

Addressing Rural Problems through Architecture in a Mississippi Delta Town.

Since July of 1998, this project has been studied and developed by undergraduate architecture students directed by Shannon Criss. It is a collaboration with MSU's John C. Stennis Institute of Government, Coahoma Community College and the Phil Hardin Foundation. A feasibility report was developed in the summer of 1999. Since then, many others have made efforts to find the funding required to renovate the school building and provide for the programs supportive to community needs.

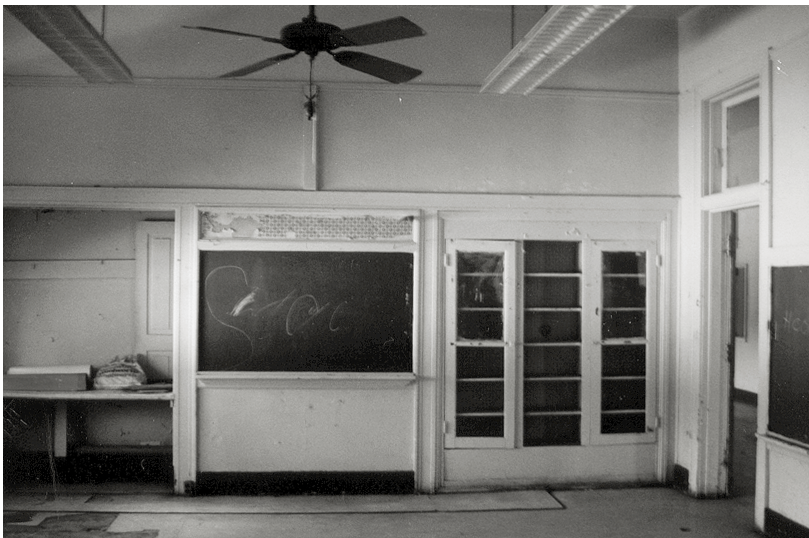
Background: Jonestown

Jonestown, Mississippi is located in the heart of the Delta. Like a number of similar towns, this small community is plagued by difficult problems: teen pregnancy, youth gangs, drug abuse, illiteracy, chronic unemployment, and lack of community focus.

Jonestown has been in a state of decline since its agrarian-dominated industry, through mechanization, has ceased supporting its growing population in the way it once did. The jobs are as seasonal as the crops which create them, meaning that much of the work force is dormant when cotton isn't being farmed. Jonestown offers few other job opportunities to supplement farming. Federal welfare reform legislation will lead to further adjustments in the economy of Jonestown.

Most job opportunities lie outside of Jonestown in surrounding cities such as Clarksdale and Tunica. These cities provide steady employment for some Jonestown citizens; however, many others are left behind because of their lack of training in specialized fields or their inability to commute to other cities due to the lack of available transportation and twenty-four hour childcare.

Economic stresses have forced some citizens to leave Jonestown as well as the rich aspects of their lives which reside there--their families,





their friends and their memories. In the meantime, many citizens become unemployed and direction and hope for the future erode. This is the context in which the youth grow up.

In essence, the direction of Jonestown has declined because of the loss of its financial independence. Citizens have been forced to seek opportunity outside of their own town. As people become more dependent on other cities, the need to stay in Jonestown diminishes. One is faced with the inevitable question, does Jonestown continue to erode or does it find ways to become more independent?

Many citizens are dedicated to Jonestown and the town is rich with its own history. An abandoned school building that has been purchased by the town from the County will play an important role in Jonestown's future.

Renovating the Old School

The Old School Building, the site of our emphasis in Jonestown, has long been a pillar within the community. The building, although now vacant, was Jonestown's first school, and it served the community until its evacuation in 1997, when a new school was constructed on the fringe of town. The city dreams for this building to fulfill its needs and foster positive community growth. The city hopes this structure will act as a foundation for community revitalization.

Jonestown needs the old school building to serve as a center to support its needs: elderly care, daycare center, after-school program, city hall support, vocational training facility, and general community needs.



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