

Excerpt

Introduction

The Carolina Lowcountry has been home to the Gullah People for centuries. The Lowcountry consists of the coastal areas and Sea Islands, and the Lowcountry is known for its good fertile grounds. The Gullah People are descendants of the residents of West Africa who were involuntarily brought to these shores centuries ago to work the fertile coastal areas as slaves. They came through the ports of Angola and the Congo, from Goree Island, Senegal and Bunce Island, Sierra Leone, etc. The Gullah-Geechee culture is alive and well in the Carolinas, Florida and Georgia. The people are all descendants of the residents of West Africa who were involuntarily brought to these shores centuries ago. They are known as Geechee in Georgia and Florida, and as Gullah in the Carolinas; from about Jacksonville, N.C. to about Jacksonville, Florida. Some of the communities have changed, some are changing and some are gone.

I was born and raised in South Carolina along the coast about 14 miles from the Atlantic Ocean, in the Old Historic Riverfront Town of Conway. My father was born and raised on Sandy Island, S.C., an isolated island that is still the home to some Gullah people. The state of South Carolina now owns a little over 75% of Sandy Island, and the Gullah settlements or communities are still located on the eastern quarter of the island. Many of the Gullah people there still reside on land passed down to them from the prior generations. I often visited Sandy Island when I was young and spent many summers on the island as a young child growing up. I had some great experience and have many memories of the Gullah people there, as well as many of the surrounding areas all up and down the coast of the Carolina Lowcountry.

I will concentrate on the Gullah people and their communities or settlements because I am Gullah, and I have seen many of the communities changed, changing or gone, as a result of major developments, especially over the last decade or so. The Gullah communities were more defined or pronounced after post reconstruction than they are today. The Gullah settlements today are, and can be referred to as Gullah communities; we referred to them as settlements in the 1950's when I was growing up in the area. Many of us subsequently migrated away to jobs and careers and resided elsewhere for decades. Now that many of us have retired after over 40 years in the workforce; many of us have returned to our Gullah roots in retirement, to help preserve our rich culture and heritage.

Many of our parents (that generation) resided in the Carolina Lowcountry in or close to their childhood homes and hometowns all of their lives. Many of them here in the county where I grew up remained close to the Waccamaw River, which for centuries has supported an abundance of life. Opportunities for them did not exist as it did for my generation and beyond, therefore they remained close to their land just as their forefathers before them. Their sacrifices made it easier for me to travel and get a good education in an effort to make life and living better for all. Their sacrifices will always be greatly appreciated, as we continue on.