'We had lighter tongues': Making and mediating Gullah/Geechee personhood in the South Carolina Lowcountry

Krystal A. Smalls *

Graduate School of Education, Language and Literacy in Education Division, University of Pennsylvania, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216, USA
School of Arts and Sciences, Center for Africana Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 3401 Walnut Street, Suite 331A, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6228, USA

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ABSTRACT

Two historic institutions in the South Carolina Lowcountry, the Avery Institute/Avery Research Center and Penn School/Penn Center, played a central role in cultivating a complex Gullah community through the construction of construable and consumable Gullah identities. This ethnography explores how the ideological transitions undergone by these two institutions over the past 80 years have helped to shape conceptualizations of selfhood and belonging in local communities. These ideological transitions, initially mediated via formal schooling, and 'translated' in later years into cultural preservation and revitalization efforts, have engendered new and robust forms of Gullah selfhood and Gullah belonging in which Gullah ways of speaking, but not a bounded Gullah language—together with an idea of Gullah sincerity—have become key components in local community- and nation-building efforts.

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1. Introduction

While sharing her thoughts about 'Gullah[1] language,' an 82-year-old resident of a small city hugging the coast of South Carolina provided the following description of the strata of distinction she had noticed amongst different Gullah speakers during her schooling years: 'Well, those folks on the island had them heavy tongues. We had lighter tongues over here.'

Her words became an act of remembering that not only named her own 'Gullahness,' but also named a Gullahness of another kind. While they could be understood propositionally as an evocation of physiological difference, or as an evaluation of linguistic (un)intelligibility, the non-referential indexicality of her words and the way she produced them (over-enunciated compared to her normal speech) rendered her statement a clear metapragmatic account of different ways of being and doing Gullah. Throughout my life, I have heard similar expressions of Gullah sameness and difference uttered within the single breaths of different folks, many of them members of my own family. In these coterminous articulations of a Gullah self/identity and Gullah personhood as distanced object, I have also heard the elusiveness of a single linguistic or cultural location and the versatility of belonging in the Gullah community.

This article focuses on the ways two particular institutions—the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture in Charleston, and the Penn Center on St. Helena Island in Beaufort County—helped to construct very elastic diacritics

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 * Address: Graduate School of Education, Language and Literacy in Education Division, University of Pennsylvania, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216, USA. Tel.: +1 917 627 6571.
    E-mail address: ksmalls@upenn.edu

[1] I use the term 'Gullah' rather than 'Gullah/Geechee' for simplicity but acknowledge the various regional and positional implications of its use. My own experiences in South Carolina indicate 'Geechee' as an emic term and 'Gullah' as an analytic term introduced by outsiders that is now used by Gullah/Geechee community members as the more official title of our language and culture.

of Gullah belonging. They did this, I will argue, by enregistering certain behaviors as indexical of various 'models of person-hood' (Agha, 2007) in two distinctive phases of ideological mediation.

In their first phase (roughly, 1862–1954), both institutions, Avery Normal Institute ('Avery School') and Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School ('Penn School'), functioned as prestigious private schools and mediated discourses (along with their embedded ideologies concerning language, community, and social identification) that may have served to distance or demote Gullah selfhood, and did so primarily via language-teaching strategies and overall educational philosophies. In a second phase (roughly, 1954-present), these same institutions, refurbished as cultural research centers, vigorously helped define, legitimize, and promote a vibrant and hybridized Gullah selfhood in their local communities and statewide, by mediating a very different set of ideologies.

Based on ethnographic and archival research at both institutions, I show how the distinct—and competing—ideologies upon which these institutions were founded affected the lives of the pupils who studied at both, some of whom I was able to interview. As it turns out, the combined efforts of these institutions yielded a privileging of interventions for linguistic, cultural, and community revitalization that attended not to purist ideologies but to a living sense of Gullah heterogeneity. In so doing, they managed to unsettle some purist and essentialist ideologies typically embedded in endangerment/preservation and nationalist efforts (see Errington, 2003; Hill, 2002; Kroskrity, 1998; Moore, 2006; Swinehart, this issue; Whiteley, 2003) despite their employment of related rhetorical devices.
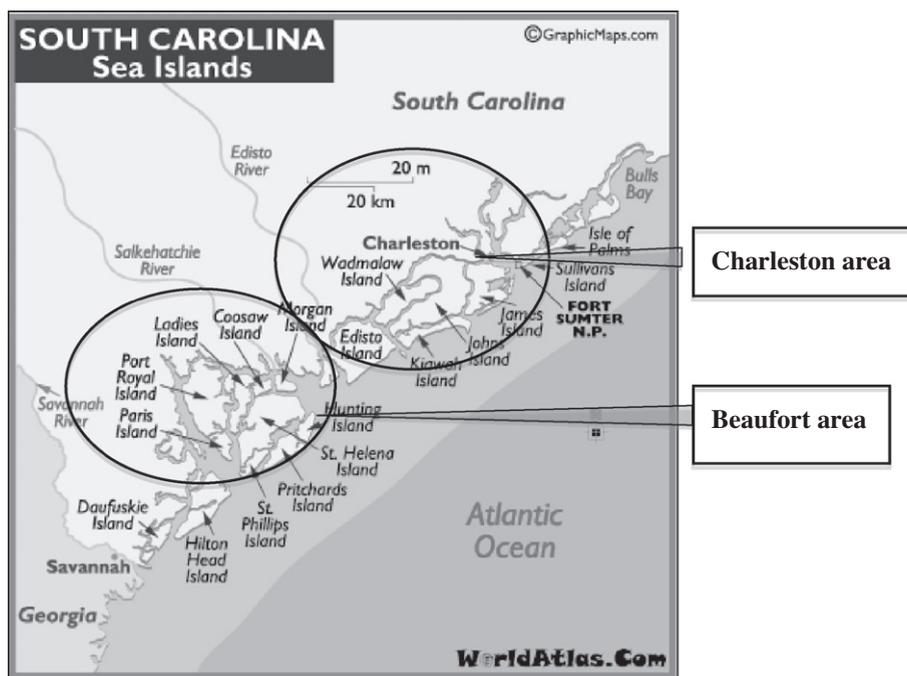
In this way, the institutions' current efforts to revitalize and celebrate Gullah language and cultural practices effectively treat identity as a 'changing same,' as Gilroy's (2000) reverberation of Amiri Baraka's famed phrase in which sameness is evoked not as 'some invariant essence' but a thing that is 'ceaselessly reprocessed' and 'retained without being reified' (p. 129) should suggest.

This article queries the mediating role of these two prominent institutions in the ways the eldest members of my family's community have been negotiating varied orders of meaning about language, subjectivity, and identity, as well as belonging and community. In particular, I consider how these institutions have helped to form two overlapping but distinct publics: a formal Gullah community, and a Gullah nation, that enlist communicative practices indicative of Gullah personhood as diacritics of belonging but resist proclivities to formalize and deploy a specific Gullah language to construct these publics. Based on archival and internet research at/on both institutions (namely, those pertaining to language practices) and interviewing former students and their local peers, I excavate the implicit ideologies that underlie the Avery and Penn Schools/Centers' shifting manifestations that link language to personhood, and consider how these institutions may have impacted local community- and nation-building processes by enregistering certain 'models of conduct' (Agha, 2007) as diacritics of different Gullah identities/selves.

From conversations with former students and other senior members[2] of these two Gullah communities (Fig. 1) who had some relationship to the institutions, I suggest that the complex ways in which ideas of Gullah community and national belonging are/were possibly being imagined and deployed in fact correlate with the ideological shifts through which these two focal institutions transformed themselves from schools entrenched in a 'classical' European-inspired curriculum to hubs of Gullah cultural preservation and celebration. In the conclusion I argue further that these moving and hybridized constructions are reflected in complex conceptions of Gullah selfhood and fluid diacritics of belonging that are grounded in a reflexive idea of Gullah sincerity, rather than an essentialist idea of Gullah authenticity. I also note that while these institutions' reinventions of themselves as cultural brokers have borrowed facets of 'typical' cultural preservation/revitalization efforts, they also seem to have organically attended to the multiplicity and fluidity of language and belonging symbolic of this hybrid community.

As an epigrammatic description of Gullah language is vital to any exploration into its related social phenomena, I will begin my discussion with the following working definition: 'Gullah language' is generally understood as a contact language (contentiously typified as a 'creole' [Collins and Mufwene, 2005; Mufwene, 2008]) composed of various English varieties and an undetermined number of source African languages. Historically, it was spoken by inhabitants of the Lowcountry regions (coastal regions) and Sea Islands of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and northern Florida, but is currently most prevalent in South Carolina and Georgia (Mufwene, 1997). This language, like any other, includes many registers, styles, and regional and social varieties that continue to experience gradual transformation as the nature of social contact changes over time. Structurally similar to other varieties considered Atlantic English Creoles (Barbadian Creole [Hancock, 1980], Jamaican Creole, and Guyanese Creole, for example) and comprised of many features common among them (Arends et al., 1995), Gullah is also noted for a number of distinguishing structural features such as variably omitting the complementizer *fuh*, the use of the schwa phoneme (/ə/) in the definitive marker *a*, the use of *dem* as a singular prenominal demonstrative (Mufwene, 2004), and the use of the durative and perfective aspect markers *da* or *duh* (Hopkins, 1994). Some notable phonological features have been documented as well (Turner, 1973[1949]; Weldon, 2004) which include frequent word-initial syllable omission (aphesis), nasal velarization, and the monophthongization and raising of /aw/ (Klein, in press). More

Fig. 1. Map of Focal Gullah Communities. *Note*: adapted from World Atlas website: http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/infopage/scisles.gif. Copyright © Graphic Maps.

discursively, interactive narrative (which enlists audience members' verbal and non-verbal vocalizations), along with idiomatic rejoinders and exclamations such as '*ha lawd*'[3] and '*do Jesus*' (which appear to be unique to some Gullah varieties) in specific spaces during conversations are examples of common Gullah communicative practice (K.M. Smalls, personal communication, December 2010). As yet, no notable research has been conducted on Gullah kinesics, but anecdotally, those familiar with Gullah would certainly note the significance of distinctive deployments of facial expression and gesture in interaction.

Nichols's 1976 dissertation offered the first notable scholarship suggesting large-scale movement towards use of more local Standardized English (SE) forms among Gullah speakers,[4] and such claims have been meticulously explored and substantiated by Patricia Jones-Jackson (1984, 1986, 1987) and others. These groundbreaking studies are complicated by others that challenge assumptions of unqualified 'decreolization' by documenting the retention (or proliferation) of certain salient Gullah forms (Mille, 1990; Mufwene, 1994, 1997; Hopkins, 1994) and together, they provide an immense inventory of Gullah structures and their variations. I suggest that a great deal can be learned by looking beyond language structure into wider Gullah 'languaging' practices (i.e., interactional orienting practices [Becker, 1991] that would include pragmatics, non-verbal language, kinesics, etc.), the meanings attributed to these practices by speakers, and the ways these practices and localized meanings are reflexively related to macrosocial structures (Kroskrity, 2000). A more encompassing focus of this kind can aid our understanding of: (1) the ways people inhabit different languages and social identities; and (2) how these incarnations affect the inherent variation within languages as well as the ebbs and flows of language change (see Hazen (2002) for this kind of work on North Carolina regional varieties and Mufwene (1993, 1997) and Klein (2007) for similar work on Gullah).

An excavation of the body of work on Gullah language and culture, from Lorenzo Dow Turner's seminal linguistic work in the 1930s (1973[1949]) to Wilbur Cross's rigorous historical account of Gullah's origins (2008), reveals a rich scholarly canon that helps us better understand where Gullah language and culture(s) have been and provide a sturdy foundation on which we can begin to explore what it means to be and do Gullah today (Cross, 2008; Goodwine, 1998; Jones-Jackson, 1984, 1986, 1987; Klein, 2007; Montgomery, 1994; Mufwene, 1993, 1994, 1997; Mufwene and Gilman, 1987; Opala, 2000; Pollitzer, 1999; Wade-Lewis, 2007; Weldon, 2003, 2007; among others).

To be clear, I do not intend with this contribution to argue that Gullah language and culture are not decreolizing or that they are not endangered in the sense that previous forms and practices may be giving way to new forms and practices; I intend, rather, to goad a re-imagining of what Gullah was and is for Gullah-identified individuals, in the hopes of reaching a better understanding of how different varieties of Gullah function in the lives of their speakers, so that any initiatives implemented, internally or externally, do not unintentionally create new 'regimes of language' (Kroskrity, 2000) that marginalize speakers of, for example, non-traditional, more acrolectalized, or hip hop-infused varieties (as each of these examples is prone to being rendered 'inauthentic').

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[3] Pronounced h/ɛ/: l/ɔ/d.
[4] Mufwene (1997) cites an 1895 publication by a Reverend John Williams as the first caveat on Gullah decreolization.

2. The first phase of ideological mediation: schooling

Language education—whether through formal schooling, family structures, peer groups, or other institutions—typically functions as a diffusive apparatus of ideology and aids in the implicit tethering of models of personhood to language practices. Embedded in many language ideologies are messages about how different 'human kinds' (Hacking, 1995) communicate and behave, and we can see how such messages are mediated via teaching strategies and materials in schools (see also Peery, this volume). As Kathryn Howard explains, 'During the process of language socialization, community members transmit information to novices about cultural norms and expectations regarding how to use language appropriately, what it means to speak a language, what it means to learn a language, and how different codes and varieties construct and index various social identities and roles' (Howard, 2008, p. 188). Despite being among the earliest secondary schools for African American students established in the United States, the language education practices of the Avery School and the Penn School (and the language socialization processes they advanced) included treatments of Standardized American English (SAE) and European languages that, on the surface, appeared quite 'typical' of White secondary schools of the period, insofar as both implemented a 'classical curriculum' (Urban and Wagoner, 2000). Both schools opened near the official end of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and educated thousands of African American students throughout the bustling Reconstruction Era and on through the mid 1940s; the Avery School serving working, middle, and upper class families from Charleston proper (and in its later years, many poor, rural families from nearby islands like Johns Island, James Island, Sullivan's Island), and the Penn School educating the children of rural working class and poor families of St. Helena Island. As members of the first generation of African Americans to receive a secondary education in large numbers, the individuals in my study attended these institutions for various durations between 1920 and 1945, and thusly experienced the first iteration of curriculum standardization (Anderson, 1988) and the first proliferation of high school education in the US. That is to say, they experienced a particular variety of ideological grooming concerning race, language, and nation. Most notably, all of these individuals' linguistic and more general socialization processes spanned periods *before*, *during*, and *after* the conceptual construction of 'Gullah language' in the 1930s by Turner (1973[1949]), a designation that formally recognized and defined what was emically referred to as 'Geechee' by most people in the region and was not easily accessible outside of the academy until propelled by North American cultural revitalization movements in the 1980s and 1990s.

Co-authored by Charleston's elite antebellum African Americans, the Avery School's curriculum adhered quite closely to prevalent standards and offered modern European languages (e.g., French, German) and classical languages (Latin and Greek), and incorporated European and European American literature, mathematics, natural sciences, history, and geography, as well as some vocational training. Due to its distinctive administration, faculty, and parental cohort, the curriculum remained centered around normal training and college preparation and also incorporated a fair amount of African American and Afro-Caribbean literature, befitting the 'uplift' philosophy of its generally black leadership (Drago, 2006). Meanwhile, students at the Penn School were exposed to a similar catalog of subjects, sans European (or any other) 'classical' languages and African American and Afro-Caribbean literature, and with a considerably heavier focus on vocational training by their largely white European American faculty and leadership (Penn School Historical Information, Penn School Papers). The following accounts of the two schools reveal the convergences and divergences between these two institutions' educational philosophies and language education programs and the models of personhood they helped generate.

'*Show me a negro who knows Greek syntax and I will believe he is a human being and should be treated like a man*' (reported in Drago, 2006, p. 19). This quotation, believed to have been uttered by John C. Calhoun, helps compose the introduction to Edmund Drago's comprehensive history of the Avery Normal Institute (2006). The author follows the quote, 'Avery produced such persons' (p. 19), perhaps capturing the very essence of the Avery School's educational philosophy better than this, or any, examination of its practices possibly could. Established in 1865 by the American Missionary Association (AMA), the Avery School immediately offered its African American students a 'classical' education replete with Latin, Greek, Physiology, Physics, English Literature, and more, mirroring other attempts at assimilating the other prominent 'others' in the young American landscape, Native Americans (Coleman, 1993). Impelled by the Second Industrial Revolution, the industrial and practical education movement gained momentum in the first decades of the 20th century and was enthusiastically promoted by the AMA and other organizations deeply committed to the Protestant work ethic, and was famously championed by political leader Booker T. Washington (Drago, 2006). Due to Avery's divergent 'aristocratic–artisan ethos' (Drago, 2006, p. 21), which espoused the uplift philosophy advocated by DuBois (1989) and reflected his notion of a 'Talented Tenth' as well, faculty and parents successfully resisted pressure from the AMA to implement a predominately vocational curriculum.

In 1915, when the first African American principal appointed since the school's opening, Benjamin Cox, was appointed and led an all-African American faculty, the school began to actively foster a political and cultural 'black consciousness' among the Avery School's student body that would penetrate its curriculum and programming for decades to come. For example, in conjunction with rigorous guidance in European and European American literature, works by African American writers were taken up. Avery's last principal, John Potts, was appointed in 1940 and saw Avery through its transition to a public school in 1947 and through to its closing in 1954. He espoused civic engagement for students and initiated a service program dedicated to improving literacy amongst undereducated African Americans in the Charleston area (Drago, 2006). The Avery School's educational philosophy effectively disseminated models of personhood that embodied refinement,

respectability, and social responsibility. Most significant, the individuals it sought to produce would be capable of and committed to teaching and leading their fellow African Americans.

Three years before Avery opened its doors—while the Civil War continued to wage on in other parts of the South—Penn School was founded by two Northern missionaries as part of the Freedman's Association of Philadelphia's 'Port Royal Experiment' (Penn School Historical Information, Penn School Papers). This 'rescue and civilizing mission' aimed to further liberate the newly freed African Americans of Port Royal Island (and surrounding Sea Islands) from the grips of extreme poverty and its byproducts. Articles, essays, journal entries, and letters from some pivotal individuals in the school's history (including founders Laura Towne and Ellen Murray, along with Rossa B. Cooley and Henry Wilder Foote and others) indicate that this mission, and Penn School in particular, were devoted not only to offering the formerly enslaved people of the region opportunities for literacy and self-sufficiency (Penn School Historical Information, Penn School Papers), but were also committed to 'car[ing] for the negroes of St. Helena Island' who 'hardly knew their right hand from their left,' being as they were 'Like children bereft of their parents... with a new freedom they could neither understand nor direct' (Crum, 1938, p. 147). The original founders (who also served as the first principal and vice principal of Penn School) were most concerned with traditional edification for these 'ignorant and brutal field hands' (Foote, 1904, p. 4) and hoped that by focusing on normal training, they were engendering a tradition of education within the local community.

This focus on traditional education shifted dramatically when a vocational education philosophy was imported from Hampton Institute by Rossa B. Cooley and Grace Bigelow, Penn School principals from 1908 to 1944 (Penn School Historical Information, Penn School Papers). The two northern missionaries and educators (Jacoway, 1980) would vigorously embark on an 'enterprise of lifting self-respecting people—sons and daughters of slaves—to higher standards of living' by providing them with industrial and agricultural training (Cooley, 1933) and a progressive education that embodied the core principles, 'learning for living' and 'learning by doing' (Penn School Historical Information, Penn School Papers). The Penn School curriculum shifted in tandem with its educational philosophy (along with its name, to Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School from Penn School). In its early years, students were provided a classical curriculum much like the one offered by the Avery School, albeit without instruction in classical or modern European languages. By 1924, students worked an extensive farm and trained in one of many industrial shops (Penn School Historical Information, Penn School Papers). From this depiction of the Penn School's educational philosophy, which clearly shared its primary ideological location with the Avery School, we can see how the models of personhood it helped to construct emphasized self-sufficiency and being a contributing member of society. While the models of personhood encouraged by both institutions clearly inherited a Weberian notion of a Protestant work ethic (Weber, 2001[1920]), the Penn School came to espouse a Washingtonian educational agenda and thereby diverged from the more DuBoisian models of personhood that were idealized and mediated by the Avery School.

2.1. Language education

Germane to this examination of language education practices, my findings from the Avery School's archive indicate that a classical curriculum endured the school's many transitions and helped distinguish it from other local institutions. Avery's language arts curriculum in 1899 is represented in Table 1.

Four decades later, in a 1944 memorandum, AMA officials noted that the Avery School's curriculum 'is now and has been from the beginning copied largely from the old school of classical culture. Latin, Spanish, French, and German, mathematics through solid geometry, high school sciences through chemistry and physics, Shakespearean drama, and daily drill in English grammar are all part of the program' (American Missionary Association Memorandum, 1944). By its closing in 1954, the only notable change to Avery's language arts curriculum was the absence of Greek (replaced by a second year of Latin for students on both tracks) and the inclusion of French, German, and Spanish.

Notably different, a small section of the Penn School's curriculum outline for the 1924–1925 school year is devoted to 'Academic Work' and simply states that students followed the course of study then required by South Carolina public schools (Annual Reports 1923–1927, 1925). Table 2 outlines this school year's prospectus for academic, agricultural, and industrial instruction and illustrates the school's emphasis on the latter.

In addition to modern European languages, reading, writing, and *speaking* local Standardized English were fiercely encouraged at both institutions through a host of practices including conventional instruction, spelling bees, language games, speech clubs, and oratory events. Among the most noteworthy were Avery's 'Annual Speaking Contests,' in which students recited revered English prose and poetry, were judged by a panel, and were watched by an audience of faculty, parents and community members; and the Penn School's 'Better Speech Club,' the subject of the following announcement[5] retrieved from the scrapbook of a former Penn School teacher who began teaching at the school in 1934:

-Better Speech Club-
'Better English, Better Pupils'
that's our motto and it is jolly fun helping each other improve his speech. Our meetings are held every Monday and Wednesday afternoons from 3:45–4:00. During that time we discuss language difficulties and play language games.
('The Vision of St. Helena,' Mary E. Langford Scrapbook, undated.)

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[5] Transliterated as closely to the original as possible.

Table 1
Language Arts at Avery Institute, 1899.

Normal track		College preparatory track	
Language lessons	4th–7th grades	Language lessons	4th–7th grades
Reading	4th–9th grades	Reading	4th–8th grades
Spelling	4th–8th grades	Spelling	4th–8th grades
Writing	4th–8th grades	Writing	4th–8th grades
Grammar	8th–9th grades	Grammar	8th–9th grades
Rhetoric	10th grade	Latin	9th grade
English literature (American and British classics)	10th grade	Rhetoric	10th grade
English literature		Ceasar	10th grade
		Greek	11th grade
	11th grade	English literature	12th grade
		Virgil/Xenophon's anabasis	12th grade

Data culled from Avery (1899) Catalogue, 1899.

Table 2
Prospectus of Study at Penn Normal, Industrial, and Agricultural School, 1924–1925.

Academic		Agricultural		Industrial	
1st–10th Grades	Public school curriculum	1st–2nd Grades	Nature study and simple gardening	4th–7th Grades	One industrial day weekly
		3rd Grade	Acre of corn on school farm		
		4th–6th Grades	Acre of corn on home farm	7th–10th Grades	Half-day academic/half-day industrial or agricultural
		7th–10th Grades	Garden Club and Poultry Club (girls)		Courses:
			Progressive Young Farmers' Club (boys)		– Blacksmithing and wheelwrighting
			Miniature Farm (boys)		– Carpentry
					– Cobbling
					– Cooking
					– Sewing

Annual Reports (1923–1927, 1925).

While on the fringes of formal schooling, as elective extracurricular activities, the Speaking Contests and Better Speech Club exemplify how the mediation of particular language ideologies saturated spaces of varying 'officialness.'

Each of the former Avery School students with whom I spoke studied at least one modern European language and three had also studied Latin. A larger body of interviews with former students collected by Drago and associates (part of an oral narrative project conducted by Avery Research Center in the mid 1980s) showed a similar valorization of European and European American language and literature. For example, in one of these interviews, a former student related that she had majored in Classical Latin and Greek in college and confirmed the interviewer's assumption that it was the Avery School that had given her 'the background for the appreciation of the classics and the languages' (Drago and Hunt, 1980).

A thorough review of curricular documents from the Avery School's almost 100 years of operation certainly indicated the privileging of a European and European American literary canon, European languages, and local Standardized English in its language education curricula and pedagogies. While singing 'Negro spirituals' was widely endorsed as an extracurricular pastime by the Avery School's faculty and administrative personnel after 1930, many of whom were former members of the famed Fisk Jubilee Singers (Drago, 2006), archival records indicated that there was little to no explicit encouragement of (or reference to) any other non-European forms of verbal expression, let alone any that remotely resembled Gullah language.[6] Former Penn School students replied similarly to Avery School alumni regarding their lack of recollections of any explicit acknowledgment of Gullah but, conversely, did not reminisce about any experiences with languages besides local Standardized English. However, while the Avery School's archive corroborated the accounts shared by alumni of that school, the Penn School's archive did offer one overt reference to 'the Island dialect' in a section on the St. Helena Folklore Society in the 1924–1925 Annual Report (Annual Reports 1923–1927, 1925). The section explains that the society was 'organized to

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[6] In one interview (File number: AMN 500-100006) conducted by Avery Research Center, the interviewee says that his English and French teacher (same person), who was a former Fisk Jubilee Singer, 'taught us the idiomatic language;' however, nothing more is said on the subject (Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture).

preserve the folk-lore of the Islands' and that a Mr. Nicholas Julius Ballant (noted as a 'native of Sierra Leone, East [*sic*] Africa'), was sent by the Board of Trustees to record the spirituals. Clearly expressing a sense of value for the 'dialect,' the write-up noted:

> The Island dialect has been preserved and the Spirituals recorded by this native African whose profound interest in the songs of his people has brought forth many from older Islanders which would have been inevitably lost had this work not been done.

(Annual Reports 1923–1927, 1925)

While most references to language in the Penn School archive mirrored the Avery School's and indicated rather clear strategies for teaching 'right' or 'better' ways of speaking, there seemed to be some nuance to both schools' messages, as is suggested by the Penn School's Folklore Society's interest in preserving Gullah and the Avery School's inclusion of African American and Caribbean American literature and its celebration of Negro spirituals, which tend to contain notable African American English features.

When I sat down to speak with former students of both institutions, each participant recollected fond memories of their rigorous education, and Avery School alumni provided meticulous details about their experiences studying foreign languages and classical English texts. However, in line with the written archive, none of these individuals recalled any explicit mention of Gullah (or Geechee, as it is locally termed) by faculty or administration. The following interview excerpts begin to reveal some of the snarls involved in the ways these individuals took up the implicit language ideologies they encountered. For example, when asked how faculty addressed the few Avery School students who used a marked Gullah variety (most of whom the participants reported to be from one of the aforementioned islands closely bordering Charleston), one former student, Winston, explained that he never heard anyone refer to Gullah as 'broken English' but added, '*Of course they corrected them if they were not using the correct grammar, but not the way they spoke*' (personal communication, June 23, 2009). Similarly, a Penn School alumnus, Richard, elucidated his own characterization of the relationship between formal schooling, formal language, and Gullah language[7]:

Richard:	Well Gullah just a broken English, you know like if you say 'Come here!' 'Come heya!' 'How ya'll doin'?' 'Hown yawna do?' (The) people couldn't (.) back then they didn't go to school to know how to speak good English
Krystal:	uhka:y
R:	so whatever it is (they) pronounce it just like (.) they- they speaks. That's why that they start that <u>school</u>. That- That's why it was a great thing for Penn <u>School</u>, cause most of the people back then couldn't read and write (ya know)
K:	right (.) And when you were there, did they teach you like (. that you shouldn't speak Gullah and you should speak-
R:	=well they learn you how to speak good English in case you went away looking for <u>jobs</u>
K:	okay
R:	you know they teaches you- they let you use your (.) regular <u>language</u> but it's (.) also learn you how to pronounce words

Beyond mediating an ideology that ties Gullah languaging to certain social phenomena (e.g., illiteracy), the work described by Richard in the previous excerpt illustrates how the Penn School also effectively 'mediatized' a model of conduct or lifestyle (via 'good English' as a commodified sign) by linking certain behaviors to socioeconomic roles (Agha, 2011). In this case, the commodity formulation of 'good citizenry' unequivocally entails one becoming an employable and employed laborer, as shown by Richard's astute assessment of the Penn School's objectives.

Noting an early moment of embracing Gullah hybridity and multilingualism, a former Avery School student, Lola, recalled her parents hosting young women from the islands so that they could attend secondary school (there were none on the islands until the 1950s) and explained how her mother always encouraged them to 'keep' their Gullah even as they learned the more standardized and prestigious Charleston dialect (K.A. Smalls, personal communication, June 22, 2009). Pertinent to Winston and Richard's fascinating comments about different kinds of languaging, Lola also discussed a particular 'way of talking' (Excerpt 2) that she did not necessarily designate as Gullah, but which seemed to be meaningfully connected to her own Gullah selfhood.

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[7] Transcription conventions used: (.) for long pauses; [ ] for overlapping speech; **–** for cut-off speech; : for elongation of the preceding sound; ((·)) for gestures, laughter, and other paralinguistic and nonlinguistic information; = for no break between turns and/or speakers; (– –) for unclear speech; CAPS for very high volume; * for very low volume; <u>underline</u> for strong stress; **bold** for analyst's emphasis.

Lola:	And I always thought that that story was so capital because the thing that you learned (.) when you were here was (.) you learned how to speak about a *white* person <u>in their presence</u> without them knowing it
Krystal:	=<u>M</u>m:
L:	=And I continued to c- (.) to do that. I tried to teach it to my children
K:	=((*laughing*))
L:	=I don't think the current generation does it very much
K:	=Yeah
L:	They just don't quite get it when you- (.) you know it's a lot of eye movements and the body. You can talk about a white person right while they're sitting there and they won't have a clue about what you're saying
K:	Um-hm
L:	And you can- you know (.) speak the truth about them and they still won't get it. And it's- it's not *all* words, but there's um you know it's it's a methodology. And I hate we've missed that but we don't know [how to do that anymore]
K:	[Yeah.] (.) Yeah that seems like another level of- of <u>language</u> that we had- I guess you're saying that we've lost
L:	E::xactly. And you <u>had</u> to. You had to be able to <u>warn</u> your: friend or your (.) co-worker or whatever they might have been in the presence of somebody and they were asking you to do something and you (.) you know you had to know what to say or what to- you know- you know- if you didn't want to do it or whatever
K:	Right right
L:	Uh (.) And so you- you used your parents frequently 'My parents would tan my hide if I (.) got involved in something you know in something like that or whatever.' And so: uh (.) it's just it was- it was a **way of talking**
K:	Yeah
L:	That- that we don't- (we) can't do anymore

In this excerpt, Lola attributed this 'way of talking,' an enculturated system of indirect signals used to carry out a host of tasks, with the ability to protect speakers and interlocutors from various harms (namely, those inflicted by white people). This stretch of talk transpired in the presence of a European American (ostensibly white) man who seemed to be within ear-shot of our conversation. She lowered her voice to a nearly inaudible level when saying the word 'white' and employed many of the discursive tactics she describes in the excerpt to demonstrate for me exactly the 'way of talking' of which she was speaking.

I suspect that while the institutions' practices in the first half of the 20th century imparted a language ideology in which proficiency in local SAE or a European language (specifically, the classical languages at the Avery School) became indexical of one's social evolution, and structural language practices correlated with Gullah were indexical of some other kind of person-hood, other sources of ideology provided the co(n)text with and through which these language lessons were taken up by students. In particular, Richard and Winston's statements, along with the documents regarding Penn's folklore society, are critical because they complicate any simple assessments of the Avery and Penn Schools' language programs. While both schools emphasized structural aspects of SAE (such as grammar) in tandem with a clear, although markedly less rigorous, endorsement of SAE genres and styles (via 'speaking contests' and language clubs), Richard and Winston's statements may have alluded to unofficial 'third spaces' (Gutiérrez et al., 1999) in which some Gullah discursive practices were permit-ted/tolerated, and thereby pointed to conceptual spaces, or gaps in the schooling schema, where competing ideologies from other sources could provide fodder to valorize Gullah in particular ways. If nothing else, these gaps may have foreshadowed the institutions' later orientations and their rather explicit messages that valorize(d) Gullah identity and languaging.

3. The second phase of ideological mediation: cultural revitalization

Contemporaneous with other movements organized around the protection of 'endangered' cultural groups and practices, Gullah preservation and revitalization efforts began in earnest in the mid-1980s, and made considerable headway in the 1990s under the burgeoning 'identity politics' and 'politics of recognition' (Taylor, 1992) activities that helped define the era. It was during this period that the Avery and Penn Schools—both of which closed their doors as schools in the 1940s un-der insurmountable economic pressures—became centers of historic preservation and education, as well as galvanizers of cultural revitalization.

The Avery School endured decades as a struggling historical landmark until its executive board, the Avery Institute of Afro-American History and Culture, partnered with the College of Charleston in 1985 to found the Avery Research Center for Afro-American History and Culture—now the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, or 'Avery Center' (Drago, 2006). Meanwhile, the Penn School immediately transitioned into an active community service center after closing in 1948, becoming Penn Community Services, Inc. in 1951 (South Carolina Department of Archives and History) and Penn Center in later years, gaining resources and momentum in the 1980s and 1990s. Presently, both institutions not only boast impressive museums and historical archives, but also host a number of community events, offer educational services,

and serve as the most prominent repositories of Gullah historical and cultural artifacts in South Carolina. The Avery Center, a university-run institution, is headed by a team of scholars whose commitment to and emphasis on research and knowledge diffusion is emblematic of an institute of higher learning, and is exemplified by its regular exhibitions and lectures. The Penn Center, historically guided by scholars and local activists, concentrates the bulk of its energies on community involvement, and in so doing functions as much as a community center as a cultural center, hosting an annual festival, weddings, retreats, conferences, and other community events in addition to more scholarly events like an annual Gullah Studies Summer Institute.

The institutional discourses produced by the Avery and Penn Centers help to reflexively construct Gullah language, culture, and identity by formulating the diacritics used to identify each phenomenon (e.g., ascribed kinship and a host of communicative practices not detailed here) and by enregistering these diacritics as emblems of Gullah personhood and therefore as stereotypic of it (Agha, 2007). However, these two institutions do this in different and yet overlapping ways, and one can detect some continuity of the institutions' respective class orientations from earlier moments in their current practices and registers.

For African American people living in the Charleston and Beaufort areas, most of whom identify as Gullah or note a Gullah heritage, the need to create an identifiable and durable public to organize politically and economically took on a sense of urgency in the 1980s, when increased land dispossession, economic downturn, and a number of other phenomena came to a disheartening head. Here, we may note that the two institutions' discourses of Gullah identification and community-building have been contextualized and informed by broader language and cultural endangerment and preservation discourses, which gained momentum alongside various other 'identity politics' projects (Heyes, 2009).

While invaluable because of their affirmation and promotion of marginalized cultural forms and practices like languaging, discourses of cultural and language endangerment and preservation have historically centered on saving 'pure' forms of indigenous and other peripheral languages (Dorian, 1994; Duchêne and Heller, 2007). Like other projects inscribed with notions of 'authenticity' and 'purity,' many endangerment/preservation discourses, including those examined in this issue,[8] tacitly suggest that certain cultures, languages, and peoples should remain the same while the rest of humanity changes (Muehlmann, 2007; Mufwene, 2006), and may also work towards the preclusion of actual languaging practices (which could include 'code-mixing') from language and cultural initiatives. Additionally, numerous endangerment discourses that focus on languages deemed creoles also tend to rely on conjecture about tidy, methodical, and exceptional flows of language change that engender notions of prototypes (McWhorter, 1998) and other paradigms that can be considered to effectively undermine the role of intelligence, agency, and heterogeneity in language evolution (Ansaldo et al., 2007; DeGraff, 2003). From this purview of pure/authentic and/or prototypical language systems, any evidence of cultural or linguistic change is quickly read as forced 'loss,' becomes characterized as a 'threat,' and consequently, becomes the object of remedial interventions.

In the South Carolina Lowcountry, however, the ways that being, doing, and speaking Gullah are being assembled and disseminated by these two centers comprise a collaborative and dialogic project that includes local residents, scholars, and activists alongside distant historians, linguists, and anthropologists, and liminal folks like myself who do not wholly (or only) inhabit any one of these positions. As hubs for Gullah activism and scholarship, the Avery and Penn Centers play a key role in implementing the most significant 'official' intervention into Gullah preservation and revitalization to date, the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act introduced by South Carolina Congressman James Clyburn in the 108th Congress. This legislation, passed in 2006 as part of the National Heritage Areas Act, federally designates the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor (GGCHC) and marks the southeastern coastline and adjacent Sea Islands from Wilmington, North Carolina to Jacksonville, Florida as an endangered historical region in need of protection and revitalization (see Fig. 2).

A 15-member commission, made up of five federally appointed Expert Commissioners (two from South Carolina, and one from Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, respectively) and 10 state-appointed Commissioners, is responsible for distributing funding to institutions that are deemed to successfully promote and protect Gullah history and cultural forms and practices. The National Park Service, which funds and oversees all US cultural heritage corridors, explains the GGCHC Commission's mission as follows:

The Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission is committed to:

- nurture pride and facilitating an understanding and awareness of the significance of Gullah/Geechee history and culture within Gullah/Geechee communities;
- sustain and preserving land, ***language***, and cultural assets within the coastal communities of South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida; and
- educate the public on the value and importance of Gullah/Geechee culture.
  (http://www.nps.gov/guge/upload/what%20is%20a%20nha.pdf, emphasis mine, retrieved on March, 19, 2009).

Interestingly, there is considerable mention of Gullah language in the community meeting transcripts from the Special Resource Study conducted before the legislation was drafted (Dias, 2002), throughout the GGCHC webpage (http://www.nps.gov/guge/) on Congressman Clyburn's webpage (http://clyburn.house.gov/district-gullah.cfm), as well as in a

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[8] And many others, e.g., Tatar by Wertheim (2003), Corsican by Jaffe (2007), French in France by Moïse (2007), Polish in Lithuania by Spires (2003), Croatian by Turk and Opašić (2008), and Tamil by Ramaswamy (1997).

Fig. 2. Map of the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor. *Note*: adapted from National Parks Service website, http://www.nps.gov/guge/.

number of news reports on the Corridor and its activities, but it is not present anywhere in the actual legislation. This absence of explicit reference to language in the official legislation alongside its pervasive presence in GGCHC discourses opens up critical space for the Gullah community to consider and address broader issues of Gullah languaging rather than fixate on promoting/preserving a specific code.

Both the Avery Center and the Penn Center are closely linked to the conception and implementation of the GGCHC. Serving as both the chairperson for the Commission and one of two Expert Commissioners from South Carolina, Emory Campbell was also the first Executive Director of the Penn Center. Although she is not officially associated with the Penn Center, the other Expert Commissioner from the state, Marquetta L. Goodwine (or Queen Quet, Chieftess of the Gullah/Geechee Nation), is from St. Helena Island and her mother is a Penn School alumna. From my conversations with Avery Center staff and alumni, both Campbell and Emory have significant professional and personal ties to the Avery Center as well (as workshop facilitators and guest lecturers and as friends of some of the center's members), along with a number of other Avery-affiliated individuals who actively participate in the GGCHC Commission's activities. Goodwine's words and works were cited repeatedly throughout the GGCHC's Special Resource Study report (2007). Although many of her public statements and scholarly works include some rehearsal of essentialist rhetoric about Gullah personhood (Goodwine, 1998; Low Country Gullah/ Geechee Culture Special Resource Study, 2007), Goodwine also helps formulate and publicize a rather fluid sense of Gullah personhood, particularly through her strong internet presence (the Gullah/Geechee Sea Island Coalition website, the Gullah/Geechee Nation websites, various podcasts, and Facebook and Twitter pages). In these forums, she routinely acknowledges and celebrates a range of individuals and cultural practices and forms as Gullah in some way.

Although the Avery and Penn Centers' specific missions orient primarily to very local African American histories and cultures (the Sea Islands for the Penn Center and the Lowcountry for the Avery Center), they both emphasize Gullah history and culture as symbolic of these local phenomena, and their discourses mediate ideologies that accentuate the revitalization and preservation of Gullah artifacts and practices specifically. For example, while the Penn Center's website explains its mission as the following: 'to promote and preserve the history and culture of the Sea Islands,' the same webpage describes the Penn Center as being located in 'the heart of Gullah culture' and explains that its annual festival, the Penn Center Heritage Days Celebration, is intended to 'to celebrate and showcase the unique cultural heritage of the Gullah people of the Sea Islands' (http://www.penncenter.com/, accessed February 10, 2010).

Similarly, the Avery Center's homepage clearly stated that its purpose was 'to collect, preserve, and make public the unique historical and cultural heritage of African Americans in Charleston and the South Carolina Lowcountry' (http://avery. cofc.edu/index.htm, accessed February, 10, 2010) and in another section described its gift shop as a place to procure 'books, audio & visual Gullah history and culture resources, African American games, T-Shirts and caps, note cards, calendars, and holiday gift ideas,' suggesting that 'Gullah history and culture resources' are symbolic of the Lowcountry culture and history they aim to 'collect, preserve, and make public' (http://avery.cofc.edu/index.htm, accessed February 10, 2010). A review of the exhibits it has hosted in recent years also indicates a keen emphasis on specifically Gullah topics. And while both centers share the primary occupation of constructing construable, respectable, and consumable 'Gullah culture,' they do so in rather class-stratified ways, with the Penn Center mainly offering easily accessible and banal services and the Avery Center serving as a depository of more erudite services.

4. Conclusion: constructing Gullah belonging

In this article, I have attempted to demonstrate how the shifting mediation of ideologies by two pivotal institutions has helped to shape some of the ways individuals have oriented to and taken up Gullah selfhood,[9] and how these varied ways of being Gullah have generated a publicly circulating sense of community belonging.

When we consider how variable, but sincere (Jackson, 2005),[10] conceptualizations and expressions of Gullah selfhood were meaningfully informed by shifting messages about personhood mediated by institutions like the Avery and Penn Centers—institutions that moved from downplaying Gullah selfhood to actively helping construct and promote multifarious ways of inhabiting it—we can better understand the intricate conditions under which multifaceted publics are now forming among Gullah-identified people.

Two recent articles by Matory (2008a, 2008b) contribute to this understanding of Gullah culture(s) and community as inherently dynamic and dialogic. Matory's contributions aim to puncture the enduring premise of Gullah isolation with re-tellings of Gullah culture as 'an evolving product of interaction rather than of primordial isolation' (2008b, p. 950). He offers a close examination of the sociohistorical reality of African Americans in the region from the 18th century through the present (2008a, 2008b) which diverges from most noted accounts of physical and social isolation (Cross, 2008; Jones-Jackson, 1987; Opala, 2000; Pollitzer, 1999) by detailing how a Gullah selfhood and sense of belonging (i.e., Gullah sincerity) emerged amongst many external influences, linguistic and otherwise, and did so by integrating some of these 'outsider' practices. Consequently, Matory helps move us toward a 'polynomic perspective' on Gullah culture and language which 'does not take the relationship of linguistic form and practice to community and identity for granted, but rather views it as an emergent property of social and political life' (Jaffe, 2007, p. 65). The loss of isolation is reported to have begun in earnest in the 1950s when bridges were built connecting many of the larger islands to the mainland (and when more students were bussed onto the mainland for schooling), and is frequently blamed for observable linguistic and cultural decreolization. Not only do Matory's contributions problematize visions of change, movement, and contact as bound to certain linguistic and cultural deaths, they may even cheer on a notion that high levels of variation, or broad repertoires expressed through what many call 'code-switching' and 'code-mixing,' have long existed amongst many Gullah speakers and are in fact perduring features of a construable Gullah selfhood and sincerity.

Because of the nuanced conceptualizations of community, nation, and belonging engendered by the intricate negotiations briefly discussed here, a very atypical kind of community- and nation-building project, passionately promoted—in distinct but overlapping ways—by the Avery and Penn Centers seems to be emerging among Gullah-identified people in the Charleston and Beaufort areas today. It is one that strategically borrows from prominent and widely circulating rhetorics of language endangerment, cultural and historic preservation, ecological conservationism, and even nationalism—but thus far, mobilizes highly flexible notions of language and unity. When we consider Matory's account of Gullah languaging and culture(s) as inherently hybridized and constantly moving, alongside Hopkins' (1992), Mille's (1990), and Mufwene's (1993 *et seq*) accounts of Gullah's complex linguistic ecology and trajectory, we can see the coherence and the historical continuity of the institutional projects described here; such flexible, responsive, and dexterous approaches to cultural revitalization should almost have been expected from Gullah communities. We can also begin to see how the Gullah woman's words quoted in the opening paragraph —'*We had lighter tongues over here*...'—brilliantly articulate the ways competing ideologies about what it means to speak, do, and be Gullah have worked both *with* and *against* one another to create conditions of possibility in which robust collective identities and fervent nationalisms can be cultivated without the certain demise of contingent and idiosyncratic self-making and languaging.

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[9] The larger project from which this analysis is drawn indicated that fluctuations of dis/alignment to different Gullah languaging practices (and the models of Gullah personhood they indexed) yielded diacritics of different kinds of Gullah identifications that maintained a sense of belonging to a complexly constructed and heterogeneous Gullah community.

[10] Jackson's account of sincerity (2005) proffers it as an analytic that focuses on one's subjectivity, or the modes through which one experiences the world, and how s/he articulates these ways of experiencing the world in ways that are perceivably indexical of certain models of personhood.

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Further reading

Graphic Maps (d/b/a of the Woolwine-Moen Group), n.d. South Carolina Sea Islands. <http://www.worldatlas.com/aatlas/infopage/scisles.htm>.

Krystal A. Smalls is a PhD student in Educational Linguistics and Africana Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. Her research interests converge around race and language ideology in educational spaces and focus on Hip Hop registers, hybridized languages, diaspora construction, and racialized subjectivity.

Update

Language and Communication

Corrigendum

Corrigendum to "'We had lighter tongues': Making and mediating Gullah/Geechee personhood in the South Carolina Lowcountry" [Lang. Commun. 32 (2012) 147–159]

Krystal A. Smalls [a,b,*]

[a] Graduate School of Education, Language and Literacy in Education Division, University of Pennsylvania, 3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6216, USA
[b] School of Arts and Sciences, Center for Africana Studies, University of Pennsylvania, 3401 Walnut Street, Suite 331A, Philadelphia, PA 19104-6228, USA

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Structurally similar to other varieties considered Atlantic English Creoles (Barbadian Creole [Hancock, 1980], Jamaican Creole, and Guyanese Creole, for example) and comprised of many features common among them (Arends et al., 1995), Gullah is also noted for a number of distinguishing structural features such as variably omitting the complementizer *fuh*, the use of the schwa phoneme (/ə/) in the indefinite marker *a*, the use of *dem* as a plural prenominal demonstrative (Mufwene, 2004), and the use of the durative and perfective aspect markers *da* or *duh* (Hopkins, 1994).

The authors regret 'in the definitive marker *a*, the use of *dem* as a singular prenominal demonstrative'.

The authors would like to apologise for any inconvenience caused.