

PRESS RELEASE

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Contact – Jannie Harriot, info@WeGOJA.org, 843-332-3589

SCAAHF is now the WeGOJA Foundation

Columbia, S.C. -- To raise broader public awareness and build a more sustainable organization, the South Carolina African American Heritage Foundation has re-branded itself as the [WeGOJA Foundation](http://www.WeGOJA.org). Under the new brand, the non-profit will collaborate with civic, government and business leaders to strengthen its advocacy for historic preservation and to raise money to support the efforts of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission.

“Particularly in today’s climate, we are obligated to ensure that the African American voice and experience in South Carolina are not overlooked or minimally included in conversations about the state,” said Jannie Harriot, WeGOJA Foundation Executive Director. “Whether we’re talking about history, education, government or tourism, we can make sure African American perspectives have a seat at the table. We can broaden awareness by identifying, documenting, preserving and sharing the places associated with the African American experience.”

The organization shares its story and solicits memberships on its new website at www.WeGOJA.org. They will launch a grassroots fundraising campaign in the fall.

The name **WeGOJA*** (pronounced we-GO-juh) itself is a tribute to history. It is an acronym of words from three languages spoken by people of African descent who were brought to the Americas as a result of the TransAtlantic slave trade.

“**We**” is from the Gullah language and means “Our”. Historically, Gullah Geechee people are from southern coastal North Carolina, coastal South Carolina and Georgia, north coastal Florida and St. Augustine, and extending inland about thirty miles. West Africans who were enslaved in this geographical area were literate in many Old World languages. They were denied the opportunity to learn English formally. To communicate, a language evolved that combined West African languages with English. This language became known as Gullah.

“**Gem sa bop**” (pronounced THEM suh bop) is from the Wolof language and means “Believe in yourself”. Wolof is spoken widely in Senegal and The Gambia. Countless Africans from these countries, including the Wolof, were enslaved and brought to South Carolina. Wolof also heavily influenced the shaping of the Gullah language.

“**Ojo Iwamtu**” (pronounced o-joe e-WAHM-to) is from the Yoruba language and means “Future”. Yoruba people primarily inhabit southwestern Nigeria, and similarly to the Wolofs, countless Yoruba bondsmen

and bondswomen were brought to South Carolina. Yoruba heavily influenced the shaping of the Gullah language.

“Jom” (pronounced jome) is Wolof for “Purpose”, and it also means “Courage.”

“Asa” (pronounced AH-suh) is Yoruba and means “Culture.”

As the SCAAHF, the Foundation supported a variety of Commission projects, including:

- The oral history project “Black Carolinians Speak: Portraits of a Pandemic”
- The installation of hundreds of official state historical markers
- Inclusion of historic sites on the National Register of Historic Places
- The “African American Historic Places in South Carolina” guide and its annual addendums
- Curriculum-based teacher’s guides that incorporate African American heritage into school instruction
- The Green Book of South Carolina, the state’s first online travel guide to more than 300 African American historic sites at www.GreenBookofSC.com
- “The Business of Rural Heritage, Culture & Art: An Introductory Resource Guide for Entrepreneurs”
- “How Did we Get to Now?” which documents historic African American schools in South Carolina from the Jim Crow era

These services will continue as funding is available.

More information, including [downloadable brand logos](#) for media, are available on the website at www.WeGOJA.org. For more information, contact Jannie Harriot at 843-332-3589 or info@WeGOJA.org.

Thank you to Contributors

*The WeGOJA Foundation is eternally grateful to Dr. Dior Konate for lending her expertise in the research of West African languages. Konate is Associate Professor and Coordinator of History at South Carolina State University in Orangeburg, S.C. Also contributing to the development of the new name were Dr. Larry Watson, professor of history at SC State; Alada Shinault-Small, historian and tour guide in Charleston, and Strauss Moore Shiple, retired tourism marketing professional in York County.

South Carolina African American Heritage Commission

The mission of the South Carolina African American Heritage Commission (SCAAHC) is to identify and promote the preservation of historic sites, structures, buildings, and culture of the African American experience in South Carolina, and to assist and enhance the efforts of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. The 15-member commission includes representatives from all regions of the state. It was established as a council in 1993 by joint legislative resolution, and became a commission in 2001 by executive order of Governor Jim Hodges. More info [here](#).