

Commonalities and differences from Africa to Cleveland as evidence through the Gullah Community Connection 1

Michael Hickey, South High School

Grade Level: 10-12, Earth Science

Summer 2003

Title: Commonalities and differences from Africa to Cleveland as evidenced through the Gullah community connection.

Author/School: Michael Hickey, South High School

Course: Earth-Space Science

Level: Grades 10-12

Standards Met: Grade 9: Benchmark B: Explain that within the Earth system, many processes are cyclic in nature. Performance Indicator 5: Explain the course of the seasons. Performance Indicator 6: Explain the relationship between the water cycle, weather and climate. Grade 10: Benchmark A: Explain that within the Earth system, many processes are cyclic in nature. Performance Indicator 1: Explain the processes of the biogeochemical cycles which are regularly repeated sets of changes in an ecosystem. Performance Indicator 2: Summarize the relationship between the climatic zone and the resultant biomes. Performance Indicator 3: Explain the impact of terrain on climate and weather. Benchmark C: Describe the finite nature of the Earth's resources and which human activities can conserve or deplete the Earth's resources. Performance Indicator 9: Compare different ways that human activity can alter biogeochemical cycles, food webs and energy pyramids in agricultural systems to ensure a food supply. Contrast in terms of productivity, sustainability, and stability of the ecosystem.

Grade 11-12: Benchmark E: Know that humans are connected to natural systems, and that the choices they make today may impact the natural systems in the future.

Performance Indicator 26: Explain how the basic processes of natural ecosystems affect the maintenance of the atmosphere, generation of soils, control; of the hydrologic cycle, disposal of wastes and recycling of nutrients. Humans are changing many of these basic processes and the change may be detrimental. Benchmark H: Know that the Earth is made up of a series of interconnected systems, and a change in one system could affect other systems. Performance Indicator 43: Interpret weather maps and their symbols to predict weather conditions occurring worldwide.

Scope: The project should be covered over the course of one week, in 30 to 40 minute increments as supplemental to the standard course of study in Earth/Space Science.

Goals and Objectives:

Students will have a greater appreciation for Afro-American history. Students will see a commonality between African, Carolinian and Cleveland Black culture. Using The Great Migration as a developmental matrix, students will study the water cycle, oceanography, hydrology and biogeochemical processes. They will develop an understanding of the interconnected nature of these Earth cycles and draw parallels between historical accounts and present day, "real world" events.

Keywords: Gullah Low Country Marsh
Sweetgrass Palmetto Tidal Basin
Tide Ocean Current Gulf Stream
Okra Peas Beans
Trunk Sluice Gate Salinity
Density Aquifer Ground Water
Pollution Runoff Coriolis Effect
Barrier Islands Evapotranspiration Artesian Formation
Hurricane Hydrosphere Levee
Latitude Longitude Tidal Environment
Pelagic Benthic

Introduction: See attached background report and bibliography.

Daily Lesson Plans:

- Day 1: African American history. Timeline. Background on slavery, Gullah and migration to the Cleveland area.
- Day 2: Ocean currents. Trade winds. Trade routes. Great circle routes. Mapping. Latitude & longitude.
- Day 3: Water cycle. Rain. Climate. Ground Water. Land use in Africa, Carolina, Cleveland. Why do we eat the traditional foods when farming is not necessary? Why is shrimp so popular?
- Day 4: Family genealogy assignment. See whose ancestry can be traced to the Carolinas. Food assignment. Have students bring either recipes or actual samples of traditional family dishes for comparison to African roots.
- Day 5: Map class genealogies. Compare class food history.

Assessment:

Vocabulary quiz.

Essay on personal family migration. Draw parallels between their food traditions and African traditions.

At start of section, have students write a brief (25 words or so) essay on their views of Black History. Have them do the same at the end of the section. Compare & assess.

Background Report on the Great Migration.

African-Americans have played an enormous role in the building of not only the United States of America, but, by extension, the sociopolitical structure of the entire world as we know it today. This is something that has been glossed over in History books, and an attempt to correct this oversight is the main thrust of this approach to this lesson sequence.

The general misconception is that slavery began in the United States sometime around the late 1700's. Millions of Africans were kidnapped and dragged in chains to the cotton fields of the South. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln ended slavery with the Emancipation Proclamation. The North won the Civil War and released millions of unskilled laborers to flood the highways and byways of the country.

This is grossly in error.

Enslavement of the African people by outsiders actually began in the 15th Century when Portuguese traders brought Africans to Europe as slaves. With the discovery of the New World by Europeans in 1492, Spain became the predominant world power and continued the practice of the enslavement of Africans, who were now brought to the new Spanish territories. Following the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, England stepped up as the dominant world power and the modern conception of slavery began.

Most European settlement in the Americas was in the West Indies and along the tropical coasts of the mainland. These areas were ideal for growing sugar cane as well as other crops and were the primary location for the vast majority of the slave trade. It is estimated that between the early 16th Century and 1820, over ten million Africans were enslaved and brought to the New World. Of this number, less than half a million were brought to the area that is now the United States. The interesting statistic here is that when the slave trade was outlawed

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in 1820, the African-American population in the area of the United States had increased to nearly four times the number brought in, while the populations in all of the other areas had been reduced to less than half of the number brought in. Part of this dynamic is due to the fact that slaves brought in to work on the sugar plantations were predominately male, while those brought to the United States were more evenly mixed as to gender. Another factor was that being closer to the tropics and doing much harder labor on the sugar plantations generated a higher rate of mortality than did the plantations further north. North American slave traders also actively pursued breeding as a means of expanding inventory.

Another misconception regarding slavery in North America is that slaves worked picking cotton. Cotton was a late addition to the agriculture of the region. The cash crop in the English colonies was rice. Huge fortunes were made among the rice planters in the lowlands of the Carolinas and Georgia. It wasn't until the Nineteenth Century that cotton became a major source of revenue.

This introduces a main aspect of this unit. There is a large, but dwindling, population of descendants of slaves living in communities along the Atlantic Sea Islands known as the Gullah people. The name, Gullah, is believed to have been derived from Angola, where a high percentage of the slaves came from. In the 1800's, this was commonly pronounced as N'Gulla. It was from Angola that a high percentage of slaves were taken.

When the capture and trading of slaves began in Western Africa, there were literally hundreds of groups, each speaking a different language. What developed as a common tongue was a creole of languages. As the Portuguese gave way to the Spanish and them to the English, each of these languages blended with those in place. Captured slaves, upon being taken to the New World had no common tongue with those already here, except for this creole. While areas that had a lesser percentage of Africans saw those separate languages gradually replaced with the common tongue of the slave owners, places where the population was predominately African enabled their residents to maintain an individual culture.

Such was the case among the Sea Islands. Since rice was the staple crop, it was determined that bringing slaves from the regions of Western Africa where rice was commonly grown was economically more advantageous. The climate most conducive to rice cultivation was extremely hot and moist, while the terrain was largely swamp. This was extremely uncomfortable for the white slave owners. Malaria was also common. People from the western parts of Africa were better able to withstand the climate and had developed some resistance to malaria. This resulted in huge populations of slaves being left to themselves, allowing a development of community and associated customs.

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The system for controlling the slave labor force on the rice plantations at this time was known as "tasking". Each slave was assigned a specific task which was to be accomplished during the day. When it was finished, the slave was able to attend to other pursuits, such as tending their own gardens or raising animals. Many slaves were able to develop a fairly sophisticated trade in goods for cash and barter. Many, in fact, did so well that it caused their masters considerable worry. It was this community and trading system that enabled the low country slaves to maintain a separate language and to retain many customs with deep African roots.

Evidence of this is still found today not only among the Gullah people in South Carolina, but also in areas the Gullah influenced. Many people who escaped slavery in the Southern colonies made their way to what was still Spanish Florida, joining with the Seminole tribes. When the United States fought the Seminole Wars, it was largely against people of African descent. Redistribution of the tribes following the conflicts has resulted in remnants of Gullah culture to be now found in Texas and Oklahoma.

As climatic and economic changes diminished the rice business, mainstream America paid less and less attention to the Gullah people. Until 1957, when Hilton Head Island was developed as a resort area, the Gullah were largely left alone, and their culture, if not their economy, thrived. This means there has been a region where a population group has been able to maintain its separate identity for over four hundred years. Now that the Sea Islands are being developed, the Gullah culture is being eroded. As recently as the 1970's, it was still possible to find those who spoke only Gullah, and little if any English. Now, those who do speak Gullah will do so only among themselves in a family atmosphere.

It must be noted that the Gullah are considered a definite population group. Linguistic analysis has shown that their language, also called Gullah is, in fact, a separate and true language, and not a patois of broken English. Many words of African origin can be found in Gullah, and a Gullah traveling to Sierra Leone, for instance, can be understood by native speakers there.

As regards the slave trade, the journey from Africa to the West Indies and to the United States was known as the Middle Passage. Ships left Europe and sailed to Western Africa where they traded for slaves. This was the First Passage. From Africa, ships followed the Trade Winds across the Atlantic and the slaves were sold. The trip back across the Northern Atlantic, following the Gulf Stream, was the Third Passage.

The point of history that is commonly forgotten or ignored is that African-American slaves were all unskilled and uneducated field hands. Prior to being abducted, many Africans were skilled tradesmen, doctors, and accomplished

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farmers. Border disputes, wars and politics and of course economics led many Africans to capture and enslave others. The rice plantations in the South required a high level of engineering to build and maintenance to keep running. They needed carpenters, engineers, millwrights, coopers, blacksmiths, doctors and more. This level of skilled labor, if not originally provided, needed to be trained.

There are three main ways of cultivating rice, highland, flatland and tidal. In highland growing, which was the first method used in the colonies during the 1700's, rice fields are planted down slope from retention basins. The basins collect stream flow and runoff, and the water is used to irrigate the crop two to three times per year. The land needed to be cleared, dikes constructed and a system of sluice gates built to accomplish this. During the latter part of the 16th Century, rice cultivation moved to the tidal areas of the Carolinas. Once cleared, much larger areas could be cultivated. Clearing and preparing the land was no easy task. It was swampland, populated with snakes, alligators and malaria carrying mosquitoes. Enough earth was moved during this process in South Carolina to rival the building of the pyramids of Egypt. Once cleared and drained, with dikes, retaining walls and bypass ditches, planting could begin.

The tidal area of South Carolina is an estuarial system. In it, fresh water from inland meets with salt water from the oceans. Sea water, being more dense than fresh, stratifies to the bottom when injected by tidal movement. In essence, fresh water "floats" on top of salt water. It is this principle that enabled the irrigation of the rice fields. The fields are planted below the level of high water. A gate in the retaining wall is opened to siphon off the fresh water layer at the top, which irrigates the crop. The gate is closed before salt water can intrude. Plants are left to grow in the fresh water until they reach a point of maturity where they are viable. At a low tide, the gates are reopened, and the standing water drained back into the river.

The infrastructure necessary to maintain this method of agribusiness could not have been developed, built, maintained and operated by unskilled labor. The vast amounts of monies earned through this business financed not only colonial expansion, but the building of what became a new nation. The tragedy here is that the people who made this possible were slaves doing their work for others, and not free men laboring for themselves. This does not, however, diminish the magnificence of what they accomplished.

It is this magnificence that needs to be impressed upon urban classes today. Too many of our students are of the opinion they are somehow less than they are. This comes from societal implications over the centuries as well as current economic situation. A sense of pride in ancestry is deserved and must be imparted. Given a sound foundation, a new future can be built.

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