

Introducing Folknography: A Study of Gullah Culture

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Abstract

Principles of rural sociology, ethnographic research, and interpersonal communication provide the foundation for a study of Gullah culture. The Gullahs are descendants of enslaved people living in the Sea Islands and coastal regions of South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida. Unlike enslaved Africans living in mainland regions, the Gullahs remained more isolated and able to transform their language and culture into a uniquely distinctive African American heritage. Construction of bridges during the last fifty years, connecting coastal Sea Islands with the mainland, eventually led to land development initiatives and a thriving coastal economy founded on resort tourism. Gullahs began losing their land at an alarming rate. The Gullahs are a people with economic and emotional ties to their homelands, and the loss of land means the loss of Gullah culture. Literature suggests the Gullah community is experiencing a cultural Diaspora, exacerbated by a perceived fear that younger generations of Gullahs may be losing their cultural identity. *Folkography*, a version of Rapid Rural Appraisal, will be introduced to provide a descriptive analysis of Gullah culture and explore the impact of land development initiatives on the dissipation of Gullah culture and language.

Quotes

Gullah/Geechee people have always considered ourselves as one. Amongst ourselves, we don't use designations of 'Gullah,' or 'Geechee.' We know we are all kin. We know we're all the same culture, heritage, and legacy.” (Interview with Marquetta L. Goodwine, Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation (7-6-02) on St. Helena Island, SC)

By virtue of their isolation in the Sea Islands, the Gullah population received little acculturation into the ways of Euro-centric colonists, or their enslaved Africans living on the mainland. The geographical isolation of the Sea Islands, the insistence of Carolina's plantation owners on importing slaves from West Africa, and the relatively small number of whites willing to live in the tropical coastal climate were significant factors in the isolation and development of a unique Gullah culture and language.

Gullahs represent a traditional, rural population with extensive economic and emotional ties to their homelands. The construction of bridges in the middle 1950's, connecting coastal Sea Islands with mainland areas, led to land development in the form of gated communities, expensive homes, elaborate country clubs, and elite hotel properties. The following decades brought increasing land development initiatives directed toward properties owned by Gullahs. The creation of a thriving coastal tourist industry, and an ever-increasing scale of interaction with outsiders from the mainland, presented a series of potential threats to the traditional Gullah 'way of life.'

Emory Campbell, Director of Penn Center, Inc. (an academic and cultural attraction for African Americans located on St. Helena Island) stated at the 1982 South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium Conference, “New resorts have turned the Sea Islanders' lives upside down. Before developers built gated communities, Gullahs had been free to travel anywhere, hunting and fishing on their land, or on property belonging to absentee landlords. But developers built gates and fences cutting Gullahs off from fishing and hunting grounds, sometimes even traditional cemeteries. To sustain Gullah culture, we've got to protect the land. We're very much a land-based culture. If we don't have the land - we can't protect the culture.” (Interview with Emory Campbell 7-2-01)

There exists a need for social scientists to examine the effects of land development and resort tourism on the dissipation of Gullah culture. The Gullahs are a traditional people living in the midst of transition, and the loss of land places an obvious burden on community members wishing to preserve Gullah culture and language.

Folkography is a modified version of *Rapid Rural Appraisal* designed to assist researchers who are interested in gaining a better understanding of the “*subjective perspective*” of a particular “*folk*” selected for investigation. A literal interpretation of the term *Folkography* suggests “*folk*” refers to people of a specified kind, while “*nography*” is a direct reference to the use of ethnographic methods during research.

Folkography borrows from the objectives and methods of ethnographic research. Ethnography is defined as the work of describing cultures, with a goal of understanding another way of life from the ‘native point of view.’ *Folkographers* share with ethnographers a philosophical commitment to investigate cultural norms, values, beliefs, practices, and artifacts, especially as these entities connect to the wider social processes of a whole ‘way of life.’

The objective of ethnography is to produce what Geertz (1973) has described as “*thick descriptions*” of the “*multiplicity of conceptual structures*” of cultural life. *Folkographers* produce forms of cultural description by placing themselves in the midst of a specific “*folk*,” and from this vantage point, attempting to describe social reality from the “*subjective perspective*” of particular “*folk*.”

Max Weber, one of the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology, believed there was no absolutely objective scientific analysis of culture, or social phenomena. Weber notes, “We can only understand human action by using methods of investigation requiring “*verstehen*,” or “*empathetic understanding*.” Weber’s definition of social investigation aimed for an interpretative understanding of social behavior by penetration into the subjective meanings that actors attach to their own behavior, and to the behavior of others.

Folkographers apply “*verstehen*” (or *empathy*) by using qualitative methods appropriate for interpreting the social world from the “*subjective perspective*” of “*folk*” in *their* natural setting, stressing *their* attitudes, *their* beliefs, *their* values, *their* social expressions, *their* interactive rituals, and *their* mode of communication. *Folkographers* actively listen for the “*voice of the people*,” searching carefully for “*emergent themes*” and “*collective interpretations*” appropriate for gaining an “*empathetic understanding*” of social reality as defined by a particular “*folk*” selected for investigation.

Folkography represents a “*middle range analysis*” with respect to time and space. *Folkographers* conduct leadership interviews, direct focus group sessions, write ethnographic narratives of daily experiences, use content analysis, collect digital camera photos, and post data labeled “*artistic observations*” to a research-specific web site during a more intermediate field experience, somewhere between the framework required by researchers of the other two disciplines.

Folkknographers employ “*methodological triangulation*,” a metaphorical term describing a convergent validation of three distinct sources of data. There exists an assumption that *different* methods of data collection reveal *different* facets of reality. Leadership interviews, focus group interviews, and artistic observations reflect three distinctively different forms of data collected during field experiences.

Folkknographers are encouraged to post written narratives, photographic essays, autoethnographic accounts, journal entries, and personal observations to a web site designed specifically for the research project. “*Methodological triangulation*,” expressed by three distinct forms of data - leadership interviews, focus group interviews, and artistic observations - provide researchers with a more substantive means for verification of study findings.

Folkknography is a “*multidisciplinary endeavor*,” relying on the expertise of researchers who apply knowledge from their respective disciplines during the field experience. Researchers are encouraged to use their professional training during field experiences. A rural sociologist may focus on the importance of values as a motivator of social action, while an expert in the discipline of interpersonal communication may focus on the forms of communication used to transmit values from one generation to another. There exists an assumption that different interests lead to different interpretations of the same social reality, each observation playing an important role in the totality of description.

Folkknography employs a technique of data collection known as “*feed forward*,” or the ability for others to provide a critique of data during the field experience. Rather than processing information as ‘feedback,’ or critique after the fact, researchers will encourage commentary during the process of data collection. One method used to facilitate the process of “*feed forward*” requires posting data to a research-specific web site. Data from leadership interviews, focus group sessions, and artistic observations may be immediately accessed by scholars, colleagues, educators, students (even the ‘folk’ under investigation).

Folkknography recognizes the importance of researchers working with a liaison (s) within the ethnic community selected for investigation. A community liaison provides guidance for researchers, ensuring the indigenous population and culture are respected. A liaison can provide legitimate opportunities for people in the community to express their views by assisting with interviews, focus group sessions, and opportunities for artistic observations. Data may be shared with the community through the liaison, with comments and critique enabling researchers to further substantiate gathered data.

Foundations of Folknography in Abbreviated Form

1. Folknography represents a modified version of Rapid Rural Appraisal combining elements of ethnographic research with principles of rural sociology, symbolic interactionism, and phenomenological sociology.
2. Folknography is defined as a qualitative research methodology providing a descriptive analysis of specific ethnic groups.
3. Folknography employs methods of data collection that encourage the use of 'verstehen,' or empathetic understanding, to gain insight into native perspectives of social reality.
4. Folknography requires a limited, intermediate time frame for data collection and field experiences.
5. Folknography employs 'methodological triangulation' during stages of data collection.
6. Folknography is a 'multidisciplinary approach' to field research, data description, and qualitative analysis.
7. Folknography promotes the concept of 'feed forward,' or methods designed to allow immediate access of data and information.
- 8.** Folknography recognizes the importance of using a community liaison throughout the field experience.

Language

Language has long been identified as a unique cursor of the Gullah culture. Gullah language remains an oral tradition, the emphasis not placed on written text. Key informants insisted Gullah language represents their ‘breath of life’ and the foundation of Gullah/Geechee culture. Gullah language resonates with the rhythms of the islands, forming an instrument of interaction among Gullah/Geechee people. Gullah language represents a connection with African roots and ancestral traditions. The language is first (and foremost) African by definition, for it operates as a “code of the spirit,” a method by which cultural traditions are passed from one generation to another. Gullah/Geechee people are self-expressive, and the language provides a sense of community, belonging, and continuity with the past.

The Gullah population may best be defined as a heterogeneous mixture of enslaved people taken from Angola, Senegal, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the ‘Gold Coast,’ and the ‘Windward Coast’ of Africa. It is important to note the enslaved ancestors of Gullah/Geechee people were bi-lingual, or often tri-lingual. Linguistic sources of Gullah sounds and grammar represent a diversity of African languages including Gola, Gidzi, Kissee, Ewe, Yoruba, Igbo, Twi, Efik, Fanti and Kongo. Vocabulary sources originate from Kongo, Yoruba, Mende, Ewe, and Bambara languages. The importance of language may be interpreted from statements cited below (Interviews 2001-2002):

*“De Wey Wi Speak, Duh De Wey Wi Lib!”
(The way we speak is the way we live)*

*“To get way from the Gullah language is to get away from your African roots...
our language is a connection to our past, our ancestral heritage.”*

*“Our language is a ‘code of the spirit’... an oral history. Through our language,
Gullah/Geechee people continue to the traditional ways.”*

*“The Gullah language is unique, nothing like it survives in other places. Gullah
language is the only lasting ‘Creole’ in North America.”*

“Gullah adults reflect a deep appreciation and fondness for old ways of talking.”

Gullah youth, though not necessarily conversant in the language, show a curious interest in this unique form of communication. Gullah language was originally perceived by mainlanders as a form of ‘broken English.’ Gullah/Geechee people were forbidden to use the language in public settings, the implication being Gullah language was, in fact, not a language. Lorenzo Turner (1949) challenged this very Anglo-centric viewpoint, changing the thinking not only about the speech of Gullah/Geechee people, but also about the general linguistic heritage of African-Americans. The experiences of Gullah/Geechee people, who have had to defend the mere use of their language, may be interpreted from specific statements cited below (Interviews 2001-2002):

“We lead a double life. We have the language of Gullah and the language of English.”

“ For years we were told that our language is broken. A generation of people were told, ‘you’ll never get through life talking like that.’ So, anybody living in town would say, ‘I’m not Gullah; I’m not from the island.’ “

“ During the days of slavery, we got whipped for speaking Gullah. When we went to school, we got disciplined for speaking Gullah. As adults, we were made fun of for speaking Gullah. Now you come and study us because we speak Gullah. What’s a Gullah to think?”

“A lot of young people are taking a new interest in the Gullah language. It is important for young people to have pride in their language and culture”

“Our culture must be passed along to younger generations...Gullah language is an oral history of Gullah culture and the younger generation must never lose touch with the language. Ignorance of the language and culture is our greatest threat.”

Gullah Cuisine

An essential component of Gullah culture is food. To the Gullah, food is not merely for human sustenance, but a bridge for celebration and family interaction. The elaborate preparation, presentation, and consummation of meals represent a form of communication expressing love and appreciation for family members. The names of Gullah dishes have special significance and offer various nuances to the Gullah person. Gullah favorites include Low Country seafood boil, shrimp, crab, collard greens, lima beans, okra (gumbo), hoppin' john, red rice, pullet (chicken), turtle egg stew (now against the law), stew fish, bread pudding, sweet potato poone, sweet bread (cake), venison, raccoon, and conch. The importance of food to the Gullah may be interpreted from specific statements cited below (Interviews 2001-2002):

“Gullah is food, oh yes! You gotta’ celebrate when you eat. You just don’t eat food...you celebrate food.”

“Food provides a healing. Good food is medicine for the soul.”

“We don’t eat with our eyes like the mainlanders. If a tomato tastes good, then, it is good – no matter what it looks like.”

“Our food is for sharing – it shows our caring”

“I’m always able to feed another person in my home. People (here) will automatically cook something more just in case a stranger drops in.”

Gullah Artisans

Handcrafted material items constitute a significant component of Gullah culture. Gullah/Geechee people understand the value of patience and take the necessary time required for completing a task by hand. Gullah/Geechee people insist that energy flows from the Almighty through the hands of each human. Gullah people are famous for the quality of their hand made baskets, quilts, casting nets, fishing boats, and other material items required for survival in the Sea Islands.

The crafting of sweet grass baskets provide a visible link to the African heritage of Gullah/Geechee people. Baskets served functions in the production of rice, cotton, and indigo. Men usually made larger baskets for vegetables and staples, while women made smaller baskets for domestic needs. True to the Gullah tradition of living in harmony with the land, baskets were crafted from indigenous materials - bull rushes, long leaf pine needles, palmetto leaves, and sweet grass.

Religious Beliefs

Gullah/Geechee people have a deep sense of spiritual connection to Almighty God. Gullah “spiritual life” operates as a central ethos and foundation for the culture. Gullah/Geechee people are guided by spiritual powers, beliefs, and personal values not easily discounted. Religious beliefs and teachings guide the Gullah sense of justice, equity, kinship, social awareness, and community relations. Religion provides the Gullah with a basic philosophy from which life becomes directed, a ‘divine order.’ Gullah tradition and cultural heritage rest on a foundation of ‘spiritual belief.’ Activities in the life of Gullah/Geechee people, from town meetings to sporting events, have spiritual overtones. The quotes cited below reflect the spiritual awareness of Gullah/Geechee people (Interviews 2001-2002):

“We have to say God comes first. We can’t breathe without our God, and we gotta start with Him.”

“Gullah people respect God first; then, we’re able to respect others. We stop respectin’ if people give us a reason. Otherwise, we just keep respectin.’

“Goin’ to church is like goin’ to the ole’ dug well and drawin’ up a cold cup of water. When you drink it down on a hot August day...well, then you get yourself a good feeling. That’s goin’ to church.”

“You gotta’ love everybody – that’s what the Lord says. Some people don’t want you to love ‘em. I don’t know what we’re gonna’ do with them folk.”

“This is all God’s property. I don’t know why outsiders think they own it. They sure ain’t gonna take it with ‘em when they meet the Lord.”

“Faith in our Almighty God gets the Gullah by on a daily basis”

Church membership is largely Baptist, or Methodist. However, the expression within these churches is not the same as in mainstream and mainland churches of the same denomination. A major departure from mainstream Christian philosophy is a duality of presence involving ‘soul’ and ‘spirit.’ The ‘soul’ leaves the body and returns to God at death, but the ‘spirit’ stays on earth – still involved in the daily affairs of its living descendants. As an example, funerals are elaborate and mourners decorate graves with prized possessions of the newly deceased.

Gullah/Geechee people believe their ‘ancestors’ maintain presence in daily affairs of the family. Ancestors visit with family members on various occasions, walk the streets and roads, guard and guide individuals, and advise or council people through spiritual means. The ‘dressing’ of graves, legends and accounts of visitations, and substantive Gullah folklore add significant dimension to this one specific concept – family members who have passed “are still with us now.” (Interviews 2001-2002):

Pray's Houses

Gullah pray's houses function as a spiritual extension of their churches and communities, providing a distinctive socio-religious context wherein folk beliefs and religious practices prosper. The spiritual focus of the pray's house allows folk to practice "seeking the Lord." Alonzo Johnson spells the name 'pray's house' (rather than praise house) after Samuel Lawton's research in the 1930's. The majority of locals interviewed by Lawton referred to these places as either pray houses (without the possessive *s*, or as the pray-ers house), with an equal accent on the two syllables of the first word. Without question, the 'pray's house' provides a number of important socio-religious functions for the Gullah/Geechee community (see below).

Socio-Religious Functions

- *Pray's houses provide churches a separate facility for examining new candidates for membership.*
- *Pray's houses provide a moral influence by bringing a spiritual voice directly into the neighborhood, curbing potentially destructive behavior patterns*
- *Pray's houses offer a place for strengthening one's faith, for extending one's fellowship, or for one's moral instruction.*
- *Pray's houses play an important role in the socialization of youth and for providing a forum for a child's rites of passage from childhood to adult*
- *Pray's houses provide a ritual framework facility for resolving personal disputes and dysfunctional behaviors within the community.*

Kinship

The concept of kinship is very important among Gullah/Geechee people. When describing family relationships, Gullahs frequently use words such as respect, honor, love, and phrases like “all we got is family,” and “all we are is family.” Aunts, uncles, cousins, distant relatives, and even people not necessarily related by blood, belong to the family unit. The bonds of connection are voiced through expressions of loyalty, appreciation, and consideration for family members.

The terms ‘neighbors’ and ‘community’ are nearly synonymous for the Gullah. Gullah/Geechee people literally interpret the Biblical passage “love thy neighbor as thyself.” Gullah/Geechee people believe in a moral responsibility to “care for their neighbors.” Gullah homes and family units are often arranged in a circular fashion. This pattern of settlement is called ‘heir’s property’ and operates through a system of family inheritance, as children receive permission to live on family property after marriage. A Gullah yard may contain the houses of parents, several children, and even grandchildren.

Social Norms

The concept of respect is extremely important for Gullah/Geechee people. Gullah/Geechee people respect, accept, and appreciate other people, for they believe in the spirituality of the “Golden Rule.” Social norms tend to revolve around the foundation of Gullah life, a value system directly related to the ‘spiritual beliefs’ of Gullah/Geechee people. The following quotes reflect Gullah/Geechee norms of behavior with respect to family, friends, and neighbors (Interviews 2001-2002):

“We gotta’ have our family around. That makes us fulfilled. That gives you upliftment. Without family – what have you got?”

“You have to respect your elders. That’s what makes you civilized. Him that don’t respect his elders is worse than an infidel.”

“I feel sorry for folk that can’t feel their family. They don’t know where they come from, so they sure don’t know where they’re goin’.”

“You have to give people honor. If somebody does something good, then you gotta give them the honor for it.

“When I was little...we shared everything. Neighbors shared. If somebody had a watermelon in the community, then every family got some. If a family had some venison in the community, then every family got some. We’re not a selfish bunch. We understand loving, giving, and sharing. That is who we are!”

Gullah social norms reflect a positive philosophical approach to the celebration of living. Gullah/Geechee people firmly believe in God, and the belief that there's "a little bit of God is in all of us." Gullah values revolve around issues of religion, family, kinship, and humanitarianism. Their positive philosophical attitude seems to serve as a tool of power for resisting depression, bitterness, and malice toward others. The Gullahs exhibit strong moral character and a positive approach to everyday life, as illustrated by the following quotes (Interviews 2001-2002):

"My culture lifts me up! When I feel low, I think of where we've been – then, I feel like goin' on."

"We have open hearts 'til somebody don't want us to offer them up!"

"If'n God be in us all, den we gotta love all of us, huh?"

"You know love overpowers all! Love is more powerful than hate – our people strive only for peace and harmony. I have never been taught to hate – only to love!"

"Tune in to the Almighty Spirit, then you can be in tune with everything else!"

Methods of Land Loss in the Gullah Community

Methods of land loss reflect a number of socio-political consequences pertaining to the issue of power in local communities. There is great concern among Gullah leadership regarding the rapid land loss of Gullah families residing on the Sea Islands of South Carolina:

Land Speculation

Many Gullahs were prevented from getting a formal education and could not read, or write effectively. Land agents would create contracts and coerce, or "trick" Gullah landowners into signing contracts that resulted in families relinquishing all rights to the land they had owned for many years. Often lawyers verified illegal surveys and corrupt government officials confirmed such illegal land transactions. Land speculations often translated into fraud, trickery, or coercive treatment of Gullah/Geechee people, who are suspicious of 'white' land developers promising one thing and delivering quite another – the loss of Gullah lands.

Partition Action

There was a significant migration of Gullah/Geechee people to northern cities following the Civil War. When Gullahs headed north seeking employment, the absent families paid taxes on properties in the Lowcountry, or in the Sea Islands. However, absentee Gullahs often lost the “attachment” to the land, unlike the Gullah/Geechees left behind who remained productive farmers and fishermen. When land speculators contacted absentee families in the North, (who had no intention of ever coming back to their ‘roots’) they agreed to sign “quit claim deeds” on the family property. Speculators would rush to and fro, from one Gullah family to another living in the North, and have ‘quit claim deeds’ signed. After recording the deeds, Judges would require the deeds be sold during land auctions. Speculators, knowing the full worth of the land, would outbid Gullah family members bidding on the property. Partition actions would often result in the loss of Gullah land.

Inaccurate Surveys

Gullah people were never considered to be a vital interest by the dominant group, so Gullah land was often improperly recorded in the county ledgers. Gullah families have indicated a loss of over half their land through legal wrangling and boundary disputes based on inaccurate surveys. In fact, more water front property has been lost in this way than by any other kind of land swindle. If deeds were the least bit inexact, swift actions by land speculators and the legal community resulted in land sales (and most often at much lower than market value). Inaccurate surveys have led to the loss of Gullah land, especially the loss of waterfront properties.

Adverse Possession

Gullah/Geechee people hold a different kind of attitude toward land. Land is more than a single commodity, it’s more like a divine part of Gullah daily life. Gullahs consider the land to be home - a place of being - the land is perceived as a living ancestor. Often, people would “squat” on Gullah property, and if they squatted long enough, they could claim the property as theirs. A squatter could go to court and get a “quick release deed,” and then rightful owners may lose rights to the land. Developers and speculators were known to pay people to squat, then speculators would buy the property from squatters as soon as it could be legally declared. The South Carolina Supreme Court ruled that the county can’t be burdened with cases of land reapportionment. That means that the land -all of the land - must be sold so that one or more of the heirs can get their share of the money. The land is sold for the taxes owed, for the county refuses to subdivide it. Developers would buy the land, subdivide it, and by using adverse possession, make millions. Meanwhile, Gullah/Geechees lost their rightful ownership of the land.

Real Estate Taxes

Real estate taxes have cost many Gullah/Geechee people their land. The county sets the value of land and, therefore, the amount of taxes owed on land. Coastal properties owned by Gullahs continue to rise in value, according to the tax assessor, and therefore taxes continue to escalate. The land can be taxed on its potential value, so that, in the end, Gullahs are often taxed off their land by escalating real estate taxes. For example, if the property next to a Gullah family was developed into a hotel property, golf course, tennis court, gated community, or popular restaurant, then the assessed value of the Gullah property would escalate at an alarming rate, making it very difficult for the family to pay the taxes. Speculators would pay the escalated tax and secure the land making it available for further development by elites or corporations.

The findings of this study reflect the spirit and resolve of Gullah/Geechee people, a people determined to preserve their culture regardless of the obstacles presented by an encroaching value system based on materialism. Gullah language and culture have not yet been made complete victims of the impact of land development, resort tourism, or assimilation with mainlanders. Gullahs understand there is concern for the possible erosion of their language and culture. However, the foundation of Gullah culture, a deep and abiding faith in Almighty God, provides a ‘light of truth’ and a ‘divine order’ of things in the universe. Gullah/Geechee people repeatedly remarked and asserted ...

“ We do not desire ‘outsiders to come down here and save us.’ We already have a Savior. What we need is for people to let us tell our story, let us be who we are and not make us a commodity, or piece of cultural merchandise.”

“Outsiders shouldn’t be making money on our everyday lives. We know who we are and we’re at peace with that. We are Africans living in the United States - We are Gullah/Geechee. That is who we were, who we are, and who we will be. We are forever!”

“Outsiders should not expect to come here, hide away in an archive, read a few books and essays, and then go away saying they know who we are. They need to hear, feel, sense and touch our story.”

Gullah/Geechee leadership is in the process of passing the torch of “cultural tradition” to their youth. The challenge of preserving Gullah/Geechee language and culture rests squarely on the shoulders of a younger generation. Gullah leaders are currently working to motivate adults as positive role models for Gullah youth; and, as Marquetta L. Goodwine Goodwine (2001) notes, “Youth do not learn things ‘out of the blue.’ We, as adults, must be living examples for our youth to follow!”

The value of this paper (and similar efforts) may truly be the response taken by Gullah youth. Gullah adults would remind younger generations they must understand the past, present, and future are inter-related - part of a ‘Divine Order’ of things – and one must be constantly in touch with God Almighty! Gullah adults teach children and adolescents to feel a connection with God, a connection to each member of the family, and a connection to each member of the Gullah/Geechee community.

Gullahs have declared their right to self-determination via *The Constitution of the Gullah/Geechee Nation*, announced July 1, 2001 during a public ceremony on Sullivan’s Island, South Carolina. The Gullah right to self-determination was re-affirmed during a similar ceremony held on Sullivan’s Island July 7, 2002. Gullah/Geechee people are claiming the right to genuine social dignity, the right to preserve and protect Gullah language and culture, the right to develop in spirit with Gullah principles and aspirations, and for the right to consolidate an official, institutional framework of the Gullah/Geechee nation. Currently, preservation objectives are being accomplished through community meetings, academic conferences, seminars and workshops, cultural festivals, and socio-historical presentations exploring Gullah cultural traditions.

Gullah language is a living, breathing, oral tradition that must be carried forward by younger generations. The greatest threat to Gullah culture is ignorance. The strongest asset of Gullah culture is the determination of Gullah adults to motivate and educate their youth. In the ‘divine order of things,’ it shall be done.

Glossary

<i>Ethnographic method</i>	method of cultural description whereby the researcher is placed in the midst of a particular social group, and from this vantage point, attempts to describe and interpret social expressions, interactions, and communication among people
<i>empathetic understanding</i>	using 'empathy' to better interpret the social world from the unique, subjective perspective of people under investigation/study
<i>emergent themes</i>	important information or descriptive data obtained by researchers from interview and/or discussions with people under investigation
<i>Gullah</i>	a 'Creole' language spoken by people of African descent living in the Sea Island region of South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Gullah also refers to the people who speak and use this language
<i>Geechee</i>	a dialect, or 'pidgin' language derived from the interaction of Gullah speakers with non-Gullahs. Geechee also refers to people living in the Sea Island region who speak and use this language.
<i>focus group</i>	a small group of people under the guidance of a moderator who are engaged in interactive discussion relative to topics of research
<i>indigenous</i>	native to (or living naturally in) a particular area, or environment
<i>key informants</i>	people of a rural community selected for interview on the basis of reputation, special knowledge, expertise, or leadership qualities
<i>phenomenology</i>	an approach that emphasizes the unique subjective perspective of a member of a social group, or members of a social group
<i>pidgin</i>	a simplified form of speech, usually a mixture of two or more languages, with a rudimentary grammar and vocabulary used for communication between groups speaking different languages
<i>qualitative</i>	indicates the notion of quality as essential to the nature of things/ qualitative research refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, symbols and descriptions of things under investigation
<i>artistic observations</i>	cultural descriptions made by researchers in the field expressed in the form of ethnographic narratives supported by digital camera
<i>triangulation</i>	a method of investigating a phenomenon from three slightly different perspectives for the purpose of more reliable findings

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