

DWELLING ON WADMALAW: LANDSCAPE CHANGE AND CHANGING
AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE WAYS ON A SOUTH CAROLINA SEA ISLAND

By

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This thesis is dedicated to the people of Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, who were so gracious and accepting of me and my research.

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This thesis explores changes that have occurred in African American ways of life on Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, a Sea Island about twenty miles southeast of Charleston. Wadmalaw is home to an African American majority, who are part of the larger African American Sea Island peoples commonly referred to as the Gullah. For the purposes of this thesis, emphasis was placed on observable changes that have occurred in the landscape of Wadmalaw within the past seventy years. Through a documentation of a decline of agriculture and the subsequent rise of new middle and upper class housing, the thesis sought to understand these changes' possible impact on African American culture. The thesis also explored the ways in which the land-use and zoning laws of Charleston County are playing a significant role in shaping the landscape of the island. The changes in the landscape of Wadmalaw proved to be a significant factor in changing ways of life of the island's African American population. These changes contributed to (and continue to contribute to) a "secularization" of African American ways of life on the island.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis is based on a summer of fieldwork on Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina. During this time, I carried out research among the island's mostly African American residents. Wadmalaw, which is situated about twenty miles south/southeast of Charleston, South Carolina, has experienced many changes in the past seventy years. These changes are primarily represented in the growth of Charleston's urbanized footprint and the subsequent "suburbanization" of the area's Sea Islands. This process has played an important (if not dominant) role in reshaping ways of life on the Sea Islands, and it is the nature of those changes that this thesis will seek to understand.

The goal of my research was to begin to understand, through both qualitative and quantitative methods, what role economic growth and urbanization have played and continue to play in changing the landscape of Wadmalaw, and, consequently, what effect these changes may have on African American culture there. There are many ways to define culture; for the purposes of this thesis culture can be defined as the behavior-produced meanings that are constantly being reproduced and reinforced by people's daily practice and their interactions with both the material and ideological world (Bourdieu 1977). From these interactions and practices emerges culture. In the case of the African American Sea Islanders, culture is represented in all aspects of their daily lives including in their language, occupations, religion, family structures, and their food (to name a few). In my research, I hope to contribute to research being conducted on Sea Island culture by posing questions about material changes occurring on the islands. Instead of attempting

to make generalized statements about the perceptions or inner cultural orientations of the inhabitants on Wadmalaw, I will focus on changes that are more easily observed by an outsider (such as me).

In the field, much of my focus turned to the political battles being fought over issues of growth on the island, and, specifically, attempting to understand how these battles take shape. Additionally, I sought to discover who was being represented on either side of these land-use battles. This shift in focus took into account the difficulties I faced being an outsider to the African American community and allowed me to take a more realistic approach of observing accessible exterior forces that, though on the “boundaries” of African American culture, theoretically play a role in defining it. Several basic research questions resulted from this inquiry: (1) in what arenas have changes occurred on Wadmalaw (demographics, occupational structure, land distribution and land tenure, housing, infrastructure, social services, language)? (2) Which of these changes could I document effectively? (3) How might these changes be playing a role in reshaping ways of life for the islanders? Which are the prime movers and which are secondary causal factors? (4) Have attempts to control growth on Wadmalaw contributed to the reshaping of ways of life on the island, and additionally, what groups are represented on the different sides of this battle (which is primarily being cast as a battle for land rights)? (5) What other readily observable, exterior forces are at play on the islands? These broadly stated questions were the background to the research I conducted on Wadmalaw and informed the more specific questions I asked while in the field conducting interviews. Once in the field, the basic goal of my research shifted from

attempting to understand the African American islanders' culture from an emic viewpoint to a more etic approach (understanding their culture through an outsider's lens).

In the next few chapters, I will begin to answer some of the questions posed above. In the second chapter, I will review the literature on Sea Island African American ways of life. I will also review relevant theories and my methodology, which those theories informed. In the third chapter, I will move to a more specific discussion of life on Wadmalaw Island in the 1930s. A description of island life in the 1930s will contextualize the present day changes and the land-use battles discussed in the Chapter 4. In Chapter 4, a picture of Wadmalaw as a dynamic and changing island will emerge. In this chapter I will discuss the decline of agriculture and the subsequent development of Wadmalaw Island. I will pay special attention to one recent land-use battle in particular. The focus on the relatively recent development of Wadmalaw and the battles over land-use will allow me to begin to formulate answers to at least some of the research questions I have posed above. Finally, in the fifth chapter, I will examine the effects of these changes in the landscape on the life ways of the island's African American population. In this chapter, I will revisit some of the categories from Chapter 3 in order to demonstrate changes that have occurred in ways of life on the island. An examination of present day life on Wadmalaw will allow me to draw some conclusions about how these ways of life are influenced by changes in the island's landscape.

CHAPTER 2
THE GULLAH OF SOUTH CAROLINA: A REVIEW OF THE HISTORY AND
CULTURE OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN SEA ISLANDERS

In this chapter, I will lay out the background to the research I conducted on Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina. This will include a brief review of the historical literature on the life ways of the Sea Islands' African American residents (known as the "Gullah"). After reviewing this body of literature, I will move to a discussion of the theories that informed my research. Once I have discussed these theories, I will explain the methodology that these theories informed. This chapter will serve as a foundation for the following two chapters in which I move to a more specific discussion of changes on Wadmalaw Island.

Before moving to a more detailed explanation of methods, the theories that informed these methods, and an evaluation of how these methods fared in the field, it is helpful to review the existing literature on the history and culture of South Carolina and Georgia's coastal African American residents. Many scholars believe that their history and culture is unique in comparison to the history and culture of other African Americans. For the purposes of this thesis, most of the following historical data are derived from secondary sources. The historical literature and some of the sweeping generalizations it makes are not without their problems, but a review of this literature will serve the reader well in setting up the background to changes occurring on Wadmalaw. When I move to a more specific discussion of Wadmalaw, I will examine the changes that have occurred and continue to occur there from an outsider's perspective,

concentrating more on the legal and political battles and economic growth occurring on the island rather than attempting to make generalizations about how the changes are perceived by the islanders.

A Brief History of the Gullah

The African American residents of Wadmalaw are considered by scholars to be part of a larger group of African Americans who reside on the coasts from North Carolina to Northern Florida; scholars often refer to this group of African Americans as the Gullah. This label has been bestowed on this particular group of African Americans because of their perceived ability to preserve more so-called “Africanisms” in their culture relative to other African Americans. These Africanisms are most readily observed in the language and culture of the Gullah. Here, Africanisms are defined as practices (or some form of those practices) commonly agreed upon by scholars to have originated on the continent of Africa. This definition is purposely broad because of the many different peoples represented in the African Diaspora.

Many scholars believe that the term “Gullah” may have originated in Africa, but there is disagreement as to where and how the term came into popular use. Creel (1988) points to evidence of its use as early as the 18th century in the low country, and she contends that it is probably derived from the Angola/Kongo region of Africa from whence many of the South Carolinian slaves were taken. Other scholars point to the Windward Coast (where present day Sierra Leone and Liberia lie) for the origins of the term. In the hinterlands of Liberia, a group of people referred to as the “Goulah” were a supposed source of many slaves in the South Carolina low country and some believe this may have been the source of the term Gullah (Creel 1988). Today, though it may not be possible to prove its origins, the term Gullah is widely used by scholars and residents of

the Sea Islands alike to describe the language and African American peoples of the South Carolina low country.

As anthropologists are always quick to point out, labels imposed on peoples are not without their problems (Boon 1982). The label Gullah is no exception, and, in its present day use, it is certainly a label in every sense, imposed upon the people of the Sea Islands. If one were to ask African Americans on the Sea Islands what the word “Gullah” means to them (as I often did), inevitably the responses would vary depending on a number of factors. The term “Geechee” is also often used by scholars and inhabitants of coastal areas of South Carolina to refer to the African American peoples of the low country. That said, the term Gullah is not without its merits, and for now I will continue to use it in order to pose important research questions for the purposes of this thesis.

Slavery in South Carolina

When historians speak of slavery, they are all too often very general about the history of the enslavement of Africans in America. But, Joyner (1984) points out that this portrayal is not accurate. The conditions surrounding slavery often depended on several factors. Among the factors that differentiated slave life in America was the region where enslavement took place in the United States and the type of crop being cultivated. These differences in the landscapes of slaves translated into differences in cultural practices on plantations. Consequently, slave life differed not only over geographical space, but also through time. For example slave life in the low country (a term often used to refer to the coastal areas of South Carolina) would have changed as the economy there moved away from rice and indigo based agricultural systems to a long staple cotton based agricultural system. Similarly, as Morgan (1998) has shown in his comparison of two different geographical slavery systems, slave life in the Chesapeake

Bay area would have differed significantly from slave life in the coastal regions of South Carolina.

The history of the low country slaves followed a somewhat different path from that of many African Americans. Their historical trajectory allowed them to preserve more Africanisms in their culture for longer periods of time than other African Americans. It is important to clarify the notion of “preservation” used here. Though the Gullah certainly were able to preserve many of these so-called Africanisms in their culture, it was not a static preservation. The process, like most cultural processes, was a dynamic one in which these traits were constantly being reconstituted in the daily practices of the island’s African American residents. What scholars say differentiated and continues to differentiate the Gullah from other African Americans is their ability to retain more African cultural traits in comparison to other African Americans.

I should point out here that the following review of the historical literature on the Gullah is not without flaws. Often, when writing about the history of the Sea Island’s African American populations, scholars have picked and chosen facts that suit their agendas, choosing, sometimes unconsciously, facts that better their arguments. Of course, this sort of bias is something that many scholars have been guilty of at one time or another, but in the case of the Gullah, the picture is somewhat distorted by these biases. In particular, scholars often concentrate on the slaves’ relative isolation in the low country, not allowing for variance and differences in their ways of life. The descendants of slaves on the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia are treated as a uniform group, despite the fact that their histories varied from plantation to plantation. There is also evidence that not all of the slaves were completely isolated. Slaves on the Sea Islands

surrounding Charleston would have had more opportunities to encounter external influences than slaves on more isolated Sea Islands. This warning is only to point out that the following general description of Gullah history is not fact; it is a recounting of Gullah history based on the literature that is often biased. I do not agree with all of the depictions of Gullah history and ways of life espoused below. That said, a recounting of the history of the Gullah told through the eyes of these scholars will benefit the reader by laying a foundation upon which the history of Wadmalaw can be added.

According to scholars, the preservation of African traits in Gullah culture resulted from a number of factors. These included relative geographical isolation, the type of crops being cultivated in the low country, the type of labor structure on the plantations, and the sheer number of slaves relative to whites on the islands. Another supposed factor in the preservation of Africanisms may have been the African tribal origins of the slaves in the low country. Edgar contends that many slave owners were well aware of the geographic and tribal origins of slaves they purchased and that a slave's country or region of origin and skills had a great deal to do with marketability and profit (1998:64). In the low country, many historians contend that this interest in the ethnic and regional origins of slaves can be directly attributed to the cultivation of rice on plantations. Joyner asseverates that the plantation owners' lack of experience in rice cultivation led them to seek African slaves who had experience in rice cultivation (1984). On the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia, the theory goes, slaves would have continued with many of the methods of rice farming learned on the coasts of Africa.

Some historians argue that in South Carolina, the plantation owners were also aware of the ethnic origins of their slaves and sought slaves who were perceived to have

experience in the cultivation of rice (Creel 1988; Edgar 1998). Littlefield (1981) argues that owners had a keen practical sense that dictated a judicious concern about things affecting their well-being, and the regional derivation of slaves was one of them. Edgar adds that the plantation owners “identified certain skills, physical appearance (to include tribal scarring), personality traits, and habits with particular regions of West Africa. As more Africans were imported, white Carolinians became even more knowledgeable about the countries whence slaves came” (1998:64). In the early 18th century, this knowledge led to higher concentrations of certain ethnic groups from Angola and Sierra Leone in the coastal areas of Georgia and South Carolina (Littlefield 1981). If these historians are correct, then the regional origin of the slaves could have certainly played an important role early on in their ability to preserve certain aspects of their culture.

On the continent of Africa, being from a region as big as that of the West Coast of Africa does not imply similar ethnicity and it is likely that the slaves of the low country represented a broad number of different tribal groups. Edgar supports this contention pointing to “twenty-five individual groups or peoples” that were identified in the low country’s slave population (1998:65). The common link for the slaves of the low country was neither their ethnicity nor their language; it was the similar environments from whence they were taken that the slaves had in common.

In the 18th century, the popularity of rice and indigo fueled the need for more slaves in the low country (Edgar 1998). Growing rice required large numbers of slaves and to fuel this demand slaves were being brought directly from Africa to the port of Charleston. This differed from the normal practice in which slaves were often held in the Caribbean or the West Indies before being taken on to South Carolina for sale. Edgar

contends, “By the end of the slave trade, probably 20 percent of South Carolina’s black population had come from the West Indies and the remainder [directly] from Africa” (1998:63). This is important to note because slaves directly from Africa would have been more readily identified as coming from particular regions of the continent.

It is important to note, however, that the slaves brought to South Carolina in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were by no means the first to reach the state. Early in the colonial history of South Carolina, a majority of Africans were present. According to Jones-Jackson (1987), this majority existed as early as 1708. By 1720, blacks outnumbered whites two to one in the entire state of South Carolina, and, in the low country, where crops demanded high numbers of field laborers, the African majority was estimated to be a considerable seventy percent (Edgar 1998). Further contributing to the relative isolation of slaves in the low country was the fact that many of the plantation owners were unwilling to remain near the fields in the region’s miserable summer months. Diseases such as malaria and yellow fever made the low country a hostile environment for the white landowners. Creel asserts, “tidal swamps were infested with malaria-carrying mosquitoes, and the summers were so hot and unhealthy that whites convinced themselves they could not endure such conditions” (1988:34). The plantation owners found the slaves to be somewhat immune to diseases, and they often left trusted slaves in charge of fieldwork. One white plantation owner stated, “while they [slaves] thrive and are healthy in the midst of our rice fields and hot summer sun, a white man, particularly foreigners, sink under their influence” (Joyner 1984:35). Due to the fragmented nature of the Sea Islands, the plantations were often further divided into smaller working plantations with about thirty slaves each. This created “pockets” of

slaves who may have rarely encountered whites (Edgar 1998). So, both the necessity for a large labor force and the harsh climate of the low country contributed to the early isolation of slaves in the coastal regions of South Carolina.

Historians contend that this isolation in the low country contributed to the slaves' ability to preserve more Africanisms in their everyday practices relative to other African Americans. They were not subject to the mass of European influences that other slaves in the South encountered more frequently. This, of course, did not free them of European influences, and, in fact, these influences played an important role in shaping the Gullah's ways of life. Joyner states, "It is true, as far as it goes, that newly arrived Africans were socialized into the ways the British colonists would have them behave; but it is also true that the preponderance of Africans furthered a constant renewal of African cultural patterns on the rice coast [of South Carolina]" (1998:15). Morgan adds, "The two races fought, had sex, played and prayed together. Everyday contacts across the color line were common place" (1998:437). The boundaries between the races can be described as "fluid and imprecise," but it is certainly true that behind these boundaries, unique and distinctive social forms were cultivated. In the case of the Sea Island slaves, interactions with whites were less common, and these boundaries were even less defined. So, though certain aspects of European culture were present in Gullah ways of life, the Gullah differed from other slaves in their ability to preserve more Africanisms in the face of less European influences.

Another factor scholars point to as differentiating low country slavery from slavery in other areas of the country was the direct importation of slaves into that area well into the 19th century. In that century, the production of short staple cotton, a special

type of cotton produced in the low country and renowned for its high quality, created a new, increased demand for slaves. Supplementing the increasing numbers of slaves born on plantations, the importation of Africans to South Carolina continued; this occurred despite a federal law passed in 1808 barring the importation of slaves. Traders were able to evade this law by using the cover of the many navigable rivers that permeate the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. According to Jones-Jackson, “the continued addition of Africans to communities with few, if any, Europeans and an already dense African population made possible the reinforcement and perpetuation of African traditions in these areas” (1987:9). When the new Africans arrived they were often a minority in the community, and they were forced to learn slave ways of life. While adjusting to their new surroundings, the new slaves also contributed more Africanisms to the dominant culture. Joyner explains that, at least up until the Civil War, many of the slaves were well aware of their African roots: “as late as 1860, there were still slaves on Waccamaw rice plantations [near present day Georgetown, South Carolina] who retained vivid memories of Africa” (1984:37).

With the onset of the Civil War, many of the plantation owners, fearing the invasion of Union Troops, fled the virtually indefensible Sea Islands. Slaves were left to fend for themselves. A survey of fifty-nine Combahee River, South Carolina plantations by the Freedmen’s Bureau in August of 1865 confirmed this abandonment. It found “nearly all” the plantations were abandoned by whites, but “to some extent occupied by freedmen, ‘bred and born’ on the spot” (Schwalm 1997:157).

Following the Civil War, some officials in the United States government thought that the Sea Island land should be handed over to slaves (largely as a punishment for the

plantation owners), and in 1865, General Sherman issued Field Order No. 15. The order proclaimed, “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. Johns River, Florida, are reserved and set apart for the settlement of the Negroes” (Jones-Jackson 1987:14). The decree, also known as the “Port Royal Experiment,” was the “only egalitarian land redistribution in United States history” (Edgar 1998:43).

Unfortunately for the freed slaves, that September, President Andrew Johnson nullified the order and many of the freed slaves were dispossessed of their recently acquired land (Joyner 1987). As the former landowners returned wishing to regain their property on the islands, the islands’ new landowners fought to keep the land Sherman had allotted them. Schwalm states:

On the Sea Islands, including John’s, Wadmalaw, Edisto, and James Islands, freed people held public meetings, organized commissions, appointed delegations, and formed paramilitary guards to protest the accelerating process of restoration, and to prevent white landowners from setting foot on the islands and usurping their own claims to the land. [1997:80]

Eventually, the politically powerful whites were able to regain much of their land on islands like Wadmalaw and many of the former slaves agreed or were forced to work as wage laborers and tenant farmers in the same fields they had once cultivated as slaves. Nonetheless, some blacks were able to retain their land or buy land, and today, many of the African Americans residing on the few remaining rural Sea Islands own the land where their houses stand.

In the 1890s, the rice economy of South Carolina and Georgia could not withstand the competition coming from farmers farther west in Louisiana, Arkansas, and Texas, and the rice growing in the low country soon fell by the wayside. Opala states, “By 1900, the rice plantations were all abandoned, and the fields were returning to swampland”

(1987:10). The collapsed rice market along with the declining price of cotton, led many landowners to abandon the low country in search of new opportunities. The impact on the low country's African Americans was two-fold. The immediate impact was a loss of jobs for many of the islands' African Americans, but it also meant that some of the more well off African Americans were able to purchase more land. Of course, the impact of the decline of these two crops varied depending on the island. In the following chapter, I will describe the situation on Wadmalaw, where the economy shifted in the early 20th century to one based on a different type of agriculture.

At the beginning of the 20th century, plantation houses were frequently sold to wealthy Northern industrialists who used the houses as "second homes and usually occupied them for only a few weeks or months each year" (Kovacik and Winberry 1987:108). The lack of major cash crops (which required large labor forces) on the coast of Georgia and South Carolina furthered the relative isolation of the Gullah during the years from 1890 until the 1920s. Kovacik and Winberry assert that during the years after the Civil War, urban areas in the "up country" and foothills of South Carolina began to grow, especially in and around towns like Greenville (1987:123). This interior growth, coupled with the collapse of large scale agriculture (based on rice and long staple cotton) may have meant the former slaves on the Sea Islands had less contact with whites than inland African Americans. Some scholars theorize that the shift away from cotton and rice farming allowed Sea Island African Americans to lead a lifestyle based on subsistence (Harris 2001). This is not to say that no one was coming and going; though population numbers were steady at least up into the 1940s, these numbers could be deceiving. It is probable that some of the African American islanders participated in the

Northern migrations taking place in the early 1920s, and despite the Great Depression and population numbers remaining steady, the Sea Islands were certainly not completely free of outside influences (though they may have been relative to other African Americans). In the next chapter, when I move to a discussion of life on Wadmalaw, I will further detail the agricultural system found on the Sea Islands in the early 20th century.

The 1940s brought new prosperity to South Carolina and more change to the people of the Sea Islands. Kovacik and Winberry explain: “World War II and the years following it marked a watershed in the evolution of South Carolina’s landscape equal to that of the War Between the States. Developments during the 1950s and 60s set the stage for social and economic growth that characterized the ‘New South’ of the 1970s and 1980s” (1987:133). During this period, urban areas such as Charleston experienced rapid economic growth. During this time, Charleston’s growth began to spill over to some of the Sea Islands surrounding the city. For example, James Island, which is east over the bridge from Charleston, experienced a population increase during this period, especially in its white population, which grew from 3,913 in 1940 to 27,719 in 1980 (Jones-Jackson 1987:11). The increase in populations on the islands surrounding Charleston coincided with the growth of Charleston’s “urban footprint” (the area including Charleston, defined by geographers as “urban”). The growth on these islands during this period and the factors contributing to that growth are the subject of the remainder of this thesis. In the next section, I will explain some aspects of Gullah culture that scholars consider unique to that group.

Gullah Culture

These above-mentioned historical trends reshaped the demography of the islands. It is now time to examine those aspects of Gullah ways of life that at least partially distinguish them from other African Americans. There is a fairly large corpus of literature on that topic. Scholars argue that the retention of Africanisms in Gullah culture manifests itself in a number of practices still existing on the islands. They argue that these can be observed in religious practices, family life, language, and in the everyday practices of the Gullah. Here again, as with the historical literature on the Gullah, the literature on the culture of the Gullah must be understood with a grain of salt. There are many generalizations about “Gullah culture” that do not allow for a diversity of cultures both in African American culture on the coast and on the inland. There are aspects of Gullah culture that are common to African American culture in some form throughout the rural Southeast. For example, the services I attended at Webster United Methodist were very similar to African American church services I attended in my hometown of Fort Valley Georgia. So, though it is helpful to recount what scholars point to as the uniqueness of Gullah culture, it must be understood in light of the fact that scholars often over generalize aspects of that culture to fit their arguments.

One arena which scholars often point to for evidence of Africanisms preserved in the culture of the Gullah is on the plates and in the kitchens of the Sea Islanders. Opala states, “Two traditional dishes are ‘rice and greens’ and ‘rice and okra’ are similar to Sierra Leone’s *plasas* and rice and okra soup” (1987:14). The importance of food to the Sea Islanders dates back to the days of slavery. Joyner asseverates, “Food had immense cultural and ideological significance; the choice of particular foods and particular means of preparation involved issues of crucial importance to the slaves sense of identity”

(1984:106). Today, despite the fact that rice is rarely grown in the low country, it remains a staple of low country cuisine. Seafood also remains an important staple of the Gullah diet. Oyster roasts and fish fries are still common, and community gatherings often center around these food items.

Today, fish fries and oyster roasts are sometimes used as fundraisers events for Sea Island churches. Religion is a second area of African retentions worthy of analysis. The church has always played an important role in the lives of most African Americans. The Gullah were no exception, and today, the church continues to be the focal point of many of the islanders' social activities. African American Christianity is unique in that it combined both the slaves' religious roots in Africa and the dominant European's religion (Protestantism). It is believed by many scholars that the Gullah were able to preserve more of the African aspects of their religion relative to other African Americans.

Despite the relative infrequency of encounters with whites on the Sea Islands, attempts were made to convert the islands' slaves to Christianity, often as a means to attempt to control the slaves: "Some argued that it was the duty of the planters and churchmen to convert the slaves . . . that a concerted program conducted by 'Southern men with Southern principles,' was the best insurance against slave insurrection" (Creel 1987:22). Despite these attempts, the slaves continued to exhibit agency by not wholeheartedly adopting the doctrine of the missionaries who visited the plantations; instead, they combined elements of their systems of beliefs and practices with the system they were taught. Joyner explains, "It was not God, the judge of behavior—God the master or overseer—who was the object of worship in Afro-Christianity, but a God more like African deities: God the transcendent spirit" (1984:141).

In the case of the Sea Island slaves, more agency could have been exhibited by the slaves in the formulation of what scholars believe was a idiosyncratic version of Christianity. Creel asserts:

continuity in religious songs can be found in the Sea Islands and coastal lowlands. There indeed two types of religious music among the Gullahs who adopted Christianity: those songs and hymns learned from white religious instructors and mainly Methodist in origin, and those representing the Gullah's own creativity and imagination, generally referred to as spirituals or prayer songs. [1988:203]

The singers of the spirituals used their hands and feet to keep a steady rhythm. It is believed the importance of rhythm apparent in some African tribes' use of drums had translated into the spirituals in the use of hands and feet to keep rhythm.

The use of the "Praise House" in Gullah worship is believed to have played an important role in the preservation of the Gullah's distinctive form of worship. According to Creel, the Praise Houses were erected by planters after 1840 to give slaves a place to worship and to keep them from mingling with other plantation slaves. But, they also "offered the Gullah a means of free expression" (Creel 1988:277). The Sea Islanders continued to use the Praise Houses as a gathering place during the Civil War. Creel states that "despite the fact that white Baptist churches were almost completely under black control during the war (in terms of both structure and organization), the source of power on the plantations was still in the Praise House" (1988:278). For the Gullah, the Praise Houses were not only centers of worship, they were also centers for the communities of the Sea Islands. Creel notes, "elders and members exerted great disciplinary power over plantation hands, having the right to 'turn dem outen de Pray's House if dey ain't fur walk right'" (1988:287).

Another aspect of Gullah worship that Creel identifies as having African roots is the unique form of dance known as the "shout." In shouts, the participants sing and move

in a circle while simultaneously keeping the beat with their hands and feet. Here is a description from a traveler dating to 1848:

At the Methodist prayer-meetings, they [the slaves] were permitted to move round rapidly in a ring, joining hands in token of brotherly love, presenting the right hand and then the left, in which maneuver, I am told, they sometimes contrive to take enough exercise to serve as a substitute for the dance, it being in fact a kind of spiritual boulanter. [Creel 1988:298]

Creel claims the shout and the circle dance were “a manifestation of possession trance, West African in origin and an important characteristic of the initiation process.” She associates the possession that took place in “bush schools” with the style and form of the shouts (1988:298-300), and though this theory is unsubstantiated, it is likely that the shout has some of its origins in African religions.

Another religious practice found in the low country was that of “voodoo” or “hoodoo.” Joyner states, “belief in magical shamanism—called voodoo or hoodoo in the New World—continued an underground existence outside of and hostile to the Christian tradition” (1984:144). Pinkney believes that the roots of present day “superstitions” (to use his term) he calls the “power of the root” can be found in the voodoo and hoodoo practices of the past (1998). According to Pinkney, the belief in “herbalism, spiritualism, and black magic” lasted into the 20th century, and that stories of “conjurers” of the power of the root can still be heard on the Sea Islands.

Beyond food and religion, the domain of language was yet a third focus of African retentions. One of the most frequent examples of Africanisms in Gullah culture is their language, also referred to as Gullah. Gullah is considered by most linguists to be a “creole” language. Jones-Jackson explains, “a creole is similar to the primary language (English) mainly in vocabulary and differs in features of syntax and phonology to the extent that the creole language and the primary language are unintelligible” (1987:137).

Much of the syntax and phonology in the Gullah language originated in the various tribal languages represented in the slave populations. It is important to point out here that the recognition of the Gullah as a unique group of African Americans is largely tied to the recognition of their creole language (even though the language has long been in a state “decreolization”) (Jones-Jackson 1987).

There are differing theories as to how the creole language of the Gullah came to be. Mufwene asserts that the Gullah language formed years after slavery was instituted on the Sea Islands when population numbers began to shift in favor of the slaves (1997), while Hancock suggests that the creolization may have taken place between the time the Africans were captured and the time they joined the plantations serving as a means of communication beyond “pidgin” English (1986). Pidgins are a very basic mixing of languages that do not have the rules and structures of creoles; creoles are believed to be pidgin languages before they become creoles (Katzner 1986). Pidgins become creoles when they become the primary language of their speakers (and are more than just a contact language). Whatever the origins of Gullah creole, there is little disputing its existence, and due to the dynamic nature of languages (and especially creoles), Gullah language almost surely continued to change before, during, and after slavery.

Many scholars believe that the language of the African American Sea Islanders still has many of the markers of a creole language. They point to several aspects of the language that distinguish it as such. These aspects include the consistent use of the pronoun *e* applied to both sexes; use of the preverbal marking of uninflected verbs with the particles *de*, *ben*, *bina*, and *do*; the use of the complementizer *for* to signal infinitive; and the absence of plural nouns (Jones-Jackson 1987). These aspects of African

American speech on the Sea Islands may distinguish it as a creole language, and if they do not, they certainly distinguish it as a unique dialect.

Today, linguists assert that Gullah creole is in decline and that it is in a stage that DeCamp calls “decreolization” (1971). Decreolization is the process by which a creole (Known as a “basilect”) language begins to merge with the dominant regional dialect (known as a “acrolect”). As the Gullah language encounters increasing pressures, both external and internal, in theory it has begun to merge with the regional Southern dialects. Nichols points to the need of the islanders to become more mobile as a factor contributing to the decreolization of Gullah (1976).

There are several problems with DeCamp’s theory of decreolization. Firstly, it does not allow for variation in the basilect or the acrolect. Though it is helpful to understand creole languages as existing on a continuum between these “marker” languages, there are no pure languages; all languages have different dialects and vary not only horizontally but vertically as well. Speakers of the Gullah language are usually what Mufwene (1997) calls “bidialectical.” They can speak in different dialects depending on the situation (as you or I might be able to as well). There is also likely to be variation amongst Sea Island speakers depending on both their age and the region in which they live. Another factor that needs to be considered in the language situation on the Sea Islands is the fact that there may be pressures amongst some Gullah to preserve the language. There are, no doubt, many complex factors contributing to language change on the Sea Islands, and most linguists agree that Gullah language is either disappearing or already gone. I will revisit the subject of the present day state of the language in the fifth chapter.

In the three arenas described above the Gullah are believed to have preserved more Africanisms in their culture relative to other African Americans. Though there may be some problems with many of the conclusions scholars have drawn concerning Gullah culture and language, I will not question them in this thesis. The limited time I spent in the field (three months) did not allow me enough time to gather information that would allow me to draw any sweeping conclusions about the people of Wadmalaw (not to mention *all* of the Gullah!). Instead, after reviewing contributing theory and methodology, I will shift to a description of the changes that have occurred on the Sea Islands (focusing on Wadmalaw) in the past seventy years. Hopefully, this will contribute to further studies done by qualified linguists and anthropologists alike on the impact of these studies on the islands' African American residents.

Theory and Methods

For the purposes of this thesis, I chose to concentrate on changes that have occurred in the past seventy years on Wadmalaw and the surrounding Sea Islands, with emphasis placed on the latter part of the twentieth century. There are several reasons for choosing this time period. Firstly, the past seventy years were generally a time of rapid economic growth in the United States; Charleston is no exception and growth in and around Charleston is well documented during this time. Secondly, maps and historical documents researched indicate that in the mid-thirties, Wadmalaw's primary thoroughfare, the Maybank Highway, was paved, a development that, as I shall demonstrate in later chapters, played a key role in the development of the Sea Islands surrounding Charleston; the paving of Maybank Highway coincided with the improvement of bridges and roads in the low country. Another reason for choosing these dates is that they allow me to concentrate on the more recent efforts by politicians and

some residents of the Sea Islands to control the development of the Sea Islands through an official county “growth plan,” or as the plan for Charleston county is called, through a “Unified Development Ordinance” (often referred to as the “UDO” plan). All of these factors combined with the obvious empirical advantages of studying recent changes and the time constraints inherent in attempting to conduct a thorough study in one summer, led me to choose the 1930s as a baseline state.

There are several theories that informed my research plans before, during, and after the summer I spent on Wadmalaw. Though I originally hoped to investigate issues of identity change on the island in the past seventy years, it quickly became apparent that, for the purposes of this study, both temporal constraints and the constraints that come with being an outsider to the community would have made it difficult to operationalize such a concept. Instead, once on the island, my focus turned to issues and changes that were more accessible to an outsider such as myself. This did not discourage me conducting interviews with the islanders, but it did allow me to have a more realistic goal of documenting changes on Wadmalaw that are more readily observed by the researcher. It also affected my theoretical orientation, turning me to a somewhat more material theoretical orientation, with a focus on landscape change.

“Dwelling” in the Landscape

One theorist, who offers a possible theoretical way of understanding the landscape of Wadmalaw is Heidegger (1977). He states that to build is to dwell and that the “way in which you are and I am, is dwelling” (1977:323). In short, we are all always dwelling and features present in the landscape are a part of that dwelling. In fact Heidegger tells us that these landscape features gather the four—earth and sky, divinities and mortals—into one (1977:324). That is to say the material and the ideological co-exist in a

recursive relationship and are constantly reproducing a certain reality which manifest itself in the actors' identities and in features present in the material landscape. Thus, the newly built bridges and paved highways, along with the new shopping center, and new gated communities on Wadmalaw interact with ideological meanings placed upon them by their dwellers to give form (the theory goes) to a new identity for the residents of Wadmalaw, which in turn is reflected back upon those material sites.

Heidegger's notions of dwelling are very similar to Bourdieu's *habitus* (1977). *Habitus*, according to Bourdieu, is a "socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures" (1977:76). *Habitus*, similar to Heidegger's dwelling, is constantly being reproduced and reinforced by agents' daily *practices*. This is often an unconscious reproduction that reinforces societal and cultural norms. Bourdieu points to this relationship as a sort of recursive relationship between the material and the ideological. Where Heidegger and Bourdieu's theories part is in Heidegger's focus on the material landscape as a possible factor in the reproduction of these daily norms, and it is this focus that allows the anthropologist to begin to operationalize at least parts of Heidegger's theory.

As I mentioned earlier, due to the limited nature of my data and the difficulties inherent in operationalizing such a concept, I do not plan to explore issues of identity change in this thesis. That said, Heidegger's notions of "dwelling" are still informative. One key component of Heidegger's theory is the material landscapes or "places." Basso points out that this component is all too often ignored by anthropologists, and he is critical of anthropologists for not studying what people "make of places" (1996). Basso explains, "dwelling is said to consist in the multiple vivid relationships that people

maintain with places” (1996:105). It is these relationships people have with places that Heidegger and Basso are concerned with. But, how can one begin to measure these relationships? For the purposes of this study the answer was not to attempt to understand the relationships that the Gullah of Wadmalaw have with their landscape. Instead I attempt to understand ongoing changes in that landscape from an external perspective, understanding that the ongoing changes in the landscape are likely to have *some* affect on the peoples who encounter them. Landscape from this viewpoint is a *process* in which different people are constantly creating the landscape around them by “dwelling.” Without people to encounter it, one could argue that landscape is non-existent.

In his portrayal of Scottish sheep herders, Gray’s description of how these herders encounter their landscape is also relevant (2003). The herders, who are a marginalized group in this particular case, have taken the hills that they walk through to be a part of their identity. Gray considers identity making “as a cultural process through which, in creating places in the hills and forming attachments to them, people also implicate a historicized image of themselves as people *of the Scottish Borders*” (2003:224). In other words, the people that encounter the landscape bring their own histories of that landscape to bear on their interpretation of it, and this contributes to the formation of their identity. The landscape the herders encounter does not always coincide with the landscape outsiders know either, and place names that are important to government officials may have little meaning to the herders. For the purposes of this study, Gray’s work with the Scottish sheep herders, points to the importance of understanding the history behind places and features in the landscape; an issue I address by documenting changes that have occurred in the past seventy years on Wadmalaw.

Another theory that weighed heavily in my interpretation of data is de Certeau's notions of "tactics" and "strategies" (1984). Speaking of Spanish colonizers treatment of Native Americans, he states, "Submissive, and even consenting to their subjection, the Indians nevertheless often *made of* the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind;" (1984:xiii). The Native Americans displayed agency in the face of their conquerors using what de Certeau refers to as "tactics" to counter their conquerors "strategies" against them. De Certeau sees strategies as being implemented by those who hold political power by distinguishing a place from an "environment." He states, "A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as a basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, "clienteles," "targets," or "objects" of research)" (1984:xix). "Tactics" are weapons of the marginalized who are subject to these strategies (a group he calls the "silent majority"). Tactics cannot count on a "proper" like strategies can (1984:xix).

De Certeau's notions of strategies and tactics echo much of what has been written about the history of the Gullah on the Sea Islands, and serve as an important guide to understanding externally generated "strategies" that are being implemented today on Wadmalaw in the form of zoning and planning restrictions. His definition of "space as practiced place" complements these notions of strategies and tactics and serves as the theoretical underpinning of much of what I observed in the battles over land-use occurring both on and off Wadmalaw. Again, it is not possible here to fully comprehend what tactics are being implemented by the marginalized people affected by these strategies on Wadmalaw, but the strategies are readily accessible in the forms of county

and planning commission meetings open to anyone (who has the means to get there). So, de Certeau's theories informed my investigation of the laws (and the battles being fought over those laws) that are helping shape the future of the Wadmalaw landscape.

Methodology

Theories can not only inform the development of methods before and during fieldwork, they can also aid in the interpretation of the data once gathered. Before I entered the field, a research plan was drawn up; I decided to use both qualitative and quantitative methods of data gathering. These data consisted of mainly qualitative interviews conducted with the islands' African American residents. Interviews were also conducted with other members of the community and with visitors to the community. Questions were formulated before arriving in the field realizing that the questions would change as I became more familiar with the island and its people. Quantitative data was to be collected in the form of census figures and government data. That data was supplemented by archival data found at the local libraries. In addition to the collection of data and interviews, I planned to work in the community helping out with various non-profit groups on the island.

One of the advantages of being based in a university only five hours from one's field site is that preparations for my arrival could be made through several preliminary trips. Having worked with Habitat for Humanity in Hickory, North Carolina for several years, I decided to contact Sea Islands Habitat for Humanity. Sea Islands Habitat for Humanity is located on Johns Island just across the river from Wadmalaw. They serve both Johns and Wadmalaw Islands and though many of the families participating in the program are from Wadmalaw, they build primarily on Johns Island (they have expressed interest in building on Wadmalaw, but have been unable to find suitable, affordable land).

Through Habitat I was introduced to the minister of Webster United Methodist Church, who arranged for me to stay in the old Head Start Center located next to the Webster UMC on Bears Bluff Road, Wadmalaw, where I moved in upon my arrival in May.

Once I arrived on Wadmalaw, I began setting up meetings with leaders in the community while simultaneously concentrating on archival research in the Charleston libraries. I also began attending community and Charleston County meetings on issues affecting Wadmalaw; these meetings primarily dealt with the county's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) plan, which at the time was under review by the county's planning committee. At the beginning of my fieldwork I agreed to volunteer with Habitat on Johns Island, and I spent an average of one day a week working with Habitat on Johns Island and helping them conduct a survey of sub-standard housing on Wadmalaw.

On Sundays, I attended church at Webster UMC and it was there that I informally introduced myself to the community. I also began working with Rural Mission which is a Christian mission that works on dilapidated homes on both Johns and Wadmalaw Islands. The leader of Rural Mission's construction operations was a member of the congregation at Webster and many of the volunteer groups, who came from all over the country, stayed with me in the old Head Start Center. Through Rural Mission I was able to make more contacts with local peoples on the island while working on their homes.

Another relationship I fostered was with the Wadmalaw community center. The community center hosts a number of programs for the community's older African American residents. One such program was a diabetes awareness program being sponsored by the Medical University of South Carolina in Charleston. Working with the leader of the program on Wadmalaw, I was able to conduct a number of interviews and

hold round table discussions with some of the islands older African American residents (most of whom were women). I also helped set up a free men's health clinic and participated in the Saturday "health walks" for the women of Wadmalaw (both of which provided excellent opportunities for participant-observation).

Despite all of these opportunities to work in the community, there were still challenges to be overcome in the establishment of rapport. Though these issues were foreseeable, they did change my research model somewhat once I reached the field. One example of such an obstacle involved getting people to sign the waiver form required by the University of Florida for research with human subjects. Even after attempting to explain what the waiver was for, many of the interviewees were hesitant to fill it out or did not wish to sign it at all. It would have been much easier to accomplish my field interviews had I been allowed to get a verbal consent instead. So, ironically, a piece of paper meant to explain my research and protect my informants became another hurdle to overcome in the field.

One strategy I used to overcome this obstacle was to enlist the help of local people. Many in the church and at the community center sat alongside me and acted as voices of reassurance when I conducted interviews. I also enlisted locals' help in finding people who were willing to sit down and talk. Nonetheless, communicating the purpose of my research continued to be problem, and many of the interviewees would tell me that I should "talk to so and so because he knows more about that." Again, these reactions were predictable, and I was sure to back down if the interviewee showed any signs of discomfort. That said, in many cases the discomfort and misunderstandings were overcome in the latter stages of my research, when islanders began to realize why I was

there, and by the end of my stay I had collected several interviews. However, it is important to note, that the answers to many of the questions I asked were often answers that seemed tailored to what the interviewee thought I wanted to hear.

Discouraging as the situation above may seem, the people of Wadmaw were especially kind and welcoming. This was especially true at the church services I attended and while working on projects with Rural Mission, the Community Center, and Habitat. It was usually in this participant-observer setting that I was able to interact and talk with people about island issues. In these conversations, I had two separate lines of questioning; one set for so-called community leaders, and another for people who were making no claims to be spokespeople for the community (“everyday folks”). Once on Wadmaw, I also formulated questions for many of the outsiders I encountered while working on mission projects.

When questioning general members of the community, I started by explaining the nature of my research. I explained that I was trying “to understand changes that have occurred on the island in the past 50 or so years with hopes of understanding how the island will continue to change in the future.” After this explanation, I collected the basic demographics of the interviewees; these included place of birth, age, place of employment, gender, and education level to name a few. From there, I moved on to questions that were meant to get at understanding what had changed on the island for the interviewee. These included questions about migration on and off the island, questions about changes in different arenas (education, housing, health care), and questions about their family history.

When interviewing community leaders I again explained my research and then moved on to inquire about the nature of that person's organization. Then I moved to questions about their life histories and demographics (similar to the ones described above). In these interviews, as with the interviews with general members of the community, the questions were often asked informally, and questions varied depending on the direction I felt the conversation was going. In this sense all of the interviews were somewhat qualitative, and though a tape recorder was used upon consent in some interviews, they remained relatively informal in nature.

In the early days of my time on Wadmalaw while I was conducting archival research at the Charleston County offices, my attention was turned to the ongoing review by the county planning commission of the UDO plan. This plan, as I shall demonstrate later, impacts the ways in which Wadmalaw can be developed. My interest in the issue of land-use planning on Wadmalaw led me to investigate the history of planning on the island. This issue also presented itself as something that would be more easily researched in such a short time frame. So, I began attending planning meetings on the island, and interviewing people associated with the land-use plan that was being implemented in Charleston County. Most recently, Wadmalaw has made Charleston's headlines as a battle has been fought over the development of Anchorage III a gated community on Wadmalaw. A concentration on these very public battles gave me a subject that was more appropriate for a master's level study, and a thorough documenting of these issues is one focus of the remainder of this thesis.

In the next chapter, my focus will shift to Wadmalaw in the 1930s. Building upon the literature, theories, and methods explained above, the next chapter will document

some important arenas of life on Wadmalaw in that period. From there I will move to an explanation of the changes that have occurred in those arenas and to a focus on land-use battles of the present and future. This approach will allow me to answer some of the research questions posed at the beginning of this chapter, and later allow me to draw some conclusions about the nature of these changes occurring on Wadmalaw.

CHAPTER 3 WADMALAW ISLAND IN THE 1930s

In the second chapter, utilizing mostly secondary sources, a general history of the Gullah of South Carolina was reviewed. As I pointed out then, such generalized accounts of the life-ways on the Sea Islands and coastal areas of South Carolina are not without problems. In this chapter, with these problems in mind, both primary and secondary data will be used in order to describe life on Wadmalaw in the 1930s. Of course, this description is somewhat limited by the data available. Despite these limitations, what begins to emerge is a dynamic picture of Wadmalaw in the 1930s as a place undergoing constant change. What also emerges is a picture of an island and a people that are neither completely isolated nor completely immune to external influences. Though these external influences are not directly observable, they do present themselves in the form of increased opportunities for interaction with external forces that came with the improvement of the infrastructure of the islands in the 1930s, and they foreshadow changes that would occur in the latter part of the 20th century on Wadmalaw.

In order to understand these changes, several arenas of change will be explored. These include occupational structure, racial composition, land distribution and land tenure, housing, infrastructure, and available social services. These data were taken mainly from United States Censuses of 1930 and 1940, which are only available at the county level (in this case Charleston County). That said, census data must be understood as biased dialogue and not fact; after all, census gatherers were conducting interviews (and these interviews were likely laden with biases; i.e. racial bias or bias contained in

the nature of the questions). Older maps and secondary accounts of life on Wadmalaw are also used. Finally, interviews with some of the Island's older community members will enrich our understanding of life on the island in the thirties.

Geography

Before examining the available data on Wadmalaw in the thirties, a description of the geographical landscape of the island is necessary. Measuring 43 square miles in area, Wadmalaw is one of the larger Sea Islands in Charleston County (see figure 2-1). The Sea Islands of the low country are considered islands because of the marshland, rivers and creeks that surround them; most of the islands are not far from the mainland, separated only by creeks and marshes. Wadmalaw lies about 20 miles south/southwest of Charleston and is an inland island surrounded by tidal creeks and rivers. The smallest of these creeks is Church Creek, separating Wadmalaw from Johns Island on the island's eastern edge, and it is the longtime site of a bridge connecting the two islands (the site of present day "Essau Jenkins Memorial Bridge"). The widest of these bodies of water surrounding Wadmalaw is the Edisto River which separates Wadmalaw from Edisto Island to the southwest. To the north, Wadmalaw Sound separates the Island from Yonges Island. Wadmalaw is protected from the Atlantic by the barrier islands of Kiawah and Seabrook and partially by Johns Island which wraps itself around the eastern and southeastern shores of Wadmalaw and is separated from the island by Bohicket Creek. Splitting Wadmalaw almost in half is Leadenwah Creek, a tidal creek originating to the north of Rockville off the Edisto River and an important geographical feature in the island's landscape and consequent infrastructure.

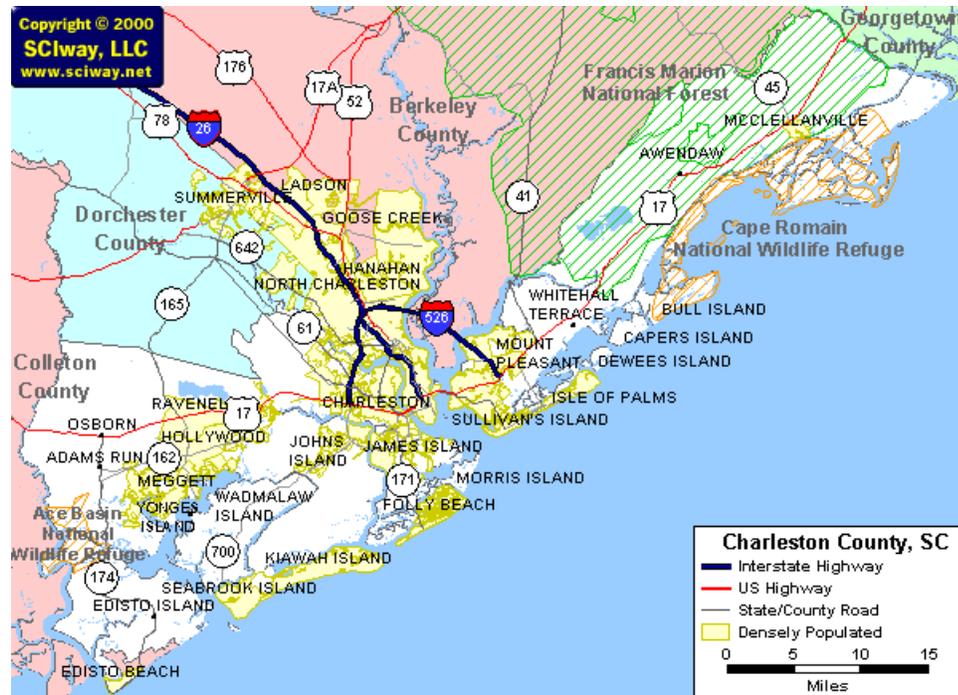


Figure 2-1. Map Showing Charleston County and Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina (SCIway, LLC 2000)

Pre-1930s Wadmalaw

According to historical and secondary accounts, Wadmalaw followed a somewhat similar historical trajectory to that of the rest of Sea Islands. As early as 1711, there were European dwellings on Wadmalaw (Frick 1992). The Island, with its numerous acres of agriculturally viable land, was desirable for settlement, and farms and plantations were set up on the island. Nonetheless, the environment of Wadmalaw remained a hostile one; in the summer months when malaria carrying mosquitoes swarmed, most of the white plantation owners were driven to the “Up-Country” of the Carolinas or to the coasts and beaches where breezes kept the mosquito swarms away. Obviously, slaves working in the fields of the Sea Islands would not have had the option of leaving (unless they escaped), and this would have contributed to their relative isolation on Wadmalaw.

Later in the 19th century, the only town on Wadmalaw, Rockville, may have been an alternative destination to the up-country and beaches for landowners wishing to escape

the harsh summers. Rockville is located on the shore of the Edisto River at the easternmost point of the island. It was there that William Seabrook, a wealthy landowner, established his ferry to Edisto Island in the early 19th century, and it was also there that many of the island's wealthy built homes. Records indicate that as early as 1824, the present-day Maybank highway was being referred to as the "High Road to Rock Landing," thus indicating the road's frequent use as a main thoroughfare (Frick 1992:26). Today, the town of Rockville remains with its houses facing the river where Main Street lay before it was washed away in an 1893 hurricane. Rockville is also the site of the yearly Rockville Regatta, which has been held on the banks of the river since 1890. The Regatta is said to bring boating enthusiasts from all over the country to the island each year around the beginning of August (Frick 1992). Rockville's status as a small town on the island seems to indicate that there was a constant presence of whites on the island even in the summer months, and despite the fact that there were never large numbers of whites on the island, they certainly represented a presence there.

Early census figures for Wadmalaw indicate black to white ratios on the island were similar to that of the rest of the low country. A 1790 census for St. Johns Colleton Parish, of which Wadmalaw was a part, reveals 585 whites and 4700 slaves. By 1850, the census reveals Africans outnumbering whites approximately eleven to one in that Parish. The 1850 census lists 132 white households, 87 planters, 12 overseers, 16 physicians, 3 blacksmiths, 2 laborers, 7 carpenters, 3 clerks, 7 clergymen, 5 storekeepers, 2 seamen and 10,332 slaves. Of the 104 farms and plantations in the Parish, 97 grew cotton and 20 grew rice, a trend that mirrors historical accounts of the low country in the mid-19th century (Frick 1992). Though the figures include other islands in the area

(Edisto and Johns), there is little reason to believe that the ratios on Wadmalaw would have been drastically different. It appears as if Wadmalaw would have experienced a large African American majority in the middle 19th century; a factor, that theoretically, could have contributed to the preservation of more Africanisms in their life ways.

The landscape of Wadmalaw and its surrounding islands is similar to that of the rest of the Sea Islands and is divided by small winding rivers and creeks, and marshes. This fragmented landscape led to a reliance on the waterways for the transportation of goods and as a means of traveling (Frick 1992). Where it was unfeasible to build bridges crossing the rivers of the Low Country, roads and paths were oriented to ferry stations, and in Charleston County roads were built in relation to the rivers. This was the case on Wadmalaw; 19th century maps of Wadmalaw indicate that the two primary roads (which remain today), Bear's Bluff Road and Maybank Highway ran parallel to the north and south banks of the island, respectively. This orientation of roads on Wadmalaw corresponds directly with the layout of the water there, with both roads running on opposite sides of Leadenwah Creek. The one road providing access to Wadmalaw is the Maybank Highway, which connects Wadmalaw to John's Island across one of the smaller waterways (and thus one of the easiest to build a bridge across). An 1820 map of Wadmalaw and the surrounding area indicates a bridge being in place at or near the same site as the Church Creek bridge today (Vignoles and Ravenel 1820). Interestingly, this 1820 map shows an additional connection to Johns Island just southeast of the current bridge near the site of the present-day private road. Bear's Bluff road splits off of Maybank Highway a few miles onto the island. Both roads dead end on the western end of the island and are divided by Leadenwah Creek to the north of Maybank and the south

of Bear's Bluff. The Edisto River at that end of the Island was too large to build a bridge across (which explains the need for Seabrook's ferry).

After the Civil War many of the freed slaves on the Sea Islands and Wadmalaw were able to obtain land for farming, and fieldwork seems to have been the primary occupation of most freedmen in the low country. For freed slaves, the process of land acquisition followed a different path in the low country than in the interior areas of the South; the freed slaves on the Sea Islands acquired land more rapidly than their counterparts on the interior. One factor scholars point to is the difference between the "task system" of slave labor on the coast and the "gang system" of labor on the interior (Hargis and Horan 1997; Harris 2001). In the task system, work was divided into units; the "days work" was a set task and not a set time as in the "gang system." According to Hargis and Horan this system may be responsible for the low country freed people's ability to obtain land so rapidly: "Low country freedmen resisted emergent capitalism and rejected the oppressive systems of sharecropping and crop lien, preferring instead to engage in domestic production" (1997:30). Harris adds, "In taking up plantation labor in the era of freedom, the former slaves insisted on sticking to the traditional task system" (2001:15). With the task system, there was more time for the farmers to tend their own crops and profit from them; this, the theory goes, either imbued them with a sense of independence or gave them the skills and capital that enabled them to purchase land earlier than their counterparts (Harris 2001).

If these historians are in fact correct, then after the Civil War most African Americans on Wadmalaw were farming. African Americans on Wadmalaw would have either worked as a laborer on someone else's land (as a tenant farmer or sharecropper) or

worked their own land. Evidence points to more tenant farming on the Sea Islands in the years after the war than on the interior (Harris 2001). African American tenant farmers on Wadmalaw could work their lessor's land, finish the "days work," and return home to tend their gardens, fish, or engage in other domestic activities. According to Harris, on the Sea Islands in Georgia, "The work lives of most of these black men and women crossed paths with planters only on the two or three days a week they worked for wages in the rice fields" (2001:26). Though the situation on Wadmalaw may have differed, it probably did not differ significantly, and it is likely that the task system allowed many African Americans there to obtain their own land for both subsistence and market farming.

In the late 19th century, white farmers on Wadmalaw began to shift away from the exclusive production of agricultural goods like long staple cotton and rice in favor of a different type of farming commonly referred to as "truck farming" (Frick 1992). Truck farming is the practice of growing vegetables for shipment to distant markets. On the Sea Islands the production of long-staple cotton and rice may have been abandoned because of a lack of willing African American laborers; African Americans on the Sea Islands preferred to produce a more diverse, less labor intensive list of crops (Harris 2001). The growth of low country truck farming was also aided by the invention of the refrigerated rail car in the late 19th century. On Wadmalaw, truck farming benefited from a new rail line that in 1892 was "run south from Ravenel and Yonges Island, where steamboats from Edisto and Wadmalaw Islands brought produce and passengers to the mainland" (Frick 1992:40). The vegetables were then transferred to other lines that would take them to markets, both near and far. On Wadmalaw, in order to transport vegetables from the farms to the rivers for loading on the boats, three railroad tram lines were built. These

ended at Martin's Point, off Bear's Bluff Road on the north side of the island, Oak Grove, on the southern bank of Leadenwah Creek, and Quiet Corner, location unknown (Frick 1992). These tram lines transported cotton (which was still grown in small amounts), cabbage, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, cucumbers, and beans from the farms to the rivers where they could be transported to the mainland trains and markets.

Another important early twentieth century invention contributing perhaps more significantly than the train lines to the changing landscape of Wadmalaw was that of the automobile. With the invention of cars came the eventual need for better and improved roadways; as the highways improved, trucks became a popular alternative to trains and boats for the transportation of perishable goods (Frick 1992). In 1917, the South Carolina State Highway Department was created with the mission of improving and building the states highways and roads. By 1925, in South Carolina alone, it is estimated that 170,000 cars were on the road (Moore 1981). As a consequence, the twenties saw a boom in the construction of roads and, where necessary, new bridges. In 1926, construction of the Wappoo Bridge crossing the Stono River between Johns and James Island created a direct road from Wadmalaw to Charleston by way of what is today called the Maybank Highway (as I mentioned previously, there was already a long standing bridge crossing Church Creek from Wadmalaw to Johns Island)(Witherspoon and Elling 1981). At the time of the Wappoo Bridge's construction, the Maybank highway was not paved, and many still made trips to Charleston from Wadmalaw, when necessary, by way of boat; the boat trip could take up to six hours each way (Mitchell 1997). Nonetheless, the invention of the automobile and the subsequent improvement and building of bridges are one marker indicating a further shift away from an occupational structure based

completely on agriculture. Both of these changes meant people eventually would have easier access to other employment options, both on and off the island.

Now that I have briefly described the history of Wadmalaw before the 1930s, I will move to a more detailed description of several different arenas of life on Wadmalaw in the thirties. This will allow me to explore changes in these arenas over the last seventy years, while laying the groundwork for understanding how these changes relate to present-day battles being fought over land-use on the island. My description of the thirties will draw primarily on census data and maps of the area, but it will also be supplemented by qualitative interviews conducted with some of the community's older residents. The census data is only broken down to the county level, but with the other sources, a picture of life on Wadmalaw in the thirties begins to emerge.

Wadmalaw in the 1930s

Wadmalaw Island in the 1930s was still very much a rural island with an economy based primarily on agriculture and truck farming, but it was also a place where changes were constantly occurring in several arenas. Though many blacks may have left the island in the African American migrations following the first World War (despite some attempts by whites to prevent this exodus), many remained and continued to farm alongside white farmers as tenants. In the thirties, Wadmalaw, like the rest of the country, was recovering from the Great Depression, and President Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration (WPA) was bringing federal money to low country projects. According to census figures, between 1930 and 1940, the black population of Wadmalaw dropped 11 percent from 1,813 to 1,607 people, while the white population remained fairly constant at around 250 people (Jones-Jackson 1987:11). These figures are difficult to interpret; there could have been errors in the sampling or people could have migrated

on and off the island. They do tell us that a black majority of at least 85 percent remained on the island. The population numbers on Wadmalaw when viewed with other data extracted from these two censuses begin to give the reader an idea of the landscape of Wadmalaw in the thirties.

One 72-year-old African American gentleman whom I interviewed while on the island, said this of his life growing up on Wadmalaw:

We were raised up on the farm. Everyone was farming [then], that was the main thing. You had small farmers and you had large farmers. And the large farmers and the small farmers we works together. This time of the year is the month of May and this is the time you'd dig white potatoes. What the large farmers would do is they'd come around and get trucks and bring them from the upstate and come and buy our potatoes first; then we'd go and help them harvest their potatoes. That's the way farming worked on the island.

For this man, farming was an important part of his childhood on Wadmalaw and was an occupation he held until he got a job with Charleston County in the mid-1950s.

In the thirties, farming and agriculture were still an important way of life for many of Charleston County's white and African American rural residents. The 1930 United States census lists 1,957 farms in the county occupying 26 percent of Charleston County's available land. An overwhelming 75 percent of these farms were African American operated (compared with 49 percent of farms in South Carolina). Despite the abundance of African American farms in the county, the average size of these farms was only around 16 acres; the average size of a white farm in Charleston County was 271 acres (a number which is probably skewed because of a few landowners who still owned plantation sized farms in the county). Of the 101,050 people listed in Charleston County in the 1930 census, 38,785 were living in "rural" areas, and 14,146 of these people lived on farms. There were 54,812 blacks listed in Charleston County in the 1930 census (University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center 1998).

What the census data do not tell us is how many of these African American farms “operators” were tenants and how many were still sharecropping. Woodman explains: “The census counted as a separate farm each unit whether operated by an owner, a tenant, or a cropper;” thus obscuring any changes in tenancy on the nation’s farms (1997:14). Another change in farming resulted from a combination of technology and New Deal farm programs. Daniel (1984) states, “as acreage reduction, federal relief programs, and mechanization in the 1930s made croppers less crucial, landlords increasingly pushed off care of tenants onto the federal government” (444). This was probably true of Wadmalaw in the thirties, too, but the African American tenant farmers of the Sea Islands were more likely to have possessed the means to continue farming because of the diversity of their crops. In other words, there is evidence that the Sea Island African Americans had the means to continue farming their own land. According to Hargis and Horan, most African American Sea Island households “tended large garden patches and grew enough corn to meet annual family and livestock needs” (1997:44).

In the 1940 census, the questions were a bit different, but the data still give us a good indication of what Charleston County may have looked like in that era. By 1940, there were still a large number of “non-white operated farms.” Out of 2,124 total operating farms (whether owned or not), 1,492 (70 percent) were “non-white” operated. The average size of white operated farms remained relatively high at around 228 acres in comparison to the average size of non-white operated farms, which was around 11 acres (University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center 1998). Again these numbers do not by any means give us the full picture; some of the farms listed were worked by share and tenant croppers, while some were operated by their owners. Also,

the average sizes could have been skewed towards the white farms because of a few large white-owned farms, but the tremendous gap between the average size of white farms and that of black farms is hard to ignore.

In interviews with some of Wadmalaw's elderly residents the importance of farming and farm work in that era was reinforced. One Saturday morning, while walking with a group of elderly African American women, they explained to me that "everyone used to work in the fields. That is what we did." These women described Wadmalaw as it was for them growing up in the thirties and forties. For them, in those years, life revolved around work in the fields. One usually either worked in their own fields, or someone else's, or, in many cases, both. Allen Mitchell, who wrote a book on Wadmalaw, recorded many interviews on the island. In one of his interviews with an elderly man, the man said this of farming: "My grandfather did share cropping and on Saturday, he worked his own land" (1996:67). Mitchell, inquiring as to why another gentleman left the island got this response: "There was nothing but farm and yard work, and I got tired of working in the fields. I picked snap beans for 25 cents a basket, white potatoes for 6 cents a bag, cut cabbage for 1.25 cents a day and 65 cents a half day. In 1951, I left the island for the first time and went to Key West, Florida..." (1996:65).

The figures from the census and the interviews give us an idea of what agriculture on Wadmalaw was like in the thirties. On Wadmalaw, it is likely that most of the African American farms were relatively small. The farming situation would have been similar to the situation that the 72-year-old man described to me: the smaller farmers would lend one another a hand in the harvesting of crops like potatoes; then trucks (brought in by white farmers) would come along and purchase their harvest. After their crops had been

purchased, they would move on to help the larger farmers harvest their crops, or if they were tenant farmers or wage laborers they might work their own fields only on the weekends. On Wadmalaw, African American farmers seemed to have assisted one another in the harvest of their smaller patches of land; farming was an activity that required the cooperation of neighbors. Therefore, the landscape many of Wadmalaw's residents would have encountered on a daily basis was primarily a local one. That is not to say that the people of Wadmalaw never left their fields; to the contrary, many of the people of Wadmalaw may have worked on Johns Island or even in the city. Further, many of the African American residents of Wadmalaw may have participated in the migrations of African Americans off the rural countryside to more urbanized areas. What we can say is that agriculture played an important role in the daily lives of many of the residents of Wadmalaw, and that is at least one major difference in the Island as it was then and as it is today.

Another facet of the encountered landscape of Wadmalaw was the configuration of the neighborhoods, schools, and churches there. In the thirties, when they weren't working in the fields, many African American children had the opportunity to attend school. Here an older interviewee describes the walk he would make from his home on Bohicket River to the all black school on Bear's Bluff Road: "When I was a boy, we had to walk to school. I'd walk three miles from where I lived to school. The school's still there next to strawberry field." Another gentleman had this to say to Mitchell: "Yes, there were schools on the island. Nine Mile School was here. Miss Sane, who lived in Charleston, was the person who came around once a month and checked on the teachers. She also checked on Johns Island. Later, schools were built in certain sections on

Wadmalaw, Rosewald School on Martin Point and one in Rockville. Everyone walked to school which was about three miles” (Mitchell 1996:67).

A 1938 map of the island reveals three black schools, Nine Mile, where the interviewee I mentioned above and Mitchell’s interviewee went to school, Rockville, Bear’s Bluff and one white school—Wadmalaw school. Despite the opportunities for education in Charleston County, in the 1940 census, only 6,600 people over the age of 25 (24 percent) (regardless of race) are listed as having completed at least one year of grade school (University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center 1998). This may have been due to the fact that, in the early 19th century, farm duties received priority over education, even for children.

The 1938 map also reveals that the African American schools were spaced evenly among the island’s present-day African American communities. The three black schools were in what can be best understood as small communities on the island. These were located near the end of Bear’s Bluff Road, near the end of Maybank Highway (just before Rockville), and at the split between Maybank and Bear’s Bluff, just over the Church Creek Bridge. The churches of the island are also located in vicinity of these schools and communities; one can speculate that many of the islanders’ activities centered around these small communities.

In terms of housing, the great differences between housing in the urban areas and rural areas of Charleston County in the thirties make it difficult to generalize about Wadmalaw housing based on the census figures (which were not separated into “rural”/“urban” categories). Despite this problem, the data is still worth mentioning. Of the 31,907 “occupied dwelling units” in Charleston County in 1940, 16,519 (52 percent)

were occupied by African Americans; a percentage which corresponds with white/black population percentages for the county. Twenty-four percent of the African American occupied dwellings were owner-occupied; this compares to 34 percent of white owner-occupied houses (University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center 1998). It is hard to say without more specific numbers whether or not these numbers would hold true for Wadmalaw, but based on interviews, these percentages are probably a low estimate of African American owner-occupied houses for the island.

All of the homeowners on the Sea Islands were not originally from the low country. In the thirties, on the Georgia Sea Islands, many wealthy Northern industrialists were building vacation homes, and in their homes many of their servants and employees were African American Sea Islanders. Harris explains: “Tourism was to become the main source of dynamism in the economy. A new highway down the coast offered the promise of siphoning off a bit of tourism money on its way to booming Florida” (2001:254). Though Wadmalaw was not immediately affected by this new tourism, the Island did not lie far from one such “highway down the coast,” U.S. Highway 17. It is likely that in the thirties, Wadmalaw, with its yearly regatta in Rockville, would have been the destination of at least some tourists and new homeowners, who would have benefited from the newly built bridges and paved roads.

So, the picture of life on Wadmalaw in the thirties that emerges from the data above is one of an island whose economy was still largely based on agriculture, and whose people’s practices probably centered around several small communities there. What may not be evident from these data is that Wadmalaw was in a very dynamic state. The Maybank Highway was being paved with federal funds, allowing some people to

become increasingly mobile. Agriculture on the Sea Islands and elsewhere was moving towards mechanization and away from a labor based system. The Sea Islands (Wadmalaw included) were increasingly viewed as a place for tourism and less as a source of agricultural products. Further, during the thirties, many people would have had opportunities to migrate on or off the island (a fact that the census data do not capture). Though most of the islanders' daily lives may have centered on the communities of Wadmalaw, the seeds of major change were being sown in the form of improved infrastructure (and possibly in the form of increased migration). In the next chapters, I'll examine some of these changes by exploring several primary and secondary causal factors that changed and continue to change the landscape that Wadmalaw's residents constantly encounter.

CHAPTER 4
FROM FARMING TO HOME PLANTATIONS: LAND GENTRIFICATION ON
WADMALAW ISLAND AND THE FIGHT TO “PRESERVE RURAL CHARACTER”

Whereas the previous chapter dealt with life on Wadmalaw in the 1930s, this chapter will deal with the changes that have occurred on the island since that time. In those years, farming has declined, roads have improved, and new “plantations” of homes have been built. These changes have important ramifications for the island’s African American population and are immediately recognizable in the changing landscape of the island. In this chapter, I will examine both primary and secondary causes of change on the island. Special emphasis will be given to the decline of farming and shift away from tenant farms. I will also focus on the attempts to control growth and sprawl on the island. These are obviously not small issues to tackle and much has been written about both. Nonetheless, examining the history of these issues as they pertain to Wadmalaw will aid the reader in understanding changes occurring there and the impact they might have on the island’s residents.

In recording the changes that have come to Wadmalaw in the past seventy years, a variety of sources will be utilized. First, historical literature on agricultural change in the United States and on land-use planning will be utilized to examine general trends in the decline of agriculture and the subsequent development of the Sea Islands. Then, interviews, newspaper articles, and field notes will be utilized to examine changes in these arenas on Wadmalaw. I will use one land-use battle in particular as an example of these changes. Finally, census data and interviews will be used as a resource to

understand the present day state of Wadmalaw. By examining the zoning laws that dictate the development (and non-development) of Wadmalaw, I hope to further the reader's understanding of African American ways of life on the island.

Agricultural Mechanization, Migration, and the Decline of Farming

Since the 1930s, changes in agricultural technology and methods, both in the low country and throughout the Southern states, have helped create a "New South" in which fewer people farm or work on farms and more people live and work in urban areas. This decline proved a primary factor in reshaping the South, and though the trajectory through which any given Southern region traversed in these changes will have locally unique elements, Wadmalaw, nonetheless, presents an excellent opportunity to study these changes and their ramifications. But before we move on to examining changes occurring in agriculture on Wadmalaw, a general account of the agricultural changes that occurred in the South is helpful and will serve as a background to the changes occurring on Wadmalaw.

Despite the invasion of the boll weevil in the 1920s, cotton was still to a large extent "king" in what was known as the "cotton belt" that stretched from the interior of South Carolina through Georgia to the Mississippi Delta (Daniel 1984). Cotton, in the first half of the century, was still extremely labor intensive, and the industry was largely dependent on sharecroppers and tenant farmers. Farmers still depended on the sharecropping system, a system that allowed farmers to receive labor without laying out a lot of cash. Many scholars have described the share-tenant labor system as peonage. The shift away from labor intensive farming and small farms resulted from a complex number of causal factors that include agricultural mechanization, migration, and federal agriculture programs (Holley 2000:142). Mechanization coincided with African

American migrations out of rural areas of the South. Federal programs provided farmers with loans that allowed them to mechanize their operations and payouts for taking parcels of their land out of production. But, the payouts went to the landlords not the tenant farmers, and it allowed some farmers to shed tenants (Holley 2000). By the middle of the century, the sharecropping and tenant based farm labor systems had collapsed. Wheat and Crown explain, “Sharecropping’s heyday was the era that ended around 1950. Then came the mechanical cotton picker, mechanized cultivation, herbicides, a shift from cotton to less labor intensive crops, mechanized tobacco, and other developments. These brought the share-tenant farm system to a rather abrupt end” (1995:170). The end of the share-tenant system was a major transition in the rural South. With the tenant-cropper system coming to an end, many left the farms for jobs in urban centers.

Accompanying the end of the share-tenant farm system in the South was the growth of large-scale agri-business. The small family farm was disappearing and many once involved in that system were seeking work in the country’s urban centers. Hurt explains that “By the late 1970s landowners rather than tenants operated most Southern farms. African American farmers had essentially vanished from the land” (2002:124). Though African American farmers probably didn’t “vanish from the land,” the African American farmer had become a rarity by the end of the twentieth century, as had the small farmer. The shift away from smaller farms was largely the result of improved agricultural technology. The larger farmers could afford the new technology, and, aided by government assistance, their production rates far outpaced those of smaller farmers.

On Wadmalaw, the shift away from labor intensive crops and tenant farming seems to have followed the general trends described in the South. Between the 1940 and

1950 censuses, the number of tenant farmers listed in Charleston County dropped from 419 (19.7 percent of farm operators) to 130 (11.6 percent of farm operators), while the number of “non-white farms” dropped from around 1,500 to 900 during that same time period (University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data 1998). In Charleston County, the shift was away from a system largely based on tenants to one that depended more on farm equipment. These data also seem to indicate a consolidation of agricultural land into fewer hands (and in fact the average size of farms grew from 78.4 acres to 92.5 acres in that same period).

That said, the path of farming on Wadmalaw would have differed from the general trends that occurred in the South in at least one significant area. The farms of the low country were based on the truck farming system with its multiplicity of crops not on a system that depended on one or two primary crops (like much of the rest of the South). Cotton farming and rice farming had been abandoned by many Sea Island farmers at the turn of the century in favor of this type of farming. Many scholars point to a number of factors influencing this shift. Most agree that the growth of the rice and cotton industries in the Mississippi Delta region made it less profitable for farmers to continue growing these crops on the Sea Islands. Though mechanization and a loss of laborers certainly occurred on the islands, the emphasis on vegetable farming maintained a need for seasonal workers; a need that in the last twenty years has been partially filled by migrant workers. Nonetheless, the trend in the low country and on Wadmalaw still seems to have been towards larger consolidated farms, and the farm land on Wadmalaw was increasingly in the hands of fewer farmers.

One factor that scholars point to as playing a role in the consolidation of the land was the migration of many African Americans out of the rural South. Daniel states, “Historians still argue whether machines pushed people off land or simply replaced a population that had already fled in anticipation” (1984:448). The most likely scenario is that it was a reciprocal cause/effect relationship in which both migration off the land and mechanization both contributed to a consolidation of farmland into the hands of a few white farmers. The direction of the causal arrow can be argued, but not the fact of emigration itself; I interviewed several African Americans on Wadmalaw whose parents and relatives had participated in this emigration. One gentleman I interviewed spent the first 33 years of his life in New York, where his parents had migrated near the middle of the century. He returned to Wadmalaw in the early eighties to take care of an ailing family member. Other interviewees explained that there were many people they knew who had left the island in the past, either to find work in Charleston or to find work further north in cities like New York. In fact several of the people whom I interviewed had spent time living in New York and had recently returning to live on family land. Others whom I interviewed had spent time in the military before returning to Wadmalaw. Almost all of the people that I interviewed who had returned from the North said their grandparents or parents farmed before leaving the island. These movements of people off the island may have contributed to the changing methods of farming occurring there, and at the very least they contributed to Wadmalaw being a place of constant and dynamic change.

In addition to migration, another factor that may have contributed to the decline of African American farming on the Sea Islands was the problems associated with what is

known as heirs' property. Essentially, heir's property is land which has no clear title. Often, this land is owned primarily by African Americans who originally purchased or were deeded land following emancipation. With heirs' property, there is usually not a will and the land is shared equally by all identified descendants. This arrangement, which effectively gave each family member equal property rights, did not determine how responsibility for the land should be divided. A lawyer whom I interviewed explained to me, "If one of say 50-60 'tenants in common' decides they would like to collect on their piece of the land by selling, they can sue and force the sale of the land. This can happen even if the tenant in common suing has not been living on or taking care of the land which he or she wishes to collect on." These types of land battles could have contributed to the decline of African American farming by forcing those farming the land to divide and sell their land. Beauford asserts that, "...unclear titles associated with heir property continue to be a major factor in the loss of farmland by blacks" (1986:33).

Today, this collectively owned heirs' property continues to be a problem on the islands and still contributes to the loss of land amongst African Americans on the islands. One member of the community explained it this way:

Thing about it, the law is changing. The older people got heirs' property; they figured that is permanent. Used to be can't nobody sell it unless everyone agree, but that days is gone. Now one person can sell their portion; that one person can mess up the whole rest of 'em. Thing about it that the law is changing. But heirs' property no good anymore. What trying to do the family come together and give everybody their portion and if they can't give everybody pass it to the next person. Working on it gradually, a few have done it.

So, though efforts are being made to get families to agree on a will so that the land can stay in the hands of its heirs, heirs' property remains a problem for many African American land holders.

Heirs' property has contributed to the loss of land among African Americans. This loss of land when combined with the move away from labor intensive farming has effects that are visible in the landscape of Wadmalaw today. As one drives across the island, one can see fields that lie fallow; the Sunny Point tomato packing shed is permanently closed and the houses that once were the homes of seasonal migrant workers stand abandoned. One resident who used to work with the migrant workers in an outreach program remarked to me that the migrant working season has gotten significantly shorter in the past twenty years as less and less people were planting on the island. She observed that "twenty-two years ago the season lasted almost twelve months; last year it was about five and a half months." Many of the (mostly white) farmers of Wadmalaw have decided to quit farming and sell their land for development; it is this move from mechanized large scale farming to the abandonment of farming in favor of development that is a major factor in the shaping of Wadmalaw's landscape today. For the farmers who are selling their land for development, the numbers make sense; there is little financial incentive to continue farming.

The census numbers confirm this decline in agriculture and change in occupations on Wadmalaw. Of the 2,611 people listed as living on Wadmalaw in the 2000 United States Census, only 49 (or 5 percent of the employed population) held occupations listed as "farming, fishing, or forestry," and though 3.8 percent of those employed still said they walked to work, an overwhelming 94 percent of those employed commuted by way of automobile. The average commute for these people was 34.1 minutes (U. S. Census Bureau, Census 2000). One factor in the average commuting time of the employed of Wadmalaw is the influx of middle class and wealthy new homeowners who commute

from the “exurbs” to their jobs in Charleston. Exurb is a word used by planners to describe the recent move of the highest end houses beyond the suburbs to the outermost edges of what is considered urban; their residents often make commutes of more than an hour each day (Blakely and Snyder 1997). But, the upper and middle class are not the only ones making long commutes to work; one person whom I interviewed described family members commuting thirty-five to forty minutes to jobs in the service industry. In the next section, I will address an issue that is closely connected to the decline of farming and the rise of a commuter work force on Wadmalaw, that of economic development and land-use planning.

Land-Use Planning and Gated Communities

In the following sections, I will address another primary factor in changes occurring on the island, the issue of land-use on Wadmalaw. First, I will examine the general history of land-use planning and gated communities in the United States; then, I will examine their history on Wadmalaw, exploring what land-use plans might mean for African American housing on the island and how these plans are intimately linked to the decline of farming. Finally, I will look at a recent land-use battle that has occurred on Wadmalaw over a gated community. When I examine the ongoing battle over the development on Wadmalaw, I will bring in dialogue on the issue from newspaper articles, planning committee meetings, and interviews. A thorough look at the issue of land-use planning on Wadmalaw will serve to better the reader’s understanding of changes occurring in the life-ways of African Americans on Wadmalaw; it will also serve to further the reader’s understanding of the ramifications of urban sprawl for all of the low country.

Though the decline of farming on the Sea Islands has proved a primary factor in other changes occurring on the Sea Islands, it has also led to attempts to control the nature of the direction of these changes occurring on the island. These attempts to control and manage growth are manifest in the planning committees on Wadmalaw and in Charleston County and in the comprehensive plans and zoning regulations of Charleston County. One of the primary goals of these committees has been to preserve the “rural character” of the island with its agriculturally based economy. Though the idea of preserving “rural character” may sound idealistic, when it is written into zoning laws, it has real implications for the way Wadmalaw and the rest of the low country will continue to grow. As one elderly resident exclaimed to me when I inquired about issues that concern him most: “It’s the land!”

American attempts to control and regulate the ways in which cities grow are not new. Their roots are found in the city plans of Europe; Colonizers brought these ideas with them to the New World and incorporated into their plans for new cities. Williams argues that, despite the present-day chaotic appearance of some of our city’s layouts, “much of the early development of colonial North America was surprisingly orderly, with street grids, open public spaces, public buildings, and market places” (2000:3). According to Williams, after the American Revolution, counties and cities were given more authority (than the state) to administer land-use policies. This authority was badly handled or not exercised at all, and what resulted were cities with no clear authority to control or direct the development of land within and beyond their boundaries. Because there was easy money to be had in quick land speculation and sales, cities grew somewhat chaotically, without regard to the functions of neighborhoods. With the

Industrial Revolution, people realized that this uncontrolled growth could be harmful to the population, and a backlash against uncontrolled growth occurred. It was this backlash that would eventually lead to urban and land-use planning. In the last two decades of the 19th century, cities began to adopt building codes. Williams states, “Their intention was to use the power of regulation to delimit the locations of industrial, commercial, and residential land-uses to pre-designated zones” (2000:4).

The frequent designations of these zones were not without their court challenges. In many cases people complained that these designations reduced the value of their property and thus infringed on their private property rights. In 1926, the United States Supreme Court upheld the legality of these zones in the *Village of Euclid v. Amber Realty* (272 U.S. 365 [1926]). Here is an excerpt from the opinion of the court delivered by Justice Sutherland:

Building zone laws are of modern origin. They began in this country about 25 years ago. Until recent years, urban life was comparatively simple; but, with the great increase and concentration of population, problems have developed, and constantly are developing, which require, and will continue to require, additional restrictions in respect of the use and occupation of private lands in 387 urban communities. Regulations, the wisdom, necessity, and validity of which, as applied to existing conditions, are so apparent that they are now uniformly sustained, a century ago, or even half a century ago, probably would have been rejected as arbitrary and oppressive. Such regulations are sustained, under the complex conditions of our day, for reasons analogous to those which justify traffic regulations, which, before the advent of automobiles and rapid transit street railways, would have been condemned as fatally arbitrary and unreasonable. And in this there is no inconsistency, for, while the meaning of constitutional guaranties never varies, the scope of their application must expand or contract to meet the new and different conditions which are constantly coming within the field of their operation. In a changing world it is impossible that it should be otherwise. But although a degree of elasticity is thus imparted, not to the meaning, but to the application of constitutional principles, statutes and ordinances, which, after giving due weight to the new conditions, are found clearly not to conform to the Constitution, of course, must fall.

The court's stamp of approval meant that zoning laws would continue to play an important (if not commanding) role in the ways U. S. cities would grow in the 20th century. Cities were divided into residential, industrial, commercial, and agricultural zones; these zones were further sub-divided, thus limiting where and what type of buildings could be erected.

The phenomena of "sprawl" and suburban developments owe much of their existence to the implementation of zoning ordinances. As cities and urban areas continued to grow throughout the twentieth century, middle-class, and upper-class residents of these cities increasingly looked for homes on the outer limits of the cities. In order to avoid zoning restrictions developers would build new subdivisions on the outskirts of the city limits. Industry soon caught on as well and began developing factories farther and farther from city centers, aided by the new roads that were built in the middle of the 20th century.

As the phenomena of sprawl became the norm, what resulted was a form of both racial and class segregation. In some occasions this was blatantly written into zoning laws. Williams states, "Minimum lot requirements of one-half to one acre or more; minimum floor areas that would preclude less than substantial construction; and prohibitions on an array of multifamily housing that would effectively deny entry to any who could not afford to purchase a detached, single family residence" (2000:7). Though these requirements may not always have been created with the explicit intent to racially segregate, their real effect was to produce class segregation. Furthermore, some deeds contained restrictive covenants that would not allow the deed to be signed over to African

Americans (Williams 2000). Both overt and covert forms of segregation meant that the new suburbs were dominated by white, middle and upper-class people.

In the seventies, housing advocacy groups recognized the segregationist nature of some zoning laws and tested their legality in court. One ruling in particular addressed this issue; in the *Village of Arlington Heights v. Metropolitan Housing Development Corp.* (429 U.S. 252 [1977]) the United States Supreme Court ruled that a denial by the Village of Arlington Heights (near Chicago) to rezone a neighborhood for multi-family housing, (which meant, in theory, that the largely white Arlington Heights would become integrated), was not in violation of the 14th Amendment. In its decision, the court made it clear that the ends in this case did not always indicate the means; in other words, the fact that the zoning law in this case might disproportionately affect minorities did not alone constitute a violation of the 14th amendment; in order to constitute a violation of the amendment, intent had to be proved. This decision laid the burden of proof on those minority groups represented in cases such as this one, and it has increasingly proved a difficult standard to meet. What has resulted is a pattern in which largely white middle-class and upper class neighborhoods continue to move farther and farther from city centers.

Another contentious issue embedded in zoning laws is that of private property rights (as we shall see with the *Wadmalaw* case). Although some argue that the need to preserve the environment or the need to address problems that come with greater densities of people (as Justice Sutherland essentially said in 1926) warrant restrictive zoning laws, others argue that the laws amount to what is known as a “taking.” A taking occurs when a zoning law is deemed to be denying a property owner access to the

original economic potential of a piece of property, thus rendering the property valueless. In 1992, the United States Supreme Court heard a case that dealt with this very issue. In *Lucas v. South Carolina Coastal Council* (505 U.S. 1003 [1992]), the Court decided in favor of a property owner who had purchased land on the coast of South Carolina near Charleston. The owner had hoped to build on the land, but new zoning restrictions forbade him from doing so; he sued, arguing that the zoning law amounted to a “taking” of his private property. The opinion was delivered by Justice Scalia, who said, “We think, in short, that there are good reasons for our frequently expressed belief that when the owner of real property has been called upon to sacrifice *all* economically beneficial uses in the name of the common good, that is, to leave his property economically idle, he has suffered a taking.” The court case brought to light some of the problems inherent in attempts to balance property rights with zoning laws meant to protect the “common good.”

The general pattern of growth occurring in the Nation’s urban centers as a result of these zoning laws is commonly referred to as “sprawl.” Again, to quote Williams, “This has taken shape in the form of low density housing subdivisions, office parks, and commercial strip and mall development and has led to more cars on inadequate roads, increased utility costs, the decline of once vibrant, inner cities, and the loss of a sense of community” (2000:xi). It is obvious from Williams’ quote that there is much emotion attached to the issue of sprawl and land-use, and if as he claims, there is a “loss of a sense of community” it is certainly an issue that deserves the attention of anthropologists.

Closely related to the issue of sprawl is the growth of gated communities in the United States. Gated communities are essentially neighborhoods with limited access.

They are referred to as gated communities because many of the neighborhoods are accessed through gates that either require a code or compel the driver to receive access from a security guard stationed outside the gate. Originally, the majority of these gated communities were retirement or resort communities, but recently the phenomenon has spread, replacing suburban homes as the ideal living standard in America (Blakely and Snyder 1997). The communities are often planned unit developments that basically sidestep zoning laws by exhibiting that they are in compliance with the “spirit” of the city or county’s comprehensive plan. Blakely and Snyder gave this evaluation of the spread of gated communities:

The phenomenon of walled cities and gated communities is a dramatic manifestation of a new fortress mentality growing in America. Gates, fences, and private security guards, like exclusionary land-use policies, development regulations, and an assortment of other planning tools, are means of control, used to restrict or limit access to residential, commercial, and public spaces. [1997:1-2]

It is this element of control that may make the gated communities so desirable to buyers.

Blakely and Snyder go on to explain that in polls of community members, an overwhelming majority listed security as a major reason for purchasing a home in a gated community.

Many gated communities also use homeowners’ associations as a way to further their control over the streets and property contained within that community. The significance of these homeowners’ associations to society in general should not be underestimated. As private entities, the associations increasingly take services once considered public and privatize them. Blakely and Snyder assert: “With the spread of homeowners’ associations more and more Americans can set their own taxes in the form of assessments, use them for services they choose, and restrict those benefits to themselves and their immediate neighbors” (1997:25). Blakely and Snyder go on to

describe this as a form of “civic secession” and though they point out that the gated communities themselves do not cause this trend of civic secession, they do, in the authors’ opinions reflect larger processes at play in our society. In their view, the gated communities represent “yet another barrier to interaction among peoples of different races, cultures, and classes, and may add to the problem of building social networks” (1997:153). If, in fact, Blakely and Snyder are correct in their interpretation of these gated communities then their theories should hold up in the low country, where there happens to be an abundance of gated communities; there is also a recent history of planning and zoning in Charleston County and on Wadmalaw. In the next section, I will examine both of these issues and their importance to the Island of Wadmalaw and its people.

Planning Wadmalaw’s Future

Much has changed on Wadmalaw since the 1930s. Today, all of the main roads are paved and many of the side roads are paved as well. The commute to Charleston, which took as long as an hour and a half in the 1950s (Martin 1954), now takes only about a half hour, and with the completion of the new Stono River Bridge between Johns Island and James Island on the Maybank Highway, the commute may take even less time. The islands around Wadmalaw have become increasingly urbanized, and with this transformation, the roads have been widened and the drawbridges have been replaced by larger bridges that allow cars to cross without stopping for boats (see figure 3-1). Instead of working on farms, most of the population of Wadmalaw now commutes to non-agricultural jobs. Rather than walking to the nearby corner store, for most, it is now necessary to find a way across the bridge to Johns Island where a new shopping center dominated by a large Piggly Wiggly has stood since 1988. One resident of the island told

me, “Take for instance Johns Island and the corner where the Piggly Wiggly is; anybody who left and came back wouldn’t recognize that corner.”



Figure 3-1. The new and old Stono River Bridges connecting James and Johns Islands, South Carolina.

The pattern and the rate of growth (in the form of new houses and developments) on Wadmalaw has not been as marked as the growth on the surrounding islands. One factor in the island’s relatively slow rate of development is the planning and zoning laws that exist in the county. In an interview with one of Wadmalaw’s relatively new residents, who is also a Charleston lawyer, he explained some of the reasons Wadmalaw’s growth has been controlled. According to him, many of the island’s newer, white residents got what he called “drawbridge syndrome;” these new residents wanted to build their new homes on the island and “pull up the drawbridge,” not allowing anyone else to build there. To facilitate the preservation of the island’s “rural” and “agricultural

feel” the island’s community leaders formed the Wadmalaw Planning Committee in 1988. The committee made efforts to include both minority and the newer residents’ interests in shaping a growth plan for the island, and the committee does have representatives on its board from both the African American and white communities on the island. Nonetheless, he did not think some of the islands African American residents necessarily cared how the island grew.

The Wadmalaw Planning Committee took their requests and concerns about growth to the body that was responsible for land-use laws on the island, the Charleston County Planning Committee. Though zoning laws had long been in place in the City of Charleston, the Charleston Planning Committee had only been formed five years before the Wadmalaw Planning Committee. The committee was formed by the County Commission in response to the rapid economic development occurring in Charleston County.

One of the jobs of the Charleston County Planning Committee was to formulate what is known as a “comprehensive plan” for the county. In the 1990s the state of South Carolina, recognizing the problems of sprawl, required all of its counties to formulate such a plan. Williams explains that comprehensive plans “can determine exactly what kind of growth a community desires, how it’s to be paid for and whence it should be located” (2000:18). The Charleston Planning Committee adopted a comprehensive plan in 1999. The plan commonly known as the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) in conjunction with the county’s Zoning and Land Development Regulation divided the entire county into development zones (Graham 2003). The plan drew imaginary lines throughout the county designating some areas as urban and others as rural. According to

the *Charleston Post and Courier*, the distinction between suburban and rural zoning sometimes split properties “right down the middle” (Graham 2003).

The plan, of course, was not without its critics on both sides of the issue (those who were worried about their property rights and those who were for restrictions on growth). When I arrived on Wadmalaw in May of 2003, the plan was up for review before the planning committee. I listened in on arguments at the public planning meetings. It should be noted here that, though the meetings were supposedly public, it struck me that the meeting was being held at two in the afternoon on a Monday in North Charleston. Both the time and the place of the meeting seemed to indicate that the committee would rather not receive public input (at least not at this particular meeting). Nonetheless, they did open up the floor to the few people who made the trip to the meeting.

One gentleman complained that the plan did not take into account the needs of the “rural poor and middle-class.” An African American gentleman whom I interviewed on Wadmalaw said this of the plan, “I don’t have too much of a problem as of yet. But they want you to put a house on one acre of land,” then pointing to an empty lot where a house once stood he lamented, “but I can’t build on that land because it’s not an acre.” Another African American resident of Wadmalaw had this to say of the plan: “I don’t particularly care for the plans the county may have for us and when we look at Hilton Head and Bluffton, we don’t want that happening to us. The land issues, as far as Charleston County wanting to develop or make us a carbon copy of somebody else, I’m really concerned with.” For this resident, the county’s plan meant that the island might be

developed into a low-density resort island like the resort community of Hilton Head, South Carolina.

In the county's review of the plan, few changes were recommended in the zoning of Wadmalaw. Most of the island is zoned as either what is known as AG-15 or AG-8 (see figure 3-2). These designations are agricultural zoning designations; the number represents the density. AG-15 means one house can be built on fifteen acres; AG-8 means one house can be built on eight acres, and so on. These zoning designations are meant to help preserve the island's "rural character." Agricultural zoning designations are one type of two tools used by planners to preserve farmland that gives places their "rural character." Agricultural zoning designations provide a "disincentive" for developers because of the high costs and low returns associated with building on such large lots (Williams 2000). The other method involves giving farmers some sort of incentive *not* to develop their land; one example of this type of method would be a farmer receiving a tax incentive to keep his land in agricultural production.

For the mostly white farmers of Wadmalaw, the incentives and disincentives may not be enough to keep them from developing their land. Most of the large landowners on the island are farmers or former farmers. The land these farmers own is often ideal for development. The fields, when taken out of agricultural production, are already cleared and usually shed water well, thus eliminating two major costs of development: land clearing and grading. Williams points out that "the amount of profit to be gained by farmers selling off their lands is well above what prevailing commodity prices offer, should the land remain in agricultural use" (2000:13). In Charleston County, Wadmalaw is one of the few places near the coast that remains largely undeveloped; this makes it a

tempting target for the development of new residential neighborhoods. The farmers insist that it is their right to develop their land as long as they do it in good faith. For them anything short of being allowed to develop their land amounts to a government “taking” of their land. It is this issue that is at the center of a current land-use battle over the expansion of a new Wadmalaw gated community.



Figure 3-2. Wadmalaw Island zoning. The darker green areas are zoned AG-15 and the lighter green areas are zoned AG-8 (County of Charleston 2001).

Wadmalaw's New Plantation

An examination of estimated home prices on Wadmalaw reveals a divide between high valued homes and low valued homes. While helping Habitat for Humanity conduct an unscientific survey of sub-standard homes (looking only at homes with a tax value of less than \$25,000), I noticed that this divide also seemed to be along racial lines. In the 2000 census, of 527 owner-occupied homes on Wadmalaw, 303 (or 47.5 percent) of the

houses were valued at less than \$99,999. This compares with 169 owner-occupied homes (or 32.1 percent) that are valued at \$200,000 or more (U. S. Census Bureau, Census 2000) These numbers display a gap between high and low valued homes, and reflect the influx of new high end homes built on the island in the past 15 years. The new houses being built on Wadmalaw are being sold as second, country homes and as “exurb” housing for commuters to Charleston. One such exurbia neighborhood on Wadmalaw is the gated community of Anchorage Plantation on the Maybank Highway. Developers’ plans to expand Anchorage have recently received the ire of many citizens in a very publicized land-use battle.

Though most of Wadmalaw is zoned agriculturally, the comprehensive plan allows for something called “planned developments.” The proposed Anchorage III development on Wadmalaw is such a development. These developments, according to the land-use plan, are meant to allow “more flexibility than base zoning districts,” promoting:

- (A) Greater choice in the type of environment and living units available to the public;
- (B) More open space;
- (C) A creative approach to the use of land and related physical development;
- (D) An efficient use of land resulting in smaller networks of utilities and streets and thereby lower housing costs; and
- (E) Implementation of the *Comprehensive Plan*. [County of Charleston 2001:3.9]

To receive approval of what is effectively a rezoning the developers must go through several stages and receive a stamp of approval from both the County Planning Committee and the County Council. The law also requires that there be at least one well advertised public hearing on the matter.

From the outset, the new development of the 747-acre tract on Wadmalaw has come under fire (see figure 3-3). The new development, which allows for 107 units (or homes) would cover about 380 acres; this would be in addition to the older Anchorage

Plantation which encompasses 200 acres with 70 housing units. Most of the critics of the plan are environmentalists and newer homeowners on Wadmalaw who feel that the development violates the spirit of the county comprehensive plan. Recently on a return trip to the island, I noticed a letter addressed to the island's residents in the lobby of New Webster United Methodist. The letter was from the South Carolina Coastal League, and it was calling on the people of the island to attend a public forum on the proposed development of Anchorage III. It said that the planned development is "in complete contradiction of the Charleston County Comprehensive Plan, and the Charleston County land development regulations for Wadmalaw." The *Charleston Post and Courier* has also been a vocal critic; in one of several editorials run in that paper on the subject of planned developments, they assert:

What constitutes the public benefit of a Planned Unit Development needs to be more thoroughly described so that the public, and council, can determine if the public is truly the beneficiary. A credible case for the designation has yet to be made for either of the island proposals cited. Council needs to back off considering these requests until it examines the PUD criteria and the manner in which the public benefit requirements are being applied. [Editorial 2004]

The editorial which references both the planned development on Wadmalaw and one pending on nearby Edisto island, claims that the planned developments should be more thoroughly reviewed and less hastily approved.

Of course the landowner in the battle over Anchorage III has a much different view. He wants the right to develop his property and collect on its value. In his opinion, not allowing him to do so amounts to a "taking" of his property. In fact, the landowner may be right. In approval of the planned development, he seems to have followed the letter of the law even though the development calls for densities of one house per acre. The problem, if there is one, seems to be in the lettering of the law, which is somewhat

vague in defining how a planned development must demonstrate it does not violate the county's comprehensive plan.

Historically, counties have been in favor of growth and development (Blakely and Snyder 1997), and this comprehensive plan with its loopholes reflects that bias. It should also be noted that many of the members of the planning committee were wealthy landowners in the county, who stood to benefit from these loopholes. Furthermore, though he removed himself from the hearings, the landowner in the Anchorage III planned development is a member of the county planning committee, who is said to hold much political sway in Charleston County. So, the end result, much to the dismay of environmentalists and some islanders, is that the gated community of Anchorage III will likely be built with the county's stamp of approval.



Figure 3-3. Sign on Maybank Highway, Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, protesting the impending approval of a new planned development.

With the impending approval of Anchorage III, Wadmalaw's landscape will continue to change. It seems as if the wave of growth occurring in Charleston County may be impossible to curtail; this despite planning and zoning laws meant to preserve the island's rural character. New developments like Anchorage may clear the way for city water to be piped over to the island (most homes are currently using well water); something that would make it easier for the island to be further developed. Nonetheless, there are important points that can be gleaned from the battle over Anchorage III, and these may have important implications for the island's longtime African American residents.

Wadmalaw's Future

In observing the battle over the development of Anchorage III on Wadmalaw, several points stood out. Firstly, the development of Anchorage did not seem to be a primary concern of many of the African American islanders whom I interviewed. One African American islander remarked to me, "I'm for progress; if people move on the island, I think its for the best. I don't want things to be like it was twenty years ago. Even though taxes go up I think it be easier for the average person." Other African American islanders with whom I spoke welcomed the idea of city water coming to the island. This may be in part because of the high densities associated with African American property on the island; when so many water wells are concentrated on a small piece of property, the quality and quantity of water often deteriorates. Interestingly, most of those publicly voicing opposition to the proposal were local environmentalists and new residents of the island. The voice of the island's African Americans seemed largely absent from the battle.

Another observation I took away from this battle was that the development of Wadmalaw seems almost inevitable. A study sponsored by the Strom Thurmond Institute for Public Policy, estimates that much of the island of Wadmalaw will become urbanized by the year 2030 (see figure 3-4) (Passmore, Campbell, and Allen 1997). Though the study was conducted before the implementation of the county's comprehensive plan, the case of Anchorage Plantation demonstrates the limits of the plan. The money to be gained by developing large rural tracts on Wadmalaw may prove the deciding factor in the future of the island's development.

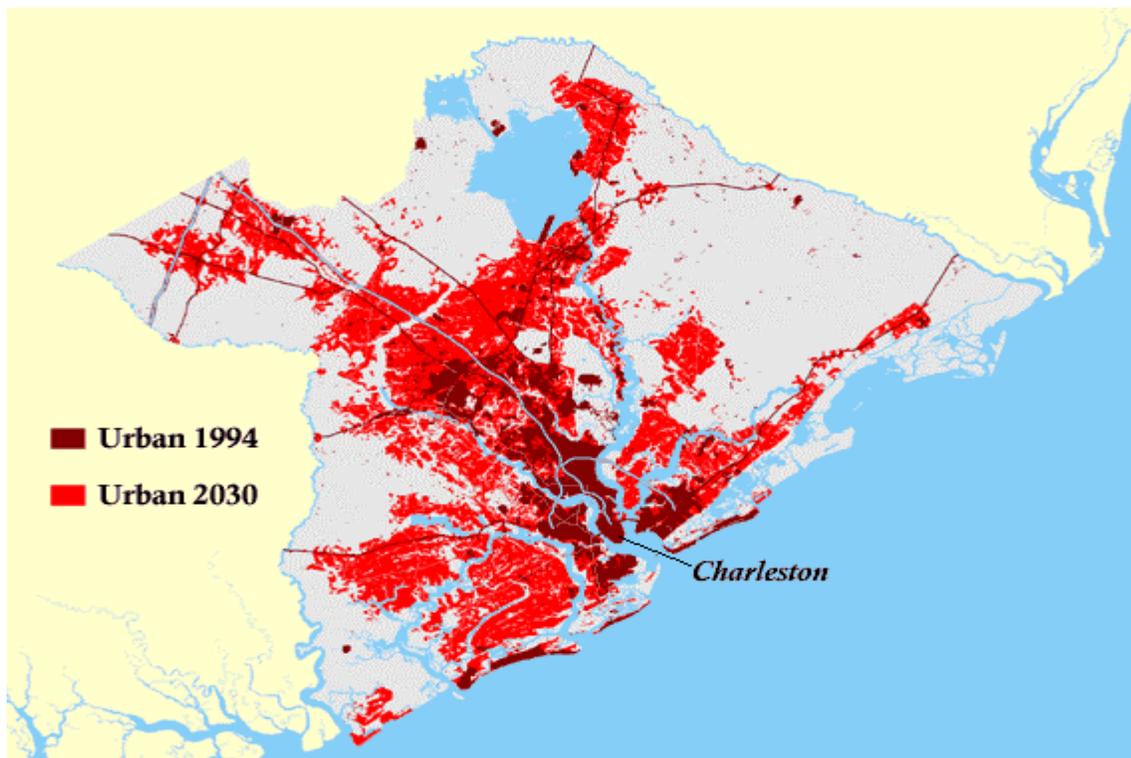


Figure 3-4. An estimate of the growth of metropolitan Charleston urban area (Passmore, Campbell, and Allen 1997).

The development of these rural tracts seems to follow a similar pattern of segregation described by Blakely and Snyder (1997), in which the poor and the rich continue to live in separate neighborhoods. But, in some respects the situation on

Wadmalaw does not resemble their description. Though the whites and African Americans on Wadmalaw often live in different neighborhoods, they are constantly interacting with one another. These interactions may occur at the grocery store or when a laborer comes to clean a house in Anchorage. The fact is, though segregation exists in some areas of daily life, it does not exist in all areas and is by no means absolute.

In this chapter, I have examined changes occurring on Wadmalaw Island in the past seventy years, emphasizing those changes that are most readily recognizable—changes in the landscape. By documenting the decline of farming and the subsequent development of the island, I hope to have revealed two possible primary factors in how the island's longtime African American residents go about their daily practices. What also begins to come into focus is a picture of Wadmalaw's future, and whatever that future may be, changes in the landscape will certainly continue to be a primary factor in shaping peoples lives there. Now that I have described several major forces of change on the island, I will move to an examination of the possible effects of these changes on the state of African American life on the island today.

CHAPTER 5 AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE ON WADMALAW ISLAND TODAY

In the previous chapter, I examined two major factors dictating change in the Wadmalaw landscape. These two factors are the decline of agriculture and the subsequent development of parts of Wadmalaw's landscape for high end housing. If the landscape theories I reviewed in second chapter hold true, these very visible changes in the landscape should have important ramifications for the island's longtime African American residents. In this final chapter, I will utilize ethnographic field notes and recent census data to describe present day African American ways of life on the island. This description will focus on visible external life domains, and though I may speculate at times as to the effects of these landscape changes on ways of life, I will eschew broad generalizations about the less tangible aspects of African American culture on the island. My focus will be on observable material changes in life ways, while simultaneously acknowledging the role unobservable ideological changes might play in shaping these same life ways.

In this chapter, for the purposes of organization, I will describe several arenas of present day change on Wadmalaw. These descriptions will pull from my field experiences, from interviews on Wadmalaw, and from U. S. Census data from 2000 and 1990. I will begin by describing the racial composition and demographics of the island. Then I will move to a description of land distribution, land tenure, and housing on the island; though I touched on these arenas in the previous chapter, this description will focus on the island's African American majority's homes and land. From there I will

move to a brief description of the occupational structure of islanders and a description of the island's infrastructure (which will include a description of infrastructure changes on Johns Island and other surrounding Sea Islands relevant to life on Wadmalaw). Finally, a description of social services (in the form of schools, churches, and healthcare centers) on Wadmalaw and on Johns Island will be given. An exploration of these areas of life when compared with ways of life in the 1930s will demonstrate how these changes may be affecting traditional ways of life on the island.

Demographics, Land Tenure, and Housing on Wadmalaw

One aspect of life on Wadmalaw that seems to have remained fairly constant over the past seventy years is the existence of an African American majority on the island. That said, there is evidence that the minority community of whites on the island is growing. In the 1990 census, the total population of Wadmalaw was listed as 2,570; 1,788 or 69.6 percent of the population were listed as black; 754 or 29.3 percent of the population were listed as white (U. S. Census Bureau 1990). In the 2000 census, the population had increased to 2,611, but the African American population decreased from 1,589 or 60.9 percent of the population during that time span. The white population on the island increased to 985 or 37.7 percent of the island's population during that same time (U. S. Census Bureau 2000).

However, these numbers may not be the best indicator of changes in island life ways. As I shall show in a discussion of housing and land on the island, these new residents were not directly displacing African American residents on the island. Although the influx of outsiders may be a secondary cause of African American population decline on the island, the new high end homes being built on the island are being built on old farm land and are usually not replacing African American homes.

Theoretically this may be a secondary cause of African American emigration because the houses are being built on land that has been taken out of agricultural production.

Nonetheless, I must stress that these population numbers do not reveal patterns of migration on and off the island over that time.

Despite the failure of these population numbers to reveal migration patterns, there are some census numbers, that when combined with observations I made in the field, begin to reveal patterns of migration onto the island. In the most recent census, there were 2,499 people listed as five years of age or older on the island. Of these, 543 or 21.7 percent lived in a different house in 1995; of those, 127 or 5.1 percent moved to the island from a different county (U. S. Census Bureau 2000). Though these numbers do not indicate race, the interviews I conducted reveal that whites were not the only people moving onto the island. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, several members of the African American community whom I interviewed had moved off the island only to return in recent years. Others had been born in other states and returned to the island in the past twenty years. Further, many of the people I interviewed were still members of the workforce and were commuting to jobs off the island. When I asked one 33-year-old African American woman about the phenomenon she told me, “I just came back two years ago and my sister came back three years ago from Charleston. Retirement age folks are trying to get back home, too.” This woman, who had extended family on the island, had returned in order to live in a quiet, rural place where “you can still see the stars.” Other people I interviewed had family members who had served in the military before returning to Wadmalaw to live. Nonetheless, many people I interviewed said that the younger members of their community were leaving the island when they graduated

from high school in search of jobs, to join the military, or to attend college. In fact the census figures for 2000 may reflect this phenomenon; 48.9 percent of the 2000 population were between the ages of 25 and 59 and the median age of the population was 41.4. These figures demonstrate that most of the population of Wadmalaw is middle aged, and they also demonstrate the lack of early twenties aged residents.

One factor influencing some African American islanders' decisions to return to the island may be the availability of family land (heirs' property) on the island. One woman I interviewed said that her family owned property on the island and that her father had divided it between her and her siblings so that they could live there. Another member of the community told me it was not uncommon for several family members to live in the vicinity of one another on property that had been divided amongst extended family members; another resident told me she had six houses in the vicinity of her home that were family. For at least some of the African American residents I interviewed, the opportunity to live in a rural neighborhood, near family, on land they or their family owned was the reason for their return to Wadmalaw. Others I interviewed talked about the advantages of living in a rural area free of the crime of big cities; interestingly, some African Americans were returning to Wadmalaw for one of the same reasons whites were moving there: for safety and seclusion. This perceived security combined with the opportunity to own a home or live on family land seems to have been a factor in some African Americans' choice to return to the island. Corroborating this theory are census numbers on housing tenure that seem to indicate that there were more people who owned their homes on Wadmalaw than elsewhere in the county. On Wadmalaw, 87.9 percent of the homes are owner-occupied. This compares with 61 percent owner-occupied homes in

the county and 72.2 percent owner-occupied homes in the state (U. S. Census Bureau 2000).

When I lived on the island, I observed a tendency for African American homes to be clustered in relatively dense neighborhoods. These neighborhoods, whether on Bear's Bluff Road, on the north side of the island, or on Roseville Road, near Rockville, were also noticeably denser than the white neighborhoods on the island. They were also largely segregated from white neighborhoods. The densities of these neighborhoods are especially noticeable on Charleston County's property maps. On these maps the lots are often split irregularly and into smaller lots than those found in predominantly white neighborhoods (County of Charleston 2002). Many of the lots lack road frontage or only have a narrow strip accessing the road; a fact that is likely the result of the lot being divided for family heirs. One might expect the density of these neighborhoods to contribute to a stronger sense of community on the island, while also allowing for the preservation of more relatively unique cultural traits. But, as we shall see, these neighborhoods and their people are increasingly encountering external influences in their daily practices.

Despite the high rate of home ownership amongst African Americans, many of the African American homes on the island are in bad need of repair. Several of the homes I worked on as a volunteer for Rural Mission had severe water damage due to roof leaks, and, though there are efforts to repair many of these homes, it seems as if many of the homes will remain substandard. Many of the people with whom I spoke could not afford to make the repairs their homes needed, and an informal random survey of homes revealed many substandard homes in these African American neighborhoods. There

were also a number of mobile homes in these neighborhoods, which may be a more affordable alternative to “stick-built” homes for many of the island’s poorer African American residents.

The 1990 census broke down homeownership into racial categories. Out of 814 occupied housing units on the island in 1990, 527 or 64.7 percent of the homes were occupied by African Americans. According to that same census, 82.4 percent of the homes (whether occupied or not) on the island were built after 1950, but 137 units were built before 1939 (U. S. Census 1990). Though there are a few older, white owned homes in the town of Rockville and scattered across the island, many of these 137 homes built before 1939 are African American owned, and it is partially because of their age that many of these homes are now in need of major repairs. An additional factor in the quality of housing is that of water sources. Almost all of the homes on Wadmalaw receive their drinking water from dug or drilled wells (96.4 percent in 1990). These homes also rely on septic systems rather than city sewers (which were not available to the islanders as of 2004). According to an African American community member whom I interviewed, the dependence on ground water and septic systems has led to problems of water quality. One man whom I interviewed showed me where two old wells sat on his land; they had dried up and he had been forced to dig new, deeper wells. This does not seem to be a problem for the less dense white neighborhoods, but for at least some African Americans on the island it contributes to a substandard housing problem on the island.

In the numbers and descriptions above, a picture of relatively dense rural African American neighborhoods on the island emerges. Though the notion of a “dense rural”

neighborhood may seem contradictory, it is not when one considers the extreme low density of the white housing on the island. Furthermore, these neighborhoods are not new; interviews and maps indicate their existence in the 1930s. For the African Americans of the island, homeownership and land ownership do not seem to be new phenomena either. It is also probably true that the quality of life in most of these homes is greater than it was in the thirties; electricity, indoor plumbing, and air-conditioning may be responsible for these improvements. Nonetheless, there are still problems of sub-standard housing on the island, and though these problems are being addressed by a handful of non-profit groups (most notably Rural Mission and Habitat for Humanity) and government housing programs (HUD housing on Johns Island), housing problems are persistent. In the next section, I will examine an arena that has changed perhaps more significantly for African Americans on Wadmalaw, that of occupational structure.

Present Day Occupational Structure on Wadmalaw

Whereas in the above section I examined the state of African American housing on Wadmalaw, in this section I will describe how occupational structure may be affecting the way people interact in those neighborhoods. As I explained in the previous chapter, the decline of agriculture and the influx of outsiders have played an important role in reshaping the landscape of Wadmalaw Island. These changes not only reshaped the landscape of the island, they also played a role in reshaping the occupational structure of Wadmalaw. Instead of working in the fields, people now commute to jobs on Johns Island, on Kiawah Island, or in the City of Charleston; or, in some cases, people do not work at all. In the following paragraphs I will use both census data and field notes to explore the new occupational structure of Wadmalaw.

As I have stated previously, the decline in farming meant that many African Americans no longer worked in the fields. Furthermore, the urbanization of the islands surrounding Wadmalaw and the growth of Charleston created jobs in the service industry for some of Wadmalaw's residents. This fact is reflected in the 2000 census. Of 2,042 members of the population of Wadmalaw over the age of sixteen, 1,053 or 51.6 percent were listed as being in the "labor force." The census bureau defines the labor force as those people employed or unemployed who have not removed themselves from the workforce; these figures do not include stay at home moms and dads or those who are retired (U. S. Census Bureau 2000). Compared to the state of South Carolina, the percentage of those listed in the workforce is low (the state percentage is 63.4 percent). One criticism of labor statistics is that they do not take into account people who have been unemployed so long that they give up and withdraw themselves from the labor force; this may be the case for Wadmalaw. Another explanation may be that the influx of wealthy islanders has allowed more members of these wealthy households not to join the labor force.

Most of the working population of Wadmalaw commute to work (over 93 percent), and over 69 percent of this working population said that they commuted an average of thirty minutes or more to work (U. S. Census Bureau 2000). African Americans with whom I spoke worked in a variety of occupations ranging from construction to health and social services. The largest segment of the population works in education, health, and social services industries (22 percent). I only met a few African Americans who worked on a farm, and the census only shows 6.1 percent of all the

population working in “agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting, or mining” industries (U. S. Census Bureau 2000).

Several African Americans with whom I spoke worked in the service industry. The most compelling trend among them was the fact that most were not working on Wadmalaw. Many worked on Johns Island and some worked in Charleston, but it was rare that I met anyone who worked on Wadmalaw. One woman told me that most people work on either Johns or James Islands. This is a significant change from the 1930s, when many African American islanders worked in the vegetable fields of Wadmalaw, which were often within walking distance from their homes.

The move from an agricultural, local occupational structure to a more regional, commuter occupational structure means African American islanders are increasingly working in places farther from the neighborhoods where they reside. This might prove a factor in cutting down on interactions people have with those in their neighborhoods, just by virtue of the fact that they are spending less time there. It might also imply that the African American islanders are interacting more frequently with people who are not from Wadmalaw. If this is in fact true, it theoretically would have important implications for the life ways of these islanders.

In the next section I will describe the infrastructure as it exists on Wadmalaw and the Sea Islands surrounding it. The changes in infrastructure are readily observed in highway projects and new shopping centers being built on the Sea Islands. These changes which have been constant since the 1930s also were an important factor in the changing occupational structure of the island described above.

Infrastructure Changes

In the past chapter, I discussed changes in the economy of Wadmalaw (represented by a move away from agriculture) and the subsequent efforts to control growth on the island. The changes in the infrastructure of Wadmalaw and its surrounding islands are closely tied to these developments. Furthermore, these changes in the infrastructure, which are represented in the building of roads and bridges, the introduction of electricity to the island, the potential of new water sources, and the building of new markets, theoretically play an important role in changing ways of life of African Americans on the island. These changes in infrastructure have the potential to increase the likeliness that African American residents of the island will encounter external, more secularized influences.

One such change in infrastructure which I touched on in the previous chapters is the improvement and building of roads, highways, and bridges on Wadmalaw Island and its surrounding islands. The improvement of these roads when coupled with the increased number of vehicles per household (87 percent of households on the island have at least one vehicle or more) have had the effect of increasing opportunities people have to leave the island. This is not to say that people did not have these opportunities in the past (as migration patterns have demonstrated); it is just to point out that leaving the island is much easier and more accessible than it was on Wadmalaw in the past. Today, most of the island's roads are paved. On nearby Johns Island two new, taller bridges have recently been completed; these bridges replaced drawbridges linking Johns Island to U. S. Highway 17 Southeast of Charleston and to James Island. These bridges have eliminated the problem of the drawbridges, which occasionally would get stuck, trapping people on the islands. Today, the improvement of roads in the low country continues,

further linking the islands and increasing the opportunities for islanders to become a more mobile population, while simultaneously increasing opportunities for outsiders and newcomers to travel to and from the islands.

Around the same time roads were being improved and built, electricity was brought to the islands. The subject of the introduction of electricity came up in one of my interviews with a 70-year-old African American man; he told me, "..., that was a great change, electric pump, fridge, [before we] had outdoor bathroom; after had power got bathroom in the house, water in the kitchen. A lot of good things come with electricity." He also explained that with "the good came some bad." Now people had to pay electric bills. He stressed that before the introduction of electricity and other amenities, there were not as many bills to pay. Now he said, people "had to get a job, had to have something coming in." Today, all of the neighborhoods of the island have electricity available to them.

The introduction of electricity also paved the way for a number of twentieth century innovations. These include included electric run water pumps and wells (which allow indoor plumbing) and central air and heat systems. However, many of the African American homes which I worked on did not have central air and heat. Instead they depended on either oil or gas heat and window air conditioning units. According to the 2000 census one hundred percent of homes on the island had some form of heat, whether gas, electricity, oil, or wood (2.2 percent were wood heated). For most of the islanders, utility gas (piped gas) is not available; only seven homes had utility gas in 2000 (U. S. Census Bureau 2000). Despite the dilapidated state of some of the African American homes I visited, almost all had air-conditioning units. The introduction of air-

conditioning may be significant to ways of life on the island. For many, the introduction of air-conditioning meant they no longer had to sit on their porches to cool down in the summer; therefore, one consequence of this innovation may have been decreased social interaction amongst neighbors, who might have increasingly opted to stay inside (although I still noticed many people sitting out in the shade while there in the summer).

Electricity also allowed for the introduction of media influences like television, radios, and the internet. It is no secret that media, in the form of television, radio, and internet, to name a few, have the potential to play an important role in shaping peoples' daily practices. On Wadmalaw, one can speculate that these forms of media are likely to play a role in shaping the ways of life of the island's African American residents.

Though no formal surveys were conducted, most of the households I visited had at least one television (many of which remained on during my interview). Access to the internet, though rare in most of the houses I visited, seemed to be inevitable as well; one African American resident with whom I spoke said that she looked forward to broadband internet access being introduced to the island. The internet and other forms of media that are encountered on the island add to the list of possible influences on African American ways of life on the island. They can influence not only idea systems, but also reduce the frequency and intensity of social interaction.

Another change in the infrastructure of the islands has to do with where people shop for their groceries. One of the first things I looked for when I moved to Wadmalaw was the nearest grocery store, and I discovered that the nearest grocery store was not on the island, most of those had closed in the past twenty years. The nearest store was a Piggly Wiggly grocery located on Johns Island, just across Church Creek leaving

Wadmalaw Island. Nonetheless, there were two other stores on the island. One of these stores, Bebe Middleton's place on Maybank Highway about half-way to Rockville, had many of the products one might find in a convenience store; the other, King's grocery, had similar items but was only open occasionally (Mr. King had been sick in recent years). Both stores were not self-service; instead of walking aisles to choose products from shelves, customers asked the store clerk to retrieve items from behind the counter, as was done in the traditional American grocery store of yore. Somewhat ironically, it was the original Piggly Wiggly grocery store in Memphis, Tennessee, which opened in the early part of the twentieth century that claims to have first introduced the self-service grocery store to America. Today, the Piggly Wiggly is the main grocery store for many of the African Americans with whom I spoke, and though you are almost guaranteed to find folks sitting out front of Mr. Middleton's store, it may eventually go the way of William's Grocery on Bear's Bluff Road, which is closed. That said, there is a possibility, with newcomers moving to the island, that there will be a call for a gas station or a larger convenience store on the island (neither of the current stores on the island sell gasoline), and many African Americans with whom I spoke said they would not mind having a store on the island that was more convenient than the stores on Johns.

Now that I have discussed some of the present day features in the landscape of Wadmalaw, I will move to a discussion of some of the social services available to the African American population of the island. These are represented in the schools and the healthcare centers available to the islanders. I have also included Wadmalaw's many African American churches and the services they offer in this discussion. Once I have described some of the social services available to African Americans, I will move to a

brief discussion of the possible ramifications of these present day features on African American life on Wadmalaw.

Social Services

One important aspect of social services available to African American is that of education opportunities. In the thirties, there were several African American schools and one white school on Wadmalaw; today there is only one school on the island, Edith L. Frierson Elementary School. The school, which was built in the fifties, was originally the all white Rockville School. Now it serves as an elementary school for children in grades pre-kindergarten through six. Some community leaders explained to me that the school was one of the few schools in which enrollment is dropping; the numbers seem to corroborate this. In 1973 there were 353 students at the elementary school; today there are only 163 students enrolled. According to the school's 2003 report card most of the children attending the school are African American. I was told that many of the white residents on the island send their children off the island to private schools; they may do this because of a perception of Frierson being a substandard school. Of the 121 students listed for that year 18.2 percent were behind at least one grade. Most of the children at Frierson (over ninety percent) were also determined to be in need of subsidized meals. According to the school's report card, the "absolute rating" of the school in 2003 was "below average," but the school had made "satisfactory" progress in that same year (State of South Carolina 2003). When children reach the seventh grade, they begin middle school on Johns Island, where they also attend high school. Of the population of Wadmalaw over the age of 25, 68.2 percent had completed High School or better; in the State of South Carolina, 76.4 percent of the over 25 population had achieved this level of education (U. S. Census Bureau 2000). So, though an education may be more easily

obtained today on Wadmalaw, there are still problems with the quality and quantity of that education.

In the 2003 school report for Frierson Elementary, the principal had this to say of the community's support for the school: "Each community can boast of something that is uniquely theirs and ours is the support and help we continue to receive from our Faith Community. Our Faith Community helps to instill values and build character as well as reward our students for success" (State of South Carolina 2003). To the principal of Wadmalaw's only school, the "faith community" is an indispensable asset to the school. The churches of Wadmalaw seemed to play an important role in many arenas of life on the island. These include, but are not limited to, school support, programs for the sick and elderly, and assistance to those in need of housing and food. The island's six African American churches also seem to be an important meeting place for many of the island's African American residents. The churches of Wadmalaw are one place where members of the community gather consistently, whether for Sunday service or for a church sponsored supper. Many African Americans whom I interviewed also stressed the importance of their faith and the importance of their church.

The importance of the church to African American Sea Islanders is well documented (Creel 1988). On Wadmalaw, the African American church that I attended (Webster United Methodist) seemed to be an important fixture in the community and in the lives of those who attended it. Not only did the church serve as a place of worship for its members, it also served as a place for the dissemination of information on community events and community issues. There was rarely a day of the week when nobody visited the church. It also seemed to be common knowledge among the community leaders and

people of Wadmalaw that, if you wanted to “get anything done on the island,” it was best to go through the churches’ leaders. The church I attended almost always took time in the Sunday service to somehow recognize its younger students, whether for graduating or for making the honor roll. In fact, one Sunday, a Johns Island high school senior delivered the sermon, further attesting to the church’s involvement with its youth. While I cannot say definitively that the African American churches of Wadmalaw are unique among African American churches, I can say that they have played and will probably continue to play an important roll in African American life on the island.

Another important aspect of social services available to the islanders is that of healthcare. While on the island I helped with an outreach program organized by the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC). The program was meant to raise awareness of diabetes and health issues among African Americans on the island. The program organized walks for seniors and health clinics for men. At one of the free health clinics for men there was a problem getting the men of the island to attend. The turnout was extremely low and seemed to indicate that Saturday morning health clinics were not high on the island’s African American men’s list. One man told me that most of the island’s men probably did not want to get up on a Saturday and go to a health clinic after working all week long.

Today, healthcare remains a priority for many African Americans on the island. Federal programs like Medicaid have bettered the situation for many African Americans who otherwise would not be able to afford healthcare. Also, a shuttle visits the island daily to take people without transportation from the island to appointments in Charleston. There is also a health clinic just across Church Creek on Johns Island, but one member of

the community explained to me that the clinic was about to close. There are not any other healthcare centers in the nearby vicinity of Wadmaw, and obtaining emergency care and healthcare may continue to be a problem for all people on the island.

In the previous sections of this chapter, I have examined a number of facets pertinent to African American life on Wadmaw. In the next section I will speculate as to how these aspects of daily life may play a role in shaping African American ways of life on the island. The picture of African American life ways that emerges is not a picture of an isolated, non-dynamic group, but one of a group of people who increasingly encounter external influences that theoretically play a large role in shaping daily practice and life ways.

African American Ways of Life on Wadmaw

In the second chapter, I explained that scholars have often referred to the language and culture of the Sea Islands as Gullah. My original research question was meant to investigate the present day state of this language and culture, but it quickly became apparent to me that this may have been too lofty a goal to accomplish in one summer of fieldwork. So, my focus shifted to documenting changes that were more easily observed. This documentation focused on changes in the landscape and on laws that contribute to these changes in the landscape. Now that I have documented those changes, I will speculate as to their possible effects on African American life ways on the island of Wadmaw.

In my review of the literature on Gullah ways of life, I described several arenas which scholars have identified as unique to Gullah culture. Though I cannot judge whether these distinctions hold true for African Americans on Wadmaw, there are several areas in which these traditions may be under pressure from external influences.

These pressures have resulted from changes in the arenas described in the previous three chapters. One fact that is undisputable is that life on Wadmalaw has changed drastically in the past seventy years. The African American population's daily practices have changed with the landscape, and if the theories I laid out in Chapter 2 hold true, these changes in the landscape played an integral role in shaping the new daily practices of African Americans. Because it is difficult to document exactly what African American life ways were *exactly* like seventy years ago, it is difficult to say that aspects of those ways of life are disappearing. Nonetheless, I can say with confidence that many aspects of life on the island have changed in that time period. I can also say that these changes result from more frequent encounters with external influences, and, further, if the scholars' description of life on the islands holds true, these more frequent encounters would result in a move towards secularization of ways of life on the islands.

One arena of life that has always received a lot of attention on the islands is the Gullah language. Though I am not trained as a linguist, I did inquire about language in my conversations with the African American residents of Wadmalaw. Most of those whom I interviewed were aware that the language of the Sea Island African Americans had been recognized by scholars as unique. That said, most of the people with whom I spoke felt that attempts to preserve the language, though important, ignored the fact that people had to speak "good English" to get a job off the island. One woman described it as "talking country," and said that when she went away to college that many people "looked at her funny whenever she opened her mouth." She also said of the Gullah language, "I want to see it preserved but I don't want my son to stick out when he goes to

college.” Another man whom I interviewed said, “I don’t think there’s no difference; only thing different is the accent.”

It is possible that many of the islanders were less willing to admit to their use of the Gullah language because of negative stigmas that remain about the language (“talking country”), but, I suspect that the language has probably merged with the dominant local dialect, or, at the very least, has moved closer to that dialect. As islanders have increasingly sought work off the island and encountered more and more external influences their language is likely to have been effected. The same is true of other aspects of African American ways of life on the island; an increase of external influences may lead to a decline in the uniqueness of African American life on the islands.

The question that repeatedly emerged throughout my investigation of African American life ways on Wadmalaw was: what differentiates Sea Island African American life today from African American life elsewhere? The answer to that question is not a simple one, and it cannot be definitively answered in this thesis. Nonetheless, there are certainly differences in African American ways of life on the Sea Islands and, say, African American ways of life in New York City (as there are differences in white ways of life on the Sea Islands and white ways of life in New York). For instance, it was rare that I crossed from Wadmalaw to Johns Island and did not notice a group of African American men or women fishing from Essau Jenkins Memorial Bridge; but, that alone does not differentiate Sea Islanders from other African Americans. In order to understand how African American Sea Island life has changed and whether or not ways of life there have crept on an imaginary continuum towards more secular, common African American ways of life, further studies are needed. This should not diminish the

importance of the Sea Islands to African American studies; quite the contrary, it should demonstrate their continuing importance in understanding African American life throughout the United States. It is my hope that the documentation of possible causes of these changes on Wadmalaw in this thesis will contribute to this understanding.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

In the past four chapters, I have reviewed changes that have had and will continue to have important implications for the African American population of Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina. I concentrated primarily on changes that occurred in the past seventy years. The changes I documented were those that were most readily observed by an outsider such as myself, namely changes in the landscape. Wadmalaw Island is on the edge of a growing urban area that centers on the city of Charleston. The growth of this urban “footprint” has important repercussions for the African American population of Wadmalaw. Changes in the landscape resulting from this growth are encountered daily and may contribute to new ways of life on the island. This growth has also contributed to an increase in opportunities for the islanders of Wadmalaw to interact with the outside world and to an increase in their vulnerability to loss of traditional life ways as a result of these external interactions. These external influences can play an important role in reshaping daily practices of African American islanders. What emerges from these documented changes is a dynamic picture of a people and an island in a state of constant and marked change; these changes certainly will affect the preservation of any life ways associated with what scholars refer to as “Gullah culture.”

In my introductory remarks, I posed a few research questions I hoped to answer in this thesis. I sought to document changes occurring on the boundaries of Wadmalaw African American “culture” (a term which I noted was not without its own problems). In order to document these changes I identified several arenas of change. These included

changes in demographics, occupational structure, land distribution and land tenure, housing, infrastructure, social services, and language. Though not all of these arenas of change were easily documented, some were. The changes that were most easily documented were changes in the landscape and changes in the laws that dictate many of these observable, material changes. The changes in the landscape consisted principally of the building and improvement of roads, the decline of agriculture, and the subsequent development of new subdivisions and housing for the island's new, middle and upper class residents.

In order to understand how these changes might be affecting the lives of African Americans on Wadmalaw, I began by examining some aspects of African American life on the island in the 1930s. The picture that emerged of Wadmalaw in the thirties was not one of an island and its people isolated from exterior influences or one of an island in a static state; on the contrary, there was evidence of people migrating to and from the island, and there were numerous opportunities for people to encounter what might be considered influences that were external to life on the island. The island's economy was based on an agricultural system that produced vegetables for local and distant markets, and most of the population worked in some capacity in this agricultural industry. Many African Americans worked as tenant farmers, and though there were opportunities for migration and the movement of people, the more frequent scenario in the thirties appears to have been one in which African Americans rarely ventured off the island.

The thirties were also a time of great change on the island. Roads were beginning to be paved and Roosevelt's New Deal social programs were contributing to a reshaping of the island's landscape. The mechanization of agriculture also began in the thirties.

Both of these developments would contribute to the changes in African American ways of life on the island. These developments and their outcome were largely the subject of the fourth chapter. In that chapter, I explored the ways in which changes in agriculture contributed to a shift in the occupational structure of the island's African American residents. African Americans emigrated to the North and took jobs off the island in other industries. The shift away from labor intensive agriculture and, later, the decline in agriculture led to attempts to control the way the island was developed. These attempts to control development of the island, represented in Charleston County's comprehensive plan, were the second subject of that chapter. I concluded that both of these developments played an important role in shaping present day African American ways of life on the island.

Present day African American ways of life were the subject of the fifth chapter. In that chapter, I revisited some of the analytic categories used in the third chapter on life on Wadmalaw in the 1930s. The obvious difference in this chapter is that I was able to rely on my own observations from the field as well as interviews with African American residents of the island, something not possible in the investigation of life in the thirties. This qualitative data supplemented documented changes in the landscape. What emerges is a dynamic picture of present day African American life on Wadmalaw. Unlike in the thirties, movement from present day Wadmalaw Island is much easier for the island's residents; conversely, it is much easier for outsiders to settle and visit the island. The landscape of the island had also changed over that time period. Today, the landscape of the island looks less and less agricultural and more like a rural suburb of Charleston.

Based on the documentation of these changes in the landscape and life ways of Wadmalaw, I drew several conclusions. First, it was apparent that these changes in the landscape were playing a role in shaping African American life on the island. A second conclusion was that though African Americans certainly play a role in shaping their landscape, they were largely absent from some of the arguments and battles that play a significant role in shaping the laws that contribute to the new landscape of Wadmalaw. Finally, it is apparent from my investigation of African American ways of life on the island both in the present and the past that the people of Wadmalaw do not easily fit a prescribed label. They are a dynamic group whose interests and practices vary depending on a number of independent factors; furthermore, this is not a recent phenomena, and it is likely that the African American population of Wadmalaw will continue to defy generalized descriptions, as most peoples do.

In my brief review of anthropological landscape theory, I introduced Heidegger's notion of "dwelling" (1977). In dwelling, people encounter and incorporate their material landscape into their ideological "being." That is to say that landscape, though sometimes ignored in anthropological studies, plays an important role in shaping the daily practices of those who encounter it, and, in a dualistic relationship, landscape is shaped by those who incorporate it into their daily practices. By exploring the changes occurring in the landscape of Wadmalaw and in some of the daily practices of the island's African Americans, I have demonstrated how African Americans "dwell" on Wadmalaw. Furthermore, by dwelling in their landscape, these African Americans are effected by and active in creating the new landscape of Wadmalaw.

What Heidegger's theory fails to address in the case of the African American residents of Wadmalaw is issues of power inherent in the formulation of a new Wadmalaw landscape. The building of Anchorage Plantation is a vision of landscape that is being thrust upon the island's black residents. Though the new landscape of Wadmalaw almost certainly plays a role in shaping ways of life for African Americans there; one must also consider who plays the biggest part in the construction of these new landscapes (white landowners) and what that means for those who do not play a significant role in the construction of this new landscape (the island's poorer mostly African American population). For the island's African American population, not only do they have little say in what is built on the island, their voice is also absent from the battles over the laws that dictate how these new landscapes are built. This is not to say that they have no agency in the process. Many of the island's African American residents attend meetings and voice protests or support for development projects on the island, but often these voices are muted by more politically powerful agents of change.

Another theorist relevant to my study of life on Wadmalaw is de Certeau (1984). His notions of "strategies" and "tactics" are relevant to my discussion of land-use and planning on Wadmalaw. In the battles I described over land-use on the island, it was the politically powerful who formulated the policies that dictated land development on the island; these politically powerful were represented on both sides of that argument. These are the "strategies" that de Certeau argued were important in shaping landscapes and ways of life. For de Certeau, "tactics" were the tools the masses utilize to counter these strategies. In the case of Wadmalaw, these tactics are the tools of the island's African American population, and are represented by their ability to play a role and display

agency in shaping their own landscape. The only problem with de Certeau's notion of tactics is that he treats them as only a reactionary response to his strategies. In the case of the African American residents of Wadmalaw, not all of their displays of agency are reactionary. To the contrary, they play an active role in shaping their immediate surroundings. Nonetheless, de Certeau's notions of strategies and tactics are helpful in understanding the power issues at play in the formulation of a new Wadmalaw landscape.

In conclusion, I did not find the African American population of Wadmalaw to fit any prescribed pre-conceived notions of what their ways of life should or should not be. Life on Wadmalaw, like life in so many other places, is diverse and full of individuals, each with their own agenda. That said, life ways on Wadmalaw have certainly changed in the past seventy years. The island's African Americans are generally a more mobile population. Those who work often do so off the island. The island has also experienced a new wave of homeowners seeking houses in a "rural, country-like setting." This influx of outsiders has contributed to an ever changing picture of African American life on Wadmalaw and will likely continue to do so in the future.

It is my hope that this thesis will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on Sea Island African American ways of life, while simultaneously demonstrating the diversity of life ways on the Sea Islands. I have also sought to outline some of the very serious issues that African American residents of Wadmalaw face. These issues, which include housing, healthcare, and land tenure, to name a few, will continue to be a problem for many of the African Americans of Wadmalaw unless they are properly addressed. Furthermore, these issues are of more importance to the African American residents of Wadmalaw than the issues of linguistic or cultural preservation that dominate

the attention of many outside scholars. Though the uniqueness of the African American Sea Islanders' ways of life and language should be recognized and perhaps even celebrated, there simultaneously should be more attempts to address the serious social issues facing the Sea Islanders.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Charles Alexander Vinson was born on September 15, 1974, at a hospital in Macon, Georgia. He grew up in Fort Valley, Georgia, where he attended and graduated from Peach County High School in 1993.

Mr. Vinson attended Princeton University in Princeton, New Jersey, where he received an A.B. in anthropology in 1999. Upon graduating from Princeton, Mr. Vinson spent three years working in various capacities for Habitat for Humanity of Catawba Valley in Hickory, North Carolina.