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GULLAH-GEECHEE CULTURAL HERITAGE CORRIDOR:
SOUTH CAROLINA PUBLIC HEARINGS

REPORTED BY: MARY ANN RIDENOUR, RPR, CLR
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I N D E X

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July 7, 2009 - Wesley United Methodist Church -
Johns Island.....221

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(The proceeding commenced at 7:21 P.M.)
COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: My name is Bill
Saunders. And I want to welcome you here at Wesley
United Methodist Church. It has always not been
united. Back in my days, it was just Wesley Church.
We're going to ask the pastor of this church, my
pastor, to open us up with a prayer. Reverend Otis
Scott.

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(Invocation.)

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COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: My job is to welcome
you here tonight. And we're sort of starting it off
the way that things normally happen in this kind of
way: We're starting off late. We don't have any idea
how long we're going to be here. And we don't know
what's going to happen. But the man from the Post and
Courier said, You're not going to be here that long.
Well -- just messing with you.

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Wesley United Methodist Church, or Wesley Church
was actually chartered in 1869. I believe sincerely
that it was started probably about 1866 and it got
chartered in 1869.

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belonged to this church was continually being buried at

2 the plantation graveyards. There are about six
3 graveyards within five miles of this church, that
4 people were being buried, one right across the road,
5 over here at the airport. So about 1933, they started
6 burying people here.

7 And the kind of leadership that came out of this
8 church has just been unbelievable.

9 And I want to just give you even a little bit of
10 background on me. I represent -- I'm Bill Saunders.
11 I'm one of the commissioners. We've got two other
12 commissioners here. We've got Dr. Herman Blake. And
13 he's from Johns Island. We've got Attorney Willie
14 Heyward. And he's from Wadmalaw Island. So the island
15 is fully represented on the, on the Commission.

16 There's so much things that went on, on this
17 island, that have not been -- and Reverend Scott prayed
18 for -- to be preserved. I fight against preservation.
19 I fight for things to go on like it is and don't get
20 destroyed. I fight for that when you preserve it, then
21 you begin to put it in a little bottle or a little
22 place, where people to come see it every now and then.
23 We want the culture of this island to continue to grow.

24 And to that end, I got together with Thomas
25 Legare, who we're going to have to talk to you after a

00223

1 while, about two years ago. Because there was just so
2 much development, so many things going on, on the
3 island, that we felt there must be a way to slow down
4 those developments. And they were trying to put a very
5 large water main almost straight down River Road. And
6 it was done so much for development. So we got
7 together. We fought against that. Thomas and -- we
8 got three people to get elected to the water
9 commission. And they were able to change the kind of
10 pipe that they were going to put on this road.

11 The other thing, about a year and a half ago, we
12 still -- although it's in court, they're trying to
13 build 700 homes, right here, next to this church. And
14 we went before the City of Charleston. And we were
15 able to stop that, although the person that was doing
16 that right now has that in court. And Victor Rawe,
17 he's been elected to County Council. So I don't know
18 what's going to happen as this emerges. But, anyway,
19 those are the kinds of things that is going on.

20 I started working for Thomas Legare's grandfather
21 over 60 years ago. And I started off making good
22 money, a dollar and a quarter a day. And we used to
23 work from what we called "from can till can't," from
24 the time you can see in the morning till you can't see
25 at night, all day. During the summer months, like

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1 this, you put in 14 hours. You know, just -- just --
2 and, Reverend, y'all react to that. But nobody got in
3 trouble. When you work that hard, you don't get in no
4 trouble.

5 Our kids are getting in trouble today. They ain't
6 got nothing to do, you know. So -- so I want you to
7 take a look at even those kinds of stuff, you know.

8 One of the things that I was able to -- within a
9 year or so, I was able to work myself up to the last
10 corn breaker we had. I got up to making two dollars a
11 day. Again, that was a whole, whole lot of money. But
12 back in those times, different from today, my
13 grandmother took seven dollars and 50 cents of that

14 money. You had to take your money home, and didn't
15 spend -- and then, even out of the two fifty, I had to
16 save of some of that, put up some money. Now, my
17 grandchildren, all my children, don't save no money.
18 And they're making a lot, but they don't save no money.
19 And we call it progress.

20 And what I have been trying to do, in working with
21 the Gullah-Geechee Commission and with the people on
22 the island, I'm trying to redefine what is progress.
23 Because the kind of things we've been calling progress,
24 to me, is not progress.

25 So the thing that's important for this

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1 Commission -- and we want to listen to you tonight,
2 hear your input. I started off the meeting tonight,
3 you heard a song that was playing. It was the Moving
4 Star Hall singers. They're members of this church.
5 Two of those ladies are still members of this church,
6 still singing songs on Sundays here at this church.
7 And they've been to the Smithsonian. And we've had
8 here -- Redbook has been here and done research on us.
9 National Geographic has done a lot of work as it
10 relates to the people of this island.

11 So -- and, Bill I guess, or somebody you were
12 talking about the Progressive Club, come up and do
13 that.

14 So what I'm going to do now, I want to introduce
15 the commissioners, Attorney Heyward and Dr. Herman
16 Blake.

17 And, Herman, you want to come up and make your
18 statement?

19 And we're doing this really, really informal
20 tonight. Herman likes to be formal.

21 It ain't going to work tonight, my brother.

22 DR. BLAKE: Thank you, Bill.

23 I learned a long time ago that there are different
24 kinds of formalities, and some of the finest I've
25 experienced here.

00226

1 When I first drove down River Road, it was in
2 1967. And while I was driving down River Road, I saw a
3 gentleman sitting by the side of the road with this big
4 fedora. He always wore a fedora pulled down over one
5 eye. And I knew who it was immediately. It was Esau
6 Jenkins. And I stopped and picked him up, which was
7 the custom. And he was on his way to a meeting here at
8 Wesley Methodist Church. And that was when I started
9 my work here on Johns Island, in 1967, listening to and
10 watching Mr. Esau Jenkins. He was a man of profound
11 wisdom. And I cannot even begin to describe it in
12 terms of the ways in which I see things.

13 I'm a college professor. You may know that I'm a
14 professor at the Medical University of South Carolina.
15 And I approach things very differently.

16 But the first meeting I attended here at Wesley
17 Methodist Church was led by Esau Jenkins. And I came
18 to many meetings and I was always amazed at how wise
19 and how good he was.

20 My brother, William, had a church on Wadmalaw, an
21 AME church. And my uncle, Herbert, I believe at that
22 time, was pastor in Greater St. John, down on Bohicket
23 Road. I learned a lot from them, but I can say that I
24 learned much more from Esau.

25 I met Leon Robinson that night and Herbert

00227

1 Middleton that night. And those warriors are still
2 toiling in the vineyard.

3 This is not a night for me to just wander in my
4 own reflections. But the point I want to make is, in
5 the understanding and the insights of an Esau Jenkins
6 and a Septima Clark and so many others was a profound
7 wisdom that didn't necessarily end up in the textbooks.
8 It didn't get written down. It didn't get categorized
9 into theories. But it was powerfully effective.

10 Let me give just one example. I'm not going to
11 carry on. But I sat and talked with an old lady on
12 this road here, and listened to her tell me about why
13 she wanted to vote. And as she kept talking about why
14 she wanted to get her certificate and vote, as she
15 said, Get my document and vote. As she kept talking
16 about it, I realized she was working with an image in
17 her head that was connected to the residues of the
18 Reconstruction governments in South Carolina, when
19 blacks had a majority in the lower house of the
20 legislature. And since then, we've been able to put
21 together in the memories of people a connection between
22 protest activity in the early fifties and a
23 reconstructionist government. That wisdom and that
24 knowledge and that understanding is what we seek as
25 members of the Gullah-Geechee Commission. Some of

00228

1 those people are now dead and gone, but the
2 understandings are not necessarily gone.

3 There are many things we would like to gather, we
4 would like to hear, and we would like to collect. And
5 the purpose of this meeting tonight is to have input
6 from people who might not otherwise have had the
7 opportunity to be heard and to have their voices
8 recorded in such a manner that they begin to impact
9 what we do. We've been doing this from Wilmington,
10 North Carolina, to Jacksonville, Florida. And I think
11 this is the last of about 20 meetings we've held up and
12 down this corridor. And we've been listening to
13 hundreds of people. So tonight we want to hear from
14 you.

15 Now, before I turn it over to Mr. Hayward, and
16 then we'll hear from Mr. Legare and the others, I just
17 want to take a moment to introduce three special guests
18 that are here because I made a special effort to get
19 them.

20 And I just want you to know that one is from Red
21 Top. He's not a stranger here. His name is Sam White.
22 And I want Sam to stand and be recognized. I don't
23 want you to applaud or anything, I just want you to
24 know that this man and I are working together in Red
25 Top and other parts of Johns Island. And our purpose

00229

1 is to preserve the land, preserve the land. Thank you,
2 Sam.

3 And then, Dr. Paulla Ebron. Dr. Ebron is a
4 professor of anthropology from Stanford University.
5 And she has been doing research and work here in the
6 Lowcountry. And she's here with some of her students.
7 Thank you, Paula.

8 Last, but not least, Dr. Renata Leite with Ms.
9 Lynn West.

10 Professor Leite, don't sit down.

11 Professor Leite is modest and shy, but she is an

12 extraordinary professor of dental medicine at the
13 Medical University. And she is doing research on the
14 relationship between dental disease and people who come
15 from Gullah-Geechee populations. And I urged her to
16 come tonight. And I want people to know about her
17 because she has insights, understanding and resources
18 that some of you may want to tap. So call on her
19 before she leaves.

20 Now, before I call on Mr. Hayward, I have to at
21 least let you know that I'm here in many respects
22 because of my wonderful spouse, wife, friend, Dr. Emily
23 Moore, who has just stepped down as the provost at
24 Dillard University in New Orleans. This is Dr. Moore.

25 And so that's -- that's a part of why -- that's a
00230 part of some of the things we're about.

1 I have a tendency to go on and on and on, but I
2 will not do that. The doctors in emergency medicine
3 gave me two hours to talk to them about the Lowcountry,
4 and I had a wonderful time, so I don't need to take the
5 time here.
6

7 I'm going now call on Mr. Willie Heyward to say a
8 few words and then we'll go on with the program.

9 COMMISSIONER HEYWARD: Thank you, Dr. Blake.
10 I would also like to recognize Mr. Michael Allen.

11 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: We're going to bring
12 him in.

13 COMMISSIONER HEYWARD: Without his efforts, I
14 don't think we would be here today. So any time we
15 have one of these meetings, absolutely I would like to
16 recognize him for his efforts toward creating an
17 appreciation for the Gullah culture.

18 Someone introduced me. I think Mr. Saunders said
19 I was from Wadamalaw. Well, that's one half of my
20 family. The other half -- that's the father's half.
21 And the other half, my mother is from Red Top, where
22 Mr. White, who I've known pretty -- Sam White, who I've
23 known all my life. But I was, I was born in
24 Charleston.

25 I never realized how rich the culture was until I
00231

1 left. Because I couldn't wait to leave. And when I
2 went to school in California, I learned in sociology
3 and history in UCLA about the Gullah culture. And when
4 they started getting closer and closer and closer, and
5 when they finally got to Wadamalaw Island, I was way
6 down in my chair. It was not something to be proud of,
7 to be appreciated. And one of the reasons, I think the
8 primary reason, is we didn't know what we had at that
9 time, didn't know how rich it was at that time.

10 But when I go downtown now and I see tourists
11 walking around in their shorts, some look like they
12 just stepped out of the closet after a 20-year hiatus.
13 But they like what they see. They like what they see.
14 And they'll be back, therefore putting a lot more
15 pressure on those folks who are "bin yahs," as they
16 say, who have been here.

17 Gullah is a land-based culture. It's based on
18 property, not based on how many Lexus and Mercedes you
19 have, how much money you've got in your pocket. It's
20 based on land and how you can provide for your family.

21 You know, when I was coming up, they had one
22 bridge across the Ashley, one bridge across the Cooper.
23 Now, Charleston is slowly, but surely, becoming

24 cosmopolitan. And I could see the change from that
25 sleepy little town, that sleepy little place that I

00232

1 used to know, with that slow pace of life, to what we
2 have now.

3 And I could also see into the future, that if we
4 don't do something, if we're not proactive, that our
5 efforts are not aimed in helping those who are
6 entrenched, and have our meaning in this particular
7 area, that we are going to get wiped away. There will
8 be no history. I would suggest, if nothing was done,
9 in ten or 20 years, you'd never know that there was
10 actually a Gullah culture here, besides maybe you would
11 see something that -- an item or something that
12 somebody is selling in a store. So it's really up to
13 us to pass the culture down to the next generation.

14 There's a big disconnect between the folks who are
15 here now and who have sacrificed to maintain that
16 culture, to the younger folks that I see walking down
17 the street, hanging on the corners, under the big oak
18 tree, who have no connection to the culture. We have
19 to pass it on.

20 The -- and I made some notes while Dr. Blake was
21 talking. The culture on the sea islands, Wadamalaw, in
22 some ways, was very different than the culture that was
23 thriving in Mount Pleasant, Johns Island, James Island.

24 I remember when folks from Wadamalaw, my father,
25 his family, when they would come to town, there was --

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1 they'd come on a bus on the weekends to spend money.
2 And the bus would drop them off by Edwards Department
3 Store. You know where Edwards is, on King and Morris
4 Street? Then they would disburse, do their shopping,
5 and then go back to the island. Now, when they came
6 off that bus, now you want to see some colors. A rich
7 culture, a rich culture. But at that time, very
8 insular. And they were allowed to be insular because
9 of lack of infrastructure, meaning bridges and roads,
10 water, sewer.

11 And now that's beginning to change. Now
12 developers are beginning to put a lot of pressure on
13 folks who live on the land.

14 And title to the land, in a lot of respects, is
15 suspect. By that I mean, they live on land that is
16 heirs' property. And if you've heard that word before,
17 it really means land that belongs to someone who is
18 deceased. And you wouldn't ride around with your
19 great-grandfather as the registered owner of your car,
20 would you? Well, they live on land that is titled in
21 the name of someone who's deceased, and that person has
22 been deceased for a long time. The ancestors, when
23 they died, believed that land was supposed to be shared
24 by the entire family. It was there for the family. It
25 wasn't to supposed to belong to individuals. However,

00234

1 the law in South Carolina, and most other states, say
2 that land is to belong to individuals, to be titled to
3 individuals, and thereby it causes a clash of folks who
4 have lived on the land for generations without having a
5 clear title then being put in a position of losing that
6 land because they can't clear title and they can't go
7 to court with some sort of agreement among all the
8 family members of how they want to divide this land or
9 how they want to dispose of this land. What's going to

10 be the disposition? You want to divide it? Who's
11 going to live on it? Who's going to pay the taxes and
12 so on and so forth? And I see Mr. George, the
13 surveyor, back there in the back, with his spouse. And
14 he can definitely confirm what I'm saying. Families
15 who now have different perspectives and different
16 interests, some are strongly routed in the land and
17 some are strongly routed in the secular world. And it
18 comes down to heritage versus money. And guess, guess
19 which one is going to win, especially if you don't have
20 any? So it is incumbent upon us to give some sort
21 of -- it's not protection, some sort of resource to
22 those folks that want to hold onto their heritage, hold
23 onto their land, hold onto their culture. And I think,
24 through these meetings and hopefully through the
25 efforts of the commission, that we can at least

00235

1 accomplish some inroads into achieving that.

2 I'd also like to make one more aside. There are a
3 lot of -- I guess when folks have a chance to come up
4 and talk, we're going to talk about buildings and we're
5 going to talk about people and we're going to talk
6 about different activities and foods and art. But I
7 saw something a couple of months ago. An old lady
8 died. And most of her children had moved away. And
9 her belongings, whatever was in the house, was
10 considered trash because somebody wanted to clean up
11 the house and fix it up for themselves. And beside the
12 road were boxes of letters and pictures, in the rain,
13 boxes of letters and pictures that were discarded
14 because no -- because no longer did they have any
15 value.

16 We have to preserve our heritage or it's going to
17 get wiped away. One way is a lot of you are holding
18 onto it: Pictures. Pictures show a lot of things. Not
19 only does it show people, but it shows the surroundings
20 of that person who's in the picture. How did the land
21 look? Who else is in the picture? What's the
22 relationship? Those things should be preserved.

23 I would also like to thank you for letting me
24 talk. And I'm going to give the floor up, I think, to
25 Mr. Allen, to Mr. Saunders.

00236

1 But I want to take a quick count. How many of you
2 are from Johns Island? If you can just raise your
3 hands. Johns Island? How many are from Wadamalaw?
4 Okay. Okay. Any from Mount Pleasant? Great. And
5 James Island? All right.

6 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Colleton County?

7 COMMISSIONER HEYWARD: And Colleton County?

8 Oh, Edisto. I can't forget about Edisto and Colleton
9 County. And that's great. Beaufort? Oh, my goodness.
10 All the way from Beaufort? That's excellent.

11 I want to thank you. And we look forward to
12 hearing from you. Thanks.

13 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Thank you, Attorney
14 Heyward.

15 He just mentioned Sam White. Sam is the person
16 that I wanted to be like when I grew up. Been trying
17 to do that for years.

18 Attorney Heyward's father -- I worked in the
19 mattress factory on Anson Street for 22 years. When
20 blacks could not drive a tractor-trailer, his father
21 bought a tractor-trailer. He was the only black around

22 that had one. And he used to deliver the cotton that
23 we made mattresses out of at (inaudible) Mattress
24 Factory at 28 Anson Street. So there's a lot of
25 history that we are not collecting.

00237

1 He talked about throwing out stuff. You know,
2 when we built the church over there, the little church
3 over there, when they add onto it, we had some new
4 members from the island, but they just came back home.
5 They threw out everything that was in the church. I
6 came one day and picked up a lot of -- I got some stuff
7 that we used to use back in the forties that was behind
8 the church getting wet up. I just took it home because
9 the women just threw it out.

10 And what Willie is saying so much, you've got to
11 know that it's important. And nobody is teaching that
12 it is important.

13 Willie right now represents people that has heirs'
14 property and has problems. That's what he spends his
15 time doing at this particular time.

16 So it's important for somebody -- we're hoping
17 that this Commission is going to be able to pull that
18 kind of history, that we can end up with some kind of
19 curriculum or something that we can go back in to the
20 young people, Reverend Scott, that you're trying to
21 reach, that are nine, ten years old in our church right
22 now.

23 And I'm going to turn -- because I'm going to ask
24 you to come up before I bring Michael up. Because I
25 want you to talk about when they were talking about

00238

1 land rich, and how far you go back, and the other thing
2 that is so important, your relationship to Sol Legare.
3 I would like for you to make sure you put that between
4 James Island and Johns Island.

5 MR. LEGARE: Bill, I don't know where to
6 start when we start talking about the history of Johns
7 Island and James Island and everything.

8 I've said this before in a meeting. Bill said he
9 worked for my grandfather for a dollar twenty-five a
10 day. I offered him a job, but he said he couldn't work
11 for a dollar twenty-five any longer.

12 My family -- and we've done a lot of research.
13 And I think this is a very important thing to do, to
14 gather the stories and the history. I mean, so many
15 people know little tidbits of history. And I've heard
16 so many stories from Bill about my grandfather and all,
17 and members of my family and all. And it's so
18 important, I think, to get the community together, to
19 learn these, put these stories and history all
20 together, because so many people are going.

21 We just lost Mrs. Eleanor Jenkins today, 84 years
22 old and lived here on Johns Island for years. She
23 passed away. And my sisters and I were sitting in the
24 office and one of them said, You know, I hate to say
25 it, but the older generation is going. I guess we're

00239

1 the middle generation now.

2 I was like, No, we ain't the middle-age generation
3 yet, but we're getting there.

4 But, you know, so many people are going away so
5 fast. And it's so important, I think, to get, you
6 know, the information before it's all gone.

7 My family, as far as back as we can tell, we've

8 been farming on Johns Island since 1725. We -- on our
9 home place, we've been on it since the 1830s.

10 And one thing that Bill and I have been talking
11 about doing -- when Maysie Wigfall died this year,
12 well, Helen and I were talking one day, my sister
13 Helen, said she came over to the place one day, she
14 used to live on the place, and she wanted to show her
15 daughter, who'd grown up, you know, somewhere else
16 where they used to live. And Helen and I said, We
17 should have gotten in the car that day and rode around
18 with Maysie and let her point out where they used to
19 live and where some of the people used to live.

20 And Bill and I were talking about getting a couple
21 of people that used to live on our place, and grew up
22 on our place, and let them ride around and show us this
23 is where a house was, this was where so-and-so lived.
24 And, you know, it's so important we, we do that.

25 My great-great-grandfather, Solomon Legare, used
00240

1 to farm on both James Island, on the Sol Legare side,
2 and Johns Island, both Legareville and on our place
3 there on Huxton (ph) Point. He used to live downtown.
4 He'd come from downtown, all the way across, come
5 across James Island, right across, and then they'd row
6 across the river to Legareville. He'd get on a horse
7 and ride the horse all the way around to our place.
8 And the boat would pick him up and they'd go back into
9 town. And I don't know if he did that every night or
10 every day, but he -- he -- a couple of times a week,
11 that's how he went out and checked on his places and on
12 what was being done. And, you know, went over all his
13 properties like that. And it's just amazing that
14 that's the way they used to do things. Nowadays, we
15 all jump in the truck and, you know, ride around the
16 island in 15 minutes' time. But it's just -- to think
17 that that's how they used to go around and how they
18 farmed at one time, it's just truly amazing to me.

19 And these stories like that, I think, are very
20 important, that, you, know we preserve as part of the
21 heritage here. Because there's so many things that are
22 getting lost, like I said.

23 Bill, I don't know what all else you want me to
24 touch on.

25 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: You started to say
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1 something about the 1939 map or something.

2 MR. LEGARE: Yeah. One thing we are going to
3 do, the USDA, in 1939, the Soil Conservation Service
4 started taking aerial photos. They take them every ten
5 years. But they got them dating back to 1939.

6 One thing that's real interesting, I don't know
7 how many of y'all are familiar with Fort Trenholm over
8 here on the airport. It was built back in the Civil
9 War. I don't think it really ever saw a lot of action.
10 You know, and I'm ashamed to say, I grew up in
11 Charleston, born and raised here, been here my all
12 life, but I have not really followed history as much as
13 I should have.

14 I just finished reading a real interesting book
15 the other day on Morris Island and all, and what was
16 going on with it, and the battles that happened there
17 and Fort Sumter. And it was real interesting because
18 it covered a lot of what happened on James Island and
19 Johns Island and all.

20 But Fort Trenholm was built in the late, mid --
21 late part of the war. Well, back ten, 12 years ago,
22 the aviation authority started clearing up some land
23 here on the airport. Well, the contractors took the
24 bulldozers and started clearing away part of the trees
25 around Fort Trenholm. Well, we got ahold of some

00242

1 people at the aviation authority and put a stop to it.
2 And on Monday morning -- there was an article in the
3 News and Courier on Sunday. And on Monday morning, I
4 called the boy with the Soil Conservation Service,
5 Dwayne Magnum. Lived on James Island at the time. And
6 I said, Dwayne, how far back do the aerial photographs
7 y'all have go back?

8 Because one of things, the contractor and aviation
9 authority, they just wanted to bulldoze the trees so
10 they could get federal money, FAA money, because they
11 wanted to expand the airport. And they wanted to
12 bulldoze the trees and Fort Trenholm, which is part of
13 the history of the island.

14 Well, the contractors and the aviation authority
15 said, Oh, these aren't Civil War hard work. They were
16 built probably in the 1940s, during World War II. They
17 couldn't have been built by hand. They had to be built
18 with draglines and machinery.

19 So Monday morning, I called Dwayne at the Soil
20 Conservation Service and said, How far back do your
21 photos go?

22 He said, 1939. He said, I was thinking about that
23 when I read that article in the paper Sunday and it was
24 quoting you.

25 So I went down and got a picture from 1939.

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1 We had a meeting with the aviation authority and
2 the contractors. I walked in there and put the picture
3 down on the table and said, All right, this picture was
4 taken in 1939. Y'all want to claim that this fort was
5 built with draglines during 1944? That's not true.
6 You got a picture from 1939 showing what it looked
7 like. And you've got to remember, this was built by
8 hand, by labor, back in the 1860s.

9 So we were able to work on keeping the bulldozers
10 out of the fort and destroying it by these aerial
11 photos.

12 But, getting back to what I was saying - I could
13 go on for two hours, like Dr. Blake said.

14 The only thing we're going to do is go down and
15 get the 1939 photos, which will still show some of the
16 houses on our place. Mama and daddy got married in
17 1953, I think it was. And mama said there were still
18 people living on our place in the 1950s. Up to the
19 late fifties, they were still burying people in the
20 graveyard on our place. And we know where the
21 graveyard is and would love to do some work to protect
22 it with easements or something. That's one thing we've
23 been talking about doing for years.

24 But we want to get the 1939 aerial photographs and
25 mark where the houses were and then get Bill and some

00244

1 of the other people who grew up on our place, and were
2 sent home when they were young on our place, although
3 Bill was not very young in 1939. I don't even think he
4 was born yet.

5 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Be kind.

6 MR. LEGARE: I'm being kind to him tonight
7 because he says I always tease him about being old.
8 But we're going to get some of the old people and
9 let them show us, point out, this is so-and-so's house,
10 and this is so-and-so's house, and who lived there and
11 all. And that's one thing I think would be a very
12 interesting thing, not just for my family and the
13 families that lived there on our place, but for the
14 entire community.

15 So, thank you.

16 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Thank you, Tom.

17 MR. LEGARE: Thank you, Bill.

18 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: You know, one of the
19 things that I learned is that you don't let people
20 speak behind you. Normally, everything I do, I be the
21 last one to talk. Folks will get at you.

22 Attorney Heyward mentioned Michael Allen. And
23 Michael Allen has done so much, and with the law,
24 putting the law together that brought the Gullah
25 Commission into being. He's been attacked from people

00245
1 from the right side, from the left side, from the
2 middle side. And all the time he has hung in there.
3 And he has really, really done a tremendous job. And
4 we are all proud of him. And one of the things I just
5 learned recently, that Michael is now also tapping
6 table. See that? That's, again, a Gullah thing.
7 Tapping table means that he's now preaching. Tap,
8 people that tap the table. Mike is now tapping table.
9 So he's really -- so he's really doing well, under the
10 kind of pressure. He really brought this with
11 Congressman Clyburn and some other folks. He's really
12 done a good job. And I am going to ask you all to give
13 him a hand as he comes forward.
14 (Applause.)

15 MR. ALLEN: Well, like I said, good
16 afternoon.

17 And, again, I thank you, Bill, for that great
18 introduction.

19 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: You're blushing.

20 MR. ALLEN: Being here tonight and being on
21 Johns Island, just being up and down the corridor, I
22 think, has been a blessing to me over the last 29 years
23 of being with the National Park Service. And I could
24 never imagine, in the summer of 1980, I'll have this
25 opportunity, as I have here tonight, in the summer of

00246
1 2009, to do this here.

2 We are here for several reasons. One, and this
3 has been eloquently done by the Commission that you've
4 heard, to lay out a vision, to lay out a purpose, to
5 lay out a plan, that they have been blessed with, to be
6 a part of, and that's the Gullah-Geechee Cultural
7 Heritage Corridor.

8 They were modest to tell you that tonight, as you
9 sit here, there are approximately 49 National Heritage
10 Areas across the United States. But the one that you
11 sit in here tonight is the only one that's dedicated to
12 the African-American experience, way of life and
13 culture and heritage in the United States. So that's
14 unique in itself. That brings challenges and
15 opportunities, but it also brings promise. Because
16 we're looking at a living, breathing culture. The way
17 that we handle our business in this endeavor is a

18 little bit different than the way other heritage areas
19 have handled it.

20 So you saw tonight, coming from the vocal cords of
21 those who have spoken before me, when we began this
22 journey in 2006, when they all became publicly known as
23 commissioners, several things came into place with the
24 law that was passed in 2006. One, as you see on the
25 map to my left, it laid out the boundaries of this

00247

1 corridor, stretching from Wilmington, North Carolina,
2 all the way down to Jacksonville, Florida, from the
3 St. John in the south to the Cape Fear in the north.

4 Secondly, it also said that we would have
5 commissioners, which you've seen here eloquently
6 speaking, that would help work with me and you, the
7 public, to move this forward into the future.

8 Thirdly, it also said that we would embark on
9 developing a management plan, which will talk about the
10 breadth and scope of how Gullah-Geechee history and
11 culture would persist, exist, and sustain itself off
12 into the future.

13 And I think, as one of them alluded, I think we're
14 in meeting 20, beginning in February up to the present,
15 from the Wilmington to Jacksonville. In each place
16 what we've tried to do, as these men have done
17 eloquently, is to lay out a story, to lay out a vision,
18 but to engage you.

19 The bottom line, we don't want you to leave here
20 tonight thinking that the four of us have made the
21 decisions absent of your conversation. That may be --
22 that may have been done by other governmental agencies,
23 but that's now how we're planning to operate. So I
24 have been afforded the opportunity and the blessings to
25 be the coordinator of this Gullah-Geechee Cultural

00248

1 Heritage Corridor. And so, as a result, I am going to
2 ensure that this will be done in a way that you would
3 be proud, our ancestors would be proud, and future
4 generations would be proud.

5 So that's the task that's before us here tonight,
6 that we want to hear from you what you would like to
7 see done, opportunities, promises, collaboration,
8 sustainability, growth, awareness, education,
9 interpretation, preservation. These are the keys that
10 you heard each one of these men talk about. And so
11 that's the reason why we're here tonight, that we can
12 listen to you.

13 You notice to my right, this young lady here,
14 that's a court reporter. She's gathering what you all
15 are saying. In the back, there's another gentleman
16 there that's videotaping. I believe this endeavor is
17 of the same character as the WPA project was in the
18 1930s. And so we will use modern technology. Because
19 50 years from now, someone is going to ask, Who was at
20 Wesley United Methodist Church on July the 7th, 2009,
21 at the meeting? Now they'd have an adequate way to
22 know who was sitting here and what you said.

23 So, with that, I will step away from the mic and
24 we will allow you the opportunity to share the vision
25 that we can take and run with it.

00249

1 Thank you.

2 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Tell them to make
3 sure that they give their name.

4 MR. ALLEN: Okay. And when you do come here,
5 not all at one time, one at a time, give your name and
6 your address and what island, what community you're
7 from. This is about history.

8 I guess, does this work? I could be Oprah like
9 and walk around, or not? You need to come up to the
10 front, according to the cameraman. So not all at one
11 time.

12 MR. BLAKE: Good evening. Dwayne Blake. In
13 the interest of full disclosure, I would like to let
14 everybody know that I am the nephew of Dr. Herman Blake
15 and who is a member of the Gullah-Geechee commission.

16 I am not as eloquent, so I had to write my notes
17 down because I can't remember everything that I would
18 like to say, so I'm going to present this to you.

19 I am an eighth generation descendent of a woman
20 identified as Harriet, who was an old woman who was
21 enslaved on the East Hermitage Plantation on the Argyle
22 River in the Savannah River. Now, plantation records
23 identify this slave woman in 1849. And they show that
24 she died in 1853. My family has descended from this
25 Harriet. And my extended family still resides in the

00250

1 rural communities along the South Carolina coast.

2 This evening I speak to you as a representative of
3 the Blake-Manigault Club of Johns Island, South
4 Carolina, Red Top area. This is an organization of the
5 descendants of Lydia Manigault who was born and raised
6 in slavery. In 1887, Lydia Manigault purchased 25
7 acres of land in the Red Top area for \$400. Eight
8 generations later, we have organized to honor her
9 legacy, preserve our heritage and perpetuate our
10 family.

11 Before her death, she made sure that her children
12 and her grandchildren understood her wishes: To
13 preserve the family by preserving the land. Her
14 mandate to them was: Never cut the land. It is for
15 the unborn generations.

16 The Blake-Manigault Club represents the owners of
17 44.5 acres of land in Red Top. And, as owners, we
18 would like to address this Commission. We want you to
19 understand that we realize our heritage is much more
20 than an expanse of land. Our heritage is encompassed
21 in values and social practices that have sustained our
22 family for over 120 years. These are the values that
23 led Lydia Manigault to work so hard in slavery without
24 compensation and in limited freedom with little
25 compensation. These are the values that led Lydia

00251

1 Manigault to give us such a firm foundation for our
2 family. The land itself is an economic base for our
3 family's unity and mutual support.

4 In our meetings, as a family club, and other
5 gatherings, we have sought to specify and understand
6 the values and customs that help us to remain united as
7 a family and point toward the future we wish to
8 sustain. These are just some of the values and
9 customs: Number one, faith, church, family, land,
10 community, education, work.

11 We believe that if your Commission is to be
12 successful and it is to fulfill the hopes and dreams of
13 our ancestors, you must ensure that the Gullah families
14 have the support of legislative policies that protect
15 our land from loss to those who are motivated by greed

16 and wealth. Such policies must provide community
17 education, as well as land protection. If we can
18 preserve and if we can sustain the land, we know we
19 will always sustain our family. We ask you to place
20 your major emphasis on land retention as fundamental to
21 our cultural heritage.

22 Now, in conclusion, we would like to thank you for
23 this opportunity to share with you these thoughts from
24 the Blake-Manigault Club of Johns Island, Red Top
25 Subdivision, South Carolina. We are proud of our
00252

1 Gullah-Geechee heritage. We rejoice in our
2 Gullah-Geechee family. We want to enjoy a future that
3 reflects our past. We need to uphold our legacy by
4 protecting our land. This is our most urgent quest:
5 To protect the land.

6 Thank you.

7 MR. MITCHUM: Good evening, ladies and
8 gentlemen. I'm Allen Mitchum, from Wadmalaw Island.
9 And my background pretty much paralleled that of
10 Mr. Heyward. I was born in the last street section of
11 Wadmalaw Island. And at the age of 2, 1945, the storm
12 blew our house down and my mother took me to the City
13 of Charleston to live. Graduated from Burke in '61.
14 Went on to Allen University after that. Vietnam, three
15 times. Then I spent the last 25 years in Philadelphia.
16 And I graduated La Salle University with two degrees.

17 But I am the author of this book here, Wadmalaw
18 Island: Leaving Traditional Roots Behind. This is the
19 first and only book that I know of that's written from
20 a Gullah perspective. If there are other books, I
21 would really like to know. So would the historical
22 society. Because I haven't seen too much on Wadamalaw
23 at all.

24 And a lot of people are not too familiar with
25 Wadamalaw. You can ask people even in the city of
00253

1 Charleston, they've never heard of Wadamalaw or they
2 don't know where Wadamalaw is at.

3 And after I moved back home, about six years ago,
4 I really became involved.

5 And at every meeting I attend, I always tell the
6 people that Wadamalaw is a separate sea island and a
7 separate entity. And a lot of people think that if you
8 give \$50,000 to Johns Island, then you've satisfied the
9 needs of the people on Wadamalaw. And that's not true.

10 I came home and I became the president of the
11 Wadmalaw Island Citizen Improvement Committee. And
12 also I wore a double hat, two hats. I was also the
13 chief executive officer of the community center. I
14 resigned a couple of months ago because I wanted to
15 write and travel more.

16 There's a lot of history on Wadmalaw Island. For
17 one, we have a tree on Wadmalaw Island. To the people
18 on Wadmalaw Island, it's more famous than Angel Oak,
19 the Bore Hog Tree. You don't hear anything about the
20 Bore Hog Tree. They cut the Bore Hog Tree down about
21 12 years ago. That's right, they cut it down. Because
22 some limbs was falling and it was decaying and rotten a
23 little. Same thing happened to Angel Oak. But what
24 happened to Angel Oak? They called tree surgeons from
25 around the world and restored the growth of Angel Oak,
00254

1 but they cut Wadamalaw down. So that's what I kind of

2 wanted to share with you.

3 But more so than anything, I think we need to put
4 more emphasis on the Gullah-Geechee culture. And what
5 I would like to see us do is collectively, as a group
6 and as a unit, try to keep the history going and
7 promote the history.

8 This book here, I have a distributor, Sandlapper,
9 in Orangeburg. And they pretty much sell my book all
10 over the state. But in the Gullah-Geechee corridor,
11 you won't find this book here too much. The
12 Gullah-Geechee people, they don't -- it was at Penn
13 Center, at one time.

14 You'll find Ms. Stringfellow's book. And if you
15 look in Miss Stringfellow's book, the one she wrote
16 about four years ago, this whole book is in the back.
17 You wouldn't see nothing but Allen Mitchell, Allen
18 Mitchell. And if you don't believe me, I have a copy
19 in the car. Because I'm the type of guy, if I tell you
20 two and two is four, you tell me to prove it, and I can
21 show it to you.

22 The same thing with the gentleman, a professor
23 emeritus Heninger (ph), from the University of North
24 Carolina. They plagiarized my work. He bought two
25 copies of my book, but they didn't ask me to use my

00255

1 work. He gave me credit for my work. If you look into
2 the back of it, you see it. But neither one of them
3 asked me to do it.

4 But I say there's a lot of history on Wadamalaw.
5 And I'd just like to get a little more involved with
6 the Gullah-Geechee culture. I'd like to see our
7 culture get spread and get more recognition. People
8 need to know more about it.

9 And I have some other questions I'd like to direct
10 to Mr. Heyward, but I'll give someone else some time to
11 speak.

12 Thank you.

13 MR. DENNIS: How y'all doing? How y'all?
14 I'm a little nervous. So my name is Benjamin Dennis,
15 IV. I was born west of the Ashley. All of my family
16 are from Cainhoy, Clements Ferry, Daniel Island, which
17 a lot of people don't know, people are from Daniel
18 Island. But my great-grandfather, he was born on
19 Daniel Island, I think 1906, 1908. It was a farm land.
20 He -- I'm nervous.

21 MR. ALLEN: That's okay. Take your time.

22 MR. DENNIS: I'm here to represent my
23 granddaddy. He sits down with me all the time.
24 Because for me to know who I am as a man, I got to know
25 where I came from. And just to sit down with him and

00256

1 to talk to him about my grandfather, I mean my
2 great-grandfather, my great-great-grandfather.

3 My great-grandfather was the only way to get off
4 that area. He owned the ferry boat coming from the
5 area, taking everybody downtown. I don't know any of
6 the older -- I don't want to call y'all old. But there
7 was a fertilizer plant downtown called 81 (sic), back
8 in the days that everybody used to work -- from Cainhoy
9 used to go downtown and work. But my great-grandfather
10 was the only way to get off that island. He had a 60-
11 to 70-foot -- I mean, 60- to 70-passenger ferry boat
12 that took people from Huger, from Cainhoy, to the city
13 to go to work.

14 My great-great-grandfather came from off the boat.
15 We don't know if he was bought or if he came as a free
16 man from the Caribbean. He bought 22 acres of land for
17 50 cent, back in between 1910 and 1915. Twenty-two
18 acres that he bought. And he passed that down to his
19 son, his sisters, his -- his daughters. And that went
20 to my granddaddy. And all we have now is an acre and a
21 half. That's my granddaddy's land. That every other
22 week you have somebody come in that area, come to my
23 granddaddy's house and saying, When you going to sell
24 the land? We give you \$900,000 for the land.

25 Money don't mean nothing. It's about heritage and
00257

1 about where you're from. My great-great-grandfather
2 was the one who left that for his grandchildren. And
3 my granddaddy leaving that for his grandchildren. And
4 I told my granddaddy I would never, never sell.

5 We got a Palmetto tree on my granddaddy's land
6 that he had since he was little. That Palmetto tree
7 got to be 20 feet in the air. It is a big Palmetto
8 tree. And I say that's representation of the growth
9 that you've been through.

10 I just recently moved back from the Virgin
11 Islands. I been there three and a half years. And it
12 would amaze me, that people would hear me talk and they
13 would say, Well, where are you from? You from St.
14 Lucia? You from Barbados? I'm like, No, I ain't from
15 Barbados. I'm from Charleston, South Carolina. But
16 what shocked me was the fact they would be like, Oh,
17 you a Gullah-Geechee. Like, they knew about us. Like,
18 they knew about us more than a lot of the young people
19 my age know about ourselves. And it just blew my mind
20 away, that they was wanting to sit down and talk to me.
21 I used to wear Geechee Gear t-shirts and I would wear
22 them around St. Thomas. And people would stop me,
23 like, Sweetgrass, that's -- that's a South Carolina
24 thing. They want to hear the accent. They would just
25 be so intrigued because it's roots. You know, our

00258
1 roots come from West Africa, Caribbean, to here.

2 And I guess I just came to speak. I have a lot
3 more. I'd probably be up here for an hour. And I also
4 need help the kind of find out more about just my
5 great-great-grandfather. All we know is he came off
6 the boat. We don't know if he was a free man or if he
7 came off and he was bought.

8 That's pretty much it.

9 Oh, and my grandmother would always tell me when
10 she was young, she remembers the ladies used to wear
11 the baskets on their heads, walking around with the
12 laundry. So we're not too far gone from past
13 generations of true culture. And it's really deep.

14 I'm big on culture. I'm just proud to be a
15 Geechee boy. I don't care what nobody else say. Proud
16 to be. Proud to be.

17 And, honestly, after I graduated high school, I
18 went to see my cousins going to other colleges. And
19 being Geechee kind of helped me with the ladies too,
20 anyway.

21 But, honestly -- but, honestly, you know, the
22 culture is deep.

23 You know, like, my grandfather, 83 years old,
24 still plants an acre of okra. We got cane, we got
25 sugar cane. We got peanuts growing. And I get up

00259

1 sometimes in the morning -- and I'm an aspiring chef.
2 I work late nights. But I will get up in the
3 morning -- I live on James Island now -- and drive all
4 the way out there, to Clements Ferry, to help him get
5 in that yard and cultivate the land and pick okra.
6 Because I'm a -- I'm a -- I'm his grandson and I feel
7 that's the right thing to do.

8 You know, you got to know where you come from.
9 So I think I skipped a whole lot of stuff, but
10 thank you y'all.

11 (Applause.)

12 MR. JENKINS: Good afternoon. First, let me
13 say, I'm the son of Esau Jenkins. So I should get that
14 out up front.

15 But the reason why I'm here today, we are trying
16 to look at the Progressive Club, as it is, tell you how
17 it got started, and why we feel so dear about it.

18 Back in 1943, or in that area, there was a young
19 man on this island got shot for a dog by a white man.
20 And he was not from the island, but he was -- bought a
21 piece of land on the island and was living on the
22 island. And when he -- when this young man got shot,
23 my father and some of the people were selling on the
24 market in Charleston. And when word got that he got
25 shot on the, on the truck -- it was a truck, not a bus,

00260

1 they then went to the hospital and tried to help by
2 giving blood. It didn't kill him, but they shot him in
3 the stomach with a shotgun.

4 So my father got some people together. And he and
5 a gentleman from New York said, We need to do
6 something. We are not animals, that people -- anyone
7 can come out there and shoot us and nothing happen.

8 So they went to find an attorney to help them.
9 And that went on and on and on, you know like they do,
10 just keep putting it off. So what they did, they
11 formed the club and they called it the Progressive
12 Club. They were in the Moving Star Hall.

13 And then, at Moving Star Hall, they started
14 gathering people around and they start talking about
15 where they're going to get money from and how they're
16 going to raise money. So they charging everyone 25
17 cents per meeting. And with that 25 cents, they
18 started raising the money in order to pay the attorney
19 for -- who shot this, who defend this young man.

20 And in so doing, Mrs. Septima Clark then was
21 working -- she had lost her job as a teacher on these
22 islands. And she was now working in Tennessee, with
23 Miles Thornton. And she came home. And my father
24 helped her to drive back to Tennessee. When they got
25 there, they started talking about their achievements

00261

1 and some of the things they had done. And as they were
2 talking, they start talking about the United Nations
3 and -- because it was United Nations Day. And as they
4 talked about the United Nations, they just started
5 going around the room and said, What do you think about
6 the United Nations here? What do you think we should
7 do?

8 When they got to my father, he said, Maybe the
9 United Nations is a good thing, but I got a more
10 immediate problem. We got people on Johns Island --
11 and that's what he named, Johns Island -- who need to

12 register and vote so they become citizens. Many of
13 them cannot read and write. We need to start some kind
14 of adult school. And from that meeting, those people
15 from Tennessee, Mrs. Septima Clark here, Bernice
16 Robertson, my sister Ethel Grimball, and they all
17 started an adult education school. First, it was at
18 the Moving Star Hall, then St. John's School was moved
19 from where it was to where it's at now. So that
20 building become vacant. They had it up for sale and a
21 group of people bought that building, start calling it
22 the Progressive Club. And from that two-story
23 building, two-teacher school, they started having
24 meetings in there and started raising money and started
25 doing other things.

00262

1 And, eventually, they went back to Tennessee. And
2 they got some money from groups and some other people,
3 and they came back and built the building that you saw
4 down there in the late sixties. That was about 12
5 years later. And they started having schools down
6 there. And they had people come in from Mississippi,
7 Alabama, locally, and all over the South. And they
8 started teaching adults how to read and write.

9 And they took that method that was started here at
10 the Progressive Club and went all over the South, as
11 far as Dallas, Texas. And everyone -- Martin Luther
12 King came here and stayed here and tried to learn about
13 how -- after Martin Luther King finished with
14 Montgomery, Alabama, they went to Albany, Georgia. And
15 they found out that they didn't have the grassroots
16 with them. And this school here, with Andrew Young,
17 they came here and saw what was happening, with Septima
18 Clark, Esau Jenkins and Bernice Robinson and Ethel
19 Grimball, and started showing how they were doing the
20 method of trying to get people to read and write, to
21 become citizens, so they could register to vote.

22 And the thing about it, there was one lady here
23 said, Mr. Jenkins, I can't read and write, but I know I
24 got a good memory. They had to read a portion of the
25 Constitution, in order to get a registration card then.

00263

1 So she just said, Tell me what part I need to learn.
2 And when they took those people down there to vote, and
3 they gave them this part of the Constitution they had
4 to read in order to get your registration card, the
5 lady in front of her start missing the word. And she
6 whispered in her ears, tell her what the word was. The
7 registrar looked at her, said, No coaching in there.
8 She was the one who couldn't read, but she had it so
9 memorized that she didn't even have to look at the book
10 and just read the little paragraph. And so they did
11 that.

12 And those people came back. And when they got the
13 registration card, that's what stimulates so many
14 people. Because they said, You got yours? They
15 just -- it was a graduation certification. They just
16 went around and started showing people. Did you get
17 yours yet?

18 After a while, things started growing so fast that
19 they had to add more teachers and started on Johns
20 Island, Wadamalaw, North Charleston, Edisto, then it
21 start spreading. Fannie Lou Hamer came here from
22 Mississippi, (inaudible) from Atlanta, Georgia, and
23 many other people.

24 But the thing I just wanted to say is that --
25 because I could go on for two days.

00264

1 The thing I just want to say is that that
2 Progressive Club is at a state that after that part of
3 the era was over, the roof fell in. It's just a brick
4 wall there now. And we have worked with the
5 Preservation League and we got it as a historic site.
6 Because that's the only building now standing in the
7 South that started off as a civil rights building, and
8 it's still there. So we are asking for as many help
9 that we can get in getting this started.

10 I'll stop there.

11 (Applause.)

12 MR. FREEMAN: Good evening. I think I'll get
13 up here right now, since we got these long-winded
14 people coming up.

15 My name is George Freeman. I live in Mount
16 Pleasant. Although I live in Mount Pleasant, I feel
17 that really I'm at home tonight because as far as my
18 understanding is that my mother, not my mother -- well,
19 my mother's mother, my grandmother, was from Johns
20 Island. I don't know if anybody in here ever have
21 heard of Maggie Horry, but that was my grandmother's
22 name. And my understanding is that she lived on Johns
23 Island and married my grandfather, who was from Goose
24 Creek. And how they got together, I don't know.

25 But, anyway, in 1900, they moved to Mount Pleasant
00265

1 and bought land in what we call Six Mile right now.
2 And he started a farm with about 20 acres. And as
3 Mr. Heyward stated earlier, about heirs' property,
4 although they were a little smarter. My grandfather
5 was a little smarter because he broke it up into the
6 kids, each of his kids. But, right now, all the
7 grandchildren live on that 20 acres today. So it's
8 still the whole family thing.

9 And one of the things I tell people is that I
10 didn't realize how unique our neighborhoods were until
11 I left there. Because it's very unique to live in a
12 community where almost everybody in the community is
13 related, and which is a very unique thing. Because
14 that's one of the safest places I've ever felt when I
15 was growing up, was in my neighborhood. And I still
16 feel that way today because everybody in the
17 neighborhood is basically related.

18 But I just wanted to mention a little bit about my
19 grandmother because it's still, again, my
20 understanding. And I did have the article one time. I
21 have to go back and get it again, that my grandmother
22 was interviewed in the Post and Courier back in 1933.
23 Because she was one of the people that sold produce,
24 flowers and things at the market. And she sold
25 sweetgrass baskets also.

00266

1 And it's also my understanding that a young
2 lady -- well, I guess I can call her young. She's a
3 little older than I am, lady in Mount Pleasant, I
4 believe her name is Julia Rawles, that she's supposed
5 to have a basket that my grandmother made back in 1933,
6 and still has it today. She allowed me to videotape
7 her one time with it. But my thing is, I was hoping
8 she'd let me have the basket. But I wasn't fortunate
9 enough to do that.

10 MR. ALLEN: We'll talk to her. I know her.

11 MR. FREEMAN: But one of the main reasons I'm
12 here, when the commissioners came to Mount Pleasant, I
13 spoke before them at that time also. But I came out
14 here tonight because my thing is that one of the things
15 that we don't talk about that much is education. I
16 believe someone was talking about it just now, about
17 how they educated themselves to be able --
18 Mr. Jenkins -- educated themselves so that they could
19 register.

20 One of the things that a lot of people don't
21 understand is that during slavery, we weren't allowed
22 to be educated. And we've only been in the educational
23 arena for about 150 years. But a lot of the schools
24 that we had back during that time, especially in Mount
25 Pleasant, have been destroyed. The only ones that are
00267
1 left now in Mount Pleasant are the ones that were built
2 in the fifties.

3 And I don't know if you were listening to the news
4 recently about the school board putting Laing Middle
5 School up for sale. That was my high school. We're
6 trying to save Jennie Moore Elementary. And one of the
7 reasons we want to save it is because we feel we don't
8 have a location in Mount Pleasant where we can save all
9 this history or either educate our children of all this
10 history. And we feel if we have Jennie Moore
11 Elementary, we can do that.

12 But the problem we have is that the school board
13 is planning to sell Lange, they're planning to tear
14 down Jennie Moore, to build a new school. We don't
15 have any problems with new schools, but we would not
16 like to see that school just torn down. Because just
17 as we're talking here today about buildings that were
18 built back in the 1600s, 1700s, 1800s, in the year
19 2020, if we were to save Jennie Moore today, that would
20 be a real old school that we could talk about, where
21 the descendants of Africans were able to attend. And
22 this was during that time when we had separate but
23 equal, in order to keep schools segregated. So that
24 was one of the main things about the school that will
25 be destroyed.

00268
1 And I always tell the people the story about the
2 Japanese that were incarcerated -- I wouldn't say
3 incarcerated, but they were held in camps in America.
4 Those camps are gone today. But with those camps gone,
5 I bet most of you in this room today have forgotten all
6 about that. But that's a history that's lost. I mean,
7 it's a bad history, but it's still a history that's
8 lost.

9 And we are -- that's the same way we look at
10 Jennie Moore school. If these schools are destroyed,
11 that history of the separate and equal will be
12 destroyed. So I'm here to mention it to the
13 Commission. But I'm here to mention it to you also.
14 Because we would like people throughout the county to
15 understand that this -- the school in Mount Pleasant is
16 not just a Mount Pleasant school. The school belongs
17 to everybody in Charleston County. So if we have your
18 help to help save it also, that would add to us helping
19 to preserve Jennie Moore. So if we can get you to
20 respond to the school board members, that this is
21 something that should be saved, that would help us a

22 lot.

23 Thank you for your time.

24 (Applause.)

25 MS. LAROCHE: Good evening, everyone. My
00269

1 name is -- I didn't know we were supposed to talk. But
2 anyway, my name is Easter Hines Laroche. I'm the 15th
3 child of Louise and Frank Hines. My mother's name was
4 Louise Manigault. I heard you talking. And my
5 grandmother's name was Lydia Manigault.

6 Uh-oh. I was sitting down there. Oh, my gosh.
7 But, anyway, I'll talk to you later, okay?

8 And my grandfather, we were told, went to -- went
9 to the city on a ferry, Mr. Manigault. And he never
10 came back. So my grandmother remarried. And she
11 remarried a Walker. So I don't know where my
12 granddaddy went. And that's the truth. Okay.

13 But, anyway, I just wanted to say that I'm so
14 proud of the Gullah-Geechee Corridor. I do remember
15 when I went to school, when I went to college in
16 Tennessee -- and one of my colleagues is here -- I was
17 a little ashamed to say I was from Johns Island because
18 here we were told that we spoke bad English and so
19 forth and so on. But when I went to Tennessee, the
20 students, many of the students there, when I told them
21 where we were from, Johns Island, they would ask, Well,
22 what island is that? You know, Is that in the
23 Caribbean or where?

24 I said, Well, we're on Johns Island, right in
25 Charleston. You know, I never said I was from
00270

1 Charleston. I was from Johns Island and so forth.

2 And I learned to be proud of my history,
3 especially here in Wesley. Because this church here
4 has always been the type of church that helped us, they
5 nurtured us, and helped us to be proud of who we were.

6 They taught us -- you know, Evelyn is here. She
7 can tell you about the older, older people, with the
8 clapping. I really, really miss that. I miss coming
9 to church, one person would raise a song, right, no
10 piano, nothing, just the clapping and so forth. One
11 would sing, the next thing, when the other person --
12 when that person would drop the song, another lady
13 would pick that song up. And, I mean, we would go and
14 we would shout and we'd have a good time. We don't
15 have that anymore. I really, really, really miss that.
16 That really helped me and so forth.

17 So I would like to see -- in conclusion, I would
18 like to see someone else talk about education or
19 awareness. I think that if a lot of the elderly people
20 that are still living knew that -- knew about this
21 corridor, if they knew about the meetings tonight and
22 so forth, although it was broadcast in our church, I
23 think they would be proud. Because when most of them,
24 you start talking about the older days, there is pride
25 in them, when they stand up and they talk about what
00271

1 happened and so forth.

2 So I think that would really, really be great,
3 awareness, education, but also education for the
4 younger people. You know, I have two sons and a
5 daughter. My younger son, when I told him about a long
6 time ago, he said, Oh, Mama, come on. You know it
7 wasn't that hard. They don't understand. So that way

8 to -- I think education, awareness for the people of
9 the corridor and so forth.

10 Lastly, I want to call you -- I want to invite
11 everyone to the Sea Island Cultural Arts Festival.
12 This is our 17th year. It's an annual cultural -- I
13 can't even talk. It's a festival that is held each
14 year. It's always the second Saturday in September.
15 It is in front of the Hermina Traeye Nursing Home,
16 which is now Island Oaks Nursing Center. And we would
17 like to invite everyone to come there. There's all
18 kind of good stuff. Everything we ask to be of
19 cultural essence. And if one wants to be a vendor, you
20 can do that. You can sell food very, very cheap, if
21 you want to do that. I'm not trying to pitch that.
22 I'm just giving you the information. It's 50 dollars
23 food vendors, arts and crafts is just 25 dollars. And
24 if you just want to do a display to learn about the
25 Gullah-Geechee Corridor or anything, anything of

00272

1 importance to the island, that is free. I will put
2 some of these out there, in case anyone would like to
3 have it.

4 And I do remember Fort Trenholm. My mother used
5 to always talk about that. Some of her children were
6 born there, my brothers and sisters, Fort Trenholm, by
7 the airport.

8 Thank you.

9 (Applause.)

10 MR. WHITE: Good evening, everyone. I'm Sam
11 White. Dr. Blake, Attorney Heyward, Bill and Bill. We
12 go back a long way, Bill, the two Bills.

13 But he spoke about his father. His dad, I knew
14 him for years. I'm going to say a little bit about
15 your dad. When I -- it's a long story.

16 When I got back out of the military and started
17 working, went back to school, got into plumbing, the
18 first man I worked for was Oscar Pinckney. And the
19 restaurant and the motel, we did the plumbing in your
20 dad's place.

21 And I remember, as young men, on weekends, my
22 mother would fix that lima beans. All the older folks
23 know about that lima beans. We had that lima beans.
24 But when we go out and party, we would stop by
25 Mr. Jenkins' place and get that bowl of beans and rice.

00273

1 Now, you know, that was the thing. We got it. That
2 lady who was the cook -- Bill, you know who I'm talking
3 about, who used to cook all them beans.

4 But, anyway, I'm talking about my family. My name
5 is Sam White. My father was a White, but my mother was
6 a Gibbs.

7 My grandmother was a large girl during slavery
8 time. The owner didn't make her work in the field, but
9 her mother did, and also my grandmother, aunt. My
10 grandfather and his brothers, they came over slaves.
11 And we have family, some Gibbs over on the island here,
12 and we have some also in McClellanville. I get so
13 happy to be a part of something like this, a forum like
14 this.

15 Because the old folks used to stress -- my
16 grandparents, my mother -- I was the youngest out of
17 her mother -- or my mother's children. And my mother
18 was the youngest out of her mother's children, which
19 was 15. My grandmother had 15 children. My mother had

20 13 children. But my grandmother used to tell me about
21 the things that happened.

22 My grandfather fought during the Civil War, was a
23 Civil War veteran. The land that all of us, my mother
24 and her siblings was born on, was in his name, Captain
25 C. Gibbs. His name was (inaudible) Gibbs. We got

00274

1 together and made that property a family cemetery. We
2 have our own family cemetery now. But my grandfather
3 was buried in Buell (ph) Plantation. The Savannah
4 Longs, those developers, are -- we was cleaning it up.
5 There is hundreds of graves back there, in Buell, Civil
6 War veterans, World War II veterans, World War I
7 veterans. And back then, some of them -- well, some
8 people had tombstones, but most of them had just the
9 plate, or some favorite things that they put on the
10 grave or a wooden cross. But there is hundreds of
11 graves back there. And we are locked out, where we
12 can't go back there to maintain the graves, the
13 cemetery.

14 And, you know, my -- you know, to me, myself,
15 Dr. Blake had to stop me on a couple of occasions
16 because, you know, I get carried away when I talk about
17 the things that my grandmother talked to me about.

18 What -- what my -- she -- one particular thing I
19 say in church, I say it out of church, I say my
20 grandfather was out fighting so long, in her words,
21 that he was fighting for so long on the battlefield,
22 and when he come home, there was nothing home to eat,
23 and he took the grits out of the slop bucket. Now,
24 country folks here know what the slop bucket is. You
25 know what the slop bucket is. But he took the grits

00275

1 out of the slop bucket and eat it. And she always
2 instilled in me -- and, I mean, I was fascinated by
3 what she told me, the things that she told me over the
4 years. Said, Always have something already cooked. We
5 didn't have no electricity or refrigerator or anything
6 back then. But have something done or have something
7 you can fix real quick. Because you never know when
8 somebody going to come that are hungry.

9 But the people back then were loving and caring,
10 black and white.

11 You know, in Red Top, there was a few white
12 families there. But we grew up. We didn't know
13 anything about segregation other than we didn't go to
14 the same school, but we did everything together after
15 school. We grew up together.

16 We went -- when I went in the military, Bill and
17 some of the others who went back, I went in the
18 military in '51. And when you get -- have mail call,
19 everyone would ask who you got a letter from. Well,
20 you know, they would run to see who the letter was
21 from. And I said, Well, this is a friend of mine, a
22 white guy from home. And those guys I left, we part
23 with each other. And they couldn't believe that I was
24 getting letters from a white boy at Red Top. But we
25 grew up together, close knit.

00276

1 And I believe it's the same thing on Wadamalaw.
2 That back years ago, there were black and white. But
3 we're supposed to have the love for each other, work
4 together for the betterment of everybody.

5 You know, things that happened years ago, that was

6 a part of history. I don't -- I didn't have no control
7 over it. You don't have no control over it.
8 Things that happened in my family, my grandmother
9 told me about her mother. She worked the field. Her
10 sister, which is my great-grandmother or
11 great-grandaunt, she was the house lady. She worked --
12 well, she was the owner, slave owner's girlfriend. She
13 had one child for the slave owner and she had another
14 one for him. She wanted to break off the relationship.
15 And she -- the slave owner said, Well, if you break it
16 off, you have to go back in the field. She choose to
17 do this. And she caught what people used to call
18 confinement; she died. And my great-grandmother
19 breastfed that child, along with her child. She had a
20 child during the same time.
21 But I know all these things would happen, other
22 things would happen. And in life, those are history.
23 We're supposed to work together, love each other,
24 and work together for the benefit of all.
25 And like that cemetery back in Buell, I would like

00277

1 for each and every one of us who is able to work
2 together, to preserve that cemetery.
3 Another one, the playground in Red Top, that was
4 the first school that I attended on the Old Charleston
5 Road. People older than I went to that school. But
6 the school burned down later on.
7 This man right here, his brother, Jesse McNeill,
8 he is dead and gone. When Jesse got out of the
9 service, he got out of the service shortly after I did.
10 He intended to go to California, to live. And I
11 persuaded him to say home. We went to school to
12 Denmark, South Carolina, area trade school at that
13 time. Now it's Denmark Technical College. Ollie and
14 I -- he was married, I wasn't. We couldn't afford to
15 live on campus. Things were just that rough. I could
16 tell you things what we couldn't -- didn't have the
17 opportunity to have the funds to live on campus. All I
18 was getting was 110 dollars per month, back during that
19 time, to go to school. With a wife and one child, it
20 was 160 dollars. Back then, I had a wife and one
21 child.
22 But, before this, Ollie -- after, after we got out
23 of school, Ollie worked, McNeill, Jesse McNeill, he
24 worked with the young kids around school, Boy Scouts,
25 carried them up. My daddy (inaudible) my children,

00278

1 said, Man, snakes going to bite those children in the
2 woods.
3 But Ollie had a passion. He kept -- carried those
4 children up. And he was the man that was instrumental
5 in getting that playground. He went and worked hard.
6 McNeill, he didn't take the credit for it. He -- James
7 Green, a bricklayer at Red Top, he did the block work.
8 McNeill did the carpentry work. I did the plumbing in
9 that, in that building. It was -- I know it was just,
10 you know, a couple of -- a few thousand dollars, what
11 the whole building cost back then, what we did. I
12 don't recall exactly how much it was. But, now, we are
13 there.
14 But the school district, we would like for them to
15 turn that property back over to the Red Top Improvement
16 Association because, you know, that is so rich in our
17 history. People older than I went to school there.

18 And it's there. You know, we don't want that property
19 to be sold (sic) to some developer and they build it
20 up and we're using it. We would like to have it for
21 the Red Top Improvement Association.

22 Thank you.

23 (Applause.)

24 MS. GEORGE: I'm Dottie George. Thank you.

25 I am chairman of Friends of McLeod. We're a diverse
00279

1 group of over -- of probably about 800 individuals that
2 got together to save and preserve McLeod Plantation.
3 And I have got our vision, it's called Pathways, that I
4 would like to give to the Commission.

5 And the Commission, I would like to thank you for
6 having us here tonight and listening to us. Thank you
7 very much.

8 And they're in here. And if you could give them
9 to the rest of the Commission, I'd appreciate it. It's
10 a DVD that explains a little bit about what we're doing
11 and about McLeod Plantation.

12 McLeod Plantation is one of the most intact sea
13 island plantations on the East Coast. It's been
14 preserved, mainly due to its been encapsulated because
15 Mr. Willie McLeod, who was the owner, or descendant of
16 the owners of the sea island plantation, he loved his
17 land. He wanted to preserve his land. And he only
18 sold the land, part of -- partial pieces of land to
19 keep the other land intact.

20 We have taken up his cross and we want to continue
21 to preserve McLeod Plantation. We want it to educate
22 the generations to come about the history that is so
23 much a part of McLeod Plantation.

24 McLeod Plantation dates back to pre-Columbian. It
25 goes through the Revolutionary War, antebellum, the
00280

1 Civil War, the reconstruction, civil rights and on
2 after that.

3 We've seen it, in my lifetime -- I'm -- I've lived
4 on James Island all my life. And I have seen it go
5 from people working in the fields to the people living
6 in the slave cabins that were free, but yet still
7 working on the plantation, and then seeing all the
8 slave cabins just shut down. And it's really
9 encapsulated in time.

10 What we would like to do is open McLeod Plantation
11 to the public. We would like to ask the Commission to
12 help us educate the public by putting McLeod Plantation
13 on the Gullah-Geechee heritage -- cultural heritage
14 trail.

15 This is one thing, it's a living, land-based
16 culture, as Mr. Heyward was saying. And also, as
17 Mr. White was just saying, that it's brought blacks and
18 whites together, to work for this common cause of
19 preserving our heritage. It's everybody's heritage.
20 It's a heritage of sea island cotton that, that made
21 Charleston one of the richest cities, one of the four
22 richest cities in America antebellum. And it was only
23 the richest, wealthiest city because we had slave trade
24 and the slaves were doing a lot of this work, to make
25 McLeod Plantation and other plantations what it was,

00281

1 and to make Charleston and all the historic houses in
2 Charleston -- I mean, it would not -- Charleston would
3 not be Charleston without the Gullah-Geechee heritage.

4 And so as chairman of McLeod, I'm trying to relay
5 that message of almost 800 people, that we would like
6 to ask you, the Commission, to grant our request and
7 put McLeod on this heritage trail.

8 I would appreciate and thank you for your time
9 tonight. And I'm not as long-winded as other people,
10 but I think I've got my message across.

11 Thank you.

12 (Applause.)

13 MS. SINGLETON-PRATHER: Well, first of all,
14 let me say good evening to all my cousins. Because
15 that's one thing Gullah does, it connects us all. My
16 name is Anita Singleton-Prather. Most folks know me as
17 Aunt Pearlie Sue. I'm a Gullah storyteller and
18 historian from Beaufort, South Carolina. And it's
19 exiting to see everybody out here.

20 And one of the things I'm so happy to hear is that
21 there are many, many Gullah stories. There's no one
22 person that can claim its fame. But it belongs to all
23 of us. And it belongs to the world. So I'm excited
24 about everybody coming here to tell their story. My
25 heart is always for children and educating our

00282

1 children.

2 And once you tell kids, especially
3 African-American kids, and you tell them that our
4 history, yes, it was 400 years here with slavery, but
5 it goes even beyond that, back to Africa. And when we
6 start connecting those dots, then our kids find out
7 where they belong. And you get -- make such a
8 difference in knowing who you are and what you are and
9 what you're capable of being.

10 So I'm always excited about education. I was in
11 the classroom. This would have been my 31st year.

12 But for the past 15 years, I've been basically
13 traveling, doing Gullah storytelling and Gullah
14 presentations.

15 And we have several -- you may have seen us on
16 PBS, Tales from the Land of Gullah, and some other
17 things that we have done. And I work real close with
18 South Carolina ETV. I have a Web site with them that's
19 called -- it's knowitall.org\gullahnet. And it's
20 becoming very international.

21 One of the projects that I'm part of, would you
22 believe the Houston Museum, Children's Museum, is
23 teaching Gullah? So now, for the past two years, there
24 has been a Gullah museum exhibit that has been
25 traveling the top nine children's museums throughout

00283

1 the U.S. and Canada. And it ends next year, in 2010.
2 And it's called Tales from Land of Gullah, and it
3 features my animated character. But it's estimated
4 that at least a million children will be introduced to
5 the Gullah culture. And I'm excited about other kids
6 learning about our culture.

7 But it's so important that our own children know
8 about our culture. So I challenge you, Commission, to
9 really get on the school system, the school district,
10 South Carolina Department of Education, so that we can
11 get a Gullah curriculum in our school district, get our
12 teachers trained to teach the -- to pass this
13 information on.

14 I can't tell all the stories. Don't want to tell
15 them all. But just being here tonight, everybody has a

16 Gullah story to tell.

17 And if we can get together and come up, one of the
18 things we're working on in Beaufort, South Carolina, at
19 three predominantly black schools, is called a South
20 Carolina arts integration grant. And we're going --
21 and I work as a community cultural heritage scholar.
22 And I go in and I work with teachers, to show them how
23 to infuse the Gullah culture through the arts and to
24 relate these different areas and these different
25 stories. But I'll take some of these stories back to

00284

1 Beaufort and relate it to our children in the classroom
2 and teach teachers how to do that. But we have
3 teachers that are coming in from all over the U.S. and
4 some come from other parts of the world. We need to
5 make sure they understand our culture, our children,
6 and how to relate a lot of our information to our
7 teachers. So I challenge you, Commission.

8 And, Michael, I'm so proud of you, Minister
9 Michael, of the work that you've done. Because, you
10 know, we've had some spats and I know it has been
11 challenging. And we really have a treasure, a jewel in
12 this young man.

13 And, young man, you blessed me tonight.

14 We have young people who are seeking their culture
15 and wanting to preserve it. And that's what we have to
16 do. It's nice that all of us are here. And, you know,
17 I'm 25 plus, plus, plus. But we have to get young
18 people in here. I'm sorry, last time they had a
19 meeting in Yemassee and I took my two grandbabies. And
20 they were eight and five. And -- but we have to
21 make -- we have to drag them here. They may not
22 understand, they may not want to come right now.

23 But a lot of things that I'm doing now is because
24 my grandmother dragged me to things. And I didn't want
25 to go, but it gave me enough information so that when I

00285

1 got old enough and I came into my right mind, that I
2 knew it was something important that she had dragged me
3 to. So I challenge you for that.

4 And one last question, if there's anybody that can
5 remember the old-fashioned Decoration Day celebration
6 in Beaufort, South Carolina, around Memorial Day
7 celebration, please, before you leave here tonight,
8 that you could give me your name and phone number.
9 That was one of the biggest celebrations right after
10 the Civil War. Memorial Day was called Decoration Day.
11 Our white -- southern whites didn't celebrate it
12 because it was -- sort of reminded them that they lost
13 the war. But it was celebrated by blacks and northern
14 whites down in Beaufort, and was one of the biggest
15 celebrations. You can just imagine 10,000 black people
16 right around 1887, around our Beaufort National
17 Cemetery, for a celebration. So it one of the biggest
18 celebrations. What I do, I bring history on in stage
19 musical theater. So we do that production called
20 Decoration Day. So I'm always looking for new
21 information to put on stage and make history come
22 alive.

23 God bless. Thank you.

24 (Applause.)

25 MS. ALSTON: Good evening, commissioners and

00286

1 good evening to you all. My name is Delores McKnight

2 Alston. I'm not too much of a public speaker, but I've
3 been taught very well lately.

4 But, anyway, my dream started about 15 years ago.
5 My dream came from the background of my parents, Melvin
6 and Leola McKnight of Ravenel, South Carolina. They
7 were always -- there are now deceased. They will
8 always live within us. I am the 15th child of 16
9 children. Today, nine is living and seven preceded
10 them in death. They have many grandchildren,
11 great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren to
12 whom they have not seen, but they will live within them
13 years to come.

14 I stand here before you tonight. I have a dream.
15 My vision -- and I have planted and prepared already,
16 in progress, that dream.

17 I have some most empowered in mind people behind
18 me: Dr. Blake, for example, Commissioner William
19 Saunders, Congressman William Clyburn, just to name a
20 few. I came to them about my vision.

21 Cancaw Plantation in Ravenel is very unique to
22 strangers. But it's not about the people who've been
23 living there for many years, like my family.

24 The road in which I live on today is named after
25 my father's last name, McKnight Village Road. The land
00287

1 in which my house is on now is where my father and
2 mother raised them.

3 (Inaudible) still grows there. I cook with it.
4 My mother was a master chef. Everything you named,
5 that lady cooked. And, today, I stand here to tell you
6 all today I'm a master chef in her creation. Because
7 whatever you want, I can cook. But I have to do a
8 little downsizing with it, for health reasons. With
9 the saturated, you substitute for olive oil now. But
10 it's very healthy, being in nursing.

11 I am a mother of three children, age 32, 29, 22,
12 and one granddaughter, ten years old. My husband.

13 My vision is to have the McKnight Cultural Life
14 Enrichment Center to be built in Ravenel. It would
15 consist of banquet halls, something that we do not have
16 in that area. It would consist of an exercise room,
17 meeting rooms, education for the children in the
18 community, just to name a few.

19 But Commissioner Saunders talked to me a few weeks
20 ago. And listening to Mr. Sam White, I could reflect
21 on something my dad said, that was Mr. Saunders told me
22 a few weeks ago: It takes a village to raise a child.

23 My village consists of the people in Ravenel, but
24 it also takes, you can say, planning, process of
25 planning. But it only take -- it takes months of
00288

1 planning, years of planning, but only takes a second to
2 destroy.

3 Commissioner Saunders told me, I knew your father.
4 You act like him. You look like him. Now step out and
5 be like him. He was a fighter. He was a believer.

6 He had his own body shop, his own business. It
7 was called M and L Snack bar. Back in the day, aka,
8 that was a juke joint. When they left from him, they
9 left, they went to Sam White, in Red Top, to his juke
10 joint. I wasn't at the age to go in there, but I had
11 siblings that used to work for Mr. White, that worked
12 in my dad's juke joint.

13 Today, that building still exists. It's on 17

14 South in Ravenel, South Carolina. It's right on the
15 highway stretch. My brother took the roof off it. But
16 Mayor Opal told him to reserve it.

17 I believe in preserving. Preserving is a process.
18 When you do canning, it's a process in canning. When
19 you harvest, it's is a process in harvesting. The
20 harvests are plentiful, but the labors are few.

21 But I'm going to take my project, after tonight,
22 and I'm stepping out on faith. Because you can do all
23 things to God who strengths you. And I believe in
24 that.

25 I sit here. I don't think I'm the youngest in
00289

1 here, but I learned a lot. I'm not biased. I have
2 children who have graduated from college and they have
3 brought so many different children to my house. I
4 thought I had a really cultural household. And, today,
5 they're still bringing them. Even though they have
6 left home, they're still bringing them there. Matter
7 of fact, I got about 15 people in my house right now.
8 They were supposed to be leaving Sunday from the
9 Fourth. They're still in my house.

10 But I took my mother's recipe this past weekend.
11 That banana pudding they make in that store today,
12 that's not banana pudding. The one I'm accustomed to
13 is the one you put inside your oven. The potato pony,
14 the potato pie that you have with the window pane
15 strips across it, that's what I make. That's what I
16 cook. And remember the collard greens? The candy yam
17 I make today is baked in a cast iron frying pan that my
18 mom gave to me.

19 I asked her, when I moved home, for a set of pots.
20 I came to her. She said, I got you a set of pots. I
21 came to the house. The lady handed me that cast iron
22 frying pan she used to beat us with and said, You take
23 this. In years to come, think about me in your
24 kitchen, when I'm not there.

25 I just baked two cornbread this past weekend in
00290

1 that same frying pan.

2 And my sister told me, Why will you bring
3 something your behind got whooped with?

4 I said, For our history and our culture.

5 The Gullah-Geechee corridor is part of -- matter
6 of fact, it's the main issue in my planning process.

7 I've had the distinguished honor to have a pastor
8 by the name of Reverend Tony Slater, Junior, who
9 preaches at Bethel AME Church, in Ravenel, which I
10 attend. He developed, he put together a planning, a
11 visualization, planning presentation. Now I can take
12 that to bankers, to anywhere, to get the funding. But,
13 hopefully, with one of my villagers in my village, such
14 as Congressman Clyburn, I can get that building funded
15 grantly.

16 It will be many information in the near future
17 that will be coming to you forward about the planning.

18 I have to get with the Town of Ravenel. Mayor
19 Opal is the mayor there. Very good lady. I've been if
20 front of them before to get my catering license.

21 I brought tonight -- this is the license that my
22 father had from his building, his business. This is
23 then the beginning of me.

24 And Reverend Tony Slater's presentation will be
25 the future, underneath the Gullah-Geechee corridor,

00291

1 building the McKnight Cultural Life Enrichment center.
2 Thank you so very much.
3 (Applause.)

4 MS. BROWN: I don't have any stories like
5 what was told, but I am so glad to be part of this
6 meeting. I've learned a lot. And I just came up to
7 say to Mr. Tommy that when you and Mr. Saunders do the
8 planning of building up your island, I would like to be
9 a part of it. My grandparents, my mother, they all
10 raised up on your farm. They called it Pint.

11 And last year, my brother moved from New York. He
12 was 73 years old. I asked him what he wanted for
13 Father's Day. He asked if I would take him back to the
14 plantation. And he wanted to show me where he was
15 born. I took him to that plantation. That was his
16 Father's Day gift, which was June 19th. And July 19th,
17 he died. So he, like you said, they're dying and we're
18 not getting the story.

19 When Maysie Wigfall died, that's my aunt, I was
20 able to get some information from her before she died.

21 And I would like to sit with you and Mr. Saunders
22 and let us learn more of where my mother, my
23 grandfather worked and lived for many years. He was
24 the last one that picked your father's watermelon. He
25 said Mr. White (inaudible) Tommy.

00292

1 So I've learned a little, so I'd like to share
2 that with you.

3 DR. BLAKE: Would you state your name,
4 please.

5 MS. BROWN: Okay. Evelyn Brown. And I live
6 right around the road, just around the corner, right
7 here on the island. Okay.

8 MS. ZIMMERMAN: Hi. I'm Katie Zimmerman.
9 I'm with the Coastal Conservation League.

10 And we have had the privilege of working with the
11 Sea Island Coalition for, I think, nearly a decade on
12 various projects. And we're really excited that the
13 Commission is soliciting input on what the corridor
14 should contain.

15 And one of the things that we would like to see,
16 if possible, and we're working with the developers on
17 this and also with Sea Island Comprehensive health
18 care, their board, is to have the second phase of the
19 Angel Oak Village Project, whatever they're referring
20 to it as now -- I think it's now Sea Island Health
21 Phase 2, would be purchased by county greenbelt funds,
22 to become a park. And we felt like the opportunity
23 exists, since so many people come to the park, to look
24 at the tree, they should also be there to value and
25 learn about the heritage and the culture of

00293

1 Gullah-Geechee history out on Johns and Wadamalaw
2 Islands, including the struggle for civil rights that
3 many of you have talked about tonight. So we just
4 wanted to make sure that you all and the Commission is
5 aware of our idea and what we have been working on.

6 And we have talked to Dr. Rod Rutledge, with the
7 board of Sea Island Comprehensive Health Care. And
8 we've talked to Mr. Saunders. And we've also talked to
9 Queen Quet. And we've gotten some good feedback on
10 what they think of this idea. And we're really excited
11 about it because we think that the tree is a good place

12 to start when you have all these people coming in that
13 live on the islands, and tourists from all over the
14 world who come to see the Angel Oak. Why not, while
15 they're there, learn about the people and the culture
16 that was surrounding the Angel Oak for so long? And we
17 feel like that's an opportunity that's been missed for
18 a while and it should be addressed. And, hopefully,
19 this way, we can have some affordable housing on the
20 island. We can also have the preservation of the Angel
21 Oak. But, most importantly, retain the importance of
22 the history and the culture that's associated with the
23 Gullah-Geechee people and traditions.

24 And I was actually looking up some contact
25 information, and I was on the Gullah-Geechee, their
00294

1 official Web site. And I saw a quote that I thought
2 was perfect as we're working on this. And I was
3 talking to Queen Quet on the phone. And I told her.
4 And I'm not going to ruin it by trying to speak in
5 dialect. But, essentially, the essence of the quote
6 is: You must take care of the root in order to heal
7 the tree. And I thought it was perfect. As you know,
8 we're trying to look at the Angel Oak development, and
9 look at the people who want to keep Johns Island the
10 way it is, and honor the history. And I thought it was
11 a good sign, that meant that this project was going to
12 be worthy of moving forward.

13 So I just wanted to make sure you all were aware
14 of that. I wanted the Commission to know about it.
15 And we'll keep the Commission and all of you informed
16 as we move forward. And, hopefully, we'll make some
17 headway with this idea.

18 So, thank you.
19 (Applause.)

20 MR. SKIDMORE: Good evening. I'm Bud
21 Skidmore. I'm from Edisto Island.

22 And while we may be off -- the farthest off the
23 beaten track, we're not immune from any of the problems
24 or the challenges that you have mentioned here tonight.
25 Development threatens us just as it threatens you. And
00295

1 we're working very hard to try to preserve what we have
2 out there.

3 Probably the most important thing we have
4 happening is our effort to make highway -- scenic
5 Highway 174 a national scenic byway. We've attempted
6 to make the Gullah-Geechee corridor folks aware of this
7 through Queen Quet and through Michael. And we hope
8 they'll support us in that effort. Because the roads
9 that connects these pieces of property we all hold so
10 dear are truly the roads to the stories that you've all
11 tried to share with us tonight.

12 I spent 30-plus years working for South Carolina
13 Educational Television. And I can tell you the honest
14 truth: The stories are what make it all important.
15 What people have in their hearts and what they've
16 talked with you about tonight is what makes it part of
17 all of us. The efforts could not be complete if we
18 don't preserve the stories. We need to be sitting down
19 with every person over 60, 65, with a recorder, and
20 capturing it now. Because they're all going away. And
21 I would recommend to the Commission a nonprofit
22 organization called Story Corps, which has done a
23 marvelous job across this nation working with the

24 Smithsonian to go out and record these stories.
25 I have enjoyed tonight, listening to your stories.

00296

1 And I want so much that we keep these stories in our
2 community and that we share them with the next
3 generation and the generations thereafter.
4 So come on out to Edisto and see us. It's best to
5 be (inaudible) Edisto.

6 (Applause.)
7 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good evening. I'm Greg
8 (inaudible) from Johns Island. And where's Bill?

9 MR. ALLEN: He's somewhere out there. He's
10 working?

11 AUDIENCE MEMBER: Bill doesn't work. I want
12 to thank you for allowing me to be part of this. This
13 is really interesting and educational.

14 I'm from off, way off. Grew up in New England and
15 went to graduate school in Atlanta, after college in
16 New England. And it wasn't until I got there that I
17 found that you can be happy. I was not a happy child.
18 I did not enjoy my childhood. But when I came down to
19 Atlanta, I realized there's a different way of living.
20 It truly is. And it was. I wasn't born again
21 religiously, but I was born again culturally, I'd say.

22 And been in South Carolina for about 30 years.
23 Been down Johns Island for the last four. Actually, my
24 address is in Kiawah, but I consider that part of Johns
25 Island. And I appreciate your allowing me to drive

00297

1 through your island, back and forth. And I respect the
2 road.

3 And respect -- oh, there's Bill. I was going to
4 tell you, I'm Bill's grandson, the white sheep of the
5 family, the side he won't talk about. No, that's not
6 true. Take that out of the record.

7 Fifty years from now -- I respect Bill.

8 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Time is up now. It's
9 after nine o'clock.

10 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I've spoken to him a number
11 of times and I respect him very much.

12 But what I came to say was about the Progressive
13 Club. One of the things that I did in some years past
14 was pick up a book called, Ain't You Got A Right To The
15 Tree Of Life? And Bill is prominently featured in
16 that, as a very handsome young man, I might add. Now
17 he's just a handsome man. And I was amazed at what
18 went around in there. And it actually drew me to
19 moving to Johns Island full time and being a part of
20 this culture and community.

21 We didn't have this kind of roots when I was
22 growing up in Connecticut. Everyone is too busy being
23 successful, moving around, going to Europe, being vice
24 president of this or that, or whatever. California, it
25 didn't matter where, it was climbing the road or the

00298

1 success that was important. Coming down here, it's
2 different. And it may not be for everybody, but it's
3 for me.

4 And reading that book about Johns Island and what
5 happened with the Progressive Club, I tried to search
6 out some more information about Esau Jenkins. It's not
7 to be found. There is no book written, that I could
8 find, in the library, on anything on Esau Jenkins.
9 It's amazing, amazing to me.

10 AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's coming.

11 AUDIENCE MEMBER: I hope so. You can find a
12 little bit about Ms. Clark, Septima Clark, but not
13 about Esau Jenkins. It's right here.

14 And I would hope that the Commission would see
15 that that site not is just preserved but is resurrected
16 and celebrated for what went on there in the sixties
17 and what led up to that. I mean, what better location
18 than that? That's a very important place. And I only
19 know it tangentially. I know Bill and Mr. Jenkins know
20 it intimately.

21 But thank you for letting me be a part of this.
22 It's a been a pleasure.

23 And, Michael, I don't know how you do it, but
24 congratulations on getting this going, because it's
25 difficult. And it takes one person. Everybody has an
00299

1 interest and everybody can play a part, but it takes
2 one individual to push, to push, to push, to push and
3 not give up. And I think Michael's the man. So thank
4 you.

5 (Applause.)

6 MS. TIPTON: I'm Ida Tipton, of Edisto
7 Island. And I moved down here from Edisto -- from
8 Indiana, about ten years ago.

9 When I told them where I was going, they said, Oh,
10 you're going to Gullah culture. So Indiana knows about
11 Gullah.

12 I work for the Edisto Island Open Land Trust. And
13 I can say that definitely help is needed for trying to
14 control Charleston County letting rezoning go on, and
15 also to protect and help the Gullah people with getting
16 a clear title and preserving their land and letting
17 them keep their land.

18 Thank you.

19 (Applause.)

20 MR. COLLETON: Good afternoon. My name is
21 Abraham Colleton, so I'm from Colleton County. And I
22 didn't want the records to go without some recognition
23 from Colleton County.

24 I just want to say I lost a bit of history went my
25 aunt died a couple of months ago. She was 99. So I,
00300

1 you know, I missed my calling because, you know, I get
2 involved in the history.

3 And we ought to -- because, you know, we don't
4 know who we are, we don't know where we're going. And
5 that's what our kids are doing today.

6 So I just got up, just to kind of, you know, say a
7 few things here. And I think that what I would love to
8 see the Commission do is to kind of have a breakdown
9 meeting where you do it at community churches. Because
10 I think you miss so much. And, you know, I work at my
11 church. And I think what happens is, you know, we
12 travel around. I do stewardship, so you try to get a
13 meeting with your people. And they usually don't come
14 out. But there's a lot of history, you know, involved
15 in the Gullah culture, I mean in the Gullah culture.
16 So I am just, you know, encouraging you, you know, that
17 you would consider that.

18 The other thing I wanted to say is, I think we
19 need a logo. I think all of our highways should, you
20 know, kind of -- I'd like to see a logo on the signs,
21 to let people know that we are in Gullah country. So,

22 you know, hopefully, that that would be one of the
23 other things that we would get done. And I just wanted
24 to say that.

25 I know, we lose a lot, you know, of our culture
00301

1 because if we don't -- you know, we almost have to
2 protect our communities and -- you know, when we're
3 inviting people in.

4 I remember one of the things that I lost was -- we
5 had a -- I know you all seen this big pot that you do
6 sugar cane with. I had that thing on my farm. And I
7 invited somebody over to do some logging. And when I
8 went back to look, the thing was gone. So I'm just
9 saying that, you know, you need to preserve whatever
10 artifacts you do have and encourage you to be a strong
11 community.

12 And I sure appreciate this. I try to keep, you
13 know, keep abreast of all the information that I hear
14 from you, so, you know, I can get a chance to come in.
15 So, anyway, I thank you and I appreciate it. Thank
16 you.

17 (Applause.)

18 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: Okay, Michael, are
19 you going to come on up?

20 One of the things that somebody mentioned, the
21 comment about Mr. Jenkins and there are no books. My
22 friend just made that comment. And I find that losers
23 got to continue to fight. So losers don't write books.
24 People that write books ain't doing nothing but writing
25 books. And somebody else has to write the book, not

00302

1 the person that was doing the fighting.

2 One person asked me the other day, Paul Robertson,
3 he asked me, he said, Bill, where did y'all used to get
4 hominy from? It's a good question, you know. But we
5 had grist mills on Johns Island, where folks used to
6 take all of their corn. But we -- then we also had, we
7 had ones that we used to put onto the porch and grind
8 our own corn. And my grandmother would tell you what
9 size meal she wanted, cornmeal and all that, the grits,
10 whether she wanted fine, whether she wanted coarse,
11 those kind of stuff. And we had it right at, right at
12 the house. And so all -- but when you read that
13 question, I never thought about folks didn't even
14 know where we got grits from, you know. We grew the
15 corn and we did all those same things.

16 Come on, Michael.

17 DR. BLAKE: In closing, I want to thank you
18 all again for coming and being with us and sharing so
19 much with us.

20 I have to take exception to my Brother Bill's
21 statement about those who write books. Those who write
22 books?

23 COMMISSIONER SAUNDERS: You survived a long
24 time.

25 DR. BLAKE: What I -- we will be meeting as a

00303

1 Commission on the 15th, 16th and 17th of this month in
2 Wilmington, North Carolina. And we'll be doing some
3 community things there, but we'll also be doing some
4 deliberations. Michael will say more about that.

5 I just wanted to close out with a commercial. And
6 I want to be very, very clear about what I'm doing and
7 why I'm doing it. As I said before, I am the

8 humanities scholar in residence at the Medical
9 University of South Carolina. If you were to visit my
10 office, you would see I sit between the president and
11 the vice president. And I have a very wonderful
12 opportunity. The Medical University of South Carolina
13 has extraordinary resources in terms of knowledge and
14 the capacity to heal disease and prevent disease. And
15 as a part of our work, we want to partner with the
16 people in this community and these communities. And we
17 will be calling upon you in various ways to be engaged.
18 Because, as you know, we are faced with some real
19 crises here: HIV, stroke, diabetes. I could go down
20 the list. And that's the reason why I asked Dr. Leite
21 if she would come tonight. She represents all of the
22 Medical University, but she particularly works in
23 dentistry. And I just want to be upfront and
24 transparent, that every time I get a chance, I'm going
25 to push getting Gullah-Geechee people more connected

00304

1 with the Medical University, for the purpose of getting
2 healthier, more able, young people and older people to
3 deal with these things. And if you want to know more
4 about dentistry or dental care, Dr. Leite and Ms. West
5 are still here. And I wanted to make that clear before
6 the evening ended.

7 MR. ALLEN: Again, on behalf of the
8 Commission, I want to say thank you.

9 You can see that I have been blessed with an
10 awesome task. One of the things that the Chairman of
11 the Commission told me very clearly, Chairman Campbell,
12 You need to go home and tell your wife that you have 24
13 other children. And I can tell you that my kids call
14 me daily. And if I don't call them first, they call me
15 in the middle of the night, early in the morning, by
16 e-mail, by cell phone, by page. But I say that to say
17 this, that we are dedicated to this process. We are
18 committed to this process. And without you, this
19 process would not be successful. And so I think it's
20 important that you realize that now you all become
21 disciples of what you heard here tonight and to take it
22 to the person that was not sitting here tonight.

23 A part of my journey with this is also spiritual
24 and understanding the blessings that have been given me
25 to be a part of this process. Dr. Blake reminds me,

00305

1 Sometimes you're like Joseph, working in the process
2 that you didn't ask for, but this task has been given
3 to you. Other commissioners say, You've been like
4 Moses, leading people in a place they've never been
5 before, but you have a vision to get there.

6 All we ask, that you'll continue your prayers and
7 support in this endeavor, that we'll make this corridor
8 the best in the nation, and that we will allow this
9 corridor to be a shining light to other communities
10 that exist in this country, that will desire the same
11 opportunities that you spoke about tonight.

12 And to the gentleman that asked about the logo, if
13 you happen to secure, when you first walked in, a copy
14 of your newsletter, right now what you see here is
15 serving in that capacity. We wanted something that
16 would be visual, something that would be educational,
17 something that be artful, but also something that would
18 link you.

19 Because, ultimately, I see this corridor as one

20 unit. I tell the commissioners all time, You all may
21 have come from the different states, but at the end of
22 the day, you're all one body. And that is the way they
23 try to operate, as one body. So, again, the work that
24 we do here is vitally important.

25 And, again, we encourage those who were not here,
00306

1 that you will see, they're more than welcome to go to
2 our Web site, where they can also add comments to the
3 process that we will look at and be a part of the
4 process.

5 Just let you know where we're traveling here
6 probably for the remaining part of this year. We'll be
7 beginning to digest what y'all have said to us along
8 the corridor. We'll be retooling what you said to us.
9 And probably sometime in the spring of next year we may
10 come back again to make sure we heard tonight what you
11 said to us. And then we'll begin the process of
12 pulling this all together and laying this at the feet,
13 if you will, of the Secretary of the Interior. And
14 through his signature, will then bless us to move
15 forward in the very things that you ask, suggested, and
16 the comments. We can all work together. I see this
17 ultimately as in the Book of Joshua, with smooth stones
18 being laid as a remembrance from which we have come.

19 Thank you.

20 (The proceeding concluded at 9:27 P.M.)