A Brief History of Gullah Culture

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Dedication

- Septima Poinsette Clark
Dedication

• Esau Jenkins
Gullah Culture – African Roots

• Small-scale political organization
• Rural life of farming, fishing and hunting
• Skill in rice and cotton production
• Social/political organization with tendencies toward gender equity
• Distinctive network of gender-based organizations whose rules permeated all of life
• Belief in multiple deities with multiple levels of involvement in human affairs through nature and other activities.
The Crucible of Gullah Culture

• Crucible: 1-A place, time or situation characterized by the confluence of powerful intellectual, social, economic or political forces. [American Heritage Dictionary-2006]

• 2-A test of the most decisive kind; a severe trial. [Webster’s Revised Unabridged-1998]
GULLAH CULTURE

• Deeply held values, beliefs, attitudes—and their consequential behavior patterns
  
  • Emerging from unique historical patterns

• Sustained by contemporary social, economic, and educational patterns
CRUCIBLE OF GULLAH CULTURE

- Slavery—1650-1865
  - Coastal SC—Task System
- Isolation/separation of Sea Islands
  - Cape Fear, NC to St. Johns--FL
- Illegal importation of slaves directly from Africa until 1858
  - Jekyll Island, SC—The Wanderer
- Black/White Ratio (State, Sea Islands)
- Century of Oppression (1865-1965)
Ethnographic research/Interviews of elderly

• 1967—1985: Ten islands in Beaufort and Charleston Counties
Current manifestations of Gullah culture
(from my research)

• Strong sentiments/bonds of family, kinship, community
• Dignity, defiance and political resistance
• Sense of humiliation, degradation and servility
• Strong entrepreneurial spirit with related practices
• Strong beliefs in spirituality, religion and the church
• Belief in traditional folk medicine
• Women as social and political leaders
• Profound respect for educational skills and literacy
• Supernatural beliefs with related practices
• Meaning and significance in one’s “travels” (dreams)
A Greeting Shout—

“How Do You Do, Everybody”
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