Word, Shout, Song:

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Connecting Communities through Language

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Communication is one of the principal mechanisms that bond like kind together. Modes of communication encompass a wide range of sounds, tones, movements, tools, and symbols and transcend the human species. For example, just as one can distinguish the “language” of a mourning dove from an owl or a canary, man’s language has always served to bond as well as separate groups of people.

The study of languages has often led to the discovery of long forgotten trails of the migration of groups of people. The examination of word roots, dialects, intonation, and definition has helped forge greater understanding of the formation, contamination, and evolution of language. Through this exhibition, Word, Shout, Song: Lorenzo Dow Turner Connecting Communities through Language, you will see how this extraordinary scholar expanded his research to trace the common threads of language to their origins through the cultural and oral traditions that transcended geography and circumstance. This research helped verify the connection of people to their ancestry and validated the influences of African languages across three continents. This exhibition of a rare and extensively annotated collection of documents, recordings, and photographs, as well as film and artifacts, helps reconnect communities and brings language to life. It reveals surprising facts about the origins of some very familiar, commonly used words and helps draw parallels between their traditional and adapted uses.

The Lorenzo Dow Turner papers were donated to the Anacostia Community Museum in 2003 by Professor Turner’s widow, Lois Turner Williams. This collection of her husband’s materials had been stored in her home in Chicago, Illinois. Mrs. Williams contacted the museum with her wish to share the collection with the public. The donation to the museum included thirty-five (35) boxes of materials. The papers, which date from 1895 to 1972, include travel notes, archival documents, photographs, records, musical instruments, audio-visual material, costumes, books, recording equipment, a typewriter, and more. Related and complementary collections can be found at the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana; the Herskovits Library at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois; Roosevelt University, Chicago; the University of Chicago; Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University; and the Library of Congress, Archive of Folk Culture, American Folklife Center, Washington, D.C.

Finally, it is important to acknowledge the contribution made by Dr. Margaret Wade-Lewis to this exhibition. Dr. Wade-Lewis’s book, Lorenzo Dow Turner: Father of Gullah Studies, and the information she so carefully collected over the many years she researched Dr. Turner’s life were essential to the research that went into developing the exhibition script. Unfortunately, Dr. Wade-Lewis passed away in December 2009, and although she is not here to share in this accomplishment, her contributions are appreciated and her memory will long live among us.

Camille Giraud Akeju
Director
The estimated 645,000 Africans who were brought to America as slaves had something that gave them identity and from which they could not be parted despite the violence of capture, the horrors of the middle passage, and the despoliment of slavery—their native language.

They arrived in America speaking Bambara, Ewe, Fon, Fante, Fulani, Hausa, Kongo, Kimbundu, Vai, and Mende, among other languages. Under slavery they had to acquire the rudiments of English and they eventually lost the fluent use of their native languages, but they did not forget them all together. As they saw an animal or plant that reminded them of one in their native land they named it in their language. As much as they could, they cooked foods that were similar to what they had eaten at home and they named those foods in their native languages. They passed along to their children customs, celebrations, and songs they had learned in their native lands. More fundamentally, they named their children with African names, a very strong way of maintaining African identity.

In the process, in areas where slaves were the majority population and which were distant from centers of white dominance, enslaved people created their own Creole language—an amalgamation of words from many African languages and English—to communicate among themselves.

Yet, until the 1930s in the United States it was believed that African Americans had not retained any knowledge of the culture and language of their ancestors. Scholars dismissed Gullah, the language spoken in the Sea Islands along the coast of Georgia and South Carolina, as “baby talk” or simply “bad English.” All that was changed by the breakthrough research of Prof. Lorenzo Dow Turner, an African American linguist. Through pioneering research he proved that Gullah was a Creole language with words and a distinctive grammar derived from African languages and that African Americans had retained some African customs, especially in naming their children.

This exhibition traces the life and work of Professor Turner and his enormous contribution to African American scholarship and linguistics, his journeys through the worlds of the African Diaspora, his lifelong quest to bring knowledge of Africa to America, and the relevance and significance of his work eight decades later.

**Roots of Excellence, 1799–1906**

When Lorenzo Dow Turner was born in 1890 his African American family was already in its fourth generation of freedom. The Turner clan had started around 1799 in Gates County, North Carolina, with the relationship between Sally Rooks, a white woman of Scottish-Irish descent, and a black slave named Jacob Brady. Brady probably belonged to Sally’s father, Joseph Rooks. Sally and Jacob had four daughters during a period of twelve years. These daughters were born free since the statutes in the South at that time stipulated that a child’s legal status followed that of the mother. The last daughter, Margaret (Peggy), was born around 1812. On April 17, 1828, Peggy married Daniel Turner, a free man of color who was a landowner and a Baptist minister who knew how to read and write. They would be the paternal grandparents of Lorenzo Dow Turner. They had twelve children and the Turner clan was known as being “up-headed people.” They were hardworking, well educated for the times, and were able to buy land.

Rooks Turner, Daniel and Peggy’s ninth child, was born on October 24, 1844, in Pasquotank County, North Carolina. Because of his race he could not attend school until after the Civil War, but in 1866 he was admitted at a school established by the Freedmen’s Bureau and, despite the fact that he was already in his twenties, he entered first grade. By 1877, only twelve years after the end of the Civil War, Rooks Turner had completed his college degree at Howard University and had returned to Elizabeth City, North Carolina, to teach. He married Elizabeth Sessoms in 1880 and they had four boys: Shelby, who died as an infant in 1883; Rooks Jr., who died in 1912 while a medical student at Howard University; Arthur, who graduated from Howard University with a law degree; and Lorenzo Dow, who was born on October 21, 1890.

By the time his youngest child was born, Rooks Turner had been teaching in North Carolina for many years. He had founded the first public school for African Americans in the eastern section of the state and a teacher’s college which would become the foundation for what is today Elizabeth City State University.

“I am glad to say the colored people [in Elizabeth City] are quite . . . prosperous.” Statement by Noah R. Newby, Rooks Turner’s assistant in 1893

Rooks Turner’s prosperous life and successful career as an educational leader in Elizabeth City came to an abrupt end in the fall of 1896. He was involved in an altercation with a white man and had to leave town overnight fleeing for his life. He would never return. Nevertheless, his contributions to the
education of the African American community in North Carolina were well remembered into the 1970s by octogenarians who had benefited from his efforts in their younger years.

Left behind without means, Elizabeth Turner had to relinquish all of the family’s property to pay taxes and work as a seamstress and washerwoman for white households to support her children. Lorenzo Dow Turner was just six years old when his father had to leave the family. Yet he had received enough influence from him to understand the need for education. That example, combined with his tenacious personality and high intellect, would shape his life. The roots of Lorenzo Dow Turner’s excellence had been well planted.

By 1901 the Turner family had been reunited in Rockville, Maryland, where Rooks Turner, who by then had obtained a Master’s Degree from Howard University, was working in the public school system. Lorenzo went to elementary and middle school in Rockville. Years later he recalled that the activity that he had most enjoyed had been public speaking. So much so that in eighth grade he had been awarded a gold medal and twenty gold dollars for excellence in oratory and acclaimed as “the best speaker in the Negro public schools of Montgomery County.”

Before baseball’s integration, all-black baseball teams were very much in vogue. Many companies allowed their black employees to form baseball teams and play during their off hours. Turner was able to combine his ability as a baseball player and his job as a waiter when he worked summers for the Fall River Steamship Line. He worked in the dining room of the Commonwealth, the largest passenger liner operating between New York and Fall River, Massachusetts.

Howard and Harvard, 1906-1917

“The student who has done the most for Howard”
Entry about Lorenzo Dow Turner in the 1914 Howard University Yearbook

Lorenzo Dow Turner entered Howard University’s high school in 1906. He worked throughout his high school years to help support his family. After he entered college at Howard in 1910, he received a challenging classical education and graduated in 1914. Years later he stated that the most interesting subjects he had studied were ancient and modern languages, undoubtedly the beginning of his passion for languages. He also had two favorite extracurricular activities: debating and baseball. Baseball would soon become a source of much needed income, as well as working as a waiter.
The steamship's famous dining room was located on the upper deck, fifty feet above the water. Clad in his waiter uniform Turner served a select clientele of politicians, financiers, and socialites. After dining room duties were over, he and his African American teammates on the Commonwealth Giants team went down the gangway to the baseball parks in all the New England towns along the route of the boat. At the end of the summer Turner divided the money he had earned between his tuition and his mother, who by then was definitely and irreconcilably separated from his father. Turner followed this routine except in the summer of 1913. He went to Chicago to work as a waiter at the tenth floor dining room of the Auditorium Hotel. This would be the beginning of a circle that would be completed many years later.

During his years as a student at Howard University, Turner turned the heads of the female students because he was so handsome. As a matter of fact he was voted the “Most Handsome” senior. He was soon dating a young beauty named Geneva Calcier Townes. He married her in 1919. Although they eventually divorced, she played an important part in the beginning of his Gullah research.

Right after graduation Turner took a year off to work and save money for graduate school. His first job out of college was as a Pullman car porter. The job soon ended when the inexperienced novice let passengers off the train at the wrong station. Nevertheless Turner must have had a taste of the indignities that the Pullman porters had to deal with on a daily basis.

“I think the two years I had at Harvard did more for me than almost anything I can think of . . . I learned there how to concentrate.”

Lorenzo Dow Turner about his studies at Harvard University

When Lorenzo Dow Turner was accepted to pursue a master’s degree at Harvard University, he had been preceded by luminaries such as William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, who in 1895 had been the first African American to receive a PhD at the famous school; Alain Locke, who had graduated in 1907 with degrees in English and philosophy; and Carter G. Woodson, who had graduated just three years earlier with a PhD in history. As he started his studies in the fall of 1915, Turner was well aware that he needed to study very hard to succeed and work even harder to pay for his education since he could not count on help from his family or from scholarships, which were not available at the time.

Years later he reminisced that “out of twenty-four hours I had to put aside eight for work in order to stay in school . . . I [would] allow . . . four [hours] for my sleep.” The other twelve hours were dedicated to study. The intense pressure led Turner to learn how to concentrate no matter the activity taking place around him. This trait enhanced his highly organized personality.
“He was tall, lean with a head of wavy black hair above his thin aesthetic, tan colored face. . . . His delivery was soft and restrained. Listening to him I decided that I must be an English teacher . . . ”
Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*

After obtaining his master’s degree at Harvard, Turner was offered and accepted a position to teach English at his alma mater, Howard University. It was a comfortable fit and of course there was no possibility of an appointment at a white university. As Turner very aptly stated years later, ”. . . when I came through there were no colleges appointing Negros . . . I guess it just never occurred to them that Negros have to have jobs as well as others.” Turner’s career at Howard was immediately successful. He worked as an instructor from 1917 to 1920 and then rose to professor and Head of the Department of English.

He was a demanding teacher and he impressed his students. Zora Neale Hurston briefly considered the idea of becoming an English teacher, so enchanted was she with her debonair professor. Dorothy Porter, who became a librarian and director of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, stated in 1966 at the time of Turner’s retirement that she would “always remember [Turner’s] thoroughness in imparting knowledge.”

Conscious of the need to further his education, Turner applied and was admitted in 1919 to the University of Chicago to pursue his PhD. Lack of money was always a factor, for he continued to support his mother. So in the summer of 1919 Turner attended classes and worked as a waiter at the Windermere Hotel near the university’s campus. He was caught in the Chicago riot during what became known as the Red Summer, when mobs of racist whites roamed black neighborhoods terrorizing residents. There were confrontations and deaths on both sides. Turner escaped unharmed but he probably never forgot the event. The situation was somewhat improved when he received a Smiley scholarship and was able to attend school full-time for the academic year 1924–25 which allowed him to graduate in 1926.

As he pursued his education and built a career in academia, Turner decided to start a family and married Geneva in 1919. She was teaching in the segregated school system in Washington, D.C., and improving her own education by taking private French lessons and music classes with famous Howard professor Roy Tibbs. Turner completed his dissertation in the summer of 1926 at the same time that he lost his father in what was ostensibly a drowning accident in Rock Creek. Most likely it had been a suicide since Rooks Turner had suffered severe setbacks later in life. He had lost a leg to diabetes and the manuscript of his autobiography, his life’s most cherished work, had been lost in a house fire.

In the middle of this turmoil, Turner defended his dissertation and became one of the first forty African Americans to obtain a doctorate. Turner’s dissertation “Anti-Slavery Sentiment in American Literature Prior to 1865” had all the hallmarks of his later work on Gullah. It included systematic analysis, methodical organization, and comprehensive coverage of the topic. It became his first published work in 1930. It still is used today by libraries to measure the coverage of their collections on this topic.
As a Howard professor, Turner probably received “some pretty rough treatment from . . . college presidents under whom [he] had to work.” Although he was discreet and did not mention any names, it is most likely that he was talking about Dr. Mordecai W. Johnson, the first African American president of Howard University. Under Dr. Johnson's iron rule Howard University went through a tumultuous time in the late 1920s. Some of the best talent at the time left the faculty in disagreement with Dr. Johnson's efforts to silence criticism of any form. Alain Locke, professor of philosophy; Metz Lochard, professor of French; and Alonzo H. Brown, professor of mathematics, left between 1926 and 1927. William Henry Jones, professor of sociology, and M. Franklin Peters and Lorenzo Dow Turner, professors of English, left between 1928 and 1929.

Jones, Peters, and Turner had been accused, without foundation, of “swapping high ratings with co-eds for kisses.” Turner left the school with full support of the student body which at one point threatened to strike in support of the professors. Despite this setback the most productive and most important part of his career was still ahead.

Out of academic life, Turner decided to try his hand at publishing a newspaper. Naming it The Washington Sun, he and his brother Arthur, who served as business manager, wanted to publish a “fearless, independent newspaper” which would primarily “stimulate a wider and keener local interest in education, religion, and business . . . and . . . promote the civic welfare of the community.” The initial capital was $2,000 and the brothers kept very meticulous ledgers accounting for income and expenses. The weekly publication was an excellent piece and strived to practice the exhortation contained in its slogan “TO SERVE ALL THE PEOPLE ALL THE TIME.” Despite all the efforts, the newspaper did not succeed. Its first issue came out on September 6, 1928, and by January of the next year it went out of print.

As the newspaper venture came to an end, Turner’s mind went back to academia and he applied for a summer position and was accepted at South Carolina State College at Orangeburg. There Turner heard two of his students speaking a totally unfamiliar dialect. He had the opportunity to visit their homes on John’s Island on the coast and came to the conclusion that the language that they and their neighbors spoke was not “bad English” or “baby talk” as most scholars had believed. Turner was sure it was a distinctive language with a different cadence than the English spoken by African Americans in the South and containing words that he could not understand. These first encounters with Gullah speakers put Turner on the path of the seminal research that defined his career.

“One of the very serious handicaps of having to go South to teach was that of the segregation policy . . . it [was] embarrassing every time . . . [I left] the campus.” Lorenzo Dow Turner talking about his experiences with segregation as a professor at Fisk University

By the fall of 1929 Turner was again in academia, this time as professor at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. Fisk, along with Howard, was one of the best African American universities in the country. Famous intellectuals, such as John Hope Franklin and Frank Yerby, were trained there and were taught by Turner and a cadre of other excellent professors.

Initially Turner was hired to replace Sterling Brown, famous African American writer and poet, who had taken a leave of absence to pursue his graduate studies. Once Brown decided to move to Howard University to teach, Turner was given the position permanently in 1930. Fisk was a good fit for Turner. It provided a nurturing environment, and the university’s president, Dr. Thomas E. Jones, was very supportive of his career. The only problem was that Turner was separated from his mother and Geneva, who continued to reside in Washington, D.C.

The scourge of segregation was the only darkness in all the bright lights of his sixteen years at Fisk, as far as Turner was concerned. Besides the humiliations that he was subjected to every time he left campus, there was the problem of access to good research facilities. Years later Turner remembered how he had to travel north to Chicago and New York to undertake research in well-stocked libraries. The best library in Nashville, the one at Vanderbilt University, did not allow him entrance because of his race.
The research he undertook in these trips north was published in his new book in collaboration with Otelia Cromwell and Eva Dykes, *Readings from Negro Authors: For Schools and Colleges*. The book provided resources for high school and college teachers to teach African American literature. It was comprehensive as it included pieces from pioneers such as Phillis Wheatley and rising stars such as Zora Neale Hurston. Today the volume could still serve as a valuable compendium of African American literature covering the period from the 1760s to the 1930s.

During his tenure at Fisk, Turner had the distinction in 1943 of participating in the establishment of the first African Studies program in the United States. Later on, Northwestern University established its African Studies program in 1948 and Howard University granted the first bachelor’s and master’s degrees in African Studies in 1954. But in 1943 Turner and his colleagues foresaw the end of colonialism and established a program of studies that looked towards a time when African Americans and Africans would collaborate in the process of building a new free Africa. The program attracted a number of African students to Fisk including two who served as language informants to Turner: Fatima Massaqoi, who worked with the Vai language, and Ako Adjei, who worked with Gã.

Turner stayed at Fisk University until 1946 when he accepted an appointment at Roosevelt College in Chicago. Turner was the first African American professor to receive an appointment to a white institution, but Roosevelt was not your average mainstream white college. It had been founded in 1945 as a “democratic haven” where discrimination because of race or religion would not exist. It was a revolutionary proposition in 1945 long before the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Its first president, Dr. Edward J. Sparling, had resigned from Chicago’s Central YMCA College because of the college’s discriminatory practices and taken with him almost 80 percent of the faculty. At Roosevelt students were all “an animated crazy-quilt, all pieces of which are woven into the same material, with only the colors different.”
The novelty of having an African American professor teaching white students puzzled white observers. Turner was often asked if he taught students from the South and, if so, what was their reaction to him as a teacher. Turner always replied that he could only guess where his students were coming from given their accents, and that they were all respectful towards him. Their accents might be different, but their attitude was the same.

For Turner there was also an element of nostalgia mingled with a sentiment of triumph in coming to teach at Roosevelt, which was installed in the historic Auditorium Building facing the expansive views of Grant Park and Lake Michigan. Turner had worked there in the summer of 1913 as a waiter in the tenth floor restaurant of the Auditorium Hotel which now was Roosevelt’s Library. Turner confessed that as he looked out of the windows at the gorgeous view he often remembered the time he waited tables located in the space where now he strolled in as a respected professor. The circle had been completed.

Turner stayed at Roosevelt College, later Roosevelt University, until the end of his academic career. In 1966 he had to retire due to age; but he remained at the university as a professor emeritus until 1970, when he left because of poor health.

"He did not accept what students of the Gullah dialect assumed was very bad English . . . and set about disproving this theory engaging in a lifelong scholarly pursuit of a link that Black Americans had with Africa." Robert L. Franklin, Roosevelt University, in a posthumous tribute to Turner in February 1972

Turner’s interest in linguistics was long-standing and, when he began searching for a subject for his doctoral dissertation in the mid-1920s, he briefly considered studying the speech of ex-slaves in the South, particularly, as he himself stated, "those whose speech is very old-fashioned." The project did not succeed because of the difficulties in obtaining adequate recording equipment at the time.

Yet Turner’s exposure to Gullah speakers in South Carolina in 1929 spiked his interest again to study the speech of ex-slaves. He decided to pursue training in linguistics which would prepare him to do the research and in the summer of 1930 he attended an institute run by the Linguistic Society of America. This connection led to an invitation to work for the Linguistic Atlas of the United States Project, which intended to map the dialects spoken in the United States. This in turn led to his seminal work on Gullah and its African connections.

By 1931 Turner had become the first African American member of the Linguistic Society of America, another “first” among the many he would collect throughout his life. A year later he was awarded his first grant by the American Council of Learned Societies to begin his research on Gullah. Thus, with his acquired knowledge of the International Phonetic Association transcription system, a questionnaire from the Linguistic Atlas project, and a recording device, Turner was ready to begin his Gullah research.

In this age of microrecording devices that can be held inconspicuously in a shirt pocket, the recording machine that Turner obtained, a Fairchild recorder manufactured by the Recording Instrument Division of the Fairchild Aerial Camera Corporation, was a case apart and can easily be described as a behemoth. It weighed more than one hundred pounds and consisted of a disc-cutting device that slowly moved a cutting stylus onto the surface of an aluminum disc covered in acetate, producing very precise spiral grooves. It was a record player in reverse. It produced sound recordings which could then be replayed on a phonograph.
The equipment, which had been acquired by the American Council of Learned Societies for Turner’s use, and, according to him, was only the third to be produced in the United States, was shipped by train to Charleston, S.C., where Turner was staying. It came with a twenty-page detailed manual on how to operate it.

The weight and the cumbersome operation of the device were not the only problems facing Turner. Reaching the Sea Islands was an adventure in itself. Turner had to rely on the tides to take him back and forth. Sometimes the row boat in which he sat could not reach the shore and he had to wade in. Most of the time there was no electricity in the locations where he was interviewing his informants and he had to ferry them to the mainland, where the recording machine could be connected to electricity. Consequently, most of the interviews were made in Charleston, Beaufort, Savannah, and Brunswick.

Despite all the technical difficulties, Turner made recordings that have defied the distance of time and have reached us today to bring from slavery times the voices, the music, and the reminiscences of Gullah speakers. It was Turner’s first journey into one of the worlds of the African Diaspora and his first exposure to African survivals in the United States.

Turner first began presenting the fruits of his Gullah research in December of 1932. During the Christmas break he delivered a lecture at the New York Public Library’s Harlem branch on 135th Street (which later became the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture). On December 31st he made a presentation to his peers at the annual meeting of the American Dialectic Society at Yale University. In the Yale presentation Turner described Gullah for the first time as a distinctive language and effectively made use of his recordings to point out aspects of its tone, syntax, and morphology. He did not raise the possibility of African influence in Gullah at this meeting, probably because he was not yet able to present corroborating evidence.

“I assisted in making records of the Gullah dialect in the Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina.” Geneva Galcier Townes Turner, late 1960s

Geneva Turner accompanied her husband in the early years of his work in the Sea Islands and assisted him in making the recordings. Although her contributions went without acknowledgement in later years, she was the one who served as her “husband’s associate and scribe” in his first years doing Gullah research. To prepare for that role, she learned phonetics in the evenings while teaching school during the day in Washington, D.C., and attended classes in international phonetics at Brown University.

Turner elicited the trust of his interviewees first because he was an African American as they were and second because of his courteous and engaging manner which included the gifting of tobacco, groceries, and sometimes small amounts of money. His subjects were so delighted to hear themselves once the discs were recorded and played back that Turner had no trouble at all in gathering the information he wanted.
S sometime in the late eighteenth century a Mende woman was captured in what is today Sierra Leone on the West Coast of Africa and transported as a slave to a plantation in the Sea Islands of Georgia. She brought with her a song which she had heard numerous times when a funeral was taking place. The destructiveness of slavery did not erase the song from her mind and she transmitted it to her daughter, for among the Mende the women were the guardians of funeral traditions. In time the meaning of the song’s words was lost and it became a playful jingle that mothers sang to their children. Thus Catherine, a slave woman, learned the song and passed it on to her daughter Tawba, who in turn passed it to Amelia (born free in 1880), who then taught it to her daughter, Mary.

On the other side of the Atlantic, 5,000 miles away, Mende women continued to sing the song at funerals until the early twentieth century when the old animist religion and its ceremonies were replaced by Christian and Islamic religious traditions. Yet one woman kept singing the song. Mariama of Senehun Ngola village in Sierra Leone taught her granddaughter Baindu how to sing it. Mariama insisted that “some time in the future, if people who can sing it come back here to our village, you will know they are your own family.” So it was that two hundred years after the song had left Africa it made its way back and Baindu could identify its singer, Mary Moran from Georgia, as a long lost relative. This miraculous reunion was possible only because, in the summer of 1933, Lorenzo Dow Turner had recorded Amelia Dawley of Harris Neck, Georgia, singing that song. In the 1990s, anthropologist Joseph Opala discovered the song among the many Turner recordings held at Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University. Subsequently Opala, ethnomusicologist Cynthia Schmidt, and linguist Tazieff Koroma arranged a “reunion” in Sierra Leone between Baindu Jabati of Senehun Ngola and Mary Moran of Harris Neck. Together they sang the song and mingled their tears in joy. An elder of the village summed up the momentous occasion by quoting an ancient proverb: “You can identify a person’s tribe by the language they cry in.”
The resemblance between these [West African] languages and Gullah is much more striking than I had supposed."

Letter, Lorenzo Dow Turner to Dr. Thomas E. Jones, Fisk University president, November 15, 1936, from London

As Turner immersed himself in the Gullah culture, he knew for sure that the old theories about Gullah were wrong. What he found were grammatical constructions and words that had nothing to do with English and that he believed were of African origin. After all, if dialects such as the Pennsylvania Dutch based on German and the Louisiana Creole based on French had survived in America, why not believe that Gullah could be a dialect linked to African languages? To prove his point Turner decided to study African languages.

To pursue this next step, Turner applied and was accepted to study phonetics and West African languages at the School of Oriental Studies, later School of Oriental and African Studies of the University of London, which at the time was the premier center for the study of African languages.

Turner arrived in London in early October 1936 and shortly thereafter began his studies under the guidance of Professor Ida C. Ward, a noted British linguist specializing in West African languages. As Turner concentrated on the study of Ewe, Efik, Gà, Twi, and Yoruba, he began to understand some of the unusual linguistic features he had observed in Gullah. The cracking of the Gullah code had begun.

At a time when few dictionaries and grammars of African languages existed, Turner had to be resourceful and creative in how to continue his studies and his research. After almost a year of study in London he found another opportunity to do research at the Exposition Internationale in Paris in the summer of 1937.

He had contacted Professor Henri Labouret, who was a noted French Africanist and the honorary governor of French colonies in Africa, as well as a professor at the École Coloniale and director of the International Institute of African languages. Labouret arranged for Turner to have a tent office on the grounds of the exposition where Turner settled himself with the Gullah recordings he had brought with him and a phonograph. Professor Labouret began to direct any African visitors that came by the exposition to visit Turner. Once the visitors arrived at the door of his tent, Turner played for them the recordings he had made in the Sea Islands, hoping that they would recognize some of the words and could give him information about the structure of the languages. He was primarily interested in Ewe, Fon, Bambara, and Wolof, African languages spoken in the French African colonies whence the visitors originated. This way he gathered more information that confirmed his hypothesis of African survivals in Gullah.

Turner must have commented to Labouret that some of his Gullah informants, had Muslim ancestors. Labouret then suggested that Turner should learn Arabic in order to be able to identify other African survivals in Gullah. This led Turner to study Arabic at Yale University in 1938 and to some of his most interesting linguistic findings.
In the Gullah tradition, the participants sometimes danced around an altar placed in the middle of the church or around the church itself, thus recreating the act of moving around a sacred object. Furthermore, the term “shout,” despite its meaning in English, is applied by the practitioners only to the movements rather than to the vocal or percussion accompaniments of the dance, further connecting “shout” with *sha’wt*. Combined with other elements of African origin, such as call-and-response singing, clapping, foot stomping, marking rhythm with a stick, and the fusion of dancing and singing leading to spiritual possession, the “ring shout” is the oldest African American performance tradition surviving in the United States.

**SHOUT = SHA’WT**

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While studying at Yale Turner also tried to produce, but evidently did not complete, a translation of the so-called Bilali Diary. This was a document in Arabic compiled by a Muslim slave, Bilali Mohamed, which would become a seminal document in the history of Muslims enslaved in the United States. Bilali Mohamed was originally from Timbo in Futta Jallon, which is now located in the West African country of Guinea. At the time that Bilali was captured into slavery, Futta Jallon was ravaged by a civil war that lasted from 1725 to the end of the century. Those unfortunate enough to be captured by the opposing faction were sold into slavery. This was probably what happened to Bilali, who was taken to the Caribbean and later sold as a slave to Thomas Spalding, who brought him to his plantation on Sapelo Island, Georgia, in 1802.

Bilali lived on Sapelo Island for more than fifty years, always following as well as he could the precepts of the Muslim faith. Sometime before his death around 1859, he delivered a manuscript in Arabic to a trusted white confidant, Rev. Francis R. Goulding. The manuscript, which is the most extensive African-Arabic manuscript to be found so far in the Americas, is held today in the collections of the University of Georgia Library. Studies of the manuscript undertaken in the twentieth century indicated that the document had been erroneously identified as a diary. Its contents are mostly a transcription of the Risāla, a work of Islamic jurisprudence for the Maliki School of Thought written by Abi Zayd of al-Qayrawan and very popular in West Africa. The Risāla was the source text for many later works of Islamic law. The belief now is that Bilali was training to be a Muslim legal scholar at the time of his capture.

There are other fascinating characteristics of the document such as the fact that it was written in a variety of Arabic script used in West Africa in the eighteenth century and that its paper, of Italian origin, was imported into North Africa and then exported to West Africa in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These facts suggest the unlikely but tantalizing possibility that Bilali Mohamed was able to bring the manuscript with him throughout the ordeal of capture and the middle passage and then conserve it through a life of more than fifty years of slavery, a monument to his endurance and faith. Two of Bilali’s descendants, Katie Brown and Shadrack Hall of Sapelo Island, gave information to Turner in the early 1930s.

“*The field here is rich in African material and I am having no difficult finding it.*” Lorenzo Dow Turner to Melville Herskovits, February 1941, from Bahia, Brazil

As Turner continued to explore the African survivals in Gullah, he was attracted to Brazil. He knew that a much larger number of Africans had been brought to Brazil as slaves than to the United States and that many of the West African languages that had influenced Gullah were the same ones that these enslaved Africans had brought to Brazil. Better yet, Turner also knew that Afro-Brazilians in the Northeast area of the country, especially in Bahia, had been able to retain many of their religious practices, oral literature, and musical heritage. Researching these survivals would be useful for him in his quest to build a more complete picture of how African languages had influenced Gullah. With the support of Melville Herskovits, the most prestigious Africanist in the United States at the time, Turner obtained a grant and left to do research in Brazil in June of 1940.

Turner’s first stop was in Rio de Janeiro, then the capital of the country and its principal intellectual center. There he tried, with mixed results at first, to learn Portuguese. The “linguaphone set” he had brought with him—evidently the Rosetta Stone language learning device of the time—had not been as useful as he thought it would be because it contained lessons mostly in European Portuguese, which is a very different language from the one spoken in Brazil.
Always a serious and conscientious student, Turner poured himself into the task of learning this new language as one of his notebooks, with neat rows of conjugated verbs, attests. He probably quickly overcame his early troubles because by the end of July, a little over a month after his arrival, he reported that he could ask for anything he needed, although he sometimes did not understand what was said to him.

While Turner was in Rio, E. Franklin Frazier, a noted African American sociologist based at Howard University and accompanied by his wife, arrived in Brazil to do research on the structure of the Afro-Brazilian family. Both men were treated as celebrities. They were interviewed by newspapers with front page coverage as they explained their interest in studying the rich Afro-Brazilian culture. In Rio, Turner met with Brazilian intellectuals and recorded Mario de Andrade—considered by many the most important Brazilian intellectual of the twentieth century—speaking and singing with friends. In early October Turner and the Fraziers embarked for Salvador, Bahia. In Bahia, they were also treated as celebrities. They were interviewed on the deck of the ship by the local media even before disembarking. Turner was also invited right away to attend a ceremony at the School of Medicine where Brazilian President Getúlio Vargas received an honorary degree.

Salvador presented Turner with fertile ground for his research. This most African of Brazilian cities had received the majority of the Africans who had been enslaved in Brazil. Furthermore, its population of African descent had been able to maintain close relations with West Africa, as ships plied the waters between the two coasts taking people, goods, and news to and fro. Turner had found Africa in Brazil.

He was particularly taken by *Candomblé*, the Afro-Brazilian religion brought from West Africa by the slaves. He was admitted to its temples, or *terreiros*, where Afro-Brazilians worship the gods that had crossed the Atlantic.

Turner recorded hundreds of hours of ritual songs, life stories, and African folktales that had been transported to and nurtured in Brazil. He played back to the people of *Candomblé* the recordings he had made in the Sea Islands and they recognized some of the very words they used in their rituals and songs. Turner experienced once more the momentous experience of language connecting the worlds of the African Diaspora.

Turner was particularly interested in the close connection that individual Afro-Brazilians had enjoyed with West Africa. He interviewed individuals who had lived in Africa and now lived in Bahia and others whose families were split on the two margins of the Atlantic. This connection had provided the constant source of linguistic and cultural replenishment for Afro-Brazilian culture that had allowed it to survive and thrive.

Having been subjected to the embarrassing and degrading institution of racial segregation in the South of the United States, Turner was pleasantly, if naively, surprised by the lack of structured segregation in Brazil. His personal experience in Brazil of discrimination was for being a rich American and not because of the color of his skin. Although Turner’s views on racial harmony in Brazil were somewhat idealized, it must have been a relief not to be mistreated only because of the color of his skin.

Turner left Bahia in April of 1941 and did more research in Pernambuco further up the Northeast coast of Brazil. He was back in the United States in July with an array of musical instruments, *Candomblé* vestments, wonderful photographs, and a sense that Afro-Brazilians were well aware that their African ancestors had given to Brazil its best in music, art, and dance.
The Myth of Omolu, the Orishá of Sickness and Smallpox

Omolu Disobeys His Mother and Is Punished with Smallpox

When Omolu was a young boy, he was very disobedient. One day he was playing near a beautiful garden, which was covered with small white flowers. His mother had told him not to step on the flowers, but he disobeyed her and stepped on them on purpose. Omolu’s mother did not say anything, but suddenly he noticed that his body was covered with small white flowers which turned into horrible pustules.

Omolu was very frightened. He cried out asking his mother to free him from that horrible disease—smallpox. His mother then explained that the disease was punishment because he had been disobedient, but that she would help him. She got a handful of popcorn and threw it on Omolu’s ravaged body, and as the popcorn fell the pustules disappeared as if by magic. Omolu left the garden completely cured but his body was pockmarked. Since then Omolu covered himself completely with clothing made of straw to hide the marks and became the orishá of pestilence and cures.
In the urban area of Salvador, Bahia in the nineteenth century slaves and freedmen alike earned money as carriers of heavy loads. There were those who carried the sedan chairs (cadeirinhas de arruar) and others who formed work groups to carry heavy loads on their heads. These work groups were called cantos, either for the fact that they congregated on corners or because the men sang as they carried their loads. The word canto in Portuguese can be used to designate the corner of a room as well as the act of singing.

Cantos were very important institutions in the Afro-Brazilian male community. They were not only a source of income but also performed several other functions. They were solidarity groups, provided chances for leadership roles to men who had been completely disenfranchised, and gave a sense of community to men who had been deprived of their freedom and families.

Possibly while wandering around the streets of Salvador with his camera, Turner came across a group of men lifting and carrying away a piano. He photographed their moves in a sequence of five wonderful photographs. He might have photographed one of the last cantos in existence in Salvador; although without further information we cannot say for sure.
When Turner arrived in Bahia he was immediately directed to talk to an elderly man who was considered the sage of Afro-Brazilian culture. Martiniano Eliseu do Bomfim (whose Yoruba name was Ojeladê) was by then in his eighties and in declining health. Nevertheless, Turner found him to be a veritable fountain of information. He recorded many hours of songs, folklore narratives, and life experiences which Senhor Martiniano, as he was called by Brazilians, delivered in three languages: English, Yoruba, and Portuguese. This experience tremendously enriched Turner’s research in Brazil.

Born free in Bahia in 1859, the child of ex-slaves who had been able to buy their freedom, Martiniano was sent to Lagos, Nigeria, by his father as a teenager in 1875 to study at the Faji School of the Anglican Church Missionary Society. He would stay for eleven years. At the school he learned English, perfected his knowledge of Yoruba, and acquired his trade as a house painter. After his formal schooling, Martiniano studied to be a Babalawo, a practitioner of the art of divination known in Yoruba as Ifá. Back in Brazil around 1886, Martiniano became an anthropological and linguistic consultant for Brazilian scholars studying Africa and an important member of the Candomblé community. He was a collaborator and friend of the famous Candomblé priestess Eugenia Anna dos Santos, known as Mãe Aninha. He helped her organize the Ilé Axé Opo Afonjá in 1910. Back in Bahia, besides earning his living as a house painter, Martiniano also taught English to the children of well-to-do Afro-Brazilians and traveled a few times back to Lagos to earn some money in the active trade of goods between the two coasts.

Talking to Turner seems to have given Martiniano a boost. Remembering his youth in Lagos and singing the old songs made him feel young and want to dance as well as feeling wistful. At one point he stated: “Maybe someday God will strengthen me. I like there [Lagos] very much. I would like that I again go back there to that place.” His wish was not to be. Martiniano died in 1943 and entered forever the pages of the history of Candomblé in Brazil.
the present study is the result of an investigation that has extended over a period of fifteen years . . .” Lorenzo Dow Turner in the preface of Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect (1949)

In a letter dated April 9, 1945, Turner indicated that the manuscript that would later become his seminal book Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect was ready for publication and only waiting for final revision and a typist who could handle the typing of the special characters included in it. As always Turner’s work was impeccable. He had been careful, had devoted years to research, and had spent many more in making sure that the text met the very best technical standards. Nothing had been left to chance.

In fact Turner’s work was momentous, much more than a meticulous and technically flawless text. By identifying words in Gullah that were derived from more than thirty African languages from the Niger-Congo family he had proved irrefutably that slavery had not completely obliterated the memory of Africa in its victims. Turner’s text was one of the first steps in the movement that would eventually create the field of African American studies.

At the time that Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect was published by the University of Chicago Press in 1949, almost nothing had been written about Creole languages. Consequently Turner did not have access to a complete picture of what a Creole language was and could not expand on the theory of the subject. Yet his work pioneered the field of Creole studies and helped propel it. He even correctly envisioned that the future of Creole studies was in the comparisons of different Creole languages based on different European languages to determine the commonality of many of their structures. His work laid the foundation that inspired Creole studies in the 1970s, 1980s, and beyond.

His work provided other incentives for further study of the African influences in English. In the 1970s Turner’s findings were cited as the proof that Black English or Ebonics was a distinctive language from everyday colloquial American English. Furthermore, linguists inspired by his findings launched into the task of finding Africanisms in American English in general. To no surprise they found that many words currently used in colloquial English are derived from African languages.

After its first edition in 1949, Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect was well received by many academics and deemed controversial by others. The fact that it has withstood the test of time attests to its importance. It had two more editions, one by the University of Michigan Press in 1974 and the other by the University of South Carolina Press in 2002. It is a standard reference work for creolists to this day.

“My research is now going very well. Interesting material is to be found everywhere.” Lorenzo Dow Turner writing to Lois Turner from Africa in May of 1951

After his breakthrough research in the Sea Islands and the exhilarating discovery of Africa in Brazil, Turner’s eyes turned to the real prize: Africa. Finally, in 1951, he was able to achieve his dream of visiting Africa after he received a Fulbright award. His visit to West Africa was a major adventure of interacting with the local people, presenting lectures, and again recording songs, folktales, and proverbs.

Turner was initially located at the University College of Ibadan, Nigeria, where he lectured to appreciative audiences on topics such as Africans in the New World and the English language in America. Soon after his arrival he was extending his reach and traveling all over the country. During these excursions he often played the recordings he had made in Brazil with Yoruba speakers. His audiences in Africa were fascinated. He was further connecting the worlds of the African Diaspora through language.

Always the independent sort, after relying on transportation provided by others, Turner bought a light truck for his travels. Before he left Africa he had put 20,000 miles on the odometer and the truck’s tires were threadbare.
Some of the adventures Turner had in Africa were outright funny, others somewhat dangerous. By experience Turner soon learned that the local bridges were closed at 6:00 pm when the bridge guard’s shift ended for the day. If he arrived at a bridge after that time, he could count on sleeping in the truck and on taking turns with whoever was his guide in keeping watch with a shotgun on hand to keep wild animals at bay. On another occasion, Turner was presenting a lecture at a mission school when somebody announced “Elephants are coming!” His audience immediately bolted for the door and the lecture was never finished.

After traveling extensively throughout Nigeria, Turner briefly traveled to Dahomey (today Benin), Togoland (today Togo), and the Gold Coast (today Ghana.) He then moved to Sierra Leone where he undertook research on Krio. In Sierra Leone he visited Fatima Massaquoi, one of his students in the early days of the African Studies Program at Fisk. He also made many recordings which would help him further his knowledge of Creole languages and his later work in teaching Mende and Krio to Peace Corps volunteers bound for Sierra Leone.

Back in the United States, Turner had a new store of knowledge regarding the connections between African, Afro-Brazilian, and African American cultures. He had brought with him from Africa more than 8000 proverbs, 1600 folktales, and hundreds of hours of recordings in addition to musical instruments and art items. He was also eager to begin a last journey: bring knowledge of Africa to America.

“He . . . was an African American griot par excellence.”

After returning from Africa in 1951, Turner took every opportunity to present his eyewitness view of Africa to diverse audiences. From his students at Roosevelt University to the members of the B’nai Torah Temple of Highlands Park (a Chicago suburb) to the congregation at inner city Ebenezer Baptist Church, those attending his lectures were unanimous in rating them as highly successful and entertaining. Turner highlighted his presentations with his recordings, his pictures, and his vivid narrative, all in the true style of a griot, imparting knowledge and entertainment.

Although his main focus had always been on words, Turner was also very interested in music. His research led him to the conclusion that the melody of many well-known spirituals such as “I am climbing up the mountain” and “A city called heaven” had African origins. He was particularly fascinated by drums since they set the tone in African music. Turner always mentioned that drums in Africa could speak, and his “talking drum” was always a favorite item in his lectures.
The talking drum is an hourglass shaped pressure drum that can closely imitate the rhythms and intonations of spoken language. The drum’s heads—at either end of its body—are made of animal hide, fish skin, or another membrane which is wrapped around the drum’s wooden hoop. Leather cords or thongs run the length of the drum’s body and are wrapped around both hoops. When the drum is placed under one’s arm, the cords are squeezed, the head tightens, and the drum’s pitch then changes, imitating the sounds of a language. The talking drum is called *dundun* in Yoruba.

Skilled drummers, called *onigangan* in Yoruba, have the ability to closely imitate the sounds of African tonal languages and reproduce the sounds of proverbs and praise songs. This drum language can be easily understood by Yoruba audiences. The use of talking drums was forbidden in the United States during slavery times because of its ability to “speak” in an unknown language and its potential to incite rebellion.
Turner’s expertise with words and his knowledge of Africa and African languages came together in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The world was fundamentally changing then. Colonialism in Africa and other parts of the developing world was fast disappearing; in the United States the civil rights and black power movements had brought to the fore the plight of African Americans as well as an interest in African American culture. There was a need for new dictionaries that reflected these changes and gave due credit to the influence of African languages in English. Turner was the person to meet this need for information. He was hired by Funk and Wagnalls to serve on the editorial board of the *New Practical Standard Dictionary* and as a consultant on African languages for *Webster’s New World Dictionary*.

Turner had also been keenly interested in folktales and proverbs as teaching tools. He had observed in Africa, especially among the Yoruba, that these forms of creative oral expression were used to teach morality and the correct use of language. They also provided opportunity for imaginative comments on life as well as for less laudable purposes such as ridicule. Folktales were the tools of expression that a griot such as Turner was very comfortable in using.

Unfortunately he was never able to publish the voluminous number of folktales he had collected in Brazil and Africa. Yet at the very end of his life he participated in a project that would fulfill some of this desire. Turner collaborated on a project with the Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corporation in Chicago to produce a series of filmstrips for students from kindergarten to sixth grade. Poignantly, the folktales from Congo, Nigeria, Liberia, and Dahomey were published only after his death. But they were received well by the critics who expected them to be excellent tools to teach language arts and to help elementary school students acquire more familiarity with Africa. Turner would have been glad that his work had reached children of all races in the United States and imparted to them the knowledge and wisdom he had brought from Africa.

Lorenzo Dow Turner departed this life on February 10, 1972. His death notice in the *Chicago Daily Defender* said it all: “*Death has removed from the scene one of America’s truly great linguistic scholars of our time.*”

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*Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago, IL, and Learning Resources and Technology Services, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, MN*
The saga of the Black Seminoles spans three centuries. They were fugitive slaves from Georgia and South Carolina who found refuge in Florida and were able to retain their culture and language to this day. In the 1970s it was discovered that the language they spoke was an ancient form of Gullah no longer spoken in the Sea Islands but definitely linking them to their kin in that area. Although Professor Turner never knew of their existence, it was indirectly due to his work that their language was discovered.

Beginning in the seventeenth century Spanish officials in Florida had started to offer refuge to runaway slaves from Georgia and South Carolina. By 1738 the Spanish had established a fort named *Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose*, also called *Fuerte Negro*, near St. Augustine, which was occupied by fugitive slaves from Georgia and South Carolina. Also bands of Lower Creek Indians from Georgia began fleeing into Florida and became known as Seminoles. They bought slaves; received them as gifts from the British (as so-called “King’s gifts”); and also gave shelter to runaways.

In 1763 Spain ceded Florida to England for twenty years and fugitive slaves were no longer welcome. But the outbreak of war between England and its American colonies in the War for Independence once again encouraged slaves from South Carolina and Georgia to flee into Florida.

Eventually Florida reverted to Spain and became again a haven for fugitive slaves. On July 27, 1816, the “Negro Fort” on the Apalachicola River in Florida, near the frontier with Georgia, was blown up by a shell fired from an American gunboat moored on the river. Most of the estimated three hundred black men, women, and children who had taken refuge inside the fort were killed. A few were captured alive and returned to slavery in Georgia. Hundreds of runaway slaves who lived in villages on the margins of the river fled towards the Suwannee River. Almost two years later on April 16, 1818, during what became known as the First Seminole War, General Andrew Jackson and his militia attacked and destroyed the Seminole and Black Seminole villages on the margins of the Suwannee River.

The pursuit of Black Seminoles continued unabated. In 1821, after Florida had been acquired by the United States, a Black Seminole settlement ("Angola") on Florida’s Manatee River was destroyed by a Creek Indian party looking for fugitive slaves. Some of the survivors fled to the tip of the Florida peninsula and escaped to the Bahamas in dugout canoes. They established a settlement in Red Bays on Andros Island which still exists today.

In December 1835 the Second Seminole War was ignited by an ambush of an American Army detachment led by Major Francis L. Dade. Abraham and John Horse became important Black Seminole leaders during the struggle. At one point one of the generals in charge of the war would declare “This . . . is a negro, not an Indian war.” The costly conflict ended in 1842 with the removal of thousands of Indians and blacks to Indian Territory.

In 1842 John Horse arrived in Indian Territory (today Oklahoma) after removal from Florida. As they had done in Florida, the Black Seminoles attempted to reestablish themselves independently in Indian Territory near Fort Gibson. But they ran into trouble when Creek Indians and white slave traders alike captured and sold the Black Seminole women and children as slaves to Arkansas slave owners.
After seven years of attempting to establish himself and his people in Indian Territory, John Horse fled to Mexico in 1849. Slavery had been abolished in Mexico in 1829 by President Vicente Guerrero (who was of African descent). On November 15, 1849, it is reported that a considerable number of Seminoles, under Chief Wild Cat, and Black Seminoles, under Chief John Horse, had left the Indian Territory. The Black Seminoles who stayed behind are known today in Oklahoma as Seminole Freedmen.

After traveling for almost a year the group asked for refuge in Mexico in 1850. Eventually, the Black Seminoles were settled permanently at Nacimiento de los Negros in Coahuila. For the next few years small bands of Black Seminoles made the trek to freedom in Mexico, many of them paying with their lives in clashes with the hostile Plains Indians. Mexico became a permanent sanctuary for the Black Seminoles, who became known there as Mascogos, and where the men served as border troops.

After slavery was abolished in the United States the Black Seminoles decided to return. On July 4, 1870, a band of Black Seminoles under the leadership of Chief John Kibbetts crossed the Rio Grande. The first contingent of the “Detachment of Seminole Negro Indian Scouts” enlisted at Fort Duncan in Eagle Pass, Texas, on August 16. Some Mascogos remained in Nacimiento.

In 1872 the first Black Seminole scouts arrived at Fort Clark opposite Brackettville, Texas, where they established their village on the margins of the Las Moras Creek within the military reservation. On July 10, 1914, the Detachment of Seminole Negro Indian Scouts was demobilized after serving as scouts for the U.S. Army for more than thirty years. The Black Seminoles were told to vacate their village. Most of the members of the community moved to Brackettville and eventually moved throughout the United States.

In the 1970s Dr. Ian Hancock, a linguist, discovered that the language spoken by the Black Seminoles of Brackettville and Nacimiento de los Negros is a Creole language, which had separated from the Gullah language between 1690 and 1760. Until Dr. Hancock’s discovery the Black Seminoles had called their language simply “Seminole.”

Today the Mascogos in Mexico and the Black Seminoles in Texas have preserved their language and identity for more than three centuries. They are the Gullah that got away!
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AFRICA TO THE AMERICAS
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The mission of the Anacostia Community Museum is to challenge perceptions, broaden perspectives, generate new knowledge, and deepen understanding about the ever-changing concepts and realities of “community.”

Above: Lorenzo Dow Turner makes recordings in African village
Lorenzo Dow Turner Papers, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution, Gift of Lois Turner Williams