

Bayou farewell essay example

[Environment](#), [Water](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

Human activity and natural forces have endangered some of the most resourceful regions in the world. This has a direct impact not only to the communities living in the regions but also to the ecosystem. Campaigns for the conservation of natural resources have exhibited an increasing trend especially in America. The campaigns have been done using different media such as books, magazine and newspaper articles, the internet, television and radio documentaries as well as books emphasize on the need to conserve wildlife especially in the Amazon rainforests, African savannas and the Arctic refuges. Tidwell's book explores the alarming losses of natural resources in the wide delta lands of the Mississippi river.

An overview of the region

The coast is not only vital to the region but also to other parts of the nation. It is continually changing, as the Mississippi river, the Gulf of Mexico, and human activities shape it. It is a human landscape as well as a physical place, a multiethnic region alive and evolving as it has been for centuries since people not only use but also modify the land and its resources. Generations have searched for means to harness the region's abundance or natural resources and means to cope with declines caused by their activities. People also seek to overcome other challenges imposed by weather, climate and market downturns. The cultural process of adoption, impact as well as learning is among the defining aspects of the inhabitants of the region. The region makes significant contribution to the United States and its citizens. In the age of reliance on hydrocarbon-based energy, Louisiana's

Cajun coast and the Gulf waters off the state's coast furnished an estimated 17% of the country's crude oil and 25% of its natural gas by the year 2000 (Gomez 5). In 2006, the Louisiana Department of Natural resources released a report about the economic value of the region. It showed that the region was among the leading sources of crude oil and natural gas. This has been associated with the increase of human activity in the coastal region. For instance, a vast network of pipelines has been installed beneath the land and waters. They transport both domestic and imported oil and gas to the nation's refining and processing facilities.

Besides providing energy to the nation, the coastal region also supports valuable commercial and recreational fishing industry. According to Gomez, Louisiana's commercial fishermen harvest 25-35% of the country's total catch (17). Along with the neighboring ports, their catch includes brown shrimp, white shrimp, blue crabs, oysters, menhaden and a variety of edible fish. This catch consistently ranks the state at or near the top national harvest of crabs, oysters, shrimp and first in the harvest of menhaden, a small inedible fish that processors convert into high protein fishmeal and oil (Gomez 19). It has become one of the most important components of feeds for poultry, fish farms, cattle as well as pets.

Many of the residents of Louisiana including New Orleans and other cities within the coastal region rely heavily on the regions wetlands for protection. Coastal marches provide a crucial buffer that can reduce the wind velocity of a hurricane as well as the velocity of a storm surge. The presence of the coastal wetland buffer reduces hurricane damage and associated insurance payments as well as federal assistance costs. The region has imparted a

strong sense of place and identity to its longtime residents –the Cajun settlers. It is an identity rooted in the land and resource use, with wildlife harvest, fishing and petroleum extraction among its major components especially in the coastal areas.

The region is highly vulnerable. It is under constant threat of hurricanes; flood control raised banks or rather levees along the Mississippi river starve it of sediment; canals necessary for navigation and oil and gas-well access provide conduits for salt intrusion; subsidence takes its toll. As the wetland plants die, land washes away and becomes open water. Oil and gas pipelines, storage tanks as well as other facilities nestled within the protective marsh zone become vulnerable as erosion exposes them to the ravages of waves. As wetlands are lost, so too is habitat for a variety of wildlife, from ducks, egrets, alligators, muskrats and turtles. Nursery grounds for commercially valuable fish and shellfish have also been lost.

Tidwell's Bayou Farewell

Tidwell's tour in the Louisiana's Cajun region was a suggestion made to him by one of the editors in America who thought that Tidwell would find it very interesting to know about the state of the region as far as natural resources are concerned. Tidwell was pleased by the suggestion and he set out on a journey to the region. His findings form the basis of the book Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana's Coast. It expresses his concern about the devastating state of the Louisiana Cajun coastal region. The book reveals the conservative nature of the Cajun community as compared to the rest of the American communities. The region is the home to thousands of Canadian immigrants who came to the region in the eighteenth century

(Mazzeno 2). They earn their living by fishing, shrimping, collecting oysters and crabs, which they sell to the traders in wholesale. Statistics show that the Cajuns supply approximately 30% of the seafood that is consumed in the United States of America (Gomez 102).

Tidwell applied all the methods that he thought would enable him to get all the information that he needed for the book. Among his devices was a tape recorder, which he used to record the interviews as well as the conversations that he held with the people. Additionally, he wanted to be actively involved in the daily activities of the Cajuns an aspect that would give him first hand information for his research. He arrived in Louisiana's Cajun region during the shrimping season and he began hitching rides with the residents especially the boat owners. Additionally, he agreed to work for them without any form of compensation. This enabled him to have firsthand experience of the everyday life of the region's people. Some of the towns that he managed to visit in the region were Cocodrie, Leevile and Golden Meadow. He also sailed down several estuaries. Additionally, he had the privilege of fishing and shrimping in one of the giant water basins in the region e. g. the Baratia Bay that lies in the Mississippi delta. This approach enabled him to gather reliable information that boosts one's knowledge about the state of the region in question i. e. about the natural resources as well as the residents. His stay in the region enabled him to give a detailed account on the culture of the Cajuns. Most of the characters used in his book symbolize the lifestyles of the majority of the Cajuns. Examples of them are Papoose Ledet, Tim Melanchon and Wine Belanger who are owners of the small boats that facilitated Tidwell's tour across the region. Other characters are Lawrence

Billiot and Emory Melanchon known as the alligator folk healer and alligator wrestler respectively. One of his observations about the people is that they own little and they are very generous-their willingness to share with others including strangers (Studymode. com 2).

The book, Bayou Farewell, is a rich source of information about the two minority groups that live in the Louisiana Cajun region. The two groups are the Vietnamese immigrants and the Houma Indians. The two groups arrived in the region after the fall of Saigon in the mid 1970s (Mazzeno 12). From his close interaction with them, he learned that the Indians were the first inhabitants in the Louisiana region occupying mainly the Coast. They were later displaced by the Acadian people who caused them to move farther to the backwater areas, where they finally settled. They are among the poorest people living in that region. The three communities namely the Cajuns, Indians and Vietnamese, compete for the natural resources since they all rely on fishing and shrimping for their livelihood. The book gives the extend of the danger caused by not only human but also natural activity. He noted that:

The whole ragged sole of the Louisiana boot, an area the size of Connecticut- threemillion acres- is literally washing out to the sea, surrendering to the Gulf of Mexico. It's an unfolding calamity magnitude, taking with it entire Cajun towns and the age-old way of life (Mazzeno 6).

The detrimental effects of lack of conservation of the natural resources in the region were evident. During his first trip, he noticed a group of headstones that were almost submerged on the water surface. On asking, he was informed that it was a cemetery (Siegel 4). The cemetery had been on the

dry land a decade earlier.

The book gives comprehensive and reliable information. Tidwell did not rely on his the information that he collected in the region during his tour but included extensive documentation from other private researchers as well as government agencies. These outside sources not only give a detailed account of the loss of landmass in the region but also provide sobering estimates of the cost and time of intervening on the situation to prevent further loss of landmass besides repairing the damage that has already been caused (Mazzeno 15). As he notes repeatedly, approximately 25 acres of land per day is lost per day by either being swept away by water or being covered by the rising waters not only from the Mississippi delta but also from the sea. For purposes of comparison, he noted that the rate would make the islands of New York and Manhattan to disappear within a week (Mazzeno 17).

The changes occurring in the coast are detrimental to the livelihood of the people living in the region. As the bayous undergo continuous expansion, they will eventually be transformed into giant lakes at the mouth of the Mississippi River. The ultimate result will be the disappearance of the shrimp and crab population, which is the sole source of the livelihood of not only the Cajuns but also the minority groups living in the region. The author argues that the disappearance will also have a direct impact on the lives of the rest of the Americans, as there will be a decreased supply of seafood in the nation (ibid). However, the greatest impact will be on the people living within the region since such a phenomenon will lead to the loss of not only their source of food but also their homes. Their eventual migration will be a

Diaspora to some of the people who have lived there for decades. This is due to their many years efforts in preserving their unique culture against monumental odds.

In Bayou Farewell, Tidwell has been able to relate an aspect of this particular human cost to the Tim Melancon family. Melancon came from a family that relied entirely on marine life for livelihood. He could not think of any other probable source of income for his family as he asserts, “ to be honest, I never had a job in my life” (Siegel 4). Melancon’s son, Tee Tim, confirmed this aspect when he said that he wanted to pursue a career in engineering (mechanic) or carpentry-actually, he left home while Tidwell was still in their home to pursue his career. Melancon represents many other Cajuns who have relied on marine life for their livelihood for their entire lives. If they would lose their fishing grounds and homes due to the rising of waters their lives would come to a standstill.

Tidwell has also used the book to highlight the source of the calamity. He notes that the eminent loss of the Louisiana coastline as well as its immediate environs is not “ an act of God There is nothing natural about it, in fact. Human beings have made it so’ (Mazzeno 18). The book implicates the large oil and natural gas companies within the region as well as the United States’ Army Corps of Engineers as the culprits. Their activity is evident especially their pipes which occupy thousands of miles in the marshlands (Gomez 90). The pipes enhance the transportation of the oil and natural gas from the Gulf of Mexico to their refineries. Despite their rather detrimental effect on the natural resources, the American government has not taken any action against the organizations.

Tidwell, as he points out in the book, believes that the problem can be resolved. The book presents the interviews that he carried out with environmentalists and scientists that sought to find the solution to the problem (Mazzeno 20). Some of the suggestions that author gives in the book include the construction of massive and extensive diversionary channels in the region. This will play pivotal role in allowing the water from the Mississippi river to flood to the marchlands once again. Additionally, there is a dire need for the reconstruction of the banks of the bayous as well as the barrier island. These features played a special role in protecting the area from the ravages of the recurrent hurricanes and the slow incursion of the Gulf of Mexico. The author asserts that despite the great cost of building all the constructions that the environmentalists and other scientists suggested, the government should consider it worthy to rescue the lives of the thousands of the people living in the region (ibid). He also adds that by doing so, the government will be securing or rather protecting one of the chief sources of seafood in the nation.

Conclusion

The book Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana's Cajun Coast provides the views of Tidwell, an environmental advocate, about the Louisiana coast. It gives a detailed account of his tour to the region, his interaction with the people and the extent of damage that has been caused in the region. The author urges not only the government but also the other members of the American community to take the necessary measures towards the conservation of the natural resources in the region, which will

prevent further damage in the region, as the phenomenon is detrimental to the economy of the Americans as well as to the ecosystem.

Works Cited

“ Bayou Farewell.” Studymode. com. 4 April 2013. .

Gomez, Gay M. Louisiana Coast: Guide to an American Wetland. College Station, TX: Texas

A&M University Press, 2008. Print.

Mazzeno, Laurence W. Bayou Farewell. New York: Pantheon Books, 2003. Print.

Siegel, William. “ Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana’s Cajun Coast.”

2008. Web. 14 April 2013. .