

African American Resiliency in the British Caribbean

Self-Sufficiency in the Foodways of Cat Island in The Bahamas

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1. Introduction

On Cat Island in The Bahamas, the local population of subsistence farmers has relied on the foodway traditions of pothole farming for generations. However, with the introduction of modern agricultural machinery and the resistance of younger generations to continuing the practice of farming, the practice of pothole farming may be at risk of disappearing.

→ How the disturbance of modernization affects the foodway traditions, specifically the practice of pothole farming, practiced by the local population of Cat Island will be examined.

Framework

A social system's responses to disturbance, or change, can be categorized into:

- **Resilience:** social system faces change while still maintaining distinctive features and overall identity
- **Adaptation:** efforts arise to reduce the influence of the disturbance on the social system's identity
- **Transformation:** disturbance changes the identity of the social system altogether

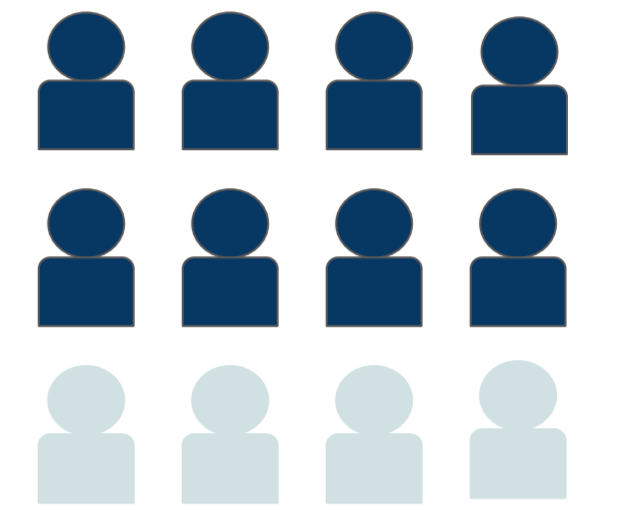
2. Methodology

Ethnographic field research methods

- Primarily oral interviews

Interviewees

- Twelve residents
- Eight men
- Four women
- All over age 50



To improve upon data collection, a more equitable distribution of youth and women could have been interviewed.

3. Results

Traditional Foodways

Cat Island is composed of limestone with a thin layer of soil at the surface. The rocky land and lack of rich soil proves especially difficult for agriculture.



→ Pothole farming

- After a storm, rainwater carries nutrients into naturally-formed limestone holes
- Ideal location to grow crops

Living on an island with limited resources, Cat Island residents look to reduce their dependence on external food sources.

The practice of pothole farming enables the local population to grow their own crops in an unforgiving terrain, allowing Cat Island residents to sustain themselves.

→ Self-sufficiency through foodways forms the identity of the local population on Cat Island

Modernization

One farmer described, "when I say, 'look, come, go with me in the field,' " the youth would answer, "I ain't going to no field. I ain't going. I'm not 'gonna dirty my nails. I'm not going to farm.' "

In general, younger generations appeared to prefer a modernized way of life, often migrating to urban areas for employment.

In May of 2024, the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources in The Bahamas donated a package worth \$821,068 to the Cat Island community.



→ John Deere 6175M tractor with various attachments:

- Break through limestone rock/till soil
- With a rotation program, every resident will have access to the technology

Residents eager to use

- Look to increase crop production and expand into commercial agriculture

→ Shade houses for the two Cat Island high schools:

- Extend growing season/control for pests
- Expand basic agriculture curriculum

Incorporating technology makes agriculture more lucrative

- Occupation appeals more to youth



4. Conclusion

Older generations: transition away from pothole farming in pursuit of greater crop yields with modern agricultural practices

Younger generations: forgo the practice of farming altogether, attempts at engaging youth emphasize education on modern agricultural practices

Identity: self-sufficiency through foodways

Disturbance: modernization

Response: residents prioritize profit and greater crop yields, loss of traditional foodway practices, overall emphasis still on self-sufficiency through foodways

→ Adaptation

Further research must be completed in the future to accurately assess the impact of modernization after the prospective machinery and education curriculum have been implemented.

References

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For access to the full research paper and all collected data, please scan QR code on the right.

