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Marketing Gullah: Identity, Cultural Politics, and Tourism

Melissa D. Hargrove
University of Tennessee, Knoxville

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Melissa D. Hargrove entitled "Marketing Gullah: Identity, Cultural Politics, and Tourism." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in Anthropology.

Benita J. Howell, Major Professor

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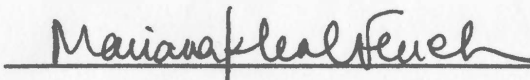
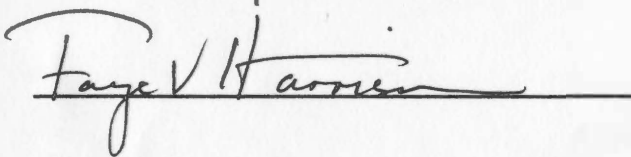
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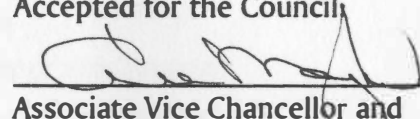
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Dr. Benita J. Howell, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council

Associate Vice Chancellor and
Dean of The Graduate School

Marketing Gullah: Identity, Cultural Politics, and Tourism

A Thesis

Presented for the Master of Arts Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Melissa D. Hargrove

August 2000

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DEDICATION

**This thesis is dedicated to my
sweet baby girls, Passley and Katie,**

and

my soul mate and husband, Rex.

May you someday know

what an

inspiration your love and

support have been.

Only through you three is there me.

Acknowledgments

I want to extend the deepest gratitude to those who allowed me the honor of knowing their story. Without the people of St. Helena Island, Beaufort, Charleston and Mt. Pleasant none of this would have been possible. I would like to thank Marquetta Goodwine for her assistance and friendship over the past two years. The experience of knowing her has been the most rewarding portion of my research. I would like to extend a special thanks to Carolee Brown for the kindness and hospitality she has extended to my family and me over the years, as well as being there to encourage me during those first few days in the field. Thanks to Kuji and Kumar, also, for extending their friendship to me and my husband and children. I also want to especially thank Harriett Brown for being the first person to give me a chance.

I would also like to thank Elayne Scott, Ron and Natalie Daise, Rosalee Coaxum, Alfreda Jamison, Jannie Gourdine, Vera Manigault, Rosalie Pazant, Andrea Brown, Mary Dawson and Liz Santagati for making time to sit down and speak with me. Their stories and insight have contributed greatly to this thesis and I am extremely grateful.

My sincerest appreciation to my mentor and friend, Dr. Benita Howell. Her kindness and intellectual expertise have contributed greatly to my education, while her encouraging words and belief in my ability have been my greatest support. I would also like to thank Dr. Faye V. Harrison for her early encouragement from afar and her continual challenging contributions to my work. She has been a great inspiration since the first day we met. In addition, I am grateful to Dr. Mariana Ferreira for her enthusiasm and encouragement concerning this thesis. Her ability to constructively critique my work has been extremely synergetic.

I would like to thank the Women's Studies Program at the University of Tennessee for the grant award which funded my first season of fieldwork. I would also like to thank Avery Research Center at the College of Charleston for their kindness and cooperation concerning my research.

Lastly, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my family for their love and

unwavering support over the last three years. Thank you Passley and Katie for being the inspiration that keeps me striving to be the best person I can be. May you someday be as proud to be my daughters as I am to be your Mommy. The greatest thanks goes to my husband, Rex, for all the years of love, encouragement, and truth that have brought me to this point. Your sacrifice and dedication have allowed me the freedom to pursue my dreams; words cannot do justice to how much you mean to me. I also want to thank my Mommy, Tammy, Steve, and Zoe, Gabe, Robin, and Tyelo for being there over the years. Your smiling faces and encouraging words have meant more than you know. I extend love and kindness to each and every person who has helped me get through the last three years.

Abstract

This thesis represents an ethnographic study of the current situation of the South Carolina Gullah. Research was conducted during the summer of 1998 and 1999, in the Sea Island communities of Mt. Pleasant and St. Helena Island, to determine the ways in which local grassroots organizations are combating increased tourism, resort and retirement development, and the commoditization of their cultural heritage as a boost to state revenue. The sweetgrass basket weavers of Mt. Pleasant are situated within this struggle as the living legacy to their Gullah ancestry. Their insight is particularly enlightening concerning the current predicament of native Sea Islanders with respect to land ownership, the devastation of development, and the ways in which the traditional craft they have preserved is now being co-opted by others for economic benefit. Along with Mt. Pleasant, St. Helena Island is waging a war against the further destruction of Sea Island communities. The local inhabitants, under umbrella groups such as the Gullah/ Geechee Sea Island Coalition, are becoming influential on a local, national, and international level. Their involvement has prompted public policy which will ensure that their community be recognized as an area of cultural significance and, therefore, in need of preservation.

Within the preservation effort these communities are experiencing internal conflict over whose ideas will serve to direct the future. This type of contestation also exists concerning the images which will serve to define Gullah culture. What does it mean to be Gullah in the twenty- first century? How will Gullah culture be impacted by increased tourism and resort development? How can the shared experiences of remaining Sea Island communities bring about cultural survival and accurate cultural representation? These are the paramount issues being addressed in this contemporary study of Gullah culture.

Preface

The past two years have brought about many changes in my perception of my purpose as an anthropologist. In the beginning I felt I was doing a great service for the Sea Island communities by bringing their story to the rest of the world. I had lofty goals of publication within and outside academia. Eventually, my knowledge of one particular culture would pay off and I could somehow use my expertise to aid this culture in their survival. What I now realize is that they do not need my help. They are doing an incredible job at the grassroots level to bring about an international awareness of their existence. The job of expert is taken, by those who participate in Gullah culture on a daily basis. My job has been as observer and participant in their culture. Through that I have been truly educated about the genuine meaning of community and cultural pride.

Those interested in researching Gullah culture should understand the importance of becoming truly involved with those you desire to study. "A study of Gullah culture can only be successful if the community is part of the study process and not simply treated as a voiceless specimen" (Goodwine 1998a: 9). As a result of the growing interest in Sea Island culture, Marquetta Goodwine¹ recently published a set of guidelines for future research. It is obvious that the residents are unhappy with what has been produced from past research, however, I am hopeful that directives, such as those that follow, can allow us to learn from the mistakes of the past.

Guidelines For Researching the Gullah Community (Goodwine 1998d:202-203)

1. *Respect the fact that this is a "living culture" and that the people have a right to choose whether or not to be studied.*
2. *Contact institutions and/ or organizations which can connect you with a Sea Island mentor or mentors to present information with a proper perspective.*
3. *Couple all documented research and analysis of the culture with information obtained by discussion with Gullah community members and mentor(s).*
4. *Do not attempt to speak Gullah to native speakers as a means of trying to be accepted.*

¹The principal collaborator of this thesis and the founder of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition.

5. *Do not push people to begin to speak Gullah to you or in your presence.*
6. *Do not attempt to force your way into the Gullah community or to superimpose the ways of your own community on the Gullah people.*
7. *Follow through on your word with the people that are assisting you. Always put something positive and beneficial back into the community. Also, make sure that the community has seen the completed project.*

I have worked very hard to follow these guidelines throughout my research. I am hopeful that everyone involved with this thesis is satisfied with my efforts.

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Chapter One: Setting the Stage

The Sea Islands of South Carolina are home to a rich cultural heritage known as Gullah. The inhabitants of these Sea Island communities have been the object of academic study for over a century. Their obvious connections to west and central Africa, from which they were brought in bondage, have intrigued scholars from a variety of disciplines. The anthropological literature relating to Gullah culture is in need of a contemporary update concerning the current issues being addressed by Gullah people, such as resort development, tourism, cultural commoditization, group identity, and cultural politics. Traditional lifeways are being lost to resort development, increased tourism and land loss. Several communities, such as Mt. Pleasant¹ and St. Helena Island², have realized the need for grassroots involvement and are working toward the preservation of their culture and traditional practices. Gullah identity is in question and those concerned with its survival are redefining what it means to be Gullah in the twenty first century.

Along with cultural preservation and revitalization there are other issues to address. How are local communities reacting to the devastation, conventionally termed “development,” they view throughout the Sea Islands? Are there feasible responses to the influx of outside economic interests which will benefit Gullah communities? What can be done to slow the increase of tourists and retirees encroaching on family land? How are images of Gullah culture being marketed for the benefit of the South Carolina tourism industry? Even more significant– how can members of various Sea Island communities overcome internal conflicts and contestation over power and authority in order to unite in the struggle for the preservation of their Gullah heritage? This thesis seeks to answer such questions. The players in this drama are actors, grassroots activists, writers, entrepreneurs, basket weavers, art dealers, politicians, mothers, fathers, friends, and sometimes enemies. How can their shared experience bring about cultural survival?

¹Community located near Charleston, South Carolina.

²Community located near Beaufort, South Carolina.

Contemporary Issues in the Sea Islands

As we move forward, from an anthropological standpoint, it is necessary to make a shift away from the study of Gullah as a culture whose elements of importance are those marking the past toward the study of the current processes by which Gullah culture is being maintained, altered, co-opted, and reinvented. More importantly, how are outside forces, such as development and tourism, affecting the Sea Island communities? Is there cause for alarm concerning cultural survival? It is becoming quite apparent, as more islands are being made accessible for tourism, that tourism pursued as an economic development strategy affects local cultures in unforeseen and unintended ways (Cogswell 1996). More relevant to the issue of Sea Island communities is the growing popularity of cultural heritage tourism as a means of generating economic gain. Is this strategy beneficial to cultural preservation issues or will it prove to be another avenue of cultural exploitation? How can ethnic tourism be utilized to the economic and cultural advantage of Sea Island communities? These issues, among others, play an integral role in the future of Gullah culture.

The majority of Sea Islands have been transformed into resort playgrounds for the white and wealthy. Cities such as Charleston, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia, are beginning to cater to scores of people who are interested in the mystique of Gullah culture, both from an academic and a personal standpoint. Among the increasing number of visitors to South Carolina and Georgia every year are rising numbers of African Americans who come in search of their own roots— both actual and metaphoric (Moore 1980, Jackson et al. 1991). During my research I gathered much material from tourist points of view, such as pamphlets and tour guides, which are co-opting "Gullah" along with a few lines of the language, to entice visitors to join in and become part of the Gullah culture. This is important from the standpoint of identity politics and the commoditization, or marketing, of culture and identity (see Cohen 1988). Other destinations, such as St. Helena Island, are at the starting point of a cultural conservation movement which they hope will also result in economic

opportunity for Gullah people. Those involved are being cautious, however, not to draw attention to what they still possess that other Gullah communities now lack –the deeds of ownership to their property and their traditional way of life.

It is hard to look back, into the historical past of the Sea Islands, and recommend tourism on any level; however, there is no doubt in the minds of those keeping watch that it is an inevitable fate. The lure of the beautiful beaches, the enchantment of the moss-covered trees, and the charm of historic cities such as Beaufort, Charleston, and Savannah continue to draw visitors in large numbers. Tourism is here to stay; however, with adequate planning and grassroots involvement from host communities the Gullah of the South Carolina Sea Islands can influence the types of tourism which will best coincide with their desires for the future. Based on the time I have spent with Sea Islanders, whose words are scattered across these pages, I feel it is safe to assume the following: there is a strong desire that the remaining islands with a recognizable Gullah population be preserved for posterity while encouraging interested outsiders to come and experience the cultural heritage of Gullah people. The one stipulation is that the visitor return to wherever it is they came from, taking with them only the things which have been willingly shared... not stolen, co-opted, or exploited. Visitors are no longer welcomed to take up residency in these communities and wall themselves off from the indigenous populations with fences and guard gates. With this in mind, the possible avenues for tourism in these areas should be focused in two distinct areas: *cultural heritage tourism* and *ethnic tourism*. Ironically, many involved in the struggle to safeguard against mass tourism have recognized these options, and are developing them in various ways. Chapter three will illustrate appropriate ways, by the standards of local community members, in which Gullah culture should and is being incorporated into the tourism industry of South Carolina.

This thesis is an attempt to situate the current predicament of the Gullah in a broader anthropological context of such issues as identity (re) invention, contestation over authority, cultural politics, and the effects of resort, real estate, and tourism development. Such issues are of worldwide importance as local groups increasingly

become targeted by developers and entrepreneurs. Just as land is a nonrenewable resource, the various cultures of the world are under siege for the sake of the tourism dollar and what is lost today cannot be adequately regained tomorrow. It is essential that we join in the fight to save the diverse cultures of the world under threat of extinction. This thesis is my earnest contribution to that end.

Fieldwork

Research conducted for this thesis was gathered over a two year period within the communities of St. Helena Island and Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. My initial visit to the Sea Islands was in July and August of 1998, which lasted nearly four weeks. In 1999 I extended my stay to the entire month of July. The initial focus of research was the preservation of sweetgrass basketry in Mt. Pleasant and the role of basket cooperatives formed by the weavers. I was introduced to the idea of cooperatives in the literature (see Day 1982) and became interested in the role of women in economics through arts and crafts. Research led me to previous work conducted among the basket weavers of Mt. Pleasant (see Day 1982; Twining 1983; Rosengarten 1986; Derby 1980). From these sources I gathered my initial list of potential participants. It was a rewarding experience with a notable lesson. The weavers I managed to locate were hostile to the idea of participating in any further academic study. Their distrust of my intention made it impossible for me to establish rapport, which is vital for ethnographic study. By the fourth day I realized it would only hinder my research to mention past material concerning sweetgrass basketry. With that I began going stand to stand.

What proved most beneficial to my research was initially undetectable. During my fieldwork I rented a research cottage on St. Helena Island, an hour from Mt. Pleasant. I learned of the cottage through my interaction with the Gullah/ Geechee Sea Island Coaliton, founded by Marquetta Goodwine. Through e-mail and phone conversations I decided this would be an opportune place to stay, due to location. The cottage is within walking distance of the Penn Center. Through day to day interaction

with community members on St. Helena I learned of potential weavers who might speak with me. I was also informed of Avery Research Center, part of the College of Charleston, through similar means. The archives at Avery were theoretically beneficial, in that I realized a need for a broader, more contemporary study of Gullah culture; one which situated the Gullah communities along the coast of South Carolina in the current predicament of increased tourism, land loss, resort development and cultural destruction.

Venturing out to conduct fieldwork is a formidable undertaking, especially under time constraint. In retrospect, I now realize I was completely overbearing concerning the research aspect of my first visit. I was worried I wouldn't be able to collect enough data, and that anxiety transferred over into my interaction with the people of St. Helena Island and Mt. Pleasant. I now know it was not the words on paper that informed my ideas about the current situation in the Sea Islands; it was the daily interaction with the people. This type of encounter, often termed participant observation, makes it possible to observe daily interactions and social situations that help to create a more coherent picture of any particular group of people. It also allowed for a more intimate relationship between me and my informants, because the situation reveals that we are both simply people.

My research trips were filled with constant participation in the daily lives of Sea Islanders. My neighbor, Mr. Parker, was always there to lend an ear when I was frustrated or discouraged. I can remember trying to secure an interview with a certain gentleman who had taught basket weaving at Penn School in the early years. His family made it clear he did not want to speak with any researchers and I just wanted a chance to talk with him. Mr. Parker, who had grown up with this man, spoke with the family to try to encourage them to give me a chance, but they refused. I was so grateful for his kindness. He was always watching out for me. Also, our conversations informed me of the rapid changes taking place throughout the Sea Islands.

A typical day began with a cup of coffee and the local news; the Gullah Sentinel and the Beaufort Gazette. Marquetta, or a member of her family, would have dropped

them on the front steps of the cottage by early morning. I always spoke with her to find out what her plans for the day were, and if I could tag along. Several times I was able to accompany her. We made trips to Hilton Head to secure a book signing, to Savannah for a visit to the Civil Rights Museum, and to Bluffton to visit the Heyward House, which is famous for the two slave quarters on the grounds. Marquette was also involved with a national program for the Girl Scouts of America, in which the girls visited sites all over the United States to learn about history. They stopped off in St. Helena to take Marquette's tour, and she invited me to tag along. We began at the Penn Center, where she gave them the history and significance of the Center. We went to her homeplace and led the girls down to the waterfront marsh, where they learned how Africans were brought through these marshes in small boats and deposited on St. Helena Island as enslaved property. Events such as this were valuable in that they exhibit the growing interest in Sea Island culture and history. We later returned to 'Hunnuh Home,' where members of Marquette's family had prepared fried chicken, potato salad, red rice and okra, and bread.

I was also able to interact with local business owners on a daily basis. There are several U-Pick farms on St. Helena Island where I would buy my tomatoes, strawberries, watermelon, and corn. There is also a restaurant which has great authentic Gullah food that we visited several times. This restaurant sponsors many local events, such as book signings for local artists and live music promoting local talent. The book signing for *The Legacy of Ibo Landing* was held there, which I attended my second day on the island during my first trip. I also traveled to neighboring islands, such as Harbor Island, where I met a local who owns a surf shop. He told me stories about the filming of *Prince of Tides*, *Forrest Gump*, and the *Big Chill*, all filmed right around St. Helena Island. He was also very informative about the growing interest in Gullah culture.

The highlight of my second trip to St. Helena was a special event held to welcome Marquette and the other members of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition home from her travels around the world. There was music, food, and lots of conversation about all the exciting things going on throughout the Sea Islands

concerning the preservation of Gullah language and culture. Marquetta gave a moving presentation. I was honored that my family and I were invited to share in that celebration. I was also able to attend her presentation for the Ford Foundation, which was held at the Penn Center. We also got to spend much time with Marquetta's husband and son. Both love the beach as much as my husband and daughters, so they spent lots of time together. It also gave me a chance to discuss many things with Kuji. His unique perspective, as an outsider yet an accepted member of the community, was particularly valuable. More than anything he assured me that their reluctance to speak with me had nothing to do with me, and very much to do with exploitations of the past. One advantage of staying at Hunnuh Home was that I got to meet other researchers from different disciplines and talk to them about their research. All my daily experiences were crucial in the formation of this thesis.

In the times I was not conducting formal interviews I was able to visit many historic sites within Beaufort, Charleston, and Mt. Pleasant. I visited the Old Slave Market, Avery Research Center, the downtown open-air markets that Charleston is famous for, the Charles Pickney site, Boone Hall Plantation, and the historic homes of Beaufort. I learned many valuable things about the history of the lowcountry, as well as facts which dictate the social climate. When visitors come to Beaufort and Charleston they see breathtaking homes; Gullah natives see houses built on the backs of their ancestors and point out aspects of the architecture which tell a different story. For example, most of these homes have a distinct feature on the bottom floor with small doors and vented airways, which gives the house great character and style. In truth, this space is where captive Africans were kept while being transferred from place to place, a dungeon in disguise.

Throughout the periods of enslavement, the struggle for self-sufficiency as freedmen and women, and the current threats to cultural survival the Gullah spirit has endured, carving out a niche that will not be erased with ease. Even as the countless residents are moved off their land, their history persists in small familial units spread along the islands of South Carolina. Through my earliest experiences of fieldwork I

realized the existence of animosity on the part of many Sea Islanders who had been involved in past sociological and anthropological studies. From the standpoint of the Gullah their stories have historically been articulated through the words of others and pseudonyms only served to mask their identity. Marquetta Goodwine once wrote a column in the *Gullah Sentinel*³ entitled “Crak ya teeth.” This represents a Gullah saying which literally means “Don’t let others speak for you! Open your mouth and tell your own story. It’s yours!” For this reason, and contrary to standard anthropological practice, pseudonyms were not used in this thesis. The names which appear are the actual names of those interviewed⁴. A complete list of research participants appears in Appendix 2.

This thesis relies most heavily on ethnographic interviews. Potential participants reviewed a written consent form (Appendix 3) which was signed upon agreement to take part. In feasible situations audio recordings were made of all oral interviews. Those interviews appear here as they were recorded. Unfortunately, the intense noise of Highway 17 prevented audio taping of the Mt. Pleasant sweetgrass basket weavers. Their stories were developed from field notes taken by hand. Over the course of 1998-1999 I have maintained close contact with my principal participant, Marquetta Goodwine, in order to present a more cohesive view of contemporary problems within these communities. Her status in the Gullah communities aided in facilitating local cooperation. I spoke with many who would not consent to a formal interview, although our interaction facilitated a more coherent framework from which to present my findings.

Photography plays an important role in presenting a contemporary survey of Gullah people. Photographs were taken with a 35 mm camera with the intention of

³A newspaper which began publication in 1997 and is known as *the black voice of the Lowcountry*. The Gullah Sentinel spotlights news and events about and for African Americans. They also keep readers informed about issues that affect them and focus on the concerns of the community (excerpt taken from http://users.aol.com/gullgeeco/Gullah_Sentinel.html, June 28,2000).

⁴ There was a special section included on the Informed Consent (Appendix 3) which allowed participants to choose to be identified by name or pseudonym.

allowing visual imagery to complement discursive data. Photographs are a sensitive issue in these communities, for reasons which will become apparent throughout this thesis. Those which appear were approved by participants for inclusion.

The Beaufort County local library was consulted for documents which are often difficult to get outside the area, such as maps of newly named areas that were once recognized as communities⁵, common names of the area, historical sites that are no longer present, and archival information such as local newspapers and unpublished research from nearby colleges. Although I do not cite any sources directly these materials were invaluable in pointing me in the right direction– toward a future focused study of the Gullah as they presently exist... not as they have existed historically (which characterizes the sources found in the local library).

Limitations of Representation

It is important to Goodwine that accurate information concerning Gullah culture reach outsiders to destroy the myths and misinterpretations of the past. It is for this reason that I present Marquetta as the primary spokesperson for Gullah preservation. The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition has many supporters and contributors throughout the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia, as well as throughout the world. The limitations, however, were imposed by the picture of the past as one of exploitation and misrepresentation. Sea Islanders are not, at present, ready to hand over their stories to academic researchers.

The relatively brief periods of time I have spent in the Sea Islands over the past three years also are a limitation. Because many do not yet trust my intentions, communication with a broadly diverse, representative array of Sea Islanders has been extremely difficult. Being a woman also limited my range of social interactions but proved to be advantageous.

⁵Local maps helped to clarify the area of St. Helena Island designated as Frogmore, a name I found in earlier literature about the Sea Islands.

Gullah Women: Leading the Way

Throughout history women and their stories have been invisible (Jordan and Weedon (1995). Within the past three decades, however, anthropology, along with many other branches of social science, have recognized the need for 'herstories' and have begun to instigate research along these lines. In the case of this thesis, I did not begin with the intention of representing the current predicament of the South Carolina Gullah from a feminist perspective. Over time, however, I realized that all the leaders of the organizations and grassroots groups who are fighting to preserve Gullah culture are directed by women. Only one of the my research participants was male.

The friends and acquaintances I have made during my research should be considered in light of my own gender. I am a woman. It is important that I make it clear that women are not the only players in this drama. They are, however, the ones I made a connection with on many levels. As a whole, the Gullah women I encountered exhibited a strong, confident, kind disposition. They possess a nature that is difficult to explain— one that suggests their history of hard earned independence. In many conversations during daily interactions I observed women, always trying to figure out what it was that set them apart from other groups of women in my mind. Then one day I was with Carolee Brown, who owns the cottage I rented during my fieldwork and is the mother of Marquetta Goodwine (my principal collaborator on the project), and we began to talk about Gullah women. Carolee told me about the history she remembers. Women were always right along side the men working in the fields. They always pulled their own load, and they still do.

The female slaves of Sea Island plantations did all they same types of work that was expected of the men (Schwalm 1997).

On antebellum rice plantations, field work was slave women's work. The preparation of the fields, the planting, cultivation, harvesting, and processing of rice, and the maintenance of the elaborate plantation irrigation systems occupied the daily lives of most plantation women (Schwalm 1997:19).

It was not only in the fields in which these women made their importance known. The freed women of the South Carolina Sea Islands were deeply involved in the final destruction of the system of slavery (see Schwalm 1997). Their dedication and involvement pushed the Union to accept emancipation as a war goal. They also openly confronted the institutionalized forms of power: the state, the Union, and the white power structure. The period of Reconstruction was one of defiance for the freed women of the South Carolina Sea Islands (Schwalm 1997). These women actively protested any compromise concerning the autonomy of their freedom with regard to the agricultural system. Gullah women protested even the presence of white planters and, in some cases resorted to physical violence. Therefore, the history of these women gives us clues as to the strong and autonomous nature of the Sea Island women I have come to know.

The current struggle for autonomy and the right to participate in the structuring of their own fate is nothing new to these powerful women. Their female ancestors helped shape the historic time following Emancipation. They are the daughters of those who came before, many of which participated in the Civil Rights Movement and other events credited with the subsequent restructuring of social freedom for the African Americans of the Southern United States. It was on St. Helena Island that Dr. Martin Luther King came to retreat from the rest of the world in order to relax with his family. Within this community Dr. King found much support in the form of females registered to vote⁶ and ready to take action against racism to promote social equality.

The following thesis is just one interpretation, my interpretation, of the current situation within the Gullah communities of St. Helena Island and Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. It is my truest intention to allow the words and stories presented here to represent a contemporary view of Gullah culture. Within several contexts of opposition; to resort development, inappropriate forms of tourism, and to previous constructions of Gullah identity, history, and culture, I will examine the dynamics and interaction of

⁶At that particular time in history, a majority of African American women (within an African American community in the South) being registered to vote was rare.

those involved as well as the politics of identity formation and reinvention. These issues are inextricably linked to the question of “who constructs culture?” and “what part will the residents of these particular Sea Island communities play in the redefinition of their cultural identity?”

Composition of Chapters

Chapter two will introduce the Gullah of the South Carolina Sea Islands. Although the Gullah supposedly are spread throughout the Sea Islands, which extend from Georgetown, South Carolina to Cumberland Island, Georgia, the South Carolina Gullah have been more successful in retaining their Gullah identity and lifeways. Reasons for this will be elaborated in the text. The material in this chapter will focus on the geographical, historical, and cultural significance of the Sea Island communities. The geographical isolation of the Sea Islands is a very important piece in the puzzle of Gullah cultural survival. Historically, these locations were among the few places in the United States where freed blacks actually obtained land they had worked while enslaved and became self-sufficient farmers, fishers and crafters. Such events as the Civil War, known as "big shoot" to the Gullah, and the Port Royal Experiment played an enormous role in the shaping of Sea Island history.

Chapter three will be devoted to the sweetgrass basket weavers of Mt. Pleasant who took time to share their stories. The time I spent in the company of these women represents the beginning of my journey. It illustrates the common frustrations of fieldwork as well as the difficulty of establishing rapport with complete strangers. Within their words is a larger picture, which is intended to emerge slowly throughout the pages of this thesis. It is a picture of struggle, determination, and everyday life. It is a picture of the current predicament these women find themselves in, with regard to changes brought about by tourism and resort development. It is a picture of an identity, being reshaped each day with the increasing importance of Gullah culture within the tourism industry of South Carolina. How else could one explain the current

contestation over an identity which was vehemently denied by all only three decades ago?

Chapter four will explore the past, present and future of tourism throughout the Sea Islands. In order to do this effectively I will define the types of tourism being utilized, such as cultural heritage tourism and ethnic tourism, as well as the effects of tourism on specific Gullah communities. I will pay special attention to the communities of St. Helena Island and Mt. Pleasant, as those are the dominant areas in which I conducted ethnographic fieldwork. Also, I will reveal the many ways in which Gullah culture is being commoditized. In this chapter I will discuss the use of public policy and illustrate ways in which public officials in Beaufort County have joined forces with grassroots activists in order to preserve Gullah culture. I will also discuss the recent partnership between local community members of St. Helena Island and the federal government in an attempt at economic development. Local governments throughout the Sea Islands are growing more aware that their future success depends on their stance regarding these issues. They have taken a pro-active role in advocating that the Gullah culture survives well into the twenty-first century.

Chapter five will elaborate on the larger issues of identity, contestation and cultural politics. Within this chapter interview excerpts provide a more accurate portrayal of Gullah identity than can be constructed by an outsider, such as myself. I will also present the multivocality of St. Helena Island and the dominant themes involved in the contestation over control of the future. As more researchers venture to the Sea Islands and economics increasingly becomes attached to identity, people are climbing out of the woodwork to claim and express Gullah identity. This is creating serious community disruptions, as well as a general distrust of anthropologists with camera bags and tape recorders, viewed as interested only in book royalties and career advancement. Within this chapter I will revisit my fieldwork experiences and illuminate the reasons for the hostility I encountered. The ethnographic data gathered during 1998 and 1999 offers excellent insight into what those involved see as the problems facing their communities. Taken as a body of ethnographic data, these words tell a tale

of distrust, misuse of funds and information, and a lack of cooperation among many people with common goals.

Chapter six will profile the efforts of my principal collaborator, Marquette L. Goodwine. She refers to herself as "homegrown" and a resident of St. Helena Island. Her efforts over the past eight years are being recognized on a national and international scale as she travels the world informing others about the Gullah and the current need for preservation. Marquette is the spokeswoman for the Gullah, as evidenced by her testimony to the United Nations in April of 1999. This chapter will be devoted to her poignant words and insightful ideas for the future survival of her culture and community. I will also discuss, briefly, the position of Penn Center as the community core for Gullah preservation. I will make several suggestions about the future path of Sea Island literature and what anthropologists can do to ensure the cultural survival of the Gullah community of St. Helena Island and elsewhere.

Chapter seven will conclude the thesis. Within this chapter I will discuss the lessons learned during my three years of research, as well as the insight I have gained into one community's struggle against resort, real estate, and commercial development and tourism. I will also make several suggestions, from an outsider's standpoint, concerning one of the crucial factors for Gullah preservation: the insistence upon continued ownership of family land.

The literature review appears as Appendix 1.

Chapter Two The South Carolina Sea Islands: Past, Present, and Future

The Sea Islands are a string of islands which, geographically, extends from Georgetown, South Carolina to Cumberland Island, Georgia (Figure 2.1). As a cultural area, the Sea Islands have served as home to the Gullah and Geechee. The South Carolina Sea Islands include the following: Bull Island, Sullivans Island, James Island, Johns Island, Kiawah Island, Seabrook Island, Wadmalaw Island, Edisto Island, Ladies Island, St. Helena Island, Hunting Island, Fripp Island, Parris Island, Hilton Head Island, and Daufuskie Island. The Georgia Sea Islands¹, also known as the Golden Isles, consist of: Tybee Island, Skidaway Island, Ossobaw Island, St. Catherines Island, Sapelo Island, St. Simons Island, Jekyll Island, and Cumberland Island.

These islands can be classified as low-lying; this area is often referred to as the “lowcountry,” separated from the mainland by small inlets, tidal creeks, and grass-covered marshlands. The islands possess a warm marine environment rich with various types of tropical and subtropical vegetation (Salter 1968). Beneficial to these islands is their extremely long growing season: from 250 to 300 days a year (Salter 1968). The sandy-loam soil of the Sea Islands is well-suited to many types of agricultural production, which made them ideal for the plantation economies of rice, indigo and cotton, all of which fed the need for enslaved labor. West Africans seemed the best choice for such a labor force, due to their superior knowledge of rice and indigo cultivation (Schwalm 1997). Those captive Africans, which we now know as the Gullah, forged a common culture out of their shared misery and will to survive and surmount obstacles.

It is indeed the entire chain of Sea Islands which became home to hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans, but the islands of South Carolina are believed to have retained the most sizeable population directly descended from African

¹Geechee is the Georgia equivalent of Gullah (Pollitzer 1999).

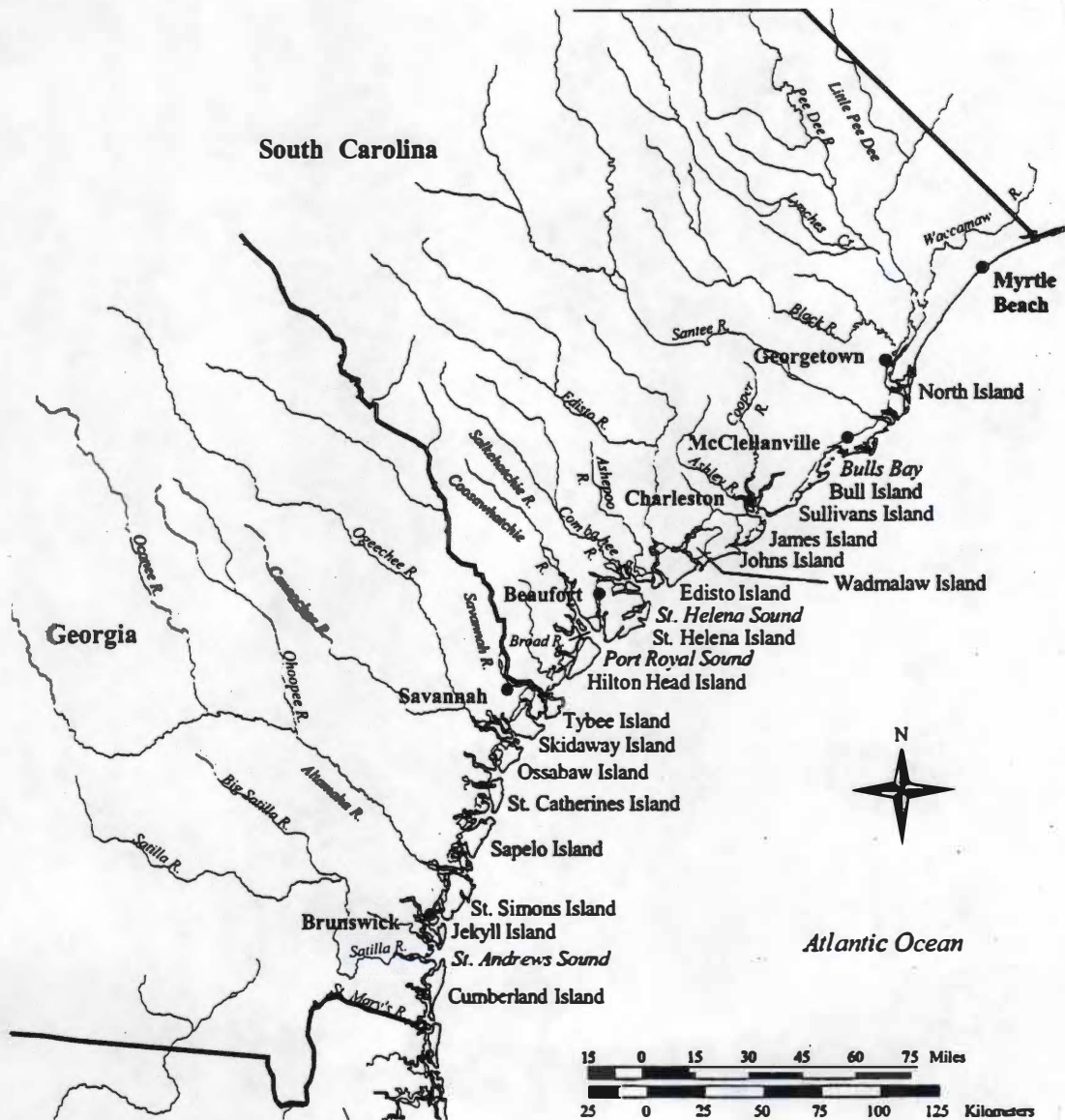


Figure 2.1 Map of the Sea Islands
(Pollitzer 1999:5)

slaves (Creel 1988). Many scholars maintain that the Sea Islands of South Carolina are the most authentic source of African culture history in North America, because their culture exhibits various remnants of the experiences of slavery and the traditions of West Africa (Guthrie 1996). For this reason, the remainder of the text will deal directly with the South Carolina Sea Islands and the fieldwork, including my own, conducted in those communities.

The South Carolina Sea Islands: Exploration, Conquest, and Exploitation

It was early in the sixteenth century when the conquest of the Sea Islands first began. Pedro de Quexos, of Spain, landed at present day St. Helena in 1525 (Johnson 1930). He was immediately taken by the beauty of the place, dense with pine, cedar and, the ever-present, breathtaking live oak draped in moss which has become the icon of lowcountry Georgia and South Carolina. Quexos named the island *Punta de Santa Elena*, in honor of his saint, Elena, who he believed had led him to this glorious place (Johnson 1930). The broad river which bordered the island was also named for Elena, but is presently known as Port Royal Sound. The island's name was translated into English: St. Helena Island. Port Royal was the term the Spaniards used to refer to the vicinity of present-day Parris Island, specifically named by Jean Ribaut, commander of the first French expedition to Florida (Johnson 1930).

The Island remained embroiled in conflicts for the next 100 years, primarily between the French and Spanish, and later between the Spanish and the English. Early settlers who came from England in search of an area to settle landed at St. Helena, but moved on to Charles Town upon hearing of the better soil conditions there (Johnson 1930). Charles Town became the major docking point for incoming African captives who were sold in the slave market, which now serves as a tourist attraction in present-day Charleston, South Carolina. It was not until 1700 that the first birth of a white child was reported (Johnson 1930). This event has come to signify the beginning of the colonization of the Sea Islands.

Before the first European explorer set foot on the Sea Islands, they served as home to indigenous Americans. These included the Yamassees, Westoes, Savannas, Santees, Congarees, Waterees, and Peedees (Pollitzer 1999). The late 1600s and early 1700s brought about forced migration of these tribal people, along with death due to slavery, warfare and disease. By 1715, the Native American population of the area, collectively known as the Yamassee, waged war on the English settlers in protest against their ill-treatment (Pollitzer 1999). Their imminent defeat forced them across the Savannah to San Agustín, which opened up their land to subsequent conquest. The land was to be colonized under strict stipulations by the General Assembly of the Province, making ownership available only to “newcomers” from Great Britain, Ireland, or any of His Majesty’s plantations in America, although those would be forced to wait seven years to convey their tracts (Pollitzer 1999).

The province of St. Helena, as well as several other Sea Island communities, grew slowly in population until settlers realized certain crops would prosper in these geographic areas. Among the earliest white settlers to relocate to St. Helena were several families from Barbados, already familiar with the system of plantation slavery² and the utilization of African labor (Schwalm 1997; Johnson 1930). These first West Indian planters brought close to a thousand laborers with them (Creel 1988). During the last decade of the seventeenth century the economy of the lowcountry was transformed from a mixed economy— comprising the exportation of naval stores, lumber, livestock and deerskins into an economy entirely dependent on rice cultivation using forced African labor. As rice became South Carolina’s most valuable export the need for labor increased, which translated into increased numbers of enslaved workers being brought into the lowcountry, first from the West Indies and then directly from Gambia by 1700 (Pollitzer 1999).

Indigo was the next economic fire to be fueled by slave labor, beginning in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Soon after indigo came the cultivation of sea island cotton, rounding out the 137 years of legal slavery in the Sea Islands of South

²Slavery was well established in Barbados as early as 1643 (Phillips 1918).

Carolina. Pollitzer estimates that at least 122,000 Africans were brought from Senegal through Angola between 1670 and 1808 (1999). It is doubtful that a definitive number resulting from the subsequent trade³ will ever be known.

The Royal African Company had an intimate and documented relationship with the planters of South Carolina. Through trial and error, the planters had discerned the type of slaves who best suited their needs, and began “ordering,” with regard to size, strength, health and temperament:

The order of choice among South Carolina planters appears to have been Gold Coast, Gambia, Winward Coast, and Angola; Ibo from Calabar or Bonny in the Bight of Biafra were considered worst (Pollitzer 1999:41).

Pollitzer reviewed a wealth of data concerning the documented origins of South Carolina’s African population which can be broken down as follows: 39 percent came from Angola (which includes the Congo), 20 percent from Senegambia, 17 percent from the Winward Coast, and 13 percent from the Gold Coast. The contribution from Sierra Leone was, surprisingly⁴, only 6 percent (1999). However, 23,033 (20 percent of the total number of slaves legally imported into South Carolina) were omitted from these calculations because their origin was not recorded (Figure 2.2). These Africans formed communities, or *common unities*,⁵ out of their shared enslavement. What developed, and

³ Referring to the period between 1808 and 1848.

⁴ Ian Hancock (1971) asserted a strong linguistic relationship between Krio language of Sierra Leone and Gullah language. In 1989 Sea Islanders visited Sierra Leone to establish a connection with their cultural and ancestral heritage. The natives of Sierra Leone and the Sea Islanders of South Carolina understood one another. Due to such connections Sierra Leone has come to be recognized as the symbolic origin of Gullah ancestry. In 1997 a woman from Georgia accompanied another group of Sea Islanders to Sierra Leone in order to sing a song believed to have been brought to Georgia from this region. The trip was documented and released as a documentary entitled “The Language You Can Cry In: The Story of a Mende Song.” However, the certainty of a linguistic connection between Sierra Leone and the Gullah of South Carolina and Georgia may need to be further substantiated for anthropologists, such as Marilyn M. Thomas-Houston, to be convinced. Thomas-Houston (1999) reviewed the video and concluded that the connections are simply implied through a mythical story staged as academically credible. For the purpose of anthropology, the film offers no credibility to the implied connection.

⁵Reference made by Marquetta Goodwine.

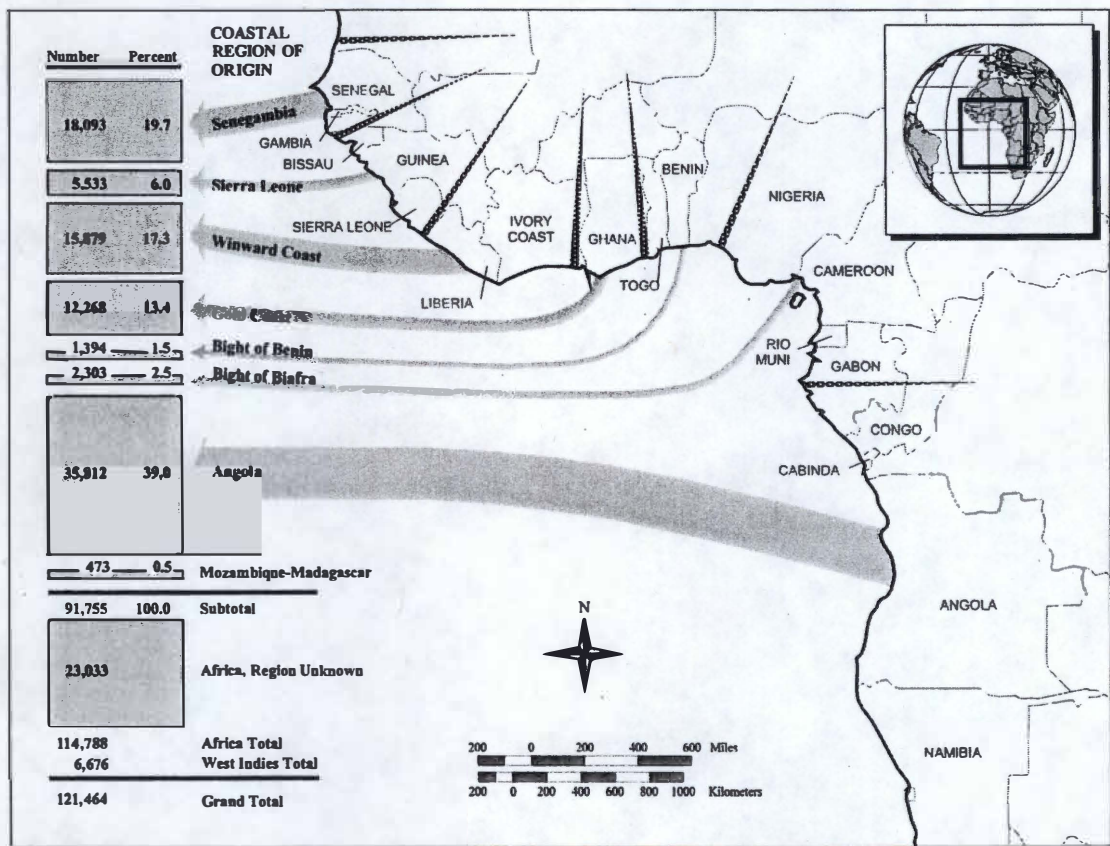


Figure 2.2 West African Areas of Origin (Pollitzer 1999:46)

is the present focus of study, is a creolized⁶ culture which was constructed out of a remodeling of various cultural traits brought across the sea from many different parts of West Africa (Mintz and Price 1976), with subsequent influences from European and indigenous sources. Both the culture and its people are referred to as Gullah. It is impossible to pinpoint the exact number of enslaved Africans that were brought to South Carolina in terms of their ethnic and cultural profile. It can be asserted, however, that the many ethnic groups who contributed to the Gullah culture exhibit certain traits which can be positively linked with recognized areas of West Africa. The cultivation of rice and the role of rice in Sea Island culture, along with cattle husbandry, has been attributed to the western bulge of Africa and the Sudan. These peoples also brought influences in musical instruments, basketry, wood working, initiation ceremonies, and herbal plants usage for healing purposes (Pollitzer 1999). Those who came from the Guinea Coast are credited with contributions in the areas of grammar, magic, secret societies, possession and trance, quilting, ceramics, and skilled metallurgy (Pollitzer 1999). The Central African captives brought many Bantu words and names, as well as values of kinship and their deep religious beliefs concerning death and the afterlife (Pollitzer 1999). As Pollitzer illustrates through many years of study, “no one sea island can be connected to a specific region in Africa” (1999:198). What can be alleged with relative certainty is that Gullah culture is an amalgamation of many different cultural elements from West and Central Africa (Figure 2.3).

There are two dominant hypothetical accounts on the origin of the word “Gullah.” Most often mentioned within the literature is the belief that it is a shortened version of “Angola,” derived from the heavy importation of slaves from that region during South Carolina’s early colonial period (Creel 1988; Jones-Jackson 1987; Pollitzer 1999). Another possibility is a derivation of “Gola,” sometimes spelled Goulah, which refers to a large group of Africans from Liberia who were heavily imported into the Sea Islands at the height of rice and indigo cultivation. Golas were preyed on by

⁶“Creole” is a term often used within linguistics, however, it is also appropriate when discussing situations of cultural contact which give rise to new cultures molded from the remnants of disparate points of origin. In this case, Gullah culture can be characterized as a creole culture.

<u>People</u>	<u>Location</u>
Bambara, Malinke	Mali
Susu	Guinea
Senufo	Ivory Coast
Mossi	Burkina-Faso
Tiv	Nigeria
Hausa	Nigeria
Songhai	Mali
Djerma	Niger
Fulani	Guinea-Nigeria
Ibibio, Efik, Nupe	Nigeria
Bini, Igbo, Yoruba	Nigeria
Ewe	Togo
Fon, Popo	Benin (Dahomey)
Ga, Akan: Ashanti, Fanti	Ghana
Temne, Mende, Kissi	Sierra Leone
Kru, Vai, Kpelle, Gola	Liberia
Wolof, Baga, Serer	Senegal
Fang	Gabon
Djema	Congo-Brazzaville
Bobangi	Zaire
Luba, Songye	Zaire
Kongo	Zaire, Angola
Kimbundu	Angola
Umbundu	Angola

Figure 2.3 People and Locations of Africa Relevant to South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands (adapted from Pollitzer 1999:32-33)

neighboring groups, such as the Mende, Vai, and Mandingas (Creel 1988). There is existing support for a linguistic relationship between the Gullah and both the historical Goulah or Golas. It is therefore problematic, at present, to establish either as fact.

Sea Island Slavery

Slavery in the Sea Islands can be seen as unique when compared to other regions of the United States for several reasons. First, the slaves of Sea Island plantations overwhelmingly outnumbered whites. Figures obtained from the Georgetown district in 1800 illustrate this point: 2,150 whites and 12,400 black slaves (Jones- Jackson 1987). By 1840, the white population had added 50 people, totaling 2,200, while the slave population had increased to 18,000. In many cases the Sea Island slaves had minimal contact with white masters, often only as they were transported from the Charleston slave market to their island destination. Upon arriving at the plantation, slaves were turned over to a *driver*, or overseer, who would also have been black (Creel 1988). The fresh- water swampland around the islands was an ideal breeding ground for malaria. Europeans had no genetic tolerance for this parasite, as did many Africans, and they were often forced to reside on the mainland (Nichols 1976). The absence of Europeans allowed these island inhabitants the opportunity to maintain, as much as can be expected under the circumstances, some semblance of community autonomy. The relative isolation of the enslaved population was also conducive to subtle retention of various African cultural traits, being blended and transformed into the creolized culture known as Gullah.

Also unique to this region, the Sea Island plantations operated on a *task system*, vastly different from the gang system widely used throughout the South. The task system is based on an allotted amount of work for each fieldhand, usually broken down into acreage to be worked per day. As pointed out by G.G. Johnson (1930), from research done on St. Helena Island, the “task” came to signify a quarter of an acre, laid out 105 by 105 feet. A typical allotment for a plowman “was usually four tasks, or an

acre a day” (83). Slave life on St. Helena was described as follows:

In the late spring when the cotton had to be hoed at the critical stages and again in the autumn when the cotton was in “good blow” they might work from “day clean” to “just dark,” but these were unusual periods, and as a reward for the extra labor, their masters dealt out choice rations of molasses and meat and passed around presents of tobacco and gay headcloths. The ordinary task of a full hand kept him in the field only four or five hours a day so that the “smart” ones were habitually through by two o’clock (Johnson 1930:124).

At the peak of harvest, tasks might require working well into the night; however, when the tasks were light, there was free time in the afternoon to hunt and fish or tend personal garden plots (Pollitzer 1999). It was also time used to sew baskets and fishnets, tend pigs and chickens, or build boats and canoes (Johnson 1930). In conditional situations, Sea Island laborers were encouraged by plantation masters to produce items which they could sell for economic benefit. On St. Simons Island, for example, the overseer of Butler plantation allowed many of his slaves to go to town to do just that (Johnson 1930).⁷ Slaves were also forced to produce items sold by the master for a profit. There exists documentation from the 1730s of slaves making sweetgrass baskets that were sold by the master (Rosengarten 1986). Along with these varied activities, the Gullah’s foreparents, undoubtedly, spent time with others, passing the afternoon with accounts of their predicament, along with folktales and stories brought from far across the water.

In addition to geographical isolation and the task system, the importation of slaves into the Sea Islands continued longer than elsewhere. The slave trade officially ended in 1808; however, the geographic position of the Sea Islands made it possible to continue importing slaves well into the late 1850s. There is documentation of 400 Africans from the Congo landing on Jekyll Island, Georgia, in 1858 aboard the *Wanderer* (Wells 1967). It is feasible to speculate that this was not an isolated incident and that the illegal trade persisted throughout the Sea Islands. Therefore, there was a constant flow of Africans into the Sea Islands for nearly two centuries, which molded the Sea

⁷These statements should, in no way, be taken to indicate slavery was enjoyable; simply that the task system allowed for more personal time than the gang system utilized elsewhere.

Islands into distinct representations of African- American history and culture.

“Big Shoot”

It was November of 1861 when the guns of “big shoot”⁸ rang out through Port Royal Sound. The Civil War brought change and, subsequently, freedom to the Sea Islands. As Union armies invaded the areas inland of the island plantations, the white owners fled leaving everything just as it was in the hopes of soon returning. Those who had a chance informed the overseers of the situation, assuring them they would return; those without time left their slaves behind with no warning of what was to come. Upon contact with the slave populations, Union troops discovered they had not been informed of the War. The military enlisted the help of the federal government to take responsibility for these “contraband of war” (as they were at that time designated) who were running out of food and options (Dabbs 1983; Pollitzer 1999).

Many members of President Lincoln’s cabinet became nervous about the situation in the Sea Islands. This was to be one of the largest cotton crops ever, and it had to be taken in. To accomplish the harvest, the US government had to formulate a plan for the supervision of the enslaved work force. Appropriate to the era, the intellectual elite of the North came to their aid. The project was a correspondence between philanthropists from New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, who came to be known as the “Port Royal Relief Committee.” With funding from the U.S. Treasury, the committee assembled a group of missionaries, and sailed them off to the rescue of the desperate, abandoned islanders (Rose 1964).

The volunteers enlisted to help with the federally sponsored Port Royal Experiment, as it has come to be known, were put in charge of one plantation each. They were presented with several duties: management of the slaves as they harvested the crop, distribution of relief supplies, teaching, preaching, and preparing them for citizenship (Dabbs 1983). The objective of the Port Royal Experiment was to

⁸Sea Islanders use this term to refer to the Civil War.

uplift – in every possible sense – those released from slavery by the war (Dabbs 1983). Among the first group to arrive on St. Helena was Laura Towne, whose primary goal was the education of the freed people in the Port Royal Area (Rose 1964). Her name has become legendary for her devotion to, and fulfillment of, that task.

Penn School

In 1862, the Penn Normal and Agricultural School was established by Laura Towne and Ellen Murray at the Oaks plantation on St. Helena Island. These two devoted women, along with Charlotte Forten, served a pivotal role in Sea Island history through their teaching at Penn, which was the first school established for the education of freed slaves. The school was named after William Penn, known as “the great lover of liberty.” These women paid their own expenses, with help from outside donations. They were supported by two Quaker societies of Philadelphia: the Commission which had sent them and the Benezet⁹ (Dabbs 1983).

Charlotte Forten was the first black teacher at Penn Normal and Agricultural School. Charlotte came from a long line of activists and was educated at home, as she wasn’t allowed to attend Philadelphia’s white schools. She later moved to Salem and began teaching school. She was encouraged to apply for a teaching position with the Port Royal Experiment and was in Port Royal by 1862. Even though Forten was African American, she and the Gullah did not get along right away, due to cultural differences. She was shocked by their shouting during worship; but over time she got to know and understand the philosophies of spirituality from an African perspective (Goodwine 1997). She later became very near and dear to the hearts of this community (as did Murray and Towne) as they taught reading, writing, and arithmetic, as well as fought for the right of land ownership for Sea Islanders.

⁹ Philadelphia Society named after the late Anthony Benezet, who spent his life teaching enslaved African children to read and write. Benezet convinced the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting (Quakers) to take an official position against the practice of buying and selling slaves. He is known for his antislavery writings and abolitionist activity in Philadelphia, as well as his influence on the formation of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society.

The Port Royal Experiment was centered around the Penn School. The number one objective, contrary to the idea that the north wanted to prepare the freed slaves for factory work, was to teach the people how to be self-supporting and industrious enough to stay in their rural communities (Rosengarten 1986). The students were taught a vast array of things at Penn, from basket-weaving to net-making to advanced mathematics. I spoke with several elderly members of the St. Helena community who had been students at Penn before it closed in 1948. Most comments were, overall, quite positive. The objectives of Penn School are retrospectively viewed as constructive and beneficial. The Penn Center now serves as a cultural resource center and meeting place for grassroots activity as well as houses the Penn Normal School archives and the York W. Bailey Museum, named in honor of St. Helena's first black doctor: Dr. York Bailey (Dabbs 1983).

From Enslavement to Ownership

In 1862, President Lincoln gave the order that abandoned lands in and around St. Helena be set aside for the freed population (30 miles inland from the sea). On January 1, 1863, President Lincoln's official Emancipation Proclamation was read aloud to the former slaves of St. Helena island.¹⁰ One quote sums up the feelings of the former slaves on that day. Prince Pilot, who was present at the ceremony, later shared this with his grandson, regarding the singing of *My Country Tis of Thee*:

At first only one or two joined in, and then it seemed like all the colored people of a sudden know that that flag belonged to we people and that for the first time we had a country of our own – and nothing could keep them from singing it out (Dabbs 1983).

Soon after Emancipation came the actual land sales to the freedmen. Much of the land was sold to missionaries or speculators, but some tracts were sold to the slaves who had worked that particular plantation. The land was partitioned off into

¹⁰This day, known as Emancipation Day, continues to be celebrated on St. Helena.

plots ranging from ten to twenty acres and sold for \$1.25 an acre. Owning land was one of the greatest status symbols ever gained for the freedmen, and many who purchased it demanded that it be on the same land as their home plantation. Most often they even chose to keep the original name (Rose 1964). Other advantageous orders followed the land sales. Special Field Order 15 was issued by Union Army General William Tecumseh Sherman on January 15, 1865:

At Beaufort, Hilton Head, Savannah, Fernandina, St. Augustine, and Jacksonville, the blacks may remain in their chosen or accustomed vocations, but on the islands and in the settlements hereafter to be established, no white person whatever, unless military officers and soldiers, detailed for duty, will be permitted to reside; and the sole and exclusive management of affairs will be left to the freed people themselves, subject only to the United States military authority and the acts of Congress. (adapted from Goodwine 1998b:165).

It was at that time official: the Sea Islanders were on their own.

Self- Sufficiency in Isolation

From Emancipation until quite recently the Sea Island communities remained largely self-sufficient, utilizing their agricultural and fishing skills to meet their needs. Many islands remained isolated, with no connector bridges, until the middle of the twentieth century. Even electricity arrived late, coming to the more remote islands only as recently as the 1960s (Jones- Jackson 1987). This century of isolation, beginning with emancipation, brought about many changes in land use patterns. Sea Island freedmen who became landowners proceeded to cultivate the crop already in production, such as rice and cotton, until the boll weevil infestation of the 1920s. This event terminated cotton production for most farmers, aside from the few who converted to the short- staple variety (Salter 1968). Those who could no longer earn a living from cotton entered into *truck farming*, which remains a viable economic option for the present day farmers of several Sea Island communities, including Johns, Wadmalaw, Edisto, St. Helena, and Ladies Island (Salter 1991). The leading value crops for truck farming

continue to be tomato and cucumbers. This was evidenced by the constant convoy of trucks roaring past my rental cottage during my 1999 fieldwork. The process began before sunrise and lasted through to late evening. St. Helena is dominated by tomato truck farming, and utilizes migrant farm labor from Mexico during harvest season.

Land use has been altered by other forces, aside from agriculture, in more negative ways. Farmland is now the prime target of developers (Carawan 1989). Statistics obtained from census data show an overwhelming amount of land being taken out of food production between 1987 and 1992. Farming acreage in Beaufort County¹¹ dropped more than 17% between 1987 and 1992. Charleston County¹² also shows a severe reduction in farmlands: nearly 23% during that same five year period. That amounts to almost 20,000 acres being taken out of farming production within a five year period. The question becomes, what is it being used for now?

Resort Development in the South Carolina Sea Islands

The present situation of Sea Island communities consists of dramatic changes (Figure 2.4). One need look no further than Hilton Head Island, which only 50 years ago was home to an African-American farming community. Connector bridges began being built to the islands during the 1950s and “*everything change up now*” (Ed Brown, resident of Wadmalaw Island, quoted in Jones- Jackson 1987). Land is constantly taken out of production and converted to resort development for the industry of tourism. Present day Hilton Head is populated by rich whites, residing in communities named after successful plantations of the slavery era. This practice of using the term *plantation* was troublesome to me. I decided to ask one of my informants, Carolee Brown, how she views the use of the word. Her opinion holds particular relevance. Carolee’s occupation

¹¹Includes St. Helena Island, Hilton Head Island, Port Royal, Parris Island, and Shell Point.

¹²Includes Wadmalaw Island, Mt. Pleasant, Johns Island, Kiawah Island, Seabrook Island, Edisto Island, and Charleston.

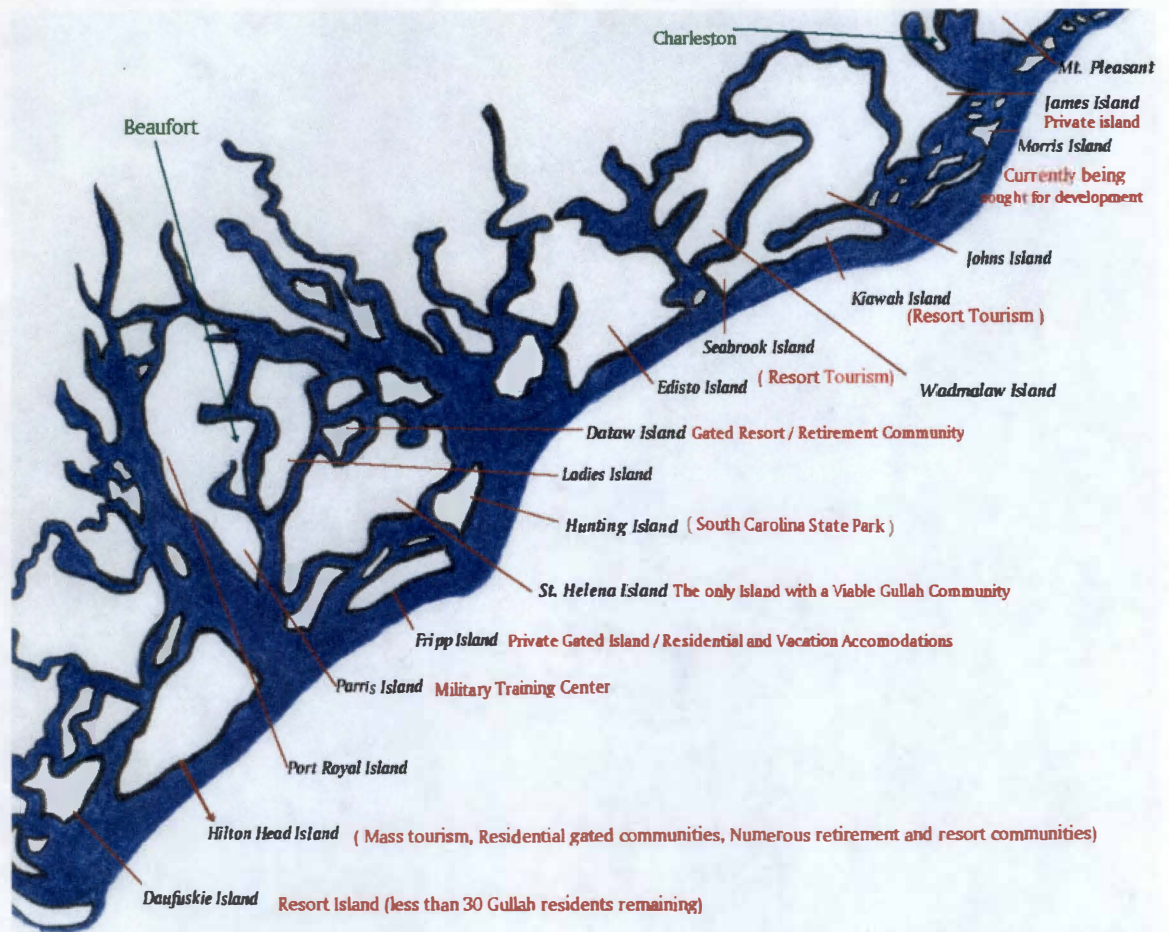


Figure 2.4 Altered Sea Island Map Illustrating Specific Changes

is cleaning houses in such communities.

M: Now when you see the signs that say “plantation” does that offend you?

CB: *No, don't bother me one way or the other. I work over there, hey I know they got my money and if they hire me they gotta pay me my price. I treat them accordingly; I don't go in they house raggedy.*

M: You don't think it's in poor taste they still refer to those places as “plantations”?

CB: *Well, we have discussed that but this is what they want. There is nothing we can do about it. They think they want plantations. They figure they are protected, which they're not because the thieves can always get in. This lady told me the neighbor's son was robbing the houses, and I said Look! That ain't nothing new. Anytime you all get robbed over here it's an inside job. It's not we who come to work and steal it... and they know it. And a lot of them get jipped into these plantation fees, because you wouldn't believe what high fees they pay for security at that gate.*

M: I can believe it.

CB: *They wanna live there, but there are so many of them now that they wanna get away from those plantations. But where are they going? They don't know where to go.*

M: So, in a way they are slaves¹³ to that whole thing too?

CB: *Yes. You gonna pay and don't fool yourself... Only the rich can afford it. The young white people can't afford it.*

By 1980 whites outnumbered blacks on Hilton Head five to one (Pollitzer 1999).

Kiawah Island was purchased in 1974 to become a resort; it is now presented as “the premiere Resort on the East Coast” offering championship golf, world-renowned tennis, award-winning nature program, and undisturbed natural environment (adapted from Travel brochure produced by Kiawah Island Visitor's Center). It is described in tourism literature as a private residential and resort community, and a “popular choice for both vacationing and retirement” (Charleston Trident Convention and Visitors Bureau). The same publication represents Seabrook Island in a similar light:

¹³ Slavery used here to refer to the bound condition of homeowners in such communities. I am in no way comparing this situation to the deplorable institution of slavery and, in retrospect, realize the need for word substitution. However, interviews are transcribed exactly as they were conducted.

“Seabrook Island is an exclusive, private, residential sea island located just 22 miles south of Historic Charleston.”

These resort communities of Kiawah and Seabrook can only be reached by driving across Johns Island. Charles Joyner gives an eloquent description of the changes on Johns Island brought about by the resort development of these two Sea Islands between 1964 and 1989:

When I first came to this part of Johns Island in 1964, it was a quiet rural black community. Now expensive cars cruise past on their way to Kiawah and Seabrook Islands. These resort islands can only be reached by driving across Johns Island and meeting the approval of a guard at a security gate. Beyond the guarded gates are plush hotels and upscale shopping facilities, beachfront houses and condominiums. Those who are waved through the checkpoint are mainly affluent visitors from afar (Charles Joyner in Carawan 1989).

These are referred to as *gated communities*, and they are a permanent fixture of the South Carolina Sea Islands. Gating presents many problems for the residents and their families who once resided here. Many Sea Island residents cannot visit the graves of deceased family members because they are located inside gated communities which do not grant access without pre-approval from the proper authorities of the resort or community establishment. “No Trespassing” signs keep natives from traveling the roads they have known as home all their lives (Pollitzer 1999).

Daufuski Island has undergone a complete transformation. Once home to a small Gullah population, Daufuski is now an outgrowth of the resort industry of Hilton Head. The ferry which takes visitors to and from the island is operated by the Sea Pines Plantation as a service to their guests, who often purchase a \$100 day pass to the golf courses on the island. There is also a ferry operated by Adventure Cruise for about the same price. My attempts to reach Daufuski Island were foiled by a \$19 boat ticket— my first year of fieldwork was spent eating peanut butter sandwiches because all my money went to buying a small basket from each weaver I interviewed. I had not planned on that expense, so the ferry to Daufuskie might just as well have been \$1000. The second year I had plans to visit Daufuskie with Marquetta Goodwine, but it did not work out for one reason or another. I believe the trip would have been pointless without a native Sea

Islander; the remaining Gullah residents of Daufuskie would not have viewed me as a welcomed guest without the company of someone whom they trust.

During my interview with Ron and Natalie Daise we came across the subject of Daufuskie Island. Ron and Natalie are famous for their roles as “Uncle Ron” and “Aunt Natalie” on the hit children’s show *Gullah Gullah Island*, but in reality they are deeply invested in the current efforts toward Gullah preservation. I had the pleasure of meeting with them in their home, and we discussed many things. Their reaction to me making the trip to Daufuskie was an indicator of how native Sea Islanders¹⁴ view the fate of that Island

M: Now what about Daufuskie? I have been trying to get out there but the only way...

ND: *Oh why? Don't go.*

M: What have they done to that place?

ND: *They erased it and it's horrible.*

RD: *It's a return to the Old South.*

I was encouraged by many informants not to waste a trip, because only a handful of native families remain and it was highly unlikely that they would speak with a white researcher.

Edisto Island tells a similar story. In 1980 U.S. Census data blacks were 84% of the Edisto population. By 1990 that number had been reduced to 50%.¹⁵ It now has the reputation of a family vacation spot, completely void of any historical representation of the Gullah who labored in bondage upon this island. In marketing to tourists and potential buyers Kapp / Lyons Realty, Inc. describe the history of Edisto Island as follows:

The Spanish arrived in the 1500's, followed by English settlers in the 1600's.

¹⁴ Ron is a Sea Island native who worked for many years as a local reporter and Natalie, his wife, is an invested member of the Gullah community.

¹⁵U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census for 1990.

The English remained, first living off the sea, then cultivated money crops of rice and indigo. By 1790 planters turned to a long staple cotton, known as Sea Island cotton— one of the finest cottons ever produced. It was this which brought the great wealth to Edisto Islanders. Many of the elegant houses and plantations remaining today are reminders of that affluent age (adapted from Internet site www.charleston.net/com/edisto/history.html).

St. Helena Island is, at present, the location of a battle against real estate and tourist development. Through the programs designed by the Penn Center and a realization of Beaufort County officials that St. Helena could be next, many steps are being taken to arrest the devastation played out on other Sea Islands. This island presents a unique case in native islander involvement for the conservation of land and cultural heritage, due to the strength of various grassroots leaders with differing agendas aimed at a common goal— Gullah cultural preservation. The Gullah of St. Helena refuse to become the shadow of a community, as have the Gullah with ties to the resort islands mentioned thus far. The players in this battle are numerous and range from grassroots activists to politicians. A significant portion of this thesis will be focused on St. Helena and the sword being taken up against development, as well as the conflicts created by such an heroic effort.

Defining Culture

Culture, as an anthropological term, has traditionally been defined as simply “shared values or webs of meaning” (Sider 1994:115). Until quite recently, the use of the word *culture* would have caused very little ambiguity, however, the definition of culture is constantly changing as more knowledge is gained about the role of culture in shaping our existence as individuals and as groups. Culture can be a process, an expression, a world view, or even an arena for contestation over the meanings of the term. It is, therefore, important that anthropologists (re)examine the discourse of *culture* and begin to broaden our conceptual framework of the term. Culture is not only about meaning and values; it is the locus of struggle over what will and will not be

used to define a group (Sider 1994), as well as “ the ways in which members of a group determine and symbolize the meaningfulness of their lives” (Chambers 1997:3). The realization that culture can be used in such broad terms allows anthropologists to address the *struggles* that occur; both between groups and the dominant power structure outside the group, as well as the struggles within the group itself. In the introductory issue of *Identities Journal* (1994) Gerald Sider addressed the issue of ‘Identity as History’ and suggested that we, as anthropologists, reformulate the concept of culture in order to better recognize the dynamics of identity struggles. The concept of culture, as interpreted by Sider, encompasses much more than ‘shared values or webs of meaning’:

The concept of culture as shared meanings and/ or values, rather than being a simple descriptive statement about social landscape, in fact names an arena of the most profound conflicts, where people struggle to create different and ongoing conceptual and material histories within and against the same general history, a general history, a general history that people must continually struggle to create or to transform (Sider 1994:116).

Therefore I will use the term *culture* to refer to the shared meanings and values which are represented by the Gullah, within the context of the social landscape of Gullah communities as a locus of struggles over the creation of history and identity. Such a utilization of the term will allow me to address the struggles which exist “both against the domination¹⁶ and amongst the dominated” (Sider 1994:116).

Issues of Anthropological Relevance: Identity, Commoditization, Contestation, and Cultural Politics

Currently there are many anthropological issues of extreme relevance to the present study of the Sea Island Gullah. The relationship between history and identity is one such issue. The people *without history* are those who have been prevented from

¹⁶ Domination, as it is used here, can be viewed as the destruction of Sea Island communities for the sake of the tourism industry, as well as to refer to those within and outside the Gullah community who are marketing the images of Gullah in a way that is inconsistent with cultural preservation.

defining themselves for others (Friedman 1992). Much of what we now recognize as factual material was gathered by European observers, missionaries, and outsiders for academic purposes. It is important, therefore, to realize the rights of natives to define their own identity, as well as rewrite their history from the standpoint of their unique indigenous experience. Harald E. L. Prins (1996) reveals one group's struggle for such an opportunity. Prins is an ethnohistorian and action anthropologist who assisted the Mi'kmaq Indians of the Northern Atlantic seaboard in the rewriting of their cultural history. Through this case study, *The Mi'kmaq: Resistance, Accommodation, and Cultural Survival* (1996), this native group gained powerful insight into their past as a source of cultural identity.

What we are beginning to realize is that identity construction is not static, but is constantly being redefined and recreated in response to social, economic and political concerns. Karen Fog Olwig (1999) realizes the need for anthropology to address the use of the past in the creation and recreation of identity in the present. In terms of the Gullah, this application reveals the transformation from a culture of shame to one of proud Gullah heritage for the sake of future progress. There are economic, political, and social factors tied up in Gullah identity. It is necessary to determine how the past is being used to define what it means to be Gullah in the twenty-first century. We cannot discuss identity in terms of culture alone. In the modern world system identity is increasingly being expressed in ethnic terms (Romanucci-Ross and De Vos 1995). An ethnic group is one in which the members share the following: religious beliefs and practices, language, historical continuity, and common ancestry (DeVos 1995:18). Identification with a particular ethnicity can be viewed as a creation or fabrication of identity, depending on the sociological factors involved. In many instances such expressions are either politically, socially, or economically motivated. They can, however, also be the product of a history of being defined by others. This situation is bringing about a "revolution in the recording of social and cultural history" (DeVos 1995:16). The residents of the Sea Islands exhibit this movement toward self identification as they refuse to be termed African Americans. They express their ethnic

identity as Gullah or Geechee.

It has been suggested that a reinvention of ethnic identity can be initiated by tourism (Van den Berghe and Keyes 1984). Appropriate forms of tourism, such as ethnic tourism, could potentially create an awareness of the plight of numerous third world tribal cultures being repressed by their respective governmental systems. Ethnic tourism is the avenue by which the ethnic exoticism of a particular locale is marketed to outsiders as an economic option. In such cases, the commoditization of a particular culture can be detrimental to indigenous¹⁷ people not accustomed to dealing with outsiders. By cultural commoditization I am referring to the use of particular images and ideas which define a particular group for the explicit function of economic benefit. The commoditization can take many forms. It can be applied to the Gullah in areas of material objects, such as sweetgrass baskets, folk art, such as using the color blue in art to imply an affiliation with the Gullah, religious ideology, such as Gullah spirituals being performed for public demonstration, and visual imagery, illustrated throughout this thesis as presented in South Carolina tourism literature.

The effects of tourism are of growing concern to social scientists. Valene L. Smith is known for her contribution *Hosts and Guests: the Anthropology of Tourism*, published first in 1977 and revised in 1989, as well as subsequent publications (see Smith 1992). This collection of case studies from around the world has been an important influence on this thesis. Based on these, I was able to conceptualize the various forms of tourism and the effects each has on host communities. For example, it became apparent that when local communities are encouraged to be involved in tourism development there exists a better chance for mutual success between planners and host communities. Many anthropologists have made immeasurable contributions to the anthropological study of tourism. Davydd J. Greenwood's study of cultural commoditization "Culture By The Pound" (1977) brought about the synthetic focus of

¹⁷ I use the term indigenous to refer to Sea Islanders who are considered original natives and still reside within small Sea Island populations such as St. Helena Island and Mt. Pleasant.

this thesis¹⁸. There are various exemplary studies within this collection (see also Nunez 1989; Swain 1989) that have added tremendous depth to the issue of tourism and its effects in the South Carolina Sea Islands.

At present the various cultures of the world are involved in identity formation, ethnic identification and contestation over whose words will ultimately serve to redefine them. Issues such as these are studies within anthropology as “cultural politics.” As articulated by Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon in *Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World* (1995) “cultural politics fundamentally determine the meanings of social practices and, moreover, which groups and individuals have the power to define these meanings” (1995:5). Cultural politics ultimately deal with the issue of power— power to define a particular culture or identity, the power to legitimate or authenticate certain members and not others, and the ultimate power of rewriting history. This power has been, historically, held by formal institutions (such as governments and universities). David Whisnant addressed this in *All That is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region* (1983). His valuable treatment of the politics of culture gave me insight into the role of the Penn Center as the arbiter of Gullah culture and allowed me to peel away the multiple levels of internal contestation over authority.

St. Helena Island is the epitome of Gullah culture. It has been recognized by the City Planners, as well as countless academic researchers, as an emblematic Gullah site. The concept of place is receiving considerable attention within anthropology (Rodman 1992). It has been my intention to acquaint the reader with this place through the words of those who reside there. Each member of a community has their own reality concerning a particular place, often based on personal experience (Rodman 1992). People have differing experiences which build a multivocal landscape within any place. It is important that the contestations and the tensions between different actors and

¹⁸The use of the term *commodification* within this thesis will be in reference to the appropriation of Gullah imagery, ideas, knowledge, language, and material culture in any way that is not conducive to cultural preservation. It also refers to the creation of an ‘exoticism’ concerning Gullah culture which is increasingly being utilized to boost tourism revenue throughout South Carolina.

their construction of a particular place be explored by anthropologists (Rodman 1992). As St. Helena Island and Mt. Pleasant become politically, historically, and culturally defined, they offer an advantageous climate for future research concerning the exploration of the complex realities attached to place.

Chapter Three

Mt. Pleasant Basket Weavers: Keepers of the Gullah Culture

Every community has an independent voice. It is the independent voice of a people that is expressed in their culture.

Once this voice is heard, then and only then will they gain respect from other cultural groups. The independent voice does not require us to dominate anyone else, but it does require us to dominate (or control) ourselves (Goodwine 1998a:8).

Mt. Pleasant is a community located just across the Cooper River from Charleston, South Carolina. In 1980 Doris Derby conducted her Ph.D. fieldwork in this community in order to study the role of basket weaving in the domestic economy of black women. The information she obtained concerning the tourism industry and its impacts in the Mt. Pleasant area is relevant to this thesis. It is important to note that during the late 1970s when Derby conducted her fieldwork the African Americans from this area were offended when referred to as “Gullah” (Derby 1980). The term was associated with a negative stereotype of blacks as “illiterate, lazy, country in manners and in personal habits, and cultural traits associated with slave status” (Derby 1980: 11). However, in nearly all respects Mt. Pleasant people are identical in cultural and genetic heritage to the residents of Sea Island communities throughout South Carolina. Therefore, they are Gullah by the standards of my research. The earliest inhabitants of Mt. Pleasant were enslaved Africans whose families were able to purchase land after Emancipation. Descendants of those emancipated people made up the majority of families on Mt. Pleasant in 1980, at the time of Derby’s fieldwork. The last twenty years have brought about many changes.

Mount Pleasant basket weavers first made Gullah heritage an integral part of statewide tourism. The basket stands along Highway 17 have been attracting visitors for many decades, but the incursion of tourism, resorts, and gated communities has begun to threaten their existence. A difference of one year, between 1998 and 1999, transformed the basket industry. Where basket stands had stood in 1998 I found a shopping mall in 1999, filled with popular clothing stores. The basket stands were still present; however, the small grassy space once used as a parking lot for tourists was now blocked by a sidewalk and curb (Figure 3.1). In the past, each basket stand was



**Figure 3.1 Effects of Development on Mt. Pleasant
Roadside Basket Stands**

easily accessible by just pulling off the road in front of the stand you desired to browse through. Today all that has changed. I spoke with one weaver whose family had been selling baskets at the same spot for fifty years. Now there is a video store on that spot and she is continuously moving around trying to find a permanent location. What began as a way to increase tourism has backfired in Mt. Pleasant because many of the tourists come to visit and never leave. They become attached to the beauty of the area and take up residence, as has been the case throughout the Sea Islands.

As more and more newcomers settle in these areas, the population composition is changing. Sullivan's Island was once home to many black residents; however, as the elderly pass on and the property taxes become delinquent, much of the land is being bought by white developers (Derby 1980). The same situation applies to the Isle of Palms, also within Charleston County. What was once a seasonal vacation area for whites has now become home. The 1980 statistics revealed that very few black residents remained. Those Derby interviewed in 1980 were asking themselves the question: Will our community be next?

The Charleston Downtown Market is famous for its nostalgic image of Gullah women weaving sweet grass baskets alongside a variety of other vendors. Selling baskets in the market is a family tradition. The spots in the market are highly competitive and families do not relinquish voluntarily. Many who sell in the market also have a spot on Highway 17, and can be found at one when not at the other. The market spots are often rotated between family members so that each has a chance to sell at market prices, which are slightly higher than at the roadside stands. A Charlestonian shopkeeper comments on why he markets sweet grass baskets in his store:

Baskets are the most Charlestonian thing in the store: handmade from materials grown in and around Charleston, and gathered by Charlestonians. Moreover, everything to do with the baskets is a historic Low-Country tradition. The baskets emphasize Charleston's uniqueness and that's what people dig (Derby 1980:166).

This type of rave review has taken some weavers by surprise. I spoke with many women who had instructed their children not to tell others about her occupation. They were once embarrassed to sell baskets for a living, and now they are called on by members

of local government to participate in school programs, museum exhibits and local festivals. Travel brochures highlight the cultural attributes of Sea Island residents and invite visitors to come and witness their colorful heritage. The use of sweetgrass baskets in the creation of such an identity has definitely brought about changes. Chapter four will focus on such changes, as well as the (re)creation and misrepresentation of Gullah identity.

Nothing to Weave: The Effects of Development on Sweetgrass Basket Materials

The rapid rate of both retail and residential development in Mt. Pleasant has brought about a shortage of materials for weaving sweetgrass baskets. The women I interviewed have all resorted to buying their materials from Florida. Sweetgrass can no longer be found in abundance growing wild in the area. The materials needed for the baskets are being bulldozed for malls and subdivisions, and buried under parking lots for resort hotels. In the 1980s a consortium of regional interests formed a committee to seek a solution to the sweetgrass shortage. With the assistance of agricultural experts, they succeeded in establishing a sweetgrass reserve on Bull's Island where weavers can go to harvest the sweetgrass. In a paper discussing grassroots issues in cultural tourism(1996) Robert Cogswell asserts that the Mt. Pleasant basket weavers are now reaping the benefits of local involvement; however, my fieldwork suggests otherwise. Not a single weaver I interviewed utilized the reserve. From an insider's perspective, the project was viewed as purely academic. The social scientists involved selected only a few weavers to contribute their ideas, with the major conclusions being credited to academics. The basket weavers I spoke with do not feel their needs were met, nor that the project was a community effort.

The sweetgrass reserve does exist but is not practical. The only way to get to Bull's Island is by boat, and the weavers either do not have boats or expressed a fear of traveling there by boat. From the standpoint of my research I disagree with the assertion that Mt. Pleasant, or Charleston for that matter, has made an effort to involve

the local communities most affected by their decisions. The weavers continue to face material shortage, and the situation worsens with each new construction project. The latest trend in Mt. Pleasant is the use of sweetgrass in landscaping. This is an additional slap in the face to the women who make their livelihood from this natural plant material. They have to drive to Florida to buy it while the development companies have nurseries that grow it to use in landscaping the very establishments displacing their roadside stands.

In 1997 the community of Mt. Pleasant dedicated a historic marker to the legacy and history of sweetgrass basketry (Figure 3.2). The ceremony was held at a Mt. Pleasant church and a local news anchor served as Mistress of Ceremonies. There were academics who spoke on behalf of the craft, as well as those who spoke about the African connection between Sea Island basketry and the basketry of Sierra Leone. What was missing from the ceremony were the basket weavers who have kept the art alive. Several of those interviewed were unaware of the dedication until they read about it in the news, while those present felt they were not represented appropriately. The entire ceremony was a tribute to three centuries of basket making in the low country, but those responsible for preserving this craft for future generations felt somewhat out of place. It is events such as this that have created a rift between academics and the local basket weavers of Mt. Pleasant. It is important for the future of the discipline that we encourage equal participation and control of such events, remembering those who share their stories with us.

Mending the Rift: The Weavers and Their Words

My fieldwork was constrained by past encounters between Sea Islanders and academic professionals and entrepreneurs. With regard to the Mt. Pleasant basket weavers there have been countless episodes of exploitation and insidious disrespect. I will never forget my first encounter. I was terrified. I had read all I could get my hands on about doing fieldwork properly, but nothing prepares you to stroll up to a complete



Figure 3.2 Historic Marker Dedicated to the Sweetgrass Basket Industry of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina

stranger and begin trying to establish rapport. The first woman I approached was sitting with two other women. They were surrounded by beautiful baskets hanging on wooden hand- built stands, and sitting on blankets spread over the grass. It was obvious the stand had been there a long time, evidenced by the three stands clustered together, that were necessary to hold all those baskets. I parked my car and walked toward them. They were apprehensive from the second my foot touched the ground. The women appeared to be staggered in age, a young lady, a middle aged woman and an elderly woman. The middle aged woman looked at me as if she knew what I was going to say and, with nothing more than a gentle smile and her eyes, tried to stop me before I started.

I paced around nervously at first looking at all the beautiful sweetgrass baskets. The smell permeates the air on Highway 17. I patiently waited for a tourist to finish his inquiry about the weaving technique then stepped up with confidence and introduced myself. I then briefly introduced my project goals. Immediately the elderly woman jumped up from her chair and began walking away. She began shouting as she picked up the pace, turning periodically to see if I was still there. The middle aged woman, who turned out to be her daughter, was very kind as she declined to speak with me. She informed me that her mother had been photographed without her permission and was recently informed, by a friend in New York, that the picture is in a calender of women and traditional craft production. I thanked her for the honesty and apologized for upsetting her mother. As I drove away I could see the elderly woman several hundred yards away in the parking lot of a nearby convenient store. She still appeared very upset.

This encounter was replayed many times and I became depressed and disgusted. Day after day I drove around and one by one the basket ladies refused to speak with me. By day four I was ready to give up. I decided to give it one more try before my sixty mile trip back to St. Helena, where I was staying. I pulled in front of Harriett Brown's stand and got out of the car. It was as if she could see my frustration and disappointment. She smiled and greeted me. I introduced myself and went through my

routine. Much to my surprise she asked to read my informed consent form. That was a first! She studied it very carefully, asking several questions. She then asked to borrow my pen, and she signed the form. Then she handed me the form, gathered her material back to her lap and said “*what do you want to know?*” That was the beginning of my fieldwork among the sweetgrass basket weavers of Mt. Pleasant.

One of the greatest regrets of my fieldwork experience is that I was unable to record the voices of the women I interviewed on Highway 17. The once quiet single lane road is a bustling six lane highway which produces an abundance of noise, thereby making audio recording impossible. What I do have, however, are the shorthand notes taken during these memorable interviews. I only hope I can do them justice. Each of the women I had the pleasure of speaking with had a different story to tell. Some told me about the old times, others talked only about weaving and some didn’t even want to discuss the basket industry. During these priceless conversations, their stories revealed the deeper issues being encountered by various Sea Island communities. For this reason, I will tell their stories here, as they were passed on to me, to the best of my ability.

Harriett Bailem Brown

Sweetgrass basket weaving has been a family tradition for five generations. Harriett Brown has been weaving baskets for 51 years. She was taught to weave by her father, mother, and grandparents. The current location of her stand has been used by her family for over twenty years. She shared memories of growing up along Highway 17, when it was a small two lane road. She ran around her mother’s basket stand as a child, just as her grandchildren do today. She told me about her family and their self sufficient life. She took pride in telling me how her parents made money– *by natural sources*– farming. Harriett has been a witness to the changes taking place in Mt. Pleasant. She began driving when she was ten years old.

HB: *There just weren't a lot of cars on the road. My dad was one of the only black men to have a car. He often used it to take people from Mt. Pleasant to work.*

Driving isn't the only thing that has changed over the years. Drugs and crime are higher than ever.

HB: *We used to never lock our doors or even shut our windows, but you have to now.*

She also spoke about the effects of development on Mt. Pleasant within the past ten years.

HB: *Within the last 10 years there has been lots of land lost and the road is much busier now.*

Recently, her family lost 10.8 acres of her great grandfather's property to development. The family was informed that *someone* signed the papers for the land transfer. Harriett's mother, now 86 years old, does not remember. All the development has taken a toll on basket weavers in more than one way. The materials used to weave baskets are scarce and expensive to buy. Even though she learned to harvest the sweetgrass herself as a child, it is too scarce now to go looking for. Another problem is that those who harvest it and bring it to Mt. Pleasant to sell want the weaver to take the entire load. A single bundle is \$25 and they want you to take all or none. This becomes quite costly. Also, the weavers now have to ask permission of people to go onto their property and collect pine needles for the baskets. Harriett freely explained the process of drying sweetgrass to me, as she harvested it herself when there was grass left to harvest.

HB: *Just put it out in the sun for a few days and it will dry out.*

She was good at making it sound and look very simple. She also clarified some of my misinterpretations. I thought all weavers used pine needles throughout history, however, bullrush was a common element in the earlier years and some weavers still use it to give the basket stiffer sides. I was also unaware that water will not damage baskets. It actually strengthens them. While working, Harriett showed me the correct

way to rip the palmetto as to make it the proper width for sewing the basket. In the early years, most baskets were lightly colored because they lacked the brown coloring of the pine needles. This signifies a time when many weavers did not have cars, and therefore did not have access to the needles.

We talked about the benefits of weaving and why so many women turn to it as an occupation. She informed me of the two advantages she most enjoys. The hours and schedule are flexible and you can bring your children with you.

HB: Women stay in the basket industry because they can be with their children. You can bring them with you.

Harriett is lucky in that she has a small building on her spot and she can go there even in winter. She has a wood stove in the building to keep warm.

The stand Harriett now occupies was begun by her mother, Wilhelmina Bailem (Figure 3.3). The property was once owned by a local man. Upon his drowning death he left the property to a church. Unlike most weavers, Harriett has been assured by the church she will not be asked to move. Harriett's work is very unique. Just as her mother before her she likes to invent different styles which will distinguish her from other weavers. Her special design is the "real huge fruit basket." She is very invested in her community and works hard to preserve the art of basket weaving. She is involved in teaching and demonstrations in the local public schools as well as teaching at the Mt. Pleasant Arts Council. She also works with senior citizens, teaches weaving at the Recreation Center and does exhibitions for the local children's festival. At the time of our first interview the local Garden Club chapter had placed a large order with Harriett for small baskets. After all was said and done they paid around \$3 per basket, which took several hours each to sew.

The first basket I ever witnessed being sewn was the one I purchased from Harriett. It was the least I could give to someone so willing to help me and trust that my intentions were true. She weaved as we talked, constantly having to get up and speak with tourists who had questions, or who just wanted to haggle. As soon as she



Figure 3.3 Harriett Brown at her Basket Stand on Highway 17

would get comfortable someone else would come, but I suppose that is a good thing! The basket is small and oval, with a coiled strip crossing over from one side to the other, serving as a small handle. She sold me that basket for \$8, which averaged nearly \$2 an hour. I asked Harriett why so many of the weavers are apprehensive about speaking with me. She informed me that weavers who refuse to work with the public or speak with people about weaving do so because they are afraid others are trying to take what they have.

Alfreda R. Jamison

Word travels fast in Mt. Pleasant. It was apparent the next day that word had spread of my interview with Harriett. I next attempted to speak with Alfreda Jamison. Alfreda is a kind woman. She descended from a long line of entrepreneurs. Her aunt was a street peddler in downtown Charleston who sold flowers prior to the 1950's. When Alfreda was a child her mother sold vegetables she had grown in the Charleston market. Her mother has also been recognized by the *American Journal* for her weaving expertise. Alfreda's father was a farmer, just as most residents of Mt. Pleasant were at that time. We discussed many facets of basket weaving. She showed me how she starts her baskets. She also informed me of the reason the grass is called sweetgrass.

AJ: It is because the aroma smells so sweet.

She was taught to weave by her grandmother and her mother and has fond memories of playing around their basket stands as a child of four or five.

AJ: Around age ten most children are capable of producing good quality baskets that can be sold at the stands.

On her stand at the time of our interview were baskets made by several of her children and her father, now deceased. She weaves baskets in the traditional styles: fruit,

sewing, and flower baskets. She doesn't see herself as one who integrates personal styles into her baskets. She does, however, weave bell and wreath ornaments at Christmas time. The one thing she made very clear was her insistence on tight fitting, snug lids. Over the course of my interviews I discerned that this is a mark of a skilled weaver; a snug fitting lid. Another issue of importance to Alfreda is the way her baskets are put up at the end of the day. She always does it herself and it is time consuming.

AJ: I am very particular with my baskets. I have my own way, how I'm gonna stack them.

The issue that took precedence throughout our conversation was the current situation with land and materials. She expressed many concerns, such as the scarcity of pine needles and the now- required permit to get the needles where they are abundant. Although she and her husband still harvest the grasses those are increasingly harder to come by. She did not inform me of the location where they gather grasses. What was of paramount interest was the land situation, which has become quite tenuous. Alfreda will soon have to move her stand once more. The land has been sold and that means finding another spot. She has moved several times in the past.

AJ: You move around like a gypsy!

What is worse is that she was informed she would have at least two years to relocate before the actual construction started. Now, after only one year, she has been informed differently. One of the problems with frequent moves is that you cannot easily build up a client base. Therefore when locals want to find a particular weaver, which they often patronize in order to purchase baskets as gifts for out-of-town business clients, they cannot locate them. They then go to someone else.

AJ: Mt. Pleasant is too crowded with basketmakers. Nearly all females in Mt. Pleasant can weave, even those who married into a Mt. Pleasant family from elsewhere. There is so much competition because the stands are now so close together. Sometimes people will leave your

stand and go to the very next stand and buy a basket.

This type of competition can also be found in the Charleston market.

AJ: *The Charleston market is all sold out. There are no spaces. You couldn't get a space there if you wanted to!*

Alfreda is not involved in teaching weaving classes or doing demonstrations. She has four daughters and one son, all of whom have been taught to weave. None of them do it for a living, they all have other jobs. I asked if any of her children will succeed her in the sweetgrass business; she was unsure. We talked about her grandchildren. They do not like to come to the basket stand with her because of the heat. They complain too much. She did inform me that all of her grandchildren over the age of eight know how to weave. In this age of video games and computers that in itself is an accomplishment.

Jannie P. Gourdine

Jannie was born on Boone Hall plantation, just down the road from the location of her basket stand. Her grandfather was enslaved for the first six years of his life. He was the one who taught her mother to weave at a young age. Her name was Lucinda Graddick Pringle.

JG: *He used to send her to the 'crick' to get bullrush so he could weave fanner baskets.*

Her family owns ten acres very close to the location of the basket stands. They all live close to one another. She and several family members have stands located in a row. Her stand is the first one next to a small road, then beside her is her sister's stand, and on the other side is the stand of Jannie's first cousin, Rosalee W. Coaxum. Jannie's third sister also weaves baskets, which she sells from Jannie's stand.

What she most wanted to share with me were her memories of Boone Hall plantation. Her mother had worked as a watergirl for the fieldworkers when she was

pregnant with Jannie. She was paid twenty-five cents a day. The owner of the property at that time was an Italian man, Mr. Stone.

JG: *He was a beautiful man. Everyone loved him. He always gave parties for his plantation workers at the end of every harvest. We would have barbeque and ice cream. But he went away to World War II and never came back.*

She told me a story about Mr. Stone.

JG: *One day he came looking for my mother. He said "Is Miss Lucinda Pringle at home?"*

Perhaps that explained her fondness for Mr. Stone. That was at a time when no white person used a title to refer to black help.

Jannie told me about her life's journeys, back and forth from Mt. Pleasant to New York until settling back home in 1979. She has been weaving and selling her baskets at her roadside stand since. She pointed out the spot where her mother's stand had been when she left Mt. Pleasant for New York. It was just across the road from where we were sitting. We discussed many things which had nothing to do with sweetgrass baskets. She was a warm soul, but when she decided we were finished there was no turning back.

JG: *I'm tru wit you gul. You cyan go!*

M: I have other questions I would like to ask you. Can I come back in a few days?

She laughed, shook her head and said "No!" That was the end of my interview with Mrs. Jannie P. Gourdine! She did offer to allow me to photograph her. I knew I better not take too much time deciding so I took the photo right away. (Figure 3.4).



Figure 3.4 Jannie P. Gourdine Sewing a Basket Bottom

Rosalee W. Coaxum

Two stands down from Jannie I found her first cousin, Rosalee (Figure 3.5). She was taught to weave baskets by her mother and grandmother. She told me a story about when she was a child. Her mother sewed baskets all her life. Rosalee's older sister would always be out at the basket stand with their mother and when Rosalee would come her sister would chase her back to the house. She started out making baskets only for gifts, not for sale. But eventually she ended up here, at her own stand. She has three sons and three daughters but only the daughters ever showed an interest in learning to weave. Only the eldest daughter weaves now, but she is also a schoolteacher. She doesn't think there will be anyone to take over her legacy on Highway 17.

We talked briefly about the situation concerning materials.

RC: In the 1970's you could go to John's Island and get the materials for the baskets yourself. I can still remember going to Boone Hall as a child to pick sweetgrass. Today you can go over to Bull's Island and get sweetgrass, but you have to have a permit.

She now purchases most of her materials from Savannah, Georgia. She buys the pine needles too. She still gets her own bullrush from the marsh. She wanted me to understand that the baskets aren't just for show.

RC: The baskets hold up so well.

M: What is your favorite basket to make?

RC: The small bread basket. It takes about six hours.

M: How much can you sell it for?

RC: About \$35 to \$40.

She could see I had my eye on a one of her larger baskets. The cost? \$250! She had sewn it on and off for four long years. She also wanted me to know that there isn't big



Figure 3.5 Rosalee Coaxum at her Family Basket Stand

money in basket weaving, as some may assume. Her husband, John, made it a point to support that statement. *“Basketweaving didn’t pay to send my kids to college! I did!”*

One of the most unique things about Rosalee was her soft voice, void of any dialect that could be classified as Gullah speech. I asked if she perceived herself to be Gullah. She responded by saying that a Gullah way of speaking is something that people do on purpose.

During our interview Rosalee told me about a certain Mr. Livingston, whom she remembered from her childhood. He would come around and pick up all the baskets her grandmother had made. He would pay her \$1.25 for the bread basket. It was the first and only time a weaver mentioned this man to me. It wasn’t until the analysis of my interview data that I became curious about the significance of this man. Through researching the current literature on sweetgrass baskets I came across the following information. In 1916 a prominent Charleston merchant named Clarence W. Legerton began purchasing large quantities of baskets from the weavers in Mt. Pleasant (Rosengarten 1986). He sold them both wholesale and retail, later starting a company known as Seagrassco. Rosengarten states that many of the basket weavers she interviewed remember him as “Mr. Leviston” (Rosengarten 1986). This went on for fifteen years, at which time the basket weavers realized a way to cut him out of the deal. They set up the roadside stands on Highway 17 and began selling baskets directly to tourists (Rosengarten 1986). They have been there ever since.

Vera Manigault

I caught up with Vera Manigault at Patriots Point, setting up her temporary basket stand. Patriots Point is located on the historic Charleston harbor and is home to the Naval and Maritime Museum. The focus of this tourist attraction is a decommissioned aircraft carrier from WW II. Vera and other local basket weavers take turns setting up their stands here. I had been warned by others about approaching her. I had been told that she would not consent to being interviewed. At first she was very

apprehensive and assured me she could tell me nothing more than the other weavers had. She asked if I would come back several days later to give her time to consider it. I agreed. During those few days I tried to assess the reason for her apprehension by asking lots of questions and going back over some of the academic literature on sweetgrass basketry. Anyone studying sweetgrass baskets is aware that the Manigault family is synonymous with the craft. Many of her family members were interviewed for, and appeared in, the academic publication *Row Upon Row* (Rosengarten 1986).

When I returned to Patriot's Point several days later Vera consented to be interviewed. We began to talk about the previous research that had been done among the weavers of Mt. Pleasant, more specifically within her family. Vera related to me that her family had opened their homes to many academics over the years and after the work was published they were never heard from again. This explained her obvious distrust of me. We did, however, overcome it.

Vera grew up on the side of Highway 17. Her mother had a basket stand there for over 50 years. Her mother was born in the community known as *Four-Mile* and was the only weaver in that area. Vera was born and raised in Mt. Pleasant and her family is well known for their history of sweetgrass basket weaving. She explained the transitional perception of basket weaving from a supplemental hobby to a craft.

VM: It was around 1975 or 1976 that lots of blacks started recognizing basket weaving as a craft. After 1976, the Bicentennial, it became a very important part of our heritage and many more people wanted to keep the art alive.

What troubles Vera about the current popularity of sweetgrass basketry is that the older women, who have been weaving all along, are not getting the recognition they deserve. Also, as with all the weavers of Mt. Pleasant, the availability of materials is important.

VM: Hurricane Hugo took a toll on the availability of sweetgrass but it's development that is killing the opportunity to get our own sweetgrass.

Vera gathers her grasses occasionally, but she isn't fond of snakes and bees! (Which is

what you have to contend with to gather it yourself). She also has memories of pulling sweetgrass as a small child. She explained the reasoning behind the required permit necessary to gather pine needles from the Francis Marion Forest.

VM: *People were bundling up the pine to sell, now everybody has to get a permit.*

Along with the normal concern of materials comes the issue of land use for basket stands along Highway 17. Vera knows this first hand; what was once her mother's stand is now a Blockbuster Video store. There was also a furniture store which displaced a family basket stand, however they offered to let the weavers stay if they would consent to taking down their stand every night and putting it back up in the morning. Perhaps they knew the impossibility of such a proposition.

VM: *When a business goes in, they don't want the stand in front of their establishment, no matter how many generations of weavers it represents.*

What distinguishes Vera from other weavers is the use of color in her baskets (Figure 3.6). She has a trademark on the technique. The baskets are unique and beautiful in colors of blue, green, and wine. Vera assured me the coloring does not affect the smell of the sweetgrass nor its durability. The hanger on the back of baskets, I was informed, is her invention also.

VM: *The hanger on the back of baskets was my idea. Now everybody is using it and claiming it is their invention!*

Vera's innovations support the assumption that commoditization brings about changes in traditional arts and crafts. Cohen suggests that as such items begin being produced for the tourist market they may undergo changes in form, material, and color (1988). This explains the many styles which can be found not only in Vera's baskets but among all weavers. There are pocketbooks, place mats, hair accessories, key chains, coaster sets, clothes hampers and many more. This signifies quite a departure from the sewing, fanner, fruit and bread baskets originally sewn. Even though many weavers make the



Figure 3.6 Trademark Coloring Technique Practiced by Vera Manigault

same types of baskets Vera spoke about, there are vast differences from one weaver to the next.

VM: *No two basket makers have the same identical baskets. There is no blueprint for making baskets.*

While admitting that she does have a small local clientele Vera's business comes from tourism. She feels the local media, unlike academics, *has done right by her* through interviews and local television spots. This has helped to generate more business. She participates in arts and crafts festivals both locally and abroad. She is also planning to write a book.

Andrea Brown

The time I spent in the Charleston market was made valuable by my interview with Andrea Brown. She was the only market weaver, out of the eleven I approached, who consented to an interview. The others quickly made it clear they were not interested. Andrea also comes from a long line of basket weavers. Her family is from Boone Hall in Mt. Pleasant. She has many sisters and aunts in the business. She was taught by her grandmother and her older sisters. Presently she buys her materials but in the past she was able to go gather them. Sweetgrass basket weaving is her primary occupation, but it hasn't always been. Before weaving full time Andrea worked at a shipyard. After having children she started staying home and weaving the bottom parts of baskets, which she sold to other family members in the business. After the children started school she began weaving full time. She attributes the change to becoming a mother and wanting to have the luxury of spending more time with her children. Her three sons, ages 6, 9, and 11 at the time of our interview, have all learned to weave.

I was fortunate in that I got to watch her begin a basket. She told me step by step how you start with the pine and use bullrush to build up the sides. The bullrush is what makes the basket sturdy. She prefers to make round baskets as opposed to oval. It

takes much longer to sew oval baskets. She shares the basket stand in the market with other family members. Business in the market is very good. There is the occasional haggler and she tends to come down on the price if she can afford to. When a large order comes in the whole family pulls together to fill it. They participate in many festivals in and around Charleston, as well as other places. Andrea informed me of a festival she often attends in Indiana. Her family is also quite innovative when it comes to their baskets. They often decorate sweetgrass wreaths with dried flowers. They also make pine needle wreaths.

The rules in the market are stringent. All vendors must be there and set up by 9:30 am. If not, you lose your spot. She stays there until 5:00 pm and goes to market six days a week, except for Sunday. Most of her business comes from the market but often customers will call her back and order more baskets. She also receives orders through her children's schools.

Andrea is very proud of her heritage. She often does demonstrations for her children's classes. I asked if she associates herself with the term "Gullah"?

AB: I grew up hearing Gullah. It's my history, I'm not ashamed of it. I am proud that sweetgrass basketry is part of my heritage. That's why I teach it in the schools.

During our interview one of Andrea's family members sat in on our conversation. Throughout she interjected much information concerning the basket industry and the changes that have taken place throughout the last twenty years. Unfortunately she would not consent to being formally interviewed. This is yet another interview lost to the distrust of academics interested in this culture.

Following Up in Mt. Pleasant

The following year I returned to the Sea Islands with a different agenda: to explore the internal politics of St. Helena Island in light of the growing interest in Gullah culture. I did, however, make several trips to Mt. Pleasant to check in on the

weavers interviewed in 1998. When I returned in 1999 I brought my family along. I took them to meet Harriett Brown, and she was overjoyed. In my mind I believe she was surprised to see me again, even though she knew I was not trying to take advantage of her. Since I had last visited with Harriett she had been to the Straw Festival in Missouri, which was in the hometown of a tourist turned friend who had bought her baskets years prior. This friend invited her to bring some baskets and set up a booth at the Straw Festival. Harriett informed me she did well there, but it was the friendship that was the reward of the trip. She conveyed the current situation concerning the development of Highway 17 and how it is affecting those with basket stands. In 1999 the weavers met with the Mayor of Mt. Pleasant to establish what the future holds, but there is no law thusfar that will guarantee their future. We also talked about the current situation concerning the materials needed for weaving sweetgrass baskets.

There are no materials now. It's all built up. Now you have to go pay \$10 and obtain a permit to get pine needles from the Francis Marion forest. The only way to survive as a weaver is to have a husband to support you, because you can't make a living off it.

M: What about the sweetgrass reserves? Why don't people take advantage of them?

They aren't convenient. You have to get in touch with a certain someone to let them know you're coming and get permission. It's very difficult. It's still like you're on a plantation.

Presently there brews another conflict. Many entrepreneurs have brought to light the fact that weavers don't pay taxes, therefore they are asking lots of questions. There is talk of a possible business license that weavers will be forced to purchase in order to sell their baskets, which will cost in the neighborhood of \$200.

People don't trust one another. Everyone is out for themselves.

On a more positive note, the Parks and Recreation Department asked Harriett to teach basket weaving in the fall.

M: Does that scare you?

HB: *No. What good is it for you to know it and not pass it on to someone else. God word is true!*

Concerning the others interviewed in 1998, I was unable to locate them all. I managed to speak briefly with Andrea Brown but the timing was not conducive to a follow-up interview. I was informed that Jannie Gourdine was in the hospital and I did not find the others at their stands. When I caught up with Vera Manigault she didn't have time to talk. I did, however, get to introduce my family to this magnificent artisan and show them her work. She was set up on the grounds of a church with several other women. Over the course of a single year many things had changed. I was startled by the prevalence of empty stands (Figure 3.7). A mere 24 of 61 total stands were occupied by weavers. The empty stands reflect the devastating results of residential and commercial development on Mt. Pleasant sweetgrass basket weavers.

The Basket Cooperative That Never Was

I originally traveled to the Sea Islands of South Carolina to study sweetgrass basket cooperatives (see Day 1982). I had read about these groups of women who worked together in many facets of business and life. Much to my surprise none of the weavers I interviewed even acknowledged such an organization ever existed. There were several reactions to questions concerning a cooperative in which women worked together, pooled resources and attended to each others children in an effort to successfully market their baskets. The reactions are easily summed up through the words of Alfreda Jamison:

AJ: *There is no co-op! If someone has a large order they will go to stands around theirs to see if others want to help, or if they already have the baskets needed to fill the order.*



Figure 3.7 Empty Basket Stand on Highway 17

Marketing Gullah Images

One of the most pressing questions concerning Mt. Pleasant seems to be the part Charleston County has played in the development of the sweetgrass basket industry as a tourism draw. The visitor center in downtown Charleston has brochures on everything from animal preserves to resort rentals. I collected a variety of these pamphlets, which I later realized indicated something very significant: sweetgrass baskets are used by the tourism industry to create an image of Charleston. Pictures of women weaving, some allegedly taken without proper permission, pictures of baskets, and actual baskets can be seen throughout the visitor center. There were several basket makers inside the center weaving on the day I visited. There are baskets on the front of brochures for outlet shopping malls, postcards, calenders, travel guides, and many other forms of tourism literature (Figure 3.8, 3.9, 3.10).

Gullah Identity and the Basket Weavers of Mt. Pleasant

In 1971 the South Carolina ETV produced a film "Gullah Baskets" which documented the African origins of the art. At that time there was a general resentment against being identified as "Gullah," a way of speech classified as backward (Rosengarten 1986). Only a few of those I interviewed would discuss the term, and there were mixed responses when asked if they associate themselves with being "Gullah."

HB: *A lot don't wanna say they speak Gullah, but you always speak Gullah. You must speak the way you understand. I will not change myself to speak to someone. You go the long way, we go the short way!*

Alfreda Jamison does not associate herself with the term Gullah, although she said she doesn't find it to be a negative connotation. There were some I interviewed whose dialect made the question ridiculous to ask. Once you've heard Gullah spoken you

Within the Open Air Market section between Church Street and East Bay Street are stalls leased daily by local artisans and international importers. Watch the lowcountry sweetgrass baskets being woven—an art handed down from African ancestors, and limited to this one area of the United States. Hear the vegetable vendors ply their wares in “Gullah,” that distinctive lowcountry accent. (“Yo can try to say ‘em, but dey jest don’ soun’ likem!”)



THE HISTORY OF CHARLESTON AND THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN EXPERIENCE ARE INEXTRICABLY BOUND.

The African-American National Heritage Museum is a cooperative educational undertaking of the Avery Research Center for African-American History and Culture, the City of Charleston, Historic Charleston Foundation, and the South Carolina African-American Heritage Council. The museum sites explore the origins of African-American culture in the United States and the role African-Americans played in shaping Charleston, the South Carolina Lowcountry, and the nation. Historical exhibits, living history demonstrations, site interpretations, and cultural events anchor educational programs offered at the Slave Mart Museum, the Aiken-Rhett House, McLeod Plantation, and the Avery Research Center and serve as points of departure for related Charleston activities.

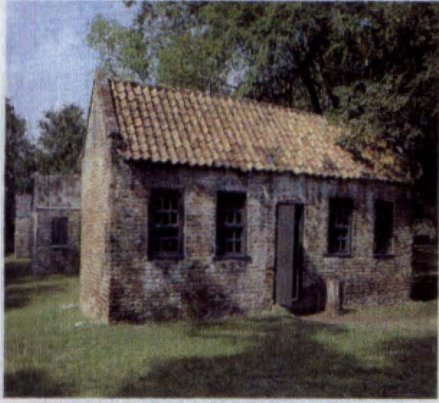
The African-American National Heritage Museum invites visitors to its four primary sites, the Slave Mart, a property of the City of Charleston, the Aiken-Rhett House and McLeod Plantation, properties of Historic Charleston Foundation, and the Avery Research Center for African-American History and Culture of the College of Charleston. As a group, these historic sites provide unique connections to both rural and urban aspects of the African-American experience.

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Figure 3.8 Examples of Gullah Commoditization Used in Tourism Literature- Charleston




SLAVE STREET

Bordering the avenue of oaks are nine original slave cabins. The house servants and the plantation's skilled craftsmen were housed in these cabins. Field slaves lived in clusters of small cottages elsewhere on the plantation.




The making of sweetgrass baskets, identified by the Smithsonian Institution as an African craft, produced utensils used in daily plantation work. The craft continues at Boone Hall Plantation and in the surrounding area, as basket weavers create decorative items in a variety of styles.



Boone Hall Plantation's Slave Street is one of the few remaining intact in the Southeast. The Street consists of nine original brick cabins, ca. 1743; all nine cabins are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.


TOURIST ATTRACTIONS

Mount Pleasant attracts thousands of visitors each day. A few favorite sites to catch include Patriots Point, the world's largest Naval and Maritime Museum and home of WWII aircraft carrier Yorktown; Congressional Medal of Honor Museum also located at Patriots Point; Museum On the Common which features the exhibit *Hurricane Hugo Revisited*; historic Boone Hall; Palmetto Islands County Park where there are canoe rentals, state-of-the-art playground equipment, nature trails, swimming and picnic facilities; Shem Creek, part of the area's shrimping fleet;



Yorktown by Larry Workman

Charles Pinckney National Historic Site, the former plantation of a signer of the Constitution; historic Alhambra Hall and Park; the historic district known as the Old Village; and our Sweetgrass basket weavers, featured in *National Geographic*, who set up shop on Highway 17 North in Mount Pleasant.



Sweetgrass Baskets by Peter Whitbeck, Freelance Photography

MOUNT PLEASANT

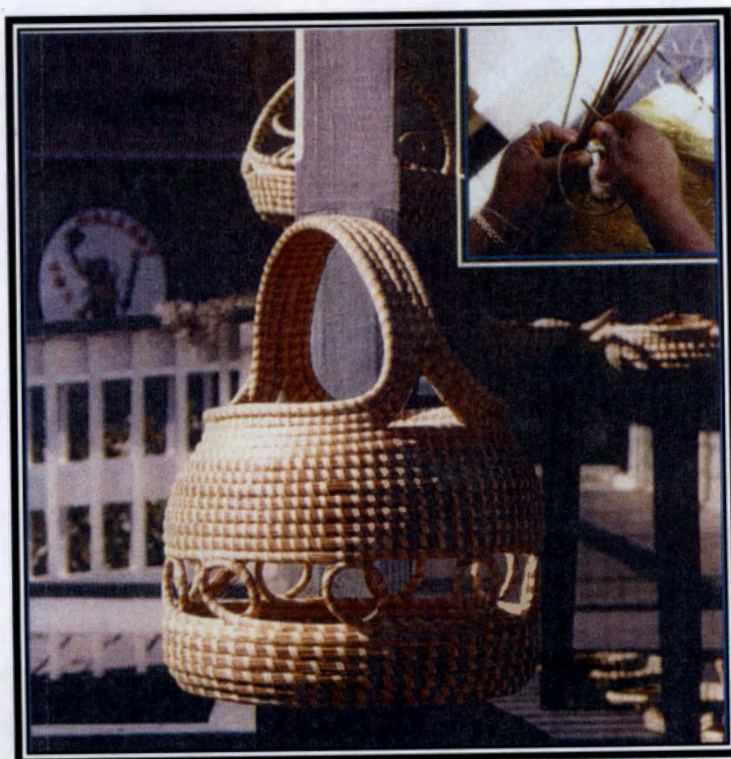
Just across the "big bridge" from Charleston sits the quiet town of Mount Pleasant with its beautiful old waterfront homes and famous Boone Hall Plantation. As you cross the bridge, you can spot the world's largest naval and maritime museum—Patriots Point.

Continuing on, catch a glimpse of the picturesque shrimp boats docked at Shem Creek and visit the Museum On The Common which features the exhibit "Hurricane Hugo Revisited." Further down, across the causeway, lie the beaches of Sullivan's Island, the Isle of Palms, and Wild Dunes Resort.

Mount Pleasant, for all its charm, is growing at an astounding rate. New trendy boutiques and specialty shops abound on this side of the river.

Figure 3.9 Examples of Gullah Commoditization Used in Tourism Literature- Mt. Pleasant

BEAUFORT
CARRIAGE TOURS
and **Sea Island-Gullah**



**Figure 3.10 Examples of Gullah Commoditization
Used in Tourism Literature- Beaufort**

recognize it. As previously mentioned, Rosalee Coaxum informed me that Gullah speech is something people do on purpose. However, most of the weavers I spoke with had no reason to speak any way but the way in which they were most comfortable, the way they had spoken all their lives. For most, that way was Gullah.

This brings about an important surreptitious issue— Gullah language has been transformed from a stigmatized, unacceptable creole to an element of culture which distinguishes a people with a noticeable heritage, a group which is bringing an ever increasing wealth of tourism dollars to South Carolina each year. One has to wonder if the change was brought about by increased respect for culture and art or by the lure of economics on the part of those within the tourism industry. The change can be attributed to both; however, we must not minimize the role of the Gullah themselves in their pursuit to be recognized as a distinct culture.

Cultural preservation and the (re)invention of identity is visible within many Gullah communities, but often in the form of aggressive opposition to further resort development and inappropriate forms of tourism, such as the mass tourism and resort industry which characterizes Hilton Head Island. This struggle has brought about internal conflicts also, in terms of who will decide upon the appropriate ways to educate visitors about Gullah history and culture without forsaking the integrity of those involved. The battle to make tourism compatible with the various host communities will take the stage in Chapter three. Chapter four will address the associated internal conflicts and contestations (often referred to as cultural politics within an anthropological paradigm) and will also include unequivocal ideas about Gullah identity from the very people who have lived it.

Chapter Four

Tourism, Commoditization, and Public Policy: Anthropology as a Discursive Tool for Examining the Sea Islands

Lessons Hard Learned

In 1950, the population of Hilton Head Island primarily comprised blacks (Jones-Jackson 1987, Danielson 1995). This fact seems impossible to anyone who has visited that island in this decade. The only visible African Americans I encountered were ringing up gas at mini-marts or entering the gated communities to clean the homes, or manicure the lawns, of the affluent whites who reside there. Tourism and resort development have erased what was once a self-sufficient Gullah community and replaced it with gated neighborhoods fancifully named after past or possibly imagined plantations. In my view “plantation” is an unfortunate yet appropriate category, because what has been created on Hilton Head is a tolerable and legal form of enslavement of the African American labor force in Beaufort and surrounding counties. This type of oppression has recently been termed a “culture of servitude” (Faulkenberry et al. 2000).

Gullah communities have been self-sufficient for more than a hundred years, however, the somewhat recent introduction to a cash economy has left little room for upward mobility or the possibility of agricultural self-sufficiency. Resorts need housekeepers, plantation lawns must be mowed, and these jobs are just a few of the meager options being offered to the African Americans of Sea Island communities. This situation exists on Daufuskie Island as well. There are less than thirty native Gullah residents remaining on Daufuskie Island, and the only ferry to the island is offered by the resort companies of Hilton Head. Those left on this island are also employed by resorts, either on Daufuskie Island or the mainland.

Tourism is the most highly debated issue concerning plans for the future of St. Helena, as well as other Sea Island communities. There are many paths of tourism that have been promoted throughout the world as means of stimulating economic

development. Anthropologists have been quick to point out the numerous cultures which have been altered, even destroyed, by their treatment as tourist attractions (Greenwood 1977). However, tourism does not have to be damaging. Ideally, it can produce positive results without exploitation, cultural annihilation, or environmental destruction when approached with local interests incorporated into public policy.

Along with local interests, care must be taken to avoid “*selling a culture*,” which is currently an issue within the Gullah communities in which my fieldwork was conducted. The commoditization process goes beyond land, labor, and capital and is beginning to target the history, material and folk culture, and ethnic identity of indigenous and minority groups throughout the world (Greenwood 1989). Even that which people know, think and feel is being commercialized for the purpose of increased tourism revenue, so much so that the literature refers to this process as the commoditization of “cultural intangibles” (Cogswell 1996). In South Carolina, this type of cultural ‘marketing’ is manifest through the use of traditional Gullah images in tourism literature, commercials, brochures and postcards. Within this chapter I will explore how cultural heritage tourism and ethnic tourism are being developed in the Gullah communities of St. Helena Island and Mt. Pleasant, and ways in which certain aspects of Gullah culture are being marketed for the benefit of increased tourism. Can culture heritage tourism and ethnic tourism continue as vehicles for exposing the dynamics of Gullah culture, without the invasive nature and damaging effects of mass tourism and resort tourism?

Cultural Heritage Tourism

In the past twenty years, academic scholars from the areas of applied anthropology and folklore have been increasingly involved in cultural heritage tourism (Walle 1998) initiatives in small communities. The appropriate methodologies of these two areas allow those involved to serve as brokers between the often differing agendas of host cultures and the tourism and development industries “by identifying,

documenting, and interpreting the history and elements of traditional culture that have the potential to become visitor attractions” (Howell 1996: 133). This type of tourism can also be used to focus on either high cultures or folk cultures. Such involvement has also led to the realization that the actual physical space of tourist activity is of considerable value and should be included in preservation planning.

Within the anthropological literature cultural and heritage tourism are sometimes used as interchangeable concepts. I feel it necessary, however, to elaborate on the overall definition of each and how they are being utilized as tools for analysis within this text. Cultural tourism can be defined as any aspect of a particular culture, such as music, dance, crafts, stories, sites, historical events, and architecture, which is represented to visitors as a form of cultural production (Kurin in Walle 1998). This production can take the form of festivals, tours, and material goods. There is normally economic gain involved for those marketing the cultural elements, which is paid by either tourists, sponsors, government agencies or organizations (Walle 1998).

Heritage tourism is a relatively new concept in tourism studies. In 1990 the state of Tennessee was chosen as a pilot state for the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Heritage Tourism Initiative (Caldwell 1996). The Tennessee Overhill Project, one of several multi-county projects in the state, was aimed at striking a balance between the arts communities and the tourism industry in creating locally controlled tourism programs. This project serves well to illustrate the definition of heritage tourism as “showcasing what is unique and special about a place in a way that is agreeable to its residents (Caldwell 1996:126). The Advisory Council comprised a variety of personnel, including forest rangers, museum directors, business people, real estate agents, preservationists, civic workers, craftsmen, and local residents. The success of this project was achieved through an understanding that tourism planning must be done in collaboration with those it will impact.

The Gullah Festival as Cultural Heritage Tourism

Annual festivals attract tourists in order to showcase multiple elements of cultural presentation (Cogswell 1996). The Gullah Festival is a yearly celebration held in Beaufort, South Carolina on the weekend preceding Memorial Day and illustrates a positive attempt at cultural heritage tourism in which the touristic event is planned, executed and controlled by local community members. The Festival has received many awards, including recognition from the South Carolina House of Representatives for the festival's contribution to tourism to and within the State, as well as to the efforts to preserve lowcountry (Gullah) heritage (Pazant 1992: 110). This event began in 1986 and has grown in attendance and importance over the years. It was named "Gullah Festival" because the founders wanted to highlight the surrounding population of "Gullah speaking people of African descent" (Pazant 1992:110). Mrs. Pazant is one of those founders and I was thrilled that she agreed to share her ideas with me concerning the evolution of the festival. All the knowledge presented here can be credited to her kindness. Not only did she talk to me, but she gave me a signed copy of her autobiography *Never Too Late: The Life and Times of a Gullah Woman* (1992).

The festival began with three goals: to help Arts in Education, to provide local students with scholarship opportunities, and to "reclaim for future generations the love, knowledge and understanding of their heritage and culture" (110). The festival highlights Gullah storytelling, presentations, and local and professional entertainment and art. There has also been academic involvement from a variety of disciplines from universities throughout the world. The festival has stimulated yearly discourse between academics and local community members. It has also served to educate the residents about their African heritage. In 1991 a group of citizens from Sierra Leone served as consultants for the Gullah Festival. They provided a slide show presentation and discussed the similarities between the Gullah and the natives of Sierra Leone with respect to such things as songs, basket weaving, and food (Pazant 1992). I met with Mrs. Pazant in her home in Beaufort. She is a kind, soft-spoken woman with a gentle

nature. During our interview Mrs. Pazant informed me of the importance of the festival to the Gullah community:

RP: The Gullah Festival was not only a vehicle for African Americans to learn about their culture but for others to learn about our culture. I believe the more I know about your culture and the more you know about mine the better we co-exist.

M: Was there resistance to calling it Gullah?

RP: At first my friends said "Don't call it the Gullah Festival! People look down on us!" My daughter suggested that we call it that because this is the area where the Gullah slaves lived and they added so much to the fabric of American society. And the sad thing was a lot of our young people didn't know it, and a lot of adults don't know it. What I wanted our young people to know is their heritage is just as important as anyone else's. Nothing to be ashamed of... there were so many kids turning to drugs and violence and I thought through the festival we could show them that there are other avenues.

While later reading her book I came upon this poignant passage, which adds a broader context to the objectives of the Gullah festival:

It is important for the festival to get across the message that everyone has a culture and that no one culture is better than another. Before African Americans can venture into the future, we must look into the past (1992: 120).

I came away from my interview with Mrs. Pazant possessing a renewed faith that grassroots action is one of the most positive tools for sustainable development and appropriate endeavors of tourism— not to mention a stomach full of the best salmon patty I have ever eaten, prepared by her daughter and shared with me.

Ethnic Tourism

Within the interface between anthropology and tourism studies it is apparent that ethnicity has become a popular item of commoditization for the tourist market (Picard and Wood 1997; Wood 1997; Linnekin 1997). Properly defined, ethnic tourism can be viewed as a situation in which the tourist visits a particular location in search of cultural exoticism (Van den Berghe and Keyes 1984) or ethnic exoticism of a particular

group (Van den Berghe 1994). Tourists of this type often desire a more authentic interaction with the cultural other (Van den Berghe 1994) and seek out such interactions in places outside designated tourism venues. Ethnic tourism can be instituted by either the host or the guest, and does not require that the host be interested in such interaction. For this reason it can be either positive or negative, depending on the attitude of both sides. When used as a lure ethnic tourism is often viewed as a viable alternative to mass tourism and is most feasible in groups that are “clearly bounded and culturally different” (Wood 1997: 8). It is important to note, however, that in cases of ethnic tourism the local community has no place to retreat from tourists seeking an authentic interaction and, even though this type of tourism attracts smaller numbers, it could prove to be more intrusive upon the host community (Howell 1994). Much of North American society is becoming fascinated with and interest in, what in their view signifies, exotic cultures which are now being encroached upon throughout the world. This sudden intrigue may be the product of the prior isolation of indigenous groups from mainstream society, which serves to create a strong curiosity among outsiders (Van den Berghe 1994). This has applicable relevance to the Sea Islands, due to their relative isolation prior to the 1950s.

The main difference between ethnic and cultural heritage tourism is simply what is being most emphasized as an attraction. In cultural heritage tourism the lure is the local history and material objects which represent that culture. Ethnic tourism tends to emphasize a particular way of life in which the subject of interest is the native living out that cultural existence (Van den Berghe and Keyes 1984; Wood 1984). On St. Helena Island this translates into tourists attempting to catch a glimpse of natives fishing, shrimping, planting crops, sewing fishnets, attending church service, or the many other activities still performed by local residents as part of their daily lives. Ethnic tourism can exist without being exploitative or invasive if local communities are treated with respect. Without respect locals often feel as though they are constantly “on stage” without their consent, similar to what Jocelyn Linnekin refers to as a “human zoo” (Wood 1997: 217).

The negative impacts of such interaction between host communities and outsiders is evidenced by the current situation on St. Helena Island. When tourism is planned only with the visitor in mind, as has been the case for Beaufort County in the past, members of the host community feel like "caged bears or subservient display items" (Cogswell 1996: 7). The increased interest in the Gullah brings many tourists to St. Helena who treat the locals in this manner. Many of my informants complained of having tourists ask them "Are You a Gullah?" as if they expected to see a woman carrying a sweetgrass basket full of rice on her head dressed in soiled clothing and an apron¹. Even worse are those tourists who ask the locals to "talk Gullah" for them.

The research cottage which served as home for me while conducting my fieldwork, known as Hunnuh' Home, is owned by my principal informant, Marquette Goodwine, and her family. It is several miles from the family compound which she and her extended family know as home, and within walking distance of the Penn Center. The cottages were once just three small houses on the side of the road, in need of repair. Marquette and her mother came up with the idea of refurbishing them and making them accessible to researchers from around the world. My neighbors the first year were a gentleman from Ethiopia conducting research in Social Work, and a Reverend in training, conducting research on Gullah spirituals and church ceremonies.

In each of the cottages there are handy notes and suggestions posted throughout. My favorite is the one that reads "Turn off all lights and air conditioning upon leaving for the day." This told me two things: first, you are here to work so get to it! Second, don't run up the electric bill! In each cottage, on the back of the door, there is a list of rules for staying at Hunnuh' Home, which means "your home and my home—our home" in Gullah. At the bottom of the list is the one thing she most desires that guests remember: "don't study us— spend time with us." Those words serve to represent the ways in which tourists treat the local community and their distaste for such behavior. [It also represents, in my mind, the idea that academics conducting research sometimes forget why they do what they do.] Being a resident of East

¹Stereotypic view of Gullah market women created by past academic research.

Tennessee I can sympathize with the effects of stereotyping. The “hillbilly” image has been marketed to such a great extent that I am often teased when I visit West Tennessee. Tourism has served to package the entire East Tennessee area as one of uneducated, shoeless mountain folk with corn cob pipes.

Alternative Tourism

Recent population statistics serve well to illustrate the need for alternatives to resort tourism, and second home development throughout the Sea Islands. However, the Gullah communities do want to encourage tourism on a reasonable scale. A II who come to visit cannot possibly make the Sea Islands home; therefore, it is important to create alternative ways in which outsiders can experience Gullah culture without becoming permanent residents. This has recently become an interesting topic within the study of the anthropology of tourism, referred to as ‘alternative tourism’. This concept is best defined as “forms of tourism that are consistent with natural, social and community values and which allow both hosts and guests to enjoy positive and worthwhile interaction and shared experiences” (Eadington and Smith 1992:3). There are three broad general attributes of alternative tourism, as outlined by deKadt (1992): tourism committed to the least negative effects on the environment and that is ecologically sound; attractions which are organized by locals, believed to have a less destructive impact on the host society and culture than mass tourism; and tourism which is non-exploitative and most benefits the local community. Simply stated, alternative tourism is the rejection of mainstream mass tourism (deKadt 1992) and is a direct result of the typical problems which accompany such tourism, such as low paying jobs, unwelcome disruption of traditional cultures, and an overall lack of concern for the local citizens and their shared values (Eadington and Smith 1992).

To devise successful alternative tourism projects, i.e., projects that are consistent with community values while also being economically profitable, tourism planners must involve members of the local community as well as the history and art

activists in the area (Cogswell 1996). In some situations, it may even be feasible to have a group of local independent guides who can be called upon by local business owners, museums, etc. to take visitors off the beaten path for specialty tours (Cogswell 1996). The Penn Center hosts a variety of weekend retreats for a multitude of organizations. Its location within the community allows for the presence of tourists without the baggage of resort development, such as the low paying wage jobs which accompany corporate hotels and the land loss necessary for their construction. The Penn Center has a host of locals they call upon at different times to serve this purpose. Marquetta Goodwine conducts a variety of tours around the island depending on the interests of the tourists. She also leads a historic tour of Beaufort geared toward those most interested in the African American history of Beaufort. In the summer of 1999 my family and I accompanied Marquetta to the Penn Center to observe a presentation for the Ford Foundation. She was called to give a cultural performance for a group interested in Gullah culture. At other times Penn Center may bring in local people who weave baskets or tell stories. This strengthens the success of cultural heritage tourism because the locals are involved in determining what is presented to the tour group. However, it also silently empowers Penn Center to assume the role of arbiter in determining what qualifies as *authentic* Gullah performances and crafts.

Commoditization of Gullah Culture

There is a beautiful art gallery on St. Helena Island that I frequented during my fieldwork. The gallery is filled with a variety of art, including pieces created by many local artists and craftspeople. From the beginning I was attracted to a wall of mirrors, each painted in a variety of aesthetically pleasing colors. I was, over time, drawn to a particular mirror. It was indigo blue and inscribed with a Gullah proverb concerning the color blue and its powers of protection. I approached the gallery owner, only to be informed that the mirrors were made by a white woman from a nearby community.

Unfortunately, there are no rules which mandate that members of a culture give consent to their ideas and traditions becoming marketable items (see Greenwood 1989).

The transformation of cultural resources into marketable items is not the only way in which cultures are being marketed. These “packaged” versions of culture are also being exploited by government agencies and the tourism industry (Wells 1996). As I walked through the Charleston market I was bombarded with the sights and sounds that bring the Gullah culture to mind: sweetgrass baskets, hand sewn fishing nets, quilts, and home-made rice blends made by locals. What most caught my attention were the ways in which the word “Gullah” was being used to present the products of the market. Charleston is an historic town with much to offer tourists, but what seems to be the *idea of the day* is anything labelled as Gullah. For example, the city is filled with tours, both walking and in horse-drawn carriages, appealing to a wide variety of interests. There are historical home tours and walking tours throughout the quaint streets of Charleston. There are even ghost tours of homes believed to be haunted. The most surprising was the “Gullah Tour” which caters to visitors exclusively interested in the African American history of Charleston. I overheard many tourists inquiring about this tour which is growing rapidly in popularity. The tour guide is a local Gullah of Charleston. He is a licensed guide, lecturer, and author with a vested interest in the area. It amounts to a tour of historic Charleston spoken in Gullah, (with several additional sites concerning slavery); however, the guide’s command of the language makes this an interesting way for tourists to spend the afternoon. He also occasionally tells a Gullah folktale or two. The increasing interest in Gullah can be attributed to a rise in black consciousness, which brings African Americans from all over the United States to the rural and isolated areas of the American South in search of possible historical connections to their own past (Jackson et al. 1991).

Just across the Cooper River, in the Mt. Pleasant community, the trend toward commoditization of Gullah is growing. Just before entering the stretch of Highway 17 known for the roadside basket stands, there now sits a restaurant which boasts “authentic Gullah cuisine” with a sweetgrass basket logo (Figure 4.1). I entered the



Figure 4.1 Mt. Pleasant Restaurant “Gullah Cuisine”

restaurant in the hopes of speaking with the owner. There were baskets everywhere, all crafted by one particular basket weaver known throughout the community. From speaking with a waitress, who was wearing an apron with a big basket across the front, I was informed that the weaver had entered into a partnership with the restaurant manager. The restaurant increases business using the Gullah image of sweetgrass baskets while the weaver is compensated through selling her baskets in the restaurant. This restaurant was not present in 1998, during my first season of fieldwork. Only time will tell how long it will remain.

Tourism in the Sea Islands

The Sea Islands have sacrificed a great deal of land to new construction projects for the purpose of resort hotels and gated communities. The game of land acquisition has been perfected by rich developers. The proliferation of resorts, vacation homes, and retirement communities serves to raise land prices and tax assessments for local property owners, often forcing them to sell. The type of traditional property or land tenure arrangement used throughout the Sea Islands, known as *heir's land*, has been the most common mechanism of land loss on St. Helena Island. Under *heir's land* rights many family members are tied to a particular plot of land. Heirs property is land that has been passed down through successive generations. The failure of Sea Islanders to write wills makes it difficult for families to keep it from being lost in tax sales. When there are more than a few heirs, developers must only buy the interests of one, therefore making it impossible for other members to exercise control over their own particular shares.

There are two types of inherited property: property that is passed on to heirs and to which the heirs hold clear individual deeds, and property that is passed on but for which the heirs have yet to secure clear titles. In this case they may use the land but they do not "own" it. Children who set up a dwelling on land owned by a family

member may not hold a clear title to the property, consequently, their signature on a sales deed can, and has been, honored as valid in court.

Historically, land in the Sea Islands was passed down through the generations within the family. Each time land ownership changed, names of most or all of the surviving family members were included on the deed or property. This means that today, one parcel of land may be legally owned by hundreds of people, tremendously complicating the deed process and creating difficulties for those interested in acquiring local land (Faulkenberry et. al. 2000: 89).

I will illustrate this pattern, and associated complications, with a contemporary example of Carolee Brown's family compound (Figure 4.2). Carolee allowed me to come over one afternoon and walk the property in order to note the location of each home. After my notations we sat down and discussed which houses belonged to whom, their relationship to her, and how they came to be there. I am, however, quite unsure who holds the deed to each particular piece of property. Her father bought the ten acres she now considers her home place for \$80 from Dr. White, the previous owner. To understand the complicated issues surrounding *heir's land*, one needs only suppose that any of the relatives living within this compound sold their share. How comfortable would the rest of the heirs be living in such a setting with an outsider, or possibly worse— beside a resort?

The executive director of the Penn Center also alluded to another impetus for land loss on St. Helena. Prior to the completion of Sea Pines Plantation on Hilton Head Island (a gated, resort community), the average acre of farmland on St. Helena was valued in the range of \$100. With the success achieved by Sea Pines, land is reportedly now being assessed for as much as \$200,000 an acre (Guthrie 1996; personal communication with Emory Campbell, Executive Director, Penn Center 1992). This land situation is not unique to South Carolina. An identical scenario has been documented for other parts of the country, particularly in Western North Carolina (Howell 1996). Many land poor residents were forced, by rising appraisals and land taxes, to sell family land which held both sentimental and economic value, often serving as a buffer against the constant threat of layoffs from industrial jobs and seasonal employment.

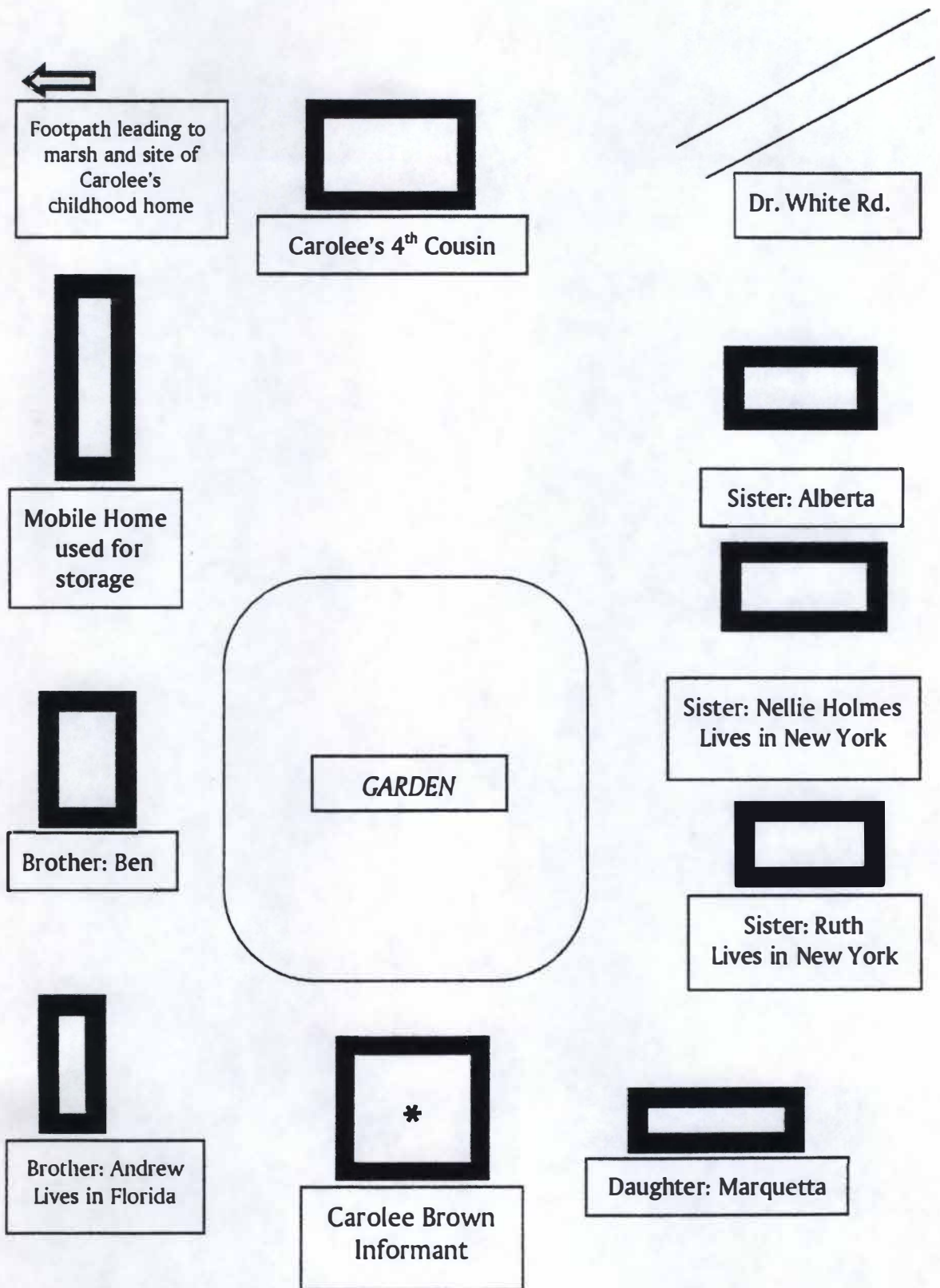


Figure 4.2 Compound Layout: Carolee Brown's Homeplace

Just down the road from St. Helena Island is Dataw Plantation, which serves as another example of rapid development and land acquisition. What was once a thriving African American community is now an upscale private development for white residents (Guthrie 1996). Information gathered from the Internet lists a price range for lots on Dataw Island beginning at \$50,000, depending on location: fairway, riverfront, or marsh-front. Prices for the homes range from "\$200,000 to over \$500,000" ([www.registryone.com/South Carolina/Dataw Island/.](http://www.registryone.com/South%20Carolina/Dataw%20Island/)) The Island boasts a 24 hour security patrolled gatehouse, 36 holes of championship golf, putting greens, 16,000 square foot clubhouse with casual and formal dining, tennis, and a full service marina.

Along with the actual development projects come hikes in taxes for the purpose of infrastructural maintenance. My second field season (Summer 1999) was spent sitting in traffic for hours daily as I tried to navigate back and forth from St. Helena to Beaufort. The road is being widened to make the island more accessible. Many locals expressed their concerns about this road construction. Some believe it is a way to bring in more tourists, while others view it as making it possible for residents of Fripp Island residents (a gated community only accessible by crossing St. Helena Island) to pass over St. Helena "without ever touching their brakes." This signifies the attitude St. Helena residents hold regarding their "neighbors" on Fripp Island, as if their community is just one of the barriers to a perfect life for those on permanent vacation.

Community Involvement and Public Policy for a Sustainable Future

The acceleration of resort and tourism development being witnessed by Sea Island communities is quickly becoming a concern to both the local inhabitants and others who hope to influence public policy governing such issues. The issue of Gullah preservation, as well as the overall protection of St. Helena Island as a cultural resource, is at the forefront of public policy in Beaufort County. The Sea Islands which are incorporated within Beaufort County include St. Helena Island, Lady's Island, Hilton Head Island, Daufuskie Island, Parris Island, and Port Royal. The most recent economic

issues of Beaufort County have centered around the growth of tourism and the retirement community industry. However, local policy makers are increasingly aware of the negative impacts this growth has had upon the local environment, both physically and culturally.

Between 1960 and 1990 the population of Beaufort County more than doubled, from 41,052 to an overwhelming 86,425. The county officials acknowledge that “much of the new growth and development has been, and will continue to be, directly related to the development of Beaufort County as a quality tourist destination, second home, and retirement location” (BCZDSO 1999: Ordinance 01-1). The provisions of this plan are designed to discourage future growth which will compound the cultural and environmental devastation that Sea Island communities already have experienced. With Hilton Head Island serving as a reminder of what development can become, officials at all levels, joined by local activists, are cultivating development plans that will satisfy the residents of Sea Island communities while permitting controlled economic growth.

In 1997 the Beaufort County officials formulated what is referred to as the first draft of the Comprehensive plan, titled “Get a Grip on our Future.” Among the many policy recommendations within this plan was the enhancement of “arts and humanities services for visitors in recognition of the importance of cultural heritage tourism to the County’s economy” (BCCP² 1997:693). Also listed as an important factor was the hope that government officials, private sector businesses and the citizens could communicate with one another successfully and “speak with one voice” (547). A prime example of such a project is the Food Processing Small Business Incubator on St. Helena Island (Figure 4.3).

The Beaufort County Economic Development Board was actively involved with the citizens of St. Helena in the planning and financing of the Incubator project. The building is referred to as the St. Helena Food Center/ South Carolina Coastal Community Development Corporation (CDC) . The project receives 25% of its funding

²The abbreviation used to represent the Beaufort County Comprehensive Plan of 1997.



**Figure 4.3 Food Processing Small Business Incubator
on St. Helena Island**

start-up and writing business plans; community access to commercial kitchens for baking, food production, freezing, refrigeration and storage of homegrown produce; the creation of a community development credit union; and the early steps toward opening a local restaurant in a nearby abandoned building on the main road through St. Helena (Figure 4.4). All these accomplishments and future plans will aid St. Helena in building their own tourism related businesses.

The 1997 draft of the Comprehensive Plan was reworked into the 1999 *Beaufort County Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance* (BCZDSO)³ and adopted by the City Council in April of 1999. It is most commonly referred to as simply the “Ordinance.” Relevant to the study at hand, one of the six over-arching public policy goals of the comprehensive plan is the preservation and protection of the existing Sea Island communities, along with the appropriate development of future communities. Chief among the locations listed as potentially in jeopardy is St. Helena Island. According to the Ordinance, St. Helena “contributes toward the creation of an image of the County that is essential to the sense of place that residents and visitors alike share about the community.” It further designates St. Helena as vital to the continuation of diversity in Beaufort County, in terms of race, age and income. In light of this aspect, the Ordinance designated St. Helena as a “Cultural Protection Overlay District” (CPOD) (Appendix 4) designed to ensure the future of its unique position. The overall purpose of the plan is the effective long-term protection of cultural resources found on St. Helena. The population of this island represents “the center of the most notable concentration of Gullah culture” (BCZDSO 1999:02-9). The CPOD is also designed to preserve traditional land use patterns and retain established customs and rural lifeways, while protecting St. Helena and the Gullah community from “encroaching development” and “displacement of residents” (BCZDSO 1999:APP C-1).

The one location within Beaufort County that has maintained a Gullah population is St. Helena Island. For this reason the BCZDSO specifically made reference to the conservation of Gullah culture through the formulation of several policies. The

³The abbreviation used to represent the 1999 revised plan.



Figure 4.4 Projected Site for a Gullah Restaurant on St. Helena Island

most fundamental policy affecting St. Helena is the use limitations outlined within the CPOD. The policy targets three aspects of development viewed as detrimental to Gullah preservation: gated communities, resorts, and golf courses (BCZDSO 1999: APP C-2). The new policy guidelines assert that these types of development are “incompatible with cultural protection and are therefore prohibited” (BCZDSO 1999: APP C-2). The policy was recently challenged by a large development firm, Cardinal Engineering, Inc. I recently received news from the Chair of the St. Helena Island Corner Area Community Preservation Committee⁴ that a permit for building request was submitted. The project would build 128 units of rental properties with a club house on Highway 21, the main thoroughfare of St. Helena Island. The proposed name of this development is “Island Club Apartments” (e-mail communication, January 10, 2000, Marquetta Goodwine). The Beaufort County Zoning and Development District Review Team rejected the project in late 1999; however, the development firm continues to file appeals. The community members of St. Helena Island must continue to be present at all appeal meetings, as well as staying informed of other such requests for permits.

The Gullah/ Geechee Sea Island Coalition, founded by Marquetta Goodwine, serves as the umbrella group for all issues concerning the Gullah communities of South Carolina. The Coalition takes full advantage of modern communications technology and maintains a strong Internet presence⁵. Through this type of communication the Coalition is constantly alerting Gullah supporters worldwide that their support is urgently needed. Letters of opposition against the development of St. Helena Island are continually rolling across the desks of South Carolina politicians, commissioners and board members. This type of grassroots organization may be essential for the Gullah community of St. Helena to survive and prosper in light of the current situations

⁴ A local committee who has been appointed to review the BCZDSO and assess how it will benefit and/or harm the central area of St. Helena Island, referred to as the “Corner”.

⁵(see <http://users.aol.com/queenmut/GullGeeCo.html>).

regarding development and tourism, however, there is no consensus about whose ideas will govern the future.

Chapter Five

Identity, Cultural Politics, and Contestation: Multivocality on St. Helena Island

Island of Hope

St. Helena Island, just 30 miles north of Hilton Head, bears no resemblance to other Sea Islands. It is unique in that it is primarily still owned by Gullahs that descend from the inhabitants enslaved and once imprisoned there. Unique to this island is the historic Penn Center, whose job is to educate the residents of this and surrounding islands how to avoid becoming another Hilton Head Island or Daufuskie Island. It began as The Penn Normal School and was the first school established for the education of freed slaves upon their unofficial emancipation during the Civil War. The Port Royal Experiment was centered around the Penn School. The primary objective of the Port Royal Experiment, contrary to the idea that the north wanted to prepare the freed slaves for factory work, was to teach the people how to be self-supporting and industrious enough to stay in their rural communities (Rosengarten 1986). Students of Penn Normal School were taught a variety of skills from basket-weaving to net-making to advanced mathematics. I spoke with several elders of the St. Helena community who had been students at Penn Normal School before it closed in 1948. They had only positive things to say, and enjoyed their experiences while there. The Penn Center now serves as a cultural resource center and meeting place for grassroots activity. It also houses the Penn Normal School archives and museum. Penn Center receives funding from various institutional and government agencies. In light of its historical centrality, the Penn Center is inevitably involved in the current internal politics concerning Sea Island cultural preservation and representation.

Within any area under anthropological study identity, cultural politics, and contestation are vital issues to be addressed. However, the Sea Islands, particularly St. Helena Island, offer a unique perspective concerning the interplay of these concepts and how they are currently being addressed. Gullah identity is being redefined by those

who have lived it and the previous ideas formulated by outsiders and academics are being rejected. The Gullah are engaged in a conscious effort to be recognized as a vibrant culture with a future, challenging the grim predictions made by outsiders concerning this culture and its survival. In the past thirty years many academics have traveled to Sea Island communities and painted a romantic picture of a culture that once was, leaving the impression that such locations are doomed to impermanence. This type of ethnographic writing needs to be examined, as was articulated by James Clifford:

The theme of the vanishing primitive is pervasive in ethnographic writing. Ways of life do change and populations are disrupted, sometimes losing important cultural elements, but the persistence of ethnographic writing on this subject needs to be examined (1986:112).

Clifford is arguing against the assumption that a cultural identity endures only as long as certain culture traits are deemed to be traditional. However, the islanders I encountered have a different idea of the future of their home. They are taking on the task of reinventing themselves as present day Gullah communities with no plans of vanishing. This type of action symbolizes a quest for empowerment within a group long defined by outside forces.

Within any culture that is undergoing revitalization of identity there is the possibility for internal conflict concerning what particular vantage point will serve as the authority (Prins 1996). On the Island of St. Helena, where I resided during both fieldwork seasons, the internal politics are dividing even native islanders as to whose concept of Gullah identity will serve to represent the future of their culture. The battles being waged internally serve to weaken the cohesion necessary to combat Sea Island development and further ruination of the very thing they are fighting to preserve. There is contestation over who is really Gullah, who is in it for the money, and who has the right to be involved. This situation, although distressing, opens up the opportunity to investigate the multivocality of cultural politics by exploring multiple definitions of the current situation. As an anthropologist, it is crucial that I not only document the

information as data, but that I try to understand and present to the reader the complex realities of my area of study (Rodman 1992).

Gullah Identity

Identity is a question of empowerment, particularly for those who have been prevented from identifying themselves (Friedman 1992). This holds particular relevance for the Gullah, who have been defined repeatedly throughout their history by missionaries, historians, linguists, and anthropologists. These constructions of identity, for the most part, have been negative, leaving a lasting impression on Sea Island residents. In retrospect I can only now understand the hesitation expressed by many residents regarding their participation in my research. As anthropologists, whether consciously or not, we are constantly involved in the “invention” of cultural identities (Friedman 1992). In order for this process to be of value to the communities we study we must begin to engage in dialogue and productive discourse with members of such groups. Through this process we can begin to support their reconstructions of identity (Friedman 1992).

Carolee Brown is a resident of St. Helena Island with a wealth of knowledge. She served as my surrogate mother during my fieldwork. She was always there to check up on me and just talk with me about the way things used to be and are now. She is the mother of Marquette Goodwine, and their family owns the cottage I rented during my stay. We shared many conversations and the most insightful are included here. The following excerpt was taken during one of our taped interviews. We were inside her house enjoying the air conditioning.

M: What does Gullah mean to you, when you hear that term– what does that mean for you?

CB: *What Gullah means, hey, I grew up in it! This is home!*

M: So a typical Gullah person does what? Did what?

CB: *Oh they work, they work hard. They not only kept house, but they even work on the outside of their home.*

M: Has it been an agricultural thing, mostly?

CB: *Look, it has been agricultural, because farming is agricultural. With me growing up, my father grew most of what we ate. Even cows, we had cows- I had a cow to milk every morning before I went to school. So we had fresh milk. The chickens was running around in the yard whenever Momma said chicken for supper, my father would kill two or three. Really, I grew up on the farm. The ten acre here- with the one house sitting in the middle of where the oak trees are. That was the only house on this ten acre. The rest was farmland. And I and my brother was the two that was always out there in the morning before we go to school.*

M: Did your dad shrimp?

CB: *Oh yes, he used to go in the river....*

M: So that was just a natural occurrence for a male on this island?

CB: *Yes, on this island, and my father made a living from the river. He used to crab for a living and he would only catch shrimp for his own use, for the family. But I have an uncle who would go up there and catch and sell everything. But I grew up when you had to work in the garden. The land was here and you had to get the best out of that crop. Cotton was one.*

M: How old were you when you all stopped growing cotton?

CB: *Thirteen or Fourteen. That's when I was happy that the cotton was gone. I hated it because you could pick the row this afternoon, all that is out, and tomorrow when the sun comes out and my father come in the field and he say "come back here, you didn't pick this yesterday," and I'm ready to scream. And I said one day "Huh, I don't care whether I get books or not, the cotton price needs to fall!" and the next day it did! That's when my father stopped planting. And I said " boy am I happy to get rid of the peas and the cotton." But now the peas, you could plant enough peas that.. We had a corn house. You had one corn house for the corn and one for peas so by the time the harvesting season was over both of those houses were full. Corn in one, peas in the other. So whenever my Mother said she want peas to cook one day my father would get a sack and fill it with peas from the corn house and beat it with a stick until all that hulls crumble. Then you takes it off with your hand until you get to where the little fine one. Then you throw it up and the wind would blow all the husk away.*

M: Just like fanning rice..

CB: *Right.*

M: Now when did people stop growing rice here on the Sea Islands?

CB: *Well, I was about fourteen or fifteen. My father grew rice right across the way from Marquette's there [making reference to her daughter's present home next door to her own]. That place, when we moved here on this property, that would stay full of water.*

M: And that's what rice requires?

CB: *Yes, rice requires a lot of water. I remember, it dried enough for my father to plant it. And once it came up from then on you would get rain every week. So the alleys was always full of water and you would have to wear boots out there.*

M: So you harvested rice?

CB: *Oh yes, my father cut it in bunches— it was the brown rice not the white- and he tied them in bunches. And then he took all the rice and when he did the rice, they took all the furniture out the house when it's time to thrash it. Took all the furniture and set it in the yard— and my mother laid out white sheets and he put two bushel box in the middle of the floor and they were dry enough that each time you hit that box they just fell off. Then he got through doing that- he did that for a week— and after he got all the rice, he would bag up one or two hundred pound bags of rice. And then when he was completed they had a place here to mill that husked. So when he got everything off the stalks he would go and have the, take the hull off. So we never had to buy rice until they all were gone. We had a place to store that. The hogs he used to kill, my father could kill it and when he get through it as white as your shirt. He shaved it. He knew how to make the ham, the pork chops, the ribs. He put them in salt for a week, and then after he take it out of the salt he washed them like you would wash clothes. Soak it and soak it and then he hangs them up outside to dry. And every evening he brings them in and the next day he hangs them out. If it's gonna rain, he don't. And when he get through curing that meat he could hang it in the loft; so whenever, whatever meat my mother said she wanted to cook this afternoon— he goes up there with his big knife and cuts it off and brings it in and puts it on the table for her. It wasn't such thing as a refrigerator, you had ice boxes.*

M: So the meat would just hang in the loft all the time, curing?

CB: *All the time. It was fully cured then. You had to bake it. He just sliced it and it was so pretty. And my mother would put it in cold water and soak it and it look just like bacon you buy today, and that's how we came up.*

M: No electricity?

CB: *No. You had a few lamps.*

M: Do you remember when the island got electricity?

CB: *Now the people who had a decent job were able to get electricity in they houses. Really, in our old house, electricity didn't get in that house until I got married and left. I had four children*

and I used to live on Polawana. I used to live on that side, then come back over here on the weekends some times.

M: When would that have been?

CB: I got married in '51. Let's say that would have been '53 or '54 before she could have afforded electricity.

Carolee Brown, who owns this Gullah identity, equates it with a past of self-sufficiency; however, she is just as quick to tell you about her big garden where she continues to grow a variety of foods. I enjoyed many tomatoes and watermelons grown by those very hands. I showed up for one of our sessions to find Carolee ripping the heads off shrimp which her husband had gathered from the marsh behind their house. There were buckets and buckets of shrimp and she stood there de-heading them for the duration of our conversation. So just as her family was self-sufficient in her childhood days she is now, within reason. The identity of Gullah as an agricultural community is still present, although in a new reinvented form- one that coexists with the wage labor necessary to pay taxes.

For other members of this community Gullah identity means something else. Ron and Natalie Daise, commonly known for their starring roles in the hit children's show *Gullah Gullah Island*, are also deeply invested preservationists of this culture. Ron published a book, *Reminiscences of Sea Island Heritage*, which showcased photos of the earlier years on St. Helena. In the years following the book Ron and Natalie traveled the country performing an educational drama 'Sea Island Montage.' The production incorporated live performances with the historical photos of St. Helena Island obtained from the Penn School collection, those used in *Reminiscences of Sea Island Heritage*. During our conversations, they articulated their unique ideas about what it means to be Gullah through discussing their many years of involvement in the struggle to save their culture. Our interview was conducted in their home during my second field season (1999) and we were discussing the impetus for the 'Sea Island Montage.'

ND: *The purpose was to celebrate the passage... the transition of being Gullah people, or having been these West African people who'd gone through this passage and there are particular things that are unique to the community and unique to the people and we carry it with us. But we are carrying it with us through all these transformations.*

RD: *And that it was ennobling. Each person's heritage should be ennobling...*

ND: *And to recognize what makes up a creole culture, and that this is a creole culture and what it takes is a great ability to adapt and a willingness to do so, and still hold on. That is something that is hard to articulate, particularly within the tourism industry, because people love 'sound bites,' people love something that they can capture and that matches a picture they carry inside their minds. I remember for a while there, on Hilton Head, was a return to the Old South and people loved it... They would come in and look at the pictures.. And I would be thinking, wait.. That's not what you mean, cause if that's what you meant... you mean to return to the Old South of your imagination. So there were folk who wanted to come to a Gullah culture of their imagination. And in that Gullah culture all the women would be wearing lovely things and gather flowers and make baskets, which they do, many do. But they aren't thinking these are business women. And all the folks sat around the pot eating "Hoppin' John" and men wore overalls when they came in from the fields, as many do.. But they're farmers...*

RD: *There are Gullah people who are lots of things...*

M: *And drive a Lexus...*

RD: *Engineers...*

ND: *Yes, and drive a Lexus...and they might have the "Hoppin John" right there...*

RD: *But they're still Gullah people.*

ND: *Yeah.*

This is symbolic of the stereotyped identifications which have been branded on the people of these areas. Most who come to visit, including academics, have a preconceived notion of what they will find.

The most persistent stereotype which is being redefined daily is the stigma attached to Gullah language. The Penn School, as mentioned previously, was the first school started to educate free blacks. The history which African Americans were taught until recently was a white man's version of history, which often ignored or disparaged the achievements of African Americans (Jordan and Weedon 1995). Within such a

system African Americans educated in this manner internalized all the negative stereotypes attached to being who they were (Jordan and Weedon 1995). Because the Penn School persisted as the primary educator of St. Helena residents until public schools were built, it also was involved in this process of cultural destruction through education. Carolee Brown attended Penn School, as did the parents of Ron Daise. Their own words serve best to illustrate the lasting impact of such an education on the hearts and minds of Gullah people.

M: Now when I hear '*a graduate of Penn*' there seems to be a mentality that goes along with that.

CB: Yes.

M: That totally says "I am not Gullah! I am not from here!"

CB: *Even the ones that live here, they don't speak Gullah, because they weren't allowed to at Penn.*

M: But Penn was trying to educate these people?

CB: *Educate them... Right!!* (spoken with sarcasm)

M: Educate them straight out of their culture?

CB: *Right- that's what they did...*

M: So, none of them want to come back and want to learn it?

CB: *Learn it? Now there's a few vaguely wants to learn, but it's a rare occasion.*

M: But they heard it growing up but didn't listen?

CB: *No. They heard it growing up, our parents spoke it. Yes, they didn't want us to speak it. You know, they'd get together and get with their friends and just rattle it off. And so we go in the backyard and rattle it off too. We couldn't speak it in the presence of them.*

M: So the community I have been able to see, like at the concert, those people are interested. But you're telling me a lot of people on this island are not interested, do not want to be part of this whole thing— the Gullah culture!

CB: *Oh, it seems as though they are not because they don't even attend.*

M: Why is that?

CB: *I can't figure it out.*

M: I think it reminds people of the whole slavery era and what's happened here, and some people— I don't know if they're ready.

CB: *Well, it makes you wonder.. It's history— so it's nothing for them to be ashamed of! It's great history— Look! It's happened! So live up to it! But it's gonna take a while for them to really grasp it... Now to some of the little younger children, I think, it's interesting. But you need the parents to bring them out to different functions so they can learn.*

This mentality has not only affected the older generation, but has spilled over into all generations since. Natalie and Ron recounted one particular experience of their many years of touring around teaching children, and adults, about Gullah culture.

ND: */ remember being at one of the schools in South Carolina. You would see the kids... As we went on they would get drawn in and by the time we were doing language those who knew Gullah (who would have sworn they didn't know Gullah before we got started) were saying "Oh yeah..." because they knew what we were saying. And the teachers thought they were laughing in ridicule, but they weren't.*

RD: *It was affirmation!*

ND: */ remember one little girl saying "I like that! My grandma talks like that" and her teacher had come up first and said "oh I just love that you did that" and "It empowers the children," and then the little girl said "I'm gonna learn to write like that!" and the teacher shouted "Oh no you don't!"*

RD: *It nullified everything she had said before.*

M: Now did you go through that? Did you go through school being instructed how to speak?

RD: *Oh yeah, and my own family. My parents were graduates of Penn School and Gullah was not an acceptable form of speech in my home. It was something that I always heard but I can remember we were always corrected and polished.*

ND: */ call it the school of 'save your race through diction'. It was everywhere. I grew up in segregated schools in the early years and you had those teachers who said "If you want to make*

it in this world, you must present yourself in a certain way or you will not be accepted.” And it was done with every positive intent to help. And he, of course (referring to Ron) was Gullah, so he had it a whole lot worse. You crossed your t’s and dotted your i’s.

RD: *And you enunciate every word.*

ND: *I still know black teachers for whom the British cannot out enunciate.*

RD: *I left Beaufort with my degree of polish, and on the campus of Hampton Institute of Virginia, people immediately heard something else.. “Where are you from? Because you’re not from the States, maybe your parents are but you’re not.. Maybe from one of the islands” and I would say ‘Yes, I am from an island’ and I hung out with kids from the Virgin Islands so they would ask “Are you from St. Croix? St. Thomas?” and I would say ‘No, St. Helena!’*

ND: *And that’s one thing we talk about in language. We talk about code-switching and how we are trying to encourage folks not to lose the language but to switch when need be. So that there are times when Gullah will not work. Part of the job of a good English teacher or a bad English teacher around here is to give them the skills to switch. I mean I have friends who speak Spanish and English and don’t have a problem switching, even within the same conversation.*

RD: *But to do that recognition must be given that it is a language. For years it had not been... It was bastard English, broken English... bad English, and just bad talk. Even when I taught in the Developmental Studies Program at the Technical College, there were adults in there and I would point to them and say read the word (street) and they would say “skreet” and I’d say ‘now look at the word’ and they just couldn’t do it! And they hadn’t been doing it throughout their childhood and adulthood and it wasn’t a shift that could be made.*

Ethnicity as Identity

Currently as more and more native groups reinvent themselves in cultural terms these identities are being expressed in ethnic terms. De Vos (1995) defines an ethnic group as:

a self-perceived inclusion of those who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions typically include “folk” religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin (1995:18).

The Gullah fit these criteria without question. Another group mobilizing ethnic identity is the community of St. John’s Island in the Caribbean. A recent anthropological article

(Olwig 1999) delineates the striking similarities between these two communities. Both are sites of three centuries of exploitation and slavery at the hands of Europeans. Each has a history of self-sufficiency through farming and of a cultural pride in their African heritage, and each has been the site of tremendous land loss through rising property taxes and limited access to anything other than wage labor. Where they differ is the point at which the true fight against cultural exploitation began. The community of St. John is fighting against encroachment that has already occurred whereas St. Helena is battling the threat of tourism development. As a result of these battles, new and reinvented identities are being forged with a strong link to the African heritage brought across the Atlantic some three hundred years ago. The ultimate goal: using the knowledge and strength of the past to construct an identity capable of battling the further appropriation of their cultural heritage. How can identity achieve such a feat? By using the past to assert their ethnic heritage, thereby granting them exclusive rights to the land they now inhabit as descendants of African slaves, they can create an identity which makes all others outsiders. The cultural heritage of such groups is tied to land, as is evidenced by the stipulations for land use within the Ordinance concerning St. Helena Island. Cultural ties to land must be maintained in order for cultures to survive and thrive in the future.

Just as St. Helena residents were apprehensive about speaking with me, many members of the St. John's community were reluctant to publish their oral histories for fear of being exploited (Olwig 1999). In the mid-1970's the winter residents of St. John, who have built homes on the island, organized a historical society and hosted educational lectures which featured trips to old plantation ruins. This situation is much like Hilton Head Island, South Carolina besides the fact that they don't have to take trips to plantation ruins; they built neighborhoods on the exact spots of former plantations and often use plantation names for these communities. The mounting interest of the white community concerning the African American past is also obvious, as an excerpt from my interview with Marquetta Goodwine will help to illustrate. This segment is taken from one of our many conversations. At the time of this interview we

were driving to Savannah, Georgia to pick up some things she had dropped off at a copy center. It was, undoubtedly, something to promote the Coalition. Marquetta never stops moving...

M: Now you were telling me that you are booked at all these different resorts on Hilton Head- does that mean as an entertainer?

MG: *Oh yeah, but they don't know me very well.*

M: So they basically think you entertain and tell stories?

MG: *No, a lot of the people who do the bookings have seen me present. So they really want to educate the people who are in these resort areas because it always has to take the one to get to the two. And that's their thing is that they don't feel it's right to be living on these islands and they don't know the history of these islands. They don't even know their "neighbors," who are the Gullah folks. And the truth be told the people who are there are on top of those people land. So that's why a lot have invited me now to come and speak there, because they really want to get history and knowledge. And most of the people who invite me.... These are not the resorts with just anybody and everybody in them. These are the most affluent ones where the oldest people are. They have been here a long time.. And maybe it's a guilty conscience or just a longing for more knowledge but they feel they want to do something.*

During the same period that whites began expressing an interest in local culture, in St. John, the National Park Service created a living history project at the ruins of a former sugar plantation (Olwig 1999). The project employed many locals to come and demonstrate basket weaving and gardening techniques and allowed visitors to sample authentic food cooked by native residents of the Island. The Sea Island equivalent can be found in such places as Boone Hall plantation in Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina, where sweetgrass basket weavers are *allowed* to set up and weave for tourists (although to my knowledge they are not paid by the tourism industry). Many see this as an opportunity to make money but it brings into question the difference between exploitation and opportunity. The tourism industry, undoubtedly, is aware of the cultural nostalgia tourists attach to the mere opportunity to observe this 300 year old

art. Is this, in the reality of the tourists who visit, a return to the plantation era in their minds or do they view these women as contemporary members of Mt. Pleasant society? Many members of the St. John community view this type of public display as yet another attempt by white society to “appropriate” their past (Olwig 1999). Although I did not get an outright definitive answer I feel that many of the weavers in Mt. Pleasant view such displays in a similar manner. How can locals have a role in what is presented and what is not? Who decides what aspects of a culture will be incorporated into a reinvented, or possibly staged, identity? Questions such as these serve to unravel the interior politics of a particular culture or community.

The Politics of Culture

As those within a particular culture begin to redefine themselves and reshape their cultural identity there are issues which take on great importance: who will be the authoritative voice? What aspects of the past will become important to the future? What aspects of our history need to be corrected or reinvented? The discourse used to address such questions is known as cultural politics. Historically, the power to serve as an authority has often rested in the hands of institutions, such as governments, missionary groups and academic institutions. In more cases than not, these institutions have also been predominantly white (Jordan and Weedon 1995). Within marginalized groups effective political mobilization depends on a shared history grounded by past experience, but how does a group like the Gullah, with a past which until quite recently brought about shame and degradation, become something worth reinventing for the sake of preservation? The answer lies in a brief history of the past thirty years and the growing interest of outsiders. I asked Ron and Natalie Daise about the rapidly growing interest concerning Gullah culture.

M: When did the interest in Gullah begin to mount, becoming what it is now?

RD: *I think there are a lot of reasons for the interest, not only my book, but performances that we toured with, Natalie and I. Our Sea Island Montage performance using the photographs*

from the Penn Center collection as part of the presentation, as well as the increasing popularity of the Penn Center Heritage Days festivals, the Gullah festival, the St. Simons Day festival in St. Simons, Georgia. Also Daughters of the Dust. Daughters of the Dust played an extreme major importance in the celebration of Gullah. Of course this was an artistic movie and after the premiere of the movie a lot of people came to the area thinking that they would see a lot of dark women dressed in white running along the beaches... but there was an interest in what Gullah is all about.

M: Most people don't even see that as artistic. Most of the people I have spoken with are very disturbed by that movie and feel like it was a very negative stereotype.

ND: *It wasn't a linear piece, it wasn't meant to be a historical piece. It was her own vision. It's just that... with the press that it got, such that it was, it tried to make it about a culture when it really wasn't. It was about Julie Dash's own internal search and vision and as such I can watch it... If I looked at it as a documentary I was going "What are they doing?" but once I let it go...*

RD: *You realize that she had a story and that was her way of telling one particular story.*

ND: *Her part, on a limited budget...*

M: The Montage that you talk about... What brought that about and exactly what did it entail?

RD: *Sea Island Montage was a way of bringing the book, Reminiscences of Sea Island Heritage, to life.*

ND: *We took the oral histories from the book and we turned it into theater, and we would become the people. This is Janie Hunter's story or ... Miss Marion's story and then you would tell her story... And we would use music, old music from here, and use them as part of the story. And we would adapt it to whatever we needed. We found out after we had been to... (I don't know how many schools across the country talking about Gullah culture, talking about St. Helena Island)...*

M: Universities?

ND: *Universities, colleges, elementary schools, kindergartens...*

RD: *any educational institutions...*

ND: *We went all over the place.. Here it was difficult at first... It was very difficult at first because people would say "You just do this to tell all our stuff to white people so they'll laugh at us" so initially a lot of resistance was from our own community. And at that time local tourism wasn't celebrating Gullah; matter of fact I had talked to the Chamber of Commerce at that time*

and they said there were no Gullah people... Well somebody was doing a National Geographic piece and in Beaufort even there was resistance to it.

M: Resistance to calling it Gullah?

ND: *Yes, saying why are you celebrating “bad talk”? Why are you making fun of us.. In one segment of the community now, Gullah has become a commodity. Gullah socks, Gullah shoes!!! Which in a way you gotta just think– from the beginning when our own children were ashamed of it to now being comfortable saying Gullah, being Gullah, recognizing it... which in ten years is like...whew... from sitting in a classroom in Bluffton and watching a little black child do like this (putting her hands over her face) because she couldn’t stand to look at the pictures and she didn’t want to hear it to kids who walk up to you in the airport and... We didn’t set out with that as a goal. And you know there are probably mixed feelings about how commercial our show was as well, but it wasn’t meant to be a cultural or anthropological lesson... It was meant to be a show for preschoolers set in our community and trying to do it as naturally as possible without making a big deal about it being set in this community... And also without making Gullah culture be a history piece which is something that we... I struggle with... With the idea that when you say Gullah you mean an era. And so Gullah means music that is from this point, or people who dressed in a certain way – Gullah is about solely being agricultural, and in the nineties it can’t be.*

ND: *I used to read everything as it came out (referring to Gullah related literature) , but I’m behind. It’s coming at an avalanche now... I can’t keep up¹.*

ES: *People have come out of the woodwork and it takes so much time. I think that’s what happens. Since 1992 I have learned to build boundaries around myself. I can also tell you that I have now learned that I can no longer afford to spend two hours talking with someone and they come in off the street several times a day. It is amazing! And also, as I told City Council the other day, we are really trying to go somewhere with economic development based on this culture, and I think that makes people think “ If we give it away, then there’s no value to it!” And we have given it away for so, so, so long!*

The words above belong to Elayne Scott. She owns a beautiful art gallery on St. Helena Island known as the *Red Piano Too* (Figure 5.1). Her gallery houses the art of some seventy local artists within a 60 mile radius of the Island. I visited several times before I thought to sit down and speak with her about the current situation on St. Helena. My

¹See Appendix 1 for a review of this literature.



Figure 5.1 *The Red Piano Too Art Gallery on St. Helena Island*

hesitation stemmed from the internal politics surrounding the opinion of locals I had spoken with pertaining to her gallery and her position within the community. Many residents of St. Helena expressed their distrust of whites who get involved in local affairs, which she does. They also shared the opinion that she profits tremendously by exploiting Gullah culture. I assumed my most unbiased researcher position and sat down with her. She is extremely pleasant and very well spoken. During our time together Elayne expressed a genuine desire to preserve all that is Gullah. In retrospect, the term “gone native” (Jordan and Weedon 1995) best describes her ideas about the St. Helena community of which she sees herself as a part. We sat down to talk in one of the many rooms of her gallery.

M: How did you come to be here?

ES: *I got my land here in 1975. I have been back here for ten years. I left in 1976 and lived in the Caribbean until 1989. In 1990 I came back here to Beaufort where I own land. I married a West Indian man and became completely comfortable and happy and enchanted with a culture which is of African heritage versus one of European heritage, which is my own— which is fine, I love it. I don't have the same wrapper but we are all connected. I have seen enough to know that there is a thread that runs through every single one of us. And I think people need to understand that! When I came back here it was just like the Island I left... Everything is the same. I see the same faces... Gullah is West Indian! The same patois, the same language. The way they tie their head ties, the way they walk down the road. The way they have their very own societies.*

Toward the issue of cultural preservation, this is the first gallery in the county of Beaufort that sold or featured images that were other than European. So we are very committed. My partner, Mary Mack, was born and raised on this island, she is a graduate of Fordham University. She is a fantastic woman. We aren't going anywhere. We are here for the long haul. We're preservationists in every way.

H: So the lady who helps you run this is from here?

ES: *She was the first woman to be chair of the Penn board, Mary Mack. I mean, I have roots here.*

M: I don't think people know that.

ES: *It doesn't really matter.*

M: Now you sponsor a lot of activities that are geared toward preservation, is that correct?

ES: *Yes, I've been given the Dr. Martin Luther King Humanitarian Award, I've been to Leadership South Carolina, I did the two years at Penn School for Preservation, I've served as chair of endless committees to write our comprehensive plan. If people don't know me it's because they weren't paying attention! Or they don't go to meetings! There are people who are appealing to funding institutions who have never been to a local meeting.*

M: I have never understood why they don't set up a co-op here.

ES: *We went to school for two years here. We put together a program here, it was hugely diverse in every way... It was wonderful! We brought in people from Daufuskie and other Sea Islands that were endangered and for two years we studied preservation. We decided that the way to save this island was through economic development and toward that end we wrote a million and a half dollar federal enterprise zone grant. I worked on it for two years. We designed a program of economic development based on cultivating the very small niche farmer and he can grow herbs. We were going to take that packing shed down there and turn it into an open air market, hang fans, bring in water, put in cables and allow people to be in the process of supplementing their incomes with what they can do and do well and have done for 100 years! Making quilts, jams. I identified every artist in the community... You can go on... furniture, walking sticks, dolls, pickled jams. So we said "Ok, if our focus is going to be on keeping the culture in its tradition and we know that, our culture, many people would consider us small farmers. In the 60's when they did the whole agri-business thing everything collapsed. A lot of people had their land stolen from them because they didn't give loans to black farmers and when they got behind in their taxes— And I will put this on tape, I would stand up before Jah himself and say it— the white guys stole their land! Right up until now. Every time it came up in a tax sale there was no way...*

M: And they can't get it back?

ES: *No! They have been so marginalized by the white guy's political system, and they struggled and tried to save their land but.. In two years of study all the stake holders, which included everybody on this island, we identified that we were small farmers. So how could we keep it that way? We would set up a small co-op where we could nurture these projects on a scale (which is the operative word here) which would make people comfortable and willing to do it. We did this incredible grant.*

M: When you say "we," who are you talking about?

ES: *I am talking about all the people who graduated from the “Penn School for Preservation”², there were eighty of us in all.*

M: What kind of relationship do you have with the artists who have their work in here?

ES: *It has a lot to do with money, and artists always need money. I was thinking this morning about the bills; between what it costs to maintain the heating and the air and the security system.. Those three things alone, nobody ever sees those and the expense is just huge! It’s \$800 a month, easy! I never thought it would be this hard for this long. I started this company with \$5,000 and now we have a huge inventory. It’s probably worth \$300,000 now if I wanted to sell it. It isn’t always smooth with the artists. I’ve lost some because they just think the person who owns the gallery should get a certain percentage.. Well, fine, go get your own credit card machine that costs \$7,000 a year. Do your own sales.*

H: So, some think your percentage is too high?

ES: *I know what I have to make to keep this business running. If they don’t want to be here they don’t have to be here. I’m not holding anybody hostage.*

M: What is the deal with people (mostly educated whites) coming from surrounding areas and writing books about the Gullah?

ES: *I don’t have a problem with that, I think we all have a contribution to make. I don’t necessarily think they all need to live here. I don’t have any problem with people making money off of it, but what I don’t want to see is Gullah theme parks and Gullah gawking! We don’t want it to turn into Cherokee! That’s what I will fight against... But the first water slide that goes in called the ‘Gullah run’ or something... NO.*

Our conversation lingered on and eventually led us full circle, back to our whiteness and the awkward nature of being involved in this struggle, with each person involved never quite knowing who is really on the side of what. The internal politics of the Island are hard to fathom and have much to do with the rapidity with which the interest in

² Refer to page 113 for a detailed discussion of this project.

Gullah culture has caught on. Elayne holds a particular view on the current situation, which she used to close our interview:

ES: It doesn't belong to anybody any more than it belongs to anyone else. Now some people are going to exploit and some are not. It doesn't matter what side you're on. Some of their own people are going to exploit the hell out of it. So, I just think if you stand in the truth, you're okay. As Mary would say "you can't slice bread so thin there aren't two sides".

Penn School as an Agency of Gullah Preservation

The Penn School, now referred to as the Penn Center, is recognized as the community agency for Gullah preservation. Being located in the heart of St. Helena Island, the Center is constantly involved in issues pertaining to the survival of Gullah culture. All academics who have come to the Sea Islands to do research have been aided by the representatives of Penn through the borrowing privilege of pictures, manuscripts, and historical documents often used in scholarly publications. However, over the years that position has changed and the circumstances are laden with cultural politics. I approached the Penn Center on several occasions over a two year period in search of assistance, to no avail. Only through interviews with local residents have I come to recognize and understand the current situation pertaining to this institution.

M: Last year I had a grant from the UT Women's Studies Program to do research, and Penn wanted me to pay \$50 an hour just to speak with someone. How do they expect anyone to learn the truth³ about Gullah culture without their assistance?

ND: That's something you will encounter and that's partly because what people have done... What folks say is "don't give away anything because all we have now are the secrets that are left and if you give it away they are going to take it and turn it into a commodity and they are going to market it and we will not have it". And unfortunately it's true... It's true but it's limiting because the fact of the matter is it's going to happen anyway. What's gonna happen is that all of the developers are coming through and they're looking for something to make it

³The Penn Center serves as the cultural broker, whether officially or implied, for Gullah culture. It is difficult to gain access to relevant historical documents and pictures from any other archives.

unique and they're going to take something and they're gonna create their picture of Gullah and they're gonna market it. And whether anyone has cooperated or not... It's gonna happen. It may sound fatalistic but you see it happen all the time, over and over... and it's going to happen here. So the question is, I guess, what we're all trying to figure out is how do folk who live here capitalize on what they have so that they at least benefit in some way, because somebody is going to... period! It's gonna happen, it's happening. How do we... (I hate the word but it works so well)... empower?

Another resident put it this way, same message, different context:

ES: The problem with Penn is the fact that so many people took advantage of their resources that they got robbed! They got intellectually robbed because over and over scholars and academics came in and said "we'll send you a copy of this..." and they don't!! That's why they are now charging \$50 for interviews!

In 1992 the Penn Center launched the 'Sea Island Preservation Project' which sought to bring together community leaders and business owners to create economic strategies that would benefit the Sea Islands without destroying the land, traditions, and culture of the Sea Island Gullah (EPA/Concern, Inc. 1997). The goal of the project was the creation of a community vision and the formulation of a strategic plan for St. Helena Island. This brought about the establishment of the "Penn School for Preservation" in 1993, in which 37 community leaders and public officials got together on weekends for six months to discuss such issues as zoning, economic development, growth management, and community economic development. Using what was learned during the initial meetings of the "Penn School for Preservation" these members joined new participants in 1995 to create a master plan for economic development of the Corner Community⁴ on St. Helena Island.

The "Sea Island Preservation Project," with the assistance of those involved in the "Penn School for Preservation," opened the South Carolina Coastal Community Development Corporation (SCCCDC), which was to become the lead organization for

⁴The "Corner Community" is recognized as the center of St. Helena Island and has recently been deemed the "traditional commercial heart of St. Helena Island."

the economic development strategies devised by local participants. In 1997 the SCCCDC was awarded a \$1million grant for the building and operation of a food processing kitchen (*Concern, Inc.* 1997). This project also provided legal assistance and educational workshops to land owners in order to maintain family land ownership on St. Helena and surrounding islands. The Penn Center is also concerned with such issues as historic building preservation, sustainable forestry projects, and the future possibility of a Folk Art School to preserve traditional arts and crafts. The Penn Center is also involved in land-use issues on and around St. Helena Island in an effort to restore and preserve the traditional agricultural lifeways of Sea Island people (*EPA/Concern, Inc.* 1997).

Contestation

It hasn't been exclusively outsiders from surrounding areas who began to flock to the Sea Islands. Many of those who came went away with notepads full of information and libraries of video and audio tapes about the changes taking place on these islands. These were academics from various fields and their subsequent published works have become the authority on Gullah culture. There has been a deep cleavage created between academics and local community preservationists. Most Gullah residents harbor suspicion and resentment toward academics and it is precisely their authority which is being contested. Members of Gullah communities feel they are capable of representing themselves as a viable culture, without the help of outside academics who have read the literature but don't have an understanding of the true essence of Gullah culture. Over the years, strictly academic visitors have become emphatically unwelcomed. Many of my conversations with Marquetta were devoted to the overall distrust of academics. During a day trip to Hilton Head we discussed it again:

M: Of all the academics, when did they start coming here? How recent is the phenomenon?

MG: *The seventies.*

M: Why?

MG: *I think that within different fields of academia they began to look around and someone had done it already. This being an isolated area, up until the 50's we were isolated. It became "Maybe if I go down there I can break ground."*

M: Has anyone done anything applied? Have the academics "given back" to this community?

MG: *NO, not to my knowledge, they go away and get published and that's that! Because they make money more than one way. They make money because of the books and then they receive honorariums to go around and talk about their work at different academic institutions.*

M: What do you most want to convey about the current situation here? What are the paramount issues?

MG: *You have to tell people what your own experiences are, and my experience has been that what people call development in this country is exactly the opposite, it is "destructionment." These people are seeking out places that appear to them to look like paradise but then it is paradise revisited because they have to recreate or build on top of it. I don't feel that you can make anything greater than the ultimate creator has made it already, so they're playing God, and in the process they are destroying the things that God actually put here, that could be beneficial to a whole lot more people than 1 to 10% of the country that's making money off of everybody else and moving people out. And I think people need to understand that when one culture dies another soon follows. That's what I always tell people, you might say "Oh who cares, that's not my culture."*

M: What could academics do to bridge the rift between themselves and the local community here and throughout the Sea Islands?

MG: *I'm not against people writing books or whatever, I just think they need to do it in a respectful manner and they need to put some of their own personal insight into it; not just act like robots spitting out some data. What did they feel? What did they find? Maybe they felt all of us were closed and we didn't want them here. If that's what you got out of the experience put that down! Let somebody know and learn from your experience and insight instead of making it hollywood-ized. Or just sticking to the two people you interviewed who were nice to you and fed you dinner, and you wanna act like they are the King and Queen of the Sea Islands and they're not! And one of the things they can do is that, if they're going to write a book or something, then at least put in there the Coalition's address or something. Maybe somebody wants to come for more than just research. Maybe somebody just wants to come and find their roots or whatever. Then they can contact some people who are legitimately part of the community and*

not somebody who is just part of a tourist trap to get people's money or whatever. Put a page in about that or a section and appendix of people who did help you. That way people can help those institutions who are helpful to continue to be there to preserve the culture. That's a necessary factor.

A lot of people will study you into non-existence. They are studying you and studying the crisis but they are not involved. It is as if you are under a microscope. They actually come programmed to look at the situation, analyze it and that's it. They don't go any further with their understanding. They come here and they get thrown back because they don't see us with sweetgrass baskets on top our heads! And it's not that we can't carry them that way. People get so caught up in imagery that they don't use their own minds.

Marquetta expresses the opinion of many of my informants, and many others who would not consent to be interviewed but were eager to tell me how they felt about researchers. The residents of Sea Island communities see academics come and visit for a few weeks, write something that sounds romantic and eloquent to other academics and never come back. They take and take, but never give back. Many even consider the rise in academic interest to be partly responsible for the destruction of such places as Daufuskie Island and John's Island. This rift between academics and the local communities is hard to overcome. I am quite confident that many of the interviews I conducted were granted simply because I was staying with the Goodwine family and they are well known. I even had a few call and check me out with Marquetta. It was comical at times and disheartening at others.

Academic interest in Gullah culture breeds contestation over authority on many levels. Marquetta's perception of the Sweetgrass Basket Marker Dedication in 1997 serves well to illustrate the current contestation over cultural knowledge and authority.

MG: Sweetgrass baskets have been preserved by people of African descent. That's it! Now the primary people who have preserved it are in Mt. Pleasant. I got the information about the Marker Dedication from Mike Allen who did the work to get it recognized; he worked with the Sweetgrass Basket Coalition. At this dedication, they started everything late. Myself and my mother are ticked off that this church is only half way full for a dedication like this because it's been a long time coming. It's in Mt. Pleasant, all the sweetgrass people should have been there with their families. They didn't even know!!! I found out afterwards from a bunch of people, they

never even knew! People were still out making baskets as we drove by. I was thinking— why are they still out here making baskets? They should be up at the dedication for the marker. They should take the day off. People's family names were being called, like the oldest person of that family that had passed this tradition down and down... they were calling names of people they had certificates for to give honor for them. Some of them just weren't there. Some didn't even know they would be called. The Emcee for the program was not even a local person, although she does anchor a Charleston news channel. I am thinking— we are here to dedicate a sweetgrass marker, why couldn't you all have gotten a local person from Mt. Pleasant or Charleston to Emcee? They could've called me! Okay. I get it. That's part of the commercial thing. You gotta play politics— get a person who is in the media because her channel will cover it. She was mispronouncing people's names. I am looking at this platform of people. One third of them are African Americans and this is gonna be all the people who are going to speak about sweetgrass baskets? They had the audacity to have a white anthropologist, they're gonna have him up there speaking about the West African connection to the Sea Islands. That would have been fine if he got up and said it and moved out of the way. But they are gonna have him speak before a man from Sierra Leone. Now I'm not saying you have to draw everything along race lines but I am saying have some respect for what you are saying you're dedicating here. What does a white man know about making a basket? And what does that have to do with him personally about our heritage and culture and preservation? Not Jack!! The ambassador from Sierra Leone should have sufficed to talk about the connections between us and them. Then, I'm trying to figure out what all these Caucasian people are doing up there. I haven't ever seen a Caucasian person weaving a basket in my life! So what is going on here? The key speaker was another Caucasian woman who has written about the Mt. Pleasant basket weavers, and who many in this community have mixed feelings about. At the end of the whole thing was this Caucasian woman from Charleston who has, in the past, been around us (referring to the Gullah) and written down what we said and now she does these books about Gullah speech. She was walking out with the key speaker, and I asked if I could take their picture.

M: Did you get it?

MG: Yeah, because I find it interesting that these two people act like they would give their life to preserve Gullah culture but really what it is is the commodification and I feel there is a level of arrogance that I feel that just exists naturally within European mindsets when it comes to doing things. There is always the "I am going to tell you what's best for you."

MG: Lorenzo Dow Turner is still being used for the number one resource for information on Gullah language and when was it written? In the 1930s! Not looking at how Gullah has progressed since then. There are things that have been lost and I appreciate the fact that his work is there. That we can refer back to get some of the old words that my Grandmomma used to use that we don't use too much now, simply because we believed what these people taught us in public school system; that Gullah was backward and ignorant and don't speak it! That's how

we lost a lot of those words. But don't tell me now that if I go and write something down that I have written it incorrectly and am therefore contributing to the death of the language. (Referring to academics and outsiders who have published on Gullah language often positioning themselves as authoritative sources.) Our ancestors been speaking this language all our lives, which was an oral language to begin with, so if we want to write it down in Chinese letters, who are you to tell me it shouldn't be written in Chinese letters! So this is a problem that I have.

This type of contestation is closely linked to authority and control. It brings us to the very important question of “who constructs culture and on behalf of whom?” (Howell 1994: 153). With regard to St. Helena Island, what role does the local community play in the politics of culture? Howell(1994) elaborates on the problematic situation concerning State Humanities Councils. Funding for cultural conservation projects may be awarded to community organizations, but they are required to work with academics in the planning and implementation of project goals. The problem is often the conflicting agendas of multiple local stakeholders and project consultants.

Many local residents expressed an interest in gaining financial support for projects to promote and preserve Gullah culture. It stands to reason that activists from St. Helena have a better chance of receiving funding for culturally relevant projects when working in collaboration with an agency, such as Penn Center. However, even this situation can have competing agendas. In the past Penn Center has included, on project committees, native and non–native business owners whom St. Helena Island residents view as outsiders. The most obvious divide exists between the ‘comeyas’⁵ and the ‘binyahs’⁶. Comeyas, regardless of their level of sincerity concerning Gullah preservation, are often viewed as having no right to participate in community affairs. The avenue of choice is self-determination. Under the current situation of funding opportunities many valuable projects must go unsupported until an accord is reached between academics and local communities, as well as within the various Gullah communities comprised of multiple stakeholders with differing agendas.

⁵Term used to refer to those from elsewhere– who have ‘come here’.

⁶Term used to refer to native Sea Islanders– who have ‘been here’.

The current situation on St. Helena Island substantiates a theory proposed by Friedman (1992) which suggests that outbursts of cultural identification and reinvention often occur during periods of declining hegemony. The purpose of such action is to “define, demystify, and debunk others’ construction of themselves” (Friedman 1992: 850). For the Gullah this has meant a complete mind shift for the older generation.

Going out and around the Sea Islands with Marquetta is almost like being in a parade. Everywhere we would go there were people with something to say, and it was always encouraging. I did, however, want to elicit her ideas about the older generations. After all, these are the people who were raised at a time when being Gullah was not something to go all over the world and talk about. Matter of fact, it wasn’t even a suitable identity to boast within your own community.

M: How does the elderly community feel about what you’re doing?

MG: *Well, the ones that talk to me, they love me. I’ve had complete strangers, they might know my mother or father or grandparents, walk up to me at the supermarket “ Oh you doing a great job girl. I love to hear you come on that radio! Boy, you shock em’ and tell em’ bout that stuff!” So they feel good about it. That’s my only litmus test. I don’t care if I am in the newspaper, I don’t care if I am on TV (I am thank God) but those are not my interests. When I know that my elders and my ancestors are at peace with what I am doing, then I know I’m doing it right. Now when they start frownin’ up their face at me, or don’t speak when I’m passing by I know something’s wrong. But as of today I can feel safe in saying if I died now I’d be happy because I did my fair share and they were comfortable with what I’ve done. All the elders that I know and see all over the place... One thing about it is that it isn’t just elders on St. Helena Island but I started getting letters and postcards, or I will meet people from other Sea Islands and they know who I am already. And they’ve heard about the work that I’ve done. Or I call them and introduce myself and they know me. That makes all the difference in the world. That’s what is important.*

This is indicative of the changes taking place within Gullah identity and ideology. The same folks who only ten to fifteen years ago were against such things as the ‘Sea Island Montage’, or referring to the annual festival in Beaufort as the Gullah Festival now

embrace their identity as Gullah people and are proud of that heritage and all it represents. In the eyes of any beholder this is truly commendable. The problem of authority and contestation over power, however, is still a force to be reckoned with. Once again, Ron and Natalie Daise contributed deep insight into the internal politics of the current situation.

ND: The hard part is that we have these layers of cultures here, all these layers, and all these different expectations and ways of interacting and there's going to have to be the next evolution. And because different money comes in and there are different power shifts and the ways of communicating that worked aren't going to work anymore. Who knows what the answer is. We are at a place where we need to find out what it is. Who knows?

RD: But in order to maintain any level of success for the community there must be a settle of trust. There can't be people within the community pointing fingers... we're all in the same condition.

ND: We are! And it's sorta like what happened at the beginning, with the creation of the Gullah culture, which was a creole culture created from West Africans from all these tribal groups and they all came and had to become a community and develop a language that they could communicate with and develop a common culture. It has to happen again. What has to happen now is that the comeyas who are black and the comeyas who are white and the binyas who are black and the binyas who are white are going to have to find a way to create the new way of communicating.

RD: Which was done, which was effected with the committees working with the whole Overlay district.

ND: Didn't happen in Myrtle Beach, didn't happen in Hilton Head, didn't happen in Georgetown– but it happened here.

RD: And that has to be maintained in order for, ten years from now, those things aren't...

ND: Remember when.

RD: Right.

Another spot of contention within the community is aimed at those who have come to St. Helena, from elsewhere, and are essentially now claiming Gullah identity. This may possibly be due to their perception of the investment they have made and are continually making in the community.

ND: *See, I'm part of that comeya layer and married into that binyah layer. And if I open a store and make money I will be exploiting my community.*

M: When does it become not a good thing anymore? And why are some people, who are not Gullah, able to market themselves as such without intense resistance?

ND: *They are well connected and folks are seeking out these people. And if we don't find a way to stop this exploitation the only knowledge people will learn about Gullah culture is what they obtain from these sources...*

M: Which, from what I understand, isn't even accurate.

ND: *Right.*

M: So, many African Americans are flocking to this area because they are realizing their family could have come through here--

ND: *We used to call this the bedroom of African American culture-- this is it. This is where it started! If you're out there and you don't know who your people are but they could've come from right here.*

M: So people are coming here to learn about Gullah culture and being even further mis-educated by comeyas pretending to be natives?

RD: *Yes, and because within the Gullah community there's not a sense of bringing offense to these people who are wrongly representing us, or going to them and saying "you aren't doing this right." There is a sense of "well, just back off and..."*

ND: *Ignore them and they'll go away...*

RD: *Maybe not go away, but what happens is this perception that darkness is causing light to retreat, whereas the light should be exposing the darkness and illuminating more.*

ND: *You know what I see happening Ron? I was just thinking about this as she was talking about the different things I see, and it's making me feel real good talking about it and thinking*

it. Of course this is just my theory at this moment, it could change! A lot of those of us who are comyas, who sorta bridged that world between them and us, are also entrepreneurs. But a lot of us are also involved in grassroots movements.

RD: *I think the answer for that, for entrepreneurs whose business thrive on the culture, you are helping the culture in so much as you aren't selling out and seeing the difference in what that means to a number of people. What is essential, however, is doing it for yourself, so that you don't fall into anyone's box– limited by their perceptions of how things should be presented.*

ND: *But there is that question about– how do we– what does preservation mean in a rapidly changing culture and how do we define what it is now that holds on to what it was and we can take it with us?*

RD: *Right, and as far as trying to assign a monetary value to a culture, that isn't anything that hasn't been done before..*

The future of the St. Helena Island Gullah community lies in the ability to reach a mutually agreeable ideology concerning the preservation of Gullah culture. It is also necessary that the native islanders of St. Helena internalize the truth: if St. Helena declines as a viable Gullah community it will be difficult to bequeath it to the next generation. The possibilities for grassroots organization to yield positive results is evidenced by the passage of the Cultural Protection Overlay District. The struggle to keep developers at bay while educating the young about the rich inheritance of Gullah culture, will continue, however. Will St. Helena Island successfully thwart resort developers and remain home to the largest population of Sea Island Gullah? The only certainty is the persistence and strong will of Gullah people throughout the Sea Islands trying to influence the answer.

Chapter Six

Grassroots Preservation and the Future of the St. Helena Gullah Community

An analysis of contemporary Gullah culture is very much needed, for the developments of the past 20 to 30 years have brought significant changes to the Sea Islands and altered many of the classic patterns studied by earlier scholars (Jackson et al. 1991: 158).

The aim of this thesis has been to represent the Gullah of St. Helena Island as a viable community with a future. It is important to me, as an anthropologist, to represent those who informed my opinion as grassroots activists involved in the preservation of what they are entitled to: their culture, their home, their language, and the freedom to be Gullah. Throughout my three years of contact and interaction with those whose words appear here I have learned much about Gullah culture, but even more about the spirit, resilience and optimism of the St. Helena community. They are breaking new ground as “keepers of their culture”¹ and I salute their determination.

The future of neighboring Sea Islands is beyond prediction. So often the mere involvement in cultural tourism forces communities to cling to the past in order to construct a marketable identity for the future (McKean 1973 in de Kadt 1992). For St. Helena Island this is simply not the case. The residents seem confident in their ability to maintain many of the traditional ways of the past while moving forward. This confidence, however, should not be taken as naivete.

M: Let's talk about the Ordinance. How long do you think you can hold these people off? Do you think the developers are going to leave it alone?

MG: *Oh, we know they'll never leave it alone! They'll try to find loop holes or ways to maneuver around it, but St. Helena has been able to see what St. Helena has been for generations because there is fighting power on St. Helena and people don't suspect it. From Civil War times to now, people think we're dumb, we're stupid, we're backward and we won't fight for anything. But let them set foot on St. Helena and start trouble and they'll see how many fighters are on St. Helena. So, I have no problem with developers. I know they'll try something. But the minute they do they'll have a bunch of us down their throats saying “Wait a minute! By*

¹Often used to refer to those within the community of St. Helena leading the battle for Gullah preservation.

law on the books...” I think it’s a good thing. I really think we can hold on to it. It’s just gonna take people sticking to their guns.

M: Which is hard sometimes.... I try to think about working everyday in the sweltering heat, and somebody comes along and says they will give you \$200,000. But, what I am actually beginning to think is money isn’t what it’s about!

MG: *Have you heard that rap song- “Money Ain’t A Thing!”? That could be the theme song here, because that’s not been our heritage. We have some that are greedy but they see that money doesn’t last that long. We all have to realize that we are microcosms in a macrocosm that is the world, and that doesn’t mean you are better than the next one and too many people are trying to be the biggest. There could be so much peace in the world if people would look at that. I mean, I don’t come in your house and move your furniture!*

Even the older generation, which has seen both the suppression and reinvention of Gullah culture within their lifetime, are optimistic about the future. Carolee and I had lengthy discussions about the changes she sees taking place within Sea Island communities:

M: Do you think the same things that have happened on Hilton Head Island and Daufuskie Island can happen here on St. Helena?

CB: *I don’t think it can happen, NO! There’s too many black people who own property and they’re not selling. They are keeping it and for those who have property, and if they have any gumption, if they can’t afford it- if they are a member of any of these churches on St. Helena they should come to the church for money, for taxes. If they can’t afford it let somebody know.*

M: Because they will pay it?

CB: *They’ll pay it.*

M: Because they don’t want to lose it?

CB: NO.

M: The widening of the road scares me because it seems like the next step is more people and more neighborhoods... and more gated communities.

CB: *But the only gated community that can ever be is here already on St. Helena: Dataw, Fripp and Tansi- That's it!*

M: So that's what the Ordinance means?

CB: *That's all we gonna have. Nobody gonna sell them nothing else. There was some rich folks going out on the islands in the river at Eddings Point and they wanted a road—*

M: To put 21 condos in..

CB: *Oh, we stopped that in a hurry! All they have to do is start and put it in that paper! It's more than what you want to see in that courthouse up there, or right there at the school here on St. Helena!*

This type of staying power is being manifest in a variety of ways. The organization I have been affiliated with throughout my research, The Gullah/ Geechee Sea Island Coalition, is blazing a trail for grassroots activity. Marquetta Goodwine is the founder and director of the Gullah/ Geechee Sea Island Coalition. In 1993, she spearheaded the annual event, the *Ourstory and Heritage Conference*, held in Nova Scotia in 1994, St. Helena Island in 1996, London in 1997 and New York City in 1998. She was awarded the *Harriet Tubman Women of Distinction Award* in 1997. She also served as the Regional Director for the Sea Islands regarding the Smithsonian Institution's Anacostia Museum Project *African American Rural Experience: 1865 to Present*.

"Hunnuh Home" serves as the center for the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition and is located within walking distance of Penn Center and historic Brick Baptist Church in the heart of the St. Helena community. Located at this site are two research cottages and an archive center, each painted white with blue window frames "as is Gullah tradition" (Goodwine 1998c: 192). On weekends Carolee Brown, Marquetta's mother, cooks traditional Gullah meals and sells them from this location. Other material, such as books, tapes, traditional Gullah quilts, fish nets and sweetgrass baskets can also be purchased here. Marquetta begins a variety of tours from this location. What is amazing is the hospitality of this family. During my first year I watched as Marquetta and her family escorted a researcher around the island. He had taken a bus to St. Helena Island and had no plans of getting a car. At first I was amazed, but I

later realized it was only I who viewed it as a burden. I have never felt as at home anywhere as I do when in the company of this family.

Gullah Preservation Goes International

In an effort to bring about international recognition of the current Sea Island situation, Marquette Goodwine attended the 55th session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, Switzerland on April 1st, 1999. She is an associate of the International Human Rights Association for American Minorities (IHRAAM). The objective of the visit was the recognition of the Gullah community as one in need of preservation. She appealed to the United Nations in an attempt to push the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior of the United States to “recognize how important it is to preserve our community which no doubt is of historical significance to people globally” (Appendix 5). One particular section of the address was spoken in Gullah which had astounding effects throughout the session.

When Goodwine began to speak Gullah while explaining how her ancestors were kidnapped from West Africa and forced to work on the islands during chattel slavery, looks of amazement and mumbles filled the room. This was no doubt due to the fact that these words could not be translated to any other language by the interpreters. (The Gullah Sentinel April 2, 1999).

After the session a large number of delegates came to Goodwine requesting written copies of her full statement. This was the first step toward international recognition of the cultural devastation of the Sea Island Gullah.

Over the past three years, since the beginning of the Gullah/ Geechee Sea Island Coalition, Marquette has toured all over the United States educating others about Gullah culture. During 1998 she took the “Save the Sea Islands Tour” throughout the United States and abroad to draw attention to the need for preservation efforts in the Sea Islands. She has been designated a folklorist, a preservationist, a storyteller, even as “tradition’s keeper” (*The Oregonian*, April 20, 1999: B2). Her destinations range from

elementary schools to cultural centers. I once asked Marquetta why she started the Coalition. She informed me she was tired of hearing all the ignorant and incorrect information being circulated about the Sea Island Gullah and she decided it was time to connect all those throughout the Sea Islands involved in grassroots preservation movements. What she made very clear to me was the desire to form a diverse group.

M: : OK, the Coalition started when?

MG: *The Coalition started, the Gullah/ Geechee Sea Island Coalition started in 1996. It was an outgrowth of the "Our Story and Heritage " Conference that we did called "Sea Island Survival."*

M: Who did? Penn Center?

MG: *That our organization did, the Afrikan Kultural Arts Network (AKAN); the conference that I founded that was taken all over the world and focused on the history of people on African communities and how they link globally and so we did the one on the Sea Islands.. We wanted to bring together all those throughout the Sea Islands who were working to preserve Gullah culture, not just academics. See, anybody can go to a building everyday and get a piece of paper, but that doesn't matter here. We wanted people from this culture that know this culture.. People like my mother...whether you quilt, or sew sweetgrass baskets, it doesn't matter.*

Not only has the campaign taken to the road, it also takes full advantage of the Internet. The Coalition is constantly involved in efforts to inform those who are interested in current issues relating to Gullah preservation. The latest involvements are centered around two issues; dock permits requested for Polawana Island, and the proposed development of Morris Island. A recent posting to the list-serve illustrates the constant involvement and commitment on the part of St. Helena residents involved with the Coalition.

I am on the west coast making connections, but will soon be back in the Sea Islands. I thank all of you that attended the hearing on St. Helena Island in regard to the docks. My audio taped statement was played and the e-mail ccs that I received were submitted for the record. A number of people from the community spoke and addressed the issue that their family members would have been present had they been notified in the proper manner.

Beaufort County Councilman McBride spoke out against the docks when a request for any elected officials to speak was made. According to an update from one of our main supporters who is also a part of the "Save Our Small Islands Committee": The Coastal Conservation League spoke out against the docks primarily on Polawana, emphasizing the lack of water during low tide. All of these statements have been the first blow to knock down some part of the battle with injustice and destruction. However, to win a fight, a boxer hits more than once. Thus, I would like for ALL members of this list and ALL supporters of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition to write in specific letters that will reference the numbers that OCRM now has attached to the dock permits that they are considering. (e-mail communication, March 24th, 2000, Marquetta Goodwine).

The building of the docks being requested will hamper the efforts of those who use the waterways daily. Building these docks would thus chip away further at the traditional lifeways of the St. Helena Island fishermen.

With regard to the development of Morris Island, the Coalition has expressed overwhelming disapproval through countless letters to Charleston County officials and involvement in local meetings. A developer wants to build 43 homes on Morris Island, which is the historical site where the all black 54th Massachusetts Infantry stormed Battery Wagner. This Civil War battle was made famous by the movie "Glory." It is currently a deserted barrier island, but holds special significance for Sea Islanders as yet another part of their history in need of recognition and preservation. Marquetta posted her comments to the list-serve as follows:

Again, there are those trying to "capture the fort" on Morris Island. However, this time, it is those that would have it become a plantation. A "developer" wanted to build 40 units of housing on this small island by having it annexed into Folly Beach in Charleston County. However, the cries from across the country were NO! And "troops" had to again join in to stop another one of our islands from suffering and dying for the sake of the pleasure of a few. Hold tight and don't let them put the chains on again. (Listserve communication/ GullGeeCo@aol.com, February 25, 2000).

For the past two years, the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition has been working toward the Congressional designation of a "Gullah Project." They have joined

forces with the South Carolina African American Heritage Council in an effort to bring this to fruition (Listserve communication/ GullGeeCo@aol.com, February 25, 2000). Congressman James E. Clyburne (6th District of South Carolina) was successful in persuading his fellow representatives to support directing the Secretary of the Department of the Interior to conduct a special resource study on the Lowcountry Gullah Culture. This is certainly a step in the right direction.

Recommendations for the Future

I have been witness to many processes over the past three years concerning the future of Gullah culture and viable Gullah communities. I have written this thesis in an effort to present current data on the Gullah culture of the Sea Island communities I visited. As an anthropologist I feel the most beneficial preservation effort must be linked to oral history with direct control maintained by the Gullah community. The benefits of oral history are numerous. As Lummis suggested, “many people have not kept their cultural past in their pockets or their houses, in terms of material objects, but in their heads as memories” (Lummis 1987 as cited in Jordan and Weedon 1995). Oral history captures people’s own accounts of their lives “via vernacular speech, dialects, diverse languages and oral traditions” (Jordan and Weedon 1995: 167).

It is crucial to document the devastation that has taken place throughout the Sea Islands. Only through learning from the past can we be sure the same mistakes are not repeated.

The Gullah that remain in scattered communities throughout the Sea Islands have an altered perspective of their present day homes. They remember the beauty of dirt roads, the fields they played in as children, and the landings to the creeks now locked away by gates and ‘No Trespassing’ signs. Many of them have to hold back the tears and swallow the pain as they come home from the mainland for a visit or drive to work in Hilton Head and other resorts each day. What remains of the Gullah communities on Hilton Head and Daufuskie Islands have been forced off to one side of the island. They are often prohibited from traveling through areas they have known all their lives due to the rapid increase of gated communities (Goodwine 1998b: 171).

Each and every member of these Gullah communities has a story to tell. It must be recorded before it is too late.

Although the present study is ending it is only the beginning for the community of St. Helena Island. The internal conflicts discussed in previous chapters can be surmounted by community organization and the realization that each person has a voice that is just as important as another. This has special relevance for the elderly members of Sea Island communities who have a wealth of information to offer the world. Marquette is optimistic about the future of the Sea Islands. After all, she is committed. Many are.

The Sea Island community is now beginning to come together as a Coalition instead of attempting to continue to fight the “powers that be” as fragmented groups from one island to the next. This type of organization is necessary in order for the Gullah community to have our own self-interest promoted as well as to have our culture preserved. We must tell our own stories and govern our own community as our foreparents did (Goodwine 1998c: 197).

There are several Gullah phrases which are becoming recognized within this movement of cultural preservation. Each carries the voices of the ancestors as they have spoken to Marquette—both figuratively and spiritually— providing guidance in the struggle to preserve what remains.

As mi people dem sey, “ empty sak cyan stan upright ‘lone.”
As my people say, an empty sack cannot stand upright alone.

Cum toggedda wid we people fa hold on ta de tings wa wi peopol lef wi.
Come together with our people to hold on to the things that our people are left with.

Mus’ tek cyear a de root fa’ heal de tree.
You must take care of the root to heal the tree.

Perhaps sentiments such as these can serve to motivate (both those within and outside the remaining Gullah communities) so that we may all continue to learn.

Chapter Seven
Lessons Learned:
Celebrating Gullah Heritage in the Twenty-First Century

Gullah Commoditization and the South Carolina Tourism Industry

Throughout this thesis I have illustrated several visual ways in which Gullah culture has been commoditized by the tourism industry, however, there are other forms of commoditization. The mystique which is being created concerning the remaining Gullah is attracting visitors from near and far. In some ways, African Americans throughout the United States are becoming aware of their cultural origins and seek answers from the Sea Island areas. Also, white America is gaining insight into the rich cultural past of African Americans, thereby fostering a greater respect and acknowledgment of their many contributions to American culture. In other ways, however, the commoditization stirs a desire on the part of wealthy whites to colonize these picturesque locations previously unheard of. Resort tourism is endangering what remains of Gullah culture through environmental, social, and cultural destruction of the very elements which have promoted its survival— such things as plant resources used in sweetgrass basketry; threats to social systems (held in place for generations) by the need to migrate elsewhere for employment; and the constant barrage of outsiders with differing ideas and cultural practices. These are by-products of resort development and tourism. It is, therefore, important to reach a point at which the level of tourism is non-exploitative while still allowing for tourists.

Grassroots Control of Tourism

Many Gullah natives are becoming involved in the tourism industry in ways which are conducive to positive future growth and cultural survival. Throughout my fieldwork I was informed of various types of native involvement. Regretfully, I was unable to visit with many of them, such as Cornelia Bailey from Hog Hammock.

Cornelia belongs to the last generation of Islanders who were born, raised, and schooled on Sapelo Island off the coast of Georgia

(<http://www.gacoast.com/geecheetours.html>. May 16, 2000). With the help of her family Cornelia and Julius Bailey now operate the “Wallow”. This is a guest house located in one of the oldest Gullah/ Geechee communities still inhabited. Not only are there accommodations, the Bailey family also offers private tours of the area, picnic lunches, hay rides, and many other activities. They are also involved in activities with the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition.

The Gullah natives of the Charleston area are also involved in the tourism market. As previously mentioned, the Gullah Tour is led by a native guide, Alphonso Brown. He is a native of Rantowles, South Carolina, a rural community of Charleston, and is fluent in the Gullah language and familiar with many Gullah customs (<http://www.gullahtours.com/>. May 16, 2000). Another notable native, Carlie Towne, established the Carlie Towne Gullah Geechee People Foundation (CTGGPF) in May of 1998. This non-profit corporation strives to preserve and promote the culture and heritage of the Gullah Geechee people among the community at large, by presenting cultural awareness programs and events

(<http://www.starlightgraphics.com/CarlieTowne/home.htm>. May 24, 2000). This organization works in conjunction with the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition on many projects. The above Internet site also allows for the purchase of Gullah cultural items online, such as sweetgrass baskets, jewelry, and books pertaining to Gullah culture.

The most recent attraction aimed at tourism is the announcement of the Daufuskie Island Tours (e-mail communication, GullGeeCo@aol.com, May 18, 2000). The First Union African Baptist Church of Daufuskie Island has officially joined with J & W Corporation “in order to make sure that as people now come to Daufuskie, they will leave with the full story”.

The Daufauskie Island Gullah Heritage Tour is a boat and land tour that takes people on a journey through the story of the Gullah community of Daufauskie and the Sea Islands. The tour is conducted by natives of the Sea Islands and includes treats such as stories, folklore, songs, and crafts along the way. One also should never leave that island without a Daufauskie devil crab, so that is part of what can be picked up on the journey as well. The net proceeds of the tours will go to the perpetual care of the historic landmarks of Daufauskie which all still fortunately lay outside of gates and in the Gullah community.

This venture is also connected to the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition and will include Marquetta Goodwine as part of the native tour staff. This move makes it possible for tourists to visit Daufauskie Island without contributing to the resort companies operating on Hilton Head. This is a big step in the right direction.

Commoditization and Comeyas

There are many non-Gullah involved in the marketing of Gullah culture through tourism. It is not my position to judge their intentionality. It is possible they feel a strong connection to the people, as well as the environment, and consider their actions as preservationist in nature. It is also possible they have witnessed the overwhelming interest in Gullah culture over the past twenty years and feel they have a contribution to make. Some, as African Americans, feel they are ultimately connected to this area so they are, in a sense, home. Many of those considered comeyas, who presently claim Gullah identity, have not grown up in these areas but have an ancestor in their lineage they rely on to authenticate their Gullah heritage. I am not in a position to decipher their motives. Through personal experience, I can attest to the fact that those who have spent their lives on these Sea Islands are offended by this type of identity claim. I once heard a saying “*her heart led her here*” in reference to an African American comeya who has opened a successful business. When relaying this to my research participants their reaction was “*her pocketbook led her here!*” How can we ever know which it was?

St. Helena Island: Common Unity

As an anthropologist it is easy to become empathetic toward the Gullah and begin to stereotype all types of tourism as exploitative and unnecessary. This is, however, a common malady of such research (Nuñez 1989). It is crucial to find an objectivity and establish mutual rapport with both sides, therefore striving to represent the dilemma from both perspectives. We must avoid the tendency to condemn all types of tourism as exploitative and deculturative (Nuñez 1989) without losing our ethical responsibility to “expose the cultural fakes and the human zoos for what they are” (274). Throughout the world host populations are feeling the negative effects of tourism without reaping the benefits earlier promised by tourism boards and city and country officials. St. Helena Island residents must not acquire a false sense of stability from the “Cultural Protection Overlay District” designation. There are no guarantees, as demonstrated by the recent approval of the 37 dock permits for the residents of Polowana Island granted by Beaufort County. Moves such as this suggest the CPOD was merely lip service on the part of those involved, also making it extremely hard for anthropologists to remain objective concerning the motives for tourism and development.

What sets St. Helena Island apart from other host communities is their unique past. In many cases tourists represent the haves, while host communities consist of have-nots (Nuñez 1989), but this Island is an exception. The residents of St. Helena have owned their land and lived self-sufficiently for over 100 years. They are not simply acting out a way of life for the sake of ethnic tourism. They did not wake up one day and decide to sew baskets, or go fishing in the tidal creeks as their ancestors had done. That is all many have ever known. The community is an enigma— they resemble egalitarian societies I have only read about in classic ethnographies from the past. They are not pretending to be Gullah for the sake of cultural revival— they are doing what they do on a daily basis. The question was raised by one of the participants of my research, “what does it mean to be Gullah in the twenty-first century?” In honesty, it

means the same thing it has meant throughout the past century for the residents of St. Helena Island. The continuation of reciprocity and the communal atmosphere will aid in their cultural survival. As long as folks still help one another with their children, swap foods from their gardens, sell items for their true worth, give land to their children, assist nieces and nephews with their college tuition, help others pay their taxes, and lend a helping hand to neighbors when it is necessary there will be a Gullah community on St. Helena. That quality of *common unity* is what has brought them this far.

Twenty - First Century Gullah: Future Recommendations

My intention is not to presume that St. Helena will remain unchanged forever. One of the goals of anthropologists should be the recognition that indigenous people want to be full participants in the fate of their future. Our role is not to shield them from change, assuming that were a possibility. Being Gullah in the twenty-first century will require some adaptation, but that is how they came to be what they are today. The bonds within Sea Island communities are strong, but the issues which threaten those bonds need to be addressed.

In a recent article “A Culture of Servitude: The Impacts of Tourism and Development on South Carolina’s Coast” (Faulkenberry et al. 2000) many of my own ideas concerning the future of the Sea Island communities were articulated by others conducting similar research. The authors describe the impacts of tourism on local populations and address the negative side of tourism employment. Ultimately what emerges is the true culprit of this vicious cycle— land loss. When family farms are lost to development of any kind, through sale or otherwise, the family members must look elsewhere for employment. The only jobs available are often service jobs, such as maids, grounds keepers, busboys, etc. Hilton Head provides such an example. Those who choose not to enter the service industry often leave these communities, therefore altering the social and communal fabric.

I disagree with Faulkenberry et al. (2000:88) in their assertion that “while glimpses of the traditional life remain, tourism has effectively transformed the essence of Sea Island life.” Tourism, resort and real estate development, are the by-products of land acquisition. Resort hotels, million dollar retirement communities, and tourism venues require land. Land is the key to the cultural survival of the Gullah. The culture is tied to land ownership and self-sufficiency; it always has been. The Gullah have had things that other host groups have not, such as control over themselves and their future. As one Sea Island farmer commented “As long as you control the land, you control the growth that goes on that land” (Faulkenberry et al. 2000:89). Therefore, the focus of Gullah preservation lies in the ability to retain land ownership.

Although the information within the article corroborates the tenets of this thesis, I disagree with the concessions being suggested. From my vantage point, it is useless to propose ways to salvage what remains of Hilton Head. The once-viable Gullah community of that island will never return. There is hope, however, for the islands on which native Gullah still own property. Turning attention toward preventing other islands from becoming another Hilton Head is the avenue to pursue. Local involvement and strong support in bureaucracy, such as the Cultural Protection Overlay District on St. Helena, are the keys to success. These areas will also benefit greatly from the continuing efforts of native writing projects, such as those mentioned within this thesis. This type of involvement and local control will help foster greater support both within and outside the communities of the Sea Islands.

I recommend that the activists from Sea Island communities use the current avenues already in place, such as the Penn Center and the Gullah /Geechee Sea Island Coalition, to attack this issue. Educating landowners is a good start but that is not enough. There have to be means put into place to safeguard against land loss. One of the ways to address the issue is through grants that would encourage more productive use of land while also being ecologically sound. There are several U-Pick farms on St. Helena which appear to do quite well. This type of strategy allows economic profitability without industrialization of family farms. One suggestion made by the

authors of the aforementioned article that I do agree with is the formation of tour associations, craft guilds, farmers markets, and family-owned restaurants (2000). There are many talented storytellers, performers, speakers, and tour guides from various Sea Island communities who could offer an exceptional experience to tourists, contrary to the exploitative nature of many tours presently being offered by non-Gullah. The formation of such an organization would also put the control into the hands of locals, therefore giving them some creative control over the types of tourism acceptable to the larger community. This suggestion, however, brings us to the barriers prohibiting such progressive organization.

The internal conflicts I have witnessed over the past two seasons of fieldwork must be addressed. From the perspective of an outsider looking in I visualize many people with one vision. Prior to beginning the actual writing of this thesis I took several weeks to reflect on what I had learned. I was left with an image which has persisted over the past year. The image is of many people in a leaking boat, all diligently scooping water out of the boat and tossing it over the side to prevent it from capsizing. Each person has an idea about how to fix the leak, but they are engaged in conflict over whose idea is best. The question becomes, “do you want to survive, or do you want to be the one with the master plan that everyone remembers as a hero?” There is power in numbers, but the fragmentation within the St. Helena community, as well as throughout the Sea Islands, is hampering the progress. Someone in that boat must take in a suggestion and try to repair the leak. Otherwise, they will continue fighting to remove the water until the boat is sunk.

Conclusion

The past fifty years have delivered many changes to the Gullah communities scattered across the South Carolina Sea Islands. They have witnessed the loss of land, livelihood, and language; in many areas they have lost the very things which provided a

link to their ancestral heritage and traditional culture. What were once self-sufficient farming communities have been transformed into resorts and retirement retreats for outsiders. Tourism has also played a role in these negative changes by marketing the images of Gullah culture to increase state revenue. These changes are presently being addressed by native Sea Islanders and grassroots organizations, in both St. Helena and Mt. Pleasant, who are dedicated to slowing the pace of development and tourism within their communities. With local involvement and a voice in public policy St. Helena Island is charting a course for successful interaction with curious visitors that will minimize unwanted changes within the Gullah community. Their dedication is inspiring and can serve as an example for other groups experiencing increased development and unwanted forms of tourism. The philosophy of the Gullah has become very clear to me...only through the lessons of the past can we truly affect the future.

Every year as I venture to St. Helena Island I will slightly hold my breath, in the hopes that the changes will be minimal. I, along with countless others, have fallen prey to the beauty and power of the place, as well as the people. As an anthropologist that was not part of the initial goal, however, I have shared so much with these communities as a privileged outsider. I have witnessed the rapidly increasing interest developing around Gullah culture within academics, as well as tourism and literature. I feel connected to the people and their cause and hope my contribution will be viewed in a positive light by all who assisted in bringing it to fruition.

Epilogue

In April of 2000 came the official announcement of a National Gullah Project to be conducted by the National Park Service in cooperation with local activists from various Gullah communities. Meetings concerning the project have begun and are being held throughout the Sea Islands region. This represents a monumental step for the activists of the Gullah communities of South Carolina. The project symbolizes a recognition that Gullah culture is of importance to us all and, therefore, must be preserved for posterity.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Literature Review : Gullah Culture and The South Carolina Sea Islands

Today on some islands, urbanization, migration, corporate tourism, industrial development, and other forces instigated by non- African Americans are adversely affecting the resident Sea Island African population. These African Americans are facing continual underdevelopment and virtual extinction on some islands (Demerson 1991: 77).

Introduction

Within the context of the material presented in this thesis, I felt it necessary to delineate a clear path concerning the direction of my research. Although much work has been conducted and published concerning the Sea Island Gullah, the majority of what appears in the following literature review was born out of the culture history paradigm of an earlier era of anthropology and the various social sciences. This type of research was trait focused—not people focused— which left many indigenous groups feeling dissatisfied with their level of control over their own identity. Consequently, the identity which was created through such tactics, along with the inconsistencies still harbored from that type of framing, are points of contestation in the minds of native Sea Islanders. There is currently a struggle under way to reinvent Gullah culture as it is viewed through the eyes of those who have lived it. From the grassroots level to local government, Gullah identity is being exalted as a rich cultural heritage in need of preservation. It is within this current dynamic that my research was conducted. Therefore, it serves no purpose to utilize data which is being undermined and redefined.

As increasing numbers of indigenous groups begin to rebuke the history that has been written about them, the field of anthropology must adjust our methods and research tactics. What has often been termed postmodernist theory is simply an escape from the informal classification system of the culture history paradigm. Presently, anthropologists realize the need for native representation within ethnographic discourse. Only through the dissemination of truth, as it is defined by the cultural group

in question, can we truly discover the dynamics of any cultural system.

The Sea Island Gullah of South Carolina

The Gullah have long been an object of study for folklorists, linguists, cultural anthropologists, and archaeologists. Research conducted in the Sea Island areas has revealed many contributions to present day African American culture, such as family structure, food preferences, song, and language patterns, only to mention a few. However, most of the resulting research was published a generation ago. “There is no contemporary published research which gives a comprehensive view of present-day Gullah culture” (Jackson et al. 1991:155). This thesis is an attempt to fill the void, along with the more recent research of Jackson and Derby (Derby 1980; Jackson 1991).

Where We Have Been

In the late 1920s, the Institute for Research in Social Science of the University of North Carolina and the Social Science Research Council joined forces in a cooperative research project concerning the African American culture on St. Helena Island (see Johnson 1930). This project resulted in three of the most influential works ever presented on Gullah culture, language, and folklore: T. J. Woofter's *Black Yeomanry* (1930), Guy B. Johnson's *Folk Culture on St. Helena Island* (1930), and Guion Griffis Johnson's *A Social History of the Sea Islands* (1930). I have yet to find comprehensive literature on the subject of Gullah lacking these references. They stand as a canon for the study of Gullah culture. Another similar project was initiated by the Highlander Institute and conducted on St. John's Island. This effort resulted in Guy and Candie Carawan's *Ain't You Got a Right to the Tree of Life* (originally published 1967, republished 1989) which includes songs and stories important to the Gullah of St. John's Island. The information was gathered over a four year period in which the married Carawan team

lived among the River Road Gullah community. The collection was an effort of preservation for posterity. The latest edition of this collection includes a preface by Charles Joyner(1989) discussing the changes on the island brought about by resort development and tourism, between the time of the initial publishing in 1967 and 1989.

Much of the earliest Sea Island research was primarily focused on two scholarly arenas: folklore and linguistics. E. C. Parsons *Folk-Lore of the Sea Islands* (1923) serves to illuminate the many similarities between West African folk tales and customs and those documented in Sea Island folklore. Also, Parson's preface is very introspective and valuable from an anthropological standpoint; it reveals her difficulties in obtaining cooperation due to the barriers between Caucasians and African Americans during that particular period of history. Amazingly, that aspect of conducting fieldwork in the Sea Islands has changed very little. Sea Islanders are, understandably, quite suspicious of whites, as well as academics. There have only been a handful of outsiders who have conducted research among the Gullah who remain credible to the communities involved. One such person was Lorenzo Dow Turner; an African American scholar who conducted fifteen years of research among Sea Island residents with the objective of recording their language, folklore and songs. The ultimate goal for Turner was to uncover the links between Gullah and the African languages they most closely resemble in the methods used to form words (Turner 1949). The invaluable data he collected was published as *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949) and continues to be used as the primary reference guide for studying the principles of Gullah language. His pioneering work illustrates the connection between Gullah speech and West African languages through discovering the phonetic, syntactical, and morphological elements that represent a definitive link.

African Retention or Shared Creations: The Anthropological Debate

It is impossible to do research concerning African Americans in the United States without consulting the work of another very influential anthropologist: Melville

Herskovits. His work was centered on the frequency of Africanisms in New World African populations and continues to be viewed as "a landmark in the study of Negro-white acculturation in the New World" (Johnson 1980:418). At the time of his work, Herskovits rejected the idea that the institution of slavery had destroyed all vestiges of African culture within the populations of the Americas. He conducted research in Africa, North and South America, and throughout the Caribbean. He then rated the cultural traits of those studied on a scale of their association with African traits. The scale ranked from "very African" to "trace of African custom, or absent" (Herskovits 1952 as cited in Pollitzer 1999). From his research he concluded that there was continuity between Africans and their descendants in the Americas. Parallel culture traits linking the Americas to West and Central Africa include marriage patterns in Haiti and Trinidad which were similar to those found throughout West Africa, voodoo in Haiti, an outgrowth of vodoun from Dahomey, the West African influences on Santeria in Cuba, as well as countless similarities in kinship patterns and language.

Herskovits' work had a lasting effect on the academic world, in that it challenged the stereotypical idea that African Americans were inferior to Europeans. It also brought to light the presence of many African traits present in the everyday lives and speech of South Carolina and Georgia residents at the time of his research (see Herskovits 1941). It is important to mention that Herskovits never conducted fieldwork in the Sea Islands but rather drew his ideas concerning the area from available literature. Be that as it may, his work is essential to a modern day study of Gullah culture as an African American community in New World. It must be used, however, with an understanding of the era in which it was conducted.

Herskovits was a student of an anthropology which aimed to describe the various cultures of the world and assign them to recognizable "culture areas" (Mintz and Price 1992). Similarities in cultural traits were taken as indicators for inclusion within culture areas. In pursuing a culture history approach, Herskovits overemphasized the role of African retentions in accounting for the culture of New World populations. Therefore, what makes the work of Herskovits most beneficial are the debates which

have ensued over the contemporary relevance of his arguments. In 1976 Sidney Mintz and Richard Price published a booklet entitled *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past*. In 1992, in acknowledgment of the need for update, they republished the same essay with a preface as *The Birth of African American Culture: an Anthropological Perspective*. This essay offers an essential anthropological approach to the contemporary study of African American culture and history.

The crux of their argument is that no culture can be transplanted from one locale to another without significant cultural change.

Without diminishing the probable importance of some core of common values, and the occurrence of situations where a number of slaves of common origin might indeed have been aggregated, the fact is that these were not communities of people at first, and they could only become communities by processes of cultural change (Mintz and Price 1992: 18).

Even more significant with regard to the study of Gullah culture is the assertion that Herskovitz oversimplified the culture area of West Africa (the area of Africa presented as having the strongest connections to Sea Island culture). What more recent data have illustrated is that the complexes and traits presented as homogeneous by Herskovitz are in actuality not as widespread as he supposed (Mintz and Price 1992). What seems more likely than cultural traits being carried over from Africa to America, from the perspective of Mintz and Price, is a gradual remodeling of each group's traditional practices in which enslaved Africans were forced to accept foreign practices out of a necessity to survive (1992). They suggest, however, that direct formal African continuities are "more the exception than the rule in African American culture" (Mintz and Price 1992:60). Based on my fieldwork experience and years of research I believe the Gullah to be that exception. The survival of sweetgrass basketry, net making, boat building, communal living and linguistic patterns in the Sea Islands, as well as phenotypic similarities and religious idiosyncracies are but a few of the elements on which I base this belief. I agree with Mary Twining in that "the problem is not the debate over the existence of Africanisms but the continuation of research to determine just where and how much material exists" (1977:37).

Moving Forward

The past five decades have witnessed an ever increasing interest in Sea Island culture. Such interest has become manifest in many forms. Photographic essays, such as *Face of an Island* (Dabbs 1971) and *Daufuskie Island: A Photographic Essay* (Mountoussamy-Ashe 1951) attempt to tell the story of an island through photography. Historical accounts, such as *Rehearsal for Reconstruction* (Rose 1964) give us the story of how the Gullah came to be as we find them today. This source chronicles the Port Royal Experiment and gives background data on those who came to the Sea Islands as teachers during the Civil War. Their accounts provide a historical foundation for the differing aspects of Gullah culture within particular Sea Island communities, such as St. Helena Island. As indicated above, this island was the center of the Port Royal Experiment as administered by the first school started for Gullah freemen, Penn Normal School.

In 1980 the *Journal of Black Studies* devoted an entire issue to Sea Island culture, edited by Mary Twining and K. E. Baird. Although this is not anthropological in nature, it is an essential contribution to any study on Gullah culture. The special issue took a look back at past Sea Island research, such as Lorenzo Dow Turner's linguistic work and contributions made by Herskovits, and included emic perspectives in essays from those who have lived the culture of the Sea Islands.

The 1990s brought several edited volumes containing various contributions pertaining to differing elements of Sea Island culture. Michael Montgomery's *The Crucible of Carolina: Essays in the Development of Gullah Language and Culture* (1994) covers a wide variety of topics, such as the Gullah- Caribbean connections, the art of naming in the Sea Islands, religious rituals, and sweetgrass basket weaving. Along with this essential volume, anthropologists interested in Gullah culture are certainly appreciative of *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*, edited by Mary Twining and Keith Baird (1991). This collection expands the literature by covering topics of kinship and inheritance, quilting, and the unique consciousness of blacks from Sea

Island communities. The goal was to cover as many topics as possible “without putting together an encyclopedia” (Twining and Baird 1991:vii). Within this collection Mary Twining conceptualizes the argument concerning traditional Sea Island naming practices, concluding that present practices exhibit continuity with the past. She also explores how Gullah people relate to their environment and the impact of this relationship on their overall worldview. This volume also contains Twining’s assessment of women’s economic contributions in the Sea Islands, through such crafts as quilting and basketry. It also includes reprints of early classic studies, such as William Bascom’s data concerning folk beliefs associated with childbirth (resulting from fieldwork conducted in 1939) and Simon Ottenberg’s analysis of leadership patterns within Sea Island communities (first published in 1959). This close look at edited volumes points to the need for contemporary research on Gullah culture. More specifically, it reveals the gaps in the literature concerning the impacts of resort and commercial development and tourism on the many traditional elements of Gullah culture and the ways in which Gullah residents are struggling to preserve what remains.

Certainly relevant but often harder to come by are the countless unpublished Ph.D. dissertations, masters theses, and professional meeting presentations. In 1980, the Southern Anthropological Society held a symposium “The Rural South, Problems and Prospects” which was later published as *Holding on to the Land and the Lord: Kinship, Ritual, Land Tenure, and Social Policy in the Rural South* (Hall and Stack 1982). Within this volume, a doctoral student of anthropology from Rutgers, Kay Young Day, published the preliminary findings of her fieldwork conducted among the Mt. Pleasant Gullah of Charleston County: “Kinship in a Changing Economy: A View from the Sea Islands.” It later became her Ph. D. dissertation “*My Family is Me*: Women’s Kin Networks and Social Power in a Black Sea Island Community (1986).

Mt. Pleasant provides us with a benchmark by which to gauge the progressive destruction of Sea Island communities: once self-sufficient farming and fishing families now struggling for wage labor jobs brought about by the ever increasing industry of construction. At the time of this article, Day appeared hopeful that many of the

traditions would remain somewhat intact (such as kinship and residence practices, naming traditions, land inheritance and cooperative economics) while making it clear there had been significant loss of several traditional aspects through the transition. This is evidenced by the current rate at which male members of the younger generations migrate out of the area for acceptable jobs, thereby altering family dynamics and hindering traditional life ways.

The most relevant data, concerning the objective of my thesis, is Day's sideline focus on women of the community and their creativity in etching out an economic niche for themselves. Mt. Pleasant has been, and continues to be, home to generations of women who weave sweetgrass baskets. Originally these baskets were made for agricultural use (Day 1982), however the growth of tourism over the last four decades has launched basket weaving into the realm of economic opportunity. Day reported that these women were organized into collectives based on kinship, sold baskets from roadside stands along Highway 17 and shared duties such as childcare and attending the basket stands with other collective members (Day 1982).

In 1980, Doris Derby completed her dissertation on the same subject: *Black Women Basket Makers: A Story of Domestic Economy in Charleston County, South Carolina*. Derby conducted her Ph.D. fieldwork in the Mt. Pleasant community in order to study the role of basket weaving in the domestic economy of black women. She also conceptualized the changes brought about by the growing tourism industry at that time in Charleston County, which offers a valuable diachronic perspective for interpreting my own research findings from Mt. Pleasant.

Mary Twining contributed to the body of knowledge concerning Gullah culture with her Ph. D. dissertation: *An Examination of African Retentions in the Folk Culture of the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands*. She referred to her dissertation as "an ethnographic study based on folklore and folklife concepts." She presents the Sea Islands as "a homogeneous, traditional community that provides a living laboratory for folklorists and other students of human cultural behavior" (Twining 1977:3). The aim of the dissertation, as written in the introduction, "seeks on the basis of extensive

fieldwork to prove that Herskovits was correct as far as he went in estimating the African content of the Sea Island culture” (1977:2). Much of her dissertation has been published piecemeal in a variety of academic journals (see Twining and Saunders 1970, Twining and Baird 1980; Twining 1980, Twining 1982; Twining 1983; Twining 1985).

Patricia Nichols conducted a linguistic study of the Gullah, *Linguistic Change in Gullah: Sex, Age, and Mobility* (1976) in which she utilized the theoretical framework of “action anthropology”:

In the optimum fieldwork situation for action anthropology, the people themselves, rather than an administrator-anthropologist, decide what to do and carry out their decisions (Nichols 1976:32).

The aim of her study was to educate her research participants in the description and analysis of selected grammatical features of Gullah language which were experiencing change within the community. Such changes were viewed against the differing backdrops of age, sex, and social factors as they effect linguistic change. After six months of involvement within several Gullah communities she concluded that the direction of change within Gullah language is determined by those who share in its usage. Unfortunately, the generalized direction indicated by her analysis was a gradual process toward standard English. Age, sex, mobility, and community membership all contribute varying degrees of transition away from Gullah language and toward the socially acceptable standard of English.

Charles Joyner must also be recognized for his many contributions to the present understanding of Gullah culture. His Ph. D. dissertation *Slave Folklife on the Waccamaw Neck: Antebellum Black Culture in the South Carolina Lowcountry* (1977) has greatly aided in our knowledge of Sea Island slavery. Much of this research eventually reappeared as *Down By the Riverside: a South Carolina Slave Community* (1984). Joyner has contributed his comments on many of the works published on Gullah culture. His most recent publication, *Shared Traditions: Southern History and Folk Culture*, pays special attention to the price of progress being felt throughout Sea Island communities. He also lent his expertise to the documentary “*God’s Gonna Trouble the Waters*” (1997)

produced locally in conjunction with the South Carolina Humanities Council, the Arts Council of Beaufort, and the Educational Television Endowment of South Carolina.

There are three remaining publications which have become synonymous with Gullah research: *Catching Sense: African American Communities on a South Carolina Sea Island* (Guthrie 1996), *When Roots Die: Endangered Traditions on the Sea Islands* (Patricia Jones-Jackson 1987), and *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (Creel 1988). Guthrie conducted much of her ethnographic research in the 1970s and returned to St. Helena Island briefly in 1992. Her research is based on the idea of *catching sense*, which can be translated in terms of coming of age and learning the lessons that bring one into adulthood. Her analysis discusses many other important elements of Sea Island culture, such as land inheritance, household composition, social meaning and the praise house systems. Her fieldwork was conducted on St. Helena Island.

Jones- Jackson's dissertation, *The Status of Gullah: An Investigation of Convergent Processes* (1978), illustrates her many years of association with Gullah culture. She spent nine years on Wadmalaw Island gathering stories and folktales, and studying language and religion. In *When Roots Die* Jones- Jackson actually referred to her work with the Gullah as "an act of cultural conservation"(1987: xvi). Her book has been referred to as "the first book-length treatment of contemporary Gullah language and culture that combines sound scholarship with a clear and engaging style accessible to nonlinguists and nonfolklorists" (Charles Joyner in Preface to Jones-Jackson 1987). Her research solidified linguistic data presented earlier by Turner which confirmed the African origins of countless Gullah words. It has been suggested that her overwhelming acceptance into the communities she studied was due to her blackness (Pollitzer 1999). What can be asserted, without doubt in my opinion, is the significance of her contribution to Gullah research in terms of establishing continuity between aspects of Gullah language and their African origin, as well as her detailed accounts of time spent with the Gullah of Wadmalaw Island.

Margaret Washington Creel is recognized for her monumental contribution to the current knowledge of Gullah religion. *A Peculiar People* covers a variety of topics: the roots of Gullah religion and the connection to African religions, religion during slavery, indoctrination into Christianity, and their subsequent melding of traditional religion with Christian elements, creating the current synthesis we now know as Gullah. Many scholars have ventured to the Sea Islands to study Gullah religion; however, Creel presents the most comprehensive assessment.

The most recent publication on the Gullah culture was released only weeks prior to the completion of this thesis. William Pollitzer's *The Gullah People and Their African Heritage* is a synthetic treatment of Gullah culture. It combines Pollitzer's lifetime research efforts, the establishment of a genetic connection between Sea Island communities and their West African ancestors, coupled with much of the current literature concerning Gullah culture. "The framework is historical and carries the book's subjects from Africa to the influx of retirees and tourists on the Gullah coast in the last generation" (David Moltke-Hansen in Foreword of Pollitzer 1999: xiv). It is an essential reference to the study of contemporary Gullah, yet lacking the recency of ethnographic data presented in this thesis. None of the aforementioned research was focused on tourism and its impacts.

Native Contributions to Sea Island Literature

During my research I came into contact with several native Sea Islanders involved in literary projects concerning their Gullah heritage. Ron Daise, a former journalist and native of St. Helena Island, published *Reminiscences of Sea Island Heritage* in 1986. This was a compilation of songs, oral histories and historical photos of freed people during the early years on St. Helena Island. His contributions toward Gullah preservation go far beyond this book and are discussed extensively in Chapter 4.

In 1996 my principal informant, Marquette Goodwine, began a literary series entitled *Gullah/ Geechee: The Survival of Africa's Seed in the Winds of the Diaspora*. She has

projected thirty books in the series, which began with Volume I- *St. Helena's Serenity*. This is an eloquent portrayal of what St. Helena represents in the hearts of those who reside there. Volume II came along in 1997- *Gawd Dun Smile Pun We: Beaufort Isles* - which is an historical account of the Beaufort area and the Sea Islands within Beaufort County. It also provides an emic perspective on the history of a people as well as the outlook for the future of Gullah culture. Volume III, which was published in 1999 is titled *Frum Wi Soul Tuh de Soil: Cotton, Rice, and Indigo*. This volume discusses the cash crops of the Sea Islands.

Goodwine is committed to Gullah preservation. In 1998 her efforts were recognized by Clarity Press, which offered her the editorial position on the Clarity Press Gullah Project. The publication sought to "contribute to the many efforts now underway for the protection and development of Gullah and Geechee culture" (preface to Goodwine 1998). The product, *The Legacy of Ibo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture*, is the first book of its kind. It combines scholarly articles with relevant cultural material in order to attract a broader readership. It includes the work of William Pollitzer, well known for his genetic data linking Sea Islanders to their ancestors in Africa and artwork from the famous Gullah artist, Jonathan Green. There are Biblical translations in the Gullah language, Gullah stories and Gullah recipes gathered from Sea Island residents. What sets this book apart from other literature is the inclusion of six chapters written by Goodwine. Within these chapters she is able to present what she wants the rest of the world to know about contemporary Gullah culture. Within this Clarity Press publication Goodwine is validated as one of the primary keepers of this dynamic culture. This type of linear perspective is an attempt to present the Gullah as a living culture. In prefacing the book the collaborators assert that most previous work:

"fosters the impression that the primary interest of their culture lies in the archives, while those who practice Gullah traditions are remnants soon to be obliterated by the weight of mainstream culture"
(Preface to Goodwine 1998: 7).

This publication is yet another testament to the need for current and future research on Gullah culture.

There is native discourse concerning Gullah culture scattered throughout the literature. *Sea Island Roots* (1991) offers the native insight of William Saunders in “Growing Up on John’s Island: Sea Islands Then and Now,” an insightful memoir written by someone who has lived this culture and is sorrowful concerning the changes brought by modernity and progress— chain grocery stores, television, wage employment, and resort tourism. (This essay was first published in the special issue of *Journal of Black Studies* (1980) previously mentioned.) Also found in *Sea Island Roots* (1991) is an article co-authored by Sea Island native, and sociologist, J. Herman Blake, “Sea Islands as a Research Area” (see Jackson et al. 1991). This article is aimed at those interested in conducting research in Sea Island communities. Blake comments on the past exploitation of these areas and encourages ethical responsibility in future research efforts:

It is still too possible for irresponsible persons interested in the quick book and the fast buck to simply take what they want without regard for the effects on subsequent serious research or concern for the people whose lives they disrupt (1991: XI).

I carried these words with me throughout my fieldwork. The primary contribution of this thesis is my own attempt to understand the tourism situation and the effects of tourism as perceived by local community members, as it was presented to me. It is the goal of this thesis to address the many issues Sea Islanders view as important for the survival of Gullah culture. This thesis will be made accessible to all who participated. Through an ongoing relationship with these communities I am seeking to make a positive contribution in appreciation of their participation.

Appendix 2
Complete List of Research Participants,
Initials Used to Denote Participant's Voice Throughout Text
Sea Island Area Represented

Marquette L. Goodwine	(MG)	St. Helena Island, South Carolina
Carolee Brown	(CB)	St. Helena Island, South Carolina
Ronald Daise	(RD)	St. Helena Island, South Carolina
Natalie E. Daise	(ND)	St. Helena Island, South Carolina
Elayne T. Scott	(ES)	St. Helena Island, South Carolina
Liz A. Santagati	(LS)	St. Helena Island, South Carolina
Mary Dawson	(MD)	St. Helena Island, South Carolina
Rosalie F. Pazant	(RP)	Beaufort, South Carolina
Harriett Bailem Brown	(HB)	Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina
Jannie P. Gourdine	(JG)	Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina
Vera M. Manigault	(VM)	Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina
Alfreda R. Jamison	(AJ)	Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina
Rosalee W. Coaxum	(RC)	Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina
Andrea Brown	(AB)	Charleston, South Carolina

Appendix 3 Informed Consent Form (1998)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Gullah Women and Their Varied Responses to Development: Basket Making Cooperatives in the South Carolina Sea Islands

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine the positive and negative effects of development on women's economic activities. The objective of my research is to collect data on the marketing strategies of the women of the South Carolina Sea Islands as a response to the rapid development which is taking place. I feel that the women involved have created a stable economic niche for themselves by engaging in sweetgrass basket production aimed at the tourist market based in Charleston, South Carolina. In this research, I will be exploring this theory, while also examining the nature of women's cooperatives and how they are established and maintained. I am also interested in the role of kinship within this domain.

INFORMATION

1. The primary method which will be used to collect research will be oral interviews. I will also observe and participate in daily activities, such as basket making, the market, and local coop meetings.
2. This research will extend over a 14 day period, with the option of future participation through follow-up interviews if you consent to do so.
3. The oral portions of this research will be audio taped. The length of audiotaped interviews will be dependant on the amount of information supplied by various participants. The location of audiotaped interviews will be chosen to best accommodate the participants of this study. The actual process of basket weaving will be captured on video only with your consent. However, if you do not consent to being videotaped you will not be excluded from this study. The audio and video data will be stored indefinitely for the purpose of further doctoral research. There is a strong possibility that the video portions will be used at future professional meetings to illustrate the art of basket weaving.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participation in this research. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you do not wish to be videotaped you will not be excluded from the study. The nature of the research is based on the public activity of individual basket makers and groups.

BENEFITS

The benefit of this research will be an increase in the current knowledge concerning women and development. It may also serve to attract attention to any problems being encountered by women due to increased development and tourism.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Written data, audiotapes, and videotapes will be stored securely and will be made available only to myself and my advisor, Dr. Benita Howell. Thesis descriptions and any future showing of the video tapes will not identify individuals by name unless you grant permission to do so.

____ Participants initials

I do ____ I do not ____ want to be identified by name in this research.

I do ____ I do not ____ want to be identified by name in the video tapes.

Video footage will only be used for public presentation at professional meetings with your explicit

consent.

_____ Participants initials

I do___ I do not___ give consent for the future use of my video tapes as public presentation at professional meetings.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures you may contact the researcher, Melissa Hargrove, at 208 East Stadium Hall, University of Tennessee , Knoxville, TN 37996; phone (423) 974-4408. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate at any time without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and my questions have been adequately answered, therefore I agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print) _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

* There may be a need for further research in the future. If you are interested in participating please indicate below:

Contact by mail: Participant's full name and address _____

Contact by phone: (only with your consent)

() _____

Informed Consent Form (1999)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Cultural Revitalization in the South Carolina Sea Islands: Gullah Women and Their Varied Responses to Development and Tourism

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to determine the positive and negative effects of development and tourism on women's economic and community activities. In past research, conducted in 1998, I was impressed by the number of women focused on the preservation of Gullah culture. I am interested in individuals and organizations which are actively involved in educating others about Gullah culture, while also preserving their culture for future generations.

INFORMATION

1. The primary method which will be used to collect research will be oral interviews. I will also observe and participate in daily activities.
2. This research will extend over a 4 week period, with the option of future participation through follow-up interviews if you consent to do so.
3. The oral portions of this research will be audio taped. The length of audiotaped interviews will be dependant on the amount of information supplied by various participants. The location of audiotaped interviews will be chosen to best accommodate the participants of this study. If you do not consent to being videotaped you will not be excluded from this study. The audio and video data will be stored indefinitely for the purpose of further doctoral research. There is a strong possibility that the video portions will be used at future professional meetings.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks for participation in this research. Participation is strictly voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. If you do not wish to be videotaped you will not be excluded from the study.

BENEFITS

The benefit of this research will be an increase in the current knowledge concerning women and development. It may also serve to attract attention to any problems being encountered by women due to increased development and tourism.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Written data, audiotapes, and videotapes will be stored securely and will be made available only to myself and my advisor, Dr. Benita Howell. Thesis descriptions and any future showing of the video tapes will not identify individuals by name unless you grant permission to do so.

____ Participants initials

I do ___ I do not ___ want to be identified by name in this research.

I do ___ I do not ___ want to be identified by name in the video tapes.

Video footage will only be used for public presentation at professional meetings with your explicit consent.

____ Participants initials

I do ___ I do not ___ give consent for the future use of my video tapes as public presentation at professional meetings.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures you may contact the researcher, Melissa Hargrove, at 225 South Stadium Hall, University of Tennessee , Knoxville, TN 37996; phone (423) 974-4408. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Compliance Section of the Office of Research at (423) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate at any time without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and my questions have been adequately answered, therefore I agree to participate in this study. I have received a copy of this form.

Participant's name (print) _____

Participant's signature _____

Date _____

* There may be a need for further research in the future. If you are interested in participating please indicate below:

Contact by mail: Participant's full name and address _____

() _____

Contact by phone: (only with your consent)

Appendix 4

Cultural Protection Overlay District (CPOD) (APPENDIX C) Beaufort County Zoning and Development Standards Ordinance

Purpose

The Cultural Protection Overlay (CPO) District is established to provide opportunities to protect natural and/or cultural resources found on St. Helena Island. The Comprehensive Plan provides "actions" to be undertaken, which would prevent rural gentrification and displacement of residents. Although, the intent of the CPO district is to protect St. Helena and the Gullah culture from encroaching development pressures, growth is not discouraged. However, the quality and rate of growth is of concern in these areas. Rapid in-migration would substantially alter the traditional social and cultural character of this area, as new residents represent different values and customs. The gentrification of the island would result in a greater demand for urban services and eventually to the urbanization of the island. This can be particularly acute on St. Helena where maintaining the traditional lifestyle becomes cost prohibitive because of the value of land of development.

For those areas that require additional cultural protection, the CPO District provides additional standards. The criteria for the delineation of areas, which may be designated CPO are:

- The omnipresence of an ethnic heritage
- Historic structures, settlements, and land use patterns
- Archaeological sites
- Significant cultural features and sites

Applicability

The CPO District requirements apply to new uses; it is not the intent of this section to create nonconforming use of existing uses. Subdivisions, PUDs and other developments approved prior to the adoption of the 1999 Zoning Development Standards Ordinance (ZDSO) are exempt from the requirements of this section.

District Boundary

The CPO District boundary includes the St. Helena Planning Area, excluding Fripp, Harbor, Hunting and Dataw Islands. The delineation of areas, which fall under the CPO designation, is outlined on the Official Zoning Map of Beaufort County. The official zoning map shall be amended to show a CPO suffix on any parcel where the CPO District has been applied.

CULTURAL PROTECTION OVERLAY (CPO) DISTRICT

The provisions of the CPO, the underlying zoning district, as well as the general development standards of the ZDSO are intended for the effective long-term protection of the culturally significant resources found on St. Helena.

Cultural Protection Standards

Permitted Uses

Where the CPO District is applied, the permitted uses shall be limited to those permitted uses specifically referenced in the base zoning, except those within the CPO district.

Use Limitations

The Comprehensive Plan recognizes the ethnic heritage, historical assets and rural traditions and customs of St. Helena Island. In general, uses and activities that generate high traffic volume, require substantial parking, or massively alter the natural landscape are inconsistent with the intent of the CPO District.

Site Design

Design features that restrict access to water and other culturally significant locations, and franchise design are prohibited.

Without limiting the foregoing, the following specific new uses are deemed to be incompatible with cultural protection and are therefore prohibited.

1. **Restricted Access (gated) Communities.** An intentionally designed, secured bounded area with designated and landscaped perimeters, usually walled or fenced, that are designed to prevent access by non-residents.
2. **Resorts.** This use includes lodging that serves as a destination point for visitors, located and designated with some combination of recreational uses or natural areas; such as marinas, beaches or pools, tennis, golf, equestrian, other special recreation opportunities, and / or a variety of restaurants and shops to serve the guest. This does not include ecotourism or its associated lodging
3. **Golf Course.** This use includes regulation and par 3 golf courses and clubhouses having nine or more holes.

Appendix 5 Marquette Goodwine Addresses the United Nations

Agenda Item 14(b)

*Yeddy We: Statement to the UN Commission on Human Rights
from the Gullah/Geechee Community of the United States
Written and delivered by Marquette L. Goodwine,
Founder of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition
Gullah/Geechee Ambassador of Information
Associate of IHRAAM*

In praise to the Creator and homage to my ancestors, I give thanks for the opportunity to be here. On behalf of the elders and culture keepers of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Islands of the United States, I thank the commission for allowing me the privilege to speak in this forum.

I make this statement today as an associate of the International Human Rights Association of American Minorities known also as IHRAAM and on behalf of the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition. The latter organization I founded as a means to connect all the people of the Sea Islands with other people around the world that are interested in assisting my people with the preservation and continuation of our native culture-Gullah.

Our native tongue, which most of us have been denied the opportunity to speak in public for generations, is the language that I have been guided to present to you in today given that you all have translations of the words that I will present. On behalf of my community, I ask that you hear us-yeddy we.

(Spoken in Gullah)

My ancestors were the captives of British enslavers that kidnaped them from the African continent during the Transatlantic slavery system period. Through various academic studies and scores of documents including ledgers, journals, newspaper clipping, wills, etc., it appears that the majority of the African people that were brought to the islands off the Atlantic coast of the United States were from West Africa. The Windward and Rice Coast down to Angola were the lands from which skilled Africans were removed and then sold and held in bondage as laborers without choices or rights in the Caribbean and later my home- the Sea Islands.

The Sea Islands which is the home of the Gullah and Geechee people are located from Georgetown County, South Carolina (at the base of North Carolina) down to Amelia Island in northern Florida. The largest "slave" auction block in the United States was Charles Town in the Carolinas. This city was built by the labor of indigenous or Native American people along with enslaved Africans which were brought from Barbados by a group of Anglo men referred to as "the British Lord's Proprietors."

Charles Town is now called "Charleston, South Carolina." Many people consider this the center of Gullah culture. However, the main places in which anyone is still able to locate viable Gullah communities is the same place in which the culture developed— on the islands. Due to being placed on isolated islands where the Gullahs had extremely minimal contact with Anglo culture. Africans that came from various ethnic groups and who spoke different tongues and had different spiritual rituals were able to combine these and form a new culture with its own language. This is Gullah.

Gullah people were the labor force that harvested "Carolina Gold" rice which became the rice that brought the highest price on the market. They also harvested and processed long staple Sea Island cotton which was used all over the world to make the finest garments.

Indigo completed the list of what we call "the cash crops." These products were brought forth due to the knowledge of their cultivation that the Africans in America now refer to as "Gullahs" knew. They brought about the wealth that built the infrastructure of the United States. It also supported the base of European cities such as London and Liverpool, England.

Gullah and Geechee people were never allowed to express their rights as human beings due to the various means of oppression that they endured through different periods in history. They were forced to work without pay and were sold away from their family and friends. The break from their clans and tribes caused the connection with others that were under these same conditions, but it also cause irreparable damage in that the Gullah may never be able to return to the actual villages from which their great great great grandparents were stolen. They were stripped of the chance to pass this information on.

During enslavement, Gullahs and Geechees were not allowed to write or read. This was made a law in the United States. If they were found doing either of these things, punishments as severe as death could be imposed and were in many cases. They were also banned from playing the drum when it was found in various uprising when Gullahs stood in order to regain what was rightfully theirs—freedom.

Gullahs and Geechees even joined forces with indigenous or Native American people in their efforts to take a stand against the gross violation of their rights. This resulted in over 40 years of war against the United States governing forces and militias which very few American text refer to. Which it is mentioned, it is called "The Seminole Wars." However, it would be more appropriate to call this the "Gullah Wars" given that my ancestors were the primary group involved. They formed the group called the "Seminole Nation" as a result of the years of living along with indigenous Americans and forming a community in which they all dwelled together and eventually went into the swamps of Florida and later west into what is now Oklahoma and Texas in the United States and into Mexico.

Gullah people that were forced to live on the mainland as servants or who later migrated there after the Civil War speak a dialect of the Gullah language called "Geechee." Just as they have picked up more of the "dominant" language of the United States- English, they have been forced to lose many of the ways that they had were they were on the islands.

Gullahs and Geechees have been denied any education in the Gullah language. Most have not ever been taught any of the aspects of our history which I have presented to you thus far. We were told that the way that we spoke was backward and ignorant and to get anywhere in life we were to stop speaking like that and learn "proper English."

Given the fact that our community has been encroached upon from the time of the arrival of soldiers and missionaries during the Civil War until today with the onslaught of resort and retirement areas, we have had other groups of people superimpose their cultural mores upon us. Our children have been taught in a system designed by outsiders to our community. This system has been designed to focus on Anglo Americans history with little mention of people of African descent beyond calling them "slaves" and then mentioning two to five other people that are considered "African Americans of note."

My people who built the foundation of African American culture are not mentioned n classrooms. Our language is still misunderstood and thus, not considered to be acceptable for academic and "professional" arenas. We have even been told in political and legal forums that were focused on laws that would be placed on these areas that

we live in that there is no such "culture." Well, I am before you today as a result of the existence of my community.

As Clifford Geertz wrote "Community is a culturally defined way of life." Part of the way that Gullah and Geechee people were able to survive chattel slavery with our language, spiritual expressions, and our crafts and skills in tact is because we have had strength, adaptability, and faith. Our adaptability has caused us to be master code switching which allows us to be able to speak to like this or to speak to you in this way. We have had to keep our culture, our language, our "community" hidden in order to protect it from the world.

Our community is joined by water just as the water brought us to the New World. We live off the land and from the sea. However, as other people saw the richness of the land on which we dwell, we started to be removed from our homeland. This area was even officially declared as our homeland by the United States government via William Tecumseh Sherman's Special Field Order Number 15 which he issued during the Civil War. In it he stated:

I. "The islands from Charleston, South, the abandoned rice fields along the rivers for thirty miles back from the sea, and the country bordering the St. John's River, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the negroes (sic) now made free by acts of war and the proclamation of the President of the United States.

II. At Beaufort, Hilton Head, Savannah, Fernandina, St. Augustine, and Jacksonville, the blacks may remain in their chosen or accustomed vocations, but on the islands, and in the settlements hereafter to be established, no white person whatever, unless military officers and soldiers, detailed for duty, will be permitted to reside; and the sole and exclusive management of affairs will be left to the freed people themselves, subject only to the United States military authority and the acts of Congress..."

Sherman was an agent of then United States President, Abraham Lincoln. This field order got rescinded and the land was never given to my people. However, it was bought at auctions by Gullahs and Geechees in large plots. Once the Anglo people that had our families enslaved on much of this land received word in the North where many of them ran to when they found out that we were going to possibly be freed, many of them began lawsuits to try to take land back from us. Today we are still fighting to remain on our land, to preserve our language and customs, and to have people know of our existence before we are eliminated entirely or fenced out of our own home.

Wealthy developers have built "gated communities" throughout the Sea Islands and left cultural destruction in their wake. Our graveyards and burial grounds have been desecrated. Grave markers have been removed and areas leveled. Club houses, golf courses, and other recreational facilities for rich affluent people have been placed on top of graves. This has gone on in spite of us bringing these issues out in courts which are supposed to uphold the laws that they have on their books that clearly state that this is an illegal practice.

We are not allowed to visit some of our burial grounds and graveyards or other sacred lands due to gated communities being located there. We are not allowed to enter these resorts and retirement areas unless a person that lives within the gates leaves our names at the entrance to allow us "permission" to enter. Many of our crafts and means of survival are fading as a direct result of pollution of many of our historic waterways and our soil by resort and retirement areas. We are also placed under numerous restrictions which go against our traditional ways of being independent and sustaining our families.

The financial gain from recreation is a major focus of many people in the United States. Thus, there is little put into preservation, especially in reference to the preservation of the heritage of people of African descent. For us, the land is an extension of ourselves. Without the land which we have nurtured and which has fed us, we have lost all that makes us who we are. As one of our ancestors, Uncle Smart X stated:

"We born here; we parents' graves here; we donne oder country; dis yere our home. De Nort' folks hab home, antee? What a pity dat dey don't love der home like we love we home, for den dey would nebbber come here for buy all way from we."

We have opened our doors many times to other people to host them in our community, but that has resulted in them moving in and moving us out. We believe in working WTHH other people for we know "An empty sack cannot stand alone." We believe that it takes more than one to hold up the sack that holds history and heritage. Thus, we went to the United States government to find out what would be needed to designate our home as a World Heritage Site and we were told that due to the parameters that the United States has set for this, it would be impossible to have that happen. However, we know that any thing that has been written can be rewritten. There are exceptions to rules or amendments to laws. Therefore, our community would greatly appreciate any assistance that this commission could provide in order to have the National Park Service of the Department of the Interior of the United States to recognize how important it is to preserve our community, which no doubt is of historical significance to people globally.

We seek to educate people of the world about Gullah and Geechee people and our kinspeople called the "Seminole" who also struggle to hold on to our language and heritage in the western parts of the United States. We want to be able to preserve our historic and sacred buildings and land areas which stand as testimonials to our connection to our kindred of islands in the Caribbean and other parts of the world, including our connection to West Africa. We want to be able to have our children proudly continue our crafts, our spiritual expressions, and most of all, our language.

The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition is currently working to obtain funds for land reclamation. This will allow many of our people that have been displaced from the islands to be able to return. The prohibitive prices of real estate or bidding against billion dollar corporate developers does not allow them to have equal footing in the current battle for ownership of the very same land that we have dwelled on and nurtured for generations.

My community is looking back at our story and doing all we can to have it recognized by others as we fight to hold on to it. We know that you truly do not know where you are going if you do not know where you come from. We ask that this commission help us in continuing to be the keepers of our culture. We realize that "hunnuh mus tek cyare de root fa heal de tree." You must take care of the root to heal the tree.

VITA

Melissa D. Hargrove was born Melissa Denise Hinely on February 14, 1969 at Fort Stewart Army Hospital in Fort Stewart, Georgia. She became a permanent resident of Tennessee at age 1. She received her primary education in the Blount County Public School System, where she graduated from Maryville High School in June, 1987. She entered the University of Tennessee in August 1990. Due to the responsibilities of being a full time mother and wife, she received her Bachelor of Arts with a concentration in Cultural Anthropology in May 1997. She entered the Master's program, also at the University of Tennessee, in August 1997. She served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant during the academic years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000. She was awarded a grant from the Women's Studies Department at the University of Tennessee which funded her first season of anthropological fieldwork among the Gullah of South Carolina. She began her teaching career as an instructor in the Evening School at the University of Tennessee during the Fall of 1999. She received her Master's degree in August 2000.

She is planning to enter the Ph.D. program at the University of Tennessee in Fall 2000 as preparation for her career as a professor of Anthropology.