

## **R/UDAT: Ten Years After**

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## Biographical Sketch



Charles W. Jarrett, Ph. D., Tenured Associate Professor of Sociology at Ohio University, has spent the past five summers studying Gullah culture and teaching sociology courses for the University of South Carolina Beaufort South Campus.

Charles Jarrett has developed a series of cultural enrichment programs for Ohio University entitled *Gullahs and Geechees of the Sea Islands*, programs that have introduced Native Islanders and their unique culture to the students and residents of southeastern Ohio. Charles Jarrett has created an innovative web-based course for Ohio University students entitled *Journey to Wholeness*, a course that compares and contrasts the spiritual awareness expressed by traditional Gullah lifestyles with the technical and material influences of postmodern American society.

Charles Jarrett has presented papers on Gullah culture at the 2001 International Conference of the National Association of African American Studies in Cancun, Mexico; 2001 National Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society in Albuquerque, NM; 2002 National Association of African American Studies Conference in Houston, TX; 2002 National Meeting of the Rural Sociological Society in Chicago, IL; 2003 National Association of African American Studies Conference in Houston, TX; 2003 African Diaspora in the Americas Conference at Ohio University in Athens, OH; 2003 Middle States African Studies Conference at West Virginia State College in Charleston, WV; 2004 National Association of African American Studies Conference in Houston, TX; and the 2005 National Association of African American Studies Conference in Houston, TX. Charles Jarrett has published the following peer-refereed papers on Gullah culture:

- Message for America: Gullah Perspectives on Postmodern American Culture *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines, Vol. 7* (2006 in press)
- The Gullahs of Squire Pope Road: A Case Study in Social Impact Assessment *Cultural Memory: Ethnicity & Multiculturalism in the Modern World* (2004)
- Connecting with the Soul of a Community: An Interactive Study of Gullah Culture *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines, Vol. 4* (2003)
- Connecting with the Soul of a Community: An Interactive Study of Gullah Culture *Black Praxis, Vol. 1, Number 1* (2003)
- Connecting with the Heart of a Community: Introducing Folknography *Heritage and History: A Celebration of Diversity* (2002)

## Abstract

Gullahs are descendants of enslaved Africans *indigenous* to the Sea Islands and coastal regions of South Carolina. Gullahs (Native Islanders) were the primary inhabitants of Hilton Head until 1956, when entrepreneur Charles E. Fraser developed Sea Pines Plantation and changed the history of the island. Hilton Head Island has become an international resort destination with world-class country clubs, luxury hotel properties, vacation rentals, and gated communities; however, Native Islanders have not experienced the economic rewards enjoyed by property owners on other parts of the island. In 1995, an independent and unbiased *Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT)* reported the economic under-development of Native Islanders may be attributed to rapidly increasing land taxes, substandard utility services, inadequate financial resources, multiple land ownership with clouded legal title, and multiple failures by the Incorporated Town of Hilton Head to meet its municipal obligations to the Native Island community.

Equity is a fundamental principle of American society. Robert K. Merton argues the *American Creed* set forth in the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights guarantees each citizen the human right of equitable access to justice, freedom, and opportunity regardless of race, religion, or ethnic origin. The *1995 R/UDAT Report* indicates the Incorporated Town of Hilton Head falls seriously short relative to the principle of equity. A special committee was appointed to provide recommendations for the problems identified by *R/UDAT*. Native Islanders including Thomas C. Barnwell, Jr., Perry White, Nancy Schilling, Betty Days, Mark Moore, and Kenneth James invested eleven months developing a comprehensive response plan for public officials. The *1996 Resource Committee for Native Island Affairs Report* offered a plan for resolving inequities on the island and specified cultural preservation as a critical issue for local, native-born Blacks. The committee presented a plan to establish a permanent “heritage center” for the preservation of Gullah culture on Hilton Head Island.

Hilton Head Island shares *two* conflicting visions for the same geographical space. Until those visions are resolved into *one*, the island’s population can never become *one true community*. The challenge of unifying the island’s population requires collective action by public officials and leaders from the Native Island community. The political climate appears conducive for public officials and *indigenous* leaders to nurture a viable partnership capable of acting on the ideals of the *1995 R/UDAT Report*. The United States Congress has unanimously passed the *2005 Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act*, legislation providing resources for state and local officials to educate the public about Gullah cultural heritage throughout North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. Establishing a permanent “heritage center” for *indigenous* culture represents a measure of progressive social change, a symbolic and substantive gesture capable of unifying island residents into *one true community*.

## *Quotes*

Hilton Head Island represents the innovative vision of Charles Elbert Fraser, an entrepreneur who introduced the first *Resort-Retirement* community in America. The physical, aesthetic, social and political future of the island was heavily influenced by Fraser's privately developed *Sea Pines Plantation*. Fraser literally created a concept for residential living never previously considered, a retirement community woven into an environment of resort beaches, golf courses, tennis courts, and wildlife preserves.

Danielson, M. N. (1995). *Profits and Politics in Paradise: The Development of Hilton Head Island*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, Pp. 30-34.

Resort and retirement communities do pose distinctive developmental issues. Aesthetic attractions remain extremely important for both types of communities, but retirees have vastly different interests than other resort populations. Historically, Hilton Head's retirees have been very concerned with residential amenities, substantially less dependent on the local economy, and more politically active than other island residents.

Danielson, M. N. (1995). *Profits and Politics in Paradise: The Development of Hilton Head Island*, Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, p. 19.

Michael N. Danielson, B. C. Forbes Professor of Public Affairs at Princeton University and author of Profits and Politics in Paradise: The Development of Hilton Head Island, spent extensive time on the island before concluding:

“Affluent Islanders could have accepted the responsibility for improving public services to Black Hilton Head as an essential part of building a viable community as well as an equitable *quid pro quo* for land use controls and the higher taxes imposed on Blacks. Most important, in a place with so many intelligent and concerned citizens, both private and public life needs to be informed with a greater sense of social justice, for doing the right thing for the descendants of the people who were Hilton Head between the original and modern plantation eras.

African Americans did not see themselves as welcome or influential participants in local politics. Behind these views are deep feelings of anger and anxiety that transcend the immediate issues of land regulations, design standards, and road building. Native Islanders see themselves as threatened with political, economic, and cultural extinction—as an *endangered species* on a Sea Island that had been largely theirs four decades earlier. Blacks resent a system that consigned them to the shadows, ignored their needs, raised their taxes, and expected them to be grateful for the benefits that came with development.”<sup>7</sup>

Native Islanders view development and growth in racial terms, largely because the *town* has used *its* political clout to impose land controls that deny economic opportunities to Black property owners. Behind the facade of responsiveness to local Blacks was the reality of a political system dominated by affluent White *plantation* residents who have no interest in the island’s natives and their problems.

Danielson, M. N. (1995). *Profits and Politics in Paradise: The Development of Hilton Head Island*, Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, p. 294.

The Incorporated Town of Hilton Head and the Native Island community are distinctive domains bordering one another, each possessing a vastly different agenda and definition of social reality. Hilton Head Island cannot become *one true community* until each domain perceives the other as an integral part of a shared “collective identity.”

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. “R/UDAT: Ten Years After,” a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (pages 4-7)

Minority perceptions are often ignored or under-appreciated by existing power structures in America. Sociologists are trained to represent disenfranchised populations lacking the power necessary for changing the realities of social and economic inequality. Scholars interested in the dynamics of power and interaction among competing social groups present a fundamental question for consideration - “Who determines social reality?”

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. “R/UDAT: Ten Years After,” a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 8)

The Incorporated Town of Hilton Head has historically demonstrated an insufficient understanding of the Native Islanders’ definition of social reality. Gullahs have been shouting “*Yeddi Wi*” (Gullah for “*Hear Us*”) since the first bridge was constructed from the mainland to the island.

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. “R/UDAT: Ten Years After,” a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 9)

Native Islanders have not experienced the economic rewards enjoyed by property owners on other parts of Hilton Head. In 1995, an independent and unbiased Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (*R/UDAT*) reported the economic under-development of Ward One (a district heavily populated by Native Islanders) may be attributed to a combination of factors including rapidly increasing land taxes, inadequate financial resources, substandard utility services, multiple land ownership with clouded legal title, and multiple failures by the Incorporated Town of Hilton Head to meet its municipal obligations to the Native Island community. The *1995 R/UDAT Report* suggested the island population can no longer bear the fragmentation brought by economic disparity if it ever hopes to move forward as one community.

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. "R/UDAT: Ten Years After," a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 10)

Scholars agree the *aesthetic character of indigenous* culture has been radically altered by economic development. Gated communities have limited the freedom of Native Islanders to roam traditional hunting grounds, fish in salt-water rivulets, and visit sacred burial grounds. Coastal development has adversely affected local waters that no longer produce ample supplies of shrimp, crab, and fish. Emory Campbell, Director Emeritus of Penn Center, Inc, emphatically states, "Gullahs are (a people) tied to their land, and we're losing our land at an alarming rate. To sustain our culture, we've got to protect the land!"

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. "R/UDAT: Ten Years After," a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 11)

An island paradise that once belonged to an *indigenous* population has been radically altered by private development. A resort-based economy has eroded native culture and marginalized the political power of local Blacks. The true aesthetic of the island remains invisible to residents living behind locked gates or tourists seeking idyllic vacations. Hilton Head Island shares *two* conflicting visions for the same geographical space; and, until those visions are resolved into *one*, the island can never become *a true community*. Island inhabitants are fragmented into special interest groups lacking the collective social conscience to provide equitable treatment for local, native-born Blacks.

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. "R/UDAT: Ten Years After," a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 12)

Sociologist Robert K. Merton argues the *American Creed* set forth in the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights guarantees each citizen the human right of equitable access to justice, freedom, and opportunity regardless of race, religion, or ethnic origin. Merton notes the *American Creed* does not imply a notion that all men are created equal in physical or mental endowment. Rather, Merton argues if humans differ in innate qualities, they do so as individuals and not by virtue of their group membership.

Merton, Robert K. (1949). "Discrimination and the American Creed," in Robert MacIver *Discrimination and National Welfare*, New York: Harper, Pp. 99-126.

The Incorporated Town of Hilton Head has made one attempt to act on the ideals of R/UDAT. On December 19, 1995, a Resource Committee for Native Island Affairs was appointed by the Town Council to provide recommendations for the problems identified in the *1995 R/UDAT Report*. Native Islanders including Perry White, Thomas C. Barnwell, Betty Days, Mark Moore, Nancy Schilling, and Kenneth James provided conscientious leadership by investing eleven months in the development of a comprehensive response plan for the Incorporated Town of Hilton Head. The Resource Committee for Native Island Affairs presented a *Vision Statement* that asked town officials to build a single island community through partnership with Native Islanders.

“Our vision for the Native Island Community of Hilton Head is that we not be treated as, viewed as, nor live as second class citizens; but, as equals of the other communities of Hilton Head Island. However, we must not be forced to become another *plantation*, but retain our character and our culture. We must view ourselves as ‘PEOPLE WITH A PROBLEM’ rather than ‘PROBLEM PEOPLE.’ Residents of the other communities on the island must gain a better understanding of *their role* in creating some of the problems faced by Native Islanders. *They* must develop a more caring attitude and a willingness to work with Native Islanders to improve relationships and to build a better community for everyone. Together, we must build a single community to replace the patch work of communities that now exist on our island.”

Response to Hilton Head Island R/UDAT Report (1996). *Resource Committee for Native Island Affairs (submitted 11-20-96)*, Hilton Head Island, South Carolina: Incorporated Town of Hilton Head, p.4., in Jarrett, C. W. 2006. “R/UDAT: Ten Years After,” a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 15)

The *1996 Resource Committee for Native Island Affairs Report* clearly documented cultural preservation as a critical issue for local, native-born Blacks. Gullah language represents an oral history expressing a connection with African ancestral traditions and cultural identities for Native Islanders. Land development and the forces of assimilation literally threaten the existence of Gullah culture and language today. The *1996 Resource Committee for Native Island Affairs Report* expressed a strong desire for a permanent cultural center on Hilton Head Island, a museum dedicated to the preservation of Gullah culture and language...

“A history of a people has been hushed, been stilled ...the people of Ward One have had little (if any) public or private resources allocated to the preservation of their culture. Moreover, they have seen the opportunity denied (or deferred) for private development that might stabilize their cultural heritage. Many residents on Ward One share a unique historic culture with other settlements along the southeastern United States. The culture is known as Gullah. On Hilton Head Island, people who embody the Gullah culture identify themselves as Native Islanders. To date, there has been no clear, consistent, and accountable program in force to protect this history or interpret the Gullah culture of Hilton Head Island **in situ**. Given the historic linkage of Gullah culture to the land and the geographic specificity of this culture, **its survival is critically dependent on the continued presence of Native Islanders on Hilton Head Island.**

Response to Hilton Head Island R/UDAT Report (1996). *Resource Committee for Native Island Affairs (submitted 11-20-96)*, Hilton Head Island, SC, p. 44. R/UDAT (1995). *Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team Report: # 213*, p. 28., in Jarrett, C. W. 2006. “R/UDAT: Ten Years After,” a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 15)

The *1996 Resource Committee for Native Island Affairs Report* established an historical precedent by reporting a permanent heritage center owned and operated by local, native-born Blacks was a necessary requirement for the survival of Gullah culture:

“The rich history and culture of the Native Islanders are practically unknown to most residents and visitors to Hilton Head Island. This condition stems (in part) from the extremely limited visibility of Native Islanders, left on the sidelines as observers of the growth and development occurring in areas away from the native communities. Native Islanders contributed to this condition by their desire to continue a way of life that existed when the island was an isolated place (*before the bridge*). The isolationist spirit helped to preserve a cultural lifestyle that reaches back to Africa. Churches, spirituals, stories, arts, crafts, diets and language are still prevalent in the native community. Nevertheless, assimilation is taking place and the old culture is dying off with the passing of generations. Native Islanders are becoming a ‘*displaced people*’ while at home. Immediate action is needed to preserve this very rich aspect of African American history known as the ‘*Gullah Culture*’ before it is too late.”

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. “R/UDAT: Ten Years After,” a paper presented at the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration* (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 19)

Georg Simmel argued a *stranger* may be a better mediator between estranged parties than full members of either group.<sup>12</sup> A *stranger* is not obligated to either group or bound by commitments that influence perceptions; hence, the *stranger* may effectively suggest alternative strategies for resolving inequities between groups. The *stranger's* position within a particular group is determined by the fact that *he/she* does not belong to it from the beginning, and *he/she* may leave again at any time. *My* position is essentially one of the *stranger*, a professional observer by virtue of partial residency and employment on Hilton Head Island. *My* responsibilities as a professional educator are to disseminate information through university courses, scholarly publications, and public appearances. *My* responsibilities as a *stranger* are more challenging ... . *I* must have the courage to employ writing as a method of critique regardless of circumstances.

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. "R/UDAT: Ten Years After," a paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 22)

The genius of *indigenous* culture lies in its survival. Native Islanders have survived the horrendous experience of slavery and modern versions of paternalism based on *their* consignment to positions of marginality. Ethnocentric thinking and condescending attitudes continue to enable the discrimination embodied in the island's "*limited services governmental policy.*" Island residents and the *true* island population--Native Islanders--have never shared in the construction of social reality.

Jarrett, C. W. 2006. "R/UDAT: Ten Years After," a paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration (February 4, 2006) on Hilton Head Island, SC. (page 23)

Native Islanders believe life and civilization originated in Africa; therefore, Gullahs believe *they* have an appreciation for life European immigrants may have distorted or entirely lost. Gullahs continue to embrace *their* culture and prepare for *their* survival with an abiding spiritual connection to the *Great Creator*. Gullah children are taught the past, present, and future remain inter-related as part of a *Divine Order*. Perhaps, the idea of a “heritage center” dedicated to the preservation of Gullah culture on Hilton Head Island remains in the *Hand of God*. We must learn to be still and obedient--for all things shall be done in *Divine Time*.

The Incorporated Town of Hilton Head, responding to problems described by their local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, had requested a *Regional/Urban Design Assistance Team (R/UDAT)* to investigate socio-economic development on the island. *R/UDAT* teams are comprised of professionals not compensated for their services nor provided commissions for work resulting from recommendations. *R/UDAT* teams acquaint themselves with a community and its people, engage in analysis from an unbiased perspective, and offer recommendations for planning and action strategies. The *R/UDAT* report specifically targeted economic development strategies on Ward One and questioned the value of a “limited services government.”

The NAACP offered public support of the 1995 R/UDAT recommendations to end ‘limited services policy’ on the island, reinforcing the need for a more inclusive government able to meet its municipal obligations to the Native Islanders of that district. As part of a more inclusive plan to stimulate economic growth and development on Ward One, the Incorporated Town of Hilton Head proposed expanding traffic capacities on Highway 278 from the entrance of the island through Squire Pope Road. Stoney, a neighborhood located along the entrance to the island, is one of the few remaining island communities with significant Gullah populations. Whether expanded capacity takes the form of additional travel lanes, frontage roads, or reconfigured intersections, planned changes may displace yet more Gullah families.

2006 “R/UDAT: Ten Years After” (Charles W. Jarrett) *Progressive Think Tank For Social Change, Winter 2006*, Hilton Head Island, SC, 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Native Islander Gullah Celebration, NIBCAA Press.

Although the published Ward One Master Land Use Plan was not widely understood by community residents, plans to expand traffic capacities from the entrance of the island through Squire Pope Road was of great concern for people in the neighborhood. The Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church, an important spiritual and social institution in the Gullah community, sits in close proximity to Squire Pope Road. People commented that efforts to provide additional traffic lanes would likely alter the physical appearance of church property and create increased traffic flow directly in front of the church. Community concerns regarding road construction included the following:

- safety of neighborhood children due to increased traffic flow
- physical changes to the Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church
- re-location of the Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church
- re-location of Gullah families and/or roadside businesses
- rising taxes associated with highway and roadway expansion

A comprehensive level of stress was felt by community residents and the past maltreatment of Gullah cultural heritage cited as a major problem. Comments were made about significant Gullah institutions on the island being negatively impacted by real estate brokers and land developers. Comments were directed toward the altering and/or loss of sacred burial grounds, waterfront properties, traditional hunting grounds, fishing areas, family land use patterns, sharing of resources, and declining patterns of communal interaction by native islanders. Preserving the historical legacy of Gullahs figured prominently in conversations about future development on the island.

Previous studies have established a precedent regarding Gullah attitudes and perceptions about land development in the Sea Islands. Gullah leadership has expressed definite preferences regarding highway and road improvements.

- design of walking paths through a community to encourage social interaction
- ample room for roadside businesses, farm markets, and vegetable stands
- the elimination of continuous turn lanes extending from main highways/roads
- road expansion that does not remove historic oak trees and/or landmarks
- improving traffic safety without affecting the rural character of communities
- direct dialogue and face-to-face discussion with agencies planning change

Gullah preferences regarding planned changes stress the need to protect traditional cultural values, the rural character of surrounding landscapes, and traditional venues for community based social interaction. Governmental agencies should respect the preferences of native populations and attempt to mitigate the adverse effects of development prior to the implementation of planned change initiatives.

The 1995 R/UDAT Report recommended corridor planning should be expanded beyond mere traffic engineering and access management issues to include a social impact assessment of the attitudes of residents toward planned changes. The mandates of *R/UDAT* clearly state the preservation of native island culture must become a priority for the Incorporated Town of Hilton Head.

## *Notes*

2005 Jarrett, C. W., "Message For America: Gullah Perspectives on Postmodern American Culture," *Journal of Intercultural Disciplines*, Fall 2005, Columbia, SC: Benedict College.

Jarrett, Charles W. (2003). "*The Gullahs of Squire Pope Road: A Case Study in Social Impact Assessment*," a paper presented at the National Association of African American Studies Conference (NAAAS) on 2-17-04 in Houston, Texas.

Jarrett, Charles W. (2004) "The Gullahs of Squire Pope Road: A Case Study in Social Impact Assessment," a peer-refereed publication in *Harnessing the Future by Studying the Past*. Biddleford, Maine: National Association of African American Studies & Affiliates.

Research findings are based on a multidimensional investigation that relied on historical and archival documentation, ethnographic accounts, one-on-one interviews, focus group interviews, ethnographic narratives, evocative representations, and in the final analysis, systematic sociological introspection. An experimental methodology labeled "Folkography" was employed during the first year of investigation resulting in many ethnographic accounts and observations being posted to a research-specific web site during the field experience. The principal investigator has continued to post ethnographic observations to a research-specific web site, and readers may access the raw data by logging on to [www.southern.ohiou.edu/faculty/jarrett](http://www.southern.ohiou.edu/faculty/jarrett).

Focus Group Interviews. (2001). Arranged by *The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition* for June 8, 9, 15, 16, 23, and July 1, 3, 4, & 5, 2001; Records on File.

Focus Group Interviews. (2002). Arranged by *The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition* for June 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 18, 25, and July 4, 5, & 6, 2002, Records on File.