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Exploring empowerment within the Gullah Geechee cultural heritage corridor: implications for heritage tourism development in the Lowcountry

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While scholarship on the Gullah Geechee (GG) people has been extensive, little research has examined heritage tourism's potential to empower or disempower the GG. In an attempt to shed light on this, the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC) was chosen as a case-study site because of its 2006 designation by Congress to protect and promote the unique attributes of the GG's cultural heritage. Qualitative interviews were conducted to unearth how heritage tourism was psychologically, socially, politically and economically empowering or disempowering the GG. The interviews described heritage tourism as having both the potential to be a positive force for good, as well as destructive. Specific positive examples of empowerment discussed were increased pride in being GG, tourism providing opportunities for community members to come together around certain initiatives such as the Sweetgrass Basket Festival, tourism being a 'carrot' to clear heirs' property issues, and the many economic opportunities associated with tourism in the Lowcountry. One example of disempowerment which transcended all four dimensions of empowerment was the claim that frauds were posing as GGs and attempting to benefit from the current renaissance surrounding the culture. Implications to the marketing and management of Lowcountry heritage tourism are discussed.

Keywords: Gullah Geechee; empowerment; heritage tourism; sustainable tourism; impacts of tourism; Lowcountry tourism

Introduction

The Gullah Geechee¹ (GG) people with their tragic, yet fascinating history have, for decades, captured the attention of numerous academic, state, federal and private organizations (Blockson, 1987; Burke, Halfacre, & Hart, 2003; Pollitzer, 1999; Singleton, 1982; Turner, 1949). Interest in the GG culture stems from the GG people being, in many instances, the direct descendants of slaves originally brought to the southern Sea Islands and coastal communities of Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina from

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West Africa for their agricultural expertise (GGCHC Management Plan, 2012). After emancipation, the GG people lived in these coastal communities relatively undisturbed until the mid-1960s, when development began to increase dramatically on the Southern Sea Islands (Hargrove, 2007; Thomas, 1980). Despite encroachment from development, relative isolation has allowed the GG culture to remain largely intact. Some even believe that these African–Americans living on the southern Sea Islands are ‘the most direct repository of living African culture to be found anywhere in North America’ (Szwed, 1970, p. 29; Thomas, 1980, p. 1). Jackson, Slaughter, and Blake (1974, p. 32) concur and emphasize that: ‘The unique history and geography of this region have combined to produce one of the most distinctive reservoirs of African-American culture in the United States.’

In recognition of the importance of preserving and promoting the GG cultural heritage, South Carolina Congressman James E. Clyburn, with the help of many GG leaders, championed the creation of the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC) in 2006 (Clyburn, n/d). The GGCHC is a 30-mile wide strip of land extending from Pender County, North Carolina, down to St. John’s County, Florida in the south (Figure 1). The Corridor has three guiding purposes to:

1. Recognize, sustain, and celebrate the important contributions made to American culture and history by African–Americans, known as the GG, who settled in the coastal counties of South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida.
2. Assist state and local governments and public and private entities in South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina and Florida in interpreting the story of the GG and preserving GG folklore, arts, crafts and music.
3. Assist in identifying and preserving sites, historical data, artifacts and objects associated with GG people and culture for the benefit and education of the public’ (GGCHC Management Plan, 2012, p. i).

One strategy suggested for helping the GGs protect and promote the unique attributes of their culture is sustainable heritage tourism development (GGCHC Management Plan, 2012). While heritage tourism has been proposed as a strategy to bring economic development to GG communities, little research has actually looked at GG attitudes toward heritage tourism development and how tourism may empower or disempower the GG. This is despite tourism being one of the most prominent industries in the Lowcountry² of Georgia, South Carolina, Florida, and North Carolina. However, traditional heritage tourism within the GGCHC in areas such as Charleston, SC, Hilton Head Island, SC, and Savannah, GA has been heavily criticized for bringing tourism development that favors a ‘whitewashed’, ‘slave-free’ interpretation of history (Butler, 2001; Hargrove, 2007) with poor jobs that use the GG as cheap labor within what Good (1968) and Thomas (1980) refer to as a ‘chambermaid-caddy economy’. Faulkenberry, Coggeshall, Backman, and Backman (2000) add that tourism in the Lowcountry has resulted in a ‘culture of servitude’ where the burden of accommodating tourists falls disproportionately on GGs. These criticisms of Lowcountry tourism mimic the larger literature on plantation tourism across the ‘Antebellum South’, which has been criticized for its ‘historical elisions’ that trivialize the slavery of the past by deflecting heritage narratives away from slavery toward romanticizing the lives of wealthy planters (Butler, 2001; Butler, Carter, & Dwyer, 2008; Buzinde, 2010; Buzinde & Santos, 2008).

Even though these challenges speak to the potential negative impacts of tourism, heritage tourism in the Lowcountry also has the potential to help the GG leverage their unique



Figure 1. Map of the GG cultural heritage corridor (GGCHC, 2011).

cultural resources into economic assets while providing an important incentive to protect their cultural heritage (GGCHCC Management Plan, 2012). Heritage tourism within the GGCHC also has the potential to move past the challenges associated with excessive or deficient surrogation and the complicated politics of remembering slavery in the Antebellum South (Alderman, 2010; Dwyer, Butler, & Carter, 2013) because of its combined focus on representing the difficult past of the GGs while at the same time celebrating the current cultural aspects of folklore, arts, crafts, and music that embody the GG culture today in a

way that addresses real socioeconomic problems currently facing the GG culture (Taylor, 2010). It is in essence bridging the gap between the critiques of ‘excessive’ and ‘deficient’ surrogation talked about by Alderman (2010) and Dwyer et al. (2013) because of its multi-faceted focus on past and present manifestations of the GG culture rather than solely turning to static commemorative substitutes (i.e. surrogations) to make up for the past wrongs of slavery.

With these complexities in mind, the primary purpose of this exploratory study was to speak with several GG stakeholders and advocates within the newly created GGCHC to better understand areas where tourism development within the GGCHC is being successful at empowering the GG people and identify challenges that still exist. To help guide the interviews, special attention was given to a holistic emphasis on empowerment across its multiple dimensions of psychological, social, political, and economic empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999). This broader focus on empowerment provided an appropriate lens to identify corridor-wide successes and challenges, as well as to see how tourism has positively or negatively impacted the GG people.

The paper follows with a review of the extant literature on African–American heritage tourism before introducing the four different types of empowerment used within the qualitative analysis. Following the literature review, the qualitative approach used to conduct the interviews and analysis will be reviewed before presenting the results from the study.

Literature review

Heritage tourism in the Southeast USA

Alderman (2013, p. 375) summarizes the relationship between African–Americans and tourism as ‘a complex and conflicted one’. These complexities and conflicts stem from a vibrant heritage tourism industry in the Antebellum South that has literally been built on the backs of slave labor (i.e. southern plantations and destinations such as Savannah, GA and Charleston, SC) while at the same time tending to whitewash the atrocities of slavery away to create a tourism ‘meta-narrative’ centered around southern hospitality and charm (Butler, 2001). This promotion of an ‘Old South Mythology’ within the southern heritage tourism industry has been heavily critiqued within the academic literature for its ‘symbolic annihilation’ of slavery which has led to an ‘institutional forgetfulness’ of slavery’s past atrocities (Alderman, 2010; Butler, 2001; Butler et al., 2008; Buzinde, 2010; Buzinde & Santos, 2008).

Flowing out of these critiques has been an emphasis on how to reconcile the past wrongs of slavery through commemorative surrogates in the form of memorials and heritage sites that best honor and remember those who suffered and died as slaves (Alderman, 2010; Dwyer et al., 2013). Dwyer et al. (2013, p. 428) describe commemorative surrogates as ‘heritage representations that address the historical-cultural void resulting from symbolic annihilation’. Alderman (2010, p. 90) uses Legg’s (2005) phrase ‘sites of counter memory’ to describe how these commemorative surrogates act as material spaces that actively challenge the prevailing historical consciousness of those in power.

While these commemorative surrogates represent important counter narratives, they have been criticized for being either too excessive or too deficient in representing slavery’s past wrongs (Alderman, 2010; Dwyer et al., 2013). Examples of perceived excessive surrogations include a graphic description attached to a monument in Savannah depicting the horrors of the middle passage which brought slaves from Africa to the Americas (Alderman, 2010) and the display of a Ku Klux Klan costume within the National Civil Rights

Museum in Memphis, TN. The common critique of excessive surrogation is that the memorial site is 'irritating an already difficult situation and intensifying the pain associated with the sense of loss accompanying an obscured or debased past' (Dwyer et al., 2013, p. 429). Another critique of excessive surrogation revolves around the potential for the commemorative sites (i.e. surrogations) to negatively influence tourists' experiences based on the emotional weight often imposed by their graphic depictions of past wrongs. In reference to the monument in Savannah, Alderman (2010, p. 2010) writes: 'There were significant calls to locate the monument away from the gaze of the many tourists who walk down River Street. Some suggested it was better suited for an African American churchyard, cemetery, or housing project.'

In contrast, the critiques of deficient surrogation often come from the point of view that the heritage site in question fails on some level to make an emotional connection with the audience, and that it glosses over the realities of the past (Alderman, 2013; Dwyer et al., 2013). Much of the critiques of southern plantations making slavery invisible align with this notion of deficient surrogation. There is also research suggesting that the dulling down of slavery has negative implications for the quality of international tourists' expectations when visiting plantations. Butler et al. (2008) found that international tourists were fascinated by slavery and were the most interested group in having slavery as a core part of historical interpretations.

The swinging pendulum between excessive and deficient surrogation of slavery speaks to a need for a more holistic type of heritage tourism that provides a range of interpretations in its attempt to educate tourists about past wrongs as well as to demonstrate the positioning of African-Americans in contemporary American society. However, with respect to the GG or any other historically marginalized groups, it is imperative that the 'history' and the 'present' of such peoples not be bifurcated, such that what came before is represented as categorically difficult/sorrowful, and *distant* – to be contrasted with a suddenly vibrant/colorful and potentially income-generating present replete of continuing poverty (Taylor, 2010). The point is that although the GGCHC emphasizes the celebratory aspects of the GGs, structural subjugation among the GG remains and should be acknowledged in any contemporary representation of GGs. Not to do so would perpetuate the whitewashing of this important segment of the American population.

Heritage tourism in the GGCHC

Heritage tourism within the GGCHC corridor has the potential to provide a middle ground where representations of the past are blended with current manifestations of the GG culture through folk art, music, food and customs. It, in essence, switches the traditional white male gaze of tourism toward a gaze on the GG and the special features of their culture (Alderman, 2013; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000). It has the potential to turn a formerly invisible aspect of southern heritage into a visible one.

While many potential benefits exist, past participation of the GG in Lowcountry tourism has been characterized mostly in terms of working class positions, that is, the GG working for others either endemic to the region or from outside who have been able to generate wealth from tourism opportunities (Faulkenberry et al., 2000). The mostly subservient involvement of the GG in coastal tourism may stem from two predominant characteristics of Lowcountry tourism that have historically worked against the GG people: (1) A glorified focus on the Antebellum history of the region from a white planter's perspective, and (2) a strong coastal tourism industry that often bypasses the cultural treasures of the GG while enlisting them as a cheap labor force for the service jobs commonly associated with the

hospitality and tourism industry. This led Good (1968) and Thomas (1980) to refer to the GG's role in the tourism industry as a 'chambermaid-caddy economy', where the GG's are the backbone of industry working the menial jobs without opportunities to personally profit from the lucrative industry.

Despite the overwhelming negative tone of the literature, there is some optimism surrounding the potential for the GG people to benefit more fully from tourism development. This can be seen in the creation of the GGCHC, as well as lines of research focused on developing small-scale tourism initiatives under the banner of ecotourism (Tyler, 2003) and geotourism (Thibeault, 2006). There has also been a focus on the importance of integrating the GG craft of sweetgrass basketmaking into the larger tourism industry in the Mount Pleasant and Charleston, SC area (Derby, 1980; Grabbatin, Hurley, & Halfacre, 2011). The hope is that these small-scale and community-owned heritage tourism initiatives will empower the GG people to take control of tourism development and economically benefit from the many tourists already traveling within the Lowcountry region to visit other attractions.

These diverse views on tourism within the GGCHC and the potential for tourism to generate wealth for the GG people speak to the need for more research into the impacts of tourism across the corridor. The largely negative tone within the extant literature has played an important role in serving as a herald to some of the injustices associated with Lowcountry tourism development, but it has also failed to analyze and elaborate on the successes that tourism development has also brought to those of GG descent. Much of this literature was also published prior to the development of the GGCHC by Congress and the National Park Service. This necessitates a need to take a current look at empowerment across the GGCHC, so that areas of success can be highlighted as well as problems can be identified. With this in mind, the literature review will now shift to empowerment's place within tourism development, so that the dimensions of empowerment used within the analysis can be better understood.

Empowerment with sustainable tourism

Resident empowerment is at the philosophical core of sustainable tourism (Cole, 2006) with Choi and Murray (2010, p. 589) writing that 'If the government fails to empower residents, the success of tourism development and sustainability cannot be guaranteed.' The importance of tourism empowering local residents has been widespread within the tourism literature with many suggesting that without resident empowerment, sustainable tourism is not attainable (Cole, 2006). This interpretation of empowerment within the tourism literature has been multidimensional with emphasis placed not only on the political power commonly associated with empowerment, but also highlighting the importance of psychological, social and economic empowerment (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999).

Psychological empowerment

Psychological empowerment, within a tourism context, refers to tourism's power to increase the pride and self-esteem of residents (Scheyvens, 1999). This increase in self-esteem is tied directly to the feeling of uniqueness that residents feel when people travel to purposely experience the unique natural and cultural features of one's community. Di Castri (2004, p. 52) summarizes it as tourism's ability to renew residents' sense of pride in the 'universal value of their culture and environment'. This reevaluation of a community's natural and cultural heritage is often noted as one of the most important benefits of tourism development (Besculides, Lee, & McCormick, 2002; Medina, 2003). For

example, Besculides et al. (2002) found that greater pride in one's community was one of the highest-ranking benefits of tourism development within the community of San Luis, Colorado. Stronza and Gordillo's (2008), in their work on tourism in the Amazon, also found that heightened self-esteem was one of the most important non-economic benefits associated with ecotourism development.

While the majority of the literature has focused on the positive aspects of psychological empowerment, it is important to note that it is possible for residents to be psychologically disempowered by tourism. This would occur from any type of tourism development that embarrasses or even brings back hurtful memories from tourism focused on aspects of the culture that residents want to hide or forget.

Tourism in the Lowcountry, with its complexities of being centered around the Antebellum South, has the potential to bring both psychological empowerment and disempowerment to the GG people depending on how tourism is developed, marketed and interpreted. This is precisely why there is a need to look within the GGCHC to identify areas where tourism is succeeding at psychologically empowering residents and to identify areas where it is not.

Social empowerment

Social empowerment, within a tourism context, occurs when tourism acts as bonding force within the community to increase community cohesion and collaboration (Boley & McGehee, 2014; Scheyvens, 1999). It is often characterized by residents perceiving themselves as being more connected to the community and therefore willing to work together toward common goals. Social empowerment is also associated with tourism development initiatives that not only provide a specific function to attract tourists, but also provides spaces for locals to socialize such as community farmers markets and town amphitheatres (Boley, McGehee, Perdue, & Long, 2014).

While sustainable tourism can result in this type of community revitalization and feelings of solidarity, it can just as easily result in social disempowerment where there is increased alienation of residents and feelings of distrust. Stronza and Gordillo's (2008) work in the Peruvian, Ecuadorian, and Bolivian Amazon demonstrates this potential when tourism development results in the erosion of cooperation within the community, the unequal treatment of community members from tourism development, and some community members 'buying' themselves out of traditional community obligations. It is for these reasons that examining the potential for tourism development within the GGCHC to either bring the GG people together or split them apart warrants further investigation.

Political empowerment

Political empowerment is the dimension of empowerment most often described in articles that take a unidimensional approach to addressing power relations within tourism development (Madrigal, 1993; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012). Political empowerment describes residents' access to the political decision-making process (Scheyvens, 1999). It focuses on all residents being fairly represented and having outlets to share their concerns about tourism development. Political empowerment is also commonly associated with residents having agency over the direction of tourism development within their community (Scheyvens, 1999).

Its application within tourism has been recently split between Western notions of democracy and Eastern governments with more separation between the people and those

in charge of making decisions. For example, when first developed, the Resident Empowerment through Tourism Scale (RETS) measured political empowerment using phrases such as ‘having access to the decision making process’ and ‘my vote makes a difference’ (Boley & McGehee, 2014). When applied in the country of Japan, the researchers recognized that there were no functional equivalents to ‘having access’ and being able to ‘vote’, and therefore adapted the scale by using phrases more tailored for an Eastern culture such as ‘I feel like I have the opportunity to participate in the tourism planning process in Oizumi’ (Boley, Maruyama, & Woosnam, 2015).

The GGCHC is a good case study for investigating political empowerment because the past literature has shown positive and negative examples of political empowerment. On one hand, Good (1968) and Thomas’ (1980) references to the GGs being the workforce of a ‘chambermaid-caddy economy’, and Faulkenberry et al.’s (2000) description of a ‘culture of servitude’ within the Lowcountry tourism industry do not sound like the tenets of political empowerment represented within the literature. On the other hand, the development of the GGCHC by Congressman Clyburn and others is a perfect example of political empowerment. It is because of these complexities that more in-depth research is needed with GG stakeholders to better understand where political empowerment is at work and where it is being hindered.

Economic empowerment

The last dimension of Scheyvens’ (1999) empowerment framework is economic empowerment. Economic empowerment, within a tourism context, refers to the economic gains of tourism being equitably spread across the community and retained for personal and community improvements (Scheyvens, 1999). It is commonly associated with enhancing the multiplier effect and minimizing economic leakage through emphasis placed on supporting local businesses and sourcing as many resources as possible from within the local community (Archer, 1982). The promises of economic empowerment are often the reasons for the strong support of heritage tourism development amongst governmental and developmental agencies (Al-Oun & Al-Homoud, 2008; Timothy & Boyd, 2006). It may also be part of the impetus behind the development of the GGCHC, so that the GG culture can be preserved while also being leveraged into a tourism asset that can perpetually bring money into the corridor to alleviate widespread poverty among GGs (Taylor, 2010).

While economic empowerment through tourism is a common goal of tourism development, it often falls short of its lofty goals. With the renewed emphasis on GG culture presented in the GGCHC Management Plan, it is important to talk with stakeholders to identify examples where economic empowerment is at work and areas when there are obstacles.

Research methods

In an attempt to shed light on the current level of empowerment or disempowerment within the GGCHC, a deductive qualitative analysis (DQA) following Scheyvens’ (1999) empowerment framework was embraced for two main reasons. First, DQA provided a depth of richness not available through common quantitative methods such as survey research (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Gilgun, 2005, 2010; Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001). Second, DQA provided the conceptual structure needed to assess Scheyvens’ (1999) dimensions of psychological, social, political and economic empowerment within the GGCHC (Gilgun, 2005, 2010). Gilgun (2010) describes DQA as type of qualitative research that begins with a conceptual framework and allows researchers to use a preconceived

conceptual framework to guide their preliminary codes and interpretation of the data. It is inherently different from the inductive ‘grounded theory’ approach where researchers set aside any preconceived perceptions of the topic and use the qualitative research to develop concepts and allow theory to emerge (Corbin & Strauss, 2014; Gilgun, 2005).

The primary researcher traveled within the Georgia and South Carolina portions of the GGCHC from July 2014 to October 2014 to meet with GG stakeholders in order to better understand the current tourism situation within the corridor. Participants were identified through a variety of avenues such as service on the GGCHC Commission, involvement in GG entrepreneurial activities across the region, involvement with nongovernmental organizations focused on African–American land retention, and through word of mouth referrals from other interviewees. A majority of interviewees came at the recommendation of one of the GGCHC Commissioners who was familiar with the local situation and knew of interviewees that would have valuable information to share. This purposive sampling methodology resulted in 10 semi-structured interviews, with 4 respondents located in Georgia and 7 residing in SC (Table 1).³ Interviews were conducted primarily as single interviews (8) within the GGCHC at the location of the interviewee’s choice. This was done to ensure a ‘natural setting’ and allow the interviewees to feel comfortable to speak freely about the positive and negative aspects of tourism. In addition to these eight one-on-one interviews, there was one interview conducted as a dual interview and one conducted over phone after the identified participant was not available during the two trips within the corridor. In total, 6 males and 5 females were interviewed for total of 11 participants. Interviews lasted between 14 minutes and 101 minutes with an average time of 54 minutes.

Interviews were recorded using the iRecorder application for IOS operating systems and then were professionally transcribed into Microsoft Word documents by Castingwords. Each respondent was provided the opportunity to look over his or her comments to ensure that captured thoughts were accurately portrayed before data analysis. This type of ‘member check’ is recommend by DeCrop (2004) and Krefting (1991) because it allows for verification of qualitative data and increases the trustworthiness of the data. Even though all respondents were provided the opportunity to review the transcripts, only 4 of the 10 respondents provided feedback on their ‘member checks’.

After the interviewees were given a chance to look over the transcripts, coding began using the software NVIVO 10 for Windows. During the coding process, special attention was given to Scheyvens’ (1999) empowerment framework and coding responses into the themes of psychological, social, political and economic empowerment. This type of coding is common in DQA when a prior conceptual framework is being used to guide the analysis (Gilgun, 2010). The findings from the interviews are discussed below.

Table 1. Locations of interviews, types of interviews and sex of respondents.

| Location | Single interviews | Dual interviews | Phone interviews | Total # of informants | Males | Females |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------|-------|---------|
| Darien/Sapelo Island (GA) | 3 | | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Beaufort/St. Helena (SC) | 1 | | | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Charleston/Mt. Pleasant (SC) | 4 | 1 | | 6 | 5 | 1 |
| Total | 8 | 1 | 1 | 11 | 6 | 5 |

Findings

Psychological empowerment with the GGHC

Psychological empowerment is the dimension of empowerment concerned with the self-esteem boost and sense of pride that tourism can bring to residents from visitors traveling to see the unique natural and cultural features of their community (Scheyvens, 1999). The interviews uncovered many examples of psychological empowerment. One of the most interesting findings related to psychological empowerment was the notion that there were strong negative connotations associated with being GG in the past.

We had people we met in our public hearings ... who said, 'My child will never speak Gullah. My child will never learn Gullah.' It's been a pejorative for a long time. (SC-2)

They were angry about the way they were portrayed. Angry ... He said, 'I don't speak Gullah.' It's pejorative, you've got to understand. (SC-2)

For us, Gullah/Geechees, which, we didn't call ourselves that back then, it was for embetterment. You had all of the racism stuff you had to deal with. (GA-4)

Interviewees' discussion of a historically antithetical stance among GGs vis-à-vis their own lineage is consistent with a larger black avoidance, also historically, of most things related to Africa and African peoples (Herskovits, 1938). Similar to other ethnic groups in American society, African-Americans (in particular, the historically small African-American middle class), viewed alignment with middle-American values as the key to success in American society. This took the form of emulating white, middle-class etiquette and mannerisms, eschewing black diction (again, the GG are known for their distinctive speech, which is unrecognizable even to other African-Americans), and aspiring to higher education. Perhaps more importantly, physical features typically associated with GGs – darker skin (the 'black Geechee'), tightly coiled ('nappy') hair, full lips and broad nose, characteristics of west African phenotypes, were mocked by both the larger white society but also intimately and directly by other blacks, so that GGs were rendered inferior both by a pervasive white racism external to the culture and also by a black colorism (incubated by the former) which privileged a 'mixed', if not exclusively European physical form (Coard, Breland, & Raskind, 2001; Martin, 1964). It was the Black Power and cultural movements of the 1960s and 1970s that gave voice to the legitimacy of distinctive black cultures, including the GG. Black art and cultural forms have, of course, influenced mainstream American culture since slavery, but these were subdued or aligned with mainstream white culture in a manner that did not challenge white interpretations of black influence.

While there appears to be a long history of embarrassment with being GG, the interviews revealed that the pendulum has begun to swing toward embracing and celebrating the heritage now. For example,

Now, I tell everybody I'm a Geechee. Like back then, 'Shh.' (GA-4)

I would say, 14 years ago, people were hesitant to refer to themselves as Gullah/Geechee in a public arena, and some folks expressed that. The work that all of us have done in the last 14 years has helped to subside that or wane that. People would feel good about themselves, and, yes, acknowledge that this was a painful past and being called that was fighting words. We understand that, but let's look at it in a different way today, as a term of pride. (SC-5)

There are Gullah/Geechees, who their parents and grandparents were ashamed of who they were, wouldn't teach them about the family history, they can come in now and learn it. And they want to. And they share it. They come out to events and they bring their children to learn, so that they don't grow up to be 50 year olds who don't know their own native tongue. (SC-1)

It is a stretch to attribute this new-found pride in being GG solely to heritage tourism development, but there does appear to be a connection, as many businesses have appeared that highlight the GG culture such as specialty restaurants that serve GG food including Ike's Gullah Food in Charleston and Gullah Cuisine in Mount Pleasant, SC.

Other aspects of psychological empowerment appear to be directly associated with GG's sharing their culture with visitors.

Again, one of the positive things about the tourism coming to the island, is it gives people a chance to become more curious about it (GG culture). If they don't do initial research, then maybe after coming, maybe it will occur to them to read a little bit more, purchase books. (GA-3)

We love this! It's our culture ... We did this for free (musical performance). We are just having fun. We are not trying to make any money. We just love this. (GA-4)

For African-Americans, it's a major opportunity to have people learn and then study more perhaps about the culture, the people, what has happened. My project on rice is a project that tourism loves, because it's educating them about something. Most of them have never heard of rice culture here. (SC-4)

As we disseminate information about history, cultural preservation, food, and the historical context of that, then people say, 'Where can I get this food today?' Then I can say, 'You can go to Ike's.' Folks coming from Ohio ask me, 'Where can I eat in the vernacular?' (SC-5)

First of all, the baskets are known all over the country. People come from all over. Highway 17 is designated as the Sweetgrass Basketmakers Corridor. People in search of that art form, they would tend to come over in this area. (SC-3)

I would say, over the last 14 years, being engaged in this process and this journey, the awareness and understanding of Gullah culture has gone up, which is positive. People are coming here looking for, wanting to experience and learn about it. That's positive. (SC-5)

The only examples of GGs being psychologically disempowered from tourism were associated with inauthentic representations of the culture by those considered as outsiders. For example, one interviewee mentioned:

There's a difference between being black-owned and Gullah/Geechee owned ... The next biggest issue is ignorance, literal ignorance, of people who think they know what our culture is, incorrectly interpreting our culture and putting that out here now, because they can sell it a certain way. And not sell the truth, OK? They can't sell the truth, so they package a lie, and they're selling it. That's damaging, because now you have people who don't know any better wondering and confused, don't know what to support, because they're like, 'But they said this.' That's a direct contradiction of what I see the people trying to do. That's a big issue. Now the part that I think that can be beneficial is in people holding to their culture. They're going to win out against the fakes. As I always say to people, when someone presents you with a cubic zirconium, it's beautiful if you never saw a diamond. You love it, but when they give you a diamond, you'll never accept a cubic zirconium again. That's what's happening now. People go to some things, because it says 'Gullah.' And they get there and they may be entertained. I mean, a lot of it's very entertaining. But when they then turn around and come to something with the traditional people, that it comes, 'Oh, wait a minute. This is a different ... I feel this. This is emotional. I'm really connected here, not like the show we went to the other day.' (SC-1)

Then, of course, she went and interviewed the tour guides throughout Charleston. 99.9 percent of them seemingly, from her perspective, knew nothing about rice culture, and knew nothing about the actual building of Charleston. They knew about the people whose names are on the buildings, but they don't know about the workforce. (SC-4)

There are people who make money off of tourists and tourism and the Gullah Geechee thing. But I was talking to a local leader recently who was very upset about these interpreters. As he put it, they tell very common, stale stories and jokes, in bad English. (SC-2)

These reflections point to a common criticism of tourism, that it can lead to an intentional distortion or inauthenticity of culture or events, for the sake of profit (Salazar, 2009). In defense of such activities, however, Wang (1999, p. 352) writes that these attempts serve a useful purpose in late modernity if they can effect an 'existential state of Being [in the tourist] ... Existential authenticity can have nothing to do with the authenticity of toured objects'. Such a state is evoked when the tourist participates in activities that need not be objectively authentic. Thus, if a tourist were invited to take part in a 'traditional' Gullah rice harvest in the Lowcountry, it would matter little if the rice harvested was not actually used during the ante or post-Bellum era. More important would be the real-time experience of imitation, which, according to Wang (1999) would result in a lasting, beneficial impression (which is what the tourist is seeking).

Social empowerment within the GGCHC

While the respondents provided predominately positive comments about psychological empowerment, the interviews revealed more of a mixed message when they were asked questions about social empowerment. One of the positive examples of social empowerment unearthed from the interviews was in regard to how the development of the GGCHC brought the GG community together.

Having the 21 public meetings, as we did, allowed people to feel connected and engaged. (SC-5)

In the late '90s, there was an organization formed called the Gullah Consortium made up of folks from Gullah/Geechee communities and sites and properties and historic sites. A conversation that probably had never even taken place in it. We had to weed through the transition of that, because many folks in the community felt uncomfortable initially, because they had never been openly invited to these historic sites anyhow. Or had they gone to any of these places, they didn't see themselves there. They didn't see themselves reflected in the interpretation and a whole range of stuff. We had to work through that process. But that gave us a foundation of the communities, of the people, of the culture, and of the sites working, walking, and talking together. (SC-5)

What was happening was everybody had gotten so accustomed to fighting in their one little spot by themselves they never stayed in touch with each other. Out of that conference I said, 'We need an umbrella group that can be a clearinghouse for the issues, so all of us can fight together for each other.'(SC-1)

Another positive example of social empowerment was from the development and planning of the annual Sweetgrass Basket Festival held in Mount Pleasant, SC.

I said, 'Let me put some feelers out into the community and see what I get back.' I did that, and I was successful to get enough positive feedback that I was able to form the nonprofit Sweetgrass Cultural Arts Festival Association, half of which were basketmakers, the other half were community residents and people who wanted to help. (SC-3)

All we wanted 10 years ago was to have a two-day (Sweetgrass Basket) festival and go home. We're helping to work now with the fire department, transportation in developing roadways, dealing with subdivisions and development, school locations, all these things. But all we wanted 10 years ago was a simple, two-day festival. (SC-5)

Even though it appears that the development of the GGCHC and other initiatives such as the Sweetgrass Basket festival have brought GG community members together, there does appear to be a lot of tension within the community. Part of this tension stems from there being an apparent divide between those who are 'truly' GG and those who are perceived as being imposters.

This is the problem. We have a certain set of African Americans that live in Beaufort County that are from Ohio, and they are going around for years, and the state of South Carolina financed them doing it, by calling them ambassadors at one point and outraging people who were native to Beaufort County who were Gullah/Geechee, saying they were Gullah ambassadors. (SC-1)

So now you have a lot of rifts because of money. (SC-1)

Another interview speaks of this animosity toward outsiders in their treatment by native GG people when they returned from living afar.

I am an outsider. Number one, I'm not a basketmaker. Number two, even though I was born here, I did not grow up here, so the majority of them didn't know who the heck I was. Here I come and, 'Who does she think she is? She's going to put on a festival, a Sweetgrass Festival?' There was a small percentage that supported it. The majority of them, no! (SC-3)

The last negative example of social empowerment comes from Sapelo Island, GA where some within the community feel like they are carrying a disproportionate weight of the work to help save the community from forces threatening to take the small amount of GG owned land. One interviewee mentions:

We've got too many descendants doing lip service, and not actually sacrificing anything. You've got to sacrifice in order to save this community. We, who live here, are like the sacrificial lamb. We are sacrificing. We choose to stay here 24/7. We don't want people who don't live here 24/7 to come dictating to us, and not doing anything, not sacrificing anything, just lip service. We don't need lip service. We need help service. (GA-2)

Respondents bring up important social distinctions within the GG culture. These are based on geopolitical affiliations, for instance, the South Carolina, Lowcountry folk who call themselves Gullah and the Georgia people who are known as Geechee. The formation of the GGCHC brought together a GG amalgam, obscuring internal differences among people who may certainly have stronger allegiances to their respective states or towns than to a politically defined moniker (i.e. the GGCHC). Also, there are certainly distinctions between mainland GGs and islanders across all states comprising the GGCHC and perhaps starker differences between bona fide GGs who remained in place and those who either went or were sent North in search of better living conditions. A culture clash of sorts can develop when return migrants who have acquired a different (better) socioeconomic standing resettle in a rural area (Krannich & Zollinger, 1997). Spain's (1993) study of 'Been-Heres versus Come-Heres' stresses that conflict can arise between longer term and newer residents when the latter assume the role of community salvager. That is, newer residents see their role as either restoring a rundown city district or that of focusing a rural community's efforts on the aesthetics of the rural environment or saving that environment from further degradation. Such efforts can be perceived by longer tenure residents as elitist.

Political empowerment with the GGCHC

The process of creating the GGCHC is a great example of political empowerment within the GGCHC as some of the interviewees mentioned.

Basically, you have a grass roots and a Capitol Hill combined effort that ends up getting this law passed. Neither one of us thought this was going to be what people would now use as a leverage point for careers, for their individual advancement, and for their individual

ways to bring in money. None., myself nor Congressman Clyburn, could ever have imagined that. (SC-1)

Other examples include politicians of GG descent being elected to public office.

When I got elected, I have to say, because I never dreamed, in my wildest dreams, that I would be involved in politics. But I realized that in order for me to have a voice and be effective in the decision making process, as to how the town managed its growth and its development and all of that, that I had to be a part of the council. (SC-3)

Now being on City Council, I can brag now ... I'm offering the local legislation to set up a Geechee/Gullah Cultural Heritage Commission Committee from the city of Darien, long name, and it passed unanimously ... I knew the local politics though. I couldn't boast on the fact that this is the first piece of African American ... Skip all that crap! Let's just get it passed, now I can see it. Yeah, now we have a commission. And this is the first time that anything like that has been brought up or passed. (GA-4)

While the above examples highlight the increased inclusion in Lowcountry politics, not all interviewees felt the same way. When talking about Sapelo Island, one interviewee mentioned:

We got politicians that represent this area that never even been on Sapelo. You told them to come to Sapelo, they'd probably get lost. They'd probably end up in Cuba, having dinner with Castro ... They don't focus on Sapelo. It's almost like there's a hands-off policy among politicians. I don't know where that come from, because we didn't give nobody no hands-off, especially when it comes to somebody lending us a hand, and helping us with things. (GA-2)

Another political empowerment issue mentioned by some of the interviewees involves the high percentage of GG land owned as heirs' property.

The nature of ownership is a tenancy in common, and that just means that group of heirs ... as far as the number of folks we're talking about, they each have an undivided right and use in interest in the land ... It makes it highly susceptible to predatory development. (SC-6)

When applied to tourism, it has both positive and negative effects on political empowerment. The negative impacts are that heirs' property can attract predators from both within and outside the community. Outside agents may target those with interests in heirs' property, purchase an interest in the land, and then insist on a division of the land, with the ulterior motive of purchasing the entire property for later resell at a profit. For example,

There was a recent case where the town of Hilton Head purchased heir's property out of a forced partition sale by an heir in New York who came down. They were moving homes off that land for two months, people were displaced. They got a lot of money for that property, but, again, there were a lot of people displaced who didn't want money. They wanted to remain on their ancestral land. (SC-6)

I think what tourism will do is open up the land to the predators more. That would be a major concern on my part because we're now talking about, you got multiple people coming to see you, visiting you. They find out this type of situation, and now that opens the door for them to say, 'Let me see how I can get in your family.' (SC-6)

The flipside of tourism's impact on heirs' property is described by the following interviewee.

I think tourism could be a benefit in certain circumstances, in the sense that once title's clear, it can be a carrot on the stick ... Listen, there are going to be people making money off tourism, making money off this land around you. If you can get up to snuff and up to speed and resolve your title issues, in whatever way you see fit – putting it in a trust, in an LLC, conservation easements, whatever – or presuming some sort of ecotourism or something like that. (SC-6)

I really think, as long as we are treating tourism the same as what I see forestry and agricultural ... It helps the landowners to hold on to it, it helps the landowners to decide if they want to clear title. They are all carrots, and to me, tourism falls in that third bucket as an opportunity for them. (SC-7)

The impact of tourism is building highways to make it more convenient and comfortable for tourism. But if people on these land sites can just get real for a moment, do some investigation of the history and how the land came to be, and figure out a way of working cooperatively together, then tourism is not going to be a negative. Tourism is going to be a positive. (SC-4)

Economic empowerment within the GGCHC

The interviewees were generally optimistic about tourism's potential to bring long lasting economic benefits to GG residents residing within the corridor. Some of the general positive comments about tourism's ability to bring money into the GGCHC include:

Certainly, it provides opportunities for people who have businesses, say, for instance, the people who cook the meals, like how you said Sally (pseudonym) prepared a meal for you. (GA-3)

I see there are some people who are able to make a living out of it – sweetgrass baskets and other crafts. (SC-2)

The positive (of tourism) is bringing money to the island. You know for a fact that you don't have any jobs over here, really not many jobs over here, especially for the youth. At the age of 16, normally you can find a job on the mainland at the age of 16, but being over here, they don't have jobs for 16-year-olds. It's bringing money back to the community. The bad part about it, a lot of people come over here looking for land, to buy land. (GA-1)

A huge percentage of my work (art) is purchased and supported by tourism. But then also a huge part of it is purchased by very learned, educated people. People that know about the Gullah culture, people that want to know about the Gullah culture. So I don't know if I could openly say tourism, because most people come here to buy my work. They are not coming here, necessarily, to look at the city or take part in whatever is happening around. (SC-4)

A part of this is also economic development. Case in point, Ike's, Gullah cuisine, and the Gullah Museum. As we disseminate information about history, cultural preservation, food, and the historical context of that, then people say, 'Where can I get this food today?' Then I can say, 'You can go to Ike's.' (SC-5)

Another example economic empowerment is the many GG-owned and operated tours popping up within the corridor. One of the authors actually participated in one of these tours on Hilton Head Island. It appeared to be a very successful operation with a 17-year tenure and 2 full buses with approximately 20 people each on the day the author visited. An additional example is the potential for GGs tours throughout the corridor.

A lot of folks now are looking how they can develop a tourist network of tourist opportunities that would encompass all four states (of the GGCHC). There are some folks in Jacksonville that are developing a bus tour that you take from Jacksonville to Mount Pleasant and back. Next year, they're planning on running from Jacksonville to Wilmington and back. There are folks who have said publicly that they wanted to develop a boat tour that you get on, probably either in St. Augustine or Jacksonville, and traverse the Intercoastal Waterway, from the south to the north and back. (SC-5)

While tourism does hold a lot of promise for the economic development of the region, some interviewees were more critical of it only bringing marginal benefits. For example,

It's not beneficial when the state of South Carolina takes a picture of a sweetgrass basket and puts it on the cover of a brochure for something in Columbia, South Carolina. That's not beneficial to us, because that's too far away from where sweetgrass is grown and baskets are made still in Mt. Pleasant and up and down the South Carolina coast. It's not beneficial then. If you want to say you want to help Gullah/Geechee to be empowered, step back and come to where we have our businesses that we're owning, that we're operating, that we're presenting our story to you as our family lived it, and support that. Don't say to us, 'No, no, no. I don't want them come to you. We want to have an event at my restaurant and my resort and my hotel, and we want y'all to come in for two, three, four hours, without pay. Hopefully you'll sell something, but come sit.' (SC-1)

The quandary for them is jobs. They can't help me hold on to it if they don't have a job to help me hold on to it. I don't want the next generation to settle for minute jobs. With DNR, or the University of Georgia cutting grass, swabbing the deck as the saying goes. I want them to have more meaningful jobs ... In order to do that, parents, and the young generation have to figure out, 'What are they doing over here that I can go to school, and learn so, I can help succeed in jobs here?' 'I can come back, and apply for a meaningful job here.' (GA-2)

These comments point to the need for a more nuanced interpretation of potential economic opportunities available via heritage tourism. While there are tangible signs of GG culture, such as its religious subtleties, food, and language, observers and would be marketers of the culture may find it more symbolic than obdurate (Gans, 1979). For instance, if one, nowadays, were to attempt to point out where and how this culture plays out in everyday life, this may be difficult because the essence of the culture is expressed in everyday understandings of movement, gestures, or ontologies that can be verbally relayed but not experienced. It becomes apparent to any outsider who travels the four-state corridor that many other features of Lowcountry life intermingle. One can easily lose sight of GG cultural sights if these are not clearly marked (i.e. Ike's Gullah Cuisine).

Importantly, the GGCHC is a political designation and construction that ignores the uneven development potential across this historical space, and the grand efforts, in terms of social and human capitals, required to build sustaining enterprises that can generate inter-generational wealth. Certainly, within the GG monolith are economic and political differentials that make for an irregular distribution of material goods and knowledge across the corridor. For instance, the iconic sweetgrass basket is prominently displayed in most advertisements or references to the LowCountry Gullah; however, Grabbatin et al. (2011) report studies estimating only 300 individual basket makers or 300 Gullah families participating in the art form. As well, the locally available raw material used for making the baskets is dwindling. Basket makers must either travel to other states to collect the grass or purchase it at high prices. As a result of the limited availability and added costs of sweetgrass, the art form, economic welfare of these artisans and contributions to the local culture and economy are in jeopardy (Hart, Halfacre, & Burke, 2004). Clearly, this activity is not a broad-based economic mainstay of the Gullah economy and points again to the irregular distribution of economic potential within the GGCHC.

Discussion and conclusions

This study used DQA to investigate areas where GG residents may be psychologically, socially, politically and economically empowered or disempowered from heritage tourism within the Georgia and South Carolina portions of the GGCHC. Results suggest

that that heritage tourism in the Lowcountry has both the potential to be both a positive and negative force. Specific positive examples of empowerment uncovered through the interviews included an increased pride in being GG, tourism providing opportunities for community members to come together and rally around certain initiatives such as the creation of the GGCHC and festivals such as the Sweetgrass Basket festival, tourism being a 'carrot' to clear heirs' property issues, and the many economic opportunities associated with tourism businesses in the Lowcountry.

Even though the comments were mostly positive, some stakeholders were very vocal about tourism's inability to solve certain long-standing issues and its tendency to exacerbate other problems. One example of disempowerment which transcended all four dimensions of empowerment was that certain groups of people posing as GGs were viewed as frauds attempting to benefit from the current renaissance surrounding the culture. This resulted in some of the interviewees being embarrassed by the fraudulent group's depictions of the culture and frustrated over how the economic benefits from tourism were going into the pockets of this group who are just using the culture to make money.

The corruptive power of money associated with tourism is not a site-specific phenomenon unfortunately. Dwyer et al. (2013) acknowledge the problems associated with 'memorial entrepreneurs' who profit financially and reputationally off of producing historical traditions even though they may be cultural imposters. Past heritage tourism research is also full of examples of tourism commodifying the culture and bringing divisions within the community (Nyaupane, 2009; Timothy & Boyd, 2003, 2006). This finding highlights the fact that there are real problems when it comes to social disempowerment within the GGCHC. While there are examples of groups coming together to work for a common cause, it appears that the profit and fame associated with tourism have resulted in increased tension within GG communities. Other problematic areas include tourism's potential to exacerbate GG land loss through the loss of already fragile heirs' property holdings, as well as tourism's inability to provide widespread economic development.

These initial findings have many practical implications for those associated with the GGCHC and Lowcountry tourism. The first recommendation is for Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO) and other tourism officials to take the time to ensure that those stakeholders who they are working with are the 'real' GGs rather than 'memorial entrepreneurs' who are falsely representing the culture and commodifying it for personal economic gain. This will help reduce the embarrassment associated with 'others' falsely portraying the GG culture, prevent 'ethnic intruders' from capitalizing off of tourism (Timothy & Boyd, 2006), and help increase the cohesion of GGs living in the corridor. It will also help ensure that marketing initiatives directed at GG heritage tourism are of top quality and complement many of the other superb tourism assets of the Lowcountry. Related to this finding is that there is a large gap between the GGs who have lived in the corridor all of their life and the diaspora that left for their education and careers and are just now starting to come back with the time and will to volunteer on GG related projects. While there will always be the 'Old Timers' and the 'New Timers' or the 'Been-heres' or 'Come-heres' (Spain, 1993), those involved with the management of the GGCHC could help bring the two groups together by facilitating more opportunities for the groups to interact and work toward common goals that are mutually edifying.

Other practical implications include enhanced efforts to bring the unique cultural features of the GG people into the tourism product market within the Lowcountry. The city of Charleston, SC has been recently voted the #1 tourist destination in the USA four years in a row (2011–2014) by Condé Nast Traveler readers (Charleston City Paper, 2014). Savannah, GA is also a heavy draw for tourism with 12 million annual visitors in

2012 (Savannah Chamber of Commerce, 2015). While there is certainly evidence of success within these two cities and across the Lowcountry, there is increased room for those in the tourism offices of NC, SC, GA and FL to showcase the GG culture alongside the dominant themes of ‘the Antebellum South’ and the sun and sand of the Lowcountry Sea Islands. Doing so, according to Butler et al. (2008) findings, could enhance already strong international visitation. This type of tourism marketing will ideally provide an additional facet to the already successful tourism industry, as well as positively influence all dimensions of empowerment. For example, this type of inclusion in the marketing and management of the Lowcountry tourism industry will ideally result in GG residents’ pride and self-esteem increasing from being included in the tourism marketing material (*psychological empowerment*), a feeling of more inclusion as they work together with local and state DMOs (*political empowerment*), increased community cohesion as GG’s are able to come together and rally around a common cultural narrative (*social empowerment*), and more jobs opportunities from the spillover of visitors interested in experiencing the unique facets of the culture (*economic empowerment*). More inclusion of the GGs in state promotional material may also be the needed bridge between the criticism of heritage tourism in the Lowcountry as either ‘deficient’ or ‘excessive’ in its representation of slavery (Alderman, 2010; Dwyer et al., 2013). As discussed, any promotion of GG culture should emphasize the intangible components of this heritage. While physical sites of observation are valuable in demonstrating both the heritage and presence of GGs, as important are narratives and folklore that are impossible to ‘visit’ but nevertheless contain cultural pointers that are instructive in understanding the GGs place in American history.

While the potential for a sustainable heritage tourism industry is high within the GGCHC, these suggestions may be too idealistic because the little bit of tourism success within the corridor has already bred suspicion, distrust and greed by some masquerading as true GGs to cash in on the demand for the culture.

Limitations & areas of future research

As with all studies, this study has certain limitations that need to be addressed. The first is associated with the decision to use qualitative methods over quantitative methods. While it was determined that the richness associated with qualitative data was more desired, this limited the number of participants included in the study. The methodology used also privileged certain points of view over others. For example, most of the respondents interviewed were those associated with the GGCHC or currently involved in the tourism industry. GG residents not involved with tourism or the GGCHC may have completely different views than those interviewed. This is also evident in the spatial distribution of responses. With the present study, only two states of the corridor were included. It is likely the tourism industries in Florida and North Carolina have different complexities that would influence the interviewees’ responses to the various dimensions of empowerment.

These limitations set the stage for a fruitful area of future research. As mentioned in the introduction and literature review, the impacts of tourism on the GG people is an under-researched area. Most of the previous research has been directed toward African–Americans in general and toward either the representation of slavery at heritage sites (Alderman, 2010; Butler, 2001; Butler et al., 2008; Dwyer et al., 2013) or the absence of African–Americans within state tourism brochures (Alderman & Modlin, 2008, 2013). Building off these initial findings, future researchers could turn to quantitative methods and apply Boley and McGehee’s (2014) RETS across the GGCHC. This type of large-scale study would help determine

how residents perceived themselves as being empowered psychologically, socially, politically and economically by tourism across different parts of the corridor.

It appears that tourism within in the Lowcountry is at a critical moment for the GG people. Heritage tourism could help to leverage the creation of the GGCHC into a sustainable heritage tourism industry or it could result in a similar system of power and wealth concentrated within the hands of a few as seen in other areas of the 'Antebellum South' (Buzinde, 2010; Buzinde & Santos, 2008). There are other concurrent social processes that may have a bearing on tourism development within the GGCHC, for example, migrant and immigrant labor streams. Service persons of Latin origin either work along with or have supplanted African-American service workers in the hospitality sector, including Lowcountry sites. The impact of an emergent culturally and linguistically segmented labor force could be considered in larger explorations of tourism development along the GGCHC, specifically how the presence of a culturally distinct population may be impacting employment opportunities in positions that were once deemed 'black only'. Results from this exploratory study also suggest that future research in this arena should more carefully examine assumptions of universal empowerment brought by tourism, for example, investigations of how empowerment may intensify or ebb across a given study area. Most importantly, future research must investigate the extent to which residents embrace or accept the idea of the local as something which should be subjected to the tourist gaze.

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Notes

1. The names Gullah and Geechee are used together in the paper following the GGCHC's attempt to show the similarities between the two groups. When used separately, Gullahs have been traditionally identified as those living in the SC and NC portions of the corridor, and Geechees those within the GA and FL portions of the corridor.
2. The term 'Lowcountry' has been traditionally reserved for the 200-mile (322-kilometer) stretch of coastal South Carolina and Georgia (Bopp, 2015), but with the creation of the GGCHC, the paper extends it to the 30-mile wide strip of land extending from Pender County, North Carolina, down to St. John's County, Florida in the south (Figure 1).
3. FL and NC were not included in this exploratory study because of the limited time and budget of the trip. GA and SC also make up the heart of the GGCHC with large-scale tourism sites such as Savannah, Charleston, SC and Hilton Head Island, SC.

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