



Catching Sense: African American Communities on a South Carolina Sea Island

Patricia Guthrie

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Plantation membership, an important association that continues to carry meaning in today's African-American communities on the Sea Islands, depends on one's residence between the ages of two and 12. This is the time when one catches sense, or learns the difference between right and wrong and the meaning of social relationships. Plantation membership confers rights and duties to its members for life, particularly in the areas of dispute settlement, adjudication, and status confirmation. The praise house system, which was the focal point of plantation life, is analyzed historically and in terms of the ethnographic present. Guthrie, an African-American anthropologist, believes that much of what she witnessed on St. Helena during her field research was a response to the experience of slavery when identity was derived from plantation residency rather than from mother, father, or place of birth.

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