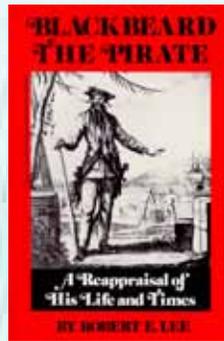
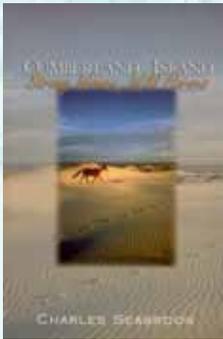


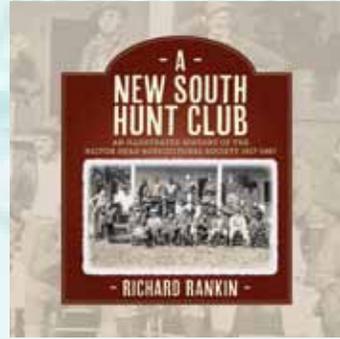
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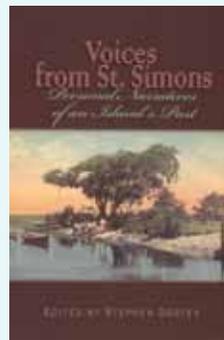
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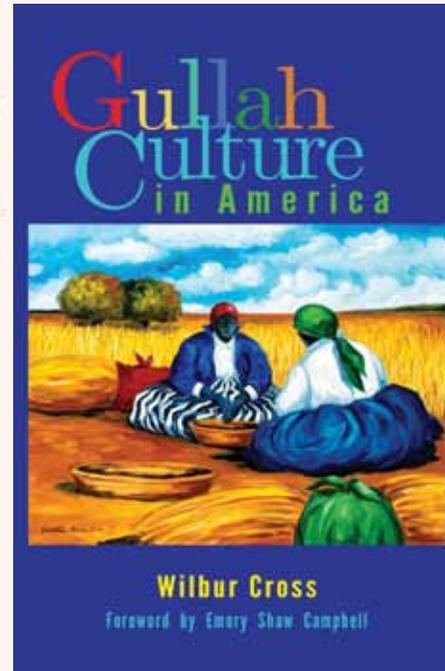


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Spring 2012



Gullah Culture in America begins with the journeys of 15 Gullah speakers who went to Sierra Leone and other parts of West Africa in 1989, 1998, and 2005 to trace their origins and history. Their stories frame this fascinating look at the extraordinary history of the Gullah culture.

The existence of the Gullahs went almost unnoticed until the 1860s, when missionaries from Philadelphia made their way to St. Helena Island, South Carolina, to establish the Penn School to help freed slaves learn to read and write. There, they discovered hidden pockets of a bygone African culture with its own language, traditions, medicine, weaving, and art.

Today, more than 300,000 Gullah people live in the remote areas of the sea islands of St. Helena, Edisto, Coosaw, Ossabaw, Sapelo, Daufuske, and Cumberland, their way of life endangered by overdevelopment in an increasingly popular tourist destination. Having evolved from the original Penn School, the Penn Center, based on St. Helena Island, works to preserve and document the Gullah and Geechee cultures.

Author Wilbur Cross originally set out to make the excellent work of the Penn Center known and to introduce the Gullah culture to people in America. He became entranced with the Gullah way of life and ended up with 12 chapters that explore the various facets of Gullah culture. *Gullah Culture in America* not only explores the history of Gullah but also shows readers what it's like to grow up and live in this unique American community.

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John F. Blair, Publisher
 978-0-89587-573-0 | \$16.95 paperback | 6 x 9 | 288 pages
 Cultural Heritage, Educational, Historical

Sweet potato planting on Hopkinson's Plantation, Edisto Island, S.C., circa 1862 [Courtesy of the Library of Congress]



Gullah Facts

- The first known appearance of a variation of Gullah was in a 1739 ad seeking a runaway slave named “Golla Harry,” perhaps referring to a person from the Gola tribe in Liberia. The name did not surface again in print until 1822, in reference to “Gullah Jack,” who helped to plan a large slave rebellion. It wasn’t until 1922, though, when the newspaperman Ambrose Gonzales published *The Black Border: Gullah Stories of the Carolina Coast*, that the name became prevalent.
- Contrary to historical perceptions of the Gullah language, it is not “broken English”; rather, it is a distinct language with its own grammar and vocabulary that originated with slaves brought to the Sea Islands. It is a Creole blend of Elizabethan English and African languages that originated on the coast of Africa and came across the Atlantic on slave ships. As many as 20 percent of the words are West African, and many more of local origin were influenced by traditional African speech. Gullah is a language of cadence, accents, and intonations.
- The first known attempt to reproduce the Gullah dialect appeared in a 1794 edition of the *South Carolina Gazette*, though a more famous early effort can be found in Edgar Allan Poe’s 1843 tale “The Gold Bug,” set on Sullivan’s Island.
- Thanks to their solidarity and relative isolation, the Gullah people of Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina were able to keep their heritage, language, and traditions intact. Today there are more than 300,000 Gullah-speaking people living on the Sea Islands.
- When *De Nyew Testament*, the Gullah translation of the New Testament, was published in 2005, after 30 years of effort, the initial printing of 10,000 copies sold out in a matter of weeks.

- For every illness and injury, there is a Gullah remedy, many of which have been found by scientists to contain properties that are used in modern-day medicines. One example is the centuries-old use of spider webs to treat sores and rashes, a remedy which has recently been determined to have a sound basis in science: according to one medical researcher, arachnid secretions contain elements that have healing properties for skin infections.
- A number of English words are indebted to counterparts from African languages. Here are just a few: “gorilla,” “zebra,” “banana,” “okra,” “bogus,” “hippie,” “jamboree,” “sock,” “tote,” and “banjo.” Even the word “doggies” in the essentially American cowboy song “Get Along Little Doggies” comes from *kidogo*, an African word meaning “a little something,” or “something small.”
- One of the most familiar symbols associated with Gullah culture is the coiled sweetgrass basket so popular among tourists. Grasses of the marshlands of the Carolinas are sturdy and flexible, and slaves who lacked the extra fabric needed to make bags used them to sew baskets. The coil design originated in Africa, and can be sewn so tightly that the baskets can be used as containers for liquid, as the fibers swell and become watertight.

