

Summer 9-2022

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### Recommended Citation

St. Louis, Jamesia, "The Preservation of Gullah Geechee Culture in Georgetown, South Carolina" (2022).  
*Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities*. 8.  
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The Preservation of Gullah Geechee Culture in Georgetown, South Carolina

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September 2022

**Introduction:**

For this report, I examined community members and initiatives in Georgetown, as they worked to implement the preservation of Gullah Geechee heritage and culture. I will show how this implementation relates to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities. The preservation of Gullah Geechee culture specifically relates to two targets within Goal 11; Target 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage and 11.A: Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning. Using my internship at the Coastal Observer newspaper, I had the opportunity to attend community events, participate in activities, and interview community members on the ways they are actively working to preserve their heritage.

There is an intersectional approach that can be used to examine African American tourism as cultural tourism. Preservation of a culture can be viewed as a form of tourism, in the way it is depicted and the benefits and uses that arise, such as monetary gain. Marilyn Hemingway (who will be referred to as Ms. Hemingway), founder of the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce and foundation, is working to preserve the heritage of Gullah Geechee individuals in a multitude of ways, including providing a new source of cultural tourism in Georgetown, S.C. She is directing a new cultural and ecological tourism initiative, the Gullah Geechee Seafood Trail. The trail is an infrastructure plan set to help promote and develop African American and Gullah Geechee businesses and communities, (Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor NHA, 2020).

To understand the intricacies of why Gullah Geechee culture is important globally, one must look at the impacts and the things lost by the originators (enslaved individuals) of the culture. The transatlantic slave trade is estimated to have begun in the sixteenth century and lasted until the late

nineteenth century, (Lowcountry Digital History Initiative, 2019). The transatlantic slave trade is interconnected with the colonization of various parts of the world by European colonies. Researchers suggest that “the hallmark of Atlantic circulations is the massive, forced exile of millions of people of African descent and their inhumane oppression and overexploitation along with their negated humanity, citizenship, and sovereignty” led to many African diasporas that were formed in multiple colonies across the Atlantic world, (Thiaw and Mack, 2020, S146). The groups and communities within the diasporas that were formed during these tumultuous times are what are known in America as the modern-day Gullah Geechee.

The culture of the Gullah Geechee community is complex as researchers agree that all members of the community “are not indigenous to the United States, the language spoken, traditions, experiences, and the ways in which their culture is interpreted. They share some parallels with each other and are often minority and marginalized populations in the U.S”, (Ghahramani, McArdle, and Fatorić 2020, 2). There is a distinction between the Gullah Geechee individuals and the greater African American populations in the United States that predates most modern advances. “Gullah Geechee people residing in the Sea Islands were isolated and able to maintain their culture in the close-knit, rural communities”, (Ghahramani, McArdle, and Fatorić 2020, 2). Individuals maintain traditions, speech patterns, cooking styles, forms of art, a necessity for resilience, and other aspects that encompasses the culture as a whole.

The global impact lies in how researchers link an increase in the rise of advancement in European colonies to slavery. The “European Miracle”, a spreading of the European capitalist system and the making of empires during the Industrial Revolution and the colonization of the rest of the world, has intricacies that suggest it was made possible due to the labor of the enslaved individuals assistance in the production of trade, (Thiaw and Mack, 2020, S146). “European civilizations prior to 1500 were largely rural and displayed little evidence of superior levels of economic and technological advancement

over other rural societies in China, India, and Africa. The rapid growth of Western European empires can be traced to participation in the Atlantic commerce, slavery, and colonization in the New World”, (Thiaw and Mack, 2020, S147). The labor of the enslaved individuals in these European colonies, specifically the New World (modern-day America), helped to create European empires that dominated economically during the nineteenth century. The low-cost labor of enslaved individuals in the New World led to the development of specialized agriculture on plantations that expanded the market sector to a global scale. This also fueled the growing plantation economy with a “boosted commodity production and stimulated industrialization, colonialism, and capitalism,” (Thiaw and Mack, 2020, S147). The beginning of the now global capitalist economy was created as a result of the economic establishment of the Atlantic European nations and new industrial powers of the United States.

This study will take a look at the Gullah Geechee Seafood trail, which used cultural tourism as its basis to preserve culture. Some of the history of the enslaved individuals and past African diasporas can be found within the trail. The trail will be created to promote the use of cultural heritage assets, consumption of experiences, products, and increasing the influx of tourists for the city of Georgetown, (Rodzi, Zaki, and Subli, 2013). As Ms. Hemingway described the aspects of Gullah Geechee culture that needed preservation, she detailed attractions such as outdoor fishing, river and swamp tours where attendants can hear the history of Gullah descendants from “true” Gullah Geechee individuals and various outdoor activities that are rooted in the cultural teachings and beliefs. Culinary and local businesses were also areas of development the trail will work on, (M. Hemingway, personal communication, May 15, 2022). Ms. Hemingway suggested that the preservation of the environmental knowledge that the Gullah individuals held, is essential to understanding the impacts on the economic development in the early colonies, enslaved individuals made, such as the building of rice canals that are still used modernly in parts of Georgetown County. She noted that the town of Georgetown allowed her,

as founder of the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce, to review town plans to make suggestions on how the town can assist in the preservation and location of significant places in the culture, (M.

Hemingway, personal communication, July 12, 2022)

### **Literature Review:**

The Gullah Geechee community consists of people who are descendants of various African villages and cities, who were enslaved on the rice, indigo, and Sea Island cotton plantations along the south Atlantic coast, (Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, 2019). The Gullah Geechee heritage is encompassed by a variety of arts, crafts, foods, and music. The intricacies and distinctive artistic expressions reflect the nature of their enslavement, the isolated island and coastal plantations.

One example of Gullah Geechee cultural experience in Georgetown County is the Gullah Geechee Seafood Trail. As mentioned previously the trail led by Ms. Hemingway will be an infrastructure within the Gullah Geechee Corridor that will help with the preservation of Gullah Geechee culture in the states (North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida) of the Corridor. The overall mission of the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce is “*to create Global Awareness, profitability and sustainability of African American Businesses and entities impacting Gullah Geechee communities*”, (M. Hemingway, personal communication, May 15, 2022) and Ms. Hemingway said that falls true for the trail as well. The 2- part initiative began with content creation in the first year. She listed some of the objectives of the trail during the first year as putting together a website that will contain a directory of businesses, including fishermen, oyster harvesters and creators who may use water in their creation. The infrastructure also consists of a digital archive that contains individual stories of Gullah Geechee communities which will be a part of the director, (M. Hemingway, personal communication, July 12,

2022), Ms. Hemingway noted that this will increase revenue for tourism related businesses (not secluded to Gullah Geechee) in Georgetown, as well as other cities within the corridor.

The Gullah Geechee Corridor was established by the United States Congress in an effort to federally recognize the culture of Gullah Geechee people who inhabit the states and islands of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and Florida, (Clyburn, 2004). A 2020 Market Report for Gullah Geechee Heritage Tourism conducted by the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor NHA found that the potential leisure for the corridor was 34 billion dollars, (Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor NHA, 2020).



The establishment of cultural tourism in these states were vital to the preservation of the heritage. Studies suggest that there are four elements that make up cultural tourism: actual tourism, the use of cultural heritage assets, consumption of experiences, products, and tourists, (Rodzi, Zaki, and Subli, 2013). The seafood trail planned to establish avenues in all elements of cultural tourism.

Cultural heritage can be associated with the creations of artistic expression and symbolic rituals and patterns, passed on to one another of the same culture. There are many varieties of what it looks like to preserve a culture, including preserving things that can be physically given to an individual and verbally passed along. Research suggested that with the passing of heritage and culture, it can add to the uniqueness of a culture as well as provide a competitive advantage against other shared cultures, (Hani et al., 2012). An example of this is collective identity.

Collective identity describes people's sense of personal identity and their connection to a group. Research suggested that collective identity emerges from the shared collective experiences (colonization, forced labor, racism, racial identity) of individuals within the same group/community, (Johnson and Carter, 2019). Johnson and Carter argued that "black collective values can be considered interdependent with Africultural values and thus important to examine as cultural strengths, (Johnson and Carter, 2019). This in turn, added to the uniqueness of a culture, as individuals use shared experiences to learn how to maneuver in the society/world they encompass. The uniqueness and intricacies of African American identity and culture can be found in the community or areas they lived in. However due issues such as heirs' property, some Gullah communities are losing areas of importance to these identities in ways such as the inability to establish owners of the property, the inability to physically divide properties, receive legal assistance or being bought out in force sales, (Breitenbach, 2015) .

Heirs' property is defined by the United States Department of Agriculture as "land that has been passed down informally from generation to generation without clear title or documented legal ownership. Every heir has rights to the property, but the lack of a clear title creates confusion regarding taxes, the use of the land, and the ability to sell the land," (South Carolina State House, 2022). A lack of trust in the American Government system can be a catalyst for issues as such. This practice would



continue through multiple generations in a family, which left the title for the property further divided and complicated the heirs' ability to determine the legal owners of the property, (South Carolina State House, 2022). In the Southern half of the United States, a vast majority (one-third) of land owned by African Americans is held in the heirs' property system currently, (South Carolina State House, 2022). This is a problem the Ms. Hemingway worked to sustain by creating partnerships that educate individuals on these issues in an effort to preserve the culture in the communities.

The Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, a partner of the seafood trail, created a strategic plan of preservation to aid in the education of land ownership. Their plan detailed a “range of challenges that threaten land ownership” with a “particular concern that a great deal of land that is privately owned by Gullah Geechee people is “heirs’ property, (Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, 2020). Research suggested that “African-American land ownership peaked in 1910 at 15 million acres and then fell dramatically from that point, with land loss often due to heirs’ property complications”, (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019, viii). A 2019 study by the United States Department of Agriculture, noted that 41,000 acres in six coastal counties of South Carolina, representing 1% of total land,”(United States Department of Agriculture 2019, 12). Berkeley County, SC, about 57.5 miles from Georgetown, has 17,000 acres of heirs’ property, which represents 2.2% of the county’s total, (United States Department of Agriculture, 2019). In the Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law and Policy, it is noted that heir’s property is widespread in the south, and especially in predominantly African American communities, (Breland, 2021).

The preservation of the Gullah Geechee culture ties directly into the Sustainable Development Goal 11 and its target 11.4 defined as the “total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage” by the grants Ms. Hemingway received to create the initiative (seafood trail) and a web platform for it, (Ritchie et al.,

2018). The South Carolina Sea Grant consortium has contributed grants to the Seafood trail in an effort to sustain and preserve Gullah Geechee culture and maritime culture. Ms. Hemingway is an advocate for not only implementing the trail but also developing sustainable solutions to help with the environment as well, including environmental education. These efforts contribute to fulfilling the goal of target 11.4: “Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage,”(Ritchie et al., 2018).

Researchers agreed that both ecotourism and cultural tourism have benefits for the areas that adopt them. It is noted that upon being adopted, a more integrated plan should be taken between tourism practitioners, government tourism officials and academics, (Laitamaki et al. 2016, 11), such as increased knowledge surrounding environmental knowledge and tourism itself. A shared vision among all groups is needed in terms of what tourism “product” the county/city/area promotes and what type of tourists they will attract. Shared compromises, such as county meetings to gain public insight on the direction of the tourism plan, is essential as research would insist that a highly centralized government structure results in weakened local representation and a low level of community participation”, (Laitamaki et al. 2016, 11). In this plan, aspects such as the inquiry of diversity need to be fully examined to encompass the full range of cultural tourism Cultural heritage and conservation of biodiversity need to be at the forefront for best implementation of cultural and environmental tourism.

Water is a significant part of Gullah Geechee culture. Individuals would insist there are water-centered aspects of a culture that are passed down through traditions such as fishing, crabbing, etc. Water-centered traditions or activities are a common recurring factor in terms of income or a means of livelihood for many Gullah communities, (Ellis et al. ,2014). During times of enslavement, many individuals encompassed water related skills, such as fishing, which allowed for them to accumulate money and supplement the poor eating conditions they were under. Individuals were found to have “sold

excess meat, fish, and skins or traded them for clothing and other goods, (National Park Service 2005, 38). Elaborate trading systems were established for their crops and crafts and with most plantations having river access, goods were bartered and sold along the rivers, which were the major transportation routes of the day. Some of these practices continued after their enslavement ended.

### **Empirical Evidence:**

Ms. Hemingway, a Gullah Geechee descendant, was my first interview conducted. Ms. Hemingway's Gullah Geechee Seafood trail started off in the South Carolina (in Charleston and Georgetown, two prominent Gullah Geechee cities) region of the cultural heritage corridor. In a 2-year plan, the trail will make its way up to North Carolina and down to the other parts of the corridor in year 2.

Ms. Hemingway used the website, created during year one, to incorporate the ability to create a virtual itinerary for visitors to plan to go to Gullah restaurants, lodging and different attractions to gain experiences through the trail. One of the agriculture experiences that is a part of the trail is Kidogo farms, a farming homestead located in Georgetown County, S.C. Ms. Hemingway noted there's a primary need in preserving the stories of the community's connection to seafood, water ways such as rivers and oceans, and agriculture.

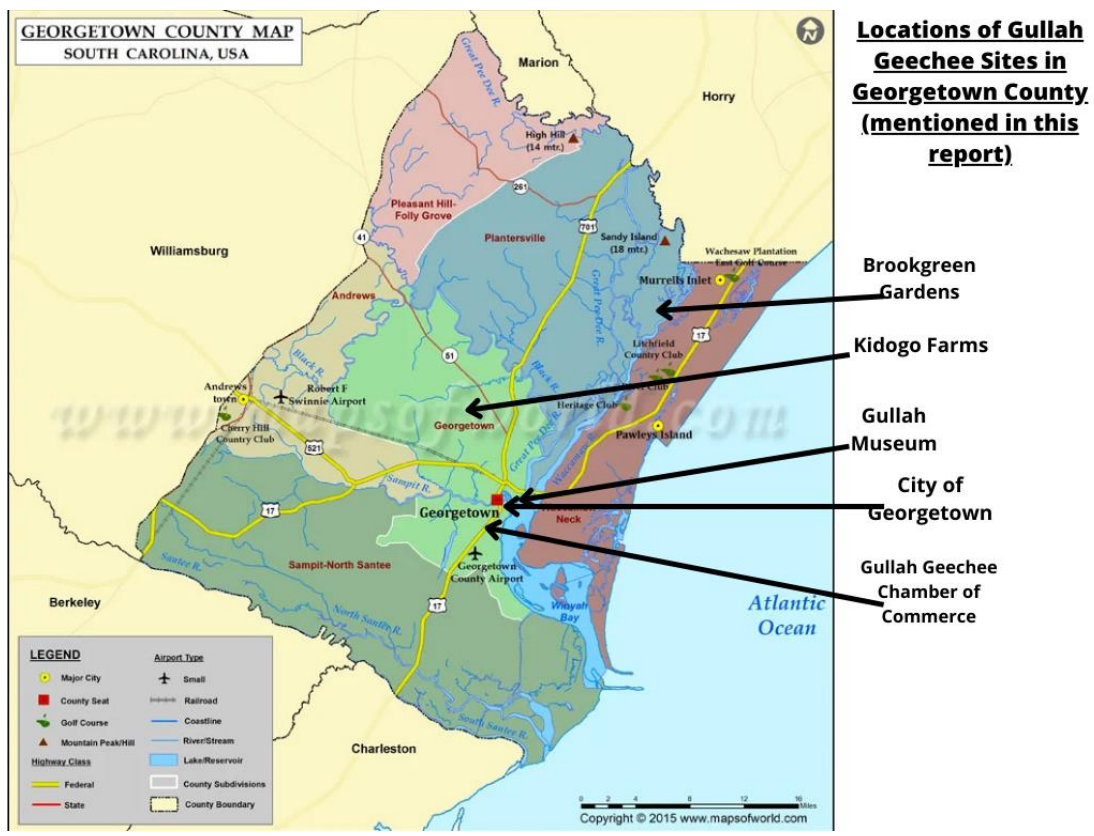
The culture tourism aspect of the trail is sustained by the entrepreneur course that is provided to participants of the trail. Beginning in Horry County, specifically Bucksport, S.C., the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce offered in-person and virtual attendance for the course. The course included business starting knowledge such as L.L.C. instruction and helped to obtain marketing, etc. Ms. Hemingway noted that this would increase businesses that are a part of the trail. The main goal of this portion was to create a basis for small businesses to sustain themselves and handle the demand of tourists and visitors, helping to advance the local businesses to a global scale.

Culinary and local businesses were also taught about environmental aspects through various partnerships. At the kickoff event, I spoke to the president of the Georgetown chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Marvin Neal. The NAACP is a partner in the seafood trail, in an effort to help better connect with the community. Marvin noted that there is a working effort of “Promoting Gullah Geechee maritime culture heritage and enhancing economic resilience through a Gullah Geechee seafood trail,” (M. Neal, personal communication, May 15, 2022). As noted previously, the South Carolina Sea Grant Consortium awarded a grant for \$283,000 for the preservation of Gullah Geechee maritime culture heritage, tying into target 11.4: “total expenditure (public and private) per capita spent on the preservation, protection and conservation of all cultural and natural heritage,” (Ritchie et al., 2018). The revenue obtained from cultural tourism will help to provide resources to spend on the continuation of preservation while also providing a working effort to implement environmental knowledge, in addition to the grant provided by the Sea Grant Consortium.

The aforementioned market study held by the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission found that Gullah Geechee heritage tourism has a determined potential of 34 billion dollars a year. Though Ms. Hemingway noted the 34 billion is not the goal, just a percentage of it is, and would increase Georgetown’s revenue substantially. Increasing the town’s revenue through the Gullah Geechee Seafood trail tied into the Sustainable development goal 8, target 8.9 “by 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products”, (United Nations, n.d.). The trail will create an infrastructure to create more sustainable income and jobs for Gullah individuals but also residents in Georgetown. Ms. Hemingway noted an expressed interest in traveling and experiencing Gullah Geechee culture and cuisine from various countries around the world. This infrastructure worked to also promote the local culture and products by implementing the

community with entrepreneurial classes and discussions on promotion techniques and environmental safety.

Ms. Hemingway’s efforts tied in with the town’s previous year (2021) comprehensive plan. The plan included a midterm goal to: “Work with the local Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission and other similar groups to locate additional sites of importance for preservation,” (Georgetown County Council, 2021). The seafood trail is structured to bring in attention and designation of other historical contexts and areas in Georgetown and other parts of the corridor. An example of this locally is the Gullah and Rice Museums in the city of Georgetown.



The implementation of places of importance to Gullah Geechee Gullah culture and places of that serve as educational opportunities, such as Kidogo farms, tied into target 11.A: Urban and regional planning, as they worked to ensure adequate education is provided so that the population of Gullah Geechee that surround these areas, but also allow for communities that have called these areas home for

decades, can remain attached to the community and members can stay educated on these areas. African American farmland ownership peaked at 16 to 19 million acres in 1920, with most of this ownership concentrated in the South, (Pippin, Jones, and Gaither, 2017). Research suggested this is because “historically, these locations were among the few places in the United States where freed Black people actually obtained land they had worked while enslaved and became self-sufficient farmers, fishers and crafters, (Hargrove, 2000). Not all of the areas on the trail are properties that were previous heirs’ property, however the inclusion of them “supports positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning by 2030,” (Ritchie, et. al., 2018). Preservation of these cultural aspects are important to the communities in Georgetown but would not be secluded to just Georgetown. These ideas will be spread along the entire corridor.

During my internship at the Coastal Observer, I wrote several articles highlighting some of the efforts of Gullah Geechee culture preservation. One of the first events attended was the second kick-off of the Gullah Geechee Seafood Trail that was held in Georgetown, South Carolina at the Maritime Museum on May 19th, 2022. The first event was held in Charleston, S.C.



Ms. Hemingway notes that she created the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce with the mission of Global Awareness, profitability and sustainability of African American Businesses and entities impacting Gullah Geechee Communities, (M. Hemingway, personal communication, May 15, 2022). During a presentation about the seafood trail, she defines one of her main goals, African American Tourism as: “visits by any race to African American Historic sites, deemed events, festivals, tours, buildings: such as Churches, monuments and museums , theaters, cemeteries and even restaurants, serving traditional African American and Gullah Cuisine”, (M. Hemingway, personal communication, May 15, 2022).

Ms. Hemingway’s Gullah Geechee Seafood trail highlighted other working initiatives that contributed to the efforts of cultural preservation, also tied into goal 8.9. The Gullah Museum in Georgetown is a working preservation site. Researchers at the museum noted that though the area was essential for rice cultivation, British colonists and landowners did not have a knowledge on rice production and thus turned to the “Rice Coast” of Africa. This led to the displacement of many Africans

from this area to slavery for their assumed environmental knowledge, rice production, labor and aquatic infrastructural builds, such as: dams, dikes and floodgates, (Gullah Museum SC, n.d.). Sites like this helped to provide sustainable, educational tourism options that are also forms of cultural tourism .

Kidogo farms, a business featured on the trail, worked to preserve the culture through agricultural tourism, instilling teachings of Gullah experiences and environmental knowledge to patrons. She worked on the trail to establish “agritourism” at her farm without the help of big enterprises. Agritourism is "a form of commercial enterprise that links agricultural production and/or processing with tourism in order to attract visitors onto a farm, ranch, or other agricultural business for the purposes of entertaining and/or educating the visitors and generating income for the farm, ranch, or business owner,"(The National Agricultural Law Center 2019).

Kidogo farms is the first farmstead operation that joined the trail. Alissa Matthews and her Husband Monte, own the 26- acre property with their two children, 11 &13. Alissa and her family work on the farm and maintain it in traditional Gullah Geechee ways. Examples of this is the way she controlled the pest on her farm through natural products such as cayenne powder and relied on the natural water systems (rain) to rinse the vegetables off . Agricultural practices and knowledge can be traced back to enslaved individuals on plantations who controlled hydraulic apparatus to control the weeds and pests, (National Park Service, 2005). The value of agriculture and food to this community tied into the need to preserve their culture. Alissa stated that “[Food] is a connection to the culture itself. I went to visit my aunt who lives in Dunbar (S.C.), and I took her squash. When I go over there, I know she’s going to offer me something to eat and drink. It’s what we were taught,” (Matthews, 2022).

Food is an important part of the heritage that is tied directly back to ancestral patterns. A large quantity of the similarities shared between African ancestors and African Americans is found in food practices. Researchers suggested that through slavery, and its bi-product segregation, African Americans



found little interference from other cultures and thus were allowed to “preserve much of their own heritage and to evolve a culinary style of their own and despite egregious oppression. African Americans have been able to preserve aspects of their African heritage through food customs,” (Vance, 2008).

Alissa used her farm as a catalyst to preserve culture by putting the aspects that are deemed “low class” or viewed as unintelligent on the forefront as cultural heritage and important aspects that need to be valued. One of her main goals of the farm was to show that agricultural practices rooted in traditional Gullah Geechee practices, in a Gullah Geechee community, should not be viewed as obscure.

She attributes how dress was a factor in the development of the mindset toward labor-centric jobs. “I think it comes from the surroundings and the subliminal messages you get from family. My mom worked at a little sewing plant; it was a t-shirt manufacturing company. Everybody wore skirts and nice shirts to work. So, you associate someone's worth to their wardrobe. The people who worked on the beach (Myrtle Beach, South Carolina) wore socks, tennis shoes, and jeans. Sometimes khakis, cargo shorts, a t-shirt, a head tie. The people who worked on the beach looked just like the people that worked the fields and we “knew” they weren't smart. Because if you were “smart” you could get a better job than pickling cucumbers, is what my 12-year-old mind had thought” (Matthews, 2022). Alissa’s past views are not limited to just Georgetown. Similar views were found throughout history. Enslaved individuals were often viewed as being “stupid, uneducable, childlike, lazy, untruthful, untrustworthy, etc.”, (Hellie, n.d.), This is an overreaching pattern that another contributor of the trail, Ron Daise, is working against.

Ron Daise’s Geechee literacy series worked to preserve the culture and heritage by writing the oral language down into a literacy novel.



Researchers previously noted that the language spoken by Gullah individuals was “composed of various English varieties (languages) and an undetermined number of African languages,” (Smalls, 2012). Daise’s literary series was not the first attempt at writing down the language, but it was the first attempt in Georgetown that worked to redefine the narrative around the dialect spoken. Daise noted that the previous illiterate narrative can be “toxic” to the preservation of the culture. In incorporating it in readings and his interactive classes at Brookgreen Gardens, there was a visible increase in participants being interested in Gullah Geechee culture as the garden contains an exhibit that was Gullah Geechee centric. Participants could be seen entering and interacting with the exhibit after attending a session with Daise.

On May 25 and June 13, 2022, Ron Daise, Gullah Historian and descendant, was observed during a presentation, offered at Brookgreen Gardens. Brookgreen holds its own significance in Gullah

Geechee history<sup>1</sup>. The teachings incorporated the authentic verbal language of Gullah Geechee individuals into the two books that were a part of Daise’s new literacy series titled “Gullah Literacy Series”. An excerpt was read to the crowd from the first book of the series, “We wear the Masks: Unraveled Truths in a Pre-Gullah Community”: “Me ain neba see em dis gus. Him mek me dribe Sibney so fas fa git ta de sto,” (R. Daise, personal communication, May 25 & June 13, 2022,).

The language spoken by individuals of Gullah Geechee, was considered a verbal language, created in its own oral culture. Without a “correct” way to spell words within the dialect, outside of phonetically sounding it out, his writing style followed this notion. A prominent way, in African and African American communities, most teachings, cultural identifiers and aspects, were taught through an oral culture that’s established in the communities, storytelling. Researchers found that “stories are a means of preserving common characteristics of a culture and passing them on to subsequent generations, providing practical guidelines and answering existential questions” (Banks-Wallace, 2002).

Storytelling is a vessel for communication transference that dates back to slavery. Researchers believed they distribute “dominant mores, customs, themes, and language of everyday life contexts in which they are created or shared.” It reflected “turbulent history of a people forcibly removed from their homeland and subjected to a variety of inhuman abuses both during slavery and following its “official” demise. The act of storytelling allowed enslaved individuals to keep intact traditional values and practices, language, sights, sounds, smells, and textures of their homeland, (Banks-Wallace 2002).

Daise used his stories within the literary series and his own experiences of growing up in the culture, to teach participants and patrons the oral language cultural intricacies, in an effort to “keep the culture alive”. This is similar to traditional practices of storytelling, for enslaved individuals it allowed for

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<sup>1</sup>“Four former plantations make up the present-day Brookgreen Gardens: The Oaks, Brookgreen, Springfield and Laurel Hill plantations established family dynasties and were leaders of the rice planting elite during the pre-Civil War years,” (Georgetown County Council 2021).

them to keep “in touch with friends and family, developing new kinships, sharing information across plantations, learning more about their new environment, and perfecting language skills,” (Banks-Wallace 2002, 413). During his teachings, he emphasized the importance of the hymns and melodies sung by people of the culture, including the notions of intricacies in the language spoken, this shared connection to heritage and others within the Gullah diaspora.

Daise initiated how the Geechee literature series was an initiative that is working to preserve the heritage as he created the series as an effort to change the perception of Gullah Geechee individuals. The name of the series being titled “Geechee literature series” as he noted that at one point, was seen as an oxymoron. In our interview session, he alluded to the perception of ignorance and a lack of literacy that is tied to the way the culture is perceived. This notion, that Alissa Matthews also tried to combat with her farmstead, is one that researchers agreed with.

<b><u>Gullah</u></b>	<b><u>English</u></b>
<b><i>ooman</i></b>	<b>woman</b>
<b><i>oonuh</i></b>	<b>you</b>
<b>E</b>	<b>he, she, it, his, her</b>
<b>gwine</b>	<b>going</b>
<b>enty?</b>	<b>is that so?</b>

*\*Information provided by the National Park Service,  
2005*

Though it was a language that was used legitimately among Gullah individuals, educators would encourage students to “give up their native language in favor of so- called ‘standard English’. The use of Gullah Geechee for many years was considered to be a mark of low status and ignorance and, thus, was a source of pejorative remarks. Many people, including educators, viewed it as substandard or broken English, (National Park Service 2005, 56).

**Case Study Observations:**

Establishing a community based tourism program had substantial potential benefits.

Georgetown's tourism was reported to have accumulated over "\$319 million a year in Georgetown County, and the industry as a whole employed nearly 3,000 workers. The county saw a nearly 20 percent increase in accommodations tax revenue in 2020 over 2019 and collected \$37 million in state and local taxes", (Caines and The Post and Courier 2021). Ms. Hemingway's plan to instill a cultural tourism infrastructure in Georgetown was similar to the attempts of the Basarwa community, located in Southern Africa. Through a government adopted plan, community led tourism was implemented in an attempt to reduce poverty levels. Their plan included creating sustainable jobs and enhancing conservation through encouraging the responsible use of natural resources among locals and visitors, (Ghahramani, McArdle, and Fatorić, 2020). This brought many socio-economic benefits to the Basarwa community, such as increased economic growth as a result of the centralization of wildlife resources and the establishment of protected areas, (Mbaiwa and Stronza, 2011) . Researchers Mbaiwa and Stronza found that members of the Basarwa community held positive attitudes towards the increased tourism. Members were quoted saying "the more tourists come to our area, the more our well-being as a community improves. Tourists are a source of income for us," (Mbaiwa and Stronza, 2011). This form of economic growth was what the Seafood trail worked to bring to Georgetown. Economic impact reports for Botswana showed an increase in travel and tourism jobs, citing that 8% of the total economy in 2021 came from travel and tourism and 55% of all money spent in the country the same year came from international spending. 95% of money spent was on leisure activities, (World Travel & Tourism Council and Oxford Economics 2022).

Efforts such as Kidogo farm followed traditional frameworks found in African American cultural institutions in the form of "agritourism." Examples of this have been found in parts of Italy. Soave is a

small region in Italy that is known for its traditional vineyards, in Garganega, that have provided income to more than 3000 families for 200 years, (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2022). “Farmers in the region still use traditional methods of training the vines, a vineyard management method balancing the growth of the vine with the quality of the fruit to produce optimum results”, that in turn produces Soave, a very popular wine from this region, (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2022). Though this is a small region, it had sustained itself through the use of traditional practices and thus preserved the culture of the vineyard and community before it was lost. Alissa attempted to create a plan that is innovative and will work for the region she is in using traditional practices.

Daise’s Gullah literacy attempted at preserving the oral culture Gullah Geechee in a fashion that is similar to what is seen in other Gullah coastal areas, such as the Penn Center located on St. Helena Island. The Penn center worked to tell and preserve the histories of Gullah individuals on St. Helena Island, and throughout the U.S. by showcasing and teaching them in the museum, (The Penn Center n.d.). The Penn Center, formerly known as Penn School, was one of the nation’s first schools for formerly enslaved people. According to the center’s website it was still an institution of significance in African American education. St. Helena island is 64 miles of low-lying, rural terrain, it was first inhabited by the Cusabo Indians until British occupiers came around 1520, (The Penn Center n.d.). Labor of enslaved Africans and Native Americans constructed large agricultural structures to produce rice and other crops. As mentioned before, the isolation and lack of interference with enslaved individuals by slave owners or occupants, led to the creation of their own culture and language which is known as the modern day Gullah Geechee dialect, (The Penn Center n.d.). The center noted that “African Americans on the Sea Islands kept the land productive and built their own financial

independence”, Natives of St. Helena created a system (Penn Center) to sustain intellectual property of the Gullah in the island community,(The Penn Center n.d.).

Other examples of cultural preservation of Gullah culture and communities can be found 164 miles away from Georgetown in the town of Hilton Head Island, S.C. In partnership with the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce, the town developed an ad hoc committee in 2017 to preserve Gullah Geechee culture on the island called the Gullah-Geechee Land & Cultural Preservation Task Force. Through this initiative, 13 historic Gullah neighborhoods were recognized and history of communities’ establishing can be found on the website. Along with maps of historic Gullah neighborhoods, similar to what Hemingway tried to establish along the entire corridor, economic and community resources can be found on the town’s website. Heirs property education, the town’s Gullah Geechee Culture Preservation project report, adopted in 2019 could also be found on the town’s website.

### **Conclusion:**

In this study, I examined the preservation of Gullah Geechee heritage and culture in Georgetown and its alignment with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities and its two targets within; Target 11.4: Strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world’s cultural and natural heritage and 11.A: Support positive economic, social and environmental links between urban, peri-urban and rural areas by strengthening national and regional development planning. Members in the community made various efforts and strides in their preservation of Gullah Geechee culture.

Community members' efforts of cultural preservation in Georgetown are substantial. The town worked in a similar notion to their neighboring community of Hilton Head, S.C. Though there has not been a special committee that was dedicated to Gullah Geechee preservation itself, in the town’s county

comprehensive plan for 2020 (that is renewed every 10 years) the cultural resources section stated the town worked with the National Register to follow the Historic Preservation Act of 1966, that urged the need to “coordinate and support public and private efforts to identify, evaluate, and protect our historic and archeological resources”, (Georgetown County Council, 2021). On the register, Georgetown had 10 historic districts and 38 historic places that are recognized in the national register. All of the locations listed are significant to the Gullah Geechee culture as the areas were listed as being used for agricultural farming purposes, and with Georgetown county being an area with a large population of enslaved individuals, it can be determined that enslaved labor was used to operate them. The town’s acknowledgement of the Gullah Geechee Chamber of Commerce in the plan also signified their efforts of working to preserve the living culture in the town. Ms. Hemingway also noted that she has been asked to review the plan to establish the best practice for cultural preservation in the town.

The acknowledgment of historic places and the chamber also worked to help strengthen the efforts of the community members as the trail worked to establish historic sites as well but for the cultural, economic and environmental benefit. The comprehensive plan also listed some of the town’s projected plans for the next 10 years, one of which included a collaborative initiative funded by a Civil Rights grant the National Park Service received to document and begin preservation of the Sandy Island school, which was established in 1932 to educate Sandy Island residents, called the Sandy Island Cultural Initiative, an initiative Ms. Hemingway was also a part of. The town’s goal of enhancing public awareness of Georgetown County’s history and scenic resources stated that the town would have an ongoing effort to “continue to advertise the increasing number of opportunities for ecotourism throughout Georgetown County via the Parks and Recreation Department and other public relations channels”(Georgetown County Council, 2021). This would allow for the promotion of businesses such as Kidogo Farms that preserve the cultural practices while using ecotourism.



Ms. Hemingway stated that her infrastructure plan worked to garner attention and has begun the process of preserving the heritage in the communities of Georgetown. In comparison to the Basarwa community who gained the tourism increase but lacked the economic community benefit, the seafood trail is projected to reduce poverty levels in Georgetown communities by the influx of jobs that would bring in Georgetown as well as the projected economic growth she planned to establish. Though the exact results of her plan cannot be documented yet, as it is still in its building stages at the time of this report, there was great hope from community members that the trail made a difference in Georgetown and for the entire Gullah Geechee community, (M. Hemingway, personal communication, July 12, 2022).

#### **Future Research:**

As the effects of this trail and cultural preservation continues, an area that begs for more research is how the progress of preservation is established. As mentioned before, upon the adoption of tourism plans for an area a more integrated plan should be taken between tourism practitioners, government tourism officials and academics, (Laitamaki et al. 2016), such as increased knowledge surrounding environmental knowledge and tourism itself. A shared vision among all groups is needed in terms of what tourism “product” the county/city/area promotes and what type of tourists they will attract. There needs to be an establishment of how the town and the community want the culture and heritage showcased for monetary benefits. Though the town noted that there are historical roots of Gullah, there is not an established site or place of information that is readily accessible as other significant monikers of the area, such as the branding of the area as the “Hammock Coast”. Though on the Georgetown County official website it is noted that the Gullah history is here, the advertisement did not adequately show any visual representation of the culture in the video but shows other tourism-based attractions such as golfing, beaches and restaurants (none of which were Gullah). The videos lacked diversity. This plays

into communal integrated planning. There was a brief mention of slaves and slave descendants and only portraits and old pictures, which is not the full picture of the culture of the area, and in turn, could be harmful to preservation efforts. The town's comprehensive plan states that they are working to preserve the culture and promote eco-tourism, so the ways they are trying to follow the establishment of the plans should be studied to ensure that the plans work and represent the full population of the town. The 2021 census for Georgetown states that 29% of the town reported as being African American alone (which means numbers could be higher if bi-racial), .06% reported being Hawaiian or Pacific Islander alone and .3% being American Indian, the videos for the town's pages only show one portion of the population and could stand as a blockade to cultural tourism if visitors want to visit but see the lack of cultural representation, or lack of cultural tourism options available..

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