COMMUNICATION, DEVELOPMENT, AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION: 
THE CASE OF GULLAH HISTORY AND CULTURE ON JAMES ISLAND, SC

Brian Andrew Graves

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Approved by:

Advisor: Dr. Ken Hillis
Reader: Dr. Carole Blair
Reader: Dr. William Ferris
Reader: Dr. Jeremy Packer
Reader: Dr. Sarah Sharma
ABSTRACT

BRIAN GRAVES: Communication, Development, and Cultural Preservation:
The Case of Gullah History and Culture on James Island, SC
(Under the direction of Ken Hillis)

This dissertation explores contemporary issues of communication, commercial
development, and Gullah preservation on James Island, South Carolina. All along the
coastal region of the Southeastern United States, African American communities, known
as “Gullah,” have retained more of their African cultural and linguistic heritage than any
other large African American community. From the times of slavery to the present,
Gullah communities have lived in a Southeastern coastal landscape remarkably similar to
the shores of Western Africa. During the later part of the twentieth century, however,
“modern” suburban, commercial, and resort developments have transformed the region’s
physical, social, and economic geographies and threatened the culture’s survival. In the
wake of these developments, efforts to preserve Gullah culture have emerged, often with
an emphasis on tourism, news, and entertainment projects designed to merge economic
and cultural activity.

The central thesis of this dissertation is that while forces of “development” and
“cultural preservation” often appear to be at odds in popular discourse, they are actually
different sides of the same coin in so far as they are a forced contextualization of people
and places within systems of knowledge and communication that privilege modern
European conceptions of history, politics, economics, and culture. Missing in the
dominant social imagery of Gullah culture today, which either portrays a people who are behind the curve of modern progress, or, that evokes nostalgia for a now “obsolete” way of life, is an adequate representation of the present and ongoing struggle of Gullah history, identity, and sense of place. By looking at specific and concrete situations of development and cultural preservation on James Island, the chapters of this dissertation examine how Gullah communities themselves articulate their own history and culture, and define their roles as political actors in the modern world, both through and against dominant modern conceptions of history, culture, politics, economics, and communication. Through a locally oriented cultural political economy approach, the study also seeks to understand, through the work of cultural theorists James Carey and Harold Innis, among others, how culture as a concept can be used to develop a more detailed and fruitful analysis of the political and economic problems of communication, modern development, and cultural preservation.
For Toby

&

In memory of Allan Graves
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CHAPER ONE:

Introduction: Communication and the Preservation of Gullah History and Culture on James Island, SC

Ethel Campbell, an African American woman who grew up in the early part of the twentieth century on the Grimball Farm of James Island, South Carolina, remembers barely being able to sleep at night because she was so excited about taking a trip to the Charleston City Market. Before sunrise, her parents loaded the vegetables that they would sell onto a wagon by the light of a lantern. At daybreak they hitched the horse and accompanied several other families to the City. The trip, a distance of about eight miles, seemed to take a long time, and no one had a watch to measure the hours. The family had to cross three wooden bridges: the little Ellis Creek Bridge, the James Island Bridge, and the Charleston Bridge. Ethel remembers looking through the wooden planks of the bridges, and covering her head because she was afraid of water. At the end of the journey, she recounted, “You’d get to Charleston and it seemed so new, you know, steam from some places, maybe the hospital. . . It was just fascinating.”¹

Ms. Campbell’s story about her family’s trip to Charleston encapsulates some of the ways that life was changing for African Americans on James Island in the early part of the twentieth century. Her generation was virtually the last to experience everyday life without electricity, a sense of time without watches, and an island geography in which a few miles marked a different world. And like many African American elders who grew

¹ Campbell, Ethel (2005), Author’s Interview.
up on the island, she remembers a rural culture rich with African heritage, known as “Gullah,” which existed more prominently on the island before it became a part of the “modern” world.

All along the Lowcountry Coastal Plains and Sea Islands of the Southeastern United States, Gullah communities are known to have retained more of their African heritage than any other large African American community. From the times of slavery until the latter part of the twentieth century, Gullah communities lived in relative isolation from the mainland and constituted the majority of the Sea Islands’ population. They also occupied a coastal landscape with a geography and climate remarkably similar to the shores of Western Africa. According to William Pollitzer, “So many Africanisms survived in Gullah culture, that to some degree it was a re-creation of Africa within the New World” (Pollitzer, in Cross, pg. 229). Gullah’s African traditions include folklore, language, religion, arts and music, land use, food ways, architecture, and health practices.

In recent times, however, the conditions that allowed the Gullah to maintain cultural continuity with their African roots have changed as suburban, resort, and commercial real estate developments have transformed the islands’ physical and social landscapes. A rapid transformation of Gullah is symptomatic of development that cuts the culture’s ties to the land, displacing and disorienting its people. According to Gullah political activist Marquetta Goodwine (2009), “For Gullahs, land is an extension of themselves,” and historically, “land has played a central role in their everyday lives. All

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3 For a bibliography of studies on Gullah’s cultural continuities with Africa, see Hargrove, Melissa (2006), pg. 3.
aspects of Gullah and Geechee culture are tied to the land, and it serves as a psychological reminder of their connection with the ancestors and their communal plantation lives” (in Cross, pg. 57).

Like many other Sea Islands, James Island has a history of black land ownership that spans many generations. After the Civil War, a sizable number of Freedmen in these island communities were given shares of plantation property in the “forty acres and a mule plan,” a government land reparation program initiated under Union General William T. Sherman. Ironically, today, much of the marshy waterfront property on James Island that was considered undesirable and therefore given or sold to former slaves by plantation owners has become some of the most highly valued property on the Southeastern U.S. coast, and economic pressure to “develop” in these areas has increased in unprecedented ways. As the nearby City of Charleston expands, new market value assessments and subsequent tax burdens, as well as unclear property deeds, make it difficult for recent generations of farm families to continue their way of life on these large tracts of land, particularly along the waterfront.

Increasingly, a livelihood based on farming and fishing has been replaced with more urban employment, and the field of social and economic opportunities for black families has shifted radically. While development arguably brings many benefits to the islands, such as improved education, new jobs, and public and private services, it also brings new challenges. According to Cornelia Bailey, a resident of Sapelo Island, Georgia, people are often persuaded, “that this company is coming in, and its going to

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4 General Sherman’s “Special Field Orders, No. 15” (1865) confiscated 400,000 acres of arable land along the Southeastern coast and distributed it to 18,000 freed black landowners in 40 acre parcels, sometimes along with an Army plow mule.
provide jobs, and people will be able to take care of their families and afford better housing and everything else.”

Commercial developments, however, are also “giving people a new set of problems to work with. I got a paycheck this week, but at what price? Because you bring more people into the area with different ideas. . . . and you’ve got a whole different set of problems you never thought possible.”

Tax increases, displacement, Eurocentric public education, and a cash economy that introduces “poverty” and crime to the region have all become significant problems.

Although Gullah communities have become wary of the more exploitative practices of development, they do not necessarily refuse its progressive possibilities.

According to Emory Campbell, director of the Penn Center of Gullah History and Culture on St. Helena, SC, “It is not that they [the Gullah] resist change, but they are concerned about the change that has taken place and how it will continue to fluctuate” (in Cross, Wilbur, 2009, pg. 57). Rather than trying to survive in a disadvantageous political and economic situation, younger generations of Gullah families often move away, abandon a traditional Gullah lifestyle, or assimilate into “mainstream culture.” John Tibbetts writes:

It’s the oldest American story, told countless times. For generations, an ethnic or religious clan, tightly knit by language and religion, huddles in a New World rural enclave or urban ghetto, enduring prejudice and poverty. Then abruptly ancient bonds fray. Strangers move in and disrupt local traditions, elders complain about their heritage’s neglect and the exploitation of outsiders, while young people leave home in droves to gain better jobs and education (2001, pg. 3)

During the latter part of the twentieth century, many people on James Island, and in the Southeastern U.S. region more broadly, have seen the Gullah language and culture

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5 Author’s Interview, 2005.

6 ibid.
largely “disappear.” Tibbetts notes that, for some, “the Gullah language remains just a lingering remnant, a museum piece. Within another generation it could disappear altogether.” (pg. 12). However, he also notes that others do not see Gullah so much disappearing as transforming and taking new forms in the modern world, and points out “that all cultures change constantly with new influences and people. . . Gullah life, which began as the blending of various traditions and ethnic groups, is just taking another vibrant form within the melting pot of modern America” (ibid). While there is apparent truth to each of these views, both can be problematic in so far as they overlook important political dimensions of cultural preservation, historical continuity, and the distribution of resources among people of the Sea Islands. A culture does not simply “disappear,” neither does it adapt into a new and “vibrant form” without departing from its traditions to some degree. Caroline White, a woman who grew up on James Island and practices the art of Gullah storytelling warns, “We don’t want our children to forget our culture; where the ancestors came from, where they came to, what they had to do to make a living; that these children today are surviving off some of those same things.”  

Many Gullah people believe that their culture can and should be preserved, but its preservation will only be possible if people can hold onto their land and language, and pass the culture down to the next generation. According to Marquetta Goodwine, “Keeping the land is a priority. Yet we also need to keep spirits intact, to nurture and restore minds, to remind ourselves what our language is, what our culture is” (in Tibbetts, 2001, pg. 12).

For the sake of cultural preservation, many Gullah leaders and activists also recognize the importance of fostering improved communication among different cultural groups living in the Sea Islands. For example, Campbell writes:

7 Author’s Interview (2005).
We need a continuing dialogue between residents and property owners, real-estate developers, government officials, and new-comers interested in establishing new roots in our region. Unless we get all of these people in communication with each other, to recognize the values inherent in our culture, then the destructive elements and relationships will foster continuing problems (in Cross, Wilbur, 2009, pg. 228).

In response to these problems of communication and culture in the Sea Islands, the research questions guiding this dissertation are: 1) How do different cultural groups living on James Island, and in the Sea Island region more broadly, perceive landownership, development, and cultural preservation differently and why?; 2) What contextual factors and communicative practices might give rise to, support, and shape these perceptions?; and 3) How might practices of communication and cultural preservation be re-imagined, and in possibly progressive ways that foster the improved communication that Campbell calls for among individuals, institutions, and cultural groups living in the Sea Islands?

Addressing these questions led me to a number of primary research resources, including historical archives, popular media accounts, and my own ethnographic work with people living in the Sea Islands. In my research, I noticed striking differences in the ways that people perceive “ownership” of land. Of differences between mostly white developers and black landowners, for example, William W. Falk (2004) writes:

For white developers, a land transfer is a simple business transaction: elementary capitalism with profits to be maximized. For local black folk, it is anything but this: it is taking something from families whose roots in America are found there, usually back to the Reconstruction era. For them, the issue is not dollars and cents but rather a cultural identity tied to the land (pg. 131).
And of the conflict between African American communities on James Island and the Island’s mostly white newcomers, Eugene Frazier, a seventy-two year old “born and raised” James Islander explains:

Well, let me put it this way. Some people call it destroying the landscaping. I think basically, that for example, if a person move to James Island from up north or theoretically from anywhere they have a problem understanding why and how we live and why we feel the way we feel, because we came up feeling the landmarks, and feeling, when this pace was nothing but woods, dirt roads, and they [the African American ancestors] helped build these structures with their hands before all the machinery. And so we have a sense of close knit with the island. And when we see them bulldozer the buildings. . . when we see that it look like they don’t have no concern about tearing things down, without the feelings, the genuine feelings of people on the island . . . Until they understand where we’re coming from, they have some problems with us, and we have some problems with them.  

Perceptions of development expressed in local and regional media do not often consider a clash of cultures or a disruption of senses of place and cultural identity experienced within African American communities as a starting point for evaluating issues of development and cultural preservation on James Island. Rather, the starting points are mostly framed in terms of the politics and economics of development. For example, public debates have occurred about whether or not the City of Charleston has the right to annex land on James and other Sea Islands for development, and in related debates, politicians and community members have argued whether or not such development would benefit islanders economically in terms of job creation and expanded access to better municipal services and education. In the wake of development, local and regional media also often frame politics and economics as guiding factors and fields of struggle for Gullah preservation efforts; for example, in news coverage of recent

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8 Author’s Interview (2009).
legislation approving Gullah heritage corridors, or tourism trails, and court cases concerning the justness of heirs’ property laws.9

While politics and economics certainly do define issues of development and Gullah preservation, the central thesis of this dissertation is that these problems can also be framed and understood more fundamentally in terms of communication and culture. The fields of “politics” and “economics” are often bracketed off from “culture” in popular discourse; more specifically, the former are perceived as capable of shaping culture, but not as integral parts of culture itself. This study considers, however, ways in which politics and economics of development are themselves cultural conceptions, grounded in a particular history of colonialism, and realized through various representational practices of modern communication. And while development and cultural preservation are often framed as being at odds in popular discourse, they are actually different sides of the same coin in so far as they are a forced contextualization of people and places within systems of knowledge and communication that privilege modern European conceptions of politics, economics, and culture. It is only after the imposition of colonization, and within the context of modern development’s technological, political, and economic delivery of “progress,” that the cultural concept of Gullah as a pre-modern folk culture emerges and is given meaning. Furthermore, the idea of “Gullah” itself is then available to serve as a cultural category against which modernity is defined.

9 Many of the Gullah’s ancestors, who acquired land following the Civil War, were not instructed to properly deed their property. As a result, hundreds or even thousands of their descendants can possess shares of property, none of which is clearly demarcated, either spatially, or by percentage of ownership. If a single heir, even one who has never set foot on James Island, can be convinced to sell his or her share, then that share must legally be “cut off” from the rest of the property. Since shares are not clearly delineated, legal disputes can arise where the sale of a greater number of shares, or even all of the property, is forced by the courts. A lack of clarity with regard to ownership can be exploited by developers who wish to acquire the property.
The general approach of this study can be described as a cultural political economy with a local orientation. Rather than trying to describe and analyze large, all-encompassing, abstract frameworks of “communication,” “politics,” “economics,” “development,” “Gullah,” and “preservation” in the modern world, I seek to investigate and understand their concrete particulars on James Island. As a localist project, the study examines specific instances of communication, development and cultural preservation, including developments in James Island’s Grimball Farm and Sol Legare communities, and local preservation projects, such as the restoration of a Seashore Farmer’s Lodge, efforts to preserve the island’s historic McLeod plantation, and Gullah/Geechee grassroots political activism. As a Communication and Cultural Studies project, the study also seeks to understand, through the work of cultural theorists James Carey and Harold Innis, among others, how culture as a concept can be used to develop a more detailed and fruitful analysis of the political and economic problems of modern development, communication, and cultural preservation.

**Personal Trajectory and Research Period**

In 1980, when I was five years old, my family moved to James Island. We lived in a mostly white middle class neighborhood on the Island’s Eastern side. At that time, many sections of the Island had already been developed, mostly as shopping centers and suburbs, but these were surrounded by large tracts of undeveloped farm land, almost all of which lay fallow. I grew up hearing Gullah voices in the island’s rural pockets, at places such as the Sol Legare Boat Landing, and the Clam Farm where I used to work during the summers, and found myself drawn to the culture and fascinated by its history. Living and studying on the island has given me a great affinity for its people who were
there before me. Through my research, I have been challenged, sometimes in disturbing ways, to think about my position as a white, privileged, South Carolinian, and a relative newcomer to James Island.

When I began my graduate research in 2004, the United States real estate boom was in full force. All over James Island, properties were churned, and a large number of new suburban and commercial developments emerged almost overnight. For the first time, I witnessed large scale development in and around many of the island’s rural African American communities: a new public school was constructed in the centuries-old African American community of Grimball Farm. Shortly afterwards, a development firm, the Ginn Company, cleared land for an upscale housing development in the neighborhood. A few miles from Grimball Farm, a large supermarket was constructed at the entrance of the African American community of Sol Legare. While these developments occurred, others communities and important sites of African American history were slated for future development: The Mcleod plantation, which contains the only remaining slave cabins on James Island, was sold to a School of the Building Arts, and Backman’s Seafood, one of the largest black businesses on the island, was proposed as a site for waterfront condominiums. During that time, I spoke with many members of the African American community who were cynical about these plans and feared that they would ultimately lead to their displacement and the erasure of African American history and culture on the island.

Development on James Island, however, at least over the last five years, has not followed the grimmer predictions that I heard in 2004. Following the collapse of the housing market during the later part of the 2000’s, many plans for development were
slowed or stopped altogether. The School of the Building Arts could not afford to construct a campus on the Mcleod plantation and sold the property back to the Historic Charleston Foundation. The condominium plans for Sol Legare were abandoned, and Backman’s Seafood remains open for business. The Ginn Company has temporarily halted its plans to develop Grimball Farm, and has even met with members of the African American community to include them in discussions of its future plans. Efforts to preserve African American communities and important sites of black history on the island also gained some political traction during the later part of the 2000’s. In Sol Legare, a community organization banded together to protect the Seashore Farmer’s Lodge 767, a historic structure once occupied by a black mutual benefit society. A citizens group, the Friends of McLeod, fought to preserve the island’s historic McLeod plantation. Other citizens groups worked to communicate with developers, protect African American cemeteries, and defend the right to incorporate a Town of James Island as a municipality separate from the City of Charleston.

As a research period, the 2000’s were a unique, dynamic, and often fascinating time in James Island’s history. I witnessed emerging events of development and cultural preservation in James Island’s African American communities, and was able to learn from the people who lived and shaped them. I also witnessed acts of communication involving diverse groups, the emergence of new technologies, and the organization of local political and social movements. Through my study, I seek to describe and interpret these events, particularly their communicative aspects, so as to inform future directions of development.

Historically, African American mutual benefit societies were widespread in the South. They have roots in slavery, and facilitated black survival through Jim Crow and segregation by providing a social safety net, including health care, crop insurance, and recreation.
development and cultural preservation on James Island, while also contributing to the field of Communication Studies.

**Research Materials and Method**

Communication and Cultural Studies scholars have argued that interdisciplinary work and diverse theoretical and methodological approaches can be used effectively in bricolage.\(^{11}\) Gregory J. Shepherd, Jeffrey St. John, and Ted Striphas (2006) also note, however, that Communication Studies is as wary of adopting the stance that any approach is equally good, as it is of adopting the stance that any one approach is the best or only way. In choosing and evaluating approaches of study, Communication scholars begin with a consideration of what role theories and methods serve in their particular context, and how they represent a scholar’s political commitments. For this project, I have chosen a combination of historical, ethnographic, and theoretical methods with a goal of understanding, interpreting, and intervening in political questions and challenges posed within contemporary relationships of communication, development, and cultural preservation on James Island.

**Historical Method**

A number of primary archival resources have helped me to piece together a unique cultural history that looks at how different practices of communication have both reflected and shaped dominant discourses of development and preservation on James Island from times of settlement to the present. These include:

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\(^{11}\) See, for example, Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, Eds., 1992, in which bricolage is explained. Within Communication and Cultural Studies, bricolage is a method in which scholars draw from diverse theoretical and disciplinary approaches to meet the historical demands of particular projects.
• A large archive of newspaper articles from the South Carolina Room at Charleston County Library, which concerns development on James Island, and ranges from the 1940s to the present.

• Photocopies from the Charleston Historical Society’s photographic collection of people and places of the Sea Islands, ranging from times of slavery to the early twentieth century.

• A personal archive of newspaper articles about Gullah preservation efforts.

• A collection of urban planning materials, including census reports, public service recommendations, traffic density reports, city planning manuals, SC Department of Commerce Guidelines, City Council of Charleston and Town Council of James Island meeting minutes, and Real Estate Guides.

• My own video archive which includes James Island Town meetings; television news footage about development on James Island; footage of Gullah activist events on nearby islands; plantations on James Island; and footage of development in and around the James Island communities of Grimball Farm and Sol Legare.

• Popular film, television, and new media accounts of development and cultural preservation, including, but not limited to, documentaries, narrative films, local and national news stories, and preservationist web sites.

Many of the historical documents that I selected are “popular,” and were chosen because they both reflect and produce dominant “commonsense” attitudes about development and cultural preservation. As a method of cultural analysis, I relate the cultural texts I have chosen to their wider organizational contexts, both historical and contemporary, to understand how they function politically in relation to modern development and cultural preservation. Cultural theorist Raymond Williams (1961) describes contextual analysis of cultural texts as an aim of Cultural Studies: the propagation of culture is a selective process that takes place both within the historical

period that cultural forms represent, and also within the context of contemporary interests. In all cases of cultural selection, “The more actively cultural work can be related, either to the whole organization within which it was expressed, or to the contemporary organization within which it is used, the more clearly we shall see its true values” (Williams, in Bennet et al, pg. 52).

My historical method is also influenced by the work of Michel Foucault, particularly his concepts of archaeology and genealogy. In *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972), Foucault outlines “archaeology” as a historical method of analyzing discourse that documents the conditions which limit the possibility of what can be thought and said about a subject. Unlike traditional historiography, which tends to attribute the movement of history to individual subjects, archaeology examines the wider discursive formations which allow particular subjects to speak from positions of authority: it “examines particular ways whereby the conception of a subject and its domain, such as sexuality, punishment or pathology, is constituted within knowledge as a concern central to a specific age, society or social stratum” (Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner, 1991, pg. 226). In combination with Foucault’s archaeology as a historical method that explains the authority of particular subjects, I use a genealogical method that counters a dominant rationalist European conception of history and development as guided by inevitable and transcendent principles. From a genealogical perspective, historical developments have no pure origins or necessary outcomes. The work of the historian, then, is to examine the “origins of things only in relation to and in contest with other things” (Poster, Mark, 1997, pg. 1). I have thus tried to construct a history of development and preservation as
contingent and relational concepts that emerge and have meaning only within particular discursive contexts and modern relationships of knowledge and power.

Ethnographic Method

In addition to historical research, ethnographic work has been the project’s most important resource. With IRB approval, I collected eighteen interviews with people living in the Sea Island region during the Summers of 2004 and 2005, and during the Spring and Fall of 2009. During the first period, I interviewed mostly older African American men and women (ages 45-90), who were born and lived in the Sea Islands for most of their lives, and remember life on the island before the recent period of rapid development. Most interview questions concerned the island’s history, changes that had occurred in African American culture on the island, and the benefits and problems of development (See Appendix One, IRB Permission Form). In addition, I interviewed a number of younger African American islanders (ages 25-45), asking similar questions as a point of comparison. I also spoke with town planners, educators, and Gullah political activists, all of whom provided additional insights into the problems of development and cultural preservation on the island.

Following the aforementioned collapse of the real estate market, the emphasis of my qualitative research shifted more toward a number of specific preservation efforts occurring on James Island. In the Spring and Fall of 2009, I conducted interviews with leaders of community and cultural preservation efforts on James Island, including the Seashore Farmer’s Lodge 767 restoration in Sol Legare, and the preservation of the McLeod plantation. The questions asked of these participants were more specific, mostly pertaining to the particular preservation projects with which they were involved.
Questions covered a wide range of topics including the background and vision of preservation projects, the communicative practices involved in preservation, the logistics of community organization, and the media’s relationship to preservation.

When my fieldwork was completed, I logged and coded data, and particular themes emerged. These themes were further organized within what P. F. Carspecken (1996) terms high-level coding, which emphasizes more abstract ideas, and low-level coding, which emphasizes more concrete data. High-level coding groups focused on broad abstract themes such as “religion and community,” “attitudes of landownership,” and “cultural preservation,” while low-level coding groups focused on more specific concrete local themes, such as “public school development,” “The McLeod Plantation preservation effort,” and “Seashore Framer’s Lodge rituals.” When I completed the grouping of topics, I made decisions about their relevance to my study, and attempted to analyze the interplay between abstractions and more concrete examples of communication, development, and cultural preservation on the island.

The themes that emerged in my qualitative research also served as a point of comparison for common conceptions of development and cultural preservation apparent in popular media discourses. In many cases, I discovered differences in how “mainstream” media portray concepts of development and cultural preservation affecting Gullah communities and the ways that Gullah communities themselves articulate those concepts. These differences occur in both form and content. Newspaper articles about development, for example, are not written in Gullah, neither do they often express many of the sentiments and attitudes about development that are expressed in Gullah.
communities. They do not “participate” in oral tradition, and have particular limitations and strengths as a form of textual culture and one-way address.

It is important to note that had the project been undertaken by another researcher, the results would surely have been different. A researcher of a different gender, class, age, color, or from a different place, would likely have different interests in the area, pursue different questions, and receive different answers. Within the limitations of my position as a white male researcher, however, I often felt that I was getting frank answers to the questions that I asked, and that I was trusted by the black families who shared their stories. It is also important to note that ethnographic work is always an act of cultural sharing and coproduction. I did not simply record observations in the “field;” rather, I was a co-constructor of that experience and approached it from a position of collaboration and advocacy.

*Communication Theory*

As a theoretical tack for understanding the problems of communication, development and cultural preservation on James Island, I have turned to the work of James Carey, particularly his notion of ritual communication. For Carey, a ritual model is concerned with the representation of shared beliefs, and is linked to concepts of “commonness,” “communion,” and “community” that define social reality. When it was introduced in 1975, the purpose of Carey’s ritual/cultural model was twofold; it served as a method of cultural analysis, and an intervention into the field of Communications itself, which had become dominated by a positivist transmission model of communication that reduces communication to the process of sending a message to a receiver. In his formulation of ritual communication, Carey was concerned with denaturalizing the then
dominant spatially biased model of communication in U.S. culture, in which 
communication is “understood and developed as a basis simultaneously for settlement 
(reconciling the distance between two points/individuals, making way for a population) 
and for population management” (Hay, James, 2006, pg. 32).

Historically, the transmission model of communication is concerned with the 
extension of messages across space for mercantile and religious purposes. During 
ocolonization, it served trade, the escape from the religious boundaries of Europe, and the 
extension of God’s kingdom into “heathen” communities of the New World. Since its 
inception, the transmission model has been fundamentally concerned with the 
transmission of signals across distance for the purpose of control. To explain the 
difference between the transmission and its counter model of ritual, Carey expounds 
upon John Dewey’s (1925) claim in Experience and Nature that “Society exists not only 
by transmission, by communication, but it may be fairly said to exist in transmission, in 
communication” (in Carey, pg. 13) According to Carey, Dewey’s shift in prepositions 
indicates the distinction between the two models: the ritual model is directed not toward 
the act of imparting information across space, but toward the representation of shared 
beliefs over time. A tradition with older roots, the ritual view is linked to ancient 
concepts such as “sharing,” “participation,” “association,” and “the possession of a 
common faith” (Carey, 1989, pg. 18).

13 Contemporary Communication Studies scholars, including Jeremy Packer and Craig Robertson (2006), 
James Hay (2006), and others, have discussed the historical relevance of the ritual and transmission binary. 
Hay (2006) explains that contrary to Carey’s apparent intentions, the models have often been 
oversimplified, and reduced to a rigid binary. The terms in Carey’s model, however, are not mutually 
exclusive. They can intersect, and form points of tension and contradiction, which “represent a framework 
for an analytic of communication concerned with the relations between temporality and spatiality, history 
and geography. . .” (Hay, in Packer and Robertson, Eds., pg. 30).
For the purposes of my research, Carey’s model of ritual communication is useful for three related reasons: 1) It is a critique of a transmission model of communication that is at work in the spatial expansion of the City of Charleston; 2) It offers a way to understand differences in communication and culture among different groups living on the island; different organizations of time, space, and social power, and a current disjunctur in shared meanings of landownership, development, and cultural preservation; and 3) It provides a way to imagine communication, development, and cultural preservation in ways alternative to the dominant model’s terms; within a ritual model, development can be situated in time, as a set of cultural, political, and economic conceptions which are both supported by, and inextricably linked to, spatially biased forms of modern communication.

To further understand the spatial bias as a theoretical method for analyzing relationships of modern media, development, and cultural preservation, the dissertation also takes up the work of Harold Innis, a strong influence in Carey’s formulation of the ritual model. As a seminal media theorist, Innis (1949, 1972, 2000, 2004) elaborates the idea that the content “carried” by media are not separate from the types of media themselves, and provides a material understanding of how the temporality and spatiality of media are related to different types of knowledge, culture, and social power. Time biased media, such as the monuments and hieroglyphs of ancient Egypt, are durable and facilitate the development and continuation of social hierarchies over time, whereas spatially biased media, such as paper, are transient and portable, and thereby facilitate the geographical or spatial expansion of empire. As particular types of media bias align with
particular types of knowledge, Innis argues that the group which controls the medium in question can exercise a “monopoly of knowledge” as a means of empowerment.

Rather than subscribing to an idea that a group of elites control the media, and thus development, I seek to expand Innis’s analytic of the monopoly of knowledge by searching for compatibilities with Foucauldian discourse analysis. In other words, I attempt to understand how certain “authorities” or subjects are empowered by particular forms of knowledge about “development.” Knowledge about development is produced, made meaningful, and accepted as self-evident through various discursive strategies, such as newspaper articles, public service recommendations, traffic density reports, tax policies, city planning manuals, and various technologies, such as bridges, automobiles, and sewer lines. Rather than looking at the supposed “decision-makers” of development, such as the mayor or the City Council of Charleston, as much of the popular discourse does, I seek to understand specific strategies of power through which development operates. Foucault writes that in “every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures” (1972, pg. 216). Specifically, discourse is controlled in terms of objects, rituals, and certain subjects’ exclusive right to speak. The transparency or self-evident quality of a discourse depends upon yet also masks the wider field of discourses, institutional supports, and relations of power through which discourse operates.

Chapter Summaries

Missing in much of the media imagery of Gullah culture today, which either portrays a people who are behind the curve of modern progress, or, evokes nostalgia for a now “obsolete” way of life, is an adequate representation of the present and ongoing
struggle of Gullah history, identity, and sense of place. Gullah only appears to be “behind” within a particular cultural perspective that favors a linear notion of “modern development.” The contradictory desires for preservation and progress—preservation: trying to preserve or protect community and local culture from modernity, and progress: trying to modernize under a general banner of progressive social and economic change—reflect two ongoing forms of colonization at work, in the sense that both are a forced contextualization of people and places within certain systems of knowledge that privilege a particular modernist sense of linear history. By looking at specific and concrete situations of Gullah, development, and cultural preservation on James Island, the chapters of this dissertation examine how Gullah communities themselves articulate their history and culture, and define their roles as political actors in the modern world, both through and against dominant modern conceptions of history, culture, politics, economics, and communication.

In order to understand present struggles of communication, such as the construction of social barriers and inequalities along lines of “race” and “class,” which pertain to development and cultural preservation on James Island, it is first necessary to situate and understand those struggles historically. Chapter Two, A Cultural History of Land Ownership and Development on James Island, SC, examines historical concepts of landownership and development among different cultural groups on James Island, S.C., and relates them to the present challenges of preserving Gullah land and culture. Many black islanders, as Eugene Frazier notes “came up feeling the landmarks. . . which their ancestors built.” Following European colonization, the physical, social and economic landscapes of the island were primarily shaped by the slaves and their descendants who

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14 Author’s Interview, 2009.
constituted the vast majority of the island’s inhabitants. Within the Gullah community, a strong sense of landownership developed, which was tied to a unique sense of place, cultural identity, and communal life that facilitated black survival through slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation.

A Gullah sense of ownership, however, is much different from a European ethos of individual ownership that characterizes modern development on the island. Using Carey’s model as a method for understanding these differences of perspective, Chapter Two situates concepts of development within different practiced models of ritual and transmission. Within the knowledge of African American communities of the island, land is understood as a resource to be used among extended networks of kin and passed down through generations. A sense of ownership that extends down through generations, beyond residential units, and across property lines, requires ritual communication with a concern for maintaining communal and institutional ties over time. Such a model is incompatible with a spatial notion of development as exclusive control of property and individual ownership. Through an examination of different types of knowledge and models of communication involved in different understandings of ownership, the chapter also argues that applying the ritual model to modern development holds potentially progressive possibilities. By framing development within the ritual perspective, one can see that the environmental and social consequences of spatially expansive development do not line up with the ritual purpose of maintaining a society over time.

Against the historical backdrop of Chapter Two, Chapters Three and Four take up specific case studies of communication and cultural preservation on James Island. Chapter Three, *Communication and the Preservation of Sol Legare’s Seashore Farmers*
Lodge 767, examines efforts to preserve a building once used by an African American mutual benefit society in James Island’s Sol Legare community. In the late 2000’s, a Sol Legare citizens group partnered with local businesses, the Town of James Island, and volunteers from all over the Charleston region to restore the dilapidated Lodge. The restoration garnered considerable media attention: In conjunction with Trademark Properties, a real estate company, The Learning Channel documented the restoration for its popular program, *The Real Estate Pros*. Local news and social media, such as blogs and Web-casts, also covered and helped shape the character of the local preservation effort.

To understand the role that different media have played in the preservation effort, Chapter Three uses a medium theory approach developed by Harold Innis to understand how different material structures mediate the experience of culture surrounding the Lodge. Innis’s theorization of the bias of communication provides insights into relationships of communication technologies, cultural constructions of time and space, and social power. While exploring how Innis’s theory can inform understandings of the media’s involvement in a local preservation effort, the chapter also addresses some problematic aspects of Innis’s theory for the purposes of contemporary cultural analysis and localist studies, including what some cite as its reliance on technological determinism, as well as the limitations inherent in its focus on political economy at the

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15 See Blonheim, Menahem (2004) for a discussion of a tendency within the academy to understand Innis’s work as technologically determinist. Examples of work in which Innis is understood as a technological determinist include Schramm, Wilbur (in Pool, 1973), McQuail, Denis (1994) and Ramot, Ruth (1996). McQuail writes, "The most complete and influential variant of media determinism is probably that of the Canadian economic historian, Harold Innis. . . Innis attributed the characteristic features of successive civilizations to the prevailing and dominant modes of communication" (pp. 97-98). Ramot writes that Innis "developed ideas in the field of technological determinism" (p. 193).
macro-level of state power.\[^{16}\] Using the Farmer’s Lodge as a specific example, the chapter also looks at some implications of Innis’s “plea for time,”\[^{17}\] a call to check the spatial bias of modern communication, and imagines how it might inform progressive communicative and preservationist practices.

Chapter Four, *McLeod Plantation and the Politics of Place*, examines an ongoing dialogue and debate among different preservationist groups about how best to preserve James Island’s historic McLeod plantation. For most of the 2000’s the effort has also involved a public media battle in which a citizens group, the Friends of McLeod, has fought the plantation’s current owner, the Historic Charleston Foundation, over the best or most “appropriate” use of the property. The Foundation has twice attempted to sell the plantation to private interests: first to a School of the Building Arts and most recently to the College of Charleston. The Friends work to improve communication among different groups and form a consensus about the need for a more progressive preservation plan at McLeod. The effort has meant drawing together a diverse cast, including Civil War historians, descendants of slaves that worked on James Island, and many others. The Friends of McLeod also seek partnerships with almost thirty diverse organizations that could aid in the McLeod plantation preservation. These include the Gullah/Geechee Nation, Daughters of the Confederacy, Clemson University, and the International African American Museum.

\[^{16}\] See Blonheim, Menahem (2004) for an overview and contextualization of Innis’s work, particularly the early foci of his work in political economy (such as the Canadian fur trade) and state power (within the British empire).

In terms of its historical and cultural value, the material structure of the plantation is unique, and offers a significant opportunity for preservation. However, as a cultural object, the plantation has also become problematically commodified. Increasingly, the feasibility of preservation efforts depends on their ability to be objectified and consumed in some way; in the case of the plantation, as a tourist site or a college experience. Within the economic constraints of modern preservation, physical structures are often turned into a museum or academic space in which communication tends to be one-sided and organized around imparting information for consumption. Using Carey’s theory of ritual communication as a method of critique, the chapter argues that “preservation” is only effective to the degree that it stimulates less hierarchical forms of interaction and conversation among people. Restoring the physical structure of McLeod is a starting point. Maintaining the site as place of ritual communication, in which citizen communities are created and sustained over time is the ongoing and more difficult work of preservation. With this in mind, the chapter also argues that McLeod would best be preserved as a dynamic interactive and interpersonal educational site oriented around producing a public history of the African American majority who built, inhabited, and defined McLeod as a place for most of its history.

Local preservation efforts on James Island over the last decade have also occurred alongside, and sometimes in combination with, regional and national political movements devoted to the preservation of Gullah/Geechee\textsuperscript{18} culture. These movements, which are the subject of Chapter Five, \textit{The Conversation of Gullah Preservation}, have involved the grassroots political work of organizations such as the Sea Island Coalition and Gullah/Geechee Nation, and more recently, the work of state and federal legislatures. In\textsuperscript{18} Geechee is a name used to describe Georgia Sea Islanders, who have a similar culture as the Gullah.
2005, a Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor Act was passed in both Houses of Congress, which will allocate federal preservation funds and work to protect Gullah/Geechee land and culture. In addition to these public concerns, Gullah preservation has been a subject of popular interest in the news, on the Web, and in books, television, and film.

In addition to providing an overview of broader Gullah political movements, Chapter Five examines some of the epistemological and communicative underpinnings of Gullah preservation with a goal of understanding it more fully as a modern phenomenon. In popular media discourse, Gullah is often understood as a pre-modern “folk” culture in need of isolation and protection from an encroaching modern world. Most Gullah leaders and political activists, however, do not seek isolation or protection from modernity; rather, they are working to maintain their cultural traditions while taking selective advantage of what the modern world has to offer. By situating Gullah as a modern phenomenon, the chapter takes issue with an implicitly reactionary “preservationist” idea of Gullah as an anachronistic folk culture that should remain a product of its time and place. By examining technologies and practices of modern communication involved in Gullah preservation, the chapter also questions some ways that Carey’s theory of ritual communication might apply (or not apply) to contemporary studies of media technology. Particularly, the chapter examines a tendency in Carey’s work, and in Communication Studies more broadly, to valorize a notion of pre-modern face-to-face dialogue at the expense of other forms of communication. By using both dialogue and technologies of dissemination in arguably progressive ways, the modern Gullah preservation movement provides a specific example through which Carey’s theory of ritual communication may be rethought and perhaps applied within contemporary contexts.
CHAPTER TWO:
A Cultural History of Land Ownership and Development on James Island, SC

This chapter examines historical concepts of landownership and development among different cultural groups on James Island, S.C., and relates them to the present challenges of preserving Gullah land and culture. More specifically, the chapter looks at tensions between more communal understandings of landownership practiced within Gullah communities, and more individualistic understandings of ownership practiced among developers and suburbanites on the island. Using Carey’s ritual model of communication as a method for understanding these differences of perspective, the chapter situates concepts of development within different practiced communicatory models of ritual and transmission. Within the knowledge of African American communities of the island, land is often understood as a resource to be used among extended networks of kin and passed down through generations. A sense of ownership that extends down through generations, beyond residential units, and across property lines requires ritual communication with a concern for maintaining communal and institutional ties over time. Such a model is incompatible with a spatial notion of development as exclusive control of property and individual ownership. Through an examination of different types of knowledge and models of communication involved in different understandings of landownership, the chapter also argues that understanding modern development within the ritual model holds potentially progressive possibilities.
By framing development within the ritual perspective, one can see that the environmental and social consequences of spatially expansive development do not line up with the ritual purpose of maintaining a society over time.

**Background**

One of the greatest problems facing the Sea Islands of South Carolina and Georgia today is the commercial development of rural land and its impact on local cultures. Laylon Wayne Jordan and Elizabeth Stringfellow (1998) write, “Some islanders have fought ‘development’ as if Satan himself were the opponent and what was at stake was their very lifeblood” (pg. 229), and “among white and black folk alike burns a strong animosity to ‘development’ in principle and a deep-seated preference for the old ways, including the low taxes and slow pace of country life, the quiet of country roads, and fishing with handwoven fish and shrimp nets” (pg. 224). While Islanders fight the invasion of development, though, they also recognize it as an almost inevitable force of the modern world, and “alternatives are not easy to come by. While changes affront black and white islanders alike who see established scenes and old styles lose ground, lack of development after old ways have broken down leaves islanders ‘chewin’ dry bones’” (ibid). As economic pressure to develop increases, alternatives to do otherwise often seem limited.

Currently on James Island, most of the once-agricultural land that largely belonged to white farmers has been sold and developed as suburbs and shopping centers. Economic pressure continues, however, through the expansion of nearby Charleston, and recent developments have proceeded in areas in and around the Island’s less wealthy,  

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19 See Figure 1: Map of James Island and the City of Charleston.
more rural black communities in unprecedented ways. Two good examples are James Island’s Grimball Farm and Sol Legare communities. In 2003, there was talk about developing a large tract of land in Sol Legare for condominiums, and a shopping center with a Piggly Wiggly was built next to the community’s entrance. In Grimball farm, an elementary school was constructed, and adjacent to the community, a large tract of land was sold to a large development firm, the Ginn Company. All of these development plans have been contentious, but most proceeded with some sense of inevitability, as though development is a “natural” consequence of the modern world.

Though development is often framed in monolithic terms, all developments are not the same, and it is important to ask what the term “development” defines in each particular case before trying to define its alternatives. Usually, development implies a particular model of economic change that is favored by those doing the developing, along with an object that supposedly “needs” development within this model. Take, for example, the general wording of the South Carolina Department of Commerce’s description of its Rural Infrastructure Fund: “The Rural Infrastructure Fund (RIF) is funded by a portion of the Job Development Credits (JDCs) earned by qualifying new or expanding companies creating jobs in counties designated by the SC Department of Revenue (SCDOR) as being underdeveloped, moderately developed or developed” (South Carolina Department of Commerce, 2007). Development is also often framed as a problem of politics, for example, in debates about the annexation of land that have occurred between the City of Charleston and the Town of James Island.
Politics and economics certainly do define development, its causes, and its problems on James Island. It will be argued here, however, that these problems can be framed and understood more fundamentally in terms of communication and culture. Historically, three main cultures have existed on James Island: The Native American, White European, and African American. The perception of development as a modern phenomenon has distinct cultural roots in the European model of “settlement,” that included particular notions of the extension of landownership, nationalism, capitalism, and religious beliefs into the New World. English political authority during the colonial
period on James Island pursued values of national unity, order, religious toleration and personal freedom, and “adopted an aggressive and outward looking entrepreneurial capitalism supported by a powerful navy and merchant fleet” (Jordan and Stringfellow, pg. 9). In its coordination of settlement, the modern project of the 17th century also brought with it a particular model of communication, oriented around transmission, and implemented in the “development” of Native lands.

Existing at the margins of European settlement on James Island, were the Native and Slave populations, who were perceived by the settlers as savage, backwards, and more cynically, as economic resources. Understandably, the different worldviews and communication patterns of the marginalized populations did not always, or even usually, harmonize with those of the English. They were born of different influences, expressed different cultural goals, and within the oppressive colonial order, were often concerned with the most basic needs of survival and community preservation, rather than with spatial expansion. In black communities, for example, “the ritual” reinforced communal and familial ties essential to survival, and was reflected in many aspects of everyday black life. Thomas C. Holt (1989) writes:

> Even in slavery blacks created customs, ceremonies, and rituals that reinforced their communal values and institutional ties. In freedom, these cultural practices multiplied as weddings, funerals, church ‘homecomings,’ and family reunions provided occasions for renewing ties between individuals and their communities” (pg. 137).

The island’s ritual cultures also had a dimension of oral tradition quite different from the more mediated culture of the Europeans. In a discussion of Native oral tradition, for example Jerry H. Gill (2002) writes:
It is difficult for those of us who have grown up in what Marshall McLuhan calls the ‘Gutenberg Galaxy’ to understand the important role played by oral discourse in cultures that do not convey their traditions, beliefs, and values by means of written language. . . Speech in oral cultures functions specifically to transfer and reinforce the traditional beliefs and values by means of which a people maintains and sustains itself (pg. 47).

Sense of place and “land ownership” within oral cultures also has much different dimensions than those conceived of in textual cultures. Of pre-literate individuals, and their sense of familiarity and attachment to the land, ethnologist Ted Strehlow writes:

Recorded in the ancient landscape [is] the ancient story of the lives and the deeds of the immortal beings whom he reveres; beings for a brief space may take on human shape once more; beings, many of whom he has known in his own experience as his fathers and grandfathers and brothers, and as his mothers and sisters. The whole countryside is his living, age-old family tree (in Tuan, Y-F, 1974, pg. 100).

While distinctions can be made between different cultures and the models of communication that they practice, it is important to note that following colonization, there was never a neat division between Native, Black, and White populations and the forms of communication that they practiced. The different populations interacted, interbred, and shared parts of their cultural and social lives. The practiced forms of ritual and transmission communication were ever-changing, shaped and in turn were shaped by different conceptions of time and space, and never existed in neat or essential distinction on the Island according to population, or along lines of “race.” To reduce the communication of any group to only a ritual or transmission model overlooks important aspects of its culture, and has political implications. White supremacists, for example, both ritually reinforced and defended beliefs about slavery in the pulpits of the South, and also disseminated them through transmission, in justifications of slavery that poured from
the legislative halls and the press. Furthermore, Carey’s model itself does not presume a neat distinction between ritual and transmission. The dissemination of information in a newspaper, for example, could be construed as an act of transmission across space, but also as a ritual representation of shared beliefs. As a methodological concern, then, different practices of ritual and transmission, and the political choices which scholars make with respect to using them as analytic concepts, must be understood as contingent, relational, and existing within particular contexts.

In applying Carey’s theory of communication to understanding concepts and practices of land ownership and development on James Island, his formulation of the relationship between communication and transportation also bears consideration. In *Technology and Ideology* (1983), Carey turned to the telegraph, a largely overlooked media form, and addressed it as a critical moment in the formation of communications theory and practice, in which “The simplest and most important point about the telegraph is that it marked the decisive separation of ‘transportation’ and ‘communication’” (1989, pg. 213). For Carey, the introduction of the near-instantaneous communication technology of the telegraph marked a moment in which the extension of messages across space no longer depended exclusively upon transportation technologies. Communication scholars, such Jeremy Packer (2006), and Jonathan Sterne (2006), have noted the progressive purpose of the division: By reopening the telegraph as an object of inquiry, and at the same time addressing the teleology of the field of communications itself, Carey was able to work against social scientific positivist transmission models of communication, and guide the field’s attention more toward a ritual and thereby a culturally oriented perspective of communication. While Carey’s intellectual move was
an effective political intervention into the then narrowly transmission-defined field of Communications Studies, Packer argues that in contemporary applications the split should not be over-emphasized, and the dependent relationships of communication upon transportation and vice versa can be productively rethought. Sterne argues that it is productive to look at communication and transportation as a “combined, intertwined process—as a massive assemblage of organized movement in space” (pg. 119). In the case of James Island’s development, I argue that transportation and communication were never mutually exclusive, in so far as both imply a movement in space with conceptual and physical dimensions. In each specific case, however, different conceptions of time and space, and different technologies of transportation and communication were involved, and with different cultural, social, and political implications.

Finally, before embarking further on a cultural and communicative history of land ownership and development on James island, I also wish to note Carey’s fundamental premise that all models of communication have the dual aspect of being symbols “of” communication, and symbols “for” communication: “In one mode communication models tell us what the process is; in their second mode they produce the behavior they have described” (1989, pg. 31). Historically, populations on the Island were unaware of themselves as practicing particular conceptual models of communication, at least in Carey’s terms. As a method for this chapter, then, the models are a lens through which the historian may view communication and culture and gain insight into historical relationships among different concepts and practices of communication, with a goal of more fully contextualizing and understanding modern practices of development and cultural preservation.
Communication and Colonization

The earliest Native American sites on James Island discovered by archaeologists are from around 600 B.C. They suggest that the early Native American tribes followed sustainable hunting patterns and lived in temporary shelters. In later periods, it is believed that Natives on James Island practiced limited agriculture. Spanish explorers arriving on James Island and neighboring Johns Island in the early 16th century noted the presence of the more settled and agrarian Stono tribe. In 1666, English explorer Robert Stafford also noted the presence of the Stono, which perhaps suggests that it was the Island’s majority population.

According to Jordon and Stringfellow, archaeologists dated a Native American burial on nearby Johns Island to the eighteenth century, by a set of glass beads worn around the neck of the interred. The beads were supposedly evidence that “the first Carolinians were not just victims but eager participants in a new economic system that transformed and thus destroyed a way of life” (pg. 10). A more in-depth look at Native/European relations, however, suggests a much more complicated history, in which Natives were forced out of a sustainable lifestyle and into new and disadvantageous economic situations.

The first English settlers arrived in the Sea Islands in 1670 and began the “Charles Towne” settlement at Albermarle Point on the Ashley River. In addition to the Charles Towne settlement, the settlers soon established two more settlements, James Towne and

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Oyster Pointe.\textsuperscript{21} James Towne was located somewhere on James Island,\textsuperscript{22} but the exact location of the original town is unknown. The site expanded very quickly, as settlers were given half-acre lots in town, and ten-acre lots next to the town.

Native American and settler relations were good at first. According to Jordan and Stringfellow, “Initially, the red men and women may have thought the strangers beings from another world, which in a sense, they were. They celebrated their coming with gifts and banquets. They held the keys to survival” (pg. 21). From the English standpoint, the ability to survive in the New World also depended, at least initially, on maintaining good relations with the Natives; “When the newcomers had difficulties getting provisions, not knowing the herbs and roots and berries of the country, nor how to catch fish in quantity, nor easily adapt their culture to a novel environment, the indigenous people shared their goods and experience” (ibid).

Following the initial colonization in the Charles Towne area, however, Native/European relations quickly soured. In one case, the prominent Stono and Kussoe tribes united against the colonists, but were quickly defeated, sold, and shipped to the West Indies to work as slaves. By 1684, all the Native American land had been “turned over” to the Lord Proprietors. The last reference to the Stono tribe appears in a 1707 act regulating Indian trade.\textsuperscript{23} Whatever survives in the written record of early Carolinian history makes relatively sparse reference to Native Americans, as they were so taken for granted “that no more than passing mention of them [is made,] especially as individuals”

\textsuperscript{21} The first “Charles Towne” was not established at the site of modern Charleston. “Charles Towne” was quickly abandoned and residents moved to the Oyster Pointe settlement located on what is today the Charleston peninsula and site of the modern city.

\textsuperscript{22} James Island was known as Boone’s Island at the time.

\textsuperscript{23} Bostick, 2008, pg. 16
Native Americans disappeared early from the scene of European “settling” of the Sea Islands, as they were killed in war, devastated by European diseases, and subjected to external economic pressures which broke traditional life patterns.

While the accounts of Native life in the Sea Islands are limited, there are some interesting insights into Native worldviews gain that can be gained through the Europeans’ cultural lens. Particularly, a European sense of Native poverty reflects significantly different cultural perspectives with regard to the use of natural resources. Jordan and Stringfellow write, “To some Europeans’ way of thinking, North American Woodland Indians were not nearly industrious enough, seemingly taking what nature, little aided by human effort, provided, and making, and using, very little: a kind of willful ‘poverty’” (pg. 17). Thomas Nairne, a Scotsman by birth, reflected on a Native perception of unnecessary commotion and acquisitiveness innate to the settlers’ worldview: “The heads of you Britons have in them a thousand projects and chimeras, about making yourselves great, rich, and the Lord knows what, this keeps you perpetually in a hurry,’ [which Natives] . . . more prudent . . . would avoid by making happiness consist in a few things” (in Franklin, 1997, pp. 135-136).

The colonial “projects” and “chimeras” reflect goals of progress and profit pursued by the settlers from England, a “nation which embraced more fully than its European neighbors crucial changes associated with ‘modernization’” (Jordan and Stringfellow, pg. 9). According to Eric Wolf (1999), the “apostles of modernity” have “advocated industrialization, specialization, secularization, and rational bureaucratic allocation as reasoned options superior to tradition” (pg. 25) and “tag others as opponents
of progress” (ibid). In the settlement of Native lands, “progress” was seen in political, economic, and social terms, which were measured according to European standards. For example, in his essay, *Carolina, or a Description of the Present State of that Country* (1682), Thomas Ashe wrote that the Natives “are divided into many Divisions or Nations, Govern’d by. . . Petty Princes. . .” (pg. 156). Such a description of “nations” fundamentally fails to grasp Native political and social organization, in which a European sense of the state did not exist. Native societies had hereditary leaders, yet they led through persuasion and consensus, and without the structures of codified laws, taxes, a police force, armies, courts, or prisons that characterized modern European states.

Another Western standard of “progress” involved the control of nature, a form of control inimical to Native cultural attitudes. Gill writes, “Western culture focuses on the conquest and control of nature, on shaping it to fit the needs and desires of people, while the majority of Native American cultures encourage the adaption of human life to the laws and patterns of nature” (pg. 160). A good example of the progress (and lack thereof) that Europeans associated with the Natives was their failure to fully adopt modern agricultural methods. According to Olivia Vlahos (1970), the transition to agriculture was not delayed because Native populations were backwards. Rather, it was because natural vegetation and animal life were abundant, and indigenous people had no reason to practice agriculture until it was demanded by increased population. And even after adopting agriculture, Natives never fully abandoned their ancient hunting and gathering lifestyle.

Adaption to the patterns of nature implies a ritualistic concern with the maintenance of society over time, rather than specialization, and it’s accompanying
spatially expansive and control-oriented approach to meeting human needs. Of Native views on nature, sustainability, and the possession of land, Gill (2002) writes:

Native Americans were content to devise a lifestyle involving a reciprocal relation with nature and saw no need to ‘conquer’ or significantly alter their environment. Moreover, the concept of land ownership generally had no place in Native American worldviews. The earth was seen as the life source of all creatures and thus could ‘belong’ to no one (pg. 160).

Jordan and Stringfellow write, “Nothing was quite so strange, or destined to create more hostility between natives and the Europeans, than the Indians’ views on land ownership” (pg. 18). In English practice, a person became a landowner through purchase, gifting, or developing land for use, and was then free to rent, sell, or gift the land to someone else. In Native practice, however, land was owned by everyone, and a person could only own the produce from land that she or he cultivated. The sparse historical record does not give many specific insights into exactly how the Natives of the Sea Islands perceived the “sale” or “gift” of land, but it is certain that it did not match the European definition. For example:

While we may never know what the Kiawah cassique thought as he ‘gave’ tribal lands along the Kiawah (Ashley) River as a gift to his English guests in 1670 or Edisto chieftans perceived as they sold their island for a lot of ‘Indian goods’ later on, it is certain they viewed the transactions differently than the English, who saw them conveying full, permanent, and exclusive control (ibid, pg. 19).

The concept of landownership also had different religious dimensions for Europeans and Natives. Europeans envisioned a universal and transcendental basis for the extension of European values and religion into the unsettled lands of New World, while Natives practiced a kind of religious materiality. These Native worldviews imply a more
ritualistically oriented model of communication, concerned with reverence for nature, sustainability, and the maintenance of society over time:

Unlike the Europeans, who saw mankind as ‘a transcendent species,’ they [Native Americans] revered the living indivisibility of things, even down to the barest motionless existence of rocks and trees. In this view, nature is not filled with things, animate and inanimate, designed merely to supply human needs. Nature is deified. Each thing, plant, and animal is invested with spiritual, and thus material, power. Each has a society equivalent in all respects to mankind’s; each has a soul and due respect (ibid. pg. 20).

In the modern era of expansive development, the cultural legacy of Natives is thought to have largely “disappeared” from the Islands. However, that may not actually be the case: For close to half a century in the Charleston area, Natives and African slaves shared close cultural contact. Before the Tuscarora War of 1711 and the Yemassee War of 1715, Charleston was the first place in which contact between enslaved Natives and Africans was intensified. After the wars, however, Carolinians became fearful “that the enslaved Africans and Indians would unite to overthrow the white minority, [and so] began a divide-and-rule policy to keep the two peoples separated” (Williams, 1989, pg. 167). Natives were paid to capture and punish runaway slaves, and Blacks were used in wars against Natives. Though the groups ultimately lost much cultural contact, it is nevertheless important to consider the “previous intermarriage between the two enslaved groups [that] resulted in afro-Americans having considerable Indian ancestry and absorbing Native American culture” (ibid, pg. 167).

Communication, Agricultural Development, and Gullah culture

Timbering was the main income source for the settlers of the 17th century on James Island. During that time, there were slaves on the Island, however, they were far
less in number than they would be in the 18th and 19th centuries. When labor-intensive cotton farming was introduced to the Island, slave numbers increased tremendously. In 1720, population figures for the St. Andrews Parish of the South Carolina Lowcountry region, listed 210 white taxpayers and 2,493 slaves.24 There are many instances in which whites were virtually absent from large plantations in the Lowcountry. Maurice Mathews conducted a survey of the Carolina colony in 1695 that showed dense occupation of James Island by white settlers, but “occupation” did not necessarily mean being present: “In the colonial era, most James Island plantations were owned and operated by men who actually lived in Charleston” (Bostick, 2008, pg. 50). The slaves of the All Saints Parish in South Carolina “lived in an environment of few whites, and one virtually devoid of free blacks and mulattoes” (Joyner, Charles, 1984, pg. 37).

The geography of the Sea Islands contributed to the cultural isolation of slaves in a number of ways. For example, according to a visitor to the Waccamaw, the great wealth of the plantations was “the product of a sun that dashes his benefits with malaria, pestilence, and death” (in Joyner, pg. 37). While assuming that the malaria was caused by a “marsh miasma,” the visitor noted the relentless attack of teeming mosquitoes; “the insects that single, are insignificant. . . have yet, when they come in swarms, powers of intolerable annoyance. The night is no season for rest; they must be kept at bay by nets, that break the freshening breeze which should fan the feverish limbs” (ibid). The visitor goes on to write:

The planter walks forth in the morning unrefreshed, yet he must heed his steps, for the poisonous reptiles lie in his path—the shark watches for him when he laves his burning body in the surf, and the alligator pulls him down in the rivers. For nearly half the year he cannot visit his own

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plantation... if he comes back before the frost, it is like the return of the banished Foscari, on pain of death. Thus he becomes an absentee (ibid).

Living in relative cultural isolation from the mainland, the Gullah retained more “Africanisms” than any other large African American population. There are many specific instances of how slaves continued the cultural patterns from Africa in the building of the plantations. On large rice plantations, for example, Joyner, explains that African patterns of rice culture persisted, and the technological knowledge needed to establish the rice culture was introduced by Africans, not Europeans:

None of the Europeans, whether from the British Isles, Western Europe, or the Carribbean, had any experience with rice culture at all. They could not have learned rice culture from the local Indians, who gathered small quantities of wild rice but did not cultivate the crop. Rice, however, was plentiful along the entire West African coast (as well as on the East African island of Madagascar), especially in the Senegal-Gambia region that supplied nearly 20 percent of the slaves imported into South Carolina (ibid, pg. 14).

The slaves worked within an economy that was based in African patterns of rice culture, but was also organized by European-American economic systems. Understanding how the culture unfolded requires an understanding of the opportunities and constraints of the new physical, social, and economic environment within which African traditions were both practiced and transformed.

On some plantations, slaves worked with a degree of self-supervision under a “task system.” Each morning, an overseer organized tasks according to an estimated day’s work. If the slaves completed tasks before the end of the day, they were free to pursue personal interests. While allowing some degree of freedom, the task system also had a negative side: both oral tradition and slave-narratives record many instances in
which Slaves were beaten if they failed to complete tasks, some of which were impossible to finish in time.

In spite of the horrible conditions that they faced, Joyner writes, “The slaves developed a strong sense of ownership of these plantations that their ancestors had created and that they continued to make productive” (pg. 42). He further observes “that, a slave, considered to be property, might enjoy a sense of ownership that rivaled his master’s claim might seem paradoxical; but a slave was not merely property. A slave was also a human being who had an immense investment in the plantation both by inheritance and by personal contribution” (ibid). For example, when an ex-slave, named Morris, who lived on one of the rice plantations of the Waccamaw, learned that the plantation’s superintendent planned to kick him off of the plantation, he visited the plantation’s landlord, and is reported to have said:

I was born on dis place before Freedom. My Mammy and Daddy worked de rice fields. Dey’s buried here. De fust thing I remember are dose rice banks. I growed up in dem from dat high. . . De strength of these arms and legs and of dis old back, Mist’ Bernie is in your rice banks. It won’t take long before de good lord take de rest of pore old Morris away too. An’ de rest of dis body want to be with de strength of de arms and de legs and de back dat is already buried in your rice banks (in Baruch, 1957, pg. 292).

And a slave-owner, J. Motte Alston wrote that his “head man” Cudjo “looked upon my property as belonging to him” (in Childs, 1953, pg. 108). In these examples, one can see that a Gullah sense of landownership began to emerge long before the end of the Civil War, as did a sense of place that was already rooted in generations.

Following the Civil War, a sizable number of former slaves were given shares of plantation property in the “40 acres and a mule” plan. In determining the first arrangement for black landownership, Union General Sherman and Secretary of War
Stanton consulted a group of fifteen black ministers, one of whom explained, ”The best way we can take care of ourselves is to have land, and turn and till it by labor. . . and we can soon maintain ourselves and have something to spare. We want to be placed on land until we are able to buy it and make it our own” (in Bresee, 1992, pg. 149). Following the consultation, Sherman ordered that all coasts and riverbanks thirty miles inland from Jacksonville to Charleston be set aside for the Freedmen.

After the implementation of the land reparation program, many planters on James Island tried to regain ownership of their land, sometimes purchasing the claims from the freed slaves. For example, James Island plantation owner, Wallace Lawton, according to his wife Cecilia ”experienced much difficulty in gaining possession of his James island property; he finally had to pay several hundred dollars— a big sum then— to buy off the negroes who had land claims from the U.S. government” (in Bresee, pp. 149-150). Ultimately, however, repurchasing the land was unnecessary. In May of 1865, President Andrew Johnson announced that all plantation land was to be returned to its previous owners. E.M. Clark was the first James Island planter to apply for the restoration of plantation ownership. On the application, represented by Lieutenant Erastus W. Everson at the Bureau’s Provost Court, it was noted “One [case] is the restoration of the Clark Plantation, the first and only one that I expect will be planted by white people. The colored people refuse to contract and it may involve some important questions” (in Bostick, 2008, pg. 85) regarding land claims.

By January, 1868, almost all of the plantations on James Island had been returned to their former owners. Throughout the South, “The aspirations of black men and women came into sharp conflict with the perceived needs of the planter class. What nearly every
field hand aspired to after emancipation was the chance to work for himself on his own plot of land. . . “(Litwack, 1998, pg. 120). White farmers exploited the poverty of blacks to control their labor. Many blacks found it difficult to attain land from whites, and even when they managed to do so, often lacked the supplies to properly farm it. They had never negotiated a relationship with a factor, a creditor who would advance money to planters in return for payment at the end of the year. Of the James Island freedmen’s predicament, Bostick writes, “Though the freedom bestowed upon them must have been exhilarating, the realities of what they faced were harsh. Planting was all that James island slaves were trained to do. They had never negotiated a relationship with a factor and most would have few assets to do so” (2008, pg. 89) Even if they did manage to establish a relationship with a factor, freedmen had difficulty attaining a fair rate of interest. In addition, there was no organized system of support for black planters beyond the Freedman’s Bureau. The Bureau, while offering support for black owners, could be less than a sympathetic advocate. For example, J.M. Johnston, an agent for the Bureau, wrote a report to Washington on the conditions of James Island, in which he criticized “idleness,” “negligence,” and theft and robbery among the freed people:

Generally concurring misunderstandings and misapprehensions of the requirements of the contracts — under which they had bound themselves to cultivate the crops, as these Freedmen have little confidence in the planters generally, it was necessary that an Officer of the Bureau explain it to them. The motive and obligation of their contracts, which explanation generally set at rest the minds of the Freed people and satisfied the planter . . . they [the freed people] are laboring for their own interests as much as that of the Planters. . . we find much idleness and vagrancy among these [freed] people and the consequence is they have made poor crop generally, part of which is attributed to the improvidence of the part [sic] . . . but much more to the negligence of the freed people.

Large numbers of vagrant freed families, who would not contract . . . have squatted on the abandoned plantations and are living in a state of idleness,
and gaining a livelihood by theft and robbery. Nothing is secure in the sections when they have congregated. The freedpeople who have contracted, labored and made a crop during the summer are not more exempt of these malanders than the white people (in Bostick, 2008, pg. 87).

In spite of enormous difficulties they faced, “some blacks managed to acquire land and make the most out of their opportunity” (Litwack, pg. 122). By 1880, blacks owned around ten percent of the land on James Island, totaling about 1,600 acres. These tracts varied from 5 to 20 acres in size. The achievement of the freedmen on this land was remarkable, considering that “15 years before, these black planters owned no land, had been counted as property along with the livestock, and re-entered the world as freedmen with no assets, no home, and probably very little, if any, cash” (Bostick, 2008, pg. 96). By 1900, 42.8 percent of blacks in Charleston County owned land, a large number relative to the 22.4 percent of blacks who owned land in the rest of the state.  

For most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, black property on James Island was owned by former slaves and their descendants, who continued to farm the land. Ethel Campbell remembers that on the Grimball Farm everyone had their own house and nobody paid rent. She is not sure how her family acquired their land, whether it was “given to him (her grandfather) after the proclamation of freeing the slave, or if my grandfather bought land from him (Mr. Grimball), but when we came up everyone was free and had their own land.” According to Cecelia Simmons Green, “Some of the

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26 Land ownership, however, did not guarantee economic success; often former slaves were given the plots of land on the Island with the poorest drainage and limited access to waterways, or were conned into selling land back to their former masters (Preservation Consultants, Inc., 1989, pp. 13-14).

27 Author’s Interview, Campbell, Ethel, 2004.
plantation owners were fairly descent to us. Mr. Ephraim Clark, Lawton, and the Grimballs sell land to black people at a reasonable price they could afford. The Seabrooks did give blacks the property where the Payne RMUE Church was built” (in Frazier, 2006, p. 89). Other plantation owners, however, “gave the slaves nothing. But still, God was good to us through our hard work, pain and suffering. We kept the faith and pray he help us survived, Amen” (ibid).

Acquiring land marked a huge achievement for black families on the island, and allowed an unprecedented social and economic freedom. It is not surprising, therefore, that the land in black communities on James Island is attentively cared for and often understood in terms of familial history and continuity. Of his family’s land, Thomas Backman, a shrimper in the Sol Legare community, explains, “The history of this place is what makes me hold on to this. I know my mother she eats this, she breaths it, she sleeps it. . .”28 And according to Queen Quet, a Gullah activist, “Land is like one of the family members.”29 Explaining the Southern Black family’s relationship to the land, Tony L. Whitehead notes that land was very difficult to attain, and ownership was a priceless symbol of freedom; therefore, land was regarded “not a commodity to be sold but a resource to be used by kinsmen and to be passed down from generation to generation (1989, pg. 154).

In addition to a sense of landownership that extends across generations, a broad sense of kin in black families has implications for more communal understandings of ownership. As a means of survival that began in slavery, and that resonates with African and Native American cultural roots, the sense of kin in the black family is ritually

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28 Author’s Interview, 2004.

29 Author’s Interview, 2004.
reinforced, and extends far beyond immediate family. Whitehead explains that the “Southern black family includes more than a household of primary relatives. A history of economic and political marginality has made it necessary for southern blacks to depend on support systems beyond the household for their survival” (ibid, pg. 153). Families extend far beyond property lines and residential units, and include distant relatives as well as members who are not biologically related.

Many James Island elders remember when land was a lifeline of family and community. People mostly grew and raised their own food, and shared when necessary; “it was not unusual for neighbors to send their children to each other’s house to borrow a cup of sugar, flour, salt, grits, rice or coffee when their supply ran out,” and “If they needed to cook soup, many parents would send their children to each other’s farms to get collard greens, tomatoes or okra out of the fields” (Frazier, pg. 97). The community also shared a mill, in which people could grind cornmeal and grits. Of nearby St. Helena Island, William Cross writes, “Families and extended families worked the fields, fished the waters, and shared and exchanged goods and labor. Everything that went on their tables and most of what their families needed came from the natural environment of the island” (pg. 50). Values of sharing and community are also reflected in a tradition remembered by James Island elder Caroline White, in which meat from hog killings would be shared among members of the community. 30

After kinship, religion was arguably the central value of black communities in the South. Although many slaves were required to worship with their masters, they also held their own services with black preachers. Almost immediately following the Civil War, free blacks broke away from white churches, established their own congregations, and

30 Author’s Interview, 2005
held more open and formal worship services (Holt, 1989, pg. 137). On James Island, for example, shortly following the Civil War, the St. James Presbyterian church broke away from the white congregation of St. James. Black churches, and also “praise houses,” were important centers of communication that organized many aspects of black political and social life on the island. Sociologist T.J. Woofter (1930), who studied the black family in the 1920s, wrote about the relationship of church and community:

The religious organization is strong. The church is much more of a factor in the control of Sea Island communities than in the average modern community. Not only is it the place of worship, but through its peculiar organization of branch ‘praise houses,’ it also settles the disputes of the community. This active control by church committees has held crime at a minimum (pg. 79).

A strong sense of identity, emotional connection, and purpose was also reinforced through the ritual acts of the praise house. In her book, *Yankee Missionaries in the South* (1980), Elizabeth Jacoway writes:

At the center of religious life was the praise house, an inheritance from the days of slavery. The old plantations, about forty of them, still gave geographic definition to the island, and on each of these was located a little tumble-down building with rude benches, where islanders gathered three nights a week for simple, informal, spontaneous worship. As one observer described in a praise house service, ‘In the prayers and songs the emotional experience of the Islanders takes on a vividness and depth which is hardly to be entered into by a member of another race’ (pg. 90).

In addition to the churches, black secular organizations established senses of identity, rootedness, and communal values.31 One such institution on James Island was the Lodge Hall, which served as a meeting place and social safety net. The Lodge of the Grimball Farm community, for example, was started in the late 1800’s by two brothers,

31 See Holt, pg. 137
Edward and Richard Singleton, who called a meeting of all the black people on James Island. They began the meeting by reading a passage from the Bible about how King Solomon took care of his people, and the sacrifices that they made. After the reading, the Singletons proposed that the black community should build the Lodge. The people agreed, and everyone pitched in to construct the King Solomon Lodge Hall that still stands on Riverland Drive today. The lodge was a political organization and also assisted the community through activities such as home repair and care for the sick.  

Community institutions were also banded together under segregation. While segregation was fundamentally wrong, it was not without certain benefits for black communities. As Booker T. Washington advised, a black middle class could make the most of a bad situation and build its own economy as a means of empowerment. Some Islanders remember that during segregation, at least the money of the black community was often spent at black businesses. Other Islanders remember cultural benefits of being educated by Black teachers in Black schools. Separate, however, was never equal. For example, in the 1950s, the Gresham Megget School for blacks was built on James Island, and most children chose it over the black church school because it was accredited. While white kids rode to the Charleston High School in school buses, black students had to catch their own rides, or they would have to wake up early in the morning to walk, sometimes as much as ten miles.

32 Frazier, Eugene, 2006, pg. 96
33 See Weare, 1989, pg. 146.
34 Author’s Interview, 2005, Ethel Campell.
Communication and Real Estate Development

For most of its history, James Island, like many of the Sea Islands, had a large black majority until northern black migration and the influx of Euro-Americans radically shifted the population dynamic during the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{35} By 1950, James Island’s population reached around 6,600 people, and was comprised of more whites than blacks.\textsuperscript{36} Increasingly in the second half of the twentieth century, white farmers sold their land for development. Construction of the first subdivision on James Island, Riverland Terrace, was started in the 1930s, and by 1940, subdivisions were built at Wappoo Hall, Woodland Shores, and Lawton Bluff. Property adjoining the Country Club of Charleston was sold for development in the fall of 1943, but wartime activities prevented much home construction until the late 1940s.\textsuperscript{37} Of development in the late 1940’s and early 1950s on James Island, Clyde Brese, who grew up on the Lawton Plantation, remembers a ”quiescent period of a few years when the fields produced only truck crops and while the real estate developers were gathering their forces” (1992, pg. 217).

During 1926, the first concrete bridge connecting James Island to the mainland was built, and electricity became available in “upper portions of the island for lighting and power purposes” (Bostick, 2008, pg. 121). By this time, the island also had full mail service, telephones, and ice delivery. Of the wave of modern changes, the 1926 annual James Island Agricultural Society meeting minutes reported that “James Island is no longer a real country community devoted entirely to agriculture” (in Bostick, 2008, pg. 119).

\textsuperscript{35} See Twining, 1989, pg. 223.

\textsuperscript{36} Bostick, 2008, pg. 125.

\textsuperscript{37} News and Courier (Oct. 4, 1948).
In the mid to late 1950s the boom of subdivision development on James Island gained full force. In particular, waterfront property, once thought to be a “swamp,” became quite desirable. According to a 1956 article in the Charleston Evening Post, “James Island residential subdivisions, particularly on the harbor side, today are the center of much activity—both in area expansion and in construction of homes” (March 28, 1956). The construction of a new bridge connecting Charleston to James Island across the Wapoo Cut was expected to “quicken the pace of development and to further enhance the value of James Island property” (ibid), and the property was billed as balancing the aspects of convenience and “quiet” country living, an idyllic place in which “Children ride bikes and play touch football where some of the world’s finest Sea Island cotton once grew” (News and Courier, Nov. 28, 1965).

Following the initial boom of development, the pace began to slow in the late 1960s and early 1970s. A “James Island Community Council,” made up of developers and advertising executives, responded by working to speed up development of the Island through a campaign of billboards and radio ads. The council also circulated a bumper sticker which read, “James Island, the Island with Everything,” and displayed a picture of sprawling oak trees to symbolize the Island’s rural flavor. The period of slow development did not last long, and the development boom continued in the early 1980s. The 1990s witnessed an even greater increase. According to a 2004 feature in the Real Estate section of the Charleston Post and Courier, ”Benefitting from close-knit neighborhoods and the short commute to downtown, James Island’s evolution from a modest suburb to a magnet for upscale residences is showing no signs of slowing” (Aug. 28, 2004). Today the Island’s population is around 40,000.

The increase in development brought a host of problems. According to Evan Hyde, the DHEC facilities inspector, a lagoon system on James Island was a “polluted, contaminated mess,” and in “complete shambles” (News and Courier, Nov. 18, 1976) A series of articles about increases of crime on James Island ran in the local paper, and one reporter wrote, “James Islanders fear they are wallowing in a swamp of lawlessness and can find no direct route out of the mess. . . They are apparently mired in a muck of society: crime; drug abuse; affluence; lack of parental guidance and discipline; limited—sometimes shackled—law enforcement” (News and Courier, March 28, 1974).

To combat these perceived problems, the protection of an incorporated municipality, which could offer better public services and increased “police power,” became attractive to many residents. These services could be acquired through annexation by the City of Charleston, or through the incorporation of a separate town. (Until relatively recently, James Island was unincorporated, and was only a part of Charleston County). In a 1973 meeting, James Island residents discussed the incorporation of a Town, and addressed questions, such as “what will incorporation do for sewage,” “will my taxes go up,” and “why can’t we stay like we are” (James Island Journal, 1973). Residents also discussed possibilities of better police protection, construction of a new bridge, and parks and playgrounds. Though they captured the interest of residents at first, plans for the town eventually fizzled out. Some portions of the Island were annexed by Charleston, and others remained part of the County.

In the 1990s discussions of incorporation were revived, this time more in response to concerns over Charleston’s high density development of the Island, and lack of public benefits for tax dollars. The South Carolina Secretary of State issued a charter for the
Town of James Island on January 8, 1993. As a political and social organization, the Town united many of the Island’s longtime black and white residents, along with newcomers to the Island. According to Ron Garman, an incorporation proponent, “Tons of people showed up for meetings—blacks, whites, everybody was getting together for community service. It was amazing how many people wanted to do something” (in Riddle, pg. A16).

Two weeks after the Charter’s issue, the City of Charleston sued the Town, claiming that the Town violated State annexation laws. Charleston was the first municipality in South Carolina to annex land that lay across a public body of water, and a basic issue of the case was whether or not Charleston had a right by law to annex more land. Gregg Meyer, an attorney for the Town of James Island, joked, “Apparently Charleston owns the right to Paris, France, too” (in Riddle, pg. A17). According to City Attorney William Regan, ”The City of Charleston has to grow. We are simply protecting its area of natural growth and development” (New York Times, 1997, pg. A11). The Court ruled in favor of the City, and the Town was disbanded. The decision was appealed all the way to the Supreme Court. Ultimately, the Supreme Court decided that the Town had a right to exist, and today, both the Town and the City of Charleston occupy different portions of the island.39

Though the debate appears to be settled legally, disagreement still exists among James Islanders over the advantages of a Town versus annexation into the City. Some James Island prefer to be annexed by the City, arguing that two municipalities operating on the Island creates a bureaucratic mess and unnecessary duplication of public services such as sewer lines and trash collection. Some proponents of annexation are pragmatists,

39 See Figure Three, Map of the Town of James Island.
who like the idea of a Town in theory, but believe that maintaining a Town is not feasible as Charleston continues to grow and could potentially mount future legal challenges; better to work with the City now, establish positions in City Council, and have a stronger voice in the Island’s future direction and development.

Many James Islanders prefer the Town. According to Garman, following the first incorporation, “Residents say they created nothing short of magic in their days as a town. Long neglected sections suddenly got streetlights and sidewalks. The Town paid Charleston County to clean every island drainage ditch, ending a longtime problem with flooding during heavy rains” (in Riddle, pg. A17). Drawing from its three million dollars in reserves, the town also started a Little League program, a Community Center in the black neighborhood of Honey Hill, a bicycle path, and had begun constructing a 35-acre park with sports fields. The Town also claims to have staved off development in its jurisdiction. According to Town Council Member, Joe Qualey, “If there’s a death knell for this Town, you folks better close your windows, and put on your earmuffs, because you’re going to be overwhelmed by the sound of chainsaws and bulldozers” (Town Council Meeting, 2005).
Whether or not the City of Charleston will find new legal grounds on which challenge the Town remains to be seen. Since its first attempt at incorporation in 1992 “Laws have. . . changed, and Clark [the town mayor] believes the 2006 incarnation of the town will stand” (Charleston Post and Courier, Aug. 28, 2008). Many James Island residents continue to back the town and believe that it is a progressive political project. As it could potentially stave off development, and perhaps displacement, most black residents of James Island support the town’s incorporation. The Town Council also includes representation from the island’s prominent black communities, which is lacking in the Charleston City Council.
While the Town does offer potentially progressive possibilities, however, both the City of Charleston and the Town of James Island are legal entities with spatial jurisdictions. The fundamental spatially-oriented purpose of both political organizations has important communicative and cultural implications. In terms of the communicative models that they favor, arguably both the City and the Town are ultimately biased toward technologies of transmission and transportation which are required to bind and reinforce their spatial jurisdictions. While I do not wish to diminish the progressive possibilities of either the Town of James Island or the City of Charleston, it is important to question how both reflect, produce, organize, and administrate a space of development on the island that is primarily defined in terms of political and economic purpose.

**Communication, Real Estate Development and African American Communities: A Cultural Perspective**

Ironically, today, much of the marshy waterfront property that was considered undesirable and given or sold to the former slaves by the plantation owners has become some of the most highly valued property on the Southeastern coast, and is perceived by developers as a space of opportunity. Increased market value assessments and subsequent tax burdens make it difficult for the recent generations of farm families to survive on larger tracts of land, particularly on the waterfront. Also, many of the Gullah’s ancestors, who acquired land following the Civil War, were not instructed to properly deed their property. As a result, hundreds or even thousands of their descendants can possess shares of property, none of which is clearly demarcated, either spatially, or by percentage of ownership. If a single heir, even one who has never set foot on James Island, can be convinced to sell his or her share, then that share must legally be “cut off” from the rest
of the property. Since shares are not clearly delineated, legal disputes can arise where the sale of a greater number of shares, or even all of the property, is forced by the courts.

The twentieth century trend in land sales has meant a reorganization of the black family on James Island, and elsewhere in the Southern region. Many black families migrated North after freedom, a trend that increased following World War I. Urban black families usually did not have access to land, and therefore did not practice the family commune structures found in the South, in which multiple kin occupied a small family village. Land lost much of its significance for Northern blacks, and “When urban heirs sell family land in the South upon the deaths of their parents, the southern black family can be affected” (Whitehead, pg. 155). Still, “Although black families are rapidly losing their land in the South, family land that resembles small villages with multiple households of related units is still visible in many places” (ibid, pg. 154).

While the informal land arrangements of African American communities can be subject to exploitation by developers, it may also to some degree be these very land arrangements, and their debt to understandings of land forged within the early cultural intermixing of Natives and blacks, that protect Gullah land and culture from real estate development. In order to develop the land, it must first be understood within a particular “grid of intelligibility,” in which it is literally divided into grids, assessed for value, taxed, considered in terms of easements, and so forth. Often developers are hesitant to get involved with property in which the ownership is unclear, as it can lead to unforeseen financial problems. Before the property can be exploited, either through heirs, property laws or by taxation, it must be subject to Eurocentric knowledge about development and valuation of the land upon which these strategies depend.
The production of knowledge about the “need” for development is often oblique, and usually takes form through commissioned reports about the needs of the island’s population, such as the construction of schools, bridges, and public utilities (all of which raise property values). The sets of knowledge produced about development are usually scientific and empirical, and taken as self-evident, in terms of statistical observations about “traffic-density” or the need for a new school because of population “overcrowding.” While these “improvements” that such reports call for generally do fix the perceived problem, at least for a time, they also increase property value, and add infrastructure that paves the way for further development on the island.

Once infrastructure and development are implemented, and property values rise, they come to redefine standards of life for people already living on the island. Development is perceived as not only beneficial, but as necessary to rural and “impoverished” areas. Such a trend lines up with other instances of development found in many places around the world. Arturo Escobar (1995) explains that poverty on the global scale was a discovery of the post-World War II period. In colonial times, the European colonizers did not believe in or recognize the capacity of natives to “develop” themselves, technologically or economically, however, it was recognized that native societies were capable of accommodating conditions of poverty through community, frugality, and self-sufficiency. Conditions of “poverty,” did not emerge until after “the spread of the market economy broke down community ties and deprived millions of people from access to land, water, and other resources. With the consolidation of capitalism, systematic pauperization became inevitable” (Escobar, 1995, pg. 80).
A contradiction of capitalist development on James Island is that it produces the very conditions of poverty, or “lack,” “deficiency,” or “backwardness” to which it then responds. In interviews I conducted with African Americans living on the island, they explained that “poverty” occurs because they no longer have access to certain resources on the island. One interviewee explained that private waterfront developments and docks have been built where people once fished. Another interviewee explained that property taxes make it impossible to earn a viable income from farming. Discourses of “poverty” or “lack” must first be naturalized before development can redress their apparent social and economic problems on the island.

A close examination of discourses of the island’s development reveals that even the more liberal, “social work” oriented attitudes and the desire to intervene progressively into the economic conditions of poverty are symptomatic of the same economic discourses that produce rural African American poverty in the first place. Many older people on the island, supposedly living in poverty, say that as children growing up on the island, “they were poor, but didn’t know it.” One woman explains that there was always enough food to eat, and if her family ever needed anything, they could get it from a neighbor. The son of a farmer recalls that all his community needed from the outside, were truckloads of free lime for planting that the government would drop off on the island. Writing of the influence of modern development and a cash economy, and

40 Author’s Interview, Thomas Johnson, 2004.
41 Author’s Interview, Anonymous, 2004.
42 Author’s Interview, Ethel Campbell, 2004.
43 Author’s Interview, William Saunders, 2004.
diminishing communal traditions in the Sea Island region, Emory Campbell (2009) explains:

The biggest impact has been the need for cash. The old culture known as the Gullah, and just now being recognized as a major heritage, had existed without the need for cash. Everything the Gullah people needed was done by them, among them, and you might say, in coordination with the entire community. If you needed a net knitted, you knew where the net knitter was. You shared information. All of a sudden, development and the need for cash comes. Now on the island people have to buy food, look for a better way to fix the roof, or equip their homes, but since they don’t grow crops or maintain a tool shop, and since they have a job that takes all their time, and hardly ever get to go fishing, they realize they have changed day-to-day occupations and a way of life” (In Cross, pg. 51).

In African American life during the pre-, or perhaps proto-capitalist conditions on the Island, it seems there was simply not a widespread sense of poverty, or of lack or deficiency. Current interventions into the “poverty” of African American communities then, do not counter the forces of capitalist development, rather they are symptomatic of them. Such examples point to the need for greater intervention in the field of culture and discourse, rather than a narrow focus on the political and economic dimensions of development.

And, arguably, the concept of “developed land” that already exists in many African American communities is more beneficial than that of the new suburban developments, both from an environmental and social standpoint. For example, in a James Island Journal article, Eleanor Kinlaw-Ross (2004), a former resident of James Island writes, “James Island became synonymous with nature, open spaces, clean living, and people whose motives were understood from the first ‘hello.’ It was good country with a way of life that people now travel to exotic islands to find” (pg. 5-B), and “Once an innocent portrait of natural beauty and authentic culture, James Island and its future
are now awash in ugly tones of greed and exploitation” (pg. 5-B). Today strip malls, fast food restaurants, and housing developments have taken over the land. Traffic is a problem, in spite of the bigger highways and bridges that have been built.\textsuperscript{44} It is clear that the Island’s economic infrastructure cannot support its rapidly expanding population. Planners project that if Charleston proceeds to develop James Island, then its population will grow from 29,969 (1990 population) to 43,599 in the year 2015.\textsuperscript{45} Ross writes, “no one would imagine that this is the same island once inhabited by generations of country folks- grouped together by less than two dozen last names- who were self sufficient and steeped in a rich and abiding culture” (pg. 5-B).

While it is possible to romanticize the island’s past, in which it had a black majority and unique culture, the point is not that “things were better back then,” as the histories of slavery and Jim Crow attest. Many of the island’s black elders remember tough times growing up in the era of segregation. As a form of progress, development has arguably marked many positive improvements for African Americans on the island, such as running water, sewers, electricity, and increased access to educational, social, and cultural resources. However, it is still important to look closely at development as “modern progress;” to not accept a broad and universal definition, but to look more deeply at specific instances of development, and determine what the pros and cons are, who benefits the most and why.

\textsuperscript{44} LPA Group, Transportation Consultants (Oct. 2001).

\textsuperscript{45} Charleston County Planning Report (2002).
Local Media and Development in Sol Legare and Grimball Farm

As I mentioned previously, commercial development has occurred increasingly over the past decade in two of James Island’s prominent African American communities, Sol Legare and Grimball Farm: A Piggly Wiggly supermarket was constructed at the entrance of Sol Legare, and a new public school was constructed in the Grimball Farm neighborhood. Shortly after these developments took place, a development firm, the Ginn Company, cleared land for an upscale housing development in the Grimball Farm community. While development has occurred increasingly in an around Sol Legare and Grimball farm, much of their rural character still remains. If one looks at a Google Earth map of the areas (accessible by typing “Sol Legare Rd.” in the program’s search engine), many of the farm tracts referenced by early twentieth century maps are still visible in satellite images.46

Commercial development in the Sol Legare and Grimball farm neighborhoods began in the mid twentieth century when a company that fabricated steel window and door guards located on the uninhabited eastern side of Sol Legare Island. Today, the company no longer exists, but fallow fields were used as dumping areas, and one can still find ample evidence of the company’s activities (Trinkley, 1984). In the 1970s, the Sherman Agency built a suburban development on the same eastern portion of the Island, constructing “six paved roads, each 24 feet wide with a 50 foot right of way. . . [along with] two lakes and the placement of underground sewer, water, electric, and telephone lines” (Trinkley, 1984). The company also subdivided land into two hundred and sixty 0.13 to 0.23 acre lots. These developments were consistent with the aforementioned trend

46 See Figure 3: Map of Gimball Farm and Sol Legare. Sol Legare is the island at the bottom portion of the map. Grimball Farm is located on the peninsula to the north of Sol Legare.
of commercial development occurring all over James Island during the later part of the twentieth century. For the most part, however, the Grimball Farm and Sol Legare communities remained unchanged until the housing boom of the 2000’s.

Figure 3: Map of Grimball Farm and Sol Legare (Google Map Image).

Around that time, a common assumption in the local media seemed to be that land in and around rural African American communities on James Island was ready for development, and that this development would be a form of “progress” that could bring these communities into the modern world. For example, Charleston’s Deputy Assessor,
Bobby Cole (2003), is quoted in a newspaper article addressing the possibility of condominiums being built in the Sol Legare community: “You can ride out there and see a lot of potential with all the waterfront property, but no one has come forward to exploit it. It’s like a time warp out there” (pg. 1A). Phrases such as “see a lot of potential” and “it’s like a time warp” imply that the community is backward, and needs to be developed and brought into the twenty-first century. Apparently this was to be accomplished through the building of condominiums. But the logic of this assumption is questionable: the community already existed in the twenty-first century. The community only appeared to be behind within a perspective that conflates the “progress” of real estate development with a particular notion of cultural development that assumes a people’s way of life is behind the times.

Media coverage of development in the Sea Islands has been often been regarded as untrustworthy within the islands’ black communities. According to Cornelia Bailey of Sapelo Island:

The media portray it as development coming down as savior. . . a long time ago our savior [was portrayed as] the slave master, who got us out of Africa, and put clothes on us, and taught us how to talk and so forth. . . because we were like infants, that we were trying to learn something and blah blah. They brought us in modern society and henceforth here we grew. And so, the media today is doing a thing like that. . . so big development will come in and help the community and bring jobs and various things. And it doesn’t work that way. . . I got a paycheck but at what price? The only thing they want you for is to sweep their floors, swab their commode, and gas up their cars and trucks or chauffeur them somewhere. . . There are places where people are working as gardeners and maids in places they used to own. It’s like a slap in the face.  

There are many cases in which the ultimate effects of developments on James Island do not match with the logics of “modernization” or progress upon which they are

47 Author’s Interview, 2005
initially based. For example, in an article “New Day Dawns for Students in Schools on James Island” (Charleston.net, August 10, 2003), school development, including a new elementary school constructed in the community of Grimball Farm is framed as being a solution to problems of education. Throughout the story, renovation and construction of schools are portrayed for the most part as positive developments; updating classrooms with new technology, expanding facilities to accommodate population growth, and allowing new courses. The assumption that increased education is progress is hard to argue against. The article says very little, however, about any negative influence that school development might have, with the exception that some parents are concerned about the racial makeup of school districts. However, these concerns are offset in the article by its inclusion of a statement that numbers indicate a fair racial balance in most schools relative to the island’s population, as well as the opinion expressed by the school superintendent that current numbers showing a racial imbalance are inaccurate and could not be correctly determined until the school opens.

The article fails to mention that in some ways, school construction is a kind of “trojan horse” that often precedes an increase real estate development in the community and surrounding areas. The construction of schools increases the exchange value for people profiting from land development, since new schools make the area more attractive for investors. In a National Association of Realtors “Public School Toolkit,” which provides tips for how realtors can improve public schools, NAR president Al Mansell (2005) writes:

> Every REALTOR® knows what surveys and studies confirm: The quality of public schools influences where people buy a home and what they pay for it. Regardless of whether they have children, buyers care about the
reputation of the local schools because they know that schools directly affect a community's vitality as well as a home's resale value (pg. 1).

While improved schools do have educational benefits, the black communities at Grimball Farm and Sol Legare fear that the subsequent development and tax burden may lead to the dislocation of people whose families have lived there for generations. Tom Johnson, a resident of James Island, gesturing to the newly constructed James Island Elementary School, explains:

We’re looking at preparations being made for future growth and development in this area. This is a recently constructed elementary school, which is good planning in a sense of speaking, built to anticipate the growth that will happen here in the next few years. The only negative aspect of that is that on this end what we’re looking at, what was once a plantation, Grimball’s plantation, which was once farmland, and so forth; many parcels of that are going to be sold, if it hasn’t been sold, and the kinds of homes that’s going to be constructed there and developed there, will be those of high income. What I’m talking about, is probably starting around two hundred and fifty thousand, and who knows, maybe going up to five, six, or seven hundred thousand. But the negative impact will probably be on those individuals that’s been here for the last sixty or seventy years or longer, whose home are not worth near that much. But the tax impact, the impact that it will have on these homes and these individuals.

About six months following my interview with Johnson, the *Post and Courier* announced that the Grimball tract was sold to the Ginn Company. The article contains quotes, mostly from the company’s president, Bobby Ginn, that reference the purported benefits of developing on James Island: “We like the proximity to the historic district” (2005, pg. 7-B), and “We like the river frontage, the views, and it’s a size that suits us.

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48 Actually, property values were greater than Johnson’s estimate (which was given before the property went on the market). At that time, before the housing crash of the 2000s, smaller lots without constructed homes were selling for $525,000. Larger lots and those with homes constructed on them were projected to sell for more than one million dollars.

49 Author’s Interview, Tom Johnson, 2004.
We think it’s a well-located and attractive property that’s ready for development” (pg. 7-B).

A few months later, the same author who wrote the Ginn Co. article wrote, “Plan for James Island Raises Concerns.” This second article reported on the development’s social and economic problems. Concerns of a longtime Grimball Farm resident are expressed: “Williams and his neighbors are bracing for a potentially jarring transformation of this sleepy rural setting, as a Florida-based developer is proposing to take a fallow but prime piece of farmland just up the road and turn it into an upscale subdivision for well-heeled homebuyers” (2005, pg. 1-A.), and “He (Williams) expressed frustration that the new land owner, the Ginn Co. hasn’t made an effort to meet with the community and explain its plans” (ibid).

As an example of the media’s relationship to development, it is important to recognize that while the newspaper “reports” on development, the framing of discourse in the report can also have an active hand in its promotion. The newspaper circulates knowledge about development, for example, what benefits new schools will bring, the real estate section’s “hot” properties, and the socioeconomic problems that development might cause. To understand the kind of knowledge about development that the newspaper produces, however, it is important to understand the newspaper’s own involvement within the region’s economic relations. According to Logan and Molotch (1987), “Most newspapers . . . profit primarily from increasing their circulation and therefore have a direct interest in growth” (pg. 70). Within the newspaper’s circulation area, a consensus is formed about development’s supposedly progressive tendencies. As a space-binding medium, the newspaper is materially capable of circulating knowledge across geographic
expanse and fostering a common cultural perception of development as a general form of progress.

In a spatially-biased society that confuses and conflates “development,” and “progress,” it is difficult to decide how a truly-progressive development in rural black communities could or should proceed. On one hand, the conveniences of modern life, and the new social and economic opportunities opened by development may be worthwhile. On the other hand, development often relies upon a vague notion of “progress,” and incorrect, yet naturalized ideas that rural black communities are “behind the times” or that a “new day will dawn” with development. Such assumptions obfuscate development’s real material benefits (or lack thereof). To understand the true pros and cons of modern development, its specific instances must be examined in concrete detail.

The recent economic downturn beginning in 2008 has provided a pause during which development in black communities can be reevaluated. The downturn stalled the Ginn Corporation’s development plans, leaders of the black community have been in contact with the company, and a dialogue concerning the development has begun. In a 2009 interview, Frazier told me, “Thomas Johnson and I have been working with the Ginn corporation. . . we have been instrumental in relaying to the Ginn Corporation how the people feel and I think we made progress on that.” For now, the future of the development in and around the Sol Legare and Grimball Farm communities is uncertain.

Communication and the Future of Development on James Island

According to Mary Ann Twining, recent developments on many South Carolinian Islands, “threaten the serene beauty of the islands, as well as the cultural integrity of their Afro-American folkways, which have few defenses against the advance of mainland-
originated technology‖ (pg. 223). One such trend is the proliferation of communications technologies that have been key to the promotion and subsequent administration of development. Television news stories about traffic jams, property listings in newspapers, and the availability of land plots and tax assessments through online sources are all good examples. In addition to circulating knowledge that benefits developers, these media also marginalize those who do not have access to modern communication technologies, and form part of a basis for their exclusion from the political and economic processes of modern development.

Increasingly, communications technologies are used to bypass local places in real estate development. Ken Hillis (1999) critically examines the realization of disembodied space in capitalism as a disarticulation of places in virtuality; “Such a conceptual overlay is crucial for the spatial mobility of capitalist production and accumulation activities increasingly dependent upon the political disarticulation of one place from another” (pg. 133). The internet, for example, eliminates geographic distance and allows for the development of a real estate market with less face to face interaction, particularly in terms of personalized searches for property and the potential to browse photographs and virtual images of property online. Building on Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) concept of the medium is the message, Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) argues that in the realm of electronic media “where we are physically no longer determines where and who we are socially” (pg. 115) and “the once consonant relationship between access to information and access to places has been greatly weakened by recent changes in communication media” (pg. 117). For example, when place no longer binds real estate development transactions, investors from inside and outside of the Charleston area, and even from outside of the
Southern region of the United States, can conduct real estate deals on the Island from a distance and with minimal, or in some cases no, face to face interaction. The internet facilitates the marketing of the property to individuals outside of the local area, and eliminates the necessity of face-to-face interaction, not only with realtors on the island, but also with the potentially dispossessed.

A proliferation of communication technologies functions as a means of “modernization,” “progress,” and “development” of rural lands and cultures in the Sea Islands. As the islands’ real estate is bought and sold, generations-old black families are persuaded or forced to sell, and younger generations assimilate into “mainstream” culture. Older forms of ritual and oral communication increasingly disappear from the islands’ cultural landscape.

African American cultures, however, have survived on James Island for centuries, and will continue to do so. Maintaining the African American cultural legacy and history with integrity, though, is one of the Island’s most important and difficult goals. Hanging in the balance of today’s development, is “transformation and preservation—these are really the same thing—of those parts of our past, those achievements of our history that we deem so crucial that we cannot get along without them.”\(^5^0\) Caroline White, who grew up on James Island and practices the art of Gullah storytelling warns, “We don’t want our children to forget our culture; where the ancestors came from, where they came to, what they had to do to make a living; that these children today are surviving off some of those same things.”\(^5^1\)

\(^5^0\) Tyson, Timothy (2007) *South in Black and White*. Lecture Series.
\(^5^1\) Author’s Interview, Ethel Campbell, 2004.
One part of that survival involves a concern with how land ownership, in a broader sense of familial care, contributes to the welfare of future generations. Such concerns with landownership were developed in resistance to an oppressive colonial social order, the residual effects of which continue today in the political and economic practices of expansive land “development” into black communities. Historically, European conceptions of politics and economics served the function of spatially expansive land ownership and development from the days of “settlement” to the present. “Politics” and “economics,” then, are difficult terrains of struggle on which to fight development, as they have been and continue to be an integral part of its process. Rather than focusing on the politics and economics of development, as much of the popular discourse does, shifting the fields of struggle more toward communication and culture holds potentially progressive possibilities. Both environmentally and socially, a ritually-oriented communicative/cultural view of land ownership offers an alternative to the transmission model of land ownership and spatially expansive development. For the transmission-oriented culture, shifting understandings of communication about development toward the ritual model advanced by Carey can allow a consideration of how society will be maintained over time, rather than how it will use (and ultimately exhaust) resources in the quest for spatial expansion.

From a theoretical perspective, Carey’s models provide a starting point for the project of understanding problems of communication, culture, and development on James Island. The models allow a shift of overcommitted focus on development as a matter of “politics” or “economics,” and more toward an examination of how politics and economics are themselves cultural concepts, situated in time, and supported by modern
technologies of transmission. Finally, Carey’s models can point to how development might be imagined differently, and possibly beneficially, if reframed in accordance with the tenets of a ritual model of communication. From such a vantage point, one can see that development is enacted over and over again, as a ritual representation of modern beliefs. In practice, however, the environmental, economic, and social consequences of these beliefs do not line up with the ritual’s fundamental purpose of maintaining society over time—an issue which I explore in the following chapters.
CHAPTER THREE:
Communication and the Preservation of Sol Legare’s Seashore Farmers Lodge 767

This chapter examines efforts to preserve a building once used by an African American mutual benefit society in James Island’s Sol Legare community. Particularly, the chapter focuses on the role that different media have played in the preservation effort, and uses a variation of “medium theory” developed by Harold Innis to understand how different material structures mediate the experience of culture surrounding the Lodge. Innis’s theorization of the bias of communication was greatly influential in Carey’s formulation of ritual communication, and provides insights into relationships among communication technologies, cultural constructions of time and space, and social power. While exploring how Innis’s theory can inform understandings of the media’s involvement in a local preservation effort, the chapter also addresses some problematic aspects of Innis’s theory for the purposes of contemporary cultural analysis and localist studies, including what some cite as its reliance on technological determinism, and political economy at the macro-level of state power. Using the Farmer’s Lodge as a specific example, the chapter also looks some implications of Innis’s “plea for time,” a call to check the spatial bias of modern communication, and imagines how it might inform progressive communicative and preservationist practices.
**Background of the Lodge Preservation**

Seashore Farmers Lodge 767 is located in the centuries-old black community of Sol Legare. Though considered a part of James Island, Sol Legare is actually a separate island that is connected to the main island by causeways. It is a place of haunting beauty, in which small homes built in the early part of the last century are interspersed among large live oaks, old dirt roads, and small fields. A paved road runs down the length of the island along a spectacular view of marsh, creeks, and oyster fields. Most of the people living in Sol Legare are descendants of slaves who worked on the island when it was a plantation. They live on the same tracts of land acquired by their grandfathers and great grandfathers following the Civil War, and many still farm, shrimp, oyster, and crab, a way of life that has sustained the community for generations.

Recently, the small rural community has received unprecedented attention in the media, including television news coverage, Web-casts, and newspaper articles surrounding its effort to preserve one of its historic buildings, the Seashore Farmers Lodge Hall No 767. The lodge is one of the last remaining of what were once common structures of mutual benefit societies that formed a part of Southern black communities. In 1907, W. E. B. Du Bois wrote, “No complete account of Negro beneficial Associations is possible, so large is their number and so wide their ramification” (pg.92). Their function, Du Bois writes, was “partly societal intercourse and partly insurance. They furnish pastime from the monotony of work, a chance for parade, and insurance against misfortune. Next to the church they are the most popular organizations among Negroes” (ibid). Through slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation, lodges were centers of black political and social life, and, collectively, an institution that helped people survive when they
didn’t have enough food, could not afford insurance for their crops or healthcare, and lacked access to recreation areas used by whites. If a member did not earn sufficient income from crops, or “defaulted” at the end of a growing season, the Lodge would help provide seeds for the following year. If a member of a Lodge’s family was sick, a committee would take care of them and provide assistance with maintaining their household.\textsuperscript{52} The Lodges were also sites of traditional rituals, such as prayer meetings, funerals, and social activities that reinforced communal values. According to Thelma Gilliard of Sol Legare, “This speaks to the culture, the way of life, of how people supported each other. Laughed together. Cried together. Felt each others pain. . . This was a focal point” (In Behre, 2006, pg. 1).

In interviews conducted for an application for the National Register of Historic Places (2007), community members remembered activities of Lodge meetings:

Meetings were held the 2nd Monday of the month at 3:00. Members were mostly family members of original Lodge members and were mostly residents of Sol Legare, though some were from “over the pond.” Members brought their children into the Lodge. The Lodge rituals were typical of secret societies; according to the lodge’s ritual booklet, the room was arranged with a table in the center with an open Bible and a 2-foot triangle before the table known as the “Altar of Justice.” The Lodge had a secret grip and other secret knowledge. At meetings, the Lodge members conducted business, such as checking to see if memberships were up-to-date, had reports of officers, balloting on applications for membership, and initiation of new members. The Seashore Farmers’ Lodge also rang out with song during meetings, as members sang songs that are not in the ritual book, including spirituals such as ‘Swing Low, Sweet Chariot’” (pg. 8)

By the first part of the past decade, the Lodge building was in danger of collapsing. In 2006, the structure’s porches were gone, its longest walls were barely

\textsuperscript{52} Nickless, Karen, 2007
supported by braces, and a blue tarp covered the top of its roof.\textsuperscript{53} Due to the deterioration, Bill “Cubby” Wilder, a member of the Sol Legare Community, feared that, “If we don’t get it this year, it may cave in on us” (in Behre, 2006, pg. 1). In 1989, Hurricane Hugo caused heavy damage to the structure. A decade later, Hurricane Floyd left the building in even worse condition. According to Behre, the building “has stood empty for more than a decade, and the passing years have not been kind. Glancing at it these days is interesting and sad, not unlike driving by an auto accident” (ibid). In another article, he writes:

> There's a certain evocative beauty to the ruin that is the Seashore Farmers' Lodge No. 767. Most of its wooden siding has shed its paint and is bending, making the boards look more like the trees from which they were hewn. Its patchwork of tin on the roof is rusting in places, which makes it resemble the soil from which the metal was mined. Flowering plants try to climb the side. . . The only problem here is, it's about to fall down (2008, pg. 1)

Today, the Seashore Lodge is one of four original Lodge buildings that remain on James Island. One of these buildings, located on Camp Road, has become a black nightclub.\textsuperscript{54} The other two structures are located along Riverland Drive within a couple of miles of the Seashore Lodge. One of them has become a hair salon, and has lost much of its original appearance, since the wooden walls have been covered with cinder block.

Eugene Frazier (2009), a James Island historian, estimates that the original structure at that location was built between 1730 and 1750. The site has special historic significance, since in 1876, James Island African Americans voted there for the first time.

\textsuperscript{53} See Figure 4: Seashore Farmer’s Lodge 767 Prior to Restoration.

\textsuperscript{54} See Figure 5: B and B Nightclub.
The other nearby lodge, known as the King Solomon Lodge Hall, has been purchased and renovated by a private owner. Of the changes to that building, Behre (2006) writes:

While that restoration may keep the Solomon building from any kind of imminent collapse, it also has brought on a series of changes that have eroded some of its original look and history. For instance, the building has been jacked up a few feet. Its porch has been stripped off, and the front facade has a new lunette window and a far fancier front door. It may survive, but in a different, less authentic form (pg. 1).

Behre also writes “With so many of the island's lodges disappearing, the stakes are even higher for those hoping to preserve the Seashore Farmers Lodge, which still could take its place as one of the most significant landmarks built by the island's black community after the Civil War” (ibid). Yet many residents of James Island do not know of the lodge’s significance. Doug Bostick, a local historian says “it's shocking. . . how little of the island's history, including these lodges, is understood, even by those who have lived on James Island a long time” (in Behre, 2006). The importance of preserving the Lodge and educating the public about its history also extends beyond the island. In a local ABC newscast, Ernest Parks (ABC News 4, 2009), a member of the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare, explains, “The history of this hall is very, very important, not only to the town of James island, not only to Charleston, not only to South Carolina, but to the United States as well, and it’s our job to ensure that this hall is renovated and shown to the public.”

55 See Figure 6: King Solomon Lodge Hall
Figure 4: Seashore Farmers Lodge 767 Prior to Restoration (Corie Hipp).

Figure 5: Band B Nightclub (Author’s Photo).
The Lodge Restoration as a Media Event

The media have played a crucial role in the Lodge’s preservation. In fact, the preservation effort was not fully funded and launched until its restoration became the subject for an episode of *The Real Estate Pros*, a reality television show on The Learning Channel. Before the involvement of the show, Bill “Cubby” Wilder, a citizen of Sol Legare, estimated that the cost of the Lodge’s restoration would be about half million dollars. The Town of James Island set aside $50,000, other organizations contributed funds, and the community held fundraisers, such as oyster roasts and a fish and chicken dinner. These fundraising efforts alone were not enough, though, and it was not until early 2009 that full funding was secured when a company named Trademark Properties
partnered with local businesses, donors, and volunteers, and helped document the restoration for *The Real Estate Pros*.

The involvement of national cable television is important to consider, as it changes both the character and the scale of the local preservation movement. According to Richard Davis (ABC News 4, 2009) who works with Trademark, and is from the local area (though not from the Sol Legare community), “if you can’t make a difference in your own back yard, you know, what can you do, so this was something that, this is where we’re from, it’s what we know, and we feel like it’s a good time to get involved.” Through the show, the local restoration project was documented, represented for television audiences, and brought onto the stage of national culture.

As the crew of the show and volunteers performed the Lodge’s restoration, maintaining the authenticity of the lodge, and preserving its local character were of great concern. According to Davis, “This thing [the lodge] needs to be painstakingly put back together, methodically, exactly the way it was built” (ibid). In order to be certified as a historic structure at least fifty percent of the original materials had to remain in the restored building. Corie Hipp, of Trademark Properties, kept a running blog with photos of the restoration, and maintained an online community organized around the event. Throughout Hipp’s daily blog, local aspects of the preservation effort were highlighted.

By June 7th, 2009, the restoration was for the most part complete.56 Hipp writes:

> What a day - just when people thought it could never be done, the lodge was able to host its first gathering in decades. With a beautifully landscaped front yard, ferns hanging from the porch, and a host of updated touches - the Lodge was open for visitors. The neighbors came over for lemonade, tea, cake, and to take a look at all of our hard work. Bruce Faw, local artist, is going to

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56 See Figure 7: Seashore Farmers Lodge After Restoration. See also Figure 8: Volunteers and Neighbors Celebrate the Lodge Restoration.
sell us a painting he did in 2008 to hang in the museum. All is well as we move onto the next phase in this historical project - updating all the amenities to present day. This includes electrical, plumbing, and ADA compliant updates. Shortly thereafter, we will delve into the historical portion, which will be the items we display to educate future generations. 

Figure 7: Lodge after Restoration (Corie Hipp).

http://sollegare.shutterfly.com/ (last accessed Aug. 20, 2009)
In addition to Hipp’s blog, local media covered the preservation effort, including newspaper articles, and local news coverage of the Learning Channel’s involvement in the restoration. The media not only represented the event, but also helped to coordinate the social networks surrounding it, including Sol Legare residents, volunteers, people of African American and white communities, local businesses, Trademark Properties, the Learning Channel, and local and national audiences. These overlapping communities and interests involved face to face interaction among people in concrete places, in situations such as volunteer work days, fund raisers, and television crews. Other social interactions
occurred through media environments and across different physical locations, through blogs, Web casts, and local news.

Harold Innis’s “Medium Theory” as Method: Contemporary Challenges

In examining the preservation effort, it is important to look at how the Lodge, as a part of a mediated event, is undergoing substantial changes, and becoming something other than what it once was. Understanding these changes requires not just analyzing content about the lodge that is circulated in the media, but also considering the media themselves, or as Marshall McLuhan stated in his famous aphorism, considering that *the medium is the message*. Of McLuhan’s theorization of media, Katherine G. Fry and Barbara Jo Lewis (2008) write, “Through their [the media] logic, we come to view, hear, and understand the world by their technological and symbolic dictates . . . each medium is unique. Each requires something different from us, and each shapes our understanding in a different way” (pp. 4-5). Following from this basic understanding of medium theory, one might look at how different media surrounding the Lodge shape people’s understandings and experiences of local preservation and transform the social relations that are involved. Moreover, one might consider how the Lodge itself is a kind of medium, in so far as it is, like other media, a material structure that both reflects and shapes the social organization of the community in which it exists.

While McLuhan is famous for popularizing his particular brand of medium theory, and is a good entry point for discussing some general ideas of medium theory, the theoretical tack of this chapter focuses more on the work of one of McLuhan’s mentors, Harold Innis. McLuhan was greatly influenced by Innis, particularly by Innis’s concept of media as a social environment. Before turning to Innis’s theory as an analytic for the
Lodge preservation effort, however, it is first important to consider some of medium theory’s ideas and problems, elaborate a bit of its intellectual history and decide how it might (or might not) be applicable for the purposes of contemporary cultural analysis in a local setting.

Medium theory has a somewhat contentious history within cultural studies, in part because of McLuhan’s influence. In his essay, *Further Notes on Marshall McLuhan* (1972), James Carey examines how McLuhan’s brand of media theory both borrows from and depoliticizes the work of Innis. McLuhan and Innis both divided history into transformative media epochs. While Innis conceptualized a history in which the biases of media created “monopolies of knowledge” for the dominant culture, McLuhan (1964, 1995) divided history into oral, written, and electronic medium-periods. The last of McLuhan’s periods, the electronic, leads to the coming of a utopian “global village.” Unlike Innis, and importantly for current readings of Innis and medium theory more generally, McLuhan’s narrative does not emphasize the dangers of institutional control of the media. Carey attempts to rescue Innis from the influence of McLuhan, writing, “McLuhan’s revision of Innis seriously dilutes the substance of Innis’ scholarship and greatly modifies the political implications of media analysis” (pg. 2). Particularly, Carey is concerned with McLuhan’s account of the electronic revolution, which he deconstructs as a “messianic narrative” with roots in the utopian fantasies of the mechanical revolution, and states:

The reality is quite different. Whether the new technologies remove or intensify conflict, heal or increasingly fragment personality, expedite life or harry it, make life more manageable or more alien depends ultimately on the interests, values, and priorities the technology serves. . . and that is a political question (pp. 8-9).
In *Space, Time, and Communications: a Tribute to Harold Innis* (1989), Carey explains that the legacy of Innis (and by extension McLuhan) is rooted in concerns of the Chicago School of sociology, which saw communications technology as the key to improving the quality of politics and culture, and transforming, in Dewey’s terms, the great society created by industry into a great community and nation. While inheriting a useful perspective of “communication as the entire process whereby a culture is brought into existence, maintained in time, and sedimented into institutions” (Carey, pg. 144), Innis did not succumb to the more romantic tendencies of the Chicago School. Rather, he:

took the concerns of the Chicago School and, with the unvarnished eye of peering across the 49th Parallel, corrected and completed these concerns, marvelously widened their range and precision, and created a conception and a historically grounded theory of communications that was purged of the inherited romanticism of the Chicago School and that led to a far more adequate view of the role of communications technology in American life (pg. 145).

Lawrence Grossberg (1997) explains that Innis’s concern with the bias of communication and monopolies of knowledge developed at the margins of two empires: “The British Empire, with its great burden of tradition and history, was seen as embodying a time bias, and the American empire, so conscious of its spatial freedom and so committed to control across space, as embodying a space bias” (pg. 41) and “it was natural to interpret the uniqueness of the Canadian experience in the possibility of mediating between the two” (ibid). The media bias allowed a unique understanding of how material structures of technology and imperial culture functioned at a particular historical moment. According to Carey:

All scholarship must be and inevitably is adapted to the time and place of its creation. That relation is either unconscious, disguised, and indirect or
reflexive, explicit, and avowed. Marx was among those who understood that scholarship must be understood in terms of the material conditions of its production as the prerequisite to the critical transcendence of those conditions” (pg. 148).  

Similarly, Stuart Hall (1996) argues that what is stable in cultural studies is a Gramscian understanding of “conjunctural knowledge”—knowledge that exists within the context of particular historical and political circumstances. He also argues that within the interventionist project of cultural studies “historical junctures insist on theories: they are real moments in the evolution of theory” (pg. 105). Innis’s theories emerged within a particular national context, with specific concerns of nationalism, empire, trade, and geography. Within contemporary contexts of Communication and Cultural Studies, however, Innis’s theories need be adapted in order to meet present historical demands, particularly in so far as they narrowly focus on political economy at the macro-level of state power, with analysis limited to economic determination in the last instance, as well as technological determination.

If the apparently grander historical claims of Innis can be separated from his useful method for mapping the relationships between monopolies of knowledge, material structures of technology, and the biases of time and space, then his work remains useful for the endeavors of contemporary Communication and Cultural Studies. Cultural Studies rigorously defines itself against sweeping political economic narratives of history and

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58 See the introduction of this dissertation in which I discuss Carey’s coupling his own theory with an intellectual history of communications.

59 Here, some delineation of “cultural studies” is necessary. Grossberg (1997) notes that the term “Cultural Studies” has come to function as a banner under which a very broad range of progressive critical academic work labels itself, but also has a narrower sense as a particular set of intellectual and political practices. Here, the term refers to cultural studies of the “Birmingham” model, a field that strives for radical contextualization and historical specificity to understand the workings of culture (Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler, 1992).
seeks instead to understand the inter-workings of culture and specific “capitalisms.” According to Grossberg (1995) Cultural Studies recognizes the existence of economic determinants, however, it also recognizes that the economy is not the only determining factor: “Cultural studies believes that culture matters and that it cannot simply be treated (dismissed) as the transparent—at least to the critic—public face of dominative and manipulative capitalists” (pg. 76). Good Cultural Studies argues that any cultural difference, “whether race, gender, class, sexuality, and so forth—is articulated to and by other differences. And the ways in which they are articulated make a difference in the formation of specific capitalisms (in particular countries, for example) rather than to some abstract capitalism” (pg. 73). While Innis’s theory has a strong political and economic dimension, Grosserg (1997) and Berland (1999) have recognized that it is more complex than a simple deterministic theory of political economy and need not be incompatible with contemporary Cultural Studies. And scholars such as Sarah Sharma (2008), and others, have productively used Innis’s theory as a useful method for understanding relationships of time, space, culture, and social power in specific and concrete settings.

While it has been criticized as grand theory, Innis’s work can also be usefully read as being more specific, concrete, and diagrammatic; mapping the material circumstances of the Canadian fur trade, for example, rather than as presenting an abstract grand narrative for all of time. And with respect to the charge of technological

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60 See Blondheim (2004).

61 Sarah Sharma (2008) looks at how taxis in Toronto work as “a labor intensive medium [that] mediates the relationship between culture and power, specifically in terms of time” (pg. 458).

determinism, perhaps the concept of “bias” can be read as something more flexible, and less absolute than that of determinism. Different mediums do not always work in terms of an either/or spatial or temporal effect, and their relationship to culture is not always certain. An easily disseminated and space-binding medium, such as video, for example, could also be used for more temporal and ritualistic purposes, such as home movies. Furthermore, if it is read with a softer, more variegated notion of determination, in which “the reality of determination is the setting of limits and the exertion of pressures, within which variable social practices are profoundly affected but never necessarily controlled” (Williams, 1990, pg. 130), a media bias does not necessarily foreclose the possibility of other determinants. Rather, along with other determinants, it can “set limits and exert pressures, but neither wholly control nor wholly predict the outcome of complex activity within or at these limits, and under or against these pressures” (ibid). Sut Jhally (in Acland, 1999) usefully sifts through Innis’s supposed technological determinism for a technological “framework of possibilities and parameters—the limits and boundaries within which social power (as well as modes of cognition) operate” (pg. 253). While the bias can be a framework “of possibilities and parameters” for understanding social power, it should not be read as a universal one. Depending upon the project that one is undertaking, the media bias can be a useful theory that elaborates the functioning of a particular force which may operate powerfully at certain moments, and possibly in combination with other forces.

In addition to understanding and questioning the apparent “determination” of Innis’s theory, I also wish to extend the theory’s concepts of power and control, particularly regarding its conception of how the media bias aligns with particular types of
knowledge that empower a ruling class. For the purposes of contemporary cultural analysis, and for understanding the Lodge preservation effort more specifically, Innis’s concept of monopolies of knowledge can be complemented and enhanced by a Foucauldian notion of knowledge and power. A Foucauldian analysis of power does not stop at examining the activities of those who supposedly have the power to make choices, the “decision-makers,” such as a member of a ruling class or a government official. For “even if we reach the point of designating exactly all those people, all those ‘decision-makers,’ we will still not really know why and how the decision was made, how it came to be accepted by everybody, and how it hurts a particular category of person, etc.” (Foucault, 1988, pg. 104). A more in-depth analysis requires studying the “strategies of power,” or “the networks, the mechanisms, all those techniques by which a decision is accepted and by which that decision could not but be taken in the way that it was” (ibid). The strategies of power go hand-in-hand with the production of knowledge and truth; a particular field of knowledge will dictate who is put in a position to speak, and from what authority. Rather than trying to discover a narrative of how human consciousness is changed by those who control the monopoly of knowledge, it is more productive to turn analyses toward the formation of discourses and the genealogy of knowledge, and to look at the monopoly, “not in terms of types of consciousness, modes of perception and forms of ideology, but in terms of tactics and strategies of power” (Foucault, 1980, pg. 77). 63

For the purposes of contemporary and local cultural analysis, Innis’s theory benefits from a careful reading and consideration of its focus on state-level political

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63 In this discussion, Foucault is not referring specifically to Innis, but to a Marxist notion of ideology. By extension, I am arguing here that the concept of monopolies of knowledge supposes the control of human consciousness as a means to empower a ruling class—and that it is more productive to look at control in terms of tactics and strategies of power.
economy, supposed reliance on technological determinism, and conceptions of power. More specifically for my project, his theories provide valuable insight for understanding the restoration of the Seashore Lodge at Sol Legare as a media event. As a structure that has been in the community for centuries, and that functioned to maintain communal values and social ties, the Lodge can be considered a time-biased medium. Current television, print, and Web coverage surrounding the lodge, however, are transient, quickly disseminated, and can be considered as spatially biased media. While separations between these types of media can be drawn, they do not function exclusively from one another, or in contradistinction relative to a sense of place. Rather, their combination represents a particular configuration of time and space that, along with articulations of cultural difference, shapes particular social organizations and experiences of place.

**Mediation of the Lodge and a Changing Sense of Place**

According to Ken Hillis (1999), “place can be conceptualized as drawing together. . .the spheres of nature, meaning, and social relations”, “Place offers a means to center phenomena”, and “An experience of being in actual places suggests something of the agency that resides in phenomena”( p. 133). Place is distinguished from a virtual space in so far as “Places are not arithmetically proportioned,” whereas a Western European conception of space is absolute “geometric space (that) assumes an empty field onto which humans can place discrete and mutually exclusive locations as points on a grid” (ibid). The Lodge, as a place, intersects with the absolute spaces of media technologies on an experiential level. Therefore, it is important to examine the new forms of social organization, and different forms of agency and identity that are being produced (or limited) through the preservation effort.
In response to a modern “crisis” of space-time compression, some scholars argue for a kind of return to place. Edward S. Casey (1993) argues, for example, within the modern world, “place has come to be not only neglected but actively suppressed” (pg. xiv). Casey associates the suppression of place with the dominant modern natural and social scientific discourses of absolute Time and Space, which have relegated “place” to the position of an “impoverished second cousin” (pg. xiv). “Places” that are mapped upon a Euclidian-Newtonian sense of absolute space and time are homogeneous and interchangeable, defined by objective measures. Casey laments the loss of place, and claims that we are experiencing nostalgia for the places we have despoiled, a symptom of “the profound placelessness of our times, in which we have exchanged place for a mess of spatial and temporal pottage” (p. 38). Left floating in a placeless world, we live without any of the phenomenal resources, such as ecosystems, familial ties, memories, and landscapes that are the markers of places and identities.

Casey seeks a reversal of this trend through an attention to and caring for place that are rooted in a phenomenological understanding. In the 1950s, Martin Heidegger formulated ideas of “location” and “region” in contrast with space, a theme which Casey picks up with respect to how our phenomenal experience of “being in the world” is situated according to our position in place. Understanding the uniqueness of place and its experience becomes important, particularly as we face a modern anxiety of being “unplaced” that gives rise to a kind of “ontomania” that seeks to fill the placeless world with objects, “to fill up, to populate, the empty field with as much determinate Being as possible (p. xi). Casey calls for us to “get back into place,” to understand our phenomenological rootedness, and live with attention and care to the special places that
we inhabit, while also continually journeying to and affirming the particular spirit of other, different, places.

Other scholars have argued that a “return” to place is nostalgic and reactionary, as it strives for stability rather than transformation. Some accept, and even embrace the “disappearance” of place. Rather than striving for a return to place, Doreen Massey (1994) provides a concept of local place, in which social process and conflict are keys to understanding how “the local” is constituted. The boundaries of the local are never in stasis. They are permeable, ever-changing, vary over time in their geographical form, and their spatial dynamic is constantly shifting in a “social geometry of power and signification” (pg. 3). Rather than assuming that space-time compression is a disturbing threat to place and identity, Massey asks, “Why should the construction of places out of things from everywhere be so unsettling? Who is it that is yearning after the seamless whole and unsettled place? A global sense of place—dynamic and internally contradictory and extra-verted—is surely potentially progressive” (pg. 143).

Joshua Meyrowitz (1985) thinks of transformations in media in terms of a changing social stage on which our various roles and senses of appropriate social behavior are altered. He further argues, building upon Irving Goffman’s (1959) idea that social roles are best thought of in the context of the places in which they are performed, that in the realm of electronic media, “the once consonant relationship between access to information and access to places has been greatly weakened” (pg. 117). Supposedly access to information and social life with no sense of place will blur traditional distinctions among social groups; “Formerly distinct groups not only share very similar

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64 For example, see Brockelman, Thomas (2003) for a critique of Casey (1993), particularly concerning the purportedly reactionary tendency of “Being in place.”
information about society in general, they also share more information about each
other—information that once distinguished ‘insiders’ from ‘outsiders.’” (pg. 131). While
Meyrowitz’s work contains many useful insights about how electronic media bypass
local place in the formation of social bonds, he, like McLuhan, tends to see the historical
and social transformations of media in rather grand terms:

. . . the social explosions of the 1960s, the many “integration” movements
(blacks, women, elderly, children, disabled, etc.), the rise of malpractice
suits, the development of “halfway” houses for prisoners and the mentally
ill, the decline of the nuclear family and the rise of the nuclear freeze
movement, and the trends toward living alone and “living together.” The
theory suggests that a broad, seemingly chaotic spectrum of social change
may be, in part, an orderly and comprehensible adjustment in behavior
patterns to match the new social situations created by electronic media.
(pg. 9)

In Meyrowitz’s vision, media become a driving force of historical change as they
create new social and “placeless” geographic situations to which people adjust their
social behavior. However, as Robert Kubey (1992) notes, these changes could also be
attributed to a broader array of cultural, social, and economic factors. For the purposes of
understanding the Lodge preservation effort, a “grand” historical approach does not
sufficiently explain the specific material circumstances of media, and changing
relationships of time, space, sense of place, culture, and social power surrounding the
Lodge.

Ritual Communication and the History of the Seashore Farmer’s Lodge

More fully understanding the Seashore Farmer’s Lodge, and its current
intersections with media technologies, first requires understanding the Lodge both within
its concrete historical context and within the ritual forms of communication that have
sustained its surrounding community for centuries. Very little written history of Sol Legare is available. Elias Bull (1970) notes that the island is named after Solomon Legare, a wealthy planter who appears in the 1830 census, and once owned the island. An 1879 plat of a Solomon Legare tract (probably of a later generation) near the island suggests that Legare owned, “a variety of tracts, either for cultivation, livestock grazing, or speculation” (Zierdon, in Trinkley, 1984, pg. 9). No antebellum plats or written references to the island’s name exist. A map surveyed by the United States Army Engineers between 1823 and 1825, titled Charleston Harbour and the Adjacent Coast and Country, shows eight structures on the Western third of the island, seventeen structures near its middle, and fourteen cultivated fields. An 1863 map titled Charleston and Its Defenses shows the island divided into seventeen fields, with twelve structures along a main road, suggesting, “a single large cotton plantation with a main structure and a slave row” (pg. 9). According to the slave schedule from 1850 to 1860, the Legare family owned two hundred slaves, including thirty mulattos, and according to oral history accounts, “the Legare family rented their slaves out to other plantations as hired hands” (Frazier, 2006, pg. 154). The first written records of the island’s name appear in 1888 documents that refer to “Legare’s Point” and “Sol Legare’s place,” By 1919, the United States Geological Survey published a map that labeled the island “Sol Legare.”

Michael Trinkley (1984) writes that “the occupational pattern of the island quickly spread out during the postbellum, probably as a result of freedmen beginning to operate small farm and mills on the plantation” (pg. 11). The 1919 Geological Survey Map shows fifty structures, mostly on the Western side of the island, that were probably occupied by black farmers. In 1942, a Highway and Transportation Map of Charleston
County shows long linear lots, each of about 15 acres, and oriented perpendicular to the length of the island, thirty-eight occupied farm units and thirty-four vacant units, all of which were likely held by blacks, and some of which could have been tenant dwellings. The map also shows four homes not associated with farming, three business establishments, one white church, and one black school.  

Oral histories of African Americans living on James Island today describe the lives of farming and fishing families living in Sol Legare in the early to mid twentieth century. Florence Left Walker (2006) remembers:

when every road on this island was dirt. When I was a little girl, my sisters Elouise, Lottie, and me would go crabbng, pick oyster and fishing with my grandpa. We also had to go on the farms, pick cotton, beans, potatoes, corn, cabbage, peas, and collard greens, like all the other girls and boys. . . Those were hard times. The plantation owners paid us one cent a pound to pick cotton (in Frazier, 2006, pg. 161).

Mamie R. Chavis (2006), another resident of Sol Legare, remembers “many times I went in the creek with my daddy to fish, crab, and pick oysters to sell to help pay the bills. My daddy was a farmer and among the vegetables he planted was cotton.” and “I hated looking down them long rows of cotton bending my back over all day” (pg. 158). Though agricultural work on the Island was hard, there were few alternatives. Some blacks worked at a cigar factory in Charleston. Others were able to find employment at a naval shipyard. The military was also an option (or a draft requirement), but mostly only for men. Chavis remembers:

I got married in 1942, boy was I glad. I thought I finally got away from farming that’s what I thought. Calvin’s family was also doing farm work, I found myself right back doing the same thing. Nine days after Calvin and I got married, he was drafted in the army. . . during those trying times we

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65 Trinkley, 1984, pg. 11.
survived because we believed in God and treated everyone the way we wanted to be treated” (in Frazier, 2006, pg. 158)

According to Frazier, Chavis is one of the last blacks living on James Island, “who deeply believed in a tradition known as ‘old-time religion.’” which “meant before you could become a member of one of the churches on the island, you would have to go out in the wilderness and pray and be led by the spirit into the church” (2006, pg. 158).

Frazier, who interviewed Chavis, had his own recollections of black religion on the Island:

It was a time when the majority of blacks on James Island was poor and appreciated simple things such as the ability to eat two meals a day. It was a time when we clung to our religious belief in God in order to survive during those turbulent years of manual labor working in the cold, rain and hot sun to earn enough money for the bare necessities of life (pg. 159).

Frazier explains that the Lodge Halls were important centers of religious ritual and “were used primary in African American communities . . . as a prayer hall. African Americans got together in a community and prayed in those halls, usually on a Tuesday, a Thursday, and a Sunday evening.” The Halls were also important centers of information and communication in a rural area with no telephones and few automobiles.

A drum that was beat at the Hall signified important news in the community:

in the early days of the African American there were no telephones, and James Island were primary farm and woods. In other words, you would very seldom see an automobile when I was a young boy growing up. And in those halls for example, someone get gravelly ill, or die, an there was no transportation, the secretary of that lodge hall would open that lodge hall in that community, and if a person died, they would send the oldest son to that hall and the secretary and the drummer would beat that bass drum and you would hear them say ‘boom, boom’ and people in that community would put their eldest son on a horseback or a mule, whatever they had

66 Authors Interview, 2009.
and send them into the direction until they find the lodge hall where that drum were being beat, and there they get the message that Mr. so and so or Missus had passed away, died, expired. That’s how they use it, for the information. There were no telephones. That’s one of the way in which they communicate by the drumbeat. ⁶⁷

The Lodge Hall was constructed with communal concerns in mind, and had committees that would distribute food and care for the sick:

If an African American in the community is sick, that committee would have a group of ladies or men break down so many nights or days to stay with that sick woman while her husband went to work. And if it was in the summertime they would have cardboard or paper to try to keep that person cool, and tell that person either to get better or either expire or die two people would stay with them. In the community, there wasn’t much food. So if one member of that community kill a hog they would then cut that hog up and then send each person in the community a piece of meat. They also had a committee if some one doesn’t have enough food to survive, you could send from your house to the next door neighbor, and send his son or daughter. Go get some coffee or sugar and tell miss so and so when I get paid I’ll send it back to you. ⁶⁸

Over generations, the Hall helped the Sol Legare community to survive. Today, the community of the Lodge Hall is still intact, though membership has dwindled. The Lodge once had as many as 150 members, but today membership ranges from 50-70 (Fennel, 2009). Even after agriculture began to wane as a way of life on James Island in the early twentieth century, the Lodge remained a social hub for hundreds of members of the black community living on the southern side of James Island. In 1953 a pavilion named Mosquito Beach opened on Sol Legare’s Western side, and the Lodge’s role as a social center diminished. (Behre, Robert, 2008). When the Lodge Hall fell into disrepair, members began holding meetings at the nearby Sol Legare Community Center. Shortly

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.
before renovations began on the original building, Edward Wilder, who has been president of the Lodge for twenty-five years, said that even without their original building, the Lodge members were still dedicated to the core mission of the lodge, which is helping each other, especially in the tough economic times.⁶⁹

_The Battle of Sol Legare_

Recently a historical marker was placed in front of the Lodge that commemorates the Civil War Battle of Sol Legare (1863) that was fought nearby.⁷⁰ In the battle, three companies of the 54 th regiment of all black soldiers, made famous by the Hollywood film _Glory_ (1989), faced a Confederate brigade commanded by General Alfred Holt Colquitt. It was the regiment’s first experience of combat and a very significant moment of black military history, in which “the 54 th would be a constant source of interest to the press and the public as a measure of African American performance in battle” (Sutherland, 2003, pg. 171). On July 16 th, Colquitt’s brigade, which contained about 3,200 troops, left nearby Seccessionville and attacked the James Island lines. The 54 th was able to hold the lines against a Confederate cavalry attack followed by an infantry assault. Most of the men killed or wounded during the engagement were from the 54 th. Although the Union was defeated in the battle, the 54 th’s resistance allowed most of the troops to escape, and in its first test of battle, the regiment gained recognition as an effective force. (Sutherland, 2003, pp. 366-367).

Members of the Sol Legare community are very proud of the regiment’s history. On a segment of the ABC News 4 show _Lowcountry Live_ (2009), Ernest Parks, a member

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⁷⁰ See Figure 9: Battle of Sol Legare Historical Marker in Front of the Lodge and Figure 10: Battle of Sol Legare Historical Marker.
of the Concerned Citizens of Sol Legare, appears in a Civil War Northern uniform, sings amazing grace, and tells the story of the battle:

I remember, it was a bitter cold winter December of 1862 in Massachusetts. America decides she gonna let the Negro get in on the fight to preserve this Union and to prove that, that we are men. But hell, we were always men. God made us men, and that was established from the foundation of the world. But in the name of labor, they made us slaves. And then when they needed our force, they made us soldiers. We’re soldiers from the North, the 54th Massachusetts regiment. . .”

At a later point in the program he recounts some details of the battle with pride:

A general named Johnson Haygood and his men tried to trap us by coming into Sol Legare Island and cutting us off, but he was about to see something he never saw before, blacks in blue. There were three groups from the 54th standing strong that day. Strong on Sol Legare. Yes sir, I’ll never forget that day, July 16th 1863. ‘Johnny Reb’ moved out from Seccessionville.

Figure 9: Battle of Sol Legare Historical Marker in Front of the Lodge (Richard Edling).
On July 18th 1863, the regiment was ordered to Morris Island to lead an assault on Confederate controlled Fort Wagner\textsuperscript{71} in what proved to be a “disastrous and glorious action” (Sutherland, 2003, pg. 172). During the battle, Sergeant William H. Carney rescued the regimental flag from the fallen color sergeant and became the first African American to be awarded the Medal of Honor. Though the 54th was defeated in the battle and suffered enormous casualties, they contributed to an eventual Confederate abandonment of the Fort, and forever changed the public perception of African American soldiers.

Figure 10: Battle of Sol Legare Historical Marker (Richard Edling).

\textsuperscript{71} As I have mentioned earlier, this was a famous battle depicted in the film \textit{Glory} (1989).
No marker can completely capture a historical event, and in contemplating a monument that shapes public memories, one might also be prompted to consider what has been left out.\textsuperscript{72} For example, though they sacrificed more in the battle of Sol Legare and the attack on Morris Island than the white soldiers, the 54\textsuperscript{th} regiment, and its sister the 55\textsuperscript{th}, were not fairly compensated. When they enlisted, both regiments were told that they would earn the same money as white troops, who were paid thirteen dollars a month. The agreement was not kept by the government, however, and the troops were only offered ten dollars a month, minus a three dollar clothing allowance. The regiments refused the unfair pay and demanded full compensation. On several occasions, Washington tried to compensate the troops with ten dollars, but they refused each time. In September 1864, the government agreed to pay the survivors what they deserved, a sum of around $170,000 (Sutherland, 2003)

The new historical marker at Sol Legare is important, as it makes black history on the island visible over time, and also defines the senses of place and cultural identity surrounding the Lodge. Julie Riesenweber (2008) writes, “Most value places because of the memories associated with them, because these memories and the attached places are part of who they are” (pg.30). Different media, such as the historical marker and the film \textit{Glory} do not simply reflect a static history, but shape memories that are attached to places. In terms of preservation, Riesenweber writes, “what is important is not that which is unique and monumental, celebrates success, fits into some canon, or has remained unchanged but that which most decisively shapes how we view and interact with the

\textsuperscript{72} A point made by Blair in \textit{Collective Memory} (2006).
world” (ibid), and “Preservationists thus might follow cultural geographer’s lead in asking not simply what landscapes reflect, but also what they shape” (ibid).

**Communication, Preservation, and the Future of the Seashore Farmers Lodge**

Throughout its history, different types of media have supported different kinds of knowledge about the Seashore Farmers Lodge and the Sol Legare community, aligned with different conceptions of time and space, and shaped different types of social organization. Tracing these historical developments gives insight into how the Lodge’s preservation is understood today, how different media might shape the Lodge’s story, and who should be authorized to represent it. Using Innis’s theory as a lens, one can see that mediations of the Lodge are central to preservation. Depending upon the media and the cultural groups involved, the Lodge’s preservation may require the participation of many media forms: a television episode, a blog, a Web cast, a museum, a meeting place, and a historical marker. The important question, following Innis, is what forms of media will improve (or impair) the quality of politics and culture surrounding the Lodge, a question that he saw in terms of achieving a balance between the demands of time and space.73

James Carey and Jody Berland provide useful insights into Innis’s challenge. Of space-binding technologies, Berland (1999) writes, “Shaped by their commercial and geographic context, these technologies facilitate the ongoing production of centres and margins – that is, spatially differentiated hierarchies of political economic power” (pg. 282). In Berland’s understanding of space-binding technologies, space is not simply a fixed entity that is commanded by imperial powers, rather, it is produced; “the product, not the predecessor of colonizing practices” (pg. 288). Following from Innis’s concept of

73 See Innis (1951), *A Plea For Time*, pp. 83–89
the time-biased tradition of orality, resistance to the spatial strategies of the center depends upon reclaiming communication as a practice of dialogue “that shapes and is shaped by the exigencies of power” (pg. 306). Resistance is located in the margin, which is defined as “any site that enables communities to employ cultural technologies as counter-hegemonic tools” (pg. 306). For the purposes of understanding the Lodge’s preservation, one might consider how cultural technologies are being employed, and ask questions about how different media marginalize (or centralize), the degree to which they enable (or disable) dialogue, and what forms that dialogue might or can take. For example, a television program and a blog produce very different kinds of “preservation” involving different audiences, margins, opportunities for dialogue, and forms of political practice.

While Berland focuses on how political action could possibly occur within the space of post-colonial cultural technologies, Carey focuses on how cultural resistance could happen outside of technologies of transmission. A compelling aspect of Innis’s theory is the idea that a space-bound society can be balanced by the spontaneous, flexible, and time-biased spoken word. Carey explains, “speech is the agency of creative thought” and, “It was precisely the imbalance between the processes of creativity and dissemination that Innis sought to correct” (pg. 166). And Innis (2004) writes that by “attempting a balance between the demands of time and space we can develop conditions favourable to an interest in cultural activity” (pg. 379). Witnessing the rise of mass media in the twentieth century, Carey, influenced by Innis, “realized that these developments had effectively destroyed traditional forms of communication, including older forms of media, as potential sources of public conversation” (Hardt, 2009, pg. 185). Carey saw
restoring face to face public dialogue as a way to improve the quality of communication in a society that has come to passively receive politics through technologies of transmission. In a time when culture and politics are heavily mediated and spatially “unbalanced,” it is important to create opportunities for James Islanders to have face to face dialogue, to imagine and develop new languages about preservation and development, and new public forums in which to express them.

The approaches of Carey and Berland offer different ways to imagine the role that media should (or should not) play in the Lodge’s preservation effort. Returning to Innis, with Carey and Berland’s additional insights, an emphasis on time and dialogue seems appropriate for the project of the Lodge’s preservation. Mr. Frazier says that he would like it if at least one of the old Lodge Halls could be used as a museum in which people could learn about their historical function, and in which members of the community would be present to have face to face conversations with visitors. He supports the idea that the black community could continue to hold political and social meetings there, as they did for generations. Edward Wilder Jr., who has been president of the Lodge for 25 years, says that his goal is also “to transform the Lodge into a museum and to leave a lasting legacy for future generations” (NBC News 2, 2009). As both a monument and a site of ritual, the Lodge should continue to serve the community and maintain its sense of collective memory with integrity. Wilder’s wish is “That my children, grand children, and great grand children would be able to realize that this monument here is something that their grandparents was involved with, and that this is home for them” (ibid).
CHAPTER FOUR:  
McLeod Plantation and the Politics of Place

This chapter examines the ongoing dialogue and debate among different preservationist groups about how best to preserve James Island’s historic McLeod plantation. Different groups have argued whether the plantation, which has fallen into disrepair, should be renovated as a School of the Building Arts, a preservation park, or an addition to the College of Charleston campus. In terms of its historical and cultural value, the material structure of the plantation is unique, and offers a significant opportunity for preservation. However, as a cultural object, the plantation has also become problematically commodified. Increasingly, the feasibility of preservation efforts depends on their ability to be objectified and consumed in some way; in the case of the plantation, as a tourist site or a college experience. Within the economic constraints of modern preservation, physical structures can often become a kind of museum or academic space in which communication tends to be one-sided and organized around imparting information for consumption. Using Carey’s theory of ritual communication as a method of critique, this chapter argues that “preservation” is only effective to the degree that it stimulates interaction and conversation among people. Restoring the physical structure of McLeod is a starting point. Maintaining the site as place of ritual communication, in which citizen communities are created and sustained over time is the ongoing and more difficult work of preservation. With this in mind, the chapter also argues that McLeod
would best be preserved as a dynamic interactive and interpersonal educational site oriented around producing a public history of the African American majority that built, inhabited, and defined McLeod as a place for most of its history.

**Background of the McLeod Preservation**

McLeod plantation was started in 1670, shortly after Charles Towne was founded. The plantation is located on the northern side of James Island at the meeting point of the Wappoo Creek and the Ashley River, and has been called “the gateway to the Sea Islands” (Fennel, 2008, pg. 8A). At its height, the plantation covered more than nine hundred acres of high ground, and seven hundred and seventy-nine acres of marsh. Excavations of the property have uncovered over ten thousand artifacts that span Native occupation of the land, the Colonial period, Revolutionary War and Civil War. There is also a slave cemetery containing nearly one hundred graves.

Arguably, the plantation is one of the most important sites of African American history remaining on James Island, and as a citizens’ preservationist group, the Friends of McLeod, proclaims that it “stands as one of the few places where African-Americans can show their children the evidence of the unending struggle from bondage to freedom . . . This is a place where people can trace their families through the many graves of people who lie buried there, their spirits still attached to this piece of land.” According to Carol Jacobsen (2007), a member of the Friends, "It would be devastating to the Gullah/Geechee community if anything happens to the (slave) cabins.” (in Hankla, pg. 1) Of the place’s meaning, she reflects, "Mothers and fathers and children being sold off because of any talents they may have and never knowing what happened to their own

family — it’s not a picture to explain, but a feeling. The cabins hold their souls and spirits” (ibid).

Today, only a fraction of the plantation remains intact, including one field, six slave cabins, a barn, kitchen, dairy, gin house, and main house. The plantation is surrounded by suburban development, shopping centers, and a busy road, across which lie a McDonald’s and a bank. Jason Hardin (2004) writes, “It might not be easy to imagine for drivers zipping by on Folly Road, but the plantation has a rich history that, in many ways, is a microcosm of the Lowcountry’s story” (pg. 1). Through the lens of McLeod, one can trace many different parts of the island’s history, including “the first white settlers, the rise of slavery, the Civil War and the rapid suburbanization of the 20th century” (ibid).

In 1990, Willie McLeod, the plantation’s last private owner, died in the same room in which he was born, at an age of 105 years. In his will, he left the remaining plantation property to the Historic Charleston Foundation with the understanding that its rural character would be preserved (Watts, 2004, pg. 1). The will reads in part:

I direct that Historic Charleston Foundation Inc. place restrictive covenants on as much of the above described property as possible so as to preserve my residence as a single-family residence, to preserve Oak Avenues and to provide that as much of the property as possible be restricted to single family residence or residences having the lowest possible density (McLeod, pg. 5).

According to director of the Historic Charleston Foundation, Katherine Robinson (2004), the Foundation was instrumental in protecting the property following McLeod’s death. Mcleod and his sisters had willed the property to thirteen non-profit organizations

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75 See Figure 11: Slave cabins at Mcleod Plantation, Figure 12: Cotton Gin at McLeod, and Figure 12: Main House at McLeod.
that could possibly sell, subdivide, and develop the property. The Foundation raised the capital to preserve the property and acquired undivided title to ensure its protection.

Restoring and maintaining the property, however, proved very costly. In addition to other expenses, the Foundation spent ninety thousand dollars in archaeological research, performed a costly restoration of slave cabins damaged during Hurricane Hugo, and spent one hundred thousand dollars to research the feasibility of turning the plantation into a museum. The Foundation decided that it could not continue to support ongoing restoration and operating expenses, and “thus the Foundation’s challenge was . . . to find a buyer who also had demonstrable financial resources and commitment to responsibly complete its costly restoration and subsidize its ongoing operational expenses beyond potential administration fees” (Robinson, 2004).

The plantation was sold to the Charleston College of the Building Arts in December of 2004 for eight hundred and fifty thousand dollars. According to Robinson, the School was a good fit for the plantation, and “Mcleod, which is listed on the National Register of Historical Places, will be protected by restrictive easements. The College will repair and preserve structures on the site and won’t build new ones” (in Fennel, pg. 8A). According to the Colby M. Broadwater, president of the College of the Building Arts, the “college’s ‘short’ and ‘midterm’ plans include putting the administrative offices at the plantation, and long-term plans include classrooms and workshops at the site. Students could help restore historic structures while they are studying how they were created” (ibid). In January of 2005, the School received a $2.75 million grant, awarded under the Workforce Investment Act, to underwrite its educational programs. According to Mason Bishop, U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of Labor, who delivered the grant, “Our
government is concerned about the lack of quality trained craftspeople in the U.S” (in *The James Island Journal*, 2005, pg. 3), and “We believe that our American culture is represented both in our historic structures and in the ideas that future generations of builders will help make a reality” (ibid).

The vision of McLeod’s preservation articulated by the School and the Historical Foundation seeks to simultaneously preserve a plantation while also preserving an important set of building skills. The idea has generated a great deal of controversy. For example, in an election debate, Bob George, an incumbent City Councilman, and challenger Kathleen Wilson disagreed over the best use of the property. George called the College of the Building Arts’s Plan an “abomination,” that would destroy “sacred, hallowed ground” (in Slade, pg. 3B) Wilson, however, maintained that the “site and the college are a ‘good fit’ and the best alternative found by the foundation” Wilson also asks, “What better way to preserve a plantation than to teach the building arts at that plantation?” (ibid).

In response to the Foundation’s plans, the Friends of McLeod organized and incorporated an alternative preservation effort. The Friends are comprised of diverse groups, including descendants of slaves that worked on the plantation, Civil War historians, and longtime and newcomer Anglo and black James Islanders. The group claims that the College of the Building Art’s “proposal to build 21 new structures (60,000 square feet) on this property will permanently and irreversibly alter the fields where so many people gave us our history, the cemeteries that remain to be delineated, and the archaeology that will tell us the story of McLeod's people,” and protests, “We cannot allow this destruction. For the Indian tribes, the various owners of the land, the slaves
who built this Sea Island plantation into a great agrarian complex, and the troops who served there, it must be saved. The soul and the memory of those people are still there.”

As an alternative to the Foundation’s plans, the organization’s mission statement reads:

Friends of McLeod, Inc. is dedicated to preserving and protecting all aspects of McLeod Plantation, including its house, slave cabins, outbuildings, cemetery, oak allees, woods, and character-defining fields. Friends of McLeod, Inc. will inform and educate the public on the plantation’s historical importance, military history, and particularly its importance in African-American history, from slavery to the Civil War to freedom. Friends of McLeod, Inc. will inform and educate on the plantation’s agricultural history as a Sea Island plantation, and will work to protect its remaining rural vistas. The organization is also dedicated to protecting the plantation as one of South Carolina’s most valuable Archaeological sites (Friends of McLeod, Inc., 2007, pg. 2).

In pursuing their alternative plan of preservation, the Friends of McLeod face a difficult legal battle. In a Post and Courier article defending the Historic Charleston Foundation’s actions, Robinson (2004) notes that G.L.B. Rivers Jr., McLeod’s friend, and the attorney who prepared his will, “attended the City’s Planning and Zoning hearing last July and attested to the fact that Mr. McLeod confidently placed his faith in the Historic Charleston Foundation to find the best use for the property” (Robinson, 2004). Without clear legal recourse, the Friends of McLeod rely on fundraising and educational efforts to garner popular support and gain political leverage. In addition to hosting lectures on the plantation’s history, the Friends produced a fifteen minute DVD titled A Walk with History (2008) about the importance of preserving the plantation for future generations, and distributed it to local schools. Of the effort, Robinson remarks that it “It’s so odd that

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the Friends are going to distribute this to schools when the property does not belong to them” (in Fennel, 2008, pg. 8A).

Figure 11: Slave cabins at Mcleod Plantation (Author’s Photo).

Figure 12: Cotton Gin at McLeod (Author’s Photo).
For the Friends of McLeod, however, the “belonging” of the plantation is not only an economic matter, and ownership of the plantation is seen more in terms of historic connection. In the opening paragraph of a Friends of McLeod Inc. Newsletter, for example, the organization’s chairman, Jerry Owens (2009) writes:

Did you know that there are still many James Islanders who do not know about the impending loss of McLeod Plantation, this historic connection to our past? There are still others who think that the present owner will keep it perpetually as we see it today. Let others know that plans are still in place for new buildings and speak out! When the slave cabins are “adapted” into classrooms, and the main house is an office building, it will be too late (pg. 1).

Through the organization, members of the African American community have been able to express some of their concerns for the plantation’s preservation. Of the slaves and their descendants buried on the plantation grounds, Thomas Johnson notes that
“Their [slaves and their descendants] blood, sweat, and tears remain part of the spiritual connection at McLeod” (in Fennel, pg. A8). And of his concerns about locating the School of the Building Arts at McLeod, Reverend Charles Heyward explains “It’s painful for the African American community to preserve plantation life in any form and have the story of their ancestors forgotten and not properly recorded, properly documented and shared with a sense of integrity,” and:

I never worked to preserve any plantation. I want to see plantations die. But the group [Friends of McLeod] that gathered around preserving McLeod plantation made a commitment to make sure that the McLeod story was told in truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.77

Heyward goes on to explain, “I’ve had a change of heart on one side of the coin, because preserving the plantation also means preserving the culture, the history, the suffering, and the contribution that African Americans have made in this country” (ibid).

The Friends of McLeod articulate their vision for the plantation’s preservation in a six point plan: 1) converting the plantation into a passive park with an active Sea Island heritage center; 2) working with the Charleston County Commissioner, with plans of purchasing the plantation as a green space and multicultural center, and planning and obtaining grants for preservation and archaeology through the S.C. Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, and the S.C. Department of Archives and History; 3) interpreting the history of the plantation with the assistance of the Gullah/Geechee Nation; the agricultural areas with the aid of the S.C. Department of Agriculture, Clemson University; and the battlefields with advice from the Carolina Battleground Preservation Trust; 4) applying for grants to preserve the main house, the slave cabins,

77 Author’s Interview, 2005.
the outbuildings, and a more comprehensive archaeological survey; 5) adapting the barn, gin house, and the stables or carriage house as meeting areas, seminar rooms, and multipurpose rooms while maintaining the character of their exteriors; and 6) using other buildings to house components of preservation pathways and illustrate activities that took place at McLeod.78

The Friends’ plan includes six interpretive walkways, organized by color: A green path would offer a visual narrative of agricultural production on the plantation illustrating planting, harvesting, and cotton gin operation, and demonstrating the importance of Sea Island cotton to the economy of Charleston. The red path would mark a colonial road, and highlight military positions on the plantation spanning the Revolutionary and Civil Wars. A blue path would lead through the slave cabins and cemeteries to the Wappoo Cut landing, and back to the plantation buildings, and would offer “Gullah/Geechee” and “Slavery to Freedom” components. A yellow path would cover active archaeological sites. A purple path would cover the history of Post-Reconstruction Sea Island African Americans and would include a section in which visitors could listen to taped oral histories of black and white islanders.79

While the Friends preservation plan apparently has a lot to offer, it has yet to obtain funding and has been criticized as financially unfeasible. The Friends’ website lists 27 possible partnership and funding opportunities, including State grants, the International African American Museum, the Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Avery Institute of African American Studies at the College of Charleston. The Friends also claim that they can organize their effort as a successful non-profit, and that their

79 Ibid.
“plan is viable, affordable, and ensures that Mr. Willie McLeod's direction that McLeod Plantation be open to the public is met.” Restoration plans, such as converting buildings into useable space and rebuilding the dock on the Wappoo Cut, would be costly. Parking would also be an issue, though the Friends claim they could offer limited space at the plantation as well as bus visitors from other nearby parking lots. Perhaps the biggest issue would be the ongoing costs of maintenance, a problem which led the Historic Charleston Foundation to sell the property in the first place.

In 2009, the Friends gained new hope, when the American College of the Building Arts “dropped its controversial plan to use McLeod Plantation as a campus and, as part of an effort to repair the college’s finances. . . sold the plantation it bought in 2004 on James Island back to the Historic Charleston Foundation” (Slade, David, pg. 1). According to the College President, “It would have and could have been a wonderful place to do what we do. . . However, my mission right now is to get the college on sound financial footing” (in Slade, pg. 1). While the College has lost the claim to McLeod, the Friends have not won it. As of early 2010, the plantation is back in the hands of the Historic Charleston Foundation, which is still considering the best use of the property.

Most recently, the Historical Charleston Foundation considered selling the property for four million dollars to the College of Charleston, which proposed a plan of converting the property into an extension of the College’s campus. In terms of how it planned to use the property, the College was unsure, except perhaps for “building intramural sports fields which they said the landlocked campus desperately needs” (Knich, pg. 1B, January 17, 2010). George Benson, College of Charleston President, indicated that the College could also “use the plantation for many academic programs.

80 Ibid.
including archaeology and historic preservation” (ibid). In its consideration of the plan, the College also met with community members, including representatives of African American history and heritage groups. According to Kitty Robinson, executive director of the Historic Charleston Foundation, the Foundation was “delighted that the college is working on its plan. . . and listening to the community. . . It’s a thoughtful and inclusive process” (in Knich, pg. 6B).

As with its past proposal to sell the plantation to the College of the Building Arts, however, the plan to convert the plantation into a campus generated controversy, particularly among the Friends and some of their associate organizations. In a public statement, for example, Emory Campbell, chairman of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, indicated that the plantation “should be protected, preserved, and interpreted because of its importance to the history and culture of the Gullah/Geechee people” (ibid). And according to Michael Allen, coordinator of the Commission, “maintaining the integrity of the plantation house means preserving the house, fields, slave quarters, and landscape” (ibid). Dottie George, chairwoman of the Friends of McLeod, also averred that the Friends want “nothing on the fields. . . if we disturb the fields, we’re disturbing history” (ibid).

After meeting with community members and groups, and facing the controversy surrounding the plantation’s purchase, the College of Charleston elected to abandon its plans for McLeod, deciding “it could no longer justify the costs associated with purchasing, preserving and maintaining McLeod Plantation” (in Knich, February 17, 2010, pg. 1). Of its decision, Benson stated, "While we are disappointed with this outcome, we are also energized and inspired by the important lessons we have learned
and by the exciting new opportunities that have arisen between the college and the African-American community of South Carolina” (ibid). The Historic Charleston Foundation continues to own and maintain the property, and still awaits an organization that it deems suitable to meet the plantation’s continuing needs, one which understands that “In addition to lofty goals, it requires technical expertise, significant financial resources, a realistic business plan based on hard facts and market research, and an ongoing revenue source other than gate admissions, which will never be enough to support the plantation's restoration and ongoing operation” (Robinson, in Knich, February 17, 2010, pg. 1).

In the meantime, The Friends of McLeod continue their efforts to purchase, renovate, and preserve the property. For now, the plantation remains at a historical crossroads. Some have expressed a desire for the Charleston County Parks and Recreation Commission to assume control of the property and convert it into an agricultural park or community garden space, however, any formal discussions centered on this idea have yet to occur. In determining the plantation’s future direction, Tom Johnson, like many other African American James Islanders, continues to feel “personally that it should be used as place to teach us about the lifestyle, the hardship, and the difficult times that African Americans had to go through on these various plantations.”

81 See for example, Rhodes, Malcolm McLeod (December 30, 2009).
82 Author’s Interview, 2006.
Communication, Preservation, and Economics: a Ritual Perspective

As a method for understanding the McLeod preservation controversy more fully, I turn again to Carey’s conception of communication and the formation of common culture. John Pauly (1997) writes, that for Carey, “Our symbolic acts call society into existence and sustain its presence among us, making relationships amenable, investing the world with significance, offering us shared models of identity, tutoring us in common modes of interpretation” (pg. 4). By applying this broad framework to the McLeod preservation movement, one might ask how symbolic practice constitutes (or fails to constitute) the common cultural frames of reference within which efforts to preserve the plantation take place—and, hence, how controversy arises when visions of preservation are not shared. One might also ask how communicative and cultural practices surrounding different preservation efforts construct and maintain a consistent sense of preservation over time, particularly since preservation often implies something of a state of permanence.

By asking these questions through Carey’s theoretical lens, I wish to take issue with an increasingly prevalent idea that in order for preservation to be considered feasible, sustainable, and potentially “permanent,” it must first be valued and spatialized for consumption in some way, for example, through “significant financial resources, a realistic business plan based on hard facts and market research, and an ongoing revenue source.”83 In the case of McLeod, feasible options for preservation have conceived it variously as a museum, park, or academic space that can be continually consumed by tourists or college students. In terms of their communicative dimensions, these products must be consistent and controlled, are often one-sided, and organized around imparting

83 See Robinson, in Knich, February 17, 2010, pg. 1
information for consumption; for example in the form of a class lecture, a preservation trail, or a video about the plantation’s history. While I do not wish to diminish the progressive potential of these forms of communication, or deny the very real political and economic constraints that require them, it is nevertheless important to critically question and examine the types of preservation that they produce, particularly as it is becoming increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to conceive of forms of communication surrounding preservation which are not in some way motivated and rationalized by economic consideration alone.

In his essay, Communication and Economics (1997), Carey stakes out a political position in which he acknowledges that there are good reasons for academic trends that analyze economics as a particular type of communication, and also for the oppositional trend of understanding communication as derivative of economics. Carey, however, follows neither of these paths. Rather, he asks a more fundamental question: “What are the practical differences . . . between communication understood through the prism of the market and communication understood through the prism of community” (pg. 73). When applied to the case of McLeod’s preservation, Carey’s question gets to the heart of the problem, which is a contradictory tension between practices of communication for community and communication for economic purpose. Preservation is always in some way a statement of community values—some agreed upon conception of what is historically important, a representation of shared beliefs. However, modern “preservation” also often gets defined according to the interests of one group, for example a foundation or a school, and thereby conceived as a kind of “information product” that must be repeatedly consumed. I argue that within such an economic
capacity, this understanding of communication often limits, rather than expands, a sense of community\textsuperscript{84} surrounding a preservation site.

The contradiction of communication and economics with regard to preservation can be more fully understood within a wider context of Western thought. According to Carey, communication and economics are based on different premises and irreconcilable in practice, as communication is a resource that is “superabundant, free, [and] good,” while economics is the “practice of allocating scarce resources” (pg. 64). In the modern world, “communications . . . has itself been so transformed by the theory and practice of economics that the former (communications as a practice, meaning a resource) can hardly be recognized given the dominance of the latter” (ibid). Modern capitalism assumes that individual behavior is motivated within the free market. Within this free market, “the focus is upon individuals exchanging privately owned goods; the individual and the rights that accrue to the individual from ownership are the given of the economic mode of thought . . . “(ibid). These assumptions, however, also extend to other areas of Western life, in which “The assumptions of the market have so invaded and transformed all human activity and relations that little remains outside the imaginative orbit of the market” (pg. 67).

Carey further explains that the social itself has come to be conceived through market assumptions of the individual, and is oriented around neoclassical economic tenets such as maximizing behavior, stable preferences, and equilibrium.\textsuperscript{85} These

\textsuperscript{84} Here, I am indicating a dynamic sense of community in line with Carey’s ritual model, rooted in communication understood as process rather than product; communication as a symbolic process through which reality is “produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed.”

\textsuperscript{85} The assumptions of maximizing behavior, stable preferences, and equilibrium were developed by economist Gary Becker. In 1992, Becker won the Nobel Prize in economics “for having extended the domain of microeconomic analysis to a wide range of human behavior and interaction, including
assumptions are at odds with the practice of communication, since for Carey, communication forms the very basis of the social. In effect, economics suppress meaningful communication; however, communication can never be completely colonized. The communications side of the divide between economic and communicative practice always betrays “the individual,” and its accrual of individual property and rights, and asserts that “we are not bearers of self wholly detached from our aims and attachments; our preferences are not simply exogenous” (pg. 73). For Carey, language is inherently a shared social practice, created in the very act of sharing, and the process of communication is “not some mere transmission of language, an extension of messages in space, but the maintenance of society in time, not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs” (pg. 69).

In so far as communication, conceptualized through the prism of capitalist economic theory, serves the interests of a few and limits understandings and practices of communication to the transmission of a product, I argue that it also limits the potential of nonmarket behavior” (Press Release: The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel for 1992). Becker's research program:

is founded on the idea that the behavior of an individual adheres to the same fundamental principles in a number of different areas. The same explanatory model should thus, according to Becker, be applicable in analyzing highly diverse aspects of human behavior. The explanatory model which Becker has chosen to work with is based on what he calls an economic approach, which he has applied to one area after another. This approach is characterized by the fact that individual agents - regardless of whether they are households, firms or other organizations - are assumed to behave rationally, i.e., purposefully, and that their behavior can be described as if they maximized a specific objective function, such as utility or wealth (ibid).

Gary Becker and Kevin M. Murphy (2001) present “a testable, analytic framework for measuring how people make choices by including the social environment along with standard goods and services in their utility functions. These extended utility functions provide a way of analyzing how changes in the social environment affect people's choices and behaviors. More important, they [Becker and Murpy] also provide a way of analyzing how the social environment itself is determined by the interactions of individuals.”
preservation to serve the public good as a representation of shared belief. Effective preservation arguably “addresses the concerns and values of multiple groups, not just one or the dominant one, and does so in a way that each of these constituencies can learn from components beyond its own sphere” (Longstreeth, pg. 9). Preservation has the capacity to foster deeper understanding among different cultural groups, and can arguably effect positive social change. Though it would be difficult if not impossible to measure how any particular preservation effort changes society, preservationists can still begin planning by considering the politics involved in representing multiple groups, and therefore ask questions about whose histories would be represented, why and how, and with what possible social consequences.

A further consideration here is that concepts of preservation informing the McLeod debates need to remain flexible, meet changing social demands, and in effect, allow the plantation to remain as a site of public dialogue and debate. As Paul Shakel argues, “many histories can exist in one place, and these stories of the past are continually being shaped and reconstructed” (2004, pg. 2). Allowing the McLeod site to remain flexible will require its interpretation to remain to some degree open and contested. According to Shackel, preservation efforts are often used to “promote and preserve the ideals of cultural leaders and authorities” and are “displayed to the public as though the past they represent is reality. They present the past as abstract and timeless and sacred, and they help to reduce the competing interests” (pg. 4). The establishment of stable sites of preservation can foreclose public dialogue and contestation about the histories and identities that they represent. In so far as they shut down opportunities for public dialogue, preservation efforts may impose the kind of culture of transmission that
concerned Carey, along with a variation of the colonial space that concerned Innis, in which knowledge principally serves the interests of commerce and power. Taking cues from Innis and Carey, I argue that the McLeod site has the potential to serve progressive purposes of ritual communication and maintain a sense of historical continuity over time within a community. Of the plantation’s historical importance and its power to sustain (or limit) a community, Eugene Frazier asks “why would you want to destroy the history of where we came from? If we forget where we came from, you don’t know where you’re going.”

African American History and the Preservation of McLeod

Understanding what aspects of McLeod plantation may or may not be worth preserving first requires understanding its unique African American history. A black majority inhabited the plantation for most of its history, and as with many places in the South, though black populations have decreased relative to white populations since the Civil War, “The larger fact remains: these are places where black people either were the numerical majority or were a very large proportion of the total population,” and black people have “been the defining part of what the place was, perhaps the defining part” (Falk, 2004, pg. 19). Any effort to preserve McLeod with any degree of cultural and historical accuracy should thoroughly examine the history and the culture of the slaves and their descendants who built, inhabited, and defined McLeod as a place for most of its history.

86 Author’s Interview, 2009.
Particularly for the purposes of understanding the plantation as a contemporary structure, it is also important to examine how the concept of race has continually defined McLeod as a place since the times of slavery. According to Richard H. Shein (2003) “Racialized” places are “particularly implicated in racist practice and the perpetuation of (or challenge to) racist social relations” (pg.203) Such places shape social interaction along lines of “race.” They can include, for example, redlined school districts or developments that are designed and sold to particular ethnic groups. Less obvious, are racialized landscapes in which certain histories are privileged, while others are omitted.

As an example, Riesenweber cites the courthouse square in Lexington, Kentucky, which bears statues of Confederate General John Hunt Morgan, and John Breckenridge, a U.S. Senator and Vice President. Historically, the square was a slave market, and the square as a landscape, “both reflected the racist practice of omitting African Americans when interpreting the past and shaped social relations by implying this was the ‘normal’ way of doing things” (p. 30).  

Effective preservation at McLeod requires a carefully researched history of the slaves and their descendents who built and inhabited the plantation until relatively recently. As written history of the McLeod slaves is scant, reconstructing their history and culture presents some difficulties. We do know that Edward Lightwood, who owned the plantation in the eighteenth century, was active in the Charleston slave trade and imported nine cargoes of slaves between 1762 and 1774. Based on the average duty per slave, Lightwood is estimated to have imported around 270 slaves to Charles Towne, plus

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87 The history of the slave market was eventually made visible, when a group of African American activists was successful in having a historical marker placed in the square in 2003.
slaves for his own use, and in the late 1700s, it is believed that about 53 slaves worked on the McLeod site. In the 1860s, under the ownership of William McLeod, the plantation had a labor force of seventy slaves (Bostick, 2004).

The labor of slaves and the lucrative crop of Sea Island cotton brought the plantation’s owners tremendous wealth. The plantation reached its height of productivity in 1860, producing sixty-four hundred pound bales of cotton. Sea Island cotton was known as the best in the world, and priced as much as six times higher than cotton produced elsewhere in the State. According to Bostick (2004), “Sea Island cotton made land on the sea islands the most valuable in the state and James Island, with its proximity to Charleston, the most valuable among the Sea Islands” (pg.16). By the 1850’s James Island had been timbered extensively, and acreage for cotton planting was readily available. According to oral history, in the mid nineteenth century, “from the extreme southern edge of McLeod plantation, one could see as far west as the Stono River, Fort Johnson to the east, and the city of Charleston to the northeast. When cotton came in, legend holds that it looked like James Island was covered with a blanket of snow” (ibid).

The organization of labor on Sea Island plantations did allow the slaves some degree of autonomy. Slaves often worked under a task system, in which they were assigned tasks and were “free to leave when that work was done to the driver's satisfaction. And it was... calculated, as one planter put it in his overseer's contract, to be the amount of work [able to be done by] the meanest slave” (Joyner, Charles, PBS). Slaves are commonly thought of as performing general jobs as field hands and houseservants, yet many practiced skilled occupations. Running a plantation required a vast

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88 An uncertain number, since no duties had to be paid for these slaves.
89 “Meanest” here refers to “average.”
array of skilled trades, including animal raisers, baby keepers, barbers, blacksmiths, boatem, bricklayers, butchers, butlers, carpenters, coachmen, cobblers, cooks, coopers, engineers, gardeners, gunkeepers, laundresses, lumbermen, tailors, tanners, tinsmiths, and many others. Joyner writes, “West Africa was a land of consummate craftsmen, and enslaved Africans had brought with them to South Carolina highly developed technologies in metalwork, woodwork, leatherwork, ivorywork, pottery, and weaving” (pg. 71). South Carolina’s natural environment was very similar to that of West Africa, which made the West Africans’ skills essential in the New World.

The slaves built most of the buildings that stand at McLeod today, including the slave cabins. The 1860 census records seventy-four slaves living in twenty-six cabins on the property. These cabins and nearby outbuildings “remain today as perhaps the single most striking feature of the property” (Friends of McLeod Newsletter, 2007). The cabins have dimensions of about twenty by twelve feet, are constructed of wood frames on brick piers, and have brick chimneys. Many were demolished when the plantation property was sold and a shopping center was constructed along Folly Road. One cabin was moved to another neighborhood on the island and is currently used as a shed. The six cabins remaining are organized in a row along one of the main oak alleys leading into plantation, once called the “slave street.” The slave cabins are the only ones left on James Island and provide an unequaled material opportunity to learn about the island’s slave history and culture.

As with many other plantations in the area, the construction and arrangement of slave cabins was characteristic of European notions of symmetry, however the interiors

91 Ibid.
were quite African. Particularly, “The two-room house was crucial to the Yoruba architectural tradition” (Joyner, pg. 119). By modern standards, and in comparison to the lavishness of the big plantation house, these cabins are small. However, they are comparable in size to dwellings in Africa, and “by Afro-American standards, the slave cabins may have been too large, not too small. Optimal dimensions in African architecture are small—nine by nine in Benin, eight by eight in Angola, ten by ten generally” (pg. 120). West African buildings often have small rooms in order to “facilitate intimacy in social relations” and “the relatively small dimensions of slave housing may be taken less as evidence of the physical deprivation of the slaves than as evidence of cultural continuity with Africa” (ibid).

With only a few small windows, the cabins are quite dark. Slaves lived, for the most part, in separate compartments of darkness and daylight. The cabin’s fireplace, in addition to heat, provided some light. Keeping the fire lit was very important. Since the slaves rarely had matches, “a huge log stayed in the back of the chimney summer and winter” (Smalls, in Joyner, pg. 121), and “People would carry fire to and from each other’s house” (ibid). On James Island, the practice of sharing fire continued into the twenty-first century. Ethel Campbell, an elder who grew up on James Island, remembers that as a child, “what my mother didn’t have, she could get from another family. We’d share” and “even when the fire go out, and we ran out of matches, we used to take a fired coal to make fire; to start a fire in our home.”

The slave cabins were positioned close to the main house, apparently allowing for a “close interaction between white planter families and the servants” (Bostick, 2004). Yet

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92 Joyner, 1984, pg. 120.
93 Author’s Interview, 2005.
the cabin was also a private space, and “when the family was together in its home, gathered around the fireplace, the master and his power were shut out for the moment” (Joyner, pg. 126). In this space, family traditions and stories were passed down:

Around that fireplace the young slave learned a language, heard stories of how Buh Rabit outsmarted Buh Bear and of how the slave John outsmarted Ole Massa, watched the grownups cook and quilt and dance to the music of fiddle and banjo, observed the spirited weekly prayer meetings, and prayed quietly in the family bosom” (ibid).

McLeod allowed slaves to choose their own religion. It is recorded that slaves of McLeod named Sophy, Mariah, Rachel, Cephas, and Patience belonged to the James Island Presbyterian Church. In 1854, an Episcopalian rector, Rev. Stiles Mellichamp, recorded the baptism of slaves named Harriet, Liddy, Vaidtimes, Indy, and Jenny. Mellinchamp also conducted services for slave congregations at St. James on Sunday mornings and at the McLeod plantation on Sunday afternoons (Bostick, 2004). Plantation owners on James Island, and many other places, encouraged slaves to practice Christianity. For the masters, Christian beliefs justified slavery, as for the first time slaves “were hearing the gospel. In fact the more one considered the matter, it was the way God ordered the world. One saw it everywhere, Master-servant, teacher-pupil, parent-child. The able and strong must discharge these obligations as accountable to God” (Bresee, 1992, pg. 32) More cynically, Christianity was used to pacify slaves and help them to accept their lot in life. As a theology of resistance, however, African Americans did “not so much adopt Christianity as adapt Christianity, adapting this faith to both their own enduring religious traditions and sensibilities and to the oppressive realities of their lives.” (Tyson, 2007). Within Afro-Christianity, “It was not God the judge of behavior—
God the master or overseer—who was the object of worship. . . but a God more like African deities: God the transcendent spirit” (Joyner, 1984, pg. 141). Thus, while acceptance of Christianity did promote a certain compliance among the slaves, it also “demonstrated that the slaves were as concerned with freedom in this world as with salvation in the next” (pg. 141).

Not much information survives regarding specific relationships among slaves, or between masters and slaves, on the McLeod plantation. As one might expect, some stories passed down from the owner’s side paint a flattering portrait of the master and slave relationship. According to McLeod family lore, for example, an Englishman was a guest before the Civil War, and:

In the midst of the festivities, the Englishman began to hear screams from outside, which appeared to be that of a child. Going to investigate, the screams led him to the building that housed a dairy. There he found sitting in the middle of the floor, the plantation mistress [Susan McLeod] holding in her arms an injured slave child. As tears streamed down her cheeks, she treated the child’s wounds. The child had been playing too close to a stove and caught her clothing afire, and when she came screaming, someone had immediately called for the ‘big house mistress.’ As the Englishman took in the scene his only recount was ‘Is this the cruel South that I’ve been hearing about?’ (Bostick, 2004, pg. 15).

When the Civil War broke out, McLeod left the plantation under the charge of a “trusted slave” named Steven Forest. According to McLeod family oral history, a group of several faithful former slaves extinguished a fire in the main house when evacuating Federal soldiers “broke a bottle of turpentine in a corner of the first floor room and tossed a match to it” (ibid, pg. 20). The McLeods subsequently claimed that a scorched spot on the dining room floor of the house supported this story.
As an African American Civil War site, McLeod has special significance. During a Federal occupation, the 54th and 55th Massachusetts regiments composed of African American soldiers (discussed in Chapter Three) spent time there. Members of the Regiments camped in the fields, or stayed in the slave quarters and plantation outbuildings. Today, one can see where a soldier of the 55th regiment, George Smothers, signed his name on the portion of the chimney running through the third floor of the main house.

Following the Civil War, the Freedman’s Bureau assumed control of the plantation, and used it as a regional office and Provost Court. More than four thousand newly freed blacks camped in the plantation’s fields, waiting for food, clothing, and land grants. During that time, J.T. Trowbridge, an American author, toured the property and wrote:

Families were cooking and eating their breakfasts around smoky fires. On all sides were heaps of their humble household goods, — tubs, pails, pots and kettles, socks, beds, barrels tied up in blankets, boxes, baskets, bundles. They had brought their livestock with them; hens were scratching, pigs squealing, cocks crowing and starved puppies whining” (in Bostick, 2008, pg. 84).

On three occasions, Trowbridge accompanied white planters on boat voyages to James Island. On the first visit, Trowbridge recalls that they were “met by a party of Negroes, forty in number, who rushed to the landing [at McLeod Plantation] armed with guns and drove them away with threats to kill them if they ever came to disturb them in their homes again” (ibid). The planters did not disembark and returned to Charleston.

On the second visit, the planters came to the island with Captain Ketchum of the Freedmen’s Bureau. Again, they were met by Freedmen at the landing, who are reported
to have said, “We are ready to do anything for gov’ment. . . But we have nothing to do with these men” (ibid). Without certainty as to how they would be received, the planters again returned to Charleston without disembarking.

The third visit was different, and Trowbridge recalled:

We disembarked at a plantation belonging to three orphan children [McLeod Plantation] whose guardian [Mr. Lawton] was a member of our party. The freedmen, having learned that the mere presence of the planters on the soil could effect nothing, had changed their tactics, and not one was to be seen. Although there were twenty-two hundred on the island, it appeared as solitary and silent as if it had not an inhabitant.

We found the plantation house occupied as headquarters by an officer of the bureau recently sent to the island. The guardian of the three orphans took me aside, showed me the desolated grounds without, shaded by magnificent live oaks, and the deserted chambers within. Mr. Lawton said, “This estate, containing seventeen hundred acres and worth fifty thousand dollars, is all that remains to them; and you see the condition it is in. Why does the government of the United States persist in robbing orphan children. They have done nothing; they haven’t earned the title of rebel and traitors. Why not give them back their land?” (in Bostick, 2008, pg. 85)

Of Mr. Lawton’s appeal, Trowbridge remarks:

I afterwards learned that he was one of the original and most fiery secessionists of Charleston. He made a public speech early in 1861 in which he expressly pledged his life and fortune to the Confederate cause. His life he had managed to preserve; and of his fortune, sufficient remained for the elegant maintenance of his own and his sister’s children, so that it appeared to me quite unreasonable for him to complain of the misfortune which he himself had been instrumental in bringing upon the orphans (ibid).

McLeod was the last James Island property returned to its prewar owner. In the years following the war, much of the land laid fallow. Like other plantations on James Island, shortages in labor and cash prevented any extensive cultivation, and in 1872,
white planters only planted 700 acres of cotton on the island. Land was either fallow, used as pastures, rented to black farmers, or used by black farmers in return for their labor.94 Many black families continued to live on plantations, a situation that “left them at the mercy of such owners who could evict them at any time if they failed to meet quotas, missed work, or attempted to organize” (Borick, 2008, pg. 4). Though the position of sharecropper95 was undesirable, most African Americans lacked capital, found it difficult to acquire landownership, and many continued to be economically bound to the plantations. Borick writes of the difficulties of the sharecropper lifestyle, particularly in the Lowcountry Sea Islands, in which labor was tough, wages low, housing poor, and “Children. . . toiled alongside their parents in the field. One James Island woman remembered as a child only wearing her shoes in the wintertime so they would last longer” (ibid)

During the post war years, the McLeod plantation had a store that was used to control black labor. Laborers were advanced credit up to the amount of their weekly wage to pay for essentials such as groceries and luxury items such as tobacco and candy.96 George Brown Tindall (1952) writes, “Through the plantation stores the landlords supplied laborers who had been promised rations under sharecropping or land sharing contracts, and sold to those who had cash or had been credited with wages on the books or in scrip”97 (pg. 105). Prior to the war, interest rates on the advances were around

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94 Bostick, 2008, pg. 91.
95 There were a variety of tenant arrangements, of which sharecropping was one. Landowners advanced capital and tenants provided labor. Share tenants kept a share of crop profits after paying off the advance. The highest rung of the system was a “cash tenant,” in which farmers could furnish their own money, paid fixed rents and kept profits from crops, allowing the best possibility for saving money and purchasing land.
96 Bostick, 2008, pg. 91.
97 A proxy currency.
15 to 20 percent, but after the war, they amounted to usury, with rates as high as 50 and even 100 percent.98

By 1870, tenant farming was the main system under which most black laborers worked on James Island. While limiting, tenant farming did provide some opportunities for the island’s blacks. Tenant farmers had more freedom to decide what crops to plant and how to cultivate them, and perhaps a better opportunity to save money and purchase their own land.99 By 1881, blacks on John’s, James, Wadmalaw, and Edisto Islands held ten thousand acres of land valued at a total of around $300,000 (Charleston News and Courier, Jan. 5, 1881). Through the end of the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, black landownership in South Carolina continued to increase, as blacks travelled “the difficult path from wage labor to share tenancy, from share to cash tenancy, and from there to part ownership and full ownership of their farms and homes” (Tindall, 1952, pg. 123).

Tracing the histories of specific former McLeod slaves turned freedmen and then landowner is difficult. Slaves names were not included in the 1850 and 1860 U.S. Slave Census schedules. Other records, such as church memberships, baptism, or marriage records generally only used first names. The James Island slaves rarely retained their master’s surnames after Emancipation.100 Many moved from James Island, either to Charleston or Northern cities following the war, and since 1865, the island’s black population has decreased. In spite of the difficulties of tracking individual histories, useful records do survive, including bank statements of the Freedmen’s Saving and Trust

98 Bostick, 2008, pg. 91.
99 See Tindall, 1952.
100 Bostick, 2008, pg. 91.
Company. The 1870 Census also sheds some light on what became of some former 
McLeod slaves through its partial list of names. For example, Steven Forest, a former 
McLeod slave, is listed as a farm hand on James Island. The 1880 Census lists Steven Sr., 
his wife Harriet, and four children, Steven, Ella, Ponchee, and May.

In some cases, written records can be matched with oral accounts of the slaves’ 
living descendants. Eugene Frazier, a James Islander who knew former slaves personally, 
remembers:

I was actually fortunate enough, whether you want to call it 
fortunate enough, to know three slaves. My grandfather was a 
slave, born in 1853, died in 1954. Charlie Doss . . . born in 1844, 
died in 1958 . . . and then Harry Urie . . . They’re the ones who tell 
the story about Poppy Dawson, the man over on the McLeod 
plantation . . . His name was Poppy Dawson, born in 1821, I 
believe, but the unique part about it is I was fortunate enough to 
talk to people who knew him and was able to tell me how he got 
that nickname “Hardtime” Dawson. Because he would be in the 
field in the hot sun with a straw hat, working in the field, and he 
would be singing that song, old Negro song, ‘Motherless Chilin’ 
She a Hard Time,’ so they nickname him Hardtime Dawson . . . 
now if you look in the census report, people who look for that 
name, you ain’t gonna find Hardtime. You’ll see Poppy Dawson 
and his wife Susan Dawson.”

After the war, the plantation never regained its former height of agricultural 
production. In 1879 the plantation was divided into three tracts among the orphaned 
children of W.M. McLeod, who continued to farm the land. W.W. McLeod Jr. received 
the plantation complex and surrounding 277.92 acres of high land. Regina L. McLeod 
received 173.23 acres and Annie Mikell Frampton 178.45 acres on the southwestern and 
southeastern sides respectively. The 1880s were a time of relative prosperity. Bostick 
writes, “Labor issues had long since been resolved. While planters could not afford to

101 Author’s Interview, 2009.
place large tracts of land under cultivation, the dramatic increase in crop yields was making up much of this difference” (2008, pg. 29). Black planters also enjoyed a period of relative prosperity. The 1880 Census records 48 black planters farming their own land and the land of others. The annual planting on black-owned land included 800 acres of cotton, 600 acres of corn, and 200 acres in potato and corn (ibid).

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the fortunes of James Island planters, black and white, declined. In 1882, “black arm disease” infected and destroyed most of the cotton crop, and in the following years, unusually heavy rains and hurricanes devastated the fields. The Sea Island cotton economy which had brought McLeod its tremendous wealth before the Civil War was further eroded by plagues of caterpillars and boll weevils and was no longer economically feasible. In 1910, Sea Island cotton, still considered the finest in the world, was priced at a relatively low 50 cents per pound. McLeod planted the plantation’s last cotton crop in 1922. Author Herbert Ravenel Sass writes, “Sea Island cotton had vanished as though some evil magician had waived its wand and conjured it out of existence” (pg. 33). Of plantation life on James Island during the early twentieth century, W. E. McLeod remembers, “Times were hard and the Lowcountry was poor, rich only in land, land used to produce crops for which demand was down” (in Bostick, 2004, pg. 31). McLeod’s cousin, St. John Alison Lawton, wrote, “My plantation has been used by me years past as a cotton and truck plantation . . . owing to the boll weevil, the cotton will be abandoned and because of the shortage of negro labor, we are moving out of the truck business” (in Bostick, 2004, pg. 33).

In 1922, McLeod sold 236 acres of high land and 700 acres of marsh to the Country Club of Charleston. The Club built a golf course on the property, which opened
in 1925. Truck crops were planted at McLeod until 1940, but were not an attractive prospect compared to the plantation’s increasing value as real estate. Over the next 50 years, McLeod continued to sell parcels of land to developers which proved to be “one of the last profitable ventures for the McLeod plantation” (Bostick, 2004, pg. 33). During the later part of the twentieth century, McLeod leased out the remaining land to other farmers.

Descendants of the McLeod slaves continued to live on the plantation until relatively recently. Tom Johnson remembers that when he first came “to James Island in the 1960s, there were individuals living on McLeod plantation. It had ceased to exist as a plantation, but they were living in some of these same slave cabins that you see today.”

Black tenants and paid laborers continued to live in the slave cabins until around 1990 when McLeod died. Today, the plantation’s buildings are abandoned, except for a caretaker, and all that is left of the land is a fifty acre tract located between the Country Club of Charleston and the busy intersection of Folly Road and Maybank Highway.

**The African American Cemetery at McLeod**

In addition to the remaining outbuildings and fields, the plantation has one of the largest African American burial sites on James Island. For the African American community, the existence of this site raises the stakes of preserving McLeod, particularly since many of the island’s African American burial sites have been lost. African American burial grounds were often not marked in durable ways and consequently are often not visible to those who do not know of their location. In her *Folk-Lore of the Sea*

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102 Author’s Interview, 2005.

103 See Figure 14: Tom Johnson at the African American Burial Site of McLeod.
Islands, South Carolina (1923), Elsie Worthington Clews Parsons observed the African American burial sites were:

. . . hidden away in remote spots among trees and underbrush. In the middle of some fields are islands of large trees the owners preferred not to make arable, because of the exhaustive work of clearing it. Old graves are now in among these trees and surrounding underbrush. . . [Burial spots were] ragged patches of live-oak and palmetto and briar tangle which throughout the Sea Islands are a sign of graves within, —graves scattered without symmetry, and often without headstones or head-boards, or sticks. . .” (pp. 214-215).

Figure 14: Tom Johnson at the African American Burial Site of McLeod. (Author’s Photo).
Of African American gravesites on James Island, Eugene Frazier, who has partnered with Thomas Johnson on a number of cemetery preservation projects, explains the reason why so many graves are “unmarked”:

See, African Americans didn’t have no money to buy headstones and graves and they used to leave different things on those grave like a bottle or like a medication they used to take . . . and a lot of people didn’t know, when you pick up that bottle off a graveyard, or a prescription medication. . . they throw it away, and that was the mark of a grave. That’s why me and Thomas Johnson try to go to all these graveyards, because we know what to look for.  

As Johnson observes, “When people neglect to preserve these burial sites what happens is that they eventually become forgotten.” When developers purchase the land, “they will have a tendency, and it really does happen, that people wind up constructing homes and other areas on burial sites.” The James Island Post Office, for example, was constructed on a cemetery, of which Johnson says, “I think you’ve got about twenty-five percent of the grave site still left, but the building and so forth is on top of a gravesite. I’m quite sure somebody saw bones or remains. Did they overlook it? Did they think much about it? I don’t know.” Currently, there are other cases of African American burial sites in jeopardy on James Island. For example, James Island Town Council has argued about widening a drainage ditch in an area of the Clearview neighborhood in which graves might be located. A neighborhood resident claims that “enlarging the ditch is necessary to end the neighborhood’s serious drainage problems”

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104 Author’s Interview, 2009.

105 Authors Interview, 2004.

106 ibid.

107 ibid.
According to Johnson, “As far as we know, it’s a cemetery, and we want the bodies to remain there and undisturbed” (ibid). The Town contracted Brockington and Associates Inc. to perform an archaeological survey, in which five “anomalies” were discovered on one side of the ditch; however, no conclusive results were obtained. The future of the site is uncertain until permits are obtained to dig beneath the site’s topsoil and search for further evidence of human remains.

Eugene Frazier expresses his concern about development on gravesites:

...one of the things that concerns me about the island is developers, now this is my opinion, now has no morals or feelings for destroying African American cemeteries. And that’s one of the things that I am working on now. Any time Thomas Johnson or I find out about a house being built on a cemetery— that’s sacred ground. These slaves are buried there and helped build this place. That’s sacred ground to us. And we feel like it ought to be preserved. I don’t think you’d like it if someone trampled on your father or your grandmother’s grave.108

Johnson chairs a citizen’s organization, the Committee to Preserve and Protect African-American Cemeteries on James Island, which has been vigilant in protecting grave sites from development, including the McLeod site. According to Johnson, the burial site at McLeod was discovered during the excavation and construction of a fire station for the City of Charleston. Mr. Johnson’s organization was able to work with the city and stop the station’s construction. A subsequent survey of the site using sonar technology revealed around one hundred unmarked graves, of people whose names are unknown, and who were probably buried around the early 1800’s. About fifty percent of those buried appear to be young children, whose cause of death remains a mystery. Mr. Johnson hopes that one day the site will be further investigated to determine why so

108 Author’s Interview, 2009.
many died so young. He also wants the site to be preserved as a place where people can go to pay respects and learn about its history.\textsuperscript{109}

On the question of who owns the McLeod plantations burial sites, Johnson explains:

\textit{This is the final resting place of these individuals. . . and many of them, the only thing they owned, or ever will own, is this small three by six section of property where they’re buried, and to me, and I hope others feel, they earned it. But the point is that let them rest. . .}\textsuperscript{110}

A success story of African American grave preservation, and possibly a model for McLeod, can be seen at the Dill Plantation Sanctuary on James Island. In the late 1990’s, Johnson and Frazier formed an organization called The Dill Cemetery Perpetual Care Group that partnered with the Charleston Museum to survey, document, and protect two cemeteries located on the Dill property, known as Dill’s Slave Cemetery and Devil’s Nest. The cemeteries date to before the Civil War, and continued to be used until the 1970s. Both were undisturbed since the Charleston Museum acquired the property in the late 1980s. The Dill Cemetery covers approximately two acres and contains about 83 graves with only 35 marked. The Devil’s Nest Cemetery lies in a wooded area between open fields and is located between two “double-trunked” oak trees that have served as landmarks over the years. It contains 44 graves, 13 of which are marked. Marked graves lie in the center of the site, however, and “there are no obvious boundaries; the cemetery may be larger than suggested by surface features” (Zierden, 2008, pg. 3). According to Martha Zierden, Curator of Historical Archaeology at the Charleston Museum, “Some of the graves are marked with headstones or small metal markers, assorted funerary

\textsuperscript{109} Author’s Interview, 2004.
\textsuperscript{110} Author’s Interview, 2004.
decorations, and decorative plantings. Others are unmarked or sunken, and sometimes poorly defined” (pg. 3).

With assistance from a Henry and Silvia Yaschik Foundation Grant, and in partnership with the Dill Cemetery Perpetual Care Group, the Museum prepared maps of the cemeteries and produced a database with information on individual graves. The map and database “will constitute a permanent record of the cemeteries. They will also serve as a foundation for future discoveries. Moreover, they will serve as a guide and source of identification to descendants and family members of those buried in the cemeteries” (ibid). Depending on the future owners of McLeod plantation, and the availability of funding, the African American burial site could be documented and protected in a similar fashion.

For the time being, however, it is uncertain how future owners of McLeod might treat its burial site, since the restrictions or covenants pertaining to the property and set forth in McLeod’s will remain open for interpretation. During its debate with the School of the Building Arts, the Friends of McLeod argued that the School “would most certainly have to build over the many unmarked graves and artifacts left over from centuries of settlement”. In 2008, S.C. State Archaeologist Jonathan Leader inspected the site to determine if the School’s plans would disturb graves. The visit was arranged by Representative Wallace Scarborough who is reported to have said, “the plantation’s owner has been too secretive about its work there in the past” (in Behre, 2008, pg. 3B). After inspecting the site, Leader met with College president Colby M. Broadwater and representatives of Brockington and Associates, Inc. The group agreed that if a grave were found during construction of a School parking lot, that the families involved would

decide whether it should be moved. Leader apparently seemed satisfied that College’s plans would work, and said, “I think everybody here is trying to be on the sides of the angels wanting to do the right thing, at least in terms of archaeology” (ibid).

Regardless of who eventually owns the plantation, it is important that the local community be involved in the study and interpretation of its archaeological sites. As it has been a historically marginalized group, the involvement of the McLeod slave descendant community is crucial. A concern within the field of archaeology, however, is that archaeologists have often “further marginalized these [African American] groups by excluding them from the research process” (Reeves, 2004, pg. 72). Any archaeological study at McLeod, therefore needs to be undertaken in collaboration with the surrounding community, and care should be taken to include a diverse range of participants that goes beyond the “selective inclusion of African Americans who Euro-American scholars feel are appropriate informants” (pg. 72). In his own field experiences, including an archaeological study of a Jamaican coffee plantation, Reeves has identified three ways to best engage descendant groups, all of which seem appropriate for McLeod: 1) immersion within the group being studied, 2) interpreting finds within the context of the community’s social relations, and 3) engaging descendant groups in devising research questions.

McLeod Plantation and the Politics of Place

On two occasions, I visited the deserted McLeod plantation with Tom Johnson. During our second trip, as we walked among the slave cabins, Johnson remarked:

This is something that you can touch. This is something that you can feel. This is something that you can maybe have a personal experience as you walk and feel and touch these places where
individuals lived during those difficult times. There’s a big difference between touching something physically and seeing it in a magazine or a book.112

Being present at McLeod with Mr. Johnson allowed me a deeper understanding of its power as a place. I had read about McLeod plantation in historical records and books, and had seen the plantation daily on my drive to high school each morning. Yet Mr. Johnson’s interpretation of the site, and the experience of moving through the place with him, allowed me to see it differently, to understand it more fully as a site of historical struggle, and, therefore, as a site meriting public preservation. Of the critic’s relation to public places, Carole Blair (2001) has made the point that proximity matters, with implications for the politics and ethics of working with representations of place. The experience of walking through McLeod with Mr. Johnson taught me that being in a place, and with whom, matters in contextualizing and interpreting its physical markers, and with implications for how its preservation and memorialization might be understood.

The power of “place” has been widely acknowledged and defined across many disciplines. According to anthropologist James L. Peacock (2007), “The phrase ‘sense of place’ suggests the perception of a locale as more than just a physical space, as a territory but also as a psychological space, a place imbued with history and memory, community and experience” (pg. 102). Novelist Eudora Welty has been credited with first using the term “sense of place” to describe Southerner’s connections to their locales as well as the greater Southern region. In her essay, Place in Fiction (1956), Welty considers the importance of place in writing, as raw material, as the achieved world of appearance, and in the writer himself; “place is where he has his roots, place is where he stands; in his

112 Author’s Interview, 2006.
experience out of which he writes, it provides the base of reference; in his work, the point of view” (pg. 117) According to Edward S. Casey (1993) place is “what we feel within and around, under and above, before and behind, our lived bodies” (pg. 313), the “pre-positions of our bodily lives” (ibid), and for Ken Hillis (1999), “Places are the middle ground where all the different human and nonhuman elements come together…” (pg. 83). Across the many definitions of place, there is a shared sense that it is fundamental, and perhaps even central, to experience.

Geographer Peter Cannavo (2007) identifies four phases in a modern crisis of place, which bear relevance to understanding and situating the McLeod preservation. The first phase, “involves the exercise of top-down, governmental power to rationalize and simplify complex natural and built landscapes that have arisen organically and replace them with highly planned and controlled environments” (pg. 174). The second phase concerns globalization, or the increasing power of international corporations to transform places into commodities. The third involves a marginalization of place itself, occurring through a rise in electronic technologies that mediate global flows of political and economic power. And the final phase, related to the first three, is a kind of reaction that “over-emphasizes preservation without integrating it with founding” (ibid).

With respect to the last of these phases, Cannavo considers some implications of two common and apparently opposed practices of founding and preservation. In distinguishing between these practices, “We can found places—i.e., create new places or significantly change existing ones—or we can preserve places, i.e., refrain from altering places or perhaps maintain them according to some notion of their defining character” (pg.3) In practice, these activities are commonly conceived as fundamentally opposed;
founding means change, and preservation supports stability. Cannavo further argues, however, that “Although founding and preservation seem to be incompatible, both are integral to the practice of place. All places are founded. In other words, all places are human creations that we must at least interpret if not reconstruct...” (pp. 5-6). And on the other side of the coin, “preservation is never absolute. Although we might preserve significant aspects of particular places, we also alter our environment to suit our changing needs, values, and ends” (pg. 6).

Preserving the sense of place at McLeod in any kind of “pure” and unchanging form would not be possible, let alone desirable. But maintaining some consistent sense of place over time is nevertheless important: Arguably, there are political dangers of developing a “placeless” McLeod, for example, the construction of a school and parking lots could erase important physical markers of place and impose in its stead a homogenous space of traffic and administrative buildings bereft of historical and communal significance. It is important to also consider, however, what aspects of preserving the plantation as a place might be nostalgic and reactionary. The plantation structure certainly represents, as Friends of McLeod chairwoman Dottie George reflects, “a society with the slaves and plantation owners that you would not want to repeat.”

Great care must be taken, then, not to glorify or romanticize the plantation as a place, but to tell its complex and painful history with honesty and integrity.

Following Doreen Massey (1994), one might also question the preservationist instinct for constructing a seamless sense of place. Increasingly, since the development of James Island, the boundaries of McLeod as a local place have become blurred. McLeod is a contradictory and ever-changing locale, defined by many organizations and social

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113 Author’s Interview, 2009.
groups, including the Friends of McLeod, the Historic Charleston Foundation, slave descendants, and newcomers to James Island, as well as different media outlets, including the newspaper and the Internet. Public preservation in any form will likely bring visitors from diverse places, and increase the plantation’s media presence and exposure to the world. Certainly critical attention should be paid to the shifting temporal and spatial relationships involved in the mediation and social networking of the McLeod preservation effort, and what Massey terms a changing “social geometry of power and signification” (p. 3). Attention should also be paid, however, to the potentially progressive possibilities of the plantation as a dynamic and “extroverted” place, rather than making an automatic assumption that multivalent and contradictory senses of place are a disturbing threat to a more traditional, singular, and settled sense of place.

Finally, in considering the political dimensions of preserving McLeod as a public place, any preservation plan will involve continuing elements of both preservation and founding, stability and change. Restoring the physical structure of McLeod is a starting point for preservation. The more difficult and continuing work of preservation will be maintaining the plantation as a site of ritual communication, a place in which different individuals, institutions, and cultural groups can have dialogue, educate and be educated, and develop a common sense of the plantation’s history, purpose, and meaning. Working through a diverse group of individuals and organizations, the Friends of McLeod have recognized that the plantation “encompasses a wide range of history. . . It [the plantation] should not be turned into a school or something that we would not feel the full effect of history on that property.”114 With respect to a ritual of preservation, McLeod offers a unique opportunity to foster greater understanding among people, to maintain a society in

114 Author’s Interview, 2009.
time, and to sustain, rather than spatially disrupt, a sense of historical continuity on the island. More particularly, preserving the plantation allows an opportunity for James Island, and the nation as a whole, to confront, rather than evade, a complex and painful history of African American slavery.
CHAPTER FIVE:
The Conversation of Gullah Preservation

Gullah preservation efforts on James Island occur within and alongside a broader political movement to preserve Gullah history and culture in the Sea Island region. In addition to providing an overview of broader Gullah political movements, this chapter examines some of the epistemological and communicative underpinnings of Gullah preservation with a goal of understanding it more fully as a modern phenomenon. In popular discourse, Gullah is often understood as a pre-modern “folk” culture in need of isolation and protection from an encroaching modern world. Most Gullah leaders and political activists, however, do not seek isolation or protection from modernity; rather, they are working to maintain their cultural traditions while taking advantage of the best that the modern world has to offer. By situating Gullah as a modern phenomenon, the chapter takes issue with a reactionary “preservationist” idea of Gullah as an anachronistic folk culture that should remain a product of its time and place. By examining technologies and practices of modern communication involved in Gullah preservation, the chapter also questions some ways that Carey’s theory of ritual communication might apply (or not apply) to contemporary studies of media technology. Particularly, the chapter examines a tendency in Carey’s work, and in Communication Studies more broadly, to valorize a notion of pre-modern face-to-face dialogue at the expense of other forms of communication. By using both dialogue and technologies of dissemination in
arguably progressive ways, the modern Gullah preservation movement provides a specific example through which Carey’s theory of ritual communication may be rethought and perhaps applied within contemporary contexts.

**Background: Preserving Gullah Language, History, and Culture**

According to some cultural preservationists and political activists, there is a need to restore older traditions of communication within Gullah communities. For example, Marquetta Goodwine (1998), a political activist who grew up in a Gullah community, writes, “We used to sit down with our children, speak to them and tell them stories. This was a way of instilling morals in them, educating them, and passing on traditions” (pg. 12). Goodwine notes that children are often amazed about what they learn from others about the history of their own people. She adds, “There are even many adults who are also amazed because they have forgotten a lot of what was passed down to them, having taken it for granted when it was being presented by someone in their community” (ibid). Modern development’s commercialism, and a sense of individualism that pervades American culture have strained traditional Gullah communities, both from within and without, and for Goodwine, “the traditions, the crafts, the entire society—are all breaking down because we have stepped away from sitting together and sharing with one another our ideas, views, and life experiences” (ibid). A call for a return to older traditions within the African American community asks to “rebuild communication between us so that we can dialogue about what is going on in our minds, in our households, in our community, and in the world . . . to set a plan in order rebuild our community as African Americans” (ibid).
More fully understanding the reconstruction of African American community and culture in the Sea Island region requires historical contextualization, particularly with regard to the Gullah language. Since its inception in slavery, the Gullah language has formed the basis of Gullah community and common culture. The various African peoples brought together in slavery often could not understand each other, as they spoke diverse and mutually unintelligible languages. In order to communicate, the slaves developed a pidginized form of English. Of the pidgin, Joyner writes, “A Pidgin is by definition an auxiliary language. It has no native speakers. But when the pidgin was passed on to the American-born children of those enslaved Africans, it became the children’s native tongue” (pg. xx). Once pidgin has acquired native speakers, linguists consider it to be a creole, rather than a pidgin language. In the process of “creolization,” Gullah developed from continuing interaction between English and African forms of speaking in which ”The English contribution was principally lexical; the African contribution was principally grammatical” (pg.xxi). Of the purpose of the language, William Politzer writes, “Africans from varying geographic and linguistic origins underwent language change arising from their need to communicate first with each other and secondarily with Europeans” (pg. 124)

The origins of the word “Gullah” are uncertain. Many scholars believe that the word Gullah derives from “Angola,” as large numbers of Bantu-speaking people from the Kongo-Angola region of West Africa were imported during the early part of Carolina’s colonial history. In 1742, the South Carolina Gazette contained an advertisement for a runaway slave named “Golla Harry,” and in an 1822 entry of the Charleston City Council, one of Denmark Vesey’s conspirators was referred to as “Gullah Jack.”
According to Winifred Vass (in Creel, 1988, pg. 22), the ruler of the Mbundu nation in Central Africa was called Ngola, a name from which the Portuguese derived the name of the colony. Another theory, supported by an early twentieth-century Carolinian named Reed Smith, who wrote about the Gullah dialect, suggests that the name is derived from a large group of Liberian hinterland Africans named Golas. Such a theory is plausible, as many Africans from Sierra Leone and Liberia also formed a major part of the Sea Island population, and also as Methodist missionaries working in Liberia in the 1840s purportedly set out to convert the “Goulah nation.”

The African American slaves who inhabited the Georgia coast were often called “Geechees,” yet had “essentially the same culture as the Gullahs” (Creel, pg. 18). In his study of Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect, linguist Lorenzo Turner lists “gisi” as a Mende word, and defines it as “a language and a tribe of the Kissy country (Liberia)” (ibid). Other scholars have theorized that the word derives from the Ogeechee River in Georgia. As a folk term, Geechee also has connotations of “country” and backwardness, and the term is “generally used between intimates in a joking manner, or is intended as a challenge to a fight” (ibid). As a symbol of national pride, the term Gullah/Geechee has been used extensively to describe peoples of the “Gullah/Geechee Nation,” a territory which extends from the southern North Carolina Coast to Jacksonville, Florida.

Written and oral accounts of Gullah/Geechee culture describe how it was practiced unselfconsciously by Islanders, who did not consider themselves as an African folk culture until brought into contact with the outside world. In her *James Island*

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115 Creel, 1988, pg. 16-17.

116 Mende is a major language spoken by ethnic groups living in Sierra Leone and the surrounding region.
essay, for example, Janie Gilliard Moore writes:

For many years of my childhood I lived, believed in, and loved this Sea Island experience, but at the time, like most Sea Islanders, I did not consider it unusual. We did not see ourselves as a unique group of people with a rich surviving African culture; we did not know that our way of living was so African, for we were just being ourselves (pp. 107-108).

Moore continues “as I progressed through high school and afterward college, I ‘discovered’ (as I thought) that many of our practices were superstitious and ignorant. Educated people, I came to feel, simply did not believe and act as we did” (pg. 108).

Cultural outsiders often considered the Gullah language to be a peasant form of speech that was rural, backward, and culturally deficient. According to Marquetta Goodwine (1998):

This condemnation and pity of Gullah-speaking Sea Islanders had an overwhelming and almost devastating impact. These people were taught that ‘ef oona tak likka disyah, den ting backwad’ and if you wanted to “make something of yourself” then you needed to ‘correct’ the way you spoke (Goodwine, Marquetta, 1998, pg. 9).

As she continued her studies, Moore began to understand the African roots of her culture, and the error of an education that rejected them. As a student at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia, she came into contact with other African students and realized just how many cultural practices they shared. She writes, “the similarities between Sea Island attitudes and customs have been astounding. Even some quite minute practices are the same—which proves four hundred years of the ‘diaspora’ have not decultured us as a people” (Moore, pg. 108).
“Decreolization” in the case of Gullah is described by Pollitzer as “the progressive elimination of African-derived features and their replacement of standard-like forms, [which] is actually a continuous process that varies with different social situations” (pg. 128). Not surprisingly, in areas that are more connected to “mainstream” culture, decreolization apparently occurs to a greater degree; “Spurred by freedom and movement, decreolization is most advanced in areas easily accessible, such as James Island just across the Ashley River from Charleston” (ibid). However, there is no evidence that suggests Gullah is vanishing in these areas. Rather, decreolization may just represent the “flexibility of the speaker to shift from Gullah to standard English, that is code switching, in a social context, more than a change in Gullah itself” (ibid).

Throughout Gullah’s history, cultural exchange among Europeans and Africans has been reciprocal, and the boundaries between the two “distinct” cultures remain blurry. Pollitzer writes:

Culture is dynamic, and interaction is a two-way street. More than borrowing or survival of a trait is involved; both the migrants and those among whom they settle are changed. Many features of African life brought to American shores have had appreciable influence on the culture of the dominant, European-derived population, from language to houses (pg. 12).

The speech of Africans influenced Europeans, for example, “White children especially learned Gullah from a ‘mammy’ and from black playmates; house servants played an important role in this reciprocal process of dual creolization” (ibid, pg. 129). Today, African words like “tote,” “okra,” “Gumbo,” and many more have become part of the American lexicon.
While Gullah has shared aspects with European language and culture, the cultures have been historically divided along socially constructed lines of “race” and “class.” Gullah primarily formed “an abiding bond of understanding among the slaves” (ibid) and “helped the people to endure the harsh realities of slavery” (ibid). As examples,

An inflection in the voice, a change in tone, could convey to a fellow black a secret thought hidden from whites. Proverbs also conveyed subtleties and ambiguities that contributed to the survival of the people as they transmuted them into meaningful metaphors for their new environment. Songs, stories, and prayers, even with meanings obscure, kept alive dreams of a dimly remembered past (ibid).

Pollitzer writes, “language is dynamic; the child of history, it interacts continuously with its social setting” (pg. 128). Rather than trying to preserve the Gullah language and culture in some unchanging form, in accordance to with purportedly clean-cut cultural and social boundaries, effective preservation should take Gullah’s historical dynamism and permeability into account. Living human beings are not a museum, and cultural preservation is not accomplished by pinning down a culture and language in some isolated and static form. Cultural preservation is created in the act of cultural sharing, both within and across different cultural groups. Historically, the Gullah language, identity, and associated cultural constructions of “race,” have changed constantly. The cultural category of Gullah has also been a double-edged sword politically and socially: while a separate language and identity have been necessary to the survival of Gullah culture for centuries, in the past they have also formed a basis for white supremacist conceptions of the culture as “primitive,” “backward,” and racially inferior.
From a theoretical perspective, the establishment of stable identities can be problematic as it relies on a flawed concept of essential difference. According to John Agnew (2002), “The concept of identity is not without its problems. The term itself can seem to imply a solidity and permanence to ‘identities’ that the politics of identities is all about establishing” (p. 124). There can be a danger to essentializing identities, as identity can form the basis for the denigration and oppression of minority social groups by more powerful others. The line between political interests and identities is often blurry, as differences are not pulled out of thin air—real biological differences, such as skin or hair color, geographic “origins,” and other traits, for example, can be bundled together to form the “essential” basis for cultural and social difference.

In Questions of Identity, Stuart Hall (1996) explains that deconstructive critique has rendered concepts of stable, originary, and essentialist identity obsolete. The academy is now left with two ways of thinking through what directions further questions about identity should take. First, there are no entirely different concepts with which to replace those that are deconstructed, and so scholars must continue to think with them while no longer operating within their essentialist paradigm. Second, the concept of identity itself needs to be addressed:

We need to situate the debates about identity within all those historically specific developments and practices which have disturbed the relatively ‘settled’ character of many populations and cultures, above all in relation to the processes of globalization, which I would argue is coterminous with modernity and the processes of forced and ‘free’ migration which have become a global phenomenon of the so-called ‘post-colonial’ world (pg. 4).

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117 See Grossberg (1996) for a discussion of identity and difference in cultural studies, in which essentialist and anti-essentialist models of identity are considered.
If one considers forced and “free” global migrations as a condition of modern identities, then Gullah has been a modern culture since its inception in slavery. Yet in some ways, the Gullah identity is perceived in popular discourse as separate from the modern world, spatially and physically in an isolated geography, and temporally, in terms of naturalized European conceptions of “race” and “progress.” Following Hall, I argue that an anti-essentialist contextual understanding of Gullah culture is crucial to its current preservation. I also argue that effective preservation of Gullah, language, identity, and community involves a reflexive understanding of the different African and European languages, epistemologies, and intellectual histories that form the bases of “Gullah” and “preservation” themselves.

Gullah Culture in the Academy

Historically, the academy’s production of knowledge about Gullah culture warrants skepticism as it over-privileges Eurocentric interpretation, and the production of knowledge that assumes the culture is separate and “other” from European modernity, a product of another “time and place,” and behind the curve of modern progress. These discourses of Gullah as “primitive” are rooted in a misunderstanding of the culture’s African heritage. Much past scholarship on African American culture did not fully recognize its African influences. For example, according to E. Franklin Frazier (1963), when “the Negroes were captured in Africa and enslaved, they were practically stripped of their social heritage” (p. 108) and “the capture of many of the slaves in inter-tribal wars and their selection for the slave market tended to reduce to a minimum the possibility of the retention and transmission of African culture” (ibid). Of this questionable assumption, John Tibbetts (2000) writes that many “historians agreed that
slavery and segregation had been so devastating to African Americans that their cultural traditions had been completely crushed. . . so they absorbed those of European Americans” (pg. 8). And according to Charles Joyner, for decades, “the consensus was that there wasn’t much black culture” (in Tibbetts, pg. 8).

Black intellectuals of the twentieth century recognized the error of the idea that African culture had vanished among blacks in the United States. Ralph Ellison (1958) wrote, “The white American has charged the Negro American with being without past or tradition” (pg. 108). Further, he noted that white Americans often misunderstood and degraded their own traditions, while showing enormous respect for supposedly more enlightened European culture. Until relatively recently, much of the scholarship on the Gullah language was framed from within a European modernist perspective, and measured the culture by English standards that framed the language and culture as backward and racially inferior. South Carolinian Ambrose E. Gonzalez (1922), for example, writes:

Slovenly and careless of speech, these Gullahs seized upon the peasant English used by some of the early settlers and by the white servants of the wealthier Colonists, wrapped their clumsy tongues about it as well as they could, and, enriched with certain expressive African words, it issued through their flat noses and thick lips as so workable a form of speech that it was gradually adopted by other slaves and became in time the accepted Negro speech of the lower districts of South Carolina and Georgia (pg. 10).

118 There have, however, been notable exceptions. Melville J. Herskovitz (1941) for example, recognized that African American cultural enclaves could not be understood “in their present forms without a reference to a preceding cultural heritage” (pg. 109). And in his African Civilizations in the New World (1972), Roger Bastide wrote, “The slave ships carried not only men, women, and children, but also their gods, beliefs, and traditional folklore” (pg. 109).
Another example is found in the writings of Mason Crum (1940), who did not recognize the importance of Gullah’s defining West African influence, and instead measured the language in terms of English standards:

Gullah speech is conspicuous for its short cuts. Its grammar, which is but an abbreviated and mutilated English grammar, knows no rule except to follow the line of least resistance, take its own tack, violate all rules of logic, and just say that which is natural and to the point (pg. 121).

While a number of serious studies of Gullah were undertaken in the early and middle parts of the twentieth century, almost all were unsuccessful in fully exposing the importance of the culture’s West African roots. Margaret Wade-Lewis successfully demonstrates in her book, *Lorenzo Dow Turner: Father of Gullah Studies* (2007), that it was not until the publication of African American linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner’s groundbreaking book *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949), that the study of Gullah was reoriented toward a more Afrocentric perspective. Through careful research and extensive travels in Africa, Turner clearly demonstrated Gullah’s direct connections to languages of West Africa, and with remarkable geographical specificity:

The slaves brought to South Carolina and Georgia direct from Africa came principally from a section extending along the West coast from Senegal to Angola. The important areas involved were Senegal, Gambia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and the Gold Coast, Togo, Dahomey, Nigeria, and Angola. Today the vocabulary of Gullah contains words found in the following languages, all of which are spoken in the above mentioned areas: Wolof, Malinke, Mandiha, Bambara, Fula, Mende, Vai, Twi, Fon, Yoruba, Bin, Hausa, Ibo, Ibibio, Efik, Kongo, Umbundu, Kimbundu, and a few others (pp. 1-2).

Through his study, Turner also clarified the Eurocentric error of much of the previous scholarship on Gullah, and initiated a new way of studying and understanding the culture in the United States:
Many Americans who have attempted to understand Gullah have greatly underestimated the extent of the African element in this strange dialect. Observing many elements in common with certain British dialects of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they have not considered it necessary to acquaint themselves with any of the languages spoken in those sections of West Africa from which the Negroes were brought to the New World as slaves, nor to study the speech of those Negroes in those parts of the New World where English is not spoken; but rather have they taken the position that the British dialects offer a satisfactory solution to all the problems presented by Gullah (pg. 5).

Recent generations of Gullah scholars, such as Charles Joyner, have worked to correct the idea that African culture had ceased to exist in the United States and, instead, to demonstrate cultural continuity with Africa in the New World. Joyner’s *Down By the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (1984) illuminated particular, concrete, and detailed examples of a thriving African slave culture in the South Carolina Lowcountry. While more recent Gullah scholars provided valuable insight and correction to previous scholarship that failed to recognize the pervasive influence of African culture in the New World, however, “some scholars began to lose sight of the destructive power of slavery and segregation” (Tibbetts, pg. 8) Joyner realized that his work and that of other scholars was misinterpreted by a new generation of students who “didn’t know how horrible slavery and segregation could be” (ibid). Current scholars are working to provide a “harsher depiction of slavery” (ibid), while “also acknowledging the survival of black culture” (ibid).

As a final consideration with regard to an academic epistemology of Gullah, a reflexive and contextual view of the culture also involves the researcher’s acknowledgement of her or his own position in relation to the “object” of study. According to Melissa Hargrove, “The ethnographic past is littered with exemplars of
racist, sexist, ethnocentric and androcentric accounts of the exotic other, so often used to bolster academic credentials while casting informants as destined for cultural extinction” (2005, pg. 17). Hargrove notes that the researcher’s position has become a crucial problem and has led to four important research considerations: 1) the acknowledgement of the power dynamics involved in research, 2) the recognition that a single “truth” or interpretation is not ultimately attainable, and that interpretation is always based upon “situated knowledge,”119 3) the decentering of previous constructions of the researcher and the “other,” and recognition of the collaboration of subjects in research, and 4) the clear articulation of the researcher’s own involvement and “strategic location”120 in the ethnographic text.121

Ritual Communication and the Democratic Conversation of Gullah Preservation

The implications of “democracy” as a form through which Gullah preservation occurs are important to consider, as, increasingly, Gullah preservation has become a subject of conversation and debate in democratic public spheres of the United States. Such spheres include state and federal legislatures, popular media forums, and grassroots political organizations such as the Sea Island Coalition and the Gullah/Geechee Nation. These democratic preservation efforts, while offering progressive possibilities for achieving a popular voice and redistribution of resources in the Sea Islands, can be also be problematic in so far as they are intertwined with private interests. Within a republic in part conceived according to the neoclassical economic assumptions of the individual that


121 See Hargove (2005), for citations of literature that addresses these concerns.
Carey critiques in his *Communication and Economics* essay, mainstream communication surrounding preservation is generally conceived within the transmission model, oriented toward goals of financial profit, and mediated through channels such as the news and entertainment industries or tourism projects. While these projects can be beneficial to Gullah communities, they are limited in their social scope, and often do not so much present authentic culture as represent Gullah for profit.

The republic as conceived within Carey’s ritual model, however, holds a different and arguably more progressive set of possibilities for cultural preservation, in which the emphasis lies not in creating objects of preservation for consumption, but in creating and sustaining democratic conversation and participatory community over time. According to Hanno Hardt (2009), “the art of conversation as subject matter and method of inquiry became an essential element in his [Carey’s] own pursuit of communication studies, focused on the notion of process” (pg. 184). For Carey, the process of communication through conversation involves, “having conversations, giving instructions, imparting knowledge, sharing significant ideas, seeking information, entertaining and being entertained” (Carey, 1989, pg. 24).

Carey’s concern with conversation emerged in the post World War II era, as he witnessed a large transference of social energy from public life into private spaces. He was working at a time in which new technologies reconfigured public space and eroded the ability of citizens to construct politically active, rational, and democratic public institutions. Carey envisioned conversation as a way of reclaiming democracy, which involves “the participation of a capable and interested people in the affairs of society. He anticipated meaningful discourse would emerge from a vigorous public life, in which
genuine conversation occurs. . . “ (Hardt, 2009, pp. 185-186). It is not surprising that in an age of mass-mediated privatization, Carey emphasized the importance of reclaiming public face-to-face conversation as a model of democratic participation. And in many ways, Carey’s critique remains relevant today: an overemphasis on communication understood as transmission, the privatization of social life, a lack of face-to-face contact, and the passivity of democratic “citizens” are all still valid concerns. However, with respect to a concept of democratic conversation, the emergence of digital technologies, increased technological access, and recent political, economic, and social changes also call for a reexamination and perhaps rethinking of Carey’s theory.

**Gullah as a Popular Phenomenon**

Today, as never before, representations of Gullah culture proliferate in popular arenas; in books, films, television, tourist locations, and other media outlets, and increasingly, these media bring Gullah into the mainstream of American culture. In some ways, these mediations are symptomatic of the modern development that has broken the cultural isolation of the Gullah; it is only after Gullah comes into increased contact with “modern” culture that its mass mediation becomes a possibility. On one hand, these media may in some ways mark the decline of oral traditions that form the basis of Gullah. On the other, however, they may also mark the combination of Gullah oral tradition with other forms of communication, and the extension and propagation of Gullah oral tradition into other worlds. To the extent that they educate, foster greater understanding among people, and effectively preserve the culture, these media can arguably have progressive cultural and social value.
Since they are symptomatic of Gullah’s contact with modernity, popular mediations of the Gullah often deal explicitly with themes of cross-cultural contact, cultural continuity, and preservation. The film, *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), directed by Julie Dash, and based on her novel of the same title, was the first nationally distributed feature made by an African American woman. The film, which takes place around the turn of the last century, is about the Peazants, a Gullah family living on one of the Sea Islands and who are preparing to move to the mainland. Younger generations of Gullah desire to become a part of mainstream culture, and the film explores tensions between tradition and assimilation, and connections of characters to their culture and the Sea Island landscape. The film’s narrative is centered around the lives of Gullah women, and suggests “that women, in their roles as matriarchs and storytellers, often acted as the guardians of traditions that might otherwise have disappeared” (Backstein, 1993, pg. 88). The groundbreaking plot and style of the film earned it wide critical acclaim, and it is “rightly regarded as a brilliant exposition of female subjectivity and diasporic consciousness” (Wright, 2008, pg. 11). In 2004, the film was selected by the Library of Congress for the National Film Registry, an honor reserved for films considered to be historically, culturally or aesthetically significant.

The award-winning PBS documentary *Family Across the Sea* (1991), directed by Tim Carrier, depicts a journey\(^\text{122}\) of nine Gullahs who make a historic homecoming to Sierra Leone, and explores their communal and cultural continuities with Africa. *The Language You Cry In* (1998), directed by Alvaro Toepke and Angel Serrano, portrays the homecoming of another Gullah family to a village in Sierra Leone, and links an ancient African song preserved by the Gullah family to a Sierra Leone village, in which the same

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\(^{122}\) The journey in the film was organized by anthropologist Joseph Opala
song is sung today. Both films were organized around the work of anthropologist Joseph Opala. Opala’s latest project, a work in progress titled *Pricilla’s Homecoming*, uses historical documents to connect a Charleston Gullah woman to her great-great-great-great-great-grandmother who was taken from Sierra Leone in 1756. Opala’s public history work has had a great influence both in the United States and in Sierra Leone, and has contributed to the formation of civic groups in both countries that are dedicated to preserving the human rights of the Gullah people.

One of the most widely recognized examples of Gullah in popular culture is the children’s television series, *Gullah Gullah Island*, which ran on the Nickelodeon kid’s network from 1994-1997. The show follows the everyday activities of a Gullah family living on Gullah Gullah Island, and includes sing-alongs, storytelling, exercises, and game-playing. The show received numerous accolades, including a nomination for a Daytime Emmy, two nominations for the NAACP Image Award, a selection as a top ten children’s show by *TV Guide*, and two Parent's Choice Awards. After it ended in 1997, the show’s executives and stars, Ron and Natalie Daise, produced a stage show titled *Gullah Gullah Island Live!*, which played to sold-out audiences across the United States.123

Festivals have also played an important role in popularizing Gullah, and according to Cross, “The numbers of festivals, feasts, holidays, and other events recognizing the Gullah culture have increased noticeably over just the past two decades in the Sea Islands and Low Country” (2008, pg. 189) Recently, James Island has become

one of the sites of an annual heritage festival with events that emphasize the history of local race relations and the Island’s Gullah legacy. The event’s founder and executive director, Eleanor Kinlaw-Ross, grew up on James Island. While the events take place in many locales in and around the Charleston Peninsula, “those that delved most deeply into the history of the Sea Island natives were on James Island and Folly Beach” (Rodriguez, 2008, pg. 6A).

At the third annual festival, Al Miller, a tour leader, took a group by bus to significant sites of African American history and culture, including a cemetery on Sullivan’s Island and the McLeod plantation on James Island. The tour stopped at the James Island Presbyterian church and visited the grave of Sammie Smalls, a vegetable seller who inspired the character Porgy in Dubose Heyward’s novel *Porgy* (1924), and George Gershwin’s famous opera adaption *Porgy and Bess* (1934). As they visited historical sites Miller discussed a variety of topics with the tour group, including Septima P. Clark’s work in the civil rights movement and the African American roots of Lowcountry cuisine (ibid). A “Grits and Gullah” breakfast at Folly Beach featured demonstrations of sweetgrass basketmaking and Gullah storytelling, while attendees enjoyed the Gullah specialty of shrimp and grits. At the Charleston Progressive Academy, a “Taste of Gullah” event featured “Dancing with the Djole African Dance and Drum Company.” The festival also included a tour of the Old Slave Mart in Charleston, a performance of the play *Cross the Color Line* by Eleanor Kinlaw-Ross, and the inauguration of an Island History trail commemorating James Island’s original Native American inhabitants.
While the above examples suggest the great value, in terms of increased historical, cultural, and social awareness and understanding through increasing portrayals Gullah in film, television, festivals, and other popular outlets, there can also be problematic aspects of marketing the culture for audiences. According to Eugene Frazier:

I don’t think some of it is portrayed in the exact form that it was. I think some people try to spicy it up a little. . . the things that I see to be honest with you, I think people are trying to market things. . . 124

Some Gullah people are also not sure how to react to the relatively recent public exposure of the culture and the consequent shift in public perceptions, due in large part to its increasing mediation in popular venues. According to Marquetta Goodwine, for example, the Gullah people are somewhat confused about their new popularity: The label “Gullah” was once derogatory, and connoted a primitive culture. Sea Islanders were often told “Don’t be who you are,” (in Tibbetts, pg. 12) yet now the same people say “Look, Gullah is the greatest thing ever!” (ibid). A popular celebration of the culture is arguably positive, yet can also be problematic to the degree that it elides a more reflexive and deeper understanding of Gullah’s complex and often painful representational history.

**Popular Gullah Politics**

Identifying with Gullah roots, and establishing a politics of place has been one of the ways in which people of the Sea Islands have organized in resistance to development. Recent legislation, political movements, and organizations, including the Sea Island Coalition, the Gullah/Geechee Nation, and the Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor Act offer different, often aligned, though sometimes conflicting, organizations through which

124 Author’s Interview, 2009
democratic conversation and Gullah activism take place. These organizations are often productive in terms of achieving a popular voice, recognition of the cultural value of Gullah, and resource redistribution in the Sea Islands and Lowcountry.

In 1996, Marquetta Goodwine founded an activist group called the Gullah Geechee Sea Island Coalition, which is centered on St. Helena Island, SC. On July 2, 2000, she was elected and installed as Chieftess and Head-of-State for the Gullah/Geechee Nation.125 As the Nation’s leader, her activism is inspired by “the need to bring people around the world together in order to protect a branch of Africa’s tree that took root in North America which had become of place of consistent ‘destructionment’ and displacement of Gullah/Geechee people.”126 As its mission, the organization:

- promotes and participates in the preservation of Gullah/Geechee history, heritage, culture, and language.
- works toward Sea Island land re-acquisition and maintenance.
- celebrates Gullah/Geechee culture through artistic and educational means electronically and via "grassroots scholarship."127

The Coalition draws on historical and religious connections to the past to organize in resistance to the present destruction of Gullah lands, displacement of Gullah people, and erasure of the culture. *De Conch*, the organization’s newsletter, often commemorates important dates of black history and contextualizes them within current African American political struggles. The July 2008 issue, for example, remembers Denmark Vesey’s slave revolt of July 2, 1822, which was suppressed, and led to Vessey’s public

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125 See Figure 15: Queen Quet (pictured left) at the Gullah/Geechee Reunion on Sullivan’s Island, SC.


127 ibid
hanging “as an example that was to attempt to keep the Africans of the Sea Islands bound forever in fear of freedom” (pg. 10). The issue also connects members of the Gullah/Geechee Nation with “our ancestors that were able to endure in spite of the brutality that they were faced. . . Even as they were stripped of their traditional clothing and adornment, they were ‘clothed in their right minds’” (ibid). Maintaining hope, religion, and cultural continuity with African tradition, the ancestors “continued to hold on to their songs and sing them when their tear ducts had been emptied. . . They continued to pray for their children that would come later and they wanted us to have a better life than they had” (ibid).

In addition to local grassroots activism, the Coalition has taken its work onto the international stage. In 1999, Queen Quet flew to Geneva, Switzerland, and addressed the United Nations with a speech about the human rights concerns of her people. Following her speech, the U.N. officially designated the Gullah/Geechee people as a linguistic minority and recognized the need to protect the culture. Queen Quet’s speech, in addition to engaging the international community, also roused interest for the Gullah/Geechee culture in the United States. In 2009, the Obama administration’s United States Department of State’s Public Affairs Section invited Queen Quet to give a presentation on the “dynamism and diversity of the cultures of the United States” at the United States Mexican Consulate in Mexico City. The presentation was designed to educate the Mexican public about the Black History/African Heritage Month celebration in the United States.

The Coalition also organizes events and homecomings for the Gullah/Geechee Nation. Every year members of the Nation gather at a Gullah/Geechee reunion to
commemorate the installment of Queen Quet as their chieftess.\textsuperscript{128} The event is held at the Fort Moultrie Historical Site on Sullivan’s Island, a location to which forty percent of the enslaved Africans in North America were shipped before being sold. Participants are invited to bring food, musical instruments, and other items to the tribute, and the event offers an opportunity for participants to gather face to face; to share stories, sing songs, march together,\textsuperscript{129} and celebrate their history and culture.

Recently the Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor Act, initiated by Congressman James E. Clyburn, was passed in both the Senate and House of Representatives. Its passage was a media event, covered online, in print, radio, and on television. Explaining the purpose of the act, Clyburn (2004), an African American South Carolinian, points out the exploitation of developers, and the importance of addressing the political economic concerns of displacement, and its implications for the erasure of Gullah/Geechee history. As a remedy, Clyburn recognizes the need for cultural preservation and material redistribution projects in the heritage corridor. He also explains the historical background and preservationist approach of the Act:

These communities were developed by former slaves whose life began in indigo fields and on rice patties. They began their freedom in isolated and remote villages that nurtured and sustained their way of life for generations. But a few years ago, developers saw the potential to turn these small pockets of paradise into resort areas. As the roads and bridges came, this unique slice of history and traditions grew smaller and smaller. . . There is still time to preserve significant portions of the Gullah/Geechee culture, and I have heeded the call from community leaders and preservationists to seek government intervention. . . Just as the National Park Service protects the Grand Canyon, the great Redwood Forest, and

\textsuperscript{128} http://www.charlestoncvb.com/visitors/charleston-events/the_gullah_geechee_reunion-4349 (last accessed August 14, 2009).

\textsuperscript{129} Figure 15: Gullah/Geechee March at the Gullah/Geechee Reunion on Sullivan’s Island, SC.
Old Faithful, it is an obligation and, I hope, a desire to protect this culture that is as much a product of its place and time. . . (pg. 9-A).

Figure 15: Queen Quet (pictured left) at the Gullah/Geechee Reunion on Sullivan’s Island, SC (Author’s Photo).
Figure 16: Gullah/Geechee March at the Gullah/Geechee Reunion on Sullivan’s Island, SC (Author’s Photo).

In December of 2003, The National Park Service completed a study titled *Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Guide*, which was instrumental to the passing of the Act. The study assesses the need for preservation of the Gullah culture and the National Park Service’s role in “interpretation and preservation of the unique culture and heritage of the Gullah/Geechee people” (pg. 6). As a methodological approach, the park service held meetings with members of Gullah/Geechee communities to learn about their history and culture and determine some of the directions that cultural and historical preservation might take within the Heritage Corridor.

The outcome of the meetings, drafted in the report, was a decision to protect the Gullah Geechee culture, through selecting among four alternatives: setting up
Gullah/Geechee Coastal Heritage Centers, expanding the Gullah/Geechee Story, establishing a Gullah/Geechee National Heritage Area, and a combination of the latter two. In the first scenario, which has been approved as a part of the Heritage Act, specific sites will be established, in which the National Park Service will aid in the interpretation of Gullah culture. The second alternative, to expand the Gullah/Geechee story, would install interpretive programs at National Park Sites that are already in place; for example, the Charles Pinkney National Historic Site, the Fort Pulaski National Monument, and the Cumberland Island National Seashore. The third alternative, establishing a National Heritage Area, would “connect coastal resources, including cultural landscapes, archaeological sites, historic structures, and places of continuing ethnological importance that tell the story of the Gullah/Geechee culture” (ibid).

Cultural heritage corridors are basically tourism “trails” that run through a region and link preservation sites of historic and cultural significance. Run by local organizations, rather than the government, they are considered to be “one of the least-expensive and most cost-effective methods of conservation and preservation” (pg. 1B) Heritage corridors supposedly pay for themselves in terms of tourism dollars and job creation. According to the Park Service report:

The NPS (National Park Service) recognizes national heritage areas as important partners for adjacent parks units who are assisted by giving the community a voice in telling the larger story of a region, by building a common understanding and a vision for the future, and by encouraging local stewardship of key resources. Gateway communities in particular can benefit from heritage planning that reinvigorates local tourist offerings with real and authentic experiences . . . heritage is both a place and a concept. Physically, heritage areas are regions with concentrations of important historic, cultural, natural, and recreational resources. These are places known for their unique culture and identity, as well as being good places to live and visit. As a concept, a heritage area serves to combine
resource conservation and education with economic development, typically in the form of tourism (pg. 110).

The implications of preservation through tourism are important to consider. Tourist economies often rely on Gullah-Gecechee people to be a product of a particular “place and time” within designated tourist locations, such as Gullah restaurants, African Sweetgrass basket markets, and souvenir shops. These locations do not so much present authentic culture, though, as represent “Gullah” for popular consumption, and on what basis tourists can enjoy an “authentic” experience of Gullah-Geechee culture needs to be questioned. The very presence of tourists in a Gullah community works against the authenticity of the cultural experience, in the sense that the culture’s “authenticity” somehow depends on it being outside of the culture of tourism. Whatever cultural experience occurs in the gateway communities will not simply be passively observed by tourists, but will be co-constructed by both the tourists and the people who live in the community.

It is also important to question how Gullah culture is both interpreted and produced through the Heritage Corridors. The collective identities and common history being produced should be critically evaluated, particularly when they are produced in collaboration with cultural outsiders. The idea that the National Heritage Area could “interpret the entire Gullah/Geechee coastal area,” depends on the perspective of whoever is doing the interpretation, and it could overlook important parts of the story, as well as exclude people from its historical claim. It is important that the goals of the interpretation be primarily informed by those within Gullah communities, and that those interpretations are continually questioned and revised.
Feedback from the Gullah-Geechee community concerning the Park Service report varied. In a methodology description in the Park Service’s report, there is a passage concerning the team meetings conducted by the N.P.S. in which people from near the boundary areas of the study would attend meetings and some of them would “thank team members for ‘telling me who I am’” (pg.7), and in one of the “most extreme incidents of positive feedback” (pg. 11) a white-haired lady approached the lead researcher, held both her hands and said, ‘Write down your name for me ‘cause I’m gonna remember you. I’m goin’ home to tell my grands about you. You told me about my culture; you told me about my history. When I say my prayers tonight, I’m gonna thank God for you.’ (ibid).

The report also notes, however, that “others said that the workshop format did not allow for sufficient public expression of preferences” (pg.12). And in other fora, members of the Gullah/Geechee community expressed concerns about the Heritage Corridor. According to Whitney Dangerfield (2007), for example, “many Gullah know very little about the corridor” And according to Queen Quet, "People who are aware of the corridor are very skeptical of it. . . They think, 'What do they want? Do they want to help us or help themselves to our culture?'” (in Dangerfield, pg. 1). Whitney further adds, “They [the Gullah] have, after all, learned from their past. . . now that millions of dollars are involved, some Gullah worry that the commission will include profiteers instead of those genuinely interested in helping” (pg. 2).

Another concern is whether or not the Corridor will actually ever receive the millions of dollars promised. While there has been popular interest and even excitement in implementing the preservation plan, the separation between Congressional authorization and subsequent appropriation for the Act has become a difficult hurdle. A
$1 million appropriations bill introduced by Congressman Clyburn in 2008 stalled over budget haggling due to spending for the Iraq war. According to Clyburn, “It seems everybody in the federal bureaucracy is faced with the same problem— doing more with less” (in Peterson, pg. 1A) and “The only contentious part is an administration that seems to veto everything that is not war-related” (ibid). In the meantime, Michael Allen, an education specialist for Fort Sumter, Fort Moultrie, and the Charles Pinckney Historic Site, has maintained the effort alone, a responsibility that has strained finances dedicated to his primary job of running educational programs for the parks. According to Allen, “My work, my time, my labor, is really coming out of park expenses” (ibid). And according to Bob Dodson, monument superintendent, “The reality is, here at the park area, there is no financial support to set aside for park time” (ibid).

Clyburn is more hopeful of the future for appropriations within the new Congress; “Now that this new Congress has broken the logjam, many worthwhile projects will receive the funding they need to proceed” (ibid). At the start of 2008, the federal government slated $150,000 of matching funds from appropriations for the National Park Service, to help keep the program from faltering. The new federal budget increases heritage area funding by thirteen percent, which amounts to $15.5 million divided among thirty-seven areas in the nation. While such funding might seem slim for the ambitious project, “Even a little money gives credence to the program; it puts it on the map,” according to Antoinette Jackson, a South Florida anthropology professor and member of the Corridor’s volunteer Commission (in Peterson, 2007, pg. 1B). Navassa, N.C. mayor and Commission member, Eulis Willis explains, “The plan also provides a formula for how we’re going to go about our business. . . From where I sit, an effort such as this is

130 Here Clyburn refers to the George W. Bush administration (2001-2009).
worthwhile. If we need to get some folks to come help us out, I think we should be able to do that. Normally, when the community gets behind something it happens” (ibid).

As the Act moves part of Gullah culture further into the American mainstream, it is crucial to question the shapes that Gullah “preservation” will take. William Pollitzer writes that the Gullah-Geechee people “are not a museum piece, relics of the past, but rather survivors of enslavement, bondage, discrimination, and white privilege—fellow human beings entitled to work out their own destiny” (1999, pg. 201) Considering the preservation of the culture, he adds, “Hopefully the best of sea island life language and customs can be preserved, even as people take advantage of new opportunities and move into mainstream America,” (ibid). And according to Queen Quet, “I hope [the Commission] understands the full extent of the law to protect, preserve and continue the culture, and not make it a tourist area, not to have it museumized” (in Dangerfield, pg. 2). Rather than transforming the culture into a tourist spectacle, Queen Quet hopes that fund monies will be spent on concrete plans that help the Gullah people, such as a land trust, heir’s property law center, economic development, and historic preservation. Rather than simply an opportunity for profiteers, the funds should be an investment for the future of the Gullah/Geechee Nation; "We need to take ten million seeds and then grow a whole bunch of more plants" (ibid).

**Carey’s Ritual Model and the Limits of Democratic Conversation**

By surveying Gullah as a popular phenomenon and political movement, one can see ways in which Carey’s notions of conversation are useful. Modern mediations of the culture, for example, in forms such as tourism trails, newspapers and television, are arguably limited in their democratic capacities. While these media might inform
audiences, it is questionable whether or not they will ultimately induce any kind of political action or democratic participation. To the degree that they do facilitate democratic conversation, these media can usefully improve the quality of politics and culture in the United States. In the case of the press, for example Carey writes, “we value the press to the precise degree that it sustains public life, that it helps keep the conversation going among us. . . [and] devalue the press to the degree that it seeks to inform us and turn us into silent spectators” (pg. 204).

While some media forms seem to diminish the possibility of conversation, others arguably enable it, and perhaps facilitate democratic participation. Newer media, such as the internet, offer a degree of public access and possibility for the type of conversation that Carey had in mind, in which people trade ideas and work toward democratic purpose. For example, the Sea Island Coalition, a Gullah/Geechee activist group, uses the Internet and its blogging capability as a way to exchange ideas and organize socially. The group’s mission statement even cites “celebrating Gullah/Geechee culture through artistic and educational means electronically” as one of its main goals. As an opportunity for conversation, “unmediated” face to face activist gatherings such as the Gullah/Geechee Reunion on Sullivan’s Island also arguably offer the type of democratic potential that Carey envisioned.

While Carey’s notion of conversation can be a useful model for analyzing mediations of preservation, it is important to consider that conversation, like any form of communication, has its limits. John Durham Peters (2006) writes about a “hegemony of conversation” that dominates the field of Communication Studies. In various ways, the

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hegemonic model denounces one-way communication, and praises conversation. Examples are wide ranging, and include a Marxist notion of “authentic interaction,” a sociological notion of “dialogical democracy,” conservatives who lament a totalitarian media, and “social democrats, such as “John Dewey and James Carey, who regard communities without conversation as little better than animal gatherings of intellectually passive creatures” (pg. 115). The hegemonic notion valorizes conversation and assumes its absence to be a crisis in which modern media have undermined the ability of citizens to engage democratically. As an example, Peters cites Harold Innis (1948) as “Perhaps the most explicit critique of modern media as destroyers of conversation” and a “stock image of how the twentieth century went bad” (ibid):

The quantitative pressure of modern knowledge has been responsible for the decay of oral dialectic and conversation. The passive reading of newspapers and newspaper placards and the small number of significant magazines and books point to the dominance of conversation by the newspaper and to the pervasive influence of discontinuity, which is, of course, the characteristic of the newspaper, as it is the dictionary” (Innis, in Peters, pg. 116).

Arguably, however, mass media need not always lead to a decline of public conversation. Rather, in some ways Peters argues that mass media have become increasingly conversational in form and style. Examples are wide ranging, and include talk shows, call-ins and chats, intimate forms of personal address, and advertisements that offer glimpses into everyday life. Older forms of sender-oriented, one-way, mass address do not often connect with the ethos of contemporary audiences. Peters writes, “In a capitalist society where the persuasion of audiences is essential for profits or a promotional society that considers image essential for votes, it is no surprise that communicative styles have evolved from sender-oriented to audience-oriented” (pg. 119).
Peters further argues that as public discourse is increasingly “conversationalized,” one might conclude, “perhaps the world does not have too little conversation in it; it has too much. Or at least of the wrong kind. The call for conversation ignores the ways that media have already expropriated its styles and strategies” (ibid).

The flip side of the “conversationalization” of media discourse over the past century is that conversation as a form is increasingly mediated. Conversation, both in its common experience and representation, “has come to approach something like mass communication in its miscellaneity, juxtaposition, automatism, and jumbled editing” (pg. 124). Furthermore, Peters argues that the desire for ideal, presumably unmediated, conversation is perhaps a wish for a return to something that never existed. Conversation has always been imperfect and mediated, and the yearning for perfect conversation was likely invented following the rise of mass media. Rather than holding up a return to conversation as a theoretical purpose and the cure for an ailing democracy, Peters concludes that conversation is not the only form of communication suitable for democracy, and “We need both dissemination and dialogue” (ibid). While conversation can perhaps be a useful democratic form, “Like all media conversation creates monopolies of knowledge; it can be tiring, impractical, and exclusive. . . conversation is no more free of history, power, and control than any other form of communication. . .” (pp. 124-125). In short, “we need more than conversation to anchor our theories of media and democratic life” (pg. 125).

Understanding the relationship of “conversation” and power within Carey’s ritual model presents considerable difficulties. Ken Hillis (2009), James Hay (2006), and others have noted that Carey’s model tends to see forms of power and control in terms of
transmission and does not provide many specific insights into how they might operate within ritual forms of communication. Hillis productively rethinks how “ritual and transmission might actually inform rather than oppose one another” (pg. 62) and examines “digital rituals” in which the “networked transmission of digital information collapses the binary understanding of communication and blurs distinction between these processes” (pg. 5) According to Hillis, the willingness of individuals to interact ritually in digital worlds indicates, “not only their interpolation into dominant ideologies or discourses but also that they are consenting for reasons of their own” (pg. 73). The “digital ritual” implicates the operation of power at two levels: both in the structure of the ritual and in its participants.

Rituals, whether understood as formal practice or everyday behaviors, in digital or interpersonal environments, always involve participants whose activities are structured in some way. Through concrete historical examples of Gullah preservation, one can see that in addition to a vast array of media technologies, there are political, economic, social, and cultural contexts that shape the ritual forms of “democratic conversation” involved in preservation. Rather than valorizing a notion of conversation at the expense of other forms of communication, one can look more toward a detailed analysis of the contexts within which different forms exist, and the particular political uses to which they are put. Also, while responsibility to improve communication and engage democratically may lie with individuals and communities, locating that responsibility also requires understanding the larger structural contexts that shape the types of “individual” and “communal” democratic engagement that are possible.
As the work of many contemporary scholars indicates, Carey’s analytic remains a powerful conceptual tool, worth wrestling with, as its problematics and possible applications yield useful insights into the relationships of modern communication and social control. The impulse of Carey’s work, aimed at improving the quality of United States politics and culture through a critique of the political and economic purposes envisioned for modern communication, continues to bear relevance:

Because we have looked at each new advance in communication as an opportunity for politics and economics, we have devoted it, almost exclusively, to matters of government and trade. We have rarely seen these advances as opportunities to expand people’s power to learn and exchange ideas and experience. . . Because we have seen our cities as the domain of politics and economics, they have become the residence of technology and bureaucracy. Our streets are designed to accommodate the automobile, our sidewalks to facilitate trade, our land and houses to satisfy the economy and the real estate speculator.

The object, then, of recasting our studies of communication in terms of a ritual model is not only to more firmly grasp the essence of this “wonderful” process but to give us a way in which to rebuild a model of and for communication of some restorative value in reshaping our common culture” (1989, pp. 34-35).

With respect to understanding the limitations of Gullah preservation within democratic spheres of the U.S., Carey is useful in that he identified important ways in which political and economic conceptions of modern communication are misguided and limit the possibilities for democratic conversation, whether through face-to-face settings or the mediation of technological forms. In the modern world, preservation is too often perceived through a lens of politics and economics that conceives of cultural preservation as a communication product, rather than a democratic process. Using Carey’s ritual model to further understand whether or not modern practices of communication live up to their democratic potential, however, also requires a shift away from understanding
transmission as a form of control (and conversation as the antidote) and more toward a contextual understanding of the structure and quality of our democratic rituals
CONCLUSION

Commercial development on James Island has slowed over the last couple of years, at the same time as an increasing number of African American historical and cultural preservation projects have emerged, with encouraging results. Nevertheless, future development will occur, likely at an increasing rate, in rural areas long settled by black communities. Currently there are around 40,000 residents on the Island. Of the Island’s residents, 79.1 percent are white, and 18.8 percent are black.132 The black population remained relatively stable during the later part of the 20th century. Population on the Island, however, is a trend in flux: during the 1990’s, the white population of James Island increased by around 14 percent, while the African American population increased by around 1 percent. As the City of Charleston continues to expand, white population growth and extension into the less densely developed areas of rural black communities will continue.

In response to these trends, problems of communication and culture, such as the construction of social barriers and inequalities along lines of “race” and “class,” and a lack of shared history, or historical understanding, among longtime islanders and newcomers will continually need to be addressed. In this study, I have examined current differences in practices of communication and culture among different cultural groups living on James Island, particularly with regard to the preservation of James Island’s

African American history and culture. I began with a goal of addressing a general set of questions: How do different cultural groups living on James Island, and in the Sea Island region more broadly, perceive landownership, development, and cultural preservation differently and why? What contextual factors and communicative practices might give rise to, support, and shape these viewpoints? And finally, how might practices of communication and cultural preservation be re-imagined, and in possibly progressive ways that foster improved understandings and practices of communication among individuals, institutions, and cultural groups living in the Sea Islands? In this chapter, I discuss my research findings, and draw some conclusions with respect to my research questions and methodology, the study’s limitations, possibilities for future research, and practical applications of my research.

**Research Questions and Methodology**

In terms of a general methodological approach for addressing my research questions, I insist that there is a need to ground development and preservation as historically specific and concrete processes. “Development” and “preservation” have come to represent monolithic and universal concepts, yet they are never the same in all places. In relation to the “modern” world, Gullah has neither disappeared, nor has it taken an entirely new form in the modern American melting pot. Rather, Gullah exists in different forms in different places, in relation to different geographies, social structures, and forms of capitalist development. Therefore, I conclude that understanding the presence of Gullah and its preservation in any particular place requires situating it within that place’s specific and concrete historical context.
Using a concrete historical method, I selected specific “objects” of study on James Island, such as developments in James Island’s Grimball Farm and Sol Legare communities, and local preservation projects, such as the restoration of a local Seashore Farmer’s Lodge, the preservation of the McLeod plantation, and Gullah/Geechee grassroots political activism. Within these local orientations, I chose a cultural political economy approach, based in the work of James Carey and Harold Innis, which I found appropriate for examining prevalent popular discourses that frame politics and economics as starting points for evaluating problems of development and cultural preservation on James Island. In my investigation, I found that “politics” and “economics” are often bracketed off from the idea of “culture” in popular discourse, and more specifically, they are frequently perceived as capable of shaping culture, but not as integral parts of culture itself. Rather than taking this commonsense political and economic approach to understanding modern problems of development and cultural preservation, I examined, through the theoretical lens of James Carey’s ritual model, how “politics” and “economics” are themselves cultural conceptions, with distinctly modern European roots, that are constructed and embedded within certain understandings and practices of modern communication. By so doing, I also sought to discover how culture as a concept can be used to develop a more detailed and fruitful analysis of problems of communication, development, and cultural preservation.

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Examples of these discourses are elucidated within the chapters of the dissertation, including public debates that have occurred about whether or not municipalities have the right to annex land on the island; whether or development will create better economic opportunities and public services for islanders; and whether or not property tax increases will ultimately lead to the displacement of Gullah communities. Politics and economics are also perceived as the guiding factors of cultural preservation. For example, recent legislation has approved the construction of Gullah Heritage Corridors, or tourism trails, and court cases that have debated the justness of heir’s property laws (see Chapter Two).
I conclude that relying only on modern European political and economic discourses, \(^{134}\) as a conceptual lens for understanding development and preservation in the media, masks an underlying spatial relationship of modern media, development, and cultural preservation. Both development and preservation are made possible only through the production, maintenance, and monopolization of particular types of political and economic knowledge and space. Spatially biased media, such as the local newspaper, traffic density reports, public service recommendations, the census, and many more, are capable of distributing information across geographic expanse. These media relate to “political” and “economic” knowledge on two levels: 1) They inherit, and are themselves rationalized through, political and economic knowledge in which media are understood, for example, as contributing to informed citizenry, a public good, as a forum for public expression, or as vehicles of profit; and 2) They are produced within and also produce particular understandings of communication and space, in which disparate points are reconciled for political and economic purposes. Most importantly for understanding the phenomena of modern development and preservation, these purposes include the dissemination and naturalization of political and economic knowledge about a population and its problems (which development and/or preservation can then “solve”); for example, that traffic is unacceptable and the City Council needs to approve a new traffic lane, or that additional tax increases will lead to the displacement of Gullah people.

**Limitations of Study and Future Research**

In considering my research findings, a number of limitations of the study need to be addressed. First, the “dominant” political and economic discourses that I examine

\(^{134}\) Here I refer to the discourses mentioned above.
come from a limited sample of historical documents and popular media. These discourses are embedded within a much larger discursive field, in which subjects inhabiting culturally diverse identity positions, as well as related and differently enabled levels of technological access, make sense of the problems of modern development and cultural preservation. My study does little to explain how different individuals, institutions, and cultural groups are interpolated by discourses of development and preservation within this wider discursive field, except to assume that popular media represent something of a common perception of how politics and economics influence modern development and cultural preservation. A model that presupposes a choice of dominance or resistance to a set of political and economic discourses does not take into account, and cannot fully explain, an individual subject’s complex and variegated relationship to modern media, development, and cultural preservation. Therefore, I suggest that a direction for future research is to further understand how the wider discursive position and positioning of subjects relates to the ways that they identify (or do not) with common political and economic discourses of development and cultural preservation.

Second, there are a number of important limitations to consider with regards to my ethnographic research. My interviews represent a limited pool of subjects, mostly older African American men and women who have lived on James Island for most of their lives. While there is compelling evidence that local media and older people living in African American communities often see problems of development and cultural preservation differently, the results of my study cannot be generalized to whole populations or to different locations. A more complete (and potentially a future) study would interview a more diverse range subjects, including developers, suburbanites, and
people working in media, to arrive at a fuller and more nuanced understanding of
differences in viewpoint pertaining to the political and economic problems of modern
development and cultural preservation. Future studies might also try a “non-interview”
approach; for example, examining or participating in more spontaneous interactions, such
as blogs surrounding development and preservation, rather than structuring a question
and answer session. My own subject position also obviously influenced the outcome of
this project, not only in terms of how I am perceived by others and the types of questions
that I asked, but also in terms of how I interpreted the results. A different set of
conclusions could be drawn from the same set of interviews. My own background,
position as researcher, and theoretical choices formed a particular standpoint through
which I viewed and interpreted the data.

Lastly, as an analytic framework, the cultural theory that I chose has particular
strengths and limitations. In the preceding chapters, I have tried to acknowledge their
limitations and pose possible correctives in some cases. For example, in Chapter Three, I
looked at how Harold Innis’s theorization of a monopoly of knowledge might be
complemented and expanded through Foucauldian discourse analysis. While I have found
the dissertation’s central analytic, Carey’s ritual model of communication, to be an
effective conceptual tool, it poses some limitations with which I continue to struggle. As
Ken Hillis (2009) and James Hay (2006) note, working within the “binary” of the ritual
and transmission models poses a difficult set of challenges, particularly in terms of how it
associates power and control with transmission, and does not offer many insights into
how power and control might operate within ritual communication. As I and others have
acknowledged, Carey was working at a particular time when identifying the separation of
ritual from transmission models of communication made sense as a theoretical intervention into the field of Communication Studies. Using Carey’s theory as an analytic today, however, requires rethinking it within contemporary contexts, both historical and within the field of Communication Studies itself. By using Carey’s ritual model in my own research, I have tried to demonstrate its strengths and continuing usefulness to the field, but also pointed to some areas in which it might require further reconsideration (and which future studies might address), particularly with regard to how it formulates power and control.

**Implications for Applied Theory**

In terms of its practical applications for preservation on James Island, Carey’s theory of ritual communication suggests a number of directions and possibilities. The first is recognizing the importance of creating ongoing opportunities for James Islanders to have dialogue and debate, to imagine and develop new languages about development and preservation, and new public fora in which to express them. More “mainstream” and spatially-oriented media, such as the local newspaper or Gullah tourism trails, have particular economic and formal limitations as public vehicles. In their dominant modern European conceptions and practices, these media are biased toward political, economic, and spatial control of populations and places. Within these capacities, they often circulate particular types of political and economic knowledge that form a dominant conceptual lens through which both development and preservation are perceived, understood, and interpreted. While the dominant model can hold progressive possibilities for preservation, such as increasing public awareness or garnering greater political and financial support for preservation projects, it can also obscure a battle of spatial politics
occurring at the grassroots level. Too often, development and preservation are mediated and imposed upon communities “from above,” without sufficient regard and understanding for the community’s own history, culture, and communicative practices.

Progressive local preservation efforts on James Island over the last decade, such as the McLeod plantation preservation effort, the Seashore Farmer’s Lodge restoration, and Gullah/Geechee grassroots politics, suggest that both face-to-face events and new media technologies can be used locally to facilitate greater understanding among people and foster more progressive ritual, or shared, concerns in regard to preservation. In theoretical terms, these local face-to-face and mediated efforts have the potential to reorganize the time and space of development and preservation in progressive ways. However, the politics of these forms must also be addressed. While they perhaps provide an alternative to the dominant model, these forms are not free of power and control, neither do they exist outside of larger social constructions of class, race, and gender. In many ways, newer media also rely upon and perpetuate some of the very logics of European modernism, technological progress, and “democratic” capacity against which I argue. For the purposes of progressive preservation, however, the point is that they also offer interesting possibilities as relatively new forms in flux, opportunities for social reorganization, and the development of new concepts and methods of preservation.

A second point of applied theory that I propose, is that certain historical sites on James Island, such as the McLeod Plantation and the Sol Legare Farmer’s Lodge, are ritual sites, places in which prayer meetings, storytelling, funerals, and many other forms of ritual communication sustained the ties of the black community through its history of slavery, Jim Crow, and segregation. And in some sense, the effective preservation of
these sites would mean that they continue to serve that communal function today. The Seashore Farmer’s Lodge 767 provides a good example. The African American fraternal order which occupied the Lodge still exists, though the order has occupied a different building for the past several decades. Being able to meet in the restored Hall provides not only a better facility for Lodge activities, but also a larger connection to a historical and communal life that spans generations. In addition to continuing to serve its historical function as a meeting place, the Lodge could also serve a more public function by educating non-members about its history as a hub of ritual, political, and social activities in the African American community.

A final point of applied theory that I propose is that the agricultural Lodge at Sol Legare, the McLeod plantation, together with the Gullah/Geechee preservation movement, offer progressive opportunities for a wider dialogue among individuals, institutions, and different cultural groups living on James Island and the larger Sea Island region. Outside of the dominant political and economic discourses of “development” and “preservation,” alternative forms of knowledge are available, including from within Gullah communities themselves. People of the Sea Islands speak about their struggles against development in a rich and emotionally engaging way, using a dialect of words and phrases that belong to them. Historically excluded from the means of popular representation, these powerful voices deserve greater attention in the public discourse. While a public dialogue surrounding the preservation of African American history and culture on James Island has begun, preservationists, town planners, developers, island newcomers, and local media need to interact and engage still further with James Island’s black communities, to more fully understand, interpret, honor, and preserve their history.
and culture. An effective dialogue also requires understanding, not only how improved communication among individuals, institutions, and cultural groups may be achieved within preservation efforts, but also understanding how communication constructs preservation itself.
African American Culture and History on James Island, SC

INTerview AGREEMENT

Overview

My name is Brian Graves, and I am asking you and about six other people who were born and have stayed in the Sea Islands for most of their lives to participate in a research study that is part of my graduate work in the Department of Communication Studies of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Your participation is voluntary.

If you choose to participate, I will ask you open-ended questions about the history of the Sea Islands, your experiences growing up, and how life in the Sea Islands of South Carolina has changed during your lifetime. I may also ask you questions about how Sea Island culture and history has been represented in the mainstream media, and whether or not these representations are accurate.

I plan to audiotape our interview. I may also transcribe portions of our interview and include them in my PhD dissertation. I plan to share my research with faculty and students at the University of North Carolina and possibly in other academic environments. I will possibly submit the project for publication, and may archive our interview with the University of North Carolina Southern Historical Collection. I will also give you a copy of our interview on compact disc if you so desire.

Purpose

The purpose of my study is to learn about and document African American history and culture of the Sea Islands. I am also interested in whether or not Sea Island culture and history have been accurately represented in the mainstream media. I hope that my study will invite people to think more deeply about all of these things, as well as illuminate the importance of preserving the Islands’ culture and past.
APPENDIX: IRB PERMISSION FORM, CONT.

Your Rights

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to answer any question, and you may choose to end the interview at any time. If you decide to end the interview, you may allow me to use portions of it, or you may decide to completely withdraw your interview from my project.

You may be identified in any report or publication about this study. Should you wish to remain anonymous, a pseudonym may be used to protect your confidentiality, and every effort will be made to keep research records private. However, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

If you have any questions about my study/project, you may contact me, Brian Graves, at 919-969-4762 or via email at bagraves@email.unc.edu, or my advisor, Professor Ken Hillis, at 919-962-4950 or via email at khillis@email.unc.edu.

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu. If you contact the IRB, please refer to study number 08-1104.

I have read the above and have had the nature and purpose of this study/documentary project explained to me. I have consented to the interview and understand the intended and possible uses of the interview material. I have been given a copy of this form for my records. I grant you permission to (please check the following):

_____a. Archive the interview.

_____b. Record the interview.

_____c. Identify me in the final report.
APPENDIX: IRB PERMISSION FORM, CONT.

Date of interview: ____________________

Your Name

_________________________________
Signature

_________________________________
Name of Interviewer

_________________________________
Signature
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**Figures**

Figure 1: Map of James Island and City of Charleston (Google Map Image).

Figure 2: Map of the Town of James Island (Town of James Island)

Figure 3: Map of Grimball Farm and Sol Legare (Google Map Image).

Figure 4: Seashore Farmer’s Lodge 767 Prior to Restoration (Corie Hipp).

Figure 5: B and B Nightclub (Author’s Photo).

Figure 6: King Solomon Lodge Hall (Author’s Photo).

Figure 7: Lodge after Restoration (Corie Hipp).

Figure 8: Volunteers and Neighbors Celebrate the Lodge Restoration (Corie Hipp).
Figure 9: Battle of Sol Legare Historical Marker in Front of the Lodge (Richard Edling).

Figure 10: Battle of Sol Legare Historical Marker (Richard Edling).

Figure 11: Slave Cabins at McLeod Plantation (Author’s Photo).

Figure 12: Cotton Gin at McLeod (Author’s Photo).

Figure 13: Main House at McLeod (Author’s Photo).

Figure 14: Tom Johnson at the African American Burial Site of McLeod (Author’s Photo).

Figure 15: Queen Quet (pictured left) at the Gullah/Geechee Reunion on Sullivan’s Island, SC (Author’s Photo).

Figure 16: Gullah/Geechee March at the Gullah/Geechee Reunion on Sullivan’s Island, SC (Author’s Photo).