

STITCHING CULTURE:  
ENSLAVED AFRICAN AMERICAN QUILTMaking IN THE PREJUDICIAL SOUTH

by

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## ABSTRACT

During the nineteenth century, enslaved African Americans contributed to the long-standing tradition of quilting, which has evolved across generations. Scholarship centered on this subject has yet to analyze quilts made by enslaved people within the context of plantation culture. However, much can be learned from a study of quilt production on plantations across the divergent, southern United States. This is especially true when considering the range and functions of quilts made by enslaved people. These included both quilts made by enslaved African Americans for themselves and the forced quilting labor for the “big house” on the plantation. Produced by enslaved individuals and families, whether for personal use or within the owners’ home, the techniques and meanings woven into the textiles resulted in an intermingling of African American and European American traditions.

Through an investigation of slave quilts beginning in the antebellum period, this project examines three key concepts revealed by quilts fashioned during an overtly prejudicial time: cultural hybridity, cultural hierarchy, and cultural continuity. Quilt production represents the mixing of cultural forms and the examples that survive exemplify the social and cultural hybridity of the plantation. However, quilting was not simply a hobby, but a laborious task for the plantation and in rare cases, offers a physical remnant of enslaved life. These concepts, like the identities of many of the makers themselves, are hidden in the stitches. Looking at the production of quilts through the lens of material culture reveals their function on the plantation, as well as their expression of plantation hierarchy. Thus, a study of quilts created by the enslaved community highlights quilts’ role on the plantation and reveals fundamental characteristics about

the lives of enslaved African Americans. In unique ways, quilts and their range parallel the stratified plantation division and highlight the great disparity that existed between the lives of individuals living together on the plantation. By analyzing such quilts' contexts, I reveal how the enslaved community used their resourceful textile traditions as a representation of their developing culture, as well as fulfilling the textile expectations of many plantation owners. In order to show the progression of African American quilting, from plantation production to cultural consumerism, it is important to recognize the continuation of this cultural tradition into the twentieth century. Not only should African American quilt production in the nineteenth-century United States be considered an important representation of the enslaved community, but it should also be examined as essential to the development of African American textile culture.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to everyone who helped and guided me through the trials and tribulations of this masterwork, especially my family. In particular, I dedicate this to my mom and dad, who supported my ambitions and aspirations as well as stood by me throughout the time and effort taken to complete this thesis. Thank you for putting up with me in my emotional and stress-filled state. I hope finishing this will make you proud!

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## INTRODUCTION

For over three centuries, African American quilters have produced colorful and unique quilts.<sup>1</sup> Enslaved Africans made the earliest quilts, then traditions developed through generations of African Americans. Studies of the traditions and culture of quilting have only recently become a popular topic for art history scholars, and these textiles were originally considered a craft rather than an art form. Much research is dedicated to the history and ideals of the antebellum South, including investigations of plantation life, the lifestyles of the enslaved people, and the objects created by them. However, scholarship does not analyze the significance of quilting within the enslaved African American or plantation communities. Enslaved African American quilting should not only be considered an important representation of the cultural hybridity of the enslaved community, but also examined as essential to the development of hierarchy within the plantation society and the African American culture of the nineteenth-century United States.<sup>2</sup>

A number of studies have been produced that lay valuable groundwork about textile production, including quilting. This study emphasizes the link between African and African American textile traditions that can be traced to the early years of American colonization and the slave trade. The most relevant scholarly perspectives discuss quilts created by the enslaved African American population and were beneficial to my understanding of African American quilting, as well as influential in my research. Kyra E. Hicks's 2003 volume *Black Threads* was an essential resource in my investigation of southern African American quilts created in the antebellum period, as most scholarship only relates to post-Civil War quilts created across

America. Hicks provides an overview of the African American quilting tradition, as well as a bibliography and list of resources, a catalogue of museums and galleries with African American quilts, and a timeline of African American quilting history. Significantly for this project, Hicks reiterates that there is more to be discovered and examined concerning African American quilting in the antebellum era.<sup>3</sup>

Many scholars introduce the concept that the African tradition is reflected in African American-made quilts. In *Always There: The African-American Presence in American Quilts*, Cuesta Benberry offers a catalogue of African American quilt history for a Kentucky Quilt Project exhibition in 1992. In order to remedy the absence of African American quilts within the context of American quilt history, Benberry organizes a chronological and historical range of African American quilts and their makers, beginning with antebellum slave-made quilts and continuing to African American quilts created in the twentieth century. She also outlines a summary of the quilts made by both enslaved and free African Americans before the Civil War. After introducing each section, Benberry suggests questions and encourages further scholarship as well as analyzing the connections between the earliest African traditions and present day African American quiltmaking.<sup>4</sup>

Further work on the African influence within African American quilts includes Maude Southwell Wahlman's, *Signs and Symbols: African American Quilts* from 2001. Wahlman analyzes contemporary quilts made by modern artists that represent the African American quilt tradition. As Wahlman shows, African American textile innovators, both from the antebellum South and more modern periods, have adapted African techniques, religious symbols, and aesthetic traditions into their quilt productions. By acknowledging Wahlman's reference to contemporary artists' work and their continued practice of African American quiltmaking, her

book helps to highlight key aspects about African traditions that I investigate further. Not only did the Africans and African Americans, who first established this tradition in the early 1800s create their quilts with purpose, as Wahlman shows, these same ideas can also be seen in the modern representations of African American-made quilts.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, Gladys-Marie Fry's *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South*, published in 2002, has had the most important influence on my research because it is the only book that is centered on the historical and cultural significance of enslaved African American quilts. Set during the era of slavery, the illustrated book presents a brief look into the lives, works, and creativity of African American quilters. Fry's book uncovers different textiles crafted by slaves including quilts, crocheted cloths, rugs, and counterpanes from many of the Southern states. The book highlights these artifacts attributed to enslaved men and women, as a reflection of and tribute to African American culture. Not only was *Stitched from the Soul* the first book to examine the full history of quilting in the enslaved community, but Fry was the first author to put slave-made quilts into historical and cultural context. The book provides details of enslaved quilting trends, divided by region, as well as personal styles that are reflected in the homemade pieces. Ultimately, Fry is the leading scholar in African American quilt production during the antebellum period.<sup>6</sup> Her research and scholarship initiated the interest in shifting the study of African American quilts from a strictly craft point of view to more of an art historical context. By applying Fry's ideals, this thesis takes her work one step further by analyzing quilts within a cultural context, in order to explain how quilts made by African Americans during the nineteenth century show the intermingling of different cultures and aesthetics on plantations.

In the first half of the twentieth century, textile production and quilting were confined within one concept of historical research and study. Quilting, even in present day, is

thought of as a folk art or craft, where traditions were orally established and customs were passed down and related to African American heritage. As recognition of both European American and African American material culture has emerged over the past two decades, the significance of quilts has also gained recognition. Quilts have the ability to exemplify particular elements of the culture that produced them, depending on the time period and society. In particular, enslaved African American quilts symbolize the influence and blending of quilt traditions from the African culture into the African American culture, after communities and families developed out of the slave trade.

One issue in the discussion of quilts is that the known history that is connected to these textile works is mostly an oral history. There are documents such as diaries and journals, which researchers have discovered that note scant information about family quilts, created by relatives that were once enslaved, and passed down as heirlooms. Though the documents may mention a date of creation, they rarely acknowledge the creator of the quilt. Older African American-made quilts were passed down through family generations. In some instances, families claim an African American slave created such quilts, however, records proving the maker's identity as a slave are extremely rare. The documents also rarely provide an abundance of detail about the quilts that would be beneficial for current scholars, such as the why the maker used a certain design, where the quilt was made, or how it was intended to be used. In terms of historic context, quilts and the stories within the stitching are passed down between families. Oral history leads to more concerns as family stories, truths, and legends can be misunderstood, reshaped, or forgotten over time. Therefore, it is up to the scholar to determine how much of the family's background information is reliable and then apply that information to the historic context behind a quilt.

Another issue scholars have discovered when investigating quilts of the antebellum South is that quilts are fragile objects. African American slave communities used quilts daily and washed the fabric often. For example in recounting her time in slavery, an enslaved African American woman named Mary Wright from Kentucky noted that she assisted in washing quilts as a child. As she noted, “We uster wash quilts... my Mammy would put water in dese tubs den soft soap de quilts den us [children] would get in de tubs in our bare foots en tromp de dirt out.”<sup>7</sup> Harsh washing, sunshine, and constant use would cause the fabric to come apart and break down. As a result, the early fabric works have not held together over time and most examples have not survived. The older examples of quilts that do survive, which consist primarily of fabric remnants, are not always in great shape; sometimes the organic material is broken down or has been eaten by insects due to improper storage. Accordingly, the examples of quilts created before the 1930s, are difficult to analyze due to their fragility. For such reasons, these pieces of textile history continue to disappear and the preservation of quilts becomes more important with each passing year.

In order to counteract the quilts’ fragility, many institutions are dedicated to the conservation of textiles. As the rise of quilt scholarship continues, the importance of quilt indexing around the world becomes prevalent in the preservation of such objects as they represent specific cultures.<sup>8</sup> Though the quilts are difficult to display and preserve, in order to maintain these significant cultural artifacts, actions must be taken to ensure conservation of these precious objects. Recently, the International Quilt Study Center and Museum (IQSCM), which began construction in 2007 and is located in Lincoln, Nebraska, has significantly contributed to the preservation, research, and collection of quilts from around the world. The IQSCM’s central mission is to create a comprehensive and accessible collection of quilts, documents, and other

related textiles, in order to develop a complete study and uncover the cultural and artistic significance of quilts. Similar institutions help preserve these valued textiles because the objects play an important role in the visual history of American culture.<sup>9</sup>

Collectively, all of the scholarly efforts cited above have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of quilts created by African Americans. Working beyond the importance of preservation and issues with investigation, few authors provide material and knowledge needed to compose an overview of these quilts and there are many ideas that could be further developed. In order to appreciate quilts designed by enslaved African Americans, this investigation calls for a more thorough analysis of the visual and contextual elements involving quilts as well as the stories or personal connections related to quilts fashioned under slavery. With the exception of Fry, most literature places enslaved African American quilting into one category and in a general context of art history. However, this paper intends to recognize the complex nature of these quilts. It is important to take into account quilts' relationship within material culture and understand the symbolic relationships between the enslaved makers and their quilts. Drawing from past scholarship, this project seeks to identify how quilts demonstrate cultural hybridity, cultural hierarchy, and cultural continuity. As a result, this quilt examination not only investigates the function of textile production during the nineteenth century, but also clarifies how quilts can act as a true representation of enslaved African American culture on plantations.

Chapter one addresses how quilts are a form of material culture symbolizing cultural hybridity and the different cultural influences transferred to the enslaved African American communities. Fundamentally, African American quilts created in the nineteenth century emerged from multiple traditions including African and European American, which led to the

development of a specific African American aesthetic. The chapter begins by offering a survey of the history of African American quilts, beginning with early nineteenth-century textile production and continuing through quilting development leading up to the Civil War in 1861. Summarizing this period of African American quilt production in the United States shows that even through extreme hardships, the African and African American people were able to bring their native culture to an unfamiliar territory and then evolve that production into a meaningful industry. In addition to formulating the origins of textile and quilt production, this chapter introduces the overall idea of plantation production and quilt consumption in the young and southern United States. The quilts are examined as examples of cultural hybridity, and thus they represent the intermingling of cultural aesthetics appropriated by enslaved African Americans. This idea points to the next investigation that quilts represent the cultural hierarchy on the plantation.

Careful examination of quilt examples and primary documents related to quilt creation reveals some about the purpose and rationale of quilts created by enslaved African Americans. Chapter two explores the how quilt production represented the cultural hierarchy or organized power and ranking distinguished by race on plantations in the nineteenth century. While it is difficult to distinguish the purpose of individual examples, quilts reveal the stratification of enslaved African Americans during textile production. One remarkable example of a quilt created during the antebellum period and possibly made in North Carolina in 1839 is a quilt top attributed to “Frances M. Jolly” (figure 1.9 and 1.10). Like many others presented here, this quilt is associated with the quilting context and history of the enslaved communities. Chapter two investigates stories and other examples, like Jolly’s, in order to lead to an understanding of how quilts began to show authorship, but also reveal much about enslaved quilt production in a

hierarchical and status-based society. Whether divided by social class, race, or gender, the complexity of enslaved African American quilting is highlighted.

Overall, these early quilt traditions of enslaved African Americans display a continuation of culture. The last chapter will discuss the cultural continuity of African American quilting by analyzing post-Civil War examples and leading into twentieth-century quilt production. It is important to discuss how the enslaved African American quilting tradition was preserved and transferred to a newly freed African American population, in order to understand the cultural significance quiltmaking held across generations. Ultimately, this study of enslaved African American quilting will address and clarify the key cultural aspects that quilts represent within the United States. Not only did plantation quilts exhibit cultural hybridity and hierarchy in nineteenth-century society, but also enslaved African American quilting marks the beginning of an established practice. Dissecting the function of quilts, textile production, and consumption, the idea of quilts as a form of material culture, and their role on the plantation and within the enslaved community helped fundamentally develop and transmit customs to present day. Conclusively, by analyzing the symbolic relationships between the enslaved makers and their quilts, it can be seen that quilts reveal the persistence and transformation of an outstanding artistic African American tradition.

## CULTURAL HYBRIDITY: THE MATERIAL CULTURE OF QUILTS

Quilts made by enslaved African Americans are a significant topic of study, not simply because they, like their makers, have not always been the subject of art historical scholarship. Despite this, these quilts can reveal much about the history and cultural significance of their enslaved creators. Focusing on the material culture of these quilts helps uncover the connection between textile materials and particular cultural conventions. During the seventeenth century, the first Africans were shipped to America under the harsh and grievous circumstances of the slave trade. Despite inconceivable hardships and obstacles, the African people carried their native culture to their new land in significant ways. Ultimately, blending their spiritual beliefs and native traditions with the resources and challenges of the New World created a new culture and identity for African Americans. Thus the cultural hybridity of quiltmaking began well before the nineteenth century. Textile production began to mold into a fluid cultural practice among many different racial and social groups living within the United States. For enslaved African Americans, plantation production and the consumption of quilts both within the big house and their communities, marked the early development of African American quiltmaking tradition. Though quilting has evolved from utilitarian necessity to a more personal form of artistic expression, quilt making remains one of the oldest visual expressions used by African Americans.<sup>10</sup>

Studies dedicated to material culture offer a logical approach to advance the significance of these quilts. Essentially, material culture is defined as the manifestation of culture through

material products.<sup>11</sup> Most often today, material culture is a method that scholars use to analyze subjects like quilting and other handcrafts. This method only became prominent around the 1960s and 1970s, after the shift in the art world's perception of quilts. However, in reference to material culture, quilts act as objects that through their creation and use begin to define the culture of a society, as well as gain importance and recognition among other art historical objects. Ultimately, this use of methodology is attributed to American archaeologist James Deetz. Deetz advanced the idea of examining household goods or handmade crafts in order to understand a civilization's ethnic, economic, religious, social, and cultural history. When applied to quilts created by enslaved African Americans, this idea identifies how not only an African American culture was developed within a broader tradition, but also relates other outside social and cultural influence within the southern United States during the nineteenth-century.<sup>12</sup>

Jules David Prown, a leading scholar of material culture, draws heavily upon established traditions of art history, then explains the study of material culture through an investigation of the formal language represented in objects. He builds a bond between the artifacts and their cultural significance.<sup>13</sup> Borrowing from the tradition established by Deetz and Prown, multiple scholars use material culture to understand the development of a particular culture and then discover the beliefs, values, and ideas of a community. In general, studies of material culture have advocated for the significance of handmade objects, including clothing, furniture, pottery, and quilts. These studies typically address how objects are designed, made, and used, and then determine what the materials meant to those who made or used them. As for African American quilts, at first glance, these textiles were used as functional objects for a practical purpose. But upon further investigation, a study of these quilts, including decorative elements, makers, and African traditions brings further cultural awareness.

Until the late 1960s to mid-1980s, scholars referred to textiles and quilts as crafts. This tended to dismiss the cultural significance of such works. Not only should quilts be considered an art form because of their precious significance to American culture, but quilts were also a result of enslaved expressionism. Most recently, scholars began to consider all of the contextual issues surrounding enslaved African American quilts and their material culture. However, in order to understand quilt's involvement in plantation culture, it is important to navigate through the origins of this tradition and how it transformed in the southern United States.

By examining material objects, such as quilts created by enslaved African Americans, scholars have been able to make connections from one culture to another. As material culture scholars might argue, in order to understand quilting as an art form, the quilts must be addressed within the context of the culture that would have influenced the quilt design created by enslaved African Americans. Because quilts or other textiles were mostly functional during the antebellum period, such products have been branded as crafts.<sup>14</sup> At the time, however, quilts not only were used for recreational activities and for practicality's sake, but they were also decorative. Quilts were sometimes hung on the walls of plantation homes, on display for guests to admire. This tradition dates back to earlier historical periods, such as the early modern period, when tapestries were hung on walls of castles to keep the structures insulated, but also added color to an otherwise drab interior.

African American quilts could take a variety of forms and serve a number of functions, however, a quilt constitutes a form of needlework that typically contains three layers of fabric stitched together to form a pattern. Originally, slave quilts were often made from discarded scraps, old clothing, and worn out bedding materials. As a late nineteenth-century photograph of the interior of an African American home illustrates, quilts were most commonly used as

bedding (figure 1.1). In enslaved communities, quilts were either made for the enslaved families or the families of the owners. Depending on the situation, quilts were either created out of any materials the family could spare or made of more expensive fabrics that expressed the wealth of the slave-owning family. In the South, quilts were usually made of cotton. Figure 1.2 depicts enslaved African Americans picking cotton, which required a significant labor force during harvest season on plantations in the southern United States. The cotton batting used in quilting is a raw combed cotton picked from plantations, worked into a blanket form, then stuffed inside two layers of fabric. Creating the cotton batting was often a communal affair, and multiple plantation slaves would participate in combing out twigs, leaves, or other materials. Not only were quilts created in enslaved communities for personal use, but the act of creating the cotton batting and then stitching the quilts were also a part of assigned duties for slaves on plantations. Figure 1.3 illustrates one step in the process of quilting, pinning the cotton batting. This activity continued to be a known and well-practiced task into the 1900s.

Many examples of quilts created within the enslaved community survive. These were made either for personal use by slaves or for the plantation household, and technological advancements allowed for the expansion of the plantation quilting industry. Big cotton harvests, the steam engine, railways, and other inventions contributed to the burgeoning of American millhouses that produced cloth. The invention of the modern mechanical cotton gin in the early 1790s changed the collection of cotton by reducing the amount of time and hands that were needed to separate the cottonseeds from the cotton fiber.<sup>15</sup> Instead of requiring manual labor for the task of seed separation, plantation owners invested in this invention and more cotton could be picked and processed, which increased plantation cotton production exponentially.

After the invention of the cotton gin, affordable cloth became widely available by the mid-1800s.<sup>16</sup> On some plantations, like the Melrose Plantation in Natchitoches Parish, Louisiana, seen in figure 1.4, there was a loom house specifically dedicated to textile production on the plantation, and these were not entirely uncommon. While enslaved African Americans would have labored in such textile houses for their owner, enslaved people were mostly prohibited from using the loom house for personal use. However, it is unclear whether such houses were used to produce textiles for both the main plantation home and the enslaved community. On many large plantations, certain slaves were charged with weaving the fabric to provide clothing for the enslaved members of the plantation. This occurred, for example, at George Washington's Mount Vernon, where trained slave labor was used to operate a textile manufacturing shop, which produced clothing for all of the plantation's enslaved people.<sup>17</sup> In terms of quilting, it is likely that loom rooms like Washington's were used primarily by enslaved African Americans to make quilts for their owners and other white plantation families in close proximity to the plantation.<sup>18</sup> For example, figure 1.5 pictures a quilt found in the collection of Mary Alden Carrison that was possibly created by "sewing women." These early forms of bedding would be used for warmth and comfort, but also covered the windows and doors for additional insulation. For the most part, quilts were not created in the colonies, but rather blankets or coverlets. Quilts as they are conceived today, were primarily a nineteenth-century convention.<sup>19</sup> The slaves that were especially trained in quilting would often create bedding with intricate floral designs; however, it is difficult to know where the specific patterns originated. While we do not know whether enslaved African Americans created quilts after pattern books, such materials included instructions for quilts would circulate across the United States and were quite common in the nineteenth-century upper-class society.

When American manufactured textiles became widely available in the 1840s, quilting became an everyday occupation within the enslaved communities. However, the earliest examples from around the turn of the eighteenth century, were made of fabric that was either shipped to America from across the Atlantic or hand-woven by enslaved African Americans in textile rooms on plantations across the United States. Created before manufactured fabrics, most of these early materials were made of handmade spun cloth. However, fabric spun on a loom by hand was still being created in southern farms into the twentieth century. Within the enslaved communities, the making of cloth and other materials was a tedious task. Figure 1.6 illustrates an African American woman posing as she makes thread. Women would spin up to four cuts of thread each night, then make all the clothes for the slaves among their own plantation, as well as having a hand in the cotton to make quilts, weave cloth, and knit stockings from the handspun thread. Emma Taylor, an enslaved African American from Texas, reported the duties of the enslaved women including the process of making handspun materials.<sup>20</sup>

Though there are surviving examples of quilts by enslaved African Americans created during this period, little is known explicitly about textile production from the decades before the Civil War. The accessibility of quilting materials provided the African American people with opportunities to continue their existing textile traditions. However, during the Civil War, American quilts became more distinctive and the African American quilt characteristics melded with both European and African traditions. Quilting offered women, and sometimes men, of different races the opportunity to develop a unique artistic expression. Remarkably, African American quilters have continued to practice and preserve their heritage in contemporary works that reflect some of the earliest recorded traditions in quilting from the early 1800s.<sup>21</sup>

Though quilts appear to be the work of one enslaved woman, during quilting parties some

quilts were created by multiple enslaved people. The original purpose of specific quilts is also usually unknown. The quilt could either have been created for functional use or as a decoration. Typically, this distinction among African American enslaved-made quilts is difficult to make. It can be assumed that the surviving examples were certainly not created for personal use within enslaved communities. Because fabric was a rare and precious commodity, quilts that were made were almost always functional objects, which would wither down over time. The examples we have today were most likely made for plantation households, however, such quilts prove to be more complex.

During the years before the international slave trade ended in the United States in 1808, the forced migration of the people native to the West and Central coast of Africa into remote plantations across the United States provided a strong African influence in quilting among the enslaved population.<sup>22</sup> The displaced Africans struggled to adapt in their new environment and their forced lifestyle as slaves. However, with the new materials in America, the Africans forged a new and unique cultural heritage. With engrained African heritage combined with the skill of quilting, enslaved communities could express their artistic, religious, and cultural backgrounds through this art form. As slaves, the Africans were often forced to neglect their heritage, however, through their textile work and quilting, they were able to preserve traditions from their homeland. Many quilts included in this thesis reveal that textiles produced by enslaved African Americans reflect continued traditions, which also shows the influence of many different ethnic backgrounds.<sup>23</sup>

As to the early African history of quilt making, the assemblages in specific tribal textiles were formed from repairing and putting together old pieces of cloth. Later, the appearance of piecing together fabric developed into a tradition of African American patterns.<sup>24</sup> To be specific,

quilting patterns and colors often found in African-made textiles can be identified within African American-made quilts.<sup>25</sup> African heritage was a significant influence for many enslaved African Americans into the nineteenth century. One of the most common themes and patterns found in historical African American quilts is the “African weave” pattern, which developed into the “crazy quilt” pattern. African American patchwork quilts have become a recognizable design.<sup>26</sup> The “crazy quilt” is an African American quilt tradition, but also remains a popular style throughout the United States. One example is a slave-made quilt created in 1842 at the Carson House in Old Fort, North Carolina. The design consists of striped pieces of cloth worked into a weave pattern. The patchwork style includes large shapes of cloth or single colored fabric quilted together, in addition to use of strong colors, asymmetry, or balance of color and texture (figure 1.7). Though this is not the traditional “African weave” pattern that appears in a more orderly form, woven neatly with long strips of colored fabric, the “crazy quilt” applies the same method of using fabric pieces, but applying them to the quilt backing in a random order.<sup>27</sup> Enslaved African Americans adapted this style in order to not to be wasteful with their fabric because even textile scraps were considered precious materials. These pieces of fabric were typically scrap textiles, used in enslaved communities out of extreme necessity until worn and deteriorated.<sup>28</sup> The patchwork style quilt emerged later into the nineteenth century with other forms of African American quilting which included storytelling or image recording, including narrative illustrations, religious symbols, protective charm patterns, and the theme of improvisation where quiltmakers would create new quilt patterns.<sup>29</sup>

African American culture and enslaved identity developed as a result of the blending of native traditions with the resources and challenges of enslavement. Through quilting, enslaved African Americans adapted many European American patterns into plantation textile

production as well. It is important to acknowledge that enslaved African Americans gained influence from their owners of European descent. Many patterns are found to be common amongst both European American white women and enslaved African Americans quiltmakers, such as figure 1.8. Donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, this quilt was made by two slave women, Ellen Morton Littlejohn and Margaret Morton Bibb in Russellville, Kentucky sometime between 1837 and 1850 (figure 1.8). As Barbara Brackman notes, an independent researcher confirmed that the quilt is a slave-made quilt by examining the evidence in the quilting pattern, fabric, and style.<sup>30</sup> This particular quilt pattern is commonly known as the “Star of Bethlehem” or the “North Star.” While enslaved quilting has been mistakenly associated with aiding in the transportation of the Underground Railroad and many scholars do not choose to link enslaved African American quilting with the Underground Railroad due to the lack of evidence, this “North Star” pattern could hold significance to the enslaved community both spiritually and emotionally.<sup>31</sup> While the North Star was indeed a symbol of hope within African American communities, the idea that this particular quilt pattern was used to aid the enslaved in escaping to freedom is highly unlikely. Rather, this pattern type was adapted by many quiltmakers, no matter their origin, within the United States and continues to be used today. It is interesting that in addition to being named “The North Star Pattern,” this quilt pattern is also referred to as the “Star of Bethlehem,” a known Christian symbol. Plantations often involved the intermingling of multiple cultures including religion, and the Christian symbol could very well symbolize an African American’s spiritual customs. This ideal is further seen in the continued tradition of African American quilting during the later half of the nineteenth century.

Perhaps the most remarkable example of this cultural exchange can be seen in the quilt top attributed to “Frances M. Jolly,” based on an embroidered inscription on the center medallion

(figure 1.9). This piece is held in the National Museum of American History and possibly made in North Carolina in 1839. The quilt is made of silk and wool embroidery and measures one hundred and five inches in length by one hundred and two inches width. This signed and dated piece came from an African American family, and the maker, Frances M. Jolly, was said to be an ancestor of one of the donor's grandparents. The fact that this quilt is in high quality condition is extremely rare. In the center of the textile, a thirty-seven inch black square is set diagonally with burgundy triangles on either side. The center black square holds an embroidered flower bouquet, and underneath the bouquet is the inscribed name and date "Frances M. Jolly, 1839" chain stitched in red-wool thread (figure 1.10). Three borders surround the middle piece of the quilt. The first is a nine-inch black margin, followed by a ten-inch orange border, and a second black, eleven-inch margin makes up the perimeter of the quilt. Each boundary is decorated with multi-colored flowers (blue, red, yellow, and green), leaf and vine embroidery, as well as an embellished braid. The edges of the motifs turn up and are held in place by buttonhole stitching. The motifs, stitching, and embroidery are all secured with silk and cotton threads. However, the work includes both hand made and machine stitching. Sewing machines were common in households after 1860, and it is assumed that the outer two borders were machine stitched and joined or fixed after this time.<sup>32</sup>

Artifacts attributed to both enslaved men and women often acted as a reflection and tribute to African American tradition and artistry, and Jolly's quilt is no exception. Little is known about the maker of this quilt other than that Jolly would have been enslaved during the time of the quilt's creation.<sup>33</sup> Like many enslaved quilt makers, her life as a slave is undocumented. However, by analyzing the quilt, the motifs reveal interesting and unusual characteristics not always found in enslaved African American quilts. For example, the quilt

materials include wool and silk, which were highly expensive to produce and import during the nineteenth century. This suggests that the quilt was created for the plantation household, being that enslaved African Americans did not usually decorate or create quilts without physically using the materials. Quilts made for the plantation household were to be sold, used as decorative bedding, and sometimes as hanging decorations. Jolly's quilt does contain a floral motif that was common in nineteenth-century quilts. While the floral motifs are common amongst both European Americans and African American quilt production, the delicate floral decorations seen within the arrangement and design are connected to the period style for quilt beddings.<sup>34</sup> Floral decoration, while seen in African American quilts, is not often seen within specifically African examples.

The striking and decorative nature of the Jolly quilt is noteworthy, but one distinction must be acknowledged. The signature stitched into the center medallion is not only uncommon, but also it brings up many questions centered on authorship and purpose (figure 1.10). If this quilt was used to decorate the owner of Frances M. Jolly's home or plantation, why did Jolly sign her name to this specific quilt? It could be suggested that Jolly created this as a keepsake, and if so it is incredible that the quilt survived generations. From the late 1700s to the late 1800s, slave codes deliberately prohibited teaching slaves to read and write and the majority of slaves were illiterate.<sup>35</sup> While enslaved African Americans were considered uneducated or ignorant, the enslaved were instructed to perform their labor duties in order to improve the function and prosperity of the plantation. And while most enslaved people were illiterate, remarkably Jolly had the ability to stitch her name and claim this textile as her own. Jolly's signature is the only suggestion that this quilt was not created for the plantation household, but rather for personal consumption. Perhaps the signature was stitched post-emancipation and kept by Jolly as a

keepsake of her abilities. Still, the quilt was handed down to an ancestor of Jolly and descended through generations, so we can suggest that this specific quilt was used as a personal object, rather than a showpiece for a plantation home. But this particular quilt should not be associated with the traditional quilts created for enslaved communities because the quilt acts as a treasured and cherished object, rather than quilts made from scraps and used until they were reduced to pieces. Nonetheless, despite that next to nothing is known about Jolly's life individually, this quilt allows her identity and cultural contributions to live on and be acknowledged as an important example of enslaved African American quiltmaking.

Generations after the involuntary migration of enslaved Africans, African American culture had emerged as a combination and new cultivation of culture and heritage. While quilts extend beyond simple representation of African American cultural hybridity, they exemplify how materials act as a representation of a culture that adapted the quiltmaking tradition from multiple influences. By summarizing the history and origins of the African American quilt production leading up until the 1900s, it becomes necessary to appreciate how quilts show the extension of culture for enslaved African Americans. Though the specific purpose of most extant quilts is uncertain, attempting to analyze such examples reveals the possible differences between quilts made by enslaved African Americans for their personal use and those for the plantation household.

## CULTURAL HEIRARCHY AND PLANTATION QUILT PRODUCTION

A careful examination of quilt examples alongside primary documents reveals quilts' additional layers of meaning within the textile industry on the plantation, both within the enslaved community and the "big house." In consideration of nineteenth-century African American quilting, very few scholars have connected their analysis of quilt production to these primary sources. Gladys-Marie Fry was among the first to connect personal narratives to the production of quilting. Admittedly, documentation about enslaved quilt makers and their quilts, like most enslaved people generally, is rare. However, artifacts attributed to both enslaved men and women can act as a reflection of and tribute to African American traditions and artistry, as reflected in chapter one.

This chapter recounts some of the available stories associated with slave-made quilts, as well as offering contextual information about these quilts, in order to garner an understanding of how quilts symbolize the cultural hierarchy on plantations. By examining state and local records, oral histories, and other small clues in reference to the origins of such quilts, this investigation will deepen the understanding of the general context, environment, overall purpose, and design of quilts and their makers. In the production of quilts, the power separation between both white slave owners and their enslaved laborers is highlighted as the racial divide is emphasized. Within each quilt's construction, there is evidence of this cultural hierarchy in how, where, and for what purpose such quilts were made for. Fundamentally, quilting was an activity for enslaved

communities that operated as a service to satisfy multiple means on the plantation. Also, by analyzing quiltmaking within the entire plantation, this reveals not only the major roles of enslaved African American women, but also the gender constraints within shared responsibilities of the enslaved.

As introduced earlier, there are major contrasts in the variety of quilts produced by the enslaved. The separation between the main house and the enslaved communities goes beyond the physical, but continues within the detachment of African American slaves from the rest of society. Only certain enslaved African Americans were allowed in the main house. Within the enslaved communities, African Americans were cut off from the rest of the plantation. This division is exemplified through plantation quilt production. In turn, plantation quiltmaking was more diverse. Most surviving examples today that are in relatively good condition or made from expensive materials, are assumed to have been made for a particular owner or plantation household. In the plantation assembly, enslaved African Americans were forced into harsh labor and uncomfortable living conditions. The textile production by enslaved African Americans can be divided into two categories: main house manufacturing and quilting for necessity within the enslaved community. Textile manufacturing for the plantation or main house included production and consumption of quilts to be sold or used by elite classes. Enslaved African Americans were forced into extreme labor from the collection of cotton to the long process of creating a final quilt product. Within the enslaved community, quilts were created out of necessity for their survival and were often created from left over fabric remnants. Luxury quilts for the plantations were completely different from the quilts within the enslaved community. It is important to acknowledge the context of quilt production, as in production location and purpose, in order to analyze such quilts' place within the cultural hierarchies on plantations.

To illustrate the difference between main house manufacturing and quilting within the enslaved communities, enslaved African American quilts were created through communal production in terrible conditions. The enslaved African American quarters, an example of which can be seen in figure 2.1, took many forms but generally consisted of various humble buildings placed close together. These structures provided a cramped living space for multiple enslaved family members, and the examples that survive only give contemporary audiences a glance into life as an enslaved person. Not only were many enslaved quiltmakers present throughout the antebellum South, but also textile production resulted from frequent assemblies both within the plantation household and within the enslaved communities. The social interaction quilt production often entailed is a prime example of this idea. Very few narratives or personal accounts recorded by enslaved African Americans mention quilt production within antebellum plantation communities. However, a select few do narrowly reference aspects of enslaved life associated with quilting, such as personal routines or quilting parties. Considering these activities leads to a fuller understanding of the function of quilting as well as the social connections that quilts could create for enslaved African Americans. Physically, quilts could provide warmth and comfort, but psychologically, the social interaction within the enslaved community acted as a distraction from their enslavement, as well as a familiar activity shared with their families, loved ones, and the rest of their community.

Within the separated spheres on the plantation, enslaved African Americans participated in quilting parties, which provided social interaction among other enslaved on one plantation, as well as other plantations nearby. This interaction functioned as a mental comfort to enslaved people, and created the opportunity to strengthen the relationships between them. One significant source of information can be found in recollections from the last generation of African American

slaves gathered through interviews organized between 1936 and 1938 by the Federal Writers' Project. Although these oral histories were over seventy years removed from enslaved life, many of the narratives detail the culture and lifestyles of enslaved communities from across the southern United States. In one case, Camilla Jackson, an enslaved African American woman from Georgia explained that:

a slave's home life was very simple. After work hours they were allowed to visit other plantations; however, they could not visit any plantation unless their master was friendly with the owner of this particular plantation. One of the most enjoyable affairs in those days was the quilting party. Every night they would assemble at some particular house and help that person to finish her quilts. The next night, a visit would be made to some one else's home and so on, until everyone had a sufficient amount of bed clothing made for the winter. Besides, this was an excellent chance to get together for a pleasant time and discuss the latest gossip.<sup>36</sup>

Like many other slave narratives that relate and describe everyday life within the enslaved community, Jackson's narrative describes the unique form of entertainment, the quilting party. The quilting party was a social gathering where many enslaved African American women and men would come together to create quilts for the individuals in their circle. Not only were the quilts a necessity within the enslaved people's homes, but also the quilting party itself was a community affair. In times of celebration, rest, and holidays or special occasions, quilting was a common activity. Another enslaved African American woman from Georgia, Mary Colbert, fondly remembered her and her family's activities around Christmas, where she:

remember[s] the quilting... The women went from one house to another and quilted as many as 12 quilts in one night sometimes. After the quilts were all finished they have a big spread of good food too. Now it takes a whole month to quilt one quilt and nothing to eat.<sup>37</sup>

As these memories reveal, the act of quilting and the quilting party illustrates a communal activity that produced not only a physical and functional necessity, but also provided an emotional outlet for enslaved African Americans. Quilts were not just functional objects for

the enslaved, but rather, quilts began to connect different plantation communities with one another. Mary Wright, who was mentioned earlier, also noted the significance of quilting within her community. Wright was born into slavery on August 1, 1855, and her narrative addresses her early life in Gracey, Kentucky under the ownership of James Coleman. Wright remembers how her family and the rest of the community found time to quilt their own bedding in the early morning and after dinner.<sup>38</sup> Her account shows that quilting was a communal event. Comparatively, quilting in European American society was often a communal affair as well, where ladies would gather together after a meal to quilt, stitch, practice their needle work, and converse with one another. But, while appearing similar, for the enslaved African American communities, quilts and the act of quilting functioned both as a necessity for survival and as a comfort or even a distraction from the daily toil of enslavement, rather than solely a social activity.

Furthermore, quilting, while sometimes collaborative, was nonetheless a tedious and time-consuming task. As Mary Colbert mentioned above, it would take considerable time and effort to stitch a quilt. Not only did quilting require the fashioning of quilt pieces together, but also enslaved African Americans often created their own materials. Another enslaved African American named Willis Cofer from Georgia noted that his Mammy wove cloth for their clothes and then the quilts and bedclothes were all made out of the homespun cloth.<sup>39</sup> Out of necessity, enslaved African Americans stitched quilts in order to sleep more comfortably. Quilts held additional significance within the enslaved communities and embodied of both a physical and symbolic comfort for the enslaved. Thus the purpose of quilting for the enslaved extends well beyond their physical necessity. Both individually and collectively created on the plantation, the quilts that survive today provide only a glimpse into quilt production within these enslaved

communities. Ultimately, the quilting party reveals the cultural divisions between quilt production within the plantation hierarchy.

However, the main house manufacturing and plantation consumption of quilts continued to dominate quilt production in the lives of the enslaved. With this production came unique relationships between a slave owner and their property. This relationship illustrates the social and cultural hierarchy of the plantation, with the white owners being superior to the enslaved African Americans by law. One relationship that contributed to quilt production was the intermediate relationship with a head mistress and her household slaves. While this interaction differed immensely from one plantation to another, introducing such relationships leads to an understanding of how quilt production began and functioned. This leads to many questions: Did the matriarchs of the plantation teach the enslaved to sew and quilt? How much direction did enslaved African Americans have in plantation quilt production? What were the specific roles of the enslaved in quilting? Does quilt production reveal the social and cultural hierarchy on the plantation?

In the second half of the nineteenth century, a slave woman in Kentucky named Diana DeGodis Washington Hine created a quilt piece with a triangular pattern (figure 2.2). Mr. and Mrs. George Hines, Diana's grandson, donated the quilt as a gift to the National Quilt Collection at the National Museum of American History. Alongside the quilt, the donor included a handwritten family history. Diana Hines was born in February 1797 at George Washington's home, Mt. Vernon. According to the record, "[Diana] was reared by the Washington family, and lived with them in the Mt. Vernon home, until she was past the age of twenty five. At the time there was a breaking up in the family and she was sold as a slave to a Mr. Jackson, of the Jackson Hotel at Arlington."<sup>40</sup> It is unknown exactly where Diana learned to quilt, however, it is possible

that because Diana was born into an enslaved family at Mount Vernon and Mount Vernon's textile productions were a significant part of the plantation operations, her skills were learned on site. Perhaps Diana was taught by Martha Washington herself, who was an accomplished seamstress and oversaw the spinning operations at Mount Vernon.

Martha Washington, wife to the nation's first president George Washington, who spent vast stretches of her life without him at Mount Vernon, lived on the plantation until her death in 1802. George Washington had died a few years before in 1799 and in his will stated that at least one hundred and thirty slaves would remain in Martha's possession until her death at which point they would be emancipated. It is possible that she taught her slaves quilting techniques.<sup>41</sup> "Ladies of the house" taught their female slaves specific skills, illustrated in figure 2.3, such as sewing or quilting that was then passed through generations of enslaved families. It was very common for the head white women of the plantation household to instruct their slaves in the art of textile production, including clothes and quilts. Many head mistresses' attitudes towards their slaves reflected the prevalent attitude of most women in high social classes in the southern states at the time, which was an accepted belief in white superiority. Besides this belief, most plantation owners and their wives were utterly dependent on slave labor. Therefore, teaching enslaved African Americans to quilt was done out of necessity and in benefit of the entire plantation. However, enslaved African Americans and their textile traditions were not only learned from the mistress of the house, but their talents and abilities were handed down through generations of enslaved families and communities. Enslaved African Americans developed their own tradition and made that established practice their own.

In the South, textile production varied according to location and size of the plantation household, but it was understood as primarily a women's activity. Much more textile production

was generally expected of enslaved women who were charged with these tasks, which included long hours of spinning and weaving, by the matriarchs of the plantation. The mistress dictated, managed, and oversaw the production and of course did not have the harsh expectations placed upon her that the enslaved African Americans under her control did. At the same time, enslaved women who worked on clothing and quilt production, held comparatively high positions on the plantation, such as Elizabeth Keckley.<sup>42</sup> Keckley's Medallion Quilt was stitched from used scraps of cloth, possibly from left over clothing (figure 2.4). This quilt was crafted in 1870, while she was working as a seamstress under the direction of Mary Todd Lincoln.<sup>43</sup> It was not uncommon for textiles to be comprised of pieces and embroidered together from used materials. Especially within the slave communities, small pieces of cloth were often the only fabrics available to the enslaved people. Even though Elizabeth Keckley did hold a high position under Mary Todd Lincoln as a seamstress, she was still seen as an unequal because of her race. These relationships within the plantation assembly, when centered on quilt production, reveal the cultural division for enslaved African Americans.

Alongside cultural hierarchy, the gendered nature of textile production is reflected within the main plantation manufacturing of quilts and then also sometimes seen within the enslaved communities. Enslaved women cultivated their own skills in quilting. In slave narratives, women often mention the endless cutting, sewing of slave clothes or embroidering, patterning, and mending of quilts. In addition, enslaved African American women who could sew could command a higher price on the auction block. Mary Wright addresses her early life in Gracey, Kentucky under the ownership of Mr. James Coleman:

I remember about a story Mary Beard told me about a slave woman dat war foolish [sic]. Her Massa couldn't git no body to buy her, so he dressed her up nice en buys her a thimble en gives her a piece of cloth ter sew on. It war was right her in Hopkinsville in front of de court house dat de block war en he sold dis woman as a "sewing slave," en her

war foolish en couldn't take er right stitch en she sho brought a good price en wen her new Massa found out she war foolish he show war mad.<sup>44</sup>

This anecdote illustrates that an enslaved African American woman's ability to sew was a desired and popular talent on the auction block. During the auctions, slave owners would present clean, nicely dressed enslaved people and advertise their specific skills in order to guarantee a larger profit for themselves.

Within the plantation, enslaved women, at least those who served the household and owner's family, lived both within the plantation household and the enslaved community. Their situation between these two worlds caused enslaved women to live between two different spheres: the domain of their white owners and then their relations with their African American slave community.<sup>45</sup> As a result of this complex situation, one of the ways enslaved women developed their lives and identity was through quilting. Quilting further developed the idea of cultural hierarchy, where these women were seen as high ranking as enslaved African Americans household workers. Yet, of course their lives were still defined and dictated by the plantation owners. Before and during the Civil War, those who stayed on in the big house increasingly found their working lives defined by gender expectations. In particular, enslaved women, whether in the big house or the fields, shared a common female experience that centered on the preparation of food and cloth, as well as basic household management.

In the quilt examples that survive today, most textiles are said to have been completed by women. One example, known as Ann's Quilt, was in the ownership of Mr. and Mrs. Donald W. Wooster and gifted to the National Quilt Collection of the National Museum of American History (figure 2.5). The quilt contains a patched, square pattern that is stitched into a large rectangular backing and displays bright colors of yellow, red, and green in each detail. Created between 1840-1860, this quilt was originally made by Ann, an enslaved sixteen-year-old girl in

Pittsylvania Co., Virginia. According to the museum's record, Ann not only wove and spun, but also took care of the linen on Captain and Mrs. William Womack's plantation.<sup>46</sup> In Womack's will, he officially specifies which enslaved African Americans will stay under the ownership of his wife after his death and that includes Ann. Dated November 1, 1849, the will states, "to my beloved wife Martha Womack during her natural life the following Negro slaves to wit, Ann."<sup>47</sup> This action was not uncommon amongst plantation owners, nor was it uncommon for plantations to hold detailed records of their enslaved people.

Typically, little is known of Ann the quiltmaker beyond her occupation on the Womack plantation and the mention of her ownership in the Captain's will, however both the quiltmakers Ann and Frances M. Jolly's craft corresponds to a larger consideration of the role women played in plantation textile production. To a great extent, American and western European societies have assigned textile production to women, and enslaved African American women proved no exception to this rule. The preparation, sewing, quilting, spinning, and repair of cloth accounted for a significant portion of certain enslaved women's time. Primarily, women worked in plantation spinning and quilting shops. Enslaved African Americans become economically valuable on plantations, not only for their labor in the field, but also in textile production. Beside their actual labor within the household, such as cleaning their mistresses' house, preparing the food, nursing the children, and managing the garden, enslaved women often were responsible for the sewing of cloths and quilts that were worn and used throughout the plantation.<sup>48</sup>

Enslaved women indeed made a significant contribution.<sup>49</sup> This reflects specific gender roles seen within textile production on the plantation and within the enslaved community. In most scholarship about enslaved African American quilting, these sources only refer to women, specifically Harriet Powers and Elizabeth Keckley. Male enslaved African Americans are not

regarded as dominant quiltmakers, however, men often did assist in quiltmaking in enslaved communities. This fact relates to a slippage of traditional gender roles that could occur within slavery.

While quiltmaking was considered primarily a woman's responsibility, there are exceptions to this rule. The late Gladys-Marie Fry, not only composed a research compilation of slave-made quilts, but also established her own private collection. Included within this collection is a quilt originally made on the William Dean Plantation in New Orleans around 1852 (figure 2.6). The applique quilt top appears in similar style and shape to the Frances M. Jolly quilt (figure 1.9). At the center is an embroidered date "March 19, 1852," which is surrounded by floral designs and patterns of red, green, and orange stitched to a cream or white quilt backing. Scholars believe that the long, sewn decoration in the central panel, which contains four floral cutouts, was intended to appear similar to snake symbols.<sup>50</sup> The snake plays a major role throughout African mythology and the African Diaspora. In both African and African American culture the snake was considered to be a source of life, a symbol of fertility and of the rainbow, and it was also believed to be an intermediary with ancestors. Often, enslaved African Americans placed snake symbols on their clothing.<sup>51</sup>

Fry records that there is one characteristic of this quilt that is uncommon among other African American slave quilts. Attached to the quilt was a note, which dates to the mid-1850s. The note states: "This quilt was made on the William Dean Plantation in New Orleans, before the Civil War, by one of Mrs. Catherine Dean's slaves whom they called 'Yellow Bill.' He sewed every inch with his own hand." The survival of this record is remarkable considering the rarity of such antebellum African American materials. According to the Louisiana 1850 census, "William Dean" is listed as residing in the city of New Orleans, Orleans Parish. However, it is

unclear from the listing if Dean's residence was on a plantation, farm, or mansion in New Orleans, Louisiana.<sup>52</sup> In the note, the male slave is referred to as "Yellow Bill." There is not record of a "Yellow Bill" in the Louisiana census because slaves were not usually named in the enslaved schedules or censuses. However, within plantation communities, names referring to skin color, such as yellow, were often attributed to slaves in order to differentiate between the population. Within enslaved communities, African American men also quilted. However, it is rare that the attribution is given to an enslaved male without primary documentation as evidence. The fact that "Yellow Bill" was an enslaved African American male quilting within his community also challenges the conventional understanding of textile production, which was once and is still considered a female specialty.

In the development of the textile industry, the stereotype that women ruled over the production of quilts became a prominent reality in the antebellum South. However, gender fluidity existed in the enslaved community. Male and female roles were often mixed or reversed. For example, within the plantation fields, women, men, and children were subjected to manual labor. Whereas, in white society, women did not generally work hard laborious tasks and men did not work in the home. In enslavement, African American responsibilities blurred and while it is rare to have surviving quilt examples by African American males and the majority of quilts that survive are connected to female quiltmakers, African American males sometimes quilted. Furthermore, because quilting began as a necessity for enslaved African Americans and then transformed into artistic expression, the "all hands on deck" concept invokes the idea that quilting within the enslaved community was not entirely a female tradition.

Within southern, nineteenth-century society, many did not consider enslaved African Americans to have a specific identity, rather the enslaved were seen as property or animals. As

such, many enslaved laborers were subjected to terrible treatment, whether as personal servants or further down the slavery hierarchy. The idea of racial discrimination and white superiority was entrenched in society by the nineteenth century, and maltreatment grew out of that. Within antebellum American society, enslaved African American people were a common topic of ridicule in newspapers, magazines, and other artistic forms. The interest in depicting African Americans from the white population's negative point of view persisted throughout the century. Reflected in figure 2.7, this idea promoted white superiority in photographs and engravings that illustrate stereotypical views of the interior of slave cabins and the enslaved communities. The African American population was regularly subjected to mockery of their skin color, intelligence, and cultural activities. Race as a spectacle remained before and during the Civil War, and well beyond. In *Harper's Weekly*, a prominent publication in the nineteenth century, a sketch entitled "The Brothers Assisted in Quilting" appeared in an 1883 issue (figure 2.8 and figure 2.9). Essentially this image makes fun of African American men attempting to thread their needles during what appears to be a quilting party. It is important to note that the engraving intends to degrade African American men, but also emasculate them. Even though quiltmaking was once considered work completed by only women, this idea was proven inaccurate based on the surviving "Yellow Bill" example (figure 2.6). Fighting the stereotype, both men and women assisted in sewing their community's clothes and beddings because textiles were fundamental to the enslaved. Contending against their bondage, ridicule, and racial stereotypes initiated from white American society, enslaved African Americans were able to occasionally maintain their familial and African cultural traditions, and this included dancing, spirituality, music, and other artistic customs.

For enslaved African Americans, the incorporation of African and European traditions combined with the challenges, mistreatment, and discrimination that enslavement brought upon their race, resulted in new developments within African American identity. Even through quilting, the division and separation of enslaved African Americans is represented. This chapter has addressed how quilts represent cultural hierarchy through the divided production between quilt manufacturing at the main house and quilts made for survival in the enslaved communities, as well as the relationship between enslaved women of the household and the matriarchs of the plantation. The role of enslaved people in textile production, specifically quilting, not only shows gender fluidity, but the practice expresses how this activity was an important tool and social venture that bonded enslaved communities and promoted the utilitarian necessity on southern plantations.

## CONCLUSION: CULTURAL CONTINUITY AND PERSISTANCE

Throughout the development of quilting, the practice became a personal form of artistic expression for enslaved African Americans and has continued to be used to articulate a specifically African American aesthetic for generations. It is important to recognize the cultural continuity of African American quilting, beginning with its origins, in order to fully understand why and how quilting has been preserved and transformed beyond the nineteenth century. According to Patricia A. Turner, the changing role and “status of African American quilts and quilters reflects the obstacles, challenges, and achievements of black America.”<sup>53</sup> Certainly, in the modern and contemporary perspective, the consumption of quilts created by African Americans has changed tremendously. The ability to develop quilting from quilt manufacturing on the plantation and within enslaved communities into more individual style began before the 1800s.

In addition to continuing the African American tradition of quilting, few enslaved African Americans became recognized as prominent artists during the nineteenth century. Harriet Powers (1837-1911) is one of the most well known African Americans that was born into slavery and continued to make quilts throughout her life (figure 3.1).<sup>54</sup> While Powers’ quilts display the religious and design motifs of enslaved African American tradition, her achievements are one of the only recognized and most commonly mentioned in reference to enslaved African American quilting.<sup>55</sup> Two examples of Powers’ machine-applied quilts, created in 1886 and 1896,

illustrate scenes from the Bible as well as local historical events (figure 3.2 and figure 3.3). Powers's Bible quilts were exhibited in the Negro Hall in the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta, Georgia. Turner points out that this was one of the first instances of public attention for African American quilting, not only as a spectacle of race, but also as a recognition of this African American tradition. Her quilts feature biblical scenes and symbols with detailed stitching. The 1886 applique was sold to Jennie Smith a white artist and teacher for five dollars, after Powers was under serious economic strain. Smith exhibited Powers quilt, which was alongside many other items that demonstrated a distinct race influence and character within the segregated Negro Hall (figure 3.2).<sup>56</sup> The public attention of Powers's work is largely due to Smith actions, including the purchasing and exhibiting of the quilt and transcribing an oral history for Powers's, which influenced Powers to create a second Bible quilt (figure 3.3). And while Powers's Bible quilts mark the first noted public appearance of African American quilting, as an African American quilter, Powers had to overcome many obstacles, such as racism and sexism during the society of the nineteenth century. It was an entire century later that this tradition gained widespread recognition.

Powers's Bible quilt marked the beginning of a significant transformation for African American heritage and appeared to act as a socioeconomic empowerment for African Americans. Adding onto the work of Patricia Turner, Jeania Ree V. Moore points out that the 1967 Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife began including such quilters among representatives of America's diverse culture. This inaugural festival marked the debut of African American quilting in a more broad scale. While forming the Freedom Quilting Bee a year prior to the showcase, the rural Alabama quilters featured on a national scale established such a tradition as a collective marketing tool and an important introduction of African American cultural

production. Suggesting that this establishment was rooted in problematic connotations, Moore describes the inclusion of African Americans within the “American” installation as advancing the cultural progress and modernity in the United States around the mid-1900s.<sup>57</sup>

The issues of public acclaim and society’s authority over African American quilting had a great affect on the preservation of the African American tradition, from the early nineteenth century to the present day. Nancy Callahan, an Alabama native and historian, documents the complicated success of Gee’s Bend, Alabama.<sup>58</sup> In the contemporary world, this community of women located on an island surrounded by three Alabama Rivers (near Boykin, Alabama), have produced countless quilt masterpieces since the mid-nineteenth century (figure 3.4 and figure 3.5).<sup>59</sup> The Gee’s Bend quiltmakers in partnership with the Souls Grown Deep foundation strive to continue the textile tradition of their ancestors. Over seven hundred inhabitants of this rural community are the descendants of slaves. In the contemporary world, Gee’s Bend first gained major attention around 2002 after Gee’s Bend was featured in William Arnett’s traveling exhibition, *The Quilts of Gee’s Bend*. First beginning at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the exhibit continued to be shown at thirteen museums across the United States.<sup>60</sup> Gee’s Bend acts as a representation of modern African American quilts and America’s consumption of such an aesthetic. Though it only represents a small center, Gee’s Bend’s operation and artistic achievements combined with the geographical isolation, signifies cultural continuity and essentially reproduces the communal ideals of the quilting party (figure 3.6 and figure 3.7). Two scholars, Melanie McKay and Maaja Stewart, explore the exhibition of Gee’s Bend quilts and the attitude surrounding the artistic value of such quilts’ traditions. These quilts represent how textiles work to materialize memory, and, in addition how the artifacts exemplify the continued quilting tradition of enslaved African Americans (figure 3.8).<sup>61</sup> Today, Gee’s Bend has become

the heart of the production and exhibition of African American quilt artists across the United States. This community continues to preserve the quilting traditions of their enslaved African American ancestors (figure 3.9).<sup>62</sup> Quilts created by the hands of the enslaved were produced as a representation of the cultural significance to African American heritage. Ultimately, quilting had multiple functions and significance to enslaved African Americans and transformed into expression and recognition to the United States dominated by multiple customs and cultures.

Throughout this investigation, I have followed other scholar's leads in recognizing enslaved African American quilting as an established and recognized cultural tradition. This thesis sought to categorize the cultural signifiers that quilts demonstrate, including cultural hybridity, cultural hierarchy, and cultural continuity. As a result, this quilt examination clarifies how quilts act as true representations of enslaved African American culture. As revealed in previous chapters, the analysis of quilts leads to an understanding of how African American quilts relate to the study of material culture. In connection to this method, enslaved African American quilts marginalize the function and production of quilting. The history and origins suggest that plantation quilt production and the consumption of quilts during the nineteenth century represents the cultural hybridity of early quilts made within the United States. Quilt forms and patterns can expose the melding of cultures, including African and European American to African American customs, but also reveals how styles were merged through the enslaved role in the plantation textile industry.

Within the plantation assembly, enslaved African American quilting became a prominent production, both as a labor for enslaved and a necessary activity for the enslaved communities. However, this investigation reveals the difference between quilts produced for

main house textile production and personal use. While difficult to differentiate in the surviving quilt examples, certain signifiers affirm the complexity of the roles of enslaved people on the plantation, including how quilts reveal the cultural hierarchy in nineteenth-century plantation society. Quiltmaking became a significant activity of cultural exchange. Most importantly, preservation of these textile products continues to play a critical role in the protection of these historic artifacts. The cultural continuity of quiltmaking has morphed into an established source of African American pride. Most certainly, African American tradition has evolved exceptionally from creating quilts out of necessity to an artistic tradition. In turn, the development of African American artistic identity can be recognized from enslaved quilts crafted in the nineteenth century to African American quilt production found in present day society.

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<sup>1</sup> The Chicago Manual of Style Online, “Chapter 8: Names and Terms, 8.38 Compound Nationalities,” accessed February 14, 2017, <http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/16/ch08>. I have chosen to not hyphenate “African American” in this thesis. According to the Chicago Manual of Style, the hyphen is regarded as suggestive bias and it may be omitted.

<sup>2</sup> When referring to quilts as exemplifying “cultural hybridity,” this means that quilts act as examples of multiple cultures and blending of textile aesthetics. Quilts as representations of “cultural hierarchy” indicates that quilts demonstrate the segregation between enslaved African Americans and the white population in a nineteenth-century plantation setting, whether divided by social class, race, and gender.

<sup>3</sup> Krya E. Hicks, *Black Threads: An African American Quilting Sourcebook* (Jefferson North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2003), 15-34.

<sup>4</sup> Cuesta Benberry, *Always There: the African-American Presence in American Quilts* (Louisville, Kentucky: Kentucky Quilt Project, 1992), 21-29 and 30-34.

<sup>5</sup> Maude Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols: African Images in African American Quilts* (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001), 28-67 and 84-109.

<sup>6</sup> Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-5 and 37-68.

<sup>7</sup> “Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews with Former Slaves, Kentucky,” *Project Gutenberg Literary Archive Foundation* 1 (2006): 63. Mary Wright’s accounts can be found in *Kentucky Slave Narratives*, and detail her life under the ownership of Mr. James Coleman in Gracey, Kentucky around 1870s.

<sup>8</sup> For more information of quilt indexing in relationship to material culture, see Nikki Davis, “Material Culture and the Rise of Quilt Indexing,” *Indexer* 30, no. 2 (2012): 80-84.

<sup>9</sup> International Quilt Study Center & Museum, University of Nebraska Lincoln, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.quiltstudy.org/>.

<sup>10</sup> John M. Vlach, *The Afro-American Tradition in Decorative Arts* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1990), 8-24; Leslie King-Hammond, “Identifying Spaces of Blackness: the Aesthetics of Resistance and Identity in American Plantation Art,” in *Landscape of Slavery: the Plantation in American Art*, ed. Angela D. Mack and Stephen G. Hoffius (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 58-85. Vlach and King-Hammond continue to address the connections between folk art created by African Americans and their possible cultural influences or adaptations.

<sup>11</sup> Jules David Prown, “The Truth of Material Culture: History of Fiction?” *History from Things: Essays on Material Culture* no. 1 (1993): 1.

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<sup>12</sup> Nikki Davis, "Material Culture and the Rise of Quilt Indexing," *Indexer* 30, no. 2 (2012): 80.

<sup>13</sup> Prown, "The Truth of Material Culture: History of Fiction?" 1-4.

<sup>14</sup> Susan Goldman Rubin, *Art Against the Odds: From Slave Quilts to Prison Paintings* (Crown Publishers: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 26-34. Aligned with material culture is the term "folk art," which is defined as the useful items in the production of symbolic aesthetic works by untrained artists. This becomes problematic in the definition of fine art versus a craft or folk art form.

<sup>15</sup> For more information on the invention of the cotton gin see, Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 10-25. While Eli Whitney was credited to inventing the cotton gin, it is understood by few scholars that the gin was actually invented by a slave on Mrs. Nathanael Greene's plantation in Georgia. Catharine Littlefield Green is noted as being a supporter of Eli Whitney.

<sup>16</sup> Wahlman, 9-11; Fry, 3-14. Both authors describe the functional use and material process that goes into quilt production.

<sup>17</sup> "Slave Clothing," George Washington's Mount Vernon, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.mountvernon.org/digital-encyclopedia/article/slave-clothing/>; "Thomas Jefferson's Monticello," Textile Shop: Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, accessed February 18, 2017, <https://www.monticello.org/site/plantation-and-slavery/textile-shop>. For more information on the textile production on both George Washington and Thomas Jefferson's plantation visit the previously listed websites.

<sup>18</sup> Fry, 61-63. Fry notes that many loom houses or textile shops would be considered areas or domain for enslaved African Americans, similar to the kitchen, where slaves performed one of their many labors and responsibilities.

<sup>19</sup> Fry, 9.

<sup>20</sup> Spencer R. Crew, Lonnie G Bunch III, and Clement A. Price, *Slave Culture: A Documentary Collection of the Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project* (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2014), 711.

<sup>21</sup> Wahlman, 9-11.

<sup>22</sup> A United States federal law that prohibited the importation of slaves was enacted in 1807, however, the law did not take full effect until 1808, where the law was permitted in the United States Constitution.

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<sup>23</sup> For more information of enslaved African American quilting acting as a continuation of African culture, Wahlman's *Signs and Symbols* highlights the specific African imagery, patterns, and styles that continue to be found in contemporary African American quilt artists.

<sup>24</sup> Cheryl B. Torsney and Judy Elsley, *Quilt Culture: Tracing the Pattern* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1994), 6-11. This book creates a log of quilting techniques that were adapted across different cultures.

<sup>25</sup> For more detailed information on the specific patterns used by African quiltmakers and then transferred to enslaved African American quilting, see Kaye England and Mary Elizabeth Johnson, *Quilt Inspirations from Africa: A Caravan of Ideas, Patterns, Motifs, and Techniques* (California: Quilt Digest Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Geraldine Chouard, "African American Quilts: Color, Creation, (Counter) Culture," in *Writing History from the Margins: African Americans and the Quest for Freedom*, ed. Clarie Parfait, Helene Le Dantec-Lowry, and Clarie Bourhis-Mariotti (New York: Routledge, 2017), 108-12. Published in early this year, Chouard considers African American quilts in their relationship as material objects within life, cultural, and historical context. She investigates African American patchwork by examining their historical social and political implications, beginning with slave quilts and then the cultural signifiers in the contemporary period.

<sup>27</sup> Penny McMorris, *Crazy Quilts* (New York, New York: E.P. Dutton, 1984), 2-8. McMorris details the style of "Crazy Quilt" from 1876 through 1900. The book focuses on quilter's interest in fabric, shapes, and textures.

<sup>28</sup> As addressed in the introduction, one of the major issues in discussing enslaved African American quilts is the fragility of the surviving examples. Within the enslaved communities, textiles would be used until they were falling apart.

<sup>29</sup> Torsney and Elsley, 9-14.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Brackman, *Facts & Fabrications: Unraveling the History of Quilts and Slavery* (Lafayette, CA: C & T Pub., 2006), 14.

<sup>31</sup> For more information on the debunking of quilts role in the Underground Railroad, please see Laurel Horton, "Truth and the Quilt Researcher's Rage: the Roles of Narrative and Belief in the Quilt Code Debate," *Western Folklore* 76, no. 1 (2017): 41-68. Horton responds to Jacqueline Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View: the Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999) on this controversy between publications and public audiences.

<sup>32</sup> "Sewing Revolution: Windham Textile & History Museum," Windham Textile History Museum, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.millmuseum.org/history/captains-of-industry/sewing-revolution/>.

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<sup>33</sup> Fry, 49-51; National Museum of American History, “Treasures of American History Online Exhibition,” *National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center*, accessed January 1, 2017, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections>.

<sup>34</sup> Ameila Peck and Cynthia V.A. Schaffner. *American Quilts & Coverlets in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York, New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 124-63. Both Peck and Schaffner have categorized the quilt collection located in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, such as abstract, floral, and geometric patterns, that are recognized amongst quilt production in the United States from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.

<sup>35</sup> Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 155-56.

<sup>36</sup> Crew, Bunch III, and Price, 122-23.

<sup>37</sup> Crew, Bunch III, and Price, 81.

<sup>38</sup> “Slave Narratives,” 62.

<sup>39</sup> Crew, Bunch III, and Price, 787-88.

<sup>40</sup> National Museum of American History, “Treasures of American History Online Exhibition,” *National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center*, accessed January 1, 2017, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections>

<sup>41</sup> Willis J. Abbot, “Martha Washington: the Original ‘First Lady of the Land’” in *Notable Women in History* (Philadelphia, PA: J.C. Winston Co., 1913), 79-83. The information about Martha Washington and the relationship with her slaves is typically overlooked, however, many books recognize Martha as an important female figure in American history.

<sup>42</sup> Janaka B. Lewis, “Elizabeth Keckley and Freedom’s Labor,” *African American Review* 49, no.1 (2016): 5-17. Within the last two years, extensive research and publications have acknowledged Keckley’s life and talent as a dressmaker, as well as her relationship with Mary Lincoln Todd. Lewis’ article addresses her experience and navigation to freedom through her difficult labor; Ann Rindaldi, *Unlikely Friendship: A Novel of Mary Todd Lincoln and Elizabeth Keckley* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 2016), 3-18. Rindaldi also reflects on the relationship between Mary Todd Lincoln and Elizabeth Keckley from more a historical and psychological point of view, rather than focus on Keckley’s works created under Lincoln.

<sup>43</sup> Wahlman, 72-75.

<sup>44</sup> “Slave Narratives,” 63-64.

<sup>45</sup> Fox-Genovese, 146.

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<sup>46</sup> National Museum of American History, “Ann’s Quilt,” *National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center*, accessed February 16, 2017, [http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_556586](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556586).

<sup>47</sup> National Museum of American History, “Treasures of American History Online Exhibition,” *National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center*, accessed January 1, 2017, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections>

<sup>48</sup> Fox-Genovese, 120-21.

<sup>49</sup> Fox-Genovese, 121-24.

<sup>50</sup> Fry, 49-51; Brackman, 14-16.

<sup>51</sup> Fry, 49.

<sup>52</sup> Fry, 50.

<sup>53</sup> Patricia A. Turner, *Crafted Lives: Stories and Studies of African American Quilters* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 100. Turner’s a cultural studies scholar and demonstrates her critical thesis of quilts as exemplifying one-sided gender practice.

<sup>54</sup> Rubin, 26-34. Rubin’s chapter three “Pattern for Freedom: Women’s Quilts as Art” details a short section of slave quilts, narrative quilts created by Harriet Powers, and the quilts of Gee’s Bend.

<sup>55</sup> National Museum of American History, “Treasures of American History Online Exhibition,” *National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center*, accessed January 1, 2017. <http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections>. More information on Harriet Powers can be found on the National Museum of American History collection website. The National Museum of American History have a huge textile collection from across the United States, including Harriet Powers’s Bible quilts.

<sup>56</sup> Jeania Ree V. Moore, “African American Quilting and the Art of Being Human: Theological Aesthetics and Womanist Theological Anthropology,” *Anglican Theological Review* 98, no. 3 (2016): 459-62. Moore examines quilting as analytical exemplifiers of the struggles and successes of African American women.

<sup>57</sup> Moore, 462-63.

<sup>58</sup> Nancy Callahan, *The Freedom Quilting Bee: Black Women Artists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 1987). Callahan’s work includes detailed information and interviews with the quiltmakers of Gee’s Bend.

<sup>59</sup> John Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee’s Bend* (Atlanta, Georgia: Tinwood Books, 2002).

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Partnered with five other scholars and released with a national exhibition tour, Beardsley cultivated an entire exhibition based on the artists, quilts, and their quiltmakers at Gee's Bend. The catalogue exhibition explains not only the historical tradition of Gee's Bend that, after two hundred years, continues to be an extraordinary African-American quilting community.

<sup>60</sup> For more information on the exhibition itself, see Paul Arnett and William Arnett, *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art of the South* (Atlanta, Georgia: Tinwood Books, 2000) and William Arnett, Alvia Wardlaw, Jane Livingston, and John Beardsley, *The Quilts of Gee's Bend* (Houston, Texas: Tinwood Books, 2003).

<sup>61</sup> Melanie McKay and Maaja Stewart, "The Tradition of Old People's Ways': Gee's Bend Quilts and Slave Quilts of the Deep South," *Uncoverings* 26 (2005): 155-73.

<sup>62</sup> Rubin, 26-34. Rubin's chapter three "Pattern for Freedom: Women's Quilts as Art" details a short section of slave quilts, narrative quilts created by Harriet Powers, and the quilts of Gee's Bend.

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Figure 1.1 Interior of an African American cabin, late nineteenth century.  
Note the bed covering to the right, Cook Collection, The Valentine Museum, Richmond,  
Virginia, in Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South*  
(Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 11.



Figure 1.2 African Americans working on a cotton plantation after the Emancipation, late nineteenth century, University of California, San Diego, California, ARTstor, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://library.artstor.org/>.



Figure 1.3 Jack Delano, pinning cotton batting, ca. 1941, photographic collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8a37155/?co=fsa>.



Figure 1.4 Interior of the loom house at the Melrose Plantation, Louisiana, ca. 1999, photograph collection of Melrose Plantation, Melrose, Louisiana, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.melroseplantation.org/>.



Figure 1.5 Example of quilt bedding, a quilt said to be made by “sewing women” or slaves that were specially trained to do quilting, ca. 1860-1861, Collection of Mary Alden Carrison, Rembert, South Carolina, in Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 18.

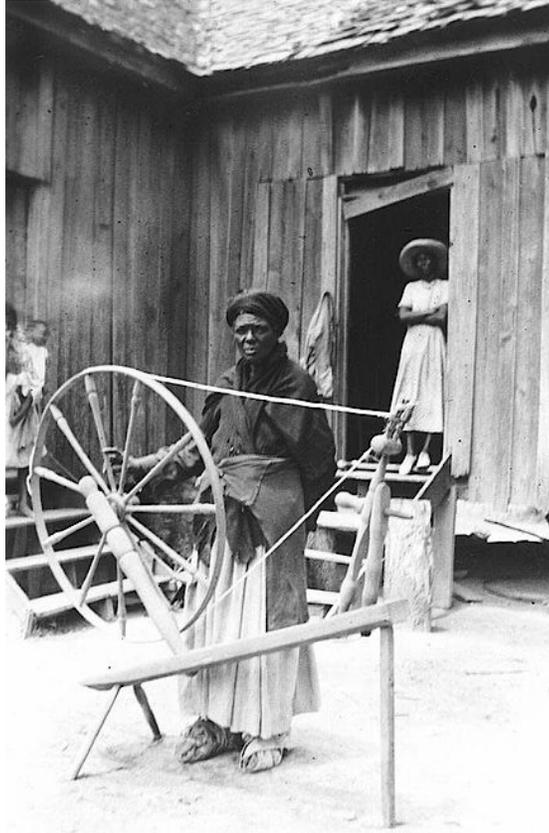


Figure 1.6 Woman at the loom, ca. 1900, Photographic collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., in in Barbara Brackman, *Facts & Fabrications: Unraveling the History of Quilts and Slavery* (Lafayette, CA: C & T Pub., 2006), 6-7.



Figure 1.7 African American "Crazy Quilt," ca. 1842, Carson House, Old Fort, North Carolina, Image Courtesy of Princeton University's Digital Collections, Princeton, New Jersey, accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.princeton.edu/>.



Figure 1.8 Star of Bethlehem quilt, Variation made by Ellen Morton Littlejohn and Margaret Morton Bibb, Russellville, Kentucky, ca. 1837-1850, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York; Gift of Robert Morton and Dr. Paul C. Morton, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/13884>.



Figure 1.9 Frances M. Jolly's Quilt Top, ca. 1839, overall material includes: wool, cotton, silk and thread, North Carolina, United States, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, accessed February 16, 2017, [http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_556182](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556182).



Figure 1.10 Medallion detail with inscription “Frances M. Jolly, 1839,” North Carolina, United States, National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, [http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_556182](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556182).



Figure 2.1 Slave quarters of Laura Plantation, South Carolina, mid-nineteenth century, Digital Collections, University of South Carolina, Columbia, South Carolina, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://library.sc.edu/p/Collections/Digital>.



Figure 2.2 Diana Hines' Pieced Quilt, ca. 1850-1880, Kentucky, National Quilt Collection at the National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, [http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_556452](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556452).



Figure 2.3 Engraving of Sewing Class, ca. 1866, Reconstruction-era vocational school to learn sewing, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/>.



Figure 2.4 Elizabeth Keckley's Medallion Quilt, Washington, D.C., ca. 1870, The Kent State University Museum, Gift of Ross Trump, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://digitalcommons.kent.edu/museumvideo/6/>.

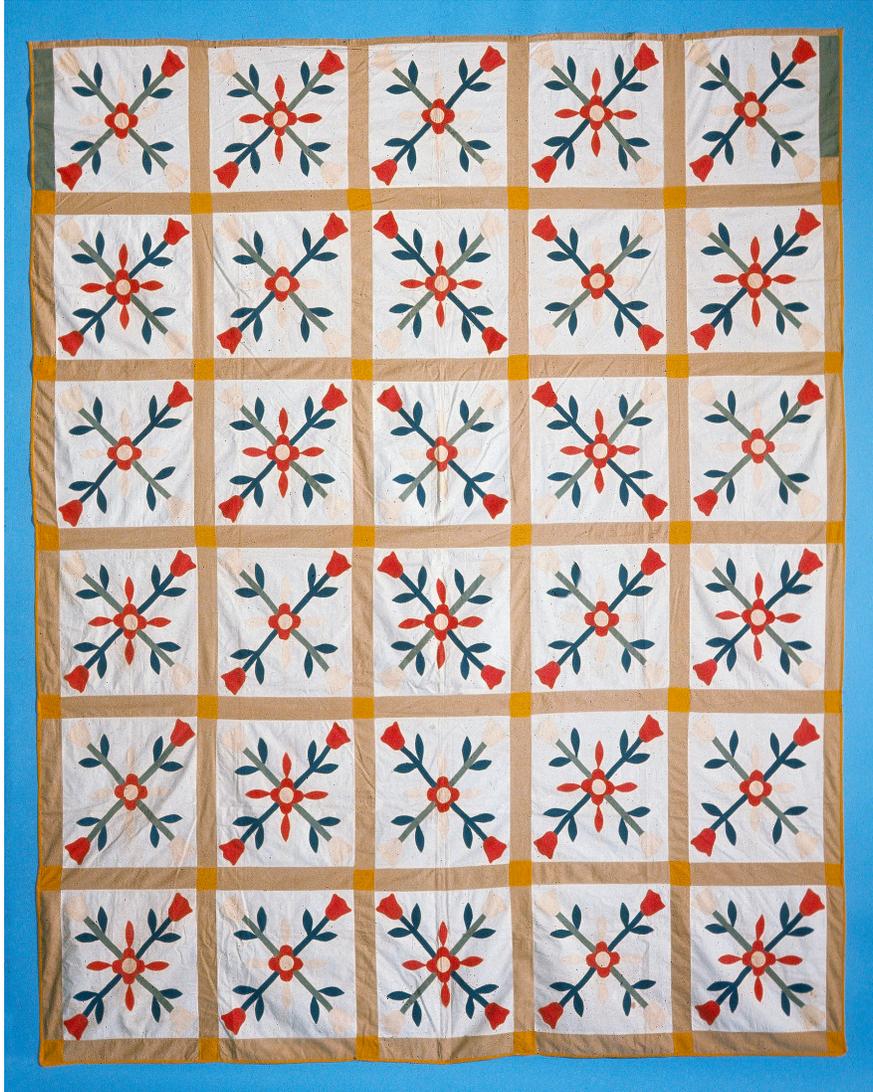


Figure 2.5 Ann's "Quilt," ca. 1840-1860, Pittsylvania Co., Virginia, National Quilt Collection at the National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, [http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_556586](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556586).

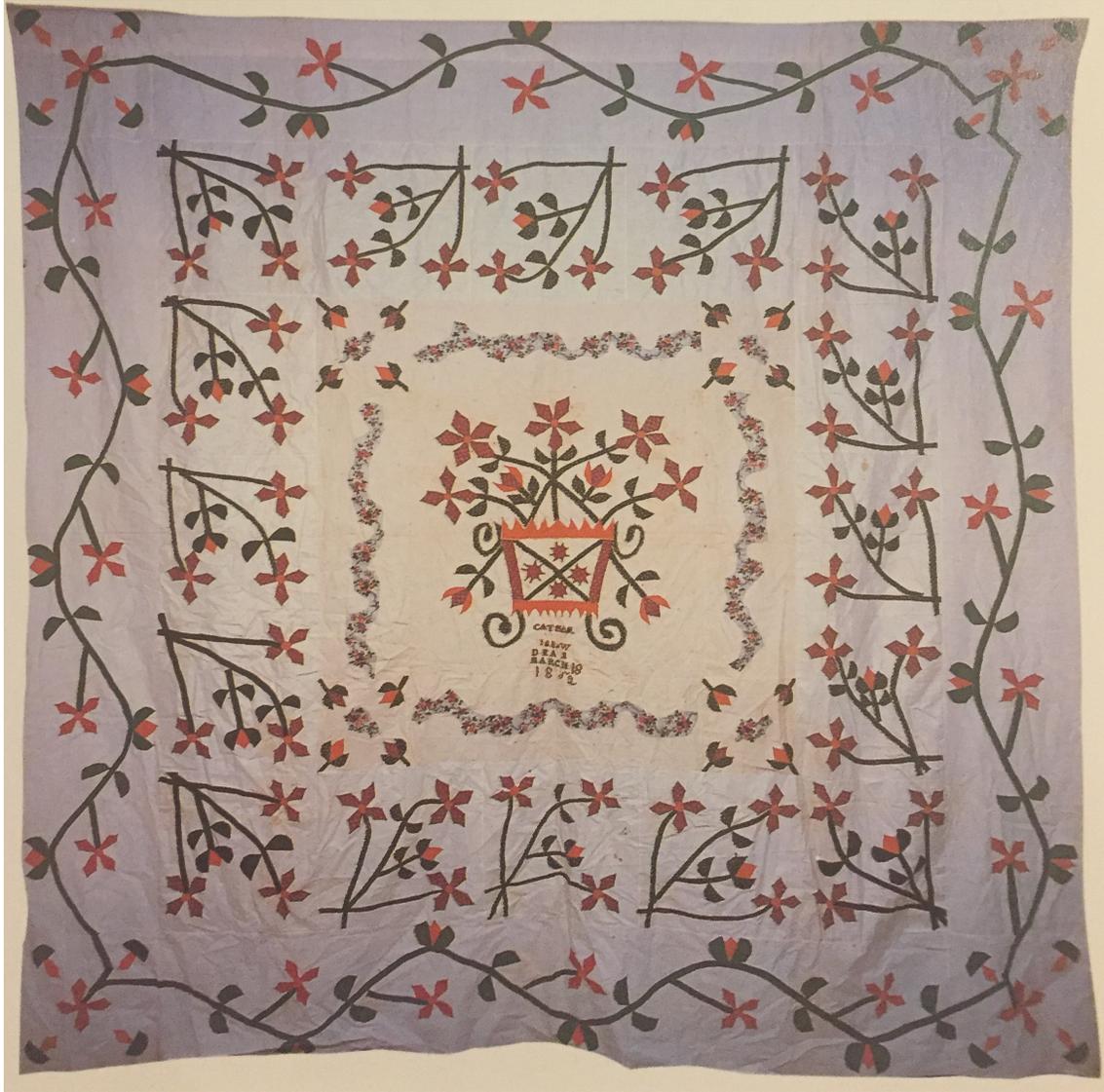


Figure 2.6 Quilt originally made by “Yellow Bill” on the William Dean Plantation in New Orleans, ca. 1852, Gladys-Marie Fry Private Collection, in Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 53.



Figure 2.7 Photograph entitled "Pride of the Family," ca. 1897, a staged version of how whites recognized the interior of slave cabins, Photographic collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., in Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 13.

# HARPER'S WEEKLY

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"SHE HUNG HER HEAD."

## VINEY'S CONVERSION AND COURTSHIP

By SOPHIE SHEPARD.

Viney felt that life was hard. Viney was a maid of sixteen, brown of color, and as pretty as any of Stoddard's South-sea Island girls—though for my part I have never quite believed in the charms of those winsome symphonies. In her soul Viney was a frivolous little wretch who loved to feast, flirt, sing, and dance, regardless of the fact that she might have to pay the piper. Her tassets, indeed, did not stand in the way of her coquetry, for Viney was "as handy as the next one"; she worked right royally when she worked, and when it came to sewing after the mode fashion. Her conversion, however, was not owing to the necessities of opportunity, for plenty of gawdy went on about her. Fate in the Hancock by name, was a shining light in the Happy Home Baptist Church, and she put her feet down too hard for it to become entangled in "de devil's snare," as she called jargonings of a worldly nature. Her social duty was to keep watch and ward over Viney, and since her in this way she should go. This was no easy task, for Viney was a keen rebel. With a figure supple as that of the Florence flower, strong anatomical arms, and extraordinary agility of motion, she would have been a terrible foe to meet in an Amazonian fray. But fortunately she was very good-natured, and extremely susceptible to kind words. "So Ally" managed her without the least trouble in life, when she followed her own heart in the matter, and did not allow herself to be too much guided by Elder Simon Bedford, who had long regarded Viney as a "brand."

"De trouble is, So Ally," complained Viney one day, "you ain't never willing for me ter have no fun."

"What you call fun, child?" said Ally, good-humoredly, resting one hand on her knee. Ally was ten years Viney's senior, "an' ten years ahead of her in looks," her admirers declared. The truth is, the sisters were exactly alike, except that for the last ten years one had been growing tall and the other broad—very broad.

"Well, parden an' parties an' dances?"

"Dance! I. Now see here, Viney, de'st one thing you kin suppose yo' will do, an' dat is, dis: When de devil sees a sinner co-dancing, he is glad to let 'em—most of 'em—'an' he keeps rattling in de light-wood knots ter make 'em feel double-bottomed, fer 'em."

"Dance! 'bout dat, but I does know dat you ain't willin' for me ter hab de joys or life."

"You'll arter know dem joys, Viney, till you is a worker in de vineyard or de Lord; but if it's gawdy about you're hankerin' arter, I'm sure we have enough o' dat for satisfy a corner."

"Yes, baptizin' an' festerin'."

"Well, baptizin' is a very jess occasion, an' festerin' is imposin' to de soul, however dey hanker de festerin'. An' den look at de tea parties we is invited to attend wid our presence an' for ter eat chicken pie, hot drink coffee, an' 'raisin de Lord."

"Pears like you don't have no interestin' folks at yo' 'amblage. Now of you would jus' sprinkle in a few young 'uns, like—like—"

"Like Jack Chaney, ma? he yo're trile' ter say," said Ally, severely.

"Viney blushed, and Ally knew she blushed, though no sign was visible through her dusky skin. She hung her head low, and dug her toes into the ground, but finally, plucking up heart of grace:

"S'posin' I did mean Jack Chaney? I guess you kin cross many a waggin' trail, widout meanin' anythin' any fater-spoken dan him. Now, So Ally, dat gran' quilts o' yo' a, why don't you give Jack a levin'?"

"He can't dacten my do'," said Ally, solemnly. "For what does de hymn say?"

"'Bout is de man—"

(Continued on page 34.)



"THE 'BROTHERS' ASSISTED IN THE QUILTING."

Figure 2.8 From an 1883 edition of *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, a sketch entitled "The Brothers Assisted in the Quilting," makes fun of men attempting to thread their needles. This cartoon shows people's social and comical opinion on the African American tradition in the nineteenth century, Journal of *Harper's Weekly Magazine*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., in Barbara Brackman, *Facts & Fabrications: Unraveling the History of Quilts and Slavery* (Lafayette, CA: C & T Pub., 2006), 14-16.



Figure 2.9 Detail from an 1883 edition of *Harper's Magazine*, a sketch entitled "The Brothers Assisted in the Quilting," makes fun of men attempting to thread their needles, *Journal of Harper's Weekly Magazine*, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., in Barbara Brackman, *Facts & Fabrications: Unraveling the History of Quilts and Slavery* (Lafayette, CA: C & T Pub., 2006), 14-16.



Figure 3.1 Harriet Powers (1837-1911), Athens, Georgia, ca. 1897. Photograph includes Harriet Powers in fancy dress, ceremonial apron, decorated with applied symbols, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts, in in Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 84.



Figure 3.2 Bible Textile, Harriet Powers, Athens, Georgia, ca. 1886, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, [http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_556462](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556462).



Figure 3.3 Bible Textile, Harriet Powers, Athens, Georgia, ca. 1896, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts; Gift of Maxine Karolik in 1964, accessed February 16, 2017, [http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_556462](http://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_556462).



Figure 3.4 Women of Gee's Bend quilting, ca. 1937, Photo by Arthur Rothstein, Jorene Pettway shown at her sewing machine, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.soulsgrounddeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>.



Figure 3.5 Women of Gee's Bend, note the quilted bedding, ca. 1937, Photo by Arthur Rothstein, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.soulsgrounddeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>.



Figure 3.6 Women of Gee's Bend quilting, Boykin, Alabama, c. 2009, Photo by Carol M. Highsmith, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.soulsgrowndeeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>.



Figure 3.7 Women of Gee's Bend quilting, Boykin, Alabama, c. 2009, Photo by Carol M. Highsmith, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.soulsgrowndeeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>.



Figure 3.8 Women of Gee's Bend quilting, Boykin, Alabama, c. 2009, Photo by Carol M. Highsmith, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.soulsgrowndeeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>.



Figure 3.9 Gee's Bend Quilting, Gee's Bend, Alabama, c. 2000, Photographic collection of Gee's Bend and the Souls Grown Deep Foundation, Boykin, Alabama, accessed February 16, 2017, <http://www.soulsgrowndeeep.org/gees-bend-quiltmakers>.