UNLESS GOD TAKE MY LIFE, I’M GOING TO BE AT THOSE MEETINGS: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE 2000 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE LOW COUNTRY GULLAH CULTURE SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY.

by

MICHAEL KENNETH DAVIS

(Under the direction of Edward Panetta)

ABSTRACT

Public meetings have become a means of expanding the reach of debate and deliberation to include the perspectives of a variety of community members. This project examines to what extent a series of meeting held by the National Park Service in 2000 are able to include the perspectives of a marginalized group, the Gullah of Georgia and South Carolina. The focus on this study is on the ways that the Gullah are both able to use the meetings to have their voices heard and how meeting administrators seek to contain public calls for empowerment.

INDEX WORDS: Public meetings, Gullah, Narrative, Public deliberation, South Carolina, Georgia, National Park Service
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MICHAEL KENNETH DAVIS

B.S., Syracuse University, 1995
M.A., Syracuse University, 1998

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Unless God Take My Life, I’m Going To Be At Those Meetings: A Rhetorical Analysis of the 2000 National Park Service Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study.

by

Michael Kenneth Davis

Approved:

Major Professor: Edward Panetta

Committee: Thomas Lessl
John Murphy
Celeste Condit
Chana Kai Lee

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
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Dedication

To my mother, who instilled in me from an early age a love of learning and encouraged me to love with all my heart.

To my father, who never let me settle for less than my full potential and taught me to wear my heart on my sleeve.
Acknowledgments

An effort such as this one does not achieve completion without the help of countless individuals. I must start by thanking my advisor Ed Panetta. Without his patience, kindness and leadership I would not have completed this project and would not be prepared to move into my academic career. I will owe him a debt of gratitude that I will never be able to repay.

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Chapter 1

“History Books Don’t Talk About Us”: Rhetorical Examination of Public Meetings

Each week there are public meetings across the nation, some of which attempt to expand discussion of political issues to include a variety of perspectives. While these meetings often lead to political change and encourage the inclusion of new voices in dialogue, they also contain the potential to limit out atypical opinions. How participants, policymakers and scholars treat public meetings are important factors influencing the management of multiple points of view in political deliberations. This study examines one group, the Gullah, and their experiences with a series of public meetings conducted by the National Park Service (NPS). The text of testimony serves as a rhetorical artifact which simultaneously provides insight into experiences of the Gullah’s culture as a marginalized group, exposes institutional power flows facilitated by meeting organizers, and elucidates mechanisms for potential political mobilization. Study of Gullah experiences in the 2000 NPS meetings is one entry point into evaluation of public meetings as sites for marginalized groups to gain access to systems of power. The NPS meetings represent an instance of how rhetorical scholars can identify aspects of public deliberation often ignored in decision making, particularly how power is exerted in ways that can result in innovative or stunted change initiatives.

The Gullah are an illustration of a group traditionally excluded from mainstream political discussion. Descendants of former West African slaves, the Gullah lived in relative isolation for generations. They primarily reside on the eastern coast of the United States, from northern Florida to southern North Carolina. For years geography allowed them to live in seclusion from the rest of the region. Over the past six decades, Gullah culture has slowly
been eroded by commercial interests and by the general neglect of policymakers, the end result being a cultural diaspora. The Gullah currently dwell throughout the United States with some estimates placing their total nationwide population at over one million. Within the coastal areas of Georgia and South Carolina their numbers approach 250,000.¹ As a result of consistent harassment by outside interests set on controlling current and previously held lands, the Gullah are beginning to search for ways to reclaim and preserve tenuous cultural resources.²

The focus of this study is a series of public meetings designed to examine issues related to Gullah cultural survival hosted by the National Park Service in the summer of 2000. The series of seven meetings sponsored by Congressman James Clyburn were designed to examine the deterioration of Gullah culture. Clyburn, a congressional representative from South Carolina, proposed the meetings as part of his ongoing effort to encourage community participation. Testimony of community members was invited in the hope that it would better explicate the beliefs of those most affected by commercial development in the region. Because the NPS initially encouraged participation by the Gullah, the meetings exemplify how disempowered groups may attempt to use civic involvement to define political issues they deem important and how meeting organizers may erect barriers to such efforts. The NPS meetings provide fertile ground for communication study at three levels. First, they signify rhetorical artifacts available for analysis. Empirically, obtaining artifacts that include the rhetoric of marginalized groups can be difficult. Because a plethora of rhetorical studies focus on those in positions of power, the rhetorical artifacts of dominant groups are more likely to be preserved. Records of public meetings, however, through transcripts or tape, create an open record of the positions of traditionally disempowered groups.³ Public debate allows participation by concerned parties and increases access to requisite means for the creation of rhetorical artifacts.

¹http://www.npca.org/magazine/2005/spring/gullah2.asp
Second, the National Park Service meetings provide an illustration of the use of institutional power. Many problems of political efficacy faced by marginalized groups in meetings are exacerbated by tactics organizers use to control the process. Barriers to full participation are erected and rules are made that manipulate the flow of information and concomitantly limit the type of warrants considered to be acceptable. The potential of public meetings to include a variety of voices is often drastically undercut by roadblocks constructed by those who organize meetings. The ways that institutional power manifests itself in the deliberation process reveals how governmental agents see their roles in relation to the community. An examination of these power relations demonstrates the manner in which community involvement in this process can be truncated by other concerns.

The third contribution that this reading of the National Park Service public meetings can make to the field of rhetorical studies is the awareness of how local political groups form. Public meetings can provide opportunities for groups to come together and to attempt to create shared understanding. Such interactions potentially lead to the establishment of alliances between individuals with similar backgrounds and convergent social and political interests. Investigation of meetings clarifies themes that traditionally marginalized groups choose to express and provides opportunity for scholars to observe artifacts contained within testimony. This analysis of the NPS study specifically evaluates the Gullah as a group that worked, through their articulated experiences, to build community support for concerns elucidated within meetings.

Marginalized groups historically struggle with social and political structures that effectively silence their voices. The failure of such groups to successfully communicate in policy discussions can be attributed to the fact that decision makers are often beholden to groups wielding influence or to arguments with substantial political expediency. The efficacy of marginalized groups is diminished by their inability to gain power in the policymaking process. The influence of dominant groups is sustained through mechanisms controlling access

to policy arenas which serve as primary means of mitigating or eradicating dissent. Groups normally excluded from structures of power are thereby required to adopt unique tactics for asserting their concerns. These sites of resistance are fertile ground for critics to examine argumentative strategies and subsequent political results in order to gain insight into disempowered groups. Attention should be focused on questions of systemic power, and in particular, on how spaces for public deliberation can also serve as gateways for disadvantaged groups to gain admission into previously inaccessible systems of power and control. The open nature of public meetings may enable disempowered groups to shed disparaging descriptive adjectives, and to make claims to power over their agency, their history, and their community.\textsuperscript{5}

This analysis identifies how the Gullah, a marginalized group, attempted to use the public meeting forum as a mechanism to voice concerns and to spur connections among fellow citizens. Important components of analysis include paying close attention to the exercise of power by the National Park Service and to subsequent responses by Low Country\textsuperscript{6} residents. This study begins with an exploration of Gullah history and the community’s past experiences with oppression. In order to understand the context in which these deliberations occur, this chapter provides background analysis which explains how the Gullah gained independence in the region. Historical examination occurs in tandem with an assessment of how outsiders were able to erode Gullah autonomy. Before initiating an assessment of issues that arose in the NPS meetings, it is important to acknowledge both the history of the Gullah and the significance of their interactions with outsiders. Contextualizing the meetings and their resultant conclusions within a larger historical framework is a necessary step to understanding Gullah speeches and the community’s interactions with instances of governmental power.


\textsuperscript{6}The Low Country is defined as the geographical area extending from Jacksonville, Florida to Wilmington, North Carolina, continuing 50 miles inland.
1.1 “Culture is Something You Do”: A Brief Description of the Gullah People

To date, Gullah history was confined to scholarly accounts and private individual histories passed on within Low Country families and communities. Examination of the historical oppression faced by Gullah communities is a requisite step in understanding how their rhetorical statements gained prominence in the context of the National Park Service public meetings. Their long history with governmental and commercial interests filtered how they presented arguments and the topics they chose to discuss in their testimony. Understanding how their interests fit within their struggle for cultural survival and in their yearning to develop political power requires probing the parameters of both Gullah regional history and of their communal relationship to the broader history of slavery.

Individuals from West Africa and their descendants have populated coastal Georgia and South Carolina for nearly 400 years. Unlike their European counterparts these individuals did not arrive in America voluntarily, but disembarked in the shackles of slavery. While many slaves living in the early United States were treated solely as laborers, the Gullah had more control over their daily lives because of their unique knowledge of rice cultivation. Initially, many plantation owners were unaware of the mechanisms of rice production and the crop therefore had a minimal role in overall agricultural commerce. While slave owners were familiar with rice imported from elsewhere, and even included rice as part of the food rations provided to slaves, owners generally were ignorant of the fact that rice could be grown in the region. The Gullah, however, began to grow rice in the marshes surrounding the plantations to supplement their rations. Once this was discovered the owners saw that rice production could be an economic boom and directed their slaves to oversee the operation of rice fields.

The rice industry strengthened the economy of the region and plantation owners believed that the best way to ensure continued success of their crops was to relinquish control of the

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7The origin of the term Gullah is in great dispute. Many scholars attribute its genesis to the African nations from which these individuals were taken. However, there is no identifiable objective way to determine the derivation of this term.
day-to-day operations to the Gullah. Such control allowed them autonomy, not just within the plantation, but also over their own lives. The rice plantations of the Low Country operated on a task-based system where individual slaves were given specific jobs and once those duties were completed, the slaves were allowed to hire themselves out to other land owners. The ability to make money under this arrangement gave the Gullah capital which was later used when slaves were granted their freedom at the conclusion of the Civil War.\(^8\) Knight explains the importance of the Gullah in the development of a rice economy in the Low Country:

They drew upon agricultural experience they carried from Africa to carve out the rice and indigo plantations of the Sea Islands, coastal marshes and upland areas. In particular, people from the Senegambia Region of West Africa brought rice production “knowledge systems” to the Lowcountry. Their experience with cultivating the African rice *oryza glaberrima*, irrigating coastal marshlands, using the West African long-handled hoe (or *kayendo*), and processing rice with mortars and pestles formed the basis for the early rice industry in the Lowcountry of South Carolina, and later Georgia. Planters so relied on Africans for their experience with rice that they began to specifically import workers from regions where people cultivated rice as a staple crop. As one traveler noted tellingly about the African-based population in the Lowcountry, “there is no raising rice without them.”\(^9\)

Rice came to signify a point of pride among the Gullah as they saw it both as a means to gain control over their future and as a connection to their African past. Thanks in part to their experience with rice and the resources they acquired during slavery, the Gullah were later able to develop and to sustain communities isolated from those on the mainland and to acquire a way of life ensuring a comfortable and sustainable existence. The continuation

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of the southeastern rice industry gave the Gullah the upper hand in the post-Civil War economy and solidified their standing in the region.\textsuperscript{10}

An outgrowth of the Gullah experience with rice was land acquisition. The Gullah believed that their historical connection to the land in the region gave them a “claim to the land,” and thus after the Civil War many used their assets to purchase property through government redistribution projects. Unlike many other former slaves, the combination of material goods and a bond to the land led many Gullah to stay in the area and to purchase property on which they could continue farming.\textsuperscript{11} For the first time since their arrival the Gullah were able to completely control their own lives and to benefit from the fruits of their labor. The ability to acquire property and to subsist on the land’s offerings meant that the Gullah were able to live in relative seclusion for several decades. Joyner explains:

> For generations the Sea Islanders lived under the same hot sun, surrounded by the same sea and salt marsh, forming a barrier that isolated them from the mainland. . . The years passed: the young grew old and the old died. And the planting, seeding, and reaping, and the fishing, shrimping, and crabbing went on. And each spring the cycle started over again. Each year was like the year before. Each generation like the generation before. . . No one thought this way of life would change. The life of the land and the people seemed fixed in an invisible circle, enclosed by the waters and the passage of time.\textsuperscript{12}

For the Gullah, life was predictable until 1950 when timber baron General Joseph B. Fraser purchased several tracts of land on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina and began the commercial development of the Sea Islands. Fraser’s son Charles, a Yale Law School graduate, viewed the island as more than a mere timber forest. He considered the island to be a potential vacation spot for many Southern whites and thus began the “resort island”


\textsuperscript{11}Moseley 49.

concept that has dominated much of the southern coastal area. Once the value of the region as a tourist attraction was realized, commercial interests increased the pressure on the Gullah to sell their property. In 1956 Fraser orchestrated the first bridge built to Hilton Head Island, a route to the islands for developers. Joyner contends that the rapid development of Hilton Head Island was a harbinger of things to come for the other islands in the Sea Island chain.\(^\text{13}\)

As developers obtained land from Gullah individuals interested in moving to the mainland, vacation resorts began to pop up and Gullah culture began to deteriorate at a rapid rate. Residents sold off pieces of property, resulting in increased land values and property taxes, thus making it unaffordable for many to stay on their land. Real estate transactions deprived the Gullah of opportunities to participate in regional development and their culture was gradually diluted by outside interests.\(^\text{14}\) Developers were largely unconcerned about the impact that commercialization might have on inhabitants of the islands. Fraser, for example, argued that cultural decline was simply an unintended consequence of development. Fraser stated:

\begin{quote}
It is a wise thing, for those who need the money, to elect to sell. Every black family that sells a portion of their heritage that was maintained with great struggle and great effort by their parents and grandparents and great-grandparents, and uses a part of that heritage to send a child to engineering school or to boarding school, is making an investment in the future of that family. I wish more of them would do it.\(^\text{15}\)
\end{quote}

For Fraser, heritage was not something to be protected, but rather a commodity that could be traded for what he thought would be a better life. Developers rushed in, prepared to trade small sums of money to the Gullah people in exchange for their homes and heritage. Only a single resident had to agree to sell their property for developers to build a resort

\(^{13}\)Joyner xii-xiii.


\(^{15}\)Tibbetts xiii.
in areas with historically low property values. The presence of resorts massively increased property taxes to levels so high that many Gullah people were forced to sell their land to developers. Goodwine argues that this steady march toward development led to a convention of Gullah heritage being “sold to the highest bidder.”\(^{16}\) They were consistently stripped of their economic and cultural autonomy, and each developer able to wrest away property from local landowners was a factor in the decline of their culture and political power.

The continued risk of cultural loss and eradication is regrettable given the historical significance of Gullah culture as a unique rhetorical tradition. Patterns of speech have developed in response to experienced oppressions and in reaction to systems established to strip the Gullah of their distinctive cultural artifacts. Threats to their cultural survival, however, do not result solely from the influence of white developers.\(^{17}\) One of the greatest threats is attributable to the Gullah themselves. Within their communities there is a strong stigma against all things Gullah, a result of lessons of cultural suppression in schools and in other contexts that urge detachment from cultural history,\(^{18}\) including belittling their rich rhetorical tradition.

1.2 “DO THE SPEECH”: THE RHETORIC OF THE GULLAH PEOPLE

Gullah history and culture have been examined from a variety of perspectives in recent years. Studies have variously focused on linguistic characteristics of Gullah language,\(^{19}\) traditional


cooking methods and food, the African roots of traditional crafts, as well as studies of how Gullah function as families, religious communities and social networks. Despite these wide-ranging and diverse studies, the manners in which cultural issues have been articulated by the Gullah have received scant attention.

Oral history has long been a staple in the lives of the Gullah. The communal primacy afforded to storytelling traditions illustrates the importance of scholarly examination of Gullah rhetorical artifacts. Pickney argues that how they choose to communicate, as well as who they choose to communicate with, marks important issues and historical concepts. The strong legacy of oral history within Gullah communities is also an invaluable cultural resource. Bailey states that storytelling within Low Country communities is at the heart of their cultural survival because it ties residents to their ancestors and to their history. Stories told throughout Gullah communities link the region’s past with the legacy of slavery, helping to maintain oral tradition as the prime vehicle for cultural and historical connection. The importance afforded storytelling is established both in the act of communication connecting older residents to younger generations, and in storytelling’s ability to relate modern experiences of oppression to rich Gullah history dating to their abduction from western Africa aboard slave ships. Because of the strong heritage associated with Gullah oral tradition, the study of their narratives is critical to understanding Gullah cultural and political interests.

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26 Bailey. See also Twining, “Time Is Like a River” 90.

Without indigenous and scholarly recognition of the importance of preserving community stories, Gullah oral history is in danger of being lost. Sustaining oral history and Gullah culture is contingent on the creation of networks within communities to tie islands and people together under the rubric of a common heritage and history. Only recently have the Gullah people begun to acknowledge how small actions, such as the sale of a parcel of land, the stifling of their language, or the allowance of a bridge to the mainland, can impact their culture. Goodwine maintains that Gullah people are beginning to realize what has been lost, and particularly attribute their losses to resorts operating in opposition to their traditional way of life:

The Gullahs that still live in the Sea Islands and remember the islands before the fifties see them through very different eyes than those who come to live in the resorts. They remember the beauty of the dirt roads and trees all around. They remember the fields that they used to play in, and the landings to the creeks — the creeks that are now locked away from them by gates and NO TRESPASSING signs.

The Gullah consequently have begun to fight back against pervasive coastal development. Even with substantial migration to other regions across the United States, there is an increasing awareness among the Gullah of the plight of the Sea Islands and other coastal areas. They are beginning to acknowledge the necessity of proactive steps to ensure the survival of Gullah culture. Goodwine explains the importance of activism for cultural defense:

There is nothing more beautiful than people knowing who they are and being able to celebrate that knowledge. The loss of land has meant the loss of traditions in more ways than one in the Sea Islands. From all over the African diaspora flung

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30 Goodwine, “Holdin’ Pun We Culcha,” 173.
out across America, Gullah are returning to re-evaluate whether the building
that has occurred has been truly development or if it has been destruction. In
the final analysis, the act of ‘destructionment’ cannot and will not be allowed to
continue as people see that when one culture dies, another soon follows.\(^{31}\)

Gullah people reclaiming and fighting for their culture and heritage produce testimony
and stories and a fertile opportunity to inspect how a culture under assault attempts to
defend itself against commercialization and cooptation by outsiders. The lack of legitimacy
afforded to the Gullah in political decisions has until very recently contributed to the absence
of their concerns in public policy.\(^{32}\) Even with recent recognition of the plight of the Gullah,
development has continued to encroach upon their lands and ways of life. The continual
erosion of autonomy has forced a dramatic response by those within the community. Many
local residents have reacted by sharing their stories of encounters with outsiders as cautionary
tales of what may happen if they yield to the whims and desires of those disrespectful of
Gullah history.\(^{33}\)

Despite instances of Gullah individuals employing narratives of oppression from their
heritage to fight the commercializing tendencies of modern life, Goodwine states that they
have historically had their voices distorted by researchers unwilling to listen to them on
their own terms. She contends that it has become nearly impossible to find unedited Gullah
thoughts and stories. Their language is instead corrected grammatically and structurally in
order to make them more palatable to outsiders.\(^{34}\) Goodwine asserts that indigenous talk
explaining Gullah beliefs should be accepted, and researchers should resist controlling forces

\(^{31}\)Goodwine, “Holdin’ Pun We Culcha,” 174.
1940. See also Goodwine, Marqueta L. “Excavating Gullah Seeds.” The Legacy of Ibo Landing.
Folk Culture on St. Helena Island, South Carolina. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina
Press, 1930.
\(^{33}\)Breed, Alan G. “Gullah Group, Ted Turner Fight over Land.” Chattanooga Times Free Press.
\(^{34}\)Goodwine, Marqueta L. Introduction. The Legacy of Ibo Landing. Ed. Marqueta L. Good-
pushing to recast these statements more conventionally. Favoring Gullah oratory as inherently valuable eliminates an elitist expectation for rhetorical perfection in communicative efforts, and reveals valuable appeals supporting the protection of their culture and history.

The history of coastal Georgia and South Carolina has been written from a primarily academic standpoint, with little attention paid to the opinions of those who have resided there for a century and a half. Study of the Gullah must be expanded not just to understand what has happened in the region, but to enable an inspection of how their rhetorical acts can add to discussions of culture and development. Researchers must ensure that the Gullah position is inserted as a primary text in the exploration of their history. Gullah cultural realities have been largely ignored by many scholars, both due to disinterest and to a wish to stifle the legacy of slavery. Dusinberre suggests that the consideration of the consequences of slave culture in coastal Georgia and South Carolina would force a reevaluation of history that is unsettling and uncomfortable to many.

The Gullah have begun to realize that in order to have their concerns heard they must take every opportunity to deliver the story of their struggle with oppression. Public articulation of stories forces outsiders, as well as members of the Gullah community, to observe Gullah life in a new light. Acknowledgement of the value of hearing Gullah speech allows for critical reflection of their history to proceed from a new vantage point, rather than from a white, elitist orientation. Studying the National Park Service public meetings provides an opportunity to engage in such a process. Examination of the NPS deliberations recognizes a series of testimony that places the Gullah at the center of analysis. These meetings are part of the larger field of public meetings and can explain how groups attempt to use the act of testifying to advance political causes.

For most of their history, Gullah rhetoric has not been subjected to popular attention. The National Park Service meetings, however, provided a stage for the Gullah to enter into political discussions regarding the future of their culture. This analysis examines the ability of public meetings to discover lines of argument often ignored in the construction of public policy. Because the NPS meetings supplied a platform for the Gullah to present their points of view, scholars of rhetoric are given the opportunity to explore a substantial and distinct collection of rhetorical artifacts.

Additionally, the consequences of public testimony can be examined through the study of media accounts of the Gullah prior to and following the meetings. The impact that the meetings had on the influence of Gullah rhetoric can be measured by scrutinizing both the amount of coverage following the meetings and by identifying the diversity of voices acknowledged. The meeting process placed the onus, at least within the community and in media coverage, on issues that the Gullah deemed important. Increased media attention on cultural issues and on the individuals pushing for community acceptance is an example of a positive externality of public meetings.

1.3 “Who is in Charge Here”: The National Park Service Special Resource Study

The Special Resource Study was established in order for the National Park Service (NPS) to ascertain whether suggested Gullah cultural reclamation projects would fit under the purview of the federal agency. Projects under consideration were suggested by either members of the NPS or by other government officials. In the case of the Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study, Representative Clyburn recommended inclusion of the study as a portion of the 2000 Department of the Interior Appropriation Budget. The purpose of the allocation was to determine “the national significance of the Gullah culture, as well as the suitability and
feasibility of adding various elements of Gullah culture to the National Park System. The goals of the study as outlined by the National Park Service were:

1. to analyze the multi-faceted components of Gullah culture (known as Geechee in Georgia and Florida) using the established criteria for the study of areas for potential inclusion in the National Park System and;

2. to evaluate the resources of the Gullah/Geechee people and cultural landscape for potential national significance and;

3. to determine how these resources could be protected, interpreted, and used for the benefit of the Gullah/Geechee people and the general public and;

4. to make recommendations to Congress based on those criteria.

Most Special Resource Studies do not focus on a culture, but rather tend to concentrate on land areas that might benefit from protection by the NPS. Despite the change in direction for this study, the method of analysis followed the traditional three phase structure of Special Resource Studies.

Generally the first stage of a Special Resource Study requests public comments on the area of interest to the study. In order to ensure better participation the National Park Service attempts to locate meeting sites known to target community members from which the agency hopes to elicit cooperation. The NPS recognized that the Gullah would be more comfortable testifying in familiar settings, and worked to identify meeting hosts that would encourage de facto community participation. Once the sites were established, the NPS delivered fliers

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41. The meetings were held in the following locations: May 20, 2005 at the Emanuel AME Church in Charleston, SC; May 16, 2000 at the Bethel AME Church in Georgetown, SC; June 1, 2000 at the Penn Center in St. Helena Island, SC; June 6, 2000 at the Ritz Theatre and LaVilla Museum in Jacksonville, FL; June 8, 2000 at the Lighthouse Museum in St. Simons Island, GA; June 13, 2000 at the First Bryan AME Church in Savannah, GA; and August 28, 2000 at the St. Paul AME Church in Little River, SC.
to community organizations and dispersed news releases to local news organizations inviting public comment at the meetings. The announcements specified that public comments should address the issue of Gullah cultural survival and encouraged concerned citizens to attend in order to have their voices heard.42

The public meeting portion of most National Park Service Special Resource Studies have a stated purpose of “encouraging community involvement” in NPS projects.43 In the case of the Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study attempts to fulfill this purpose were evident both by the sites chosen and by statements made by meeting organizers indicating that the Gullah would help to determine the nature of the process. NPS employee Michael Allen explained:

So what we do here today is to begin a journey to learn more about this culture, to seek your input in how we, The National Park Service, and how the state and federal organizations and community groups can work more in preserving and protecting this culture, and in the greater good, is making us more aware to our nation and world as a whole.44

Focusing on community involvement typically provides Special Resource Study meetings with an unstructured feel. The National Park Service rarely intervenes, but rather participants are largely able to determine the nature of testimony following initial remarks by NPS officials. The intention of such an approach is to ensure that the meeting process is community driven.

Following the conclusion of Special Resource Studies, the next step is for the National Park Service to analyze the transcripts of meeting testimony. For the Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study the analysis was completed by James Dias and included a content breakdown which compiled the frequency that particular terms were used at each meeting. Because the focus of the examination was solely on the number of times each term was used by different

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42http://www.npca.org/explore_the_parks/new_parks/gullahgeechee.asp
43http://www.cr.nps.gov/heritageareas/FAQ/plans.htm
44Transcripts, May 2nd, p. 5.
speakers, the analysis thereby excluded scrutiny of multiple uses of the same term by the same speaker, even if they testified at different meetings.\footnote{http://www.nps.gov/sero/planning/gg_srs/Dias%20Report.pdf}

The content analysis is intended to inform the final report of the meetings prepared by the National Park Service. After the conclusion of each set of public meetings the NPS releases a series of “conceptual management alternatives” that the agency could implement. These potential alternatives are then presented to the community in a second series of meetings using a poster presentation method. Each alternative is displayed visually for attendees to evaluate as they move through the meeting forum. Upon conclusion of the meetings, attendees are asked to provide written comments on each of the options. The Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study completed this portion of the process in November 2002. Attendance and participation at this set of meetings was significantly lower than it was during the 2000 meetings.\footnote{http://www.nps.gov/sero/planning/gg_srs/gg_process.htm}

The concluding phase of a National Park Service Special Resource Study is the release of the final report. Congress, as part of its appropriation, requires the NPS to submit a detailed account of the meeting process, including all background information, a brief summary of meeting testimony, and recommendations for potential actions by the NPS.\footnote{http://www.nps.gov/sero/planning/gg_srs/sm_srs_board1.pdf} The Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study final report was released in early 2004. It contained an extensive literature review which outlined the history of the Gullah in the region, an outline of the meeting process including a numerical breakdown of meeting attendance and participation, and five proposed alternatives that the NPS forwarded for consideration.\footnote{http://www.nps.gov/sero/planning/gg_srs/gg_res.htm}

1.4 Outline of Chapters

Public meetings are only capable of revealing cultural arguments forwarded by traditionally marginalized groups once such voices are viewed as rhetorically significant. Chapter two
undertakes an examination of cultural themes and contextualizes lines of argument used by the Gullah in defense of their cultural autonomy. The chapter isolates three distinct historical divisions within the testimony: the historical oppression of the Gullah, their views of the current political situation, and their suggestions for future change. In their testimony the Gullah used historical examples of oppression and their struggles to overcome related obstacles to contextualize how they experience similar issues today. Additionally, within the meetings the Gullah also articulated specific ways that the National Park Service could act to alleviate barriers to cultural survival.

Chapter three explores how the meeting process functions for participants, policymakers and scholars. The focus here is on the operation of public meetings, paying close attention both to the political structures in which they occur and to appeals deployed within testimony that shed light on contentious or historical issues. Analytical discussion focuses in particular on the structure and importance of the National Park Service series, and assesses the meetings’ capacity to explore issues related to Gullah cultural survival. It also compares the National Park Service’s analysis and prescribed course of action to actual Gullah testimony forwarded in the meetings. The NPS offered proper deference to testimony neither in its representation of Gullah statements in summary documents nor in its proposed policy solutions. From arguments made in a series of supplementary meetings to the coding of Gullah testimony to the choice of issues considered important, the NPS demonstrated an unwillingness to advance Gullah interests as central to its review. More importantly, examining how the NPS conducted its assessment illustrates the potential functioning of power in the public meeting process. Analyzing the means used by the NPS to control the course of deliberations and the presentation of meeting findings helps reveal what the NPS considered an appropriate use of its power.

The final chapter contextualizes analysis of the National Park Service meetings to reiterate three important insights for the study of public meetings and their ability to evaluate the interests of marginalized groups. First, meetings can open doors and provide access for
marginalized groups to deploy traditional beliefs in broader political discussions. The Gullah were not only able to draw on culturally-specific argument strategies to critically examine historical and academic representations of their culture, but were also successful in introducing their critiques in a policymaking context. Second, scrutiny of public meetings helps to reveal exercises of power by planners and organizers. The NPS, in this instance, used this series of meetings as a catalyst to expand their regional initiatives and not primarily as a forum to address Gullah concerns. Third, despite the potential of power maneuvers by decision-makers, public debate may still hold liberating potential for those involved in the process. The Gullah have continually worked since the conclusion of the meetings to bring to light the issues expressed in their testimony. Media coverage of these topics demonstrates the ability of meetings to expose currently overlooked arguments.

In examinations of the issues critical to the Gullah, there is an inherent tension between the role of the critic as an evaluator of Gullah rhetoric and the claim made by the Gullah that they deserve control of the means necessary for generating their own history. The focus of this study is not on the interpretation of Gullah rhetoric in a desire to ascertain its veracity or to establish whether Gullah rhetorical appeals were appropriate. Rather, the goal is to examine the types arguments meeting attendees deployed and to evaluate how those arguments flowed from previous experiences and the testimony of others. As a critic it is impossible to avoid interpretation, but the goal of this study is to give primacy to the voices of the Gullah. By placing Gullah voices in the position of authority I hope to avoid the common cultural perception that researchers are often not concerned with how research interests intersect with the beliefs of the Gullah people.
Chapter 2

“On Their Own Terms”: Themes of Argument in Gullah Testimony

The content of participant testimony in the National Park Service meetings clustered around several major themes. Analysis of arguments presented by the Gullah within the meetings illustrates a constructed reading of history that places their experiences at the center. Emergent themes in the testimony revealed a rhetorical history of the Gullah, tracing their past experiences from slavery to present concerns, including recommendations for future actions. An evaluation of the texts elucidates four lines of reasoning that emerged throughout the meetings. At the outset, Gullah speakers argued for placing their point of view at the heart of policy analysis. They contended that many approaches for the conveyance of Gullah history have relied too heavily upon traditional scholarly accounts and have not given enough credence to Gullah perceptions in constructing depictions of their own experiences. In telling their own story, the Gullah gave historical context to their experiences with oppression. This chapter examines the historical themes that emerged from the meetings to not only relay Gullah heritage, but also to highlight Gullah arguments regarding their inability to seize control of the means of production for their own traditions, their recognition of the influence of past experiences on their lives today, and their conceptions of future solutions to their current cultural concerns.

The first historical theme that emerged from testimony is the priority that Gullah place on self-description and historical contextualization. They argued that these criteria allow for historical events to be told in a manner that ensures the preservation of continued Gullah contributions to the region’s history. This testimony called upon the National Park Service and others who might study the group to place analytical concentration on the words of
the Gullah. The discovery of knowledge to illuminate cultural problems does not emerge from points embedded in history books, but rather springs forth from the experiences of the Gullah people.

The second theme that surfaced from testimony was the importance of retelling historical events from a Gullah perspective on issues ranging from the history of their language to their experiences with agriculture, including contributions to the region’s economic development. Instead of allowing outsiders to conjecture on the circumstances of Gullah cultural history, group members used their testimony to enter their own experiences into the historical record and to stake a claim to what they believed to be a more complete version of history than the one traditionally told.

A third theme explored how the Gullah are still denied access to resources necessary to cultural survival. Speakers asserted that they are closed off from cultural resources, and their testimony explored how barriers discount the potential of the Gullah to protect their own future. Included in these arguments were explorations of forces of commercialization and development, particularly as they relate to exacerbated deterioration of Gullah culture. These examples are an indication of risk, and an imperative that drastic measures are needed to save their traditions and way of life.

Finally, the testimony outlined potential solutions for cultural preservation perceived by the Gullah as best serving their interests. The solutions proposed by the Gullah had two elements. First, they argued that they need access to historical lands that hold substantial resources important to their cultural survival. Many of these lands have distinct relevance because they contain the locations of important cultural sites, including historic gravesites and land with natural resources essential to many cultural rituals. Second, they forwarded the claim that attention to testimony and personal experiences must not end with the National Park Service meetings, but rather that those concerned with maintaining history and supporting cultural survival must continue Gullah community outreach efforts. Participants believed it is important to reach out to elders who have stories to share, for example, and to
recognize that those stories collectively build a bridge to the past. Gullah testimony additionally stressed the need to reach out to young people, bringing the community together by investing in the future. A close examination of these themes is important for accurate assessment of Gullah concerns elucidated in the NPS meetings. Each of the themes will be explored at length through the following sections.

2.1 Method of Analysis

The National Park Service meetings and their outcomes provide an opportunity to explore how decision makers potentially ignore the concerns of individuals most affected by deliberative proceedings. Approaching public meetings as a site of knowledge production can create new options for the cultural protection of groups existing at the margins of the political spectrum. Analyzing testimony generated from public meetings in a manner that does not treat such rhetorical voices with respect, however, risks making such an exercise meaningless. Valuable testimony assessment highlights the ability of meetings to provide an opportunity for the excavation of lines of argument valued by marginalized groups.

Testimony in the National Park Service meetings created artifacts that can be inspected to reveal argumentative trends and strategies within the Gullah community. The permanent record of testimony produces texts which can explain situations faced by the Gullah on a daily basis. Stillar concludes that examining such remnants contributes to the identification of the social order and to the speaker’s place within the power system:

\[\text{Every rhetorical act bears relations both to hierarchies in the social order and to the symbol systems that are a major means through which social orders are structured and coordinated. Instances of rhetorical acts therefore have social consequences because they contribute to the production and reproduction of social orders. . . . Every rhetorical act is a potential transgression of some symbolic order.}^{1}\]

Discursive acts of transgression can be widely seen in NPS testimony as Gullah speakers diverged from public meeting conventions and even openly flaunted the specific mandates of meeting organizers. Speaking can be in and of itself symbolic of transgression. Study of the rhetorical choices of the Gullah in these deliberations therefore can impart valuable insights into critical political issues. Forester advances the argument that public meetings create a space for those normally ignored by political processes, and that testimony made possible by that space must be treated as rhetorically important. This significance is not diminished even if meeting outcomes do not match the desires of those who participated. The process is important as a rhetorical event and its worth should not be downplayed because the results of the meeting do not address concerns of attendees.

This examination of Gullah testimony appraises specific appeals identified by speakers as important both through the frequency and intensity of their delivery. As discussed earlier, scholarly focus on recurring arguments is a useful technique for the identification of issues perceived to be critical by the Gullah for their historical and cultural survival. This analysis, therefore, emphasizes how clusters of arguments are developed and supported by experiential testimony. In its isolation of prevalent themes, such analysis can contextualize important issues as identified by the Gullah. Burke argues that the when approaching a text, critics must reveal how presentations of experiential evidence cluster around common argument themes. The study of clusters of argument can uncover how rhetorical strategies gain and maintain influence within a rhetorical community. Burke additionally explains that trends can be uncovered through the examination of associational clusters:

The work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations, “associational clusters.” And you may, in examining his work, find “what goes with what” in these

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clusters — what kind of images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, isolation and despair, etc. And though he may be perfectly conscious of the act of writing, conscious of selecting certain kinds of imagery to reinforce a certain kind of mood, he cannot possibly be conscious of the interrelationships among all of these equations.  

The claim that Burke makes above with regard to writers is equally appropriate in the study of speech situations. Rhetors construct arguments with implicit value assertions related to their historical situation. The study of associational clusters can reveal how a rhetor or a group of rhetors perceive the world around them, and, similarly, what they consider appropriate ways of reconstituting that world. Marston and Rockwell argue that the identification of clusters can provide an insight into how groups conventionally lacking in power may attempt to rhetorically construct their world. That is, groups normally denied the ability to determine their own destiny may coalesce around an argument or set of arguments which resonate among a cross-section of group members.  

Foss demonstrates how cluster analysis can more precisely provide insight into rhetoric surrounding culturally significant issues. She contends that the study of both the frequency and intensity of rhetorical events can provide the rhetorical critic with the means to discover issues deemed important to the rhetor. By focusing on thematic screens utilized by rhetors, scholars can identify pressing topics within rhetorical communities. Initially, this investiga-
tion addresses several themes inherent in Gullah testimony by focusing on the frequency of topic deployment. By isolating the frequency of an argument, critics can begin to identify which issues hold a privileged place in the community. Secondly, this investigation evaluates the intensity of testimony delivery. Such an examination is done by focusing on themes displaying the greatest reactions from meeting participants and generating significant responses from other speakers. An important caveat in cluster criticism, however, is that neither distinguishing the frequency nor identifying the intensity of argument presentation adequately represents the universe of issues most critical to a rhetor. Only by focusing on interactions between argument frequency and intensity can a scholar reveal resonant claims. Selected testimony for this analysis focuses on topics that both exhibit high levels of frequency, and which were presented with a great degree of intensity.

A focus on argument clusters reveals both the issues which resonate within a group and the sort of political future the individuals within that group desire. The true power of the rhetorical constructions of marginalized groups is likely related to members’ abilities to define the world around them. The worldview of the speaker drives rhetorical choices and indicates important contemporary issues. For those with little empirical access to dominant cultural and political representations of history, undertaking a study of communicative acts necessitates evaluating how the alternate views of marginalized groups have redefined historical events. Coffin argues that “history is a record of the past;” the purpose of scholars, therefore, is to explore how these histories are presented rhetorically. As it becomes obvious that history and historical representations are not factual, stable places, but rather are contingencies based upon the political space of the speaker, an opportunity is given to the critic to discover how new historical viewpoints are created and sustained. This study explores

how the Gullah seek to create their own version of historical events even in the face of institutional barriers which may prevent them from doing so. The historical exclusion of their perspectives creates a situation in which factual representations of history often discount the Gullah as active participants. The past is not an objective measure that can be discovered; rather, history is created through rhetorical invention. This assessment therefore probes the implications of new perspectives presented by the Gullah during the meetings.

Much of the rhetoric advanced within public meetings is done in the form of narrative. A focus on citizen testimony in public meetings leads many participants to present their claims in the form of personal stories and anecdotes. Stories chosen to be employed by speakers mark issues “deem[ed] important in the conduct of human affairs.” Foss explains that a focus on narrative usage can permit the researcher to concentrate on both story construction and on the rhetor’s position within that story:

The critic who uses narrative or features of narrative as the unit of analysis in rhetorical criticism focuses on the story form itself. The critic may be interested in discovering how the construction of a particular narrative directs the interpretation of a situation. A narrative, as a frame of experience, functions as an argument to view and understand the world in a particular way, and by analyzing that narrative, the critic can understand the argument being made and the likelihood that it will be successful in gaining adherence for the perspective it presents.

This study scrutinizes the use of narratives within public meetings and posits the structure of stories as the heart of the analysis. The manner in which the Gullah told their stories,


both in terms of form and content, is rhetorically significant. This is especially true for the Gullah as a group whose experiential traditions are primarily shaped by an oral culture.

Drawing attention to individuals’ narratives additionally reveals the orientation of speakers to their political conditions. A significant portion of the construction of a narrative relates directly to the speaker’s perception of how they fit in the context of a speech act. Within the National Park Service meetings the Gullah constructed a history detailing their past experiences, scrutinized how those experiences manifest themselves today, and envisioned their agency in potential solutions to identified problems. Directing analysis to Gullah testimony examines how they attempt to locate themselves within the history of the United States, the region, and the institution of slavery. Their individual experiences and modes of expressing themselves through narrative display lines of argument that can proffer deeper insights into Gullah issues.

Chilton and Scaffner contend that shared perceptions of the world create rhetorical political associations. The ability of individual actors to communicate their desires in a manner that creates identification within a group is an important step in building in-group linkages. It is the “shared perceptions of values that defines political associations”.12 Groups are recognized through shared rhetorical conceptions of their surrounding world. The study of “shared speech,” therefore, can emphasize the degree to which narrative construction is intended to match the rhetor’s beliefs with those of other social groups and with the beliefs of their audience. As the Gullah came together as a group within the National Park Service meetings, they developed what they consider to be a more accurate story of their collective culture and oppression. This study investigates what the rhetorical choices of speakers can tell us about personal views of historical and political events. The focus is directed on argumentative strategies through the assessment of word choices and the preferred experiential examples relayed by Gullah speakers to push a certain agenda. These rhetorical choices set

the stage for a new way of viewing the Gullah experience, and a comprehensive analysis of such choices can expose how they hoped to reconceptualize their experiences.

2.2 “I Am Dead Serious About That”: The Power of Self-Definition Among the Gullah

The first theme was concerned with determining which rhetors should speak at public meetings, and as such, this theme established Gullah criteria for discussions. Public meetings demonstrate both the power of inclusion by inviting previously marginalized groups to contribute and the power of exclusion by erecting barriers that prevent universal participation. National Park Service testimony included discussions about participation opportunities and barriers at each of the meetings. This section examines how the Gullah used testimony to assert their agency in processes of knowledge production that they argued have been denied to them by historians and government officials unwilling to give primacy to their perspectives. The Gullah declared that their ability to define their past, present and future would determine the degree to which their culture is protected. The remainder of this section works to advance Gullah testimony by examining the arguments deployed as an example of an indigenous group affirming their right to participate in the public deliberation process.

The Gullah appeared to approach the National Park Service meetings with an open mind, and they viewed the NPS as similarly entering into the meetings unbiased, and demonstrating a spirit of inclusion. Marquetta Goodwine, the Grand High Priestess of the Gullah/Geechee nation, explained in the meetings how her involvement with the NPS led her to believe that agency officials were willing to allow Gullah feedback to determine the nature of the study:

I hope people don’t miss that while we’re doing this study, that you have to be within the spirit of the Gullah community to really truly understand what Gullah is and that’s part and parcel to it... And that’s why we’re here and that’s why the six meetings are happening because we want to know what are they going
to do. They don’t know what they are going to do. It’s because of what’s being said at the six meetings that will start to structure how to go about this.\textsuperscript{13}

Many of the participants seemed to appreciate that the interests of Gullah people drove the meetings, alleging that control and eventual outcomes would be in the hands of the Gullah.\textsuperscript{14} At the beginning of each meeting, for example, many speakers argued that the outreach efforts of the NPS must be taken seriously. This perceived control, they contended, was an important opportunity, and by calling the significance of the prospect to the attention of other audience members they demonstrated the appreciation that Gullah participants had for efforts undertaken by the NPS. For many meeting attendees, public testimony was a new experience, fostering a sense of autonomy within a local deliberative process rather than entrenching an impression of victimhood in an elite political process.

For Goodwine and others, the invitation to participate in the National Park Service study was an impetus for testifying,\textsuperscript{15} a fact evident in her statement about how inclusion and participation are linked:

\begin{quote}
So I want you all (the Gullah) to know, this wasn’t done haphazardly and they’re (the National Park Service) not taking lightly what’s being said…. And you know, unless God take my life, I’m going to be at those meetings. If you all got to wheel me in, I’ll be at all the meetings.\textsuperscript{16}
\end{quote}

Goodwine clearly believed that the power of the NPS meetings was contingent on Gullah exercise of discursive influence. Her claim that she would be at “all the meetings” underscored her belief that testimony would alter the deliberative process and influence NPS recommendations for addressing problems faced by the Gullah community. Statements like


\textsuperscript{14}Each of the meetings begins and concludes with testimony that expresses the importance of Gullah participation in determining the focus of the meetings.

\textsuperscript{15}National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 2, 2000. 87.

\textsuperscript{16}National Park Service. (Transcripts) May 2, 2000. 88.
the one made by Goodwine suggested that the Gullah could amend the policy landscape through their testimony. Because inclusion in deliberations is a means for the empowerment of marginalized groups, the NPS meetings held potential for Gullah collective identification of important issues.

For some, the meetings served as a platform from which they could use oral traditions to express crucial issues for the protection of cultural resources. Recognizing the primacy of public talk and narrative is significant because the inclusion of Gullah rhetoric in the political process signaled their entry into discussions about their future. Forester states that public meetings set the criteria for public deliberation by monitoring the style and content of messages considered to be worthy of inclusion in public debate. He argues that the act of planning meetings by public officials sends signals to citizens that indicate what style of communication is appropriate for particular settings. The study of these meetings can be expanded to incorporate explorations of how power dynamics are organized. The failure of those who study public meetings to evaluate how individuals and their opinions are included or excluded from deliberative discourse prevents understanding of how such meetings might (or might not) alter social systems. Studies should focus on how power is exerted and how individuals attempt to stake their claim to power within meeting contexts. Such examinations must include articulations of the conditions of exclusion from the public forum. Andrew Rodrigues echoed this concern by explaining that Gullah exclusion from the process of history-making must be reversed. Rodrigues argued that their story must be included in future historical accounts:

(H)istorians often overlook...history when it’s convenient to them. And for us it has always been convenient for them to overlook our history. So we need to

Testimony regarding oral history and its importance among the Gullah appears several times during each of the meetings. Additionally, this testimony is often clustered into groups where several individuals build off of each others arguments.

Forester, Planning in the Face of Power. 9–12.

Forester, Planning in the Face of Power. 27.
concentrate on telling the story as it happened...a lot of these history books don’t talk about us.20

The key to expanding views of historical events is to recognize that expertise on Gullah issues is not the sole domain of historians; rather, experiences rooted in Gullah perspectives add to discussions of important political issues. While the results of the National Park Service study fall far short in regard to this goal, it is clear from testimony that the Gullah felt that their voice would be heard by those who make policy decisions. They entered into the meetings with a strong belief that they could alter the construction of knowledge and political judgment. Goodwine claimed that a reorientation of perspectives could occur if new participants are recognized as authorities on representations of their community:

And I feel like what you need to understand is to represent our community the right way, you have to come to us because we have to be the people who are speaking. We are the experts because we live this culture and heritage, and our ancestors have and our elders have, those who couldn’t make it here tonight, it’s for us to be the vessels to go back to them and let them know so that they can come back with more information that we can bring back to the next series of meetings and the next thing.21

Goodwine sought to redefine who is considered an “expert” in the planning arena. Traditional deliberative discourse has often under-prioritized the views of marginalized peoples. Specifically, Goodwine argued that the Gullah have not been looked to as experts, and that a redefinition of the term “expert” would place elders in the Gullah community at the center of any analysis. This redefinition is critical to how the Gullah are perceived in examinations of the meetings. If the NPS seriously regarded participant testimony, then it would have relied upon the Gullah to isolate problems with status quo policies and to outline potential solutions.

21National Park Service. (Transcripts) May 2, 2000. 34.
The prospect of Gullah participation in examinations of issues immediately affecting them is indicative of the potential of local empowerment. Becoming engaged in the discovery and protection of cultural resources allowed the Gullah to develop links with the American political landscape — increasing their power by officially sanctioning their direct involvement in policymaking that could alter how they live their lives. The liberationist potential of the meetings is apparent; not only were the Gullah asked to share their knowledge, but they were also unhesitant in their responses and actions. Cornel West argues that moving away from controlling images of dominant society requires individuals concerned about issues of representation to define the world around them for themselves. He contends that empowerment occurs when individuals are able to appropriate the means of production from those who traditionally control how history and claims of truth are represented and filtered. West calls for “new critical politics of difference” and “creative responses” that vary from those that have historically bombarded dispossessed groups.22 For the Gullah, the implementation of a new paradigm for analyzing political events required seizing authority to define their own histories and interests.

The ability to define issues and terms important to a cultural group represents a claim to power. Self-definition and adjudication of collective political interests enables cultural groups to appropriate power from traditional structures that have habitually sought to constrain them. Nettleford explains the power of definition in dispossessed communities:

When one speaks of empowerment, what is one talking about? What does one want power for? If one looks at the groups who now have power, by whatever means one measures that, one finds they enjoy that status because they are able to define themselves on their own terms, they are able to follow through with action on the basis of those definitions. I think that what Blacks have to do is

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aim at the bottom line, whether one defines it in terms of economics, profits, or cultural certitude.\textsuperscript{23}

Power does not originate from physical prowess; rather, it comes from the willingness of individuals to stand up against perceived controlling forces. This distinction is significant given that the National Park Service response to Gullah testimony does not seem to respect Gullah perspectives.\textsuperscript{24} Redefining power away from a singular focus on governmental responses accords power to testimony as a rhetorical claim to political strength. If the act of standing up alters the power arrangement between public meeting planners and participants, then the mode through which decisions are made can be altered such that emphasis is placed on the citizens most closely affected by decisions. In effect, such citizens are made into experts.

Part of the importance of self-definition for the Gullah rests in the intrinsic power of the act of speaking. A claim to knowledge production by the Gullah was a claim to political strength. Placing political strength in the hands of those brave enough to speak alters how such strength and power are normally conceived. The willingness to stake a claim to power has historically and erroneously been associated closely with physical strength. The conflation of political strength with physical strength, however, limits the ability of all citizens to act courageously in the public realm. Power comes in numerous forms. In the National Park Service study the Gullah used the meetings as an arena for self-expression, an application which represented an act of power. Sparks explains that expanding appraisals of power permits citizen contributions to be added to the political landscape. Sparks states, “Deliberation, however critical as a practice, is often the goal rather than the starting point for those who engage in dissident citizenship.” She concludes that instead of relying on traditional means of political participation, the dissident citizen constitutes “alternative public spaces” in which the interactions of those citizens are changed in relation to governmental


\textsuperscript{24}A complete discussion of this treatment takes place in chapter three.
decision making bodies. For the Gullah, their previous experience with outsiders made giving testimony in the NPS meetings risky. By revealing their personal stories and anecdotes, speakers practiced an act of dissident citizenship because they could not — based on previous experiences — reasonably expect the government to act on their concerns. Thus, the act of speaking, despite the perception of stringent opposition, is illustrative of dissident citizenship.

Because Gullah concerns have been ignored for 150 years, the very act of speaking out was a courageous step. Continued disregard of the Gullah people made their willingness to articulate their interests at the National Park Service meetings a political act that was both unpredictable and daring. hooks argues that choosing to speak in situations where individuals have traditionally been ignored is a courageous political act. Since the end of the Civil War there has been little public interest in Gullah beliefs and conceptions. Politicians and other government officials have spoken about native Low Country residents, but have rarely listened to them. When action was taken in regard to Gullah people, it was often done in an effort to educate them or to bring them into the mainstream. There was little recognition, however, of the Gullah as group with autonomous opinions about their future. Retelling their history during the NPS meetings therefore challenged many assumptions of traditional historical accounts. A reevaluation of historical events is only possible when those with experiential knowledge have the fortitude to act as dissident citizens and to share their knowledge with others in the community. Redefining historical events is a political act that works to relocate previously ignored perspectives to the crux of public discussions. Such repositioning would not be possible without the courage of individual speakers.

A common argument throughout the National Park Service testimony was a call to individuals with experiential knowledge to speak out. Each meeting contained dozens of remarks imploring the Gullah to testify. Preferring experience in argument not only situated the power of definition and interpretation in the hands of the Gullah, but also questioned constructions of knowledge surrounding historical events. Exercising the power to define and to interpret requires two characteristics: experience and willingness to share experience. A demonstrated willingness to share experience in the public arena disrupts traditional readings of historical events and creates a vacuum in which truth can be established through the sharing of experiential knowledge. Many marginalized speakers do not suffer from a lack of experiences to inform their speech acts, but rather from a lack of willingness or opportunities to speak about them. The encouragement of Gullah-driven historical construction brought to light the power that they could have if they were willing to reveal their experiences in the public forum.

Throughout their testimony at the National Park Service meetings, the Gullah endeavored to expand public understanding of their people, their culture, and their history. The meetings were replete with references to the ability of the Gullah people to, as Sparks says, “reconstitute the very boundaries of the political itself,” and to the potential of the inclusion of a multitude of voices to facilitate a greater understanding of political issues. Bunny Rodrigues, owner of Gullah Oman (a store which sells Gullah crafts and historical artifacts) argued that only when they speak up and define their interests for themselves will the true history of the region be told:

Now I want everybody to just speak up tonight because I see many faces and I have worked very hard for the past three weeks. I have called everybody up and

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28 The concept of the Gullah speaking for themselves was the most common topic across meetings. Because it was often expressed within other concepts, however, the National Park Service does not recognize it as the most discussed topic.

29 Sparks, “Dissident Citizenship.”
down that beach coast... We must write the story. Not anybody else. We must
write the story and I am dead serious about that.\textsuperscript{30}

Testimony in the meetings called upon individuals to add their voices to others that chose
to speak. These pleas created a situation in which individuals were compelled to divulge their
experiences in an unfamiliar place and in an unaccustomed manner. A political call to action,
“speaking up” is functionally a reclamation project placing the onus on the people to define
themselves. This demand both provided authority for the Gullah to claim their own culture
and denied power to those who have defined them in the past. Power gleaned from speaking
in the National Park Service forum must not be wasted, Rodrigues contended. She was
“dead serious” about her insistence that Gullah people have a unique knowledge generated
from their personal experiences. Several speakers rose after Rodrigues to testify with similar
appeals, demonstrating the resonance of her sentiments with those in attendance.\textsuperscript{31} Many
speakers used similar phrases as Rodrigues or referred to her by name, illuminating the fact
that testimony on topics deemed relevant to the audience created an impetus for others
to become involved. Mirroring Rodrigues’s standpoint is Georgetown citizen Ramona La
Roche who argued that knowledge gained through experience could never be discovered by
historians:

I think it is very important that people like us, what I call community historians,
not the ones that go away and get a Ph.D. and think they know about us because
they have read it in a book — but I am concerned about the people writing their
own story... So I would really encourage the community as well and the National
Park Service to really think about what you know in constructing your project.\textsuperscript{32}

\textsuperscript{30}National Park Service, National Park Service Special Resource Study (Transcripts) May 16,
\textsuperscript{31}National Park Service. National Park Service Special Resource Study (Transcripts) May 16,
Testimony provided in the meetings was replete with calls to Gullah people to redefine their own culture and history. For La Roche, knowledge discovered “in a book” could never compare with knowledge developed through a lifetime. The absence of local perspectives in the writings of mainstream history required a proactive effort by Gullah people to consider how they have come to know what it is that they know. La Roche’s declaration implored people attending the National Park Service meetings to proactively value experiential knowledge through testimony. Individuals know not by reading or hearing about their culture, but rather by living it and sharing that knowledge with others. The NPS study must incorporate such knowledge to have meaning in La Roche’s eyes.

In addition to acknowledging the perspectives of native Gullah community members, testimony also created a space for those who were not from the region originally but who were able to grow into Gullah culture over the course of years. Cultural and historical knowledge can be achieved by immersing oneself in Gullah life first hand. In this worldview, culture is no longer constrained by birth but rather is seen as a state of mind and as a geographical distinction. If someone is willing to immerse themselves in the region and to make a commitment to the culture, then they can be considered Gullah. Even those not born Gullah are able to discover knowledge and to gain a sense of their history and culture. The Gullah even have a term, *come ya*, for someone who is not born in the region, but who chooses to live their life among the people. A number of those testifying at the National Park Service meetings did so with acquired knowledge gained from living within the culture. One such transplant, referred to only as O. J., explained the importance of history in the Gullah culture:

Culture is something you do, something you live. Like the people before me were saying about the talk, the language of Gullah. That’s a culture. . . . Basically, what I’m saying, what I’m saying, what I want you to understand is talk is cheap. Really cheap. About the cheapest thing I know of. . . . You need to get up and talk.
So I’m saying we talking about preserving all down through here. You understand? And looking for one another, and respecting one another, we’ve got to bring it straight. We’ve got to bring it for real... Do the speech. We’ve got to bring it like that there.  

In the above quote the speaker made two related claims. Initially, knowledge is gained through lived experiences. Culture is not something discoverable in study of the annals of history; instead, culture is something one would “do” or “live”. Recognition of the experiential nature of culture is an important gateway for a come ya participating in the National Park Service meetings given that knowledge of Gullah culture provides authority to speak in this forum. Not only did cultural knowledge legitimize O.J.’s ability to testify, the transferability of cultural knowledge also called into question presumably expert outsider claims to knowledge about Gullah culture. Asserting cultural knowledge is a standard through which testimony should be judged. For the realization of the power of public meetings to include a variety of perspectives, then preference must be placed upon knowledge developed out of lived experience. Experiences are inherently more “real” than the depiction of facts resulting from studies by outsiders. The success of public meetings should be measured by their ability to encourage those with cultural knowledge to enter the conversation.

Additionally, O.J. contended that individuals with cultural knowledge must be willing to encounter the hazards of sharing their opinions on a public stage. The speaker challenged those who were silent while simultaneously recognizing that the act of speaking assumes difficult risks. O.J. argued that challenging issues characterized as “a pain” are those that should be addressed by individuals possessing unique cultural knowledge. He urged people sitting on the sidelines to speak up and to demonstrate to those listening that the Gullah standpoint is “real.” He considered speech as the primary means of transmitting the importance of critical issues to the National Park Service and to others interested in Gullah cultural survival.

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Meeting testimony focused a great deal of attention on how historical instances of oppression led to a culture of discrimination that continues to affect Gullah people. They were able to reclaim power by constructing history in a way that contextualized their current experiences. In order to understand the lost potential of the meetings, this study examines how the Gullah expressed their concerns. The prospective impact of public meetings lies in the ability of planners to position traditionally silent voices at the center of study. Gullah history emerged from the National Park Service meetings, and focusing on that history lays the groundwork for discussions of oppression still affecting them today.

2.3 “We Must Write the Story”: Gullah Testimony as a Retelling of History

To set the stage for a discussion of Gullah experiences with oppression, an examination of the role of history in shaping Gullah identity is necessary within the context of the National Park Service meetings. Both examples of oppression and historical contributions of the Gullah were evident in their testimony. Such a focus on history is indicative of the determined power of Gullah community leaders to affect the development of regional economic strength and identity. Those who testified in the meetings communicated the belief that the character of the region could not be separated from contributions of the Gullah. Identifying their talents highlighted, for example, the tragedy of their oppression during slavery. Mental experiments imagining a world in which Gullah were customarily afforded respect illustrated the people’s lost potential and forsaken accomplishments. Retelling history from a nontraditional perspective remedied the denigration of Gullah ancestors who suffered during slavery. Within the NPS meetings history was retold so that the Gullah were positioned at the heart of storytelling. This section undertakes an analysis of how stories were recast in a manner that disrupted current conceptions of history and revealed new ways of viewing the chronicles of Low Country life.
One example of retelling history revolved around the role of rice in Gullah culture. According to the National Park Service, the history of rice and Gullah involvement in its cultivation in the Georgia and South Carolina coastal region was a major factor driving the federal government’s motivation for conducting the meetings. The NPS explained that the history of rice in the building of the region and its historical relationship to the Gullah made the study an important step in understanding their heritage.\(^{34}\) Testimony throughout the NPS meetings affirmed this justification by repeatedly claiming rice as a cultural resource unique to the region.\(^{35}\) Bunny Rodrigues argued that, despite claims by other groups, it was the Gullah who brought rice to the United States. She testified that, “A lot of places claim rice, but we brought rice here and in Georgetown County we did a third — we produced a third of the rice that was sent out during colonial time.”\(^{36}\) Recasting history by prominently featuring unconventional accounts of rice cultivation showed how agriculture helped to construct the region and to build the economy of South Carolina. By attributing considerable success in agriculture to Gullah people, testimony gave them agency and reduced reductionist stigmas of slavery. The Gullah were not merely slaves working for white land owners — they were the rice growers themselves.

Exploring the history of rice cultivation enabled representations of Gullah people to expand from particularistic and marginalized historical locations into broader conceptions of community and culture in United States history. Claiming responsibility for the origination of rice is critical to Gullah self-determination, and it is often depicted as coterminous with their life. The introduction and historical provision of rice to the region is a great sense of pride. Andrew Rodrigues explained:

\[
\text{Now people will say well them folks ain’t educated and they don’t know what they are doing — but when you get down to the bottom line, your parents, your}
\]


\(^{35}\)Rice was the second most common topic discussed at the meetings, and was the topic discussed by the greatest number of individuals. Each meeting contained at least five speakers who discussed the importance of rice in the history of the Gullah.

\(^{36}\)National Park Service. (Transcripts) May 2, 2000. 41.
great grandparents and great, great grandparents were the people who brought the knowledge of the indigo and the processing aspect of it. They brought the rice culture here.\textsuperscript{37}

Placing the development of rice culture into the greater context of United States history is an important endeavor. The cultivation of rice gave power to the producer because of its pivotal role in agricultural growth in the region. Gullah contributions in the rice industry are were akin to the invention of the cotton gin: rice tremendously altered the American agriculture industry.\textsuperscript{38} Andrew Rodrigues explained that rice grown by Gullah people drove the agricultural economy of South Carolina. Gullah innovations in the field of agriculture made South Carolina the second largest economy in the nation during the years preceding the Civil War.\textsuperscript{39} In National Park Service testimony, agricultural competence and skills were evoked as demonstrative of Gullah knowledge. Depicting presumably uneducated people as pivotal actors in the economic strength of a state ruptures historical assumptions. Such new historical fissures subsequently grant the Gullah community a more esteemed position in South Carolina and national history. Brendon Barber explained the connection of rice in South Carolina to the greater fabric of American history:

So you know before Plymouth Rock and Jamestown, there was a Georgetown and Winyah Bay and Hobcaw settled first... we need to let Congress know that Georgetown accounted for I believe over a third of the rice production and it created all the wealth for South Carolina to make us the richest state in the United States.\textsuperscript{40}

The issue of rice was one of the most commonly mentioned topics throughout the National Park Service meetings,\textsuperscript{41} and much of the testimony mirrored the previous excerpts

\textsuperscript{37}National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 16, 2000. 46.
\textsuperscript{39}National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 2, 2000. 60.
\textsuperscript{40}National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 16, 2000. 51.
\textsuperscript{41}Dias, Analysis of Transcripts - Final Report.
from Andrew Rodrigues and Brendon Barber. Casting themselves as innovators of the rice economy reconceptualized the historical importance of Gullah people. Validation that rice culture was developed and driven by Gullah people dispossessed historical accounts of the ability to posit slave owners as powerful controllers of the means of production. It was thought among Gullah participants that if the meetings were taken seriously, then there existed a chance that they would be able to more inclusively define their world in an empowering, respectful and meaningful manner.

The next issue appearing frequently in the National Park Service meetings was linked to the concept of rice production: slavery and examinations of its legacy. The testimony worked to contextualize Gullah oppression. Their cultural history is linked to slavery despite the fact that direct experience with slavery ended over 150 years prior to the NPS meetings. Gullah people refuse to treat slavery solely as a shameful part of the community’s past. They instead chose to reappropriate the history of slavery in their testimonies and they transformed slavery narratives into a culture-building device. Bunny Rodrigues explained:

Gullah people were captured in West Africa and brought to America, to Charleston and Georgetown County. They helped to build a plantation empire. They were part of building America and we should feel proud and you know I read something that in order for us to be successful we have to give praise to our ancestors.

Gullah conceptualizations of slavery therefore acknowledged the horror of being “captured” while simultaneously recognizing that the event of capture brought together a group of people who helped to build America. Despite the argument of oral historian Pearl Primus that others

42 Discussions of slavery were the most regularly addressed topics in the meetings. With references to slavery interwoven with numerous other issues, the subject made consistent appearances in each of the meetings. Unlike most of the other subject matters, the issue of slavery did not emerge in large clusters, but rather existed as a strong undercurrent throughout testimony.

must “feel the pain and suffering of slavery” to truly advance the interests of black Americans.\textsuperscript{44} Gullah speakers indicated that it is not enough to only look back in horror. Testimony suggested that stories of individual prosperity in the face of slavery demonstrate the strength of Gullah people. By combining the image of capture with the notion of nation building, speakers painted a communal picture of strength. Pride in individual identity required both remembering historical experiences with exclusion and displacement, as well as transcending such barriers.

Bunny Rodrigues nevertheless contended that the primary stumbling block for Gullah people in reclaiming their historical accomplishments is the shame associated with the legacy of slavery. She argued that, “we must take back that and not be ashamed. Yes, we might have been a slave in one way. But that is part of our heritage.”\textsuperscript{45} That part of their heritage, while tragic, cannot be separated from their contemporary identity. Gates explains that the experience of slavery has helped to define the culture of black Americans at the present time:

> It is critical to remember, first of all, that the space of black culture in the lives of the slaves was and never — and could never possibly be — an empty one. Despite the severe restrictions against the preservation of indigenous African cultural forms, and the concomitant legal prohibitions against literary mastery, black people merged what they could retain from their African heritage with forms that they could appropriate from various New World cultures into which they had been flung. The blends they forged, and which the horrible institution of slavery made possible, a culture at once “Pan-African” (composed as it was of several West African cultural strands) and Western. In the instance of the


\textsuperscript{45}National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 16, 2000. 62.

When individuals like Bunny Rodrigues testified to the capture of slaves and their displacement in America, she sought to create a connection similar to that of which Gates speaks. She created a context to explain the sustaining bonds among Gullah people.

The testimony continuously returned to the idea that the Gullah were brought together because of enslavement.\footnote{The linkages of slavery and community occur in all but one of the meetings. In the first meeting, an extended discussion transpires which draws a direct connection between slavery and the feeling of community throughout the region.} Gullah culture emerged out of necessity, the result of cultural pressures in negotiating the daily life of the diaspora. The legacy of slavery in the region is not something to be ashamed of, the testimony asserted, but rather serves as a point of motivation to discard the indignity of slavery in order to celebrate Gullah culture. Kitty Green argued that accepting slavery as part of their history induces a healing process:

> It’s important that people understand it. And I think once understanding is in place, then there is a healing process that can take place within the country. Because there is a migration of folks coming from all over the country and parts of the world to this place, to South Carolina, specifically to St. Helena Island, trying to reconnect to who they are. And when they see that there is a substance here, that we brought so much with us in our culture, from arts to religion to science to technology, we brought that with us. And even in the description in the book, it only dealt with the slaveholders and their bringing rice in. But it was our skills that brought rice in, the technologies. We ushered that in.\footnote{National Park Service. National Park Service Special Resource Study (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. (Atlanta: United States Department of the Interior, 2000). 36.}

Green importantly identified that individuals are migrating back to the region. She argued that many are returning to discover their Gullah roots. Such cultural exploration, in turn,
fosters the protection of cultural resources. As discussed in chapter one, individuals have been abandoning the region for years because they felt it had nothing to offer them. In her testimony Green argued that Gullah cultural maintenance gives emigrants a reason to return to the region.

The testimony additionally revealed the strength of the people in their ability to overcome slavery legacies and to develop a vibrant community. Slavery is interconnected with Gullah culture: celebrating culture is impossible without acknowledging the role slavery played in its construction. Bunny Rodrigues explained, however, that examinations of the geographical history of Gullah communities often only recognize the legacy of slavery in passing. A reconnection to the past, Rodrigues argued, reveals the truth:

So we have a lot of strings to the past to be placed on the table and let the truth come out of what they really, really are. It is too important.

My culture... it is just not yours, it is everyone’s you know because we go at it from a historical point of view. You know we lay it on the table.

Telling stories within testimony redefined the recitation of history and revealed strings of the past as discussed by Rodrigues. Connections were thus elucidated to emphasize links between Gullah ancestral struggles with slavery and other more contemporary instances of oppression in a manner that fostered cultural maintenance. Such linkages defied the tendencies of the white establishment to hastily convey Gullah history without paying proper attention to the role of slavery in the development of Gullah culture.

One of the ways that Gullah historical experiences with slavery were coupled with cultural survival revolved around the unique relationship of Gullah people with slave owners. The speakers in the National Park Service meetings payed homage to ancestors who used their free time to develop skills and to acquire knowledge to prepare for the potential of independence,

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a fact realized at the conclusion of the Civil War. A major part of the slavery reclamation project in Gullah culture is explaining how the provision of limited individual freedoms within the institution of slavery in the Low Country allowed them to gain skills and social status, as well as temporary reprieve from control by their masters. Slave experiences for Gullah ancestors were different from traditional conceptions of slavery as the geographic isolation and unique knowledge of rice cultivation gave them a greater degree of autonomy than other American slaves. Such relative freedom helped them to survive as an independent community after the Civil War. Savannah native Charles Rivers explained the connection that his ancestors had to the institution of slavery:

My great-great-great grandfather, Alexander Steel, was a — slave. That means that he could slave by day, but he was free to hire his own time and marry and own land and property. And he raised horses for a living.\(^{52}\)

Examples like the one from Rivers were repeated in NPS testimony, indicating that the connection felt by the Gullah to their ancestors is extremely strong. Instead of being ashamed of the legacy of slavery, they have instead chosen to reclaim it.

Brandon Barber, Gullah storyteller and member of the Georgetown school board, further explained the importance of remembering how his ancestors reallocated resources during slavery in order to increase their power:

We don’t want you to forget that during slavery, the slaves on the rice plantations worked an actual eight, no, 9:00 to 5:00 workday and they weren’t required to work full-time. If their tasks, they were assigned one task and if their task was completed within two or three hours, they were done for the day and they’re able to subcontract their time out to other plantation owners and make some money.

We don’t want you to forget that.\(^{53}\)

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\(^{52}\)National Park Service, (Transcripts) July 14, 2000. 25.

The structure of a typical Gullah day differed from that of a traditional slave. The ability of the Gullah to hire themselves out to other plantations allowed them to accumulate resources that in turn provided them greater freedom post-abolition.

Testimony, such as the examples from Rivers and Barber above, made real Gullah experiences during slavery. Retelling the history of slavery from a Gullah perspective altered historical parameters of conventional community truths. Conceiving of slaves as entrepreneurs in South Carolina’s antebellum economy destroyed the myth of simple exploitation, and such conceptions demonstrated Gullah ancestors’ instrumental economic influence. If they pioneered rice cultivation in the area, if they were able to work outside of the plantation system, and if they could own property, then to describe the early Gullah solely in terms of victimization risks ignoring their historical accomplishments.

Understanding slavery is a pivotal element in the rhetorical construction of the Gullah and of their culture. Their experiences with slavery are pervasive in accounts of their history, so much so that slavery serves as a backdrop for a variety of political issues considered crucial to their survival. Gullah perseverance despite instances of historical oppression informs their worldviews. For the Gullah, discrimination and ignorance cannot be separated from historical experiences with slavery. The focus on slavery in Gullah testimony therefore not only highlighted how they were able to rise out of adversity, but also drew attention to the status quo erasure of Gullah heritage and the continued denial of the community’s rights. With this in mind, this analysis now turns to examine how testimony revealed Gullah perceptions of contemporary manifestations of oppression.

2.4 “We Are Being Gated Out”: Current Experiences with Discrimination for the Gullah People

Problems between current federal, state and local representatives and Gullah communities are evocative of the contentious relationships the Gullah have experienced with discrimination. The residue of slavery, the Gullah argued, robs those who live in the area of cul-
tural resources vital to traditions and customs they hold dear. Slavery informs how Gullah presently perceive the world, and attributes to a political climate that discounts issues important to their cultural survival. The formation of appeals about present-day barriers became important when viewed in the context of Gullah historical accomplishments.

One of the means through which the Gullah are attempting to access their cultural history is by gaining right of entry to historic gravesites and cemeteries. Concerns over access restrictions to such sites were depicted in the National Park Service meetings as demonstrative of how the Gullah view their relationships with current landowners. Many historic Gullah cemeteries are located on what are now private or government owned property. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of burial sites dotting the 250 mile coastline of Georgia and South Carolina, and a majority of culturally relevant sites are now inhabited by commercial, governmental or private interests unsympathetic to Gullah visitation prerogatives.54 For the Gullah, gaining access to cemetery sites has proven troublesome. Joe Griffins explained his experiences of attempting to secure admittance into cemeteries:

And the most disturbing thing and why we should preserve those institutions and the churches and prayer houses that we have is the fact that if anybody in here is from South Carolina, Hilton Head, or St. Helena, if you’re going out to a funeral, you have to wait for them to open the gate. They have taken everything and encroached on all of our cemeteries.55

By invoking experience with gates, Griffins drew attention to the symbolic nature of gated communities in the area. Not only do the gates prevent the Gullah from visiting the gravesites of their ancestors, but the gates also send a strong class-based symbol which signals that others are not welcome.

Experiences of frustration with cemetery access persisted throughout National Park Service testimony.56 These stories combined to illustrate a pattern of exclusion. The multitude of individual concerns indicated a situation that cannot be ignored by those interested in ensuring Gullah cultural survival. Amir Jamal Toure explained the sorrow he feels upon visiting the cemeteries:

Yes, when I go to Hilton Head, I want to cry because I remember as a little boy being able to travel across the island without a problem. And going to the cemeteries right now, that I have to get a sticker to put on my windshield so that now I can go visit the graves of my great-great-grandfather, some of who did fight in the Civil War.57

Toure’s testimony highlighted the historical contribution of his ancestor and is in stark contrast to the current treatment of that relative’s gravesite. The implicit argument in his testimony was that while the nation owes a debt to those who served, the departed are currently being disrespected through the privatization of burial plots and the prohibition of access to descendants who wish to pay homage to ancestors’ lives and service.

Right of entry to cultural lands has been restricted to the extent that Gullah are prevented from remembering their dead and from mourning in what they consider to be an appropriate manner.58 Wright and Hughes explain the importance of burial practices by arguing that, “burial practices tend to be among the most conservative, or least changed, factors of a group’s material culture.”59 Gullah testimony echoed this idea in appeals to fight for the preservation of cemeteries and burial sites and in struggles for the conservation of

56The topic of burial sites generated the highest degree of follow-up testimony, often inciting those in attendance to augment others’ arguments with their own experiences. The topic surfaced in all of the meetings, and was often clustered immediately after the first mention of the burial sites.
59Wright, Lay Down Body. xxv–xxvi.
information contained within such sites for future generations. Denigration of the importance of cemeteries is an assault on ancestral heritage. Wright and Hughes explain:

For many people who are concerned about the preservation of African American history as a means of understanding themselves and their future as a people, burial grounds mirror many important customs. The genealogist who visits cemeteries and reviews valuable burial records will gain precious insights. Such visits can reveal critical findings, often opening the way to further fruitful investigations. The destruction of burial grounds is a threat to a heritage about which few written records remain, a heritage in danger of being lost. By preserving African American cemeteries, we are sustaining the memories of the folk ways they represent; the sermons, prayers, and testimonials are an expression of life’s hardships, its stresses and strains, and, in the end, its beauty.\textsuperscript{60}

The degree of Gullah access to burial grounds is therefore correlated to the extent to which their history can be preserved. As they lose access to cemeteries, they concomitantly lose access to their heritage.

Additionally, Gullah testimony argued that not only has access been limited for Gullah community members, restrictions have also created untenable circumstances for others. The denial of entry into cemeteries essentially prevents researchers from exploring important aspects of Gullah culture. Joy Barnes, a Gullah researcher, explained the difficulty of researching Gullah gravesites:

We have since been told that access to the cemetery on this part of Cumberland Island would be given only to descendents of the people buried there.

As most of us know, not a lot of written records were kept on slaves and people of color prior to 1865. Also, many persons were buried without tombstones to mark

\textsuperscript{60}Wright, Lay Down Body. 249–250.
their grave. So it’s an impossibility for most to show that they have a relative buried there.\(^{61}\)

Barnes called upon those concerned about preserving Gullah cultural legacies to take notice of how restrictions on access to burial sites can doom research. She assumed that the National Park Service interests in the Gullah would help to emphasize the tragedy of structural barriers foreclosing access to important documentation.

Historical circumstances, lack of accurate records, and unmarked graves have made Gullah research and historical genealogy difficult. Barriers erected by private owners have made it nearly impossible for the Gullah to attain information on their ancestors or to visit their graves, compounding the difficulties of research and study. Setting criteria that are difficult or impossible to meet imperils efforts toward Gullah heritage reclamation. Recognizing such barriers, the Gullah have begun to call attention to the existing structures that summarily exclude them from researching gravesites thought to hold important keys in the exploration of their ancestral roots.

Goodnight argued that, regarding the topic of cemeteries, the power of speaking in public meetings is a valuable area of study because it signifies the ability of the living to “address on behalf of persons whose remains were discarded in death, but who would not be forgotten in life.” Goodnight further commended the courage of any individual who “rises to speak tellingly to the politics of our time: the invention of genuine rhetorics of remembrance and reconciliation.”\(^{62}\) Reaching back into the past in order to resurrect ancestral voices generates a rhetoric of remembrance for the Gullah through which they are able to forge historical connections and to call attention to the plights of the deceased.

In exposing exclusions, the Gullah used the National Park Service meetings to make demands regarding access to cemeteries and gravesites. The meetings were additionally an opportunity for them to encourage NPS participation in identifying and protecting historical


sites throughout the region. The fact that many of the sites are on private property directed the NPS into an advocacy role on behalf of the Gullah. Robert Ralph Middleton, a self-described “native Gullah,” explained the nature of the problem surrounding cemetery access and argued that part of the outcome of the meetings needed to be an extensive effort to record the sites where Gullah ancestors are buried:

Now, I am glad that the park service is working on this endeavor. And I was proud, too, to hear Ms. Wendy Zara mention the cemetery, because we need to preserve our cemeteries.... The thing is that these cemeteries are on private property now, because the land has been sold. They were on — belonged to families at certain times, but now they’re on private property. And although they are located, and we know where they are, there’s still a need for us to get them plotted and to actually — in some cases, you may have to buy them, because there’s one — some group came in, and they were selling plots and advertising selling a private cemetery. And this was a come-on for a person to buy the plot because there was a cemetery there. Now this cannot be done just by the people here by themselves because, so far, we have recorded 40 cemeteries that are black cemeteries.... We know there are — people are buried there in these cemeteries, or graveyards, as they were called, because you didn’t have a private place. They were just the back of a plantation where they just put everybody together.

And I’m proud of the park service and of the Department of Interior, and I hope they can keep this up and really do something.\textsuperscript{63}

Urgency of action to preserve cemeteries was evident in Middleton’s testimony. The problem is larger than denial of access to ancestral burial sites; a key repulsion is that private landowners who show no regard for historical significance are selling the burial sites. The longer they wait, the Gullah declared, the more history will be lost.

\textsuperscript{63}National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 58–60.
Middleton’s argument for government assistance in securing access to burial grounds is important to note since many Gullah attending the meetings were suspicious of government actions. His testimony existed in a tenuous space. Their contentious history with government officials created a situation where asking for help from the National Park Service was justifiable because of the urgency of the situation. Individuals working toward increasing access to burial sites, Middleton contended, will see their goals accomplished if they are willing to briefly put aside their distrust of government and ask for help. While the initial injustice was government acquisition of Gullah land, that injustice has doubled with increased control of outside influences over their traditions of mourning the dead. Testimony surrounding the cemetery issue placed the onus of action squarely upon the shoulders of the NPS to remedy such governmental and commercial transgressions. It was obvious throughout the meetings that the Gullah are working hard to acquire access to as many sites as possible, but activists are increasingly realizing that success is unattainable without governmental assistance.

Appeals for land access were extended even further in some testimonies. Gaining access to cemeteries is a complex process necessitating governmental cooperation. Given the inherent complexities, Gullah speakers indicated that access should not be limited to certain groups or communities, but must be guaranteed for anyone with cultural ties to the area. Pat Gunn of the Geechee Institute argued that the current system focusing on achieving access to individual cemeteries fails; instead, access to cemeteries must be available to all Gullah at all times:

The cemeteries in Georgia, you run across a cemetery on a military base — Fort Stewart, for example, has 27 African-American cemeteries. Because they wanted to build airstrips for the war, World War II. And, lo and behold, the union soldiers and Freedman’s Grove and the 48 acres that we were supposed to get, and when only had 13 families getting them, those families left those properties, were given $350 per acre in 1940, and crossed the tracks into another county. They were nice enough, mind you, to relocate their church and take it with them. But they
left the land, the cattle and the cemeteries. You need to know, in Georgia, that we are only allowed, to travel to those cemeteries once a year. Once a year, in August, on the third Saturday. And when the families get together, they have to go into the cemeteries and they have to walk in twos. And no one can speak. And when we get to the grounds where those cemeteries are, they have a military ceremony. We’re not allowed to have our own pastors or our own ministers from the community. And it has to stop.

We, at the Geechee Institute, do genealogy tracing. And we have to get to the cemeteries. So we know how to fight them individually, of course. We’ve had to threaten them in terms of legal to get in. But what about my grandmother? What about my mother? What about my cousin? If they’re in New York and they want to come down to a cemetery to pay homage to the elders and the ancestors, must they wait until the third Saturday in August?64

The importance of fighting for community interests was obvious in Gunn’s testimony. While the Geechee Institute is able to gain access to cemeteries for their purposes, those lacking resources or knowledge to take legal action may not have similar success. If restrictions limit the accessibility of cemeteries, then critical insights into Gullah culture could be lost. The assumption in Gunn’s testimony was that a standard needs to be set to ensure universal access to cemeteries for all Gullah people.

For Gunn, recognizing historical connections to cemeteries is a critical element in the battle for access. The historical narrative is particularly illuminating: Gullah lands were bought from them at low prices by the federal government and private individuals, and now those same entities are preventing gravesite visitation and worship. The Gullah once controlled a majority of the property in the region. The issue of land is only one example of how Gullah cultural resources have been eroded by the infringement of government and commercial interests.

Like the issue of gravesites, controversy surrounding the demise of Gullah language also appeared throughout the National Park Service meetings as an example of continued Gullah silencing and marginalization. The NPS inflamed the controversy during opening remarks of the first meeting when the Regional Director of the NPS, Richard Sussman, told participants “Don’t speak in Gullah.” He stated that, for the purposes of recording their testimony, it was necessary for participants to speak in English. Participants in the meetings quickly reacted to this claim and spent a great deal of time explaining the importance of language in the study of Gullah people and heritage. Several members even offered to translate any Gullah that was spoken at the meeting for organizers, but — based on the transcripts and the NPS report — that offer was never accepted.

Denying Gullah people permission to speak their own language in a modern public forum mirrors historical denials of their culture and identity. Gullah experiences with censorship in the National Park Service meetings evoked the domination of their ancestors during slavery. The Gullah historically were encouraged to abandon their language, a fact often interpreted as effectually abandoning a portion of their culture. Many felt that a decree to speak English was a tool of silencing. Gullah storyteller Carolyn White explained:

You said not to get up here and talk in Gullah so I’ll try to contain myself. But, but, when you said that, it came to me, we how do you expect me to keep on going. That would require me not to talk anything.

Many of the Gullah refused to be silenced and resisted Sussman’s edict. Many continued to speak Gullah as a deliberate political act — an act that the NPS refused to acknowledge by failing to include testimony spoken in Gullah in the public record of the meetings.  

Dias, Analysis of Transcripts - Final Report.  
Gullah spoken at the meetings was not entered into the public record due to the inability of the reporter to understand the language. In places where Gullah was spoken, the phrases “Gullah spoken” or “inaudible” appeared.
Goodwine argued that the NPS orientation toward their language was misguided, and she offered assistance in translation:

Now, the thing that got me initially was I was going to sit and be quiet and listen until I heard, “Don’t speak Gullah because the transcriber can’t transcribe it.” And I think that that’s the problem.

Because as I look at this brochure it says, or our program tonight it says, “Exploring the Soul of Gullah Heritage.” And to me you don’t silence the soul... So the thing is that I hope that the park service will understand that when you come into the Gullah community, if you don’t understand us, that’s what we’re here for, we can help you.70

While the National Park Service failed to take advantage of Goodwine’s offer, her statement above is important for two reasons. First, Goodwine contended that participants should feel free to speak Gullah at the meetings. The purpose of the gatherings, Goodwine explained, is to explore the soul of the Gullah. Since, in her mind, the soul and language are one and the same, silencing the language silences the soul. Connection to language, many of the speakers claimed, is the most direct link they have to their African roots. Goodwine was the first of many speakers to speak Gullah at the meetings,71 and she set the stage for other speakers who chose to ignore the English-only dictate of the NPS.

Second, Goodwine’s testimony situated language as a focal point in public discussion of the Gullah people. If their souls and language are truly symbiotic, then discussions of culture are incomplete without full exploration of the functioning of language in Gullah society. Centering language highlights the direct correlation between language and ancestral legacy, and creates a context through which to explain the importance of language to continued cultural survival. Gullah historian David Drayton explained that the language has its roots in slavery:

71The Gullah language is used in every meeting. Approximately 40 percent of speakers use some Gullah during their testimony.
Some people will tell you Gullah is not a language. I wish they were around to
tell it to the slaves. That’s the only language they had and they used it.... So
I am encouraging you to stop telling your children and your grandchildren that
Gullah is broken English.

Gullah was the slave language. It was the only language the slaves had and if you
listen closely even after a few years even the whites spoke Gullah like the slaves.
So it was a language.  

Drayton answered critics who marginalize Gullah as a provincial dialect rather than rec-
ognizing it as an independent language, and rebuked those who relegate it as a subject
unworthy of study. For Drayton, language developed by slaves and sustained by the people
is an important contribution to the linguistic landscape and not simply an interesting (albeit
ahistorical) dialect. Drayton also contrasted the National Park Service treatment of Gullah
language with common Gullah perceptions.

By elucidating the connection to slavery, those who argued for the protection of Gullah
language did so in a manner that privileged linkages to the community’s African past as
well. Gullah language has been used to sustain a distinct society centered on language as a
cultural resource and conveyor of communal beliefs. The fact that the National Park Service
asked attendees not to speak in their language demonstrated unwillingness on the part of
the NPS to meet community members on their terms. This action on the part of the NPS
reinforced historical stigma associated with Gullah language.

Discussions of stigma associated with the language appeared repeatedly throughout the
meetings. Because many Gullah hide language usage from public view, meeting participants
often used their testimony as an opportunity to call upon fellow Gullah to proudly speak
the language. Gunn explained the concealment of Gullah language:

An elder in my family passed away. And prior to her passing away, two and three
generations of people thought that the Geechee dialect that she spoke was funny

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and to be ridiculed. So the people walk around in our community with their mouths here and their hands over their mouth when they speak, because they have become ashamed of the dialect.\textsuperscript{73}

Publicly recognizing feelings of shame about the use of Gullah language fostered pride in Gullah identity and highlighted the potential strength of their cultural heritage. Demands within the meetings attempted to expose feelings of shame and to question dominant modes of thinking.

Asserting the importance of language within the meetings also served as a summons to those who have ignored their linguistic legacy. For speakers in the meetings, effects of government erasure are redoubled by the recognition that future generations of Gullah will undoubtedly be quick to shun their language. Testimony exposed how Gullah internalize stigma against their language to the community’s detriment. Gullah communities have devalued their linguistic legacy by eschewing the language as a living link to slave ancestors. They are instead taught from an early age to discard their language as quickly as possible in order to progress in society. Alfonso Brown, owner and operator of Gullah Tours, explained that his use of the language damaged his academic performance in public schools. Brown described, “English was my worst subject because I didn’t speak English, I spoke Gullah and the teacher taught us as though we knew English.”\textsuperscript{74} Brown’s experience was not unique. The Gullah have repeatedly been told that there is something wrong with how they speak, and that they should suppress the manner of speaking most natural to them. Goodwine explained:

You have to learn to talk like this. You will never be anybody if you don’t. You will never leave a plantation. You will make meals for the rest of your life, if you don’t learn the proper English. And what they call “proper English” in America, the queen, darling, has issue with in England. So who defines what’s proper? Who

\textsuperscript{73}National Park Service, \textit{(Transcripts)} July 14, 2000. 23.

\textsuperscript{74}National Park Service, \textit{(Transcripts)} May 2, 2000. 45.
defines who you are? I say the Creator defined who we are. I say that because my elders always taught me that when they put in these islands... But part of going out into other people’s communities, learning their culture, having them in charge of our children, is what has us believing that we were nobody, that we were backwards, we were ignorant, and our language was something broken. It ain’t never been broke.\textsuperscript{75}

Goodwine placed the shame felt by Gullah people into perspective by explaining how they are taught cultural devaluation. The National Park Service request that participants only speak English reinforced restraints placed by society upon the people’s ability to express themselves politically.

Linguistic restraint damages what could have been one of the primary contributions of the National Park Service meetings to the study of the Gullah. The NPS meetings were an opportunity to place Gullah language on the public stage as an artifact worthy of study. Saving the language requires action by the Gullah people, and the testimonies were pleas for them to be proud of their language and to encourage them to fight to protect it. Leroy Benton argued that participants in the meetings must be willing to preserve the Gullah language:

\begin{quote}
The language is very important to preserve. And we must also respect those who actually speak those particular languages now because they hold within their heart all the historic aspects of that we need to know. The language, regardless of what we call it, it still needs to be preserved.\textsuperscript{76}
\end{quote}

Benton’s claim answered the contention that speaking Gullah may hold back younger generations from realizing their true potential. In actuality, Benton argued, the survival of younger generations and the culture as a whole lies in the ability of the community to preserve spoken

\textsuperscript{75}National Park Service, (Transcripts) July 14, 2000. 45–47.
\textsuperscript{76}National Park Service, (Transcripts) July 14, 2000. 65.
Gullah. Linguistic preservation requires that meeting participants take pride in their identity by acknowledging the ancestral roots of their language. Goodwine described how such preservation occurs. Part of the struggle for linguistic protection rests in the ability of individuals to force their language and cultural traditions into the public record. Individuals also argued for the inclusion of their language as a crucial component of fights against structural and societal barriers. Goodwine told the story of her visit to the United Nations, and of her ability to draw attention to the plight of Gullah people through the use of their language:

I was the first Gullah to speak before the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland April 1st of 1999 and I spoke then on behalf of my people, the Gullah and Geechee people.

Now, I had been instructed already before I went there the same way we instructed us tonight, that they don’t take too kindly to you speaking that other language unless they know how to translate it. And they have interpreters from around the world, various, you know, major languages, and what you do is you put an ear cuff on and you turn a knob and you switch to whatever your language is.

So, now, there was no way I could do that because my ancestors weren’t going to allow that. So I started in English and I let them know in English that I have to speak in a way that my ancestors direct me to do so. . . . when I talk like this they would say, “Huh?” Because all the interpreters stopped speaking so everyone in the ear cuffs had to hear me speak.

People have to understand that our language, the Gullah language is an oral language. That is how we have been able to keep it because it is oral. 77

The Goodwine example illustrated how Gullah can use their language as a tool to introduce others to their culture. Because the language was new to interpreters at the United

Nations, Goodwine had an opportunity to ensure that her unique words would be heard. The memory of her “ancestors” gave her strength to speak in her native tongue despite official instructions to limit her remarks to English. Goodwine’s testimony indicated her hope that by telling her story in the National Park Service meeting she would encourage others to act as she did to stand up for Gullah language.

The National Park Service meetings could have formed a basis for sharing Gullah language. Hearing language spoken is expressive in ways unattainable with reliance on the written word. To understand the power of Gullah language, it must be expressed orally. Goodwine hoped that her story inspired participants in the NPS meetings to respect their ancestors by speaking their words, and as a result, to protect the language as a valuable cultural resource. More importantly, speakers considered it critical for the government to take steps to protect the Gullah language since decisions concerning the region rest upon actions taken by the NPS.

Throughout the meetings the Gullah not only identified problems of cultural preservation, they also outlined a variety of solutions for the National Park Service to consider. Testimony indicated that they perceived a willingness on the part of the NPS to enact their proposed solutions. Evidence of this perception can be found in a number of proclamations early in the meetings that depict government agents as active listeners. The suggestions put forward by the Gullah, however, did not materialize in the final report from the NPS. The remainder of this chapter explores Gullah suggestions for cultural protection.

2.5 “We’ve Got to Start With Land”: Gullah Suggestions for Cultural Protection

The protection of Gullah cultural resources could take many forms. Within the context of the National Park Service meetings the Gullah outlined three primary methods for protecting their culture. They argued for access to land resources (including cemeteries), greater opportunities for economic advancement, and initiatives to increase community identification
among Gullah people. This section explores how the Gullah proposed solutions to their problems and how such demands were presented in light of the current and historical experiences with oppression discussed earlier.

The first solution proposed in Gullah testimony dealt with the issue of land resources and the denial of access to historically significant properties. Requests for access occurred in the latter part of each meeting, an indication that discussions surrounding other issues helped to generate interest in land-based solutions. Testimony indicated that discussions about land ownership and usage are significant to Gullah perceptions of culture. More specifically, the historical relationship between their experience as a community and their ability to maintain right of entry to their own lands formed the foundation of such discussions. Emory Campbell explained:

In order for us to sustain the Gullah culture, we’ve got to start with land. I think we’re a land-based culture. . . . We’re a land-based culture. And we have seen . . . an onslaught of assault on where we live, where we have thrived, where we have survived. . . . if we don’t have the land, folks, we’re not going to have the culture.78

Campbell unequivocally described land as the most important element for Gullah cultural survival. References to land ownership and to the protection of land — both those currently Gullah-owned and those with historical significance — appeared throughout National Park Service testimony. The key to Gullah culture for this speaker lay in the ability to protect land from the encroachment of outsiders. Much more than a simple issue of ownership was at stake for Campbell — rather, the very cultural survival of Gullah people is in jeopardy. Gloria Potts explained that her people could only stave off cultural extinction through the protection of land resources:

There’s always been the plan — and I say “the plan” because it has always been said that we’re going to take the land back. And what is happening is that we

78National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 49.
are losing it every day. Every day by day, we are losing the land. And if you
don’t believe it, you just go down some of these roads here and just look behind
the bushes. And you’ll be amazed at what you see, that has been there for some
years, and we have not paid any attention until they started underbrushing. And
now you see what is really behind the bushes.

I am proud of my Gullah heritage. But without help to establish our own eco-
nomics and save the land, the Gullah connection will become extinct because we
will have lost everything, as we are doing now, and won’t be around.\textsuperscript{79}

For Potts, protecting the land is synonymous with protecting Gullah culture. Potts high-
lighted how land was taken from them, slowly and piece by piece. Potts therefore drew
attention to developers who purchase small portions of land and drive up property costs,
making it prohibitively expensive for individuals to retain land. Focusing on the process
of land transference emphasized the responsibilities of each individual Gullah landowner to
retain property for cultural reasons. Potts’s argument stressed that Gullah people can no
longer treat land sales as individual choices. Each sale of property represents a dismissal of
Gullah culture.

In addition to focusing on the process of losing land, Potts also drew attention to efforts to
regain property that once belonged to Gullah people.\textsuperscript{80} Her remarks discussed development
of “the plan” to help Gullah reclaim land. Potts argued, however, that “the plan” has
not yet yielded the promised fruit, and encroachment onto land by outsiders continues.
In her discussion of underbrushing Potts challenged Gullah people and those concerned
about cultural survival to seek a more inclusive history. Failure of “the plan” is a result
of the obstruction of a Gullah-centered history by those benefiting from land transference.
Implicit in Potts’s assertion was a related belief that the National Park Service meetings were

\textsuperscript{79}National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 55.
\textsuperscript{80}While land retention and acquisition were not in the top ten of most discussed topics, the
subject was present in every meeting and testimony around the issue tended to be longer and more
developed.
an opportunity for Gullah people to expose transgressions in land possession. In discussions about land usage they repeatedly expressed a new focus on territory, namely a concentration on the historical relationships of local communities to the land.

Part of the impetus for calling upon the National Park Service to enact land protection reforms was related to the impacts of outside restrictions on Gullah land accessibility. Many of the stories relayed by individuals regarding land issues focused on how outsiders intrude on property previously held by Gullah people. Goodwine outlined how developers control Gullah right of entry and land development interests:

And the biggest issue that I think no one has really put to task in terms of all of this — and I know the recommendations come later. But within the report, a recommendation I’m making now is that the Park Service do something to obtain development rights of the land that’s in the sea islands, especially these outerlying little barrier islands that all of these quote, unquote developers — and I hate that term because they do the opposite of that. They do “destructionment”; they don’t do development — that these things are obtained, so that they are preserved, so that people in 25, 150 years come back here and see what our lifestyle is, and what it’s all about, instead of prefabricated buildings that people have spent $200,000 for. You see? And so I think that it’s important that you consider that, consider protecting the historic waterways that are around here. Because without the land and without the water (the Gullah culture cannot survive).\(^\text{81}\)

Goodwine unambiguously asserted a direct tradeoff between the preservation of Gullah culture and area development. By describing this dichotomy Goodwine circumvented claims that the sale of one individual’s land does not implicate Gullah cultural survival. Goodwine echoed Potts’s arguments by characterizing the sale of land to developers as “destructionment” — a threat to Gullah culture. She also painted a picture of the area’s future if development continues unrestrained:

\(^{81}\)National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 83.
My reason for going is Daufuskie is literally split down the middle, half of it is resort quote, unquote, plantation living, the other half, Gullah living. All right. And most of the part of it has become almost a Gullah ghost town.\(^8\)

In her testimony Goodwine tried to simplify choices about proper land use. The choice, as she described it, is between a vibrant world that cherishes and nurtures Gullah culture and a world that contains “plantation living” full of “prefabricated buildings.” Goodwine’s rhetorical picture was of a divided world, and it further demonstrated the importance of land in the lives of Gullah people. Encroaching development leads to gate construction and to the further removal of people from their culture. Bunny Rodrigues explained:

> I would like to let you know that we have been gated out of a lot of things in our culture. . . . One place today and honestly I still think we are being gated out of — and I don’t care what you say — is Brookgreen Gardens. . . . They have different ways of gating us out because you know you can’t really afford it.\(^3\)

The Gullah people are excluded from property on two levels: a denial of basic access and a lack of economic opportunities. The example provided by Bunny Rodrigues related to the transformed plantation at Brookgreen Gardens. The Gardens hold numerous tours, and management of the Gardens is in the process of planning a Gullah festival.\(^4\) As places like Brookgreen Gardens profit from area history, Gullah are locked out because of their meager financial resources. Occurrences such as those at the Gardens lead to a commodification of Gullah culture, selling a pseudo-Gullah experience to the public at great profit to corporations but not to the people misrepresented by manipulative depictions of Gullah culture. This type of structural commodification erects a system of exclusion that prevents cultural self-determination. Rodrigues argued that there are two types of exclusion. The first is overt, turning former Gullah lands into private property. The second is more clandestine, pricing

\(^8\)National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 80.


access to lands in a way that actually limits access. The Gullah could potentially purchase the buildings that Goodwine critiqued or visit Brookgreen Gardens, but the cost of doing so prohibits many from gaining admission. In this context, the National Park Service meetings took on new importance as an opportunity for the Gullah to ask for government assistance in obtaining actual physical land or in securing access.

Reclaiming land is a necessary precondition for the renewal of Gullah culture, as many resources — from sweetgrass to burial sites to historic buildings — are now located on prohibited or restricted lands. Griffins explained the process of reclaiming lost cultural resources:

We owned land from the St. John River in Jacksonville, up to the St. John in Charleston, thirty miles inward. We owned more land collectively than all other Blacks across the United States. And now we are losing land rapidly. We must go back. We must go back and reclaim that culture.\(^{85}\)

The declaration that Gullah once owned more land than all other Black Americans put land ownership into perspective. If it is true, as others have argued, that land ownership represents a claim to power, then vast historical Gullah property holdings could be conceptualized as a marker of considerable political influence. From this perspective, at one time the Gullah possessed the key to Black power in America. Drawing on this legacy, the argument often presented in the National Park Service meetings was that the Gullah could serve as a model to other Black communities throughout the United States. The only hope of restoring Gullah power, according to many of the speakers, is to increase their ability to use lands in ways that serve their culture.

The second suggested solution to problems facing Gullah people was inextricably linked to the idea of increased access to land: the augmentation of economic opportunities available to the Gullah.\(^{86}\) Many of the speakers argued that government involvement in economic

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\(^{85}\)National Park Service, (Transcripts) July 14, 2000. 32.

\(^{86}\)Like the issue of slavery, the subject of economic empowerment and opportunity persists throughout meeting testimony. While a great deal of testimony does not deal solely with economic issues, related topics nevertheless comprise a consistent undercurrent driving much of the testimony, particularly in later meetings.
initiatives is critical because only through government collaboration will the Gullah be able to gain full economic status in the area. Potts argued that pressures from governmental intrusions made it difficult for Gullah to compete economically:

The pressure that is being put on us in every way by the government is preventing us, as a people from having our own economics.

I agree with a lot of things that were said by my friends insofar as our Gullah heritage is concerned. And I can understand not wanting to dwell hard on slavery, But we must always remember that we cannot escape it. It happened. In other words, there is one reason we on St. Helena and other areas had — and I mean had — so much land. Because we have lost a lot. I myself want to see the land and our culture retained. Help us economically, and we can do the rest.

We need to be able to have businesses for our own self-sustainment and not the sustainment of the money people and the large developers.87

The above passage tied many of the other issues in the meetings together under an economic umbrella. For the Gullah to escape the legacy of slavery, to reclaim their land, and to protect their heritage, they must be economically empowered. The responsibility for this empowerment was thrust onto the federal government because of the community’s past experiences with slavery. Robinson argued that the problem with slavery legacies is that those most intimately affected are those least able to gain secure economic standing. The ability of individuals to overcome historical remnants of oppression is often inextricably linked with their potential for economic gain.88 Potts did not ask the government to ensure the protection of Gullah culture, but instead contended that the government could reduce “pressures” they placed on the people. Then, Potts claimed, the Gullah would be able to “do the rest.”

The idea that economic empowerment can help to reverse some of the inequities of the past was a constant theme throughout the meetings. The speakers did not ask the government

to take care of things for them. Rather, they asked for cooperation in protecting Gullah culture. Middle school teacher Ann Blyth argued that Gullah must work together to convey the importance of financial assistance for the project of cultural reclamation. Blyth stated that, “We all need to get together and make sure that we send the message out that a lot of money needs to be sent here to insure that this culture, the heritage, is not forgotten.”\(^{89}\) Sharon Murray, owner of Gullah Enterprises, mirrored Blyth’s contention by stating that the “indigenous communities” of people in the area “need businesses,” and she stressed that the government should ensure the survival of such businesses.

Many speakers pointed to the failure of previous superficial proposals that proved incapable of resolving the root causes of their problems — namely the economic ramifications of devastating cultural loss. Gunn argued that many of the proposed solutions were focused on planning, not on enacting meaningful change. Gunn contended that, “we must re-emphasize to the park service that the economic base has to be in place.”\(^{90}\) Gunn’s contention underscored all other potential solutions. Without economic power, all other goals would be difficult to reach.

Many speakers also asserted the benefits of economic empowerment by recognizing the importance of acknowledging the monetary value of Gullah presence in the area. Economic imbalances are equivalent to economic injustices, as can be seen in the disparate economic resources garnered by non-Gullah residents at the expense of Gullah culture. Delores Neville explained:

> And if there’s any money to be made from doing what you want to do, I don’t think we should give it all up. You know, this is what people live. It’s not something you study. This is the life of the people. And if...you’re going to make megabucks, tell us, how much of those megabucks are the people going to get from it? Put it on the table. And then we can determine, if you’re going to do

\(^{90}\)National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 65.
that, let the people get 25 percent of whatever you plan to make for the next 25 years, so that they, in turn, can have money to hold and to keep their lands, so that they don’t lose it.91

Individuals have historically come into the area and exploited Gullah for their own economic gain, often at the detriment of the people. Neville asked for those who profit from Gullah experiences to establish a relationship to the area and to the Gullah community. With Gullah control of financial gains generated from studies of Gullah culture they would be better able to protect their land, their culture, and their future. Control over their own economic resources would not only empower the people, but would also lead to better protection of cultural resources. Debra Edmondson of the Daufuskie Island tourism project provided an illustration of how Gullah people could utilize their heritage to provide for economic freedom and greater cultural protection:

What they have done now is started a tour. And that tour, the proceeds from the tour, go to the perpetual care of not only the church, but the school where Pat Conroy taught and the African-American cemeteries that are on Daufuskie Island. Prior to this, there was no one that took any concern about any of these historical landmarks. And not only will there be a base to have funds for the perpetual care, but they’re also looking to create an economic base for the natives that are on the island. There are ladies there that are known for their deviled crabs, so those are sold during the tour. The tour needed an operations manager, so a native is doing that, so that people — they see some type of economic benefit. But, at the same time, the historical landmarks are being preserved.

And I think that if you don’t try and create an economic base for the natives, the preservation aspect is not going to work because people aren’t going to care if they’re not involved in the preservation from an economic standpoint.92

91National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 29.
The Gullah were not arguing for the cessation of Gullah-themed businesses in the National Park Service meetings, but were instead asking for a role in such businesses. Inclusion of this sort would give them more regional power as economically independent individuals and communities. Miriam Burke, an associate of the NPS and a resident of the region, stated that if the government were to work with Gullah people, the outcome would be greater than either group could achieve individually:

So I would like to offer, as part of the national forest and the park service, that we could partner with you, and I think, the point that I am trying to make is that many of us groups, if we partner, the synergism that we could have could be much more than the — any one of us working alone. . . . perhaps we can work together and try to make a bigger whole than any of us working alone. 93

Burke’s argument paralleled the final strategy the Gullah promoted in the National Park Service meetings: community building toward common goals. Gullah testimony called for the NPS to enter into a partnership. 94 The power of the NPS combined with Gullah expertise created an opportunity for the emergence of new solutions to Gullah concerns. The most common strategy for protecting Gullah culture was to create a sense of community among individuals with similar backgrounds and goals. The meetings served as a foundation to develop ties within the community and as a base for Gullah mobilization toward other political causes. As people came together and realized common interests and desires, they found working together increasingly easy. Black Americans are most likely to rally around cultural protection when motivated by discourse to join with others and to foster a sense of community. Gilyard explains:

94 Each meeting concluded with participants demanding that the government and other community organizations join in a partnership with the Gullah. This request additionally gained strength as the meetings continued. Testimony in latter meetings communicated a greater frequency of the cooperation argument.
Voluminous attention has been devoted to Black discourses because such discourses have been the major means by which people of African descent in the American colonies and subsequent republic have asserted their collective humanity in the face of an enduring White supremacy and tried to persuade, cajole, and gain acceptance for ideas relative to Black survival and Black liberation.95

The meetings utilized marginalized discourse to call upon the National Park Service for assistance in securing Gullah survival. The most common topics within the NPS deliberations demanded meaningful inclusion and community involvement. Calls to create networks of dissemination to carry forward Gullah culture were replete in testimony. The NPS meetings, in the eyes of many who testify, represented a place to come together as a single community. Bill Jenkins argued that the meetings were a unique step in spreading information about Gullah culture. He described those in attendance as “learning stuff” that they “should have known” about who they are and the culture to which they belong.96 The meetings were an important step toward including community members in the process of understanding Gullah culture.97 Learning about culture and history created a feeling of cultural identification — and, Jenkins maintained, such a feeling is at the heart of community development. Lillie Jean Johnson additionally contended that too often the rush to disseminate information about Gullah culture leads to inaccuracies. She hoped that the meeting process and subsequent outcomes would tell the true story of the Gullah:

So many times we are in such a rush to get something in publication, that we do not get the full picture. Consequently, we have things written up in the community about us that are not true because of the rush to publication.

97 A proclamation that individuals were learning previously undetected aspects of culture was evident in each of the meetings.
Hopefully, one of the things that can be accomplished is to correct some of the inaccuracies that are out there in the community.\textsuperscript{98}

The idea that there is a more inclusive way to tell Gullah history was also apparent numerous times during the National Park Service meetings. Testimonials from Gullah encouraged the community to seek out their culture and to spread cultural history to others in the area. La Roche argued that regional residents have information to share and that they should be encouraged by both community organizers and the NPS to contribute to the history seeking process:

In Charleston there seemed to be a lot more foundation group kind of people and I am glad tonight that we have a lot of our community really…. So I would encourage the community, as well as the National Park Service, to really think about what you know is constructing your project.\textsuperscript{99}

As the National Park Service meetings continued, there were more calls for the federal agency, as well as for others concerned with Gullah survival, to use this process as a foundation for further investigation of community ties. Concerns regarding the potential of lost opportunities and the possibility of resultant failure to share important community information were echoed in demands on the NPS to assist in collection and dissemination of Gullah stories to build community.\textsuperscript{100} Participants argued that Gullah history would only be preserved when two events occur. First, the Gullah themselves must be willing to come forward and to share their stories, a requirement fulfilled during testimony at the meetings. Second, those in power must provide mechanisms through which individuals can come together and share their histories. Since the National Park Service came into the process suggesting that they were searching for alternatives, many Gullah obligated the federal agency to develop information-sharing systems to assist in cultural preservation.

\textsuperscript{98}National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 16, 2000. 78–79.
\textsuperscript{100}National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 16, 2000. 113.
Preservation was not called for in the testimony merely as a historical device. It was conceived of as having a broader purpose. While it is necessary that Gullah encourage preservation within their community, testimony also included demands to build coalitions between Gullah and others. Paul E. Scott argued that the protection of cultural resources in the next century would rely on sharing history with the outside world:

I think we can bring proper individuals in here. There is nothing to be ashamed about your language and we are going to a global society.

So if we are, then we are in the year 2000 and we are going to a global society. So I think it is time for all of us to share the truth, the truth about us as Gullah people and everyone else.\(^\text{101}\)

This testimony compelled those interested in helping Gullah into the next century to work to build cultural pride. For Scott, the “truth” was depicted as respect for language and culture. Respect could be demonstrated not just by upholding culture, but also by a willingness to spread cultural “truth” to others.

Publicly addressing concerns of Gullah people provided a means through which they could advance the cause of cultural protection. Much of the National Park Service testimony conflicted with traditional Gullah approaches to sharing culture with outsiders. As discussed earlier, the Gullah were conventionally a private people separated from outsiders in their explicit refusal to be denigrated as tourist attractions. Testimony in the NPS meetings indicated an interest in public outreach to increase understanding of Gullah issues. Discussions of outreach were significant because the Gullah were endorsing cultural disclosures to non-Gullah individuals and organizations. Goodwine explained:

And one thing I want to be clear is that there were a lot of people who are not from St. Helena, who are not Gullah. But they came tonight because it’s

important to them that our history be preserved. And it’s especially important to them that we do it.\textsuperscript{102}

In Goodwine’s statement, the “it” she spoke of was the act of testifying. Participation in the National Park Service meetings was an explicit endorsement of sharing Gullah experiences with outsiders. Goodwine and others argued that outreach efforts must include both black and white Americans. The Gullah must be willing to ignore historically divisive issues of race in their search for allies. Marlena Smalls stated that their concerns are too broad to be confined to a single issue or to a single audience. How they are presented must be complete and accessible to all Americans:

When I look at the Gullah, I don’t think of it in — and this is where I am coming from. I don’t think of Gullah in terms of slavery. I see it broader than that. More broader than that. I see it as a healing pool for Black Americans, reassurance of who they are and why they do what they do, and what they’ve brought to the table. I see it as an awakening to White Americans, as to how important the player that we were and that we are today, and that there’s not one piece of fabric in this world that the African did not lay the first thread.\textsuperscript{103}

Smalls essentially argued that links must be forged with those outside of the Gullah community. Alliances built with black Americans contextualize Gullah historical experiences, but developing relationships with white Americans could more broadly expose non-conventional Gullah perspectives. Challenging reified historical inaccuracies increases the chances of cultural survival.

Testimony in the meetings drew attention to how Gullah perceive possibilities of cultural protection. While they needed the help of the National Park Service, a significant testimonial focus also involved spreading cultural pride to future generations. Building alliances with outsiders was one important element for the advancement of Gullah cultural preservation.

\textsuperscript{102}National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 86.
\textsuperscript{103}National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 31–32.
Additionally, many speakers testified to the importance of sharing their history with the next generation, and particularly the worth of conveying the unique knowledge of elders. Genevieve Peterkin, a member of the Freewood Foundation, explained the importance of paying homage to the wisdom of the seniors:

This is surely an important culture and the people should be remembered and be recorded, but as my friend Alfreda Johnson has often said and I do believe, go ask the accurate sources ... the old people. Those are the people in the community who can give the best history and it can be done and it can be done properly and it needs to be a work between the people like me who remember some things and ... the older people in the Black community.

Peterkin’s testimony echoed the belief of many in the meetings that there is a proper way to tell Gullah history. This reflected prior discussion regarding the ability and desire of people to tell their own history. Gullah history is only meaningful, Peterkin argued, if its construction occurs from a proper foundation and with all available knowledge present.

Peterkin and those attending the meetings brought some knowledge, but without an effort to include the perspectives of senior citizens not in attendance, cultural reclamation would not be accurate. Gunn explained that the Gullah require assurances that efforts will be made to record their oral history:

There are people in our mother’s generation, in their seventies, that have stories within their souls, that they want to tell. But they have no one to share it with because the young people think its just an old story. We need help in preserving the oral tradition.

It is not enough that knowledge exists; wisdom must be sought out and recorded for future generations. Speakers also asserted that cultural knowledge must be collected and recorded

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104 The Freewood Foundation is a historical society whose mission is to historically contextualize the processes through which slaves became independent citizens at the conclusion of the Civil War.


quickly since historical stories are being lost. Gunn reinforced this by claiming that the National Park Service must intensify efforts to collect Gullah stories before the elderly pass on.\cite{107}

Collecting stories generates an important reservoir of knowledge necessary for the creation of a historical record that the Gullah could use to build a stronger and more vibrant community. In this regard, many speakers indicated that they want to prevent relegation of the culture to footnotes of history books. Sara Reynolds Wilson explained the process that she went through to help her understand her roots:

> I’m one of those persons who didn’t like being called Gullah. I grew up here. And it was not the thing to be, a Gullah person. But I realized later on in life that that’s the joy of my life now: knowing my culture, knowing my people, knowing what I was made out of. That made me Gullah. And that’s the essence of what I want the research to bring out . . . . We must all embrace it. But the children must embrace it because they’re our future. They are the ones who are going to be carrying it on. And in the research it is so important that you involve them as well. And in some way, some form, some fashion, the children must be involved. All the children up and down the coast, the Gullah coast, must be involved in the research so that they can take ownership in it and preserve it.\cite{108}

Wilson’s testimony highlighted an important perspective emerging throughout the meetings. Gullah cultural preservation requires outreach to young people and efforts to increase interest in their heritage. June Davis, who runs education projects related to the Gullah, argued that it is not enough to educate the youth about their heritage; young people must also be included in cultural exploration.\cite{109} Drayton reinforced the link between efforts to include the next generation and Gullah cultural preservation by stating, “You need to get your children interested in our history because it will die unless we learn how to pass it on to

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[107]{National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 67.}
\footnotetext[108]{National Park Service, (Transcripts) June 1, 2000. 44–45.}
\footnotetext[109]{National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 2, 2000. 81–82.}
\end{footnotes}
our kids.” Connecting the knowledge of elders to the participation of younger generations in cultural reclamation projects was a common thread throughout the meetings. George McDaniel stressed the role of such a connection to the protection of history:

And those of us who work in the history field are just really touched by all the stories, by all the genuine concern that’s been expressed tonight. . . . I think that’s what we want to do is to tell the story, to tell the story, to — among ourselves, to share with older people and pass it on to the younger generation.111

A specific suggestion emerging from testimony was for the National Park Service to be involved in the creation of networks to connect people with common history and shared concerns. Bunny Rodrigues explained that “the strings to the past” must be “placed on the table” so that “the truth can come out.” This suggested that only once networks are established would there be a chance to protect Gullah culture.112 A cooperative effort to promote Gullah participation in cultural preservation seemed to be valued by meeting participants. Goodwine argued that such cooperation would only work if those with resources, in this case the NPS, were involved and were willing to work with the Gullah people to save their dying culture:

If you have a big sack and you are trying to fill it up with cotton, you can’t fill it up if you don’t have your hands on it.

It is going to be up to you to hold up your end of the sack and if you need somebody else to hold up the sack you can keep pushing . . . So they might be on one side of the sack but we have to be on that other side holding it up and walking along while they is pushing because the main concern I hear in terms of our graveyards, cemeteries, burial grounds, those things that have been taken from us, borrowed from us . . . . So the thing is that we have to band together,

to pull together to preserve our heritage so that we know that we are truly the keepers of our culture and we need to look to the Park Service and Congress as other hands holding up one side of the sack.\footnote{National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 16, 2000. 82–85.}

The Gullah clearly entered the meetings believing that their willingness to participate with open minds promised a chance that some of their suggestions could be realized. Unfortunately, the NPS did not work to include suggestions developed by the Gullah into their final proposals. None of the solutions presented by the NPS in their recommendations to Congress emulated Gullah opinions and guidance. The following chapter examines the potential of public meetings to include new voices and identifies a range of pitfalls that exist within the process.
The National Park Service (NPS) meetings provided the Gullah with a platform to express their points of view in a public arena. Analyzing NPS organization and interpretation of the deliberations provides insight into how arguments of marginalized groups are treated in the political process. This study of the NPS meeting process investigates two issues: the rhetorical importance of public meeting analysis undertaken in the previous chapter and the role of the NPS in controlling the nature of meeting discourse. The structure of the NPS meetings will be outlined to ascertain how they functioned as community building events. Public meetings provide an opportunity, both physically and rhetorically, for individuals who typically lack access to political discussions to communicate their concerns. The potential of civic deliberation to advance the concerns of individuals has been examined from a policy standpoint, but the inclusion and exclusion of voices has received only passing rhetorical attention to date. This chapter explores failings in current approaches to public meetings, particularly the inability of policymakers and rhetorical scholars to recognize the role of citizen participation.

1Studies conducted by John Forester demonstrate how public meetings have been treated in the public policy field. Examples of these studies include Forester, “Critical Theory and Planning Practice.”; Forester, Planning in the Face of Power.; and Forester, The Deliberative Practitioner.

2Works such as Goodnight, “Messrs, Dinkins, Rangel, and Savage.” and Phillips, Kendall. “A Rhetoric of Controversy.” Western Journal of Communication 63.4 (1999) deal with public meetings as rhetorical events, but pay little attention to the manner in which voices are included and excluded from the meeting process. McCormick, “Earning One’s Inheritance” provides a more complete example of an effort by a rhetorical scholar to examine how voice can be studied in the public meeting process.
Additionally, this analysis evaluates the role of the National Park Service in mediating discourse specifically emerging from Gullah testimonies. Review of NPS actions in the meeting process centers on a number of points of influence, including the organization, methods, and interpretation of testimony. While the NPS completed an internal examination of the transcripts and commissioned a report to scrutinize the content and dominant themes of the meetings, their analysis did not differentiate between testimony of the Gullah and testimony of others at the meetings. The NPS analysis also ignored the context in which testimony occurred. Included is an explanation of how this study differentiates between concerns deemed important by the Gullah and those isolated by the NPS.

3.1 “It’s Going to be Up to You”: Background of the National Park Service Meetings

The Gullah/Geechee Special Resource Study was sponsored by legislation introduced by South Carolina Congressman James Clyburn. Clyburn has long been a supporter of public meetings as a tool for the discovery of community opinions on controversial topics. The federally funded study was the first of its kind to focus on the Gullah and resulted in new and important recognition of the community both within government agencies and among private organizations and individuals. The National Park Service study began in 2000 with a series of seven meetings held between May and August. The NPS recognized that the Gullah were potentially unwilling to share their concerns with agency officials given the community’s shared legacy of a contentious relationship with government authorities. To ensure greater Gullah participation, local hosts such as churches and historical sites were selected as locations for the meetings. As a result, NPS officials were granted greater access to populations than would have been possible without local sponsorship. A focus on the

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5National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study. 7.
logistical structures of public meetings reveals the institutional power wielded by meeting organizers and demonstrates how logistical decisions could function to include or exclude specific voices. While meetings may officially encourage public testimony, they actually do so only so far as participant comments fit within the prescribed parameters that meeting organizers have set.

The National Park Service meetings were conducted throughout the coastal areas of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida at sites ranging from Little River, South Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida. Participants at the meetings generated hundreds of pages of testimony for analysis. Individuals who chose to testify represented a broad age range and held numerous roles within the community, comprising an expansive swath of the Gullah community.6

One of the most important logistical decisions made by meeting organizers was the choice not to organize the sessions by topic. Instead, the Gullah were invited by the National Park Service to share thoughts and experiences that they deemed important. The conclusion of the NPS final report declared, “Many stated that the Gullah people are ready, willing, and able to tell their own story in their own words.”7 Successful public meetings require administrators to ensure that individuals surveyed have opportunities to testify whenever their experiences are relevant. Only when accommodations are made to facilitate open communication will meetings be able to operate as important tools in the construction of policy. The actual degree of openness of the NPS meetings is explored in this analysis.

During the final stages of their study, however, the National Park Service made other logistical decisions that curtailed the abilities of the Gullah to express their points of view. At the completion of the meeting series, the NPS compiled a list of potential alternatives to address the problem of Gullah cultural decline. For the most part, these alternatives failed to incorporate Gullah suggestions provided at the meetings. NPS officials then presented their proposed alternatives in a series of supplementary meetings in the fall of 2002. The format of these follow-up meetings was drastically different from the first series of meetings

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in that they did not offer the Gullah a chance to provide any oral testimony. Instead, NPS administrators presented information in a series of maps and charts during “community meetings.” NPS representatives did not invite oral public comment, but rather insisted on written comments for those attendees with questions or concerns. The change in format, and the primacy placed on written feedback, mitigated Gullah participation. As a result, the NPS did not receive enough feedback to analyze Gullah comments in a representative manner.\textsuperscript{8} The change in format can be explained as a return to the meeting structure most familiar to NPS Special Resource Study administrators.\textsuperscript{9} Even so, the failure of the NPS to adapt the format of the supplementary meetings to match the needs of the specific population being examined cheated the process of much of its potential to include community feedback and resulted in impoverished evaluation of policy proposals. The concluding section of this study examines in more detail the manner in which the NPS failed to incorporate the testimony of the Gullah and how they responded to that exclusion.

3.2 “What Does One Want Power For?”: The Study of Public Meetings

Attitudes concerning the role of public meetings vary based on the perspective of the individuals involved. This section discusses the National Park Service meetings and their use by three groups of individuals: meeting participants, meeting organizers and scholars. First, individuals participating in public meetings may foster community building by taking advantage of the relative openness of meetings both to assert their concerns and to find confirmation of their experiences in the testimony of other participants. A second group that has a distinct interest in the process of public meetings is bureaucrats charged with the organization and administration of deliberations. These decision makers are in some cases concerned primarily

\textsuperscript{8}National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study, 12.

\textsuperscript{9}Special Resource Studies by the National Park Service are normally designed to focus on the protection of some natural resource, and not on the survival of a group of people. The Gullah/Geechee meeting series represents only the second time that a federal government agency has studied the survival of a group of people under the rubric of the protection of a national resource. Information regarding these studies can be found at www.nps.gov.
with maintaining control over the communicative process in order to direct the movement of discourse toward a predetermined goal. For organizers, the focus is often on gaining community support for the initiatives of dominant stakeholders by creating a system whereby the community’s views seem to be included in decision making. Finally, this section examines how policy analysts approach the study of public meetings. Many such analysts evaluate outcomes of meetings, not the process of deliberation that occurs. Rhetorical scholars can contribute to our understanding of the potential benefits of public meetings by exploring participants’ lines of argument and policymakers’ methods of acknowledging and incorporating meeting testimony. While participants, organizers, and scholars each use meetings and their outcomes differently, one common theme for all is the power of public meetings to create winners and losers. Because these deliberations are related to a policy issue, both participants and organizers have a personal or professional stake in the tendency of meetings to limit out the interests of some groups. In such a case, one important expectation for scholars is to trace the way this limiting tendency is actualized.

Public meetings like the ones held by the National Park Service create potential winners (those who are invited to participate) and potential losers (those who are excluded or ignored). Since the goal of such meetings is allegedly to expand awareness of controversial issues, organizers should theoretically attempt to reduce the number of those who fall into the excluded group.\(^\text{10}\) Anderson argues that all participants enter public deliberation in “mid-current,” and that public deliberation is a system always in flux. This dynamic nature can allow for the reevaluation of both the content and process of public policy construction when new voices enter the dialogue.\(^\text{11}\) Because decisions surrounding entry into public conversations are often focused on class both historically and contemporaneously, the


full range of exclusions should be exposed in order to expand public discourse. Historically, meetings were closed to those who lacked economic resources or who did not fit a particular societal expectation for the articulation of issues important to the citizenry. Now the public meeting process has evolved such that most appear to be open to anyone interested in airing concerns.\textsuperscript{12}

Because open meetings are a space in which those seeking to expand political discussion or to incorporate marginalized groups can express their concerns, the study of meetings’ influence on political processes necessitates directing attention to latent exclusionary conditions. As Fischer contends, however, it is not often that excluded individuals challenge the norms that guide political action in the world. Norms repeatedly go unquestioned because individuals are not afforded space in which they can exercise power. Public meetings hold the potential to provide this political space and to expand the field of stakeholders with political efficacy.\textsuperscript{13} Cottle concludes that the inclusion of voice is essential to assess the unnoticed standpoints of others, to incorporate new knowledge, and to challenge the world in innovative and unique ways.\textsuperscript{14} The act of speaking at public meetings represents a claim to power and, more importantly, actions to exclude others from participation often represent the exercise of the administrative power to silence.\textsuperscript{15} The choice of who should or should not be invited to participate in public deliberation demonstrates the ability of meeting structures to exclude stories from the grander political narrative.\textsuperscript{16} Meetings can have three impacts on the community of participants: they act as a space for community building, as a mechanism for social change, and as an opportunity for refining political arguments.


\textsuperscript{13}Fischer, Reframing Public Policy. 48.


Highlighting the transformative potential of discourse and the ability of meeting structures to impinge that transformation underscores the prospective power of participants to achieve political change. Forester contends that dialogue in public meetings is used not only to maintain community ties, but also to establish and expand community networks. Dialogue creates discursive communities and provides a foundation around which individuals can coalesce for future action. Forrester maintains that in public planning “talk and argument matter.” 17 The significance of talk and argument in the meeting process demonstrates how the community can use the act of testifying to build community with other meeting attendees.

The potentially combative nature of public meetings also helps to create discourse vital to unearthing conflicts and to the development of diverse points of view. Without the open format of meetings, there would be little opportunity for individuals to engage those whose opinions they oppose. 18 Etzioni states that the type of talk taking place in public meetings can signal social change. When those historically excluded from political discussions are allowed a voice, the resulting discourse represents a potentially legitimate challenge to existing power structures.19 Friedman argues that an expansion of voices in the public arena is critical to rehabilitating impoverished policy processes that are representative of only a few dominant perspectives. Croy, for example, asserts that town hall meetings are designed to promote values of fair play and to provide equal avenues of argumentation for the resolution of disputes. While her study focuses mainly on the use of the town hall format in presidential campaigns, Croy’s analysis can easily be applied to other argumentative discussions (given that many rhetorical strategies and formats reach across contexts).20

17 Forester, Planning in the Face of Power, 4.
18 Jennings, “Interpretation and the Practice of Policy Analysis,” 139.
The inclusion of multiple perspectives encourages participants to express their views more completely and to analyze the world around them more critically. The development of such skills both exposes meeting participants to opposing views which might alter their standpoints and demonstrates how to unveil arguments which opponents might deploy. Appeals forwarded in meetings therefore create momentum as each side can predict and respond to opponents’ arguments. Meetings may act as a testing ground for arguments launched in future public debate and provide space for meeting participants to practice their argumentative techniques.

Examining the community-building potential of public meetings, Walsh contends that one of the primary effects of meetings is to create a discourse linking disparate individuals to each other, thus contributing to the development of greater collective understanding. Upon hearing arguments which dispute the community’s point of view, individuals may react by forming responses based on their experiences with other community members. She claims that the group process in meetings allows for discursive meanings to be managed and reconstituted:

These behaviors matter because they are part of the processes that link social locations with the perspectives people use to interpret their world. Rather than being static traits, social identities are psychological connections achieved through the active processes of linking oneself to other people, partly through interpersonal interaction. In a group context, the act of relating to one another as group members structures the content of conversations.

The ability to structure future conversations and to set norms for further interactions demonstrates the transformative power of public meetings. Placing the rhetorical acts of these

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23Walsh, Talking About Politics. 53.
meetings into larger social processes illustrates their potential power and acknowledges acts of public discourse as historically contextual. These deliberations can create connections and establish a network of citizens concerned about similar issues. As a result, participating community members can seek to create dialogue containing a common language which serves their political interests.

Fostering community through meetings is a common outcome of public discourse, and a feasible means for political change. McKee explains the community building nature of public meetings exists as an “organic wholeness” where individuals come together and establish communities through efforts to achieve a common goal. While developing a community out of common backgrounds can be the result of public meetings, it is not necessarily the focus of the political actors taking part. The very act of participation in meetings, rather, repeatedly creates a sense of empowerment among groups traditionally excluded from public deliberation. Different groups may respond to issues in drastically divergent ways, but the inclusion of a variety of perspectives can allow for a more holistic exploration of a controversial issue.

An important means through which the discourse of public meetings assists community-building is through the potential of creating an oral history around which the community can organize future political action. The relationship between oral history and public meetings exists on two separate (yet mutually reinforcing) levels. First, meetings may create a stage allowing for interested parties both to present their oral history and to subject it to public analysis. Past inabilities to utilize community venues have possibly restricted the spread of oral histories to local communities and distinct social units. The introduction of these histories into public discourse may allow for recognition of alternate ways of viewing the world. Second, meetings are entered into the record in the form of transcripts or taped comments. Such a commitment to preserving discourse for posterity results in a permanent record providing access to future generations, as well as to scholars and policymakers.

26Friedman, Planning in the Public Domain.
The maintenance of oral histories potentially alters the political spectrum by changing how history is conventionally constructed and maintained. A focus on oral histories re-conceptualizes decision making in a manner that includes alternate readings of controversies, thus exposing gaps in current understandings of political and historical issues. Oral histories have the potential to undermine structures of power and “have contributed to the democratization of memory and history.” Thomson explains the process through which oral history can be used to expand understanding of political issues:

These political uses of oral history — in which the reassertion of previously silenced histories can be empowering for individuals, social groups, or whole societies — are connected to a significant, continuing tradition in which oral history has been an important resource for political groups and social movements: in the women’s movement, for trade unionists and working-class communities, for indigenous peoples, for immigrant and ethnic communities, in gay and lesbian politics, and for people with disabilities. For example, Karen Hirsch explains how the comparatively recent use of oral history in disability studies ‘could allow yet another group to find a voice, could lead to a new view of local and social history, and could help create a deeper understanding of cultural conditions which affect everyone.’

The use of oral histories in rhetorical construction could shift the political focus away from national issues to more localized community concerns specific to lived experiences. This is especially true for groups that have been ignored or marginalized in a region’s historical interpretation — as the Gullah, for example, have been for decades. A focus on individual stories as the basis for political decision making and for the construction of political history could allow for new perspectives and, in this instance, for Gullah-centered beliefs to enter the dialogue.

28Thomson, “Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History.”
Adams additionally argues that public meetings fulfill a necessary precondition for change by allowing the citizenry to participate in the construction of political reality. He states that the public meeting acts as a microcosm of society as a whole, differing from society at large in one significant respect: actions taken in meetings are better at mobilizing the community than those same actions would be when conducted elsewhere. The study of public meetings often ignores their ability to bring people together and to create a sense of community. Connections made through deliberation have the potential to bridge gaps between individuals and to create common ground to provide a basis for more cohesive community.

When the autonomy of communities is changed through the act of communicating in public meetings, it is often because speakers are engaging in risk-taking behavior. Participants who challenge existing power structures do so at their own peril, often acting with the belief that placing themselves in jeopardy is a critical step toward changing political realities. Sparks explains that citizens who choose to participate in public debate do so in a way that offers an alternative to the status quo:

Citizenship in a deliberative democracy, consequently, means participating in ‘the determination of norms of action through the practical debate of all affected by them’ (Benhabib 1992, 86). The precise rules that should govern the practical debate are a matter of some dispute (see e.g., Habermas 1996; Joshua Cohen 1996; Young 1996), but this more expansive notion of participation as talk and deliberation in a variety of settings, Benhabib claims, ‘articulates a vision of the political true to the realities of complex modern societies’ (Benhabib 1992, 86).

The ability of Gullah people to speak out against accepted notions of the way the world functions is potentially a valuable weapon in the fight to halt the unconstrained destruction

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31Sparks, “Dissident Citizenship” 451.
of their culture. The central element of this challenge in the National Park Service meetings was the aspect of risk-taking.

Brockridge contends that argument cannot exist without willingness by at least one party to risk their position, credibility, or self. The actualization of risk in the midst of a controversy results from the readiness of individuals to place their opinions into dialogue for public purview.\textsuperscript{32} The historical relationship of the Gullah with surrounding institutional power structures is indicative of the fact that speaking in a public forum constitutes a type of danger. For certain individuals, the act of speaking does not represent a high level of threat since they have little to lose from public articulation. The land developer advocating a financially beneficial position, for example, is not in a great deal of jeopardy. Individuals condemning an injustice perpetrated against them, however, assume the historically significant risks associated with naming and defying the interests of dominant groups, parties, or individuals.\textsuperscript{33} Such assumption of risk was evident in the case of Gullah participation in the National Park Service meetings because attendees confronted the very governmental structures their community conventionally regarded as the source of a great deal of unfair treatment.

Recognizing that Gullah testimony has social value is related to the acknowledgment of their arguments as disruptors of dominant narratives. For many speakers, the meetings represented a chance to correct historical inaccuracies and to create a counter-history with Gullah people at its center. Stillar explains how discourse creates symbolic systems and explores the revelation of social conditions through rhetorical acts:

Burke, like Halliday and others interested in the social functions of discourse, interprets the structures of discourse in a functional vein: He is concerned with understanding how, in drawing upon the meaning-making resources of symbolic


\textsuperscript{33}Sparks, “Dissident Citizenship.” 452–453.
systems, instances of discourse constitute socially motivated, oriented, and consequent acts, and he is concerned with understanding how the nature of systems of symbolic resources not only enables symbolic acts to be recognizably meaningful but also powerfully constrains symbol users by circumscribing the conditions and consequences of their acts.34

If the testimony of concerned citizens fails to be incorporated into policy solutions outlined by meeting administrators, such a shortcoming calls into question the representative nature of the process. Ignoring Gullah concerns emerging from their testimony, for example, would cast the actions of the National Park Service as an extension of the exclusive symbolic system which historically marginalized Gullah voices in policymaking. Analyses of the NPS meetings are most telling if they expose institutional power in the operation of systems which limit Gullah voice — especially given that the emancipatory potential of meetings rests on the incorporation of a variety of voices. If the NPS were to examine the mobilization of symbolic systems in its public meetings, it would likely serve the Gullah in a more meaningful way than the existing analytical approach. Such a more conscientious method of inquiry would position the Gullah as experts and examine how their arguments fit into the greater political spectrum. This study takes up such an approach to analyze how the Gullah attempted to stake claims to legitimacy and to challenge the NPS for respectful recognition.

Public meeting participants impart original and potentially innovative opinions to policy makers. “Leakages” are created when individuals are confronted with new points of view within comfortable existing and recognizable structures.35 Leakages are not viewed as threatening by message receivers because they emerge in spaces thought to be secure. Phillips, drawing upon the work of Foucault, contends that conflicts generated within public meetings permit the study of “spaces of dissension” that demarcate the heart of political controversy. He states that exposure to contentious disputes holds the potential of revealing various arguments questioning dominant modes of thought, and he further argues that questioning is an

34Stillar, Analyzing Everyday Texts, 58.
35Sparks, “Dissident Citizenship.”
important exercise in the uncovering of tension and conflict. Public discourse is therefore able to redefine political situations by confronting the socially constructed nature of meaning. Such confrontation emphasizes the power of individuals within meetings to change political realities. If individuals are able to exploit deliberation processes and to redefine dominant perceptions of the surrounding political world, then public meetings can act as a check on the dominance of traditional political processes.

Not only does discursive connection with contentious politics allow individuals within communities to be directly involved in the decision making process, such communicative roles provide a plausible basis from which future groups may argue for their concerns. The ability to draw upon previous rhetorical acts for speech construction creates a common language that can be used to support discursive communities. A likely problem faced by many seeking to advance causes from political margins is a lack of opportunity to present arguments and justifications for their points of view. Analysis deployed in defense of a group’s history, culture, or resources can serve as an argumentative foundation for other groups facing similar situations. For example, many African-Americans have used assessments originally presented by individuals subjected to Japanese internment camps as justifications for slavery reparations. De Volo states that the manner in which individuals create and sustain dialogue within meetings creates “socially sanctioned subjectivities” potentially capable of providing a reservoir of argument resources for other political actors. This reservoir in turn can alter “the manner in which they mobilize themselves politically.” This mobilization could feasibly occur as individuals draw upon common themes within meeting testimony in order to demonstrate their connection with a broader political cause. Such accounts could be manifested either within the meeting process or be exhibited in subsequent discussions.

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38 Robinson, The Debt. 218–220.
promoted by the community. For the Gullah, mobilization occurred both during the meetings (as individuals build their arguments based on the testimony of others) and after the conclusion of the National Park Service meeting process (as demonstrated in the subsequent media coverage of the Gullah).

The value of meetings to participants exists independent of the use or misuse of meeting processes by planners and policymakers. Despite the emancipatory potential of public meetings there are still significant barriers to full participation. Of particular importance are institutional obstructions. O’Neill contends that those who organize meetings and determine their composition have the power to include certain points of view. More importantly for the study of meetings, organizers have the ability to determine who can speak, what they may speak about, and the format in which they must deliver their messages. Doxtader argues that scholars should be suspicious of institutions that claim to be acting on behalf of the public good but in actuality are more concerned with maintaining their own political position. Operating in their own interest, such institutions often drain the process of its potential for empowerment. Indeed, Doxtader contends, some institutions may seek to control the public sphere with the explicit intention of maintaining stability within the political system:

Institutions argue. Motivated by the need to rationalize the tension between public-deliberative interest formation and the need for stability, institutional argumentation occurs when designated advocates define, explain and revise the norms of representation that drive and justify steering decisions. In this sense, institutional arguments are interactions that define the scope of institutional decision making and explain why particular actions are justified in light of the public’s interest …critical readings of institutional argument show how institutions mediate diverse public interests, and the need for systemic stability. In this sense, the study of institutional argument investigates how institutions enter

40 O’Neill, “Decolonization and the Ideal Speech Community.”
into, structure, and perhaps take over public debate. The concern of such study is thus not so much to isolate positively which things, bodies and/or people are institutional but to identify what sorts of obligations and problems arise when collections of people claim to represent others.42

Echoing these concerns, Ono and Sloop argue that public meetings may simply reinforce governmental power and authority over decision-making apparatuses.43 As barriers are erected, the purported goals of meeting organizers may become unachievable. Representative Clyburn proposed the National Park Service study in an effort to give primacy to the voice of the Gullah.44 Thus, for Clyburn, the meetings were a success only if Gullah voices were included in the decision making process. In examinations of public meetings, therefore, it is a responsibility of rhetorical scholars to identify and to reveal structures that seek to constrain argumentative choices. Bruner contends that dominant modes of thought are often allowed to survive for the sole reason that they remain unchallenged; rhetorical scholars can remedy these situations by exposing how dominant modes are replicated.45 An especially important task of rhetorical study is interrogating the persistence of controlling discourse in spite of objections articulated in testimony.

The success of the National Park Service meetings is not determined solely by the gains achieved by the Gullah regarding their legitimacy or their ability to have their concerns addressed. The meetings, rather, held the potential to be transformative if they could alter how the community regarded itself and how outsiders viewed the Gullah.

Public meetings not only hold importance for those interested in expressing their concerns, but can also challenge others (including those conducting meetings) to examine how

42 Doxtader, “Learning Public Deliberation.”
44 Davis, Jingle. “Saving the Soul of a Culture; a Three-Year Study by the National Park Service Aims to Preserve the History, Heritage of the Gullah-Geechee People.” The Atlanta Journal and Constitution, 4 Feb. 2001., p. 1M.
they see the world. Changing how policy discussions are situated in meetings can encourage decision makers and meeting planners to recognize the importance of others’ stories and testimonies. The meeting process can also call into question the existing order and challenge how political issues are framed. Goodin argues that the focus of meetings must shift from a problem-solution orientation to one that grants primacy to respecting individual discourse and community narratives. Stories provide insights into controversies not often discoverable through expert testimony or quantitative data. For example, the power of individual stories is demonstrated in northerners’ responses to individual narratives of brutality in the South during the Civil Rights Movement. Media coverage of discrete instances of oppression was met with a broad response that did not originate out of general calls for equal rights. Prior to the spread of such accounts of oppression, northern whites were able to ignore the horrors of racism in the South; descriptive examples of experiences with oppression, however, made the oppression more real to those who did not have the direct experience of being Black in the South. Analysis that focuses on the persuasive power of stories in public meetings, then, legitimates their placement at the center of rhetorical studies and prevents the relegation of personal accounts to obscurity and particularity.

Meetings can result in policy initiatives, but they can also create what Maynard-Moody and Stull term an “expressive side” of talk regarding the political issue at hand. Maynard-Moody and Stull argue that “expressive dimensions of policy are central to understanding government actions but are left out of current discussions of policy analysis.” Expressive political acts can instigate a reconceptualization of issues and a revaluation of the type of concerns that matter in the study of discourse. Alejandro explains:

When the political system changes the rules and recognizes the validity of claims advanced by oppressed groups, it is not necessarily because it has assimilated them, but because it has been forced to make room for them; it is not because oppressed groups have been assimilated into an unalterable ‘mainstream,’ but because struggles have eroded existing rules. In the same vein, when oppressed groups enter the spaces which until then privileged groups occupied, this is not necessarily a sign of assimilation. In some cases, it is a sign of triumph.\textsuperscript{50}

The promise of open public meetings creates a stage for diverse perspectives to help inform the policy making process. Rhetorical scholars can trace the ways such political changes occur — but only if the meeting process is considered as a rhetorical event and not just as a means for making governmental decisions.

When individuals are met with opposing points of view they may begin to call into question beliefs previously considered to be self-evident. C. S. Pierce argues that such confrontations with difference create an “irritation of doubt” with the subsequent potential to lead to new inquiry and possibly even reevaluation of an individual’s personal beliefs. Transformative doubt must possess an external origin in that it must “surprise” the individual and provide an alternate worldview. For the listener, a lack of exposure to external views leaves little opportunity for substantial reevaluation of truths and ideas held to be self-evident.\textsuperscript{51}

However, it is important to note that such reevaluations are not received passively; instead, the listener’s engagement in a relationship with the speaker allows for such changes to take place. In Charles Nussbaum’s examination of the works of Habermas, he states that according to the theorist, “The hearer is not a manipulated or causally determined object, but is an active partner in a process of coming to an understanding.”\textsuperscript{52} A speaker cannot induce an


\textsuperscript{51}Schouls, Peter A. “Pierce and Descartes: Doubt and the Logic of Discovery” in Pragmatism and Purpose Sumner, L. W., Slater, John G. and Wilson, Fred (Eds.); (University Of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1981), p. 89.

individual to change an opinion, but rather, through meaningful communication, can create Pierce’s irritation of doubt that may lead the listener to a new way of viewing the world.

The development of a collective understanding, or at a minimum mutual appreciation, of another’s point of view is achieved through discourse that allows for an exchange of ideas precipitating reexamination of one’s own beliefs. Public discourse which allows for an exchange between individuals on opposing sides of a political issue, for example, often provides participants with such an opportunity. Matthais Kettner further expounds on this with his concept of discursive practices. Kettner explains that discursive exchanges allowing individuals to express their opinions and to examine structures underlying their opinions are most likely to be transformative:

The most important contribution of human linguistic communication to governance appears to consist in the unparalleled potential of human speech to facilitate representing extant norms and normatively composed practices, and to facilitate the criticism of such norms as they are articulated and defined through linguistic representation . . . . Anyone socialized within the medium of any human natural language has thereby already acquired, usually to an astonishingly far-ranging extent, the ability to say what one thinks one is doing . . . and to ask and answer, in word of thought, questions about why one is doing what one says or thinks one is doing, and to respond in intersubjectively meaningful ways to such answers and questions.

This astonishing ability is common, and thus is intersubjective; it is persuasive, and thus beyond the control of heteronomous impositions of limits; it is iterative and recursive, and thus is translatable among different language-communities. More importantly, this ability is structurally dialogical. That is to say, it lends itself as much to being exercised by and between different persons as it admits

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of realization in the first-person. Because this ability is dialogical, not only in its exercise, but already in its constitution, this ability to engage in, to produce and reproduce (what I shall call) discursive practices, connects persons, their norms of non-linguistic activities, and their norms of linguistic activities.\footnote{Kettner, Matthias. “Reasons in a World of Practices: A Reconstruction of Frederick L. Will’s Theory of Normative Governance.” In Pragmatism, Reason and Norm. Kenneth R. Westphal (ed.) (New York; Fordham University Press; 1998), pp. 317–318.}

Communication comes to represent a decisive step toward inclusion in the public sphere. While issues like voting, marching, and other signs of protest may affect political decision-making, they do not necessarily present opportunities for the same quality of discursive exchange that communication can provide. The dialogical nature of discourse provides the field of communication with a unique opportunity and responsibility to encourage public participation in discussions of critical issues. Without a focus on communicative aspects in society, there may be little hope for expanding the nature and structure of public deliberations in society.\footnote{Langsdorf, Lenore and Smith, Andrew R. “The Voice of Pragmatism in Contemporary Philosophy of Communication.” In Recovering Pragmatism’s Voice by Langsdorf, Lenore and Smith, Andrew R. (eds.); (Albany; State University of New York Press; 1995), p. 2.}

Analysis of the Gullah meetings illustrates both the power contained within the process of public meetings, but also its limitations. As discussed earlier, many Gullah expressed divergent opinions on issues and began to reflect upon their own history and community. However, the logistics of this particular meeting process and a failure to include non-Gullah perspectives limited the ability for Gullah testimony to generate Pierce’s irritation of doubt. Those participating in the meetings almost exclusively favored protection of Gullah cultural resources; therefore, Gullah viewpoints were met with little resistance. The potential of the National Park Service meetings to foster community change was limited by the homogeneity of meeting participants and testimony.

The study of public meetings is currently incomplete because scholars commonly assume that communication occurring on this level is rudimentary and too contingent on local pol-
itics for rhetorical success. Two contentions are made regarding the importance of evaluating public meetings as sites of political discourse. First, McComas argues that taking a rhetorically limited approach in studying public meetings simply assures inadequate analysis that tritely characterizes discourse as a means to achieve an end determined by the parties involved. As a result, scholars have adopted a positivist conception of meetings paying the most attention to meeting outcomes. Such a focus ignores the importance of the meeting process. Valuable insights can emerge out of the study of meetings even if the policy landscape is not significantly amended as a result of the meeting process. The study of meetings can (and should) focus on rhetorical techniques deployed during the meetings instead of concentrating on which policy decisions were altered by the deliberations. Scholarly exploration of the meeting process can yield substantial insights into how meeting participants view the world — and how they use public meetings as a forum to place their views into broader discussion.\textsuperscript{56}

Second, support for studying debate within public meetings is found in Forester’s argument that discourse can establish norms for future public interactions.\textsuperscript{57} Transformation in meetings occurs when participants act as “reflective practitioners” willing to integrate information that may not match preconceived notions of public interaction.\textsuperscript{58} Critical study of meeting discourse and aspects of normative transformation create space for further scholarly examination and reevaluation. A critical process approach to examining this discourse can illustrate the actual role of discourse as a transmitter of information to the community, as well as the potential role of discourse in creating an expectation of future participation in community progress.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57}Forester, The Deliberative Practitioner. 1.
\textsuperscript{58}Forester, The Deliberative Practitioner. 2.
Evaluating the parameters of issue framing is the predominant mode of analysis applied to public meetings in academic studies. Too often studies treat the meeting process as secondary to their outcomes. Lack of examination of arguments expressed in meetings results in the erasure of certain discursive issues in rhetorical scholarship. Much of the rhetoric occurring in public meetings is considered by scholars to be of lower quality than more standard subjects of analysis. McCormick argues that those who study public discourse must begin to expand the scope of rhetorical criticism to include the everyday talk that occurs in meetings and other informal settings. He contends that this genre of talk often contains important insights into how those most intimately connected to a given conflict view the situation at hand. McCormick states that a narrow focus on the study of traditional deliberative rhetoric ignores much of the discourse constructed in diverse public arenas:

One of the most trenchant obstacles to the study of ordinary political discourse is the pervasive belief that today’s public speech is not what it might be. ‘As members of audiences,’ critics have suggested, ‘we have come to demand too little of those who address us.’ Studies of public speech, so the argument goes, should aim to develop higher standards for public dialogue. Reading from shelves jam-packed with ancient treatises on rhetoric, it comes as little surprise that the voracity with which many of us pursue the perfect text is matched only by our willingness to reform the ‘bad literature’ we encounter along the way. Rich interpretations of what should be produced leave little room for basic questions about what is being produced by today’s political culture.

Concentrating on traditional deliberative rhetoric biases scholars toward those with access to education and power. It is dangerous to allow stories of history and culture to be constructed from the viewpoint of the dominant; such discourse by design often seeks to conceal the viewpoints of those who have been controlled. Preferring formal rhetoric risks the extinction of

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60Fischer, Reframing Public Policy.
cultures under attack: the exclusion of their voices is largely attributed to an intellectual taboo against informal speech. Focusing rhetorical studies on marginalized discourses such as those created by the Gullah can expand the field of rhetorical criticism into more meaningful and inclusive areas. Kelshaw claims that the most appropriate way to address power differentials in discourse and to ensure that the voices of local individuals are included in the study of communication is to focus on public meetings where such voices may be given a stage.63

Kathleen Welch argues that scholars must work to explore discourse communities that share a language and way of communicating, as well as individuals excluded by such communities. She isolates the erasure of women as one example of the exclusivity of discourse communities, but her analysis could easily be applied to the Gullah people:

We need to teach our students that all readers reside in discourse communities and that we must now include questions of gender and the erasure of women, whether they are historical, fantastic, or ordinary. In other words, the universalized reader — the white, male, propertied, philological, bookish decoder whose values, ideologies, and desires underlie many assumptions of standard readings — needs to be elaborated on .... The recognition of the instability of texts should help to place women within intersubjectivities of interpretation, rather than marginalized bystanders.64

The force of alternate voices can create antagonistic spaces that provide an opportunity for scholars to explore new appeals that might upset the dominant order through the introduction of new rhetorical tactics. Phillips explains:

The process of controversy elaborated here leads neither to the grand conclusion of a public sphere nor to the chaos of postmodern aporia; rather, controversies provide momentary opportunities to resist, change, and reform the local practices of those involved. The fluidity of social meaning and identity provides for only partial fixations of stability; controversies provide for the disruption of these fixations and the introduction of new systems of order. Some controversies are reproduced in various localities to encompass great swathes of social practices, others remain local and brief.65

Scholars can shed light on the constructed nature of history by examining controversies, namely differences between how views are expressed by meeting participants and how policymakers react to such views. An examination of the differences between the Gullah community’s description of their historical and political situation and more customary historical accounts can reveal the rhetorical power of new voices in the public meeting process. A counterbalance to the innovative potential of interrogating such historical controversies was the tendency of the National Park Service to ignore alternate Gullah perceptions when constructing policy options. The ability to suppress new ideas as such is an example of the utilization of institutional power.

3.3 “Who Defines Who You Are?”: National Park Service Analysis of Gullah Public Meetings

Public meetings can provide an opportunity for individuals normally excluded from policy-making to openly articulate their opinions and to identify important issues of concern. This prospect, however, is only fruitful if organizers respectfully incorporate non-conventional voices into meeting analyses. With regard to this specific topic of study, the National Park Service did not evaluate Gullah testimony from the 2000 meetings in a manner that effectively integrated indigenous voices into their analysis, a failure that is evident in the eventual

solutions proposed by the federal agency. Problems emerging from NPS scrutiny occurred because of the agency’s failure to treat Gullah testimony as rhetorically important. This breakdown occurred primarily on two levels: testimony interpretation and policy implementation.

The first way that the National Park Service unsuccessfully appraised the Gullah voice was in the interpretation and presentation of testimony in official documentation about the meetings. The analysis commissioned by the NPS decontextualized testimony by ignoring much of the cultural and historical background information informing Gullah statements. Impoverished analysis was then presented as representative of Gullah viewpoints both in the final NPS report and in a range of potential solutions proposed by the federal agency. Second, Gullah viewpoints were further under-valued in regard to solutions presented and in the manner in which meeting outcomes were offered for review by the NPS. The Gullah were given, but not asked to testify about, possible solutions to Gullah cultural decline at a series of follow-up meetings. The lack of community review allowed the proposed NPS alternatives to proceed without significant public comment. The lack of Gullah feedback was especially problematic given that none of the five proposed solutions incorporated suggestions made by Gullah in their testimony. A more careful reading of the public meetings conducted by the NPS could have yielded a result more fully constitutive of Gullah cultural issues. The final NPS proposals deprived the meetings of potential transformative power by ignoring initial indications that Gullah comments would be taken seriously. This review begins by evaluating the NPS assessments and outcomes, analyses completed by the federal agency to serve as a basis for solutions proposed to Congress.

The discursive process that emerges out of meetings is only valuable if statements are interpreted and represented in a manner illustrative of the concerns of those testifying. Public meetings, therefore, are successful if outcomes could not have been achieved absent their testimony. If organizers feel that the meeting process is worthwhile and necessary for policymaking, then they must also be willing to treat testimony as an important policy con-
tribution. This section demonstrates how the National Park Service failed to regard Gullah testimony as a significant portion of their analysis.

The National Park Service committed several omissions during their analysis which made it difficult, if not impossible, for public decision makers to critically examine Gullah perspectives. This chapter argues that the inability of the NPS to evaluate testimony resulted in proposals drastically different from those forwarded by the Gullah. Errors detrimental to the Gullah were demonstrated in several key ways: a lack of context in NPS content analysis; a failure to differentiate between Gullah speakers and outsiders; and a lack of Gullah testimony regarding the discussion of regional history in the final report. Each of these faults was integral to the formation of the National Park Service’s suggested solutions, and each unsuccessfully assimilated the precepts of Gullah testimony.

Contextualization of testimony is important because it provides a background for arguments made by meeting participants. As argued in chapter two, testimony in public meetings originates out of a historical context, indicating not only which issues are important to participants, but also why those issues are significant. Croy argues that individuals who choose to testify do so because of historical circumstances that compel them to participate. Additionally, Walsh contends that meetings are valuable to those in attendance because they create contextualized meanings highlighted by issues discussed at the meetings. A failure on the part of those conducting meeting analysis to contextualize the views of speakers annuls a major strength of the public meeting process.

The content analysis commissioned by the National Park Service\textsuperscript{66} did not seek to contextualize Gullah testimony. The report focused on the number of times a word or theme was mentioned by speakers at the meetings. While such analysis measured which terms and subjects were statistically significant in the testimony, it did not place the terms and subjects into a historical context to describe the forces compelling individuals to speak. Lucas explains that the study of rhetorical acts cannot be separated from related historical events:

\textsuperscript{66}Dias, Analysis of Transcripts - Final Report.
All subjects of rhetorical study are inherently historical questions of textual accuracy, to charting the evolution of rhetorical documents, the gauging of the rhetorical temperament of their authors, to penetrating the dynamics of rhetorical situations, to explicating the formal properties and social functions of discourse, to rendering evaluative judgments, the rhetorician inescapably confronts a wide range of concerns that require rigorous historical interrogation. Seen from this point of view, historical understanding is not simply a prolegomenon to critical understanding, but an organic element of the whole process of rhetorical analysis . . . Although accurate description is a necessary aspect of both history and criticism, it is not sufficient.67

The lack of historical interrogation in the National Park Service’s content analysis rendered the social conditions in which the meetings occur meaningless. Simply counting the number of times a term is used without examining the manner of its use or discounting the context in which meetings occur abandons the political intelligibility of the deliberative process. The analysis in chapter two demonstrates how contextually studying meeting testimony with an eye to pertinent social and historical circumstances can yield significant insights by explaining not just what was said, but also why certain topics are salient. The NPS analysis only encouraged a descriptive examination, and was generally unconcerned with explaining why particular issues were of importance to the speakers. The partial nature of the content analysis was important because it provided the foundation upon which the NPS developed and outlined potential solutions. A failure to properly probe historical and contextual cues ensured that solutions would give only a cursory explanation for Gullah concerns.

The National Park Service content analysis decontextualized testimony by relying too heavily on an inadequate method, namely that of counting “keywords” used by the Gullah.68 Focusing on statistical analysis of the transcripts removed topics from the meetings in which

68Dias, Analysis of Transcripts - Final Report. 11.
they were delivered and ignored issues that compelled speakers to testify. Contextual issues drove individual speakers’ testimony. That is, the experiences of individuals within a community created a basis for public expression, a motivation that could not be captured when statements were detached from that context. The NPS final report went so far as to indicate that the content analysis “makes no attempt to represent the intensity of sentiments by speakers.” The cluster analysis completed in this study, however, establishes a standpoint for the meeting testimony by examining the intensity and community reaction surrounding particular appeals.

Decontextualizing meeting analysis, as the NPS did, is especially troublesome because “the specifics of the content analysis became an important factor in the development of alternatives that were responsive to the views of meetings participants.” A failure to scrutinize why individuals chose to speak on certain topics created a situation where potential solutions fall short of the prospective opportunities of public meetings to answer concerns of traditionally marginalized individuals or groups.

In addition to ignoring the historical context of meeting testimony, the National Park Service content analysis was also lacking in its ability to differentiate between Gullah and non-Gullah speakers. While the study did divide respondents by race, gender and their role in the community, there was still not an effort to examine testimony by whether or not a speaker was Gullah. The success of public meetings is attributable to the ability of individuals to speak about issues of personal or communal significance, and to be sure that testimony will affect decisions generated from the meetings. For the Gullah to voice their interests in a transformative manner, the content analysis must identify Gullah voices and fully explain associational Gullah concerns.

As Forester argues, a unique strength of public meetings is the ability to ensure that individuals are able to speak from their distinctive social locations. Other formats constrain

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70 National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study. 9.
71 Dias, Analysis of Transcripts - Final Report. 18–20.
traditionally marginalized groups by sanctioning certain discursive participants.\textsuperscript{72} Public meetings, however, open up space and authorize broader levels of participation. The National Park Service failed to capitalize on the emancipatory potential of the meetings by neglecting to detail the social locations of individuals testifying. Gullah voices must be given primacy within analysis for the liberationist realization of political expression by marginalized people through testimony. If the Gullah were not given primacy in the identification of potential problems, more specifically, then it is unlikely that Gullah suggestions would emerge in the NPS final options for solving issues of cultural preservation.

The content analysis might have been a useful starting point if the National Park Service used testimony as preparation for future investigation of issues important to the Gullah. The NPS, however, did not augment the content analysis by examining how testimony indicates historical trends or Gullah concerns. In order to understand how meeting testimony reveals issues historically important to Gullah people, the analyst must be willing to evaluate testimony in conversation with the area’s history and with instances of Gullah cultural decline. The final NPS report did not give authority to Gullah testimony, but instead presented an “objective” historical approach sans indications that the meetings occurred at all.

The National Park Service summary of the meetings was released in a report entitled \textit{Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study}. Within this document the NPS summarized the meetings and also provided a “scholarly overview” of Gullah and regional history. A majority of this report is comprised of a literature review detailing scholarly work done regarding the Gullah people. Unfortunately, none of the meeting testimony is included in the report’s historical review. If, as McCormick argues, public meetings can be useful in their ability to invite the emergence of traditionally excluded groups in the production of history, then Gullah testimony should have been included in the final NPS report.

Many speakers in the meetings argued for the Gullah to grasp the opportunity to define, in their own words, issues of Gullah concern. Over-reliance on outside scholars and “official”

\textsuperscript{72} Forester, “Critical Theory and Planning Practice.”
stories of Gullah cultural legacies, the testimony argued, obscures their words and distorts the roles of people most closely affected by the region’s political forces. The National Park Service underscored this claim by indicating that scholarly studies are not sufficient, and that “a strong coordinating presence” is required between the government and the people of the region.\footnote{National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study. 85.} However, despite this call for coordination, the NPS ignored the opportunity to provide a synchronizing presence and excluded testimony in their historical review.

While many of the issues discussed in the testimony are echoed in the final report, the focus was skewed from issues advanced by Gullah speakers to issues garnered from scholarly research. Instead of focusing on issues communicated during the meetings, the National Park Service spent a great deal of time expounding on general experiences of slavery, the accessibility of historical buildings in the region, and general issues regarding NPS involvement in other projects. Attention was simultaneously diverted away from many issues identified by the Gullah as important considerations. The report did not deal directly with issues of community development,\footnote{There were some brief references to historic community development efforts, but little to no mention of community building exercises in the \textit{status quo}.} for example, and many of the historic inequities discussed in chapter three were ignored entirely.

The problem does not lie solely in issue selection for inclusion in the final report, but also in which voices were considered authoritative. Testimony was discernibly absent in the final report’s discussion of Gullah history,\footnote{National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study. 16–78.} a deficiency that mitigated the power of public meetings to democratize discursive practices. By removing Gullah testimony from historical dialogue, the meetings lost their potential to include a multitude of voices in decision making. Even if the accounts of Gullah history contained within the report mirrored testimonial accounts of Gullah history, the meetings would still have failed to achieve their liberationist potential by neglecting to include direct testimony. The usefulness of meetings is measured by their ability to both give individuals a voice in the political process and to make that voice meaningful in addressing problems that affect marginalized communities. The following
section will examine how the exclusion of Gullah voices in the final NPS analysis is related
to the presentation of fallible solutions which also ignored testimonial voices.

3.4 “It has Always Been Convenient for Them to Overlook Our History”:
National Park Service Solutions and the Inability to Include Critical
Perspectives

While problems of interpretation and misrepresentation are troubling, the inability of the National Park Service to include Gullah testimony is more serious in the consideration of potential solutions to problems outlined by the Gullah. This section explores how potential solutions were presented to the community in a series of follow-up meetings, and additionally it examines how decisive options were presented in the NPS final report. Solutions outlined within the final report demonstrate the inability of the NPS to synthesize Gullah testimony with the agency’s own goals and suggestions.

At the conclusion of the content analysis discussed above, the National Park Service developed a series of proposals to address concerns expressed by Gullah people in the meetings. The federal agency conducted a series of meetings in 2002 to encourage Gullah comment on potential solutions outlined by the NPS. The concept of a series of follow-up meetings should have provided an additional opportunity for the Gullah to come together and to express their concerns. The format chosen by the NPS, however, destroyed the potential of public meetings to provide a space for marginalized voices to speak. For the Gullah, reliance upon oral communication and the perceived importance of building and maintaining community ties rests upon the narrative presentation of arguments to others. The structure of the follow-up meetings, however, foreclosed avenues of discussion and led to less productive solutions than suggested by the Gullah during initial testimony.

The second series of meetings was conducted to ascertain Gullah attitudes toward several solutions proposed by the National Park Service. Instead of the format used during the initial set of meetings, the NPS used a “community meetings” format that significantly differed from
the blueprint of traditional public meetings. The community meetings were not conducted in an open format; the goal was not to allow all in attendance to testify regarding their concerns. In these meetings, instead, alternatives were presented in a workshop format within which each alternative was outlined in a separate station in the meeting space. Attendees moved from station to station and had the opportunity to ask questions of NPS employees. Attendees were asked to write comments on easel pads provided at each station, and were also encouraged to contact NPS employees after the meetings if they thought of additional concerns.

The community meeting format did not generate commensurate discussion to that which was achieved during the first set of meetings, a failure largely attributable to two significant shortcomings of the National Park Service approach during the community meeting process. First, instead of encouraging individuals to communally share their concerns, this approach limited Gullah interaction to NPS employees. One of the primary strengths of public meetings discussed in chapter three is the ability of individuals to come together and to share common concerns with others in attendance. In the community meetings, individuals were separated into groups, and there was little opportunity to coalesce as a community. This structure also ran counter to the oral tradition explicitly valued by the Gullah during the first series of meetings. The failure to accommodate this strong oral tradition denied an important avenue for articulating opinions.

The National Park Service not only ignored the community-building potential of public meetings, but it explicitly encouraged the Gullah to deliver concerns directly to the NPS. Side-stepping the potential of community outreach and bonding obstructed the opportunity of individuals to connect with other community members and to add their voices to issues of communal concern. Expressive opportunities for marginalized voices were mooted by the NPS edict that the Gullah should “contact (National Park Service) team members by telephone,”

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76 There was also a National Park Service employee on hand to assist the Gullah with recording comments if they were unable or comfortable with writing.
letter and/or email to make further comments or suggestions.” Insulating communication between the Gullah and the NPS diminished the possibility of community building and individual identification that could lead to a more complete set of potential solutions.

A second major problem with the community meeting format was the denial of opportunity for interested parties to present their concerns orally. As discussed earlier in this document, Gullah history is translated orally from generation to generation. The first series of meetings demonstrated the importance of oral expression to Gullah speakers, a fact that was particularly evident in the wide variety of participants who capitalized on the opportunity communicate their opinions. Failing to allow oral expression within the community meeting setting significantly restricted the potential of participant comments and truncated the possibilities of leading to some sort of significant change. Some participants in the meetings, for example, uttered their concerns that “the workshop format did not allow for sufficient public expression of preferences.” During testimony at the first series of meetings, the Gullah verbalized the importance of individuals coming together to share stories and to build a community of concerned citizens to fight for similar causes. The structure of the second set of meetings demonstrated that the National Park Service did not consider Gullah testimony when constructing the deliberative format. If Gullah rhetorical acts from the first series of meetings were taken seriously, then the NPS would have approached the second set with an eye toward oral expression as a means of discovering community sentiment.

It is clear from participation numbers that the first series of meetings were more successful. This apparent success is attributable to structural characteristics that encouraged testimony to gather the will of the community, rather than reliance on written comments characteristic of the second set of meetings. The initial meeting series yielded significant results evident in the production of hundreds of pages of testimony, while the second series produced only five pages of written comments. Additionally, it is apparent that in the

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80 For a full discussion of these issues see the final section of chapter three.
initial meetings individuals coalesced around the common themes discussed in chapter two, whereas such an opportunity was unavailable in the follow-up meetings. The failure of the second set of meetings to collect a significant number of responses is even more damaging because they were used as the basis for solutions suggested by the National Park Service. The NPS indicated that the comments made during the “community meetings” helped to drive the construction of their final solutions, a flawed process inevitably leading to tainted conclusions.

Analytical omissions from the first round of meetings and the inability of the National Park Service to collect meaningful feedback in the second series of meetings resulted in a series of proposals that do not adequately address concerns and potential solutions expressed by the Gullah. At the conclusion of the second round of meetings the NPS outlined five solutions that representatives of the federal agency thought would fit the needs of Gullah people. The disregard of these solutions to specific communal issues described by the Gullah emphasize the importance of preferring historically contextual analytical methods. The following discussion details the five potential solutions.

The first solution outlined by the National Park Service solicited the creation of Gullah/Geechee Coastal Heritage Centers (Alternative A). These centers would be placed on existing public land, and the National Park Service “would seek to recruit well-qualified individuals from the Gullah/Geechee community” for the development of presentations at the centers. The NPS argued that this solution would express a commitment on their part to the Gullah:

The interpretation of the realities of life for all inhabitants of the study area may be met with skepticism and apprehension — even shame and embarrassment — from various segments of the population. Yet, organizations such as the National Park Service, who are committed to the public’s trust, have an obligation —

82 National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study. 12.
indeed, a responsibility — to address such issues, even though they may be painful or uncomfortable to some visitors. The goal of this solution, according to the NPS, would be to educate the general public about Gullah ways of life and history. They argued that one of the best ways to protect Gullah culture is to expose their heritage to as many people as possible. They would seek to work with the Gullah to interpret historical and cultural resources for consumption by the rest of the population.

While Alternative A sought to incorporate Gullah voices into National Park Service actions, it fails to address causes of Gullah oppression identified through meeting testimony. The presentation of this alternative demonstrates a refusal on the part of the NPS to critically analyze indications of the proper channels through which to address Gullah concerns. The alternative is lacking due to a myopic focus on Gullah needs in relation to the needs of the greater community. The NPS emphasized a dearth of heritage centers in key communities and capitalization of untapped opportunities to use land under government control, but the agency failed to interrogate the possibility of incorporating cultural preservation projects with sites more closely tied to Gullah desires for land use. Meeting testimony did not focus on increasing access to outsiders coming into the community as the NPS alternative suggested, but instead concentrated on increasing Gullah access to and control of land. Alternative A spotlights the expansion of Gullah cultural study to serve the interests of the broader community. Intent on introducing more outsiders into the community, Alternative A hoped that exposure to Gullah culture would lead to greater inter-cultural understanding. This solution does not incorporate increased land access desired by the Gullah, and may instead exacerbate the problems of the status quo by encouraging unsustainable admission of outsiders into the region.

The proposed historical centers are additionally all located on government-owned land. The positioning of such cultural centers is important because proposed sites are on the exact

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84 National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study. 91
land about which the Gullah argued for the necessity of guaranteeing access rights. In the National Park Service recommendation, the land is not given to the Gullah so that they may utilize its cultural resources, but rather properties remain under control of the government organization. With Alternative A, the NPS commodifies Gullah perspectives to create new, and most likely revenue-generating, programs for outsiders.

The second solution, Alternative B, called for an expansion of the study and interpretation of the Gullah/Geechee story. The National Park Service did not lay out specific elements of this solution, but rather called for further study of the Gullah. There was no differentiation between the type of study to be undertaken with this alternative and the nature of research previously conducted. While this solution was relatively well received within the Gullah community, there remains a resounding feeling that the option does not go far enough to ensure that the story presented at the close of investigation would be complete. The main problem with the alternative lies in the legacy of past Gullah experiences with the federal government. As detailed in chapter two, their perspective has historically been excluded from policy decision making, and despite NPS claims to the contrary, there is no guarantee that the Gullah would be taken seriously during future inquiry.

In addition to concerns about inclusion, Alternative B is lacking because it operates as if the National Park Service meetings had never taken place. The meetings represent a genuine study of the Gullah people, and the idea that further research must be undertaken ignores insights gained from the 2000 testimony. The NPS meetings epitomized the investigative aspect of Alternative B, but the NPS seemed to ignore the resultant wisdom gained through public deliberation. The results must be incorporated into any solution advocating further analysis if the testimony is to be treated seriously. This alternative does not seem to build upon solutions expressed by those who testified, but rather functionally exemplifies what would have been the preferred alternative had the meetings never taken place.

Alternative B also suffers from problems associated with Alternative A because it still relies on the National Park Service to direct the nature of the study. The proposed investigative sites are additionally still located on government land. The idea that further study and subsequent interpretation would take place under the control of the NPS ignores demands of the Gullah for greater autonomy in the production of knowledge. They are instead, under this alternative, to be studied and culturally deciphered by outsiders, a dynamic which redoubles problems experienced by the Gullah in the *status quo*.

Alternative C, the third solution, called for the establishment of a Gullah/Geechee National Heritage Area. This area would create a zone designated as the geographical indicator for Gullah history. The National Park Service explained the scope of this alternative:

Under this alternative, a National Heritage Area would be established to connect coastal resources, including cultural landscapes, archeological sites, historic structures, and places of continuing ethnological importance that tell the story of Gullah/Geechee culture. This multi-state heritage partnership could interpret the entire Gullah/Geechee coastal area.\(^8^7\)

The establishment of a National Heritage Area would identify sites within the region that are important to Gullah history. This alternative would not require the acquisition of any lands by the NPS and would simply be a designation similar to placing a historical marker. This option was attractive to the NPS because the designation of a National Heritage Area is traditionally an inexpensive alternative.\(^8^8\) Focusing on fiscal concerns rather than increasing access to land, however, ignores many of the concerns and suggestions expressed by the Gullah during testimony.

Alternative C does not facilitate the protection of Gullah cultural resources, but instead only promotes awareness of the community’s plight. This solution demonstrates that the National Park Service did not take into account concrete actions suggested by the Gullah.

\(^8^7\)National Park Service, Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study, 110.
Despite the fact that they asked for specific solutions including access to land, increased community development and greater economic opportunities, Alternative C merely designates the area as important. No efforts are proposed to increase access to any resources identified by the Gullah as critical to their cultural survival. While the alternative encourages cooperation across the region, the National Heritage Area designation does not secure tangible benefits or ensure community participation.

The fourth solution, Alternative D, combined the first and third alternatives. It would establish both the interpretive centers and designate localities around them as part of a National Heritage Area.\(^8^9\) The earlier sections have discussed the shortcomings of each of these approaches, and there is no reason to believe that a permutation would go further toward addressing Gullah suggestions. The strength of this proposal, however, is that the combination was an outgrowth of recommendations made during the follow-up meetings.\(^9^0\) Nevertheless, other concerns raised by the Gullah at both the original and supplementary meetings have not been incorporated into National Park Service proposals.

Additionally, Alternative D creates greater levels of bureaucracy that could supplant Gullah concerns. As discussed in chapter one, the Gullah culture has historically been injured by the influence of outsiders. This solution would first designate the region as a protected area, and then staff and organizers at the interpretive centers would have the power to decide how issues in the region should be framed. This option denies inferential power to community members, and constructs a hierarchical process of knowledge production preferentially valuing the ideas and input of outsiders.

The last potential National Park Service solution, Alternative E, suggested taking no action. The National Park Service argued that Alternative E would not invalidate the importance of the Gullah, but instead would signal that the NPS has no role to play. Their final report explained the rationale behind this proposal:

The alternative is the no action plan or continuation of existing conditions. There is no National Park Service role under this alternative. The National Park Service would have no financial involvement. . . . Adoption of Alternative E does not imply that there is no national significance to Gullah/Geechee culture, but that no appropriate action can be identified under National Park Service mandates.\textsuperscript{91}

This alternative is the most obvious dismissal of Gullah testimony, and unequivocally demonstrates the degree to which the federal agency neglected to take testimony into consideration when developing potential solutions. In testimony participants elucidated a clear set of alternatives for Gullah and NPS cooperation. The fact that an alternative exists in which there is “no appropriate action” that “can be identified under NPS mandates” is illustrative of the federal agency’s unwillingness to enter into a genuine partnership with the Gullah. It also demonstrates that they have not taken Gullah testimony seriously. The Gullah did not highlight an alternative that would ask the NPS to stand by and require the community to develop their own solutions; rather, Gullah participants explicitly asked the NPS to “hold up” their “end of the sack.”

Each of the proposals ignored Gullah calls for increased land access and future cooperative efforts with the National Park Service. A more reflexive analysis of the meetings by the NPS could have led to the development of alternatives more closely matched to those proposed by the Gullah. The expressed community solutions included improved access to land resources, greater economic opportunities and stronger community networks. None of the NPS solutions sought to serve such ends, but rather operated as if they were developed ahistorically and sans the input of Gullah testimony.

Gullah experiences with the National Park Service illuminate how marginalized groups can be ignored by decision makers. The final chapter explores how a rhetorical analysis focusing on lines of argument advanced by marginalized people can augment policy options

\textsuperscript{91}National Park Service, \textit{Low Country Gullah Culture Special Resource Study}, 116.
designed to serve such groups. The chapter further examines contributions that public meet-
ings can make to deliberative policy making, investigates how meeting organizers exercise
institutional power in ways that interfere with community action, and explores how commu-
nities react to the invocation of institutional power through community building activities.
Transcripts of Gullah testimony at the National Park Service meetings and the response of meeting organizers provide important opportunities for rhetorical analysis of public meetings and marginalized groups. These meetings not only give us insight into the Gullah and their struggles for cultural preservation, but they also demonstrate how public meetings give marginalized groups a venue through which to voice their concerns. Meetings like these should be seen both as conduits of information for the local population and as restricted forums that exclude specific arguments. The appeals that occur in meetings reveal arguments that are prevalent within the local population and highlights governmental responses to such concerns. The structure of power relations can be uncovered through rhetorical analysis of the strategies and reactions of meeting organizers.

Some previous meeting studies have focused on the ability of deliberations to bridge divides between contrary populations. The National Park Service meetings differ from those often scrutinized by public meeting scholars in that they did not operate as a means of resolving a community conflict, but instead were designed to allow one group to bring its point of view into the conversation. Rather than directing attention to how speakers use meetings to resolve conflicts, this assessment reviews how individuals use public deliberation

to bring their outlooks into the open in a way that will enhance identification within the audience.

This study examines the three contributions of the National Park Service meetings in greater detail. First, the meetings reveal lines of argumentation valued by the Gullah. As discussed in chapter two, studying meeting testimony provides a window into common Gullah arguments for cultural defense. Close scrutiny of testimony demonstrates the style, intensity and content of arguments that the Gullah employed. Detailing the composition of such appeals reveals the relationship between Gullah testimony and their historic experiences with exclusion. Second, the meetings illustrate the kinds of administrative power that organizers and decision makers are able to wield. Despite Gullah participation in the meetings, the final report prepared by the National Park Service did not reflect the full range of Gullah appeals. The implication was that final decisions regarding appropriate actions in the region would ultimately be made by the federal government. This exertion of power was manifested both in interpretation of the testimony and in the administration of the meetings themselves. Third, examining how the Gullah community responded both to meeting testimony and to the NPS explanation of information as a basis for casting solutions is indicative of how public meetings can provide a platform for community building and mobilization. Public meetings are often able to bring together individuals with common concerns in order to provide a starting point for future argument construction. Coalitions formed out of the NPS meetings have potential to add new voices to the political landscape.

The three intertwined issues outlined above hold importance both for the Gullah and for the broader study of public meetings. Considering the National Park Service as an exemplar of the community-building function of public meetings can certainly expose how the government exerts its power to subvert community mobilization and action. However, viewing the NPS meetings as a rhetorical exemplar can also illuminate how communities use public meetings to resist government dominance. The study of lines of argument used within the community before the meetings and an evaluation of how the Gullah reacted following the
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conclusion of the meeting series indicates that public meetings can bring community appeals to the forefront in a manner that helps to strengthen the community itself.

4.1 “Culture is Something You Do”: Meeting Testimony a Means for Revealing Community Interests

Emergent testimony during the meetings helped to reveal already prevalent arguments rooted in the local community. The goal of many meetings is to create a forum more responsive to community members’ concerns. Friedman argues that the perception that meeting organizers pay attention to community interests often spurs involvement and testimony from those who would normally be reluctant to participate in deliberations.2 Delineating lines of argument brought forward by such motivated individuals discloses issues most critical (and, perhaps, most sensitive) to the local community.

Appeals deployed by the Gullah during the National Park Service meetings both paralleled many of the subjects addressed in formal studies of their history and reflected topics traditionally discussed only within the Gullah community. The potential exists for public meetings to bring localized arguments into mainstream political discussions. Many of the themes discussed by the Gullah (as examined in chapter three) did not originate in the meetings, but were instead a manifestation of years of struggle and history. The meetings simply provided an opportunity for arguments to be entered into public record. By examining scholarly accounts of Gullah beliefs and history, as well as the stories catalogued by editors of Gullah collections, one can trace the paths of community stories that surface in public testimony.

Jennings posits that meetings do not exist independent of political situations, but rather that they, and the testimony contained within them, simply bring to light issues already prevalent in the community. The importance of public meetings, Jennings contends, does not lie solely in their ability to generate arguments. Rather, meetings are a lens through

2Friedman, Planning in the Public Domain. 47–49.
which observation of testimony exposes issues driving local community discussion. Many of the appeals evident in the National Park Service meetings mirrored those deployed by the Gullah and their advocates for years.

In testimony, the introduction of arguments began with comments intended to frame the meetings in a manner explicitly relating to Gullah concerns. A contention advanced in each of the meetings exemplifying this tactic stressed the normative importance of Gullah control of the means of knowledge production. Arguments by Goodwine, Andrew Rodrigues, Drayton, and others relied on their faith in the ability of the Gullah to tell their own story and to identify imperative issues. This framing assertion reflected knowledge claims made by Gullah individuals who previously researched in the region. Dusinberre, for example, argues that Gullah construction of knowledge is necessary because it confronts dominant ideology with information often excluded or downplayed in policy discussions. This argument was confirmed throughout testimony in the National Park Service meetings.

In addition to issue framing, the Gullah also drew on judgments prevalent in their history when calling attention to community practices worthy of protection and issues threatening cultural survival. For example, discussions of the historical relationship of Gullah people to slavery appeared in descriptions of Gullah history both before and during the meetings, including expressions of shame relating to the symbolic parameters of such an association. Saunders argues that the memory of slavery among the Gullah is often so uncomfortable that young people in the community refuse to identify themselves as Gullah. The meetings, therefore, acquire additional significance given that they served as a channel through which the Gullah were able to discuss their historical connection to the institution of slavery outside of their local community.

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4. Jackson, “The Sea Islands as a Research Area.”
Stigma against all things Gullah was also mentioned as a contributor to the deterioration of communal culture. Many young people are ashamed of their heritage and are unwilling to step forward and to fight for a legacy to which they feel detached. Individuals who spoke at the meetings demonstrated an awareness of Gullah-associated stigma in their requests for community members to reach out to young people in order to bridge the gap between traditionalism and the new generation. The meetings allowed those concerned about the lack of involved younger members to bring the issue to the forefront. Argument was no longer confined to discussions within apprehensive communities, but was now introduced into broader political discussions.

One symptom of the stigma influencing many younger Gullah to rebuff their heritage — discussed both prior to and within the National Park Service meetings — is the denigrated use of Gullah language. Testimony from the meetings revealed that many younger members of the Gullah community are ashamed to speak the language in public contexts. If they do choose to speak Gullah, they often do so with their hands over their mouths. In recognition of this, many speakers argued in the meetings that their cultural survival rests in part on the ability of individuals to coalesce around the defense of Gullah language. Pinckney examines this situation and concludes that the ability to rally and to protect linguistic forms is crucial to maintaining ties both within the Gullah community and to their African roots. Arguments like those advanced by Pinckney are important threads in part of the broader political discussion Jennings contends that public meetings can produce.

The Gullah language and oral tradition were well represented during the National Park Service meeting process. Many chose to rely on stories of the past in testimony to communicate their experiences with exclusion, exploitation and discrimination. The use of the Gullah language sent an important signal to those in attendance of the significance of legitimizing the public use of Gullah language in order to ensure cultural survival. Such stories

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are experientially focused to create vivid images in the mind of the listener.\textsuperscript{10} Goodwine argued that the importance of Gullah oral tradition is related to the linked experiences of the present with the deep and rich history of the Gullah.\textsuperscript{11} Testimony during the NPS meetings, then, supported Goodwine’s contention in two ways. First, the use of stories was a prevailing method of talk during the meeting. Often such stories made direct reference to Gullah ancestry and comparatively examined current discriminatory experiences with injustices of the past. The discussion surrounding gravesite access and the exclusions individuals face was especially illustrative of the power of personal stories in rhetorical appeals. Second, many Gullah speakers alluded to the strong tradition of Gullah storytelling. As discussed earlier, their historical relationship with the practice of storytelling means that the inclusion of narratives in testimony was indicative of their perception of discursive imperatives that could guide future action. By making explicit reference to the storytelling tradition, the Gullah introduced the practice in the policymaking arena.

The solution stage of the meeting process also built on traditional Gullah arguments. According to Forester, the possibility that meetings may provide innovative alternatives for policymakers and public audiences represents their most important contribution to the policymaking process.\textsuperscript{12} These innovative solutions can often be found in arguments with historical relevance to the group testifying. In this analysis, several potential solutions for cultural preservation pointed to historical appeals deployed by the Gullah. Two arguments closely linked to historical claims made by the Gullah are an expressed desire for improved land access and the belief that increasing community ties will strengthen the chances of Gullah cultural survival.

The first of the solutions forwarded by Gullah speakers contended that improved land access could provide remedies for many problems traditionally plaguing their communities. Prior statements made by the Gullah regarding land use issues primarily focused on the

\textsuperscript{10} Georgia Writers’ Project, \textit{Drums and Shadows: Survival Studies among the Georgia Coastal Negroes}, 11–12.
\textsuperscript{11} Goodwine, “Holdin’ Pun We Culcha.” 185.
\textsuperscript{12} Forester, \textit{The Deliberative Practitioner}.
abandonment of Gullah lands in favor of material gains. In meeting testimony, however, speakers began to assert that the present situation demands an attempt to reclaim culture through the recouping of lost land. During the meetings, arguments for improved land access were tied to the necessity of improved economic conditions, increased access to traditional burial grounds, and efforts to solve a variety of other problems plaguing the Gullah. The introduction of the land issue in the meeting process exposed what many believe is the underlying cause of the community’s struggles, and additionally suggested a potential route to formulating solutions which may have gone undiscovered without such testimony.

The second solution advanced in Gullah testimony focused on the importance of community. Ottenberg argues that the natural structure of Gullah society relies heavily on the ideal that support from others provides security for the future of the population. Their relative isolation in comparison to most of the outside world is a strong motivator for asserted dependence on community ties to provide security. Additionally, relying on connections between generations is a common mechanism used to guarantee continuance of the Gullah way of life. A common claim within the Gullah community is that building bridges between generations provides the most likely means of abiding in the future. Throughout the meetings numerous individuals testified to the belief that community support is necessary for any cultural preservation proposal to succeed. The significance of this bridging effort was stressed by many of the speakers, namely by publicizing the importance of both seeking out information from older community members and of ensuring knowledge transmission to younger generations.

As Forester argues, public meetings hold the potential to alter political landscapes through the introduction of issues which, while prevalent in the local community, are absent in the minds of decision makers. Forester’s vision of the public meeting as a means of exposing decision makers to intellectual innovations only comes to fruition if administrators

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13 Goodwine, “Destructionment.”
14 Ottenberg, “Leadership Patterns in a Sea Island Community.” 142–143.
seriously regard suggestions made by in testimony. Unfortunately, the Gullah concerns appear to have fallen upon deaf ears at a crucial time for the National Park Service to integrate proposed solutions for cultural preservation into their final report and analysis.

4.2 “Assault on Where We Live”: Meetings as a Means of Institutional Power

While public meetings can serve a critical purpose in deliberations by bringing a diversity of arguments into purview, they also contain instances where groups seeking to maintain control are able to exert institutional power. The National Park Service managed the meetings, controlled testimony, and interpreted the content in ways that reveal how power is used to restrict arguments advanced by marginalized groups. Public meeting planners are beholden to institutional requirements that often lead them to interpret testimony in a manner belying the best interests of the participants. An examination of the path that the NPS followed reveals potential obstructions that can be situated by those with institutional power.

How the National Park Service managed public meetings regarding Gullah culture indicates avenues through which planners can taint the results of deliberative processes. The ability of organizers to set rules directs the meeting process toward a particular end, often to the detriment of meeting participants.\textsuperscript{16} Doxtader claims that institutions cannot help but “argue” for policies which they inherently support, even if they do so covertly through means that manipulate organizational procedures.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, stakeholders in the outcome of the meeting process often cannot be trusted to institutionally provide for the inclusion of alternate points of view. The exercise of such power was evident during the NPS meetings in the way that federal officials strictly controlled the style, length, and frequency of Gullah testimony. The beginning of each meeting included an extensive introduction by a

\textsuperscript{16}O’Neill, “Decolonization and the Ideal Speech Community”
\textsuperscript{17}Doxtader, “Learning Public Deliberation.”
NPS representative which functionally outlined several impediments to full Gullah participation: testimony should be delivered in English, should last less than five minutes, and each person should speak only once unless all participants have had a chance to testify.\textsuperscript{18}

While such rules were frequently met with objections from the Gullah, their indignation did not alter the meeting process. The most striking example of this was the treatment of the use of Gullah language in the meetings. As discussed earlier, many speakers were disturbed by the NPS dictum that they should refrain from speaking Gullah during the meetings. The ensuing uproar did not alter how the language was addressed in future deliberations or analyzed in the final report. The transcripts released by the NPS did not seek to include spoken Gullah, but instead either stated that such language was “unintelligible” or simply demarcated, “Gullah spoken.” This dismissal of language on the behalf of the NPS blatantly disregarded offers from several meeting attendees to assist in translation and transcription of testimony offered in the Gullah vernacular.

Public meeting organizers also possess a great deal of power regarding how meetings are analyzed for policy use and how policy solutions are framed. The resolutions that arise out of meetings often support governmental control and do not fully explore new alternatives.\textsuperscript{19} Fainstein argues that the contentious nature of public deliberation requires meetings to always produce winners and losers. Who “wins” in the meeting process is often altered by the structures that organize, conduct and analyze testimony.\textsuperscript{20} If, as Forester contends, “talk and argument matter” in the policymaking process, then it is critical that non-dominant appeals be taken seriously and incorporated into final proposals.

The solutions projected by the National Park Service examined in chapter three were not examples of innovative alternatives based on provisions suggested in Gullah testimony. Instead, they largely relied on expanding routes already explored by the NPS. To capitalize

\textsuperscript{18}National Park Service, (Transcripts) May 2, 2000. The verbalization of rules was most evident at the initial meeting. Subsequent meetings included reminders of the rules and slightly shorter remarks.

\textsuperscript{19}Ono, “Critical Rhetorics of Controversy.”

on the potential of public meetings to investigate new avenues for disentangling long-standing problems, it is necessary for policymakers to be severed from traditional means of problem-solving. The potential for social change does not lie solely in the hands of those who have the power to control meetings and to make policy decisions. When political bodies do not respond to public testimony in a conciliatory manner, community leaders can often launch issues into public awareness through intensified media exposure.

4.3 “We Must Go Back and Reclaim That Culture”: Meetings as a Generator of Public Issue Development

While the outcome of the National Park Service meetings did not generate solutions hoped for by many Gullah participants, the meetings were still able to serve a broader purpose for the community. Arguments supporting Gullah cultural protection bred during the meetings created a reservoir of evidence from which other members of the community could draw to gain support for additional projects and concerns. Apparent unwillingness or inability of the NPS to institute meaningful reforms suggested in testimony shifted obligation to the Gullah community to seize arguments and to integrate them into important regional political discussions. Individuals took control of this opportunity, as was evident in the utilization of meeting arguments by the Gullah in later media coverage. An examination of public statements by the Gullah detailed in the media since the conclusion of the meeting series reveals that the arguments advanced in testimony remain prevalent. An assessment of local\textsuperscript{21} and regional\textsuperscript{22} media coverage divulges that issues discussed in the meetings were granted a greater degree of credibility after the termination of the meetings than they were beforehand.


\textsuperscript{22}Regional newspapers are identified as those located near, but not within, the study area. Regional sources include: \textit{The Atlanta Journal and Constitution}, \textit{The Greenville News}, \textit{The State}, \textit{Athens Banner Herald}, \textit{Augusta Chronicle}, \textit{The Sun-Sentinel}, \textit{The Miami Herald}, \textit{The Chattanooga Free Times} and \textit{The Macon Telegraph}.
There was more than a ten-fold\textsuperscript{23} increase in media coverage, a fact signifying that the process brought new attention to the Gullah and to their plight. Assessment of this coverage reveals both an increase in exposure and an enhanced diversity of voices incorporated in the media.

The meeting process generated additional public discourse by bringing the concerns of community members into public view. In the case of the Gullah, media coverage prior to the meetings focused primarily on festivals and shows involving Gullah performances or the sale of traditional crafts. Subsequent coverage after the meetings shifted dramatically toward a focus on the plight of the Gullah and on actions undertaken to defend their culture. This change in media perspective conveys how public deliberation can alter the political climate and unearth issues around which discussion was previously abridged.

In addition to augmenting public discourse in a quantitative way, the public meeting process enhanced the diversity of voices by yielding authority to speak to additional individuals. In media coverage preceding the meetings, most of the exposure surrounding Gullah cultural protection focused on Marquetta Goodwine. The course of the meetings, however, provided opportunities to other regional residents to influence media coverage concentration. Instead of treating Goodwine as a representative spokesperson, media reports began to extend authoritative qualifications to others in the community. In this manner, the meetings dispel notions of the Gullah as a monolithic group by suggesting the impossibility of complete representation by a single individual. Instead, media portrayals began to depict the Gullah community as a diverse collection of individuals interested in a variety of important issues.

Examination of meeting outcomes is not limited to how meeting organizers use the process to create alternatives for policymakers. The manner in which public deliberation opens doors for new ways of thinking about the parameters of controversy is an additional site of exploration for scholars interested in the meeting process. Meeting attendees and community

\textsuperscript{23}In the three years before the meetings, there was an average of just under two articles per month regarding Gullah culture and efforts undertaken to protect it. Following the meetings, this number increased to over five articles per month. This excludes coverage that functionally served as announcements for meetings and public hearings.
members influenced by testimony can deploy arguments generated during public meetings for their own political causes. Burch claims that the Gullah initiated change by speaking out at the meetings and delivering “a call to action” to their community. These actions “have become the backbone of a rising movement to save the Gullah and their cultural memory.”24 The Gullah perceived an inability on the part of the government to address concerns raised at the meetings, Burch argues, and as a result, attempted to motivate community efforts to protect cultural resources.25 Media coverage of the opinions of individuals like Burch bring to light issues which suffered from meager public attention prior to the meetings.

The Gullah used assertions deployed at the National Park Service meetings to oppose sole reliance on the government as a tactic to eliminate cultural threats. Such positions recognized the central importance of meeting testimony to the Gullah and acknowledged Gullah responsibility in addressing the shortcomings of proposed government solutions by requiring a stakeholder mentality in the operationalization of their cultural future. Since the conclusion of the NPS meeting series, three arguments related to a belief in the necessity of community building initiatives were prevalent in media reports of Gullah discourse: the centrality of land to the protection of culture, the importance of building connections within the Gullah community, and an inherent distrust in governmental ability to ensure cultural survival.

Appeals related to land use were deployed by the Gullah prior to the National Park Service meetings in their local communities and by some in scholarly discussions. After the conclusion of the meetings, these points of view migrated from localized contemplations to expressions in the public media. Such media accounts of Gullah activism were replete with references to the importance of land among the Gullah people. Behre explains that arguments related to the functioning of land as a connection to previous generations have gained momentum in the past few years. The ability to hold on to this land, many Gullah

24Burch, “Threatened by Change, Gullah Fighting to Preserve Their Culture.”
25Burch, “Threatened by Change, Gullah Fighting to Preserve Their Culture.”
claimed, ensures a critical linkage to the past, and concomitantly recognizes that the loss of land sets the stage for cultural erosion.\textsuperscript{26}

Evidence of the increased importance of land to the Gullah was substantiated in common media coverage of resident relocation to the Georgia and South Carolina Low Country following the National Park Service meetings. Long-time resident Nancy Butler argues that recent attention received by the Gullah has led to a renewed interest in reclaiming the Low Country.\textsuperscript{27} Many Gullah believe reclamation is necessary given that continued development has created what Lonice Barrett, Commissioner of Georgia’s Department of Natural Resources, describes as a region “under siege.” Barrett explains that developers often offer exorbitant prices for small parcels of land in an attempt to secure as much land as possible.\textsuperscript{28} While land grabs by developers are not new occurrences in the region, Gullah reactions focusing on land reacquisition are significant departures from the strategies of previous generations who denied their Gullah heritage.\textsuperscript{29}

A regional focus has also emerged to elucidate the ill-effects of land loss among Gullah people. Losing access to land displaces Gullah from areas where they traditionally lived, resulting in not only the loss of community connections to significant geographic locations that have persisted for over a century, but also in the dislocation of Gullah people to areas further away from jobs and cultural resources.\textsuperscript{30} While the displacement is not unique to the past several years, attention to related Gullah arguments has only recently become prevalent in the media. There appears to be a strong correlation between the deployment of appeals related to land at the National Park Service meetings and the use of similar arguments on the broader political stage. The connection between territorial arguments and meeting

\textsuperscript{26}Behre, Robert. “Is Rural Life Overrated?” The Post and Courier. 6 Jun. 2004. 5A.
\textsuperscript{27}Behre, “Is Rural Life Overrated?”
\textsuperscript{28}Seabrook, Charles. “Georgia’s Showcase Islands.” The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. 26 May 2004. 1A.
\textsuperscript{29}Behre, “Is Rural Life Overrated?”
testimony is even more prevalent regarding how the Gullah discussed the treatment of such arguments in the National Park Service meetings.

Discussions exploring the conveyance of Gullah concerns, especially pertaining to territorial issues, were widespread in media coverage of Gullah activism following the National Park Service meetings. Disparities between the level of importance assigned to deliberations about the significance of land by Gullah speakers in the meetings and the dearth of attention paid to such concerns by the federal agency in its final policy alternatives exacerbate the erasure of Gullah opinions in policy discussions. Media coverage of the meetings highlighted the importance of land in the lives of those who testified.31 The connection between cultural impairment and the onslaught of developers was evident in coverage of the meetings, a fact that demonstrated the Gullah preoccupation with property ownership and access issues in their testimony. With greater media attention, expression of this preoccupation has shifted from the contained environment of public meetings into broader political discussions.

The National Park Service deliberations have spurred an increase in demands for governmental recognition of Gullah territorial rights in the region. Prior to the meetings, many arguments pertaining to land rights endured exclusively in internal documents32 and scholarly publications. After the meetings, such claims became more widespread as the Gullah took their interests to media outlets. Goodwine, for example, contended that solutions offered by the NPS fell short of those recommended in testimony and ignored the root of the problem. She called for an aggressive reallocation of land to bestow reservation status to the Gullah. Goodwine additionally acknowledged that while the motives of the NPS may have been honorable, the agency’s proposed solutions did not address the pivotal role of land in the protection of Gullah culture.33 The reservation status suggested by Goodwine was only one

32Some examples can be found on the Gullah Pride and The Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition websites.
Gullah-based solution related to the issue of property rights. Other residents argued that their individual circumstances, many of which were discussed in the meetings, could only be resolved with policy remedies to land access issues. Topics such as access to cemeteries, rights to use sweetgrass for making baskets, and actions to stop spiraling development were prevalent in post-meeting discourse.34

Goodwine also argued that not only did the National Park Service solutions fail to address concerns expressed by the Gullah, but that the proposals could actually exacerbate problems given that most of the NPS recommendations relied on expanding outsiders’ access to Gullah culture. Federal representatives argued, in part, that more cultural exposure is needed to help others understand critical components of Gullah experiences. Goodwine disputed such a claim, and stated that solutions advanced by the NPS would uncritically increase their visibility, despite the fact that they “don’t need to be any more visible than we are. Our community doesn’t need more tourists. That’s one of the main reasons that we are suffering from displacement. What we do need is a respect for the culture”.35 Enhancing Gullah territorial rights, Goodwine asserted, would be a more appropriate use of NPS authority.36

Veronica Gerald, executive director of the Penn Center, echoed her concerns by explaining that increases in tourism tend to destroy culture at a rapid rate. Gerald drew from Goodwine’s theory of destructionment to argue, “The tourism industry has created this dire need for resorts and what people call developments, but we call ‘destructionment’”.37 Many regional residents pointed to the NPS imperative to foster tourism as an indicator that the agency ignored Gullah testimony at the meetings.38

The refusal of the National Park Service to address Gullah land concerns in public discussion following the issuance of final policy suggestions is tied to a dominant legacy of disregard

35Quick, “Gullah-Geechee Future.”
36Quick, “Gullah-Geechee Future.”
pertaining to Gullah territorial problems. The Gullah argued that national politicians often briefly stop in the region, and then continue to ignore Gullah dilemmas after their visit. The failure of government agencies to incorporate their suggestions into final policy recommendations required that the Gullah focus on building community networks. This tactic, many Gullah argued, holds the best chance of helping Gullah culture survive.\textsuperscript{39}

A second issue emerging in media coverage following the National Park Service meetings was the importance of making Gullah community members stakeholders in the fight for their own survival. Arguments for increased community involvement expanded in the media following the conclusion of the NPS meetings. The series helped to reveal how diminishing community interaction damages Gullah people’s ability to forward their own cultural survival. Testimony demonstrated this fact in the efforts of multiple speakers to draw attention to receding community involvement over time. After the conclusion of the meetings, the Gullah further emphasized the need for greater autonomous control over their future. Cynthia Porcher explained that the meetings inspired the Gullah to amplify their demands on the NPS:

Gullah/Geechee people want to preserve, protect and reinvigorate their communities; they want to preserve the remaining culturally important sites in their communities; they want to paint praise houses, restore old school buildings, and protect their traditional burial grounds; they want to teach their language and traditional crafts to young people; they want to hold workshops to educate people about heirs’ property, taxes, land retention, and other issues facing their communities today; they want to create a space where Gullah/Geechee people, whose families emigrated years ago, can return and learn of their roots. They want to find a way to create good paying jobs that will keep young people from leaving the communities. Most of all, they want to take the initiative - they need financial support so that they can complete their preservation projects and tell their

\textsuperscript{39}Reid, “Forgotten Voters.” 12.
stories in their own voices and in their own ways. These efforts may follow slightly different paths in different communities, but Gullah/Geechee people are ready and willing to take on the task of telling their stories to the world.40

While Porcher argued that some financial support is necessary, the purpose of her comments was to highlight the desire of the Gullah people to control their own future. Porcher, an employee of the NPS, explicitly noted that she was not speaking at the meeting as a government official, but instead that she was there as a private citizen.41 This acknowledgment is critical because it illustrated Porcher’s acceptance that responsibility for the control of Gullah futures no longer lies with the government’s ability to protect them, but rather in the capacity of ordinary citizens to take action. This assessment of media coverage indicates that a movement toward Gullah-driven solutions for cultural erosion rapidly gained momentum in the years following the NPS meetings. Regional residents began to realize their complicity in communal deterioration, and set in motion an important strategy to remedy diminishing cultural traditions which primarily entails building bridges between individuals within the community.42

While discussions of community building proliferated since the conclusion of the National Park Service meetings, the most telling sign of emerging community activism was how the Gullah regarded their experiences of participation in public deliberation. Many acknowledged that the meetings sparked a renewed sense of community. The meetings encouraged individuals to come together and to share their experiences. A grassroots effort pushing for an enhanced Gullah stakeholder mentality emerged out of the meetings, and community

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42 Margo Harakas, “A Bridge to Gullah Culture; Author to Lead an Exploration of Threatened Community,” Sun-Sentinel January 31 2004., p. 1D.
members hoped that transitioning cultural arguments into public parlance vis–vis additional media coverage would increase their chances of cultural survival.\textsuperscript{43}

The most prevalent concern raised by the Gullah after the release of the final National Park Service report was that the agency’s solutions did not acknowledge the importance of Gullah people taking an active role in preserving their own culture.\textsuperscript{44} The greatest historical threat to the community, many Gullah argued, is unwillingness on the part of Gullah people to identify and work with other community members. Community survival persisted for generations largely because members valued and supported strong connections with neighbors. Despite the fact that such connections have been lost in recent years, many hoped that the NPS meetings would provide momentum for engaged community involvement among those not previously politically active.\textsuperscript{45}

Working in concert with a conviction that the Gullah should build community networks was an argument made by many that government agencies are unlikely to exhibit a primary concern for achieving their communal interests. Many saw the meeting series outcomes, and particularly the shallow evaluation of Gullah testimony by the National Park Service, as additional confirmation of a fundamental lack of concern on behalf of government agencies for appropriate recognition of Gullah needs. As examined earlier, the Gullah have a long history of disrespect from government agencies claiming to be attentive to their well-being.\textsuperscript{46} Prevalent both within the meetings and in the subsequent period was the advancement of arguments exacting the need for a shift in the focus of history. Some Gullah contended that allowing governmental interpretation and presentation of their heritage led to a distorted view.\textsuperscript{47} The manner in which the NPS ignored the concerns of the Gullah when constructing their final report and action proposals suggested that the community’s exhibited distrust of

\textsuperscript{43}\textsuperscript{Frazier, Herb. “Clyburn Tries Again to Pass Gullah Preservation Bill.” The Post and Courier. 12 Feb. 2005. 1B.}
\textsuperscript{44}\textsuperscript{Quick, “Gullah-Geechee Future.” 1A.}
\textsuperscript{45}\textsuperscript{Gerald, “Turning the Tide.” 46–47.}
\textsuperscript{46}\textsuperscript{Reid, “Forgotten Voters.” 12.}
\textsuperscript{47}\textsuperscript{MacDonald, Sally. “Charleston; in Black and White; Historians and Tour Guides Are Adding the Stories of Slaves to the View of Plantation Life.” Orlando Sentinel. 11 Jan. 2004. L1.}
the government may be well placed. Previous perceptions of erasure may have contributed to convictions among the Gullah that their concerns are unlikely to be answered through governmental channels.

Given that National Park Service actions after the meeting series did not mesh with Gullah testimony, a sense of disappointment developed around the agency’s proposed alternatives. Media coverage focused on perceptions that NPS proposals seemed to serve ends other than those critically endorsed by the Gullah. Some Gullah analysis concentrated on meeting shortcomings by hypothesizing that NPS proposals were constrained by tight budget requirements. The fact that structures already owned by the NPS were central to the agency’s schemes suggests that money was indeed a primary concern, rather than a commitment to historical accuracy and significance. The NPS did not attempt to reacquire any land, as the Gullah suggested during the meetings, and instead featured the remodeling of NPS-owned buildings. The solutions, therefore, did not remedy any territorial issues, but rather expanded the power of the NPS to interpret Gullah cultural expression. Gullah misgivings regarding governmental authority facilitated arguments which characterized National Park Service solutions as examples of displaced power. Some Gullah speakers emphasized that cultural preservation should not be left in the hands of the government, but rather that the government should clear a path for the Gullah to define their own history. Goodwine, for example, stated that she was most concerned with “keeping the story in the hands of the people”, and not with tolerating governmental interpretations that could downplay Gullah cultural significance.

The emergence of certain argument trends after the conclusion of the National Park Service series makes obvious the importance of public deliberation for the Gullah community. The meeting testimony identified issues significant to the Gullah people and created a reservoir of appeals for the community to draw from in the future. Media coverage of their

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49 Quick, “Gullah-Geechee Future.”
50 Quick, “Gullah-Geechee Future.”
activism identified how issues such as land, community building and governmental distrust transition from the limited purview of the meetings into broader arenas of political discussion. Argument trends also illustrate the power of public meetings to facilitate the development of a clearinghouse of ideas for community activists to use in fights for vital causes in the local community.

This analysis does not seek to examine the meetings through the traditional lens of public meetings scholars, such as Forester and Fischer, who measure public meeting success by the outcome of such meetings. Nor does it seek to examine these meetings as solely rhetorical artifacts, as Ratliff and McCormick do. Instead, the hope is that an analysis of the meeting process which examines the ways that meeting testimony and the participant response can reveal both the ways that those who testify and those who propose solutions view the meeting process, as well as their role within the meetings.

4.4 “Lay It on the Table”: The Future of Gullah Rhetoric and Public Meetings

Examination of the Gullah and their experiences offer multiple avenues for future study and analysis. This assessment of the National Park Service meetings and their consequences suggest directions for research both related to the Gullah and to the use of public meetings as an indicator of community involvement. This study scrutinizes how one group used a series of meetings to voice their concerns. Trends emerging from this research illustrate potential opportunities for exploring the efficacy of public meetings as a means of social change. Cluster analysis provides for an alternate reading of the NPS meeting testimony and calls into question the 2002 report detailing proposed solutions to Gullah cultural decline. The discovery of rhetorical themes allows for greater recognition of non-conventional views regarding Gullah heritage. In doing so, analysis exposes how bureaucratic forces operate and restrict the potential impact of meeting participants to affect change. Sponsors of programs
that encourage deliberation, like Senator Clyburn’s advocacy for the Gullah, can appraise investigations such as this to determine if public deliberations meet prescribed goals.

While the Gullah are merely one example, their awareness of the public meeting process provided ample resources for the scrutiny of future public meetings. An assessment of public deliberation based on the study of the National Park Service meetings conveys important practices that rhetorical scholars can use to identify argumentative trends and to evaluate the power of marginalized groups to drive the construction of such appeals.

The future of the Gullah still remains to be seen. How arguments advanced during and after the meetings encourage Gullah activism, and the results of such advocacy, are prospective areas for further research. The National Park Service study represents the first time that the Gullah were formally recognized by the federal government and, despite a lack of substantial change in government policy toward the group, they appear to be buoyed by the meeting process. Further exploration of argument development as a result of the NPS meetings would be a subject of interest for those concerned with the potential contributions of public meetings to community development initiatives.

Prior to the National Park Service meetings, many Gullah were isolated in individual communities. The meeting process, however, resulted in a discernible increase in cooperative interactions between various Gullah community members. Future studies of Gullah rhetoric could focus on how community based movements are able to sustain argumentative trends over a period of time and how movements garner publicity for issues through the use of the media. Additionally, argumentation scholars will also find shifting meanings and alterations in Gullah appeals over time and the concomitant reactions of those who oppose Gullah initiatives to be of interest.

The role of the government in the lives of the Gullah is also an interesting point of examination. The manner in which the government frames its responses to the Gullah and how citizens react to governmental edicts represents a significant area of research for rhetorical scholars. The National Park Service rejoinder to Gullah testimony and suggestions indicates
that even if governmental agencies approach the public meeting process with honorable motives, institutional power operates in ways that do not necessarily serve the interests of the target community. Thus, approaches taken by all levels of government in response to Gullah community initiatives will reveal important pathways of power embedded in the community policymaking process. An important question to examine discards whether the NPS and other government agencies react to Gullah demands or whether they simply adhere to traditional policy practices without acknowledging their needs and desires.

The ability of marginalized groups to respond to governmental oppression or, as in the case of the Gullah, to instances of erasure, is suggestive of the power of community activists to create argument strategies to mobilize citizen action. How they proceed in the face of continuing governmental inaction to remedy cultural protection concerns will indicate the actual degree of committed activism and community momentum for a preservationist agenda. Important research should focus on whether the Gullah continue to identify and to fight against governmental and other institutional barriers to community survival and, more importantly, should critically examine the argumentative strategies used.

Shifting the focus of public meeting study away from both an examination of how organizers can improve their ability to include new perspectives\textsuperscript{51} and the manner in which decision makers privilege those that they see as experts\textsuperscript{52} to a focus how participants use the meetings and the texts created within to reconceptualize the world and bring attention to their causes provides a valuable new insight into how meetings function within society. The process can sow the seeds of future reform by bringing the concerns of community members to the forefront, even if the meeting process fails to remedy participant concerns. How dis-


possessed groups can respond to government ambivalence was illustrated in the actions of Gullah people, and understanding such mechanisms is certainly worthy of future study.

The public meeting process has potential to create social change because it can bring new voices into political conversations. Such potential unfortunately, however, may be lost if government officials are unwilling to integrate citizen solutions to problems explored in the meeting process. Future studies could examine how government agencies wield power in the face of citizen opposition. For example, research could comparatively focus on the characteristics of those testifying in situations where the government responds favorably to citizen interests in contrast to instances in which meeting attendees experience less favorable outcomes. Are certain argumentative strategies more successful in the public meeting process? If so, how can other groups deploy similar appeals to advance their own cause?

Groups interested in bringing their concerns to public meetings can learn from the experiences of others who have had their suggestions overlooked. The practice of exclusion demonstrated by the National Park Service provides a model of how the government can reinterpret meeting testimony to support their own ends. Awareness of the mechanisms through which government agencies invite comment but fail to subsequently act can serve as a cautionary tale for groups who hope to have their concerns addressed as a result of future public meetings.

Finally, the true strength of public meetings rests, as it did in the Gullah example, with their ability to generate community momentum toward solving problems. By creating a forum in which individuals can express their concerns, meetings can be important not only because of resulting policy changes but also because appeals made in meetings may lead to enduring change. Studies that focus on the outcomes of meetings, rather than the process itself, must be shifted. Rhetorical acts in meetings inspire community involvement that persists after the conclusion of deliberations. If the focus of public meeting scholarship is modified, then definitions of successful meetings will also change. The yardstick of success will no longer be the achievement of some predetermined outcome, but rather will be rhetorical strength.
and the creation of communities continually concerned with issues advanced in testimony. Using this measure, the Gullah are more triumphant than if their value were determined by the National Park Service’s acceptance of their suggestions. This rhetorical approach views public deliberation as a process, adding diversity to available arguments and amplifying the abilities of marginalized groups to achieve success in the public political world.
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