parrothead is more like a lifestyle than just a fan of one particular entertainer.”

Parrotheads and Tailgating: Welcome to Paradise

Tailgating allows Parrotheads to get together and revel in their collective fandom and affinity for Jimmy Buffett and is another time when their imagined community has the potential to become realized on a larger scale. Tailgating before concerts is another important activity for Parrotheads and they spend hours upon hours together in the parking lots before Buffett’s concerts. As I have written about in previous work, and as has been noted by others, Parrotheads take tailgating seriously so much so that occasionally if tailgating is prohibited at an event it can dramatically change the overall fan experience.

42 Ingersoll, 264.
44 Kelly MacDonald, “Music Fans Unite: Participatory Culture and Concert Tailgating,” Midwest Popular Culture Association, Cincinnati, Ohio, October 2008 & Julie J. Ingersoll, “The Thin Line between Saturday Night and
atmosphere fans feel out in the parking lot of a concert venue can be more important than attending the actual concert itself.

Tailgating, for Parrotheads, has become such an integral part of their fandom community that even when Buffett is not touring some Parrotheads work to replicate the experience on both small and large scales. As mentioned in Chapter One, a survey respondent from the “Buffett & Corporitaville Survey” talked about re-creating the tailgating experience in the comfort of his own backyard while relaxing on his deck with his wife, drink in hand, and listening to Buffett’s Radio Margaritaville. At the other end of this spectrum, Parrothead clubs organize tailgating parties to recreate the relaxed social setting which enhances this fan group’s sense of togetherness and camaraderie often found in their tailgating experience. In these events, such as the DPHC’s One Particular Beach Party, the tailgating is an all day affair that usually includes some combination of food, games, music, and other activities with the focus being on getting local Parrotheads together for an extended period of time to spend time and interact with one another. Some clubs even go a step further, like the Atlanta Parrot Head Club which hosts a Parrothead Cruise for all fans who are interested. This club organizes travel to different locations in the Caribbean each year, and the trips usually include “Parrothead entertainment” for its attendees.

Ingersoll, one of only a few scholars to do any extensive analysis of Parrotheads and tailgating, argues that Parrothead fan practices can be understood as a kind of religion in their

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Sunday Morning: Meaning and Community among Jimmy Buffett’s Parrotheads,” *God in Details: American Religion in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 253-266. The section below, which discusses the tailgating issue at Fenway Park in 2004, is based in part on my conference presentation.

45 Survey, “Buffett and Margaritaville Enterprises LLC,” Respondent 1. This fan articulated his activity as tailgating and while it could be argued that this fan’s version of tailgating might not really constitute the same thing as tailgating in a parking lot. That he could feel that this very simplified version evoked the same sentiments in the end is all that matters.

everyday lives. She posits that Parrothead culture is an “irreligious culture” which parallels various aspects of what we think of as more traditional religious practices. In looking at some of the parallels between fandom cultures and religious cultures, Ingersoll adds a level of complexity in our way of thinking of fan rituals and practices. She likens the pre-concert ritual of tailgating to the celebration of Mardi Gras before Lent. She contends that while Buffett is often irreverent towards religions, and Parrotheads often share a similar sentiment, these fans are drawing parallels “between the way Buffett philosophy shapes their views of the world and ‘spirituality.’”47 Ingersoll argues that Parrothead fandom (or fandom in general) can be seen as a longing for something that is essentially human, that speaks to people’s need for “meaning, purpose, ritual, community and transcendent experience” as they create and make meaning in cultural texts. This new mode may be nontraditional, but it still is seeking to bring people together.48 Ingersoll explains the draw of tailgating to Parrotheads as such: “Parrotheads gather to renew old friendships; to sing and dance; to drink margaritas, rum drinks, and Coronas [though that would now most likely be Buffett’s beer Land Shark Lager]; and to renew their Caribbean souls. Then they go to the show.”49 Similarly, in my surveys about Parrothead fan practices, there were a handful of respondents who articulated Parrothead fandom as being similar to a religious practice. “I tell people that being a Parrothead is like a religion of sorts and when I’m down, it gets me through the day,” one respondent stated.50 Another respondent posited that Parrothead tailgating was a pilgrimage you should make at least once.51 Ingersoll

47 Ingersoll argues that though Buffett is a former Catholic altar boy, he oftentimes makes light of religions in his lyrics. She notes that he “pokes fun at both Catholics and Protestants,” with lyrics such as “Religion, religion. Oh there’s a thin line between Saturday night and Sunday morning” from his song “Fruitcakes” on his 1994 album of the same name (255). Similarly she notes that in the song “Bank of Bad Habits,” from Barometer Soup (1995) he parodies the ‘Seven Deadly Sins.’” Ibid, 255.
48 Ingersoll, 264.
49 Ingersoll, 258.
contends that this opens up the possibility that fandom can be seen as a longing for something people are possibly not getting from the day to day. In seeing something that is shared and communal, much like religion/religious experiences, Parrothead fandom is evoking and fulfilling essential human needs for belonging.\textsuperscript{52}

If part of the need for belonging in Parrothead fandom can be remedied by enjoying the company of other like-minded fans it makes sense that the DPHC works to extend their time together before a Buffett concert with several pre-concert activities leading up to the actual musical event. In June 2010, in anticipation of the upcoming local concert, the DPHC organized a five day “Pre-Concert Weekend Bash” at the local Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurant near Detroit. That week the DPHC played unofficial host to several trop-rock bands that played there each night during the pre-concert events. On the second night of this event the Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurant hosted raffles, giveaways, and a silent auction for those who visited the restaurant that evening. The largest event of the weekend, held on Sunday, was a picnic for members of the club, hosted at a local park. The pre-concert events were capped off the day of the show with the restaurant hosting two different trop-rock bands, starting at noon and ending just before five o’clock in the evening, giving Parrotheads enough time to head to the Buffett concert. The restaurant hosted one last party after the concert for a “late night rendezvous” and

\textsuperscript{52} Religious rhetoric in music fandom has been discussed by other scholars as well. Daniel Cavicchi found that many Bruce Springsteen fans see their evolution as fans as being on par with religious conversion. Cavicchi notes that while religion and fandom are invested with different types of meaning they both center on and around acts of devotion, which in the case of fandom has the potential to mirror similarities in religious experience. Similarly, at least one respondent articulated that tailgating to them was like an annual pilgrimage while others spoke of Parrothead fandom as being similar to a religion or church. In previous research I found that there were many Dave Matthews Band fans who in talking about attending a particular concert weekend where the band performed often referred to the event as a sort of mecca-que assembly of fans. See Daniel Cavacchi, \textit{Tramps Like Us: Music and Meaning Among Springsteen Fans} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 51- 57 and Kelly MacDonald, “Collective Identity & Community in Fandom: Dave Matthews Band Fan’s Sites of Authenticity,” Mid Atlantic Popular Culture Association & American Culture Association, Boston, Massachusetts, November 2009.
was open until two in the morning that day (the restaurant usually closes at eleven in the evening on Tuesdays).

On Tuesday, June 22, 2010, I had the opportunity to attend a Jimmy Buffett concert at the DTE Energy Music Center in Clarkston, Michigan (near Detroit). I had anticipated locating the DPHC prior to the concert, as I was told that the club would be gathering in a designated spot (one they meet at annually) before the concert to tailgate together. There were also many other clubs represented in the parking lot outside of the venue that day as well. The DPHC, however, had the special honor of hosting a meet and greet with the members of Buffett’s band, the Coral Reefers, a few hours before the show. They also used this opportunity to hand out membership applications to those seeking autographs from band members.

Tailgating on the day of the concert does not start when the venue’s parking lot opens. A handful of fans chose to start off their day by attending trop-rock concerts at the Cheeseburger in Paradise restaurant. Other fans, some DPHC members included, begin their day at the Park and Ride parking lot just off of the freeway exit to the venue where members reported meeting as early as ten in the morning.\(^{53}\) Once the parking lot for the venue was open, a majority of the people in the Park and Ride moved to the venue to tailgate with other concert attendees, though the Park-and-Ride was still full when I drove by at three in the afternoon on my way to the concert venue parking lot a bit up the road.

When I arrived at the venue the expansive lots surrounding the venue appeared to already be halfway full. I overheard a security guard explain to another worker that the venue had

\(^{53}\) I received a call from the Social Event Chair of the DPHC a week before the concert and she invited me out to the festivities of the concert. I asked her a bit about some to of the tailgating that would be taking place and asked where and when DPHC members would be meeting up. She stated that many members met up in this area before the general parking lot opened up. This was later confirmed in an event page on Facebook for the DPHC and several emails from the club highlighted the early parking lot arrival time. See Detroit Parrot Head Club Group on Facebook, http://www.facebook.com/groups/105815279456349/ (accessed June 20, 2010).
planned to open the gates of the venue at four in the afternoon, but because of the amount of traffic lined up at the entrance of the gates they had opened the venue at one in the afternoon instead. While waiting in line to enter the parking lot, I saw cars decorated in anticipation for the day’s events. Some contained written messages on their car such as “Jimmy Buffett or Bust,” “Margaritaville here we come,” or even “Buffett for President.” There were a few inflatable shark pool toys attached to the tops of cars as well as big shark fins in homage to Buffett’s famous song “Fins” and also a truck whose owners had built the front end of the grey truck look like a shark’s mouth.

The culture in the parking lot emulates Buffett’s easy going Margaritaville state of mind and constructed tropical lifestyle as Parrotheads enjoy the camaraderie of sharing the open space with thousands of other Parrotheads which they achieve by what can be seen as levels of performative practices that allow them to relax and enjoy the company of other like-minded fans. Parrotheads physically transform the parking lot with the items they bring with them, interact with one another, and display and use goods produced by Buffett’s official Margaritaville company. For many Parrotheads, tailgating before a Buffett show is the highlight event of the year as it is a chance for a large quantity of the Parrothead Nation to get together and party – and party they do. One of the first noticeable things in the parking lot are the decorations – on the cars, on the people, in parking spaces, and as far as the eye can see. The majority of these decorations – both big and small – are everywhere as the landscape quickly changes from a dusty field to a sea of bright colors, music, and tropical themed ensembles and scenery everywhere. Many fans work hard to bring a variety of props and decorations with them that help to physically transform the parking lot into a Parrothead version of the imagined tropical lifestyle that Buffett sings about. A handful of fans brought a few hundred pounds of sand to fill parking
lot spaces and create their own imagined section of beach; there were several boats used to lounge in; and a few volcanoes (some even spewing smoke) that fans brought to help set the scene and bring a small part of their constructed tropical-living escapism to life. There were also many “tiki bars” or tropical style bars that could be found throughout the parking lot. Some of these bars were created or decorated using Margaritaville merchandise. For example, a large Land Shark Lager themed surf board was used as the bar top for one particular bar. Many other bars were decorated with bamboo and thatch roofs or with grass skirts and leis, candle tiki torches, fake tropical birds, and signage for various Margaritaville products. Several bars had signs that read “It’s 5 O’Clock Somewhere” in honor of the song Buffett sang with country music star Alan Jackson, and in reference to the saying that it is not too early to start drinking so long as it is five o’clock somewhere else in the world. I saw two bars made from modified trailers so that when the backs were opened they revealed fully stocked bars in preparation for that day’s event as well as several large ice luges (which are used to pour alcohol from and into the mouths of the person standing at the bottom). There were also hundreds of pop-up canopies and beach chairs scattered throughout and in some places the canopies were so densely packed that they resembled small tent cities out in the parking lot, creating an intimate walkway through the festivities. These fans essentially built a temporarily materialized Parrothead Nation, one complete with an arsenal of supplies to celebrate the day. In transforming their space, they brought their Margaritaville state of mind to life. (Figure 1.)

Decorations were not the only thing Parrotheads enjoyed while tailgating. They also brought along entertainment in the form of live music and games. There were several live trop-rock performances, some of which were even held on small stages that had been brought to the parking lot, while others were staged within the confines of a single parking space, the band’s instruments and microphones powered by generators. Regardless of where the music was coming from, much of it helped to set the relaxed, carefree atmosphere outside the venue that day. Parrotheads also played games, whether it was limbo competitions, the popular beanbag-tossing game called Cornhole, and drinking games like beer pong and quarters (played on Parrothead themed tables). Similarly, there were several very popular stations set up by fans and Margaritaville, where Parrotheads could get free tropical themed temporary tattoos.
Parrotheads seem to share a spirit of camaraderie, often wandering the parking lot getting to know other fans and even sharing what they brought to the concert. I witnessed several people walking around with pitchers of margaritas and offering to top off the cups of other fans walking by. Based on the extent to which many fans went to decorate their spaces it seemed that there was an unspoken expectation that these areas would be shared and photographed by other fans passing through the parking lot. People gladly let others pose in front of their set-ups and there were even a handful of staged photo opportunities with life-sized cut outs of Buffett for fans to pose with, large blow-up sharks and parrots, and even comical, tropical themed photo set-ups with holes cut out for people to stick their heads through.\textsuperscript{55}

Food and drinks were also an important part of the celebration. There was everything from the standard tailgating staples such as hot dogs and hamburgers, to fancier food spreads with shrimp cocktails, cheese plates and dips, steaks, smokers, and even a huge vat of seafood paella. Buffett’s Margaritaville Foods products could also be seen being consumed by fans throughout (they also conveniently had a booth close to the venue’s entrance). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Buffett’s Margaritaville Foods empire has catered to Parrotheads’ wants and needs by selling various food items to be consumed before his shows. There were numerous bags of Buffett’s brand of chips, dips, and Margaritaville alcohol that were out on tables as I walked through the tailgating scene and sometimes it seemed like these were left out as perishable trophies of sorts for other fans to see. Margaritaville foods were not the only Jimmy Buffett products found either. There were official Margaritaville chairs, clothing and shoes, cornhole sets and numerous Margaritaville Frozen Concoction makers. This included both the

\textsuperscript{55} I saw one such photo opportunity where the picture of two parrots dressed in tropical shirts and wearing straw hats, drink in hands had the faces cut out so that Parrotheads could have their picture taken.
machines that ran purely on battery power and those that required being hooked up to the fan’s car or generator in order to run.

Margaritaville Foods, Margaritaville Cargo, and Radio Margaritaville had all set up just outside the entrance of the venue, next to the only official merchandise booth located just outside the gates, and nearby the only public restrooms in the parking lot. This entire tented section was one big advertisement for many of Buffett’s businesses. There was a display of Margaritaville goods with portable camp chairs and collapsible Margaritaville themed tables all set up in a way that suggested they were perfect for tailgating. Margaritaville Foods was giving away free samples of various food products, frozen virgin versions of Margaritaville alcoholic drinks (made in Margaritaville Frozen Concoction makers, of course), and Margaritaville tea, which was new at the time. Guests were also handed coupons for various products and magnets advertising Margaritaville Drink Mixers, which included recipes to make the perfect margarita. Radio Margaritaville played their music station and hosted games where fans could compete for Margaritaville Food themed t-shirts, which in essence transformed these fans into walking advertisements. Margaritaville Foods even had a golf cart that had been remodeled to resemble an old Woodie (a classic American car with wood siding and sometimes used to evoke a nostalgic reference to early surfing and beach culture), with various Margaritaville drinks in its windows and a giant plastic margarita-filled glass on top. This car drove around the parking lot and handed out samples of the company’s new tea drink.
Dressing in various tropical styled or themed outfits also seemed to be a way for many Parrotheads to connect with one another and also to display and perform their connectedness to Parrothead culture. (Figure 2.) Many fans dressed up for their day of tailgating. Their outfits varied from casual tropical or Hawaiian themed t-shirts, to officially released Margaritaville clothing and shoes, as well as some of Buffett’s other brands from his empire including Land Shark Lager boardshorts and ladies’ bikinis, Margaritaville shoes and sandals, Margaritaville Café shirts from numerous locations, or shirts that were related to specific Buffett albums. There were a handful of fans who wore intricate costume-style outfits and had dressed up to look like pirates, giant parrots, sharks, and “tropical ladies” who posed for photographs with other Parrotheads. Dozens upon dozens of men and women wearing bikini tops or coconut-bras, often paired with “Hula”-type raffia or grass skirts, and plastic leis stretched as far as the eye could see. I even witnessed one gentleman dressed in a coconut bra and grass skirt topped with a
Rastafarian colored hat which had faux dreadlocks attached to the hat. On the top of the hat was a fake stuffed roasted pig complete with an apple in its mouth. These “native”-themed outfits will be discussed further below. There were a dozen or so full-body costumes, with fans dressed as parrots, sharks, or even a bottle of beer. There were men dressed as pirates, and hats with shark fins on top (again in reference to Buffett’s song “Fins”). By dressing up these fans were clearly marking themselves as part of the Parrothead Nation and, while dressing in this way is obviously not required, it does help to distinguish these fans as actively exhibiting their Parrothead spirit to others.

What the casual observer takes away from this kind of Parrothead event is that, by and large, this is a group of fans that enjoy taking a break from the reality of their daily lives and constructing a bit of their own version of paradise in the parking lots before Buffett performs that evening. Pre-concert tailgating, while not an all out requirement for Parrotheads, is an important part of this fandom for many of who chose to participate in it. As one respondent put it, for him the “Parking lot is the core of the culture.” This is in large part because of the fact that the parking lots outside of a venue are turned into a momentary materialization of their Parrothead Nation on a larger scale than what they interact with in Parrothead clubs, for example. What is also interesting about this experience is that there are fans who attend these events just to tailgate and not to go to Buffett’s concert. Some Parrotheads will stay out in the parking lot and continue their partying with Buffett’s live show only slightly audible in the background.

Along these lines, when asked how important attending a Buffet concert is to their fandom, I received a variety of answers. Most fans believed that attending a concert was the pinnacle Parrothead event of the summer. “Concerts are the apex of Parrothead-ness. It’s a bunch of Parrotheads coming together for a full day and night having fun.”

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went on to clarify that “someone could be a Parrothead without attending concerts but they’re missing out. The live shows are really what the music, lifestyle, and title Parrothead are all about.” This was a sentiment echoed by several others who took my survey. About six respondents even went so far as to articulate that to be a “true fan” (a term that was not qualified further) one had to attend concerts, as they were part and parcel of Parrothead culture. As one respondent suggested, for him it was “very, very important [to attend the concert] – it’s a community- it has its own unwritten rules. You have to go to the concerts to be Parrotheads.”

Not everyone agreed with this sentiment, however. A small handful of respondents articulated that with the growing costs of concert tickets they were content to merely party with other Parrotheads before the show, something with which they seemed to be very content. One respondent explained it this way: “The concerts itself is [sic] getting a little expensive to attend. The people we meet and share our time with at the event are priceless. I have had probably more fun at the pre-concert events than actually going inside for a show.” Similarly, there were fans who expressed the importance of attending concerts as part of the fan culture but also understood why some Parrotheads could not attend the shows because of financial reasons. Ultimately though the overwhelming majority believed that concert attendance, when possible, was an important aspect of this fan culture as it helped them to feel as though they were celebrating their fandom together with others just like them. As a member of the DPHC wrote on the wall on the group’s Facebook page following the 2011 Detroit area concert:

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60 Ticket prices vary from venue to venue, but the average pavilion ticket costs about $157 per person. Depending on the venue, tickets to see Buffett in concert can sell for as high as $189 for pavilion or floor tickets, and lawn seats range from $40 - $60. These prices do not include service fees which can tack up to $20+ onto the total ticket cost per ticket.
Sometimes I wonder why I do this every year and then after a week of partying, tailgating and ending up in the 8th row, looking around at 10,000 Parrotheads all standing and singing every word I am so glad I did. Pholks, it’s all about the friends and faces. Of all of Jimmy’s accomplishments… his greatest is bringing us together. I would not have so many friends and share so much if we didn’t all become Parrot Heads. Our paths most likely would not have crossed. Thank you my friends.\textsuperscript{61}

\textit{No Tailgating? No Thank You!}

Not all concert venues are conducive to tailgating; some spaces allow for more freedom to tailgate than others. For example, concert venues at outdoor amphitheaters are usually more readily accepting of tailgating activities whereas indoor venues or venues without a central parking lot tend to severely limit tailgating activities. What is interesting in any of these scenarios is the fan response to the opportunity for tailgating being taken away. Below are two examples of such instances and their subsequent fan reactions.

Tailgating was prohibited at the Jimmy Buffett concerts held at Fenway Park in Boston in 2004. This was done in part because the venue lacked a central location where Parrotheads can tailgate near the stadium, but more so because local area businesses feared that, by allowing Parrotheads to tailgate, fans would be partying all over town before the concert. Essentially the businesses “[did not] want thousands of fans rolling into their neighborhood in recreational vehicles and opening up their own bars on local streets and parking lots.”\textsuperscript{62} Business owners believed that Parrotheads, in the act of tailgating, had the potential to tie up the streets and take business away from areas surrounding Fenway Park, and it was this aspect of unpredictability that caused the most fear. (Though one wonders why these businesses do not have the same

\textsuperscript{61} DPHC member, Detroit Parrot Head Club Facebook Group, posted July 22, 2011.
concerns when it comes to Red Sox fans, this might be because baseball fans do not tailgate in
the same way.) Boston Mayor Thomas Menino, who is a self-described Parrothead and who
understood how seriously Parroheads take their tailgating, proposed that a special area for what
he called a “Parrothead Village” be set aside so that the fans could still tailgate and not interfere
with local businesses, but even that proposition was shot down.63 When the Boston licensing
board finally approved the two Jimmy Buffett concerts, they indicated that the prohibition of
tailgating would be strictly enforced and that fans would not be permitted to tailgate near the
stadium or in surrounding areas. They even went so far as to require that “tailgating prohibited”
be printed on the concert tickets. Bars in the vicinity of the baseball field took advantage of the
tailgating ban by hosting Parrothead parties before the show. However, fans complained that
they were charged twenty dollars to just get in the door of some of these establishments, and
some complained that the bars were not what the pre-concert tailgating ritual was about.64 One
fan commented on the ruling by noting “I’m disappointed with the venue. Tailgating is the
foundation of the Parrothead brethren... You see people, you meet people. (Buffett’s) all about
that. You don’t get the same feeling [at Fenway Park].”65 Reporter Jessica Heslam interviewed
scalpers and fans outside of the venue as they tried to sell their concert tickets – it seemed that
many concert-goers decided to forgo the tailgate-free event. Several of the fans Helsam
interviewed before the show felt that the tickets would have been snatched up in minutes had the
concert been held at a nearby outdoor amphitheatre instead of at Fenway (in large part because
the other venue allowed tailgating).66 Though it is unclear just how many fans decided not to

63 Ibid.
64 Jules Crittenden, “Parrot Heads Think Ballpark’s Close to Paradise,” The Boston Herald, September 11, 2004,
News; p004.
attend the concert because of the tailgating ban, there were fans that still chose to attend the concert, but those interviewed about the concert-going experience at Fenway said it did not feel the same without the tailgating.67

Similarly, when tailgating was prohibited at the Jiffy Lube Live Pavilion (JLL) in Bristow, Virginia in 2011, many Parrotheads were outraged. In February 2011, the venue quietly changed its tailgating policy to prohibit the pre-concert activity, a change which went unmentioned when fans purchased tickets for that year’s concert season. It was not until the official start of the concert season in mid-May that fans were made aware of the change. JLL claimed that the ban on tailgating was made in an effort to “ensure a safe environment” for fans who attend concerts at the venue, which had seen several drunk driving related fatalities in the past few years.68 To help enforce this policy, the venue’s parking lots were scheduled to open to the public only one hour before expected show times, which concerned many patrons about the possibility of an overwhelming amount of traffic trying to get to the concert on time.

Soon after the change in policy at JLL was announced, a Facebook group page called “Boycott Jiffy Lube Live Tailgating Policy” quickly developed that included fans of all kinds who were frustrated with the new regulations.69 As the name of the group suggests, the page encouraged all concertgoers at JLL to boycott the venue’s concession stands as many believed that the new policy was actually fostered in part as a way to fuel concession revenue.70 By late
August of 2011 the group had 9,600 members and, though it had regular daily postings, it saw its most continuous posting activity on the day of the Buffett concert where many fans took to the page to discuss their discontent with the ban still being in place and Parrotheads were worried about how the ban would affect their concert-going experience. In years past, JLL had been a great place for Parrotheads to tailgate and catch their favorite musician, and Buffett fans in this group mentioned traveling as far as six or seven hours to enjoy the tailgating at the venue. These fans also mentioned that because of the new ban they were going to sell their Buffett tickets for this particular concert and would forgo it entirely until the policy was changed. People in the group started to try and resell their tickets in high numbers. One Parrothead wrote, “It’s official, I have just gotten rid of my Buffett Tix for the JLL show. After 30+ Buffett shows, I simply cannot go see him without tailgating. For me, tailgating is 85% of the experience.” Other posters echoed this sentiment and voiced their disappointment over the effect the tailgating ban would have on their family time. One wrote:

We’ve raised our kids to be Parrot Heads and now that they are all finally over 21 we bought the whole family (6 of us) Jimmy Buffett tickets. We’ve looked forward to this for years. Now I can’t tailgate with my kids and enjoy a few margaritas on the back of my truck/tiki bar? We are all very disappointed. I’m thinking about putting my 6 tickets up for sale.

Others went a step further, suggesting that fans should just give away their tickets and look for another venue to attend the next year, rather than JLL:

Without the tailgating we are giving up half the joy and comradeship of being a parrot head and/or a once a year Jimmy Buffet concert fan/attendee at this venue. I will give my tickets away for free (6) if the no tailgating policy holds up. I hope Jimmy will seek out
another venue for 2012. And I agree with those who advocate “don’t spend a dime while there if you must go.”

Many thought that this new policy would be rather ineffective in reducing drunk driving because the venue was still selling alcohol at concession stands (at ten to thirteen dollars a beer) and if the venue was truly concerned about drunk drivers they would stop the sale of alcohol altogether. 71

When the area was threatened by Hurricane Irene, which was scheduled to hit Virginia around the time of the Buffett concert in late August of 2011, the event was rescheduled for the following week. Live Nation, the company which owns JLL, allowed concertgoers to get a refund on their tickets. This gave fans wanting to get rid of their tickets due to the tailgating ban an easier time getting their money back. In an interview with USA Today on the day of the rescheduled concert, Buffett suggested that approximately 10,000 people (of a 25,000 person sold out show) asked for refunds, but he suggested that it was due to the hurricane rather than the tailgating policy – a fact that may be true to some degree, but most fans on the Facebook group believed that this was largely due to the ban instead of the weather. 72

During the concert Buffett did make a few very subtle jabs at the concert venue, though overall many of the Parrotheads on the Boycott Jiffy Lube Live Tailgating Policy group believed that the usually rambunctious Buffett let the venue off too easily. When interviewed about the issue, Buffett acknowledged that he understood why his fans would be upset, although he may not have wanted to ruffle too many feathers, at least in part because Live Nation represents him as an artist. 73 During the playing of Buffett’s song “Changes in Latitudes, Changes in Attitudes,” a large screen typically displays a video montage of tailgating from the tour, and

72 Ibid.
73 Sisario, “Weak Ticket Sales.”
includes footage from before that day’s concert. However, this time the montage began with a man dressed in a tropical shirt and coconut bra, holding an empty beer cup. The clip then cut to footage of police cars outside of the venue, with the accompanying text “void where prohibited by law” and finished with the same man crying into his cup. Buffett also made a joke about there only being 300 people in the audience that evening. Beyond these gestures, Buffett never directly addressed the issue that concerned so many fans, and consequently many in the Facebook group posted, sometimes in real time, that the show sounded rather lackluster.

On the day of the concert there were hundreds of posts from Parrotheads on the group page that expressed their disappointment with the venue and with Buffett for not directly addressing the issue or doing more to help out. There were also many posts from fans who shared how they were tailgating at home and listening to the concert on Radio Margaritaville instead of attending the show. Moreover, USA Today and fans who attended the show reported that alcohol was sold well into the third encore and some heavily intoxicated people were witnessed leaving the venue and stumbling out to their cars, thus negating the venue’s main justification for the ban on tailgating in the first place.74

While neither of these two examples is the first time that the banning of tailgating has occurred, and while each measure was taken under different circumstances, what we ultimately take away from fans responses is that they believe that tailgating is an integral part of the Buffett concert-going experience. For some in Boston, seeing Buffett, even without the tailgating experience, was worth it because it was an opportunity to see him play in Fenway Park, an historic ballpark in the United States. In the example of JLL, fans were accustomed to tailgating at that venue year after year. The previous year when Buffett played, the venue had not one but two sold out nights and allowed for pre-concert tailgating at the time. Regardless of the venues

74 Oldenburg, “Hurricane, tailgate ban subdue Jimmy Buffett's final summer show.”
in both examples, there were numbers of fans for whom this practice is so important that they were willing to forgo the concert altogether rather than miss out on tailgating.75

Tailgating: Problematizing Margaritaville’s Mythical Tropicalization of the Other

The relaxed tropical escapism lifestyle at the heart of Parrotheads’ fandom can also be seen as reinscribing inherently problematic and false representations of the tropics. Buffett and his fans may not always think about how they are investing in highly mythical and overly simplified constructions of the places that they use as inspiration. These tropicalizations materialize in Parrothead fan culture in many different facets whether that is in the clothing and costumes fans wear to themed parties and events, during the pre-concert tailgating rituals in which they participate, through their actions while traveling abroad, or even in online Parrothead spaces which incorporate tropical themes.

Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman posit that the concept of tropicalization serves as a way to discuss the hegemonic constructions many Anglo-Americans have of the tropics (or the broadly defined/imagined areas of the Caribbean, Mexico, and Latin America). The term tropicalization simultaneously borrows from and extends Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism. Said posits Orientalism as a type of controlled attempt to marginalize, or Other, the people, places, and cultures of the Orient and which functions as a product of the Western imagination. By acknowledging such tropicalizations, scholars are working to make visible the dominant western gaze and First World perspectives that have developed falsely framed ideas about Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino/a identities, people, and cultures.

75 In early January 2012 it was announced that JLL would be lifting its ban on tailgating. The decision came after the concert venue researched the policies of thirty other concert venues and arenas across the United States. The general manager of the venue was quoted as saying, “With the new policy and guidelines, we want nothing more than to work with our fans to create a safe and friendly “pre-concert” environment.” See Chris Richards, “Jiffy Lube Live lifts tailgating ban,” The Washington Post, January 4, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/click-track/post/jiffy-lube-live-lifts-tailgating-ban/2012/01/04/glQAcGji9aP_blog.html (accessed January 4, 2012).
Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman suggest that these false frameworks have essentially “reified the political, economic, and cultural hegemony of the ‘neighbor of the north,’” whether intentionally done so or not. Similarly, Juan Leon echoes the sentiments of Aparicio and Chavez-Silverman, and contends that this western gaze upon the tropics has, in many ways, been purposefully developed as something which represents “an unsettling version of modernity’s antithesis.” He argues, that once set in opposition to the West, the tropics are then “feminized, racialized, and paganized” and portrayed as that which is simple, primitive, and Othered in contrast to Western ideas of civility. When developed in this way these imagined tropics can be positioned as “places of recreation rather than work, feeling rather than intellectual, spontaneity rather than planning, indulgence rather then self-restraint, fecundity rather than sterility, community rather than alienation.” The larger issue at stake, Leon suggests, is that these tropicalized traits are often conflated as being real representations of the tropics. In this respect, they have many similarities in terms of how Parrotheads are not only reconstructing these false framings but also to what end they use the tropics as a way to articulate their laidback lifestyle music fandom – especially in the way it has been constructed to serve as an escape to work and responsibility.

As Leon posits in his own work regarding balseros in Miami, “What becomes of the primitive tropics when they are not only fantasized in the West but literally ‘Made in the USA’?” This question is useful in this work as it moves us to ask how Buffett, through his marketing of all things Margaritaville, is making the places he alludes to, and the tropical themed products he sells, into something that is literally consumable by his fans. The Margaritaville state of mind,

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78 Ibid, 214.
79 Ibid
Buffett explains, much like many of the songs found in his repertoire, evokes a mythical tropics or a tropicalization of the “combination of the romance of the ocean, the romance of history, and my impressions of a few places I’d been” one which is “all blended together like tequila, salt and limes.” In other words, Buffett readily conflates the places he has traveled to as an amalgam and highly constructed and false notion of “the tropics” where people do not work. When making the tropics out to be places and people who are substitutable and interchangeable, the implication is that the people, histories, and cultures are less significant and worthy of recognition on an individual level; instead they are all blended together like indistinguishable parts like the ingredients mixed up together in a margarita. In turn, some aspects of Parrothead fandom that are built upon the consumption of Buffett’s empire, through the expression of their “Caribbean souls,” as Ingersoll suggested earlier, can be seen as evoking this same artificial construction as they are also guilty of recreating these hegemonic and disingenuous representations of both places and people as exotic Others largely because that is the basis of their leisure fandom lifestyle. Much of this chapter has focused on the many recreational activities that Parrotheads participate in together as fans and how these activities serve as a reward for the hard work they perform during the week. It is in these activities where we see signs of these constructed framings of the tropics, especially as Parrotheads conflate the escapism of “paradise” with fun and is set in opposition to work and responsibilities. Further, there were several fans in my survey who suggested that Margaritaville for them was actually a lifestyle they chose to invest in because of its tropical easy living ethos, an ethos which was often set in opposition to the stress filled daily rat race of work and family life. The tropics, then, are

81 Ingersoll, 258.
constructed as a place of carefree living and the West becomes a place where serious work happens.

Tropicalization can also be seen in the outfits and costumes Parrotheads sometimes wear. In these moments of leisure some fans are actively playing “native” through their dress. As discussed above, at the pre-concert tailgating event at DTE Energy Music Center in 2010, I saw many people dressed in grass skirts, leis, and coconut bras. Parrotheads are choosing to dress up in this way during moments of celebration and festivities, which only further cast tropical paradise they are trying to momentarily escape to as being in opposition to work and responsibility. Judith Bennett discusses the grass skirt as one of the most sought after trophies by Western invaders in the South Pacific during World War II. She suggests that the skirts, which fed into the Hollywood’s image of the submissive “hula” girl, were used as souvenirs upon soldiers’ return home and became symbolic of conquest and similarly reflects a female-exotic’s submission to White male control.

Thus the grass skirt becomes representative of a consumable exoticness that allows the wearer to “dress up” and play “native.” While this may seem like harmless and playful fun to those who dress up in this way during tailgating, these costumes ultimately make light of the culture and customs of the people and places from which they have been borrowed. Further, the male Parrotheads who chose to wear grass skirts paired up with coconut bras while tailgating are not only co-opting this symbol of conquest into their fan activities, but they are also clearly creating a feminized construct of the Other by pairing the skirt with a coconut bra. In one particularly egregious example of this, I witnessed two men walking around with a plastic female form typically used to display bikinis in shop windows

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82 Furthermore, these items, with the exception of the coconut bra, are items that tend to be found in the South Pacific region as opposed to the Caribbean. Once again we see the tropicalization conflating artifacts from two disparate regions as being constructed as interchangeable.

attached to their backs. The female forms were dressed in grass skirts, with faces rudimentarily
drawn on each form with markers – giving the faces very childlike expressions. The form’s
breasts were exposed and had a clear and distinct shape of female breast. The men walked
through the parking lot and posed for pictures with other fans by turning their backs to the
photographer and displaying the female “native” strapped to them. More often than not, because
the form’s breasts were left exposed, those posing for the photo, both men and women alike,
would fondle the fake “native” woman. While this was a particularly extreme example of not
only feminizing the marked “native” female form but moreso objectifying it, this also
demonstrates a fantasized construction by these fans of a tropical Other, one supposedly readily
available to be taken advantage of without a second thought. Regardless of the intent,
Parrotheads who dress up to “play native” during Parrothead activities can be understood as
constructing the tropics, and the people from this geographic region, in a way that not only
refuses to take these people and cultures seriously, but is also demeaning and degrading.

Parrotheads sometimes travel vicariously to tropical locales through the songs that
Buffett writes; for them Margaritaville is only a state of mind, while others may be driven to visit
and experience places like those described in his songs as tourists. Whether through a state of
mind or in actual travels Buffett’s fans can still be considered to be consuming the exoticness
that Buffett sets forth. Celia T. Bardwell-Jones writes about some of the precautions Parrotheads
should consider when thinking of traveling abroad and suggests that “authentic Parrotheads”
should actually be opposed to the role of the tourist if they are to be true to what she calls
“Buffett’s sense of adventure.”

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84 Celia T. Bardwell-Jones, “Meeting a Salty Piece of Land,” in Jimmy Buffett and Philosophy, eds. Erin McKenna
and Scott L. Pratt (Illinois, Open Court Publishing, 2009), 80. Bardwell-Jones does little to explain what she means
by or how she defines an “authentic Parrothead.” This somewhat illusive construct can be inferred as Bardwell-

tourists in their encounters with culturally different others.” 85 Instead Parrotheads should seek
out encounters while traveling abroad that “should be seen as ethical contexts which require
reflection.” 86 While it is likely that there are fans who take into consideration their actions and
interactions with different cultures and people when traveling abroad it is also possible that there
are fans who are not as self-reflexive of their actions. Buffett’s website for his Margaritaville
restaurants in the Caribbean, for example, promises these places are “where the fun never
ends.” 87 But it also likely brings his fans into contact with mass-market style tourism that
Bardwell-Jones suggests most likely “does not lead to genuine encounters with,” or really,
exceptionally limited encounters with what she calls, “the strange, unfamiliar toured culture.” 88
The problem with disingenuous encounters is that it sets up the toured cultures as consumable
exotic and Othered objects, wherein the tourist becomes the colonizer and the toured cultures and
people the colonized. 89 The toured cultures, then, according to Bardwell-Jones become
“fossilized in time and space, and whose contact with tourists only serves to mystify the
background enough for the tourist to have a good time.” 90 To avoid the more overtly
problematic aspects of this, Bardwell-Jones argues that the tropical state of mind needs to be
understood as a meaningful exchange between two cultures rather than as a means of escape by
those traveling to tropical locales. 91

With the first Parrothead club officially formed some twenty-two years ago, this adult fan
group is growing up and growing older alongside their Head Parrothead, Jimmy Buffett.

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85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
88 Bardwell-Jones, 83.
89 Ibid.
91 Ibid, 87-89.
Conceived as fan based social clubs which seek out communal gatherings, Parrothead clubs see themselves as being different than merely a fan club for those who enjoy Jimmy Buffett’s music. This chapter has outlined the history of Parrothead clubs as well as briefly looked into some of the ways that this fan community materializes on a larger scale for this fan group as they gather together in the parking lots outside of concert venues to celebrate and revel in their laid-back escapism and adult music fandom before attending Buffett’s concerts. In their gatherings both large and small we can see Parrotheads engaging with and continuing to develop the Margaritaville state of mind and ethos co-cultivated with Buffett. Parrotheads perceive themselves as an inclusive group, but it seems that the costs and sometimes even the “stuff” involved in being a Parrothead from the costumes and clothing, the club dues, concert tickets, money spent on attending Parrothead club parties, etc. suggest that the actual cost of being a Parrothead can add up quickly. Thus since many of their fan activities require them to have a disposable income in order to participate and this seriously limits who can take part in many aspects of their fandom.

By analyzing some of the foundational tropical escapism tenets inherent in Parrothead fandom we can see how these constructs are woven throughout the activities and practices of their fan group. Moreover, these false constructions, or tropicalizations, can have serious implications and at the very least need to be problematized and taken into consideration as another possible place of exclusion as these tropicalizations should not always be treated as lightly as they appear to be. It seems as though the inherent problems are overlooked or justified when presented in the context of fun and relaxation but it does not make the seriousness of these false constructions any less important.
The focus of the next chapter will be on the charitable nature of Parrothead fandom. Once again we will see how the Margaritaville state of mind is integrated into this fan group’s two-fold mission of “partying with a purpose.” Parrothead clubs have dedicated themselves to this anthem in a way that allows them to seek out fun and carefree activities while also raising money as well as physically volunteering for numerous social, cultural, and environmental causes in their local areas – all in an effort to leave something positive behind as a collective fan group.
CHAPTER III. PARROTHEADS, PHILANTHROPY, AND FAN LABOR

In 2005, the Governor of Alabama, Bob Riley, recognized the efforts of Parrot Heads in Paradise as well as seven different Parrothead clubs in his state for the numerous charitable organizations they were involved in, suggesting that they contributed to making a “positive difference” in the country and their local communities.¹ Riley honored their hard work by declaring March 12, 2005 “Parrot Head Day” in the state of Alabama. As I mentioned previously in the Introduction, in June 2006, when I realized that I was volunteering with the Parrot Head Club of Eastern Massachusetts (PHCOEM) at the Special Olympics Massachusetts in Worcester, I was struck by the adult music fan group dressed in tropical themed shirts who spent their day working incredibly hard together as Parrotheads at the event that day. What I did not know was that this was not only an annual volunteering event for this group, but that PHCOEM also participated in raising funds for the organization throughout the year. This Parrothead club has contributed so much to the Special Olympics of Massachusetts over the years that they have received a handful of awards from the organization, including being inducted into the Special Olympics Hall of Fame of Massachusetts in 2002.² John Mihelich and John Papineau suggest “Parrothead clubs provide an important organizational framework for the ‘community’ of Parrotheads as they connect with each other to cultivate Margaritaville and engage in the extended community through their organized charitable endeavors.”³ As discussed in Chapter Two, Parrothead clubs are not strictly Buffett fan clubs per say, but rather they function, as Mihelich and Papineau contend, as community oriented organizations that are equally focused on being trop-rock music loving social clubs and raising money for both local

¹ “Phlockings,” Coconut Telegraph 21, no. 2 (Spring 2005).
² Parrot Head Club of Eastern Massachusetts, Our Charities!, http://phcoem.com/?page_id=29 (accessed June 1, 2009).
charitable and environmental issues. The central ideal that is the foundation of many of the Parrothead clubs is to “Party with a Purpose.” This slogan embraces a two-fold goal within each club by combining a love of partying with a desire to give back to the community. Emulating some of the charitable work that Buffett himself has done and continues to do, many Parrothead clubs spend time volunteering and raising money as Jimmy Buffett fans for local causes and charities. In some cases fans have chosen to become affiliated with their local Parrothead clubs, not only because of their common interest in music, but also because of the charity work in which their local clubs participate.⁴

The focus of this chapter is twofold. The heart of this chapter will focus on Parrotheads and their work in charitable giving and volunteering as fans of Buffett. While Jimmy Buffett is not the only musician who raises money for charity, and Parrotheads are certainly not the only group of fans who raise money for charity, what is interesting is how this group of music fans has taken up charity work as an integral part of their music fandom. The first section of this chapter will briefly look at some of the charity work Buffett himself has been active in over the years, as well as engage more directly with what some of the Parrothead clubs themselves are doing. The second half of this chapter seeks to investigate how Parrotheads enact, enhance, and develop their adult music fandom identities through various club activities wherein they participate in volunteerism and charitable giving, actively “Partying with a Purpose.” These practices can be understood as participatory fan labor practices. Fan labor is often considered in terms of what fans physically produce and is often related to, but not limited to, the creation of websites, message boards, various kinds of fan texts, videos, games, etc. Considering these

⁴ Leslie Hunt, “Around the Park: Parrotheads Come to the Rescue,” The Capital (Annapolis, MD), November 16, 2006, www.lexisnexis.com (accessed October 27, 2007). Hunt mentions this in her article, but I also found similar instances mentioned by Parrotheads who took my online survey. More on this will be discussed later in this paper.
aspects of fan labor, we can begin to recognize how this fan group is enacting their fandom through their engagement in charitable giving as a fan activity and practice.

Buffett’s Charitable Works

What is most interesting about many Parrothead’s commitment to “party with a purpose” is that although Buffett himself has never directly suggested to his fans that they participate in charity work or support environmental causes, it seems that this is something that they have picked up on from observing the musician they so admire. In an interview with Time magazine Buffett was asked a question about being involved in helping his fans “do more good in the world,” to which he responded: “I think if I lead by example, that’s the best thing.”\(^5\) Many of the larger charitable organizations he supports or is affiliated with are mentioned in his Coconut Telegraph newsletters. Almost every Buffett newsletter between 2004 and 2011 has highlighted some kind of charitable organization or social cause. These usually include organizations which Buffett directly supports and subsequently encourages his fans to also contribute to independent of their own club’s charity work. Fans are offered information for direct donations or they can support the cause through the purchase of a product where a portion of the proceeds is donated to the charity. Oftentimes, even if the issue does not highlight a charity that Buffett is supporting, it instead focuses on a Parrothead club and details the charity work that specific group has been actively performing. This volunteering and charitable giving aspect is ever-present in the newsletter throughout the year.

Buffett is involved in innumerable charitable endeavors, including charities supporting wounded United States veterans, donating disaster supplies, providing financial scholarships for women to attend college, expanding money for environmental research, and collecting private

donations to environmental and social organizations in the United States and internationally, to
name just a few.\textsuperscript{6} Two charitable organizations he originally co-founded and continues to
support today are the Save the Manatee Club and Sing for Change. Similarly, Buffett has a
bracelet for sale through his Margaritaville stores that supports donations to a variety of causes.
These three latter charitable activities will be discussed briefly below.

One of the earliest charities Buffett became directly involved with and still actively
supports is the Save the Manatee Club (STMC). This preservation organization was established
in 1981 by then Florida Governor and U.S. Senator Bob Graham and Jimmy Buffett. STMC
began as a way to raise public awareness about the endangered manatee population in Florida,
which was often injured or harassed by people in the area. By bringing the issue to the public,
STMC believed they could encourage the public to “participate in conservation efforts to save
endangered manatees from extinction.”\textsuperscript{7} The organization’s mission was simple – to help to
protect manatees and their habitats in Florida for future generations.\textsuperscript{8} In 1989, encouraged in
part by the STMC, Florida House and Senate created the “Save the Manatee Trust Fund,” which
authorized the printing and distribution of Save the Manatee novelty vehicle license plates. The
money raised from the plates went to further manatee research and protection.\textsuperscript{9} Buffett is still
active in this organization and lends his name to help raise awareness to this cause.

Another charitable program that Buffett helped to establish along with his Margaritaville
store partner Sunshine Smith is the Sing for Change Charitable foundation (SFC). This
organization began in 1995 with the Domingo College summer concert tour, when Buffett

\textsuperscript{6} Coconut Telegraph 21, no 5 (Christmas 2005); Coconut Telegraph 22, no. 2 (Fall 2006); Coconut Telegraph 24, no. 1 (Winter 2008); and Coconut Telegraph 24, no. 2 (Spring 2008), www.margaritaville.com (accessed August 2, 2008).


\textsuperscript{8} Ibid.

donated the entire proceeds from the tour to establish the foundation. The organization offers competitive grants to local charities that are concerned with “the health, education, and protection of children and their families, as well as programs that promote environmental awareness and teach people methods of conservation, protection and the responsible use of natural resources” in the cities where Buffett tours.\textsuperscript{10} The foundation also supports “disenfranchised groups,” consisting of people “marginalized by society because of their low levels of skill, education or income; people with AIDS, disabilities, and homeless people.”\textsuperscript{11} Lastly, the group assists internationally as well. In 2005, SFC donated $100,000 to International Partners in Mission, for its tsunami relief work in Nagercoli, India.\textsuperscript{12} This foundation continues to receive $1 from each concert ticket sold during Buffett’s concert tours, and the donation is proudly printed on each concert ticket sold. During its sixteen-year run, the organization has donated over seven million dollars in grants.\textsuperscript{13}

Buffett’s “Fins Up Charity” bracelets were first released by Margaritaville in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which hit the Gulf Coast in 2005. Modeled after similar yellow silicone gel bracelets popular at the time, all of the proceeds raised from the Fins up For Charity bracelets in 2005, over $100,000, was donated to the American Red Cross in an effort to help meet the needs of the people devastated by the hurricane. The bracelets were initially sold for $2 each from Buffett’s online Margaritaville Store. They were advertised as a contribution that allowed for Parrotheads to not only help make a difference, but also to “show their Parrothead


\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{12} Coconut Telegraph 24, no. 1 and no. 2 (2008), www.margaritaville.com (accessed August 2, 2008).

\textsuperscript{13} Sing For Change, www.singforchange.org (accessed August 2, 2008).
What is interesting about these bracelets is that, even though they seem like such a simple idea, they have continued to be sold by Margaritaville with the charity changing from time to time to help promote a different cause – a facet already thought of at the time of their initial inception. When the bracelets were first released, the Margaritaville website stated: “We see the ‘Fins Up For Charity’ program as a long term solution, and depending on the needs at the time, we may donate to a different charity of a variety of charities. They raised $38,000 for Key West charities in 2006.” The bracelets were then moved to be sold in individual Margaritaville restaurant stores, both onsite and online, and each store designates a local charity for which the funds raised will be donated.

These are just a select few of the many charitable organizations with which Buffett has worked and contributed to over the years. He has also helped to support and participate in several benefit concerts, such as Surviving the Storm, a benefit concert in 2004 which donated its proceeds of $3.4 million to help victims of Hurricane Katrina. More recently, in July 2010 Buffett donated money to help in the clean-up effort, as well as hosting and performing alongside several other musicians in a free concert, Jimmy Buffett & Friends: Live From the Gulf Coast, along Orange Beach in Gulf Shores, Alabama. The concert aired on the Country Music Television channel and was put on in an effort to “demonstrate support for the people, businesses, and culture of the Gulf Coast” and also to encourage tourists to visit the area.

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16 “Margaritaville FINS UP Bracelet,” www.margaritavillestore.com, December 1, 2012. Undeniably, what is good for the community is also good for business in a way. These bracelets were developed in a time of crisis, when efforts of all kinds were being raised to get help and money down to the areas affected by Hurricane Katrina. By selling the bracelets through the store (though one could also ask, where else would he sell them) Buffett may also undoubtedly benefit from other purchases made while visitors were visiting the site. While I do not think this was a goal of developing the bracelets, I do believe it could have been a benefit. Similarly,
devastated by the oil spill disaster. Buffett’s efforts were recognized by the state of Florida House of Representatives when the legislators designated April 16, 2011 “Jimmy Buffett Day” in honor and appreciation of Jimmy’s charitable efforts in support of the environment and the people of the area. Buffett’s contributions to charitable and environmental organizations over the years have likely strongly encouraged Parrotheads both to contribute to the causes he supports as well as to encourage them to go out and help out themselves.

Parrotheads’ Partying with a Purpose

The real beauty of the clubs is that they seem to attract exactly the right kind of people - people who, through their attraction to Jimmy Buffett's music also have a number of other interests in common, most importantly the desire to give something back to the community in which they live. – Parrot Heads in Paradise

As discussed in Chapter Two, when Parrothead club founder Scott Nickerson initially had the idea to start a club he conceived it as an organization that was a social group which also focused on charitable endeavors as a key component of the group’s activities. Nickerson explains his rationale as such, “After all, Jimmy had set the example with Save the Manatees Club, Friends of Florida, etc., so it seemed a good bet that this concept would appeal to most Parrot Heads.” Nickerson was then asked by Margaritaville to help develop an umbrella organization Parrot Heads in Paradise (PHiP). The aim of this organization would be to help other clubs across the US to also become more formally organized. Charity work and volunteering for environmental and social causes would continue to be an important aspect in the

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19 “April 16, 2011 to be ‘Jimmy Buffett Day in Florida.”


clubs, and moreover would become a requirement for Parrothead clubs to maintain good standing with PHiP. Today, PHiP is a humanitarian group that works with the national network of Parrothead clubs, and as such, they share a common statement of purpose:

Parrot Heads in Paradise, Inc. was created to promote friendships and organize social activities for people with similar interests including enjoyment of the tropical spirit of Jimmy Buffett's music.

In addition, PHiP, Inc. is a non-profit corporation and encourages its member clubs to provide a variety of volunteer efforts in the local, regional and national community for social and environmental causes.

In the process of making new friends and having fun, we believe in leaving something positive behind. Our clubs are open to anyone with the tropical spirit and desire to contribute to the betterment of their communities. 22

Partying with a purpose and working together as a group to leave something positive behind is very much at the heart of what PHiP and its member clubs strive to do. In the 2012 annual “State of the Phlock” report, which reviews and shares the collective work of affiliated Parrothead clubs throughout the year, stated that in 2011 club members had volunteered over 194,000 hours of service for both local and national charities and environmental groups, and collectively had raised over $4.1 million, an increase of 40% from the previous year. 23 In the last nine years, PHiP reports that Parrothead clubs have participated in 2.9 million volunteer hours and raised over $26.2 million. 24 As a way to honor the clubs whose charitable efforts went above and beyond, in 1996 Margaritaville and PHiP developed an award to be given out annually.

23 Personal email correspondence with PHiP Director of Membership Bob Heffelfinger, March 6, 2012.
to an individual club in recognition of that member club’s contributions to social and environmental causes. They suggest that the Golden Coconut is “emblematic and in recognition of the outstanding Charitable and Environmental efforts of ALL Parrot Head Clubs.” The award is based on essays submitted by individual clubs detailing their participation in charitable giving and volunteer work throughout the year. The entries are judged by a panel of previous Golden Coconut recipients.

PHiP has its own philanthropic aspect and hosts many service projects, along with individual clubs, during the organization’s national conference Meeting of the Minds (MOTM) in Key West, Florida. In 2011, Parrotheads attending the national conference donated goods or raised money for many different types of causes. Some of the events Parrotheads participated were: donating blood at a blood drive set up at the event (where they collected 175 pints of blood from attending Parrotheads); collecting school supplies and toys for local school children to donate to the Salvation Army; raising money for Wesley House Family Services, a local shelter that helps children and families; and entering the Zonta Club of Key West 5K run/walk, which helps to raise money for local uninsured women. Similarly, in 2011 the organization paired up with Visa to develop the PHiP Visa Platinum Rewards Credit Card, which automatically donates a portion of every dollar spent by the cards users to charities affiliated with PHiP. An email sent out to Parrotheads promoting the credit card stated that, along with the benefits of using the Visa card itself, members would also have “the satisfaction of showing your support of Parrot

26 Ibid.
Heads in Paradise, Inc.’s mission every time you use your card,” and, further, reminded them that “the more of us who participate, the bigger the impact we can make.”

Local Giving and Parrothead Clubs

It’s great to get together and have fun and dance and drink Margaritas but if we are privileged enough to be able to do so then we also have an obligation to think of others and do something to help others too.

Parrothead clubs integrate charity into their local organizations in a variety of different ways. While each officially recognized club is required to incorporate charity work as part of their two-fold party with a purpose mission, there are no hard and fast requirements that dictate how each club should go about doing so. To get some insight into how different clubs accomplish this, this section begins by focusing on how the Detroit Parrot Head Club (DPHC) incorporates charitable endeavors into many, if not all, of the activities that they participate in, whether this entails volunteering as Parrotheads or is integrated into the parties they host.

In the spring of 2011, I had the opportunity to interview Dave Downs, the Charity Chairperson for the Detroit Parrot Head Club, a club I interacted with from time to time while conducting my research for this project. Downs explained that in the last few years his club had been without a designated chairperson for this aspect of their club, and he and the then-President felt that they needed to work a bit harder to bring the volunteering and charitable giving aspect back as a more central focus of the club. He said that, in the past, the club would decide on what local area charities to donate club funds to each month based on member suggestions. Essentially they would donate $100, here and $100 there, with up to twelve different charities being donated to each year. They believed that while the donations were always appreciated, the

club would have the chance to make a bigger impact if the members decided instead to donate $500 quarterly to different charities or environmental causes. When the idea for quarterly donations was broached at a club meeting in March 2011, the other members in attendance agreed with Downs, and the members all voted in support of making the Club’s quarterly donations to local area charities found in Southeast Michigan. When a new charity is recommended, Downs spends time researching the organization to make sure it meets with the aims and requirements of charitable giving for the club, and he also ensures that the charities will truly benefit from the club’s donation.

This is not the only way that Parrothead Clubs like the DPHC raise and donate money to local charities. The club also believes strongly in what Downs called the “human power of donation,” meaning that its members are not only interested in donating money, but also in ensuring that their time and physical labor goes towards helping local organizations. The DPHC’s involvement with the Adopt-A-Highway program is one example of using physical Parrothead member power to volunteer. The club has been cleaning their designated stretch of highway for the last nineteen years.31 Three times a year they get together and transform themselves into “Orange Breasted Parrots” (thanks in part to the orange safety vests they wear) and spend several hours cleaning up their two-mile stretch of highway in Sterling, Michigan.32 This is all done in an effort to “leave the world a little better than (they) found it.”33 Along the same lines, in 2011, the club volunteered to help clean out flower beds in the nearby city of Royal Oak, Michigan, and participated in several fundraising walks which helped raise money for Alzheimer's and childhood leukemia foundations.

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31 Personal Correspondence with the co-coordinator of the DPHC Highway Clean-Up Committee. March 11, 2012.
33 Ibid.
Another example of the club’s human power of donation was their work with Forgotten Harvest, a group which was also selected to receive one of their quarterly donations for that year. Forgotten Harvest collects surplus food from grocery stores, restaurants, dairies, farmers, and wholesale food distributors in the Detroit area. In the fall of 2011, the club participated in two different human-powered events where they went out to local area fields and helped to bring in crops one day, while another day members gathered at a local sorting plant where they helped to sort and box up the donated food which was then delivered to local area food banks. Wigs4Kids is another organization that the club chose for a quarterly donation in 2011. This charity provides wigs for children in Michigan who have lost their hair due to illness. Charity Chairperson Downs donated his ponytail to the cause, in addition to the club’s donation.34

Further, the DPHC raises money at events in less formal ways. As part of their monthly Happy Hour meet-ups, club members venture out to the designated bar to imbibe, hang out with other Parrotheads, and listen to Trop Rock music. As a part of these more casual events, members are encouraged to donate their loose change, with the proceeds going to specified charities, or to even bring along canned goods, which are taken to local area shelters.

The DPHC works hard to incorporate some aspect of charitable giving in almost all of the larger events and parties that they host for their members and which other Parrothead clubs are invited to attend. At their “One Particular Beach Party” in March 2011 members spent the day at a hotel lounging by the indoor pool in the middle of the winter. While the day was focused on relaxing, listening to trop-rock music, and enjoying the company of other Parrotheads, they also participated in a silent auction in which members bid on gift baskets that had been donated by members and local area businesses; in doing so, they raised $1200 for Selfridge Family Relief.

Fun, which aids military service men and women and their families in the Detroit area. Similarly at their holiday party in 2011, attendees were encouraged to bring an unwrapped present or gift card to go to children and families at the Children’s Leukemia Foundation.35

The activities of the DPHC are just an example of one group’s charitable activities throughout the year. Clubs affiliated with PHiP across the country participate in charitable giving and volunteering as part of their party with a purpose mission. Other clubs, like the Atlanta Parrot Head Club (APHC), also organize larger “phlockings,” a name used for regional and national Parrothead gatherings. From 1998 to 2011 this club sponsored an annual Parrothead Cruise. The APHC organized week-long boat cruises in the Caribbean and varied in location from year to year. The cruise incorporated Trop Rock entertainment brought in by the club, as well as various tropical-themed games and onboard activities for the participating Parrotheads. This was all done as a way to have fun with other like-minded Parrotheads, while also raising money for charitable organizations throughout the trip. In 2008, for the tenth annual Phlocking, for example, they had 458 Parrotheads from 36 different states and 3 different countries participate in the event. This specific trip raised over $56,905 from participation in onboard silent auctions, raffles, and other activities, as well as donations from the cruise agents and cruise line with proceeds going to breast cancer research.36 For the first few years of the event, the APHC board donated the money raised to the charity March of Dimes, and from 2002 onward they funded a number of both local and national breast cancer charities. The Parrothead Cruise raised over $320,000 for charity over the fourteen years that they were active.37

37 Unfortunately, because of a change in policy with the cruise they had been using in previous years, the 2012 Parrothead Cruise was cancelled. Personal correspondence with Brent Jones, head of Parrothead Cruise and Atlanta
Parrotheads and Fan Labor

As we have seen above, charitable giving and volunteerism is a large part of what organized Parrotheads are devoting their fan activities to. It seems important to transition here to a discussion of how to understand some of the labor that this group of fans participate in collectively as fans. As previously mentioned in the Introduction of this dissertation, there has been a shift in scholarship on fan labor that seeks to move beyond the framework that merely celebrates or chastises fans/user-producers. I have highlighted several scholars in this section who have set forth slightly different theoretical frameworks for how to go about this new framework for thinking about fan productivity. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of charity work as a type of Parrothead fan labor.

Banks and Humphreys suggest that the unpaid labor of the player-creators who develop video games “wields its own form of power – very different to that wielded by paid labour in industrial style production.”38 Their study followed the development and production of an online game, arguing that the fans/user-creators who helped in the development of the game Trainz were engaged in a type of co-creation labor relationship with the company Auran who owned the game and, further, that the fans were often well aware of and were content with the fact that they were laboring to produce a commercial product for the company. Banks and Humphrey suggest this was a co-production relationship, in which fan activities (wherein they helped to develop the game) were being shaped by business (the timing schedules and demands made by Auran who they were working with to create a final product). The ultimate outcome was “a process in which economic outcomes sit alongside significant social and cultural outcomes.”39

Parrot Head Club member, March 5, 2012. Also see: Parrothead Cruise, www.parrotheadcruise.com (accessed March 1, 2012).

38 Banks and Humphreys, 402.

39 Ibid, 405.
Hector Postigo contends that the debate regarding “free labor as both exploitation and enjoyable of freely given” depends a lot on how those doing the labor see themselves. In his discussion of America On Line (AOL) volunteers, he found that they were initially willing and excited to participate in co-production of helping to run and maintain chat rooms and message boards for the company. They did not see their participation through volunteering necessarily as work. Postigo argues that understanding the volunteer’s experience as a form of “passionate labor” might be a way to begin to understand their motivations. For the most part, the volunteers believed their work was helping to develop and foster community in these online spaces, and that their positions as moderators created a way to help make these spaces better for other users. When AOL changed its policies regarding volunteering, they were no longer granted access in the same way, and Postigo suggests that for some who had helped out before, with positive evaluations, “the idea of volunteerism and its context [now] became alienating… the confluence of passionate labor with the other considerations (money, creativity, community), became incongruent and the co-productive relationship collapsed.”

R.M. Milner proposes “New Organization” theory as a way to gain insight into the more “non-traditional labor” that fans of the texts he was researching were producing and consuming. New Organization theory posits that the “speed of communication is increased, connectivity is vastly expanded, the desire for innovation is enhanced, organizations are forced to be more entrepreneurial and less hierarchical, and work is done by self-disciplined specialists working across traditional departmental lines in various fragmented networks.” He attempts to

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41 Ibid, 466.
43 Milner, 495.
refashion this theory slightly to suggest that if the workers in this model are instead understood to be knowledge workers – whose skill set of creativity, “intelligence and understand” – rather than employees who are compensated financially for their work, the subtle shift from knowledge worker to fan laborer is an easy one. In his research on gamers active in the *Fallout 3* online forum, he argues that the gamers regarded their labor as contributions to the game’s development, making them “ideal members of the New Organization. They will often actively labor for the games they love,” and further, to them, the “success of the text was the paramount goal.” In other words, they were willing to work at helping to improve and further develop the video game without compensation because they loved the game.

Finally, Baym and Burnett maintain that part of the success of the Swedish independent music scene, at both the international and domestic level, is a result of the music fans who have helped to promote it, both online and offline. They note that if fan activities are to be regarded as exploitation, “one must assume that the rewards that fans attain are less valuable than those they deserve, and that these fans’ perceptions of their practices are evidence that they have been seduced by the power dynamic that exploits them.” They continue, “We are loathe to dismiss their claims of affective pleasure and the desire they feel to spread what brings them joy as evidence of exploitation.” Baym and Burnett contend that much of the work that these fans are doing, both online and off, evokes similar ways of doing things from “earlier phases of musical history, phases before there was an industry” and that, in participating in the ways that they do, they are “spreading the pleasures they have enjoyed;” ultimately, Baym and Burnett argue, the

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44 Ibid, 495.
46 Baym and Burnett, 2.
fans’ feelings about their activities/work and more specifically their feelings about how their work might subsequently be used should really be up to them. In working within this paradigm one that seeks to move beyond viewing fan labor as something that is merely exploitative, and if, like Baym and Burnett, we recognize that fans’ affective pleasure is derived from the work that they do as Parrotheads, we can begin to recognize how this fan group is enacting their fandom through their engagement in charitable giving as a pleasurable fan activity and practice that forms a driving force of their fandom. While much of the discussion above concerns fan labor in the context of Web 2.0 or, in other words, in online context, this is not the only place where we can see Parrothead fan labor activities taking place. Moving the discussion of fan labor into offline contexts, we can begin to understand Parrotheads and their volunteer work as a type of fan labor, but one at the heart of their goal to “party with a purpose.” Thus, engaging with Parrothead fandom activities in terms of fan labor practices, we open up another possibility for how fan labor functions. While this type “partying with a purpose” charity work and volunteering does not physically produce things like websites, or reinterpret and manipulate texts like fan labor might entail in other fan cultures, the work that Parrotheads are doing is considered a type of fan labor because they are volunteering their time and giving their money as a collective fan group. These particular fans, through organization in their local Parrothead groups and in some cases online, are coming together to raise money for charitable organizations as Parrotheads, and also can be perceived as emulating the musician that serves as the basis of their fandom.

As previously discussed in Chapter Two, in an online survey I developed called “Parrotheads and Volunteering/Charitable Giving,” I asked participants about their involvement

48 Ibid. They do identify three trends as ways in which fans go about negotiating this, but ultimately the sentiment that it is their labor to feel one way or another about stands.
in local Parrothead clubs and participation in volunteerism and charitable giving. This survey was conducted online and posted to message boards in several large Parrothead fan websites. The survey was then reposted to the website’s Twitter and Facebook accounts by a moderator at Buffett World. This survey was originally posted on two major Jimmy Buffett online message boards, Buffett News and Buffett World, and on the Facebook group page of the Detroit Parrot Head Club. It was then reposted on both the Buffett World Twitter account and Facebook page by a moderator at that site. I cannot generalize about Parrotheads based on this sample, however, it does help us to understand some of the views felt by Parrotheads who navigate these particular internet spaces regarding the charitable aspects of their fan labor. Of the eighty-six people who took this survey, about half participated in volunteering or charitable giving in one way or another. What I thought was interesting was that, when asked why they thought charitable giving and volunteering was an important part of being a Parrothead, several respondents suggested that they were modeling habits they saw in Buffett. One person wrote, “I think it’s because we see Jimmy doing it as well. He’s very environmentally conscious and we respect him not only as a musician but also as a person. Seeing someone you respect give so much time, effort, and money makes you want to help out in any way you can as well.”

Similarly, another respondent suggested that volunteering was an important part of being a

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50 Further, I think it is important to note that thirty-seven of my eighty-six participants did not mention an affiliation with a local Parrothead club. Six participants specifically stated that this was because there was no club in their area, while eight participants stated that they were highly active in Parrothead communities online. Ten people, not included in this number, did not answer the question altogether.

51 It is important to note that about a quarter of my eighty-six participants did not mention an affiliation with a local Parrothead club. Six participants specifically mentioned that this was because there was none in their area, while eight participants expressed no interest in connecting themselves with a club.

Parrothead because, “It’s just another way to follow (Buffett). He’s a great role model.”

Taking a similar approach, a respondent suggested that Buffett recognized just how “blessed he was that he could do what he does (be a musician, perform and entertain people for a living) and how many people his music could reach. He knew that it wouldn’t take much effort to make a difference in this world and he wanted his fans to do and feel the same.” This person continues by positing that, for Parrotheads, volunteering and charitable giving is about “being part of the community of the world.” They continue, “we all need to work together to make it a better place and it makes us better people for it.”

As mentioned above, Buffett has never explicitly stated that he wished for his fans to go out and participate in charity work as part of their fandom or in response to the work he himself does. The more formally organized charitable giving requirement that is expected of clubs in order to maintain good standing with PHiP was originally added by Parrothead club and PHiP founder Scott Nickerson because he was inspired by the charity work that Buffett was doing.

What is most compelling about Parrotheads and their party with a purpose ethos is that it is an integral fan labor activity and it also helps to set a framework in some ways for understanding what drives this adult music fan group. In a study on collective volunteerism, Susan Eckstein suggested that the groups in her study were drawn to volunteering because it appealed to activities they valued, in part through the organization of events that allowed for sociability, “donors thereby had fun doing good.”

This same appeal has drawn in many Parrotheads as well. As discussed in Chapter Two, Parrothead culture in the most general sense

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55 Susan Eckstein, “Community and Gift-Giving: Collectivist Roots of Volunteerism,” American Sociological Review 66, no. 6, (December 2001), 841. Eckstein conducted an in-depth study of a predominantly Italian American working class community in the greater Boston area, and while the subjects of her study are different in many ways from my subjects, her larger contentions regarding how groups in this community produced collective volunteerism are useful in this research.
is comprised predominantly of adults, and this fan group seeks to embrace the tropical state of mind that is set forth by Buffett and then further cultivated by the fans themselves. By partying with a purpose, Parrotheads present an interesting dichotomy. At first glance, investing in this tropical escapism lifestyle suggests that Parrotheads might actually want to distance themselves from the responsibilities of social responsibility and charitable giving because, if they are relaxing, partying, and taking it easy, then participating in volunteerism might be placed on the backburner. Partying with a purpose, however, speaks to both an escape, but also, in the same breath, reinstates an awareness that this fan group feels compelled to help out their own communities in which they live and work. There appears to be a definite tension between responsibility and play at work here, as partying with a purpose suggests to an escape though fun and play but, in the same breath, emphasizes an awareness that this fan group feels compelled to help out its members’ communities in which they live and work, and both activities require money. Many clubs work incredibly hard to be community minded and work to “do good” in their cities and local areas and also at the national and international level. We must also remember that, for many groups, their charitable giving is not restricted to larger social Phlockings where members get together to “party.” While charitable giving is integrated into a majority of their club-related social activities, many clubs also participate as a group in volunteer activities outside the context of partying with a purpose when they, for example, volunteer at a food shelter. Whether working through physical volunteer work alongside fellow Parrotheads, or partying alongside them while raising money, or some balance of the two, these fan labor activities, which are freely given and acted upon, help to solidify group bonds within this adult music fan group by strengthening community bonds within the fan group itself, as well as by connecting them to social environmental causes in the areas where they live. The fact that in
many cases Parrotheads have worked to combine partying with their charity work only enhances
the enjoyment they get from helping others. In this capacity they can still come together and
evoke their Margaritaville state of mind ethos while also working together with other like-
minded fans.

Given the suggestions of the scholars above, could the Parrotheads’ charitable giving be
perceived as exploitative in some way? I would argue that Parrotheads by and large do not
perceive it in this way. If anything, many of their fan activities are centered around the tropical
ethos that they have built along with Buffett, and when Parrotheads go out and volunteer together
as Parrotheads, they are representing themselves as connected to Jimmy Buffett. This is
qualitatively different than if they went out on their own as socially minded individuals.
Whenever their good deeds are reported by local newspapers, or television or radio news stations
carry stories about their endeavors, they invariably cite the Parrotheads as being associated with
Buffett. This could imply that Buffett in some small way gets credit for his fans’ good deeds as
well – even if it is only through his being a role model and setting an example through the
charity work he does himself. Does this mean that Buffett is directly benefiting from their good
works? Perhaps. It could be argued that Buffett benefits from the social and cultural capital that
is inherently derived from him being perceived as the impetus for Parrotheads’ good deeds.
Whether that is explicitly the case or not, if at the end of the day they can raise money for local
charities or environmental groups in need, and possibly have a little fun while doing it, that is
pretty much the motivation which drives their fan labor activities – and ultimately it is what
matters most to them.
CHAPTER IV. MEET(ING) THE PHLOCKERS: A CASE STUDY OF A JIMMY BUFFETT FAN SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE

As discussed previously, for many Parrotheads tailgating is an integral part of the concert-going experience. It is what begins a day of bonding with other like-minded fans and often how the day ends as they walk back to their cars and RVs after a rambunctious concert. The communal act of tailgating is the symbolic idea behind the Parrothead social networking website Meet the Phlockers (MTP). 1 MTP touts itself as “A ‘Virtual Tailgate’ for fans of Jimmy Buffett!” where its members can “Meet thousands of others that are ‘Living Life in a Tropical State of Mind’! Fins Up!!” 2 The tagline suggests that this online space is aimed at allowing fans to extend the relaxed and carnivalesque nature of tailgating found in the face-to-face experiences in the parking lot before Buffett concerts. Thus, MTP allows for the imagined community of Parrotheads to share a common space online. This chapter will investigate MTP as a social networking site aimed at Jimmy Buffett’s fans, looking specifically at various ways that the space is being used by the members who participate there. 3 By embracing Buffett’s Margaritaville state of mind in an online social network we can understand a lot about how Parrotheads are enacting and oftentimes performing their fandom, and similarly how they construct and reinforce their identity as Parrotheads on MTP, through both visual and textual cues they express there.

Defining and Understanding Social Network Sites

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3 A note on terminology: I use the term users and members interchangeably throughout this piece. Both should be understood as identifying the same group of people – those who use the Meet the Phlockers social networking website.
With the relative explosion of social network sites (SNS) in the last ten years or so, it is useful to have a working definition of what a SNS is in relation to other online entities. With this in mind, boyd and Ellison define online social networks as spaces which allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site. 4

They are careful to point out a more subtle but important distinction between “social networks” and “social networking sites.” They argue that many of the relationships which are present in online social network sites are based on previously existing relationships in people’s more extended offline social networks, for example mutual friends, work, or school, etc. 5 Larger social network sites of this kind that are quite popular at the moment include, but are not limited to, Facebook and Myspace, both of which are aimed at more general audiences. The differences found in who SNSs are aimed to and the goals of the SNSs can vary based on the anticipated audience.

As subtle as the difference between “social network” and “social networking” might seem, boyd and Ellison are quick to differentiate the two. They stress that the main difference is that social networking “emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers.” 6 Social networking then, is often associated with “Friending,” the act of adding other users on these

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6 d.m. boyd, & N.B. Ellison, “Social Networking Sites.”
sites. Moreover, this usually suggests that users do not actually know the people they are adding offline in their daily lives. We see this in the social networking site MTP. Friending between strangers online frequently comes about when people find that they have a shared common interest (such as a shared fandom, band, book, or movie, etc.), or sometimes even a mutual friend, and they decide to become linked together as “Friends” in that online space.

Whether geared as a social medium to connect with friends, or to make new ones, social networks and social networking sites tend to have several key aspects in common such as individual user profiles with walls for users to comment, Friends Lists, and private messaging. User profile pages can sometimes be customizable so as to reflect personal style and add an air of individual flair. Comment boxes or sections on a user’s profile page, sometimes called a “wall,” are also fairly common. This allows people, or even the user themselves, to leave messages or post links and random thoughts. Friends in SNS are oftentimes “bi-directional,” meaning that Friends must be confirmed by the user and are also oftentimes listed on that user’s profile page. The ability to see which Friends are online at any given time and to engage in a form of private messaging through a SNS is also fairly common. Other features, such as online photo albums, video sharing capacity, and even discussion boards and group pages can be found on many contemporary SNSs.

It is important to take a moment to further clarify some of the terminology used in this field. Most notable is the distinction between the meaning of the terms “friends” and “Friends.” Even if the difference is merely a subtle matter of capitalization, the use of “friends” usually

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7 Ibid.
8 Ibid. As is the case in the SNS Myspace, some SNS even allow users to organize their friends into hierarchies. Myspace does this through what was formally called “Top 8.” This function allowed users to pick their top eight friends and those users would shop up first on their Myspace Friends tab. See boyd, “Friends, Friendsters, and Myspace.”
implies that users know the person in an offline context in some capacity.⁹ We know that there are vast differences in the hierarchies of intimacy between the broad term “friends” (whether that be best friends, people in one’s intimate social circle, casual acquaintances, people from work, people met through other friends, people from high school, college, church, etc.). The most basic understanding, however, is that these “friends” are people users know in their offline community or social circles. “Friends,” with a capital F, suggests that users have made connections online with people they do not know in an offline context (or who they originally met online). As if it was not already complicated enough, however, Friends can also be used in a more general sense to indicate the people who make up a user’s online “Friend List.” These lists can be comprised of people a user considers to be an offline friend as well as an online Friend, and exclusively online Friends. Moreover, as will be discussed below, a user’s Friend List in SNS tends to be made up of one’s offline friends or people they know from an offline context, whereas in social networking sites, one’s Friend List usually includes Friends or online connections made with other people they have met only online.¹⁰ Sometimes Friending can even have a literal hierarchical aspect, as with Myspace and their “Top Friends” feature which allows users to qualify and categorize those they consider to be their more important f/Friends.¹¹

As some scholars have argued, SNS are inherently different than other online communities, which earlier research on Internet community formation tended to focus on.¹² In earlier traditional interaction online, communal bonds were primarily made between strangers (Friends) with like interests. Whereas work on SNSs like Facebook and Myspace demonstrates that there tends to be a formation of community online in these spaces which is more a

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⁹ d.m. boyd, & N.B. Ellison, “Social Networking Sites.” boyd, “Friends, Friendsters, and Myspace Top 8.”
¹⁰ d.m. boyd, & N.B. Ellison, “Social Networking Sites.”
¹¹ boyd, “Friends, Friendsters, and Myspace Top 8.”
replication of a user’s offline community rather than users merely forming new online Friendships. There are, however, social networking sites like MTP, for example, where we witness trends of Friending and community formation that are similar to some of earlier aspects of more traditional online communities. Online communities tend to see the connection of online friendships beginning when their users share a common space online. The friendships formed and shared through online fan communities, for example, allows for Friending outside of one’s face-to-face circle of friends. Nancy Baym acknowledges that many people who form Friendships online tend to also communicate and/or interact with one another in at least one other channel, whether that be eventually meeting face-to-face, at a concert, convention, etc. or they communicate via phone, text message, or even through the postal service. In this case, using boyd and Ellison’s model, users might be considered *Friends* at first because of their initial contact through online mediums, but eventually become *friends* both online and off.

Social networks and social networking sites, like the fandom driven MTP, can sometimes be composed of a blend of the two. They function as places where users are encouraged to find and connect with friends they know in offline spaces as well as establishing new connections through the Friending of online strangers with whom they share an appreciation for a particular band or other text. (This process on MTP will be discussed in greater detail below.) Since MTP serves as a combination of the two different styles of online networks that boyd and Ellison describe, the term social networking site will be used when talking about MTP specifically.

**Finding the Phlockers**

In researching the social networking site, Meet the Phlockers, this case study focused on a combination of visual and textual analysis to gain a greater understanding of how Parrotheads

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were using and enacting their fandom this online space. This work seeks to read MTP and its visual markers and cues in light of visual culture studies. Nicholas Mirzoeff suggests that visual culture, “is concerned with visual events in which information, meaning, or pleasure is sought by the consumer in an interface with visual technology.” He continues to suggest that visual technologies can be, “any form of apparatus designed either to be looked at or to enhance natural vision, from oil painting to television and the Internet.” Lisa Nakamura suggests that studies in visual culture can aid in the study of new media such as SNS “if it is prepared to discuss the Internet and shared spaces of online communication and identity formation.” By paying close attention to MTP’s overall aesthetic design in terms of the website’s construction, as well as how the members of MTP construct their Parrothead identities, I analyze visually how members constructed their own spaces to represent themselves as Parrotheads, and more specifically how they in turn perform being a Parrothead in this social networking site. To gain a greater understanding of how these profile pictures and spaces were constructed, I analyzed a random sample of some 400 profile pictures and pages of users on MTP. These profile pages were selected through a sorting feature on the site that allows users to look through member profiles by newest addition, alphabetical order by user name, or profiles chosen at random by the site. I choose to use the random feature to get a sample for this case study.

Before beginning to discuss the Meet the Phlockers website, I believe it is important to first discuss how I came to find this website. When I set out to do this project, I had anticipated studying the discussion board on the official Jimmy Buffett website. Gaining access to this

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16 Lisa Nakamura, Digitizing Race: Visual Cultures of the Internet, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 10. Nakamura tends to be concerned with digital racial formations and uses digital visual culture as a way to read how these constructions play out in various sites online.
17 What, if any, algorithm was used by MTP to determine the randomness of the user profiles shown is unclear.
discussion board – beyond the very limited access of a guest pass – required that I sign up and register with the website. Once that was completed the website indicated that it would email me a password, the last piece of information needed to access this part of the website. After four unsuccessful attempts and three emails to the administrator of the site over the course of two weeks, all which went unanswered, I still could not access this particular site. It seems reasonable to conclude that this lack of communication and access to the message boards would have to be exceptionally frustrating to Parrotheads who want to interact with other fans on Buffett’s official site. It seemed, as far as I could tell from my limited guest pass access, that there were previous members who were still able to access the discussion board and contribute to the dialogue there. When the actual site malfunctioned and stopped sending out passwords to new users is unclear; however, when Buffett’s website released a new website design in June of 2010, this problem seemed to be repaired, and I was eventually able to create my own account and access this message board. But if I was having problems the reasonable conclusion to make was that others were as well, and there is no way of knowing how long this problem persisted before I experienced these issues.

My research then led me to seek out websites and discussion boards of local Parrothead clubs. After searching through seven websites for Parrothead clubs in Ohio, as well as the Detroit Parrot Head Club in Michigan, I found that there was very minimal activity happening overall in the discussion boards of these different club’s websites. I learned that many of these clubs communicate with other members via email mailing lists that are sent out regularly by club administrators. These mailing lists are useful, but did not necessarily have the more immediate interactive message exchange. This could for a variety of reasons. It is possible that the members of the Detroit Parrot Head Club prefer to maintain their club member connections in

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18 The official Jimmy Buffett website is Margaritaville, [www.margaritaville.com](http://www.margaritaville.com).
face to face settings, or maybe they are not used to communicating in online discussion boards. Similarly they could prefer to conduct extended conversations more privately and directly via email. They could also be using other online mediums. Finally, in searching a Jimmy Buffett fan website called Buffettworld, which itself has its own discussion boards, I came across a post about the social networking site Meet the Phlockers. I was intrigued by the idea of a fandom specific social networking site, especially as other popular social network sites such as Facebook were becoming immensely popular.

Meet the Phlockers

Derived as a pun from the movie Meet the Fockers (2004), the social networking site Meet the Phlockers went live on March 1, 2008. The site was developed by Bill and Tracy, two self-described “die-hard Parrotheads” who were frustrated with their experiences in social network sites such as Myspace. Both Bill and Tracy were members of Myspace and believed they were “getting lost in the crowd” because Myspace was just too large and “not personal enough.” Further, they believed that there were too many users who they did not have enough in common with and they were overwhelmed by the endless advertising and spam that they experienced on Myspace. This led them to toy with the idea of creating their own social network specifically for Parrotheads, which could serve as a place where like-minded fans could come together and interact with other Parrotheads. Tracy explained that with MTP they sought

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19 Over the course of my research I saw a stronger online presence with more Parrotheads from the Detroit Parrot Head club play out on Facebook as the club established a page and more and more members began to join in and share information about upcoming events that way. The mailing list and monthly newsletters continued to be sent via email, however.


23 “Interview with DJ Jeff Allen.”

24 Ibid.

to develop a social networking site exclusively “for Parrotheads and ALL tropical-minded people.”

MTP was created for people interested in Jimmy Buffett and his music, meeting other Parrotheads, and they welcomed “trop-rock” bands to create profiles and post their music to share it with the members of the social networking site. Their goal was create “the largest virtual Phlock around.” MTP’s mission statement explained further the site aimed “to create the broadest and finest social community for people living and loving life in a tropical state of mind.” Moreover, they suggested because the social networking was developed to cater specifically to Parrotheads it has the possibility of being a lot more personal in that it focuses on a particular group of like-minded fans.

Meet the Phlockers was given a big publicity boost when the Head Parrothead, Jimmy Buffett, endorsed it. On March 18, 2008, after having been contacted by MTP’s founders, Buffett (or someone who works for Buffett) posted a blog entry on his official Myspace profile praising the social networking site. Buffett also made the Myspace page for MTP (used to help advertise the site) one of his “Top Friends.” Since the Top Friends feature is often used to indicate meaningful connections with other users listed, Buffett’s positioning of MTP in his Top Friends suggests to his roughly 154,000 Friends on Myspace he thinks this site is important and consequently might be of interest to them as well.

A MTP virtual badge, an image or picture that serves as a type of advertisement, was also added to the “About Jimmy Buffett” section on Buffett’s Myspace profile. Included above the virtual badge are a few lines from Buffett

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26 Buffett Blog, [www.meetthephlockers.com](http://www.meetthephlockers.com).
27 Trop-Rock bands are bands that musically have what we would call a tropical island feel to their music, because of the instrumentation, lyrical content, or style of singing. Buffett’s music is often described as being a kind of trop-rock. “Interview with DJ Jeff Allen.” A “Phlock” is what Parrotheads call a group of Parrotheads. It is a play on words of the word “flock,” the term used to describe a group of birds.
29 Buffett, [www.meetthephlockers.com](http://www.meetthephlockers.com).
encouraging his fans to check out MTP. It reads, “Calling all Parrotheads! Check out this site that's built exclusively for Parrotheads! How cool is that?!" Buffett’s support essentially gave MTP a Parrothead stamp of approval and moreover the legitimacy it needed to grow in terms of users – and grow rapidly it did. With this boost of support from Buffett, the site’s owners reported from week one to week three their member numbers grew from about 30 members to over 3000. When I began looking at the site in early July of 2009, about a year and a half after it first went live, the SNS had over 12,000 members. When I began to conclude this study in October 2010, there were roughly 13,100 members.

Buffett’s active support and approval of the fan developed social networking site can be understood as encouraging a form of free labor from his fans. As discussed in the previous chapter, fan labor is defined as the voluntary labor derived from various online activities produced and/or consumed by users in the digital economy online. By allowing any Parrothead to produce and create Parrothead related content independent of the control of Buffett’s business empire Margaritaville Enterprises LLC, Buffett benefits from the content produced. The developers of MTP as well as fans who create content with a Parrothead theme (such as designing a Parrothead themed MTP profile page, sharing images of themselves at Margaritaville restaurants, for example), directly help to perpetuate and recreate the Margaritaville state of mind by spreading the mythos espoused by Buffett (which is inherently tied to, and has developed out of, his brand and image). In reproducing aspects of the Margaritaville state of mind they are encouraging (even if abstractly) the consumption of goods

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33 “Interview with DJ Jeff Allen.”
35 When I rechecked this source in October of 2010 I found that the Myspace page for MTP no longer exists and as a result it is no longer listed in Buffett’s Top Friends. By April 2012, the site had only increased to 13,200 members.
and wares associated with Buffett and the lifestyle his image perpetuates. This can be done visually though sharing of images where Margaritaville products can be seen, or though their discussion of attending concerts or even traveling to some of Buffett’s restaurants, hotels, or casinos.

Even as MTP is an example of free labor specifically beneficial to Buffett, the social networking site can also be understood as a type of fan labor developed within the gift economy to be shared and developed further by the members who use the site. Bill and Tracy do not necessarily receive specific financial benefits from their development of the site directly. They used what funds they get from minimal advertising helps maintain the cost of running the space.37 They do, however, reap more subtle rewards gained through increased social capital, by being recognized and praised as the creators of this online Parrothead social networking site.38 Further their development of MTP functions as a shared “gift” used by all members of the social networking site as members of MTP engage with one another online and cultivate Buffett’s tropical beach bum ethos.39 They also encourage other members to “support the site financially and help offset our costs of hosting, maintaining and upgrading the site. Donations are always welcome and greatly appreciated!”40 It appears that at some point those who contributed were rewarded with personalized avatars which featuring their picture inside of a heart with a yellow background filling the rest of the space. The member’s user name was listed along the top of the avatar and a MTP logo in the bottom left hand side. Along the right hand side are the words,

37 “Interview with DJ Jeff Allen.” This was at least the case as of October 2010.
38 Henry Jenkins with Xiaochang Li, Ana Domb Krauskopf and Joshua Green, “If It Doesn’t Spread, It’s Dead (Part Three and Four): Thinking Through the Gift Economy,” http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p_2.html (accessed 03.27.2009).
40 Meet the Phlockers, “Support MTP” (accessed October 1, 2010).
“Official Supporter,” which pointed out to other members that this user had contributed financially to help maintain the site.

Parrots, Palm Trees, and People

The Margaritaville state of mind Buffett has developed throughout his business empire is also evident and has clearly been cultivated at Meet the Phlockers. MTP also evokes a tropical aesthetic in the overall visual layout of the website itself. The biggest and most obvious example of this can be found on the website’s main banner, which frames the top of the homepage, no matter where you click on the website. This banner clearly marks the social networking site as evoking the Margaritaville state of mind in its physical design and more directly through its use of the word tropical. The banner states, “Meet the Phlockers we’re living life in a tropical state of mind.”41 To the left of this phrase is a cartoon image of a palm tree which is often used as the site’s logo. To the right side of the phrase there is a photo collage of users of the site in various “tropical” themed outfits – including Hawaiian leis, tropical print shirts, and coconut bras. Further, the collage also explicitly connects to Buffett as several people in the photo can be seen giving the “Fins” sign. (This is done by placing an opened hand on top of ones head, imitating a shark fin.) The Fins sign is often performed at concerts by the both the audience and Buffett, when Buffett performing his song “Fins.”42 Just below the main banner is a section called Who’s Online. Here, profile pictures, or avatars, stream along the top of the page, allowing members to see who is online at any given time.43 This feature makes a member’s presence visible to other users who are online at the same time. The rest of the social networking site’s homepage is filled with photos posted by users in a main photo album, videos posted by users can be found in the center section of the homepage along with a box containing some of the most

43 An avatar is a smaller image of users profile pictures used to visually represent that user throughout the SNS.
popular Group pages on the site. Along the left side of the homepage is a user activity log
detailing all users’ recent activity on the site in a similar fashion as the News Feed on Facebook.
Lastly, another box contains a list indicating member’s birthdays for that day.

On MTP each member has a profile page where they can give as much or as little
information about themselves they wish to share. Members also have the option of making their
personal profile pages private, but many of the pages found on MTP are in fact public and
viewable by other registered users on MTP. Similar to Myspace’s profile layout customization
capabilities, MTP allows each member to design and personalize his/her own profile page, and
many members use their space as a way to exhibit visually personal expression and also
reinforce their Parrothead fandom. More often than not, members’ profile pages are designed
with a “tropical state of mind” theme consistent with the larger themes presented in the
homepage, as well as linking them to the larger the Margaritaville state of mind Parrotheads
often covet. Some of the more specific customizable features on the social network include, but
are not limited to, a personalized background layout – users can use the layouts provided by the
site or upload their own layouts: a user profile picture (which also serves as the user’s avatar
throughout the site); profile information; optional music player; photo albums; a list of their
Friends, the Groups that they belong to, and their recent activity on the site.

Members are required to answer two questions for their profile page: “Frozen or on the
Rocks?” and “With or Without Salt?” Both questions make reference to different styles of
serving a margarita, the alcoholic drink linked to Buffett’s most famous song, “Margaritaville.”
The margarita is often symbolic and implied drink of choice for Parrotheads (whether they drink
them or not, or whether they drink alcohol period). Along these lines, the consumption of

44 Profile pages are only viewable if you are logged into the site. If you are not a registered user you do not have
access to viewing profile pages whether they are set to public or private.
alcohol is sometimes used by members as an ‘in’ group performance marker much to the exclusion of those who choose not to consume alcohol for whatever reason. A basic example of members using alcohol as a form of in-group marker can be as they pose for pictures and haven alcoholic drink in their hands or sitting near them on a table. Similarly, alcohol is occasionally used in images or gifs that members post on one another’s profile walls.

Lastly, MTP members perform being a Parrothead both on their profiles pages and throughout the SNS, and mark themselves as being part of the group through the unique spelling of beginning with the letter “f.” Through this use of performed spelling Parrotheads change words that traditionally begin with the letter “f” and instead spell them with a “ph” – deriving from a playful spelling that ties back to their fan group name sometimes spelled Parrot Heads. Thus, words like friend, fins, and family suddenly become “phriend,” “phins,” and “phamily.” Spelling words that begin with the letter “f” with “ph” instead also helps to reinforce a known play with language but also reinforces a Parrothead coded language marker. It signals to other fans that the person who spells these words with “ph” is aware of the more subtle in-group qualifiers and is expressing their fandom through the subtle varied spellings in words that begin with the letter “f.” This and other markers above help to solidify connections between members and the rest of the “phlock” and moreover it creates a Parrothead-centered language code as a type of performance marker to others in their fandom group.

Profile pictures are also an interesting space in which users visually represent their connectedness to the tropical lifestyle espoused by the members of this website and Parrotheads in general. When setting up an account users are given a generic icon as their profile picture and avatar until they change it. This image is a bright green image of a parrot saying “New
Phlocker” underneath it. Moreover, this generic icon, until it is changed by the new member, signals to other members that this user is in fact new. Profile picture selection for this site also seems important because it reinforces a set of norms that can be seen throughout the social networking site. The most common profile picture type MTP members select are self-portraits. Further, these self-portraits are more often than not evoking some kind of a tropical aesthetic, whether it is from the clothing they are wearing in the image, extra items included or featured in the photo (whether a parrot, an alcoholic drink [a margarita or beer], leis, tropical themed clothing, a pirate hat, the photo was taken on a boat, etc.), or the background scenery seen in the photo. The profile pictures chosen by members serve as visual representations of themselves throughout the site, moreover they demonstrate and strongly reinforce a member’s understanding of the “tropical state of mind” espoused by Buffett because they play into and also reinforce visual codes inherent in Parrothead fandom. I noticed that the second most common photo was an image that evoked the tropics in some way but did not have a person featured in the photo itself (these could range from a pair of flip flops on the beach, a person’s boat, a flamingo, a photo of a shark fin, a beautiful sunset or palm trees, a beach hat or towel, etc.). Thus even if a member is not in their profile photo, in these instances they are using aspects of the Margaritaville state of mind to help to reinforce their connectedness to Parrothead fandom, and the Phlock on MTP. I did find some profile pictures of members without these tropical markers, but they were vastly outnumbered by profile pictures where Parrotheads were actively performing Parrothead in the photos they selected to represent themselves.

So what does all of this tell us about the members of MTP? We can see the users tend to present a tropical and Margaritaville state of mind through their self-expression on the social

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46 I also found that if members delete their profiles this avatar is used in the place of that user’s comments made before they deleted their account.
networking site both in the physical representations of themselves they provide in their profile picture, through the photos they upload on their personal page or to the photo albums on the main page, as well as in the way they customize their personal profile pages. By “playing the part,” so to speak, they are demonstrating to the other users on the site they are Buffett fans, and they can qualify as such through the tropicalizing of their spaces. In his study of Myspace, Hugo Liu focused on the items users listed in the interest section of their profile page. Liu noted how these items worked as a kind of “taste performance” to other users who viewed them.47 Similarly MTP’s members, as Parrotheads and users of the social networking MTP, are performing to their perceived fellow fan audiences, the other members and Friends who visit their profile page, that they understand to varying degrees how to perform the part of being a Parrothead. Whether other users actually visit their profile page or not, these members are constructing their pages in such a way so as to demonstrate they understand what their imagined audience might expect to see.48 Moreover, while the mission statement, main website banner, images, and language used on MTP help to establish a set of norms in the social networking website, there is no actual articulation of how one should act or interact in the space and yet these constructions replicate themselves time and time again. Baym suggests, “the Internet gives fans a platform on which to perform for one another, and their informal performances might please fans more than the official ones do.”49 Performing Parrothead, then, works as a way of demonstrating a subtle (or not so subtle) set of group norms to other members, all of which helps

47 Hugo Liu, “Social Network Profiles as Taste Performance.”
48 Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd analyzed how users, or “content producers” as they call them, on the social network site Twitter consciously developed specific ways of constructing their tweets that also take into account an “imagined audience” – or the Twitter audience that they perceived to be following their tweets. Alice E. Marwick and danah boyd, “I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience,” New Media Society. (July 7, 2010), http://www.tiara.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/marwick_boyd_twitter_nms.pdf (accessed October 1, 2010).
members feel connected to one another in terms of the larger imagined community of their Parrothead fandom. As discussed in Chapter Two, which focused on other Parrothead activities such as tailgating, members of MTP can also be seen as guilty of tropicalization, not only in their online spaces but by physically playing into this problematic tropicalization construct by using photos, and props in self-portraits that reinforce and recreate the false constructions of people, place, and customs as exotic and something consumable. In these instances it is hard to see clearly if the Parrotheads on MTP are in fact seeking to articulate a meaningful relationship with the cultures from which they are emulating and borrowing as they often occur in moments of play in their fandom. As objects of play, the amalgamated tropical constructions and the people and places inherent within such constructs are ultimately not taken seriously.  

Phlockers and Friending

Participation on MTP is more subtly encouraged, or at the very least tracked, through a point system on the social networking site. Each member’s profile page contains a MTP Points chart; this is the only space where a member’s MTP Points are visible. Members are rewarded with points for every group joined, member added as a friend, blog post, photo uploaded, or comment made. The more points earned, the higher the member’s “award level.” Each member’s total score is automatically updated by the site (if members erase any participation, like delete photos for example, points are deducted from their total point score).

When the MTP Points was first started, several months after MTP was developed, the site administrator at the time suggested there would be a points “leaderboard,” where members

50 As discussed in Chapter Two, it should be acknowledged that the overtly tropical objectification, espoused under the guise of the Margaritaville or tropical state of mind that is used by both Buffett and his fans is inherently problematic in several different ways. See Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman, “Introduction,” in Tropicalizations: Transcultural Representations of Latinidad, eds. Frances R. Aparicio and Susana Chavez-Silverman (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997) and Celia T. Bardwell-Jones, “Meeting a Salty Piece of Land,” in Jimmy Buffett and Philosophy, eds. Erin McKenna and Scott L. Pratt (Illinois, Open Court Publishing, 2009) 79-89.
would be rewarded with “promotions” for actively participating on the website and having a high point score. In the meantime, members would be rewarded with “love and respect.”

Users were told: “You can increase your points by doing things you normally do on www.meetthePhlockers.com.” Since the leaderboard never developed, what MTP Points do for each member, beyond marking them as an active participant in the site, is not exactly clear. It does make for an interesting twist to this particular social networking site. SNS research has indicated some users on sites such as Myspace, for example, make a habit of adding (or collecting) as many Friends as possible, regardless of any actual similar friends, musical tastes, or hobbies in common. This frantic Friending can sometimes result in social networking pseudo-celebrities where people become known and subsequently and amass Friends because of their online personalities. Tila Tequila, a model turned pseudo online celebrity, is known as the “Myspace Queen” for generating more than 1,000,000 Friends on the site. While the MTP Points posting discourages this practice, members are still essentially being rewarded with points for doing this same thing (albeit on a smaller scale). On MTP, in many ways, however, this is seen as cultivating friendships between Parrotheads rather than collecting Friends who may have no other connection other than using Myspace. In actuality, however, it seems most users on MTP do not pay much attention to the point system beyond occasionally noting a member’s current point total. In at least one Group page, members even teased each other that they could earn points by doing things offline, knowing full well this would not actually earn them any

51 I was never able to locate the “leaderboard” beyond this particular post. Meet the Phlockers, http://meetthePhlockers.ning.com/xn/detail/2011976:Note:3916908 (accessed October 1, 2010). The only detailed information given about the MTP point chart is visible when a user hovers over the system on any profile page.
52 See author for a copy of the information on the MTP point system.
53 I emailed the site’s administrator two different times trying to figure out the purpose of the point system, but never received an answer. I also tried to ask users on the site, but they themselves were not exactly sure. Moreover, members of the site do have the option of hiding their points.
54 boyd, “Friends, Friendsters, and MySpace Top 8.”
55 boyd, “Friends, Friendsters, and MySpace Top 8.”
points on MTP.\textsuperscript{56} At the most basic level, beyond marking active participation, the point system can be understood as a way to further develop and cultivate community on MTP by encouraging members to contribute to it.

While the MTP Points system might not be wholly responsible for the Friending culture on the site, the phenomenon of Friending does happen frequently. This could be in part, as boyd contends, because “Friending is a social act.” This does not necessarily mean, however, Friending and online Friends are necessarily bad things. They can help to bring people together and has the potential to lead to meaningful connections between fans. It can also be seen as a ritual on MTP which helps bring new members into the fold, or flock, if you will, by making new members feel welcomed and a part of the community when members not only add them as Friends, but then also share a welcoming message or gif on their Profile page. After all, she suggests, “Friendships help people to write community into being in social network sites,” and further, it is “through these imagined egocentric communities, [that] participants are able to express who they are and locate themselves culturally.”\textsuperscript{57} This may help to explain why both Friending and friending happen on MTP. Within the first three minutes of becoming a member on MTP, I was sent a Friend request by a member of the site. In my first six weeks on MTP, I increased my Friends to eighteen people without ever having had any sort of previous communication with these members before they added me as a Friend. What I also found interesting was, after adding me many of these members left a message on my wall welcoming me to the “phlock” or saying “thank you for the add.” Often these messages were accompanied

\textsuperscript{56} Meet the Phlockers, “Phlockers Over Phorty Singles,” http://meetthephlockers.ning.com/group/phlockersoverphortysingles?groupUrl=phlockersoverphortysingles&id=2011976%3AGroup%3A4525204&page=609#comments (accessed November 11, 2010).

\textsuperscript{57}boyd, “Friends, Friendsters, and MySpace Top 8.”
by an image, or .gif (a moving image) containing connections to some of the previously discussed tropical themes above.\(^{58}\)

The aim of MTP is to be a social networking site “exclusively for Parrotheads,” and a space where this fan group knows, at the very least, they have one thing in common with other members. At the most basic level, it seems that many MTP users were motivated to join because it was constructed as an online social outlet allowing them to connect with Parrotheads and also to continue to practice performing their Parrothead fandom in an online social networking space dedicated specifically to their fandom. It seems that on MTP there is an investment in Friending as a marker of group performance more often than necessarily developing sincere intimate friendships. This does not mean, however that the Friending cannot transition into sincere and intimate friendships, something I witnessed, for example, in the group “Phlockers over Phorty Singles” to be discussed in further detail below.

Discussion Boards, Chat Rooms, and Groups

When I initially stumbled across MTP, I began to see a strong and thriving online space that functioned both as a social networking site but also had discussion boards, chat features, and something MTP called Groups. It seemed even on MTP the more generic discussion boards did not seem to be used or at least not very frequently. The same seems to be the case for the website’s chat room. There often seemed to be a lot of “hello?” or “anyone on?” in the chat room for hours on end. This does not, however, take into consideration private chats, which may actually be what is taking place, as there seemed to be quite a few users logged into the chat, but none using the main chat room to communicate as a group. Aside from direct user-to-user communication via a member’s individual wall, this site is set up so Parrotheads can develop

\(^{58}\) As I was writing this paragraph one of my “phriends” sent me a message saying that I should add him if I had a Facebook account. Apparently this user collects “Phriends” and Friends on both social networks.
“Groups” based on many different interests. At the time of this research there are over 300 Groups with different topics.\textsuperscript{59} Quite a few Groups focus on residents of whole states or large regions such as “California Dreamin’,” “New York,” “Colorado Phlockers,” “Jersey Phlocker,” “Parrotheads of North Carolina” or “New England Parrotheads.” There are also Groups which focus on leisure activities or hobbies like “Photography Phlockers,” “Parrothead Geologist/Paleontologist,” “Turtle Lovers,” and “Parrot Head Tattoos,” etc. Similarly there are quite a few groups dedicated to Parrotheads who are also fans of specific sports teams (“Red Sox Nation Parrotheads” or “Phlockers for Lakers.”) Several Group pages even focus on organizing group Parrothead/MTP trips to travel to different locales. I also noticed Groups for Parrotheads married with kids, or members who have grandchildren; those single and dating (with varying age groups dividing into separate groups); as well as groups for members who are single with kids who are dating.\textsuperscript{60} Groups which focus on various professions were also visible including such jobs as “Active Duty Military Phlockers,” “Phlocking in Medical Professionals,” “Phlocking Parrothead Police,” “Stay at Home Mommy Parrotheads,” and I even came across a Group for currently unemployed MTP members called, “Phlockers who are ‘between opportunities.’” This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor does it cover all of the different categories of groups found on MTP, but it does give an overview of some of the major group themes found in the Groups section of the MTP site.

Regardless of their theme, the Groups section seems to be where the majority of member communication is happening on the site. Members can freely join these Groups and participate in layered discussions within. Most of the Groups require a user become a member of the Group to comment and participate beyond just reading the information written within. These Group

\textsuperscript{59} Meet the Phlockers, http://www.meetthephlockers.com/groups (accessed October 29, 2010).
\textsuperscript{60} Kids are often called “keets” short for parakeets, in Parrothead fandom.
pages are considered to be different from the general discussion board itself; however, on a
Group-by-Group basis they function much like a discussion board does.\(^{61}\) The Group page
allows a main discussion to happen but also for subsequent discussion board questions/forums to
be created within one Group, usually with subtopic themes related to the main group. This
allows for multiple discussions to occur under the larger main Group discussion and generally
speaking these discussions are in the same sprit as the main aim of the Group.

Some Groups are more active than others. A few of the larger Groups on MTP are “Fins
Up Singles,” “Phlockers over Phorty Singles,” “Photography Phlockers,” “The Tiki Bar,”
“Margaritaville” and “A Pirate Looks at Forty.” These particular Groups have anywhere from
200 to 700+ members, but this does not necessarily mean everyone is actively involved in the
conversations on these groups. There is actually quite a small group of members who are
consistently active in any one Group at any given time. The Group “A Pirate Looks at Forty”
boasts over 440 members and, like many other Groups I followed on MTP, its posts are not so
much in depth discussions as they generally consist of brief responses, or in colloquial terms,
“shout outs” of sorts. At least initially, members in this particular Group merely give an
anecdotal message about their age or a quirky sort of “happy birthday to me” kind of message –
almost all of the messages in this Group follow this format. Many Groups lack consistent
participation. A Group whose participation has been fairly consistent over the life of the site is
“Phlockers over Phorty Singles.” This Group has a small following of about ten to fifteen people
who regularly contribute to the conversation. It seems, moreso than other active Groups, there
are some strong familial type bonds here. Members continuously support one another, whether it
be wishing someone good luck on an interview, or trip, sending thoughts and well wishes if a
member falls sick, or posting photos of recent activities.

\(^{61}\) For example they function much like a group on Facebook does.
Groups also seem to be a great way for members to learn about bigger Parrothead get-togethers are held across the United States. For example, the annual get-together orchestrated by Parrot Heads in Paradise Inc. is the Meeting of the Minds, which is usually held in Key West, Florida.\textsuperscript{62} This Group page on MTP provides members with more information about the annual get-together as well as a space for users to orchestrate ride shares, and facilitate room accommodations. It also serves as a place for members to share highly sought after activity schedules of various events and activities for throughout the weekend. Outside of posting messages on individual member profile pages, at least in the heyday of this social networking site, the Groups section on MTP served as a way to facilitate a continued dialogue between Parrothead MTP members and to help to maintain a connectedness to the group as a whole outside of individual one on one interaction within the site. This connectedness in many ways helps to foster continuity between members in terms of maintaining their sense of community on the site.

Social Network Slowdown

As happens online, websites, message board, and social networks have ebbs and flows in usage. Occasionally usage slows down to a trickle only to pick back up again, but when enough users move away from a site, they can cease to exist and eventually disappear altogether.\textsuperscript{63} A decrease in a site’s usage can be the result of many things. Sometimes there is a newer or better website to visit and spend time on. I have also seen band specific websites slow down in usage when the band or musician is not touring only to pick up again once another tour is announced.

\textsuperscript{62} PhiP is an umbrella non-profit organization which works to register and ensure that local Parrothead chapters doing fundraising efforts in the name of Buffett and Parrotheads are legitimate. www.phip.com

\textsuperscript{63} As is the case with many websites, if the administrators or founders of the website no longer care to continue to pay to have the site hosted, the website will eventually be deleted.
Another example of a website slowing down can be a result of the space no longer being maintained as it once was. This latter example seems to be what is currently happening on MTP.

Beginning in October of 2009, I stopped receiving a weekly newsletter style email from the site, which updated users about recent member’s activities on the SNS. I took this with a grain of salt and assumed it was merely based on the time and energy involved in producing the newsletter weekly. It appears now, however, that this was actually more of a sign of what was to come on the space. In December of 2009 and January of 2010, I started to notice a change slowly taking place on MTP. It seemed apparent to me that even in this short amount of time the website had begun to have fewer and fewer members logged in at any given time throughout the day, and participation in some of the Groups began to slow down significantly. In January of 2010, I sent a request to the website administrator inquiring about some “webisodes” (similar to podcasts) that had played through a music player on the site’s main page. They had suddenly disappeared and I wanted a chance to listen to them again for this research. The other music players hosted by the social networking site had also disappeared, but not music players which were independently embedded and added to profile pages by users themselves. It took almost five months to receive a reply, but eventually I was contacted by one of the site’s co-developers. It is possible my question might have not seemed as important as daily usage help or questions from other members, which may be why it took so long to get back to me.

I communicated with one survey respondent who had tried repeatedly to get help from the site administrators regarding problems with their account, but they never hear anything in reply. Numerous unanswered requests for assistance can also be found in the discussion board “Phorum” titled “MTP Support and FAQ.” This includes several unanswered questions about the sudden disappearance of the music players. Based on the volume of unanswered questions, it
would seem that unless users’ requests were answered via personal email or by other members, their requests for help were by and large going unanswered by the site’s administrators.64

In a discussion forum post with the subject heading, “This site is busted,” one user wrote of their frustrations with the lack of maintenance of the social networking site. She stated, “this website no longer works, there are too many errors.” She continued jokingly, stating, “I think the owners got over-extended in Key West real estate lost their investments to foreclosure and can’t pay for the website maintenance.”65 It is funny that even here the tropical escapism ethos comes into play. Another member explained the diminishing quality of the SNS this way, “Admin doesn’t care, has lost interest, and won’t address problems with the site.” She went on to explain, “they don’t even bother to respond or check in any more. Eventually, if Ning doesn’t get paid, then MTP will be deleted.” (Ning refers to the company who hosts the social networking site.)66 As my observations on the site suggest, as well as was indicated in almost the members who I contacted directly, it seems members believed MTP was neither being actively updated and maintained, nor were problems being addressed by the administrators. It seems that as the push for labor required to maintain the site as its membership grew, administrators were unable to keep up with the demand and it ultimately lead to an overall slowdown of usage on the site as a whole. It appears this neglect left many members feeling like they really had no other choice but to “jump ship,” (yet another tropical image) as this same member suggested, and seek out other social networking sites with which to continue the friendships formed on MTP.67 I personally received private messages from members of my Friends list who sent messages to all

64 If in fact they were being replied to via email, this would have gone against what was previously established in terms of norms for answered these questions.
65 “This Site is busted,” MTP Phorum, www.meethephlockers.com (accessed October 1, 2010).
66 Anonymous female MTP user, personal correspondence, October 26, 2010.
67 This could be found in the frustrated messages left by members in the FAQ section as well in personal correspondences I witness with my own Friends on the site.
of their Friends alerting them that they were moving away from MTP and over onto Facebook. Many of these messages expressed an interest in maintaining Friendships over on the more popular social network site.

MTP is not totally dead yet, but the overall usage has slowed to the point it is often unusual to see more than one or two people on at any given time now. On rare occasion, there will be four or five users on at a time, but this does not happen very often anymore. From the activity log, it seems there is a small group of holdouts who, have gone on to other social network sites to connect with MTP friends but continue to use certain features on MTP. What began as a thriving fan social networking community whose goals were to establish a place for Parrotheads specifically to socialize with one another has slowly withered away as its maintainers have stopped investing as much time and energy into keeping the space up and running. The irony is many of these members have moved onto (or back to) SNSs like Myspace and Facebook, the very places from which the MTPs founders were trying to escape from. Its entirely possible to assume SNSs allow members to expand their social networks beyond just Parrotheads and to connect with friends, family, co-workers, old acquaintances, but they can also now include Friends they met on MTP, as well as Parrotheads they have met in other settings. It would seem, eventually, as my correspondence with a particularly frustrated member I corresponded with suggested above, unless there is some major work to help fix some of the errors and problems members have been seeking help for, and there is a resurgence of usage on the social networking site, this virtual tailgate will unfortunately come to an end sometime very soon.

While it is obvious Meet the Phlockers has changed drastically in usage from its initial launch in 2008, it still managed to captivate a large number of Parrotheads in the two and a half
years the site was most active. Ultimately, this case study allowed me to gain insight into how Parrotheads in a more general sense are using the Internet to connect with other Parrotheads, whether they are interacting with local Parrothead club members online or finding new friends in marked Parrothead spaces online, be they websites, message boards, or social networking sites like MTP. Additionally, as a social networking site specifically geared towards their fan base, members used the space as a way to collectively enact, play out, and invest in performing Parrothead fandom both visually and textually in the online space. On MTP fan-produced content added to and further developed the social networking site itself by their repeated performances of their fan culture throughout the site. In studying the social networking site Meet the Phlockers, we can begin to see how this group of fans is using the space to enact several aspects of their shared fandom similar to how we have also witnessed Parrotheads enacting their fandom offline. In both online and offline areas Parrotheads are investing in the Margaritaville state of mind and developing highly constructed tropical escapism rhetoric which they weave throughout their daily lives in both spaces. Parrothead practices of enacting or performing their fandom is beneficial to the cultivation of Margaritaville and the tropical state of mind many Parrotheads seek.
CONCLUSION: “SONGS YOU KNOW BY HEART”

When thinking of other bands with strong and heavily invested fan communities, the Grateful Dead, and their fans known as Deadheads, are often mentioned. The band came together in San Francisco in the heart of the Haight-Ashbury district and was the center of that area’s hippie counterculture scene in the 1960s. They toured for thirty years until the lead singer, Jerry Garcia, died unexpectedly in 1995. Early on, the Grateful Dead projected an anti-commercialism image, playing numerous free shows and often working in collaboration with a group called the Diggers to give away free food. The Dead were noted for their commitment and strong ties to their fan community and the result was frequently reported as having cultivated a magic sort of synergy between themselves and their fans.1 Deadheads toured across the country with the band, following them with an almost religious fervor. In the parking lots of concerts fans sold goods, such as artwork, tie-dyed T-shirts, jewelry, and food in order to earn enough money to travel to the next show. The Grateful Dead encouraged their fans to tape-record and trade their live performances so long as it was not done for profit (even when the quality inherent in their live performances was often hard for the band to capture on studio albums).2 In 1971, in their live album Skull and Roses, the Dead included an insert that called for fans to sign up for a mailing list that eventually grew to about 40,000 members. The band used the list to sell tickets

2 The Dead also knew that while they were giving up potential profit from doing as much. The trading also promised to spread their music for free and could bring in more fans and followers. “The Grateful Dead Biography.” Kelly MacDonald, “Rock and Roll Fan Culture: Fandom Beyond the Music.” M.A. Final Project, University of Massachusetts Boston, 2006.
directly to their fans and also to help cultivate and connect with their fans by sending them newsletters.³

As Nadya Zimmerman suggests, “the Grateful Dead advertised an image of itself as a collection of anticommercial unprofessionals” so much so that even music industry bigwig Clive David, head of Arista Records, was once quoted as calling the Dead “noneconomically motivated.”⁴ What is often thought of as an anti-commercialism band actually became, as their Rolling Stone biography notes, “a smoothly run corporate enterprise, that, for all its hippie trimmings, drew admiring profiles in the financial and mainstream press…The Dead evolved into an efficient and highly profitable corporation”⁵ By 1995, when Garcia died, the band had already begun to produce a massive catalogue of Dead merchandise, earning $52 million during their 1994-1995 tour – their last as the Grateful Dead.⁶ The band’s business ventures over the years were so successful that several books and dozens of articles have been written about their highly effective strategies, with titles like Marketing Lessons from the Grateful Dead or “Management Secrets from the Grateful Dead,” each piece praising the marketing strategies this band put forth.⁷

The Grateful Dead does not actually seem all that different from Jimmy Buffett in terms of their exceptionally savvy business enterprises with extremely dedicated fan communities. Their fan groups are also very similar in demographic make up. As Deadhead scholar Rebecca

⁵ “The Grateful Dead Biography.”
⁶ Ibid.
Adams noted in 2000, fans of the Dead are predominantly white, and middle and upper class. They range in age from small children to those in their sixties (now their seventies).\textsuperscript{8} Both the Grateful Dead and Buffett were not your typical commercial music successes. Neither had many charting hits or got much radio play, but both toured endlessly and as a result continued to maintain and also attract more fans. The difference is that the Grateful Dead operated, until recently, within the context of a counterculture rhetoric that made a lot of their business ventures, even if merely under the guise of nostalgia, considered to be overtly anti-commercialized. Buffett, in contrast, has often openly joked about spending his fans’ hard earned money. And while he does not necessarily seem to flaunt his wealth per se, it is also unmistakable to notice in the stories he tells and retells to his fans. He makes mention, when recounting his real life adventures, of planes he owns, and his many houses scattered around the world, all of which allow Buffett to enjoy the carefree lifestyle he has cultivated.

While Buffett is an exceptionally hard working business man, if he did not also live the dream that he has built for his fans, they might not be as convinced. He is after all their ring leader, helping them along to develop and enjoy their own beach bum lifestyle. Similarly, by creating a lived Margaritaville lifestyle, Buffett’s fans can go visit Margaritaville Cafes around the world, or stay at his readily increasing number of hotels and casinos found in the US. Buffett has developed his tropical living empire and Margaritaville state of mind to the point where it is now a tangible place, where fans can take a vacation, relaxing along with other Parrotheads in a “Margaritaville Paradise.”

The different aspects of Parrotheads fan activities can be understood, on a larger scale, as examples of this fan group demonstrating a deep level of commitment to their fandom. They are not just Parrotheads on the weekends. This study highlights many of the activities that

\textsuperscript{8} Adams, \textit{Deadhead Social Science}, 33-34.
Parrotheads are doing together as fans and focuses on the leisurely pursuits which make up their adult music fandom. Parrotheads are engaging in collective community practices built upon the ideas of tropical escapism and a beach bum ethos which is articulated in terms of consumption, philanthropic activities, and new media practices.

Within this context Parrothead clubs function as social clubs, similar in many ways to other social organizations with longer histories such as the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (known as the Elks club) or the Loyal Order of Moose (known as the Moose club). Both the Elk and the Moose clubs were founded with the central idea of being social clubs, and both focus on charity work in their communities. Thus from the periphery Parrothead clubs and the Elk and Moose clubs have similar goals in mind – all three organizations are community-minded and socially active clubs which focus on charitable giving in their local areas. Like these other organizations Parrothead clubs are highly organized and regulated. What differentiates the three clubs, however, is that Parrotheads come together and are united by a shared mass mediated and popular culture interest: Jimmy Buffett’s music. Above all else they have their love of this music in common, and it serves as a driving force of their social organization and participation in Parrothead clubs.

What initially drew my interest to Parrotheads and their clubs was their active work in charitable giving and volunteering as a collective group. The charity work that Parrotheads do is something that differentiates this group from other music fan communities who also do charity work, in that it enables them to do it on a larger scale and in some ways to have a far reaching impact in their communities. Erika Doss discusses contemporary Elvis fan clubs which have raised money for charities that Presley himself donated to when he was alive. She argues that

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they do this in an effort to continue to construct a positive image of the legendary musician posthumously. This means that since Presley lived in Memphis most clubs raise money and donate to Memphis area hospitals regardless of the geographical location of the club itself. Doss posits that this is possibly because these hospitals are the “only places where [fans] can reconcile ‘taking care’ of Elvis with ‘taking care’ of those in need.”\textsuperscript{10} The head of fan relations for Elvis Presley Enterprises even suggested that clubs donate to organizations in their own communities instead of focusing on Memphis alone, but this was often ignored.\textsuperscript{11}

This is a seemingly similar phenomenon that happens with fans of other musicians as well. Fans get together to raise money in honor of the charities that their musician of choice also supports. Examples of this can be seen with fans of Radiohead and U2 with each group raising money to donate to charities the bands or musicians themselves give money.\textsuperscript{12} Parrotheads are not immune to this practice either. They sometimes contribute to charity efforts that are aligned with causes that are related to Buffett. For example, Buffett’s father suffered from Alzheimer’s disease before he passed away and as a way of honoring Buffett’s father, and Buffett, Parrothead clubs donate to the Alzheimer’s Association. In 2011, forty Parrothead clubs raised over $95,500 for this cause, donating together as a national team under the Parrot Heads in Paradise umbrella organization.\textsuperscript{13} Individual club efforts with the Alzheimer’s Association is in addition to other charity work done in their local areas.

While not detracting from these other fan groups’ sincere and important charitable efforts, there are several factors which makes Parrotheads different from them. Parrothead clubs

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Erika Doss, \textit{Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith, and Image}, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999) 57.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Doss, 54-57.
\item \textsuperscript{13} “Silver National Team – Parrot Heads in Paradise Inc.,” \url{http://act.alz.org/site/TR?company_id=1260&pg=national_company&pw_id=3321} (accessed June 6, 2012).
\end{itemize}
are highly organized and localized within smaller clubs across the United States and abroad, and thus are able to raise money or volunteer their labor for charity groups in their community, in addition to the larger national organization which they support. As a result, Parrothead clubs have more flexibility in that individual clubs can focus on different in-need organizations in their local areas. Parrothead clubs also have the power to do what Dave Downs, from the Detroit Parrot Head Club, called the human power of donation. They are physically volunteering their labor – their fan labor – to local organizations. These efforts of working together in person also helps to reinforce and solidify their Parrothead bonds by allowing them the chance to interact and play out various elements of their fandom with other members of their club.

This dissertation overall adds to the field of popular music fandom by discussing how Parrotheads are bring to light and engage with some of the ways in which Buffett’s fans integrate their adult fandom into their lives through the activities they participate in. Parrotheads have done so by investing in Buffett’s Margaritaville state of mind, an anthem which evokes a sense of relaxation and suggests a specific kind of life experience – a lifestyle imbued with the tropical mythos that Buffett has made famous. If Margaritaville is evocative of a lifestyle then, as was discussed in Chapter One, Buffett has made available the goods one needs in order to realize such an existence. By transforming Margaritaville from a state of mind into something that can be expressed (and purchased) as a lifestyle, Buffett has opened a whole world of possibilities for his fans. Buffett has successfully launched his lifestyle music and his Margaritaville brand in an all-encompassing sort of way that no other musician has ever really matched to this extent. It is something that he has infused into every aspect of his business, both as a musician and performer, and otherwise. He has literally made it possible to eat, sleep, and drink this imagined Margaritaville lifestyle in a variety of different ways. Although there are fans who take issue
with Buffett’s commercialization of everything Margaritaville, those who are vocal about this are small in numbers. If there are more fans that are reinterpreting his Margaritaville lifestyle without all of the various products, they may just be harder to spot as they renegotiate what must be a difficult terrain, as Buffett’s Margaritaville empire seems to be ever-present.

Ultimately, Parrotheads and their adult music fan activities are the driving force of this dissertation. Parrotheads seek out, invest in, and flock to the tropical ethos that they have helped Buffett cultivate. The basis of their fandom and their fan activities is to experience, in a variety of ways, the Margaritaville state of mind, as this functions as the heart and soul of their fandom. Parrotheads replicate this mythos in almost every activity they participate, and it also works as a lifestyle fandom, reinforcing not only their fan community, but also their fan activities and practices. By investing in a Margaritaville state of mind and practicing a care-free lifestyle, Parrothead fandom replicates a tropical-themed leisure culture which happens to center around a particular musician and as discussed in Chapter One, the goods and services he sells to his fans.

As discussed in Chapter Two, for Parrotheads, tailgating is an important activity that happens before and after Jimmy Buffett concerts. It is an experience that helps to bring together thousands of fans in one location where they can spend many hours together as one large fan community. It is also here where we can see many of the ways in which Parrothead fandom is physically manifested in the parking lots outside of the concert venue. As such, this work has called attention to the need to think critically about the tropicalizations that Parrotheads often evoke through the more performative aspects of their fandom. Dressing up and performing as a Parrothead is an important part of this group’s fandom constructs, but it is also something that should be done more self-reflexively, as it is not always clear whether Parrotheads themselves are taking into consideration the larger implications of such forms of play.
Another fan activity that is a foundational tenet of the Parrothead club’s mission, and the Parrothead club member’s experience, is the concept of “partying with a purpose,” the focus of Chapter Three. What is interesting about the Parrothead club’s philanthropic endeavors is that they engage in these activities both as a group activity and as an expression of the members’ fandom. The charitable giving and volunteerism, a critical aspect their organized clubs, could very well be done on an individual level, but instead it has been integrated into their fandom participating in this philanthropy work as a group of music fans. Parrothead clubs, like the Detroit Parrot Head club, specifically seek to incorporate their philanthropic endeavors into many aspects of their club activities. The two-fold party with a purpose then becomes a way for Parrotheads to come together to let loose and celebrate their community and their fandom while also simultaneously “doing good,” perhaps as a way to justify their momentary escapes into fun-filled festivities. By analyzing this activity through the theory of fan labor, we can also understand how this fan group’s philanthropic efforts can be something other than exploitation. Instead, what matters to Parrotheads is that they spend time together having fun while also raising money or donating their time to help out their communities, “leaving the world a better place” whenever possible.

The social networking site Meet the Phlockers, while no longer very active, was, in its prime, a thriving online social space developed for and aimed specifically at Buffett’s fan base. Furthermore, it is the only social networking space of its kind to have been praised by Buffett himself as a place where Parrotheads could meet and interact with one another. What is particularly compelling about how this space functioned for Parrotheads is that the fans who interacted with one another were in many ways performing and enacting their fandom within the online space. Users’ online textual and visual Parrothead performances helped to solidify and
also reinforce fan practices throughout the site. Furthermore, these actions continued to perpetuate the tropical state of mind in the online space. Even though many members of the social networking site appeared to have moved on, and MTP has seemingly failed, it was still successful in that, if even for a few short years, it was a space where 13,000 Parrotheads came together online to participate and enact their fandom.

While this case study has introduced and begun to explore some of the ways through which Parrotheads specifically are engaging with their music fandom as adults, it is also just a beginning. The area of this study, fandom, is ripe with future research possibilities. My case studies and research seemed to indicate that this specific fandom demographic is actually beginning to transition into something more along the lines of a multigenerational popular music fandom, as there were instances where children of Parrotheads were also being drawn into this fan group. As some of my younger survey respondents suggested, they were drawn into the fold of this fandom by older relatives who were already actively engaged with it. Thus we saw at least initial signs that this group was beginning to push towards becoming truly multigenerational. In fact, I once overheard a member of the Detroit Parrot Head Club say that the club was soon going to focus more on how to incorporate and maintain younger fans so as to continue their fan club and their local Parrothead community. We must remember that the Parrotheads at the heart of my research were predominantly middle-aged and, even if they continue to be actively involved, newer fans – possibly those entering adulthood – have the potential to bring and develop different activities and ways of interacting with their Parrothead music fandom. Future research into this particular fandom specifically, as well as other music fandoms more broadly, could investigate how newer generations of fans are mixing with already established fans. What can be gained from this development? And moreover, what if anything,
could be at stake? Will they be interested in the similar community activities or do they bring other fan practices into the mix? Along the same lines, it seems reasonable to then ask how the newer Parrotheads are incorporating this fandom into their own everyday lives and to what degree they are engaging with this pre-existing fan community? Are they at an age where they too are now in this post-youth, adult demographic? Does that mean that there will be few, if any, changes within this particular fandom culture?

Another consideration is that for Parrotheads there will come a day, possibly sometime soon, when Buffett will no longer continue to tour. It will be interesting to see how this changes their fandom and fandom activities. This research saw hints of how certain Parrothead activities and practices, such as replicating the tailgating experience in parties, was already being used by this fan group as a way to engage with and play out their fandom outside of the normal concert setting, and while it seems possible that their fandom could dissipate without the annual trek to see Buffett perform live, they might also potentially be able to continue on without him.

Ultimately, this work highlights how some adult music fans are embracing new types of music-centered leisure cultures in contemporary society. My research has demonstrated the lengths to which Parrotheads are integrating their fandom into their everyday lives across all facets, from what they listen to, what they buy, how they see themselves, how they spend their free time, and how they give back to their communities. In embracing this lifestyle, for Parrotheads, being a fan of Jimmy Buffett has become more than just a novelty – it has become a meaningful part of their identity. Parrotheads are a fascinating example of a fan organization which also functions as a social club, united by their love of a musician and his message. Though their literal and figurative investment in Jimmy Buffett – the man, the musician, the marketer – Parrotheads have worked together to cultivate a mythical Margaritaville.


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Soundtracks:


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Songs Cited:


APPENDIX A: BUFFETT AND MARGARITAVILLE ENTERPRISES LLC SURVEY QUESTIONS

Part I: Demographic Information

1. Your name:

2. Your age:

3. Your sex:

4. Your race:

5. Your email address:

6. Your occupation:

Part II: Buffett & Business

1. Buffett has established himself as a savvy businessman over the years. How do you feel about the many goods he sells to Parrotheads (and others)?

2. Does having the "stuff" Buffett sells help you to be a better Parrothead? Or does it not matter either way? Please explain your answer.

3. Some fans (like the now defunct Church of Buffett, Orthodox, and other individuals in Buffett message boards etc.) have critiqued Buffett’s selling of goods and feel that it takes away from his music. CoBO writes: "The actions of the real-time Jimmy are also problematical; we hold out for his eventual redemption, but if he continues his slide towards commercialism, we still have the works mentioned in (2a) as the solid rock of our faith. We are also grateful for the 1 or 2 cuts per new album that are worthy of the "core" works. Also, many of us have seen JB in the old, pre-neo-Jazz-caribbean-steel-drum-cum-backup-singers-Beach-Boy-lookalike days; memories of these ancient concerts (as well as bootlegs!) keep us going as well.” (CoBO - http://www.cobo.org/news/index.html)

How does Buffett’s commercialism, as they put it, make you feel? Does it, if at all, change anything for you about being a Parrothead? Please explain.

4. As a Parrothead, do you feel there are expectations for you to buy Buffett's stuff (food, clothing, furniture, drink makers, etc.)? Or can you be a Parrothead without buying these things?

5. On the flip side of this it could be argued that Buffett's goods help Parrotheads to further escape. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
6. Buffett's ticket prices purchased through clubs have risen to close to $140 over the years. Does this affect your desire/ability to attend his concerts?

7. If you can't afford to see Buffett live, do you still tailgate before the shows? Or how else do you connect with Parrotheads/Margaritaville?

8. Have you visited any of the Margaritaville restaurants or hotels in the US or abroad? If so, where? And what motivated you to visit these?

Part III: Wrapping Up

1. What, if anything, do you think I should have asked about, but did not? (This is actually usually really helpful!)

Thank you!

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at kelmacd@bgsu.edu.
APPENDIX B: PARROTHEADS & VOLUNTEERING/CHARITABLE GIVING
SURVEY QUESTIONS

Part I: Demographic Information

1. Your name:
2. Your age:
3. Your email address:
4. Your race:
5. Your occupation:
6. Your sex:

Part II: Parrothead Fan

1. How did you become a Parrothead? Did someone introduce you to Buffett's music? Were you introduced to a Parrothead club and then become a fan of Buffett's? Please explain.
2. How old were you when you became a Parrothead? (Also, what year?)
3. What about being a Parrothead or Buffett's music drew you to be a fan?
4. What does being a Parrothead mean to you? How would you explain Parrotheads to someone who didn't know about them?
5. How many Buffett concerts, if any, have you been to? How important is attending Buffett’s concerts in order to be considered a Parrothead?
6. Can you still be a fan if you’ve never attended a show? Why or why not?
7. Do you visit or participate in any online Buffett/Parrothead websites? If so, which ones?
8. Do you participate on any Parrothead/Buffett themed social networking sites? If so, which ones?

Part III: Parrothead Club

1. Are you a member of a local Parrothead club? If so, which club?
2. What motivated you to join a Parrothead club?
3. What aspects of being in a Parrothead club are important to you? What aspects do you enjoy?

4. What do you personally get out of being a member of a club?

5. How do non-fans (family/friends/ significant others) view your being a fan Parrothead and/or Buffett in general?

6. Do you attend any Parrothead gatherings/events in your area? How regularly would you say you participate in some kind of Parrothead event?

7. Have you ever attended Parrothead events not from your local club? Like MoTM for example, or events sponsored by other clubs. What do you get out of attending these events?

Part IV: Parrotheads & Charity

1. Charitable giving seems to be an important part of being a Parrothead. Why do you think this is?

2. As a Parrothead, what motivates you personally to volunteer or donate your time?

3. Did the volunteering and charitable giving aspect of Parrothead fans draw you first? Or was it Buffett's music?

4. Does your club focus on volunteering/charity work in your local area or elsewhere? If the focus is on local giving, why do you think that is?

5. How often do you participate in different kinds of volunteering/charitable work with your Parrothead club (or other Parrothead sponsored events)?

6. Do you participate in charitable giving or volunteering outside of your Parrothead club? If so, where? How?

Part V: Wrapping up

1. What, if anything, do you think I should have asked about, but did not? (This is actually usually really helpful!)

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at kelmacd@bgsu.edu.
ONLINE SURVEY CONSENT FORM

My name is Kelly MacDonald and I am a PhD student in the American Culture Studies program at Bowling Green State University, in Bowling Green, Ohio. I am currently working on my research for my dissertation which will focus on adult music fandom and adult music fan cultures. Specifically, I’m interested in Jimmy Buffett fans and their fan community which is why I have contacted you today. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and will involve answering some interview questions about what it’s like to be a Jimmy Buffett fan, Parrothead, and some fan activities which you may or may not participate in. I will be using the information that I get from these surveys, along with academic publications and other research sources, to help me further develop my research on Jimmy Buffett fans and adult music fans in general. The benefits of this project are that it will greatly help add to the limited field of adult music fandom.

This study will require you to fill out a survey, which includes questions about personal demographics, and your fan involvement and activities. It is estimated that each survey will take you about 15-25 minutes. The risks involved in this interview are minimal: no greater than those found in normal, daily life. You have the right to request that the answers given during the survey to remain confidential, and if you choose to do so every effort will be made to hide your identity in my research and in any quotes from the interview session that are used in the actual project. If you do not wish to have information you give in our interviews confidential, I will attribute your quote in the manner of your choosing, be that your real name, nickname, or username online.

You have the right to stop answering questions at any time should you no longer wish to continue. There are no consequences for withdrawing. I will make every effort to answer any questions you may have about my project and the research I am conducting. You may also request a copy or summary of the results of the study. You will be provided with a copy of this consent document for your records. Only my advisor and I will be reviewing this interview material. All interview materials will be retained indefinitely in a locked filing cabinet in my office.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me at 419.372.8886 or kelmacd@bgsu.edu, or you can contact my dissertation chair Dr. Radhika Gajjala at 419.372.7133, radhik@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419.372.7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu, if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.
By signing this document you are verifying that you have read this document, had any questions about the project answered, and are agreeing to participate in this study.

______________________________
Signature   Date
CONSENT FORM

My name is Kelly MacDonald and I am a PhD student in the American Culture Studies program at Bowling Green State University, in Bowling Green, Ohio. I am currently working on my research for my dissertation which will focus on adult music fandom and adult music fan cultures. Specifically, I’m interested in Jimmy Buffett fans and their fan community which is why I have contacted you today. Your participation in this project is completely voluntary and will involve answering some interview questions about what it’s like to be a Jimmy Buffett fan, Parrothead, and some fan activities which you may or may not participate in. I will be using the information that I get from interviews, along with academic publications and other research sources, to help me further develop my research on Jimmy Buffett fans and adult music fans in general. The benefits of this project are that it will greatly help add to the limited field of adult music fandom.

During my session with you I will ask you a series of questions about Jimmy Buffett fans, about being a Jimmy Buffett fan, and several activities that I see as being important to this fan group. During this time I will be taking notes and making an audio recording of our conversation. Should our interview happen over the phone, I will make you aware that I am making an audio recording before beginning the interview process. There is no personal benefit to you other than your interview being useful for research purposes. The interview process will consist of only 1-2 interview sessions. A second interview may be required to answer follow up questions not addressed in the first interview, or to clarify answers given in the first interview. I do not expect either interview to last longer than an hour each.

The risks involved in this interview are minimal: no greater than those found in normal, daily life. You have the right to request that the answers given during the interview remain confidential, and if you choose to do so every effort will be made to hide your identity in my research and in any quotes from the interview session that are used in the actual project. If you do not wish to have information you give in our interviews confidential, I will attribute your quote in the manner of your choosing, be that your real name, nickname, or username online.

You have the right to stop the interview at any time, and for any reason, should you no longer wish to continue. There are no consequences for withdrawing. I will make every effort to answer any questions you may have about my project and the research I am conducting. You may also request a copy or summary of the results of the study. You will be provided with a copy of this consent document for your records. Only my advisor and I will be reviewing this interview material. All interview materials will be retained indefinitely in a locked filing cabinet in my office.
If you have any questions or comments about this study, you can contact me at 419.372.8886 or kelmaed@bgsu.edu, or you can contact my dissertation chair Dr. Radhika Gajjala at 419.372.7133, radhik@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board, Bowling Green State University, 419.372.7716, hsrb@bgsu.edu, if any problems or concerns arise during the course of the study.

By signing this document you are verifying that you have read this document, had any questions about the project answered, and are agreeing to participate in this study.

______________________________
Signature   Date