

Kenneth L. Brown

Ethnographic Analogy, Archaeology, and the African Diaspora: Perspectives from a Tenant Community

ABSTRACT

From its inception, archaeologists have been forced to rely on ethnographic analogies when attempting to make behavioral interpretations for past humans. In the study of the institution of slavery, archaeologists have drawn a vast majority of these analogies from modern cultures of West Africa—those cultures thought to have provided the largest number of enslaved peoples to North America. This paper will attempt to demonstrate that the Gullah and Geechee cultures of the Carolina Lowcountry may very well represent a far more important source for such analogies. These cultures have been overlooked as a result of the view among social scientists and historians that the Gullah/Geechee represent the “end result” of a unique set of evolutionary factors not found elsewhere within the South. Primary among these factors is their isolation from European Americans and other African Americans. However, the historic roots of the Gullah/Geechee are embedded within enslavement, Reconstruction, tenancy, sharecropping, and land holding—many of the same forces that helped to shape African American cultures throughout North America, unlike the cultures of West Africa. An example derived from the historical archaeological research conducted at the Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas, will be employed to demonstrate the importance of the Gullah and Geechee analogies in understanding the lives of enslaved and freed African Americans.

Introduction

At least one major introductory text in historical archaeology has recently noted the importance of ethnographic analogies for interpretation in historical archaeology (Orser and Fagan 1995). Charles Orser and Brian Fagan attempt to argue that within historical archaeology this interpretive method is not often employed, due to the presence of written historical documents directly related to the sites and people being investigated. However, they go on to note that ethnographic analogies have been and continue to be important

in the study of African Americans. Among those involved in the study of the African Diaspora, ethnographic analogies have most often been drawn from cultures surviving in Africa or the Caribbean. These analogies have most often been employed to interpret African American culture under slavery, and certainly this has proven somewhat successful.

However, interpreting the materials recovered from the tenant community at the Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas, has pointed to another, possibly more important source for ethnographic analogies—the rapidly disappearing Gullah/Geechee culture of the Carolina Lowcountry. Gullah/Geechee culture is one that has been derived from a long history of enslavement and tenancy in North America. Therefore, it has the advantage of being an “end result” of the processes that have been defined as having been of primary importance in the formation of African American culture. While the Gullah and Geechee have received some attention from historical archaeologists, these studies have yet to systematically employ the full range of ethnographic information that is available. In part, this may be the result of the recent publication of this ethnography. However, the fact that Gullah/Geechee culture has been defined as being a unique African American culture by social scientists may be the most important reason it is being effectively ignored as a source for interpreting slavery and tenancy for African Americans in North America. Further, historians, in their focus on the work regimes employed by plantation owners, have provided support for the uniqueness of the Gullah/Geechee (Morgan 1999).

This paper will attempt to demonstrate that the Gullah and Geechee may well be unique African American cultures today. However, their historic roots are embedded within enslavement, Reconstruction, tenancy, sharecropping, and land ownership—the same cultural forces that have helped to shape the cultural evolution of African American cultures throughout North America. Importantly, a number of the patterns of culture developed by, and “unique to,” the Gullah and Geechee peoples have been observed being practiced by African Americans elsewhere in the

South. Indeed, this paper will attempt to demonstrate that the Gullah and Geechee were not unique African American cultures during the past. That they appear to be unique in modern times is not solely the result of their special adaptation to enslavement but, rather, to the unique history of isolation provided by the Sea Islands of the South Carolina and Georgia coasts since the mid 1860s. If this hypothesis that the Gullah were not unique in the past but were developed out of African and African American adaptations to the conditions of enslavement proves to be the case, then a major new set of behavioral practices will be defined for the institution of slavery and the postbellum development of African American culture. These behavioral practices and beliefs can then be employed as an aid to testing and interpreting the archaeological record of African American adaptation across the southern plantations and farms.

The Historical Setting of the Gullah/Geechee

Little attention was focused on Gullahs in antebellum days, and much of their early cultural history appeared lost. During the post-Civil War era and the early 20th century, however, Gullahs became the focal point of a large body of research, writing, and fictional literature. Although much of this literature is filled with sociological bias, the studies of Gullah music, folklore, linguistic patterns, and life style reveal a North American example of African retentions within black society (Creel 1991:71).

Early in the Civil War, the white population of the United States became increasingly aware of the African American population residing on the Sea Islands off the coast of southern South Carolina and northern Georgia. In November 1861, Federal troops began the occupation of several of the islands surrounding Port Royal Sound, South Carolina. For the rest of the war, these lands and the large African American population residing on them remained under Federal control. Teachers and supervisors were brought into the area from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia to help educate the newly freed population and "prepare" them for life as citizens. The money to support the educational activities of this group of people was, for the most part, donated by Northern charitable organizations. Thus, the plight of the freedmen, along with various aspects

of their culture, was brought to the attention of many people in the North. In many ways, it was in Port Royal that Reconstruction began for the African American population of the southern United States (Rose 1964). As both Willie Lee Rose (1964) and Eric Foner (1983) have noted, the black population of these islands experienced the trials of the white population attempting to find solutions to the complex issues revolving around the abolition of slavery.

The postbellum development of African American society on the Sea Islands included a higher percentage of land ownership by the freedmen and a greater level of participation in the political and legal arenas after the conclusion of Reconstruction in 1874 than was typical of other areas of the South (Rose 1964; Foner 1983). Federal census figures for the Port Royal/Beaufort area of South Carolina demonstrate an extremely high ratio of blacks to whites throughout the period from 1790 through the present. For example, Foner (1983:78) cites the Beaufort District as being 83% African American in 1860. Given that this includes the figures from the largely white city of Beaufort, the percentage on the islands was likely even higher. Immediately after the war and throughout the remainder of the 1800s, the federal census indicates that the percentages may actually have become even more one-sided. Foner further points out that the African American land holders on the islands after the war owned only small plots of land on which they produced both subsistence and truck crops (Foner 1983). These truck crops were shipped to northern ports.

The culture of the African Americans residing in the Port Royal Sound area had been developing under the conditions of slavery for more than 100 years prior to 1861. It has been suggested that the postbellum era paralleled antebellum development by evolving outside the view of the white population (Creel 1988; Guthrie 1996). Slave plantations emerged within the Port Royal area during the second quarter of the 18th century. While many large land grants were awarded by 1735, it was not until after the final battles with the Spanish based in Florida that major investment began on the Sea Islands (Rowland et al. 1996). Beginning in the 1740s, plantations on these islands began to produce large profits for their owners. Indeed, the planters became some of the wealthiest families in North America. The

enslaved-labor cultivation of indigo, then rice and long-staple cotton, transformed the Sea Islands into one of the most profitable areas for plantation agriculture in the world, despite the disease-inducing nature of the low-lying marshy environment. Indeed, one of the adaptive strategies for the plantation owners was to establish lavish homes in one (or more) of the towns within the area of the islands (primarily Beaufort and Charleston). Rarely did the plantation owners reside on their Sea Island plantations during the year. Overseers supervised the enslaved populations, who rarely, if ever, saw their actual owners (Rowland et al. 1996).

A unique Gullah culture is one hypothesized result of this long history of isolation of Africans and African Americans on the Sea Islands. This culture has been defined over the past century by a wide variety of social science researchers (Christensen 1892; Gonzales 1923; Parsons 1923; Whaley 1925; Johnson 1930; Woofter 1930; Turner 1949; Hair 1965; Joyner 1984; Creel 1988, 1991; Twining and Baird 1991). This hypothesized uniqueness began with the first reporting of the islands' inhabitants to the outside world that occurred after 1861. Shortly after the Civil War, General John B. Gordon observed of the Geechee of the Georgia Sea Islands "... those negroes upon the coast are very different from the negroes in Middle and Upper Georgia. They are almost an entirely different race of people The negroes have absolutely a language of their own" (qtd. in Foner 1983:78). In a published set of lectures concerning the political economy of emancipation in the New World, Foner (1983:78) notes of the Gullah,

If the rice kingdom gave rise to an exceptional planter aristocracy, so too a distinctive way of life developed among the slaves in the South Carolina and Georgia low country. In cultural autonomy, control over their own time and the pace of work, and even opportunities to acquire property, the slaves on the rice plantations and adjacent Sea Island cotton estates were unique. The extremely high proportion of blacks in the low country population ... and the importation of large numbers of Africans just before the close of the slave trade in 1808 meant that African culture retained its vitality here to a greater degree than elsewhere in the South.

More recently, Margaret Creel (1991:69) reiterates this belief in the cultural uniqueness of the Gullah when she states, "Here [Port Royal and St. Helena sounds], as slaves, the most isolated

Gullah people lived, first cultivating indigo and later the famous long-staple fine-quality cotton. More significantly, the Gullahs created a *distinct, original* African-American cultural form [emphasis added]." In a slightly different vein, John Clarke (1991:vi) notes in his foreword in a popular press book, that "... the culture of the Sea Islands is a special case. The lack of contact with the mainland helped to preserve some of the important features of their African culture" (Twining and Baird 1991). Ethnographic research conducted among the Sea Island Gullah and Geechee in the 1920s (Woofter 1930) and the 1970s (Guthrie 1996), along with folklore studies (Christensen 1892; Gonzales 1923; Whaley 1925; Johnson 1930; Georgia Writers Project 1940; Bascom 1941, 1991; Joyner 1984), linguistic studies (Christensen 1892; Parsons 1923; Johnson 1930; Turner 1949; Hair 1965), and historical ethnography (Creel 1991), all provide evidence for the uniqueness of Gullah and Geechee culture within contemporary North American black populations. Further, a wide variety of studies on African American culture included discussions of Gullah beliefs and behaviors as examples of African retentions in North America (Herskovits 1941; Szew 1970; Gutman 1976).

Scholars attribute the distinctiveness of Gullah/Geechee culture to several key aspects. First, and possibly the most important of these aspects, is the nature of Gullah as a dialect. As noted above in the quote attributed to General Gordon, some of the earliest observations of the Gullah/Geechee focused on their language. General Gordon further states, "If a negro were transported ... to the coast of Georgia, he would not understand at all a great deal that many of the negroes of that coast would say." In fact, Foner (1983:78), summarizing the prevailing view of Gullah language, states, "... the Gullah dialect distinguished low-country slaves from the rest of the black population." Linguists and folklorists continue to debate the origins and nature of the Gullah dialect. Following the lead of Lorenzo Turner (1949) and Paul Hair (1965), most researchers tend to agree that several West African languages, as well as English, were involved in the formation of Gullah and Geechee. Indeed, Hair (1965) has demonstrated the extensive influence from the Sierra Leone area of West Africa.

A second key aspect of Gullah/Geechee culture focuses on a number of their religious practices and beliefs. The most noted physical expression of these practices and beliefs might be the Praise, or Prays, houses of the Gullah. Creel (1988, 1991) has conducted the most extensive study, and she takes the view that "... what was retained of African religion and spirituality was culled from the customs, beliefs, and practices of a number of West African peoples But Gullah spiritual and communitarian features bear strong resemblance to traditions of Upper Guinea and BaKongo peoples" (Creel 1988:208). Creel is certainly not the first scholar to point out that "retained African traditions" are most often those traditions that represent a number of different African cultures (Mintz and Price 1992). She does, however, effectively demonstrate this point in her treatment of Gullah religion and spirituality.

To begin, Creel argues that Baptism was the primary Christian denomination integrated into the religious practices of those enslaved on the Sea Island. This synthesis with Baptism occurred after 1845 when the Southern planters became increasingly concerned with abolitionist sentiment in the North. Creel notes that the slaves preferred Baptism to other Christian denominations for several reasons.

Baptist slaves exercised a religious autonomy the Methodists would not hear of, and this, coupled with the fact that Sea Island slavery was a quasi-absentee type, contributed to the Gullahs' opportunity to control their own religion, to a point. Moreover, in their endeavor to keep blacks under civil control and to keep them on the plantations, slaveholders allowed spiritual permissiveness by legitimizing already existing black societies and leaving them in the hands of black leaders with only minimal white supervision (Creel 1988:248).

Creel further demonstrates that Baptist beliefs were incorporated into Gullah culture along with the importance of the communal or collective spirit. Thus, Gullah religion and spirituality evolved from the slaves' shared African traditions, including aspects of a "... worldview that emphasized affirmation and celebration of human life, with religion representing the highest expression of that existence" (Creel 1988:260). As mentioned above, Gullah culture also incorporated the African-derived belief that a communal or collective spirit was to be

emphasized over individual experience. Creel, therefore, states that "... of the Gullahs at least it might be more aptly stated that they converted Christianity to their African world view. Gullahs used religion as a justification to combat objective forces, to collectively perpetuate a rich sublimity in cultural form, and as a spiritually liberating ideology" (Creel 1988:266). Finally, Creel (1988: 274–275) concludes:

Slavery did not erode the African sense of pride, of community, love of home, and of family. Yet who knows how long these attributes could sustain cultural life among slaves, no matter how much their spirits struggled against degradation? Christianity offered the additional cohesion needed to develop a homogeneous people and a society based upon a progressive religious nationalism. Consequently, religion cannot be viewed only or primarily as a source of visionary, spiritual fulfillment. Nor can religion be mainly viewed as manipulative. For the Gullahs it offered a politic for collective consciousness and group conformity within an African-Christian synthesis.

Again, she argues for the importance of both the tradition of strength and power residing within the community as well as the Baptist and slaveholder willingness to permit the existing power structure of those communities to continue operation. It can, therefore, be stated that this incorporation actually led to a garnering of both a limited amount of internal political power within the slave communities and, again, limited legitimacy for the enslaved peoples own political control mechanisms within those communities.

One physical manifestation of Gullah/Geechee religious beliefs was the building of a Praise House, or Prays House, within many slave quarters. Creel argues that a more clandestine form of the Praise House may have existed earlier, but after 1840 these houses functioned openly and with the white establishment's "blessing." Indeed, she states that they were "the first building on the street" (that is, the quarters) (Creel 1988:277) and were built with both the planter's open support and expense. Services were held within these structures "... several nights during the week, as well as on Sundays" (Creel 1988:277). Like dialect, Praise Houses were viewed as particular to the Gullah/Geechee community (Towne 1969). The presence of Praise Houses and a number of the practices associated with them (e.g., the "shout") may have, in fact, been part of the reason that

the Gullah religious practices were viewed as somewhat “non-Christian” (Towne 1969).

Given the nature of the admission process into the congregation of the Praise House, and the hierarchy of elders and spiritual leaders, Creel develops the hypothesis that these houses were, in effect, the continuation of African secret societies. Specifically, she argues that Poro and Sande cults existed among the Gullah/Geechee, and that these were integrated into Christianity. Initially, these societies operated outside of the awareness of the white hierarchy. Such a continuation of tradition was facilitated by planter absenteeism. Although white overseers would have been present, some attempt would likely have been made to conceal these activities. First, Creel bases this interpretation on the fact that initiates into the Praise House were not simply admitted on the grounds of residence within the community. Rather, initiates participated in an active seeking of religion: “... a soul-grappling, traumatic confrontation between the individual and a higher power, culminating, if successful, in a sensation of rebirth and full membership in the religious community” (Creel 1988:285). These experiences, she asserts, were like those required of initiates into the Poro and Sande cults of West Africa. Second, Creel points out that there were two groups of religious leaders within the black communities. The white appointed elders who, theoretically at least, ran the church and educated the initiates. The second group,

... spiritual fathers and mothers, were not white-sanctioned leaders of the Praise House, ... the “committee” that acted as the religious court Thus, for the Gullahs the power of and respect for plantation spiritual parents exceeded that of Baptist-sanctioned elders. The former were healers, interpreters of dreams, signs, and visions, all of which were central to Gullah conceptions of religion and infused with their impressionistic form of Christianity (Creel 1988:284–285).

Praise House courts were where the slave community attempted to maintain peace and provide justice to the community members. Indeed, membership in the Praise House required the members to settle their internal disputes within this court rather than to bring in the white justice hierarchy (Woofter 1930; Creel 1988).

Finally, several ethnographic studies describe a number of other cultural aspects that demonstrate the crucial link between a sense of community

and the structure of Gullah and Geechee culture (Woofter 1930; Creel 1988, 1991; and Guthrie 1996). First, community membership is determined by what Patricia Guthrie (1996) refers to as the plantation on which a person was living when they “caught sense.” Guthrie explains that for the Gullah on St. Helena Island, South Carolina “... where a person was ‘from’ was determined by where that person ‘caught sense’ ... where you learned about life, about good and evil, and about the meaning of social relationships beyond the immediate household” (Guthrie 1996:33). Thus, “catching sense” occurred during your formative years, between the ages of 2 and 12, on what would be known as your home plantation.

This plantation became your community for life, Praise House membership, even burial after death. Community members could be members in the Praise House of the community in which they caught sense. Each of the plantation communities had their own cemetery, and those who caught sense in that community were buried there. Spouses who came to reside after marriage in another plantation community from the one where they caught sense were, nonetheless, buried on their home plantation. Guthrie argues this is a behavioral adaptation that developed during slavery to aid in the foundation of a sense of belonging and well being even under conditions where people were property that could be removed at an owner’s whim.

As children were taken from their parents, sold, and transported to other plantations, families were broken up. Thus, a unique strategy was originated by those in bondage that enabled the African Americans to establish a sense of belonging. ... catching sense was a unique social mechanism that grew out of the slave experience—designed practically for organizing people’s lives under the most brutal and oppressive circumstances. It was a way that kinless individuals could have a central respected place in the community. It provided a very logical and systematic way for relationships to develop and, most importantly, it enabled people to belong (Guthrie 1996:31).

A second feature of these ethnographies is the focus on the development of family compounds within plantation communities. Thomas Woofter (1930) and Guthrie (1996) both document the extended and expanded family residence patterns associated with Gullah plantation communities. As children grow up and marry, their

post-marriage residence is established within the compound of the family of one of the marriage partners. Although there do not appear to be any definite rules for the selection of the compound, the amount of farmland available to the compound members is one of the contributing factors. Other factors also figure into the decision. These compounds, therefore, grow over time, as children grow up, marry, and have families of their own.

As with many, if not most, cultures around the world, Guthrie points out that the terms *family* and *household* do not mean the same thing to the Gullah and Geechee. A family can be a set of biologically related individuals occupying a dwelling. What is interesting about the defining characteristic for the Gullah, however, is that this distinction can be determined archaeologically. To be an independent household, a family must also have their own stove to cook on. While this pattern of family extension within a single compound may certainly predate emancipation, it is also an adaptation to the land ownership patterns that followed after 1863 on the Sea Islands. After 1863 many ex-slaves were able to buy small tracts of land (generally either 10 or 20 acres) they could farm. These small tracts later became the focus of the family compounds.

In summary, since 1861, the Gullah and Geechee have been the focus of much concern, study, and debate. Researchers have had a pronounced tendency to focus on the uniqueness of their culture, in terms of the "retention" of what are essentially broadly based West African traditions. Many of the cultural patterns, and their material correlates, have not been defined for modern African Americans living in other areas of the slaveholding South. Certainly, there can be little question concerning the modern distribution of these behavioral patterns.

At least two major questions, however, can be raised concerning the uniqueness of these adaptations to the contemporary Gullah and Geechee. First, if Guthrie, Creel, Foner, and Woofter are correct in asserting that many of these patterns of the modern Gullah are the result of adaptations to the conditions of enslavement, then why are the adaptations unique only to the Gullah and Geechee? The easy answer for Creel, Foner, and Guthrie is the isolation of the blacks residing on the Sea Islands and the continued importation of large numbers of

Africans through 1808. However, the importation of Africans into the slave South continued until 1808 for most of the area—in Texas it continued until the 1840s. Large numbers of Africans were imported throughout the region. Secondly, while the planters may have been essentially absentee owners, they all maintained agents—overseers—on the property to control the slaves and manage the plantations. Thus, whites were present in some numbers throughout the period of enslavement. It was only the case after emancipation that the percentage of whites, along with their level of control over the daily lives of the blacks, became greatly reduced on the Sea Islands. Certainly the isolation of the Sea Island populations after 1865 contributed to the perpetuation of these patterns developed during the period of enslavement. However, the black population was far less isolated from whites during slavery than after emancipation. Thus, the question really becomes whether or not these patterns were the result of the cultural and social adaptations of Africans and African Americans to the conditions of enslavement found only in the Carolina Lowcountry prior to emancipation and not as a result of their isolation from whites. Certainly, Phillip Morgan's (1999) emphasis on the distinction between the widely employed "gang labor system" and the "task system" (employed primarily within the Carolina Lowcountry) would tend to support the potential for the Gullah/Geechee adaptations to be unique.

If isolation from whites during the development of these patterns (for example, the period of enslavement) can be eliminated as one of the reasons for the uniqueness of Gullah/Geechee cultural evolution, then perhaps we need to ask a slightly different question? Prior to 1865, were these patterns more widespread across the New World as a result of African and African American adaptation to the oppressive conditions of enslavement? Isolation from whites may have actually played a very minor role, especially in regions that supported large plantation slave holdings. In other words, despite the hypothesized impacts of gang versus task on the development of culture, proposed by Morgan (1999) and others, one might seriously question just how unique the Gullah/Geechee cultures were during the long period of American slavery. Certainly, the Gullah appear to possess a distinctive culture

today, but this does not necessarily mean that only they responded to enslavement thusly. It is possible that many slave and early-tenant-period black populations arrived at the same basic cultural adaptations as the Gullah and Geechee. The isolation of the Gullahs after 1865 may be the primary process involved in the continuation of these patterns among the Sea Island populations. In contrast, the lack of such isolation forced the reconstruction of African American culture that resulted in the loss of these cultural and social patterns elsewhere in the South.

Additional research into the documentary history and ethnography of the Gullah/Geechee, or other black communities in the South, may not provide an answer to this question. However, historical archaeology is beginning to provide the data necessary to test these questions and provide a new look at the evolution of African American culture in North America. In this research, the intensive study of the Gullah and Geechee has begun to provide very informative and important ethnographic analogies for developing research strategies and testing data interpretations. It may well be that the cultural and social adaptations recorded for the Gullah and Geechee populations were, in many ways, very similar to those made by Africans and African Americans across North America, especially on plantations with large enslaved populations.

Testing the Model: The Levi Jordan Plantation Tenant Community

Archaeological excavations have been conducted within the slave and tenant quarters of the Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas, for the past 12 years (Brown and Cooper 1990; Brown 1994, 2001; Bruner 1996; Garcia-Herberos 1998; Barnes 1999; Harris 1999). Founded in 1848, at its pre-Civil War height, the Jordan plantation was a major producer of both sugar and cotton and had a resident slave population that exceeded 140. After emancipation in June 1865, approximately 102 Freedman remained on the plantation as tenants and sharecroppers. By the mid-1870s sugar was abandoned as a cash crop, though cotton continued to be grown by both tenants and sharecroppers. The excavations have focused on the recovery of detailed, contextual information in order to permit the interpretation of various aspects of the lives of those

enslaved and, later, the tenants and sharecroppers who occupied the plantation.

The Jordan Plantation research has, in fact, been referred to as “the best known example” of an archaeological approach that has “... attempted to identify archaeological contexts and assemblages that represent religious behavior on the part of enslaved African Americans” (Russell 1997:63). While a number of historical archaeologists have excavated and interpreted remains of African American ritual activities (Singleton 1991, 1995; Ferguson 1992; Orser 1994; Yentsch 1994; Wilkie 1995, 1997; Stine et al. 1996; Russell 1997), the Jordan excavations appear to have identified a number of community-based activities and symbols. The excavation strategy—the detailed recovery of contextual information—likely played a major role in obtaining this information.

Analysis of the artifacts and contexts recovered has permitted the definition of a number of adaptive responses made by the enslaved and tenant populations to the conditions of their lives. Three aspects of this archaeologically derived evidence from the Jordan Plantation will be summarized below. This data and interpretation will be discussed here because the interpretation was accomplished through the testing of ethnographic analogies derived from the Gullah and Geechee. These interpretations include, first, the presence of a Praise/Prays House within the community, and, second, the determination of community membership.

Further, the interpretation of an artifact deposit discovered in the Conjuror’s Cabin on the Jordan Plantation was made by members of the Gullah/Geechee Nation and incorporated directly into our interpretations of African American life within the Jordan Community.

The Praise/Prays House

Early in the history of the quarters two of the cabins were modified. One of these cabins remained as a residential unit, while the other was converted to the community’s church/Praise House. Artifact deposits within the structure reflect both the function of the building and the establishment of strong community-centered ties (Barnes 1999; Brown 2001). The cabin converted to religious use was, as stated by Creel, the “first cabin” in the quarters. The

structure converted from a residence to the "community building" (Barnes 1999) or "Praise House" (Brown 2001) was originally assigned the designation I-A-1, marking it as the northwest-ernmost "cabin" within the quarters. From the viewpoint of the community's members, another important factor would be the high degree of privacy afforded by its location. Not only was it the "first cabin," it was also one of the furthest from the main house. As a result of the architecture of the quarters, there would have been no way the occupants of the main house could have observed the activities conducted in or immediately outside the structure without actually entering the building.

Based upon the artifacts recovered from within the structure, for much of its use life it functioned in a nonresidential, nonstorage capacity. Briefly stated, the artifact assemblage from this structure differed from the other cabins tested (16) in a number of ways. (A more complete description of the artifacts and contexts recovered from the Praise House can be found in Barnes 1999 and Brown 2001.) First, the main room of the Prays House lacked a hearth. The hearth originally placed within the structure was removed during its enlargement and renovation into the Praise House. Second, other than at the base of the subfloor archaeological deposit, there were no artifacts connected with residential activities found. With the exception of buttons, coins, and jewelry, domestic artifacts (for example, dishes, pots, pans, glassware, other personal items, and tools) were not found within the deposits below the structure's floor. This, again, is unlike any of the other cabins tested. Third, a small cross made of brass set with six cut red-glass "jewels" and attached to a closed chain had been deposited near the center of the structure below the floor. This cross was oriented toward the south. The closed clasp suggests that the cross was not simply dropped and lost under the floorboards. Further, coins were placed north and west of the cross on lines that appear to be continuations of those represented by the cross itself. More recent excavation revealed a sharp knife placed into a hole and under a cross made of bricks. This feature had been placed approximately 2.5 ft. east of the cross and in the exact geographic center of the room. Like the coins, it was located on a continuation of one of the lines of the cross. Although allotted space does not permit

a detailed discussion of the significance of the knife here, I would argue that this represents the eastern point on a cosmogram that was placed around the Christian cross. This feature might, therefore, represent the rebirth of members into the Praise House community, as noted by Creel (1988). The excavation in search of the southern point of this cosmogram, if one was constructed around the cross, is not yet completed. Fourth, at least three other subfloor pits were placed within the area of the reconstructed cabin. Each of these features contained a different set of artifacts, including ash and animal bone, a plaster "sculpture," a crystal, a white clay pipe stem, and other artifacts. In the Jordan Quarters, the only other cabin with subfloor features was the Conjuror's Cabin. Residential cabins lacked such features.

To date, this represents the first such structure identified archaeologically and excavated in a plantation quarters area, including the Gullah/Geechee area. However, employing Creel's model, supplemented with information obtained through interviews with several Gullah, has provided an interpretive model of the archaeological footprint of a Praise House. Structure I-A-1 within the Jordan Plantation Quarters meets the test implications of this model.

The African American Cemetery

Late in the project, research was extended to the African American cemetery on the Jordan Plantation (Bruner 1996; Brown 2001). This research included surface mapping and very limited, shallow excavation. Shallow excavation within the cemetery focused on the confirmation of grave shafts and the illustration of the surface treatment of the graves—no bodies were disturbed, and no artifacts were collected (Bruner 1996). Bottles, ceramics, knives, plow parts, and even car parts were identified as having been placed on the tops of the graves. Metal pipes were employed to connect many of the dead to the living (Bruner 1996). Further, the original, slave-period cemetery was marked by a metal half-circle welded onto a metal post (a portion of an old railroad rail). The half-circle was displayed as the lower half of a circle. Thus, it appears to have symbolized the afterworld (Thompson 1983; Ferguson 1992; Brown 1994, 2001).

Studies of the headstones, genealogical data, death certificates, and other information, have partially revealed the decision-making pattern for burial within this cemetery. Only people known to have spent their childhoods on the plantation were buried in this cemetery during the 125 years of its active use. Spouses of those buried in the cemetery and who did not grow up on the plantation are buried elsewhere—generally on the plantation on which they were raised (Brown 2001). These patterns would suggest that Guthrie's observations of recent Gullah practices on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, were also practiced during the use of the Jordan Plantation cemetery as well.

Interpreting the "Chicken Deposit" within the Conjuror's Cabin

Excavations along one wall of the Conjuror's Cabin revealed that a pit had been dug below the floor of the cabin. Three chickens were then killed and buried within the pit. Analysis of the bones recovered suggests that these chickens were placed into the pit whole. Subsequent decomposition of the animals resulted in the mixing of the bones; thus, they were not fully articulated when excavated. During our research on the Frogmore Manor Plantation, St. Helena Island, South Carolina, a single chicken was discovered to have been buried standing upright with its wings outstretched, facing to the east, and below the floor of a cabin within the Quarters. As a result of our incorporation of members of the Gullah/Geechee Nation into the research, I discussed the Frogmore and Jordan "chicken burials" with Queen Quet, elected chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation, and other members of the Elder's Council. These individuals provided the interpretation now employed for both of these deposits.

Their interpretation noted the importance of chickens as protectors of the living from the spirits of the departed and that chickens were employed in the discovery of conjure tricks. They noted that chickens had been sacrificed on the death of an individual, among the Gullah and Geechee, in part as a protection for the living. Thus, their interpretation was that the reasoning behind the burial of the chickens under the floor of the Conjuror's Cabin at Jordan represented a physical result of this belief/practice. Such a

placement would have been especially important in this case, they argued. As a healer occupied the cabin, and she was apparently unable to cure the individuals involved.

This interpretation not only explains the presence of the chicken burial, but it also led to research not originally included within the goals of the Jordan Project. We have been able to identify the Conjuror and currently believe that she also functioned as the midwife within the plantation community. Thus by employing the interpretation provided by members of the Gullah, we were led directly to an interesting and very enhanced understanding of the Jordan Plantation Community.

Conclusions

The detailed, contextual archaeological and historical research of the African American community of the Jordan Plantation has revealed a number of patterns of behavior and symbolic representations that appear to have antecedents in Africa. While not discussed within this paper, these would include the existence of a conjurer, the production and use of at least two cosmograms and other symbolically charged objects, and burial rituals. Other patterns appear to represent adaptations to life under the conditions of enslavement as noted by Creel (1988, 1991), Guthrie (1996), and Foner (1983) for the Gullah and Geechee cultures of the Carolina Lowcountry. These patterns would include determination of community membership, treatment after death, community-based church/Praise House, and a complex, internal, craft specialization. While the testing of African ethnographic models has been attempted by a number of historical archaeologists interested in the study of African American culture under the conditions of enslavement, the Gullah and Geechee have generally been ignored as a source for testable interpretive models.

Archaeological investigations of the Jordan Plantation Quarters, during both slave and tenant/sharecropper occupations, suggest that the Gullah/Geechee patterns may have been far more widespread during ante- and postbellum times than has been previously thought. Certainly, ethnographic and archaeological case studies of West African cultures have provided critical evidence for understanding the origin and development of African American culture. However, the modern

Gullah and Geechee represent descendents of people who survived both antebellum enslavement and postbellum tenancy and land ownership. Their past is one of developing behaviors and beliefs that permitted their adjustment to the patterns of oppression experienced by other Africans in becoming African Americans. Therefore, in attempting to understand the adaptations made by Africans and African Americans, historical archaeologists might do well, in the future, to attempt explicit tests of the ethnographic models derived from the study of the Gullah and Geechee. At least these patterns of belief and behavior were developed under the systems operating in North America, rather than in Africa.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to thank Maria Franklin and Larry McKee for inviting me to participate in the original symposium held in Atlanta, for their work in editing this paper, and for providing insightful and important comments and encouragement. I would especially like to thank Queen Quet and members of the Elder's Council of the Gullah/Geechee Nation for their advice/direction concerning our research, their interpretations, and their support for our work within the Nation's lands.

REFERENCES

- BARNES, MARY K.
1999 Church and Community: An Archaeological Investigation at the Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas. Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Houston, TX.
- BASCOM, WILLIAM
1941 Acculturation among Gullah Negroes. *American Anthropologist*, 43:43–50.
1952 Two Forms of Afro-Cuban Divination. In *Acculturation in the Americas*, Sol Tax, editor, Proceedings and Selected Papers of the XXIXth International Congress of Americanists, 1:63–69. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
1991 Gullah Folk Beliefs Concerning Childbirth. In *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*, Mary A. Twining and Keith E. Baird, editors, pp. 27–36. Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ.
- BROWN, KENNETH L.
1994 Material Culture and Community Structure: The Slave and Tenant Community at Levi Jordan's Plantation, 1848–1892. In *Working toward Freedom*, Larry E. Hudson, Jr., editor, pp. 95–118. University of Rochester Press, Rochester, NY.
- 2001 Interwoven Traditions: Archaeology of the Conjuror's Cabins and the African-American Cemetery at the Jordan and Frogmore Manor Plantations. In *Places Of Cultural Memory: African Reflections on the American Landscape*, pp. 99–114. U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service.
- BROWN, KENNETH L., AND DOREEN C. COOPER
1990 Structural Continuity in an African-American Slave and Tenant Community. *Historical Archaeology*, 24(4): 7–19.
- BRUNER, DAVID E.
1996 Hidden Power: Burial Practices from an African American Slave and Tenant Community. Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Houston, Houston, TX.
- CHRISTENSEN, A. M. H.
1892 *Afro-American Folk-Lore, Told Round Cabin Fires on the Sea Islands of South Carolina*. n.p., Boston, MA.
- CLARKE, JOHN H.
1991 Forward. In *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*, Mary A. Twining and Keith E. Baird, editors, pp. v–vi. Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ.
- CREEL, MARGARET WASHINGTON
1988 "A Peculiar People": *Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs*. New York University Press, New York, NY.
1991 Gullah Attitudes toward Life and Death. In *Africanisms in American Culture*, Joseph E. Holloway, editor, pp. 69–97. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- FERGUSON, LELAND
1992 *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650–1800*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC.
- FONER, ERIC
1983 *Nothing But Freedom: Emancipation and Its Legacy*. Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge.
- GARCIA-HERREROS, JORGE
1998 A Munitions Maker's Cabin: An Archaeological Investigation at the Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas. Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Houston, TX.
- GEORGIA WRITERS PROJECT
1940 *Drums and Shadows*. University of Georgia Press, Athens.
- GONZALES, AMBROSE E.
1923 *The Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast*. The State Co., Columbia, SC.
- GUTHRIE, PATRICIA
1996 *Catching Sense: African American Communities on a South Carolina Sea Island*. Bergin and Garvey, Westport, CT.

- GUTMAN, HERBERT G.
1976 *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925*. Vintage Books, New York, NY.
- HAIR, PAUL E. H.
1965 Sierra Leone Items in the Gullah Dialect of American English. *Sierra Leone Language Review*, 4:79–84.
- HARRIS, ROBERT N.
1999 Craft Specialization in a Nineteenth-Century African American Community: The Shell Carver's Cabin on the Levi Jordan Plantation, Brazoria County, Texas. Master's thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Houston, TX.
- HERSKOVITS, MELVILLE J.
1941 *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Beacon Press, Boston, MA.
- JOHNSON, GUION G.
1930 *A Social History of the Sea Islands*. The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.
- JOYNER, CHARLES
1984 *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*. University of Illinois Press, Urbana.
- MINTZ, SIDNEY W., AND RICHARD PRICE
1992 *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective*, 2nd edition. Beacon Press, Boston, MA.
- MORGAN, PHILLIP
1999 *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill.
- ORSER, CHARLES E.
1994 The Archaeology of African-American Slave Religion in the Antebellum South. *Cambridge Archaeological Journal*, 4(1):33–45.
- ORSER, JR., CHARLES E., AND BRIAN M. FAGAN
1995 *Historical Archaeology*. Harper Collins, New York, NY.
- PARSONS, ELSIE CLEWS
1923 Folk-Lore of the Sea Islands, S. C. *Memoirs of the American Folk-Lore Society*, No. XVI.
- ROSE, WILLIE LEE
1964 *Rehearsal for Reconstruction*. Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, IN.
- ROWLAND, LAWRENCE S., ALEXANDER MOORE, AND GEORGE C. RODGERS, JR.
1996 *The History of Beaufort County, South Carolina, Vol. 1, 1514–1861*. University of South Carolina Press, Columbia.
- RUSSELL, AARON E.
1997 Material Culture and African-American Spirituality at the Hermitage. *Historical Archaeology*, 31(2): 63–80.
- SINGLETON, THERESA A.
1991 The Archaeology of Slave Life. In *Before Freedom Came: African-American Life in the Antebellum South*, Edward D. C. Campbell and Kym S. Rice, editors, pp. 155–175. University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville.
- 1995 The Archaeology of Slavery in North America. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24:119–140.
- STINE, LINDA FRANCE, MELANIE A. CABAK, AND MARK D. GROOVER
1996 Blue Beads As African-American Cultural Symbols. *Historical Archaeology*, 30(3):49–75.
- SZWED, JOHN F.
1970 Africa Lies Just Off Georgia. *Africa Report*, 15: 29–31.
- THOMPSON, ROBERT F.
1983 *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. Random House, New York, NY.
- TOWNE, LAURA M.
1969 Letters and Diary of Laura M. Towne. Negro Universities Press, New York, NY.
- TURNER, LORENZO D.
1949 *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect*. Reprinted in 1969 by Arno Press and the New York Times, New York, NY.
- TWINING, MARY A., AND KEITH E. BAIRD (EDITORS)
1991 *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*. Africa World Press, Trenton, NJ.
- WHALEY, MARCELLUS S.
1925 *The Old Types Pass: Gullah Sketches of the Carolina Sea Islands*. n.p., Boston, MA.
- WILKIE, LAURIE
1995 Magic and Empowerment on the Plantation: An Archaeological Consideration of African-American World View. *Southeastern Archaeology*, 14(2): 136–148.
- 1997 Secret and Sacred: Contextualizing the Artifacts of African-American Magic and Religion. *Historical Archaeology*, 31(4):81–106.
- WOOFTER, THOMAS J.
1930 *Black Yeomanry: Life on St. Helena Island*. Octagon Books, New York, NY.
- YENTSCH, ANNE E.
1994 *A Chesapeake Family and Their Slaves: A Study in Historical Archaeology*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- KENNETH L. BROWN
DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON
HOUSTON, TX 77204-5882