How do West African and Madagascar and Asian rice compare?

This question may have a more specific answer, after a year’s exploration with the African American Seed Project at Middleton Place. A general understanding about growing grains and plants specifically, soil nutrients differ by region, as do harvesting and foodways. Rice is a basic starch and the base of a one-pot meal known as Okra Soup in the lowcountry, Gumbo in Louisiana, and Jambalaya in the Caribbean Islands. Okra, tomatoes, onions are basic ingredients, but the regions’ spices meat and fish and their preparation differ according to cooking methods in respective regions.

Are there any specific African plants in SC-Middleton in particular

Okra, yams, sweet potatoes, sesame seeds have African origins and are staple vegetables in Middleton Place 5-Star Restaurant.

What medicinal preparations are being used today?

Since I’m a “Cumya” and not a “beenya” I can only respond to this question with Knowledge of the African American experience, as it was practiced during the Jim Crow Era in the Segregated South. First-aid involved citrus fruit, tree roots and bark. Camphor oil, castor oil, molasses And honey were used internally and externally. Again, region played a major role with preparation and application.

Have any of the medicinal formulas been sold to pharmaceutical companies?

As you may know, in the 16th and 17th Century, England and France sent their best men of science to explore indigenous folkways and medicinal plants African and the New World. Seeds became a source of monetary value, as the trial-and-error, and maze learning methods evolved into pharmaceutical medical practices. Africans and African descended peoples share many of the same practices with accessible plants in their environment.

What is the long-term future for Middleton Plantation?

COVID-19 has forced a new way of existence on humanity and the trickle-down effect of social unrest about us/them, “Confederate defenders” has already affected the bottom line of tourism in South Carolina. People 40-ish and younger is less interested in public history and the trappings of the titled class. Flora and fauna is not a “cool” place to “hang-out!” School-aged kids don’t have attention spans to walk the pathways and appreciate the geometry of formal gardens. The African-American Seed Project is the first initiative that looks at a lowcountry plantation with equanimity of place and a common theme. The discoveries of food tradition and survival skills is a basic human need. It is not farfetched to say that a National Historic Site needs to rethink land usage and food sustainability. The Garden Market may also offer supplemental “farm to table” heirloom vegetables for the growing need to feed lowcountry poor people living deserts.

You indicated labor was done according to a musical beat. Has any of that been carried over?
Ethno-musicologists have offered the insight that the “Negro Spiritual” influenced American popular music as we know it. “Were it not for the ‘Spiritual’, we would still be dancing the minuet!”

The banjo has African origins. It was fashioned from a gourd and strung with muskrat gut for strings. It redates all acoustic, stringed instruments.

- Did Hush Arbor become Brush Arbor meetings? (by white Americans) current times?

My understanding is the terms are interchangeable. The rituals are Christian based and are also called “camp meetings.” Easter Sunrise service offers the same outdoor ritual.

- How environmentally aware were the plantation owners of the 1830s and 1840s?

The Middleton Men were trendsetters as plantation owners in the Carolinas. They chose “selected and skilled Africans” to build wealth with rice and indigo exports to European aristocrats with free labor.

The Africans who came to Carolina shores from Barbados were “seasoned” and knew how to work and care for Europeans and their lifestyles.

As docents at Middleton Place there was a general script used to give the secessionist, Williams Middleton with building freedman’s cottages on the plantation for freed people who returned to Middleton Place. Eliza’s House anchors the African and African American narrative that is less than true. Williams Middleton provided the opportunity for newly freed Black men and women who returned to a familiar refuge after the war, to build duplexes to live, in exchange for reclaiming the Middleton Place as it stands to this day.

- Did the camphor-related medicines ever become commercialized to the benefit of the Gullah people?

Many of the folk medical belief systems that sustained enslaved people during enslavement are expressed in traditional ways in Gullah communities today.

Grandmothers still use ‘acifidity’ or medicine bags, place onions slices in socks to reduce fever, and citrus tea and whisky for common cold symptoms, so I’ve been told.

- How do we avoid the stereotyping of skin color?

People are human beings and should not be apologetic how they are hued by Divine Providence. I think the challenge off this question addresses a privilege perspective over disadvantaged realities.

W.E.B. DuBois said: “The problem of the 20th Century is the problem of the color line.” That ‘problem’ was not solved in the last century. As retired people we have the option to interact with the ‘other’ in America’s melting pot. Unfortunately, people who hold positions of authority don’t want “diversity” or sensitivity training, so they hold fast to the
comfort zone of segregated yesteryear. America began as an experiment; it’s still an experiment, but we all must push against the worst myths that has shaped humanity with the invention of race.

- What was the whip used for in slide 49?

The image is a painting by the late, John Carrol Doyle entitled, *The Coachman*. The manservant was chief, cook, bottle washer, and coachman. The whip represents the power the ‘slave’ has over the beast of burden.

- What will be the next book after “Beyond the Fields”?

The African American Seed Project will offer opportunities to share digital and published content about growing, preparing, and eating for nutrition and not taste. The foodways were the survival skills that saved four generations of Middleton Men and their families, as well as the enslaved who thrived with a level of humanity that should be shared American knowledge.
Middleton, Middleton, how did your garden grow?

West Africans brought threadbare planting skills in tow.

Buckets, axes, strong black hands, muscled heel and toe;

Moved the earth and felled the trees to make fresh water flow.

Fresh water from across the road truncated underground

Brought spring water to a Mill Pond to irrigate the ground.

The lunar tide, the ebb and flow, cycling rhythms for rice to grow.

Rising skyward toward the sun by skills that African men did know

Reverse engineering land with strong black backs, hands and toes

Working from can’t see before day to can’t see after setting sun

Rice labor by rice folk for generations to come.

The 2300-word narration ends with these lines:

House servants could have spiked their meals three times a day

Nutmeg and cinnamon clogging throats, choking fragile lives away

Death by indigestion is what the unsuspecting doctor would say.

But Voodoo rituals, Santeria beliefs, Coptic Christian and Islamic ways

Believed in protection of humankind, respecting all their living days.

African beliefs of the Lwa, Akan and Exus kept harmful thoughts at bay.

West Africans revered generations not yet born, unlike The Declaration

Denying words of independence for one man, one vote, one nation
The fate of blood-soaked soil of broken lives and bloody hands

Toiled and fashioned homeland Africa created on Middleton land.