

A Culture of Servitude: The Impact of Tourism and Development on South Carolina's Coast

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Tourism has become the primary industry of the Low Country of South Carolina. In response, the economic, social, and cultural fabric of the area has changed to accommodate this industry. Using interviews and observations, this study examined issues concerning host-guest interactions from a political ecological perspective. Overall, especially for the local African American residents, tourism has created in effect a "culture of servitude." Proposals to help alleviate these negative impacts are suggested.

Key Words: tourism, development, coastal South Carolina, African Americans

South Carolina's coast is a vital part of the state's economy and heritage. The same land that once grew cotton and tomatoes today produces condominiums and golf courses. Tourism has become the primary industry of the Low Country, altering local land use and creating new businesses and jobs. In response, the social and cultural fabric of the Sea Islands has changed to accommodate this new industry. This paper examines the varied impacts of tourism on the South Carolina Sea Islands from the perspectives of local residents and then offers locally proposed solutions to real and potential problems created by the tourism industry.

Theoretical Background

A struggle for control of land and other valued resources often underlies the impact of tourism and development on local economies. As various groups such as hosts, guests, and external agencies seek their own individual and combined goals, the environment is affected by, and affects, the dynamics of these social entities. Political coalitions form at differing times, as group needs, and perceptions of those needs, evolve. The political ecology of a tourist area thus

encompasses the land, its use, its occupants, its owners, its visitors, and its controllers over time (Greenberg and Park 1994; Stonich 1998).

As landscapes, real or imagined, become valued commodities, the consequences of tourism begin to affect the economic base of communities, generating both positive and negative outcomes for local people (Mansperger 1995). Based on the assumed benefits of tourism, local governments typically pursue the industry as a stimulus for development (Howell 1994). The supposition is that tourism will ultimately benefit all classes in the host community through "trickle down" socioeconomic impact (Freitag 1994).

As development continues, new businesses arise, producing perhaps the most evident local benefit: new job opportunities (Mansperger 1995). As people continue to enter the community, either as permanent residents or as temporary visitors, infrastructural support systems for the increasing population become necessary (Fritz 1982). Roads, highways, water systems, sewage systems, and electrical support intensify to better utilize existing resources and to serve the demands of a changing population (Fritz 1982). Economically, the affected area grows with and for the incoming tourists as they leave their money behind in local hotels, restaurants, and shops.

Despite the obvious positive economic impacts of tourism, the industry also brings an undeniably dark side, seen and felt almost exclusively by the indigenous people. Economic benefits to host communities correlate closely with the degree of direct control local residents have over the industry (Munt 1994). Unfortunately, in many circumstances control passes into local government hands with a vested interest in increasing development (at minimal environmental cost). Economic control may also pass entirely out of the

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community because a large percentage of the profits earned from tourism are repatriated to parent companies in other areas, contributing little to the financial well-being of the host community (Pi-Sunyer 1982).

In addition, the influx of tourists hastens the erosion of the traditional means of subsistence and makes indigenous people more dependent on the outside world (Mansperger 1995). Land owners are either tempted or forced to sell their land to developers, and even when forcible displacement tactics are not used, other mechanisms accomplish the same results (Fritz 1982). Those who continue to farm are faced with escalating property taxes as land values rise in anticipation of potential resale values in a tourist area (Mansperger 1995). The "rent-value" of the land becomes too great to maintain an agricultural subsistence and many locals are forced to abandon farming (Fritz 1982).

As the control of land passes from locals to those in the tourism industry, job opportunities also change. Individual family-owned farm land becomes the property of big business for new buildings and tourist attractions. As the construction boom wanes, the local labor force is left with a low-wage and highly seasonal industry (Fritz 1982). Typically, the only jobs available to local people are minimum-wage service jobs such as busboys, maids, and grounds maintenance. The lower classes thus become a source of cheap labor, with outside companies typically reaping the economic benefits (Freitag 1994). Economic dependency ensues.

The alterations in the distribution of wealth and power that are created by tourism are paralleled by equal alterations in the local social structure (Greenwood 1989). Host communities expand both economically and socially with added numbers of people during the growth and development of tourism (Nash and Smith 1991). As the population increases, social needs intensify, affecting institutions like schools and local government.

Since the tourist is not expected to make substantial sacrifices to reside in a host community, the burden of accommodation then falls on indigenous people (Nash 1989, 1996). While the tourist pursues typical leisure goals like resting and recreation, others must perform the utilitarian functions of society such as cooking and cleaning, intensifying the labor burden (Nash and Smith 1991). Accordingly, hosts find themselves increasingly separated socially and economically from tourists by the very nature of these specified activities (Nash 1989). These economic and social transactions, marked by a disparity of power, exacerbate status differences and resentment between hosts and guests (Munt 1994).

Status differentiation and resentment also increase as land owners become displaced from their land due to escalating property values. Locals face a difficult decision: should they seek jobs elsewhere or continue to work for the tourism industry at home. Should surrounding areas face high unemployment rates, locals then have little choice. Residing further and further from the source of employment, locals must then commute greater and greater distances to continue working in the low-wage, tourism-based jobs. Spending more time

away from home, parents discover that family stability deteriorates. Concurrently, as Mansperger (1995) observes, crime (particularly theft) and substance abuse increase; social problems translate into even more fundamental concerns such as apathy, depression, and disease.

In addition to these social transformations, cultural adjustments must also be made. The newcomers (whether retirees or visitors) bring different ideals, values, and problems with them. More specifically, retirees typically have little concern for the social characteristics of their host community and predominantly focus on environmental and economic aspects (Faulkenberry and McLean 1997). Gradually, as the host community incorporates new people and their social norms and expectations (Nash and Smith 1991), the cultural values of the community change. The tourism industry then advertises the reformed community to a market of potential tourists, increasing awareness about the area while further redefining and (potentially) boosting the community image (Sandford 1987).

By means of this critical self-reflection, tourism increases community self-awareness as locals reevaluate their identity in relation to how the industry views and/or depicts them. That is, members of the local community must better understand themselves as they begin to present themselves to the tourists or as they are represented to them by the industry. As locals discuss cultural presentation, community conflicts arise; from these open disagreements, consensus sometimes follows (Howell 1994; Mansperger 1995).

On the other hand, this critical examination of local cultural values and practices, as well as self-identity when presented and packaged to outsiders, also creates unpredictable alterations and adjustments. Locals often are forced to decide which of their cultural traditions to present to public audiences, which to alter for public consumption, and which to keep private (Pearce, Moscardo, and Ross 1996). Torn between the potential for lucrative and much-needed additional income from the sale of crafts or the marketing of traditions and the desire to maintain personal privacy and cultural authenticity, locals must make difficult choices. Often these choices further split a community already divided between entrepreneurs and traditionalists (Johnson, Snepenger, and Abis 1994). When one's own culture becomes a commodity, numerous issues ensue.

While tourism produces economic, social, and cultural benefits in the host community, such as infrastructural improvements, new job opportunities, and enhanced community awareness, the industry also generates distinct drawbacks such as resident displacement, depressed salaries, and increased crime. Thus, as various groups struggle to control and reconfigure the land, economic transformations precipitate social and cultural changes that create both benefits and detriments for the local population.

Commonly, anthropological concerns about host-guest interactions and the benefits and drawbacks which ensue tend to be focused on Third World examples. In these cases, economic, social, and cultural differences between locals and

outsiders are obvious (e.g., Lea 1991; King, Pizam, and Milman 1993), and environmental impacts typical (Stonich 1998). This paper, however, examines a similar struggle over land and an ensuing disparity between hosts and guests within the United States (Smith 1989). As will be shown, the impact of tourism on South Carolina's coast strikingly parallels developments in other parts of the world (Britton 1996; Mathieson and Wall 1982) and in other regions of the U.S. (e.g., Appalachian mountain retirement communities).

Historical Background

Beaufort County, located in the southeast corner of South Carolina, consists of mainland towns separated from the coast by marshes, tidal creeks, and a series of barrier islands. The county is divided approximately midway by the Broad River. North of the Broad is the city of Beaufort and islands such as Lady's, St. Helena, Hunting, and several other smaller islands and towns. South of the Broad is the town of Bluffton and the communities on Hilton Head and Daufuskie Islands as well as other smaller islands and mainland towns.

The people who have historically inhabited this area have utilized the diverse environment in a variety of ways for subsistence. Prior to 1860, the economy and social structure of the islands used enslaved Africans to support a plantation economy (Woofter 1930; Joyner 1984). As Union troops moved into the South during the Civil War, the slaveholders fled the Sea Islands, and land was eventually sold to the former slaves in small parcels (Woofter 1930; Guthrie 1996). Very few white settlers remained on the islands following emancipation. Contacts beyond the local island communities were extremely limited, effectively keeping island people isolated from the outside world (Guthrie 1996). Through the decades, the islands' African American residents and their dialect came to be known as "Geechee" or "Gullah" (perhaps from Angola, the legendary African homeland).

During the Union occupation, two missionary teachers from Philadelphia arrived on St. Helena Island and opened a school for recently emancipated slaves. It eventually became known as the Penn School and today is called the Penn Center (Woofter 1930; Jones-Jackson 1987). Through the years, the school offered to island blacks one of the few regional opportunities for education, and African Americans of several generations have utilized the school for their educational enhancement and as a social center.

The islands' economy remained based on agriculture from emancipation to the early 1950s (Jones-Jackson 1987). The principal money crops varied over the years from long-fiber cotton to sweet potatoes to peanuts and finally to tomatoes (Woofter 1930). Land ownership defined community membership and local community boundaries (Woofter 1930). Even as children scattered, land remained in the possession of one or more family members (Guthrie 1996). For almost a century, the social structure of the islands centered on operations surrounding an agricultural community (Guthrie 1996).

The Sea Islands remained relatively unchanged until 1950, when Joseph B. Fraser and his associates bought large tracts of land on Hilton Head Island (Jones-Jackson 1987). At first they simply clear-cut the ancient stands of timber, but soon Fraser's son Charles began a series of lavish resort plantations, pioneering the "resort island" concept (Jones-Jackson 1987). In 1956, the first bridge to Hilton Head Island was built (Jones-Jackson 1987). Feverish land speculation ensued as other developers moved onto Hilton Head and other coastal islands to exploit the tourist boom, buying family land from black islanders and building more resorts (Jones-Jackson 1987). By the 1970s, the Sea Islands had been transformed from an agricultural economy to a tourist economy (Thomas 1980).

Today, the South Carolina coast is a popular haven for tourists and retirees who continue to affect the local community in a variety of ways. While glimpses of the traditional way of life remain, tourism has effectively transformed the essence of Sea Island life. As subsistence and population change because of the influx of tourists, economic and social problems arise. To ensure the quality of life and the continued prosperity of the islanders, these problems, both actual and potential, must be accurately delimited and then addressed by locals and newcomers alike.

Methodology

Ethnographic interviewing and participant observation were used to collect data. Interviews were conducted from the spring of 1994 to the summer of 1996 at various locations in Beaufort County. One author returned for a week-long visit during the summer of 1999. Each of these areas represented varying levels of tourist development, from highly developed areas like Hilton Head to largely undeveloped areas like Daufuskie Island.

The Beaufort County Extension agency, in collaboration with other sources, provided an initial list of informants for interviews. Using this list, two researchers conducted in-depth ethnographic interviews of 45 local residents: 10 African Americans (22 percent of the informants and approximately the same percentage in the county itself) and 35 Euro-Americans. Twenty-three informants were small business owners, 5 were fishermen/shrimpers, 4 were government officials, and 8 were retirees.

Contacts with informants were made prior to the interviews to explain the project, seek permission to interview, and establish an agreeable time and place to meet. Face-to-face interviews, lasting approximately one hour each, were tape recorded. All informants were given pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. Interview locations varied according to the contact and included restaurants, personal businesses, and informant homes.

In addition to interviewing, participant observation was done during 11 interviewing trips to Beaufort County. Observation was used to compare local and researcher perceptions of life on the Sea Islands. Furthermore, these observations provided insights about the intricacies of host-guest

interactions and how those interactions affected both parties. Specific sites for participant observation included restaurants in Beaufort, St. Helena Island, and Hilton Head Island; Hunting Island State Park; hotel lobbies and beaches on Hilton Head Island; and direct interactions with service personnel in various hotels and inns.

Economic Transformations

The general benefits of tourism development are apparent to virtually all residents, but most also recognize the potential dangers. "What is tourism selling?" Richard Farr, a county official asked. "It's really selling amenities and a beautiful landscape, sea, and open space." Yet if uncontrolled growth continues, he added, "you will have plucked the flower and it will wilt in your hand." "I would venture to say," Emily Broom noted, "that if you asked the people of this island [St. Helena] to choose, would they sacrifice the quality of their life here for the money that will come in as a result of developing this, they would say, 'We don't want the money.'" Yet, stopping development is virtually impossible, as Wallace Porter described:

Here you got a lot of people—they're considered poor people.... You get some of the people from up North who want a piece of this coast,...they're gonna shell that money out. And those [local] people never seen that kind of money before. They're gonna sell.

As development continues, local governments encourage tourism, believing it will bring prosperity. The issue then becomes managing tourism growth to maximize the benefits of the industry while minimizing the drawbacks—sustainable development. "The whole atmosphere is one of, not so much in the sense of wanting to grow, as in the sense of wanting to do what we do well," Sue Dunbar explained. "Quality," Richard Farr insisted, "is in everybody's interest." As a result, governments seek to regulate various activities to establish a standard for future development.

Zoning becomes a primary means to regulate growth, yet sentiments vary regarding zoning restrictions. Some residents, like Charles Gambrell, prefer freer regulations to enable those with private property to utilize it any way they wish. On the other hand, residents of retirement and gated communities (typically called "plantations") greatly enjoy the tight covenants and restrictions that keep private areas looking neatly trimmed, uniformly maintained, clean, and crime-free.

However, as unzoned farms on outlying areas (largely owned by African Americans) increasingly abut these plantations and assail residents with the smells and sounds of working farms, newcomers complain and secure government intervention to eliminate these primarily black-owned enterprises. This zoned exclusion, of course, further alienates African American residents. "Whoever got the most money, that's who normally win the case," a frustrated black business owner exclaimed.

African American informants describe a gradual and subtle loss of their political power. "They [government] try to intimidate you. They want to come in and make you look like you're stupid," Chad Allgood commented. With sarcasm, Philip Olsen wondered, "how did we...stumble through life, being as ignorant as we are,...and end up with exactly what you [newcomers and tourists] want?"

As long-term residents lose power over political decisions, they also lose control over their land. Historically, land in the Sea Islands was passed down through the generations within the family. Each time land ownership changed, names of most or all of the surviving family members were included on the deed to the property. This means that today, one parcel of land may be legally owned by hundreds of people, tremendously complicating the deed process and creating difficulties for those interested in acquiring local land. Thus, to buy even a tiny parcel of land, Richard Farr explained, "you have to talk to a thousand people. It's hopeless almost."

Yet, not all residents feel the obstacles involved in obtaining land are necessarily detrimental. Angela Holcombe suggested that:

the smartest thing they've [Hilton Head blacks] done is...will down [land] through so many years.... So, when you go to develop it, you're coming up against so many people who have a right to this land. Somebody can't come in really fast and sweep it away from them.

"As long as you control the land, you control the growth that goes on that land," Chris Mayes, an African American farmer, noted.

As land values and zoning restrictions increase, traditional subsistence practices disappear. "Even the land I used to farm," Wallace Porter remarked; "there's houses being built or mobile homes being put there.... Pretty soon there'll be no more farm land in this area." This would be a tragedy, Emily Broome contended, "because nothing will buy back the quality of life we have here if we lose it."

Many community members recognize that increasing taxes are necessary to maintain the quality of life. Mary Spencer noted: "Part of the reason [for increasing taxes] is when you have increased growth and they're more people moving down here, it puts a real strain on the services the county can provide. Therefore,...the money's got to come from somewhere" to fund those services, she concluded.

For many other residents, however, increasing property taxes generates concerns, because "they have a piece of property and eventually they want to build on it and every year...you have taxes going up," Mary Spencer explained. "It makes it harder and harder to develop that land." "At one time they were going to develop Fripp Plantation," Emma Burch observed. "We would've been sandwiched in between golf courses which would've made the land taxes go up to the point where you couldn't farm it anymore." Thus, the discrepancy between the ability of outside, capital-rich developers to transform the environment into extravagant

plantations and mansions and the relative inability of natives to do the same is exacerbated.

Informants suggest that simply continuing to own their land becomes an economic struggle. "As more people [tourists/retirees] come, the property values rise," Tony Watson explained; "so in relation to taxes and income, the poor people are now pushed and stretched [and struggle] to even continue to own their land." "When we first came over here [St. Helena]," Chad Allgood commented, "land wasn't worth a hundred dollars an acre. Now it's worth ten or fifteen thousand dollars an acre." "Every year we pay more [property] tax than the place was worth when we built it," Philip Olsen lamented. "We've paid for the house again."

Those unable to pay the increasing tax burden face an inevitable but painful decision—sell their land. "People are frightened, especially after the taxes started going up," David Jones explained. "There's a conspiracy [by developers] to take our land." As a result, many locals have lost their land from increasing taxes that they were unable to pay. "They end up in places like the Bluffton area, miserable," Jones observed; "this was home and they didn't want to leave it."

As indigenous people face a dying agricultural industry, increasing property taxes, and potential displacement, they search for occupational alternatives. As locals recognize, tourism does produce jobs. Angela Holcombe, a white hotel manager, embraced the tourism industry "because people are always going to vacation." Now, Philip Olsen reflected, "people are...working in stores, hotels, motels.... There's so many places they can work." "Everybody who wants a job here's got one," Chris Mayes stated.

For example, Henry Lawrence, a white developer, employs over a hundred workers on his planned development, providing them with "health insurance, paid vacations, [and] good wages." Jay Sullivan, a black restaurateur and native islander, grew up "when there was nothing here to look forward to...but now you look forward for the [tourist] season to change, so you can pay some of your bills."

White employers see the expanded job market on the islands as decidedly favoring the workers. For example, local islanders frequently "go from one place [work situation] to another," Angela Holcombe suggested, because:

you can only go so far in a certain position. If...you're working the front desk and if there's no place for you to go in this hotel, the natural progression is for you to go to another one. There are so many...opportunities in that area, so you can always find an opening.

With high rates of employee turnover, tourism businesses must add benefits to maintain their work force. "If...things are going to...prosper down here, you're going to have to have a happy labor force," Ed Inman, a white hotel manager, noted. Yet, he continued,

I don't see boosting salaries as an issue, because oddly enough, you ask most people, they want job satisfaction. They want the pat on the back. The money's not always

the issue. If you raise salaries, the next one is going to raise theirs to match.... [Employees] really enjoy that "God, great job!" and true sincerity.

Although tourism produces numerous employment opportunities, those jobs typically tend to be seasonal, minimum-wage service jobs that have little or no potential for advancement. As one informant noted, "They don't work year-round. They don't have health insurance. They...don't get paid what it costs to fund a family." "I've heard it said before that Beaufort has a low unemployment rate," Emma Burch commented. "I'm sure there's plenty of jobs for domestics and kitchen help and the hotels, maids and so forth.... But, there's nothing in the middle, too much. There's very few jobs above the lower class, income wise."

Directly competing for some of these tourism-created jobs are local (primarily white) high school teens and regional college students, who either live on the island or seek summer employment there. "Most of the high school kids—the whites—they don't want to work" in the fast-food industry, Robert Ross (a fast-food franchise owner) explained. "They want to work for the hotels,...on the golf courses,...[and] in the dress shops." These higher-paying jobs, with greater access to tips, inside information about promotions, and higher wages, thus leave for African Americans the lower-paying, less prestigious jobs.

Exacerbating this caste-type access to tourist jobs is a local cultural attitude toward work in general, Mr. Ross believed. Comparing situations with fellow managers owning franchises in the Appalachians, Mr. Ross felt that his workers often put family functions and responsibilities before work, viewing these obligations as more important than their low-wage, low-prestige jobs. Employees might call in sick or simply not show up for work because of a family reunion, rite of passage, or father-son fishing trip, for example. Thus, supervisor reprimands and lack of promotions increase employer-employee hostility and thereby maintain the unequal status quo.

Besides low-paying jobs, the tourism industry has another limitation, as David Jones observed: "When growth comes, it's not the people here [who benefit], the business comes from somewhere else." "Half that [tourism-generated money] goes back to California or somewhere," Richard Farr added; "hotels...are all national or international organizations, with investors outside, making money at our expense." "Granted,...tourism puts a lot of money in Beaufort—but who gets the buck?" Philip Olsen noted; "the few really reaps of the harvest."

The distance of commuting to jobs from inland communities, together with the poor incentives of low wages, create for employers a difficult decision. As the owner of a nationally franchised restaurant explained:

You like to promote from within.... I may have people that are very qualified that we'd like to promote, but they don't have transportation to work other than bus hours. So I can't promote that person, they can't better themselves financially and socially.... Or, because they live

so far away and they've got kids, that they can't afford to be available.

Locals in these service positions argue that the greatest needs within the community are for jobs that will provide adequate incomes for themselves and their families, the possibilities of real career advancement, and affordable housing near their workplaces. From these innovations, real job satisfaction will ensue. Without them, despair will continue and deepen. As Ted Underwood observed, tourist development is "the worst thing that ever happened to people;...it's still slavery, just a different form."

Social Transformations

Alongside changes to the economic base of the community come changes to the social structure, which appear first as hosts and guests interact. Some residents view their interactions with tourists positively. For example, Catherine Feltman, a local white business owner and life-long resident of the islands, said, "I enjoy the tourists. I guess I'm just one of these people persons." Sue Dunbar, a local bed and breakfast operator, explained that her guests "become like friends, and that's fun...the experiences you have just talking to people."

On the other hand, increasing numbers of tourists create problems as well. "I used to could go to town and speak to practically everyone, 'cause I knew 'em," Philip Olsen complained; "and now I don't get the chance to speak to nobody 'cause I don't know who the hell they are." "Sometimes there are so many [tourists] they just get in the way," John Abbott noted. In Beaufort's historic district, "you can't even rake your yard or sweep off your damn sidewalk or porch without having someone pointing," Abbott continued; "it's like there's no privacy at your own home."

For many residents, managing tourist development is the goal. Carol Kline, a local African American tourism business owner, recognizes the potential conflict between tourism and the islands' quality of life:

I'm cognizant of the numbers of people I hope I will be bringing in. I will be handling those people...in a way that they understand that I value this place. Not just for the economics it awards me, but for the whole lifestyle that I enjoy. I want it to be here 25 years from now—50 years from now.

In effect, as Ted Underwood observed: "You want people to come in and spend their money in your community. What we're trying to figure out is how to get them in and then send 'em back home."

For some African Americans, however, the area was home and has become so again. In the past, Sam Vaughn explained, locals "had no reason to stay here because there weren't jobs for them.... These people really loved the Low Country, but a lot of them were forced to move." Catherine Feltman, a life-long resident of Beaufort County, added: "They may have lived and raised their children up North,

and I'm seeing them come back and retire here." Ted Underwood, himself a retired African American, admitted that, "my wife's bloodline" brought them back to Beaufort County. "We'd been coming here for 40 years [for visits].... My wife said one day, impulsively, let's go to South Carolina when you retire." They did.

Because of heir property, many black retirees such as Carol Kline faced a relatively easy decision: "When we moved here, we did not have to buy land. Basically, all we had to do was decide which side of the family we wanted to live near, because my husband was an heir to property here."

More numerous than these African American retirees, however, are Euro-American ones. Attracted by the comfortable weather, attractive real estate prices, access to the ocean, the stability of planned developments, and the security of gated communities, thousands of these wealthy newcomers have inundated the region's coastal communities for the past five decades. Some are young couples employed as managers or professionals for the local tourism industry, but most are retirees from corporate or government jobs in the northern states.

These retirees are "looking for certain things," a manager of one planned community observed: security, well-maintained grounds, stable property values, and an affluent lifestyle. Ryan Upton, a typical retiree, settled in a plantation on Hilton Head Island:

What appealed to me and my wife was the planned community.... We had never seen anything like this. It was so advanced.... Your property values were secure because the person next door had to build something of consequence like yours, and it was controlled.

Moreover, as Doug Rollins (a young white professional) observed, many of these retirees are "type-A, retired military, corporate CEO's and executives—people who are used to controlling and running things. And, even though they're retired, they still have to have something to control and run." Frequently, as residents noted, these energies channel into local charitable work and cultural activities such as community theater groups.

Most of these retirees seek their security in planned and gated communities. Beginning with the initial development of tourism in the county, gated communities, locally called plantations, have increased dramatically. Guarded by private security agents, these plantations remain physically, politically, and socially separate from surrounding areas—each plantation has its own internal security system, often its own utility system, and maintains its own roads, sewers, and grounds. Consequently, residents hesitate to support infrastructural or social improvements for surrounding, external communities.

The contrast between life inside these plantations of affluence and that outside of it disturbs many local whites. "Why don't they [local blacks] want closed gate communities?" Emily Broome (a white business owner) asked, and then answered her own question:

because first of all, no rural people live in them. Second, we know that racism is now economic. And thirdly, we have worked on this island for three hundred years not to put up walls and gates for people, but to keep it open.... You can believe that there's not a lot of communicating going on [between classes] once you get behind those closed gates.

In fact, as the walls and gates go up, local residents become more aware of their relative socioeconomic position within the region. "The gap between the rich and the working people has not been closed," Tony Watson noted; "there's very little middle class here." Local people "are not educated enough to have the professional or management jobs," Angela Holcombe observed, "so therefore they're...paying higher dollars to live here...but they're making less money. So they're never going to make any progress."

In effect, gated plantations remind many local African Americans about stories they had heard and read about earlier plantation life. "As for me," Les Decker noted; "I think it's a feeling of almost going back into slavery. Like they're saying you can't come to the big house tonight." "We need to start from the beginning and create a balance," Tony Watson insisted; "we're going backwards, to the way it used to be," socially and economically. Most black residents, and many local white ones, identify these gated communities as symbols of an increasing socioeconomic rift between hosts and guests.

Compounding this rift is the fact that area residents might live in smaller homes (contrasted with mansions behind the gates). Much more frequently, though, because of the loss of land to escalating property taxes and forced development, local islanders have been forced to relocate to off-island communities. To work for the tourism industry, these former islanders often face hours of commuting. "That's why you see the buses coming in every day" to Hilton Head Island, Angela Holcombe explained; "they really don't have a choice." "People who live here are just having a real hard time making ends meet," she continued; "on that kind of money [typical service-industry wages] you can't pay that kind of amount [up to \$900/month] for rent." Sam Vaughn observed: "You see people leaving their kids at five in the morning and getting home at eight at night to get fourteen hours away from home to get seven hours of pay."

In turn, this absence of parental presence impacts directly on the stability of lower, middle-class family life. For example, Pamela Cobb, a local hotel manager, commented that: "our [African American] mothers get up at five in the morning, drink a cup of coffee, and get on that bus. And sleep to Hilton Head, go to work, come home dead tired, . . . half forget the children and fall into that bed." Robert Ross added that his fast-food workers not only have to leave home hours early in the morning, but then may also face a multiple-hour wait after their shift ends for the bus or carpool ride home. Mentally and physically exhausted, African Americans find it increasingly difficult to maintain a stable family life and work full time as well.

Another factor weakening lower-middle-class family stability is the fact that service-industry jobs offer little incentive for college-educated African Americans seeking a better life. Consequently, John Abbott complained, "So many times [local island] kids graduate from high school or college and there's nothing to keep them here" in Beaufort County; "just how many people gonna get a \$30,000 a year salary out of a what-not store or a barbershop?... You need something in this town to keep our youth here," he concluded.

As parents spend more time away from home and as families are left to survive the best they know how, social problems tend to increase. Despite optimism by some that crime has had a relatively minor impact on the area, others see a significant increase. "Years ago, when I was a boy coming up," Daniel Tatum recalled, "you could take off and go, and stay maybe six months.... When you come back, your house is right there the way you left it." For long-time residents, the contemporary social adjustment to crime is a difficult one to make. "It took her [my mother-in-law] three robberies before she finally let us put locks on the doors to her house," Emma Burch explained.

While informants noted an increase in illegal drug activity, most of the perceived increase in crime occurs against property: thefts and robberies. All residents, both black and white, recognize that this increase of crime must be addressed. While those who live in the gated communities feel relatively protected and insulated from criminal activities, local leaders insist that increasing crime is a problem for *all* residents. "Sooner or later [crime] is gonna hit" and affect all of us, David Jones explained:

My concern is that if they [government and the tourism agencies] don't start pulling these people [who are in the lower socioeconomic groups] into the planning process and the decision-making process, it's those areas outside of those gates that can turn the safety.... People eventually, if they don't care, get hopeless. Then all of those things [drugs, robberies, violent crime] will start creeping into those plantations.

Local citizens recognize the need for solutions to the social problems that accompany increased tourism in Beaufort County. While change due to tourism is inevitable, means to moderate and control the undesirable effects of the tourism industry must be sought. Ultimately, without greater social and economic opportunities for equality, the quality of life for local people will continue to degrade. As social and economic frustration builds, ensuing social problems further erode the quality experience for tourists.

Cultural Transformations

Despite the eroding local ownership of land, black islanders remain strongly attached to the landscape. Many like Daniel Tatum considered themselves to be:

very rich because we have the land...and we can live off the land. We have the water. We can live off the water... We have a much more comfortable life than those in the gated communities because they are always counting their pennies.

Emily Broome, a white store owner, related this attachment to the beautiful rural nature of the undeveloped islands, the "sense of place." Virtually all residents and tourists love the Spanish-moss-draped live oaks along the rural, sandy roads and the wide expanses of marsh grass dotted with herons and threaded by tidal creeks and streams.

Because of this concern for the land and landscape, both black and white local residents desire development that does not destroy the character of the region. Suggested culturally sensitive tourist activities include the opening of historic plantation homes for tours or the placement of bike paths along rural roads. On the other hand, all these historic homes are still occupied, and some owners objected to the parade of tourists which might make them "feel awkward" about their property. Historic homes, however, might also include vernacular architectural examples, for Sylvia Todd noted that many old houses on Daufuskie Island still reflect the African heritage of their builders: a small, square structure with rooms later added on, organized "to catch the breezes."

Of equal cultural significance are local cemeteries. Traditionally, both whites and blacks would be buried (separately) in small family cemeteries on the outer islands. Sylvia Todd explained that African Americans typically buried their dead near the water "because they think that the spirits can get back to Africa easier if they're located on water." Historic cemeteries, she continued, might also contain objects such as plates and bottles "that they might need for their journey."

Unfortunately, since most of these cemeteries had been located near water or on older plantations, many have been absorbed by modern gated communities. Consequently, African Americans must seek permission today to pass through the gates of these plantations to visit departed ancestors. Funerary objects lovingly placed on graves have also been collected over the years as examples of folk art. One development on an outer island had even routed the visitors' path from the boat landing to the tourist bus directly through an old black cemetery to give (mostly white) visitors a "cultural experience." Much to the delight of many local residents, the development has since gone out of business.

Along with an understandable attachment to the land, local African Americans feel a powerful connection to their ethnic heritage, a pride in their ties to Africa as well as to their American ancestors, who struggled through centuries of oppression and relative isolation to create a better future. The Penn Center helps maintain the African-based Gullah heritage of the region. For example, the center's Heritage Days have "brought in lots of business for the islands and for Beaufort," Catherine Feltman observed. "There's a lot of African Americans coming to the South to look into their roots," Carol Kline observed, and entrepreneurs can capital-

ize on that "wonderful culture which we call Gullah. It's not only marketable, but will also help to save a lot of African Americans once they know who they are."

However, Carrie Ellis, a Penn Center associate, noted that there are "many people that come here that don't even know that there is a culture here." Promotion would help, but it must be done cautiously. Daniel Tatum preferred "any type of development that would help the indigenous people retain their culture, even if it means marketing that culture."

Simultaneously, however, locals resent being commodified as exotic "others." Les Decker, for example, appreciated the need for tourists, but would like to see Gullah culture seen as a part of the region, not "like at a circus or someplace." Emily Broome feared "Gullah gawking. I think it is rude to drive around our beautiful rural island and look for Gullah people. We're terrified of Gullah theme parks."

Preserving the area's heritage, though, is preferable to ignoring it. Michael Emerson, a state employee, believed that "Beaufort...is keenly aware of its heritage and is out to preserve that." In contrast, Emerson noted, "Hilton Head doesn't like to look back at its heritage." Pointedly, in the visitors' center museum on Hilton Head Island, only a small room (under revision) portrays African Americans or the Gullah culture. As African Americans became displaced physically from the island, they have become displaced socially and culturally as well.

Controlled tourism may help to rejuvenate or maintain traditional arts and crafts. "There seems to be a desire...to revitalize the agricultural economy here," a Penn Center employee noted. Thus, Penn Center had considered a plan to develop a processing plant to prepare for commercial sale of locally grown foods. On Daufuskie Island, residents had constructed a cooperative, health-inspected kitchen to sell deviled crab cakes, the island's traditional specialty, to tourists from Hilton Head and Savannah during a community festival.

According to Sue Dunbar, the local white community supports numerous artists, who cater especially to the tourists visiting Beaufort. Some of these artists sculpt, others paint, others sketch, and some produce both "legitimate" and "a bit contrived" African art. These paintings of local scenes, Dunbar continued, might help promote the region as people display them in their homes or give them as gifts, certainly telling "other people where we are."

Carrie Ellis believed that visitors preferred to collect arts and crafts while locals "were much more interested in the public market" and the development of sustainable craft production. Daniel Tatum, an African American resident, listed net making, boat building, quilting, and basket weaving as examples of these crafts. Ellis, however, felt that "most of the older people on this island [St. Helena] know how to do these things, but they're just not doing it anymore."

Perhaps the most widely known traditional art form is seagrass basket making, practiced (primarily) by African American women from just north of Charleston southward into Beaufort County and out along the back roads toward the coast (Rosengarten 1986). With roots deep in tradition

from Africa, the craft began as a utilitarian practice but evolved through time to an economically lucrative and aesthetically diversified folk art. On county highways today one sees entrepreneurs sewing baskets from seagrass, palmetto, and pine needles. Displayed on shelves and offered for sale to tourists, the baskets provide much-needed family income and a source of pride to the artists.

To preserve and present crafts such as these, Carrie Ellis noted, the Penn Center has proposed the development of a folk art school where the practitioners can “teach the crafts while they’re still alive.” “What you can do,” Ted Underwood felt, “is train your children to do this and then put on a performance when the tourists come in.” Ultimately, as Underwood observed, cultural preservation occurs “by living it. You have to celebrate the holidays. You have to continue with the language. You have to continue with the foods. There’re real efforts underway to preserve this [Gullah] culture.” The irony, however, is to preserve the privacy of an authentic way of life while simultaneously marketing that same way of life for public viewing and consumption.

Conclusions

Sam Vaughn, a white business owner, echoed a deep concern for the future, shared by many residents:

We’ve got a whole culture...of servitude [on the islands]. A hundred years ago they had plantations. They were owned by white masters.... [African Americans] lived...outside the plantation.... What do we have now? We have a plantation, that’s run by people who’ve moved to the community who want the same kind of services. We have buses that transport people from outlying areas off the plantation to come and do the plantation work.

Insightful African and Euro-American residents recognize the danger in allowing this new “culture of servitude” to develop even more.

After approximately 40 years of active development of tourism facilities and attractions in this county, basic statistical data reveal a reason for concern when comparing African American residents’ standard of living to other Americans. Specifically, the mean per capita income of African Americans in 1989 was \$6,741 versus \$18,878 for whites (South Carolina Division of Research and Statistical Services 1998). Employment statistics suggest that even though only 28 percent of the county is African American, they account for approximately 50 percent of the unemployed in the county. About one in three African American families lives below the poverty level (35% in 1979 and 33.3% in 1989), compared to one in twenty other residents (7.0% in 1979 and 5.2% in 1989). This inequity is still evident in one of the most affluent counties in the state, where tourism revenues and number of visitors have increased over 200 percent between 1970 and 1998 (South Carolina Division of Research and Statistical Services 1998).

To reverse this trend, we propose that property taxes be controlled and infrastructure improved (especially outside the gated plantations); that affordable housing be made available for workers near their workplaces; and that regional schools provide training for mid- and upper-level jobs in the tourism industry. Furthermore, we propose that communities dismantle social and cultural barriers (real and perceived) between gated communities and the local residents, thereby decreasing mistrust and jealousy; that continued and unrestrained access to and protection of culturally significant sites be provided; and that communities develop and promote sustainable enterprises such as family-owned restaurants, tour associations, and craft guilds and farmers markets.

To prevent tourism development from further worsening the disparity between African Americans and the remainder of Beaufort County residents, local political bodies should allow them to access revenues from accommodation taxes and other tourism-dependent taxes to assist in funding African American entrepreneurs. Another suggestion may be to provide a property-tax freeze for lower-income workers to ensure that rising tax rates do not force residents to sell their properties. Additionally, the tourism businesses could be encouraged to provide housing subsidies or perhaps onsite accommodation for low-income workers so they could continue to reside in their home communities. These are just some of the means at the disposal of those in power to ease the disproportionate impact levied on the African American population on the growth in tourist development in the county.

As Pearce, Moscardo, and Ross (1996) suggest for other areas, without such modifications, the ecological and economic impact of tourism and development along South Carolina’s coast will exacerbate class and racial divisions, further erode the social fabric of the islands, increase the psychological frustration and despair of the lower middle class, and commodify existing cultural traditions. On the other hand, with prudent and immediate actions to eliminate the expanding “culture of servitude,” the pleasurable quality of life in this beautiful part of the United States will continue.

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