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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF FIGURES</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1  INTRODUCTION: SANDY ISLAND, AN AFRICAN AMERICAN DIASPORA GULLAH COMMUNITY</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Why Anthropology?”</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Diaspora Ancestry: A Gullah Girl Traces Her DNA</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Through the Lens of Native Anthropology: Taking Anthropology Home</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Papa” Franz Boas and Cultural Relativism</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trials and Tribulations of Being a “Native” Anthropologist</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Arrival Story: Permission Granted to Travel to Sandy Island</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crafting a Gullah Ethnography</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  THE AFRICAN DIASPORA PARADIGM IN THE SEA ISLANDS</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bringing Simms-Hamilton’s African Diaspora Paradigm Center Stage</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Gullah Girl’s Journey to Cape Coast Castle</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergence of the African in the South Sea Islands</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Celebrate My Gullah/Geechee People</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditions, Enslavement and Plantation Structures</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are You Hungry?: Fishing for Seafood</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completing the Journey to Sapelo Island</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining Gullah/Geechee</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandy Island: It is a Piece of Heaven</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Island Men-Folks Carry On African Traditions</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  TRAVELING TO SANDY ISLAND AND INTERPRETING SYMBOLIC MEANINGS</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paying Homage to Gullah People</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Plat-Eye and Hags” Live on Sandy Island</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecological Treasures on Sandy Island</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  METHODS: HOW WE ARE TRAINED AS ANTHROPOLOGISTS</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method #1: “Kitchen Table Talks”; Betty’s Family House on Sandy Island</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method #2: Sketching Sandy Island; What Does the Island Look Like Through the Gaze of the Native?</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Method #3: Pictures Are Worth A Thousand Words! Unique Customs of Island Life</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Method #4: Participant Observation ................................................................. 144
Method #5: Structured Interviews ................................................................. 147

Education ........................................................................................................ 149
Household/Family life .................................................................................... 149
Employment/Occupation ................................................................................ 149
A day in the life of an Islander. Tell me what you do from the time you rise until the time you go to bed ................................................................. 149
Do you think that Sandy Island should have a bridge that connects to the mainland? Why or why not? ................................................................. 150
Would you like to see more people visit the island? ..................................... 150
Sandy Island history, culture and traditions: Please describe your favorite place on Sandy Island ................................................................. 150
If you could imagine Sandy Island in the future (20 years from now), what would you like to see different, and what would you like to see stay the same? ........................................................................................................ 151
Education ........................................................................................................ 153
Household/Family life .................................................................................... 153
Employment/Occupation ................................................................................ 153
A day in the life of an Islander. Tell me what you do from the time you rise until the time you go to bed ................................................................. 153
Do you think that Sandy Island should have a bridge that connects to the mainland? Why or why not? ................................................................. 154
Would you like to see more people visit the island? ..................................... 154
Sandy Island history, culture & traditions: Please describe your favorite place on Sandy Island ................................................................. 155
If you could imagine Sandy Island in the future (20 years from now), what would you like to see different, and what would you like to see stay the same? ........................................................................................................ 155
Mainlanders: Basic Background Information .............................................. 156
Are you married, single, divorced or have a partner? ............................... 156
Do you have children? .................................................................................. 156
Where do you live? ....................................................................................... 156
Mainlanders, About Sandy Island .................................................................. 157
Have you ever visited Sandy Island? If the answer is no, are you interested in traveling to the Island? ................................................................. 157
Which section of the Sandy Island did you visit, and what type of boat did you travel in? ................................................................................. 157
Have you ever visted the Pyatt grocery store on the Island? ...................... 157
Have you ever taken the Sandy Island tour? ................................................ 157
Have you ever attended church or any of the social gatherings on the Island? ............................................................................................ 157
How would you describe the culture and people who live on Sandy Island? ............................................................................................. 157
Please explain what you know about the history of Sandy Island. ......... 158
Do you think that there should be a bridge that connects the island to the mainland so that the non-Sandy Islanders can commute to and from Sandy Island? ................................................................. 158

If you could imagine Sandy Island in the future (20 years from now), what would you like to see different, and what would you like to see stay the same? .................................................................................. 159

Performance Analysis .................................................................................................................. 16060
Interpretive Veiling #1 ............................................................................................................... 161
Interpretive Veiling #2 ............................................................................................................... 162
Interpretive Veiling #3 ............................................................................................................... 163
Census Report: Track #9204 Block Group ............................................................................. 164
Sandy Islanders Performing Public and Hidden Transcripts ................................................... 164
Resistance and Cultural and Political Actions (Tourism)........................................................ 166

5 CONCLUSION .......................................................................................................................... 169

Ethnographer’s Observation .................................................................................................... 169
Sandy Island’s Future ................................................................................................................. 173

APPENDIX

A SANDY AND SAPELO ISLAND RESEARCH ................................................................. 178

B EXCERPTS OF FROGMORE STEW ................................................................................. 182

Act I: Performing Gullah ........................................................................................................... 182
Setting ....................................................................................................................................... 183
The (Dramatic) Action ............................................................................................................. 183
Characters ............................................................................................................................... 183
Joe: ........................................................................................................................................ 183
Ali: ......................................................................................................................................... 183
Oshun/Goddess of Love: ......................................................................................................... 184
Uncle Sam: ............................................................................................................................ 184
Chorus: ................................................................................................................................. 185
Excerpt .................................................................................................................................... 185
August 1, 1968 ...................................................................................................................... 185
October 10, 1968 ................................................................................................................... 186
February 13, 1969 ................................................................................................................ 187
Joe to Ali: ............................................................................................................................ 188
Joe: ....................................................................................................................................... 189
Uncle Sam: ............................................................................................................................ 190

C ARTICLE: “YOUR GRANNY’S SOUTHERN CUISINE” ............................................... 192

LIST OF REFERENCES .......................................................................................................... 195

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH ...................................................................................................... 202
LIST OF FIGURES

1-1 Anthropology students working in the cultural heirloom garden (Photographed by Tracey Graham, 2011.) ................................................................. 17

1-2 Carryovers from West Africa (Illustrated by Dr. Frank Jordan for use by Tracey Graham, December 2016.) ................................................................. 19


1-5 Map of the Tikar People territory (Illustrated by Dr. Frank Jordan for use by Tracey Graham, December 2016.) ....................................................................... 26

2-1 Waccamaw River (Photographed by Tracey Graham. June 2013.) ........................................................................................................................... 48

2-2 Cape Coast Castle from my journey to Ghana (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 1994.) ..................................................................................................... 55

2-3 Inside Cape Coast Castle where my ancestors lived before leaving on the slave ships (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 1994.) .................................................. 55

2-4 A man showing people how to basket weave .......................................................................................................................... 66

2-5 Heartgate entrance to Phillip Simmons’s garden .............................................................................................................................. 68

2-6 Collecting oysters .............................................................................................................................................................................. 70

2-7 Shrimping ....................................................................................................................................................................................... 70

2-8 Sandy Island community member fishing ............................................................................................................................. 72

2-9 Map of Sapelo Island ............................................................................................................................................................................. 75

2-10 Life Everlasting herb ........................................................................................................................................................................... 76

2-11 Herskovits’s Africanisms .............................................................................................................................................................. 80

2-12 Waterfront picture of Sandy Island (Photographed by Tracey Graham, September 2010.) ................................................................................................. 81

2-13 The water front of Sandy Island .......................................................................................................................................................... 82

2-14 Rommy Pyatt at a Family Reunion on Sandy Island in 2007 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2007.) ............................................................... 83
2-15 Carolyn’s Retirement House (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.) .......................... 89
3-1 Sandy Island boat landing on the mainland side (Photographed by Tracey Graham, May 2010.) ........................................................................................................................................ 92
3-2 Gullah Ooman story quilt ........................................................................................................... 94
3-3 Winyah Bay Harbor ................................................................................................................ 98
3-4 Ibo Landing (Photographed by Tracey Graham, March 2013.) .............................................. 99
3-5 Arcadia Plantation .................................................................................................................. 103
3-6 Oneithia Elliot .......................................................................................................................... 115
3-7 Oneithia Elliot on Pontoon Boat (Photographed by Tracey Graham, January 2013.) .......... 115
3-8 Interior of Sandy Island (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.) ......................... 116
3-9 Peregrine falcon ....................................................................................................................... 117
3-10 The endangered red-cockaded woodpecker ........................................................................ 117
3-11 Sandy Islander searching for straw to make a broom for her house (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.) ........................................................................................................ 118
4-1 At Sandy Island at a Sandy Island family reunion in 2007 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2007.) ................................................................................................................. 121
4-2 Betty parking her “jon boat.” (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2001). ............ 126
4-3 This recipe is from the Island’s cookbook, A Taste of Sandy Island: Beaulah’s Family Recipes. January 2016. This is the recipe that Betty used to cook the collards during our kitchen talk. ................................................................. 127
4-4 Interior of Sandy Island (Photographed by Tracey Graham, June 2013.) ......................... 130
4-5 The former Sandy Island school house. (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2001.) ........................................................................................................................................ 131
4-6 Pyatt’s General Store was established in 1986. This area of the store is where customers purchase food items. I received permission from Betty to take this picture. (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2007.) ........................................... 132
4-7 New Bethel Baptist Church erected in 1881 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, June 2013.) ........................................................................................................................................ 135
4-8 Sketch of Sandy Island (Drawn by Jennifer Podavini for use by Tracey Graham, March 2017.) ........................................................................................................................................ 139
4-9 Jeep on a barge; 1 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.) .................................................. 140

4-10 Jeep on a barge; 2 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.) .................................................. 140

4-11 The first school boat. It is named Prince Washington and is the only school boat in South Carolina. It was established in May, 1966 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, June 2013.) ........................................................................................................................................ 143

4-12 The new school boat for Sandy Island, New Prince Washington ......................................................... 143

4-13 Island members singing a spiritual right before the baptism. I received permission to take this picture (Photographed by Tracey Graham, October 2007.) ................................................................. 145

4-14 Minister Dave* saying a prayer before the baptism. I received permission to take this picture (Photographed by Tracey Graham, October 2007.) ............................................................................................ 145

4-15 Minister Dave and Decon Clayton* baptize Ted. I received permission to take this picture (Photographed by Tracey Graham, October 2007.) ............................................................................................ 146

4-16 Methods of Participant Observation (Graphic created by Amanda Marsico for use by Tracey Graham, April 2017.) ......................................................................................................................... 159

5-1 Mr. Willie gave me permission to take and publish this photo (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.) ........................................................................................................................................ 169

5-2 Kinship Tree (Digital interpretation of Tracey Graham’s original pencil sketch created by Amanda Marsico for use by Tracey Graham, April 6, 2017.) .................................................................................. 173

5-3 Timeline of Sandy Island Milestones ........................................................................................................ 176

A-1 Where is Sandy Island? (Infographic created by Tracey Graham, October 2011.) .................................. 179

A-2 Understanding the notion of Gullah and Geechee (Infographic created by Tracey Graham, October 2011.) ................................................................................................................................. 180

A-3 Conclusion (Infographic created by Tracey Graham, October 2011.) ...................................................... 181

B-1 Press Release for *Frogmore Stew.* ........................................................................................................ 182

B-2 This is the scene from Vietnam (Photographed by Tracey Graham, February 2004.) ......................... 186

B-3 Joe returns home to his house in Arcadia Plantation (Photographed by Tracey Graham, February 2004.) .......................................................................................................................................... 188

B-4 Joe and Ali talk about the good “ole” days while the Frogmore Stew cooks in the pot. The climax of the action takes place when Joe relives his frustrations after returning from Vietnam. (Photographed by Tracey Graham, February 2004.) ........................................................................................................ 189

B-5 Uncle Sam (Photographed by Tracey Graham, February 2004.) ............................................................ 190
This ethnography centers around investigating the following question: how have the people of Sandy Island used their separation by unbridged water to develop a resistance border that protects them from non-Sandy Islanders? This is the question that guides my research. Sandy Island is hidden within the marshes of Georgetown County, South Carolina. The Island is surrounded by former rice plantations, the result of African technology brought by enslaved Africans who produced a major commodity for the global economy during the 17th and 18th centuries. The community is isolated by two large rivers—the Pee Dee and the Waccamaw. This ecological border creates a natural separation between Sandy Islanders and non-Sandy Islanders. Through this geographical separation, the community has constructed a protected collective identity by disallowing non-Sandy Islanders access and requiring them to gain permission for entry. I argue that the Islanders have been able to craft a unique cultural identity and develop avenues of cultural resistance through this geographical separation. To help preserve this identity and seclusion, I have used pseudonyms for many of the Islanders at their requests. These names are marked by an asterisk (*) at first usage.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION: SANDY ISLAND, AN AFRICAN AMERICAN DIASPORA GULLAH COMMUNITY

“Why Anthropology?”

Why anthropology? . . . It allows me to look at the lives of the people in the African Diaspora wherever they are—whether it’s in the United States; whether it’s in Belize, Central America; whether it is Suriname, South America—but more importantly, part of what attracted me to anthropology is the fact that it is a discipline that [is] undergoing a tremendous amount of cultural critique, [and] that it is one of the few intellectual disciplines where the . . . scholars inside of it . . . [are] constantly interrogating its history, they’re constantly asking questions about ethics . . . they’re constantly asking about the ways in which anthropology can be deployed in order to change the human condition. So why anthropology? [My] question is, why not? ¹

Irma McClaurin, American Activist and “Born Again” Anthropologist

At the beginning of my path towards becoming an anthropologist, Dr. Irma McClaurin asked, “Why anthropology?” Thinking about my answer to this complex and thought-provoking inquiry started me on a personal journey to understand my own identity, which further led me to my study on the Gullah people of Sandy Island. In my preliminary research on Sandy Island, I self-identified as being a part of the Gullah community; I call myself a “Gullah Girl” returning to my family roots in South Carolina to observe, ask questions, participate in daily practices, and collaborate on community projects.

As an anthropologist, I study social patterns and begin to interpret cultural markers that give me greater insight into an emic [insider’s]² notion of what makes us Gullah people. In the process, I not only describe myself as a “Gullah Girl,” but I have become a true “Gullah Girl”—practicing in my own life the natural folk traditions and foods that my people produced. When


² Cultural anthropologists have borrowed from linguistic anthropologists two terms, “emic” and “etic,” to differentiate an insider’s cultural point of view from that of an outsider’s (etic) viewpoint. In linguistics, the term describes how a native-born speaker of the language learns not just words and meanings from birth, but gestures and other nuances that are different from someone outside the culture who may become fluent, yet still will not have access to non-verbal and cultural dimensions of the language.
they are in season, I eat yams, oysters, fish, collards, grits, rice, black eyed peas and watermelon as part of my regular diet. Herbal Sassafras tea and Muscadine wine are beverages that I consume, too. I participated in as much of the Gullah culture that the Sandy Islanders allowed me to, and over time, I was considered less of an outsider. Today, I see myself as someone who maintains a foot in two worlds. I am in the world of the Sandy Island community and in the world of academics.

I teach anthropology at Horry Georgetown Technical College and, through the years, I have learned how to merge both worlds. The most notable example of this merger was the cultural heritage garden created by a group of former students during their anthropology courses with me. The garden consisted of vegetables and cultural materials cultivated during the African enslavement period (15\textsuperscript{th}-18\textsuperscript{th} centuries) in the American South. Colonists were aware that the climate in West Africa was similar to South Carolina, so they carried involuntary Africans by ships to the American South to work as rice planters, which was a major cash crop for the region. Historian Peter Wood, author of \textit{Black Majority}, argued that Africans cultivated rice prior to the Colonists’ arrivals to the continent.\textsuperscript{3} Judith Carey further built on Wood’s argument in her book \textit{Black Rice}:

\textit{Black Rice}:

In the case of rice, the position has resulted in a serious distortion that has obscured African technological contributions to rice culture in the Americas, especially where the crop was grown under submersion. Tracing the diffusion of agrarian practices, water control, winnowing, milling, and cooking techniques associated with African rice cultivation across the Middle Passage to the Americas enable us to place ingenuity in its proper setting, that is, the West African slaves already skilled in the crops of cultivation.\textsuperscript{4}

\textsuperscript{3} Peter Wood, \textit{Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion} (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1974).

When my students studied the food production of the colonial period, many initially believed that the Chinese brought rice to the Americas, not Africans. Their assumptions about the origins of rice were juxtaposed against Wood and Carney’s discussion of how African rice was a commodity that skilled Africans grew before their enslavement, and an example of the technology transfer they brought with them through the Middle Passage. The idea of technology transfer runs counter to the prevailing interpretations that said Africans had no culture and/or lost their culture through enslavement. In fact, they came with skills, technological knowledge and innovative strategies that they adapted, despite being enslaved.

In the heritage gardens, as part of the learning experience, my anthropology students grew tobacco, cotton, gourds, yams, corn, sugar canes, collards, peppers, squash, sweet potatoes, mustard greens, cantaloupes and eggplants. In tandem with the garden, one assignment required students to participate in an oral history project that encouraged them to explain how the foods in the garden were connected to their food traditions in modern times. I learned from student discussions and from listening to their informal conversations as they worked in the heritage garden that 100% of the students described using collards, yams, and watermelons as staple foods in their households. The garden became a focal point for building community on the Georgetown campus, much as it might have done in the past. Students, staff and faculty members were able to walk into this small garden and take food home for their families. At the end of each semester, we used the remaining crops from the garden to prepare a communal end-of-the-year feast, not unlike my African ancestors and their contemporary Gullah descendants.
Figure 1-1: Anthropology students working in the cultural heirloom garden (Photographed by Tracey Graham, 2011.)

The heritage garden assignment enabled students to learn firsthand that many of the foods planted, and which they regularly consumed, were carryovers from West Africa during the transatlantic enslavement period, and these items are still relevant to modern food ways. Wilbur Cross, author of *Gullah Culture in America*, confirms these dietary connections:

Many of the foods that are familiar today in the South, and that are generally thought of today as “American,” originally arrived on slave ships from Africa. Among these are not only various types of rice but okra, yams, peas, watermelon, certain teas, various blends of coffee, and kola nuts, which were originally a stimulant and then used in recipes for cola drinks. Because of the limited number of available utensils and cooking facilities, the slaves created many of the single-pot dishes that are favorites among Gullah today.

Our understanding of African residuals in American culture can be traced back to the research conducted by Melville J. Herskovits, an American anthropologist, who focused his anthropological investigation on African and African American cultures. It was from

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5 For more on culinary carryovers, see Figure 1-2 and Appendix C.

6 Wilbur Cross, *Gullah Culture in America* (Winston-Salem, NC: John F. Blair Publisher, 2008), 177.
Herskovits’s seminal book, *The Myth of the Negro Past,*⁷ that I gained clarity into how African people preserved their culture under the most adverse circumstances. Herskovits also discussed the importance of the transmission of memories and carryovers of cultural traditions in maintaining group identity during their involuntary movement through the Middle Passage to the New World.⁸ As important as Herskovits’s research and book was to anthropologists, it was Alex Haley’s book, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family,*⁹ which reached a wider popular audience and proved that African cultural traditions had not been lost. His book, made into one of the most popular serialized TV dramas of all time, showed how people were able to retain rituals, such as naming ceremonies, and engage in other forms of cultural expression surreptitiously. As a result of reading Herskovits and watching Haley’s *Roots,* when I traveled in my car across the South Carolina landscape, I saw various farms fertile with what can only be described as African carryovers.

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⁸ Ibid.

It was Herskovits’s work that motivated me to investigate how technologically skilled my ancestors were as farmers, so I reconstructed a heritage garden in an effort to connect to my ancestral past, and to give my students the same learning opportunity. This heritage project
allowed us to examine African carryovers through the lens of what cultural and Native
Anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston described as the “spy glass” of anthropology.\(^{10}\)
This metaphor relates to how Hurston’s training as an anthropologist allowed her to acquire
some level of distance (objectivity) from her community and, at the same time, immerse herself
in it.\(^{11}\)

Hurston’s impact on me is somewhat different than that of Herskovits’s. She has served
as both an inspiration to my own life history and a guiding force in my research on the Gullah
people of Sandy Island. Her ethnography on southern folk culture of the people of Eatonville,
Florida, was published as *Mules and Men* in 1935, which predates my own research by eighty
years. And yet, like McClaurin asserts in her essay on Hurston’s fieldwork, I too feel that
“[Zora’s] spirit walks with me.”\(^{12}\) As McClaurin documented, Hurston’s “ethnographic research
and methodology were brilliant, to say the least.”\(^{13}\) Furthermore, McClaurin pointed to
Hurston’s conscious decision to adopt a native anthropological approach (studying her own
people) and to use an approach we now call the African Diaspora framework which, for her,
consisted of “Black American folklore, music, and life in the United States, the Caribbean, and

anthropologist allowed her to have objectivity while researching her own community. There were times within her
community where she was engrossed. The “spyglass” refers to her ability to observe clearly those around her
despite being embedded in the community she studied.

\(^{11}\) Irma McClaurin, “Zora Neal Hurston, the Making of an Anthropologist,” *Savage Minds, Notes and Queries in


\(^{13}\) Irma McClaurin, “Introduction: Forging a Theory, Politics, Praxis, and Poetics of Black Feminist Anthropology,”
in *Black Feminist Anthropology: Theory, Praxis, Poetics and Politics*, ed. Irma McClaurin (New Brunswick:
Rutgers University Press, 2001), 12.
Latin America. It is this comparative and broad geographical approach that appealed to me as a researcher.

Also like Hurston, I have roots in the American South, but lived in the North. So, as I reflect on my northern background, I now realize that my parents’ cultural influences were rooted in Gullah traditions even though they migrated to the Northeast region of the United States for career opportunities before my birth. During my formative years, I lived in a household where my mother skillfully quilted and crocheted blankets for our family to keep warm during the winter seasons, and her skills were a major part of our family’s subsistence. Rice was the staple food in my family’s diet, which was prepared daily, and served with almost all meals.

Are these practices—crafting blankets and preparing rice—coincidental? In my investigation, I stand firm and assert that my family customs are a part of a large constellation of Gullah material culture that has larger historic and symbolic implications and reflects the reality of Gullah people’s traditions as carryovers from West African cultures.

In this ethnography, I explore how various scholars have interpreted Gullah people’s ancestral linkage to African people and situate myself and my research into this ethnographic lineage. In making cultural connections, if I identify as being a part of the Gullah culture and agree with Herskovits that Gullah people are genetically interconnected to African people, then what are my African origins? Are my daily cultural practices and dark pigmentation sustainable cultural markers that enable me to join African American people who identify inherently as "Gullah," and whose ancestors involuntary migrated from West Africa to the southern landscape of the "New World" called the American South?

\[14\] Ibid.
While collecting data for my research to answer some of these questions, I was drawn to DNA testing that allows one to trace mitochondrial (maternal) lineage and investigate whether my ancestral genetic makeup has origins in West Africa. To better understand the African origins of my DNA, in December of 2013, I ordered a maternal test kit from African Ancestry in Washington, DC, and began a journey of discovering who I am.

**African Diaspora Ancestry: A Gullah Girl Traces Her DNA**

Since the advent of *Roots*, finding one’s ancestral background has preoccupied African Americans. But more recently, with the mapping of the human genome, almost everyone has gotten into the act. Today, if you Google ancestry tests, the search engine generates over 5 million hits in less than a minute. For White Americans, proving if one’s ancestors came over on the Mayflower and are part of the earliest European settlers has been a matter of pride and honor, though the original people of America are, indeed, Native Americans. For Black Americans, the absence of documents such as birth certificates, diaries, and letters left the majority of us on the fringes of such research until Alex Haley published *Roots: The Saga of An American Family*. He was able to take a single (African) word that had been handed down in his family and find his ancestors. Most Black Americans, however, were not so lucky. And then, DNA testing arrived.

One of the earliest advocates who encouraged Blacks to trace their origins through DNA was Dr. Rick Kittles. In 2003, Kittles founded African Ancestry and was among the first to get in the business of DNA testing specifically targeting people of African descent as a consumer.

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16 Ibid.

According to its website, African Ancestry helps people find “the African in your American.” Their brand statement is: “Trace your DNA. Find your Roots.” Such marketing builds upon the popularity of African Americans’ increased interests in finding their own roots, much like Alex Haley’s *Roots* did years ago. Kittles’ marketing materials describe the business as “being the first in the industry to geographically assess African lineages to a present-day country of origin.” African Ancestry is also the owner of the largest “proprietary African Lineage Database,” overseen by Dr. Kittles.

To begin the journey of deconstructing my African ancestry, I ordered the signature “MatriClan Test Kit” at a cost of $299.00. To explain some of the nuances of what the test would reveal, I conferred with my colleague, John Plunket, a biologist at Horry-Georgetown Technical College. He provided me an in-depth description of what the genetic ancestry test would tell me. Plunket explained that mitochondrial DNA cells are commonly known as the “power house” of cells that can transform energy from food to another form, which is called ATP (adenosine triphosphate). In this form, our body uses mitochondria cells to complete essential tasks.

One result of completing these essential functions is mitochondrial DNA cell mutation. We now know from the research conducted on the human genome over the last two decades that

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19 Ibid.

20 We now know that census records sometimes identified slaves, as did the diaries, and wills, and other documents of slave holders. While many African Americans were kept illiterate in order to perpetuate slavery, some did learn to read and write and document their life histories, and others passed on African words and rituals through oral histories, which can now be examined more critically and supported by genetic evidence.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.
mitochondrial DNA cells, which derive from the maternal line, can be compared to the mutation patterns of others within our maternal lineage. Matching mutation patterns suggest relation.23

On January 7, 2014 at 6:30 am, I followed the directions to swab each cheek firmly twenty times and place the two swabs directly into a bar-coded envelope, which I mailed to the African Ancestry laboratory. In March 2014, I received my genetic sequence pattern of African ancestral groupings (see Figure 1-3). It showed that my MatriClan is 100% genetically connected to the Tikar people of Cameroon.

Figure 1-3: Certificate of ancestry (“Certificate of Ancestry for Tracey Graham.” Image File scanned by Tracey Graham. February 25, 2014.)

23 John Plunkett, Biologist and Professor at Horry Georgetown Technical College, in discussion with the author, March 2014.
February 25, 2014

Ms. Tracey Graham
8929 Hwy 701 South
Conway, SC 29527

Kit ID# 1031224

Dear Ms. Graham,

It is with great pleasure that I report our MatriClan™ analysis successfully identified your maternal genetic ancestry. By analyzing your mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequence, we have determined that you share maternal genetic ancestry with Tikar people in Cameroon today.

Below is a copy of your mtDNA sequence (Hypervariable Segment I starting at position 16024) used in the analysis. You have inherited this segment of DNA through your mother and it has been passed on consistently from mother and daughter to you over the last 500 – 2,000 years.

TTCTCCATG GGGGATGAG TTTGCTTACC ACCGCAATG TCGCTCACCC ATCAACAACC
GCTATGATTT TCGTACATTA CTGGCCAGCCA CCA7GAATAT TGTACGGTAC CATAAATACT
TGACCACCTG TAGTACATAA AAACCCACAC CACATCACA AAA CTCCCTCCCC ATGCTTACAA
GCAAAGTACAG CAATGACACCT TCGACTATCA CACATCAACT GCAACTCCAA AGCCACCCT
CACCCAGTAG GATACCAACA AACCTACCCCA CCTTAACAG TACATAGTAC ATAAAGCCAT
TTACATGACTA CAGCAGACCA CAGTCTGGTC CATCAGATCAG ACCGCCCTCA

Your Sequence Similarity Score is 100%. This measure means that we are 100% confident in your result. The bold letters indicate DNA sequence patterns that you share with the Tikar.

Enclosed you will find a Certificate of Ancestry that authenticates your maternal ancestry and a booklet to understanding and sharing your results. Please be sure to join the African Ancestry Online Community. There you can download a digital copy of the African Ancestry Guide to African History and Cultures to help you learn more about the peoples and cultures in Cameroon. You can find the link in the “New from African Ancestry!” section.

Thank you for your support and interest in African Ancestry.

Sincerely,

Gina Paige
President

Figure 1-4: African ancestry genetic sequence pattern results (“Certificate of Ancestry for Tracey Graham.” Image File scanned by Tracey Graham. February 25, 2014.)
Figure 1-5: Map of the Tikar People territory (Illustrated by Dr. Frank Jordan for use by Tracey Graham, December 2016.)

Upon receiving this key to my origins, I immediately searched the Tikar in Google and stumbled upon “Roots Revealed.”24 This is a blog where Tikar descendants share stories on how they discovered their origins through African Ancestry’s DNA testing. Some descendants from the United States have actually travelled to Cameroon, a former French colony. What they have learned is that the Tikar people originated from the Northeastern part of Cameroon. They live in the Bamenda Grassfields, and the Nso, Kom, Bum, Bafut, Oku, Mbiame, Wiya, Tang, War, Mbot, Mbem, Fungom, Web, Mmen, Bamunka, Babungo, Bamesi, Bamesing, Bambalang, Bamali, Bafanji, Baba, Bangola, Big Babanki, Tungo, Nkwen, Bambili and Bambui are all tribal communities that make up the Tikar people.25


During the Atlantic Slave Trade, Tikar people involuntarily came to the American South as iron makers, blacksmiths, farmers, herbalists, carpenters, cloth weavers, and cattle herders. Going back to Herskovits’s discussion on Africanism in America, the Tikar people’s skills are similar to the carryovers that he described in his book. Below is a description from Herskovits of the more specialized carryovers from West Africa that reflect the skills and talents of the Gullah people in the American South:

In all West Africa, south of the Sahara, and in the Congo, agriculture is the mainstay of the productive economy. . . . In addition to the basic agricultural organizations are various craft groupings, which reflect a division of labor that makes for specialization in various callings—ironworkers, cloth weavers, wood carvers, traders, dealers in objects of supernatural moments, potters, basketmakers.

I will return to a more in-depth discussion of Herskovits’s contributions in Chapter 2.

It is anthropology’s interests in the biological and cultural origins of humans that have captured my attention for years. And, it is Herskovits’s documentation of the African origins of African American southern culture, now coupled with genetic data, which provides the connection of present-day people to a past that is rooted in Africa and the American South. As a “Gullah Girl” who now knows she is related to the French-speaking Tikar people of Cameroon and to the Gullah people of South Carolina, I have answered my own question of “why anthropology?”: because it is anthropology, and especially “Native Anthropology,” that has given me the methodological and interpretive platforms for understanding the people of Sandy Island—their origins and their cultural heritage.

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26 Herskovits, The Myth of the Negro Past, 81.

27 I have chosen to capitalize “Native Anthropology” because it describes a specific approach to conducting ethnographic research. However, when quoting other scholars, I may use lower case or upper case interchangeably, depending upon the original source.

28 I have come to understand from my discussions with Dr. McClaurin that “methodology” refers to the theoretical concepts that inform the methods we decide to use, and that “methods” references specific data collection technique.
Through the Lens of Native Anthropology: Taking Anthropology Home

We become students of our own communities and develop a more refined sense of who we are in relationship to the community. At the same time, anthropology at home can awaken us to the creativity, resiliency, and diversity of our communities. Just as we prepare and reinvent ourselves for living and working abroad, we must also change ourselves in some very distinctive ways so that we can work in our own culture.  

Cheryl Rodriguez’s essay, “A Homegirl Goes Home: Black Feminism and the Lure of Native Anthropology,” resonated with me because her focus was on doing anthropology in our own backyards. Historically, there has been an assumption in the field of anthropology that if we are not traveling to faraway lands overseas and investigating people who are culturally and physically different from ourselves (i.e., the Other), then we are not authentic anthropologists.

Like Rodriguez, Zora Neale Hurston grappled with studying her own people at a time when Native Anthropology was not as acceptable as it is now. And even today, there is still resistance to the idea of Native Anthropologists, as A. Lynn Bolles has pointed out:

“Anthropology itself, although a liberal discipline, was not ready for ‘the natives’ to study themselves or anyone else. And while today the number of Black graduate students may be growing, ‘native anthropology’ is still disdained.”

It is often the question of objectivity that underlies the suspicion in anthropology towards Native Anthropology. The discipline’s entire training is based on what Hortense Powdermaker called “stepping in and stepping out.” In other words, anthropologists, who historically were White and members of the dominant racial group in America and Europe, created methodologies

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designed to help them gain entry into cultures of which they were not members. Ethnographic research was based on the stranger who became a friend, and Participant Observation assumed that the observer knew nothing about the culture they were about to study.

Native Anthropology turns all of these assumptions on their heads. Native Anthropologists have found that the strict application of methods\textsuperscript{32} may not work. Anthropology’s approaches must be modified because, as Native Anthropologists, we often look like the people we study. Thus, we must rethink the use of certain methods (data collection techniques) and our methodologies (the theories or ideas that shape our decisions to use certain methods). It is this very complex method and methodological issue that McClaurin addresses in her ethnography, \textit{Women of Belize: Gender and Change in Central America}. She discussed what it means to resemble the people you study and the expectations that are created on both sides:

In Belize, I was somewhere between an outsider and a “native.” Although I am not Belizean by birth, my African American heritage garnered me an acceptance by most Belizeans as a kindred spirit in a way they assured me could not happen for white anthropologists, no matter how empathetic they might be.\textsuperscript{33}

A. Lynn Bolles made similar observations about belonging in her book, \textit{Sister Jamaica: A Study of Women, Work and Households in Kingston}.\textsuperscript{34} Perhaps the most compelling discussion of being viewed as a “native” is that of Kimberly Eison Simmons in her essay, “A Passion for Sameness.” Simmons, who described herself as a light-skinned African American, found she was perceived and scrutinized within the racialized system of the Dominican Republic, where to identify as “\textit{negra}” (Black) is considered an insult. She wrote:

\begin{flushright}
32 Throughout this work then, I use methods to talk about my technique and methodology to refer to both the method and the theory behind it.


\end{flushright}
My incorporation into Dominican society was neither seamless nor complete, of course, but these encounters highlight the complexity of Dominicans’ notions of themselves. Because I spoke Spanish with an English-language accent, for example, people queried me about whether I was de aqui o de alla ‘from here or from there’ (meaning the United States). . . . [My] attempts to self-define as African American or Black were often met with looks of disapproval and expressions of disbelief. . . . This contestation over my identity and origins usually persuaded me to assume an india clara (and sometimes a mulata) identity in the Dominican Republic, especially because this is how others defined me in relation to themselves. Moreover, protestations to the contrary were met with bewilderment and alarm.35

How, then, does being viewed as an insider alter one’s methods? Early on, Zora Neale Hurston responded to this question in *Dust Track On a Road: An Autobiography*. She wrote, “I did not have the right approach. . . . I went about asking, in carefully accented Barnardes, ‘Pardon me, but do you know any folk-tales or folk songs?’ . . . No, they had never heard of anything like that. . . .”36 Hurston returned to Barnard feeling rejected by her community, so she talked with her advisor, Franz Boas, who urged her to go back to Eatonville and collect Black folk materials.

As biographer and literary critic Arnold Rampersad explained in the foreword of Hurston’s book on folklore, *Mules And Men*, Papa Boas, as Hurston affectionately called him, believed that “cultures [should] be seen on their own terms and not according to the scale that held European civilization to be the supreme standard.”37 When she returned to Eatonville, Zora went back as a “prodigal daughter” who her community knew and loved. It was Zora that the community embraced and understood, not the New Yorker who attended Barnard College.

Decades later, Black anthropologist McClaurin, a self-proclaimed Native Anthropologist, also described the need to modify the methods she used; she wrote:

In retrospect I realize how much I would have missed had I followed my original research design. . . . Some of the information and perspectives that appear in this work were derived from my more formal discussions with people as I sat on their verandas, in their kitchens, or as they gathered in stores. Other data emerged from the responses women gave to my survey; still other data grew out of spontaneous conversations that I held with various women as we walked home in the encroaching dusk or lingered to speak in the market.\(^{38}\)

Like McClaurin, Rodriguez also positioned herself as a Native Anthropologist, and unabashedly declared herself as such when she stated, “I express my appreciation to the Black women activists of my local community, who continue to inspire and guide my native Black feminist’s projects.”\(^ {39}\) In the body of the essay, Rodriguez clearly articulated both the opportunities and pitfalls of doing Native Anthropology:

Native Black feminist anthropology involves negotiating the challenges of our lives as Black women who are also feminists and researchers. It involves reinventing ourselves not only as anthropologists but also as those who are capable of building bridges across contradictory realities. This is something that is rarely done.\(^ {40}\)

Despite the complexities Rodriguez warned about in doing Native Anthropology research, and because of our abilities to give voice to the insiders’ (emic) perspectives in a field that has often spoken for them, I aligned myself with the Black women anthropologists discussed above and chose to embrace my identity as a Native Anthropologist in this ethnography of Sandy Island.

In positioning myself as such, I would be remiss if I did not give a nod to some of the other pioneers of Native Anthropology that I have discovered along the way, and whose research informed my own. As previously mentioned, Zora Neale Hurston is best known for her


\(^{40}\) Ibid, 250.
publication of *Mules and Men* in 1935, which established Hurston as among the first Native Anthropologists. She is preceded, however, by Carolyn Bond Day, who wrote *A Study of Some Negro-White Families in the United States*.\(^{41}\)

Katherine Dunham, a contemporary of Hurston, and sometimes her competitor, was a creative intellectual and the first dance anthropologist or ethno-choreographer who also practiced Native Anthropology. Similar to Hurston, she studied Black folk culture in the United States and in the Caribbean. While Hurston focused on folktales, language and music, Dunham, in her best known work, *Island Possessed*, turned her attention to analyzing old and new dance forms, and cultural rituals (like Voodun) among rural folk; she documented the historiography of dance and the religious ceremonies that sometimes informed and shaped movement.\(^{42}\)

A decade later, two African American graduate students, and also Native social scientists, St. Clair Drake (cultural anthropologist and sociologist) and Horace Cayton (sociologist), turned their attention to cities and published *Black Metropolis*, a ground-breaking book. Their study of Black culture in urban Chicago was a seminal analysis of Black migration and settlement patterns, race relationships, and community structures.\(^{43}\)

Another pioneer in Native Anthropology was Delmos J. Jones. In his publication *Towards a Native Anthropology*, he explained that to study one’s own group is, in fact, complex. He believed that “we” should look at social phenomena from a point of view that is different from the traditional anthropologist, “the outsider.”\(^{44}\)


Several decades after *Black Metropolis* was published, John Gwaltney, a student of Margaret Mead (herself a past student of Franz Boas and contemporary of Zora Neale Hurston), published *Drylongso: A Self-portrait of Black America* (1980), an ethnographic study of his own community. In it, he revealed how the challenges faced by Hurston as a Native Anthropologist still persisted, and that studying one’s own culture is hard work. Gwaltney also disclosed in more detail what Zora alluded to briefly in her work: that modern-day Black folk have great suspicion of all the studies that have been done on us, for us, and about us, but never with us. One of the people from his own community captured this sentiment about how our field is viewed by the people we study when he said, “I think this anthropology is just another way to call me a nigger.”

More recently, my discovery of Ira Harrison’s and Faye Harrison’s (not kinfolk) *African American Pioneers of Anthropology* was a significant contribution to shaping my own anthropologic approach. I owe them a profound gesture of appreciation for compiling this legacy of the contributions made by Black anthropologists to our field. Their book is a treasure trove of essays documenting the life and research of Black anthropologists across almost all of anthropology’s subfields, but whose names are not often mentioned in anthropology curricula, books and monographs. For me, knowing the existence of these scholars and the invaluable scholarly contributions they have made, and continue to make, fills many gaps, and should be required reading in the training of all anthropologists.

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46 Ibid., xix.

I still recall sitting in the History of Anthropology course as a first-year graduate student, listening to lectures on how the field of anthropology was developed to examine “primitive” societies and study the “natives” who inhabited them. Never once in that history course was there a discussion of the “native’s” perspective or of the contributions of Native Anthropologists and the relevance of what it means for us to study ourselves. Contrary to the History of Anthropology that I was taught, it is this latter direction, as developed by those Native Anthropology pioneers and their descendants discussed earlier, that I now follow as a “Gullah Girl” conducting research on the Gullah people of Sandy Island.

“Papa” Franz Boas and Cultural Relativism

In his seminal work, The Mind of Primitive Man, 48 (1911) Franz Boas articulated a position for anthropologists. He asserted that the discipline should be held ethically responsible for examining the community and its people with an open mind and a respect for their belief systems, even if it differed from their own. He called this approach “cultural relativism” and opened up an entire new direction for the field of anthropology. Although the birth of American Anthropology can be traced to the 19th century, as it separated from British sociocultural anthropology, the field that we practice today was very much shaped by the way Boas conducted his research. His promotion of intensive, ethnographic fieldwork over “armchair” analysis of cultures, and his approach to studying cultures and also using the methods of archaeology, linguistics and biology, yielded a more integrated approach to the study of humans. In contrast, European anthropologists viewed each subfield as separated disciplines. McClaurin explored the origins of American Anthropology in a recent encyclopedic entry:

Boas is recognized as the father of “American Anthropology” with its four-field approach. While he might not have garnered as much fame in 1926, he certainly

mapped out the structure of Columbia’s anthropology department specializing in American Indians from the multiple viewpoints of cultural, biological, archaeology and linguistic anthropological perspectives, and training some of the discipline’s most illustrious anthropologists of the 20th Century. This “holistic” approach to doing anthropology, as well as Boas’s emphasis on intensive fieldwork, would shape the future of American Anthropology and influence generations of leaders in the field.49

One of Boas’s greatest contributions to the field of anthropology in general, and to American Anthropology specifically, was his assertion that anthropologists should examine cultures in a way that recognized and respected each culture’s diversity and the unique beliefs, customs, worldviews, and values that informed a culture and its people. He argued in his approach of cultural relativism that no one else had the right to judge a culture outside its own cultural context.50 Boas explained:

A survey of our globe shows the continents inhabited by a great diversity of peoples different in appearance, different in language and in cultural life. The Europeans and their descendants on other continents are united by similarity of bodily build, and their civilization sets them off sharply against all the people of different appearance. The Chinese, the native New Zealander, the African Negro, the American Indian present not only distinctive bodily features, but each possesses also his own peculiar mode of life. Each human type seems to have its own inventions, its own customs and beliefs, and it is very generally assumed that race and culture must be intimately associated, that racial descent determines cultural life.51

This Boasian theoretical framework contends that every culture is worthy in its own right and is equal to all other cultures, even those with conflicting moral beliefs. This new direction in American Anthropology formulated by Boas not only challenged the judgmental approaches previously taken, but also gave agency to those anthropologists interested in studying their own


51 Ibid.
cultures and documenting the range of human diversity utilizing the multiple perspectives yielded through the use of biological, archaeological, cultural and linguistic methods.

It should be no surprise, then, that it was Boas who taught and influenced Native Anthropologist Zora Neale Hurston. As a student at Barnard (the first Black student to graduate from this elite women’s college), Hurston took courses from “Papa Boas,” as he was fondly called. Robert E. Hemenway wrote in his comprehensive book, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography*, (1977) that the Julius Rosenwald Foundation offered Zora a fellowship in 1934. With all of this contact, there is no doubt that Zora learned about and absorbed Boas’s framework of cultural relativism and applied it to her own ethnographic research. Boas encouraged Hurston to be a Native Anthropologist and collect “cultural history.” He told her that

> the material presented is valuable not only by giving the Negro’s reaction to everyday events, to his emotional life, his humor and passions, but it throws into relief also the peculiar amalgamation of African and European tradition which is so important for understanding historically the character of American Negro life.

Hurston’s ethnographic research was just such a study of Black southern folk culture that reflected cultural relativism and intensive fieldwork as advocated by Boas. In her initial fieldwork, Hurston returned to her native hometown of Eatonville, Florida where she actively participated in local Black folk culture. This “participation” consisted of eating diverse cuisines, engaging in local storytelling or “swapping lies,” attending social gatherings, discussing religious belief systems and observing gender differences in social interactions. Below, Hurston

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54 Ibid, xiv.
described her Participant Observation and what was required for her to be allowed into the community’s inner circle:

Ah’ll play it if you sing it, he countered. So he played and I started to sing the verses I knew. They put me on the table and everybody urged me to spread my jenk [sic], so I did the best I could. Joe Willard knew two verses and sang them. Eugene Oliver knew one; Big Sweet knew one. And how James Presley can make this box cry out the accompaniment! By the time the song was over, before Joe Willard lifted me down from the table I knew that I was in the inner circle. I had first to convince the “job” that I was not an enemy in the person of the law; and, second, I had to prove that I was their kind. “John Henry” got me over the second hurdle.55

As a result of this acceptance, other community members opened up to Zora and shared their stories.56

**The Trials and Tribulations of Being a “Native” Anthropologist**

Decades after the contributions of Boas and Herskovits to cultural relativism and documenting African survivals among descendants of enslaved Africans, we are still grappling with how best to describe, explain and interpret the African Diaspora. And I find it ironic that years after Hurston and others57 have unabashedly declared themselves as Native Anthropologists who study their own people and cultures, ethnographic methodology is still rooted in the archaic idea that anthropologists are (White) outsiders struggling to be accepted by the cultures they study.

Despite the failure of many traditional methods courses in anthropology to acknowledge that a Native Anthropology approach exists, some of the Black Anthropologists mentioned previously have made considerable strides in shaping certain qualitative and interpretive

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56 To see the stories Zora collected as a Native Anthropologist, read *Mules and Men*, ibid.

57 Others like St. Clair Drake, John Gwaltney, Delmos Jones, A. Lynn Bolles, Raye V. Harrison, and Irma McClaurin, to name a few.
methodologies to reflect their unique perspectives and experiences. And at the heart of many of their analyses is a reliance on Boas’s idea of cultural relativism. Yet, there still remain many trials and tribulations once in the field to conducting ethnographic research among people with whom the anthropologist shares an identity.

My experience, however, is somewhat different from many of the Black Anthropologists cited earlier in this chapter. Like Zora Neale Hurston, I encountered considerable resistance from the Sandy Island community during the preliminary stages of fieldwork. Despite my genetic link as a “Gullah Girl,” I found that communicating with the people of Sandy Island was not an easy task.

Some of these challenges I attribute to my own inexperience as a researcher. When I began data collecting over fifteen years ago, I was a naïve first-year graduate student making many assumptions about the nature of cultural identity. I thought that I would have easy access to Sandy Islanders because I was a “Gullah Girl”; in my mind, we were “kin folk” and “skin folk” because of our West African affiliation. What a foolish assumption, I would learn only too quickly—and wished I had read Brackette Williams’s book, *Skinfolk, not Kinfolk*, a lot sooner!\(^{58}\)

My initial contact with the people of Sandy Island occurred on a hot summer day in June of 2001. I arrived at the boat dock and approached an elderly man who looked as if he was in his seventies, introduced myself, and asked if I could travel back with him to the island to walk around and meet people. He responded firmly by saying, “I don’t know you.” In that instance, I felt rejected by the Islander. Because of my graduate training and the reading I had done on Native Anthropology, I assumed that I would instantly be able to travel to the Island and learn

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about my Gullah people. It was a humbling moment, and it would take several weeks before I received the necessary permission from an Islander (insider) to visit Sandy Island. To accomplish this, I had to do some backtracking and rely upon old-fashioned etiquette. I contacted family members on the mainland to see if they had any contacts with Sandy Island community members.

Throughout this preliminary stage of fieldwork, I recall having frank discussions over the phone with my advisor, Dr. Irma McClaurin. I shared with her that my initial attempt to interact with the people of Sandy Island was difficult for me. I further told her that I was going to change my research topic to study the Waccamaw Indians of South Carolina. At that time, I had made contact with Chief Hatcher of the Waccamaw Indians, and he was eager for me to officially meet him and his tribal members. In my mind, this was a better fit for me. In other words, working with the Waccamaw Indians seemed like I would have easier community access. I felt a strong connection with Chief Hatcher and thought that I could make a substantial contribution to the research on the Waccamaw Indians.

Dr. McClaurin told me in an adamant voice that she would not work with me if I changed my research study and told me to focus on ways to acquire entry onto Sandy Island. In other words, the problems that I was encountering in my preliminary stages were part of the research process. I needed to deal with them rather than avoid them. It took some time and some networking, but eventually I was permitted entry, and some of the conversations I had with Dr. McClaurin about the challenges of doing Native fieldwork began to make sense later on in my ethnographic journey.60


60 Ibid.
Based on my early observations, I concluded that Sandy Islanders were a peculiar people. Though a “Gullah Girl,” I was not born in South Carolina. I had a Gullah ancestral pedigree, but my culture was northern, with hints of Gullah culture interspersed, as I later learned. I found Sandy Islanders “peculiar” in the sense that they were a private community with little tolerance for non-Sandy Islanders. And I am not the only one who described Gullah people as “peculiar.” Anthropologist Margaret Washington Creel studied the Gullah people of the South Carolina and Georgia coast and wrote *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs*. In the book, she provided insight into the peculiarity of being private; she explained that Gullah communities are part of a secret society which demands privacy and that many of their religious practices during the enslavement period were spiritually connected to the West African religion systems of their ancestors and were, as we know, outlawed.61 Regarding outside perceptions of the people of Sandy Island, Creel’s research findings were backed up by the interview responses I received from the mainlanders.

Several of the mainlanders from surrounding communities of Horry and Georgetown counties had never visited the Island, but viewed the original Sandy Islanders and their descendants as non-Christian people who practiced “that African religion, voodoo.” Many cautioned me to be careful visiting “that place because you might not return back.”62 Hearing such comments, I was reminded of Zora Neale Hurston’s participation in an initiation rite with the voodoo priest in New Orleans. Hurston stated first in *Mules and Men*, (1935) and later in *Tell My Horse*, (1938) that voodoo came from Africa. I wondered if the Sandy Islanders practiced Voodoo, and if so, whether Voodoo was a part of the Islanders’ African religious

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62 Interviews with residents of Horry and Georgetown counties, June 2001.
system that Creel discussed. Were Sandy Islanders a secret society who appeared peculiar to outsiders that had little knowledge of them? These assumptions and questions really sparked my curiosity.

Moreover, I was being exposed to Sandy Islanders’ unique beliefs, customs, and values, and reminded, in alignment with Papa Boas’s relativistic viewpoint, that each culture was unique in its own right and that no one should judge it according to personal cultural standards. In that regard, I needed to set aside my designation of Sandy Islanders as “peculiar” and try to see them using an emic lens—but first, I had to get inside. And then, there was that prickly question at the back of my mind put there by the mainlanders: if I traveled to the island, would I ever return to the mainland?

In the beginning of August 2001, my networking and old-fashioned etiquette paid off. I received a phone call from an aunt. She gave me the phone number of a cousin who had married an Islander and moved to Sandy Island. Before giving me the phone number, my aunt preached to me that I must be very careful on the boat traveling to and from Sandy Island, again echoing the cautious sentiments conveyed by many mainlanders. Later that month, I arranged to meet my cousin for the first time at the mainland boat dock; we hugged, got into her (jon) boat, and together, we traveled through the Waccamaw marshes to Sandy Island. I had arrived.

My Arrival Story: Permission Granted to Travel to Sandy Island

You can embrace the love, warmth, and peace that have been passed down generation to generation. I’m proud to have been raised on Sandy Island.  

Janet*, a Sandy Islander

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63 A jon boat (or johnboat) is a flat-bottomed boat constructed of aluminum, fiberglass, or wood with one, two, or three bench seats. They are suitable for fishing and hunting. (Wikipedia 2017)

64 Janet*, a Sandy Islander, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2005.
All good ethnographies have an arrival story—it is that moment of reckoning when the anthropologist gains entry into the community. Mine began 15 years ago, but the memories are still with me. As I traveled by jon boat to and from Sandy Island, I was reminded of how close Sandy Island was in terms of distance, and yet how far away it was in terms of accessibility.

Along the way to the Island, I observed the remnants of rice paddies throughout the Waccamaw marshes. These were the spaces where my own ancestors had labored in South Carolina fields from sunup to sundown, producing rice as one of the major cash crops of the 17th century. This act of traveling back and forth was somewhat like time travel. It was then, and still is, a unique, yet scary experience for me, a mingling of the past with the present simultaneously.

One reason for my fear was the alligators visibly basking on the former rice paddies during their mating season, and as I watched them from the safety of the boat, Islanders still had to reassure me that I had nothing to fear. They told me, “Relax, the alligators will not bother you.”65 This small but constant reassurance revealed to me that Sandy Islanders know the cycle of this ecological waterway; they are not just Island people, but River people.

Their day-to-day lived experiences are organized by the tiding flow of the River. And, in every formal and informal interview I conducted with the Sandy Islanders, what was constant was the pride they had in their day-to-day island experiences and lives shaped by the River. Sandy Islanders, these River people, view their world through a cultural lens of peace, harmony and community.

The River is the Islanders’ transportation platform—they travel up and down it to fish, and to get to and from school, work, shopping, and to take care of business that can only be done

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on the mainland. But, the River is also a symbolic place for community gatherings. I observed, over and over again, that after church services and Sunday dinners, if the weather permitted, Islanders went to the area they call the waterfront to congregate and socialize. Sitting at the waterfront talking with the Islanders was an extremely peaceful experience. I was awed by the tranquility and calmness of the surroundings, and always felt freer when I was on the Island.

It is my belief that being surrounded by water helps maintain a calmer demeanor, like what I witnessed one Sunday afternoon at the waterfront with an Islander I will call Joe*. Our interaction was informal; as we sat near the River, the calmness took over, and Joe began reminiscing about the past life histories of the Island. He talked about finding out that his people were not the first inhabitants of the Island.

He had learned from a distant family member that the Waccamaw Indians were its first inhabitants. They used it as their ancestral burial place, since it is considered the highest area in Georgetown County. Later, during slavery, the Spanish named it Sandy Island because of its hilly and sandy landscape.66 This discussion intrigued me, and I searched official records for documentation to support his family’s origin story of the Island and its first inhabitants. Though I have not found any official record of this information, the narrative may explain why the Islanders perceive Sandy Island as they do; in their belief system, it is a place of refuge and a resting place for the Waccamaw Indians’ dead, which also makes it sacred. That sense of peace and sacredness is reflected in how Islanders view and treat this Island place/space today.

Recently, the Islanders granted the Chicora Foundation67 and the Nature Conservancy68 permission to travel to, locate, and preserve all the cemeteries on the Island. I and students in the

66 Joe*, a Sandy Islander, in discussion with the author, 2011.
Forestry Department at Horry Georgetown Technical College were invited to participate in the cemetery preservation project, scheduled to occur in 2017. With the help of these organizations, perhaps some of my own questions may finally be answered: are the ancestors of Waccamaw Indians buried on Sandy Island? And, if yes, what impact will this knowledge have on the African-descended people of Sandy Island? Will knowing this as a fact, based on archaeological evidence, change their own narrative about their place in the history of Sandy Island?

Over the course of my 15 years of collecting data, I have discovered that researching a group of people who have consciously resisted being studied by outsiders (non-Sandy Islanders) comes with an array of challenges. There are many that will be revealed throughout this ethnography, but the first major challenge, mentioned above, was gaining access. To better understand why gaining access to this Gullah Island community was so difficult, I must provide a sense of the community’s sociopolitical autonomy.

In trying to structure a traditional sampling process, I went to the usual suspects of city and county records to obtain census information, and found it simply is not available. The areas of land owned by the Islanders have no street names or numbers on the houses; instead, they are categorized by names of elders in the community who have passed on to the ancestors. This makes it difficult to conduct random sampling based on street addresses and home ownership. I also found that data confirmation was elusive since the route to verifying data is circular, and always leads back to Sandy Islanders and their presentation of the facts and their interpretation of these facts.

One good example is the interview I had with the Georgetown County Assessor office; having gone there in search of facts based on county documents and records, I was surprised when the city employee referred me to an Island resident for further information about street
names and house numbers. As far as I can determine, there is minimal documentation in the county assessor office on Sandy Islanders, leaving the outside world with very little information about the community. What little data existing in public records is partial, especially when compared to the information available about the mainlanders. Such gaps in data and documentation allow Sandy Islanders to control the narrative they wish to tell about their history.

Crafting a Gullah Ethnography

In this first chapter, I described the challenges I overcame in order to gain the trust and acceptance that would allow me entry to observe and participate in the culture of Sandy Island. I also discussed the pioneers and contemporary scholars who position themselves as Native Anthropologists and how their work has informed the direction of my own research. It should be clear that the framework of cultural relativism, as articulated by “Papa” Franz Boas, continues to have power in anthropology and is a central aspect of this ethnography. His legacy, and my approach, are rooted in the beliefs that all cultures are equal to each other, that groups must be analyzed through fieldwork within their own cultural contexts, and that there are no racial hierarchies in cultures—just human diversity. Moreover, I described my coming of age and coming into my own identity as a “Gullah Girl,” which I attribute to the results of my DNA testing, utilizing my family network, and my perseverance to gain access to the Sandy Island community, despite considerable odds.

In Chapter 2, I present a literature review on the African Diaspora as a key framing concept that is a guiding force throughout this ethnography. I focus on an historical genealogy of West Africans transported to the New World of North America, specifically the South Sea

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69 County Assessor Office employee in discussion with the author, 2013.

70 DNA tests genetically linked me to the people of Sandy Island by way of the West Africans forced to the American South during the slave trade.
Islands of South Carolina, and their cultural transformation into the present-day Gullah people. I also show how my travels to the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana reinforced and strengthened my connection to Africa and to the Gullah people. In this chapter, I also describe my travels throughout the South Carolina and Georgia coasts and how, through visiting these other areas, I came to better understand the distinction between Geechee and Gullah as defined by the people themselves.

In Chapter 3, I take a closer look into the landscape of Georgetown County, the history of how Gullah people are active participants in the history and formation of this area, and how Sandy Islanders perform their Gullah identity within this geographical and historical space.

Chapter 4 describes the methods I used for data collection as well as a discussion of the modifications I had to make as a Native Anthropologist and because of the community’s resistance to being studied. I describe the sources from which my data are derived, encompassing formal interviews as well as anecdotal information I gathered during Participant Observation. In assessing the reliability of formal data collected by state agencies, I point out their limitations as they pertain to Sandy Islanders. Two important issues for Native Anthropologists are those of ethics and trust, and I highlight the ways in which these values inform my own methodology for data collection; it is something with which I believe all anthropologists must contend, and it represents a unique challenge for Native Anthropologists who may be held to higher standards of accountability because they are members of, or look like, the group of people they are studying. Indications of the some of the inherent problems when studying a group of people who choose to remain unstudied are provided.

A major research dilemma is this: how many of their secrets should I reveal in the interest of research, and without doing harm to the people? This remains an ongoing conundrum even as
I write this dissertation. Since I began conducting research over a decade ago, so much has changed in the kinds of methods and resources available to anthropologists. I share some of the new methods of digital humanities and storytelling that I relied upon to acquire data in light of the community’s opposition to being studied.

Along these lines, I came to treat community members as co-collaborators, and in the research process I show how we produced material culture designed to generate revenue and give the community control over their own public narratives. The results of this collaboration are a calendar and a recipe book, which is in progress. I view both of these products as acts of deliberate agency intended to preserve aspects of Sandy Island culture and further the community’s autonomy they have worked so hard to preserve. These acts give them control over the public transcript they wish to share about themselves and their culture.

Furthermore, in Chapter 4, I will discuss my research findings based on a decade of research after I gained acceptance into the Sandy Island community. There is no way I can ever present the totality of ten years of research in a single chapter, so I focus on analyzing certain events and examples that illustrate my collaborations with the community to preserve Sandy Islanders’ cultural knowledge. This discussion also reveals how producing revenue-generating cultural artifacts (that will appeal to the tourists, who are allowed to visit the Island) facilitates the Islanders’ agency and creates a version of tourism, but on Islanders’ terms. Throughout this chapter, there is an ongoing discussion of the trials and tribulations inherent in being a Native Anthropologist and how this has influenced my interpretation of the data.

Chapter 5 concludes my ethnography of the Gullah people of Sandy Island. It summarizes my key findings along with some commentary on the direction I think the next generation of Gullah research must consider.
CHAPTER 2
THE AFRICAN DIASPORA PARADIGM IN THE SEA ISLANDS

You raised the basic question: What is the diaspora and how do we really define it? Without ducking the issue, this is one of the goals of the project. We hope that in the process of conducting this research we will better understand what goes into that notion.¹

Ruth Simms-Hamilton, Sociologist

Figure 2-1: Waccamaw River (Photographed by Tracey Graham. June 2013.)

During my fieldwork, I transcribed interviews in which Sandy Islanders shared their memories about Island life. I recall an account in which a middle-aged woman, who I will call Mary*, revealed that each time she traveled to the mainland, she got an eerie feeling because the death of her cousin still haunted her soul. According to her, over twenty years ago, her cousin Fred* drowned in the Waccamaw River. He was in a small fishing boat. The driver of a larger boat moved rapidly across the river canal, and the pressure from the water turned her cousin’s

boat over. He could not swim and did not have a life jacket, so by the time he arrived at the hospital on the mainland, he was pronounced dead. Mary and others in the community believed the driver of the other boat, who was a White male, drove recklessly because he saw a Black person in the boat and, therefore, had no regard for him or Black people in general. She concluded her story by stating that she wished that she had never left the Island because the community’s traditions are different from those of mainlanders.²

This story revealed the teller’s belief, and one held by others on Sandy Island as well, that Sandy Islanders’ core values are different from those held by people of the mainland. In her Islander cosmology, the community values people first and cultivates strong family relations, while the mainlanders represent a different set of norms and values that reflect, from the Islanders’ points of view, privilege, entitlement and power. In trying to interpret this interview with Mary, I deployed the African Diaspora Paradigm as a lens through which I could analyze the historiography and cultural traditions of enslaved Africans transported throughout the Americas when controlled by colonial structures, and now their descendants.

Bringing Simms-Hamilton’s African Diaspora Paradigm Center Stage

The African Diaspora Paradigm is a helpful explanatory tool to use in examining the humanity of African people throughout the Americas. In describing the horrors of the slave trade, sometimes the humanity of those involved gets lost. I focus on highlighting the humanity of enslaved people by providing detailed information about how these once-African people lived their day-to-day experiences and were transformed into today’s Gullah people. What were the forces that shaped their identities and the socio-political cultural expressions evident today? The African Diaspora Paradigm, as formulated by the late Ruth Simms-Hamilton, is useful because it

² Mary*, a Sandy Islander, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2005.
requires that we first understand the history of the African people who were relocated from their homelands (mostly involuntarily, but occasionally voluntarily) to other areas of the globe and the implications of that movement on their subsequent survival. The paradigm also accounts for the cultural dynamics and patterns of resistance that I see evident in the Sandy Island Gullah community today. Traditional histories of enslaved Africans often overlooked patterns of resistance. If discussed, they were often presented as a one-time aberration, rather than as an ongoing tactic of survival.

Dr. Ruth Simms-Hamilton, chair of the International Advisory Committee for the African Diaspora Research Project at Michigan State University from 1988 until her tragic death in 2003, developed the African Diaspora Paradigm as an integrative framework for those in any academic discipline to study African Diaspora communities.3 In her monograph, Creating A Paradigm and Research Agenda for Comparative Studies of the Worldwide Dispersion of African Peoples,4 she argued for a common approach to studying and interpreting the African Diaspora. Her argument was that despite being dispersed geographically, there were commonalities (patterns) in the cultures and experiences of those descendants of enslaved Africans, which could be used to compare and contrast the ways in which Africans reinvented themselves in the new world.

What most attracted me to using Simms-Hamilton’s paradigm to study Sandy Island was her incorporation of a clear vision that gave “agency” to African people. She believed that in order to understand the people of the African Diaspora, scholars needed to look for cultural patterns (or archetypes) that could be compared and interpreted in the context of a common

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3 Disciplines include Anthropology; African, Latin, Caribbean Studies; History; Library Science; Religion; Language Studies; and Sociology.

historical experience while simultaneously allowing for the uniqueness of each African Diaspora community to prevail.

While she didn’t use the term Diaspora, there is no question that Zora Neale Hurston saw patterns in her research. For example, she found similarities in songs among Blacks in the American South and the Bahamas. Yet, she also acknowledged the differences. The African Diaspora Paradigm allows for an examination of cultures within their own historical and geographical contexts (cultural relativism) while also identifying patterns that bind them to other African-descended people throughout the Americas. Sandy Island is one of those other Diaspora groups.

In the opening of this chapter, I shared a story from Mary about the death of her cousin Fred in a boating accident. Her “truth” of why she believes that the White mainlander’s action was an act of racism against the Islander is rooted in an historic divide of “them” (White mainlanders) and “us” (Black Sandy Islanders) in South Carolina. There is no evidence to suggest that the White mainlander purposely drove his boast recklessly in order to kill the Islander, but she is firm in her belief that his disregard for Black life was the motivation.

What her story shows is how modern-day behavior of Whites is interpreted by Sandy Islanders through the lenses of racial inequalities and racial hierarchies as social ills that date back to plantation structures of the 15th and 16th centuries. While times have changed, to Sandy Islanders, the White mainlanders’ behaviors are still seen as illustrative of colonists’ behaviors rooted in a system of inequality in which Black life is deemed unimportant in the eyes of Whites. Translated to modern times, Islanders perceive that they are viewed by White people as always

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subordinate to them.\(^6\) And it is their isolation that protects Sandy Islanders from what they view as the will and ill of White domination.

The validity of my interpretation above becomes clearer when analyzing why Islanders choose to live on Sandy Island rather than mainland, which has many more resources. In an interview with Janet\(^*\), a middle-aged woman who was born and raised on the Island but moved to the mainland after she married Preston\(^*\) in the late 90s, she explained why she prefers living on Sandy Island: “You can embrace the love, warmth, and peace that have been passed down generation to generation. I’m proud to have been raised on Sandy Island.”\(^7\) During this interview, the Islander expressed her feelings about how the modern-day world is full of hate and discrimination, but she never felt that way about her homeland, Sandy Island. In her worldview, Sandy Island is a safe haven and refuge from any forms of discrimination—it acts as a shield for the people who live there, and it protects them. Janet and her family travel back to the Island daily to participate in community rituals like attending church service, community meetings and fish-fries.

I turned to Simms-Hamilton’s paradigm to better explain why Sandy Islanders have chosen to remain isolated from the mainland. Their Island refuge lacks many of the amenities found on the mainland, yet they stay and choose to partake of modern amenities, but on their own terms. There are three main tenets that comprise Simms-Hamilton’s African Diaspora Paradigm; they are:

- Migration and Geo-Social Displacement: The Circularity of a People
- Social Oppression: Relationship of Domination and Subordination
- Endurance, Resistance, and Struggle: Cultural and Political Action\(^8\)

\(^6\) Janet*, a Sandy Islander, in discussion with the author, August 15, 2005.
\(^7\) Ibid. 2013.
I found these tenets useful in interpreting the data I collected about Sandy Islanders. I will elaborate on their application to my research findings in Chapter 4.

For now, I am interested in seeing how some of Simms-Hamilton’s thoughts on the idea of “home” and “homeland” might help explain the utopian view of Janet, who felt her home on Sandy Island sheltered her from racism and other ills of the world. In the introduction of her manuscript, Simms-Hamilton described it in the following way:

Homelands are socially constructed spatial representations embedded in economic, political, and cultural relations and processes. They may be neither geographical “facts” nor legally defined political or national territories. The “African homeland” is a case in point. Africa is a continent. There is no country-specific “African homeland.” The nature of the dispersion process and the culture of violence associated with enslavement and colonialism is such that there are multiple diasporic identifications with Africa that do not necessarily coincide with legal/political boundaries linked to specific nation-states, past or present. As a place, Africa in the diaspora is part of a collective memory, a reference for tradition and heritage.9

In essence, Simms-Hamilton asserted that collective memory, traditions and heritage determine home or homeland. Whether home/homeland is a real geographical fact becomes irrelevant.

I think it is this sense of imagined connection that Janet attempted to explain. It isn’t the physical space of Sandy Island per se—the sand, the houses, etc.—rather, it is what Sandy Island symbolizes to the people who live there. Sandy Island represents, to them, a place of refuge, safety, isolation and distance from racism and White domination. It is home and homeland. I would not come to understand fully what was meant by this until I traveled to Africa. There, I

9 Ruth Simms-Hamilton, Routes of Passage: Rethinking the African Diaspora: Volume 1, Part 1 (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 2007), 19. It should be noted that Dr. Simms-Hamilton tragically passed away in 2003 while working on her book, Routes of Passage: Rethinking the African Diaspora: Volume 1, Part 1. It was later published in 2007, after some of her students, Dr. Kimberly Eison Simmons, Dr. Raymond Familusi and Dr. Michael Hanson, edited the manuscript and added an introduction describing what they had done to bring it to publication, and continue Simms-Hamilton’s legacy of African Diaspora scholarship.
became fully aware of what Simms-Hamilton wrote and what Janet described to me. In Africa, I found home and homeland.

**A Gullah Girl’s Journey to Cape Coast Castle**

Africa is my homeland, and it is imaginary and real.\(^\text{10}\)

Tracey Graham, Native Anthropologist

In August of 1994, I flew from La Guardia Airport in New York and traveled over the Atlantic Ocean to Ghana. When I landed in the country’s capital, Accra, I felt a sense of belonging. This trip predated my DNA testing (Tikar people of Cameroon) by twenty years, but it marked the beginning of my spiritual awakening to connect with kinfolk across the Atlantic Ocean. Everywhere I went in Accra, I saw African people with pigmentation like mine.

There was something quite liberating in seeing people (kinfolk) who resembled me in skin, hair texture, height and weight. I felt I belonged to the African people tribe. I have never felt this sense of connection as an African in the United States. While walking around the sandy streets of Accra, I talked with my kinfolk; they instantly knew from my dialect that I was from the United States. Nonetheless, I felt a deep connection to Ghanaian people and their country. I stayed in Accra for three weeks, and during that time, I made arrangements to travel to Cape Coast Castle by bus. I felt compelled to witness the Castle where my ancestors were housed before their shackled bodies were shipped, unwillingly—and we have since learned, filled with many acts of resistance, including suicide—to the Americas.

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\(^{10}\) Tracey Graham in discussion with her editor (Amanda Marsico), April 2017.
Figure 2-2: Cape Coast Castle from my journey to Ghana (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 1994.)

Figure 2-3: Inside Cape Coast Castle where my ancestors lived before leaving on the slave ships (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 1994.)
Getting on the bus to Cape Coast was a sobering experience. I was soon to come face to face with my own historical memory. When I arrived at the Cape Coast Castle, I had such an eerie feeling; it was the same sadness expressed by the Sandy Island woman over the loss of her cousin who drowned in the Waccamaw River. Stored in the recesses of my mind, was an historic memory of great tragic proportions.

My sensibilities were shocked by the surroundings: mold, filth and the smell of feces haunted the entire Castle. As I walked through the rooms, I visualized my ancestors screaming, while being beaten and shackled in the Castle, waiting to be carried out by the Portuguese to ships destined for the New World. I had many nightmares after my visit.

The Middle Passage always seemed like an imaginary idea until I went to the Cape Coast and witnessed it for myself. Suddenly, Simms-Hamilton’s approach in her African Diaspora Paradigm made sense: people of African descent are connected, bound together by that experience of the Atlantic Slave trade. We know now,

Roughly speaking, the six to twelve million Negro slaves brought to America came from the part of the West Africa between the Senegal and the Congo rivers. True enough these West Coast slave markets did in turn obtain some slaves from far in the interior of the continent, but the principal markets were about the mouth of the Senegal, Gambia, Niger and Congo, and the majority of the [B]lacks were obtained from this West Coast region.\(^1\)

I stood on the same shores as my ancestors and recognized that I did not have to be there at the moment slavery occurred in order to experience it. Enslavement is part of our collective memory—somehow carried in our cultural DNA. This experience helped me realize the power of memory and how a horrific event could have such power over the Sandy Island woman who, years later, was still emotional and shaken every time she was on the River. Setting foot in the Castle gave me my own powerful memory that is still with me today.

\(^{1}\) Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, 41.
Emergence of the African in the South Sea Islands

To the men and women who, in Africa and the New World, have helped me understand their ways of life.12

Melville J. Herskovits, Dedication in The Myth of Negro Past

After my trip to Africa, I pondered what happened to their rituals, their values, their world views once the Africans landed in the Americas. Were they transmitted through memory, and survived as carryovers? Herskovits certainly thought so, as he documented the presence of African survivals in The Myth of the Negro Past. Forty-seven years after Herskovits’s research in 1941, William Pollitzer, a physical anthropologist, published The Gullah People and Their African Heritage in 1988. Like Herskovits, Pollitzer delineated the ways in which descendants cultivated their African heritage in the New World. In his initial research in South Carolina and Georgia, Pollitzer referred to African descendants as Gullah people, and in his examination of their African physical features he told us how he reached this conclusion.

For my doctoral dissertation research in the mid-fifties, I return to my birthplace to estimate genetic admixture as a factor of population change over time in the [B]lacks of coastal Carolina and Georgia commonly called the “Gullah.” First, I made an informal survey of the peoples of the sea islands from Charleston south through the Golden Island of Georgia, sometimes taking a boat across waterways to interview families of these supposedly isolated people, asking them about household size and migration patterns. . . . [A] great majority of the [B]lack inhabitants were descended from those brought in previous centuries to work on plantations there. . . . My research, based on physical features and inherited blood factors, showed the [B]lacks of the Charleston area to be closer to their African ancestors and far less mixed with Whites than those elsewhere in America.13

In the above passage, Pollitzer demonstrated a direct correlation to African ancestors and the Gullah people by examining their physical features and blood factors.

12 Ibid., v.

Below, he provides further evidence of Gullah peoples’ African traditions in Charleston, South Carolina:

Up and down the coast, skillful [B]lack hands made implements of wrought iron, useful and ornamental, on plantations and in the city. The modern blacksmith illustrates the tradition as he translates his vision to such a finished work as the vibrant coiled snake in the gate of Charleston yard. Woodcarving, realistic yet stylized, also displays the skill and touch of the African American [Gullah People] of the sea island.\footnote{Ibid., 9.}

Pollitzer’s research confirmed the presence of the African carryovers that Herskovits described and analyzed decades earlier.

Another significant study of African carryovers was conducted by Lorenzo Turner, a linguist and student of Herskovits; he published \textit{Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect} in 1949, eight years after Herskovits’s groundbreaking ethnography, and thirty-nine years before Pollitzer’s research. Turner used speech patterns to document the presence of Africanisms in the language of Black Americans in the southern region of the United States. And, he was the first researcher to draw a direct link between the Niger-Congo and Bantu family of African languages and the linguistic patterns of Blacks in the United States. Turner paid very close attention to the identities of African ethnic groups, and was able to identify approximately five thousand words that assert origin in West and Central Africa. He wrote:

The sounds of Gullah show many striking resemblances to those of several West African languages. When the African came to the United States and encountered in English certain sounds not present in his native language, he did what any other person to whom English was a foreign language would have done under similar circumstances—he substituted sounds from his own language which appeared to him to resemble most closely those English sounds which were unfamiliar to him. The American in learning to speak French does this when he substitutes the English alveolar t for the French dental t or the English [a] for the French [a], and the Frenchman and German in learning English do so when they substitute d or t for the English th. . . . It is reasonable to suppose that the African sounds would remain much longer in the speech of the Gullah Negroes than foreign sounds in the speech.
of other persons coming to America because of the Gullah’s comparative isolation on the Sea Island and peninsulas of South Carolina and Georgia.  

Turner’s work is significant in that it clearly links the Gullah’s peoples’ languages to their African homelands. He also provided plausible proof that the Gullah people in the Sea Islands have a unique and distinctive language because of their isolation; this unique speech pattern is filled with sounds and word patterns that I heard firsthand during my time on Sandy Island. For example, at church services on Sandy Island, Islanders used phrases like, “I kno’ I got religion. So glad! An’ the worl’ can’t do me no ha’m!” Translation: I know that I got religion. I am so glad! And the world cannot do me any harm.  

Two other anthropologists that I turned to in confirming the presence of Africanisms in African American culture today were the late Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price. Their work, *The Birth of African American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*, was published in 1976, almost three decades after Herskovits (1941) and over two decades after Turner (1948). Mintz and Price’s work is important because they argued that African peoples’ cultures were not a part of a homogenous community in the new world, but part of heterogeneous “diverse” groupings that formed communities when they began to establish new institutions as Africans and underwent a process of creolization. At the same time, they followed Herskovits in acknowledging the presence of Africanisms in Black culture, but departed from him in asserting that such elements are transformed over time from African to Black American. Mintz and Price described these transformed Africanisms as “unconscious grammatical principles.”  

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For these two anthropologists, their principles referred to a deep structure that generates specific cultural patterns. These structures include the grammatical principles carried over though the Middle Passage as well as the adaptive cultural patterns established when Africans came into contact and were forced to adopt European cultural elements. But, Black culture is not just an amalgamation of African and European cultures; Blacks came into contact with other people in the New World.\(^1\)

More recently, archaeologists like Terrance Weik have documented this “borrowing of cultures” or “ethnogenesis” between Native Americans and Africans.\(^2\) So, there were multiple cultural influences on the formation of Black American culture, and the Gullah people are clear examples of how African, European and Native American cultures fused—known in cultural anthropology as syncretism.\(^3\)

This creation of a new language, a new religion, and a new lifestyle, shaped by adaptation, coercion and resistance in a New World, became cultural markers for the Africans who involuntarily migrated to the American South. Herskovits, Turner, Hurston and Mintz and Price were pioneers in documenting the cultural, religious and linguistic transformation of Africans into Black Americans in general, and Gullah people specifically. And Simms-Hamilton’s African Diaspora Paradigm offered a useful framework to explain the patterns found among people of the African Diaspora.

It is a space, imaginary in terms of actual geography, yet a real “space/place” for those anthropologists who embrace the concept. Black feminist anthropologist McClaurin is one who

\(^{1}\) Ibid.


described the appeal of the African Diaspora in her own anthropological research in the following way:

It is at this site [the African Diaspora], an imagined theoretical space/place, where Black Feminist anthropology locates itself. It uses the description, analysis, and interpretations of social inequality and the concomitant resistance as an entry point to construct its own theory, praxis, politics, and poetics. It derives its content/data from the ethnographic study of African-descended people in the United States, Africa, the Spanish-, Dutch-, French-, and English-speaking Caribbean, Central and Latin American and in other geographical spaces where the African Diaspora is located . . . What better entry point for Black Feminist anthropology than an ethnographic study of African-descended people?”

For McClaurin, the concept of the African Diaspora is an ideal entry point for any anthropologist (Black Feminist or not) to collect data that will reveal insights about the experiences, cultures and contexts of African descended people. The place/space where she entered the African Diaspora to conduct research was Belize, Central America, and also the United States, the Caribbean, and parts of Europe—in other words, any place where one can find African Diaspora people. In this respect, McClaurin’s use of the term was less about Black Feminism and more about the connective patterns of oppression, migration and resistance that bind all people of African descent and is the center of Simms-Hamilton’s African Diaspora Paradigm.

My own entry point into the space/place of African Diaspora was through the Gullah people of the South Sea Islands. In the pages to follow, I will use the term “Gullah” to refer to the distinctive groups of people who are among the purest of those with West African ancestry and who live throughout North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida and in the south eastern area of the United States known as the South Sea Islands. At times, depending upon descendants’ geographical locations, I may use other terms like Geechee or Salt Water Geechee, generally based on the emic terms that people use to describe themselves.

I Celebrate My Gullah/Geechee People

For years, Gullah people found it shameful and embarrassing to be identified as such—in part because we thought our heritage began as slaves. We heard the term “Gullah” and “Geechee” spewed as invectives to discredit and humiliate, and only within the recent past has information been documented and accepted that invalidates this assertion.

Ron Daise, Native Gullah Speaker and Gullah Scholar 22

For over 15 years, I traveled throughout the South Sea Islands, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida to collect data and background materials for this research. When traveling the coast of South Carolina, I liked to stop and talk with people I saw selling their traditional cuisines and keepsakes on the shoulders of the road. The drive down Highway 17 South was a Gullah mecca for me, filled with all kinds of people and cultural artifacts. This is one of the main highways where Gullah entrepreneurs dwell.

In July of 2011, I took to the highway as the recipient of the National Endowment for the Humanities Grant 23 on a journey to study the African descendants of Sapelo Island (see Appendix A). I undertook studying other Gullah people so that I could compare their ways of life with what I found among the people of Sandy Island. It also gave me another chance to use Simms-Hamilton’s African Diaspora Paradigm to interpret the data I collected from the Sapelo Islanders.

Traditions, Enslavement and Plantation Structures

Sapelo Island is a barrier island located in McIntosh County, Georgia. It is 292 miles south of Myrtle Beach, or seven hours away by car. To reach it, I drove, using the highway as a


research site upon which I could make stops and engage with Gullah culture. The first stop on my trip to Sapelo Island was in McClellanville, SC; I stopped at a local gas station and purchased a bottle of water and filled my gas tank. While at the gas station, I conducted informal interviews, using a schedule of the same question: what does Gullah/Geechee mean to you? I spoke with three people who were non-Gullah people; their answers are recorded below.\textsuperscript{24}

Interviewee # 1  
Are you talking about da people in Charleston? You know, da ones who make the baskets on the side of the road. Yeah, you talking about them basket weavers!

Interviewee # 2  
Gullah . . . well, the southern traditions of slaves in Charleston. Geechee, not really sure. Were they slaves too?

Interviewee # 3  
People with the funny language in Charleston. It is hard to understand them. Geechee people live in Georgia. I read that somewhere . . .

All three responses from these non-Gullah people reflected a vague knowledge about who or what Gullah/Geechee people are, and most didn’t realize that there is a distinction between the Gullah and Geechee people. The respondents generally did hone in on geography as a marker of Gullah/Geechee people—Charleston and Georgia—as well as linguistic distinctiveness: “People with the funny language . . .”

The first interviewee identified one of the cultural markers of the Gullah/Geechee people—the tradition of basket weaving. As Gullah historian Joyce V. Coakley explained in her book, \textit{Sweetgrass Baskets and the Gullah Traditions}, this ancient African craft form has been practiced for over 300 years throughout South Carolina.\textsuperscript{25} For Gullah people, the sweetgrass baskets are functional and a part of everyday life; they are used to store dry goods, okra, corn, salt, fish and wild herbs. Other raw materials used to make baskets include bulrush, pine needles and palm leaves. Today, the richness of this African craft is seen for miles and miles down

\textsuperscript{24} Anonymous convenience store patrons in discussion with the author, July 2011.

Highway 17 South. Marquetta L. Goodwine, known as Queen Quet, and Founder of Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition, explained in her seminal work, *The Legacy of Ibo Landing: Gullah Roots of African Culture*, that Gullah people are renowned for this African tradition of basket weaving. She wrote:

> Sea Islands are famous for their sweetgrass baskets; it is this image which most frequently comes to mind when people think of Gullah traditions. The sweetgrass basket tradition has been largely maintained by the women of Mt. Pleasant, South Carolina. If you drive through the town on Highway 17, you will find the women and men sitting on the side of the road weaving baskets at their stands. On November 22, 1997, a marker was finally placed on this highway to honor the sweetgrass basket makers and this Gullah tradition.

Gullah Historian Roger Pinckney explained in his book, *Blue Roots: African-American Folk Magic of The Gullah People* that Sweetgrass basketry is similar to Senegambian basketry, which he describes below:

> Senegambian basket weaving serves as an outstanding metaphor for massive cultural retention. Gullah women in the Charleston area weave distinctive baskets of sweetgrass, palmetto, and pine straw and offer them for sale to tourists at dozens of stands out along U.S Highway 17.

I’ve had my own experience with Gullah basket makers along this historic highway; as I stopped to talk, I found the basket makers to be friendly, though sometimes unpredictable, and if they had time, they would explain how to weave a basket, or sometimes sing a Negro spiritual. I found in my travels that, if I had time to listen and they were in a talkative mood, some would share stories centered on slave life.

But I also encountered resistance. Once, I stopped to speak with a woman basket weaver to ask her for permission to tell her story in my ethnography. Her response was a firm “No.”

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The opposition reminded me of my first encounter with the Sandy Island man who would not allow me to travel with him to the Island. He had responded in the same way, adding that it was because he didn’t know me.

While this basket weaver was more than willing to share her personal story, she did not want it documented. What I gathered from our discussion was that this story was hers, and once published, it would no longer belong only to her. I was reminded of how Sandy Islanders withheld certain information about themselves in order to retain control. This basket weaver also would not allow me to take pictures of the baskets she skillfully crafted and displayed at her roadside stand on Highway 17 South.

Later, as I considered the basket weaver’s response, I came to classify it as an example of what I call “performing Gullah.” I will explain in more detail in Chapter 4 what I think it means to “perform Gullah.” For now, suffice it to say that I viewed her response as a powerful illustration of how Gullah people safeguard their cultural identity, one shaped by resistance, and leverage it to their advantage. This act of negotiating what I would call “strategic compliance” with certain requests or the decision to withhold knowledge also may explain in part why I have found it so difficult to collect folklore from Gullah people. They do not want to share and have others leave with (or appropriate) their knowledge. And, it’s not just me. If formal city and county records are any indication, officials of mainland authority also encounter resistance through withholding information and strategic compliance, and seem to have a difficult time collecting data from Gullah people.
Returning to my informal survey on the road to Sapelo Island, the second respondent’s answer—“Gullah…well, the southern traditions of slaves in Charleston. Geechee, not really sure. Were they slaves?”—illustrated the complicated history of Gullah people as seen through the eyes of outsiders. Before the presence of Blacks in the Carolinas, Pinckney indicated that the first recorded history of enslaved Africans in the United States was in 1612 at Jamestown, Virginia. A colonial journal documented their presence in the following way: “the arrival of a Dutch ship with ‘twenty neegars.’” A century later, the city of Charleston, then known as a Colony of Carolina, became the center of North America’s slave trade.

However, it was Sullivan’s Island, off the coast of Charleston, South Carolina that served as a major slave port for Gullah people. During my drive to Sapelo Island, I saw signs for Sullivan’s Island, this historic entry point for slaves. It is off Highway 17 South, and when I

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29 Ibid., 19.
turned onto the Isle of Palm Connector and followed the signs to Sullivan’s Island, I ended up at the port where my Gullah ancestors arrived on the ships. Scholars estimated that forty percent of four hundred thousand Africans came to the Port of Sullivan’s Island.30

Once sold to plantation owners, the newly arrived slaves, who would become today’s Gullah people, were housed on slave plantations. As forced laborers under the eyes of slave masters and slave overseers, enslaved Africans were forced to farm tobacco, indigo, rice and cotton. Both Coakley and Pinckney confirmed that these cash crops were a part of the major trading system that established South Carolina as a leading trading post throughout North America.

I encountered the remnants of these once-grand plantations on my drive down Highway 17 South; I caught glimpses of Hopsewee and Boone Hall, both former rice plantations. Boone Hall Plantation sits off of Highway 17 South, and is considered one of the oldest slave plantations in North America. Both plantations are located in Charleston County and deeply rooted in the state’s history of slavery. Visiting Hopsewee and Boone Hall Plantations in modern times, I saw vestiges of slave life. As I walked the grounds, I was met by aging oak trees with flower gardens that greet visitors at the entrance. I wondered: if the oak trees could speak, what would they say? Today, those who run the plantation as a museum still hold onto a traditional interpretation of the past, but in modern dress, educating visitors about the Africans who brought with them the various technologies of rice plantation life.

Arriving in the “Holy City” of Charleston is an experience. It is described as “a city full of old southern style, charm, and hospitality that was most recently voted as the No. 1 travel

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destination among cities in North America.” Charleston is a social experience filled with historical elements that contradict each other. There are enormous plantations that symbolize White power and privilege, but the influence of Black and Gullah peoples’ iconic craftsmanship is all over the city—in baskets and in iron work. One indisputable example of this influence are the works of Phillip Simmons, a Black man and craftsman who is one of Charleston’s finest and most well-known ironworkers. He was named a national treasure of the state of South Carolina and received a National Heritage Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts. He is most celebrated in Charleston, but has built over five hundred decorative ornaments shown in gates, window grills, fences, and balconies, and his work is immortalized in the Smithsonian Institute as well as state museums in South Carolina and around the country.

Figure 2-5: Heartgate entrance to Phillip Simmons’s garden

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Ironwork is just one way in which the African influence manifests itself in South Carolina culture and history. Food is another way that Gullah people and African influences are evident in South Carolina.

**Are You Hungry?: Fishing for Seafood**

Before I drove onto the interstate to Sapelo Island, I veered off of 17 South and stopped in Beaufort County to eat some of the fried fish and shrimp that Gullah people sold on the side of the roads. Food is very much a part of Gullah culture, and Gullah women are known within their communities as being very clean and skillful chefs in how they prepare their foods—from the time they go shrimping to how they clean, season, and fry the shrimp. Because they live near the coast, fishing, shrimping, crabbing, and collecting oysters are known ingredients of their food traditions.

While eating the well-seasoned fried shrimp and fish, I had a discussion with a local fisherman who lives in Beaufort. I will call him Jasper*. Not only is Jasper a fisherman, but after our talk, I also ventured to call him a historian and a marine biologist. In the course of our conversation, he explained to me the best seasons to catch seafood in the Sea Island waterways:

Now, most locals enjoy whiting, like what you are eating here. Other local fish in the Beaufort area include spots, sea trout, and black bass fish. I like to fish in creeks and sometimes I ride to a river and fish. . . . Red Drum, they call it flounder, is the most celebrated fish down here. Folks like to catch them . . . trophy fish. Shrimping takes place in salt water . . . creeks, too.\(^{34}\)

\(^{34}\) Jasper*, a Beaufort County fisherman, in discussion with author, July 2011.
Jasper usually shrimps at the Harbor River, which is known as Port Royal Sound, and he shared that there are two shrimp seasons. The brown shrimp season runs from May through August, and the more popular white shrimp season begins in September and goes through the month of December. He said, “Yeah, I sometimes go crabbing,” and he told me that the best

36 Ibid., 24.
37 Jasper*, a Beaufort County fisherman, in discussion with author, July 2011.
time to go is before sunrise and right before sunset. He enjoys eating blue crabs because they are “very tasty,” and heavily populate the Beaufort area. During a full moon and a warmer season, he explained, crabs are plentiful. After a brief interruption, Jasper went on to talk about hunting for oysters, his favorite.

Oh boy, oysters are my favorite and they are plentiful during the months that end in “r.” And, oysters do better in cooler water. We were isolated for a long time . . . living on these islands down here . . . we was able to keep our traditions close to us, you know . . . Port Royal Harbor is a place where slaves came to from Africa. We got a lot of history down here. Anytime you want to talk come and see me . . .

In my discussion with Jasper, I started to think about the fishermen and women who live on Sandy Island and fish for bass. In talking with the Islanders, I learned that they were told their ancestors knew the river systems because they were similar to West African coastal waters. They also applied African technology and were able to breed more fish in the water due to a practice called “drugging.” Historian Peter Wood, author of *Black Majority*, explained that during the enslavement period, Africans drugged for an abundance of fish.

Drugging is an African herbal remedy that fishermen mixed together, using quicklime, herbs and plant juice, and poured into the river. It is believed that, as a result of this African herbal remedy, multiple species of fish are plentiful in South Carolina Rivers. To the best of my knowledge, and based on observation, Sandy Islanders do not use drugging in modern times. I did ask Jasper if he knew of drugging, and he shared that he was familiar with the remedy.

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38 Ibid.

Figure 2-8: Sandy Island community member fishing\textsuperscript{40}

I learned so much from this fisherman; he was knowledgeable about the Port Royal Harbor and how it was another slave port center, outside of Charleston, for slave trade. As he spoke about the history of the area, I thought about Sidney W. Mintz, renowned Caribbean anthropologist, who examined the economic history associated with the cultural food production of the West Indies and European communities. Mintz’s book, \textit{Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History},\textsuperscript{41} is a study of sugar consumption and the ritualistic patterns of eating associated with it. Mintz did extensive fieldwork in Puerto Rico, Jamaica and Haiti, and also unveiled how European slaveholders not only cultivated global markets in the American South, but in the West Indies as well. According to him, enslaved Africans were transported to the West Indies region of the world to grow sugar cane because it was an important food for

\textsuperscript{40} Moore, \textit{Home Portraits from Carolina Coast}, 88.

consumption in the Europe region and in the Americas. Mintz described how enslaved Africans and their labor were responsible for making sugar a profitable crop.

Sugar cane was first carried to the New World by Columbus on his second voyage, in 1493; he brought it there from the Spanish Canary Islands. Cane was first grown in the New World in Spanish Santo Domingo; it was from that point that sugar was first shipped back to Europe, beginning around 1516. Santo Domingo’s pristine sugar industry was worked by enslaved Africans, the first slaves having been imported there soon after the sugar cane. Hence it was Spain that pioneered sugar cane, sugar making, African slave labor, and the plantation form in the Americas.42

I shared some of the findings from Mintz’s research with the fisherman, discussing how many of the foods that we eat today were originally sourced from Africa and/or produced by African slave labor. Jasper was in agreement with this information. On the road, I learned a lot about fishing, shrimping and the Port Royal Harbor in Beaufort, South Carolina, and I feel that the Gullah fisherman learned something from me about the role of Africans in shaping sugar production.

More recently, the death of self-proclaimed “culinary anthropologist” and author of *Vibration Cooking or The Travel Notes of a Geechee Girl*, Vertamae Smart-Grosvenor, in September, 2016, reminded me once again of my experiences with Gullah food and, especially, the various ways seafood is cooked among Sea Islands Gullah communities. Just as Mintz gave us the ethnography of sugar, Smart-Grosvenor, in her combination recipe book and ethnography, told a story of African survival through her favorite recipes from Gullah/Geechee communities of which she was a member.

The book is filled with cooking advice, food opinions, and cultural humor. For example, in her recipe for oysters, she repeated the same information that the fisherman on Highway 17 shared with me over six years earlier:

42 Ibid, 32.
Oysters are in season in the month of the year with the letter “r” in them. They have nutritive value and can be eaten different ways. I like them directly from the shell with lemon juice. I dislike oyster stuffing. They are very good rolled in a batter made of cracker crumbs and eggs and then fried in butter. I have to pull your coat to one thing. Don’t look for a pearl in oysters. True pearl oysters are not edible.43

Her recipe for fried crabs is extremely simple: “soft-shell crab[: clean and dip in flour (or egg batter) and fry in butter. You can eat all the soft-shell crab.”44 Another favorite dish of Smart-Grosvenor was fried catfish:

Fried catfish[: first off you got to skin the catfish. To skin: draw a sharp knife around the fish in back of the gills and pull off the skin with the pliers. (You can use your hands.) Clean and cut up the catfish and salt and pepper, then pat with corn meal. Fry in very hot grease in your heavy black cast-iron skillet.45

The challenge with Smart-Grosvenor’s recipes is that there are no measurements of any ingredients; everything is based on “vibrations” or natural instinct. This kind of cooking was brought home to me in my current collaboration (2015-present) with Sandy Islanders to put together a cookbook. The concept was brilliant, but when it came time to document each ingredient, the woman I worked with had a hard time figuring how to measure the food items. Sally’s* cooking style is very much like Smart-Grosvenor’s—based on vibrations. As Sally explained to me: “When I cook something, I just figure it out as I go. You might add more ingredients once you taste it.”46 I had ample opportunity during my research on Sandy Island over a decade, and during my travels, to observe Gullah food preparation in various settings. The one thing they all had in common is that most Gullah cooks used vibrations. And, as they

44 Ibid., 41.
45 Ibid., 90.
46 Sally*, a Sandy Islander, in discussion with the author, January 2015.
shared recipes, like Smart-Grosvenor, their descriptions of cooking were also filled with personal vignettes.

**Completing the Journey to Sapelo Island**

Returning to my 2011 road trip, after feasting on Gullah cuisine, I got back in my car and continued driving on Interstate 95 South towards Sapelo Island. Along the way, I passed signs for Hilton Head, Savannah, and many of the Georgia Sea Islands where Gullah people dwell: Daufuskie Island, Tybee, Wassaw, Ossabow, St. Catherine’s Island, and finally, Sapelo Island, my final destination, located in Meridian, Georgia. The Meridian dock was where I parked my car and waited for the Anne Marie, a ferry boat that can be a chore to catch.

![Map of Sapelo Island](image)

**Figure 2-9: Map of Sapelo Island**

The environment of Sapelo Island is similar to Sandy Island and Accra, Ghana with its sandy landscape surrounded by natural raw materials. As I walked around Sapelo Island, I saw *life everlasting* and other wild herbs that grow around the 16,500-acre island. *Life everlasting*, an herb found in abundance around Sapelo Island, is generally smoked or used in tea form to

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heal Islanders of the flu, headaches, colds and constipation. Archeological excavations can trace the first inhabitants of the island to Sapelo Indians (Native Americans) who lived on the island long before White settlers and African descendants arrived. The *life everlasting* herb came to the island with Native Americans. However, both Native Americans and Africans share in their use of it in folk remedies. This medicinal plant is another example of how the Gullah/Geechee people, who lived in isolation during the enslavement period, relied upon traditional knowledge, but adapted and used herbs that grew wild on the planation to heal themselves, blending African and Native American traditions. In general, over the last decade, I have learned that if I have an ailment, it is best to defer to Gullah people for their expertise in herbal remedies.

![Figure 2-10: Life Everlasting herb](image)

On my first visit to Sapelo Island in July of 2011, I stayed for a full day; the second visit took place two weeks later, (August 2011) and I stayed a weekend. On the first visit, I met an island leader, Cornelia Walker Bailey, who described her community members as “Salt Water

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Geechee People.” Salt Water Geechee is a term that I had never heard during all of my Gullah/Geechee travels, but it surfaces in Kim Severson’s New York Times article “Taxes Threaten an Island Culture in Georgia.” Severson’s description of the island and its people echoes that of Bailey: “Sapelo Island, a tangle of salt marsh and sand reachable only by boat, holds the largest community of people who identify themselves as saltwater Geechees.” “Salt Water Geechee People” is a different Gullah island identity from their neighbors in South Carolina. The Black Charlestonians I encountered on the mainland, and those from the island communities, have always described themselves as “Gullah People.”

One night during my second visit in August of 2011, I interviewed a Sapelo resident by the name of Kevin as we partook of an outdoors communal feast. He had built a fire pit, and community members gathered around the fire bringing food from their homes to cook over the flame. During this communal moment, I took the opportunity to ask: “Why do you all identify as Salt Water Geechee?” They explained it is because they have a unique island life, living far away from the mainland, surrounded by salt water.

They identify as Geechee, a term they’ve used all of their lives. As one Islander stated definitively, “I was born Geechee.”

**Defining Gullah/Geechee**

One person who has been instrumental to the recognition of Gullah culture, defining what is Gullah, and certainly contributed to my understanding of Gullah/Geechee people, is Emory S. 

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50 Cornelia Walker Bailey in discussion with the author, July 2011.


52 Ibid.

53 Sapelo Islanders in discussion with author, August 2011.
Campbell. He is a Gullah native, scholar, former Executive Director of Penn Center, Founder of Gullah Heritage Consulting Services, and now a Commissioner for the Gullah/Geechee Corridor.

I first met Emory S. Campbell as a recipient of the National Endowment for Humanities Grant in July 2011. When Campbell and I met face-to-face, he talked about his passion, the Gullah/Geechee culture and discussed his book, *Gullah Cultural Legacies*. I found his definition of Gullah/Geechee helpful in my understanding of the two terms. According to Campbell, Gullah/Geechee is defined as:

…a culture comprising a system of beliefs, customs, art forms, foodways, and language practiced among descendants of West African who settled along the coast of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida from slavery period to present. The culture is a carry-over from that which thrives in parts of West Africa. Today, it is estimated by some that more than a quarter million people fit the definition of Gullah in the Gullah Corridor. The area includes a substantial number of barrier islands from Sapelo, Georgia, southward to Daufuskie, Hilton Head, and Johns Island northward. Although curiosity of the origin of the word Gullah has produced several commentaries, perhaps the most commonly accepted linkage is to Angola. It is widely believed that the regularity of enslaved Angolans arriving at various coastal parts gave rise to the term “Gola Negroes” which later became Gullah. But many, particularly African Americans, use the term Geechee to describe this unique culture. It is commonly accepted that enslaved West Africans were smuggled to Georgia waterways settling along the Ogeechee River in South Georgia. Thus the term Geechee is used almost exclusively among African Americans when referring to Blacks who live in coastal South Carolina and Georgia.54

The above description from Campbell’s book is an in-depth, operational definition of the distinctions between Gullah and Geechee, mostly based on location.

However, that does not mean there is consensus about his definition. Congressman James E. Clyburn argued that the Gullah/Geechee Corridor starts in Wilmington, North Carolina and goes down the coast to Jacksonville, Florida. His definition takes geography and culture into

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account. Drawing from the official website for the Gullah/Geechee Corridor, the following characteristics describe why the corridor was created and defines who is included, based on geographical boundaries different from Campbell’s description above. The corridor serves to:

1. Recognize the important contributions made to American culture and history by African Americans known as Gullah Geechee who settled in the coastal counties of South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida.
3. Assist in identifying and preserving sites, historical data, artefacts, and objects associated with the Gullah Geechee for the benefit and education of the public.  

The term Gullah in relation to the Gullah/Geechee Corridor Heritage Commission is defined based upon the location of the African descendants. The descendants who live in North and South Carolinas are called Gullah people, while Black Georgians and Floridian communities share the name of Geechee people. Then, there are unique names within the construction of Gullah/Geechee, like Salt Water Geechee.  

What is strong in my mind, based on encounters first with the Gullah people of Sandy Island, and later with the Saltwalter Geechee of Sapelo Island, is that regardless of what people call themselves, Gullah/Geechee, or where they believe the Gullah/Geechee Corridor begins or ends, these are proud people. And, they are especially proud of having a strong African identity. Also, from the moment I left Sandy Island, hit US Highway 17, and subsequently landed on Sapelo Island, I saw tangible evidence of those aspects of Africanism that Herskovits described decades ago; they are alive, well and thriving today (see Figure 2-11).  

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56 Ibid.
Sweet Grass Baskets          Gullah Language
Quilting/Storytelling       Religion: Voodoo/Muslim
Iron Work/Masonry/Carpentry Fishing/Drugging
Herbal Remedies            Farming/Skilled Rice Growers/Food
                            Production

Figure 2-11: Herskovits’s Africanisms\(^57\)

**Hail to the Gullah Geechee Corridor**

After my encounter with the Gullah/Geechee, and observing how much their contributions are interwoven into South Carolina culture, I close this chapter with the following question: If African people in the American South produced rice, the major cash crop, why did it take so long for these geniuses to be recognized for the expertise they brought with them from Africa? The answer to that question can only be good, old fashioned racism. It took scholars like Herskovits, who was willing to challenge the prevailing ideas about Black people’s lack of culture; it is also the many other generations of anthropologists who followed Herskovits, among whom I include myself, that have taken up the mantle to retell the narrative of enslaved people and show a truth about the lives of Africans dwelling in the Americas through the eyes of their descendants who carry on the language and cultural traditions that survived enslavement.

In 2007, the answer to my question above came in the form of recognition through the creation of the Gullah/Geechee Corridor. Congressman James E. Clyburn of South Carolina, South Carolina Parks Service, Gullah/Geechee scholars, and many Gullah/Geechee communities throughout North and South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida produced the guidelines for the Gullah/Geechee Corridor Heritage Commission. The primary goal of the Commission is to

assist in protecting the history and culture of the Gullah/Geechee people’s ancestral past, present and future traditions.  

The Gullah/Geechee Corridor Heritage Commission is committed to the preservation of Gullah/Geechee communities, including Sandy Island. In the next section, I will introduce the people of Sandy Island. It is through their Island stories that we can witness how this Gullah community is able to maintain a sense of autonomy from the outside world. Sandy Islanders have created their own Gullah nation.

**Sandy Island: It Is a Piece of Heaven**

Sandy Island is a unique place because it naturally brings me closer to God. It is a piece of heaven. I have lived on Sandy Island for over 42 years, and this is the place I call home.

Betty*, a Sandy Islander

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**Figure 2-12: Waterfront picture of Sandy Island (Photographed by Tracey Graham, September 2010.)**

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58 Ibid.

59 Betty*, a Sandy Islander, in discussion with author, April 2013
Throughout the time that I spent with the people of Sandy Island, unanimously, all discussions led to Islanders expressing a similar cosmology as Sandy Island native, Rommy Pyatt: 60 “We have the seclusion, the privacy, and also we have nature, that peace and quietness, family, [and] close-knitness.” Living on an island where community members have close kinship ties means rarely locking doors and, over time, generations of Islanders have crafted a unique Island life that they “call home.” 61 Vennie Deas Moore, the author of Portraits from the Carolina Coast, echoed this essence of Island life in the following description: “There’s closeness. The outside world doesn’t matter that much in a community that is strong. . . . They simply enjoy themselves. They have good times. This is such an encapsulated environment.” 62

Figure 2-13: The water front of Sandy Island 63

60 Rommy Pyatt. Interview by Christel Bell, WMBF NEWS, June 14, 2016.

61 Ibid.


This secluded (encapsulated) island, as described by Vennie Deas Moore, is hidden within the merging of two rivers: the Waccamaw and the Great Pee Dee rivers, and surrounded by former rice plantations. Sandy Island has an incredible oral history that describes the traditions and original cultural expressions of the enslaved Africans who worked the rice fields during the 17th century. Those who live on Sandy Island are primarily Gullah people, and the descendants preserve the life histories of their ancestors through oral traditions. Today, this private 12,000 acre River Island holds approximately 60 residents.

Rommy Pyatt identifies himself as part of the Gullah heritage. Although he resides in Charleston County, he commutes daily to the Island. Why? He is committed to keeping the traditions of Island life alive and thriving in modern times. I had a discussion with Rommy in July of 2005. His responses demonstrated his commitment to the preservation of Island life.

Figure 2-14: Rommy Pyatt at a Family Reunion on Sandy Island in 2007 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2007.)

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64 Tracey Graham, Field Notes, August 2001.
The aroma of long leaf pine trees aroused my sensibilities early one Saturday morning on Sandy Island. It was around 9:00 am and the sun beams were cooking my skin. It was intensely hot on the Island and, yet, when I walked up from the boat landing and saw Rommy cleaning up the trash from around Mt. Rena (Mt. Rena is the area where most of the islanders dwell), I saw this area as an Island resort. The topography of the Island is physically beautiful. Because of the Islanders’ geographical isolation from the mainland, the Georgetown County government gives the Islanders complete autonomy of maintaining their own grounds.  

On that hot day, I walked up to Rommy, who greeted me with one of the most contagious smiles. He affectionally called me Cuz.

Rommy: Hey, Cuz.

Response: What’s up, Rommy?

Question 1: What are you doing outside in this heat? It is too hot to be out here!

Rommy: I am trying to clean up the Island; I want our Island to look good.

(As I followed him to Mt. Rena cemetery, he was putting trash into a bag while we were making small talk. Then he said:)

Rommy: We (the community) need to clean up this cemetery. This cemetery was used from the mid 1800s to the mid 1900s, and then in the 1950s they (Islanders) started carrying the bodies out to the church. The West African folks did not mind the cemetery being overgrown; they liked the area natural. . . . They wanted it to be overgrown to be close to nature, but we got to keep this area clean. It is hard to locate these graves and we have more cemeteries. We need a ground-penetrating radar.

In April of 2013, the community came together on a Saturday morning to resurrect Mt. Rena cemetery. I was invited to participate. I had never cleaned a graveyard before, so this was a unique experience for me. After three hours of community service, we went to the Island fire

65 Rommy Pyatt in discussion with the author, July 2005.

66 Rommy is Betty’s son. Betty is the author’s cousin.

67 Rommy Pyatt in discussion with the author, July 2005.
At lunch, Sally reflected on her childhood memory. In the 1980s, she and her friends played in the cemetery. During that time, it was a big open field, and she never remembered seeing graves. Rommy added that their ancestors used chicken wire to mark graves. I was curious about chicken wire being used as grave markers, so I called my 85-year-old aunt in Bucksport, South Carolina. She confirmed that chicken wire was an old tradition our people used to mark graves. I wondered how many other Gullah communities used this ancient ritual. Was this just a Gullah ritual? Since we cleared Mt. Rena cemetery, archaeologists from Coastal Carolina University in Conway, South Carolina brought radar equipment to the back side of the Island and found over 200 graves dating back to the 1700s. The back side of the Island is owned by The Nature Conservancy—9,000 acres of undeveloped land, to be exact.

Rommy continues to preserve Island traditions through the art of storytelling. In the summer of 2005, he founded Tours de Sandy Island. His tours give mainlanders a visual glimpse into Island life. Paul Grishaw, a writer for Grand Strand Magazine, witnessed Rommy’s expedition firsthand in the fall of 2011:

We toured the small, well-kept church starting in the fellowship hall and kitchen, where more traditional soul food is prepared for special occasions. In the sanctuary Pyatt asked those in the tour group for musical volunteers, and finding none, powered up the church’s organ and struggled through an old “Negro Spiritual,” as he called it. “I’m way out of practice,” he said with a chuckle. Earlier in the tour Pyatt sang a Gullah spiritual he learned at a church in Charleston during a special

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68 Aunt Sussie is a common nickname or pseudonym for an elder island woman.

69 Sally in discussion with the author, April 2013.

70 Rommy Pyatt in discussion with the author, April 2013.


72 [http://toursdesandyisland.com/](http://toursdesandyisland.com/)
African Day. The translation of the altogether difficult language to understand, speak and write was, “The Lord walks with us.”73

I also had a firsthand account of Rommy’s excursion six years before Grishaw in August of 2005. Rommy’s storytelling modes were engaging and entertaining with inflections in his voice as he drew me into his childhood memory:

These trees produce a whole lot of hickory nuts. When I was growing up, we (other children) came out here, cracked them open and played hickory nut wars and, you know who won, and who lose. The one who went home smiling won, the won who went home with a big knot on his forehead, lost.74

Twelve years later, Rommy’s tours are a testament of his devotion to honoring Island history. He explained that establishing the tour business was not an easy task. Prior to Rommy opening Tours de Sandy Island, he had a community meeting with the Islanders to discuss the specific areas in which the mainlanders could wander. Islanders firmly voiced the following conditions:

- Make sure that the mainlanders do not take pictures of Islanders without their permission.
- Do not walk over to an Islander’s property during the tour and interact with them unless the Islander(s) grants permission.
- There are selective places that the mainlanders can photograph (Island store, church, fire station, cemetery, woodland area and the River).

Rommy responded to his community’s concerns by reassuring them that he would respect their privacy. But he stressed to me that his community needed to change their mindsets to adapt to modern times.75 In Chapter 5, I will discuss how tourism is affecting Sandy Island.


75 Rommy Pyatt in discussion with the author, September 2006.
Island Men-Folks Carry On African Traditions

The men on Sandy Island built my house.  

Carolyn*, a Sandy Islander

Not all of my interactions with the Sandy Islanders took place on the Island. Over the years, I have met the Islanders at restaurants, shopping centers, worship centers, cultural events or the movie theater, depending on where he/she preferred to be interviewed. I met Michael* at a local restaurant in Georgetown for lunch in October 2006. He is a native Islander. When he got married over twenty years ago, he moved to Georgetown County. Today, he and his wife have two boys who attend the local high school. When meeting Michael for lunch, he seemed cautious. I greeted him with a friendly smile and he suspiciously nodded for me to sit down. I recalled how we always had great conversations during Island fish fries or church functions, so I felt comfortable asking him to give his point of view about Island life. Respecting his cautious manner at lunch, I went with the flow as we talked.

Question 1: Growing up on Sandy Island, what were your fondest memories?

Michael: I felt highly favored growing up there. . . . It was eight of us (siblings). And my parents provided for us in so many ways. We were a very close family. We took care of each other. I have very fond memories as a child.

Question 2: Will you ever move back to the Island?

Michael: Of course I will. . . . (His eyes lit up. He seemed very happy at this point in our discussion) We (he and his wife) will move back. I will build us a house.

Question 3: Wow, you can build houses?

Michael: Yeah, you did not know that? I love working with my hands. I do brick mason, roofing, I paint, tile floors. (He paused.) Have you seen John’s deck? I helped with it.

Response: Yes, his deck is nice. I see you on the Island working on boats, but I did not know this . . . Wow!

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76 Carolyn*, a Sandy Islander, in discussion with the author, April 2013.
Michael: All of the men on the Island work together to build homes. Maybe one or two men got certifications. But, most of us learned these trades by the elders. Sometimes outside workers (mainlanders) come in to assist with electrical work. But, usually the men come together . . .

Question 4: So, how many houses have you worked on?
Michael: (Smiling at me and thinking out loud) A lot. (Then, he ate more fries.)

Question 5: How long does it take to build a house?
Michael: It all depends on the size of the house and materials.

Response: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense.
Michael: No. Since I was a child I worked with my elders, my father, uncles, grandfather . . . that was my training.

The conversation really flowed as I stayed focused on Michael’s skills. Finally, towards the end of our lunch, I asked if he thought the community should build a connector bridge to the mainland. Michael believed that his community should maintain their Island character of being private. He did not support a bridge being built on the Island to connect to the mainland. One thing is for sure, even today: he adores his community and travels sometimes two or three times a week, working on boats, helping Islanders build decks and even building homes. He is a faithful servant to his Island community.77

Seven years later, in the Spring of 2013, I saw Michael laying bricks on the exterior of Carolyn’s 4500 square footage retirement home. In talking with Carolyn, she confirmed what Michael shared with me at lunch in 2006, that the Island men build all the homes on Sandy Island. The men are mainly skilled laborers in brick masonry, dry walling, plumbing, carpentry, and painting. Most of them do not have certification in these skills, but have worked as apprentices under the patriarchs. It took approximately one year to build her retirement home. When Carolyn purchased materials for her home, she had them delivered to the mainland boat

77 Michael*, a Sandy Island native, in discussion with the author, October 2006.
landing, and the men placed the materials on boats or barges depending on the quantity of supplies.\textsuperscript{78}

Figure 2-15: Carolyn’s Retirement House (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.)

In this section of the chapter, I discussed how I witnessed examples of African carryovers that have been transmitted through memory into modern times on Sandy Island; some of these include burial rituals, storytelling, communal labor and specialized laborer skills. As an ethnographer, it is my job to listen to the various narratives of community members in order to understand the cultural meanings assigned by the people to their experiences and history. I also listen to what is not said and what their behaviors signify. To situate this ethnography, I’ve traveled the Low Country of South Carolina searching for larger cultural patterns that connect Sandy Island to the other African Diaspora communities. Moving forward, the theoretical frameworks of both interpretative anthropology and the Diaspora Paradigm will provide the means for me to frame the county of Georgetown, in which Sandy Island is located, within the larger context of Gullah peoples’ untold stories.

\textsuperscript{78} Carolyn, a Sandy Islander, in discussion with the author, April 2013.
As a former history teacher and a vocal advocate of historic preservation, I believe the work of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission is imperative to saving this rich culture.¹

James E. Clyburn, Congressman for South Carolina

This chapter introduces some of the theoretical frameworks that have shaped my research and how I interpreted the data I collected. Central to my thinking has been the work of Clifford Geertz, an interpretive anthropologist whose contributions have had a profound impact on the discipline of anthropology, especially those of us looking at symbols and the meaning of everyday life. In the Interpretation of Cultures: Selective Essays, (1973) Geertz argued that the role of ethnographers was to look for a deeper meaning in cultural signs and symbols.² This perspective stood in stark opposition to traditional anthropology that privileged the so-called objective observer.

For Geertz, such signs and symbols of cultures formed what he called a “thick description,” and it was the task of the ethnographer to decode and analyze these embedded cultural meanings.³ In addition to collecting empirical data, the ethnographer served as an interpreter of cultural knowledge. As such, ethnographers were less “objective observer[s]” and more co-creators of narratives, always in conversation with the people who told their own stories, to which the ethnographer also assigned meaning.

³ Ibid.
Geertz’s methodological approach was not focused on “what do the people do” but “what do they mean.” And, to get at these meanings, ethnographers had to be prepared to analyze the “thick description” of signs and symbols.\(^4\) I have followed Geertz’s approach and paid attention to the “thick description” that infuses the stories told by the Gullah people in Georgetown County. But meanings do not just derive from words; they come from rituals, behaviors, greetings, gestures, foods, etc. Reflecting on the conversation I had with Sandy Islander Michael at the restaurant, initially his posturing was cautious and cold. But, once we started talking about how he builds houses on Sandy Island, there was a shift in his mannerisms. Michael became more relaxed, specifically in his body language, tone and facial expressions. All of these cultural signs, gestures and symbols, in addition to the stories told, must be read in terms of what they can tell us about this isolated community. It is this interpretive, methodological approach that guided my ethnography of Sandy Island.

Also critical to my decision on which methods I would use was H. Russell Bernard’s detailed description of the Participant Observation method in Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, a must-read text in the discipline of anthropology. Bernard made it seem so simple:

“a successful participant observer . . . learn[s] to act so that people go about their business as usual when you show up; and remov[e] yourself every day from cultural immersion so you can intellectualize what you’ve learned, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly.”\(^5\)

But nothing is simple about fieldwork, as I learned first-hand.

Bernard and Geertz shared, if little else, an emphasis on doing good fieldwork. For Geertz, it was essential to be observant because signs and symbols are ever present if you pay

\(^4\) Ibid.

close attention to the people and their environments. For Bernard, it meant using good methods to collect data.

Figure 3-1: Sandy Island boat landing on the mainland side (Photographed by Tracey Graham, May 2010.)

As I explained in Chapter 2, Highway 17 South heads in the direction of Charleston where the signs and symbols of Gullah culture are in abundance along the sides of the road. Driving in the opposite direction of the Holy City (Charleston), Highway 17 North leads into Georgetown County where Sandy Island is located. This route is necessary to reach Sandy Island’s boat landing by car. Before I go deeper into the cultural expression of Sandy Island, it is important to interpret the area in which Sandy Island is situated.

The city of was established in 1729, and Lee G. Brockington asserted in her book *Plantation Between the Waters: A Brief History of Hobcaw Barony* that, prior to European and African contact, Native (Indians) Americans were the main dwellers of the Low Country, and the surrounding rivers were named after the local tribes. Brockington wrote:
The varying topography of the Lowcountry was made useful by American Indians who named the rivers Santee (gentle), Pee Dee (shallow), Edisto (black) and Waccamaw (coming and going, or tidal), and who then took their tribal names from rivers. The Indians were involved in frequent territorial wars, claiming hunting and farming lands and making slaves of the vanquished.  

The Waccamaw River flows parallel to Highway 17 and, as I veered off of Highway 17 North to Front Street, there were signs posted that directed me to visit the Gullah Museum.  

Walking through the doors of the Gullah museum in Georgetown is such a unique experience; every aspect of Gullah people’s day-to-day experience is presented through cultural materials. Vermelle Smith Rodriguez, the owner, offers her visitors many Gullah cultural artifacts for purchase, like sweet grass baskets, grass dolls, books, cards and quilts. She considers herself a Gullah artist who specializes in weaving the Gullah narrative through story quilts.

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6 Lee G. Brockington, Plantation Between the Waters; A Brief History of Hobcaw Barony (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2006), 14.

7 Sandy Islanders see themselves as Gullah people. Islanders visit the Gullah Museum.
Figure 3-2: Gullah Ooman story quilt

Rodriguez’s most iconic quilt in the museum is pictured above and is called the “Gullah Ooman Story.” In the center of the quilt, there is a Gullah woman, or Ooman (pronounced phonetically as “OO-mahn” in Gullah language). Looking at the Ooman quilt, I see a graceful woman who is full of life displaying bright colors in dress and a head wrap. There are thirteen panels, all of which tell a compelling story about Gullah people. In panel one (clockwise from bottom left), Rodriguez stitched African pyramids to symbolize the origins of humankind. Moving up, the second panel depicts a pastoral agrarian society, and she uses earthy colors of brown and green to create an artistic expression of a farmland. The third panel shows Africans enjoying their lives before European contact. In panel four, there is picture of a dove intended to

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symbolize the arrival of Europeans to Africa—they were given the dove of peace. In exchange, they captured Africans to sell as yet another commodity.

    In panel five, Rodriguez quilted a ship, and she sees it as the starting point of the African Diaspora where enslaved Africans were transported by ships to the Americas. Dark brown bars signifying Africans in jail adorns panel six, which she describes as Africans in the holding pen. This panel depicts how Africans were stored in locations such as Bunce, Cape Castle, Elmina, Goree and Cape Verde—all historically documented as known slave ports. Panel seven symbolizes the story of the Middle Passage. There are a multitude of colors to create the impression of slave ships traveling from Africa to foreign locations. Panel eight is another holding pen, but this time for enslaved Africans that arrived at Sullivan’s Island in Charleston. Then, there is panel nine where Rodrigues stitched an enslaved African on an auction block. As Africans arrived in the New World, they were immediately sold into slavery from public platforms in open-air markets. Many Southern cities, like Charleston, have an area designated “slave auction market.”

    The tenth panel is called the big house, and resembles the main house found on most plantations. The eleventh panel represents Big Mama⁹ who keeps the plantation system operational. Her duties consist of being the mid-wife, cook and mistress—Gullah women took care of the entire plantation. Panel twelve is known as the staple-crop field. On the plantations in South Carolina, Gullah people taught Europeans their African customs on farming, making the American South the richest agricultural area in the 18th century. Finally, panel thirteen is known as the church, the religious building that brings Gullah people together to keep up their faith. The church is also a spiritual space that represents freedom (President Abraham Lincoln’s

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⁹ Big Mama, in the Gullah tradition, is the matriarch of the family.
Emancipation Proclamation became law on January 1, 1863). My visit to the Gullah Museum allowed me to witness how artists like Rodriguez keep the Gullah traditions alive through quilting, a cultural tradition passed down that speaks to generations, enabling them to understand and respect the significance of Gullah history in North America.

Gullah quilts are key cultural symbols by which, according to Geertz, we can interpret different aspects of the Diaspora experience. However, these quilts are not just symbolic; they transmit other forms of communications. Jacqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard’s book, *The Hidden in Plain View*, reinforced the idea that there are messages hidden in African American/Gullah quilts—and often hidden in plain sight. Their analysis of quilts describes the creations as both functional (not artistic) material objects and silent forms of communication in the African American/Gullah communities:

The African American quilt is a cultural hybrid that enjoys encoding meaning through geometric patterns, abstract improvised designs, strip-piecing, bold, singing colors, and distinctive stitches. When we analyze these five elements of encoding meaning, we will see the African American quilt for what it is: a “fabric griot.” As a fabric griot, the American quilt is a communicator, conveying heritage as it once displayed a means for slaves to flee the plantation and journey to freedom. Although the African American quilt appears to be an everyday bedcover, it is more. Communicating secrets using ordinary objects is very much a part of African culture, in which familiarity provides the perfect cover. Messages can be skillfully passed on through objects that are seen so often they become invisible.

Gullah people, however, did not just rely upon quilts to preserve and communicate their heritage; storytellers (griots), blacksmiths, iron workers, drummers, singers, and others skilled in African/Gullah forms of expression are all guardians of the culture. Linking this back to Rommy’s tour business on Sandy Island, I see him as a storyteller, sharing with the mainlanders.

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his heritage. These cultural expressions are filled with the Africanisms (carryovers) described by Herskovits that infuse and inform life in the American South (see Figures 1-2 and 2-11). Today, descendants are consciously working to preserve the African carryovers that were transmitted during the enslavement period.

My research locates Georgetown, South Carolina as one of many historical cultural markers of Gullah presence along the Gullah/Geechee corridor. In addition to the Gullah Museum, there is also a Rice Museum on Front Street that honors Gullah cultural materials and where I was able to purchase several local books on the unique legacy of Gullah people. The Rice Museum also houses the Sandy Island calendar that the Sandy Islanders and I collaborated on to help promote cultural tourism. As resident ethnographer, I collected and organized the life histories that appear in the calendar. More details about working on the calendar with Sandy Islanders will be discussed in Chapter 4.

When traveling around the Gullah/Geechee Corridor, Gullah Museums represent Islanders’ life histories in lots of different ways. Within the Corridor, there are a variety of museums in South Carolina. Some of the most well-known include Charleston’s Old Slave Mart Museum, York W. Bailey Museum at Penn Center in Beaufort and the Gullah Museum of Hilton Head. These museums are all important cultural platforms for presenting and interpreting Gullah/Geechee heritage. There are other places outside of museums that also symbolize Gullah/Geechee cultural heritage.
In the City of Georgetown, Front Street has many tourist attractions that relate to enslavement and Gullah people; these include the historical landmark of Winyah Bay Harbor where the Nina steamship and other vessels transported many Africans as cargo during the enslavement period. On my way to Sandy Island, I passed other signs and symbols that tell about the enslaved Africans who ultimately became today’s Gullah people.

Sometimes, I stopped at places like Winyah Bay Harbor to pay homage to my ancestors, many of whom were killed or committed suicide before getting off of the slave ships. While at Winyah Bay Harbor, I often thought about Ibo Landing on St. Simon Island, Georgia, where it is said that Africans took their lives before stepping foot on the soil of American South.

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And so, this is the story of Ibo landing that has been told and retold. A shipload of Ibo tribal men headed for the coastline of St. Simon Island in Georgia refused to work on the Georgia plantations and decided to walk off the ship right into the water before making landfall. Marquetta Goodwine, in her book *The Legacy of Ibo Landing: Gullah Roots of African American Culture*, described a memory that has been circulating in Gullah culture forever:

Another boatload of captured Africans reached the Georgia coast. Those around them did not yet know that the cargo they were to unload were Ibo. These captives were warriors, and would not toil this land. Instead, the entire group walked into the water with the chains yet on their bodies. They are said to have walked on the water right back to Africa. To this very day, no marker or shrine celebrates the site where the indomitable Ibo are said to have disembarked. In fact, Gullahs and Geechees can only look at the site from a distance, since it has been fenced off as private property. . . . The heroic resistance of the Ibo at what is now called Ibo

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Landing forms a cherished part of the heritage, not only of the Gullah, but of all African Americans.\textsuperscript{14}

In an informal interview with a Geechee man who was born on St. Simon Island, I learned that along with family members, he also visited the Ibo site annually as a way to acknowledge the passing of their ancestors. He believed, like Goodwine, that his ancestors’ spirits traveled back to Africa.\textsuperscript{15}

In March of 2013, I traveled to the landing to pay such homage to the Ibo warriors who resisted being forced into the American slavery system. Today, Ibo landing is private property and there are no cultural markers that celebrate the death of the Ibo warriors. Yet, in my mind and those of Gullah people, and anyone else who celebrates the African Diaspora, Ibo landing is a symbol, in the Geertzian sense of the word, of African survivals.

This landmark reminds the Gullah/Geechee people that the Ibo tribal men, from whom some of us are descended, were warriors who fought for the freedom to retain their African value system. Goodwine explained the importance of understanding Gullah communities and their symbols:

Those who do not understand the unique community that has been formed in the Sea Islands by the Gullahs and Geechees often regard its members as ignorant, barbaric, and backwards in their speech and practices. Only recently through the work of scholars, researchers, linguists, and folklorists are people realizing the value of the Gullah language and culture. As a result of the respect that has begun to grow for this culture, more interest is gradually growing in other aspects of southern African American culture. People are beginning to realize that there were many things that can now be drawn upon to change present negative trends in our society.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 6.

\textsuperscript{15} St. Simon residents in discussion with author, 2013.

In contrast to the descendants, I observed two non-Geechee people walking their dogs in the neighborhood. To them, the Ibo boat landing simply represents a dead end. They have no cultural connections to the area.\textsuperscript{17} The aftermath of slavery still haunts the memory of the descendants, leaving some with ill feelings towards non-Geechee people.\textsuperscript{18} Once I left Front Street, I drove back onto Highway 17 North, staring at an abundance of pine trees that surround the landscape. Driving put my mind into a reflective state, and I thought about the history of the area between Blacks and Native Americans.

Before European contact, Native Americans cared for Hobcaw Barony; they used it as a place to hunt for deer, turkey, raccoons, opossums, shellfish, fish and snakes. Leland Ferguson’s archeological findings suggested that Native Americans were serious meat eaters, which is in direct contrast to Africans, who ate less meat and more grains and vegetables as shown in Figure 1-2.\textsuperscript{19} When Africans arrived in the American South, they relied on the knowledge of Native Americans, especially the potters. Ferguson further explained that Africans and Native Americans dwelled together on the plantations. He asserted:

When slave potters first arrived from Africa, they had no way of knowing where to find choice potting clay in their new environs. In some cases they may have unsuccessful experiments with local clays before finding the best material. The crude pieces from Pettus and Utopia in Virginia may be examples of such trial and error. But as newly arrived slaves learned about the natural environment, serious potters soon discovered where to find clay for their pots.\textsuperscript{20}

When I interviewed Chief Hatcher, of the Waccamaw Indians, he affirmed Ferguson’s assertions that Africans and his people lived together on the plantations in South Carolina. His

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Tracey Graham, Field Notes, 2006.

\textsuperscript{19} Leland Ferguson. \textit{Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650 – 1800} (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992). For additional discussion on food history and carryovers, see Appendix C.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 17.
ancestors and those of the Sandy Islanders likely crossed paths during their enslavement on South Carolina’s plantations. Chief Hatcher explained, “My people passed as Black because their skins were dark so they lived on the plantation with Black people. And the owners did not know they were Indian people.” He continued to share that the Waccamaw Indians, pre-dating the ancestors of Sandy Islanders who lived in the area, had a social political structure in place long before Columbus.\textsuperscript{21} Native Americans lived near the water systems in Georgetown County.

When I drove around the area, I saw how the mainland separates the Waccamaw and Winyah Rivers. Harry R. Roegner gave vivid imagery of the Waccamaw Peninsula and how the land of Hobcaw lies between the waters. He wrote in his book, \textit{Minnie of Hobcaw}, that:

\begin{quote}
The Waccamaw Peninsula runs down the north coast of South Carolina, from about Murrells Inlet to just south of Georgetown. It is separated from the mainland by the Waccamaw River and Winyah Bay on the west with the Atlantic Ocean on the east side. At the southern end of the peninsula is an area called Waccamaw Neck, which for all efforts and purposes is like an island, surrounded by lush marshes that have been a haven for migrating water fowl for millennia.\textsuperscript{22}
\end{quote}

Today, Hobcaw Barony is owned by the Belle W. Baruch Foundation and the North Inlet-Winyah Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.\textsuperscript{23} Walking around the estate, I saw how the Baruch Foundation has attempted to replicate aspects of slave life through material culture; slave houses remain on the landscape for visitors to receive firsthand the interpretation and understanding of slave life. As I left Hobcaw Barony, a few miles North on Highway 17 was one of the most unique plantations I have ever experienced: the Arcadia plantation.

My first encounter with the Arcadia plantation was in the summer of 2001; this was the same summer that I made my initial contact with the people of Sandy Island. I was teaching a

\textsuperscript{21} Chief Hatcher in discussions with the author, November 2013 and February 2014.

\textsuperscript{22} Harry R. Roegner, \textit{Minnie of Hobcaw} (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2007), 13.

summer class at Horry Georgetown Technical College; as I left the class, I met one of the college
custodians, an African American male. He had overheard me share with staff members that I
was researching Sandy Island. He told me that he was a descendant who lived on Arcadia
plantation, which is south of Sandy Island, and he would be excited to take me on a tour of his
plantation. I wondered to myself, “Why is a Black man living on a plantation?” As a newcomer,
however, I was honored that this elder, also a veteran, would allow me entry onto this privately
owned 12,000 acre plantation. He only asked that I not use his name, so in this chapter, I refer to
him as “the veteran.”

Figure 3-5: Arcadia Plantation

The plantation that he invited me to is owned by Lucille Pate, daughter of George
Vanderbilt (owner of the Biltmore House in Asheville, North Carolina). Originally, it was
divided into several rice plantations: Bannockburn, Clifton, Forlorn Hope, Oak Hill, Prospect
Hill and Rose Hill. Most of the African descendants live in Rose Hill. In a recent 2016 article on

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the plantation that appeared in *Sasee Magazine*, 25 (2016) Lucille Pate’s daughter, Dawn, talked about the planation’s history:

“When people think of Arcadia, the first name that comes to mind is Vanderbilt, because [Lucille] Lulu is the daughter of George Vanderbilt. 26 But, what most people overlook is that Arcadia did not come from the Vanderbilt side of the family, but rather from Captain Isaac Emerson, the inventor of ‘Bromo Seltzer.’” 27

Dawn shared that, growing up on Arcadia, she and her brother roamed the entire plantation. “I was quite a tomboy!” Dawn has lived most of her life on this property that has dual meaning as a symbol of extreme privilege and enslavement. 28

As a result of my invitation from the veteran, I was able to spend many days on Arcadia plantation and examine the richness of wildlife that included deer greeting visitors as they entered the plantation; there were also pigs, squirrels, snakes, possums, raccoons and other wild game roaming the area. It seemed as if the residents also took advantage of Arcadia’s bounty. One day, I observed a young man walking down Arcadia road with two squirrels in his left hand that he killed for his family’s dinner. City-dweller that I am, the plantation offered me a different experience; I’d never seen so many wild animals living near people.

The moment provided a new outlook on how environment aided in shaping and maintaining certain practices used by Africans during plantation life in the south. I wanted to understand how those descendants who had left the smallness of their Gullah community to live and work in the larger public adjusted once they returned home, and it seemed that continuing to


26 Vanderbilt was an art collector and industrialization magnate who amassed his fortune through the steamboat and railroad industries. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington_Vanderbilt_II

27 Ibid. Bromo Seltzer was a granulated, effervescent antacid invented in 1888. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bromo-Seltzer

28 Ibid.
take part in heritage-based practices, like living off of the land, was one way to breach the divide. I was also curious why people lived on plantations in the south, given the history associated with such places. To me, plantations were symbols of many of the racial disparities of the American South, and living on them seemed to perpetuate the unjust system they stood for. Suddenly, I was faced with Geertz’s dilemma—was it a wink or a blink? Did plantations represent only the horrors of enslavement and the American South, or was it something else?

Anthropologist Hortense Powdermaker echoed similar questions about the nature of race relations in the south in her book *Stranger and Friend: The Way of an Anthropologist*. Powdermaker conducted research in Indianola, Mississippi, where she examined the racial disparities between Black and White communities. She described the complexities of what she discovered in the following way:

> During the first twenty-four hours in Indianola (and nearby Greenville), and without a single interview or question, I had been made intensely aware of the complexities of social class among the whites, of the aristocrat’s contempt for the middle class, and of their respect for him. I had seen the immediate hostile, automotive response of the middle class to any possible threat, no matter how small or unrealistic, to the status quo with the Negroes. . . . When I had visited Fisk University, both Charles S. Johnson and Franklin Frazier had strongly advised me not to reveal my Jewish background to Negroes or whites. . . .

Powdermaker conducted her fieldwork in the 1930s at the height of racial segregation in the South. She drove around the Black sections of town witnessing the levels of living conditions in comparison to White areas. Although Jewish, Powdermaker also “passed” as a light-skinned Black person and never disclosed her religious background during her fieldwork. It would have resulted in her being excluded had she done so. It was easier for her to let people presume she

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was Black rather than tell them she was Jewish. Though not a Native, Powdermaker certainly encountered some of the complexities of doing fieldwork.

Having been raised in the North, I became more aware of the nuanced complexity of race relations in the South by reading Powdermaker. This was uppermost in my mind as I learned from the veteran about the relationship between Lucille Pate, heir and owner of the plantation, and the descendants, whom she allowed to live there rent free, though they did have to pay their own utilities.

The modern-day structure of the Arcadia plantation is a throwback to the Antebellum period. Lucille Pate occupies the former “Big House,” and descendants occupy former slave quarters. The houses are not much different from when enslaved people lived in them; they are small and dilapidated, and still look like the slave quarters. The disparities between the housing of the descendants, even though they do not have to pay rent, and that of the owners is great and replicates the racial disparities of the old South. And yet, slavery was not just about disparities; it was also about enslaved people adapting and salvaging their own cultural heritage while learning to live under a rigid, oppressive system.

It was at Arcadia plantation that I first encountered Frogmore Stew, a Gullah cuisine prepared by the Vietnam veteran. He cooked this meal daily on the plantation. His recipe, passed down by his mother, is another example of the Gullah vibration cooking mentioned in Chapter 2. It consisted of his special seasonings added to boiling water in a huge black pot with raw corn and potatoes, which steamed for about thirty minutes. Next, he added beef sausage to cook for another fifteen minutes, and then placed live crabs and shrimp into the mix. All of these ingredients were cooked in a pot over coals on an outside pit. When the dish was complete, the Vietnam veteran placed newspapers on his picnic table, drained the water from the stew and
spread the food on the picnic table for the community to participate in eating his version of Frogmore Stew.

Most of my interactions with community members occurred mainly around the porch of the Vietnam veteran’s house. During one of our porch meetings, he explained that the origins of Frogmore Stew came from Frogmore planation. African families would take food from their slave quarters and give it to the person who was in charge of preparing the stew. When food was scarce, enslaved Africans came together to feed the plantation community. These were not social gatherings, like the modern-day version, but an example of a strategy for collective survival.

The Frogmore planation, where Frogmore stew originated, is located in Beaufort County, which is on the southern coast of South Carolina; the Africans on the planation would hunt for seafood to add to the communal pot. In many of the Low Country restaurants, this dish is described on menus as Frogmore Stew or Low Country Boil. During my stay at Arcadia plantation, not only did community members partake in eating Frogmore Stew, but they also shared slave stories. This pattern of social gathering, food and sharing stories on a porch is not unlike what Hurston described in *Mules and Men*.

My data collection methods at the Arcadia plantation drew upon Hurston’s methodology, augmented by what I had learned from Bernard on research methods: (1) I listened intently to the community members and (2) simultaneously participated in the community’s activities.30 Immersing myself in Arcadia’s everyday life, such as the preparation and eating of Frogmore Stew, I learned more personal details about the community members and their life histories than

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what survey methods might have revealed. McClaurin argues that such data, what she calls “kitchen table talk,” is as valid as census data.31

In 2003, there were less than 50 residents who lived on the Arcadia plantation. They worked at local jobs around Georgetown County, primarily in the service industry. The Vietnam veteran told me that most descendants do not have high school diplomas, so their employment options are extremely limited.

My Arcadia Plantation insider grew up with James Small, an internationally known historian who graduated from Howard High School in Georgetown, South Carolina. Small served in the Navy during the Vietnam War era, while my interviewee was in the Army. Small traveled the world lecturing on the heritage of African people and encouraging African Americans to trace their ancestral past because, he said, "Forgetting history can be very dangerous for us as a people."32 The community deems James Small as their town celebrity—an Arcadia Geechee Rock Star.

I asked the residents living on the Arcadia plantation about their views of Lulu, the owner; their responses were qualitatively different and mixed:

Descendant # 1: Oh Lulu . . . she is good!
Descendant # 2: Lulu is an okay person.
Descendant # 3: (Vietnam veteran) Whitee is racist!

These exchanges reminded me of John Gwaltney’s ethnography, Drylongso: A Self-Portrait of Black America, and the type of realness reflected in his fieldwork that allowed the

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31 McClaurin, Women of Belize: Gender and Change in Central America, 11.
reader to hear, firsthand, each person’s day-to-day experiences. In a review of *Drylongso* in the *American Anthropologist*, Theodore R. Kennedy (1982) applauded Gwaltney’s research:

Drylongso is one of the most vivid descriptions of Black people: their life style, their ways of maintaining and functioning in order to survive, their view of the world and the problems they have faced and are facing, their abilities to analyze their conditions and situations beyond their narrow confines, their prescriptions and cures for their population as well as the larger society, and where they fit or should fit within the mainstream society. All of this Gwaltney has captured from an academic perspective. Very few authors have been able to encompass the drama played out in the day-to-day struggle of Black people.

It was this level of authenticity and reality that I wanted to capture in my own fieldwork. And so, I probed the descendants a bit more and asked them to elaborate on why they thought that Lulu was “good” or “okay.” Most chose to say little more beyond their initial response; however, the Vietnam veteran was willing to elaborate on his response that Lulu was a racist. In his own words:

Lulu has done very little maintenance to the planation; houses are run down. Look around. She will not allow “us” to fix our places up. We can’t be better in our environment. Did you look at her house?

He further explained that part of the agreement for living on the plantation is that the community members are required to keep the architecture “as is.” He said that all of the community members felt the same way as he did, though none were as forthcoming in their responses. For example, in conversations with descendants # 1 and # 2, neither expressed any frustrations with the owner in their comments.

The Vietnam veteran was a great resource on the history of the Arcadia plantation, and I also documented his life at Arcadia as well as his tour of duty in Vietnam. When telling his accounts of the Vietnam War, he would physically reenact stories from the war. Some were

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truly heartbreaking and painful for me to watch him in his “one man show.” What he revealed was the trauma of being an African American man fighting as an American in another country, when ever-present in his mind was the reality that he had been rejected by his own country before he left for the war and after he returned from Vietnam.

As I reflect on how I felt during in his storytelling and re-enactment, I am reminded of how Powdermaker pointed out that during fieldwork the anthropologist is a human instrument who in fact studies other human beings and their communities. While we would like to believe that our training in anthropology gives us objectivity, Powdermaker argued that objectivity is an illusion and, in listening to this veteran, I came face-to-face with my own illusion of objectivity in the field.

It was really difficult for me to hear the Vietnam stories without looking within my own cultural sensibilities and wondering about the contradictions that African American veterans face. In the interest of keeping this encounter real and honest, as Gwaltney had done, I struggled to find a way to analyze the Vietnam veteran’s true story that would reveal his anger and agency.

I needed to find a framework that would capture the climactic social performance of his experiences as a Vietnam Veteran. While Geertz’s work gave me a lens through which to analyze signs and symbols, Victor Turner and the concept of performance theory seemed more appropriate to use in analyzing the Vietnam veteran’s narrative. In Anthropology of Performance, Turner explained how he came to see fieldwork as a “social system” or “field” rather than as a “set of loosely integrated processes,” with some “patterned aspects,” some persistence of form, but “controlled by discrepant principles of action expressed in rules of

36 Ibid.
custom that are often situationally incompatible with one another.”’\textsuperscript{38} Invoking Turner, I have come to call this approach “‘social drama’ analysis.”\textsuperscript{39} Turner argued that fieldwork could be viewed as “social drama,” situations that could be interpreted as arguments, combats, rituals, or rites of passage – all of which contain elements of cultural phenomena that are inherently dramatic actions.

I found that the best way for me to process the Vietnam veteran’s experience, capture his authenticity and render how he enacted his memories was through the actual form of drama; I subsequently wrote a play entitled \textit{Frogmore Stew}, based upon my interviews with him and my memory of his painful social performance (see Appendix B). Drawing upon my own background in theater and speech—using the dramatic form to analyze and illustrate occurrences in the field—is not unlike Zora Neale Hurston;\textsuperscript{40} she wrote plays and short stories based upon her fieldwork.

Both my play, \textit{Frogmore Stew}, and the long discussions I had with the Vietnam veteran revealed one certainty: he was engaged in a constant internal struggle with the power dynamics in the American South. Even though he lived in modern times, through his personal lens, he only saw slave masters in relation to slaves. As an audience to the social drama of his life stories, I observed that he saw himself as a slave and viewed all “Caucasoids,” as he called the people of European descent, as slave masters.

Living in these binary structures kept him in internal conflict. This is evident in the play dialogues, constructed from his interviews, in which he has with the character of Joe, his friend

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 74.

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{40} Irma McClaurin, “Belle Lettres: ‘Dear Langston, Love Zora’. ” 2000. Some of the literature that came out of Zora Neale Hurston’s fieldwork included \textit{Mules and Men}, \textit{Polk County} and \textit{MuleBone} (a collaborative work with Langston Hughes).
in the play, and the fictitious character of Uncle Sam. The Vietnam veteran’s analysis of his socio-political structure in the American South reminds me of Michel Foucault’s thought process in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* (1975) He theorized that in our modern society the government enforces extreme control of our lives, both in the private and public sectors—leaving it very difficult for us to escape these levels of dominance. Foucault’s depiction was similar to George Orwell’s *1984,* in which Orwell described the people as under surveillance by the government, and that “Big Brother” is always watching and in control.

The Vietnam veteran appeared to live his life in a prism best described as psychological and physical entrapment. Sadly, in 2007, the Vietnam veteran died of cancer caused by Agent-Orange, a chemical used extensively during the Vietnam War to destroy the fields of the enemy, but which had severe and negative health consequences for the Vietnam vets who were exposed to it. The veteran’s story on Arcadia plantation was an important American story. Another captivating story of the Gullah in the American South is told by a 102-year-old woman who lives (as of April 2017) in the hilly sands of Sandy Island.

### “Plat-Eye and Hags” Live on Sandy Island

Mrs. Oneithia Elliot is the oldest woman on Sandy Island. I affectionately call her “Queen Mother.” She was born on Sandy Island under the medical care of the Island’s midwife on August 10, 1915. Throughout my time on Sandy Island, I have always greeted her with a slight bow because I have great respect for her age and infinite wisdom. One day, I was summoned to visit Queen Mother at her house. Excited by her invitation, in the spring of 2013, I

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42 When I interviewed Mrs. Oneithia Elliot in 2013, she was 98 years old.

43 In Japanese culture, bowing is a gesture that symbolizes respect to the elders. And, since I lived in Japan for two years, from 1991 to 1993, I have integrated this cultural expression into my lived experiences.
traveled with Rommy on this venture. When we arrived, I walked into her house with a small
basket of fresh strawberries in my hands. She was happy to receive them.\(^{44}\) I was intrigued by
her invitation. As I sat next to her on the couch, she spoke in a soft voice: “Spirits wander
around here.” Queen Mother caught me by surprise.

**Queen Mother:** Tracey, do you know about de plat-eye?

**Response:** No, please share.

**Queen Mother:** Plat-eye waz evil spirit that roam around here. He got one eye. Oh boy, he waz evil so wez had to take care. And you kno wat I would do to
protect the house from him?

**Response:** What would you do?

**Queen Mother:** I protect my house with sulfur and salt. Yeah, I put dem around the front
door. Dem good for protection of evil spirits. (She pointed at her front
door.)

**Response:** Is the plat-eye still living on Sandy Island?

**Queen Mother:** Yea he is. I see him walking in de grave yard at night. He don’t mess
with me cuz I protect my home . . . but dem hags come over my door. Sulfur and salt don’t protect us from hags. They sleep with me til times are hard to wake up. Growing up Tiddy Beer was around all da time.\(^{45}\)

**Response:** Tiddy Beer is a hag?

**Queen Mother:** Yeah. I don’t see him anymore, just other hags.

Queen Mother continued to discuss how the evil spirit plat-eye still lives on the island.

She sees him in Blain cemetery, which is considered one of oldest grave sites on the island.\(^{46}\) I
had never heard of the one-eyed monster plat-eye, but I have experienced the negative impact of

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\(^{44}\) I remembered in an earlier discussion she told me that she loved strawberries.

\(^{45}\) In the author’s interpretation of Queen Mother’s story, “Tiddy Beer” is a similar honorific as “Queen Mother” in
terms of being the oldest/most deserving of special consideration.

\(^{46}\) Queen Mother in discussion with the author, April 2013.
hags while sleeping. In the Gullah tradition, hags and plat-eyes are considered evil spirits that linger within the community. Plat-eye roams mainly around the cemeteries, while hags hold you down while you are sleeping, making it hard to move. The ghost story that Queen Mother told is a part of West African folk tales such as those studied by Roger Pinckney.

Queen Mother knows the Sandy Island history. As we ended our discussion on the plat-eyes and hags roaming the island, she shared with us how she worked in the rice fields. She explained, “I usta beat the rice . . . hard work and Grandma kept the equipment in de barn for us to use . . . I miss those days. We waz happy.” Her training in the rice fields was not used commercially, but for Island consumption only. She continued: “I traveled to New York for a week ready to come to my safe place, Sandy Island. I missed home. . . . Growing up wez had over three hundred people on this land. We took care of each other. We showed love.”

Throughout our talk, she reiterated over and over again, “No place like Sandy Island.” She echoed this sentiment again in an interview with Christel Bell of WMBF News.

Like other discussions I had with Islanders, Queen Mother shared in the Islanders’ cosmology that, by living on Sandy Island, they feel a stronger connection with nature and God. There are many natural resources on the Island. In the next section of this chapter, I will discuss the ecological treasures of Sandy Island.

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47 In my own experience with hags, it was hard for me to move my body when waking. The spirits held me down while I tried to wake up. When I first shared these experiences with my mother, she explained that there were hags holding me down.

48 Roger Pinckney, Blue Roots African American Folk Magic of the Gullah People, 17.

49 Queen Mother in discussion with the author, April 2013.

50 Ibid.

51 Mrs. Oneithia Elliot, Interview by Christel Bell, WMBF NEWS, June 14, 2016.
Figure 3-6: Oneithia Elliot\textsuperscript{52}

Figure 3-7: Oneithia Elliot on Pontoon Boat (Photographed by Tracey Graham, January 2013.)

**Ecological Treasures on Sandy Island**

In 1997, an archaeological survey identified 51 sites on Sandy Island that date back 10,000 years.\textsuperscript{53} This gives the place a much deeper history than that of its current Gullah

\textsuperscript{52}Christel Bell, “Secluded Sandy Island deeply rooted in Gullah Geechee culture,” \textit{WMBF NEWS}, June 14, 2016.

\textsuperscript{53}Angela C. Halfacre, \textit{A Delicate Balance: Constructing a Conservation Culture in the South Carolina Lowcountry}, (The University of South Carolina Press, 2012). 116-117.
residents or of the original Waccamaw people who are thought to have once used it to bury their dead. This ancient connection may be why Islanders feel that when they are on the Island, they are close to God.

Figure 3-8: Interior of Sandy Island (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.)

Sandy Island is an ecological treasure trove that consists of a diverse habitat and is home to two of the area’s rarest birds: the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker and the endangered peregrine falcon. Travelling by boat through the Waccamaw marshes, off the scenic coast of Georgetown, I found myself among some of the oldest and largest long leaf pine forests on Sandy Island. And, for the first time, I also caught glimpses of wild turkeys, eagles, deer, bear and osprey throughout the different seasons.54

54 Tracey Graham, Field Notes, Spring 2002.
I am not alone in being captivated by Sandy Island; it is difficult not to feel as if it is sacred space. Here is how Betty described her encounter:


The first time I heard about Sandy Island, I was at our home in Bucksport, South Carolina, washing dishes. A special news report came over the radio reporting that for the first time since Reconstruction, Sandy Island had electric lights. This was in 1965; I was a 7th grader at Whittemore High School. I had no knowledge of Sandy Island at that time. Later, I heard that it was a real island, South of Brookgreen Gardens, but still didn’t know that you could get there by boat. In 1969, I met this young man named Samuel Pyatt Jr., who is the love of my life, and now my husband of 42 years. . . Sandy Island is a unique place because it naturally brings me closer to God. It is a piece of heaven. I have lived on Sandy Island for over 42 years, and this is the place I call home.57

Figure 3-11: Sandy Islander searching for straw to make a broom for her house58 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.)

As I became more familiar with Sandy Island’s unique history, Betty gave information that she and Ruth* wrote about the Island. This information was recorded in an unpublished document she loaned to me in August of 2001.59 Through their history notes, I learned that a few

57 Betty Pyatt, of Sandy Island, in discussion with the author, April 2013.

58 I was granted permission to take this picture and publish it.

59 Read more about this document in Chapter 4, “Kitchen Table Talk: August 2, 2001.”
White residents once called it home. In 1850, Captain William Percival Vaux and Dr. Edward Thomas Herriot were the only White farmers who lived on Sandy Island. Dr. Herriot’s elder son, Francis Withers Heriot, succeeded his father as a farmer and made his home at Mount Arena (an area that faces the newly constructed boat landing). Withers Heriot remained on the Island along with the Black Sandy Islanders until he died in 1873.

Though a few Whites were residents in the early 1800s, The Civil War (1861–1865) and emancipation (1863) brought about major changes in the American South. Many of the Gullah people abandoned the plantations where they once labored as enslaved people, leaving behind slave quarters to purchase land and work in the fields for their subsistence. The transition from free labor to paid labor crippled the American South because rice production required an enormous skilled labor force and was dependent upon this workforce being free. As a result, some White antebellum landowners, once wealthy due to African labor, were forced to sell their land after the Civil War.

Conversely, as the wealth of former slaveholders declined, some Blacks managed to get a foothold and achieve greater economic mobility. One such example is Phillip Washington, who worked as a manager, or “driver,” on Thomas Petigru’s Pipe Down plantation during the days of slavery. He was able to save enough money to buy land on Sandy Island. Sandy Islanders refer to him as an intelligent Black man with a strong business mind and leadership skills.

60 Betty and Ruth* in unpublished document and in discussion with the author, August 2011.

61 Ibid.


63 Betty and Ruth* in unpublished document and in discussion with the author, August 2011.
In 1882, Washington, who was a free man at that point, purchased a total of 320 acres on Sandy Island. He died eight years later in 1890, and the property he purchased has since been passed down to his heirs over several generations. He is known as the “father” of Sandy Island, and the contributions he made to his people, as a leader and through sustaining land ownership across generations, have been instrumental in helping Sandy Island develop as a free and autonomous Black community, and becoming the loving, beautiful and peaceful place so many call home, and where they feel close to God.65

65 Ibid.
CHAPTER 4
METHODS: HOW WE ARE TRAINED AS ANTHROPOLOGISTS

As anthropologists we are trained to deal with the duality of our status as outsiders and conditioned to anticipate an ongoing struggle to become an insider in the field setting to the extent that the local customs allows.

Irma McClaurin

Who are you and what are you to me?

Brackette F. Williams

Figure 4-1: At Sandy Island at a Sandy Island family reunion in 2007 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2007.)

This chapter discusses the methods used in my fieldwork on Sandy Island. I stand with Boas in his argument that we have an ethical responsibility to interact with the communities we study with an “open mind” and to learn and attempt to understand their customs and traditions

1 McClaurin, Women of Belize: Gender and Change in Central America, 15.

2 Williams, Skinfolk, Not Kinfolk: Comparative Reflections on the Identity of Participation—Observation in Two Field Situation.

3 I was granted permission to take this picture and publish it.
from their points of view. Unlike the “armchair anthropologists,” who collected data from missionaries and colonial officers rather than from first-hand experiences with natives, and then published this type of research as “science,” Boas aimed to convey through his methods and his reporting that no human being is superior to another and that, as anthropologists, we should respect each culture’s diverse and unique beliefs.

As Lee D. Baker explained in his book, *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*, the so-called science of the “armchair anthropologists” became a part of the national stage, producing socio-political structures of racialized categories. These racialized categories were used as cultural identifiers to mark societies as “primitive.” Chief Hatcher, of the Waccamaw Indians, shared the lasting effects of the labeling of “primitives” and the imposition on such identified cultures. He has petitioned the Governor of South Carolina to have their ancestors’ burial remains, many of which were buried or would have been buried on Sandy Island before its inhabitation by the Gullah people, returned to the tribe from the various state museums currently housing the remains without Native Americans’ permission.

This type of intrusion into and usurpation of heritage is felt by many racialized groups impacted by the methods of the “armchair anthropologist.” It is important to mention intrusions

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8 Chief Hatcher in discussion with the author, February 2016.
of this kind in order to highlight the damages, disservices and racialized labeling I took great care to avoid imposing during my Participant Observation—an act in itself which does not coincide with the “armchair anthropologists’” methods. In my fieldwork, the mainlanders I spoke with, not unlike “armchair anthropologists,” assigned a certain cultural worldview onto the islanders without knowing about them. It is the absence of knowledge about the Islanders that partially motivated my ethnographic research. I wanted to provide information about who they are, but from their points of view.

I would like to delve deeper into why anthropologists do this kind of research by reintroducing Brackette F. Williams’s ethnography. I was captivated by her question: “Who are you and what are you to me?”9 Certainly, this question informed my own research. The people of Sandy Island definitely asked me, “Who are you and what are you to me?” Community members have thanked me many times for my active participation in island activities. I have wondered if the expressions of gratitude were accurate depictions of how they really saw my contributions to the community. Williams’s ethnography illustrated that even if one looks like the people he or she studies and sees the group as “skinfolk,” it does not make them kinfolk. While I positioned myself as a Native Anthropologist, studying my own people and the Gullah culture, it took time before I became not just “skinfolk” to the Islanders, but kinfolk.

Some of the methods I used to establish trust drew from standard anthropology research methods as described by H. Russell Bernard.10 But, similar to Native Anthropologist Irma McClaurin, I had to use other methods not necessarily used by traditional (White) anthropologists. Like McClaurin described in Women of Belize: Gender and Change in Central

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10 Bernard, Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches, 9.
America, I experienced first-hand how experiences overlap and are relatable across cultures. In Toledo, McClaurin met with women who, as females, recognized inequalities in their homeland and, through face-to-face discussion, she was able to position herself as an interlocutor who “linked” the women’s understandings of the power of gender inequality to the larger socio-political structures in their country and globally. In my own experience with residents of Sandy Island, my face-to-face exchanges similarly provided me with insights which statistics or discussions with mainlanders (outsiders) could never provide. The insight I gained from my findings are discussed alongside the methods I used. The first method was “Kitchen Table Talks.”

On my first entry onto Sandy Island, in August of 2001, I spent hours at the kitchen table of Betty and Jack eating Gullah foods and talking about Island life. McClaurin found “kitchen talks” were a key method of informal interviews with female community members who she referred to as “cultural experts.” McClaurin suggested that “kitchen talks” allowed her cultural experts to feel relaxed and comfortable within an environment they controlled. The idea of the kitchen table as a safe space, especially for women, can be found in Barbara Smith’s article, “A Press of Our Own Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press” (1980), in which she explained that, for women, the kitchen is the center of their homes; it is the space where women

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11 McClaurin, Women of Belize: Gender and Change in Central America, 1996. McClaurin described her own use of this method, not found in Bernard’s research methods book.

12 Betty is my cousin on my mother’s side and is considered my third cousin. She was not born on the Island. Jack is her husband, a native Islander.

13 Ibid., 11.

14 Ibid.
come together, work, and interact with each other. Similarly, in Gullah culture, social interaction of women and men revolves around food, and the kitchen becomes a source of engagement, safety and security.

**Method #1: “Kitchen Table Talks”; Betty’s Family House on Sandy Island**

My kitchen table talks spanned five sequential days in which I watched, listened and asked questions that were iterative and based on the behaviors of the Islanders and myself within the immediate moments. During these kitchen talks, there were days I recorded descriptive notes at the kitchen table. There were other days in which I wrote my notes after I left the Island environment. H. Russell Bernard asserted that “descriptive notes are the meat and potatoes of fieldwork. . . . Whatever you observe, try to capture in field notes the detail of the behavior and the environment.” Below are some examples of my “meat and potatoes,” the following “Kitchen Table Talks” taken directly from my field notes.

August 1, 2001: I met my cousin, to whom I will refer as Betty, at the mainland boat landing at 3:00pm; we drove off in her family’s jon boat, my first of many jon boat experiences over the years. I had never ridden in a jon boat before, so I was quite nervous. What an experience! Traveling through the Waccamaw canal, I got a glimpse of rice paddies that Sandy Islanders’ ancestors produced during the enslavement period. As Betty boated through the deepest part of the Waccamaw River, she pointed out that the wetlands were owned by Brookgreen Gardens and the South Carolina Department of Transportation, known as SCDOT. It took about 15 minutes to reach the island from the mainland dock. Betty said the best time to travel to the Island is when the river tides are high. The tides were high.

When we arrived on the Island, I was surprised to see several jon boats, as well as the pontoon boat that the Islanders use for church services, at the dock. For some reason, I imagined that there would be only a few boats; in reality, the residents use their boats the same way the mainlanders access their vehicles. The boats are an

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essential part of their day-to-day experiences. There are U.S. coast guards (boat police) who make sure that the islanders and other boaters adhere to the rules and regulations of the water system. Docking the boat required precision, so I helped Betty secure her boat to the dock. We took her groceries off of the boat and into the house, which was approximately 300 feet from the landing. The front of her house faced the interior of the Island. As we entered the house, I saw a huge deer mounted on the wall to the left of me. She explained that her husband killed the white tail deer during deer season.

Figure 4-2: Betty parking her “jon boat.” (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2001).

While sitting in Betty’s kitchen, we shared our families’ histories as we ate collards, rice and fish; this food was prepared for my arrival to the Island. Betty shared that she was born and raised in Bucksport, South Carolina, and that she moved to Sandy Island in the 1970s after she married her husband. They have three children that they raised on the island. Today, their children live on the mainland.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, August 1, 2001
Figure 4-3: This recipe is from the Island’s cookbook, *A Taste of Sandy Island: Beaulah’s Family Recipes*. January 2016. This is the recipe that Betty used to cook the collards during our kitchen talk.

She explained how we are kin; she is related to my mother’s side of the family, and is considered my third cousin. When the timing felt right, I went into detail about my interest in studying Sandy Island, and she was pleased that I wanted to learn about the community, but there were requirements I had to fulfill in order to continue contact. I was required to attend church service to introduce myself to the Islanders and explain my intentions being on the Island. I agreed to attend the next church service on August 5, 2001. After dinner, she took me back to the mainland; it was getting late and Betty does not like to drive the boat in the dark. She asked me if I was available to come back the next day. I told her yes and that I was excited that I was invited back to the Island so quickly. This was a good day for me because I received permission to return.

August 2, 2001: I met Betty at the same time; this time she was returning from her job with Bank of America. She was a part-time teller. At the landing, we were bombarded by three Islanders who wanted a ride back to the Island with us. They

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ANYTIME COLLARD GREENS

2 large bunches of collards
2 large ham hocks or 4 large smoked pork neck bones
2 pieces of salt pork

Clean, wash and cut collards in 1/2 inch strips.
In a large pot, cook other ingredients until done. Place collard greens in stock and cook 30 minutes, or until tender. Season collards to taste with salt and black pepper as needed.

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were talking with Betty. I just stood there nervously; I really did not know if they
would accept me into their community. Then, Betty turned to me and I gave a
warm smile. She introduced me as her cousin who lives in Bucksport. Likewise,
the islanders gave me warm greetings and friendly smiles. We all got into the jon
boat, careful to distribute our weight across the boat. It was scary because the boat
was wobbling back and forth.

As we drove off, the Islanders were not bothered by the boat rocking. Instead, they
began talking about church business. Even though no one else was alarmed at the
rough ride, I was having a nervous breakdown. I tried to “fit in,” not showing that I
was a city dweller; Oh boy! Once we were at the Sandy Island dock, I helped them
with their groceries; we transported the groceries to their trucks and they headed
into the interior of the Island.

When I entered Betty’s kitchen, she was cleaning shrimp and boiling potatoes for
her homemade potato salad. I assisted her with peeling the shrimp; I told Betty that
fried shrimp and potato salad were among my favorite southern foods. Before I
met her at the landing, I stopped to pick up a red velvet cake for our dessert. I was
starting to enjoy our kitchen table chats.

While at the kitchen table, her husband walked in from his job at Verizon. Betty
told me that he was a Vietnam veteran and that he worked at Verizon as a pole
climber. He is the oldest son of eight children. I will refer to him as Jack. I shared
with him that I was going to speak to the community about my interest in studying
Sandy Island. Jack was honest in his depiction of his community, telling me it
would be difficult receiving information on Sandy Island from them. I asked him
why. He thought that his community would have a hard time trusting me as a non-
Sandy Islander. I respected his sincere honesty about his community.

Betty and Jack allowed me to ask them a few questions about the community.

Question 1: Hey, I was wondering how many people live on this Island?
Betty: Around 75 to 100 people. (Her husband nodded.)

Question 2: Can you share with me the history of the Island?
Betty: (Betty jumped up and went into another room. She pulled out a type-
written document that she wrote on the history of Sandy Island; she gave it to me,
instructing me to make a copy for myself and give her back the original ASAP. I
agreed.)

Jack drove me back to the mainland. I felt like I was in a racing boat; his turns
were quick, aggressive, and he seemed in tune with the river system. I was scared
as hell! I was getting sea sick. But Jack was full of life on the water and started
opening up about his life. He told me that he was born and raised around the
Waccamaw river and loves it. When we drove to the mainland dock, I noticed that
there were several Sandy Islanders socializing on the mainland under the area I call “the shelter.” The shelter is a little area that Islanders sit while they are waiting to get on a boat. It is similar to a bus stop. As I approached the Islanders, they were laughing and talking. As I got closer, I heard them listening to music; a few of them were drinking from bottles in brown paper bags. I thought, “I need to start introducing myself to all the Islanders I meet so they will not be surprised to see me in church on Sunday morning.” I walked up and said hello. They reciprocated and asked who I was. I said that I was Betty’s cousin from Bucksport.

Once I told them that I was her cousin, the interactions got friendlier. Betty has a good reputation on the island. There were about ten Islanders (I think that they were all living on Sandy Island) at the shelter. I learned that one of the Islanders worked at a local restaurant that I frequent daily. I remembered seeing him a few times. He was the main cook; he makes the best grits I have ever tasted; he shared with me his recipe. One Islander asked me if I wanted a drink from the brown paper bag; I told him a polite no thank you. I learned later that he was drinking moonshine; I do not like moonshine. My father makes moonshine, but he calls it homebrew, and he makes it out of corn. It has a horrible taste. Even though I do not like moonshine, I thought that offering me a drink was like “breaking bread.” I felt better about Jack telling me that the Islanders will not trust me; perhaps my entry onto the Island was not as difficult as he discussed. Was Jack being cautious? Or was I naïve? Was the veil lifted?

August 3, 2001:20 I met Betty at 3:00 pm. I handed her the original text that she gave me on the history of Sandy Island. Today, I decided to walk independently around the island. So, when we arrived at the Sandy Island dock, I helped her dock the boat and asked her if she thought that it was going to be okay if I walked around the Island by myself. I wanted to feel the pulse of the Island. She gave me a strange look, but reluctantly gave me permission. She reminded me that if anyone asked who I was, to tell them I was her cousin. For the last two days, I had only spent time on Mount Rena; this was the main area where Islanders like Betty and Jack lived along with two other families. As I traveled to the interior, I saw beautiful long leaf pine trees and aggressive bees and mosquitoes that followed me along the path. The woodland area of the island is the most peaceful and serene.

Figure 4-4: Interior of Sandy Island (Photographed by Tracey Graham, June 2013.)

It was over 100 degrees outside. I had my bug spray, but it really did not help me fight off the critters. When I walked farther into the interior, I saw a woman and a man outside working in the yard; they examined me with puzzled eyes. We all nodded, which was an indicator for me to say hello. They asked me if I was lost; I said no. I let them know that I was Betty’s cousin and was just visiting her for the day and decided to take an evening walk. I told them that I thought the Island was beautiful; they agreed that Sandy Island was the best place they had ever known. They told me their names, and I told them that I would be attending church on Sunday. They were happy to hear that I was attending New Bethel Missionary Baptist Church. I shared that I would see them at church; they shook their heads no. They attended church on the mainland. I made an assumption that everyone who lived on the Island attended Bethel. I thought, “Who else on the Island attends church on the mainland?” I was curious to know which part of the Island I was walking, and they told me Susie Village. Soon, I arrived at the old school house, which the Islanders turned into a library and a community center.21

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21 Ibid., August 3, 2001
Figure 4-5: The former Sandy Island school house. (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2001.)
Figure 4-6: Pyatt's General Store was established in 1986. This area of the store is where customers purchase food items. I received permission from Betty to take this picture. (Photographed by Tracey Graham, August 2007.)

August 4, 2001:22 I wanted to show my appreciation of Betty driving me to Sandy Island and allowing me to learn and partake in Island life over the last week. So, Betty met me at the boat landing on the mainland at 5:00 pm where I was waiting with a small crate of whiting fish from the local fish market—a gesture of gratitude. At the mainland landing, I met Betty’s oldest daughter and her husband, who were waiting for Betty, too. We greeted each other with hugs; all of us were spending the night with Betty and Jack so that we could attend church on Sunday. Getting the materials on the jon boat required two trips. We loaded the crate of fish and our suitcases on the boat; Betty’s son-in-law drove over with her to upload and to get the fish fry started at Pyatt’s General Store. When Betty returned, Betty’s daughter and I got into the boat.

The river seemed calm; it was a peaceful ride. There were many boaters on the waterway. On the Island, Betty’s son-in-law was cleaning and seasoning the fish

while Jack got the grease hot in the fish fryer. We fried the fish right in front of the store. Betty had her store open for boaters who wanted to stop in and get cold drinks, snacks or a package of cigarettes. The store has been open since 1986, and most of Betty’s business comes from mainlanders who stop by to get food and supplies during their boating excursions on the Waccamaw River. It is similar to a convenience store; however, she does not sell gas. Islanders travel to the mainland to purchase gas for their boats and vehicles on the Island. While we were frying fish in front of the store, two boaters purchased drinks and cigarettes. Betty spent most of her time in the store while we fried fish outside.

As the Islanders parked their boats at the landing, they came up to the store, and I offered them a fish sandwich. A few of them ate, while others did not want food and went to their own homes. I shared with the Islanders who spent some time with us on the porch that I was Betty’s cousin, and I was attending church tomorrow. They were happy to hear that I was attending church; they shared that they were all going to be there, too. Two of the women were members of the church choir with Betty; they practiced the spiritual songs that they planned to sing the next day. The church members had beautiful voices, and the Negro spirituals they sung were the same ones that I had heard at other churches. I wanted to talk with them about Island life, but they were so engrossed in their singing that I just listened. It was getting late, so we cleaned up.

August 5, 2001: This was the big day to present my intentions to the church. I tossed and turned all night; I got up at 5:00 am, went outside, and sat on the store’s porch. The sun had not risen. As I walked outside, I noticed that the side door and the truck were unlocked. I was really surprised see that Betty kept the doors unlocked. Is this safe on Sandy Island?

When I walked back into the house, I sat in the kitchen talking with Betty’s daughter. I asked her what it was like growing up on the Island.

Daughter: Growing up, I got so much love from everybody on the Island. The elders really took care of all us (children) on the Island. Since I got married, I live on other side. But, this place will always be my home. As children, we played together all the time. I’m proud to have been raised on Sandy Island.

Listening to Betty’s daughter, I felt like I was a part of a small nation of people who see themselves as uniquely different from the mainlanders, and the ecological borders that separate them from outsiders give Sandy Islanders a strong sense of autonomy. I really enjoyed my conversation with Betty’s daughter. We sat at the kitchen table drinking coffee and eating toast; I explained to her that I was a graduate student at the University of Florida and my research topic was focused on Sandy Island. Like her parents, she was happy to hear that I would be writing about Island life; but she felt that the community members would give me a difficult time in collecting any type of information from them. I was intrigued to see if I was going to receive resistance from the Islanders.
The main service at New Bethel Church started at 11:00am. I sat in Betty’s family room waiting for them to get dressed for church. All of us traveled together in Betty’s truck to church. The church is in the area the Islanders call Susie Village. From Betty’s house, it takes about ten minutes to drive there. The drive is bumpy and rocky headed into the hilly area of the island. When we arrived at the church, there were Islanders standing outside, and I greeted them by saying hello. Honestly, I was really nervous; I never thought that I would have to ask for permission to participate in Island life.

Church service began with an Islander in the congregation singing a Negro Spiritual. As we followed the order of service, Betty stood up and introduced me to the congregation. I rose and thanked her for allowing me the opportunity to spend time with her and her husband over the last five days. I let the congregation know that I was Betty’s cousin and that my roots were from Bucksport, South Carolina. I continued by sharing that I was an honest person who comes from a decent family. Finally, in a humble voice, I asked the community for permission to spend time learning about Sandy Island and the community. There was an awkward pause as I looked out into the congregation. I was hoping that they would give me positive feedback. I felt an uncomfortable mood from the congregation. I ended my speech abruptly by saying thank you. I started having an inner dialogue: “This is what Jack and his daughter were trying to explain to me.” I felt that I had a long journey ahead of me in order to establish trust with the Islanders.

After church service, I got many stares from the Islanders. What were they saying through their stares? One woman approached me and thanked me for attending church service; she wanted me to come again. Was she just being polite, or did she really want me to return? Others just looked at me with uncertainty. I could not interpret the thoughts behind their facial expressions. There was a hidden dialogue within their language. I was an outsider within a Gullah community that I assumed would embrace me because I culturally identified myself as Gullah.

We got into Betty’s truck and went back to her house to eat Sunday dinner that she prepared for us. I was silent at the table; I was trying to process what happened at the church service. While at the kitchen table, Betty told me not to give up on the community. I agreed that I would continue to interact. After dinner, Betty drove me back to the mainland. I thanked her for allowing me to spend time with her family.²³

The next day, I packed up my car and headed back to the University of Florida. I was going through what Bernard called “culture shock.” He explained that this is a part of the fieldwork experience, and it “subsides as researchers settle into the business of gathering data on a daily basis, but it doesn’t go away because the sources of annoyance don’t go away.”25 I agree with Bernard; there was definitely some form of culture shock, particularly when I attended the church service asking the congregation for permission to study Island life and the response was silence. Also, I felt culture shock every time I got into the jon boat to drive to and from the Island because I was a mainlander with Gullah roots, but these types of experiences and behaviors were ones with which I was not familiar. In addition to examining culture shock, I want to examine another fieldwork experience.

24 Meaning the things that, because of their differences from the researcher’s typical experiences, lifestyle and scenery, require vast adjustments when entering and leaving the field.

25 Ibid., 161
Method #2: Sketching Sandy Island; What Does the Island Look Like Through the Gaze of the Native?


Through this traditional medium of writing, he/she turns it from a passing event to an occurring event in the moment. Geertz’s book was written over 30 years ago, but even now, I still support his assertion that ethnographers should explore experimental modes of collecting data. Personally, *Frogmore Stew* (discussed in Chapter 3 and Appendix B) is my experimental mode of presenting the data I collected. I also used the method of informal interviews and presented the data in the form of multiple vignettes, which I felt was an effective way to interpret and represent Gullah cultural symbols. Writing the *Frogmore* play encouraged me to approach collecting my data in ways that I could never imagine. As a result, it allowed me to be open to applying diverse methods and creating new approaches. I use the term vignettes because I started to see my methods as part of a story, with each vignette adding to the story line.

Vignettes can also be viewed as a type of sketching method, and they are how I created a written description to form a visual of the Island-life landscape. In deciding to use sketching as a method, I was influenced by Robert M. Emerson's, Rachel I. Fretz's and Linda Shaw's *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. This work introduced me to the idea of sketching, which they describe as the depiction of still life of a place, and serves as a visual metaphor. Sketching, as a visual metaphor, creates snapshots that add to the storyline. Entering the landscape of Sandy

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27 Ibid.

Island, I jotted, doodled, and sketched the Island’s physical aesthetics. I believe that it is a beautiful island, and this method became a unique way for me to tell the community’s story using my gaze to interpret the physical aspect of Island life. Using the sketching method, my gaze focused on four areas Islanders deem as symbolic to their landscape:

- Mount (Mt.) Rena
- Sussie Village
- Annie Village
- Georgia Hill

Although Islanders dwell in all four areas, Mount Rena is where most Islanders live.

In an informal discussion with Rommy, a native Sandy Islander, he explained the name of Mount Rena: “It’s the Spanish term meaning mountain of sand [Mt. Arena]. The Gullah/Africans kept that name. When Phillip Washington bought the property, he named it Mt. Rena, the Gullah term.”²⁹ He further shared that, prior to Spanish invasion of the area, Waccamaw Indians used the island as a burial site due to its hilliness around the Georgia Village area.³⁰ I have not found any recorded evidence of this oral account of the burial of Waccamaw Indians, but as I discussed in Chapter 1, the Chicora Foundation and the Nature Conservancy were granted permission to travel to the Island to preserve all the cemeteries,³¹ and Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) studies conducted by Coastal Carolina University found 200 graves of Sandy Island ancestors from the 1700s.

Symbolically, Sussie Village, Annie Village and Georgia Hill are names that honor the elders in their neighborhoods. Keeping alive the legacies of elders who have passed on is one

²⁹ Rommy, a native Islander, in discussion with the author, May 2007.
³⁰ Ibid.
³¹ This project is scheduled for 2017.
way to interpret Islanders’ naming practices. The names are a reminder of their lives on the Island.

Off-Island, people have little knowledge of the Island’s regions or names. In Chapter 1, I introduced an interview with the Georgetown County Assessor Office, and described my surprise that the interviewee referred me to an Island resident for further information about the street names and house numbers on Sandy Island. Additionally, the County Assessor Office did not have documentation of Sandy Island’s physical landscape. When trying to get data about the Island’s demographics and landscape, the local government relies on the Islanders as the caretakers of that information. With so few details and the absence of maps of the Island, sketching allowed me to depict how I saw the Island’s landscape. I spent many days driving around the Island jotting descriptive notes and sketching aspects of Island life.
In addition to actually drawing sketches, Fretz and Shaw recommend taking snapshot photos to create visual storylines. In the next section, I will explain how photography is also important in collecting and recording data.

**Method #3: Pictures Are Worth A Thousand Words! Unique Customs of Island Life**

“I was born and raised here and wherever I go I will come back to Sandy Island. I feel good about Sandy Island. We have a unique life.”

Jane*, Sandy Islander

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ятся*: a Sandy Islander, in discussion with the author, April 2013.
I used photography as a form of data recording. I carried my camera around the Island always looking for evidence of unique Island customs. In April, 2013, when I first saw a jeep on a barge coming towards Sandy Island, I was amazed at how precisely the Islanders were steering the barge. The majority of the Islanders own vehicles on the Island, and all of them follow the same barge method. It takes about an hour for the vehicle to reach the Island. This is one of the
most unique customs of Island life. This custom is a rare practice in modern times. Taking pictures allows me to document this unique custom, and a practice that may disappear in the future.

Another distinctive feature of Islanders’ commutes is the use of The Prince Washington School Boat, named after the man the Islanders call “the mayor of Sandy Island.”33 Michael, commenting on the boat ride to school, explained: “This was our way of commuting to and from school and it was normal.”34 The boat was established in 1966, a year after the Island’s school house opened.35 Prince Washington, the boat’s namesake, was born and raised on Sandy Island and took great pride in his Island community. Another Islander remarked about the boat’s namesake captain: “He was dedicated to making our Island better.”36 Prince drove the school boat for many years. Michael continued to share, “Prince Washington was my godfather, so I felt favored by him. Even when I was tall enough to see over the glass, he started letting me steer the boat. This was an exciting routine for me each day.”37 After Washington retired, Tom* drove the children to the mainland.

The Georgetown Board of Education owns the school boat and currently employs Tom part-time to drive the boat. In August of 2015, the community received a new school boat from the Georgetown County Board of Education.38 I found an article from South Strand News, written by Taylor Griffith, who explained:

33 Betty Pyatt in discussion with the author, May 2002.
34 Michael in discussion with the author, April 2013.
35 Michael in discussion with the author, April 2013.
36 Queen Mother in discussion with the author, April 2013.
37 Michael in discussion with the author, May 2013.
38 The author saw the boat on the island shortly after its debut.
The new boat solves many problems raised by several groups, including the Georgetown County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, about the former boat, named “Prince Washington.” Most of the complaints were about safety: the 50-year-old boat engine leaked diesel fumes into the passenger cabin where the children sat on their way to school, which can cause health problems. The former boat also was not handicap accessible.  

I learned from the Islanders in 2015 that there are fewer than 15 students, ranging in age from 6 to 18, riding on the Prince Washington to attend the Waccamaw School system. Queen Mother, who was born in 1915, shared, “wez had over 300 people here when I was a child.” Queen Mother continued to express that folks do not stay on the Island anymore. In my observation, once the children graduate from high school, they attend college, register for the military or just move to the mainland to work. Consider my discussion with a millennial who, at the time of my interview with Ted* in 2013, was 18 years old and had just graduated from Waccamaw High School. He shared, “Sandy Island is an an amazing place. I was raised on this island. Now, I am attending college and want to experience life on the mainland. Sandy Island will always be my home.”

In September of 2015, I called Georgetown County school system and spoke with a representative by the name of Jackie*, and she confirmed that it was the only school boat in South Carolina. The photographs that I have produced overtime allow me to maintain a visual

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40 Sandy Islanders in discussion with the author, 2015.

41 Queen Mother in discussion with the author, April 2013.

42 *Ted, a native Sandy Island teen, in discussion with the author, August 2012.

43 Jackie*, from the Georgetown Board of Education in discussion with the author, September 2015. Daufuski Island, off the coast of Hilton Head, is only accessible by boat and has a small community of residents. I cannot find any records of a school boat for that community, and I wonder how the children travel to school.
record of the Islanders’ unique traditions, such as traveling by school boat. Many photographs were taken as a result of participant observation.

Figure 4-11: The first school boat. It is named Prince Washington and is the only school boat in South Carolina. It was established in May, 1966 (Photographed by Tracey Graham, June 2013.)

Figure 4-12: The new school boat for Sandy Island, New Prince Washington

Method #4: Participant Observation

“Stay steady, with my eyes and ears.”

*Participant Observation: A Guide For Fieldworkers*, Second Edition, by Katheleen M. DeWalt and Billie R. DeWalt is a great fieldbook that has been extremely helpful in informing my method of Participant Observation. The authors firmly assert that:

The heart of adopting the method of participant observation is to behave appropriately enough to be accepted as a participant at some level and to participate in the daily activities of people with whom the researcher is working. By behaving appropriately, we mean learning what constitutes good manners and practicing them to the best of your ability.

Participant Observation is a key method of cultural anthropology and a central focus to my research on Sandy Island. This method, by far, was the one that I applied to all of my interactions with the Sandy Islanders. My sensibilities as a researcher and as an outsider played a major role in how I approached my practice of this method. Over time, the mantra I used in my participatory practice with Island members became: “Stay steady, with my eyes and ears.” It was this mantra that kept me socially grounded within the Islanders’ day-to-day practices.

I would like to discuss another one of the Islanders’ practices—a traditional baptism in the Waccawaw River. The baptism took place in October 2007 at 10:00 am in the morning. Two junior high school children were being baptised.

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Figure 4-13: Island members singing a spiritual right before the baptism. I received permission to take this picture (Photographed by Tracey Graham, October 2007.)

Figure 4-14: Minister Dave* saying a prayer before the baptism. I received permission to take this picture (Photographed by Tracey Graham, October 2007.)
This activity was, by far, the most captivating experience for me. I had never witnessed a baptism that took place outside in nature. After the baptism, I asked Ted how he felt after being cleansed in the water. He responded with a smile and said, “I feel good.” The ritual of baptism reflects the Islanders’ strong commitments to their Christian faith.

Another example of a church-related activity from my field notes made in February 2006 supports this observation. I participated in the Islanders’ Black History Celebration at New Bethel Baptist Church. I volunteered one Saturday morning to help Margaret and Jennifer go food shopping at Sam’s Club for the church event. That Saturday morning, we got in the jon boat to leave the Island for the mainland. We spent about an hour in Sam’s Club and, once the shopping was complete, we loaded the bags into Margaret’s car on the mainland—she has one on

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47 In the Christian traditions, the water represents purity and cleansing.
48 Ted in discussion with the author, October 2007.
the island, too. When we arrived at the dock, we unloaded the bags from the car onto the jon boat for the first of two trips from the mainland to the Island to transport the food. Finally, we got all of the bags into Margaret’s truck on the Island and proceeded to drive across the Island to Annie Village where we unpacked yet again, and then prepared the food for the Black History event the next day at the church. The Black History Celebration was a success, but the preparation process required an enormous amount of time and patience.49

In September of 2006, I involved myself in community events through the method of Participant Observation and was able to see a shift in the Islanders’ behaviors towards me. I noticed that they became friendlier and our interactions were easier. I still felt like an outsider, but the Islanders let me into their Island world. I was invited to Sunday dinners, and one Islander knew that I liked plants, so she started giving me starter plants. I believe that my daily participation in their day-to-day lived experiences made them feel more connected to me. Even so, I was still an outsider within. Time has been my ally over the years. I have maintained a presence on the Island over time. In the next section of the chapter, I will discuss structured interviews.

**Method #5: Structured Interviews**

In cultural anthropology, we understand that people who live in the same community have different experiences. Thus, there is no right or wrong answer to any of these questions. What I am in interested in is your honest opinion and your understanding of what it means to live on Sandy Island. . .50

I created a series of questions designed to elicit demographic and individual data (i.e., births, deaths, religion, family histories, kinship structures, their views on the absence of a

49 Tracey Graham, Field Notes, February 2006.

50 Tracey Graham, to University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB), in letter of intent to study Sandy Islanders, September 2010.
bridge, on crossing the river, on the geography of their land, etc). The structured interviews were approved by University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB): Protocol # 2010-U-0657. The data collected allowed me to identify patterns in the ideas, values, and behavior of Sandy Islanders.

In 2010, I interviewed 10 Islanders: 7 women and 3 men from different age groups. There were 48 questions ranging from identifying the Islanders’ genders to imagining Sandy Island 20 years in the future. I asked each interviewee what he or she would like to see change and what to stay the same. Many of the questions overlap in topic, and the responses were similar. These were face-to-face interviews. When I asked if I could make an audio recording of their responses, all chose not to be recorded. Still, I was permitted to take notes and transcribe their answers. All 10 of the interviews, from which the following dialogues were transcribed, took place during September, October and November of 2010.

**Sandy Islanders, Group 1: How Do You Self-Identify? African American? Gullah? Both?**

In coding their responses, I learned that all 10 of the Islanders identified as being African Americans. When I asked them to elaborate more on their identities, there were cultural patterns of 6 Islanders (only one male) who also identified as being Gullah. Jack responded, “Yes, I’m Gullah, too, am proud to say it.” Queen Mother shared, “Gullah,” nodding. The other 4 seemed neutral in their answers. It did not seem to matter to them that they be a part of the Gullah culture. They were more interested in being Sandy Islanders who are African American. Identifying as being a Sandy Islander seemed to trump African American or Gullah. Janet told me that, “I’m a Sandy Islander first!”
**Education**

While growing up, 9 out of 10 Islanders rode the school boat. One Islander was born on the mainland, so she went to school on the mainland. Four out of 10 Islanders attended school on the Island, and the rest went to school on the mainland. After completing high school, 2 of the Islanders received certificates in secretary science and cosmetology.

**Household/Family life**

All 10 Islanders were married with families. Only 1 Islander lived off the Island, but she was born and raised on the Island. She married and moved off the island with her husband. They also have a family.

**Employment/Occupation**

When asked, “What kind of work do you do for a living?” all 3 of the men reported that they are retired from the army. Two of the Islanders retired from the military and have second careers. Their salaries ranged from $15,000 to $100,000.

- Jack worked at verizon.
- Bob worked at the local post office.
- Willie retired as a military man.

The 6 women worked a variety of service industry jobs in the Myrtle Beach area.

- Betty worked as a bank teller.
- Jennifer worked in childcare.
- Janet worked as a hairdresser.
- Lisa, Mary and Melissa worked at local restaurants, cooking.
- Queen Mother does not work.

**A day in the life of an Islander. Tell me what you do from the time you rise until the time you go to bed.**

Eight out of 10 Islanders travel to the mainland everyday. One person lives on the mainland. The 8 residents work on the mainland, so, on average, they stay about 9 hours per day on the mainland—starting from 7:00am to about 4:00pm. All of the residents love living on the
Island and prefer Island life because of the peace and quiet. They see their Island lives as cultural tradition. Another connection they share is that they love living surrounded by water. As a result of them living around nature, they feel closer to God. They all enjoy fellowshipping at New Bethel Baptist Church.

**Do you think that Sandy Island should have a bridge that connects to the mainland? Why or why not?**

The responses to this question were amazing. None of the 10 Islanders interviewed wanted a bridge connecting to the mainland. Here are examples of their similar responses.

Janet’s response: I live on the mainland, and it would be so, so, so convenient to have a bridge, but then I think about it, and the answer is no. Our island will not be the same.

Queen Mother’s response: No. I love me place the way it is.

Bob’s response: Our Island will go downhill if we build a bridge.

**Would you like to see more people visit the island?**

All 10 Islanders were Ok with the idea of mainlanders coming to the Island, but agreed that visitors need to get permission from the Islanders first.

Betty’s response: I love to see mainlanders support our businesses or just attend our church services.

The others said that they would love to see the mainlanders come to the Island to attend church, but there was not a lot of support for mainlanders coming for tourism. Only 2 out of 10 supported tourism. Queen Mother believed that too much tourism “[would] be too much for my people.”

**Sandy Island history, culture and traditions: Please describe your favorite place on Sandy Island.**

- Lisa’s* response: My home, with my family
- Bob’s* response: Nature and being on the water
- Jack’s response: Being in my boat on the water
- Mary’s* response: Waterfront
Willie’s* response: With my family
Betty’s response: With God and family
Janet’s response: Front porch
Melissa’s* response: In nature
Jimmy’s* response: God
Queen Mother’s response: With my family and God

These answers were similar to another question that I asked: Please describe your favorite Sandy Island tradition. Most of the responses were directly linked to God, nature and family life. They also shared that the most important thing about Sandy Island was not related to the history, but the fact that they were God-fearing people who were committed to Him.

If you could imagine Sandy Island in the future (20 years from now), what would you like to see different, and what would you like to see stay the same?

Ten out of 10 Islanders love Island life and do not want to change anything about it. The only comment that seemed different was Betty’s. She wanted her Pyatt Grocery store to generate more business. She said, “I want to offer more business to the community in 20 years.”

Nine out of 10 Islanders were not interested in changing anything about their community. However, Rommy shared, “We need to create more of our own businesses on the Island. We have so many skills that we could market and make money.”

In August of 2011, I received approval to continue my structured interviews by University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB): Protocol # 2010-U-0657. This time, I not only interviewed Sandy Islanders, but I extended my data collection to mainlanders. On Sandy Island, I interviewed 12 more Islanders: 6 women and 6 men between 18 and 70 years old. The questions were the same. With this group, when I asked if I could make an audio recording of their responses, 1 person agreed while 11 Islanders said, “no.” Still, I was permitted to make notes about their answers. The following interviews took place in October, November and December 2011.
Sandy Islanders, Group 2: How Do You Self-Identify? African American? Gullah? Both?

Here are their responses:

Clayton’s* response: I’m a Sandy Islander and African American. Gullah, well, I can see it because of our history. But, to me, they live in Charleston.

Linda’s* response: African American, definitely, and I am Gullah, too.

Michael’s response: African American. I am an Island man!

Rommy’s response: Cuz, we are Gullah people, and we are African American. I identify with both!

Tom’s response: My people are Gullah.

Turk’s* response: I see Gullah, African American, Black, yeah. Now, you know I am a Sandy Islander.

Henry’s* response: I believe that I am African American.

Elizabeth’s* response: Gullah people are strong people, and we are strong people on Sandy Island.

Ella’s* response: Yes, I am Gullah, all the way!

Wayne’s* response: I am a Sandy Islander with African roots—so, well, I guess African American.

Daphine’s* response: I love being Gullah.

Dianne’s* response: I see myself as Gullah.

In coding the second round of responses, I learned 9 of the Islanders identify as being part of the Gullah people. Four of the men identify as Sandy Islanders and 7 of them also identify as African American. Many of the Islanders overlapped with seeing themselves as African American and Gullah and/or Gullah and Sandy Islander. Only a few saw themselves as all three identities.
Education

All 12 of the Islanders in this group rode the school boat. Two out of 12 residents attended school on the Island; the rest went to school on the mainland. All 12 of them graduated from high school. One out of 12 of the Islanders attended college.

Household/Family life

Eleven out of 12 Islanders were married with families. Only 2 Islanders moved to the mainland to work, and they also had families. One Islander was divorced.

Employment/Occupation

When asked, “What kind of work do you do for a living?” One Islander was in active duty in the Airforce, while 1 Islander retired from the military. Their salaries ranged from $15,000 to $80,000.

Two out of 12 Islanders worked for the government, while 5 other Islanders worked in the service industry around Myrtle Beach. Another 5 Islanders owned their own businesses (painter, roofer, drywaller).

A day in the life of an Islander. Tell me what you do from the time you rise until the time you go to bed.

Ten out of 12 Islanders traveled to the mainland everyday. Two Islanders lived on mainland. The 10 residents worked on the mainland and, on average, they stayed about 9 hours per day on the mainland—starting from 7:00am to about 4:00pm.

Like the first set of structured interviews, the Islanders talked about how they like to build houses on Sandy Island. Four Islander men talked about how they enjoy working with their hands and, when they are not working on the mainland, they work on houses on the Island. Two Islanders love the peace and quiet of Island life. Two Islanders love to fish and I liked to fish in all seasons. Five Islanders enjoyed Island life with their families. When I requested each
To tell me what he or she did from the time he or she rose until the time he or she went to bed, I received the following responses:

Clayton’s response: I build houses.

Michael’s response: I paint.

Rommy’s response: When I come home, if I have time, I like to fish with my son.

Tom’s response: On the island, well, I like to relax sometimes, hang out with my family.

Turk’s response: Building beautiful houses keeps me going.

Henry’s response: I do drywall and be with family.

Elizabeth’s response: We fish (the family).

Ella’s response: I fish in all seasons. The Island is a great place for peace and relaxation.

Wayne’s response: I love being with nature; I feel like I’m close to God.

Daphine’s response: I love sitting on the porch with family.

Dianne’s response: We (family) have a great time on the Island, being together, hanging out around the house.

Do you think that Sandy Island should have a bridge that connects to the mainland? Why or why not?

The Islanders do not want a bridge from the island to connect to the mainland. Twelve out of 12 said no. Here are examples of the responses:

Turk’s response: I think a bridge would be great for another island, but not ours. I love not having a bridge. Getting in my boat and driving it to the mainland is a joy for me. We cannot change our environment.

Clayton’s response: When you think about it, it would be convenient to have a bridge. We could transport our food, building supplies and other stuff, too. No, I think we should leave our Island the way it is.

Would you like to see more people visit the island?

Twelve out of 12 Islanders support mainlanders coming to the Island to visit. They all would love for the mainlanders to come to church and to support their Island businesses.
Rommy’s response: Yes, we want to share our history. I think that it is an important thing for them (mainlanders) to learn about us. We are building businesses on the mainland that need support from them. Come worship with us, too.

**Sandy Island history, culture & traditions: Please describe your favorite place on Sandy Island.**

Here are their responses:

- Clayton’s response: My house
- Michael’s response: The waterfront
- Rommy’s response: The waterfront
- Tom’s response: In nature
- Turk’s response: The church
- Henry’s response: My house and being in nature
- Elizabeth’s response: The waterfront, fishing
- Ella’s response: Waterfront, fishing
- Wayne’s response: In nature
- Daphine’s response: On my porch
- Dianne’s response: Church and being at home with my family

The Islanders responded that their favorite places on the Island were centered around the waterfront. Three Islanders enjoyed the Mt.Rena area of the Island, while 3 Islanders prefered their houses as the favorite place on the Island. Two Islanders’ favorite places were church, while 2 Islanders liked to go to the waterfront and fish. One Islander enjoyed being home with her family most.

**If you could imagine Sandy Island in the future (20 years from now), what would you like to see different, and what would you like to see stay the same?**

Twelve out of 12 people would like to see their Island remain the same, and 1 person (Rommy) believed that, while they should keep its unique cultural traditions the same, he also said, “My people are skilled people, and we need to utilize our skills to create our own businesses on the Island.”
Mainlanders: Basic Background Information

The mainlanders’ questions are similar to the Islanders’ inquiries in that they elicit demographic and individual data. In the data, I have identified patterns in ideas on how the mainlanders see the Sandy Island people and their community. The structured interviews were approved by University of Florida Institutional Review Board (UFIRB): Protocol # 2010-U-0657. In 2011, I interviewed 50 people from different age groups, localities, ethnicities and economic backgrounds. The interview consisted of 25 women and 25 men, and the interviews took place from September to June 2011. These were face-to-face interviews, and mainlanders were comfortable with me taping the interviews. There were 18 questions.

Which term do you prefer to describe yourself?

- 28 mainlanders identified as African American
- 20 mainlanders identified as Caucasion, Euro American or White
- 2 mainlanders identified as Native American

Are you married, single, divorced or have a partner?

- 32 mainlanders were married
- 10 mainlanders were divorced
- 8 mainlanders were single

Do you have children?

- 44 out of 50 mainlanders had children
- 6 out of 50 mainlanders did not have children

Where do you live?

- 28 lived in Myrtle Beach
- 10 lived in Charleston County
- 5 lived in Georgetown County
- 7 lived in Horry County
Mainlanders, About Sandy Island

Have you ever visited Sandy Island? If the answer is no, are you interested in traveling to the Island?

- 20 mainlanders had traveled to the Island.
- 16 mainlanders had been on the backside of the Island in boats, but not directly on the Island interacting with community members.
- 4 mainlanders had been on the side of the Island where the community lives.
- 11 mainlanders had never traveled to Sandy Island.

They would be interested in visiting the Island, but most of them are scared to ride a boat—but still interested in traveling over to the Island. They would ride a pontoon boat, not a jon boat. The jon boats are too low.

Which section of the Sandy Island did you visit, and what type of boat did you travel in?

- 2 mainlanders (husband and wife) spent several weekends on the Island with a family. They stayed in Georgia Hill.
- 1 mainlander had family on the Island. Her family lived in Annie Village, and she went there many times. She mainly traveled to the Island by jon boat, which she enjoyed.
- 1 mainlander visited family members on the Island. She traveled to the Island on a fishing boat.

Have you ever visited the Pyatt grocery store on the Island?

None of the 50 mainlanders have visited the store.

Have you ever taken the Sandy Island tour?

None of the 50 interviewees have taken the tour.

Have you ever attended church or any of the social gatherings on the Island?

- 4 out of 46 mainlanders attended New Bethel Baptist Church.
- 1 mainlander has been to the family reunions, funerals and marriage ceremonies.

How would you describe the culture and people who live on Sandy Island?

- “The people are genuine. They are spiritual, and they are just down-to-earth people.”
“They are connected. They still believe in each other. They have a connection that our generation is attached from.”

“I think that the culture is very unique and they are very proud people.”

“I think about the scenery. I make the connection to my own area.”

“I think that they are friendly, part of the Black culture, like the old style.”

“Real nice people, live in their own world, and have a quiet environment.”

“I heard about taking a ferry to the Island; only a selected people can go on the Island, and its private. You can’t just go there and tour.”

“They stand out; they are unique people.”

“I describe that area as pleasant, welcoming and giving. It was like Giligan’s Island.”

Many of the mainlanders shared similar responses in discussing the culture of Sandy Island. Forty-six out of 50 mainlanders had never physically been to the Island, but they understood Island life through what they read or what someone told them about the community.

Please explain what you know about the history of Sandy Island.

Forty-eight out of 50 discussed how the residents are Gullah people and their ancestors produced rice. Two mainlanders discussed the following:

“I remember Prince Washington would bring the boat over to the mainland.”

“The only thing I know about the Island is the boat accident.”

Do you think that there should be a bridge that connects the island to the mainland so that the non-Sandy Islanders can commute to and from Sandy Island?

All 50 mainlanders answered no. One mainlander summed up the responses for all 50 respondents: “No, reason is because it is culture. Leave well enough alone—having strangers in your home? No. No. Nope!”
If you could imagine Sandy Island in the future (20 years from now), what would you like to see different, and what would you like to see stay the same?

All 50 mainlanders believed that the actual culture should not change. But, there were discussions centered around the mainlanders needing to learn more about the Islanders’ unique traditions. One mainlander added that “they should have their own government.” Another said, “Develop a grocery store or gas station so they do not have to socialize with the outside world.”

Figure 4-16 illustrates the methods of Participant Observation used to gather and interpret the performances, symbols and culture of the Gullah people of Sandy Island. In the next section, I analyze my observations through the lenses of W.E.B. DuBois’s discussion of veiling\(^\text{51}\) and James C. Scott’s ideas about public and hidden transcripts of behavior.\(^\text{52}\)

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Performance Analysis

I could not interpret the thoughts behind their facial expressions. There was a hidden dialogue within their language. I was an outsider within a Gullah community that I assumed would embrace me because I culturally identified myself as Gullah.53

Because the method of “Kitchen Table Talks” provided me entrance into the daily lives of Islanders, the hidden expressions and strategic performances away from mainlander scrutiny, I learned to truly see the Sandy Islanders. What was clear in the first five days of interaction with the Islanders was that they were devoted to preserving and protecting their Island culture. From that initial contact, and over the next 15 years, I witnessed first-hand the Islanders implementing “veiling,” which made it difficult for me to “see” them because they created imaginary disguises to protect themselves from outsiders. Veiling is the term I use to describe how the Islanders mask their true feelings through strategic performances as a result of my interpretive observations on Island life.

I introduce sociologist W. E. B. DuBois’s discussion on the “the double veil of self-consciousness” to explain the Islanders’ performances. He explains in his book, The Souls of Black Folk, that African American people with African ancestry share in a consciousness and a veil, which they use as a platform for survival strategies.54 He states:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is sort of the seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a

53 Tracey Graham, Field Notes, August 2001.
Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.\textsuperscript{55}

In my analysis of DuBois’s double veil of consciousness, I discovered behavior patterns in which African Americans had to perform as strategies within two realities—his/her own reality and within the reality of the dominant culture. The dualism within two worlds/cultures requires African Americans to navigate two social constructs. African Americans living within these racialized spaces of dualism/double veil of consciousness have developed coping tools. These tools are metaphors I assign to explain how “we” (and I count myself as a member) developed internal strength and empowerment to deal with socio-political constructs of the aftermath of slavery in the American plantation system.

In applying the concept to the people of Sandy Island, I argue that they have created performance survival strategies within two worlds—Islanders and non-Islanders. I’ve also come to realize that being an Islander is a different identity than being Gullah or Black/African American. Therefore, being an African American Gullah Girl does not give me a pass to be an Islander. Over the years, it has become clear that anyone who does not have roots within the Sandy Island culture does not have full access to it. The type of access is symbolized by those who marry Islanders and those of us who need permission to enter. Here, I would like to introduce the concept of veiling within social behavior patterns of the Islanders.

\textbf{Interpretive Veiling \#1}

After visiting the Island over time, I observed an example of this type of internal access at an Islander meeting in 2005, where Jack’s family discussed the heirs’ land ownership. When it was time to attend the meeting, Betty was not invited. She is a non-Islander who married an

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 50.
Islander, Jack. It was a closed meeting consisting of only Jack, his siblings and his sibling’s children. When Betty shared this with me, she said that it was a normal practice within the community. I interpreted this practice as a veiling because Betty explained that there are family meetings concerning landownership that she is unable to attend because she is not blood-related. So, being a part of the inner circle, being kin, relates directly, and only, to the bloodline.

I would like to take a moment to discuss how the land is divided within the families. It is based on heired properties because they have not surveyed the land. Betty explained that, in August of 2016, the community members were working on getting the land surveyed. In terms of paying yearly taxes, Islanders collectively put money together and an Islander travels to the Georgetown County tax office to pay taxes on the heirs’ properties. As a result of the Islanders not surveying their respective land, the tax records are not accurate in terms of who owns what.

This seems to directly connect to the county not having access to street names or house numbers and, by not surveying the land, it is hard for the tax office to have concrete, accurate evidence of land ownership. These actions reveal that even within the government, the Islanders control what is written.

**Interpretive Veiling #2**

In taking a moment to go back to my initial contact with the Islanders in August 2001, on the mainland, I spent a brief moment with the 10 Islanders who were drinking and talking to each other under the shelter. They offered me a drink; I politely refused; but, I assumed that the veil was lifted because they offered me an alcoholic drink. Through my lens, this was a sign of us “breaking bread.” I felt comfortable in their space. In retrospect, the men were just being polite and, furthermore, I need to note that we were not physically on the Island. This raised a

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56 Betty in discussion with the author, May 2005.
question: If the men were on the Island, sitting at the waterfront, would they have offered me a drink? There was a shift in their behavior when they were at the church on August 5, 2001 compared to interacting with me on the mainland. Also, for those Islanders who were drinking under the shelter, did the consumption of alcohol relax their inhibitions toward me? When I saw the same men at church with their families, they greeted me with friendly smiles but looked at me like the rest of the congregation—with caution. The looks in their eyes suggested guarded warmth.

**Interpretive Veiling #3**

After I asked the church congregation for their permission to study Island culture, I did not receive any verbal responses for consent. Instead, the congregation gave me their non-verbal cues with cautious eyes. There was complete silence after I asked for permission to study their community. The Islanders collectively displayed a public “veiling” of cultural silence. The community’s behavior of silence showed me that they created an internal dialogue on the church grounds to which I was not privy. As I asked for permission, I thought to myself, “What are they thinking?” Their facial expressions were cold and distant. As a result, the Islanders never confirmed or granted me permission directly. Their mannerisms revealed to me that I could enter the Island, but they would watch with caution. Truly, the Islanders did just that!

The Islanders’ behavior practices revealed that DuBois’s “veil of double-consciousness” was an important theoretical approach to cultural performativity in modern times. This veil allows Islanders to control what is tracked and known about them by outsiders. Nowhere is there more evidence than in the lack of census data.
Census Report: Track #9204 Block Group

I attempted to find the United States Census Bureau data on Sandy Island. Through my investigation, I learned that there is no direct Census report on Sandy Island. What the Census Report showed was that the Sandy Island population has been merged in with Georgetown County. I wanted to make sure that I was accurate in my findings, so I called the United States Census Bureau to verify. The representative confirmed by showing me virtually that Sandy Island is not a separate population study due to the fact that they are an unincorporated population of Georgetown County.\(^57\) How do we know the demographics of Sandy Island?

Sandy Islanders Performing Public and Hidden Transcripts

Political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott, author of *Domination and the Art of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, asserts that oppressed groups employ strategies of resistance that are subversive, and they go unnoticed by the dominant groups or power holders.\(^58\) As a result, the subordinate groups perform public transcripts to the power holders and, when they are out of public sight or off-stage, there is a critique of the power holders as a hidden transcript.\(^59\) I applied Scott’s theoretical framing to the people of Sandy Island. In my investigation of the Sandy Islanders, I found that they perform for the mainlanders. The performances, which cannot be completely understood at a quick glance, involve limiting details and information for public consumption, controlling the demographical information available when compared to what is known about mainlanders and affecting public behaviors and mannerisms of distance and non-
revealing conversations that suggest there may be hidden transcripts. Off-stage, Islanders speak a collective, detailed and revealing truth to each other.

These performances and my perception of them are the foreground of my analysis, yet they only became apparent in the structured interviews I had with the 22 Islanders (discussed in Method #5). There were specific details that were glossed over. For example, when asking, “Do you have children? How many and what are their ages?” Islander’s responded with deliberate vagueness: “My kids are always welcomed home. We have two kids in High School. Well, my other kids come home on the weekends to go to church; they come during the week, too.” I interpreted these responses as strategic and deliberate with them glossing over details about age and exact size of the immediate family. And, I did not push for a specific response, but rather moved on to the next question.

The Islander’s response can be understood as an example of the type of public transcript that Scott described as staged for the public. There are reasons why some questions were constantly glossed over. It was a part of their hidden transcripts, and represents acts of empowerment, agency and autonomy symbolized by the community’s ability to regulate which parts of their identities (as a community, as a culture, and as individuals) are disclosed to outsiders. For 15 years, I have attempted to become a part the off-stage performances. In the next section of the Chapter, I will discuss Sandy Islanders’ resistance and cultural and political actions.

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60 Sandy Islander in discussion with the author, October 2012.

Resistance and Cultural and Political Actions (Tourism)

Ruth Simms-Hamilton’s paradigm gave me a framework for understanding the people of Sandy Island. As I discussed in Chapter 2, I found these three tenets useful in interpreting the data I collected on Sandy Islanders:

- Migration and Geo-Social Displacement: The Circularity of a People
- Social Oppression: Relationship of Domination and Subordination
- Endurance, Resistance, and Struggle: Cultural and Political Action

In the first three chapters, I explained the displacement and involuntary migration patterns that West African people endured once they entered onto the landscape of the American South. West Africans moved into the socio-political identity of Gullah people as a result of being oppressed by the power holders. Adapting (by force) into the role of subordinates, however, they brought their skills in specialized trades to the South, which allowed them to successfully cultivate rice into the leading commercial trade throughout Georgetown County. The Gullah people of Sandy Island were huge contributors to the production of rice.

Over time, through the Islanders’ geographical isolation, they crafted an identity and cultural practices that gave them autonomy from mainlanders. Ruth Simms-Hamilton’s final tenet—endurance, resistance and struggle: cultural and political action—I would argue, has been a guiding paradigm in the Islanders’ endurance practices. It is through the Islanders’ core value system that they have transformed their history of enslavement in the American South and created new cultural political practices that empower them.

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63 Ibid.
64 Ibid., 23.
The Islanders’ approaches to tourism are good examples of these cultural political practices; two projects in which I co-collaborated with the Islanders to complete represent their crafting a local tourism to benefit the Sandy Island community. Together, we produced a calendar completed in 2014 called *A Place We Call Home*, and most recently, we have worked together on a Sandy Island cookbook, *Taste of Sandy Island: Beulah’s Family Recipes*.

The calendar was distributed in several local stores, such as the Georgetown Museum. It is a keepsake and represents the Islanders’ first cultural material designed for external consumption by tourists. The calendar contains photographs, historical documentation of events, and the stories of Sandy Islanders that capture Island life. Readers of these Island life histories will be able to witness how the Islanders not only endured the evils of slavery, but how they have reinvented themselves—crafting new cultural practices. The water separation, and the border of resistance it represents, allows Islanders to control who has access to their unique stories and experiences, and who does not.

The *Taste* cookbook is a work in progress. Inside, there are a variety of Gullah southern dishes—recipes that have been passed down from generation to generation. The main contributor of the cookbook is Beulah. She always aspired to create a cookbook, so she called a meeting with the women in the community, and they came together to share their Island recipes. Their collective action reflects Simms-Hamilton’s idea that “Culture is the dynamic synthesis of a people’s experimental knowledge, beliefs, values, and norms that express and derive from the conflict at each stage of their development in the search for survival and progress.”65 The Islanders are in search of ways in which they can survive and progress within the tourist industry, but on their own terms.

65 Ibid.
Clearly, Sandy Islanders’ separation from the mainland by a body of water, and the physical border it has created, has allowed them to practice their culture in relative isolation. As a result, they have created cultural practices like veiling and public and hidden transcripts, along with resistance to merging with the mainland, and a strong sense of cultural autonomy that shapes and strengthens their community.

Over time, I have learned that Gullah communities in the American South are unique in their own cultural expressions. In my observation, Sandy Islanders give new meaning to “unique” because their intentional isolation from the mainland enables them to control their interactions with the outside and allows them to govern as their own Island nation. Other Gullah communities that are situated in Georgetown County are, geographically, parts of the mainland, so there are greater outside influences that impact their cultural practices, like interaction with and governance by local government—something Sandy Islanders are able to script and pursue in accordance with their own visions. Sandy Island is worth studying because the community shows the outside world that they are not just surviving as an Island nation, but growing, adapting and changing as they strive to live as a connected community, as an Island nation, on their own terms.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

“I don’t know you.”¹

Mr. Willie, at the mainland boat landing

Figure 5-1: Mr. Willie gave me permission to take and publish this photo (Photographed by Tracey Graham, April 2013.)

Ethnographer’s Observation

Sandy Island is a Gullah community in South Carolina with a complex history of adaptation and resistance. Their lived experiences follow the patterns of survival described by Ruth Simms-Hamilton as characteristics of the African Diaspora. In this work, I've described how the community has resisted development and institutionalization by the mainland by rejecting the construction of a bridge to the mainland, working with Nature Conservancy to make

¹ Mr. Willie, telling me I could not travel with him to Sandy Island because he did not know me, June 2013.
the Island a safe haven for endangered species, and building a tourism industry that they (Islanders) control.

My initial contact with the people of Sandy Island occurred in June 2001. After that encounter, where I asked Mr. Willie if I could travel with him and was rejected, I embarked on a long (15-year) ethnographic journey of discovery of self and the Gullah people and of what I characterize as their “Island nation” of Sandy Island.

Ruth Simms-Hamilton’s African Diaspora Paradigm became an essential explanatory framework that I deployed along the way. It provided an interpretive lens through which to view and understand Sandy Island as a living example of an African Diaspora community in which patterns of resistance are evident. Their resistance is visible in the choice to control entry to, information about, and encroachment and development of the Island by establishing their own tourism businesses and joining forces with organizations like Nature Conservancy to protect the Island’s environment and endangered species.

My entry into Island life took time as I navigated gatekeepers like Mr. Willie and others determined to protect and preserve the Island’s way of life and core values. I often relied upon my personal cultural sensibilities to decipher the social codes that the Islanders assigned to outsiders alongside the standard anthropological methods for data collection. I also modified, adapted and innovated as needed.

I used five ethnographic methods to collect data and gain further insight into not only witnessing, but comprehending, how the people of Sandy Island practice their day-to-day lived experiences. These five main modes were participant observation, “kitchen table talks,”2 sketching, photography, and structured interviews. All of these methods enabled me to collect

2 McClaurin, Women of Belize: Gender and Change in Central America, 1996.
data that would help me answer my key research question: how have the people of Sandy Island used their separation by unbridged water to develop a resistance border that protects them from non-Sandy Islanders?

In the course of conducting “kitchen table talks,” which occurred in a place where I was surrounded by rich Gullah foods and traditions and that allowed the Islanders to relax in the privacy of their homes, a lot was revealed to me. The kitchen chats helped me understand Islanders’ hesitations in letting outsiders into their culture as well as the uniqueness of Gullah culture—since many of the traditions of Island life are cultivated in the kitchen. I began to understand that the Islanders had multiple socio-political strategies that enabled their survival and shaped their culture of resistance.

One strategy required maintaining a polite-but-firm distance from outsiders, exemplified in Mr. Willie’s response of not knowing me. Another strategy was that of having two presentations of Sandy Islanders: one, a performance for outsiders (public transcripts) and the other, an off-stage performance for the insiders (hidden transcripts).

Another method I found helpful was sketching. Because I could not find a good map of the island, I often found myself sketching (doodling) what I observed of Island life and the environments. While I make no claims to being an artist, these sketches connected me visually to Island landscape and Island life. I also photographed what I encountered on walks around the Island once I was granted permission to be a participant observer. My photographs allowed me to document changes on the Island and my gradual acceptance by the community over the course of 15 years as I observed and actively participated in community activities.

Structured interviews proved to be the most difficult method with which to produce results. It took me two years to interview 22 Islanders because it was difficult to schedule
meeting with them. It was one of the most challenging aspects of being an ethnographer and, at the same time, throughout the process, I gained glimpses of how the Islanders performed on stage (for outsiders) and off stage (for insiders). Over time, the Islanders’ African Diaspora patterns of resistance and how they cope with a history of domination and oppression, both tenets of Ruth Simms-Hamilton’s paradigm, became clearer to me. And, the Islanders’ public transcripts of resistance were consistent across the group, maintained even by those Islanders who chose to move to the mainland but return to the Island to participate in community activities. Because some people move between staying on the Island and living and working on the mainland, it was difficult to capture detailed demographic information. I began to sketch a kinship tree (Figure 5-2) to keep track of the Island’s current residents, those who might live on the mainland but remained connected to the Island, as well as the names of those Islanders descended from some of the community’s founders.
Sandy Island’s Future

In January 2011, The Nature Conservancy of South Carolina protected over 9,000 acres of one area of the Island, giving them ownership of a majority of the Island’s land mass. The Nature Conservancy will protect and cultivate the long-leaf pine trees and other trees that are becoming extinct; they are also engaged in protection of animal species like the red-cockaded
woodpeckers native to the woodland areas of Sandy Island.\(^3\) The Conservancy’s involvement will permanently forestall efforts to develop the Island, which certainly has been tried in the past.

Back in 1993, two developers who owned three quarters of Sandy Island attempted to build a bridge that would connect the mainland and the Island. Local government was also interested in building a bridge because of the deadly boating incident that took place February 18, 2009. Islanders were traveling from the mainland around 9:45pm. They were in a jon boat, it was raining, and the boat overturned. There were six passengers in the boat, and three of the Islanders drowned in the Waccamaw River because they did not have life jackets.\(^4\) The government and the residents had local meetings to discuss the construction of a bridge to protect the residents from having more incidents like that one. Despite this tragedy, Islanders opposed such a construction and signed a petition in an effort to maintain Island life and prevent such changes, but lacked the resources and political power to prevent it. Now that the Nature Conservancy of South Carolina owns the majority of the land on the Island, and is engaged in protecting endangered species of birds and trees, the bridge idea has been abandoned, and nothing will link the Island to the mainland any time soon.

Several decades have passed since the possibility of a bridge surfaced, and seven years have gone by since the tragic water accident. Yet, my interviews with 50 mainlanders to learn their thoughts on Islanders having a bridge reveals that they are just as opposed to a bridge to connect the Island as the Islanders. Mainlanders, like the Islanders, recognize that a bridge


\(^4\) “3 dead, 2 injured. These tragic deaths raised questions for the local government in deadly Sandy Island boat accident.” Georgetown Times. February 20, 2009.
would bring more outsiders to the Island, and it would be harder for Island residents to preserve their cultural traditions. As the Sandy Island community continues to promote its own local brand of tourism, mainlanders will continue to have some access to the Island, but on restricted terms dictated by the Islanders and the preservation strategies of the Nature Conservancy.

For those future ethnographers who are brave enough to try and gain access, and who manage to receive permission, I can only recommend patience, and suggest some topics for future research, such as: 1) examining the effectiveness of the Conservancy’s presence in protecting the Island from large crowds; 2) documenting how the Islanders create and manage their own brand of Sandy Island tourism; and 3) the future for youth of Sandy Island.

On this latter topic, it is an omission in my research that I now regret. Much of my time was spent with adults and those viewed as elders in the community. This ethnography reveals very little about how Sandy Island youth view their Island life and what they would like to see for the future. What I do know is that older youth tend to leave the Island to attend school, go into the military and go to work on the mainland. Whether they return, and if so, at what point, is another important question warranting further study because it has implications for the continuing preservation of Sandy Island culture. Do the youth who reside on the Island and who go to live on the mainland maintain the Islanders’ core values, and do they also have the same sense of Sandy Island as a place of refuge, peace and harmony? These are just a few topics that would lend themselves to an active research agenda. Another aspect of Island culture that should be studied is the influence of the military on Island life. I learned from my formal and informal interviews that the Islanders have a long genealogy of military service in their families. And so, I wonder if military service is the reason that Islanders have such strong protectionist attitudes.
Did they acquire this attitude from the military, or does joining the military simply reinforce cultural perspectives that derive from Sandy Island’s history of resistance?

The people of Sandy Island have survived many milestones (see Figure 5-3) and weathered many changes, yet their culture persists. But there is more change to come, and I predict that in two decades (20 years), the people of Sandy Island may have to partner more with local government agencies to negotiate more mainland conveniences as technology and the needs of the community change and to ward off over-development as they actively work to simultaneously modernize and preserve their unique heritage and rich cultural traditions.

Figure 5-3: Timeline of Sandy Island Milestones

This research has led me to study a group of people who have resisted being studied by outsiders. Despite all the challenges I encountered in the course of my fieldwork, I believe my persistence and dedication to helping the Islanders preserve their culture and traditions (the
calendar and recipe book) allowed me to have the access that researchers in the past have not achieved.

This study of Sandy Island, South Carolina is an important contribution to the scholarship on African Diaspora communities in general and highlights the ongoing persistence of Gullah people and culture. It also reveals the value of the African Diaspora Paradigm in explaining cultural persistence and resistance in the face of change. And it adds to the body of research and knowledge that affirms our remarkable ability, as the human species, to continuously adapt and form communities in the face of immense social and environmental changes, while retaining our sense of humanity. I am forever grateful to the people of Sandy Island, and through this ethnography, I have tried to honor them.
APPENDIX A
SANDY AND SAPELO ISLAND RESEARCH

As aforementioned, the National Endowment for the Humanities funded my research on Sapelo Island. I collected artifacts and interviewed Island members throughout my stay and was able to publish a poster that examines my research on Sandy and Sapelo Islands. Additionally, English Professor, Donna L. Newsome, from New Orleans, discussed on the poster her observations of Sapelo Island and how she was able to make cultural links to her own heritage. The results of that poster are shown on the follow pages.
This study investigates the unique oral and cultural traditions of the historic Sandy and Sapelo Island inhabitants. In contemporary times, Sandy islanders are known as Gullah people, which is a term researchers used to describe displaced Africans who involuntarily traveled from Africa and were enslaved in the American South. These Africans brought with them many agricultural skills, religious practices, literary forms, and culinary traditions that were cultivated in their homelands. In modern times, sea island communities share in the preservation of their rich African cultural traditions. Sapelo, like Sandy Islanders, are an African American island community who protect their cultural legacy. Surrounded by a large body of water, sixty miles from Savannah, Georgia, Sapelo people have maintained rich traditions of folk art and other forms of cultural expressions distinctive to their community. In a recent interview, a Sapelo community leader shared, “We are Salt Water Geechee people, not Gullah...Gullah folks are from South Carolina.” The Geechee and Gullah distinct yet parallel narratives are part of an ethnographical research study developed via research and interview sessions with Sandy and Sapelo Island residents.

Sandy Island is located in Georgetown County, South Carolina between the Pee Dee and Waccamaw Rivers and represents the largest undeveloped tract remaining in the Waccamaw Neck. The island is about 12,000 acres of a prehistoric sand dune. The northern part of the island is higher than any area in Georgetown County. This area provides a refuge for the endangered red cockaded, the long leaf pine, and many other rare plants. Sandy Island has an incredible oral history that describes the traditions and original cultural expressions of the enslaved Africans who began work in the rice fields for the Southeastern agriculturalists in the seventeenth century. The transplanted inhabitants’ African influences flourished and still exist on the island in modern times.

I began my research with a multitude of probing questions about the people of Sandy Island, who live in Georgetown County, South Carolina. What makes the people of Sandy Island worthy of anthropological investigation? Is it that they are an African American river community located on an island off the coast of Georgetown, South Carolina, and have resisted being studied for many years? What about the fact that the ancestors of this African Diaspora community grew and cultivated rice, which was the major cash crop for the seventeenth-century’s global market? Even today, as I travel by boat to and from Sandy Island, I see remnants of rice paddies throughout the Waccamaw River marshes. In a recent interview with islander Rommie Pyatt, he told me that the Waccamaw Indians were the first inhabitants of the island. Pyatt recalls, “I learned later that Waccamaw Indians used it for a burial site for their ancestors” (interview with author, 2011).

Recently the Georgetown Times described the Sandy Island community as having the only

Figure A-1: Where is Sandy Island? (Infographic created by Tracey Graham, October 2011.)
The residents park their boats here at the landing. Some of the islanders drive john boats while others drive pontoon boats. Island used their separation by water and the absence of a bridge to develop a resistance border that protects them from non-Sandy Islanders.

Here is the boat landing. This is one of the main entrances to Sandy Island.

**Figure A-2: Understanding the notion of Gullah and Geechee (Infographic created by Tracey Graham, October 2011.)**
My desire to apply for the Georgia Lowcountry National Endowment for the Humanities Workshop in 2011 began as a quest to make connections between the unique dialect that my grandfa-

ther, a native of Donaldsonville, I.A, spoke and the dialect of the Gullah/Geechee people. As a young girl I would hear my grandfather say the most unusual expressions. I understood them, yet, I did not realize at the time that I was learning another language.

As an English major at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA, I became introduced to the Gullah/Geechee folktales and immediately recognized the common dialect patterns. By this time unfortunately, my grandfather was deceased, so I was unable to clarify various phrases. I did begin to record my memories and to interrogate those who knew my grandfather regarding his use of language. The results of many of these informal question and answer sessions were amazing! There seemed to be some connection between the two forms of communication, however, I could not determine the exact relationship.

A connection became apparent as I traveled to Sapelo Island, GA by ferry. The isolation of this experience, which began on a thirty minute modern ferryboat to the island, was a surreal journey for me. I also live in a river-based community where ferries are used to transport residents. The difference with the Sapelo Island Ferry is that the island is not in sight when you board in Meridian. This was truly a different journey, but once on Sapelo Island, I heard the language of my grandfather again!

This study will make a significant contribution to greatly neglected and under researched areas (Gullah and Geechee Islands) in North America. This research is not only vital to the African Diaspora; it illuminates an important part of our human communities. By examining Sandy and Sapelo Island we will expand the contemporary and cultural understanding of how the African Diaspora, despite social histories of displacement and social oppression, have found ways to maintain aspects of African cultural traditions while simultaneously creating new cultural formations that reflect their interaction with the outside environment of non-Gullah, Geechee people in North America.

Special thanks to the following: Horry Georgetown Technical College, River Parishes Community College, Sandy Islanders, Sapelo Islanders, Charles D. Snyder from the Georgia Historical Society, and The National Endowment for the Humanities.
APPENDIX B
EXCERPTS OF FROGMORE STEW

Act I: Performing Gullah

“Our stories, our voices, our lives, are too often disregarded, marginalized and left on the cutting floors . . . ignored . . .”

Dr. Irma McClaurin

“They went to Vietnam fighting as American citizens, but when they return, Joe can’t really deal . . .”

Tracey Graham

FROGMORE STEW—A TASTE OF THE S.C. SEA ISLANDS

“Frogmore Stew,” a one act play written and directed by SFCC Theater Instructor Tracey Graham, is presented by Theatre Santa Fe 8 p.m. Thursday, Friday and Saturday Feb. 12, 13, and 14 in E-129. Admission is free.

Frogmore Stew is set in Georgetown, S.C. and traces the cultural depth of African-American folk history.

Graham, a folklorist, is a graduate student in the University of Florida Department of Anthropology. She is writing her dissertation on the culture and history of the sea islands of South Carolina, where Georgetown is located. During the play, the main character prepares his favorite southern dish of Frogmore Stew, commonly served along the coast of South Carolina.

As Joe, the main character, prepares the stew, he and his friend reminisce about their shared experiences in Vietnam, southern traditions and life in the south during segregation.

“They went to Vietnam fighting as American citizens, but when they return, Joe can’t really deal with the racialized categories in the U.S.,” said Graham. For information call 395-5464

Figure B-1: Press Release for Frogmore Stew.
Setting

It was a hot summer day in Georgetown, South Carolina. Joe is in his front yard preparing for his favorite southern dish, Frogmore Stew. He invites his best friend, Ali, to his house for stew. While the stew is being prepared, they reminisce on their unique experiences together—southern traditions, living in the south during segregation and Vietnam War stories.

The (Dramatic) Action

Action moves in several spaces: the jungle of Vietnam, Joe’s front porch, Juke Joint, and West Africa.

Characters

Joe:

(Main character, African American Vietnam veteran) He is a brilliant man who has never seemed to reach his full potential in life. Why? He cannot move past the horrors of racism in the American South and his experience in the Vietnam War. He has inherent resistance patterns to colonial structures. What makes him happy is cooking traditional dishes that his mother taught him while growing up on Arcadia plantation.

(Special Note: The real Vietnam veteran reflected on many life experiences in our “Frogmore chats,” from his time as a solider, memories dancing in the juke joints—known in modern times as clubs—to his knowledge of American and West African histories. Before serving in the military service, he wanted to become a high school teacher. He makes many symbolic references to West Africa in our discussion.)

Ali:

(Joe’s best friend who also served in Vietnam) Ali was born in Wilmington, North Carolina and later moved to Bucksport, South Carolina—which is about 45 miles from Arcadia
Plantation. Ali saved Joe’s life in Vietnam. They were in the same unit. He is a very spiritual man who accepts the horrific experiences of Vietnam and the racism in the south. He is an orthodox Muslim who takes pride in loving people from all backgrounds.

(Special Note: Ali is a real person who is from Bucksport, South Carolina. Ali was in Vietnam during the same time as the main character; but they have never met in real life. I spent three months interacting with Ali learning about his tour in Vietnam and relearning his life histories. He is my uncle.)

**Oshun/Goddess of Love:**

(Joe’s mother, who we only hear her voice. She reads the letter from her son.) She brings love and spiritual healing into her son’s life. In his letters, he reminisces on how he misses his family back on Arcadia plantation and all the good ole southern foods they shared.

(Special Note: I use the symbolism of Oshun who, in the Yoruba context, represents the Goddess of Divine/Universal Love. The main character adores his mother like the Oshun Goddess.)

**Uncle Sam:**

(Narrator who disrupts the action) He wants the American people to know the government’s side to the Vietnam War. He is sympathetic to the fact that Joe had problems with being (forced) drafted in the Vietnam War. The audience members are the only ones who can see and hear Uncle Sam.

(Special Note: During our Frogmore chats, the Vietnam veteran would talk about his relation with Uncle Sam. He did not see Uncle Sam as the government, but an “actual person.” I took all of his dialogues with Uncle Sam and created responses. Uncle Sam’s responses are not
real life, but a rebuttal to the Vietnam veteran’s actions. Uncle Sam wants empathy from the main character and the audience.)

**Chorus:**

(Ten characters who guided specific events in Joe’s life) Vietnam Soldiers/Vietnamese/Juke Joint Dancers/Africans

**Excerpt**

The action opens with a voice over from the main character’s mother, Oshun, reading letters from Joe in Vietnam. He writes to his mom back on Arcadia plantation:

**August 1, 1968**

Dear Mom,

Please forgive me for not writing you sooner. But I’ve been so upset since Uncle Sam drafted me in this war. He didn’t even wait for me to graduate from the 12th grade. . . . My dream to be a school teacher is now put on the back burner. Uncle Sam got me, Mom! Basic training was an absolute nightmare. I stayed six weeks in Fort Gordon, Georgia. It was a war within itself. I don’t know why I am fighting in this war. These six weeks made me realize that a Black man has no place here! Our living conditions were horrible. We slept outside in large tents. The Vietnamese rats met us at the entrance of our sleeping quarter. These rats are bigger than the ones in cypress swamp. I lost so much weight until now; I look like Old Man Gause who lives in that lane next to the Waccamaw River. He never seemed to have enough meat on his bones. I am missing your homemade biscuits . . . they just melt in my mouth with Granny’s down-home grape jelly. Mom, I got to leave you, now. We are headed in the jungle. Give Pop and everyone else my love.
October 10, 1968

I have been in the jungle for forty days. We have been here longer than we was suppose to. The chopper hasn’t come for us, so we are stuck in this jungle. And it is beyond hot; it is worse than being in the cotton fields mid-day in Georgetown. Most of the time, the Vietnamese offer food and shelter. We take their shelter and some of the soldiers do demeaning acts that I am not comfortable with sharing with you. This is really sick. I am starting to feel demented. The army has trained us to kill anything in sight. I am a snake in the woods of Arcadia plantation, waiting slyly, camouflaging myself in nature, preying on some creature. . . . Vietnamese are similar to our people slaves on their own land and struggling to survive—exploitation of the worst kind. I don’t know when this war is going to end, but I sure do miss my folks back home. I can’t wait to go crabbing with Pop so we can catch crabs for my favorite stew.

Figure B-2: This is the scene from Vietnam (Photographed by Tracey Graham, February 2004.)
February 13, 1969

I must tell you that I miss you. . . . There are so many things I need to say. I got hurt in Vietnam; not to worry mom, I am okay. I was in the jungle and there was an explosion, and gun fire was going off everywhere all at once. We were experience hostile fire. Attack . . . we tried to escape, but it was dark, and I could not see. I didn’t know what to do. A bullet hit me in my shoulder, and it split up in my body. I fell to the ground. My pain was so intense that I started hallucinating. It was like I was being beating and then sold into slavery at the Charleston port in 1670, laid out naked. . . . I begged my medic to give me morphine for the pain. “Please, I am in pain,” I begged. And then the sandman came. My whole life flashed before my eyes. Mom, Uncle Sam is bringing me home—not your child who left—but, now, I have drop foot and the memories of search and destroy.
The action continues with the main character back in Arcadia plantation. He has drop foot. He makes Frogmore Stew outside of his house as he waits for his best friend, Ali, who also served in Vietnam with him. When Ali arrives, they sit on the front porch and talk about “ole times” while Joe prepares the stew.

**Joe to Ali:**

Do you smell that? Man, I put some red potatoes in it this time to add a new color my creation. And, we got blue female crabs along with my big jumbo shrimp from the bay; got the hot and spicy sausage from Harry’s grocery up the lane, but check this out. This beef is Kosher.
. . . I went and picked the corn from our land out east, and I am saving the most important ingredient for last, my grandmother’s famous seasonin that Mom shared with me. I tell you, man, I got the family history right here in this pot . . . All the tears and sweat from our folks so much it makes me wanna sing. (He starts singing a Negro spiritual.)

Figure B-4: Joe and Ali talk about the good “ole” days while the Frogmore Stew cooks in the pot. The climax of the action takes place when Joe relives his frustrations after returning from Vietnam. (Photographed by Tracey Graham, February 2004.)

Joe:

Hold up now. Ali, my life changed after Nam, man. I got back to the states and Martin Luther King was assassinated. And there were riots going on all over the place. I felt like a man in a cage . . . trying to get out . . . trapped! I had nothing to believe in. How could we fight for our country, but return to be beat down like damn animals? How was we able to make a life for ourselves without feeling like we were in shackles? Ali, how did you do it? Damn man, it is hard for me.
I came back here and we was dealing with Jim Crow every time we went to a restaurant; we had to pick up our food at the back door. We couldn’t eat ‘n whiteez’ restaurants. And yet, our people was the ones who cooked in their restaurants and the food . . . (pause)

I went back to finish high school, but I was angry, angry as hell. I could not find a job. I went to college to get that degree I always wanted, but I lost focus; I lost my spirit. Uncle Sam didn’t give a damn about this Black man right here. He didn’t give a damn!

Figure B-5: Uncle Sam (Photographed by Tracey Graham, February 2004.)

Uncle Sam:

Joe, I do care about you. America cares about you. (He goes over to Joe.) Yes, we made some mistakes with Vietnam. We did not do everything right. You have every right to fight in that war. THIS IS YOUR COUNTRY TOO! We are aware that your folks, our folks, helped in the building of the South. The sweat and tears of the Africans and Native Americans can never be forgotten. I honor that, Joe, because our history tell us this.
We went through the rough times after we took the troops out of Vietnam. To be honest with you, I am disappointed about how the whole damn thing was handled, but, tell me something, Joe. Why are you going to continue to play victim to our fuck-ups? (Uncle Sam walks off)
APPENDIX C
ARTICLE: “YOUR GRANMOTHER’S SOUTHERN CUISINE”

The author published an article on the history of food in the American South in Coastal Business Life magazine. See Figures C-1 and C-2.
Figure C-1: Page one of “Your Grandmother’s Southern Cuisine.” (Graham, Tracey. “Your Grandmother’s Southern Cuisine.” Coastal Business Life. March 2008.)
“My grandmother, who lived to be 100, grew all of her own vegetables. The heirloom garden makes me think of her and the wonderful dishes I enjoyed in her kitchen.”

were already being harvested by Native Americans. When European explorers traveled the terrains of Africa and the Americas, not only did they bring to the Lowcountry human cargo but also the essential crops that Lowcountry inhabitants eat today: beans, peppers, basil, cucumbers, sugarcane, tomatoes and many others.

So the next time we walk into the produce section of a grocery store and buy tomatoes or okra and okra, let’s remember that they have origins in South America. Let’s remember that the black-eyed peas we eat as a part of our Sunday dinner or New Year’s celebrations can be traced back to the continent of Africa. The cultural expressions of local historical foods continue to make the Lowcountry a unique and diverse place to live.

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Figure C-2: Page two of “Your Grandmother’s Southern Cuisine.” (Graham, Tracey. “Your Grandmother’s Southern Cuisine.” Coastal Business Life. March 2008.)
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tracey Graham was born and raised in Newark, New Jersey. Tracey, at a very young age, was exposed to people from various cultural backgrounds. Her natural talent in performance won her the title of Ms. Black Teenage World of New Jersey in 1984. Through radio announcing, broadcast journalism, television production, and creative writing, she stretched her training as a skillful communicator and theater practitioner while earning a Bachelor of Arts from Morgan State University in Telecommunications and minoring in Theater (1990). Using her telecommunication background, Tracey traveled to Kochi, Japan, to work for the Ministry of Education to teach ESL to Japanese students. Her travels to Hong Kong, Canton, Thailand, Indonesia, Guam, Jamaica, and Ghana allowed her to see firsthand how people from different cultures performed their daily practices of cultural identity.

After earning a Master of Arts in Theater from Bowling Green State University (1995), Tracey produced, directed and wrote plays that examined the complexities of African American people. Her plays consist of *The Rhythmic Sounds of a Soulful People* (1999), *Daughters of the Sea* (2000) and *Frogmore Stew* (2004). Frogmore Stew is based on a true story where Tracey spent countless hours with an African American Vietnam Veteran who lives on a post-slave plantation in Georgetown, South Carolina. She merged the interview into a one act play.

Presently, Tracey teaches Anthropology, Theater and Communication classes at Horry Georgetown Technical College in South Carolina; when she is not teaching, she’s practicing yoga and writing southern folklore.