

KINSHIP AND QUILTING: AN EXAMINATION OF AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN TRADITION

By
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Throughout our history, W.E.B. Du Bois observed that blacks have been characterized by ethnic dualism. "It is a peculiar sensation; this double-consciousness, this peculiar sensation; this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity."¹

In order to understand the historical experience of the multifaceted lives of African-American women, it is necessary to integrate the folk culture into the existing body of knowledge of black women. This work examines the inventiveness of African-American women in the decorative art of quilting. It acknowledges the diverse role of these women in the history of quilting in America. This discussion of kinship and quilting broadens our perspective of African-American history and quilting and gives new meaning to an old tradition.

Quilts can be used as resources in reconstructing the experiences of African-American women. They provide a record of their cultural and political past. They are important art forms. Yet, until recently, the historical contributions of African-American women to the craft were virtually dismissed.

African-American women, whose voices are largely unknown, have often unconsciously created their own lives and are the voices of authority on their experiences. The voices of black women are stitched within their quilts. Historians, such as Elsa Barkley Brown and Bettina Aptheker have analyzed everyday issues of women's lives. Aptheker believes that women's culture, quilts, poems, stories, and paintings provide a clear interpretation of their actions and beliefs on their terms.² Brown raised the question of how to discuss the lives of African-American women whose experiences are peripheral to the center. She used African-American women's quilting as a cultural guide.³

Artists, such as Alice Walker, who have quilting in their family backgrounds have enlightened us with insights through their novels.⁴ In Margaret Walker's novel *Jubilee*, Innis Brown responding to his wife, Vry, stated, "slaves where was I done everything. Just like you can make candles and soap and feather beds, rag rugs, and quilts, and spin and weave and sew, and cooking was your main job, I learned to do a lots of things 'sides working in the fields."⁵ Later, Vry's skills as a midwife led

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her white neighbors in a small Alabama town to defy race traditions and organize a house raising and quilting bee.⁶

Other scholars have also researched the quiltmaking traditions of African-American women and raised pertinent questions regarding the validity and worth of their contributions.⁷ But Eugene Genovese, Herbert Gutman, and John Blassingame who challenged the notion that slavery decimated slave culture, did not focus on African-American women.⁸

Distorted views of African-American made quilts began during slavery. Thereafter, it was difficult to document slave made quilts. The anthropologist, Gladys-Marie Fry, uncovered several myths pertaining to slave made quilts, namely, that they were "crudely made; had large uneven stitches; were from an inferior grade of cotton; had a make-do lining; or had cotton seed in the lining."⁹ Fry researched the quilting traditions of African-American women and found reliable sources which substantiate the creative abilities and skills of these women.

The myths, however, placed African-American women outside mainstream American quilting traditions. They imply that black women and men lacked aesthetic talents and were engaged primarily in field work. It was assumed that slave women merely assisted their mistresses in sewing and quilting. Contrarily, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese contends that slave women did most of the sewing and weaving on the largest plantations.¹⁰

African-Americans are as diverse as any group in American society and, yet, they share elements of a common cultural heritage. Among the factors that have shaped the cultural traditions of black Americans are the African heritage, the slave experience, and systematic segregation and discrimination. Culture in the creative sense refers to art, literature, music, drama, dance, language, and crafts.¹¹ African survivals have been affirmed in the folk arts and crafts as well as in the other aspects of African-American culture.¹² However, the African influence in the folk art of quilting is less familiar. Focusing on the African roots of African-American quiltmaking was merely a starting point and a means of developing awareness of the black experience in quilting.¹³

Kinship networks for African-American women have existed across generations among slave women, tenant farm wives, middle class women, and senior citizens, thus, empowering them with self-help and self-esteem. Kin and family arrangements of enslaved Africans emerged from the social and cultural processes which transformed them into African-Americans. Through kinship they stabilized family relationships. Kinship networks formed the foundation for a new African-American culture. The slave community functioned as an extended kinship system.¹⁴ Black women carried these concepts of mutual assistance with them from bondage to freedom.

For African-American women, the basis of family structure and cooperation was an extended family of kinship ties, blood relations and non-kin as well. Female networks promoted self-reliance and self-help. They sustained hope and provided survival strategies. Historian Deborah Gray White, for example, found that female slaves were sustained by their group activities.¹⁵

Kinship among slave women is clearly seen in the narratives of former slaves. These "oral historians" articulated their own views of slavery, freedom, and the

society they knew. Yet it must be remembered that these reminiscences were collected by the WPA Federal Writers Project several decades after slavery.

Quilting parties or "frolics" were the slaves' equivalent of a quilting bee. These traditional gender based activities were organized by a kinship of women. According to Ferrero in *Hearts and Hands*, quilting bees functioned for black and white women "as invaluable agents of cultural cohesion and group identity."¹⁶ Female slaves would get together in the evenings or on Saturday afternoons to spin, weave, and sew. A former slave recalled that her mother worked in the field all day and pieced quilts all night.¹⁷

African-American women recycled cloth as a means of survival. They designed their quilts to accommodate the scraps and rags which were available to them. Slave women exchanged old blankets and thick cloth among themselves. They used these and anything they could get their hands on to piece quilts.

Quiltings were both labor and a leisure activity. Slaves created their own culture or way of life as a means of liberating themselves from an oppressive environment. Quilting, accompanied by eating, story telling, games, and singing, offered the slaves unique opportunities to socialize without supervision.¹⁸ Annie Boyd remembered that she used to have a "big time" "quilting, combining quilting, eating dinner and supper, and followed by a dance at night."¹⁹ "It was sho a time when dey had one of them quilting on the plantation. Didn't do nothin but quilt en dance en play some sort of somethin' after they would get done. . . ."²⁰ Frances Willingham, a former slave in Athens, Georgia, stated that her master let them have "cornshuckin's, cornshellin's, cotton pickin's, and quiltin's."²¹

The plantation women constituted a network of quilters, which was supported by their husbands and children. Georgia Telfair's memory of her antebellum experiences provided a transition between the slave world and post-Civil War freedom. She attended the local Baptist church, which was founded in a brush arbor in 1867. Inadvertently, her testimony provided a link between the slave quilters and senior citizen quilters in the same church community of my family. Georgia found quilting to be a lot of fun when two or three families had a quilting together. She mentioned "passing the 'toddy' around; some of the folks would be cooking while the others were quilting."²²

Black and white women in the North used their quilting skills to support moral, political, and reform issues. They held fairs and bazaars to raise funds for the Underground Railroad, anti-slavery newspapers, and female anti-slavery societies. Handmade quilts were popular items at fundraising events for Female Anti-Slavery Societies.²³ African-American women joined interracial organizations or formed their own separate societies. Black women led the way in organizing the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, Massachusetts in 1832. Charlotte Forten, the granddaughter of the abolitionist James Forten, joined the Salem "females of color," which had become racially mixed by 1855. Among the twenty women who met and established the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society were Sarah Mapps Douglass, the Quaker principal of the Institute for Colored Youth, Margaretta and Sarah Forten, and Harriet Forten Purvis, the wife of the black abolitionist leader Robert Purvis. Harriet, Margaretta, and Sarah Forten, the daughters of the wealthy

Philadelphia sailmaker, James Forten, were devoted to philanthropy and reform causes.²⁴

Susan Paul, an abolitionist and advocate of women's rights, frequently served as superintendent of one of the tables during the annual Ladies' Fairs sponsored by the Boston Anti-Slavery Society. She was the daughter of the Reverend Thomas Paul, pastor of the Joy Street Church, which was the only refuge for the American Anti-Slavery Society in Boston. After her father's death, Susan developed a sustaining friendship with prominent whites in the anti-slavery movement as she attempted to provide for her family on her small income as a seamstress and teacher.

Henrietta Green Regulus Ray, a New York City urban reformer in the 1820s and 1830s, and other black women held fundraisers to benefit the Vigilance Committee. Her husband, Charles Ray, was head of the Committee and pastor of the Bethesda Congregational Church.²⁵ The annual fairs were held at the Broadway Tabernacle, a white church which resisted the Fugitive Slave Law and helped slaves to freedom through the Underground Railroad.

The United States Sanitary Commission organized fairs to raise funds and provided medical care and supplies for the Union Army. The government officially authorized a Sanitary Commission, based on the work that women were already engaged in through local societies, sewing circles, relief associations, and other groups. Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin, a visitor for Boston's Associated Charities and a founder of black women's clubs, was a member of the Sanitary Commission.²⁶ The commission provided 250,000 quilts and comforters for the Union soldiers.²⁷

African-American women contributed individually as well as collectively to quiltmaking in America. The best documentation of quilts made by black women in the nineteenth century comes from Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley (1818-1907) and Harriet Powers (1837-1911). Quiltmaking or craft history, however, falls outside the traditional or mainstream disciplines. In the late 1960s, concurrent with civil rights, the creation of Black Studies, and student protests, courses in women's literature and history were taught on college campuses. As Black Studies and Women's Studies became established disciplines, quilt histories and journals began to acknowledge the work of Keckley and Powers.

A skilled craft artist could make quilts and sell them to purchase her freedom. Lizzie Hobbs Keckley, the daughter of Agnes Hobbs, a seamstress on the Burwell Plantation, was born in Dinwiddie County, Virginia. She was sold at the age of 14 and later taken to St. Louis, Missouri. With her sewing she "kept bread in the mouths" of seventeen persons, including her master, for over two years. Using her elaborately embroidered quilts as collateral in obtaining her freedom, Lizzie borrowed \$1200 from her white patrons in St. Louis, which she needed to free herself and her son from slavery.²⁸

Prior to 1860, Keckley moved to Washington, D.C. and used her sewing skills to provide a link to Mary Todd Lincoln and Congressional wives. She became the friend, modiste, and traveling companion of Mrs. Lincoln. Around 1870 Elizabeth Keckley made the "Liberty" Medallion Quilt, using scraps of silk from the gowns she made for Mrs. Lincoln. Keckley spent her last years at Wilberforce University as a sewing instructor and director of Domestic Art.²⁹ Although the work of her students was exhibited in the Liberal Arts Building at the World's Fair in Chicago

in 1893, American blacks, as a group, were not allowed to participate in the international exposition. Ida B. Wells led a protest against the exclusion of blacks.³⁰

The work of Harriet Powers, which has been documented by Gladys-Marie Fry, enables us to observe the creativity of an individual African-American woman. The beauty and historic value of Powers's quilts were perceived first, by an art professor at the Lucy Cobb School for Women in Athens, Georgia and, later, by wives of the interracial faculty at Atlanta University. This incredible coincidence and valuable kinship led to the preservation of the quilts.³¹

Oneita Virginia [Jennie] Smith was attracted to the quilt in 1886 when Harriet exhibited it at a Cotton Fair in Athens. However, she did not succeed in buying it until 1891, after the Powers family had fallen into hard times. The Bible quilt was exhibited at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition in 1895.³²

The Atlanta University faculty wives commissioned a second Bible quilt in 1898. They presented the quilt to the Reverend Charles Cuthbert Hall (1852-1908), a white trustee of the university from 1895 to 1908. A native New Yorker, he was president of the Union Theological Seminary.³³ Like the early presidents of Atlanta University, Edmund Asa Ware, Horace Bumstead, and Edward T. Ware, Dr. Hall was an exemplar of liberal evangelism.³⁴ Hall, Bumstead, and the Wares were active in educational and reform causes for the advancement of blacks. Gertrude Ware, the sister of Edward Ware, was the first Supervisor of Kindergarten Work in the Oglethorpe Practice School, a department of the teacher training program at Atlanta University.³⁵ The Powers's quilt was inherited by Hall's son, the Reverend Basil Hall. The unusual shape of the quilt leads to the conclusion that it might have served a visual purpose as a wall hanging.³⁶

The two surviving quilts of Harriet Powers are narrative in tradition, depicting oral history, including biblical stories, local legends and astronomical or meteorological phenomena. Powers memorized stories from church sermons and folk history and transferred these to her quilts.³⁷ Evidence of her residence in black communities within close proximity to local churches, mutual benefit and burial societies corroborates my belief that she was a deeply religious woman of Christian faith.³⁸

The narrative quilts are a distinct American art form. Yet, Harriet Powers's use of applied techniques is rooted in African culture. Applied African textiles were used to record political and family histories. Historically, textiles in Africa were used as grave cloths, armor, currency, wall hangings, banners, and for ritual and ceremonial use.³⁹ Powers's machine made applied cotton quilts are similar in design and construction to the tapestries of West Africa.

Apparently, Harriet Powers was able to work creatively in the American tradition while retaining elements from her African heritage. Black women, as slaves and former slaves, were split between two cultures. Harriet Powers, undoubtedly, was influenced by the "two-ness" of the culture in which she lived.⁴⁰ Although it is impossible to categorize all quilts made by women who happen be of African-American heritage in a homogeneous grouping, we cannot completely deny the existence of a "black aesthetic," at least for some women. An individual does not necessarily know the origins of all the elements of the culture in order to practice it. As we conceptualize the diversity of quilts and quilters, we must broaden our vision to include the dual cultural heritage of African-Americans.

Historically, we can assess the quilting of African-Americans in terms of both a leisure time activity and economically as a means of income. As the latter decades of the nineteenth century progressed, economic prosperity eluded many Americans. A kinship of sharing and mutual cooperation developed across lines of race and class. Black and white sharecroppers were caught in a web of humiliation and oppression. Sharecropping, however, enabled black women to alternate quilting seasonally with farmwork.⁴¹ The social environment was the most significant aspect of the sharecroppers' lives. Crossing traditional racial barriers, black and white women sometimes joined in situations that enhanced mutual respect and appreciation. African-American tenant farm wives made quilts "on half."⁴² Thus, in exchange for scraps of cloth, they pieced two quilts, one for themselves and one for their neighbors.

As debts increased for farmers, black women used their creative ability to "make do" with whatever they had. Dresses were made from flour and feed sacks and the leftover scraps were saved for piecing quilts. Some women bartered for cloth scraps at the local store, while others ordered scrap bundles from the Sears and Roebuck catalogue.

Quilting spread through intergenerational networks among working class African-American women. It was a communal activity and a source of networking for rural women in farming areas. Slave women went from cabin to cabin to help each other make bedcovers for the winter. Post-Civil War rural black women went from home to home to make utilitarian quilts.⁴³ Near the turn of the century, young and old Sea Island women still gathered together for festivities of sewing, talking, and eating.⁴⁴

Quilting provided a sense of accomplishment and identity for black quilters who were mainly tenant farm wives or domestics. It enhanced their psychological and physical will to survive. My ties of kinship and quilting go back to my grandmother. Ironically, she was a member of the same Baptist church which Georgia Telfair had attended. My grandmother quilted with her community club, which met on Thursday or Saturday afternoons at individual homes. The meetings opened with prayer and Bible readings. In addition to quilting, topics of conversation included sewing, childcare, gardening, cooking, and canning. My grandmother networked with quilters in the church and with community women whom she served for thirty years as a midwife.⁴⁵ These were intended to be social occasions, but "idle hands were considered to be the devil's workshop." The deacons in the church, including my grandfather who farmed "on half", supported the network which provided their wives with constructive work, religion, and the opportunity to socialize. The men made two kinds of quilting frames out of planks [of oak]. A frame which hung from pegs in the ceiling and was pulled up at night or one which stood on the floor, in the "front room" or guest bedroom.⁴⁶

Booker T. Washington, head of Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, developed a strategy of self-help, thrift, and the acquisition of property. In 1895, he delivered an address at the opening of the Atlanta Cotton States International Exposition. In remarks that gained approval from Southerners and Northern philanthropists, he praised the economic progress of blacks and the vocational and technical skills he felt were necessary for blacks to survive. Yet, he seemed to dismiss quilting as

insignificant in his statement that blacks had progressed beyond ownership of "a few quilts, pumpkins, and chickens."⁴⁷ In the process, Washington may have helped to perpetuate the myth that quilting by black women was not an important tradition in the African-American heritage.

Significantly, black women in clubs and organizations held the first Congress of Colored Women during the Atlanta Exposition. They endorsed the exhibitions, which included dressmaking, fine needle work, and a plush log cabin quilt. They were impressed by a "bible quilt" made by an elderly woman [Harriet Powers], who could not read. However, she had heard the Bible stories, such as Jacob's dream, Cain killing Abel, the baptism of Christ, and these were represented in her quilt.⁴⁸ Black club women grasped the intrinsic value of the quilt and recognized its importance as a cultural artifact. They formed a spiritual kinship with Harriet Powers.

Middle class African-American women, including Washington's wife Margaret, incorporated quilting into their program of "uplifting and improving" women and girls in sharecropping families. Margaret Washington, Cornelia Bowen, and Janie Porter Barrett are examples of African-American women who established schools and outreach programs in rural communities.⁴⁹ The settlements were supported by donations from Northern friends.

Locust Street Social Settlement, established by Janie Porter Barrett, to help girls and women to become good homemakers, and to improve the social life of the community. Located in Hampton, Virginia, it maintained a library, playground, classes in cooking, sewing, quilting, embroidery, home gardening, clubs for women.⁵⁰

Barrett, a graduate of Hampton Institute and founder of the Locust Street Settlement, later assumed leadership of the Virginia Industrial School. Cornelia Bowen graduated from Tuskegee Institute in 1885 and began teaching at the Mount Meigs School three years later.⁵¹ Margaret Washington, dean and director of Girls Industries, established the Elizabeth Russell Settlement near Tuskegee Institute.⁵² She was elected president of the National Federation of Afro-American Women in 1895.

The following year, in 1896, the National Association of Colored Women was organized. The NACW motto, "Lifting As We Climb" set the objectives of the organization. Middle class women established kinship ties with their working class sisters. As educators, club organizers, and church leaders, they advocated self-reliance and character building. The acculturation process required the rural women to acquire mainstream American values and practices.

Educated black women in church and club work had enough leisure time to make quilts for their homes and for charitable purposes. Although some women worked as school teachers or in other professional occupations, most did not labor as menial wage earners to provide for their families. They were, therefore, active in literary societies, women's clubs, church societies, civic groups, and involved in interracial cooperation. Black women in Memphis, for example, working in the Baptist Home Mission, made a fancy quilt as a missionary contribution and sent it to white women in the North.⁵³

During the Great Migration, quilting traditions spread from the South to the North as thousands of blacks sought employment in industrial areas. It began in

1915 and continued until 1919, but during the peak years, 1916-1918, approximately 400,000 blacks left the South.⁵⁴ African-American migrants brought their cultural patterns in speech, music, and the folk arts from the South to urban regions of the North and West.⁵⁵ The blending and transformation of Southern culture to metropolitan areas were shaped by a heritage of African-American traditions and customs. After World War II, quilting receded as African-American women gained employment in better paying jobs and began buying manufactured bed linens.

The Freedom Quilting Bee was the first organized group to rescue quilting and bring this art form back to life. In the 1960s, quilting networks reappeared as an economic force in black communities. Local women could now make money from an activity that they had done in the past for personal and social reasons.

The history of the Freedom Quilting Bee, which began in Wilcox County, Alabama in 1966, links quilting to the Civil Rights Movement. Wilcox was one of two Alabama counties which did not have any registered black voters. The women who organized the Quilting Bee were activists in the local struggle for civil rights. They were involved in events, in particular, from January 1965 when Martin Luther King announced "a march on the ballot boxes" to the historic demonstrations from Selma to Montgomery in March the same year.⁵⁶

A close kinship of women, including Estelle Witherspoon, launched an economic cooperative that has lasted for nearly three decades. The Freedom Quilting Bee provided funds and a support network for rural women in one of the most economically depressed areas in the country. In providing work for the women, the cooperative was preceded only by the church in importance to the black community. It began with 150 quilters from the towns of Gee's Bend, Alberta, Possum Bend, and nearby areas.⁵⁷ Witherspoon related, "My whole idea in establishing the cooperative was to do something to uplift our living standards. The women wanted to help themselves."⁵⁸ Her husband, Eugene, gave up sharecropping to assist as a driver for the cooperative.

Located about 40 miles from Selma, the Freedom Quilting Bee achieved national recognition using designs from a 140-year-old quilting tradition. The women in the Quilting Bee learned to quilt from their mothers and their grandmothers. Witherspoon recalled that her mother "could make any quilt that she saw and those that she didn't see."

The demands of commercialism eventually forced the quilters to make mainstream quilts. In order to be marketable, their quilts had to be precise, uniform in size, and made with materials that did not shrink or fade. Their quilts were in demand by buyers from Bloomingdale's, Saks Fifth Avenue, Lord and Taylor, and specialty shops, such as the Bear's Paw near Syracuse, New York.⁵⁹ The handmade quilts in popular and traditional patterns were now personalized with their signatures rather than individual designs. The quilts of the Freedom Quilting Bee ushered in the "patchwork look" of the 1960s.

The Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Movement laid the foundation for a new phase in African-American history and gender identity. Civil Rights activists challenged unjust laws, and women, likewise, demanded new perceptions of gender and broader opportunities. A gender perspective of black women's lives related to

work, family, and support networks will enable us to restore a history of women that has been omitted or distorted.

Kinship ties sometimes reached beyond race and class as blacks struggled for survival. African-American women were motivated by kinship across generations. Mutual cooperation and concern are aspects of the tradition of self-help and self-reliance in the Black Experience.⁶⁰ Contemporary quilt groups serve social, economic, and political purposes as well as outlets for sewing and creative expression.

This study is an attempt to emphasize the relevance of quilts to social and intellectual history. It permits us to focus on the lives and creativity of working class women, as persons with minds and voices. It explores the history of leisure for middle class women, and especially working class women whom we know very little about. While the intrinsic qualities of quilts have diminished, historical and contemporary quilts made by African-American women are now acknowledged as visual art. They are recognized for their social, historical, and artistic value. It is important, however, to judge each quilt differently, based upon individual distinctions of the quilt and quiltmaker rather than preconceived notions of an entire group. Hence, this challenges scholars to reconsider the contributions of black women to American society. It demands new categories of analyses and new kinds of sources to expand the scope of the history of African-Americans to include their craft traditions.

NOTES

¹ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks* (1903: New York, 1989).

² Bettina Aptheker, *Tapestries of Life, Women's Work, Women's Consciousness and the Meaning of Daily Experiences* (Amherst, Massachusetts, 1989).

³ Elsa Barkley Brown, "African-American Women's Quilting: A Frame work for Conceptualizing and Teaching African-American Women's History," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 14, No. 4 (Summer 1989), 921-929.

⁴ Alice Walker, "Everyday Use," *In Love and Trouble: Stories of Black Women* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1973), 47-59. Walker's activism in the civil rights and women's movement and her background in the tenant-farm community of Eatonton, Georgia has made her keenly sensitive to the struggles of black women.

⁵ Margaret Walker, *Jubilee* (New York, 1966), 278.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 367.

⁷ Cuesta Benberry is a scholar and researcher of the American background of African-American made quilts. See, Benberry's article, "Woven Into History," *American Visions*, 8, No. 6 (December/January 1994), 14-18.

⁸ See, Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1972). Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976). John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-bellum South* (New York, 1979).

⁹ Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched From The Soul: Slave Quilts From the Ante-Bellum South* (New York, 1990), 6.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household, Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 120.

¹¹ In his book, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness, Afro-American Thought From Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1977), Lawrence Levine concluded that in their musical, verbal, and artistic expressions, blacks borrowed from all available sources, but the final product was their own. The debate regarding the extent of African survivals is long and expansive. See, Carter G. Woodson, *The African*

Past Outlined (Washington, D.C., 1939); Melville Herskovitz, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston, 1958). More recently Mary Berry and John Blassingame contend that Africa and the slavery experience were important influences in shaping black culture, in *Long Memory: The Black Experience in America* (New York, 1982).

¹² See, Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and African-American Art and Philosophy* (New York, 1983).

¹³ Maude Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols: African Images In African-American Quilts* (New York, 1983).

¹⁴ Herbert Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750-1925* (New York, 1976), 343.

¹⁵ Deborah Gray White, "The Female Slave Network," in *Ar'n't I A Woman? Female Slaves In the Plantation South* (New York, 1985), 119-141.

¹⁶ Pat Ferrero, Elaine Hedges, and Julie Silber, *Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women and Quilts on American Society* (San Francisco, 1987), 48.

¹⁷ Benjamin A Boykin, ed., *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Chicago, 1945), 180-190.

¹⁸ See, John Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Ante-bellum South* (New York, 1979).

¹⁹ George Rawick, ed., *The American Slave: A Composite Autobiography*, 19 (Westport, CT, 1972) Kentucky Narratives, 7 (35), 62.

²⁰ South Carolina Narratives, 3 (3), 244. Sallie Paul was born in 1858 in Marion, S.C.

²¹ Georgia Narratives, 13 (7), 158.

²² Georgia Narratives, 4 (4), 6. Georgia Telfair's family attended church in a brush arbor [shelter] which became the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church. She was born in 1864. Georgia walked several miles each day to attend the Knox School, a church affiliated institution which preceded public schools in Athens.

²³ Cuesta Benberry, "A Quilt Research Surprise," *Quilter's Newsletter* (February 1980), 34-35.

²⁴ Ray Allen Billington, *The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten* (New York: Norton, 1953). Also, Julie Winch, "Philadelphia and the Other Underground Railroad," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 111 (January 1987), 5-6.

²⁵ See, Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York, 1969).

²⁶ Floris Barnett Cash, "Josephine St. Pierre Ruffin," in *Notable Black American Women*, ed., Jessie Carney Smith (Detroit: Gale Research Inc., 1992), 961-966.

²⁷ Virginia Gunn, "Quilts for Union Soldiers in the Civil War," *Uncoverings*, 6 (San Francisco, 1986), 95-121.

²⁸ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes: Thirty Years A Slave and Four Years in the White House* (1868; rpt., Salem, New Hampshire, 1989), 63.

²⁹ Hallie Q. Brown, *Homespun Heroines and Other Women of Distinction* (1926; rpt., New York, 1988).

³⁰ Ida B. Wells, Frederick Douglass, Ferdinand Barnett, and I. Garland Penn, *The Reason Why the Colored American Is Not in the World's Columbian Exposition* (Chicago, 1893; Moorland-Spingarn Collection, Howard University Library). Basically, blacks wanted representation without discrimination. A compromise allowed extremely limited participation, including needlework and drawings from New York and Philadelphia in the Women's Building. Wilberforce University, Atlanta University, and Hampton Institute were represented in other parts of the exposition. See, Elliott Rudwick and August Meier, "Black Man in the 'White City': Negroes and the Columbian Exposition, 1893," *Phylon* 26, No. 4 (1965), 354-361.

³¹ Gladys-Marie Fry, "Harriet Powers: Portrait of a Black Quilter," (Tucker, GA: Georgia Council for the Arts, 1976), 16-23. The Bible Quilt made by Harriet Powers in 1886 was donated to the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. and the 1898 Bible Quilt was acquired by the Boston Museum of Fine Arts.

³² The students of the Lucy Cobb School exhibited fine arts, needlework, and antique furniture in the Woman's Building. Among the industrial work presented to the public by the Atlanta University students were wood and iron works, mechanical drawings, and products of the sewing class; I. Garland Penn was head of the Negro Building. For a listing of the participating black colleges and universities, see, *The*

Official Catalogue of the Cotton States International Exposition, September 18-December 31, 1895 (Atlanta, 1895).

³⁸ Robert T. Handy, *A History of Union Theological Seminary in New York* (New York, 1987).

³⁴ For information about Hall's service to Atlanta University and a notice of his death, see, "Dr. Charles Cuthbert Hall," *The Bulletin of Atlanta University*, April 1908. Clarence A. Bacote, *The Story of Atlanta University: A Century of Service, 1865-1965* (Atlanta, 1969). Edmund Asa Ware died in 1885. Horace Bumstead assumed the presidency and was later active in the NAACP. George Towns, "Horace Bumstead, Atlanta University President (1888-1907)," *Phylon* 9, No. 3 (1948), 109-114.

³⁵ "Our New Teachers," *The Bulletin of Atlanta University*, October 1904.

³⁶ The quilt made by Powers in 1898 was an elongated rectangular cloth approximately 105¼ x 67½ inches. The use of the Powers's quilt as a wall hanging rather than bed covering, if true, underscores the assumption that some African-American quilt designs were influenced by African textile techniques and cultural traditions.

³⁷ Marie Jeanne Adams, "The Harriet Powers Pictorial Quilts," *Black Arts* 3, No. 4 (1979), 12-28.

³⁸ Between 1870 and 1911, Harriet Powers and her family lived in Clark County, Georgia in the black communities of Sandy Creek and Winterville. Among the local churches were the Nimmo African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Shilow and New Grove Baptist Churches. The New Grove Church, founded in 1871, supported a "lodge" in which members invested small amounts to assist primarily with burial expenses. The Mutual Benefit Society was organized by Judia C. Jackson [Harris] in her rural settlement work to assist farmers in buying homes and in building a community school. Jackson-Harris graduated from Atlanta University in 1894, taught at Lucy Laney's Haines Institute, and established an industrial training school five miles outside of Athens. The institution was located on the grounds of an annual agricultural fair to which crowds from Clark and the neighboring counties came to exhibit canned goods, livestock, quilting, and other farm goods. See, "Judia C. Jackson," *The Bulletin of Atlanta University*, November 1904.

³⁹ See, Christopher Spring, *African Textiles* (New York: Crescent Books, 1989). Spring is the Curator of the African Collection, Museum of Mankind, in London, England. His oversize book is a volume of the poster art series.

⁴⁰ Du Bois eventually concluded that blacks did not have to choose, they were destined to be American. W.E.B. Du Bois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folks*.

⁴¹ Jacqueline Jones, "Freed Women? The Civil War and Reconstruction," in *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York, 1985), 44-78.

⁴² Interview with Ossie Mae Cash (1913-), August 1991, a seamstress and quilter in Oconee County, Georgia and the daughter of quilter Ada Cook Owens (1891-1975).

⁴³ Interview with Betty and Howard Stroud, August 1993; interview with Venida Barnett Tidwell, January 1994. In Oglethorpe County, Georgia, Mary Barnett (?-1937) and Hampton Barnett (?-1935), raised 7 children while sharecropping on a farm. Mary sat by lamplight during the winter months after her chores were done and sewed quilt pieces together. The myriad of cotton fabrics came from work clothing of the period. When the tops were completed, the quilting was done with other family members and friends in house to house [quilting bees].

⁴⁴ Jones, *Labor of Love*, 99-102.

⁴⁵ Daisy Stroud (1891-1981) quilted with the women's community club of the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church which was founded in 1869 in Clark County. She was the oldest of 17 and the mother of 6 children.

⁴⁶ Interview of senior citizens' club at Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, including quilter Hattie Lou Hunter (1908-1992). Among the quilt designs recalled by the women were *Step Around the Mountain*, *Nine Patch*, *Gentleman's Bowtie*, *Monkey Wrench*, *Lone Star*, *Yo*, *Crow's Feet*, *Broken Star*, and *Butter Churn*.

⁴⁷ See, Booker T. Washington, *Up From Slavery* (1900; New York, 1970). There were 14 buildings on the exposition grounds, including the Negro Building and the Woman's Building.

⁴⁸ Powers apparently aged beyond her years, perhaps due to hard work and poverty. Arrangements were made for several National Negro Congresses, including the Women's Congress, to be held within a period of ten days in November and December. See, "The Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition, September 18-December 31, 1895," *The Bulletin of Atlanta University*, No. 65 (May 1895), 3.

⁴⁹ Ossie Mae Cash learned quilting techniques in a oneroom schoolhouse at the Mt. Sinai Baptist Church and at a boarding school founded in 1881 by the Jeruel Baptist Association in Clark County. Her most difficult design was the *Yo Quilt*. See, "Jeruel Academy," *Spelman Messenger*, May 1901.

⁵⁰ Janie Porter Barrett, "Negro Women's Clubs and the Community," *Southern Workman*, (January, 1910), 33-34.

⁵¹ Cornelia Bowen, "A Woman's Work," in *Tuskegee and Its People*, ed. Booker T. Washington, 211-18.

⁵² Mary Murray Washington, "The Social Improvement of the Plantation Women," *Voice of the Negro* I (July 1904) 288-90.

⁵³ See, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Woman's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, 1993).

⁵⁴ Carole Marks, *Farewell-We're Good and Gone: The Great Black Migration* (Bloomington, IN, 1989).

⁵⁵ William Ferris, "Introduction," in *Afro-American Folk Arts and Crafts* (Jackson, Mississippi, 1983), 4.

⁵⁶ Flip Schulke, ed., *Martin Luther King, Jr.: A Documentary . . . Montgomery to Memphis* (New York, 1976).

⁵⁷ Nancy Callahan, *The Freedom Quilting Bee* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1987), 31-44.

⁵⁸ Telephone interview with Estelle Witherspoon, May 1992.

⁵⁹ Peter Scott, "Alabama Quilting Bee Founder Is Honored," *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* (17 November 1990), sec. c, 15.

⁶⁰ Carol Stack investigated survival strategies in a modern urban black community and found a viable kinship network. The urban poor structured a core of kinsmen and non-kin who cooperated on a daily basis. See, Stack, *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community* (New York, 1974).