

A NOTE FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

THE LANGUAGE YOU CRY IN is a 1998 documentary (it won the Documentary Film Award at the NY International Independent Film & Video Festival)

'It's how I became aware of the story behind the African song that appears at the end of BLACK PEARL SINGS.

Back in the 30's a professor recorded a Gullah grandmother and her granddaughter singing what to them were nonsense syllables in what sounded like a children's song. Decades later, a professor from Sierra Leone heard the recording and thought that there were words that sounded like a dialect from his country. The filmmakers searched for years and finally found a woman in an inland village who recognized the song. The filmmakers then brought the granddaughter (now a grandmother herself) and her granddaughter to Sierra Leone to meet the woman who knew the original African song. The two are possibly blood relatives. It's an amazing documentary."

The audience tonight might be interested in knowing the meaning of the translated words to the African song:

The African Song—this is a song sung at the graveside.

One scholar came up with a fragment and an approximation of what the words mean:

"Everyone come together.

The grave is not yet finished.

Let her heart be at peace.

Sudden death commands our attention

Like a sudden drumbeat.

Oh heads of the family,

We may wander far away but death commands our attention

like a distant drum beat."

The Language You Cry In----User Review

Fascinating story about an early linguist and the search for an African song he recorded in the 1930s.

7 February 2005 | by ([jbaga](#)) (United States)

Dr Lorenzo Turner, working as a professor and a linguist in the 1930s, graduated from Howard, Harvard and the University of Chicago. Although he didn't actually study linguistics for his courses, he studied the discipline in various places including London. Dr Turner was the one man who recognized that the Gullah people of South Carolina and Georgia were actually not "stupid, child-like imbeciles" but were in fact speaking a language that included over 3,000 words from somewhere in Africa. But which country out of all that provided slaves for the New World was the ancestral home of this rice-growing, island dwelling people? "The Language You Cry In" documents Dr Turner's struggle to identify the origin of this people's speech. He made meticulous notes and kept valuable data which, while it didn't yield up the answer to the mystery during Turner's lifetime, gave the researchers who came along afterward enough clues to be able to find the exact place outside of Sierra Leone where the slaves whose descendants were the Gullah came from.

This discovery is very dramatic, and the documentary shows the research struggle in a vivid manner. The film travels from the Sea Islands to Sierra Leone and back. Even more compelling is footage of the woman who sings an African song for the present day linguist who has found it amongst Dr Turner's notes. I don't want to spoil the story for you, but believe me there is a moment of incredible poignancy and triumph when the ethno-musicologist and the linguist finally come to an end of their African field work.