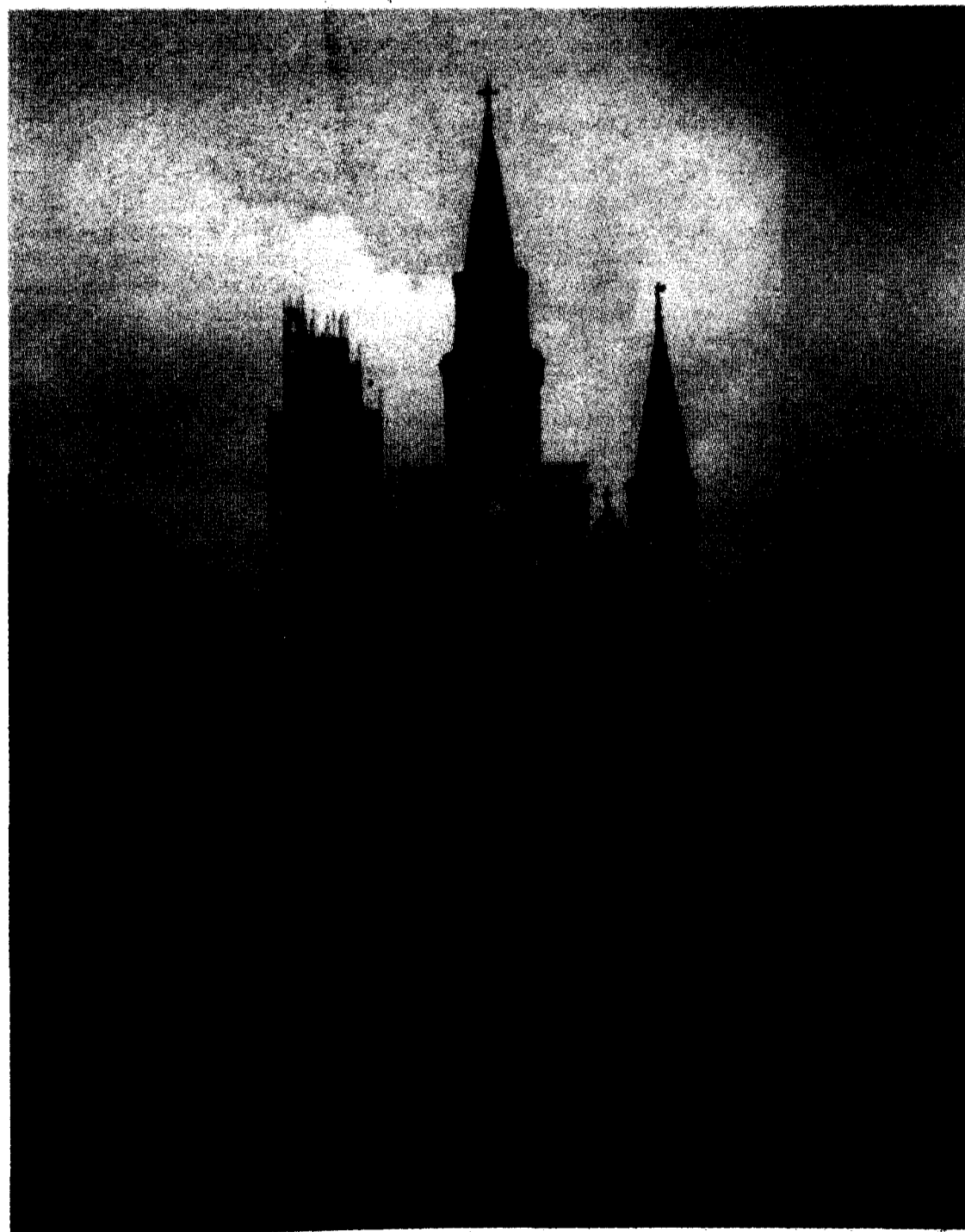
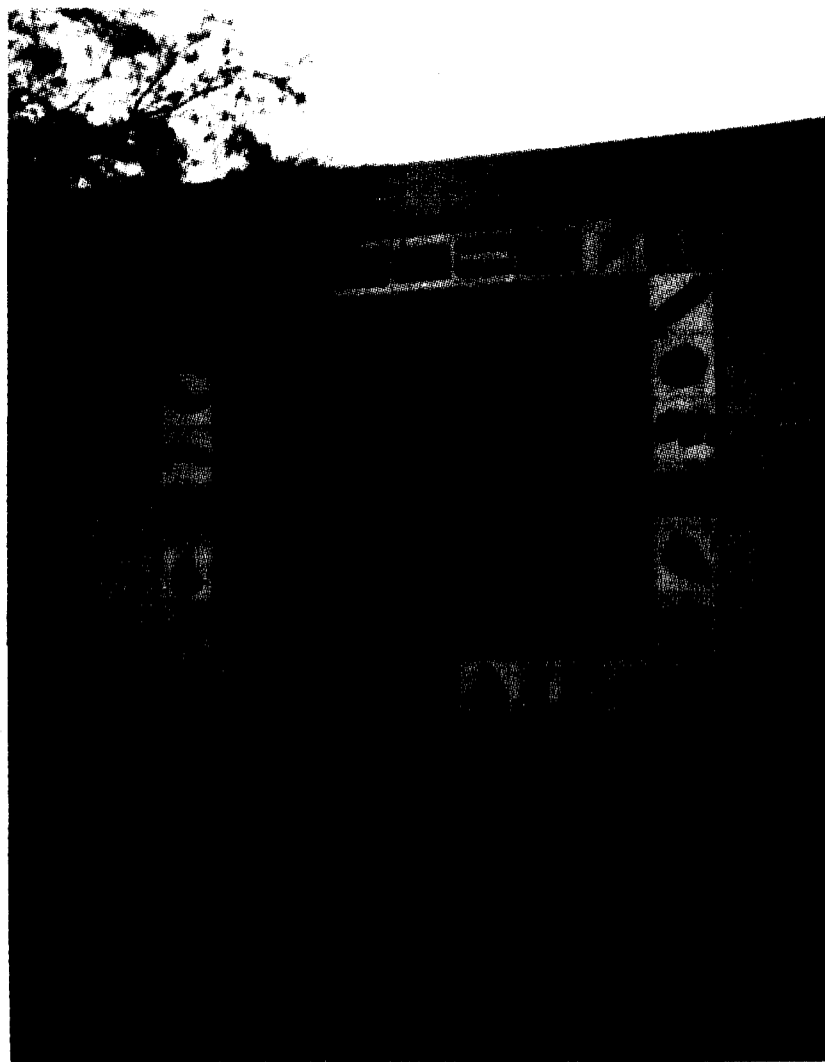


If you would rather have someone else do the cooking, the French Quarter is home to many world-class restaurants for every taste including African, Cajun, French, Italian, and Indian to name a few. If it's Cajun you're after, Patout's Cajun Cabin on Bourbon Street is one of the best. This open-air restaurant has live zydeco and Creole music every night. It's true that Cajun menu offers catfish, gumbo, crawfish and alligator (yes, alligator). Just in case you're wondering, it tastes like chicken. Finish off your meal with Swamp Water, their signature drink. I'm not sure what's in it, but it goes great with alligator.

When all is said and done, you haven't really experienced New Orleans until you take a stroll down Bourbon Street. This is truly the time when your senses are swimming in everything New Orleans. Music surrounds you and carries you along; Creole and zydeco in one ear, jazz and swamp blues in the other. Your entertainment choices are endless. While my choice was live music, many other curious folks chose to get their live "entertainment" in other ways. Most of these establishments send their scantily clad employees into the streets to entice business. In addition, New Orleans has no open-container law. Drinking in the streets is legal as long as the alcohol is in a plastic container. Now I know why it's called "The Big Easy." Even with the numerous strip clubs and legal public drinking, people rarely get out of hand. New Orleans police officers are a constant presence on Bourbon Street. They don't bother you as long as your good time doesn't endanger anyone.



My trip to New Orleans wasn't complete without one final stop: Jimmy Buffett's Margaritaville. The dining room is washed in color, like buckets of bright paint were thrown everywhere. You can have an official "Cheeseburger in Paradise" while listening to Buffett tunes. Margaritaville also offers three live musicians daily in its Storyville back room. The perfect end to the perfect trip was listening to live music while sipping a "Perfect Margarita."

The French Quarter is an all-in-one trip complete with history, mystery, food, music, shopping and nightlife. With so much to see and do, time runs out before options do. Be prepared for anything. You will most certainly limit your experience if you go with a plan. Happy Mardi Gras!

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Upper Left: This jazzy fountain sits only a block away from the Mississippi waterfront

Upper Right: Patout's Cajun cabin on Bourbon Street is the place for authentic cajun food

Bottom: This building on Decatur Street is a classic example of French Quarter architecture,

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Above: There are colorful surprises down every street

Left: The St. Louis Cathedral sits just beyond the park at Jackson Square.

Photos by Steve Standridge