

GULLAH/GEECHEE

CULTURAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR COMMISSION, INC.

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TRANSCRIPT OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MEETING

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REPORTED BY:

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DATE REPORTED: May 28, 2009

LOCATION: Wilmington, NC

APPEARANCES

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:	MR. EULIS A. WILLIS Vice Chairman, North Carolina
STAFF LIAISON:	MR. MICHAEL ALLEN, Coordinator National Park Service
NORTH CAROLINA	MS. LANA CARTER
COMMISSIONERS:	DR. JOHN H. HALEY DR. DAVID B. FRANK
INVOCATION:	DR. AARON MOORE
PUBLIC SPEAKERS:	
MS. MARY ALICE THATCH	MS. GAIL G. WILSON
MS. JAMILLA HAWKINS	MR. RICHARD BEATTY
MS. LOLA ELLERBY JAMES	MR. THOMAS MASSEY
MR. MARVIN R. GRAHAM	MS. EDNA PERRYMON
MS. MUSETTE STECK	MS. SONDRRA WARD
MS. ERNESTINE KEATON	MS. WILLISTINE McMILLAN
MS. ROXANNE DeVANE	MS. ERNESTINE KEATON
MS. CAROLYN WHITLEY	MS. SONDRRA WARD
MR. EMERSON WHITTED	MS. LEIGHANN WILDER
MR. ANDREW RODRIGUES	MS. LOLA JAMES
MS. BUNNY RODRIGUES	MS. ELIZA HAMES
MS. FELICIA TOOMER	MS. MICHELLE LANIER
BENEDICTION:	DR. AARON MOORE

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The following Public Engagement Meeting of the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission, Inc. was held on the 28th day of May, 2009, beginning at 6:35 P.M. at St. Stephens AME Church, 501 Red Cross Street, Wilmington, North Carolina, and was reported by PETER BROWNE RUFFIN, III, Notary Public and Court Reporter for the Firm of AURELIA RUFFIN & ASSOCIATES, INC.

(1) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Let's try to get started. Good  
(2) evening, everybody. Good evening, everybody. That is a  
(3) little bit better. Anyway, my name is Eulis Willis and I am  
(4) a Gullah/Geechee Commissioner. I am a North Carolina  
(5) Gullah/Geechee Commissioner, okay, and I am involved with  
(6) the group that has asked you folks to come here tonight.

(7) We are trying to solicit some information from you. We  
(8) have gone out and gotten ourselves a corridor. We have  
(9) gotten sanctioned by the President of the United States of  
(10) America. They have started giving us money to spend and now  
(11) we need you to help us and that is why we asked you here  
(12) tonight.

(13) It is my job to government as well as to try to make  
(14) sure that we get this meeting going in some kind of orderly  
(15) fashion and so if I start being the microphone police, then  
(16) you know why I am doing it, okay?

(17) We have a little program outlined for you and I think  
(18) most of you have it. If you do not have one and you need  
(19) one, make sure you ask the ladies in there. Just raise your  
(20) hand and they will get you one for you to take a look at it.

(21) It is just kind of a brief outline and it is not going  
(22) to be about us and it is not going to be about the program.

(23) We have got a brief program outlined but it is going to be

(1) about you and what you will tell us, okay? With that said,  
(2) I will ask Dr. Aaron Moore to come and give us a brief  
(3) invocation. I should have said Elder. I am sorry.

(4) DR. MOORE: It always amuses me when somebody tells me  
(5) to give a brief invocation and this will be brief.

(6) (Invocation delivered)

(7) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Yes, sir, thank you. Let me a  
(8) do a little more homework before I get started. I need to  
(9) introduce some people if I could. As I told you, I was one  
(10) of many and I am one of the North Carolina Commissioners.  
(11) We have four North Carolina Commissioners and I would be out  
(12) of order if you all thought I was standing here trying to do  
(13) this by myself.

(14) So if you would when I call you, would you just stand?  
(15) Doctor John Haley. He is our expert Commissioner. Ms. Lana  
(16) Carter and Dr. David Frank. Dr. Frank will be doing the  
(17) videography for this and, again, I will try to explain a  
(18) little bit of what we are trying to do.

(19) We are trying to get some information together to get  
(20) out to Denver, Colorado, to our management group who is  
(21) going to try to help us develop a management plan so we have  
(22) folks in here doing court reporting. We have a court  
(23) reporter here and that is what -- his job is going to be to

(1) try to make sure he gets the information that we are going  
(2) to present to him so that he can get it in an orderly  
(3) fashion out to the management group, okay, but Dr. Frank  
(4) will also be doing the videography to make sure that we have  
(5) a record of what we are saying and trying to do here so that  
(6) five years from now and you look at me and say, "Well, you  
(7) told me you were going to do this," and I will have a record  
(8) saying that I did not, okay?

(9) All right. Now, we have one other person that I would  
(10) like to introduce to you that is going to come forth to kind  
(11) of give us the background and the purpose. Now, this  
(12) gentleman is the -- he is a National Park Service employee.  
(13) He has been responsible for helping us get this corridor  
(14) information together as well as to do the background work  
(15) and actually he did a lot of the -- I guess there is a big  
(16) word for me. I like to use the word liaison but he did a  
(17) lot of the go-between work that would allow Dr. or Senator -  
(18) - I guess it is House of Representative Clyburn to pass the  
(19) bill so that we could exist. What I would like to bring  
(20) forward to you now would be Michael Allen and he will tell  
(21) you a whole lot of the technical stuff that I would not know  
(22) how to tell you. Michael.

(23) MR. ALLEN: Thank you. Just to let you know, we call

(1) the Vice Chair of the Commission, Mayor Willis -- we call  
(2) him Joe Biden because he is a good Vice President. I want  
(3) to kind of share some things with you about how we got to  
(4) this point in time.

(5) Some of you all may have read about this meeting in the  
(6) newspapers. Some of you all may have received a letter in  
(7) the mail. Some may have gotten an e-mail and some may have  
(8) gotten a phone call asking you all to come and to be a part  
(9) of this endeavor tonight.

(10) I want you to know first of all, as Mayor Willis said,  
(11) that he is a part of the Gullah/Geechee Heritage Corridor  
(12) Commission. I want you to know tonight that across this  
(13) country, there are approximately fifty National Heritage  
(14) areas but the one that you all are sitting in tonight is the  
(15) only one in that system that is dedicated to the African-  
(16) American experience in the context of United States history  
(17) so that is change and because that is the reality, we are  
(18) setting a bar for other cultural groups and organizations  
(19) around the country that would also wish to join this family.

(20) Nearly a decade ago, the National Park Service was  
(21) asked by Congressman James E. Clyburn to begin what we call  
(22) exploring the soul of Gullah/Geechee history and culture.

(23) It was called a Special Resource Study and that was an

(1) attempt that we made in conjunction with you all, the  
(2) public, to ask some very basic questions.

(3) What is Gullah? What is Geechee? What is the history?  
(4) What is the history of it? What are threats? What are  
(5) opportunities? What can the future look like for our  
(6) children and our grandchildren and future generations that  
(7) are unborn to ensure the sustainability of that way of life?

(8) That is all we asked and so we traveled up and down the  
(9) four states, here in North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia  
(10) and Florida asking these very basic questions realizing that  
(11) in the African-American experience, the relationship with  
(12) the U.S. Government sometimes can be tedious.

(13) We understood that but all we asked was for your  
(14) prayers and for your support so as we journeyed along that  
(15) way, you all came out of churches and town hall areas and  
(16) community centers and you began to share with us what you  
(17) felt about the history of Gullah/Geechee people and out of  
(18) that conversation that we had beginning in 2000 and  
(19) continuing to 2005, we were able to pull together a document  
(20) that was publicly on the Internet and in some paper copies  
(21) that shared our journey.

(22) In the context of that document, you all said and you  
(23) gave us a potential possibility that could be utilized to



(1) encapsulate the history but to preserve a way of life. We  
(2) gave a copy of that document to Congressman Clyburn because  
(3) he was the author.

(4) He was so excited with that document and with you all's  
(5) suggestions that he went ahead and gave and introduced in  
(6) 2005, the Gullah/Geechee National Heritage Act and what that  
(7) act -- as it was written by law, it gave a generic boundary  
(8) for the corridor as Mayor Willis says so it is not by  
(9) accident that we are up here in Wilmington.

(10) Because of the context of that bill, it laid out the  
(11) boundary that stretches from Wilmington, North Carolina, all  
(12) the way down to Jacksonville, Florida, and we use this map  
(13) that you see before you here today because we know through  
(14) history, we know through culture and we know through the  
(15) communities that this geographical area represents the  
(16) footprint, the life ways and the history and culture of  
(17) African folk known as Gullah/Geechee.

(18) And so in the context of that legislation, every inch  
(19) of soil stretching from where we are here this afternoon all  
(20) the way down to Jacksonville, Florida, is encompassing the  
(21) Gullah/Geechee National Heritage area. Let me be very clear  
(22) about that. These are the political geographical boundaries  
(23) that was highlighted in the act.

(1) Well, you know how Congress operates. Sometimes it is  
(2) fast; sometimes it is slow. Well, it took a little while  
(3) but eventually the bill was able to get through both houses  
(4) of the United States Congress in 2006 thus establishing the  
(5) Gullah/Geechee National Heritage area.

(6) It also called for the creation of a Commission of  
(7) individuals that would work with me and others in the  
(8) management of this endeavor and so that is why the folks you  
(9) saw standing up stood up, because they are a part of that  
(10) body, but we are here for a third reason tonight.

(11) The third reason in that bill says that within two and  
(12) a half to three years, we are required to place on the  
(13) Secretary of the Interior's desk a management plan which  
(14) will highlight through these conversations we are having  
(15) along the coast what you all would want to see done  
(16) collaboratively in partnerships and relationships to  
(17) continue to extend the history and culture of Gullah/Geechee  
(18) people.

(19) So in some respects, what we are doing here now is more  
(20) in detail than what we did during the Special Resource Study  
(21) time because we only went to targeted areas so given that I  
(22) am responsible for the movement of this ship, I am  
(23) encouraging the Commissioners to ensure that they are having

(1) conversation with as many people as possible from one end to  
(2) the other end so that is why we all are here tonight.

(3) Now, Mayor Willis also mentioned the financial picture.

(4) Let me be clear about the financial picture. The  
(5) legislation says with the passage of the Gullah/Geechee  
(6) National Heritage Act, Congress has the authority to  
(7) appropriate up to a million dollars every year for this  
(8) corridor. I will repeat that. They have the authority.

(9) Let me be very clear.

(10) At this point in time, because I am helping to manage  
(11) the money, that has not happened so do not look in his back  
(12) pocket, his back pocket, her back pocket or his back pocket  
(13) for a million dollars because that is not the reality at  
(14) this point in time.

(15) However, however we journey through this management  
(16) plan time and what goes into that final document will play a  
(17) role in what finances do come to this endeavor. However,  
(18) the legislation says whatever is given to them by Congress  
(19) must be matched in kind or in dollars so to your partners  
(20) out here with historical sites, groups, organizations, state  
(21) agencies, county agencies, town agencies, this is your half.

(22) And so, again, tonight we have an opportunity, one, to  
(23) tell you how we got here; two, to tell you the importance of

(1) why you all are here and three, that we can move forward in  
(2) a journey that will captivate the hearts and the minds of  
(3) those who have pressed their way because what we are doing  
(4) here tonight is history.

(5) In the same manner the court reporter is here, in the  
(6) same manner that Dr. Frank is here, I see both of these  
(7) endeavors as I see what I read in the WPA narratives that  
(8) were done at an economic time similar to where we are now in  
(9) the 1930s to gain information from former slaves about the  
(10) history of our country.

(11) And so that is the task that is before us tonight.  
(12) One, to let you know why we are here; two, to let you know  
(13) that -- to let you know that your voice is important and  
(14) three, that you are part of a chorus, if you will, of other  
(15) voices.

(16) Thus far, we have met in Jacksonville, Florida. We  
(17) have met in Atlantic Beach and Conway, South Carolina,  
(18) Georgetown, South Carolina, McClellandville and tonight you  
(19) are here and for the remainder of this journey, we will be  
(20) hitting other cities and communities heading further down  
(21) south in South Carolina and to Georgia.

(22) And so I just want to be very clear today on the  
(23) importance of why we are here but also to let you know that

(1) the agency, the National Park Service, the agency  
(2) wholeheartedly supports this endeavor in many ways. Not  
(3) only just in my time of being connected with this  
(4) exclusively but in other ways, they are very supportive of  
(5) this and so I have been tasked to share that with you and  
(6) that is the responsibility that we have so all the panels  
(7) that you see here basically call for what I just said to  
(8) you.

(9) About a year or so ago in another gathering, the  
(10) Commission also laid out a vision, a mission and a purpose  
(11) that we would have a road map. On the cards that you have,  
(12) we ask you to evaluate the vision, the mission and the  
(13) purpose and that will be also gathered and put through a  
(14) process so at the end of the day, we will then be able to  
(15) create, as the Mayor said, a management document that will  
(16) reflect the conversations that we have had with people along  
(17) the coast.

(18) So again, I thank you for your attendance. I thank you  
(19) for your support and we look forward to moving further into  
(20) this process after weeks and after months and after years  
(21) progress and you will be able to look back and say, "I was a  
(22) part of the establishment of the Gullah/Geechee National  
(23) Heritage Corridor." Thank you.

(1) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: All right. Moving right along,  
(2) Dr. Haley is going to come and explain briefly a little bit  
(3) about this particular panel over here. This panel kind of  
(4) represents the work that us, the North Carolina  
(5) Commissioners, have done in the area and looking at what  
(6) might or what could possibly be preserved or looked at for  
(7) the Gullah/Geechee Corridor and he will talk about that  
(8) panel for us and then we will move forward.

(9) DR. HALEY: Thank you, Mayor, and I will be brief. As  
(10) part of our work in developing the management plan, each  
(11) group of state commissioners broke out and attempted to plot  
(12) on the map sites that were of potential historical,  
(13) cultural, religious, ethnic or artistic value to the  
(14) Gullah/Geechee community.

(15) What we have done is constructed a skeleton. Hopefully  
(16) tonight, you will put some clothes on that skeleton, some  
(17) meat, some jewelry and sort of flesh it out. Some things  
(18) that we have plotted on the map -- for example, churches.  
(19) We did not do a specific church. We did not do a specific  
(20) denomination. We want you to do it.

(21) As a matter of fact, if you follow Highway 17 all the  
(22) way down and look on the side of the road, you can see  
(23) evidence of Gullah/Geechee people you are from. Well,

(1) Scotts Hill. Let's look at Scotts Hill all the way down to  
(2) Jacksonville right down the sides of the roads and you can  
(3) see them.

(4) We have put in places that are somewhat specific like  
(5) Freeman's Beach and Freeman's Beach might have been of  
(6) historical significance. If I had my way, I would put in  
(7) Harry's Barbershop because, you know, that is where I spent  
(8) a lot of time (inaudible) as a considerable number of Gullah  
(9) people who have had a variety of experiences.

(10) For those who are somewhat reluctant to speak in  
(11) public, you may make your wishes known on the comment cards.  
(12) We want you to add to what we have on the map. We want you  
(13) to challenge what we have put on this map. It might not be  
(14) of any significance to anyone but we also want you to  
(15) consider things like national resources, things that are of  
(16) significance to the Gullah/Geechee people but are in danger  
(17) of development or in danger of environmental disintegration  
(18) so it does not necessarily have to be, you know, a physical  
(19) site.

(20) But one unique thing about the heritage corridor is  
(21) this is a living, breathing cultural heritage corridor and  
(22) we do not want people running through, "Hey, have you seen  
(23) any Gullah? Have you seen any Geechee?" We want you to be

(1) able, you know, to see some evidence of their living, some  
(2) evidence of their past existence and we also want them not  
(3) to be as they have been in North Carolina for so long;  
(4) hidden in plain sight. Thank you very much.

(5) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: I told you those folks could  
(6) explain it a lot better than I could. I have planted a  
(7) couple of seeds. Before I ask you to come forward, I  
(8) planted a couple of seeds out here and I am going to ask one  
(9) of those to come forward and I have asked Ms. Thatch of the  
(10) Wilmington Journal to come and give us about -- give us a  
(11) few minutes on what she would like to see in the corridor  
(12) and some of her thoughts. So if you would, Ms. Thatch,  
(13) would you?

(14) MS. THATCH: Thank you.

(15) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Please say your name and say it  
(16) clearly for him, right, and then -- to make sure he has it  
(17) on the record, okay?

(18) MS. THATCH: Right. My name is Mary Alice Jervay  
(19) Thatch and I am the Editor and Publisher of the Wilmington  
(20) Journal and a descendent of the Gullah/Geechee people. My  
(21) great grandfather was a runaway slave from the Manigalt rice  
(22) plantation. He ran away and fought in the war.

(23) Once the war was over, he returned to South Carolina.



(1) He became the auditor for the City of Charleston. He served  
(2) in the South Carolina House, he served in the South Carolina  
(3) Senate and he served as Vice President of the Republican  
(4) party. Of course, at that time, that was the party of  
(5) Abraham Lincoln and not Jesse Helms.

(6) So I feel very proud of my heritage. My grandfather  
(7) finished at Avery Institute in Charleston and he went on to  
(8) Clapton and eventually moved to North Carolina. He first  
(9) moved to a little town in Columbus County called Elbow,  
(10) North Carolina, where he was the Postmaster and operated the  
(11) General Store.

(12) He met my grandmother there who graduated from  
(13) Williston. Not Williston; Gregory. Gregory North Institute  
(14) in 1892. She left Wilmington to go to Columbus County to  
(15) teach in the Spaulding group schools and she taught in  
(16) schools that had no (inaudible) and that is where my  
(17) grandparents met and eventually came to Wilmington and my  
(18) grandfather founded the Cape Fear Journal.

(19) So I am very, very proud of my Gullah/Geechee roots and  
(20) I want to see this project work. I want to see it work for  
(21) my people. That is my main concern. What I have put  
(22) together along with Beverly Smalls is a listing or -- we  
(23) have worked with some other folk to find out what the

(1) community wants; basically what the African-American  
(2) community wants out of this. This should be our project.

(3) We first want to see a repository here in Wilmington.  
(4) Presently, we are using the church here as a repository but  
(5) we would like to expand beyond that. There are all kinds of  
(6) possibilities there. One is -- Shaw University on Front  
(7) Street has all the space for us to have that repository.

(8) Presently, Joe Bell who is a Wilmington native is head  
(9) of the transition team at Shaw University which means that  
(10) he right now is first in command. He grew up on the north  
(11) side of town and has a deep love for Wilmington so he has  
(12) signed off on Shaw being used.

(13) I am willing at the Wilmington Journal to allow  
(14) documents and that kind of thing be stored there so we want  
(15) to see that repository in the African-American community.  
(16) We do not want it any other place but in the African-  
(17) American community. It belongs to us.

(18) And some of the groups that we have worked with who  
(19) have helped with these recommendations have been the  
(20) African-American Historical Society, the RS & TC Jervay  
(21) Foundation, the Gullah/Geechee Congress, Taylor Homes  
(22) residents, Hillcrest residents and other church and  
(23) community groups. Hold on a second.

(1) And the purpose of this repository would be to collect  
(2) and preserve originals and photocopies of historical  
(3) documents, manuscripts, family histories, images, photos,  
(4) books and audio-visuals that interpret the history and  
(5) culture of African-Americans in the Lower Cape Fear regions  
(6) of North Carolina past and present that link to Gullah  
(7) people with special emphasis on oral history collection and  
(8) transcription from individuals born in 1935 and older.

(9) And I would just like to stop for a minute. I know you  
(10) told me only five minutes but I guess I can stop for a  
(11) minute on this oral history thing. So often when we try to  
(12) collect oral history in our community, we never really get  
(13) the full story because oftentimes the person who goes out  
(14) looking for the story does not look like us and we do not  
(15) open up and tell that story and we want to get -- we want to  
(16) get the full story.

(17) We want to get something that is authentic and we just  
(18) had a study done recently about 1898. There were many flaws  
(19) in that study; flaws within that study because our community  
(20) did not want to share our stories. We would rather share  
(21) our stories with each other and let other people read them  
(22) after we write them. I just wanted to make that point.

(23) Another purpose of the repository would be to provide

(1) supplemental historical and sociological researches --  
(2) resources; I am sorry -- for schools and regional community  
(3) agencies and organizations on request.

(4) The second recommendation is to follow up the 1983  
(5) North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources exhibit and  
(6) programs; The Negro Main Street Wilmington In Retrospect  
(7) with Project Director, Historian and Author, Flora Hatley of  
(8) Raleigh. She is with St. Augustine College which is, as we  
(9) all know, an HBCU so once again, we are making a  
(10) recommendation that we look at what we have done in our  
(11) community.

(12) In conjunction, we would like to take a look at the  
(13) endangered historical sites of significance to Gullah people  
(14) and do an inventory of these sites and suggestions given to  
(15) the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Offices for  
(16) future applications and recognition and then they be placed  
(17) on the National Register of Historic Places and we want  
(18) those to be sites that are, as I said, of significance to  
(19) Gullah people.

(20) We are not -- and I hope I am not offending anybody but  
(21) we are not talking about rice plantations. We are not  
(22) talking about slave quarters. We are talking about things  
(23) that we built after we got our freedom, not things that we

(1) built for free before we got our freedom.

(2) Let's see. Develop regional riding and walking tours  
(3) linked to Gullah descendants' properties and cultural  
(4) accomplishments. You can tell I cannot read here. I am  
(5) sorry. Number three: Intercity college students from Shaw  
(6) University, Cape Fear Community College, Cape Fear Community  
(7) College Cosmetology School and others to assist with oral  
(8) history.

(9) So we want to involve our African-American students  
(10) with collecting that oral history and they would be involved  
(11) in those tours explaining the Gullah/Geechee Heritage  
(12) Corridor and, of course, they would be learning about some  
(13) of their ancestors' experiences that they do not necessarily  
(14) know about right now.

(15) When possible, provide grants, funded stipends to  
(16) trained community interviewers and interviewees with  
(17) matching funds provided through volunteer transcriptionists  
(18) and videograph of -- is that the way you pronounce that?  
(19) Videographer's services, okay.

(20) Number four: Conduct primary and secondary research  
(21) and publish scholarly works about Gullah/Geechee people and  
(22) their descendants in the Cape Fear region. Previously  
(23) studied and written about plantation slave sites, labor

(1) needs and basic cultural traditions will be promoted.

(2) We intend to develop a community speakers bureau and a  
(3) concert program, CDs, that appropriately link to the  
(4) proposed corridor's ten-year plan and beyond. The series  
(5) includes topics from culinary resources to gardening to the  
(6) arts. We will work with or network with attorneys and Mrs.  
(7) Andrew Rodrigues -- Bunny is what we call her -- of  
(8) Georgetown, South Carolina, to develop and promote consumer  
(9) products for tourist trade and local needs. They previously  
(10) presented an excellent program at Cape Fear Community  
(11) College.

(12) And number five: Provide public and private schools as  
(13) well as home school operators with curricular and  
(14) extracurricular multi-disciplinary activities linked to  
(15) Gullah people, their descendants, the historic community  
(16) sites and consumer product development methods. I am having  
(17) a little problem with reading this writing. I am sorry.  
(18) And consumer product development, a special focus on  
(19) introducing Gullah people.

(20) Oh, okay, I see what this is. What we are proposing  
(21) here is that our high school seniors be involved. If there  
(22) are community projects that they have to do when they are  
(23) seniors, that they be involved in projects that deal with

(1) the Gullah/Geechee people and I think I have covered it all.

(2) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: I think you have.

(3) MS. THATCH: Thank you.

(4) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: I have got one more seed.

(5) Jamilla. Your name clearly.

(6) MS. HAWKINS: Good evening. I am very honored and

(7) humble to be a part of this evening and I am also very proud

(8) of my heritage and just very interested to learn...

(9) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Your name; your name.

(10) MS. HAWKINS: ...so much more. My name is Jamilla

(11) Hawkins and I am from Riegelwood, North Carolina, and I just

(12) graduated from North Carolina Central University just two

(13) weeks ago. For the past two years, I have worked in rural

(14) communities across the south with an organization called the

(15) Southern Rural Development Initiative and through the work

(16) that I did with the Southern Rural Development Initiative, I

(17) was able to travel to Georgia and South Carolina and learn a

(18) lot about Gullah/Geechee heritage.

(19) And currently, I am working with the North Carolina

(20) African-American Heritage Commission. I am doing some

(21) consulting work for them helping them to figure out all of

(22) the African-American heritage resources that are in the

(23) State of North Carolina.

(1) And I also do videography training and I am very  
(2) interested in doing youth training for our youth. I am very  
(3) excited to be a part of this meeting and offering up  
(4) suggestions of what I would like to see the Commissioners  
(5) take a closer look at during their planning process.

(6) As a former high school teacher, I am very interested  
(7) in engaging the youth in this work. There is so much  
(8) history and tradition to be gathered from the elders in our  
(9) communities, from black business owners, from the churches  
(10) and so in the past, I have taught youth in Princefield,  
(11) North Carolina, how to use the art of visual storytelling to  
(12) get your voice out and create digital videos of their  
(13) communities and so just teaching the youth how to use media,  
(14) video cameras, recorders, you could have them go out and  
(15) collect oral history.

(16) And then another suggestion that I have is just  
(17) expanding the boundaries of the corridor in North Carolina  
(18) to include more of the counties of Columbus County, because  
(19) I am from Columbus County, Bladen County and other counties  
(20) that are not currently in the corridor but there is a lot of  
(21) history that can be gathered on Gullah culture that these  
(22) counties do have in them.

(23) And then just to continue listening to the voices of



(1) the people in the community, listening to their needs,  
(2) desires and figuring out how this Commission can facilitate  
(3) the process of bringing and nurturing the economic  
(4) development that is out there and cultural awareness for the  
(5) people in this state. That is all.

(6) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Okay. Now it is your turn. If  
(7) you would, the rule. The rule is there is no rule. Please  
(8) come up and state your name clearly. Tell us briefly what  
(9) you would like to see in the corridor or if you have got  
(10) something that you want to complain about or whatever, come  
(11) up and do that as well.

(12) We want to hear from you. We are trying to gather this  
(13) information and we need to get up and develop a management  
(14) plan and unless you tell us what you want or what you want  
(15) to see, then we will not know. Now, you can come on up one  
(16) at a time. Please, if you can, you know, time is -- we have  
(17) got until eight-thirty so, okay, come on.

(18) MS. ELLERBY JAMES: First, good evening to everybody.  
(19) I am very proud...

(20) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Name, name, name.

(21) MS. ELLERBY JAMES: My name is Lola Belinda Sampson-  
(22) Franks Ellerby James. That is a lot of names.

(23) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Say it again. Make sure he got

(1) it all. He is trying to get it all.

(2) MS. ELLERBY JAMES: Lola Belinda Sampson-Franks Ellerby  
(3) James. That is my legal name. And the reason I love this  
(4) Gullah/Geechee project is because it is a combination of my  
(5) whole entire life. I was born on Greenville Loop Road and  
(6) we had a seafood business and a shoe repair business and  
(7) most of the people in here are related to me. After talking  
(8) to many of the people here, we all have something in common.  
(9) We are all cousins by blood and by heart.

(10) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Put the microphone a little  
(11) closer to you.

(12) MS. ELLERBY JAMES: And so we are cousins. Wilmington  
(13) is a cosmo of relatives that some do not know that they are  
(14) relatives and not only blacks but whites are a part of our  
(15) blood, okay. I have -- my family was free born. They were  
(16) not slaves, okay.

(17) That is how you got Sampson County, okay, and my great  
(18) grandmother, she was Scottish and so I had a Scottish  
(19) heritage, I had an African-American heritage and I also had  
(20) the Gullah/Geechee in that we practiced Gullah/Geechee ways.  
(21) We fished and we had all of the baskets. We made baskets.

(22) My grandfather made hammocks out of rope and all kinds  
(23) of things, too much for me to even go into, but I can tell

(1) you this: There is a rich heritage in this town that you  
(2) will not believe and if you go to Scotts Hill area, you will  
(3) see the Greens and the McIntyres and the Simmons and the  
(4) Haskins. All of them are cousins, distant cousins, so that  
(5) is one group.

(6) Then if you go back towards Clinton, you get the  
(7) Sampsons and you get a whole other thing going that way. If  
(8) you go across the river, you get the Davises and the Dysons  
(9) and all of those people are some way related. You get the  
(10) Sagwas, you get the Jervays, you get the Wards and the  
(11) Taylors. All of these people are related.

(12) They are distant cousins whether they want to be or  
(13) they do not want to be. I hate to tell you. The Moores;  
(14) Moore's Battle Creek Ground. My uncle is Leroy Moore and he  
(15) lives on Moore's Road so it is a big history here.

(16) I want to see this project go because in doing this  
(17) project, I found my family. For some, they do not know what  
(18) that means but for me, it means a lot because I was adopted  
(19) as a child by my grandparents. My mother had to go to New  
(20) York for eight years. I felt like I did not have any family  
(21) so for me, this is one big opening and I am telling you, the  
(22) people in Wilmington, the black African-American people in  
(23) Wilmington, they have contributed so much to this town, a

(1) lot that you do not know about.

(2) I would like to see more history books with our history  
(3) in them. When our kids go to school, they learn American  
(4) history, they learn all of this history but Wilmington has a  
(5) deep history that is not in any books that you read and it  
(6) is something you cannot read about.

(7) Now, my great grandmother's maiden name was McElhaney.  
(8) Does that tell you anything? She was originally from  
(9) Edinborough, Scotland. See, I know my history and then I  
(10) was part of another thing, the Mulungian Tribe, which is an  
(11) Indian tribe whose name was changed in 1855 to the Croatan  
(12) Tribe, okay, and what they did was merge the two tribes so  
(13) it is something you will not believe. It is another roots  
(14) when you start dealing with all of the people in this town,  
(15) okay, and so for me, it is the love of everybody, inclusive  
(16) everybody, okay.

(17) One of the things that really bothers me is that we  
(18) divide so much until we divide, divide, and we have light  
(19) skin blacks that do not want to deal with the light skin or  
(20) with the dark skin blacks and dark skin blacks do not want  
(21) to deal with the light skin blacks. That is division, okay.  
(22) Whites do not want to deal with blacks, blacks do not want  
(23) to deal with whites. Cut it out.

(1) We are a human race and I am so thankful for Barack  
(2) Obama because he is diverse and I am diverse; very diverse.  
(3) I love Gullah/Geechee. I love South Carolina. As a child,  
(4) I traveled to South Carolina and saw the rice fields and  
(5) there were fish and shrimp in those areas.

(6) And here is one more thing: I want to recognize our  
(7) Civil War black soldiers, okay, because we did fight in the  
(8) Civil War on both sides, okay, so that is part of our  
(9) history that is not included, okay.

(10) As a matter of fact, my grandfather, the one that  
(11) adopted me, is buried behind Zion Chapel, AME Zion Church,  
(12) on Greenville Loop Road. He was a black Confederate  
(13) soldier, a spy, and he is buried behind that church that he  
(14) and his father built and there are so many stories and I am  
(15) not going to take up all of your time because somebody else  
(16) wants to say something.

(17) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: All right. Somebody else? Come  
(18) on.

(19) COURT REPORTER: Your name, sir. Your name.

(20) MR. GRAHAM: My name is Marvin R. Graham.

(21) COURT REPORTER: Graham. Thank you.

(22) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: G-r-a-h-a-m.

(23) MR. GRAHAM: G-r-a-h-a-m. How are we doing today? It  
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(1) is a beautiful day. I am going to start you off with some  
(2) history. First of all, I am from the Old Town Plantation.  
(3) A lot of us might not know what Old Town means. A shrimping  
(4) town; Brunswick County. That is the frontier. It was the  
(5) first county in North Carolina.

(6) Clarenton County, 1664. A European named John Drissell  
(7) sailed from Barbados and he came at the mouth of the Town  
(8) Creek. They also had slaves which I am aboriginally a  
(9) descendant from that area. I would like to introduce  
(10) Reverend Moore. This is his playground too. He is ninety-  
(11) one years old. His grandfather and nine more black men  
(12) bought 1,000 acres which is located right here. We have a  
(13) 300 and some year old cemetery down there and right today,  
(14) we cannot get to it.

(15) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Why?

(16) MR. GRAHAM: Where there is no justice...

(17) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Right.

(18) MR. GRAHAM: ...there will never be no peace.

(19) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That is right.

(20) MR. GRAHAM: Me, personally, I consider myself an  
(21) architect and an engineer; a farmer. I grow watermelon,  
(22) cucumber. I am trying to do it better. I am trying to take  
(23) the pesticides and insecticides. I am calling it organic...

(1) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Okay.

(2) MR. GRAHAM: ...because we got to eat to live.

(3) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Exactly.

(4) MR. GRAHAM: It is not the food that we eat that makes

(5) us fat and makes us sick. It is what is in the food that

(6) makes us fat and sick. If God made it, it is good to eat.

(7) Also, when we talk about the plantation, it was known as a

(8) plantation all along here. Old Town Plantation, which is

(9) Old Charles. Like I am referring you back to Old Charles,

(10) 1664.

(11) The Europeans and the Africans and the Indians sat.

(12) The Supponos; Supponos. The Supponos could be Tuscaroras

(13) but the Supponos -- my father is a direct descendent from

(14) the Indians in East Arcadia. He told us that his forefather

(15) was standing on the west bank of the Cape Fear River when

(16) the European came ashore. Now, tell me that is not history.

(17) That is beautiful because if you do not know where you came

(18) from, you do not know where you are going.

(19) I am a builder. Look up. Go to Charleston, go to

(20) Savannah or go to Wilmington to the historic district.

(21) Guess who built the buildings; them beautiful buildings?

(22) Our forefathers that could not even read or write. That was

(23) a disservice but when God is for you, the Devil cannot be

(1) against you. We used to use -- they used string lines as my  
(2) father said; angles and cuts. It is beautiful. Also, I  
(3) want to mention to you about Sunny Point. It is the largest  
(4) ammunition depot on the east coast. It was a plantation  
(5) they called Marsh Springs.

(6) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That is right.

(7) MR. GRAHAM: Our forefathers lived all along there...

(8) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: That is right.

(9) MR. GRAHAM: ...but the U.S. Government came in and  
(10) removed our forefathers but leased the land from Sprunt for  
(11) a dollar a year for 100 years. Show me the justice. We got  
(12) a historic museum that (inaudible). It is called Moore's  
(13) Chapel; AME Zion. That is his grandfather.

(14) REVEREND MOORE: Great.

(15) MR. GRAHAM: Great grandfather, 1874, and it is still  
(16) standing.

(17) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: By free men.

(18) MR. GRAHAM: By free men. Like I say, this is the  
(19) man's, Reverend Moore's playground. You have got sawmills  
(20) that still exist today, pitch, tar, turpentine. That was our  
(21) thing. That is true history. (Inaudible) The European and  
(22) then later, it was the rice plantations. We had a developer  
(23) come in, stole our bell out of our church, cut a hole in the



(1) floor and gutted it out and said he owned our historic  
(2) jewel.

(3) The Oleander Company. He said he owned all the land  
(4) around the church but he does not own the church per se.  
(5) This was ten years ago today. We stood up and told him to  
(6) leave our church alone. I boarded it up and that is our  
(7) jewel, our future museum, on this little farm.

(8) The Gullah/Geechee Corridor, this is the frontier. Our  
(9) forefathers was the pioneers. Yes, I think it is a great  
(10) day. It is a great day when truth comes to the forefront.  
(11) When God is for you, the Devil cannot be against you. You  
(12) can have this body but you cannot have this soul. The truth  
(13) will set you free.

(14) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Thank you.

(15) MS. STECK: Can I make a P.S. on him; a P.S. on his  
(16) follow-up question?

(17) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Yes. Can I give her a P.S.?

(18) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah, sure.

(19) MS. STECK: Okay. Just one thing. I just -- I wish I  
(20) had some Gullah.

(21) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: State your name.

(22) MS. STECK: My name is Musette Steck, M-u-s-e-t-t-e;

(23) Steck, S-t-e-c-k. We think this church is safe because the

(1) Wilmington Historic Foundation let the Southport Historical  
(2) Society put it on the most endangered list. There was a  
(3) picture of it in the paper and those developers know that is  
(4) there and we know how close they are trying to come to us.

(5) Like Marvin -- Marvin Smith of Southport got a Deed  
(6) that was originally given to the church by a black family  
(7) who had land out there and they deeded it to the church and  
(8) we have got everything but the funny thing is that Deed is  
(9) not in the courthouse but Marvin has got it. Marvin got it  
(10) and gave it to me so now we have copies and we just say let  
(11) them come because we are going to get them.

(12) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: All right.

(13) MS. KEATON: Thank you. Good evening, everybody. My  
(14) name is Ernestine Keaton and...

(15) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Ernestine Keaton.

(16) MS. KEATON: Ernestine Keaton and I am from Riegelwood,  
(17) a/k/a East Arcadia, which is in Columbus County, and I am  
(18) here with my sister, Cecile Bryant. I am a historian and a  
(19) writer and she is the researcher and we started doing  
(20) research on our family history back in '95 and it was so  
(21) interesting that we just expanded it to the community and  
(22) what we found was that we were in a place that had been  
(23) settled from the time that the Moores came from Goose Creek

(1) in South Carolina.

(2) There was Maurice Moore who was down in Brunswick  
(3) County and his brother, Nathaniel Moore, got 6,000 acres  
(4) that went from say, I guess, Northwest all the way to past  
(5) East Arcadia. That was Columbus and -- well, Brunswick and  
(6) Bladen County. Columbus County was created in 1808 from  
(7) Brunswick and Bladen.

(8) But anyhow, when Eulis told me about Gullah/Geechee,  
(9) the Gullah/Geechee project, Gullah/Geechee was not  
(10) necessarily new to me but I did not think it involved me. I  
(11) had watched something on TV some years ago about translating  
(12) the Gullah/Geechee language, you know, in a Bible and it was  
(13) just so interesting.

(14) They had a documentary on television and the people,  
(15) you know, in speaking and listening to them speak, they  
(16) sounded like the West Indies and I figured that the people,  
(17) the West Indians, and the people that I knew from South  
(18) Carolina had just about the same experience because the  
(19) people in the West Indies were isolated on islands so it was  
(20) the same thing for the Gullah/Geechee people.

(21) Now, I still even though, you know, I was -- you know,  
(22) I heard about the new corridor and everything. I am  
(23) wondering now how -- how can you just, you know, say these

(1) people here are Gullah/Geechee when the Gullah/Geechee -- I  
(2) think the pure -- you are looking at pure Gullah/Geechee  
(3) from the original corridor or whatever; the coast of, you  
(4) know, Sea Islands, Georgia, Florida, South Carolina.

(5) But when you think about it, the people in say like  
(6) Navassa, they talk to me. They talk like Gullah/Geechee.  
(7) There is people out near Lake Waccamaw, Hallsboro,  
(8) Cherrytown. They talk like Gullah/Geechee. There is people  
(9) over in Currie. They talk like Gullah/Geechee.

(10) Okay. Now, you talk about food; the food. We eat rice  
(11) every day. People in Tennessee, you know, they come to  
(12) North Carolina and they say, "Do you all eat rice every  
(13) day?" "Yeah, we eat rice every day." And we do not  
(14) necessarily have gumbo but we have okra, butter beans, corn  
(15) all cooked together.

(16) We do not -- and things like -- okay. Wash pot  
(17) cooking. We cook chicken and rice in the pot. I think -- I  
(18) know it comes from the slavery experience which is to put  
(19) everything -- to put everything in a pot, you know, and if  
(20) you live near the ocean, you throw some shrimp in there and  
(21) some crab in there.

(22) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Frog legs.

(23) MS. KEATON: Yeah, whatever you got. You know, you got

(1) some beans in there, some peas in there and everything.  
(2) Okay, now. If we are the descendants of the first Africans  
(3) to come from Charleston when Maurice Moore, the Mosleys, the  
(4) Swains, the Porters, the Graingers, the Daniels -- when they  
(5) all came, they came -- they brought slaves with them and, of  
(6) course, they were not all isolated where you could get a  
(7) distinct Gullah/Geechee culture.

(8) What you got was people who settled other places and  
(9) they had that core, that African culture, which is things  
(10) like I was just talking about, okra and different foods,  
(11) sweeping the yard. There is a lot of things that make the  
(12) Gullah/Geechee experience a bit, you know, broader. It is  
(13) not as pure as South Carolina but just as much African and  
(14) where we were.

(15) I think that is what Gullah/Geechee is; African people  
(16) being together where they are and creating -- creating a new  
(17) culture that is rooted in their African experience. Now, I  
(18) am from East Arcadia. We have got -- we have Croatian  
(19) people there; the Grahams, the Blakes, the Boyds, the  
(20) Lacewells, but we also had slaves and my -- one side of my  
(21) family comes from the Lloyd Plantation. You all might have  
(22) seen the stuff that I have written in, you know, the Star  
(23) News covering the Lloyd Plantation slave cemetery.

(1) Now, every plantation along the Cape Fear River had a  
(2) cemetery; a black slave cemetery. Every one of you have  
(3) ancestors that came off of a plantation. There is a grave  
(4) somewhere for ancestors. I was lucky enough between my  
(5) sister Cecile Bryant and I to have Mayor Willis here who  
(6) gave me an 1863 slave schedule from the Lloyd Plantation.  
(7) Well, from the Northwest District of Brunswick County.

(8) So you have all of the plantations and the slaves from  
(9) where we are in Columbus County all the way up through  
(10) Northwest. I do not think -- and Navassa so when you think  
(11) about the Gullah/Geechee, you know, the corridor, we have to  
(12) be a bit more creative and think about how we can all -- we  
(13) have to help -- we have to define ourselves as  
(14) Gullah/Geechee.

(15) We cannot use the same guidelines or the same things  
(16) that the people in South Carolina and Georgia and Sea  
(17) Islands. We have to have our own and when -- after the  
(18) rice, there was the fertilizer factories and that created a  
(19) culture you would not believe and also where we are, we have  
(20) - you know, we are right on the Cape Fear River so we have  
(21) the shad festival and shad fishing.

(22) We have people that make nets so I am here just to have  
(23) a little input. Not to change things, you know, or detour

(1) or anything but I just wanted to make everybody aware of and  
(2) not get too, you know, narrow in your thinking of what  
(3) Gullah/Geechee is and where it is and in Wilmington -- here  
(4) in Wilmington, there are so many people from South Carolina,  
(5) you would not believe.

(6) You meet everybody. Everybody has moved, just about,  
(7) from Wilmington. "Where are you from?" "You know, I was  
(8) born in Wilmington." Where was your mama and daddy born?"  
(9) "Well, my daddy was born in South Carolina." Or there is  
(10) people in Wilmington who have names that suggest they come  
(11) from Pender County.

(12) They come from over in Burgaw, Atkinson, Currie, Kelly,  
(13) Rocky Point, so there is that Cape Fear River and there is  
(14) those plantations and there are those people so I just want  
(15) to tell the Commission that my sister Cecile and I, we have  
(16) over 100 hours of videotape.

(17) We videotaped the elders starting from '95 and so we  
(18) have a lot of stuff that if we go back now and look at it,  
(19) we would look at it -- we have not really done that, looked  
(20) at it through a different eye, you know, where you are  
(21) seeing things and hearing things that did not mean anything  
(22) to you back then but it means something to you now. There  
(23) is something we were -- my sister Cecile was telling me

(1) about Johonaka or something that they -- can anybody...

(2) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Jonkonu.

(3) MS. KEATON: Jonkonu, yes, Christmas time. Well, come  
(4) to find out in East Arcadia, he had (inaudible) and on a  
(5) Saturday, they would play. They would beat the drums and  
(6) they would do a walk-out. They would walk out from East  
(7) Arcadia to Bolton and there was also a time at Christmas  
(8) time when they had tubs and the kids would go along and  
(9) after they would go by each house, they would put something  
(10) in the tub and once they would get to the end of the route,  
(11) then they would take the stuff out.

(12) That came from Carolyn Freeman. I know her very well.  
(13) She is from -- Carolyn is from Hallsboro; Hallsboro. Yeah,  
(14) she grew up in Hallsboro. She lives in Bolton now but she  
(15) talks about her father and that tradition that they had so  
(16) all of these things, you know, that I heard -- you know, a  
(17) lot of these things I heard, I am thinking that we really  
(18) have not did our own collection.

(19) Other people have collected our history and I think we  
(20) have a whole personal view of it. We have a personal view  
(21) because we can put names to it. We can say, "This is what  
(22) my grandma did. This is what my granddaddy did."

(23) We would put in tobacco. You know, we used to put --



(1) my grandma and mama used to can tomatoes and put them in the  
(2) tobacco barn and let them -- you know, instead of putting  
(3) them in the wash pot, she would put them in the tobacco barn  
(4) and while the tobacco was curing, you know, the tomatoes  
(5) would be preserved but all of those little things that have  
(6) people associated with them. That is what we need.

(7) We need people associated with these experiences and it  
(8) is not that -- I know now we have a lot of -- you know, a  
(9) lot of our elders are gone but there are still those who  
(10) listen to their elders. I always liked old people and so  
(11) even -- and my daddy was a storyteller. He used to be  
(12) around old people and he would tell stories about Old Man --  
(13) Old Man Tom Brown and blah, blah, blah. You know, all those  
(14) stories, we listen to those stories.

(15) Well, now, you have people who went to South Carolina  
(16) and collected their history for them. Otherwise, it would  
(17) have -- you would have never even known there was such a  
(18) thing as Gullah/Geechee. They are still a bit ashamed of  
(19) being a Geechee because that is the way it used to be.

(20) You know, if anybody called people in South Carolina a  
(21) Geechee, they might want to fight but now being called a  
(22) Geechee is something you can be proud of because we know it  
(23) is one of the only true, I think, African -- African based

(1) experiences; the things that we say we do. We cannot -- on  
(2) top of our American experience, we put it on top of our  
(3) African based and you can find it. Anywhere you go where  
(4) there is black people, there is Gullah/Geechee. Thank you.

(5) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Wow.

(6) COURT REPORTER: Your name.

(7) MS. DeVANE: R-o-x-a-n-n-e. Last name is DeVane; D-e-  
(8) V-a-n-e.

(9) COURT REPORTER: Thank you.

(10) MS. DeVANE: And mine is a question.

(11) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Sure.

(12) MS. DeVANE: Okay. My question is...

(13) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Give your name. Give your name  
(14) for these folks.

(15) MS. DeVANE: Roxanne DeVane and I am from Pender County  
(16) and I am sort of asking a question that this young sister  
(17) was mentioning and what the sister who was just up here  
(18) mentioned. I understand that these are the areas for the  
(19) corridor but my question then is how about Pender, Columbus  
(20) -- what is the other...

(21) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Bladen.

(22) MS. DeVANE: Bladen. Are they also a part of this?

(23) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Part of it is.

(1) MS. DeVANE: None of Pender is up there.

(2) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Look at Pender. Do you see how

(3) it is...

(4) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Wait a minute. Let Michael

(5) answer that.

(6) MR. ALLEN: I will answer that for you, ma'am.

(7) MS. DeVANE: Well, see, if you are talking Hampstead,

(8) Hampstead is -- in Pender County, you have the east and the

(9) west side. You probably have a great amount of people who

(10) are Gullah/Geechee background. She mentioned Currie and

(11) that is not -- that does not include that area. You are

(12) encompassing Hampstead, the east side of Pender County, not

(13) the west side. Thank you.

(14) MR. ALLEN: Her question is about the inclusion but

(15) also expansion.

(16) MS. DeVANE: Right.

(17) MR. ALLEN: In the legislature where we are now with

(18) you all in the management plan, it says through your

(19) conversation as you just did, if we come along or it is

(20) brought to our attention other places that are suitable and

(21) that could fit into the process, then they can be added so,

(22) again, like Mayor Willis said, if no one never got up and

(23) said that, that would have never been a part of the public

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(1) dialogue, okay, so by you saying that now, now that is in  
(2) the public dialogue and to be transparent about it, south of  
(3) here it says St. John's County.

(4) For those who may not know anything of black history,  
(5) north of St. Augustine in St. John's County is Fort Mosaic  
(6) which was a marooned colony that was by people of African  
(7) descent who traveled -- who traveled from South Carolina not  
(8) by Highway 17 or Interstate 95 or by the Intracoastal  
(9) Waterway but they made themselves and journeyed themselves  
(10) to Fort Mosaic. We realize, just as you pointed out, that  
(11) should be included.

(12) When we were in Florida, that was brought to our table  
(13) and we understand the process so just as they said that in  
(14) Florida about this area, what you say here tonight is in  
(15) that public dialogue of inclusion.

(16) MS. DeVANE: Thank you. And my biggest reason is my  
(17) father is from Sumter, South Carolina, and I know my  
(18) father's people are Geechee.

(19) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

(20) MS. DeVANE: And my grandmother's people in Brunswick  
(21) County, Old Town, that is my mother's side so they are -- my  
(22) father's people left Sumter, South Carolina, and moved here  
(23) to Wilmington, to Currie, Brunswick, so there are -- you

(1) would be surprised. The Geechee experience is not just  
(2) here.

(3) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: She had the mike before but if  
(4) you all be patient, we will try to get to everybody. Come  
(5) on.

(6) MS. WHITLEY: Carolyn Whitley.

(7) COURT REPORTER: Whitley?

(8) MS. WHITLEY: Uh-huh. Good evening, everyone. To take  
(9) it back on what this sister said about Pender County...

(10) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Put the mike up to your mouth.

(11) MS. WHITLEY: Oh, I am sorry, Mr. Mayor. My name is  
(12) Carolyn Whitley. I am from Pender County from the Long  
(13) Creek community. At at least three of these meetings, I had  
(14) mentioned the exclusion of Pender County for the record. I  
(15) cannot get my people out of Pender and New Hanover County.  
(16) Pender was created for political reasons. It was a  
(17) part of New Hanover County until 1885. My grandfather grew  
(18) rice. We swept my grandmother and my great grandmother's  
(19) yard with yard brooms so the Gullah/Geechee experience is  
(20) wide, it is broad and as Ernestine explained, we are people  
(21) who adapt to where we are so that our experience might not  
(22) be exactly as people who were enslaved on this -- on Sea  
(23) Islands.

(1) We are unique to where we are but that historical  
(2) African memory is passed down generationally; always has  
(3) been. All of us have had grandmothers, grandfathers, who  
(4) told stories of how it was in the old country or in the old  
(5) home place or wherever. We have that.

(6) It is as valid as any research that anyone outside of  
(7) our experience has ever compiled. It tells me who I am. It  
(8) places me in my culture and in my family and in a place so  
(9) once again, I do not remember you being at that meeting, the  
(10) last one I attended, Mayor, but I am asking again that  
(11) Pender County be included.

(12) My family is in Currie. They are in Wilmington but we  
(13) cannot leave Pender County out if for no other reason than  
(14) that technically and politically, it would be incorrect.  
(15) Pender County was New Hanover County until 1885. Thank you  
(16) very much.

(17) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Pender just -- something  
(18) happened in Pender recently about a representative or  
(19) something.

(20) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

(21) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: The same (inaudible). Next.

(22) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Circumstances.

(23) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Circumstances. Looking at that,

(1) just one point of clarification. I am asking if you could -  
(2) - well, sometimes the conversations get (inaudible) but we  
(3) want to hear all the conversations out there. If you could,  
(4) kind of limit it maybe to five, seven minutes and kind of  
(5) give us an idea of what you want. I love the background  
(6) stuff. It is great but I want to know what you want to see.  
(7) You will be next. Come on.

(8) MR. WHITTED: My name is Emerson Whitted. I live in...

(9) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Emerson Whitted.

(10) MR. WHITTED: ...the northwestern part of New Hanover  
(11) County. Historically, Rock Hill Plantation and Cassidy  
(12) Plantation were located there. I just wanted to say in  
(13) terms of what I would like, I would like for the group to  
(14) come up with some kind of strategy to get persons to create  
(15) some awareness in the fringe part of the county.

(16) You know, I personally because I am sort of a student  
(17) of history make the extra effort to read, go online and find  
(18) out information but for the average person, he is going to  
(19) have to be educated a little different so I would like in  
(20) the future for you to consider getting some dissemination of  
(21) information to the churches and maybe do some promos on the  
(22) radio stations that we listen to.

(23) And secondly, I do not want to lose my train of thought

(1) but I would also like for you to think about, if the funds  
(2) become available, having some persons who would go to these  
(3) various areas outside of the City of Wilmington with a pre-  
(4) dated time and interview persons.

(5) I had a good time today after reading online about  
(6) several things so I quizzed my mother. My mother is eighty-  
(7) eight years old and we talked about language and I even  
(8) talked about many things that I say which, you know, in my  
(9) speech that have roots with this.

(10) Just a little bit of background. I taught history in  
(11) Wilmington for fifteen years and so did my wife and we have  
(12) been little students. We were students of history and there  
(13) is just a lot of information and I was really -- I really  
(14) got excited today about it.

(15) I went online and viewed a lot of things from the  
(16) Charleston site and other things, and I said, "Gee, we  
(17) really have some work to do because sadly, the persons age  
(18) wise are passing on rapidly. They are passing on rapidly so  
(19) you are right on time with this, you know, and hopefully you  
(20) will come up with some strategies to get persons involved.  
(21) Thank you.

(22) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Thank you. Come on and then you  
(23) come. Get right on the front seat and she can come behind



(1) you. How are you doing?

(2) MR. RODRIGUES: My name...

(3) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Your name clearly.

(4) MR. RODRIGUES: My name is Andrew Rodrigues; R-o-d-r-i-  
(5) g-u-e-s. I am also -- my mother's maiden name is Grant and  
(6) she comes from a little town. If you read the sign, it says  
(7) Chin-qua-pin but when you look at it -- when you hear the  
(8) natives, it is Chinq-a-pin.

(9) One of the problems, I think, in this area when you are  
(10) trying to communicate with people that they are, in fact,  
(11) part of the Gullah culture, they do not realize that in many  
(12) cases because they do not speak Gullah. Now, I did not  
(13) realize that I was half Gullah because my wife always said,  
(14) "My people are your people," until she asked my mother who  
(15) was at that time ninety-two years old if my grandfather and  
(16) great grandfather grew rice next to their tobacco farm and  
(17) my mother gave her a history of their growing rice and that  
(18) anointed me as half Gullah.

(19) But the other thing is that the young lady mentioned  
(20) the Moores coming here in the late 1720s. When those Moores  
(21) came, they brought over thousands of enslaved Africans from  
(22) Goose Creek. Goose Creek is in the heart of the Gullah  
(23) culture.

(1) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Some of it.

(2) MR. WHITTED: So that was the beginning. That 1,000 or  
(3) more was more enslaved Africans in North Carolina at that  
(4) time so when you look at that, when you look at these rice  
(5) plantations that are around here, that is where that Gullah  
(6) came from; Gullah/Geechee. Now, we need to clear up a  
(7) misunderstanding. It is not the Sea Islands that is the  
(8) Gullah culture.

(9) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Right.

(10) MR. WHITTED: All right. You see that map here? This  
(11) is the Gullah culture; Gullah land. These little lines down  
(12) here are for Charleston or not Charleston but Port Royal,  
(13) St. Eligius and Beaufort. In 1720 or even 1730 when those  
(14) 1,000 slaves were brought here, there were only fifty-two  
(15) slaves and 145 white folks in that whole area from Beaufort  
(16) up to here.

(17) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Right.

(18) MR. WHITTED: So let's not think that you have got to  
(19) be on some Sea Island to be Gullah or Geechee. Now, there  
(20) is a lot of things that I was going to say but the young  
(21) lady who is doing the history work and whatnot covered so  
(22) much of it that I would feel insecure coming after her but  
(23) we need to get the information out to folks to let them know

(1) that if they are in this area that they are indeed Gullah  
(2) and Geechee and that it is not because you do not speak with  
(3) an accent but you do eat rice seven days a week.

(4) When I was growing up, I never understood why. My mama  
(5) and my father is from the Cape Verde Islands off the coast  
(6) of Senegal in Africa but in my neighborhood, everybody ate  
(7) rice seven days a week and you know in my neighborhood,  
(8) where folks came from in my neighborhood? 30 percent came  
(9) from the Caribbean, three Caribbean islands, 15 percent from  
(10) the Cape Verde Islands and the rest starting up here  
(11) somewhere all the way down to what is now the Gullah/Geechee  
(12) Corridor. That is where my neighborhood was made up from so  
(13) help disseminate the knowledge that folks are in fact Gullah  
(14) and Geechee because of their heritage and not just those  
(15) folks on those islands.

(16) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: You go ahead.

(17) MS. RODRIGUES: Like Mayor said in his own language,  
(18) good seeding...

(19) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Make sure he gets your name.

(20) MS. RODRIGUES: Bunny Rodrigues. I am known as Gullah  
(21) Oman and Oman in the Gullah language means woman and I am  
(22) quite sure most of you know what an Oman is. (Inaudible)

(23) Okay. That was not the first time that someone spoke Gullah

(1) here tonight. I have heard of lot of North Carolina twang.  
(2) You know that 85 percent of the African-Americans from Nova  
(3) Scotia to Florida are descendants of Gullah people.

(4) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yeah.

(5) MS. RODRIGUES: And, you know, I am so proud of these  
(6) people in North Carolina that are speaking up because, you  
(7) know, we let everybody -- because they have divided us and I  
(8) hope that this Gullah Corridor will be like a pot of gumbo  
(9) stew. We have got the okra, we have got the tomato and we  
(10) have got everything that -- you know, we have got a little  
(11) bay leaf in there, the seasoning and the onions and  
(12) everything and, wow, that tasted good and we are cooking it  
(13) up.

(14) All of us are the same and for years, people have said  
(15) that those people on the Sea Islands are Gullah people. The  
(16) people in Charleston are Gullah people but I hope with this  
(17) corridor for the next three years, it will make all of us  
(18) feel as though we are a part of the Gullah culture.

(19) As many other people who have lived along the coastal  
(20) area of South Carolina, there are some Gullah/Geechee but I  
(21) -- you know, when this corridor first started, they had not  
(22) included North Carolina and I would like to say that my good  
(23) friend over there, Sondra Ward, and myself talked to Michael

(1) Allen and said, "Listen, the Gullah Corridor starts in

(2) Jacksonville, North Carolina, to Jacksonville, Florida."

(3) Now, if we are going to do it, we are going to do it

(4) right and at the time, they had only gotten money

(5) appropriated for three states and what we did -- we said,

(6) "We will hold the meetings in Little River, South Carolina."

(7) So the people from Beaufort or the people from Wilmington

(8) could come down to the meeting and they did and I feel so

(9) proud because you are fighting for the same thing that we

(10) are fighting for, recognition, and you do not have to be in

(11) a coastal area.

(12) You can be in South Carolina almost sixty miles from

(13) the coast and sometimes seventy miles and I will hear Gullah

(14) words. You know, we drop the "h" and it is "free" instead

(15) of "three." You know, "swimp" instead of "shrimp." You

(16) know, "sreet" instead of "street." You know, and sometimes

(17) when we are cooking, you know, we are a little -- you know,

(18) we used to always -- there is some people who say turtle

(19) and, you know, some people say cuda. Of course, that is the

(20) Anglo side of you and if you are Gullah person, you say "You

(21) are nothing but a cuda."

(22) But the language is great. We have many things and we

(23) have covered so many things and I do not want to take up a

(1) lot of time but I know that as a Gullah person, you know, we  
(2) believe in my African descendants. We believe in giving  
(3) gifts so I know that -- would you give me my bag, Mike? I  
(4) always give a lot of things to Mike because he has been  
(5) working hard all these years and anytime that I want to, I  
(6) will call him and say, "Mike, that is not right." Am I  
(7) right, Mike?

(8) MR. ALLEN: Yes, ma'am. Yes. I miscount now.

(9) MS. RODRIGUES: I brought some tools and I am going to  
(10) leave these tools with you guys so we can start. Where is  
(11) my newspaper friend?

(12) MS. THATCH: I am right here.

(13) MS. RODRIGUES: Okay. So you find a place, okay?  
(14) These tools were actually made in Africa but these are the  
(15) identical things that we use; that we used when we came  
(16) here, okay, in the process of the rice making. Here is the  
(17) bag. Okay. I know the time is short and that is all I  
(18) wanted to say. Thank you for having asked me. When you  
(19) have a meeting, if I know, I will be here.

(20) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Thank you so much.

(21) MS. TOOMER: Hello. I have no history to give any of  
(22) you.

(23) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Your name; your name, please.

(1) MS. TOOMER: My name is Felicia Toomer.

(2) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Felicia Toomer.

(3) MS. TOOMER: I have no history. I came here for

(4) history.

(5) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Put the mike up to you.

(6) MS. TOOMER: I believe maybe twenty years ago was the

(7) first time I heard the term Geechee. My seventeen-year-old

(8) -- I think he was seventeen at the time -- he was called a

(9) Geechee about anywhere we went in the city and we lived here

(10) in Wilmington and, you know, it kind of got me interested in

(11) the term Geechee, what does that name mean, and I got a

(12) little offended.

(13) Well, no, I got a lot offended because I did not know

(14) what people in the community was suggesting so I had history

(15) that was given to me as far as New Orleans, Texas, Virginia,

(16) South Carolina and North Carolina. Now, my family -- my

(17) father's family is from Richland, South Carolina,

(18) originally. My mother -- my mother's -- your country...

(19) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Gullah country.

(20) MS. TOOMER: Gullah country.

(21) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: You are Geechee.

(22) MS. TOOMER: So you are Geechee, okay; Gullah/Geechee.

(23) My mother's family is from Sumerton, South Carolina, so we

(1) do not have to talk because I think we got some blood going  
(2) through here but, again, I would like to have a lot of  
(3) information so I can pass it on to three of my children who  
(4) are here and it cannot do anything but help us to learn  
(5) about the rest of our culture that we know nothing about and  
(6) all of our culture that we are pressing to learn.

(7) So, you know, sitting here today and having all of this  
(8) information from all of you in this room, I just want to  
(9) tell you thank you because twenty years ago, I heard of it  
(10) and I did not embrace it. I saw it on the news tonight but  
(11) I am ready to welcome and embrace all that I possibly can so  
(12) I can pass it on to my children and so on and so on so thank  
(13) you.

(14) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: I have got time to give them all  
(15) a chance. You will get your turn next. Come on. You come  
(16) up here next and you get in line and then you come on and  
(17) get in line.

(18) MS. WILSON: How is everybody doing? My name is Gail  
(19) Graham Wilson and I was blessed that a sister finally got up  
(20) here and said something. That is my brother Marvin Ray and  
(21) that is Sister Musette and that is Reverend Aaron Moore and  
(22) we are here representing the Old Town -- the Aboriginal Old  
(23) Town Historical Society. How is everybody doing?



(1) It is amazing how we are all connected. My brother  
(2) told me just a few days ago that he came from South Carolina  
(3) and he saw these ladies out there braiding the sweet breads.  
(4) Even my hair, even the braiding of my hair, is a Gullah/  
(5) Geechee art that we have not mentioned tonight so I took a  
(6) tobacco and I sat down and I braided my hair. It took me  
(7) two days to do it but this, as well as eating rice, is part  
(8) of our heritage.

(9) You know, the question was what do we want? What do  
(10) you want? One of the things that I have asked for -- and my  
(11) brother and I, we are constantly talking. I see one of my  
(12) professors from UNCW in the house. What I am looking for is  
(13) more black researchers out in the field.

(14) I heard Miss Mary say that we want to claim this for  
(15) our own. We do not want white Europeans to redefine our  
(16) history to us. We want to be on the front line telling the  
(17) story and rewriting the history books and I know a lot of  
(18) you all in here tonight want to see those history books  
(19) rewritten. We want our history in those history books.  
(20) Another thing we want -- we want restoration of a lot of our  
(21) land that has been right out stolen from our ancestors.

(22) My brother told us earlier that our father told us that  
(23) his father told him that our ancestors, our ancestors, were

(1) standing on the west bank of the Cape Fear River when the  
(2) Europeans came ashore. Now, I do not know about you all but  
(3) I have not read that in any of the history books that I have  
(4) read. I have not read that part of my history in the  
(5) history books. That is a part of our history that needs to  
(6) be told.

(7) Another thing is when they were doing the riot of 1898,  
(8) I was a part of that and one of the questions that I asked  
(9) was why is there a white woman doing this research? Why do  
(10) we not have more of our people, our communities, asking the  
(11) questions so that we can get the real story? So we can get  
(12) the real story.

(13) I want to say this: I did a research -- and I am going  
(14) to make this real quick. I did a research project while I  
(15) was at UNCW on Seabreeze, on Seabreeze, and I am not sure if  
(16) Seabreeze is on here in this corridor.

(17) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: It is in the area.

(18) MS. WILSON: Is it? Well, I did a research project on  
(19) Seabreeze even though I am here representing Brunswick  
(20) County, Old Town, but I did a project -- and I know Miss  
(21) Elizabeth -- on Seabreeze and how Seabreeze lost their land  
(22) and that is a story that needs to be told.

(23) I went in and I talked to a lot of the elders whereas

(1) when we went to Seabreeze, there was a young female  
(2) caucasian lady there. Now, Seabreeze was our playground.  
(3) We partied down in Seabreeze when they had the piers and the  
(4) fish and the shrimp. We partied down there.

(5) Now, when we went to do the research on Seabreeze, we  
(6) had someone that did not look like us redefining Seabreeze  
(7) to us and that was a problem for me but the other thing that  
(8) I wanted to say was that researchers -- I graduated from the  
(9) University of Maryland with a Sociology Degree and I cannot  
(10) find a job for the life of me in North Carolina; for the  
(11) life of me.

(12) And for some reason, it seems that if we, you know, do  
(13) not look a certain way or we do not talk a certain way, then  
(14) we are not going to get the jobs and so these are some of  
(15) the things that I am asking as part of this program as far  
(16) as the Gullah/Geechee program is that -- we have a son in  
(17) the New Hanover County school system and they are doing that  
(18) research project that some of these young kids go back into  
(19) the community, record this history, put it on tapes, put it  
(20) on paper so that we will have a written history and that is  
(21) all I am going to say.

(22) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: You.

(23) MR. BEATTY: Good evening. My name is Richard Beatty.

(1) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Richard Beatty.

(2) MR. BEATTY: Richard Beatty, B-e-a-t-t-y, and my  
(3) community is Cedar Hill which is now part of Navassa. I was  
(4) born and raised in Cedar Hill but I guess my -- both of my  
(5) grandfathers came from Bladen County so I am in the Geechee  
(6) Corridor but I am up here for -- I am not up here for free  
(7) things.

(8) I am up here for two things and the threat is here --  
(9) not threat but the presence here but those are some of the  
(10) words that my father would say. He would say -- he would  
(11) use the word -- he could not say "three." He would say  
(12) "free." That is three.

(13) But there is two things that I would like to see us  
(14) preserve in my little community of Cedar Hill. One is there  
(15) is a church there; an old church. I heard it was moved from  
(16) back in the woods where the cemetery was and the second  
(17) thing is Cedar Hill Cemetery, okay.

(18) There was a church called Rita Chapel, AME Zion Church.  
(19) I am quite sure you know of that church. It was moved from  
(20) out of the woods up to the road there and it is in fairly  
(21) poor condition but I would really like to see it preserved.

(22) The other thing I would like to see is the cemetery  
(23) where the church was moved preserved also. Those are the

(1) two things that I would love to see this project preserve  
(2) and I think it would recognize my community very well.

(3) Thank you.

(4) MR. MASSEY: My name is Thomas Massey.

(5) COURT REPORTER: Thomas Massey?

(6) MR. MASSEY: Massey. I am not Gullah/Geechee. I am a  
(7) European white guy. I do not know if I am really allowed to  
(8) be up here but I think this is a really crucial point that  
(9) is being made and while I completely acknowledge and  
(10) understand the importance of African-Americans retaining  
(11) control over their own history, I would like to point out  
(12) that as the only person who teaches African-American history  
(13) at Cape Fear Community College, my job is to inspire  
(14) African-Americans to teach that history.

(15) So my -- my -- what I would like to see is or what I  
(16) would like from this is to have the tools so that I can more  
(17) effectively teach this history to this community. I do not  
(18) want to waste too much of your time here but just please --  
(19) I know I am white but use me, please.

(20) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: What kind of tools? What kind  
(21) of tools? What kind of tools?

(22) MR. MASSEY: What kind of tools? The tools that I  
(23) would like -- you might be surprised. In my classes, we do

(1) teach about the Wilmington 10. We do teach about 1898. We  
(2) do focus quite closely on looking at American history from a  
(3) specifically African-American perspective.

(4) Dr. John Haley was my professor way back in the day so  
(5) I feel like I have been taught by the best and really what I  
(6) would like is to step up my game on the local stuff. It is  
(7) really quite hard.

(8) I know I am humbled. A lot of you know so much more  
(9) about the local history than I know. I know on the national  
(10) scale. I can put it into an international perspective and I  
(11) can put it in a historical framework that is perhaps more  
(12) meaningful in an academic environment but this is the real  
(13) stuff here.

(14) This is the stuff I -- I want you guys in my classes.  
(15) I want you inspiring my students black and whites alike  
(16) because I came to this country to study Americans. I  
(17) studied American history, not white American history, not  
(18) black American history, not Native American history, all  
(19) American history, and I know that in 2009, we can be  
(20) inclusive and that it is okay for white Americans or white  
(21) Europeans to take an interest in what I think is an  
(22) extremely important aspect of the history of this nation.  
(23) Thank you.

(1) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Now, do you want to be last or  
(2) do you want to go?

(3) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I will go last.

(4) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Okay. You can go right after  
(5) this lady right here.

(6) MS. PERRYMON: I am just going to say a few words.

(7) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Okay.

(8) MS. PERRYMON: My name is Edna Perrymon.

(9) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Talk into the mike.

(10) MS. PERRYMON: My name is Edna Perrymon.

(11) COURT REPORTER: Perrymon?

(12) MS. PERRYMON: Uh-huh.

(13) COURT REPORTER: Thank you.

(14) MS. PERRYMON: I am originally from Carolina. Carolina  
(15) was one big state and it was so large until they made it  
(16) South; South and North. In Georgetown, South Carolina,  
(17) where the slaves came in on the ship, at the town choir --  
(18) the town clock right on Front Street, they were sold all  
(19) over the Carolinas, Virginia, New York, Washington,  
(20) Baltimore; all over.

(21) People came and bought them from Georgetown, South  
(22) Carolina, and Charleston surrounded by water, a seaport  
(23) town. Jacksonville, Florida, Charleston, Wilmington and

(1) Morehead City, all over, and there were supply slaves all  
(2) over not only just in the Carolinas but in Virginia,  
(3) Washington, Baltimore, New York, New Jersey.

(4) They worked. They built this country. The black man  
(5) built the United States. Do not be ashamed because I am not  
(6) a Geechee but more than just come from one country. They  
(7) came from Africa and all over and all over and different  
(8) countries. They would split them because they would know --  
(9) so they would not know each other's language. So they split  
(10) them and they divided them but the black man built the  
(11) United States. That is all I have to say.

(12) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Sondra Ward.

(13) MS. WARD: Good evening. Thank you so much for  
(14) allowing us to be a part of this experience with North  
(15) Carolina. I guess we kind of bombarded our way in.

(16) COURT REPORTER: Your name.

(17) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Sondra Ward.

(18) MS. WARD: Oh, I am so sorry. He said Sondra Ward. I  
(19) am Sondra Ward and I am the Gullah/Geechee Chairperson from  
(20) Atlantic Beach, South Carolina. I guess I have got to say  
(21) that in the 80s when I used to go to Georgetown -- and I met  
(22) a lady who sits here on the front row -- and growing up,  
(23) like you said, Geechee was a deplorable kind of situation



(1) you wanted to be associated with. So was I.

(2) But this lady told me, "Oh, yeah, Sondra, you are  
(3) Geechee." And lo and behold -- and most all the people are  
(4) (inaudible). So then when somebody tells you that story,  
(5) you kind of find that actually it was true and it is true.  
(6) I live in Little River, Little River Township, but I live in  
(7) a community called Brookfield, South Carolina.

(8) But what I want to say is he asked what do we want to  
(9) see here. Most importantly, what I would like to see is  
(10) that the real history be taught and printed because if we do  
(11) print the real history, you do not have to worry about  
(12) talking about black and white because we are going to be all  
(13) over it.

(14) This lady here said that the black man and woman built  
(15) the USA and that is a fact. What we did is still standing.  
(16) I would like to use this as an example. The traffic light  
(17) is something that we see every time we move. There is  
(18) nothing different about that except that you have got the  
(19) turn signals and they are still red, yellow and green.

(20) When we do something, we do it solidly but I would like  
(21) to see that told. I would like to see that printed. I like  
(22) the idea that we will sit down and listen to our elders. We  
(23) will record our elders. I talked to Michelle earlier. She

(1) lost her grandmother earlier and that was a power house of  
(2) knowledge right there and she talked about how they went to  
(3) Atlantic Beach and just loved Atlantic Beach.

(4) Dr. Haley is also a resident of Atlantic Beach. I  
(5) found that out a couple of weeks ago but anyway, as we all  
(6) know, if you were a black person, the only place you could  
(7) socialize was Atlantic Beach, South Carolina, by the bus  
(8) loads; by the car loads. We could have a good time.

(9) And it is interesting. Atlantic Beach was more than  
(10) just a social place that existed but it had economics, it  
(11) had education, it had a spiritual connotation because you  
(12) know what? You go to church on Sunday and after service,  
(13) you load them up and bring them on the beach and you enjoy  
(14) the beach and you go back so the church is actually  
(15) supporting Atlantic Beach.

(16) We have got a history to be told and no time to be  
(17) shameful. We have got some little people that we are  
(18) charged -- we are charged to care for. We have got some old  
(19) people that we are charged to care for and if we do not know  
(20) who we are, we cannot very well do that.

(21) Now, I promised him I would not stay up here forever  
(22) and a day. What I would like to do is invite you all, each  
(23) one of you, to the Atlantic Beach Gullah/Geechee Festival on

(1) August 14th and 15th, 2009. We are going to open up the  
(2) museum and I get real fussed out because I am the Chair and  
(3) this is my Co-Chair and her husband works with us.

(4) But we are going to open up the museum at twelve noon.  
(5) We do everything pretty much at high noon. That is very  
(6) significant for us as African-Americans. Well, the museum  
(7) will be open at twelve noon. We hope like we did last year  
(8) to have our quilting project where they actually do the  
(9) quilting right there but we know -- I know that some of you  
(10) might know but Vermell did a quilt for Michelle Obama. She  
(11) was commissioned to do that and it was a wonderful  
(12) experience.

(13) I tried my best to do a stitch or two but I can only  
(14) say that I picked out the color. The yellow color you see,  
(15) I picked that out. I just kept arranging my schedule but  
(16) there is a lot of things that is going to be going on this  
(17) weekend so -- that weekend so please plan to come. Bring  
(18) them on the buses, bring them in the cars and it is a free  
(19) festival. The only thing that you have to pay for is what  
(20) you consume.

(21) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: The date again?

(22) MS. WARD: The date is August 14th and 15th, 2009,  
(23) Atlantic Beach, South Carolina. It has been a long day

(1) since you heard about Atlantic Beach. It still belongs to  
(2) us.

(3) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: I do not want to be the closer.

(4) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: No, you will not be. We have  
(5) got a couple more things we have got to do but you are  
(6) getting close. Just be patient if you would.

(7) MS. McMILLAN: My name is Willistine McMillan.

(8) COURT REPORTER: Willistine McMillan.

(9) MS. McMILLAN: Yes. I am not going to make it a  
(10) historical event other than to say that across the river as  
(11) we refer to Brunswick County -- in New Hanover County, we  
(12) always say across the river and there is a lot of history  
(13) across the river.

(14) What I would like to see is naming the communities.  
(15) Like you said Riegelwood, we might call it East Arcadia or  
(16) you might say Columbus County and we say East Arcadia or you  
(17) say Leland and we say Phoenix or Cedar Grove or Chapel Grove  
(18) so we have names for these communities and the names of the  
(19) communities become a lot of history of the community.

(20) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Amen.

(21) MS. McMILLAN: So that is what I would like for us to  
(22) do. I would like for you to get those names or someone  
(23) research those names that we have for our communities

(1) because now with all that we have done, we are losing those  
(2) names and those names mean a lot to us. Thank you.

(3) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: I have got a couple things that  
(4) have got to be done and I am going to take them in order.  
(5) Come on. She wants to say -- come on. It has got to be  
(6) official. He has got to hear it and do not -- two minutes.

(7) COURT REPORTER: Give me your name again, please.

(8) MS. KEATON: Yeah. I am Ernestine Keaton.

(9) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Say it loud.

(10) MS. KEATON: Ernestine Keaton and I forgot to say what  
(11) I would like to see. What I would like to see is a heritage  
(12) trail; a Gullah/Geechee Heritage Trail. That could go in  
(13) any direction and whatever is on that trail would be what we  
(14) think is historic about our community. Thank you.

(15) MS. WARD: Sondra Ward. I meant to say that -- as I  
(16) was mentioning, when we started this project like in 2000 or  
(17) so, what we planned -- the whole idea was to tell the story  
(18) from the top of it to the bottom of it making sure that  
(19) those point where the Gullah stories are being told. When  
(20) you get into your car at the top of it, you would be able to  
(21) travel down this corridor and stop anywhere and find out  
(22) something about the Gullah people.

(23) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Do not stay all day now.

(1) MS. WARD: I ain't staying all day. We got to take off  
(2) Myrtle Beach. We got to put (inaudible).

(3) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: We got to take off Myrtle Beach?

(4) MS. WARD: We got to take it off. We got to put  
(5) Georgetown and we got to put some other -- well, I am not  
(6) real certain about this right here but I know that in North  
(7) Carolina, you all need to be satisfied so when you get in  
(8) the car and you drive all the way from Jacksonville, North  
(9) Carolina, to Jacksonville, Florida, you can stop anywhere  
(10) and find out about your history.

(11) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Okay. Florence Warren, would  
(12) you please -- would you please come forward? I have got to  
(13) edify just a little bit. I know you all are tired of me  
(14) edifying but if I understand right, this is probably our  
(15) third time with using this church for the Gullah/Geechee  
(16) Corridor Commission purpose, okay, and I talked to my folks  
(17) and we thought it would probably be appropriate that we make  
(18) sure that the church knew how much we appreciated them  
(19) allowing us to use their building.

(20) It is in the neighborhood. It is convenient to  
(21) everybody. It is a beautiful, beautiful place and they have  
(22) opened their doors up to us. They have let us use their  
(23) mikes, their lights, their whatever else and I want them --

(1) make sure this is part of that public record. I want them  
(2) to know how much we appreciate them and we have done just a  
(3) card, a little honorary, just a little something just to  
(4) kind of let them know how much we appreciate them for  
(5) allowing us to come here. Florence, we appreciate you and  
(6) all that you and your folks do and make sure that they  
(7) realize how much we love them.

(8) MS. WARREN: Sure. Thank you, sir.

(9) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Michael has got to have the  
(10) final word. He is almost like (inaudible).

(11) MR. ALLEN: I just want to publicly thank you all for  
(12) coming out. You can come on.

(13) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Come on.

(14) MR. ALLEN: Because we do not want anyone to say they  
(15) came and...

(16) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: No, that they did not get a  
(17) chance to say anything.

(18) MS. WILDER: Hi. I am Leighann Wilder and I work...

(19) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Say it real clear for him.

(20) MS. WILDER: Leighann, L-e-i-g-h-a-n-n; Wilder, W-i-l-  
(21) d-e-r. I am actually working with the North Carolina Arts  
(22) Council in eastern North Carolina and a lot of counties east  
(23) of 95 and from -- I was -- I did not want to get up here but

(1) I was waiting for somebody else to say it but I look from a  
(2) state arts perspective and from somebody who has worked with  
(3) some of the smaller arts councils in eastern North Carolina.

(4) I would really like to see this Commission concentrate  
(5) at least on -- I know you have some of the cultural aspects  
(6) listed on your map and there was a lot of conversation  
(7) tonight about -- oh, sorry. There was a lot of conversation  
(8) tonight about the Gullah/Geechee food ways as part of your  
(9) culture but I would be interested and I would love to be  
(10) able to take the history and the culture back to my counties  
(11) and help educate some of the people who are there about the  
(12) living art conditions that no doubt the Gullah/Geechee  
(13) brought to this area and how that was changed and morphed  
(14) and influenced regionally not only the southeast but the  
(15) artists in North Carolina and show people in some of our  
(16) communities who, I am sure, are not aware that those living  
(17) art conditions came from the Gullah/Geechee culture so I  
(18) would -- I would like to see you guys concentrate on art as  
(19) well.

(20) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: All right. Come on up.

(21) MS. JAMES: I am a little tired but I just wanted to  
(22) ask -- we have a lot of medical people, black people, that  
(23) are in this area.



(1) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Name.

(2) MS. JAMES: My name is Lola James. I just said that.

(3) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Lola James.

(4) MS. JAMES: We have a lot of medical personnel in this

(5) area, doctors, and I want them recognized. I want to see

(6) some of the lawyers recognized because these doctors did a

(7) lot of work missionary wise. When I say missionary wise,

(8) they were out in the field when nobody else would bother

(9) with black people and so doctors like Doctor Wheeler that

(10) some of you have never heard of was a great eye physician

(11) and then you had Doctor Eaton. You had Doctor Upperman.

(12) Some of these doctors and nurses not only -- there are

(13) great nurses in this area and working with the Red Cross, I

(14) can tell you that we are going to need some of that

(15) knowledge back in our communities especially with swine flu

(16) and because they have the old ways, they are particularly --

(17) Gullah is a part of that. Gullah teaches you how to handle

(18) an outbreak or a disease because you have to do it.

(19) I lived in an area where there was no doctors. There

(20) was no kind of things and we had to use spirit of turpentine

(21) and we had to use asafetida bags if you heard of asafetida

(22) bags and Vicks salve and things like this and you probably

(23) say, "Oh, my God, that is bad," but it was good. The other

(1) thing I want to see -- UNCW. While we are on that subject,  
(2) the land that you have that UNCW is on, it was stole.

(3) UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: (Inaudible comment)

(4) MS. JAMES: That is right. That is right and from  
(5) black families and the Deeds were -- it was just a mess and  
(6) I wanted to note that. I went to UNCW but I am going to  
(7) tell you, I was one of the first blacks there to integrate  
(8) the school and I was very hurt and I never got my B.A.  
(9) because of all the hurt that transpired but there are some  
(10) blacks that should be recognized for that fact, that they  
(11) helped to integrate that school, and the History Department  
(12) ignored a lot of our history right here in this area so you  
(13) can start there by making sure that our history is done  
(14) correctly at your university and our university because we  
(15) pay taxes for that.

(16) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Oh, well. You cannot drop the  
(17) bag and run. I am running late already but we said it was  
(18) public engagement and we was going to let you say what you  
(19) had to say.

(20) MS. HAMES: I am Eliza Hames and I am a member of this  
(21) church, St. Stephens, also. I was not going to get up and  
(22) say anything but I have not heard anything mentioned about  
(23) this church, how the slaves -- I remember my grandparents

(1) would tell me about how they used to have to bring in bricks  
(2) in aprons and help build the church and then the other  
(3) members -- you know, family members did a lot of the cooking  
(4) and they would bring it up for the people, the men, to eat  
(5) and I did not hear, you know, as much said about how this  
(6) place -- if you look around in the church, you will see all  
(7) of this carpentry and all of the carving and they did this  
(8) by hand and what I would like to see happen...

(9) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: The Skil saws.

(10) MS. JAMES: Excuse me?

(11) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Those Skil saws.

(12) MS. JAMES: Oh. What I would like to see happen -- it  
(13) was so interesting to hear about so much about the different  
(14) foods and things that the Geechee people -- and I remember  
(15) hearing that word Geechee when I was growing up. When  
(16) people moved into Wilmington and if they had this accent,  
(17) they were called Geechee and I did not know that much about  
(18) it.

(19) All I knew is that they came from South Carolina but  
(20) perhaps we could come up with a directory, a vocabulary --  
(21) you used some of the terms in here tonight -- so that our  
(22) young people will be familiar with some of those terms that  
(23) were used and so perhaps we could come up with a Geechee

(1) dictionary and that would also be beneficial to the young  
(2) people but that is about it.

(3) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Thank you.

(4) MS. JAMES: Thank you.

(5) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: I need to make one recognition  
(6) before I turn it over to Michael. The way that I got -- the  
(7) way that I got appointed on the Commission was through the  
(8) State Historic Preservation Office and there was a lady that  
(9) was instrumental in making that happen. I still ain't quite  
(10) figured out how we met. I know her because I run my mouth  
(11) too much sometimes.

(12) She is here and she has been working with us right  
(13) through the process and she has been supporting us in anyway  
(14) she can and I will ask her if she has a couple of comments  
(15) that she would like to make at this point. Michelle Lanier.  
(16) Would you just give us a couple of words?

(17) COURT REPORTER: Your name?

(18) MS. LANIER: Michelle Lanier and I work as the liaison  
(19) for the State Historic Preservation Office with the  
(20) Department of Cultural Resources and it is an honor just to  
(21) bear witness to all of this. That is my role here. It is  
(22) to serve, facilitate, bear witness and step in where I am  
(23) needed.

(1)           There is so much wisdom in this room. There are so  
(2) many skills in this room. You all do not need people to  
(3) come in and tell your history for you. You do not need  
(4) people to come in and do the work for you. You just need to  
(5) be supported, prayed for and served and that is what I am  
(6) here to do.

(7)           I heard a lot of criticisms that came about some of the  
(8) things that have happened from the Department of Cultural  
(9) Resources and I was taking notes and taking it in and I  
(10) think it is important for me to remember that. I was raised  
(11) in South Carolina. I grew up in Hilton Head. I grew up  
(12) going to Atlantic Beach. I am a fifth generation descendent  
(13) of Atlantic Beach goers.

(14)           I am literally a progeny of love that bloomed at  
(15) Atlantic Beach. That is on the record. Bunky Halstead and  
(16) Ann Carson met in '86 at Atlantic Beach and those are my  
(17) grandparents and I remember meeting Emory Campbell as a  
(18) child. I remember learning about land law.

(19)           I remember the E.E. Broadwells too and I did my  
(20) Master's thesis at UNC Chapel Hill on the contemporary  
(21) burial traditions of Gullah/Geechee based on oral history  
(22) that I did on St. Helena Island and one of the things that  
(23) was really important to me is that I could bring my faith

(1) into that work and that I could bring service into that work  
(2) and this is that prayer being answered; the fact that I can  
(3) serve this corridor.

(4) If anybody needs my contact information or there are  
(5) questions that you have, I am here again as a servant to  
(6) this process and I am really proud of Jamilla seeing her, a  
(7) home girl come home, and being a part of this work. I feel  
(8) like we have to keep the younger generation coming into this  
(9) work. I am just really full and feeling really blessed  
(10) right now so I am not going to say anymore.

(11) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: Thank you. I would like to look  
(12) at the pictures before I get used to it. I could get loose  
(13) too.

(14) MR. ALLEN: There are two quick comments and then the  
(15) man of God can close (inaudible) when we came in here. I  
(16) want to say, Sondra, thank you. Bunny, thank you, because  
(17) they were open and honest and as our new President says,  
(18) transparent.

(19) When we began this journey, the title of the journey  
(20) was Low Country Gullah/Geechee Site and, yes, North Carolina  
(21) was not in that conversation but through wisdom and through  
(22) counsel and through guidance, we knew that we needed to do  
(23) what was done and do it correctly.

(1) I must acknowledge that tonight I am pleased to hear  
(2) you all open yourself up and share your experience in this  
(3) endeavor. Without me having to talk to you or Mayor Willis  
(4) prompting, you said, "I am Gullah; I am Geechee." You said  
(5) it out of the depth of your own spirit and you should be  
(6) commended for that.

(7) But I encourage you now to become disciples when you  
(8) leave this place because for the ones of you all that are  
(9) sitting out tonight, there may be five or six other people  
(10) that have the same experience but they have not gotten to a  
(11) point to say those words yet so I encourage you when you go  
(12) home to wherever you reside that you tell them that you were  
(13) in a place of like mind people of the same culture, of the  
(14) same background, of the same lineage and guess what? If you  
(15) are Gullah, you are Geechee too. Stand up and be proud of  
(16) that.

(17) From the political side since I am the highest ranking  
(18) federal official in here tonight -- from the political side,  
(19) the eyes of what we do in here or what he records and what  
(20) he records is also being watched by Congressman James E.  
(21) Clyburn, the highest African-American in the United States  
(22) Congress today.

(23) And I can say that very clearly because I converse with

(1) this office daily so they are going to call me tomorrow.  
(2) "What did you all do in Wilmington?" So that is the cross  
(3) that I carry but I do not mind carrying.

(4) On the first of next month, June 1 will be twenty-nine  
(5) years of me working with the National Park Service. When I  
(6) walked in the door in the summer of 1980, I had no idea that  
(7) God would bless me in the manner that I have been blessed  
(8) for the last twenty-nine years to push, to pull, to tug, to  
(9) cajole and to move the agency which I did these years to see  
(10) what you see here today because I knew what our agency was  
(11) all about. This meeting would have been done in another way  
(12) in another building and another process.

(13) These newsletters that you have here -- 6,000 of these  
(14) letters went out in the four states and beyond. We have  
(15) never sent 6,000 newsletters for anything, okay, and so in  
(16) that, I realize that the gift that I have in working with  
(17) you and the Commissioners and seeing this through is the  
(18) times that we are in now today.

(19) The other eyes that are watching over us -- and someone  
(20) alluded to it -- is our First Lady who is of the culture so  
(21) she is proud of her culture. That is why that quilt was  
(22) made. You should be proud of your culture.

(23) And in closing, I just want you to know that we did



(1) write a vision and we made a plan and you can run with it  
(2) and that vision is to recognize and sustain an environment  
(3) that celebrates the legacy and continuing contribution of  
(4) the Gullah/Geechee people to our American heritage.

(5) But we did not stop there because you all scratched the  
(6) surface when you said it nurtures a pride and it facilitates  
(7) an understanding and awareness of the significance of  
(8) Gullah/Geechee history and culture within the Gullah/Geechee  
(9) community.

(10) That is your house. That is your community so our  
(11) first priority is within the house and so again we just  
(12) encourage you as you journey with us in this endeavor that  
(13) we are breaking ground. We are laying a trail and you will  
(14) be able to say that you were a part of it. Thank you and  
(15) God bless you.

(16) COURT REPORTER: Mayor, before he does the benediction,  
(17) will you remind everybody that spoke tonight to come up and  
(18) give me their names again to make sure I have them spelled  
(19) properly for the record? After the benediction, please.

(20) VICE CHAIRMAN WILLIS: The court reporter -- the court  
(21) reporter asked me to make sure that everyone that spoke  
(22) tonight, if they would after the benediction, please stop by  
(23) and make sure he has got your name down properly if you

(1) would; if you could. If you have to form a line, form a  
(2) line. Just make sure you give it to him, okay? I am  
(3) through. I am done. I want to make sure that everyone --  
(4) we have some refreshments in the back. We got refreshments  
(5) in the back and I can promise you it is not Wal-Mart chicken  
(6) so get some refreshments that we have back in the back  
(7) there. I do not know whether there are some folks that are  
(8) sustaining. Elder Moore, would you come and give us the  
(9) benediction?

(10) (Benediction delivered; proceedings  
(11) concluded at 8:45 P.M.)  
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(23)

(1) STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA )

(2) COUNTY OF NEW HANOVER )

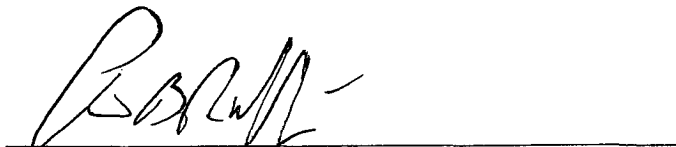
(3) CERTIFICATION

(4) I, PETER BROWNE RUFFIN, III, Notary Public, Court  
(5) Reporter and President of AURELIA RUFFIN & ASSOCIATES, INC.,  
(6) do hereby certify that the foregoing transcript constitutes  
(7) a true and correct record of the Public Engagement Meeting  
(8) of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission,  
(9) Inc., the same having been taken down by me on the date and  
(10) at the place set forth in the record and before those  
(11) persons named therein, and that said proceedings were  
(12) transcribed by MARY HEIDEN;

(13) FURTHER, that the original of this transcript will be  
(14) bound and will be forwarded to Mr. Michael Allen, NPS  
(15) Gullah/Geechee Coordinator, 1214 Middle Street, Sullivan  
(16) Island, South Carolina 29482, and Ms. Mary McVeigh, U.S.  
(17) Department of the Interior, Denver Service Center, Planning  
(18) Division, 12795 West Alameda Parkway, Post Office Box 25287,  
(19) Denver, Colorado 80225.

(20) WITNESS my hand and notarial seal this the 22nd day of  
(21) June, 2009.

(22)



(23)

Notary Public, #19971470080

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