

# *Geography & Cultural History*



A young Virgin Islander observes a scale full of fish being weighed for a customer on a pier on St. Thomas.



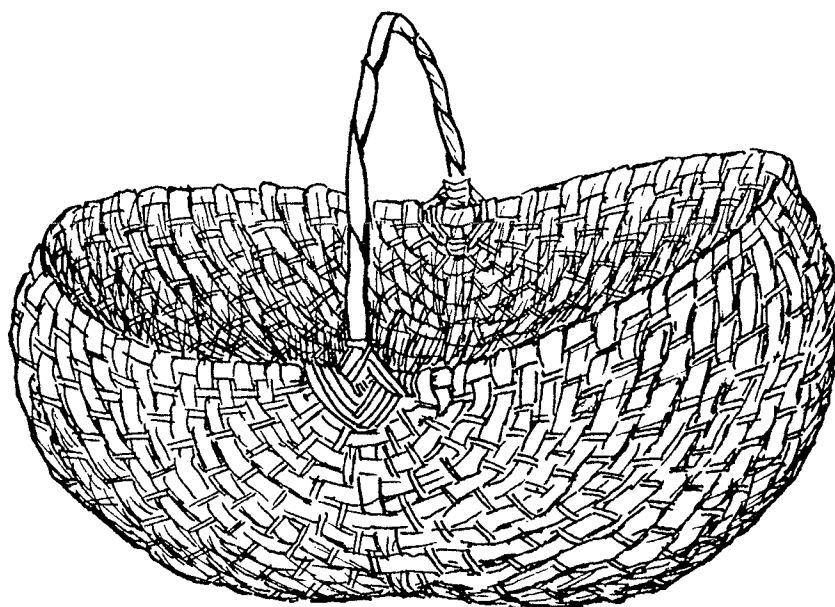
Study the maps reproduced here and read the background information. If you have the complete kit, also study the fold-out maps. Read the background articles about the Virgin Islands and Senegal in the 1990 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife program book. View the second segment of the videotape, which explains how foodways can help us understand the history and geography of another culture. If you would like to consult more maps, see suggestions for obtaining extra maps in the Resources in the appendix. For more information about the cultural history of the Virgin Islands and Senegal, see the Resources.

## TEACHER PREPARATION

After working with the maps, viewing the videotape, and completing the suggested activities students should be able to:

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- locate the Virgin Islands and Senegal on a world map or globe
- list major features of the terrain, climate and cultural history of the two areas
- recognize how foodways — the gathering, preparation and serving of food — can reflect an area's cultural history and geography
- use food traditions to learn more about the cultural history and geography of their own families and communities



St. John Market Basket made from hoop vine which grows wild on the island of St. John.

# **BACKGROUND INFORMATION: GEOGRAPHY & CULTURAL HISTORY**

## **U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS**

The U.S. Virgin Islands is a territory of the United States. It is located in the Caribbean region, and it consists of over 50 separate islands. The three main islands where people live are St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas. The population of these three islands is about 104,000 people.

The islands were home to Arawak and Carib Indians long before Columbus landed in 1493. During its history, the U.S. Virgin Islands were settled and colonized by English, Dutch, Danish and French. In the 1600s and 1700s, many enslaved Africans, especially those from West Africa, were brought to the islands to work on the large sugar plantations. In 1917 the islands were purchased by the United States from Denmark and became a U.S. territory. In the 20th century, many people from other Caribbean islands, including the British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, have made the U.S. Virgin Islands their home.

The cultural heritage of the U.S. Virgin Islands, then, reflects a combination of different influences — from Europe, Africa, other Caribbean islands, and even from the Middle East. These influences can be traced in the dances, the music, the foods, the dress, the stories and the celebrations of U.S. Virgin Islanders.

The culture of the U.S. Virgin Islands was and is further influenced by its terrain and climate. Surrounded by water, and possessing a tropical climate, fishing has always been an important source of income and food. St. Thomas has steep mountains throughout the island making it difficult for planting. Its economy has depended on its deep harbor. St. John and St. Croix have flatter lands better suited for cultivation. In early years, many sugar plantations were located on these islands. Today in St. Croix plantations have been converted primarily to grazing lands for cattle. On St. John, two thirds of the land is claimed by a National Park. Residents still grow produce for home use.

Because of their lovely beaches and mild climate, the U.S. Virgin Islands have also become a popular spot for tourists.

Senegal is a country located at the westernmost tip of the African continent — in fact, at the closest point to the Americas. The population of the country is about 6.5 million. Roughly 1 million people live in the capital city, Dakar, which is located on a peninsula on the west coast of the country and bordered by the Atlantic Ocean. The country also has several other large and modern cities, although many people live in smaller towns and villages. French is the official language, however, the language spoken most widely is Wolof. Ninety-two percent of the citizens of the country are of the Muslim faith.

## **SENEGAL**

Senegal has long been a point of contact and interchange between many cultures. The country was at the southern end of caravan trade routes that crossed the Sahara Desert from the 12th to the 16th century. This trade brought Senegal into contact with Arabs from the Middle East, Africans from other parts of the continent, and Europeans. Goree Island, part of Senegal, was the last dry land that many enslaved Africans touched before being torn from their ancestral homes and transported to the Americas (in the 16th and 17th centuries). In the late 19th century, the nation was colonized by the French and became the capital of French West Africa until Senegal received its independence in 1960. From the early 20th century it became a center for Western trained artists, writers and scholars of French-speaking Africa.

Senegal is home to many ethnic groups. These include Wolof, Serer, Toucouleur, Peul (Fulani), Diola, Manding, Soninke and Bassari peoples. People have also migrated to Senegal from other African countries, France, Haiti, the French Antilles and the United States. Each group has its own language, and folklife traditions like music and dance, crafts, foodways and storytelling. But the cultural heritage of Senegal as a whole has been influenced by the many cultures with which it has come into contact over the centuries.

Senegal is a large country, 196,712 square kilometers, located on one

## UNIT 2

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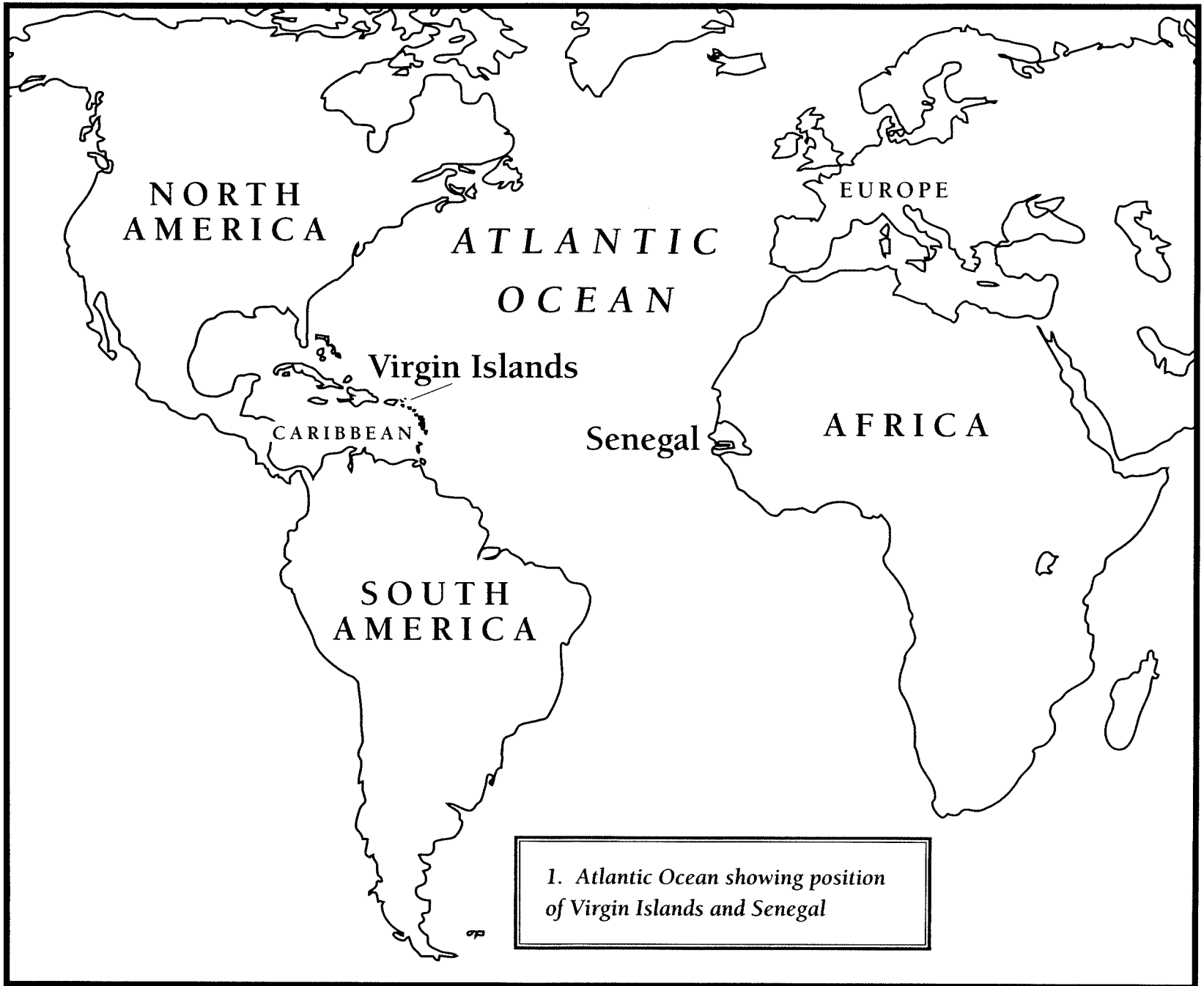
vast plain where the altitudes are rarely higher than 100 meters. There are 500 kilometers of sea coast which varies from rocky to sandy. Different parts of the country have different climate and terrain. The north is hotter and arid and the south lush and tropical. Some parts of the country are similar to the U.S. Virgin Islands in climate and terrain, and some of the same fruits and plants are grown there. Fishing is the second largest industry and an important source of food. Peanuts and cattle are also important as sources of income and subsistence. In recent years, tourism has become one of Senegal's major sources of income. Many people of African descent come to Senegal and make pilgrimages to Goree Island. The government of Senegal is planning a major monument to the descendants of Africans who survived slavery in the Americas.



Senegalese woodcarver Abdoulaye "Gadiaga" Sene, uses a traditional tool to carve the base of a drum at the 1990 Festival of American Folklife.

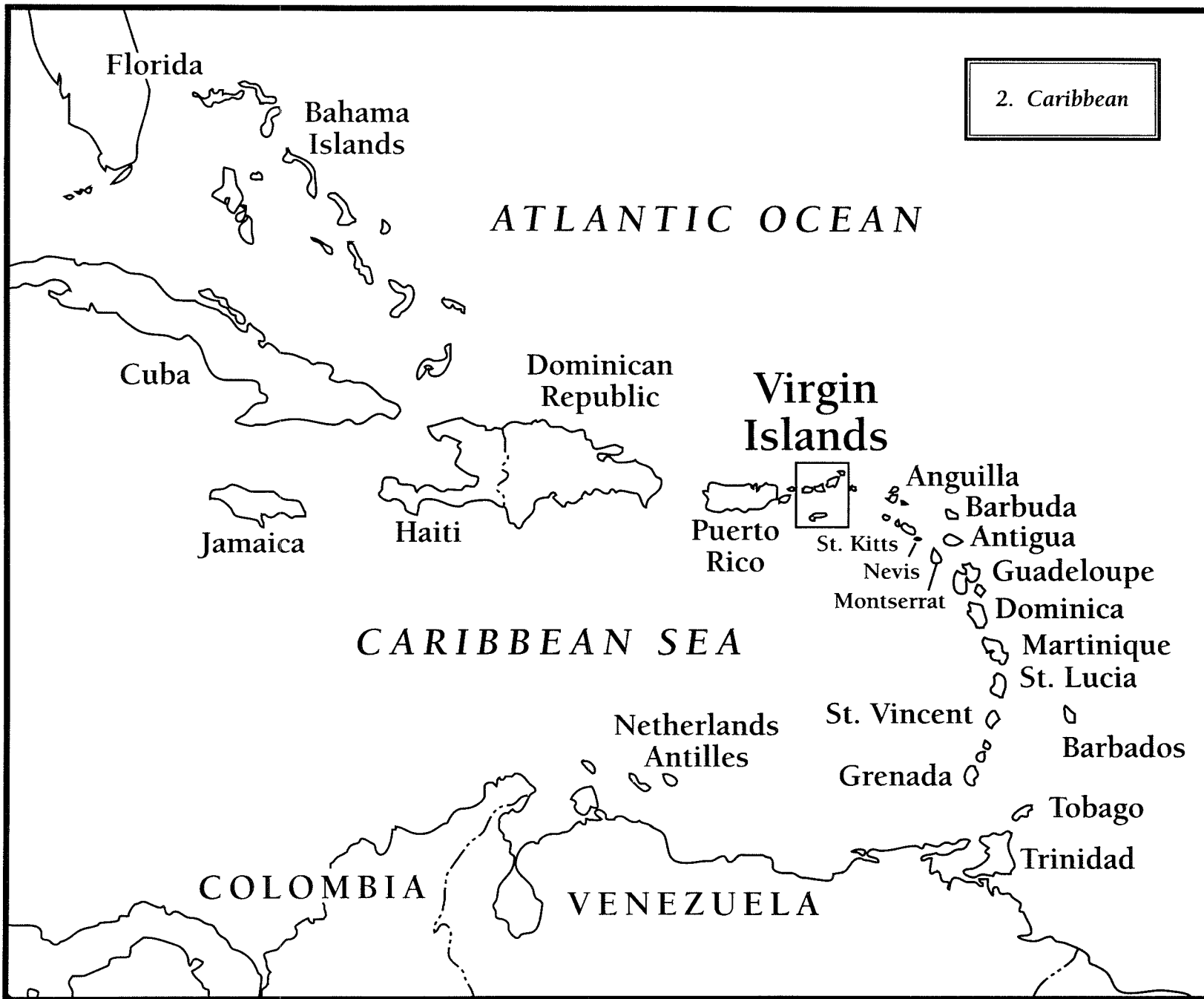
## MAPS

1. *Atlantic Ocean showing position of Virgin Islands and Senegal*
2. *Caribbean*
3. *Virgin Islands*
4. *Senegal showing cultural groups*
5. *Virgin Islands showing cultural influences since 1945*



1. Atlantic Ocean showing position of Virgin Islands and Senegal

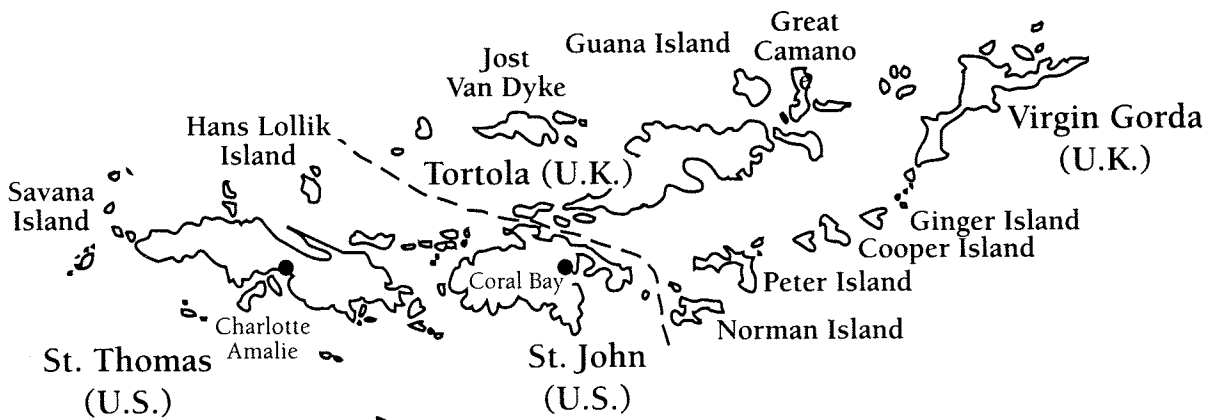




**3. Virgin Islands**

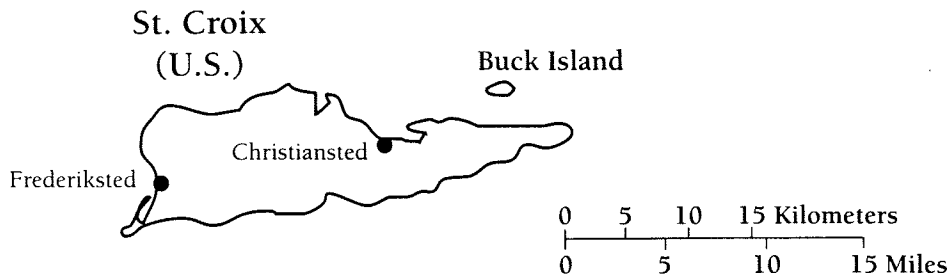


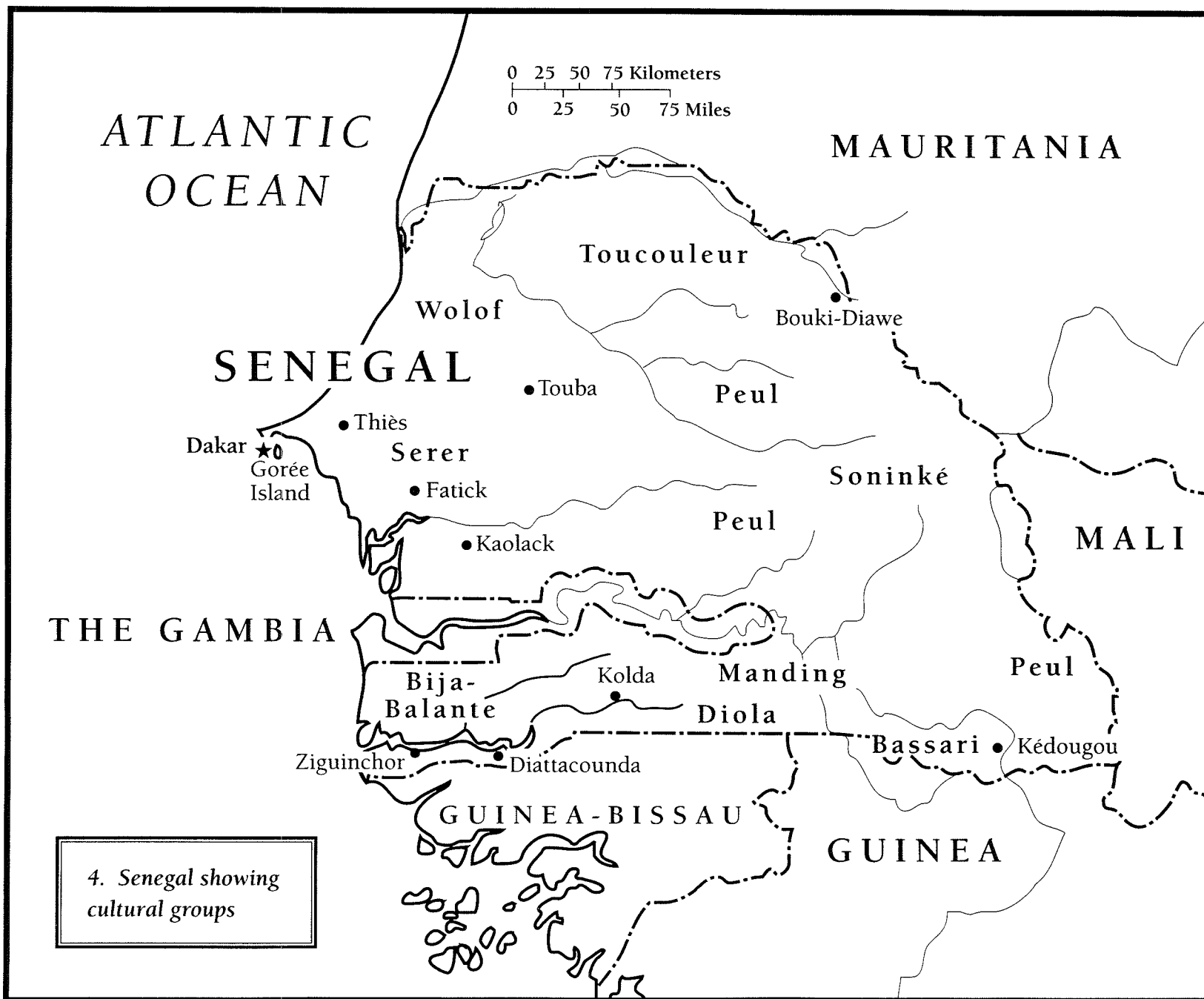
**ATLANTIC OCEAN**



**VIRGIN ISLANDS**

**CARIBBEAN SEA**

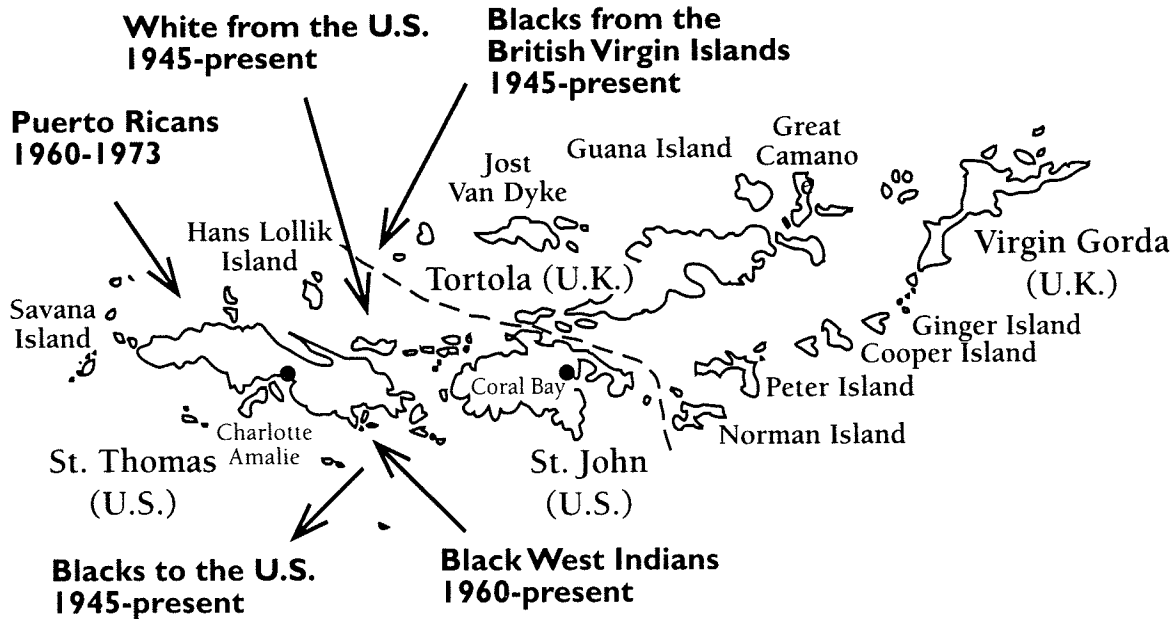




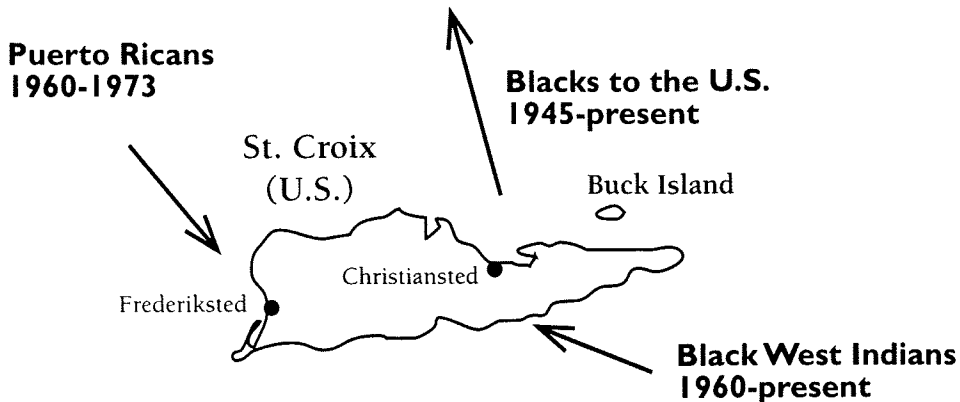
4. Senegal showing cultural groups

# UNIT 2

## 5. Virgin Islands showing cultural influences since 1945



### VIRGIN ISLANDS Contemporary Cultural Influences (1945 to Present)



## LESSON ONE: MAP STUDY

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Study the maps of the Virgin Islands and Senegal, and read the written information. Using the small map that shows where Senegal is in relation to the Virgin Islands, find both places on a world map or globe. Notice the location of these two areas in relation to each other and to the rest of the world. Check the details on the large maps, such as the map “keys” (the small boxes that tell what the symbols on the maps mean) and the “scale” (the bars that show how many miles one inch represents on the map). Then, answer the questions below.

1. How large is Senegal compared to the Virgin Islands? (One way to think of it: How many Virgin Islands could you fit into an outline of Senegal?)
2. How far is Senegal from the Virgin Islands? (One way to think of it: How long would it take to reach Senegal from the Virgin Islands by airplane? By boat?)
3. How many languages are spoken in Senegal? How many languages are spoken in the Virgin Islands? Why is French the “official” language of Senegal, when so many other languages are spoken there? How did English become the official language of the Virgin Islands? What other languages were spoken in the Virgin Islands in its history?
4. What is the “climate” of the Virgin Islands and Senegal? (What is the temperature like year-round? Is there a lot of rain or a little?) How does the climate of the two areas affect what is grown there; what type of houses people live in; what kind of clothes people wear? Are there similarities between the two areas?
5. What is the “terrain” of the two areas (are there mountains, ocean

### STUDENT EXPLANATION

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

## UNIT 2

shore, rivers, plains, deserts)? How does the terrain affect how people live, what they do for a living, how they get around?



Lucille Roberts continues to grow sugarcane for herself, family and friends in her backyard on St. Croix.

## STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET #4

# “PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR PLACE”

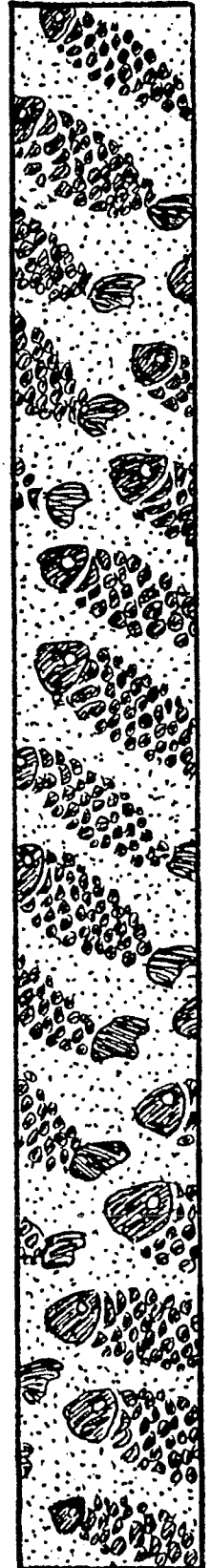
### PART I:

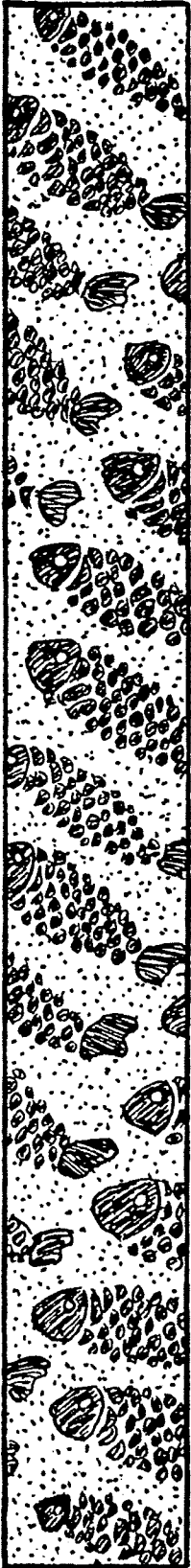
*Imagine you are a person from Senegal, in the 1700s, who has been captured and sold into slavery to a plantation owner on St. Croix, Virgin Islands. Using the maps and other information provided, write a story about your experience. Use the following questions as a guide:*

- How, and by what route, did you get to the Virgin Islands? What was the trip like?
- What is your new “home” like, compared to your old one? What do you miss? What seems particularly strange? Is anything similar?
- Will you be able to practice any of your Senegalese culture in this new place? If you try, what do you think the plantation owner will think?
- Have you ever felt like a “stranger in a strange place”? (Perhaps when you traveled to another place where people spoke differently and ate some different foods.) How is this similar and different from the way the slaves must have felt?

### PART II:

*Imagine you are a person from the Virgin Islands today, planning a trip to Senegal for a vacation. Using the maps and other information, plan your trip using the following questions as a guide. (You may be able to consult*

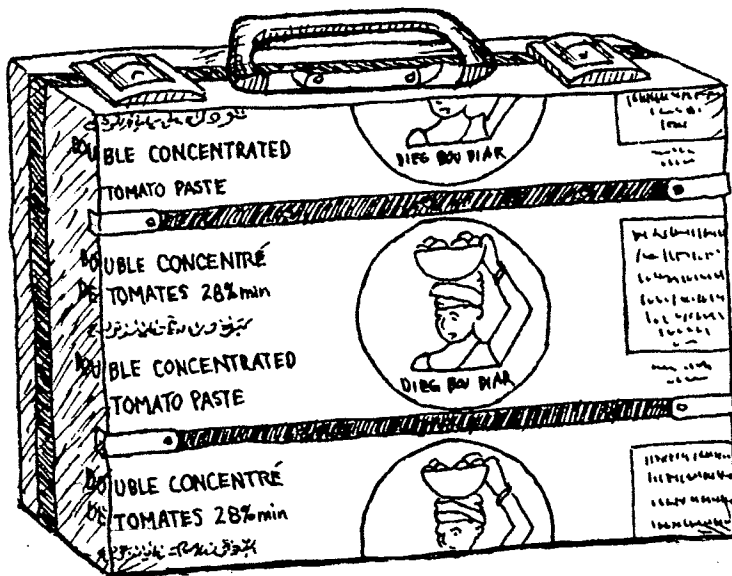




*an actual travel agent to help you with some of the information!)*

- How long will it take to get to Senegal by air? Will it be a non-stop flight? If you decided to travel by ship, how long would it take?
- What kinds of clothes should you bring? Will you need a passport? What type of foreign phrase book(s) should you bring?
- What types of souvenirs do you plan to bring back? What kinds of foods do you think you will eat there?
- How do you think you will feel, going to a strange place? Do you think people will treat you, as a “foreigner,” well? Why or why not?

*Plan your “itinerary”: where you plan to go within the country of Senegal, and what you would like to see while you are there. Use the photographs as a guide to some of the traditions you might see while you are there.*



This case made from aluminum cans and other recycled materials by Senegalese craftsman Amadou Ba at his workshop in a Dakar marketplace.



## LESSON TWO: TRADITIONAL FOODWAYS

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The section of the videotape you are about to watch tells about traditional foods in Senegal and the Virgin Islands. The foods featured are “kallaloo” from the Virgin Islands, and “thiebou-dienne” from Senegal. Both dishes use many of the foods and seasonings that are grown, gathered wild, or fished for in these cultures, as well as traditional cooking methods reflecting their histories. Take note of the similarities and differences in the two dishes. Be prepared to discuss the videotape with your classmates.

### STUDENT EXPLANATION

1. What are the main ingredients of kallaloo and of thiebou-dienne? How are they gathered? How do these ingredients reflect the climate and terrain of Senegal and the Virgin Islands?
2. What are the traditional cooking methods of the two dishes?
3. What special knowledge and equipment are needed to prepare the two dishes?
4. How and when are these dishes served? What does the method of serving the dishes say about these two cultures?
5. Can you think of any dishes in your own experience that are similar to thiebou-dienne or kallaloo?

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION: FOODWAYS

#### **VIRGIN ISLANDS FOODWAYS**

The diversity of Virgin Islands cooking springs from its multicultural heritage. African fritters, Danish salt fish and herring gundy, British black cake, Austrian Vienna cake, Danish candies and Spanish seasoned rice are but a few “imports” that come to mind. Native cooking, or specialties of the islands, include meat-filled patés, kallaloo, stew beef, mutton (actually goat) and daub pork served with fungi and sweet potato. Fry fish and Johnny cake are prepared on a coal pot fired up at picnics and food fairs. The coal pot became particularly important after hurricane Hugo made electric home appliances useless. Maubi, ginger beer or fresh tropical fruit drinks complement a traditional meal. In the fall the guavaberry is harvested to make a fruit wine or rum for Christmas.

#### **SENEGALESE FOODWAYS AND TERANGA — THE ARTS OF HOSPITALITY**

In Senegal, treating visitors and guests properly is very important. The Wolof word *teranga* describes the traditional hospitality observed in Senegal. Such things as laying out a ceremonial cloth for arriving guests to step on, sharing food with a stranger to the village, and presenting gifts to visitors when they depart are ways of showing respect for a guest, and also showing that the host is generous and well brought up. Other small but important gestures of *teranga* include waiting for a guest to finish eating before leaving the common bowl and avoiding a loud tone of voice in conversation. These traditions help to build bonds between individuals and families and reinforce the cultural identity of Senegalese people.

## STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET #5

# NOW YOU'RE COOKING!

*Study the recipes for some Virgin Islands and Senegalese dishes included in this unit and talk about the following:*

- What do these recipes tell us about the traditions and cultures of these two places?
- Which ingredients are “native” to the cultures? Which have to be imported?
- If you were to try to cook these dishes, would you have all of the ingredients? If not, where would you get them?

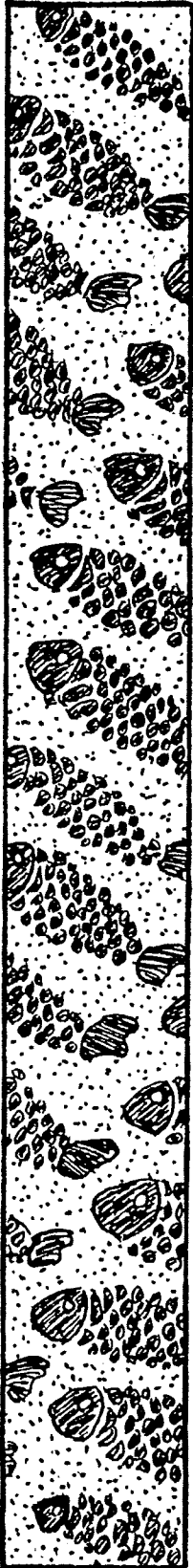
*Imagine that you are a person from either Senegal or the Virgin Islands who has moved away from his or her native land to live in a large city on the mainland of the United States.*

- How would preparing and eating some of these dishes make you feel more “at home”?
- Would you be able to find all of the ingredients in your new home?
- When would you be most likely to prepare and eat these dishes, and who would you invite to dinner?

*You might like to try to cook one or two of these dishes at home and bring some into class to taste, or you may wish to prepare one together as a*



class project. If you do not live in Senegal or in the Virgin Islands, you may be able to find some of the ingredients you need at a Caribbean or African specialty store. Ask your teacher to help you locate the missing ingredients.



Anta Diop and Maimouna N'Diaye prepare a typical Senegalese midday meal of fish stew with rice (thiebou-dienne) over an open fire at the 1990 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife.

# RECIPES

*Louise Petersen Samuel of St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands explains that “Kallaloo is a favorite dish for parties and picnics. It is very nutritious because it contains a variety of greens, such as tannin leaf, bower, popololo, bata bata, whitey Mary, pussley and kallaloo bush. Spinach may be substituted for greens. In the old days, our people would cook this pot and eat it on Old Year’s Night, searching for good luck in the new year. Now, the younger generation doesn’t seem to do this as much.”*

## KALLALOO

1 pound salt beef  
 1 small hot pepper  
 1 pound pickled pig’s tail  
 1 pound pickled pig’s snout  
 6 quarts water  
 1 pound smoked ham butt, chopped  
 2 pounds fish, cut into bite-size pieces  
 1 pound crabmeat or cubed conch  
 2 small eggplants, finely chopped  
 2 pounds frozen chopped spinach  
 2 pounds okra, chopped

1. Soak beef, pepper, pig’s tail, and pig’s snout in water for 3 or 4 hours or overnight. Rinse, then cut up meat. Cook in water until tender, about 1 hour.
2. Either the night before or 3 to 4 hours before cooking kallaloo, bone the fish and fry it. Also cook conch in boiling water until tender. Set aside.
3. Add chopped vegetables, fish, conch or crabmeat, and ham butt to meat mixture and simmer for 1 hour.

Serves 8

(Louise Petersen Samuel, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands Program, 1990.)

## UNIT 2

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### **FUNGI WITH OKRA**

1 1/2 quarts salted water  
1/4 pound okra, sliced  
1 pound cornmeal  
1/4 pound shortening  
1/4 pound butter

1. Bring salted water to a boil. Add okra and boil for 10 minutes.
2. Mix in cornmeal and stir with a fungi stick (a wooden paddle), adding shortening as cornmeal begins to absorb water. Stir in butter when fungi is almost done, or a smooth mush.

Serves 8

(Helmie Leonard, St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands Program, 1990.)

### **AGUA PIRRINGA (SWEET COCONUT WATER)**

*The Puerto Rican community of St. Croix prepares this beverage for the final day of the celebration of the Day of the Cross held in May.*

3 whole coconuts  
sugar  
3 quarts water

1. Break open coconuts and cut into small pieces, peeling off the outer shell with a small, sharp knife. Grate coconut meat and soak in water, or put coconut pieces in a blender with 1 quart water and purée thoroughly.
2. Strain coconut mixture through a fine sieve, squeezing it dry by wringing it in your hands or a dish towel. Add sugar to taste plus remaining 2 quarts water, depending on consistency desired. Serve chilled, with ice.

Serves 12

(Evarista Santiago, St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, U.S. Virgin Islands Program, 1990.)

*Thiebou-dienne* (pronounced “cheb-boo-jen” in English) is one of the most popular dishes of Senegal. Many in Senegal believe that the dish was created in the northwestern coastal town of St. Louis by the families from the Wolof ethnic group. The region of St. Louis is a major fishing and rice growing area of the country. *Thiebou-dienne* is often a regular midday meal typically eaten around a common bowl by family and invited friends. A good Senegalese cook is often judged by the look and the taste of the *thiebou-dienne* that she prepares. Women still do most of the cooking in Senegal; preparing and presenting *thiebou-dienne* are part of the arts of hospitality (*teranga*).

## **THIEBOU- DIENNE (STEWED FISH WITH RICE)**

Preparation and seasoning of fish:

- 1 large bunch of parsley, coarsely chopped
- 1 or 2 large cloves of garlic
- 1 large onion, chopped
- 2 fish or beef bouillon cubes
- 2-3 small hot peppers
- salt and pepper to taste
- 5 lbs. of whole fish (grouper is preferred by many Senegalese)  
cut into thick crosswise slices

Grind together the seasonings, parsley and onion with a mortar and pestle. Stuff the pieces of fish with the seasoning mixture. Set aside.

Stew:

- 2 or 3 large onions
- 1 large eggplant
- 1 head cauliflower
- 6 large carrots
- 1 medium cabbage
- 1 lb. fresh okra
- 4 large sweet potatoes
- 1 to 2 cups peanut oil (the traditional recipe calls for more oil than is generally used in American-style cooking)
- 2 6-ounce cans of tomato paste
- 3 quarts of water
- 1 4-inch piece of dried fish (available at Spanish markets)

## **UNIT 2**

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5 cups of rice  
salt and pepper to taste  
cayenne or red pepper flakes to taste  
dried and preserved conch (called yett in Senegal), optional

1. Chop all vegetables except one onion and the okra and set aside. Chop the last onion and set aside separately.
2. In a large pot (8- or 9-quart capacity), heat peanut oil until hot. Carefully, to prevent splashing, add tomato paste and single chopped onion. Saute for 10 to 15 minutes.
3. Add chopped vegetables to the pot with 3 quarts of water. Bring to a boil and cook for about 10 minutes. Add okra and cook for another 5 to 7 minutes.
4. Add the piece of dried fish and the stuffed fresh fish pieces and cook for another 35 to 45 minutes.
5. Take the fish and the vegetables out with slotted spoon and keep warm.
6. Wash rice three times and measure liquid in pot to make sure you have 10 cups of liquid to the 5 cups of rice. Add rice and simmer with the lid on until done, about 20 to 25 minutes.
7. To serve, put cooked rice in a large bowl or platter and top with fish and vegetables.

*Serves 10 - 12*



*Poulet yassa is a Diola dish from the south of Senegal which is prepared all over the country. Like thiebou-dienne, it is a dish made for midday when people in Senegal like to eat their heaviest meal. This recipe was prepared by Anta Diop and Maimouna N'Diaye at the Senegal Program in 1990 and by Bigué N'Doye at the first U.S. Virgin Islands Folklife Festival, 1991, on St. Croix.*

## **POULET YASSA (CHICKEN WITH ONIONS AND LEMON)**

### **Marinade for chicken:**

juice of 12 lemons  
Dijon mustard to taste  
cayenne pepper to taste or 2 or 3 whole red peppers  
salt and pepper  
2 beef bouillon cubes dissolved in 1/2 cup of warm water

### **Stew:**

12 to 15 chicken breasts, thighs and legs (about 5 lbs.)  
8 to 10 chopped onions  
5 cups rice  
3/4 cup vegetable oil  
3/4 cup lemon juice  
1 small jar Dijon mustard  
6 beef bouillon cubes (dissolved in 1 cup hot water)  
2 to 3 bay leaves  
garlic powder to taste  
black and red pepper to taste  
salt to taste  
2 6-ounce jars of pitted green olives

- 1.** In a large bowl, mix together the marinade ingredients and marinate the chicken overnight (or at least 6 hours).
- 2.** Remove chicken from marinade and prebake in oven at 325 degrees Fahrenheit. Instead of prebaking, the chicken can be sauted in a little oil.
- 3.** Heat oil in a large heavy pot. Saute onions until soft. Add chicken, lemon juice, mustard, spices and bouillon cubes. Cook in medium heat

## UNIT 2

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for about 1 hour. Add olives when chicken is almost done. Serve over rice.

*Serves 10 to 12*

### **Serving and eating:**

To serve and eat your meal Senegalese style, pile the rice in a large wide serving bowl and arrange the meat and sauce in the center with the chicken pieces more or less evenly distributed around the center. Spread a large cloth on the floor and place the bowl in the middle. After guests have washed their hands and removed their shoes, invite them to sit or squat around the bowl. Each guest should eat the portion of food which is directly in front of him or her, taking care to eat only using the right hand. (In Senegal it is considered very bad manners to use the left hand which is used to wash the body.) A good host or hostess will make sure that there is enough food from the bowl's center in front of each guest and will be sure to invite guests to eat to satisfaction.

To eat with the right hand, keep fingers together and scoop a mouthful of rice, chicken and sauce squeezing it into a compact ball against the side of the bowl directly in front of you. Then, you should be able to pop it neatly into your mouth. When you have finished eating, and only then, you are allowed to lick the sauce off of your fingers and wash your hands with soap and water. Often, the host or hostess will provide a bowl of warm soapy water and towels for this purpose. A polite guest will eat well, compliment the host or hostess and say *sur-naa* ("I'm satisfied") when finished eating.

**LESSON THREE:**  
**COOKING UP YOUR  
OWN CULTURAL  
HERITAGE**

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In this lesson, you will collect some recipes from your own family, and discuss what these foods tell us about the place where you live. Use the Student Activity Sheet, as well as what you have already learned about foodways from the videotape, to help. Before you start, consider the following questions:

1. How can the things that your family eats reflect its culture and traditions?
2. What are your family's favorite foods? Are they related to a celebration?
3. Can you tell the class about the first time you tasted, or cooked, or served one of your family's favorite dishes?

**STUDENT  
EXPLANATION**

**DISCUSSION  
QUESTIONS**



## STUDENT ACTIVITY SHEET #6

# COOKING UP YOUR OWN CULTURAL HERITAGE

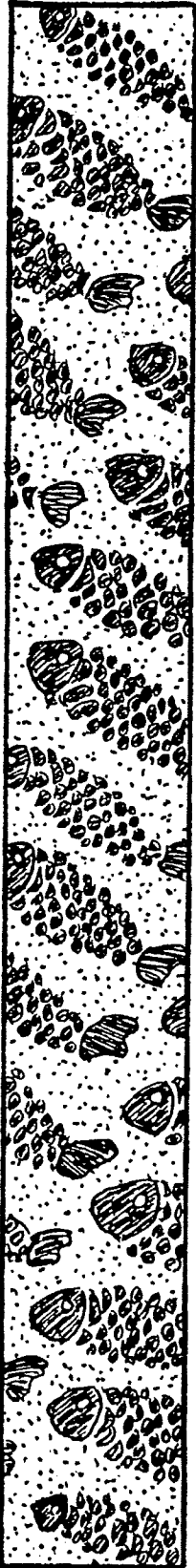
*The goal of this activity is to create a class cookbook that shows what food can tell us about cultural heritage. Each student needs to do the following:*

1. Collect a recipe from someone in your family. (Usually, whoever does most of the family cooking is a good source!) Don't collect "just any old recipe." Ask for one that the cook remembers learning from his or her mother or father, grandmother or grandfather, or older friend or neighbor. This recipe should reflect the background of your family in some way, if possible.

2. Collect information with the recipe by interviewing your family member using such questions as:

- Where did you learn this recipe?
- Where do the ingredients come from? (Do you grow any of them in your garden, gather any in the woods, go fishing for any?) Did you ever have to substitute ingredients because you couldn't find the ones you needed?
- When do you cook and serve this dish? (Is it an everyday dish or a special occasion dish?)
- What other foods do you serve with this dish?
- When you think of this food, what comes to mind? For





instance, do you think of the person who taught you to cook it? The first time you tried to cook it on your own? Something funny that happened once when you served it? The smells of your grandmother's kitchen? Do you think about a special holiday or time of year?

3. Present this recipe to the class with the other information you have collected about it. Explain what it tells about your family and where they come from. If you are able to, cook the dish and bring it into the class for a tasting.
4. Take all of the recipes gathered by the class and organize them into a book. You may organize your book in one of a number of ways. Some suggestions:
  - By main ingredient (all fish dishes together, all sweets together, etc.)
  - By the occasions or holidays (all birthday or wedding dishes together, all everyday dishes together, all dishes from a particular holiday together, all seasonal dishes together)
  - By the places people in the class are from, if you have people from many different cultural backgrounds in your class
5. Organize a "cooking class," if possible, where students teach each other to cook family recipes. If your school allows it, you may make a lunch party with all of your dishes.