QUILTMAKING AND SOCIAL ORDER IN THE TENNESSEE DELTA IN THE MIDDLE 20TH CENTURY

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Teri Klassen

QUILTMAKING AND SOCIAL ORDER IN THE TENNESSEE DELTA IN THE MIDDLE 20TH CENTURY

In an area dominated by large-farm cotton agriculture, a vernacular small-farm quilt culture was established in the Tennessee Delta by the early 1900s. Its improvisation-friendly methods allowed makers to make design decisions during construction while assuring a successful outcome: a visually attractive product that kept sleepers warm, fostered mutual-aid sociability, and did not require too much time or money. Since both blacks and whites accessed these methods, I argue that improvisational expressive genres emerge as a result of particular historical conditions, of which ethnic and racial-group heritage may be one element.

I find that quiltmaking in this setting exemplified a larger class of vernacular forms that have both practical and expressive dimensions. Such forms provide the raw material by which members of a society can intensify network connections to achieve an experience of community while meeting subsistence needs. In southwestern Tennessee, expressive-subsistence activities such as quiltmaking were a widespread source of pride in small-farm identity. In this subordinate sector of plantation culture, such activities sustained a claim on the Upland South yeoman identity.

Although scholars have credited exposure to urban culture and outside activist groups with motivating the Southern rural black participation that energized the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, I argue that internal conditions of small-farm life also played a key part. Among these were the confidence derived from self-sufficiency activities and the breakdown of cross-racial-group economic interdependence as labor-intensive agriculture ended.

Quiltmaking might have disappeared as small-farm households shifted in the 1950s and 1960s to a more urban consumer-oriented lifestyle by choice and necessity. However, it survived because makers reconfigured it with new expressive meanings that met needs in their new lifestyle. These included an identity that foregrounded individuality rather than group membership, continuity with (or rejection of) the past, and family connectedness across space and generations.
# Quiltmaking and Social Order in the Tennessee Delta in the Middle 20th Century

- This motif references the red Orange Peel pattern on the quilt on page 95.

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Curriculum Vitae
Notes on Usage and Consultant Data in the Text

Quoted Vernacular Speech

In this work I quote extensively from my transcriptions of interviews, most of which were recorded by machine but a few with hand-written notes. My purposes in doing so have been to present evidence that contributes to my scholarly arguments and also to give readers more direct access to the words and views of my consultants. In line with these goals, my approach has been to reproduce excerpts from the interviews (sometimes including my voice) as accurately as I could. I agree with Elizabeth Fine that, “As folklorists our job should be to record the speech we hear as accurately as possible, not to worry about offending the taste of some literates who cling to a static view of written language” (1983:325).

However, in reviewing the nearly 400 pages that I transcribed over a period of weeks, I recognize that I sometimes automatically converted people’s grammar and pronunciations into schoolroom, and perhaps in some cases into Northern, English (for instance, rendering “‘m” as “them,” and “we was” as “we were”). I think that I became more conscious of this issue as I progressed with my task, so that later transcriptions may more exactly reflect vernacular southwestern Tennessee grammar and pronunciations. I believe that some inconsistency in this regard is tolerable here because my project does not take a performance studies approach to speech, analyzing it linguistically as an expressive genre, but rather uses it in a relatively straightforward documentarian way to access consultants’ memories and perceptions, whose meaning generally is not affected by grammar or spelling. My approach is in the spirit of that taken by Richard Bauman in his book, Story,
Performance, and Event: Contextual Studies of Oral Narrative, according to this excerpt from his “Note on the Texts:”

I am more interested here in the narratives as oral literature than as dialectological data. No words have been added or deleted..., no grammatical constructions “corrected,” and no eye-dialect introduced, but I have attempted to convey that this is a record of language in a spoken, not a written, mode and to preserve something of the quality... of the oral discourse. To this end, I have selectively employed a variety of devices, some in themselves conventions for representing oral speech in print... and some attempts to capture features of local pronunciation as employed by the speakers.... Above all, I would emphasize that no pejorative connotation of any kind is intended by the mode of presentation I have employed. [1999:x]

Adapting the above statement to the present work, I would use the term “oral history” in place of “oral literature” in the first line, and clarify that I use ellipses in several quotations to indicate that, in the interests of efficiency, I have left out words or sentences that did not add to or change the meaning.

Repeated Use of Certain Quotations

In a few cases where I quote a passage more than once, it is because the consultant’s or scholar’s statement bears on discussions in different parts of the manuscript. In such cases, I repeat the quote for the readers’ convenience rather than referring them to the first occurrence.

Use of “Community” in Place Names

In referring to some rural neighborhoods, consultants commonly followed the name of the place with the word “community,” as in “Woodlawn community” or “Holly Grove community.” Such areas often were about two miles wide and identified with particular churches, country stores, gins, or schools.
Consultant Data in the Text

When I use a consultant’s name in the text, I include in parentheses after the name her or his birth date, death date (if applicable), and racial-group identity, for instance: Opal Brack (1919-, black). The person's county of residence may be assumed to be Haywood unless I specify otherwise, for instance: Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white). If I do not know a birth or death date, I substitute a question mark. I include racial-group identity so that readers may evaluate the extent to which this facet of identity, along with age and gender, figures in cultural difference or commonality among consultants.

Consultant Citations

I use two forms of citation in referring to consultant interviews. One form references hard-copy transcriptions of digitally recorded interviews, for instance, “(1:2)”. The first number identifies an interview CD (see Appendix A, “Chronological list of consultant contacts”); the second number is the page number of the transcribed interview. A few consultants have two or three CD numbers, due to interviews that lasted more than 74 minutes (the length of a CD) or to participation in more than one recorded interview.

The second form of citation, a date, refers to written notes that I made on that day while talking to a consultant or to a letter from a consultant. I include the consultant’s initials if the person's name is not in the text. Thus, “(AB 10/13/08),” refers to notes that I made during a conversation with Anne Baird on October 13, 2008.
Ch. 1. Introduction, Literature Review, Method

Introduction

In the mid-1900s Tennessee Delta, under conditions of a large-farm-dominated cotton economy, quiltmaking thrived in the households of farm renters, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, small-farm owners, and rural w.ageworkers. Considered a necessity by cash-poor blacks and whites, it met practical needs but also was a badge of homemaker competence and a token of yeoman-like self-sufficiency, often in households that owned no land. Its aesthetic in this mixed-racial-group setting uniquely expressed small-farm values and conditions while drawing on fancy quilt styles of the mid-1800s and published quilt culture that became widely accessible in the late 1800s.

This practical representation of quiltmaking was prominent in my oral history interviews with consultants. For instance, Opal Williams Brack (1919-, black) said of her mother-in-law that, after working for a time on a quilt, “She would get short-patient. Then she would put anything together, and she’d say, ‘It’s a quilt...’ Just as long as it would cover you up” (10/18/08). And Lucille Steele Hight (1927-, white) described the labor-intensive detail work that went into making fancy quilts as “just all kind of junk,” adding, “The quilt wasn’t worth me trying to get that li-i-ittle dainty pattern to go around all that and quilt that” (21:20). A quilt’s value thus did not inhere in exacting, complex, time-consuming
needlework artistry. Rather, among those with small-farm upbringings, warmth-giving capacity was key. Valued as an affordable means of subsistence shelter in cold weather, quiltmaking was among members of this group a source of pride in homemaker competence and household self-sufficiency. As Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) told me:

> It was a duty. And if you didn’t have quilts for your family for the winter to keep them warm, then that was the equivalent of leaving your dishes unwashed or your floors not swept.... And I think that’s kind of the class that my family would have been in. They wouldn’t have bought a quilt because they would have been ashamed to have said.... “Miss So-and-so did this and I bought it from her.” [3:16]

Here she foregrounds meanings of the small-farm era under conditions of labor-intensive cotton farming: quiltmaking as a household necessity, a homemaker’s obligation to her family, and a distinctive competence of the small-farm social group.

Quiltmaking also could be a source of pride in the post-1955 modern era, when small-farm people were getting factory jobs and moving to town. But the pride was based on different meanings, as expressed by Lue Vennia Robinson’s (1922-, black) comment that she loves her quilts, “ ‘cause they’re pretty and I made ‘m myself.... I didn’t buy ‘m. That’s some I made” (7:8). Thus, makers in both periods valued the ability to make something, but in the era that Robinson references, a woman exercises that ability to meet her own social and psychological needs rather than her household’s subsistence needs; as a hobby, quiltmaking is primarily a source of individual rather than social-group identity.

A vernacular small-farm quilt culture was well established in my fieldwork area by the early 1900s. It offered a range of improvisation-friendly methods that allowed makers to make design decisions during the construction process while assuring a successful outcome: a visually attractive product that covered a bed, provided warmth, permitted
mutual-aid sociability, and did not take too much time or money to make. Since both blacks and whites accessed these methods (although some traits were differentially distributed), I argue that improvisational expressive genres emerge as a result of particular historical conditions, of which ethnic and racial-group heritage is one.

I find that quiltmaking in this setting exemplified a large class of forms held dear in folklore studies that have both practical and expressive dimensions. Such forms provide the raw material by which members of a social network (variously linked in this case by occupation, living conditions, geographic proximity, and homemaker status) can intensify network connections to achieve an experience of community. Participation in such hybrid expressive-subsistence genres thus creates social bonds and common culture while meeting subsistence needs.

In my southwestern Tennessee fieldwork area, centered on Haywood County, expressive-subsistence activities such as quiltmaking were a widespread source of pride in small-farm identity. Among members of this subordinate sector of plantation culture, such activities sustained a claim on the Upland South yeoman identity for which other areas of the state are known.

Although scholars have credited exposure to urban culture and outside activist groups with motivating the rural black participation that energized the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, I argue that internal conditions of small-farm life also played a part. Among these were the confidence derived from self-sufficiency activities such as quiltmaking and farm management, and the breakdown of cross-racial-group economic interdependence as labor-intensive cotton agriculture ended.
Quiltmaking might have died out as small-farm households shifted in the 1950s and 1960s to a more urban consumer-oriented way of life by choice and necessity, as higher cash incomes, centrally heated houses, and store-bought electric blankets erased the subsistence need for quilts and quiltmaking. However, it survived because makers reconfigured it with expressive meanings that met needs of their new living conditions. These included an identity that foregrounded individuality rather than social-group membership, continuity with or rejection of the past, and family connectedness across space and generations.

**Scholarship Bearing on the Tennessee Delta and Its Quiltmaking**

This study of mid-1900s quilting in rural southwestern Tennessee is cross-disciplinary, engaging with folklore studies, quilt studies, anthropology, social history, and art history. In social history, it offers particularistic accounts of both black and white small-farm households in a plantation region before and during the shift to capital-intensive, low-labor agriculture, consumerism, and civil rights for blacks. In quilt studies, folklore studies, and art history, it adds to the understanding of plain-quilt aesthetics and the balance between ethnic heritage and environment in expressive genres. In particular, it expands on ideas about improvisation in expressive genres by associating it with particular historical conditions. In folklore studies and anthropology, I propose a distinctive role for expressive-subsistence genres (those that serve communicative and practical purposes) in constructing cultural complexity (meaningful social spheres of activity) and stability (meeting both communicative and subsistence needs). In social history and anthropology, this work enhance understanding of social equilibrium and protest movements by
identifying aspects of social organization that allow subordinates to improvise on structure and conditions under which they protest against it. Finally, this study contributes to folklore studies and anthropology by predicting the effects of social stability or change on culture forms.

Quilt Studies Research

Since fancy and formal quilt styles had long dominated quilt history books and museum exhibits, scholars who celebrated an alternative plain-quilt aesthetic starting in the 1970s addressed a significant gap in quilt research. Several of them represented plain-style quilts as graphic art rather than as a practical response to economic contingencies. In this respect, they aligned with cultural critique paradigms of the time by elevating the work of low-income rural whites and blacks relative to what some of them viewed as the more conventional formulaic efforts of middle- and upper-class whites (Holstein 1972; Twining 1977; Vlach 1978; Freeman 1981; Wahlman 1981, 1993; Thompson 1983; Leon 1990; Beardsley et al. 2002).

Whereas quilt history scholars perceived the alternative aesthetic criteria as those of plain or utility styles (used on quilts made to provide warmth with low investment in time and materials), these counter-culture scholars attributed them to a naïve-yet-sophisticated folk sensibility or, in many cases, to an African American sensibility. Many of them, not versed in quilt studies, overlooked the contexts of maker living conditions and/or of historical quilt antecedents: the extent to which a quilt’s appearance reflected the maker’s contingent conditions and her use of vernacular and published methods and designs geared to meeting aesthetic and practical criteria within the limits of those
conditions. Scholars who saw certain plain-quilt designs as distinctively African American did not study the quilts made by whites living in the same region under similar economic conditions, apparently assuming that their work would resemble that of white middle-class northerners more than that of their small-farm black neighbors (see my in-depth analysis of the issues discussed here in Klassen 2009).

Following scholars such as folklorist John Michael Vlach and art historian Maude Southwell Wahlman, who used the term “improvisation” in describing what they perceived as an African American quilt aesthetic, folklorist Geraldine Johnson and quilt scholars Bets Ramsey and Fawn Valentine observed that some white makers also made improvisational quilts (Vlach 1978:74-75; Johnson 1982:24, 33; Ramsey 1989:22; Wahlman 1993:vii; Valentine 1995:9, 35). In the work of these scholars, the word “improvisational” seems to reference variable color schemes and vernacular methods and designs. Like the scholars who study African American quiltmaking, Johnson and Valentine associate quilt style with ethnic heritage. But they relate improvisational quiltmaking to Anglo or Scots Irish as well as African heritage, contrasting it not with white quiltmaking generally but with what they perceive as the more formal, fancy styles of German or “mainstream” Americans (Johnson 1982:13, 17, 18, 28, 33; Valentine 1995:26, 33, 35-36).

However, unlike the African American-quilt scholars, they focus on particular geographic regions, in Johnson’s case the Blue Ridge; in Valentine’s, West Virginia. Also, they view socioeconomic and, in Valentine’s case, historical conditions as aesthetic factors. Ramsey does not consider white ethnic heritage as a factor, but finds that improvisation and other traits that scholars had associated with African American quiltmaking also occur in a quilt made by a white woman in Middle Tennessee. She suggests that social interaction
between black and white makers may account for the similarities (Ramsey 1989:22). While not mentioning “improvisation” specifically, folklorist Susan Roach notes similarities between black- and white-made quilts in northern Louisiana and cites Vlach in attributing them to shared regional culture, to “living in the same area” (1986:229). In a book on slave quilts, quilt scholar Barbara Brackman says, “Time [period] and region are more important to quilt design than race or condition of servitude” (2006:15). In summary, potential cross-ethnic-group or cross-racial-group factors in quiltmaking aesthetics that these quilt scholars cite are: locale (Johnson, Roach, Ramsey, Valentine, Brackman), socioeconomic conditions (Johnson, Valentine), historical experience (Valentine), social interaction (Ramsey), and time period (Brackman).

In focusing here on quiltmakers of African, Anglo, Irish, Scots Irish, and (in a few cases) German heritage with similar living conditions in a given time period and geographic area, I am able to examine how ethnic heritage intersects with the above-listed variables. I build on the work of art critics, folklorists, art historians, and collectors who have recognized a distinctive utility-quilt aesthetic, often with a component of improvisation, and deemed it worthy of study; and on the work of quilt scholars who recognized that such an aesthetic could be understood only by studying it in the situated context of its users and of U.S. quilt history.

Folklore Studies and Anthropological Research

Rural quiltmaking in mid-1900s rural southwestern Tennessee is an example of a widely recognized class of genres that have both practical and expressive dimensions. This concept of what I refer to as “expressive-subsistence” culture emerges in discussions of
various forms in works by Bronislaw Malinowski (yam storage houses) (1984), David Guss (Yekuana Indian baskets) (1990), James Deetz (colonial-era crafts) (1977), Michael Owen Jones (chairs) (1989), Henry Glassie (Turkish traditional art) (2002), and Richard Bauman (verbal communication) (1999), among others. Such genres tend to fall into what Dorothy Noyes (2014) refers to as the “surround” category of expressive forms, those that are taken-for-granted parts of everyday surroundings. Following her association of such forms with social stability, I account for this propensity to build expressive dimensions into subsistence forms as a way that small-farm societies create meaningful social spheres of activity. Building on Noyes’ discussion of the contrast between network and community, I argue that such spheres of activity generate complex culture and realize the capacity of a social network to be experienced as a community (1995:468-469, 471). In this framework, expressive-subsistence genres serve to strengthen social stability while meeting subsistence needs.

Sociology, Anthropology, Social History

In accounting for the timing of small-farm black involvement in civil rights activities, scholars foreground the role of external forces such as exposure to urban culture and outreach by non-local activist groups (Dollard 1957; Powdemaker 1993; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1988; Davis 1965; Dittmer 1994; Sitkoff 2010; Lau 2006). I argue that internal factors rooted in the everyday experience of small-farm blacks also were crucial. These factors include: the stake that small-farm blacks had in their way of life (including some pleasure-giving spheres of expressive-subsistence activities) under and perhaps sometimes in spite of plantation-culture conditions, the confidence fostered by self-sufficient
household activities such as quilting, increased cross-racial-group economic independence as labor-intensive cotton agriculture ended, and the associated decline of personalism in cross-racial-group social relations. My finding that small-farm blacks as well as whites experienced agency, confidence, and pleasure in some realms of activity under plantation culture counters the view of some scholars that they were powerless under this socioeconomic system.

Anthropology, Folklore Studies, Social History

Synthesizing Clifford Geertz’s classic study of how social change affected an Indonesian funeral ritual with studies of cross-racial-group relations and the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. South and with the current study of southwestern Tennessee quiltmaking, I propose a four-part model of how cultural forms and systems react to social stability or change (Dollard 1957; Davis 1965; Geertz 1973; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1988; Powdermaker 1993; Dittmer 1994; Lau 2006; Axel 2009; Sitkoff 2010).

My Tennessee Delta study also builds on the work of ethnographers in these fields who have identified elements of social organization that build flexibility and a capacity for agency and negotiation of identity into a social system (Gearing 1962; Abrahams 1976; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1988; Schultz 2005; Cashman 2007; Klassen 2007). Following scholars who cast improvisation as a universal aspect of everyday life, I posit these elements as methods of improvisation that were a source of agency for small-farm blacks and whites who had subordinate positions under plantation-culture conditions in the mid-1900s (Ingold and Hallam 2007). As such, they can help account for circumstances that
allowed development of a cross-racial-group quilt culture in the Jim Crow era of racial
group-based social segregation.

Quilt Studies, Folklore Studies, Performance Studies, Ethnomusicology

Building on Gabriel Solis’s music-oriented observation that improvisation occurs in
all cultures but not in all genres, I identify historical and situational conditions that
promote the use of improvisation based on studies of diverse expressive forms (Johnson
1982; Berliner 1994; Valentine 1995; Baker-Sennett and Matusov 1997; Gunn 1997;
Pressing 1998; Glassie 2002; Solis 2009). This notion of improvisation as rooted in
historical context complicates the view of those who have associated it primarily with
ethnic identity (in quilt studies, for instance, Vlach 1978; Leon 1990; Wahlman 1993).

Folklore Studies, Ethnomusicology, Art History

Many scholars and collectors have viewed African American identity as an
overarching basis of cultural affinity or difference, for instance, Vlach (1978), Leon (1990),
and Wahlman (1993) in quilt studies; Melville J. Herskovits (1967:225) in cross-racial-
group “borrowing”; and Ingrid Monson (2009:33) in jazz. I argue that this view sometimes
distorts findings in cases where people of different racial-group identities have developed
common culture based on shared facets of identity (for instance, gender, economic group,
regional location, age group) and generations of interaction; and where people with the
same racial-group identity have cultural differences based on differences in other facets of
their identity, such as age group, regional location, economic class, and so on. In particular,
more cross-racial-group studies are needed to avoid racial identity-based essentialization in cases where an expressive genre has both white and black participation.

**Method**

The methodology of this study is geared to collecting and analyzing data that enhance the understanding of: (1) improvisation as an aspect of a social system, of expressive genres generally, and of vernacular quiltmaking in particular; (2) social stability and change in the rural U.S. South in the decades leading into the 1960s culmination of the Civil Rights Movement; and (3) the relationship between agency, structure, and culture forms under conditions of stability and change. To these ends, I adopt a historical-ethnographic approach focused on a rural South, mixed-racial-group region in a period, the 1920s to 1970s, when relative stability gave way to social change. Key primary sources are oral history interviews, consultants’ quilts, and local autobiographies and family histories.

Because black and white small-farm women were the primary social base of quiltmaking at this time and place, data come primarily from black and white women who lived in small-farm households in the focus period (Figures 1.1-1.21, pages 15-44, show consultants, their family members, and two autobiographers who grew up in the study area). The inclusion of three male consultants (two blacks from small-farm households; one white with a planter-family heritage) broadens the project’s perspective. Oral history data reflect the everyday experiences of consultants at home, in the cotton fields, and in the case of some black women, in the homes of white employers. The mid-1900s experiences of small-farm households, especially small-farm quiltmakers, are the basis of the study’s second goal of providing insights into social stability and change.
The choice of Haywood County, Tennessee, as the central location for this study resulted from a conversation that I had with a security officer at the Indianapolis Museum of Art in December 2006, when visiting the Gee’s Bend quilt exhibit. The officer, Thelma Austin, had grown up in a black quiltmaking household in rural Haywood County in the 1940s and 1950s. She remembered seeing quilts similar to those in the exhibit, which included many in an improvisational vernacular style, and said that her grandmother had sometimes quilted with a white neighbor. This evidence of a vernacular cross-racial-group quilt culture persuaded me that this area would be fertile ground for my fieldwork.

I first made contacts in Haywood and adjacent Lauderdale counties through telephone inquiries to extension offices, libraries, senior centers, and a black church. After the first interviews, contacts came through word-of-mouth references and responses to two newspaper articles. Introducing the project in phone calls, I said that I wanted to interview people who had made quilts or grown up in quiltmaking households in this area, and also that I was interested in relations between blacks and whites. Deacon William Reed at Woodlawn Missionary Baptist Church in Nutbush, an African American church that I found online, mentioned several names and let me announce my project at a Sunday service. A librarian at Elma Ross Public Library in Brownsville, the Haywood County seat, referred me to quilt show organizer Betsy Waddell, a vice president of First South Bank in Brownsville. Waddell gave me several names of whites and blacks who had loaned quilts for the quilt show (which was held in the bank lobby) and became a consultant herself.

A county extension office referred me to Carolyn Simpson, of Lauderdale County, and she as well as some of her beauty shop customers (all white) in Curve became consultants. Anne Baird and Judy Carlton (both white) contacted me as a result of seeing
articles in Brownsville’s *States-Graph*ic newspaper. Peggy Staggs of the Brownsville senior center and Beth Cunningham of the Halls senior center in Lauderdale County (both white) served as consultants and introduced me to some of their clients, white and black. Some consultants referred me to relatives and friends (Figure 1.22, page 45, maps consultant locations). In addition, numerous informal conversations with area residents who I did not formally interview enhanced my knowledge of the area.

I conducted face-to-face interviews during my first visit to the area, in August 2007, a second visit in March 2008, and a third in October 2009; and also engaged with consultants in telephone calls and e-mails from 2007 to 2014. I had a follow-up interview with Austin, the museum security officer in Indianapolis, in August 2011. Most interviews occurred at consultants’ homes; a few took place at semi-public sites including a beauty parlor, two senior centers, a nursing home, a bank office, and a YMCA conference room. I digitally recorded most interviews but documented a few only with handwritten notes due to various contingent conditions. Autobiographies of rock singer Tina Turner (1986) and labor organizer H. L. Mitchell (1979) as well as Raye Springfield’s family history (2000) and a biography of Rev. Clay Evans (Rose 1981) also served as primary sources.

In all, I interviewed 32 consultants: 29 women and three men. About half were black and half were white. Their birth dates ranged from 1915 to 1962. I documented about 120 quilts and quilt tops, dating from ca. 1840 to the early 2000s, and visited two local quilt shows that had both old and contemporary quilts. Of the 42 quilts that were in my small-farm focus period of the 1920s to 1950s, blacks made 15 (the earliest about 1935) and whites 27 (the earliest about 1925). Of about 29 quilts that dated to the early-modern part of my focus period, the late 1950s to 1974, blacks made 16 and whites 13.
Interviews were wide-ranging. They typically covered quilt-related experiences, relations between social groups (based on gender, race, age, economic status, etc.), individual and family history, and domestic and work conditions. I photographed subjects, quilts, and in some cases other family objects, houses, and outdoor environments. Quilt documentation included photographs; consultant comments regarding maker, time period, equipment, materials, methods, patterns, and use; and my quilt studies-informed observations regarding age, quilting motif, design, size, quilting stitches per inch, fabrics, batting, edge finishing, and use of machine- or hand-sewing.

Chapters 2 to 6 comprise the body of this work. In order, they address: Tennessee Delta history and regional culture; small-farm social relations under conditions of labor-intensive cotton agriculture in this area from the 1920s to 1950s; small-farm quilt meanings in that same period; an analysis of small-farm quilt traits with reference to U.S. quilt studies research; and changes that occurred in quiltmaking and social relations with the rise of capital-intensive agriculture and local factory jobs in the 1950s to 1970s.

In Chapter 7, I relate my research findings to the fields mentioned above. Those that concern social stability reference work in anthropology and folklore studies. Those that relate to social change reference work in anthropology and history, especially Civil Rights Movement history. Findings regarding improvisation in expressive genres engage with folklore studies, quilt studies, ethnomusicology, and performance studies; and those concerning improvisation in everyday life reference folklore studies, anthropology, and social history.
Fig. 1.1. Haywood County native Thelma Austin at a YMCA near her home in Indianapolis, where we met for an interview, 2011.

Fig. 1.2. Delois Baggett and her daughters, Susan and Mary Jane Baggett, with family quilts, at their house in Tibbs, Haywood County, 2007.
Fig. 1.3. Anne (Sanford) Baird and family members, 2009.

Anne Baird with a family quilt at her house in Brownsville.
Anne Baird, ca. 1960?

From left, Anne Baird’s oldest sister, Rozelle, with her baby; their mother, Frances Sanford (1895-1960); and her mother, Sarah Ann King (1871-1965), Haywood County, 1950s?
Anne Baird’s paternal great-grandmother, Laura Applewight Stone Tipton.

Fig. 1.4. Earl Beard, Lollie Mann, Julie Taylor, and family members.

Earl Beard with overalls that he mended, at his farm near Glimp, Lauderdale County, 2009.
Lollie Mann and Julie Taylor, Earl and Virtress Beard's daughters, at Mann's home near Brownsville (10/16/08).

Virtress Beard (1921-59), ca. 1935? Earl Beard's wife, Lollie Mann's and Julie Taylor's mother.
Lue Rena Davis Mann (1894-1980), Lollie Mann's mother-in-law. Ca. 1975?

Fig. 1.5. Cobon and Opal Brack and family, 2007.

Cobon Brack (Opal’s husband), at their home, northwestern Haywood County.
Opal Brack (Cobon’s wife), at their home on Briar Creek Road.

Lillian Maynard and Robbie Jarrett-King, Cobon and Opal Brack’s daughters, at their childhood home with a quilt that their mother made, Briar Creek Road.
Mary Frances Brack (Cobon’s mother) (1882-1966), Woodlawn Church, 1950s.

Adna Williams (Opal Brack's mother) (1893-1975), ca. 1955?

Opal Brack with Virgie, 1942, behind Woodlawn Church after a Sunday service. The hats are in the deacons’ room.
Postcard photo: Juddie Williams, Opal Brack’s paternal grandmother, early 1900s, Lauderdale County.

Robert Williams (1880-1963), Opal Brack’s father, ca. 1900, Lauderdale County.
Fig. 1.6. Barbara and Tom Callery with Callery family quilts and vintage photos, 2008.

Barbara Callery at her and her husband’s home, east of Brownsville, Haywood County.

Tom Callery with one of his grandmother’s quilts, at his and his wife’s home.

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Barbara (Marbury) Callery’s childhood homestead 1949-54, off Tabernacle Road, north of Brownsville. The house burned on her 14th birthday, in 1954.

Tennie Callery (Tom Callery’s grandmother; 1890-1982), late 1800s, with her parents and brothers, probably southeastern Haywood County, Hardeman County border.
Tennie Callery with husband and child, ca. 1910? Haywood/Hardeman County border.

Fig. 1.7. Luella Carter, Halls Commission on Aging senior center, Lauderdale County (with Rosie Lemons’ quilts in background), 2009.
Fig. 1.8. Beth Cunningham with a quilt that her great-grandmother made, Halls Commission on Aging senior center, where she is the director, Lauderdale County, 2009.

Fig. 1.9. Ola Jean Currie and family members, 2007.

Ola Jean Currie with a quilt in progress, at her house in Brownsville.
Terry Currie (1960-), Ola Jean Currie's son; and Shea Currie (1980-), her first granddaughter, at her house in Brownsville.

On right, Johnanna Bullock (Ola Jean Currie's mother; 1913-96), with granddaughter Tiffany Bullock, ca. 1993 at a family reunion.
Mollie Green Williams (ca. 1875-1964), who taught granddaughter Ola Jean Currie to quilt.

Mollie Green, late 1800s?, Ola Jean Currie’s great-grandmother (died before 1942).
Fig. 1.10. Goldie Harwell and family, 2007.

At left, Goldie Harwell, great-niece and namesake of quiltmaker Goldie Morris, with me at her house in Brownsville, with Goldie Morris’s last quilt. Photo by a neighbor.

Goldie Southall Morris (1916-99), Goldie Harwell’s grandfather’s sister, ca. 1950?
Rosa Lee Morton (1914-95), mother of Ida Mae Coleman and cousin of Goldie Morris (their mothers were sisters).

Goldie Morris, hoop-quilting at her house in Brownsville, 1970s? Green door trim at right.
Lula Jones Southall (ca. 1878-1958), Goldie Morris’s mother (who taught her to quilt) and Rosa Morton’s aunt. Probably at her house on the edge of Brownsville. Ca. 1940?

Fig. 1.11. Romus and Lucille Hight and family members, 2009.

Romus and Lucille (Steele) Hight with one of Lucille’s quilts, at their house in Brownsville.
Judy Carlton (1956-), Romus and Lucille Hight’s daughter, at her home in Brownsville.

Irma Steele (1905-77), Lucille Hight’s mother, about 1975?
May and Burr Hight (1907-80; 1901-76), Romus Hight’s parents, with pet, ca. 1975? They lived on Burr Hight Road in the Wellwood community, near the Haywood-Madison line.

Lucille Steele Hight, high school graduation, 1945.
Willie Steele (ca. 1898-1959), Lucille Hight’s father, ca. 1950?

Willie and Irma Steele and children, from left: Winnie, Tommy, Marvin, Lucille, and Charles. About 1930, Pea Ridge community, eastern Haywood County near Madison County.

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Fig. 1.12. Jeanette Holloway with one of her grandmother's quilts, at home in Brownsville, 2007.

Fig. 1.13. Norma Horvath with a quilt that her husband's grandmother made, Halls Commission on Aging senior center, Lauderdale County, 2009.
Fig. 1.14. Rosie Lemons with one of her grandmother’s quilts, Halls Commission on Aging senior center, Lauderdale County, 2009.

Fig. 1.15. Images of H. L. Mitchell from his autobiography (1979) and Robertson 2014.

Harry Leland Mitchell (1906-89) graduated from high school in Lauderdale County in 1925. He was among 11 whites and seven blacks who co-founded the Southern Tenant Farmers Union (STFU) in 1934 in Tyronza, Arkansas (Mitchell 1979:100a).
This trial occurred soon after the STFU was founded in Arkansas, across the Mississippi River from Tennessee, with men, women, blacks, and whites as members (100b).

“Mitchell... at the union's Memphis offices; 1938. The STFU became an important voice for mistreated tenant farmers of the South during the Great Depression.” Photograph from Southern Historical Collection (2014).
Mitchell (center) at an American Historical Association meeting (Mitchell 1979:336a). In 1945, the STFU was renamed “National Farm Labor Union” (NFLU) (212).

Three veterans of the STFU (Mitchell at left) at its 40th anniversary celebration, Little Rock, Arkansas, 1974 (336b).
Fig. 1.16. Ollie Moore at her house in Brownsville, 2008.

Fig. 1.17. Lue Venia Robinson with great-great-great-grandchild Tamaurion, aged five weeks, at home in Brownsville, 2007.
Fig. 1.18. Carolyn Simpson in her beauty shop parking lot, Curve, Lauderdale County, 2007.

Fig. 1.19. Peggy Staggs with one of her mother’s quilts, Brownsville-Haywood County Joint Services Golden Age Senior Citizens Center, where she is director, 2008.
Fig. 1.20. Images from Tina Turner’s autobiography, *I, Tina: My Life Story.*

Anna Mae Bullock, about 1954, Haywood County. In 1956, she joined her mother in East St. Louis and soon hooked up with Ike Turner (Turner with Loder 1986:56A).

Anna Mae Bullock, age 25, performing as Tina Turner in Los Angeles (56E).
Fig. 1.21. Betsy Waddell with a quilt that she inherited, at the 2008 Hatchie Fall Fest quilt exhibit that she organized at Brownsville’s First South Bank, where she is vice president.
Fig. 122. On this map, initials of consultants show where they lived in the 1920s-1950s. Initials are listed with full names at lower left. Map created by Theresa Quill.

Locations of Consultants are Approximate

County and State boundaries from 2012 U.S Census TIGER/Line Shapfiles, County Seats from Tennessee Spatial Data Center (no metadata provided)
Ch. 2. Small-Farm Quilt Culture in a Plantation-Culture Region

As a late-settled plantation region in a mostly small-farm-dominated Upland South state, and as a Tennessee adjunct to plantation-culture-dominated Deep South states, the Delta area of southwestern Tennessee is historically a cultural anomaly. It is often overlooked in Deep South studies and underrepresented in publications concerned with vernacular Tennessee culture (Figure 2.1, pages 88-90: 1940 map of rural cultural regions in the southeastern U.S.). Whereas scholars tend to emphasize icons of its plantation heritage, such as wealthy planter families and a majority-black plantation work force, the historical background that I present here attends closely to its co-existing subordinate culture of small-farm households, both white and black. As used here, “small-farm” refers to slaves, yeoman farmers, farm renters, tenant farmers, sharecroppers, and wageworkers who, in varying proportions from the 1820s to 1950s, supported themselves in large part through household subsistence activities. Small-farm households were the context of vernacular quiltmaking in the Tennessee Delta by the mid-to-late 1800s. In this section, I discuss historical conditions and cultural-region identity.
Definitions: Plantation Culture and Small-Farm Culture

For purposes of this study, “plantation culture” refers to a regional economy with interdependent components of, one, a minority of wealthy whites engaged in large-scale commercial farming by dint of owning large tracts of fertile land and of owning or employing a mostly black workforce; and two, a majority population of blacks and whites who own no land but survive through compensation that they receive for working on other people’s land and through subsistence activities that they do on land that they rent or are allowed to use under conditions of their status as slaves or sharecroppers. Some of these landless farmers may earn income by selling what they produce on their plots.

“Small-farm culture” refers to households whose members meet their subsistence needs through growing crops and produce and by raising livestock. The classic small farm is a yeoman household. But in the Tennessee Delta, such small-scale owners commonly sold some of what they produced, hired help, and worked for others. For instance, Cobon “Li’l’ Bit” Brack (1916-, black) told me, “We’d catch our crop up, work our crop up. Then [my daddy] would let us go and make a little extra money. We’d be glad to go out and make, uh, 45 cents a day, you know. And so [get a] cold ice cream or Coca-Cola or something” [for five cents] (1:11). Landless farmers participate in small-farm culture by doing subsistence activities (such as gardening, hunting, or quiltmaking) although they own no land.

Historical Conditions

Early Settlement History

Tennessee was part of North Carolina before achieving independent statehood in 1796 (Abernethy 1967:1, 136). In 1783, the North Carolina legislature sold warrants for
about 4.4 million of the total 6 million acres in West Tennessee (about 1.5 million acres were “unfit for cultivation”), but the region did not open for settlement until 1819, when President James Monroe approved a treaty that U.S. Commissioners Isaac Shelby and Andrew Jackson negotiated with Chickasaw Indians (Williams 1930:42, 113; Finger 2001:248; Wingfield 1949:5). As shown in Figure 2.2, West Tennessee boundaries are: the Mississippi River on the west (bordering Arkansas and the Missouri boot heel), Kentucky on the north, the Tennessee River (and Middle Tennessee) on the east, and Mississippi on the south. Early settler categories were: well-connected white planters, many of them from Virginia and the Carolinas, who acquired the most fertile land with good river access, sometimes thousands of acres; slaves, some who came with early settlers and some who traders brought later from various regions; small-farm white “plain folk”; and white “squatters,” whose property claims based on having homesteaded were championed by David Crockett in the U.S. House of Representatives in the 1820s to 1830s (Williams 1930:174-175, 205, 207-208, 263-269; Abernethy 1967:236, 253-260; Finger 2001:269-272).

For purposes of this study, southwestern Tennessee counties in the Tennessee Delta are: on the southern border, adjacent to Mississippi, from west to east, Shelby (county seat is Memphis), Fayette (Somerville), and Hardeman (Bolivar); above them, from west to east, Tipton (Covington), Haywood (Brownsville), and Madison (Jackson); and above Tipton, Lauderdale (Ripley) (see Figure 2.2, page 91). Most of these were established in the 1820s, but Lauderdale (between the Mississippi River and Haywood County) and Crockett (north of Haywood and Madison) were formed in 1835 and 1845, respectively, from parts of older ones (Williams 1930:160; Black 1948:110-114).
Commercial cotton agriculture began in this area in the 1820s, with gins established in that decade in counties including Madison, Tipton, Henderson (east of Madison), Haywood, Lauderdale, and Fayette (Williams 1930:202; Morton 1989:45; Gunderson 1998:28-29) (Figure 2.3, pages 92-93, shows two Haywood County gins in 2007). Rivers connected the region to international trade through New Orleans, supplying cotton to English cloth mills; and through the upper Mississippi River to the northern and eastern U.S. (Gunderson 1998:29, 33). By 1821, keelboats carried goods such as corn, bacon, and whiskey; the Jackson newspaper reported in 1825 that the 110-foot-long keelboat Messenger had delivered flour and whiskey from Louisville, then left loaded with cotton for New Orleans; the first steamboats were on the rivers in 1828 (Wingfield 1949:8-9). Whereas commercial cotton agriculture came to dominate most of the southwestern counties, corn was a primary subsistence crop. In small-farm-dominated areas, mainly central, northern, and eastern West Tennessee, commercial crops included tobacco, wheat, and hogs (Williams 1930:202, 205-206; Edwards 1999:315-316).

Plantation and Small-Farm Culture

Although southwestern (and sometimes northwestern) Tennessee is often represented as a plantation-culture region while East and Middle (and sometimes northwestern) Tennessee are placed in the dominantly small-farm Upland South, the picture is more complex. Areas of the rural South that have large African-American populations historically were those with the richest land. This situation occurred because: the richest land usually was devoted to cotton-growing plantations (the most profitable crop but one that required a large capital investment and risk since it depended on prices
of international markets); cotton agriculture was labor-intensive; and African Americans historically had supplied most of the labor.

Historian Thomas Perkins Abernethy describes the distribution of plantation culture in Tennessee as follows: hilly East Tennessee had few slaves except in the Tennessee River valley running from Bristol southwest to Knoxville and Chattanooga; Middle Tennessee had many slaves in the north central Cumberland River basin, including Nashville, but few in the mountains between the Cumberland basin and East Tennessee (as there were few in the Cumberland and Great Smoky Mountains of East Tennessee); there were few slaves along the Tennessee River where it divides Middle and West Tennessee, an area “in which the land was poor”; but, “In the southwestern corner of Tennessee, was the richest cotton country of the state and here the Negro population was greater than in any other quarter” (Abernethy 1967:329-330). Generalizing about antebellum agriculture in Tennessee’s three divisions, historian Robert Tracy McKenzie writes:

West Tennessee resembled the Deep South and was dominated by slaveholding farmers wholeheartedly committed to the cotton economy. Middle Tennessee was the garden of the state; her farmers also employed slave labor significantly but concentrated upon the commercial production of corn, wheat, tobacco, and livestock. In East Tennessee, mountainous terrain and less fertile soil inhibited the development of commercial agriculture and discouraged the growth of a large slave population. [1993:66]

In West Tennessee, writes historian Richard L. Saunders, a demographic “pattern” emerged with the development of cotton culture between 1830 and 1840:

In the central and northern-tier counties... away from the cotton-growing centers in the south-west, black population growth was much slower and the numbers of slaves dramatically smaller. Each had fewer than a thousand slaves enumerated in 1840, as did the two southern counties of Henderson and McNairy [on West Tennessee’s eastern border], neither of which were cotton areas. The northern-tier counties, those along the Kentucky border, sustained a much larger growth in their white populations. In Dyer, Gibson, Obion and Weakley, each county white population doubled. In each of Shelby,
Haywood, and Fayette counties, the core of the nineteenth century cotton culture, white population also doubled—but the slave population tripled. Counted together, the three counties’ slave populations increased from 7,700 to 24,400. [2008:129; see my Figure 2.2, page 91, for a West Tennessee map]

From 1830 to 1840, Fayette County’s black population went from 40.5 percent to 50.8 percent; Haywood County’s from 34.3 to 45.5 percent; and Shelby County’s from 38.1 to 48.3 percent (Saunders 2008:table). In 1860, the eve of the Civil War, blacks were 63.7 percent in Fayette County, 57.5 percent in Haywood County; and 35.8 percent in Shelby County, where their percentage declined although numbers more than doubled (7,112 in 1840 to 17,229 in 1860) due to the growth of the white population in Memphis (Saunders 2008b). In counties with more small-farm culture and less commercial cotton, the percentage of blacks was lower but still increased. Lauderdale, for instance, was 29.4 percent black in 1840 and 38 percent in 1860. McNairy, in southeastern West Tennessee, was 8.5 percent in 1840 and 13.1 percent in 1860 (Saunders 2008b).

Cultural geographer Fred Kniffen also comments on the mix of plantation and small-farm areas in his study of U.S. vernacular architecture:

In the Upland South, the type of individual is, or was in 1850, a small farmer, with log buildings, free-ranging stock, and hunting as a serious part of his economy. Contained within this large region were areas where a plantation economy and settlement pattern prevailed. Some of these plantation areas, especially those in more accessible regions, were settled by migrants from a plantation background farther east. They brought with them the “big-house” frame architecture, quarter cabins, and other settlement features of the old Tidewater plantation. Other choice areas were settled by those with an Upland cultural background. If the area possessed favorable natural attributes, notably extensive acreages of good soils, a plantation system arose. [1965:574]

Kniffen recognizes here the inland extension and mixing of colonial culture regions, in this case the Tidewater South and the Middle (Atlantic) Colonies-influenced Upland South (1965:567).
Abernethy describes the presence of small-farm culture in a plantation-culture area of Middle Tennessee, the Cumberland basin, where:

Only about one-eighth of the adult whites were land-owners in 1787.... The poor farmer had to go into the back country or become dependent on the wealthy landlord. The society which grew up under these conditions, though much affected by the circumstances of the frontier, tended gradually to model itself upon the pattern set in old Virginia and the Carolinas. [1967:209]

Focusing on this “pattern” of geographic, agricultural, and socioeconomic conditions in a study of relations between slaves and poor whites in Virginia and the Carolinas, historian Jeff Forret writes:

Few poor whites lived on the most fertile lands of the black belt, where some of the densest populations of slaves cultivated tobacco and cotton for their masters. Slaveholders routinely purchased desirable poor white holdings to consolidate their own estates. Shunted to more marginal, unproductive, or depleted lands, poor whites had the greatest opportunities for regular contact with slaves at the ragged fringes of the plantation economy, in the Piedmont and the upper coastal plain. [2006:13]

In southwestern Tennessee, areas of Madison County were on such a fringe. In his article, “Men of Subsistence and Men of Substance: Agricultural Lifestyles in Antebellum Madison County, Tennessee,” historian Gary T. Edwards quotes this April 30, 1854, entry in planter Robert H. Cartmell’s journal that expresses concern about a frost: “This country is...uncertain. It is the extreme northern part of the cotton growing country. In Gibson County north of this none of consequence is raised” (1999:306). In this area, Edwards writes, “Citizens perceived the essential dichotomy between subsistence and commercial agriculture. Those with sufficient slaves, land, and capital lived by the sweat of other men’s brows” (311). He contrasts “the unremitting toil of [white] landless laborers, tenants, and yeomen” with “the more leisurely pace of comfortable planters” (311).
In 1860, 59 percent of white Madison County households owned no slaves (312-313). Just under 20 percent of white farm households were “landless” tenants, who owned no land but typically farmed 20 to 40 acres under contract with a landlord; who, if female, spent much of their time cooking and textile-making; who “lived a precarious and rootless existence that entailed frequent moves to unfamiliar communities” (307-308). About 6 percent of white households owned 20 slaves or more (312-313). The largest sector of the population comprised “land-owning farmers with small holdings” (309). Those who owned one or a few slaves often, as Civil War veteran James C. Fly recalled in his own case, had “made a regular hand working in the same fields the negroes did” (310). Large-scale planters prospered, expanding their holdings into other counties and states such as Mississippi and Arkansas (316-317). “Yeoman farmers, tenants, and landless agricultural workers might raise some [cotton] for home use and on occasion even a bale or two to sell, but on the whole they occupied their time with the concerns of subsistence,” focusing on grain and livestock rather than on “a speculative crop” such as cotton. “Common and poor folk worked to maintain daily necessities” (306). By the time of the Civil War, the area (Madison County adjacent to Haywood) was “a sharply defined class society where planters, plain folk, and indigent whites understood their respective places” (321). He might have added “slaves” to this list.

Like Edwards, historian Fred Arthur Bailey draws on responses to the Tennessee Civil War Veterans Questionnaire of 1915-1922 (Elliott and Moxley 1985) to document antebellum experiences of small-farm whites. Veterans recollected that planters “regarded themselves as superior to the peasantry,” considered non-slaveholding poor whites to be “no better than” or worse than their slaves, and “did not mingle with” them (Bailey
1998:92-93, 90). Some respondents had worked “side by side” with slaves in fields and “described a cultural work ethic in which unrelenting toil characterized each day from first light to last” (84, 86). A boy was “a regular hand in the field” by age eight or ten (88-89). As for a woman, in households that often numbered ten or more, “The better part of her day was devoted to the manufacture of cloth and the sewing of it into shirts, pants, dresses, and bed linens,” but she “would also join her husband in the field when needed” (87). The wealthy embraced leisure “activities with little utilitarian outcome,” but “Hard-working farmers engaged in pastimes that combined fun with function. Neighbors enjoyed fellowship at quiltings, hog killings, log rollings, corn shuckings, and barn raisings” (91).

Wealthy slave-owners looked down on manual laborers, but the “common folk condemned their slave-rich neighbors” as decadent, snobbish, and selfish (83-84, 92-93). Whites who lived in the same area thus comprised different social groups with differing living conditions and values, and viewed their group’s standards as superior. Traceable to this era is my consultants’ view of quiltmaking as an emblem of small-farm identity, which implicitly recognizes women as integral to household self-sufficiency and neighborliness.

This finding of differing economic- or occupational-group “norms” among people with the same racial-group identity also occurred in a late-1930s community study based in Natchez, Mississippi. Social anthropologists Allison Davis, Burleigh B. Gardner, and Mary R. Gardner write, “There is a norm of behavior which differs from class to class. The class differences in behavior are accompanied by differences in ideology and values” (1988:250-251). I argue that this heterogeneity among people of one racial group promotes variability in cross-racial-group relations.
In documenting the common work arenas of slaves and small-farm whites, Bailey’s Tennessee-based study supports labor historian Lawrence T. McDonnell’s finding of the convergence of “slave and [white] wage labor” throughout the South after about 1840 (1993:125, 132). Whereas Bailey and McDonnell do not address the potential for cross-racial-group convergence in social activities, Forret finds that in Virginia and the Carolinas, slaves and “poor whites” mixed not only in work arenas but in “leisure-time activities” (2006:39-70). Among these were: drinking at grog shops and at work parties such as barn raisings, quilting bees, and corn shuckings; gambling at cards, dice, horse races, cockfights, and gander-pulling contests; and socializing related to “public punishments and court days,” fiddle and dance frolics, camp meetings and revivals, and superstition and conjuring (51-70; 62). Whereas Bailey notes the tendency of small-farm whites to combine work and leisure activities, Forret’s evidence of slave participation in work parties indicates that they also had this propensity (Bailey 1998:91; Forret 2006:55). My research on the mid-1900s Tennessee Delta aligns with these studies in finding that a substantial portion of small-farm culture was mixed-race.

The Expansion of Sharecropping after Slavery

After the Civil War, former slaves in southwestern Tennessee as in much of the plantation South entered the sharecropping system whose social base previously had been planters and landless whites. This commercial agriculture system is geared to situations in which there are farm-owners who have more land than they can work themselves and non-landowners who need land on which to work to support themselves. Basic tenets of the system as it developed in the Tennessee Delta were that landlords and sharecroppers made
contracts for each growing season under which the cropper paid for the use of the land through either a cash rent or through delivering a portion of the harvest to the landlord.

If the landlord furnished equipment, a cropper gave the landlord half of the harvest. If croppers had their own equipment, they gave the landlord a third of the crop or, in some cases in the mid-1900s, a fourth. Consultant Lollie Lee Mann (1936-, black) told me that in her father’s case, “He gave him a fourth of it because he had his own horse and mule to farm with” (1:7; 14:19). In the Tennessee Delta, many croppers were tenant farmers whose compensation included housing and space to raise gardens, livestock, and crops for their own purposes. In some cases, landlords provided credit to croppers for personal or farm-related expenses that they could not cover before selling the crop (Killebrew 1879:50; Winters 1988:4-13; Couto 1993:10-12, 57, 109; see Ferleger 1993:31-46, on late 1800s sharecropping contracts in seven Southern states other than Tennessee).

This sharecropping system died out in the 1960s to 1970s as mechanization, herbicides, and pesticides made cotton farming a low-labor, capital-intensive operation, and many small-farm people found urban factory jobs by choice and necessity (Couto 1993:11, 179-180). In 1953, cottonpicker inventor John Rust had observed, “And even yet, the bulk of the crop is still harvested by hand just as it was done by Egyptians and Aztecs centuries ago” (1953:44; see also Schweninger 1989:52).

There was potential for landlords to exploit croppers, for instance through control of the weighing, sales, and financial record-keeping processes (see, for instance, Couto 1993:10-12; and on 1930s west central Mississippi, Powdermaker 1993:84-86). But in late 1800s southwestern Tennessee, the newfound geographic mobility of former slaves, landlord competition for scarce labor, and the ability of croppers to switch landlords at the
end of each season’s contract acted as checks on such abuses (Saunders 2008:136; Winters 1988:18). Racial-group identity was a factor in the system, given that the great majority of landlords were white and the great majority of blacks were landless. But agricultural historian Donald L. Winters finds that the sharecropping system in late 1800s southwestern Tennessee was

as much a response to prevailing economic conditions as it was an attempt at racial control. Planters...were primarily concerned with resuming and sustaining production on their extensive landholdings. Freedmen...were looking for a way to make a living for themselves and their families from the meager farming skills they had acquired under slavery. Landless whites, some of whom had lost their farms during the war, were likewise seeking a livelihood. Many members of each group eventually chose sharecropping as a suitable solution to their economic problems. [1988:17-18]

"Mutual economic dependence" drove the system (18).

Planters could exercise control over black croppers and practice racial discrimination only up to a point before their actions began to exact an economic cost. Croppers may have held the weaker position in the sharecropping relationship, but they possessed a necessary commodity: agricultural labor. This meant that planters had to compete for croppers’ labor, just as croppers had to compete for planters’ farms. But labor in the postbellum South was scarce relative to agricultural land. Thus, when one landowner became overly oppressive, the cropper could usually find another who would offer better terms. It was in the planters’ interest, furthermore, to attract and to retain the best qualified croppers irrespective of race, a situation that frequently forced them to loosen their managerial and social control. Conditions in the agricultural sector, in short, placed practical limits on planter dominance and coercion. [1988:18-19]

As Winters describes it, croppers had agency to negotiate how they were treated and their level of compensation, but not to change the system.

The state legal system contributed to the checks and balances with laws and rulings that variously protected croppers and landlords. The 1871 Tennessee Supreme Court case of Mann v. Taylor protected croppers by ruling that they owned their portion of the crop from the time they planted it, meaning that it was their right rather than the landlord’s to
sell it (Winters 1988:6-7, 13). This standard was not always met. Anthropologist Hortense
Powdermaker finds that landlords in early 1930s west central Mississippi commonly sold
the sharecropper’s share, which often resulted in exploitation (1993:84, 86). Based on this
and other record-keeping abuses by landlords, “It can be roughly estimated that not more
than twenty-five or thirty per cent of the sharecroppers get an honest settlement,” she
writes (1993:86). Historian Richard A. Couto finds that Haywood County landlords
commonly sold the cropper’s share and bound laborers to them through debt peonage,
having calculated croppers’ earnings at less than their advances (1993:11-12). Supporting
this finding, Lollie Lee Mann (1936-, black) told me that her sharecropping husband had
been unable to pay off his debt to the landlord until she helped him with wages from a job
that she got about 1965 at the Bloomington, Indiana-based Sarkes Tarzian television tuner
factory in Brownsville.

I said to my husband, “Don’t you borrow another penny from that white
man.” I said to my husband, “Not another penny.” I said, “I’m going to get us
out of debt. Whatever we need, I’m going to buy it,” on a 165 dollars a week
when we had been trying to make it off a 165 a month. [1:8]

Participating in this interview, Robbie Jarrett-King (1939-, black) said that Sarkes Tarzian
had “pulled the black women out of the field;” whereas men, said Mann, “was in debt with
the white folks, and they had to stay” (1:7; 1:8). She acknowledged that her husband had
stayed in part because he liked to farm (1:8). Winters, however, finds no evidence of such
abuse in late 1800s Haywood County:

If owners commonly held sharecroppers in debt peonage [debts carried over
from year to year], the historical record has concealed it well. The record
makes clear that the sharecropping system enabled sharecroppers, black and
white, to obtain desperately needed credit. [1988:12]
A possible explanation for these different findings is that debt peonage was not common in the late 1800s but became more so in the 1900s.

Whereas the 1871 law protected sharecroppers, an “anti-enticement” law passed in Tennessee in 1875 and also in other Southern states protected landlords. It prohibited them from contracting with sharecroppers who already had contracts, thus limiting the bargaining power of sharecroppers and protecting landlords with contracts. However, croppers could leave at the end of the contract if they did not owe the landlord money (Winters 1988:15).

Winters finds that racial disparities in contracts occurred for a few years as newly free African Americans entered the system but disappeared by about 1880 as landlords recognized that the ex-slaves had learned farm management skills (15-16). For instance, an 1869 Haywood County contract had continued the slavery-era gang system, requiring a group of laborers to work from sunrise to sunset for five days and a half-day on Saturday in exchange for half of the crop. But by 1880, planters made contracts with individual black farmers with the same terms given to whites, allowing them to manage their acreage independently (4). At this point, Haywood County sharecropping and “share tenancy” in Iowa, where tenants were white, “were fundamentally the same system” (17; see also Winters 1987).

Development of Mixed-Racial-Group Small-Farm Culture

The black population of southwestern Tennessee cotton counties increased after the Civil War, “as former slaves arrived to take up tenancy and sharecropping arrangements” (Saunders 2008:135). Saunders interprets this “vast in-migration” as evidence that “black
laboring families moved about fairly freely” (2008:136). It also suggests that freed blacks perceived that this area offered opportunities for a better quality of life than some others. From 1860 to 1880, the black population in Haywood County went from 11,067 (57.5 percent) to 17,556 (67.4 percent); in Fayette County, from 15,501 (63.7 percent) to 22,238 (69.8 percent); in Madison County, from 10,095 (46.9 percent) to 15,467 (50.1 percent); in Shelby County, including Memphis, from 17,229 (35.8 percent) to 43,903 (56.0 percent); and in Lauderdale County (which had less acreage suited to cotton-farming), from 2,875 (38.0 percent) to 5,837 (39.1 percent) (Saunders 2008b).

These percentages held fairly steady through the late 1800s (although overall population, black and white, declined in some areas) even after Reconstruction efforts broke down and Jim Crow laws were instated. Between 1880 and 1900, Haywood County went from about 67 to 68 percent black (17,080), Fayette County from about 70 to 73 percent (21,682), Madison County from about 50 to 46 percent (16,754), Shelby from about 56 to 55 percent (the increase from 43,903 in 1880 to 84,773 in 1900 reflected the growth of Memphis), and Lauderdale from about 39 to 46 percent (10,169) (Saunders 2008b).

Concurrent with this influx of African Americans, an 1879 publication by state Commissioner of Agriculture Joseph Buckner Killebrew appears to respond to a labor shortage that reflected planter dissatisfaction with the existing, primarily black, work force. In *West Tennessee: Its Resources and Advantages—Cheap Homes for Immigrants*, Killebrew aims to attract white immigrants to the area to bolster the ranks of farm workers. Noting that the Civil War had damaged the area economy, he appeals primarily to whites who were qualified to become independent farmers, renters, sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and
wage laborers rather than large landowners. This targeting is evident in the following excerpts, which present conditions for buying, renting, sharecropping, and tenant-farming land:

The people [of West Tennessee] are anxious for immigration, as the prevailing labor [that is, African Americans] is uncertain and they are more than willing to exchange it for the reliably strong immigrant, who will work without being watched.... Labor is always in demand at $10-$12/month and boarded, or $15-$20/month without board. Or he can work on the shares, the laborer getting 1/2 if everything is found [equipment supplied by the landowner] or 2/3 if he finds himself. [1879:37, 39]

In the section on Madison County, Killebrew writes:

The demand for labor is very good, as the larger portion of the farmers would readily hire a good reliable man and pay him good wages.... So many persons were ruined by the war, and kept poor since by the depression in prices, that it has thrown a great deal of very valuable land into market.... Labor is, as before said, in demand, especially good reliable white labor. It commands from $10 to $20 a month, according to its efficiency and character. The rents of land range from 2 and ½ to $3, or if rented on shares the tenant gives 1/3 [of the crop sales income] for rent unless the landlord furnishes all but labor, when he gets ½. [1879:50; emphasis added]

Killebrew's association of reliability with white racial-group identity suggests that black laborers were available but unsatisfactory under post-war conditions, which had enhanced their geographic mobility and bargaining power with landlords.

Evidence of blacks' expanded capacity for mobility at this time can be seen in Chany Black's decision to leave McNairy County for an unknown destination in 1872, when the Klan was harassing her son; and in the 1870s migration of about 4,700 working-class blacks primarily from Middle but also West Tennessee to Kansas (Lohrenz 1988:90-91; Painter 1986:116-117, 146-147; Couto 1993:46-47). The latter so-called "Exodusters" migration occurred in a period when there were frequent incidents of violence against blacks (Painter 1986:ix, 109; Couto 1993:45-46).
Another factor that tended to reduce the black plantation labor force and enhance black laborer agency is that a small percentage of former slaves became landowners. In a study of counties representing the three parts of Tennessee, McKenzie finds that in 1880, 14 percent of black heads-of-household owned land in West Tennessee’s Gibson, Haywood, and Hardeman counties, compared with 48 percent of white households. These figures compare with 16 percent of black and 47 percent of white households in representative Middle Tennessee counties, and with 32 percent of black and 45 percent of white households in selected East Tennessee counties (McKenzie 1993:79).

In McKenzie’s West Tennessee sample, black-owned farms were on average about half the size and value of white-owned farms (74 vs. 149 acres, $864 vs. $1,715) (1993:82). But the trend still posed a threat “to former masters who needed an abundant, stable labor force,” in that blacks who owned subsistence farms “were removing themselves from the labor pool available to white employers” and thus challenging “the existing social and economic order” (83). Some of those black owners who acquired land in the 1870s had lost it by 1880 (perhaps due to the depressed prices that Killebrew notes) so that, in the 1880s, about half of former slaves were doing wage labor and half were sharecroppers, tenants, or owner-operators (McKenzie 1993:84; Killebrew 1879:50). According to 1920 U.S. Census figures for Haywood County, 16.5 percent of black farm households were owners (497 of 3,008 total non-white farms) compared with 51.2 percent of white farm households (689 of 1,346). (In the mid-1900s, some owners also sharecropped.)

In trying to attract people to West Tennessee at a time when relations among planters, African American laborers, and small-farm whites were in flux, Killebrew focuses on the opportunities of small-farm culture. Giving pointers to would-be independent
farmers on how to advance beyond mere subsistence, he recommends diversified production. He advises raising cotton, hogs, and corn for harvest in late fall; wheat in late spring; and fruits and vegetables ("truck patches" such as strawberries) through the summer to be sold for transport via railroad to urban areas and the North (1879:38-39).

His discussion of the evolving role of truck-patch farming in the area economy, quoted below, gives insight into how small-farm culture coexisted with plantation culture and strengthened in the late 1800s. He describes its antebellum role as a source of agency for slaves and small-farm white women in particular, and its post-bellum potential, with the growth of railroads and interregional commerce, to enhance the independence of those whose livelihood derived largely from farming other people's land. Extolling the "truck patch," Killebrew writes:

This truck patch is a wonderfully handy affair. It will, properly managed, supply all the needed groceries and clothing of the family.... Before the war this business of selling garden sauce was confined almost exclusively to the women and negroes. A good housewife found time to superintend a garden and send its proceeds to market and the man who was fortunate enough to have such a helpmate was soon observed to leave his fellows in the race for fortune far behind. The negroes belonging to humane masters, too, had patches given them, and it was no unusual thing for one of these fellows to place the cash in his master's hand for his freedom. The changes brought about by the war and its sequels have impelled a great many people all over the south into the business, and it has saved many a family from want and ruin. [1879:38-39]

Small-farm values also figure large in Killebrew's section on Lauderdale County, which had not only cotton plantations but tobacco farms and some Mississippi River bottomland of "low value" (1879:46). Its northern and northeastern areas had been "settled by a frugal and industrious population, possessing more than ordinary enterprise and intelligence" (48). With words such as "frugal," "industrious," "provident," and "prudent," Killebrew foregrounds traits associated with subsistence horticulture rather than commercial
agriculture. With “superintend,” “enterprise,” and “intelligence,” he raises the status of small farmers relative to that of planter-dependent laborers, whether male, female, black, or white, framing them as competent, diligent, ambitious, even ingenious managers (38-39).

It is unclear how this publication was distributed or to what extent its ideas circulated among blacks as well as whites. But in promoting small-farmer ambition and success, such ideas undermined the plantation-culture social system. Small-farm blacks and whites (tenants, renters, owners, wageworkers) who stayed in southwestern Tennessee or who migrated there in the late 1800s to mid-1900s apparently perceived it as a place where people of humble status had a chance of getting ahead, or at least of maintaining or attaining a reasonable quality of life.

On the other hand, many whites and blacks chose to leave farming, dissatisfied with what it had to offer. The growth of Memphis between 1880 and 1920 as populations of surrounding rural counties stayed even or fell is evidence of this trend (although, of course, rural migrants went other places as well). The black population of Shelby County rose from 43,903 in 1880 to 84,773 in 1900 to 98,962 in 1920, while falling in Haywood County from 17,556 in 1880 to 17,080 in 1900 to 16,959 in 1920 (Saunders 2008b; 1920 U.S. Census).

Ethnic (Including Racial-Group) Origins

The Old World roots of most people who settled southwestern Tennessee after Chickasaw Indians gave it up were in the British Isles, West Africa, or both. Although some settlers were partly American Indian, this facet of identity tended to be subsumed into black or white social-group identity. Most of the region’s 19th-century settlers did not
come directly from the Old World but from east-coast colonies or states. In *The Beginnings of West Tennessee: In the Land of the Chickasaws, 1541-1841*, Samuel Cole Williams writes,

> West Tennessee was settled chiefly by such as removed from East and Middle Tennessee, and by North Carolinians, Virginians, South Carolinians, Kentuckians and Alabamians. North Carolina contributed the greatest number, the other States ranking in the order named above. [1930:174]

Likewise, a Fayette County history states, “Soon after the signing of the Treaty of 1818, which opened up the Western district, settlers began to pour into the area from the Carolinas, Virginia, Kentucky, and Middle Tennessee.... Many of them were of Scotch-Irish heritage” (Morton 1989:6). Cultural geographer Terry G. Jordan-Bychkov finds that most people in East and Middle Tennessee were of British Isles descent and that few were German (2003:9-13).

However, some Old World immigrants, primarily Irish, German, and African, did settle in southwestern Tennessee in the mid-to-late 1800s. Most Africans went as slaves to plantation areas; Germans and Irish tended to locate in urban or small-farm areas (Rauchle 1966:65; Uselton 1996:117-118). Of the six Mexican-American War companies that were organized in Memphis in 1846, one was Irish and one German; by 1860, Memphis had 1,400 Germans and 4,100 Irish people (Stanton 1952:96-97). Both Catholics from southern Ireland and Scots-Irish Presbyterians from Northern Ireland settled in West Tennessee (Stanton 1952:91-93; see also Nickolds 1958:80-108, and Uselton 1996:115-129).

German immigrants were among the settlers of Denmark in Madison County by 1860 (Brownsville-Haywood County Historical Society [BHCHS] 1989:18). Memphis had a German Jewish congregation by 1854, and German Jews came from Europe and Halifax County, Virginia, to Haywood County in the mid-to-late 1800s (Wax 1948:39; BHCHS 1989:70-71, 177, 193-194). Among them were the Felsenthals, who owned a general store
in Brownsville and had three soldiers in “our Southern War for Independence” (BHCHS 1989:70). In a family history of descendants of slaves of Haywood County’s white Taylor family, Raye Springfield notes that, for a 1926 wedding,

Grandma Tamar bought the dress for her [daughter Opal] from Felsenthal’s Department Store, one of the oldest and nicest stores in town, which had a separate floor for blacks to do their shopping. The dress was the style all the young girls were wearing. [2000:39]

In the early 1900s, prominent white Haywood Countian William West Bond (born 1884) married Rosa Montedonico (born 1887), daughter of Italian Catholic immigrants who “owned a fresh produce grocery in Brownsville” (BHCHS 1989:20). In the 1880s, Protestant Germans settled in Gibson County, a small-farm area of central West Tennessee, but within a generation had intermarried with locals and joined Baptist and Methodist churches (Rauchle 1966:61, 73, 75). Caroline Gohring Rauscher (born in 1823 in an Old World German state) migrated to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and then to Middle Tennessee’s Houston County, a small-farm area adjacent to northern West Tennessee, where she made a fancy orange, green, and white appliqué quilt about 1850 (Figure 2.4, page 94) (Weinraub 2006:68). Only two of my consultants cited some German ancestry (Carolyn Simpson, Bob Bond); most had African, English, Scots Irish, Irish, and occasionally, American Indian roots.

Following are accounts taken from Haywood and Fayette county histories of the Old World roots and New World paths of some local white families, including ancestors of some of my consultants (BHCHS 1989; Morton 1989). Patrick Callery (ca. 1819-?) left Ireland about 1842, was a Pony Express rider in Texas, then bought a farm on the Haywood-Hardeman County line about 1845 and “raised, sold and raced thoroughbred horses” (BHCHS 1989:28). Thomas Curlin and siblings came from Dublin, Ireland, to Halifax County, North Carolina, in the mid-1700s; his son’s family came to western Madison
County, Tennessee, in the 1820s, bought land from the University of North Carolina, and had items including quilts stolen by Union sympathizers during the Civil War (BHCHS 1989:52). Presbyterian Curries went from Scotland to Ireland about 1609; James Currie, Sr., immigrated to Virginia, then Caswell County, North Carolina, in the mid-1700s; Revolutionary War patriot James Currie, Jr., was in Orange County, North Carolina, then Haywood County, Tennessee, by 1839 organizing Old Union Presbyterian Church (BHCHS 1989:53). John O’Conner came from Ireland to Virginia about 1726; his son fought in the Revolutionary War; his son’s son was sheriff of Culpepper County, Virginia; the sheriff’s son William Conner came to Haywood County, Tennessee, in 1828 with his family and four servants [likely slaves] and at one time owned more than 6,000 acres in Haywood and Lauderdale counties (BHCHS 1989:40). John Bourne came from England to near Fredericksburg, Virginia, about 1657; his grandson left 19 slaves and a plantation to his heirs in 1788, and had a son who was a Revolutionary War veteran and Kentucky pioneer; this son’s son, Andrew III, left his mother’s family in Culpepper County, Virginia, and came to West Tennessee in 1855; his son bought 86 acres from an uncle in Tipton County about 1877 (BHCHS 1989:20-21).

Presbyterian Alexander Boyd, of Scotland, came to Mecklenburg County, Virginia, about 1764; his son William and family came to Haywood County, Tennessee, in 1832 (BHCHS 1989:21). Kelso family members left Scotland for Pennsylvania by 1784, lived in Kentucky and Middle Tennessee’s Maury County, came to Haywood County in 1833, and in the case of fiddler and Confederate veteran William S. Kelso, had 18 slaves (BHCHS 1989:114-116). Robert Glover Thornton was born in 1761 on the Isle of St. Croix, West Indies; he emigrated about 1776 and lived in Edgecombe County, North Carolina; Hancock
County, Virginia; and Maury County, Middle Tennessee, before settling in 1820 on land that became Fayette County in 1824 (Morton 1989:6). William Claiborne, a surveyor, came from England to the New World in 1621; his grandson’s son Charles came from Richmond, Virginia, to Haywood County by 1857, when he married Elizabeth Moore, who was born in Orange County, North Carolina (BHCHS 1989:34).

William Henry Haralson, born in Person County, North Carolina, in 1803 and known for hunting wild hogs in Haywood County’s Hatchie River bottoms, married Isabella McCulloch, who was born in 1823 in Newtonstewart, Northern Ireland, but was in Haywood County in 1840; a descendant writes of her, “She never lost her Irish accent which always characterized her as an Irish lady” (BHCHS 1989:85). McMurry ancestors went from Scotland to Ireland in 1430, to the colonies in 1773, from Lancaster County, South Carolina, to Haywood County, Tennessee, by 1846, then to Marshall County, Mississippi, and back to Haywood County in 1860; had a soldier in the Union Army and a branch that moved to Kansas in the 1870s, of which one member returned to Haywood County in 1893 (BHCHS 1989:140). Hans Peter and Christian Tritt (apparently Dutch although the family history calls Hans “an English colonist”) sailed in 1739 from “Ralterdam” (apparently in Holland) to William Penn colonies in what is now Lancaster County, Pennsylvania; descendant William Tritt went from North Carolina to Tennessee in 1834; Maurice Tritt of Crockett County moved to adjacent Haywood County in the 1930s (BHCHS 1989:216-217).

Although weighed toward families with more rather than less means, these accounts demonstrate the range of white settler experiences and the potential for cross-regional cultural links that their mobility afforded. The oldest quilt that I documented, Anne Baird’s
(white, 1922-) ca. 1840 Sunburst [not her name], points to the English roots of upper-class Tennessee Delta culture in using a pattern that also appears in early quilts of England (Figure 2.5, pages 95-98; for a 1797 English quilt with four Sunburst blocks, see Colby 1970:100[Plate 115], 103-104; for a New England example dated 1833, see Bassett and Larkin 1998:60[Plate 38]; for New Jersey examples, including a block in an 1843 sampler [quilt with multiple block patterns] and three ca. 1850 quilts, see Cochran et al. 1992:39[Plate 9], 67[Plate 27], 76[Plate 35 and cover], 80[Plate 41]; for ca. 1840 and 1850 Sunburst quilts in Virginia, see Virginia Consortium of Quilters 2006:54, 82, 86).

African Americans in mid-1900s southwestern Tennessee descended from: slaves brought by early settlers, slaves brought by slave-traders from eastern U.S. states as well as from Africa to meet the demands of inland cotton agriculture, and (free) African Americans who came of their own volition after the Civil War. “Many of the early settlers who moved into the area brought with them black slaves to work on the plantations,” writes Fayette County historian Dorothy Rich Morton (1989:74). Examples are: 150 slaves came with three white Rice families from Georgetown, South Carolina, to Haywood County, Tennessee, in 1836 (Williams 1930:120); “four servants” [presumably black] came to Haywood County in 1828 with General William Conner from Culpeper County, Virginia; and “a negro boy” came with Richard Wilson and his mother from Virginia to Haywood County in the 1830s (BHCHS 1989:40, 233). A genealogical study shows that Haywood County native Anna Mae Bullock [rock singer Tina Turner, born 1939] is a great-great-great-granddaughter of Lucy Kimbro, a North Carolina slave born in 1805. It is unclear if Kimbro came to Tennessee with an owner or a slave trader (Gates 2008; see also Turner’s autobiography [1986]).
Findings of historian Adam Rothman’s study (2005) of the Deep South slave trade that served Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama in the 1810s probably apply generally to southwestern Tennessee given that it is adjacent to his study area, opened to settlement in the year that Alabama became a state (1819, after Louisiana in 1812 and Mississippi in 1817), and had a great demand for slaves as its cotton agriculture expanded in the 1820s and 1830s. Also, Williams reports the existence of such a trade in *The Beginnings of West Tennessee:*

The earliest settlers brought a few slaves, but large numbers were introduced after the lower tier of counties [bordering Mississippi] and Madison and Haywood were organized, and cotton culture commenced there on even a moderate scale.... The number of slaves, by natural increase and by importation from purchase in the older parts of Tennessee, Virginia, Kentucky and North Carolina, grew fast until the Civil War. [1930:207]

Nashville (in Middle Tennessee) and Memphis had “permanent slave markets” (Goodstein 2011:paragraph 3). Historian Sharon Norris writes that through the early 1860s, “Slaves were brought to Brownsville [the Haywood County seat] from Memphis and other states and were marketed from the town square” (2000:11).

Rothman finds that Deep South traders imported slaves from: northern states such as New Jersey and New York, where slavery was then declining; the Chesapeake states of Maryland and Virginia, where slaves were increasing at a faster rate than they were needed; other southeastern states; areas of Kentucky and Tennessee where slave labor was less essential to the economy or in larger supply; and Africa, through privateers using ports in Florida and Texas to smuggle Africans to slave markets in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Natchez, Mississippi (2005:191-203). One of those smuggled may have been the great-grandmother of Haywood County’s Robert McElwee, Jr. (born in 1909), whose descendants described her as “African” (Couto 1993:95, 100, 103). Blacks in southwestern Tennessee
thus had diverse backgrounds, reflecting different lengths of time in the New World, experiences in various New World cultural regions, and different kinds of relationships with whites of diverse backgrounds.

Women and Textile Work

Making cloth for clothes and bedding was a primary responsibility of women in both racial groups and at all socioeconomic levels through the mid-1800s, including planter, small-farm, and slave households; and even into the early 1900s for those in small-farm households. “Spinning, carding, knitting of basic clothing, soap-making, bed construction, and quilting, old at the time of the early English colonies, were beginning to disappear in the rural areas by 1909,” writes Edward Walker Duck, who was born in 1894 in Henderson County, a small-farm area of east central West Tennessee (1971:34, 28). Consultants Anne Baird and Jeanette Bolding remembered their mothers carding cotton [using wire combs to make field cotton smooth and evenly thick] for quilt batting in the 1930s (AB 16:3; JB 3:3).

The cross-economic- and cross-racial-group interactions in the realm of textile work show that when a gendered division of labor is a plank of social organization, actors in such gendered realms of activity may submerge other social-group differences. As I observe in an earlier study of Depression-era quilters, “Quiltmaking could tend to emphasize gender-based solidarity over race-related social boundaries” (Klassen 2008:42). In the Tennessee Delta and elsewhere in the rural South, women of different economic and racial groups carded, spun, dyed, wove, and sewed, although some spent more time supervising or doing fancy work than others. In this realm, with a social base defined largely by gender-group and age-group (adult) identity, relationships depended not just on economic-group,
ethnic-group, and racial-group identity but on competence and on common responsibility for textile production. The existence of such a realm, where cross-racial-group interaction and collaboration were normal, supports social anthropologist Fredrik Barth's finding that ethnic identity in a caste system is variably potent depending on the activity:

> Ethnic categories provide an organizational vessel that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different socio-cultural systems. They may be of great relevance to behavior, but they need not be; they may pervade all social life, or they may be relevant only in limited sectors of activity. [1969:14]

The existence of such prescribed “sectors” does not necessarily threaten the caste system, but they create or build on “a similarity or community of [cross-caste] culture” (16).

The following examples demonstrate the sharing of textile skills and the variety of textile-related relations among planter women, small-farm white women, and small-farm blacks (including slaves). In Madison County, Tennessee, white Civil War veteran William Barnes Jr. remembered that his mother had “cooked spune wove cloth for the rich [white] people” (Edwards 1999:307). Also in Madison County, planter woman Elvira Witherspoon’s slaves kept “two looms running most of the time” (Edwards 1999:320). In South Carolina, a planter gave landless white Sallie Carlisle (age 35 in 1860) the use of a house and garden spot in exchange for teaching slaves to weave (Forret 2006:41, citing an ex-slave narrative and the U.S. Census). In antebellum Rockingham County, North Carolina, poor white women wove for a planter family for 25 cents a day (Forret 2006:41, citing an ex-slave narrative). Around 1850 in southwestern Tennessee’s Fayette County, planter woman Ann Eliza Jones Turner (1830-94), whose parents had come from Buckingham County, Virginia, and her slave, whose name and dates are not recorded, made a fancy pink-and-white Star-pattern quilt (quilted at 13 stitches to the inch) that descended in the white
maker’s family (Turner, accessed 9/16/12; see Morton 1989:12, for Jones family history). The quilt owner wrote, “Made by my great grandmother and her slave. [Her] slave was given to her when she was born” (Turner, accessed 9/16/12).

In McNairy County, a small-farm area of southwestern Tennessee, slave/freedwoman Chany Scot Black (1818-?) and her mistress/colleague Narcissa L. Erwin Black (1810-94; Presbyterian, likely Scots Irish) worked together and separately on textile projects for their own households, for barter, and for pay, as recorded in Narcissa Black’s diary entries of 1861 to 1872 (Lohrenz 1988). With income earned for tasks such as “spinning, weaving, dyeing, washing or cooking,” Chany Black bought a cow in 1865, a horse in 1866, and a loom in 1867 (Lohrenz 1988:90). Writes historian Mary Lohrenz,

Despite the usual custom of separate [black or white] quiltings, Narcissa and Chany did on occasion gather with others around a common quilting frame. The diary documents joint quiltings by whites and blacks [including in 1866 and 1869]. [1988:83]

Based on three quilts that descended in Narcissa Black’s family and on diary references to “fine” and “corse” quilts [made with hand-woven “jean” or “linsey” cloth], “The quilts probably ranged from simple, utilitarian bed coverings, to more elaborate, sophisticated styles” (82-83). In Sumner County, Middle Tennessee (bordering Kentucky), apparently in the early 1860s, an unnamed slave woman supervised teenager Amanda Frances West (1848-?), whose “ancestors emigrated from England via North Carolina to Tennessee,” as she wove a Sunrise-variation coverlet (Wilson and Kennedy 1983:367).

According to a white family history, an unnamed ancestor had woven a coverlet (which was once shown at the Tipton County fair) “to teach the slaves how to weave” (Wilson and Kennedy 1983:203). In Middle Tennessee’s Bedford County, unnamed slaves wove a Whig Rose coverlet about 1860 as a wedding gift for planter son Emmett Jason
Green (1983:311). In Virginia and the Carolinas, slaves and poor whites drank together at quilting parties, barn raisings, and corn shuckings; it is unclear whether the quilting as well as the drinking was mixed-racial-group (Forret 2006:55).

Georgia slaves, including women “too old to work in the fields,” made quilts for their own use, sometimes quilting as many as three quilts a night at bees, sometimes rotating among plantations, and sometimes following the work with dinner and dancing (Weinraub 2006:155, 157, citing ex-slave narratives). In mid-1900s Haywood County, Tennessee, Idella Evans (?-?, black) sewed dresses for her tenant’s granddaughters, including consultant Ollie Russell Moore (1942-, black) (13:1, 2, 11).

These examples show that textile-production relationships variously reflected conditions of geographic proximity, economic-group identity, ethnic- or racial-group identity, skill level, and age-group identity. They show the potential for distinctive designs, variations, and methods to develop in textile-production social networks that such conditions defined, but also the potential for network intersections to generate common knowledge and meanings.

Small-farm and slave women made cloth, coverlets, and quilts in southwestern Tennessee’s early decades. Coverlet-weaving was a more specialized skill than quiltmaking, as indicated by occasional use of hired or itinerant weavers (Wilson and Kennedy 1983:46, 133, 330, 346, 349; Lohrenz 1988:76, 79). It required more specialized equipment and training and a larger space, often a designated room or house (see coverlet provenances in Wilson and Kennedy 1983). Although some slaves and small-farm whites wove coverlets, they typically did so on and for plantations and substantial yeoman farms, which provided space and equipment and acquired their products, as indicated by coverlet provenances in
Sadye Tune Wilson’s and Doris Finch Kennedy’s book (1983) that documents Tennessee woven textiles. Quiltmaking, on the other hand, was a more accessible means of making bedcovers for one’s household. Women could learn basic methods by observation. Quilt frames were homemade and could be used outdoors or raised and lowered from ceilings in small houses where quilting occurred in rooms that also were needed for sleeping or eating. A woman could make a quilt even without a frame, tying or quilting it as it lay on a bed, table, or lap (Klassen 2008:23, 28, 43).

Several developments promoted quiltmaking among black and white small-farm women in the late 1800s. One of these was the great increase in quantity, variety, and affordability of factory-made cotton cloth in attractive, multi-color prints. This cloth was easier to cut and sew than were fabrics such as the (probably home-woven) “Negro cloth for winter” that was exhibited at the 1856 Shelby County fair or the jean and linsey fabrics that women such as Chany Black wove on their looms in the 1860s and 1870s (Boom 1956:41; Lohrenz 1988:82-83). The pleasure that seamstresses took in these factory-made materials is evident in this comment made by Mary Blair, a white girl in Bentonville, Arkansas, in an 1883 letter that she sent to an aunt in East Tennessee, “I am piecing me a very pretty scrap quilt called Winding Blades;” and in her 6-year-old sister Maggie’s dedication to collecting sewing scraps, expressed in an 1885 letter to her grandfather: “Now I am piecing me a quilt, I have 12 stars done, nearly all of the pieces were scraps that the neighbor girls have give to me, so just please send me a piece of one of your shirts and my aunties’ a piece of one of their dresses to put in my quilt” (Ramsey and Waldvogel 1986:90).
Another factor in the late-1800s democratization of quiltmaking was the shift of cloth- and clothing-making from home to factory, which gave women more time for sewing projects that had a social and expressive dimension. Increased affordability and domestic use of sewing machines in this period also increased household capacity for textile production. And the late-1800s expansion of quilt-pattern publishing by farm journals and mail-order companies gave rural women more design resources (Lohrenz 1988:83, 89; Duck 1971:32-34; Ramsey and Waldvogel 1986:88-91; Brackman 1989:24-27 and 1993:4-5, 521-527; and Kiracofe 1993:157, 159, 178).

All of these factors and the emancipation-fueled expansion of the small-farm sector (to include blacks) combined to generate a vernacular quilt culture that drew from Old World-influenced high-style quiltmaking of the mid-1800s as well as from popular quilt culture (published patterns) of the late 1800s and the 1900s.

**Southwestern Tennessee as a Cultural Region**

In characterizing cultural regions of the pre-revolutionary United States, scholars commonly look to the Old World origins and New World adaptations of colonial-era settlers (for instance, Kniffen 1965; Glassie 1968; Greene 1988; Fischer 1989). This approach can be adapted to later-settled inland regions by considering the east-coast origins of their early settlers, as Kniffen (1965) and Henry Glassie (1968) do in sections of their work and as Jordan-Bychkov does in his study of the Upland South (2003). In the present case, this involves looking at the cultural-region origins of people who settled southwestern Tennessee in the 1820s to 1850s.
However, the present study requires a broader concept of cultural region because my focus on mid-1900s quilt culture has components of historical change, popular culture as well as vernacular influences, and differential socioeconomic identities. Suited to these conditions is historian Gabrielle Lanier’s discussion of factors that comprise regional identity in her book, *The Delaware Valley in the Early Republic* (2005), a region known for internal diversity. Reviewing cultural-region scholarship, Lanier writes:

Factors such as land and climate, ethnicity and race, economy, politics and government, nationalism, culture, wealth, settlement history, and market orientation have long been recognized as contributors to regional and national identity; more recently, the roles of gender and religion have been explored. [2005:11]

History in particular, “imparts layers of meaning to the environment” (2005:11). This expanded notion of cultural region suits the present study, accommodating historical change, popular as well as folk culture, and differential identity.

Influences of Colonial Cultural Regions on the Study Area

Many scholars view southwestern Tennessee as part of Deep South plantation culture, apparently because of its delta geography and cotton plantation history (for instance, Abernethy 1967:x; Glassie 1968:112; McKenzie 1993:66). But whereas Lower-South states of South Carolina and Georgia are cited as the main influences on Deep-South plantation culture, southwestern Tennessee settlers came in large part from areas of Virginia and North Carolina that were in the Chesapeake Tidewater plantation area and its realm of influence, although the Lower South also contributed (Glassie 1968:109-112; see also sections above on early settlement history and ethnic origins).
Middle Colonies small-farm culture also influenced southwestern Tennessee. This occurred as Germans and Scots Irish from southern Pennsylvania as well as some recently arrived at southeastern seaports migrated in the mid-1700s to early 1800s to inland areas of Chesapeake and Lower South colonies or states, and to Kentucky and East and Middle Tennessee (Glassie 1968:74-88; Greene 1988:142-143). People of British Isles, African, German, and American Indian origins interacted in these Piedmont and Upland South areas, which along with the plantation regions fed settlers into West Tennessee starting about 1820 (Greene 1988:88; also see the section above on early settlement history).

Historian Jack P. Greene (1988) compares and contrasts these three source areas (Chesapeake, Lower South, Middle Colonies) along with eight additional pre-1760 British colonial areas in a study that promotes the Chesapeake over New England as the primary model for U.S. culture. He characterizes the three regions as follows.

Chesapeake plantation culture (Greene 1988:8-18, 81-100) was centered in Maryland and coastal Virginia but influenced all of North Carolina except its southern edge. It began with English immigrants in 1607 and developed as a “highly exploitive, labor-intensive, and sharply differentiated society” with a small wealthy class and a large majority of servant laborers (12). In addition to producing household subsistence products, its commercial economy was labor-intensive tobacco-growing, grain (corn, wheat, bread, flour), pig iron, shipbuilding, and beef and pork (86-87, 89). After 1720, “an expanding network of villages, communities, and crossroads junctions” populated by artisans, merchants and innkeepers, and lawyers testified to “growing occupational diversity and urbanization” (89-90). “Eighteenth-century Chesapeake agriculture continued to be dominated by small producers operating on family units with a handful of extra laborers”
(90). Rising exports in 1700 to 1775 resulted in increased prosperity and a higher value “of material possessions at all levels of free society,” as well as a “downward diffusion of slavery into the social structure” (91). The population was about 38 percent black by 1770 (87). A “prestigious elite” of planter families emerged in 1680 to 1720, emulating the “English rural gentry,” while “lower and middling ranks” of free whites grew “deferential” to the “relatively cohesive, responsive, even paternal elite” (93-94). Patriarchal relations between planters and slaves had elements of permissiveness, harsh punishment, and hard labor (95). Slavery in the Chesapeake was “milder” than in British sugar colonies, was “flexible and unstructured,” allowed pseudo-familial planter-slave relations, and in some cases gave slaves some “self-determination, ... a settled social life, ... autonomy,” and the capacity to develop “a common culture out of their many diverse heritages” through “cross plantation social networks” (96). In addition to large-scale planters and slaves, “There was a large population of middling and small planters and farmers, a growing number of tenants, a ‘numerous class of geographically mobile poor whites,’ and a large rural proletariat” (99-100).

**Lower South plantation culture** (Greene 1988:141-151) began around Charleston, South Carolina, and expanded to southern North Carolina and Georgia in the mid-1700s and to Florida in the 1760s (141-142). Its mid-1700s economy was based on rice, indigo, deerskins, naval stores, lumber, grains, and meat products (144). The society was “highly stratified:” about 20 percent of white households owned no land (and presumably no slaves), but about 33 percent owned more than 1,000 acres each (145). Blacks were 42 to 45 percent of the population on average, but 70 to 90 percent in some parts of South Carolina and Georgia (143).
A “commercial gentry,” comprising merchants, lawyers, and large-scale planters, “were receptive to changes that would enhance the economic well-being of its dominant population” (145-147). Slaves were subject to “highly restrictive” laws, and South Carolina had a “draconian” slave code based on that of Barbados (149). However, there were few slave uprisings, possibly due to use of the task system, under which a slave had free time after finishing a set task. Under the gang system, which was common in the Chesapeake and West Indies, slaves worked in groups for a set amount of time, typically sunrise to sunset, regardless of how much they accomplished (149). In the Lower South, by contrast, many slaves had little landlord surveillance, substantial autonomy and geographic mobility, black supervisors, their own households, the ability to raise and sell produce and livestock, distance from white society, a capacity to maintain African culture, and participation in “virtually every artisanal, craft, and service occupation” (149-150).

The Middle Colonies small-farm culture region (Greene 1988:124-141) comprised Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York, with urban centers of New York City and Philadelphia (124). Greene writes,

Especially after 1730, the Philadelphia hinterland in particular attracted thousands of immigrants from Scotland, Ireland, and Germany as well as from England.... It served as a plentiful source of immigrants for places farther south and west in Maryland, Virginia, and the Carolinas. [1988:125]

Mid-1700s agriculture included wheat and other grains, grain products, flaxseed, and meat, which were products that did not require a plantation-style intensive labor force (126, 132-133). “Family farms were the primary source of this large agricultural output,” with most “producing a wide range of crops and livestock for both home consumption and sale” (126-127). Tenant-farming was not a permanent class condition but “a necessary first step for
many who hoped to acquire an independent freehold in places where land prices were no longer cheap” (127-129).

Other industries included specialized merchant groups, shipbuilding, food processors such as flourmills and meatpackers, and iron and wood extraction (130-131). The black population averaged about 6 percent in 1770, but slaves were as much as 15 percent of the population in areas of New York and eastern New Jersey (132). Slaves worked on iron plantations, were status symbols for wealthy families, and in New York City and Philadelphia “could be found working at virtually every conceivable task” (132-134). They generally were too dispersed except in cities to have “a well-developed sense of community among them” (134).

In the mid-1700s, increasing urbanization and occupational complexity generated job opportunities other than landownership and farming (135-136). “The social structure also became more differentiated,” to include “wealthy urban mercantile elites” and a growing number of permanently poor people who were on poor relief or in low-paying jobs (136). However, in rural areas and, “For the Middle Colonies as a whole at the end of the colonial period, property was significantly more equally divided than it was in either the Chesapeake or New England” (136-137). It was “a pluralistic society containing a large variety of linguistic, ethnic, and religious groups,” whose members shared traits of “possessive individualism,” “suspicion of established authority,” “receptivity to change,” “tolerance for diversity,” and “habits of social flexibility” (137-141).

In the Tennessee Delta, aspects of these three colonial cultural regions mixed. Its dominant cotton-plantation economy required an intensive labor force as did Chesapeake and Lower South crops. But family farms occurred throughout the area. Property
ownership reflected the wide disparities of Chesapeake and Lower South plantation regions and of Middle Colonies cities rather than the evener distribution of Middle Colonies rural areas. As in the Chesapeake, large-scale planters in some cases mentored and supported dependent slaves or tenant farmers, and in some cases exploited and abused them, related sometimes to the subordinate’s behavior. The Tennessee Delta had cases of pseudo-familial relations between planters and slaves or tenant farmers, which were more common in the Chesapeake than in the Lower South; and cases where blacks lived in areas where they rarely saw whites, which were more common in the Lower South.

Black population percentages varied according to time period and location but were in the 40-to-70 percent range that aligns at the low end with the mid-1700s Chesapeake, and at the high end with parts of the Lower South. A substantial number of white farmers were small-scale or landless (tenants, sharecroppers, or wageworkers), as in all three colonial cultural regions. For instance, in 1860, about 20 percent of white farm households in Madison County owned no land; in 1920, the figure was about 49 percent in Haywood County (657 of 1,346 total white farm households), 56 percent in Lauderdale (1,023 of 1,819); and 45 percent in Madison (1,112 of 2,458) (Edwards 1999:307; 1920 U.S. Census).

As discussed above in the section on sharecropping, former slaves increased their autonomy as this system developed in southwestern Tennessee, effectively shifting with the use of individual contracts from the Chesapeake-style gang system to the Lower-South task system (Winters 1988:4-5). In many cases, however, sharecrop tenant-farming did not lead to landownership, as it did in the Middle Colonies model, but was a lifelong condition. Like Chesapeake and Lower South plantation regions rather than the Middle Colonies, the Tennessee Delta did not (until after World War II) offer a broad range of non-farm jobs. But
after the Civil War, black rural workers joined whites in being able to move to areas that offered job alternatives if local conditions did not satisfy their needs or ambitions.

I have not found evidence that slaves served as plantation foremen (overseers or supervisors) in my study area, as they did in the Lower South, but in the 1940s to 1960s black tenant-farmers occasionally did (TT 1986:4; JH 5:5; BB 25:13). As was common in the Lower South, at least some small-farm whites and blacks (even as slaves) had space to raise produce and livestock to meet their subsistence needs and, in some cases, to sell (Killebrew 1879:38-39; Mitchell 1979:18; LVR 7:2, 4-5; OM 13:2; JH 5:3). Additional evidence is the caption, “All families had cows,” in a photograph-based history of Haywood County African Americans (Norris 2000:90).

In southwestern Tennessee, Chesapeake plantation-culture traits of hierarchic but economically interdependent social groups, of upper-class paternalism and lower-class deference, tempered small-farm culture traits of “suspicion of established authority,” “possessive individualism,” and “receptivity to change” (Greene 1988:139, 140, 141). However, I argue, from the late 1800s to mid-1900s, small-farm culture was encroaching on large-farm (plantation) culture. It was bolstered by: the emergence of federal government and popular culture alternatives to planter authority; paternalist failures that were evident in vigilante justice and Depression-era withholding of federal crop-subsidy payments that owners owed to sharecroppers; rising economic independence of rural blacks; and increasing local non-farm job alternatives, first for rural whites, then for blacks.

Conditions of personalism and dual occupational identity facilitated the coexistence of plantation and small-farm cultures in the Tennessee Delta, building flexibility into the social structure. A condition of “personalism” in a social system means that individuals
relate to each other based on their personal knowledge of each other rather than following behavioral models that are based on social-group identities. Its presence in the Middle Colonies, known for religious and ethnic diversity, is evident in historian Michael Zuckerman’s observation that some people of a certain religious-group or ethnic-group identity (for instance, English Quakers, Scots-Irish Presbyterians, German Protestants) chose to interact with members of other groups, thus promoting assimilation and common culture, whereas others kept their distance (1982:22-23). “It is utterly obscure under what conditions immigrants adhered to their ethnic communities or abandoned them and in what circumstances settlers stayed within their religious traditions or strayed from them,” he writes (23). “Perhaps, as planners promoting racial integration have noticed in our own time, physical proximity did not dictate effective interaction.” On the other hand, “Sometimes propinquity did promote mingling” (22). In other words, individuals who belonged to different social groups based on certain facets of their identity (religion, ethnicity) sometimes recognized common ground based on other common facets of identity.

Forret, among others, notes personalist behaviors in plantation-culture regions. Studying relations between slaves and poor whites in Virginia and the Carolinas, he writes,

At times, shared economic deprivation and impoverishment tempered racial hostilities and drew slaves and poor whites together into civil, cordial, and even intimate and loving relationships.... Even during the antebellum decades, race relations were not predetermined but rather negotiated continually by individuals acting in specific contexts. Slaves and poor whites in the Old South persisted in crossing racial lines in violation of social convention. [2006:15, 16; on the rural South generally, see also Kirby 1984:414-418 and Walker 2003; on rural Georgia, see Schultz 2005:66-80]

Cutting across cultural regions, these findings indicate that individuals who differed in one facet of their identity (such as gender, religion, ethnicity, economic group, age, living
conditions, or neighborhood) but had another facet in common could experience separateness or affinity depending in part on which facet was foregrounded in a given realm of activity. In the Haywood County area, personalism promoted the development of a textile culture that planter, small-farm, and slave women shared until the Civil War, although some elements were unevenly distributed. In producing common ground based on shared gender identity, textile work was a sphere with the capacity to bridge economic- and racial-group difference. By 1900, historical changes resulted in declining participation of planter women in quiltmaking, increased influence of popular culture, and continued occasional quilt-related interactions among rural black and white women.

The overlap between plantation and small-farm cultures also emerged in “dual occupational identities,” by which I mean that an individual’s way of life incorporates conditions of two different occupational identities. Key identities in plantation culture were commercial planter and landless plantation-laborer. In small-farm culture, the key identity was independent (or yeoman) farmer. In the Tennessee Delta and elsewhere, these identities were not always completely separate.

Sharecroppers had dual identities as dependent laborers and independent farmers. Conditions that facilitated independence were: the 1871 Tennessee Supreme Court ruling mentioned above that gave sharecroppers ownership of their share of the crop from the time they planted it; household subsistence activities such as sewing, gardening, and raising livestock; and income-earning activities such as textile work or truck patches. Forret recognizes a capacity for laborer autonomy in antebellum Virginia and the Carolinas: “Slaves and poor whites lived parts of their lives independently from their social superiors” (2006:19).
Like Forret but in a general context, folklorist Dorothy Noyes observes the potential for subordinates to experience autonomy in certain spheres: “Some [dominators] leave untouched large spaces of everyday life, in which resistance can take shape” (1995:460). But Barth points out that such prescribed spheres of autonomy may exist as a plank of the status quo rather than as cocoons for resistance:

Stable inter-ethnic relations presuppose... a set of prescriptions governing situations of contact,... and a set of proscriptions on social situations preventing inter-ethnic interaction in other sectors, and thus insulating parts of the cultures from confrontation and modification. [1969:16]

But even if laborers who engaged in subsistence activities did not see their work as “resistance,” it promoted their agency by reducing their dependence on superiors. Historian Jeannie Whayne sees a similar dynamic in the work of black agricultural extension agents in the 1910s-60s U.S. South: “By encouraging the greater economic independence of black sharecroppers, Extension agents were laying the groundwork for freedom from the dominance of planters” (2003:164). I argue in my conclusion (pages 413-417) that while enhanced self-sufficiency did not drive small-farm blacks to engage in protest activities, it strengthened their ability to do so when changes undermined the existing socioeconomic system.

Planter and independent (yeoman) farmer identities also overlapped. Some Madison County yeoman farmers participated in plantation culture to the extent that they owned or rented slaves who helped with house- or field work and in that they grew not just subsistence crops but a bale or two of cotton to sell (Edwards 1999:306, 310-311). This mixing of commercial planter and subsistence farmer identities also occurred in the mid-1700s Middle Colonies: “Most farms throughout the region seem to have engaged in
general mixed farming, producing a wide range of crops and livestock for both home consumption and sale" (Greene 1988:127; emphasis added).

Conversely, some planter-family members did not just supervise laborers but labored themselves for dependents (that is, family members, slaves, tenants). Some antebellum planter women including Minerva Hynes Cook (1827-?, Warren County, west central Mississippi) participated in the production of utilitarian textiles for family members and slaves; and as mentioned above, black small-scale planter woman Idella Evans, of Haywood County, Tennessee, sewed clothes in the 1940s for her tenant’s grandchildren (Stamper 1988:96-98; OM 13:11).

The above examples of dual occupational identities demonstrate that plantation and small-farm cultures were not separate but coexistent and entwined. In the Tennessee Delta, Middle Colonies-influenced Upland South small-farm culture persisted amid Chesapeake- and Lower South-influenced plantation culture. Nevertheless, the minimal attention to southwestern Tennessee in some publications that are concerned with Tennessee vernacular culture, even through the late 1900s, expresses a degree of separateness between it and the rest of the state.

The above discussion of Tennessee Delta history and culture sets the stage for chapter 3’s analysis of the social system in this area as small-farm quilters experienced it in the 1920s to 1950s.
Fig. 2.1. A detail of the map, *Rural Cultural Regions in the United States* (U.S. Department of Agriculture 1940) appears below, showing the southeastern portion of the U.S. [Theresa Quill of IU Libraries Government Information, Maps and Microform Services Government Publications, configured this map for my purposes]. The original document states that it was “prepared in the Bureau of Agricultural Economics from data in WPA special research report, *Rural Regions in the United States*, by A. R. Mangus under the direction of T. J. Woofter, Jr., July 1940.”

Of the 34 regions in the U.S., four cross Tennessee, two in my study area: No. 19 Southeastern Plantation and No. 20 Delta Plantation. The key describes the four as:


19. Southeastern Plantation [light pink; much of West Tennessee, part of southern Middle and East Tennessee]. The Old South white stock with over 40 percent Negro. Dominantly cotton farming with tobacco in eastern portion. Nonfarm opportunities limited to textiles along Upper Piedmont and mining in the Birmingham area except scattered lumber operations. Nearly two-thirds of the farmers are tenants. Third lowest plane of living. Near top in birth rate. High percentage of low income farms. Relief high in first years of depression, low in last.


Descriptions of the other cultural regions that appear on this portion of the map are quoted below the map.
2. Eastern Metropolitan [dark blue]. A mixed region, dominated by large cities. One-third foreign born or of foreign parentage. Contains nearly one-third of the nation's urban and one-eighth of rural non-farm population (chiefly suburban). Farms devoted to truck, dairy, and specialties. Lowest birth rate, highest plane of living. Ranks second in owner operated farms. Low relief rate.


13. Middle Colonial [light green]. Original colonial area later settled from both North and South. One-third Negro, otherwise pure native white stock. General and self-sufficing farming with scattered truck, fruit, and tobacco areas. Over one-tenth are part-time farmers. Nonfarm opportunities include forestry, fishing, lumber, and food industries. Low in plane of living. Intermediate in birth rate. About one-fourth of the farmers are tenants. Small percentage on relief.


17. Ozark-Ouachita [pale pink]. Essentially similar to Appalachian (15), with higher tenancy rates.


Fig. 2.2. West Tennessee (Mississippi River at left, Tennessee River at right), with the southwestern Delta counties in light green. Map by Theresa Quill.
Fig. 2.3. Two Haywood County gins, in Nutbush (2 images) and Tibbs (1 image), 2007.

Cotton gin at Nutbush, northwestern Haywood County, as seen from Highway 19 driving west from Brownsville toward Ripley (in Lauderdale County).

Another view of the gin at Nutbush, approaching the Highway 19 junction from the northwest (coming from Curve, in Lauderdale County).
Tibbs Gin Co. with moon in the evening, driving north from Brownsville to Delois Baggett’s home.
Fig. 2.4. German-American Caroline Gohring Rauscher (1823-ca. 1900), of northwestern Middle Tennessee (east across the river from West Tennessee, near Kentucky), made this ca. 1850 fancy quilt (Weinraub 2006:68). Photograph by William C. L. Weinraub for the Georgia Quilt Project, Inc. Courtesy of Anita Zaleski Weinraub, the Georgia Quilt Project, and The University of Georgia Press.
Fig. 2.5. Ca. 1840 Sunburst with fancy scraps and secondary (red) Orange Peel pattern. Anne Baird’s great-great-grandmother Maria A. Brown (?) (1809-71) likely made it. Born in North Carolina, she was married to a Tipton County innkeeper by 1850. Detail shots follow.
Ch. 3. Social Relations in the World of Small-Farm Homemakers

Synthesizing fieldwork data and scholarly works, this chapter analyzes social relations in rural Haywood and Lauderdale counties from the 1920s to the 1950s, the last decades of labor-intensive cotton agriculture. It provides a context for discussions in chapters 4 and 5 of quiltmaking meanings and methods in the small-farm era (through the 1950s) and, in chapter 6, of how quiltmaking and social relations changed as capital-intensive agriculture took over in the 1960s and 1970s. Focusing on the small-farm period, sections in this chapter address: basic terms used within my analysis, primary quiltmaker identities, particularistic secondary quiltmaker identities, kinds of social-group relations, behavioral principles that accounted for social-group relations in quiltmaking, and systemic dynamics of agency and structure.

**Basic Terms**

I discuss here the meanings of basic terms that figure in my interpretation of the study-area social system: social group, identity, context-based, sphere of activity, facet of identity, role, household, propinquity, contingency, and mutuality.

By “social group,” I mean a category of people who have a common facet of identity, who may or may not know each other face-to-face. Traits, or facets of identity, that define
such groups include: gender, age, kinship, marital and parental status, economic status, occupation, religion, place of residence, and ethnic or racial-group heritage. This concept of social group encompasses ascribed and achieved statuses, terms by which anthropologist Ralph Linton distinguishes involuntary identities that a subject is born into or inherits (gender, ethnicity, birth family, caste, possibly occupation and economic group) from those that a subject achieves through choice, effort, and ability (and, perhaps, luck) (1936:113-115). I view individual “identity” as multi-faceted and context-based, with facets reflecting membership in social groups. By “context-based,” I mean that particular social contexts (referred to here as “spheres of activity”) tend to foreground and submerge certain facets of identity.

For my purposes, a “sphere of activity” refers to actions, social relations, and meanings related to a project such as housework, fieldwork, church participation, fishing, or school attendance. Since such spheres distributed authority differently among social groups, they tended to democratize a society and increase its complexity, flexibility, and stability. In the present study, the quiltmaking sphere awarded authority to small-farm homemakers, while their husbands had comparable authority in the realm of agricultural fieldwork.

Recent folklore studies scholarship also posits individual identity as composite (multi-faceted) and influenced by context. Harris M. Berger and Giovanna P. Del Negro find that interpretations of identity depend on “a larger social history and social context” and “are rarely one dimensional,” stating, “Whenever more than one dimension of identity is present, the various facets are organized in a foreground/background structure...” (2003:142, 146). They point to “multiple dimensions of identity” in a hypothetical social
situation, “variously emphasizing personality, kin group, region, ethnicity, gender, and class,” which “shift fluidly from foreground to background...” (2003:153). This concept of identity resembles mine in positing multiple parts (dimensions, facets) that may reference social group memberships and that are variously foregrounded in particular situations. In their folklore studies textbook, Martha C. Sims and Martine Stephens also associate identity with group memberships, and implicitly recognize the relevance of context in noting that participation in a group’s traditions can be a means of acquiring individual identity (Sims and Stephens 2005:39-44, 66).

Linton’s chapters on “Society” and “Status and Role” in his classic textbook, The Study of Man: An Introduction, also posit a composite, context-based notion of identity (1936:91-112; 113-131). His use of “status” and “pattern” is comparable to my use of “facet of identity” and “sphere of activity,” respectively. He perceives that an individual has multiple statuses, such as citizen, attorney, Methodist, lodge member, and husband, which reflect participation in multiple social patterns. A status is “a collection of rights and duties,” and a “role” is the enactment of the rights and duties of a particular status (1936:113-14). In the present work, I use Linton’s concept of “role” in relation to facets of identity. The perception that statuses, like facets of identity, reflect social group memberships is implicit in Linton’s statement that a status can be collective: “Whole categories of individuals may occupy the same polar position in one of these reciprocal patterns” (104, emphasis added). Thus Linton in the 1930s, like Berger and Del Negro and Sims and Stephens in the early 2000s, conceived of identity as composite and contextual. However, none of these scholars note a systemic capacity for social contexts to place social
groups in different hierarchic relations (see, however, the analysis of Cherokee structural poses in Fred Gearing 1962).

“Household” is the basic unit of social organization in this study. My use of the term draws from the fields of economic anthropology and U.S. agricultural history. Key sources are essays in the edited volume, The Household Economy: Reconsidering the Domestic Mode of Production (Wilk 1989); and Mary Neth’s study, Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940 (1995). Although the anthropologist contributors to Richard R. Wilk’s volume consider indigenous horticultural societies on several continents and Neth focuses on family farms in the western U.S. Midwest (from Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Illinois west to North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas), many of their findings coincide and apply to the households of my consultants (Neth 1995:7).

Following these sources, I view households as basic economic and social units whose members lived under one roof and interdependently produced and consumed but also had affective relationships and shared leisure activities (see Barlett 1989:5-6, 8-9; Wilk 1989:27-28, 43-44; Netting 1989:229-231; Neth 1995:2, 30-33). As Neth observes, “On the family farm, there were no separate spheres for women and men... Family space joined economic space. Market and home production served the same purposes...” (1995:17). As reported by my consultants, small-farm household economies were a mix of subsistence and cash resources, comprising: subsistence horticulture, market exchange including sale of agricultural and home-produced goods and services and purchase of commodities, paid labor (including renting and sharecropping contracts as well as wages), and neighborly “mutual-aid” exchanges of labor and goods (see Barlett 1989:5-8; Wilk
1989:28, 44, 45n1; Netting 1989:225, 229-30, 233, 238-39; Neth 1995:2, 9, 17, 30-32, 40, 275n4; and for a study of an Eastern Band Cherokee mutual-aid society [the *Gadugi*], Fogelson and Kutsche 1961). Mutual-aid networks involved reciprocal economic and social interactions with various degrees of mixing or separation among economic, ethnic, racial, and religious groups (see Netting 1989:239; Barlett 1989:7-9; Neth 1995:11-12, 40, 71-94). In my Tennessee Delta study area, “propinquity” was usually a condition of a small-farm mutual-aid network, meaning that participating households had to be within walking distance of each other since few had motor vehicles. Close neighbors might be a quarter- or half-mile away, but it was not unusual to walk eight or ten miles (see Figure 3.1, pages 154-162, for hand-drawn maps of nine consultant homesteads in the 1930s to 1950s).

Members of a given household usually were kin, related biologically or by marriage. But they also belonged to different social groups according to their age and gender, and had some different values and ideals (see Wilk 27, 46n8; Barlett 4-8; Neth 2). A basic household was a married couple and their children, but contingencies such as death or divorce led to variations: one parent with children, a woman with grandchildren, parents with their own and other people’s children, and parents and children with a widowed grandmother or bachelor uncle. “Contingency” refers here to conditions caused by external forces to which subjects can only react.

Although ideology defined distinctive household positions and complementary work roles based on traits of gender, birth order, and age, real conditions led to variations. “Women’s labor centered on the house, men’s work on the fields,” writes Neth. But, “Economic necessity countered the ideological gender definitions of labor” (1995:19-20). Contingencies that caused personnel variations and demanded role flexibility included
crop-growing labor needs, weather, physical ailments, death, and market conditions. In addition, economic interdependence and affective connections gave all household members some power to negotiate their roles according to personal preference (see Wilk 40-44; Barlett 6-10; Neth 3, 17-39). On the one hand, Neth observes, “authority structures of agriculture and family gave power to the male head of household, who represented the family in the larger political and economic world”; on the other, “the practices of family farming not only made men dependent on their families for success, but also encouraged them to define their success in familial terms” (18). Subject to variables such as economic group, ethnic group, and personalities, this condition of interdependence or mutual interest (Neth terms it “mutuality”) inhibited the competitiveness associated with a market economy and required some degree of the collaboration, authority-sharing, and reciprocity that is associated with a moral economy (see Barlett 7-8; Neth 22-26, and for “mutuality” 3, 5-6, 13, 33, 71, 77, etc.).

Reflecting irregular and unreliable cash and subsistence resources, small-farm conditions promoted values of self-sufficiency and frugality. These included work (in Netting’s words, the “Protestant ethic”), making things, using available resources rather than buying things, doing without, conservation, and not wasting (see Netting 230; Neth 29-32). Neth notes, “The value placed on making do reinforced the importance of women’s labor to the family farm.... Women and men viewed home production as crucial to family farming” (31). The home-production component of small-farm households, which included quiltmaking, thus promoted a more mutualistic ideology of gender roles than that of more cash-and-commodity-based middle-class households that subsisted primarily by using the man’s cash income to purchase supplies.
Primary Quiltmaker Identity

Based on their memories of the days of labor-intensive cotton agriculture, my consultants perceived that virtually all small-farm homemakers with children had made quilts because household conditions required it. In Ola Jean Currie’s (1942-, black) words, “When they’d get done gathering the crop, all these black ladies and white ladies would be quilting” (11:1). And Lucille Hight (1927-, white) said, “All of them had to, ... for warmth” (20:14). In this section I discuss the three facets of identity most associated with quiltmaking, which marked it as an activity of small-farm homemakers: small-farm economic group, female gender group, and adult age group. I note the presumption that quilt groups were racially homogeneous and then review secondary quiltmaker identities.

Small-Farm

My consultants viewed quiltmaking as having been a necessity in small-farm households. Economic conditions had required such families to maximize self-sufficiency and minimize cash outlay through practices such as gardening, raising chickens and hogs, hunting and fishing, cutting wood for heat (some also used kerosene, known as “coal oil”), making soap, and making clothes, bedcovers, and mattresses. As noted in chapter 2, categories of small-farm households comprised: yeomen, who owned and worked their own land although they might also have hired help or work for others; farmers who rented a house and rented or sharecropped farmland; tenant farmers who owned no land but sharecropped someone else’s (contracted to farm a given acreage and give the owner a percentage of the harvest in return for use of the land) and had the use of a house and often
personal crop and garden space under terms of their contract; and wage workers ("hands") who earned a daily wage working for landowners, renters, or sharecroppers. Most of my consultants, black and white, lived in these types of households in the 1920s to 1960s.

More blacks than whites were tenant farmers, and more whites than blacks were large-farm-owners who relied on tenant, sharecropper contract, and/or wage labor to do their fieldwork. But evidence that quiltmaking marked economic-group more than racial-group identity is Ollie Moore's (1942-, black) conviction that the wife of the black farm-owner who had Moore's grandmother as a tenant had not made the quilts on her beds although she had a sewing machine and sewed dresses for tenant children. "I don't know if somebody in her family gave them to her or how she got them," she told me (13:12). Whereas some black consultants who had lived in Haywood County's Woodlawn community said that only black people had made quilts, this view reflected the norm in this area of small farmers being black and large farmers being white. It thus aligned with the normal view of quiltmaking as a necessity of small-farm life.

On the other hand, small-farm whites who had had no contact with black quiltmaking thought that blacks probably had made quilts. As Peggy Staggs (1938-, white) said, "They was in the same boat we were in so I'm sure they did.... We would all go under if we didn't do what we had to do to survive" (18:15). As with small-farm blacks who thought that whites had not made quilts, this educated guess indicates that small-farm whites associated quiltmaking with living conditions more than with racial-group identity. They viewed quiltmaking as common culture across racial-group but not economic-group lines. And whereas some Woodlawn community blacks had associated white racial-group
identity with large-farm economic-group identity, these small-farm whites associated black racial-group identity with small-farm economic-group identity.

The small-farm quilters who were raising children had a strong utilitarian orientation, as it was their job to produce enough bedcovers to keep the family warm in sometimes below-freezing weather inside poorly insulated houses that were heated only by fireplaces and wood or “coal oil”-burning stoves. Some households had eight-to-12 children, and several children often shared a bed. Quilters minimized cash outlay through ready access to cotton (for quilt batting) and reliance on recycled materials such as commodity sacks, sewing scraps, and salvageable parts of old clothes for making quilt tops and backings. Non-utilitarian motivations, in which quiltmaking served mainly social purposes, were more prominent among small-farm women who did not have primary responsibility for children and among women in higher-income or centrally heated households. Under sociologist Robert K. Merton's notion of “manifest” functions as conscious, overt, and intended, and “latent” functions as “unintended and unrecognized,” only utilitarian uses were manifest in small-farm society (1993[1967]:328-330).

Among the latent social uses of small-farm quiltmaking were: entertainment, creative fulfillment, and relaxation; bonding with friends and family; keeping up-to-date on local events (termed “gossip” in cases involving improper behavior); locating one’s household in a mutual-aid network; creating a legacy and building community by making gift quilts for family members and neighbors; introducing girls to women’s culture; earning money by selling quilts or quiltmaking services; helping a relative who was raising small children (including cases of live-in widows who did this as a means of contributing to the household that had taken them in); and gaining recognition (for instance, through display
at a fair). These social uses were secondary in the dominantly utilitarian quiltmaking of women in small-farm households with children.

Female

Under the gendered small-farm division of labor, domestic responsibilities such as quiltmaking, cooking, canning, cleaning, laundry, sewing clothes, childcare, soap-making, gardening, mattress-making, and chicken-raising were understood to be the realm of women. As Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) informed me, “Very seldom you see a man could sew” (14:6). Ideally and most conveniently, a woman’s work complemented that of a man who contributed to the household through crop-growing, hunting, wood-chopping, livestock-raising, working for local businesses such as cotton gins, and dealing with “the public” (entities outside of the household). In practice, many women raised children without a male partner because they were widowed, divorced, or separated, or because their husband was in the military or had a factory job elsewhere. In addition, many small-farm women (black and white, with and without husbands) worked with men in the fields due to economic necessity and/or personal preference, especially during labor-intensive stages of cotton production. Some women worked in country stores, gins, or factories that made, for instance, coats, gloves, curtains, uniforms, or television tuners (white women reported local factory jobs starting in the 1950s, black women in the 1960s). Some women also sold produce that they grew in truck-patch gardens, sold quilts that they had made or quiltmaking services, or in the case of black women, did domestic work for white families.

As many small-farm women had crossed over into men’s work, so had many men played a supporting role in women’s work. Normally, small-farm men valued and respected
a woman's ability to make clothing and quilts, recognizing that it contributed to household self-sufficiency. In the realm of quiltmaking in particular, various consultants reported that husbands had built quilt frames and wooden storage boxes (to protect against mice), bought sewing machines and supplies, and brought cotton home from the gin for batting. Quiltmaking was thus a source of authority and agency as well as a chore for small-farm homemakers.

Adult

Quiltmaking was an adult realm of responsibility and expertise in small-farm households, understood to be complex, painstaking, a substantial investment of resources, and a crucial aspect of childcare. Given that local social organization put women in charge of domestic activities, the quiltmaker role was a component of small-farm homemaker status. A woman with no children didn’t need to make quilts, and a woman without a man was hard put to acquire basic quiltmaking resources, since husbands often bought sewing machines and supplies and built quilt frames and storage boxes. I encountered only two cases of quilters without sewing machines: a divorced tenant-farmer who was raising several grandchildren (OM 13:1, 7), and a family that had none while living in Henderson County, where soil was too poor for commercial cotton farming, but that acquired one after moving two counties west to Haywood County in 1950 (PS 18:1, 3, 11).

Whether alone or in groups, women commonly worked on quilts when children were not around. For instance, Barbara Callery’s (1940-, white) mother and live-in maternal grandmother quilted “after lunch. Kids were in school” (17:16). Opal Brack (1919-, black) also used school time: “After the kids had left home, I’d go in my bedroom
and quilt by myself” (2A:4). In so doing, they minimized distractions; enhanced efficiency, relaxation, and creative concentration; marked quiltmaking as an adult activity; and in cases of quilt groups, facilitated discussion of adult matters, or what some called “gossip.”

Two accounts of failed efforts to teach girls to make quilts support the view of quiltmaking as ideally an adult realm. In one, Opal Brack (1919-, black) cited the same problem with her daughters as her mother had had with her: “My children never did help me to quilt. Their stitches were too long, and I’d have to pull them out” (2A:4). In the other, Ollie Moore (1942-, black) describes her grandmother’s efforts to teach her to piece tops:

She’d look at it, and she’d say, “That’s not what I told you to do.” I had the seam coming up instead of going down. And she would take it all loose, and she’d have me to sew it again. But no matter how many times she’d tell me, “This is not what I told you,” I would always get that seam going up instead of going down. So one day she just told me, “That’s okay. Go find something else to do. I’m gonna do this.” [13:15]

Although many consultants said that they had learned quiltmaking from female elders, they commonly did so informally, by watching, by helping in various age-appropriate ways, and in the case of young wives, by collaborating with mothers or mothers-in-law, depending on where the young couple lived.

Racially Homogeneous Quilt Groups

Most consultants said that quilt groups had been all white or all black. For instance, Opal Brack (1919-, black) explained to me, “The whites did their quilting and piecing, and the black women did theirs. Everybody pieced and quilt their own quilts” (2:3). Although small-farm whites and blacks who were neighbors sometimes joined in outdoor self-sufficiency-promoting activities such as fishing and hog-killing, they normally did not mix in indoor mutual-aid activities. In this case, the norm that black and white women did not
visit each other at home for social reasons except to bring food at a time of illness or death apparently transcended the small-farm norm of neighborly cross-racial-group mixing that applied in outdoor work situations, including mutual-aid contexts. Under conditions of economic-group difference, expressed by employer-employee rather than mutual-aid relations, black and white women normally did mix in household work situations, but with black women always in the subordinate role of helping white women at their homes. The norm of racially homogeneous quilt groups apparently expressed the norm of women not making cross-racial-group social visits at each other’s homes. If so, this ostensibly mutual-aid activity was recast as indoor social visiting in order to uphold the latter as a marker of racial-group affinity. This practice testifies to the potent although latent social uses of quiltmaking.

Secondary Quiltmaker Identities

As described above, consultants viewed quiltmaking in the last decades of labor-intensive cotton agriculture as the province of small-farm homemakers working in racially homogeneous groups. However, I learned that it sometimes had diverged from this norm to include men, children, large-farm women, and racially mixed homemaker groups. I discuss these secondary quiltmaker conditions in this section.

Consultants told me of two cases in which men (both black) had not just supported women’s quiltmaking but participated in the construction process by cutting out pattern pieces or sewing. Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) had helped his wife when other women weren’t there, the children were in bed, and his own (manly) chores were done:

I wouldn’t do it all the time ‘cause, see, I had to farm. I’d just quilt with her some nights when she was lonesome…. But I could do pretty good quilting. I
could do it about like she could.... I just enjoyed sitting there and talking with her, me and her piece quilts, and after the children would get to sleep. You know, the children would be rushing, kind of jumping all around.... They can make you stick that needle in your hand with all that jumping and playing, see.... And sometimes when they'd go to bed, then that would be our best quilting time.... She'd show me what to put together, just like that quilt there.... She'd [say], "Put this one on there, put this one on there, put this one on there".... It would be at night when I'd come in. [14:7, 8, 11]

Beard's daughter, Lollie Lee Mann (1936-), noted another condition of his quiltmaking: “My daddy would quilt till somebody said, ‘Go coon-hunting.’ Then he would drop everything and go coon-hunting at night” (1:2). Beard’s quiltmaking thus did not defy the small-farm norm of gendered labor, but demonstrated the potential for individuals to adapt norms to their conditions. Like Beard, Lue Vennia Robinson’s (1922-, black) father had helped his wife with quilting, but only if his own (recognized as masculine) chores were done and there were no visitors. “He just helped quilt sometimes,” she said. “And some days, uh, he had to haul wood so they’d have fire burning. So when he’d go to wood, he ain’t quilting” (7:4, 5). In these cases, subjects adapted social group-defining ideology to their purposes.

Another secondary quiltmaker identity was “large-farm women.” Although most consultants supposed that large-farm women had not made quilts since they had better-built houses and could afford to buy bedcovers, Johnanna Bullock (1913-96) had been in a quilt group with three other small-farm black women and three large-farm white women around 1950. Said her daughter, Ola Jean Currie (1942-),

There was lots of people in the community quilting, but these are the ones that always fit together.... If you brought your quilt this week, they’d quilt yours. Then next week they’d quilt mine, and on and on. Before the spring, everybody would have a quilt... Seemed like they enjoyed it because they wouldn’t ever quit. They would just quit to get them a bite for lunch and then go right back at it. [11:1]
The black quilters in this group had worked as domestics and tenant farmers, one of them for the white woman who usually hosted the quilting. All seven quilters were in their thirties, were neighbors in the Holly Grove community, and had discussed everyday topics such as recipes and quilt patterns (11:1). In a rural area with limited recreational alternatives, some women who had no need to maximize self-sufficiency apparently found that the social rewards of quiltmaking, such as camaraderie and entertainment, outweighed its low economic-group status. As with men who helped their wives quilt, these large-farm women adapted social group-defining ideology to their conditions, in this case likely casting quiltmaking as a hobby rather than a necessity.

Another social group that abnormally participated in quiltmaking was “children.” Although it was an adult realm, children sometimes impinged given the prominent childcare role of small-farm homemakers and their contingencies of time and space. Given that the view of quiltmaking as a female realm extended to children, the cases presented here show its potential to introduce girls to womanhood.

Working alone at home in rural northern Mississippi, Jean Bolding’s (1932-, Lauderdale County, white) mother had coordinated quiltmaking and childcare in this way:

A lot of her quilting was at night, sitting around the fireplace after she had done all the chores for the day. And us, us girls would play paper dolls under the quilting frames, under the quilt. She let us, if a Sears Roebuck catalog had gotten out of date, she would let us take that Sears Roebuck catalog and cut paper dolls out of that.... [3:2]

Bolding and her two sisters also had torn the paper backing from string-pieced quilt blocks (which were made by sewing narrow scraps onto a paper template, usually a square or diamond, then trimming the cloth edges when the template was covered and tearing out the paper backing): “Some of the time that was our job, pullin’ that off, and it was fun ‘cause
we pulled that paper off and throw that paper in the fireplace and watch it burn” (3:2). In this way a mother had passed on quilting skills (using a scissors, string-piecing) to her daughters while getting her own work done.

Since about age eight, Ida Mae Coleman (1941-, black) had cut out pattern pieces with girl cousins for their mothers’ evening quilt group (22:14; 23:10):

I was never in there actually in the sewing. But what they would do,... they would already have their little design, and give us this little piece of paper. We’d cut by that.... It could be made from a, a paper bag, a piece of newspaper, a magazine, whatever they stripped that thing out of, and they would have that little pattern there for us, and you had to cut exactly by—And scissors, at that time, I don’t know how they kept them sharp, but they were extra sharp, and you had to cut ’em exact. [23:8, 9, 10]

These mothers had framed quilting as serious business rather than “fun.”

Lue Vennia Robinson (1922-, black) began quilting at about age 14 and remembered it as a family pastime in winter: “My mother was piecing quilts, and we wanted to quilt, too.... When times are cold, you won’t have nothing to do, like to be doing something....” (7:1, 2). With entertainment options limited by lack of motor vehicles and electricity, quilting had enhanced family camaraderie across gender and age-group differences.

I learned that in the experience of some consultants, black and white, quilt groups had had a special capacity to serve as liminal space between girlhood and womanhood.

Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) said,

My grandmother and aunts all quilted together.... And I can remember sitting under the quilt and playing, and they would talk about things that, you know, you didn’t talk about, things like being in a family way [pregnant]. But you just heard all those things that they talked about, and there’s things that I know about my family that the rest of the kids don’t know...because I was under the quilt frames hearing all this, and some of the stuff was things that they shouldn’t have been saying, like, “So-and-so’s wife is going with this guy,” or, uh, “This man has started drinking,” .... [3:2]
Quilt groups thus had a latent function of social reproduction, teaching girls to recognize proper and improper behaviors.

At her grandmother’s quilt-group meetings in Haywood County’s Holly Grove community, Betsy Waddell (1951-, white) also was privy to gossip, some of which had educated her to quiltmaker standards through criticism of an absent member’s “large” stitches: “It was fun to be in there listening to them and, you know, a little kid and big ears and, you know, you’d hear things” (19:14). Likewise, Lucille Hight (1927-, white) said of her mother’s quilt group: “I remember being a little girl and, and thinking, ‘Well, that woman said so-and-so.’ ... Now I wasn’t quilting. I was a little girl going to school. But when I’d come home from school, you know, they were there” (20:15). In such cases it is unclear whether quilters meant to expose girls to women’s culture, thought they were too young to understand it, or forgot they were there. In some cases, quilters had sent children away when they wanted to discuss adult matters (IMC 22:14, 23:10; JH 5:15).

Two black consultants, Ida Mae Coleman (1941-) and her younger relative, Goldie Harwell (1960-), thought that their female elders had used quilting time to teach girls social survival skills, such as family connectedness, mutual affirmation, hard work, strength in adversity, charity, and handling of racist incidents (“Act like you don’t see it. Keep on moving” [23:2-5]). Said Coleman,

I guess they were preparing us, so to speak, you know, for all those other things that were gonna come along... because, see, by allowing us to be in there some of the time when they were doing the quilting, this was also their time to talk to us, you know, to teach us. [23:5]

In their view, the quiltmaking realm had supported social as well as material reproduction.

Finally, quilt groups had served to imbue the homemaker identity with an aura of authority and mystique in the eyes of some girls, as conveyed by consultants’ use of words
such as “fascinated,” “amazing,” and “wow.” Coleman (1941-, black), for instance, said, “What fascinated me was the fact that, I’m wondering, ‘How would they take these pieces and get them into a quilt?’... When you see this thing being done, and then you see this product after it’s finished, it’s amazing” (22:1; 23:11). Waddell (1951-, white) reacted similarly: “I liked it because, watching them do the different parts of it, and seeing it start out like this, and then seeing it finished, it’s kind of like a puzzle.... ‘Fascinating’ maybe would be a word to watch all that kind of thing” (19:14). Holloway (1952-, black) also was impressed:

I remember them sitting down and, you know, just going through the motion and talking. And sometimes they wouldn’t even be looking at their hands because they already had it in their mind, you know. They could do it without even looking at it. They did it. And I’m thinking, “Wow,” you know. [5:14-15]

These cases show the capacity of the quiltmaking process to influence how children viewed women and perhaps the domestic sphere generally.

A final secondary condition of quiltmaking in the small-farm era is that of racially mixed groups. Although black and white women normally did not mix in quiltmaking, three consultants reported cases where they had. In the one noted above as an instance where large-farm women participated in quiltmaking, possible contributing factors were geographic propinquity, age-group affinity, and the pseudo-familial relations that sometimes developed between black domestics and their white employers (OJC 11:1). A second case was that of a small-farm white woman (1925-) whose mother had quilted with black neighbors in north central Haywood County’s Stogdom Bottom community, and who did so herself after marrying. “We were poor people,” she said. “I had five children. I had to make quilts” (RJ 10/19/08:4, 3). Possible contributing factors in this case of mixed-racial-group quilting were propinquity of black and white households, need for help, desire for
companionship, and respect for each other’s skill, as indicated by this woman’s comment, “Black women are good quilters. Most of them are, the ones we dealt with out on the farm” (RJ 10/19/08:3). In the third case, Thelma Austin (1944-, black) said that a small-farm white woman had sometimes attended a quilt group whose other members were small-farm black women in the Nutbush area in the 1940s and 1950s (6/26/11; 12/28/06). Possible contributing factors were propinquity of black and white households, the white woman’s apparent respect for the black women’s competence, her need for help, and, given Austin’s impression that the white woman’s presence had inhibited conversation, the black women’s willingness to enact forms of etiquette that were expected of them when they were in the company of white women (6/26/11).

Underlying factors in these exceptional cases of racially mixed groups were: areas where blacks and whites were neighbors (possibly living in closer proximity than to households of their own racial group); economic conditions that made small-farm households rely on mutual-aid networks to support their self-sufficiency; the extensive time and household space required at the quilting stage of quiltmaking, which promoted collaboration; in Currie’s case, congenial relations between large-farm white women and the small-farm black women who in some cases worked for them; lack of rural recreational options in winter; common areas of interest; and pleasure in peer-group companionship.

While (by their very nature) not representing default norms, the secondary quiltmaker conditions noted above testify to a systemic capacity for flexibility in social-group relations in this part of the domestic realm. Quiltmaking did not uniformly map neatly onto its normal core population of small-farm homemakers, but allowed (or required) them to negotiate and improvise particularistic relations with other groups.
**Variability in Social Relations**

Several aspects of the small-farm social system facilitated the variable social relations that some consultants reported in quiltmaking and other spheres of activity. For instance, due to having multi-faceted identities and to different facets being featured in different spheres of activity, subjects could experience different affinities depending on the activity. Also, whereas contingencies and psychological factors led subjects to improvise on normal conditions by necessity or choice, systemic “fallback” principles guided such behaviors and cast them as appropriate rather than as subversive agency.

Like other spheres of activity, quiltmaking provided a context for individual interactions based on how it situated social groups relative to each other. Relationships between individuals derived in part from the activity-based social context in which they interacted, although contingent and psychological factors also contributed. Presented here are six kinds of social-group relations that I discern in study-area quiltmaking: mixing, privacy, separation, complementarity, otherness, and reciprocity. These relations were variously normal or exceptional depending on the two social-group identities considered.

“Mixing” occurred when people collaborated in an activity that foregrounded a shared facet of identity. For instance, black and white women who quilted together could create common culture (and personal micro-histories) across racial-group difference because this sphere emphasized common facets of identity such as gender, age, economic group, and neighborhood. A husband and wife who mixed in quiltmaking or fieldwork foregrounded kin, household, and (often) age-group affinity over gender difference.
“Privacy” relations occurred when acknowledged primary practitioners of an activity attempted to exclude members of a group that they perceived as disruptive of their goals in that activity. For example, small-farm homemakers tried to limit or control children’s access to quiltmaking. They might also have done so with men if men had tried to disrupt women’s goals in this realm, but I encountered no such cases.

“Separation” occurred when a given activity foregrounded a common facet of identity among subjects, but they participated in it separately based on another facet of identity in which they differed. In such cases, they apparently followed the model of another social sphere that foregrounded the area of difference. For instance, in the case of racially homogeneous quilt groups that occurred in areas where small-farm blacks and whites were neighbors, norms that dictated racial-group separation in social activities apparently overrode norms of mutual-aid collaboration. The norm of racial-group-based separation in quiltmaking probably accounts for the development of some different methods, meanings, and fashions among black and white quilters, although they were performing the same activity in the same area. Kin- and age-group identities also could serve as a basis of separation in quiltmaking.

In “complementarity,” people who were interdependent based on a common facet of identity (such as kinship or household) worked for their common good by participating in different activities based on identities where they differed (such as age or gender). For instance, a small-farm woman made quilts while her husband cut wood, with a shared goal of keeping the family warm in winter. Adult caretakers and their children had a complementarity relation over time: Adults participated in certain work activities as part of caring for small children; around age eight, children started contributing to various spheres
of household economy, such as fieldwork; and grown children participated in activities that supported elders whose capacity to work was limited.

“Otherness” occurred when people with a common facet of identity foregrounded their social difference in another area by meeting a common need in different ways. For instance, as a domestic textile activity, quiltmaking historically had foregrounded adult female identity generally. But large- and small-farm women marked each other as economically “other” by meeting their household need for bedcovers differently: the latter economized by making quilts; the former used their cash resources to buy bedcovers.

“Reciprocity” occurred as an element of other relations that involved mutuality and exchange. Complementarity was a form of reciprocity, and it could enter into mixing and separation relations if individuals or groups traded roles of performer and audience or giver and receiver. In quilt groups with cross-household mixing, the normal mutual-aid arrangement whereby members group-quilted the tops that they had made individually was a reciprocity relation. Churches in the southwestern Haywood County town of Keeling had a separation relation based on racial-group difference, but the custom that the black and white Baptist churches had of attending each other’s revivals added an element of reciprocity (DB 10/17/08; see Figure 3.1.1 map, page 154). Delois Baggett (1933-, white) said that members of the guest congregation would sit on the lawn, close enough to hear the program (Figure 3.2, page 163, shows Haywood County’s black Woodlawn Missionary Baptist Church and white Stanton Presbyterian Church).

For any two people, depending on which facet of identity was foregrounded, quiltmaking (and other spheres of activity) configured one of the relations discussed above
(mixing, privacy, separation, complementarity, otherness, reciprocity) as “normal.” Quiltmaking normally placed a married couple in a complementarity relation (women and men contributed to the household in different ways); mixing occurred rarely (as in the few examples of women and men who made quilts together). A separation relation was normal in quiltmaking for women of different racial groups, although mixing occurred rarely.

For small-farm and large-farm women (in different households), otherness was normal (small-farm women made quilts, large-farm women did not), complementarity and reciprocity occurred occasionally (large-farm women made tops and paid small-farm women to quilt them or bought quilts from small-farm makers), and mixing (cross-household quilt groups) occurred rarely. For women and children (same household), privacy was normal; mixing occurred occasionally. A mixing relation was normal in quiltmaking for kinwomen of different ages (same or different households), for kin and non-kin women who were of different ages and households but the same racial group, and for non-kin women of the same age group (and racial group) in different households.

Mixing also was normal for white women of different ethnic heritages (based on limited data). This likely is because the small-farm population in this area lacked highly marked “ethnic” difference among “white” families. They all spoke English, were Protestant, and in the period examined here, had either long resided in the area or had migrated to it from areas of the U.S. that shared with it a broad national and regional culture. Thus, white ethnic identity was not prominent in my fieldwork area. (A contrast would be provided by rural areas with Amish, Mennonite, or Mormon settlements, or where strong Scandinavian or Eastern European immigrant communities existed amid more common, ethnically mixed [British Isles, German, French, Dutch] white populations.)
Particularistic Social-Group Relations in the Realm of Quiltmaking

In this section I note cases of unusual social-group relations in quiltmaking and discuss ways in which relations between certain social groups were different in quiltmaking than in other realms of housework and fieldwork. Such instances show the systemic potential for variability in how individuals related to each other, subject to particularistic conditions.

Women and men. The normal complementarity relations between men and women in quiltmaking upheld the small-farm ideal of a gendered division of labor, whereas this ideal often was unattainable at labor-intensive stages of cotton farming. The condition of men playing a supportive role was normal in quiltmaking but less common in other areas of housework. To help quiltmaking women in their households, men (black and white) built quilt frames and storage boxes, bought sewing machines and supplies, helped mount quilts on frames, and transported women to quilt group meetings. This stance expressed a view of quiltmaking as especially complex and labor-intensive women’s work that was crucial to household self-sufficiency. Quiltmaking thus emphasized the cross-gender-group mutuality that underlay normal small-farm husband-wife complementarity relations. Carolyn Simpson’s (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) comment that quilt groups had offered some women with controlling husbands a rare opportunity to get out of the house brought home to me the particular capacity for homemaker agency in quiltmaking (relative to other domestic activities) (4:5, 6).

[An exception to the supportive role of men in quiltmaking was Lucille Hight’s (1927-, white) account of her father having complained about how long his wife took to
quilt a quilt, which was on a frame hung by ropes from the ceiling. Hight said, "At night, of course, they had to be out of the way for the men and boys and all to come. So they would pull them up and tie them up yonder, and I've seen my daddy do that, fuss, 'When you gonna get through with this quilt?'" (20:13). He apparently had resented the demands that quilting made on household space and also perhaps on his wife's time and attention.]

   Women and children. Privacy relations were normal as homemakers viewed quiltmaking as an adult activity and tried to minimize and control children's access to it. It differed in this respect from fieldwork and other housework, where children normally mixed with adults at ages as young as six (picking cotton) or 12 (plowing and cooking). However, conditions of homemaker space and time sometimes obstructed ideal privacy relations and resulted in complementarity and mixing. These occasions involved primarily girls rather than boys, reflecting the cross-gender complementarity of adults.

   In some cases where privacy failed, children filled complementarity support roles similar to those of men, such as fetching the scissors or carrying a sample pattern block from one house to another. In other such cases, girls had the complementarity role of trainees, watching and listening in on homemaker skills and culture that they eventually would have to perform. And in other cases, girls mixed with their elders by cutting out pattern pieces (or practicing the use of a scissors on paper dolls) or helping to quilt a top. In the one report of a girl who helped her mother withquilting, she was 14, approaching homemaker age, and the case emphasized kin-group camaraderie over age-group difference (LVR 7:1). These cases show the potential for children and women to have different kinds of relations in quiltmaking, subject to their particular circumstances.
Black and white women. The normal separation relation of black and white women in quiltmaking differed from their normal mixing relation in outdoor work activities such as fieldwork and hog-killing, where cross-gender- as well as cross-racial-group mixing was normal. But the separation relation in quiltmaking aligned with realms of kinship and household space, given the taboo against cross-racial-group mixing in marriage and indoor socializing. For instance, Lucille Hight (1927-, white) said of her in-laws’ relations with their black domestic helpers, “There was no visiting done if that’s—unless somebody died, you know…. If there was a death in the family, then they helped out” (20:12). Black and white women normally did not visit each other for social reasons except to bring food at times of illness or death.

The norm of cross-racial-group separation in quiltmaking also contrasted with the mixing that was normal in cases where black women did housework for small-farm whites. Small-farm whites who owned or rented land sometimes had such relationships with black neighbors (who in some cases owned land themselves), distinguished from those of large-farm households in that small-farm white homemakers tended to work with their helpers rather than primarily supervise them. As Hight said of her mother-in-law, “Miss May had all kinds of black women that helped her, like I said, you know, even to chopping in the flower bed. [Me: “So did she not have to do so much hard work herself then?”] She was a hard worker…. Yes, yes, she was right there with ‘m” (20:11).

A possible reason for why small-farm white women had maintained cross-racial-group separation in quiltmaking but mixed in other housework is that they perceived quiltmaking to have more of a social dimension. For instance, when I said that I had heard one report of cross-racial-group quilting in the Holly Grove area, Hight (1927-, white)
responded, “I lived there, and I do not know of anybody that communicated together like the blacks and the whites in that community. [Me: “Like in a social—?”] Like in a social manner” (21:18). If white people had “met” socially with black people, they would have crossed “a line” and lowered themselves (21:18). Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) also focused on the social aspect of quiltmaking as the reason for cross-racial-group separation when I asked if she had ever seen black women making quilts: “They was around, but we just, they just didn’t—When I was a child, they did not do social things together” (4:7). These comments indicate that while quiltmaking was seen as a necessity, it had a social dimension that distinguished it from other housework and from outdoor work and that required different cross-racial-group behaviors than did more purely work contexts.

In the three reported cases where black and white women mixed in quilt groups, possible contributing conditions were propinquity (they were neighbors), a common need to get quilts done for the next winter, respect for each other’s skill, a common age group, and a view of quiltmaking as work, where cross-racial-group mixing was common, rather than as social engagement, where mixing was taboo.

Small-farm and large-farm women. Whereas quiltmaking normally marked an otherness relation between women in the small-farm and large-farm economic groups, one consultant reported a case where they had mixed (also noted above as a case where black and white women mixed). In this case, three white large-farm women quilted with four black small-farm women who did domestic work in white households. One of the black quilters lived on the farm of and did domestic work for the white woman who normally hosted the meetings. Possible factors were the pseudo-kin relations that sometimes existed.
between domestics and their employers, age-group affinity (all were in their thirties),
propinquity (all lived in Haywood County's Holly Grove community), and skill-level affinity.
This mixing relation contrasted with normal otherness relations between small- and large-
farm women in quiltmaking and fieldwork (large-farm women didn’t do fieldwork), and
with normal complementarity relations in housework between small-farm domestics (who
were always black) and their large-farm supervisors (who were normally white).

The reciprocity relation of small-farm and large-farm (or urban) women in a
commercial quiltmaking context also was an exception to their normal otherness in
quiltmaking. Small-farm women, including Anne Baird’s (1922-, white) grandmother
(“Mammy”), had earned money by quilting large-farm or urban women’s tops and by
selling quilts that they had made to such women. “Mammy made them for people. My
grandmother quilted for people, and I think they might have paid her $5,” Baird said. “They
would have the top made,” and would provide batting and backing (16:6,7). Said Lollie
Mann (1936-, black), “I know Miss Hattie Scott [black] used to make ‘m for white women,
and Wylie’s [sp?] sister, Josie Hunt [black].... It was really prestigious because it would be
beneficial to your family” (2:12). Factors in these cases of entrepreneurial agency were, in
the first account, a widow’s need for personal income while living with her daughter and
son-in-law; and in the second, a homemaker’s desire to increase household income.

Women’s kin and age groups. Homemakers in different households normally had
separation relations when they were making quilt-tops, each working at her own home, as
was the case with other housework. The quilting stage differed in that both mixing and
separation were normal: women of different households quilted together or alone (or only
with members of their household). Many women did both.
In cases where women of different generations lived in the same household, cross-age-group mixing was normal in both stages of quiltmaking and in other housework. Such mixing commonly occurred when a young couple lived with one set of parents or when a married son or daughter took in a widowed mother, and could strengthen ties between a wife and her mother-in-law.

Consistent conditions of cross-household quilt groups were women-only memberships (usually two to eight) and propinquity, that is, members lived within a few miles of the meeting place since nearly all had to walk to get there (although husbands had driven their wives to Betsy Waddell’s [1951-, white] grandmother’s group in the 1950s [19:11]). Such groups had a variety of age- and kin-group conditions. Many memberships were kinwomen of different generations, related biologically and by marriage. For instance, Rosie Lemons’ (1943-, Lauderdale County, white) mother had quilted with her mother- and sisters-in-law, and Ida Mae Coleman’s (1941-, black) mother had quilted with her mother, her mother’s sisters, and one of their daughters (her cousin) (24:14; 22:2). But some groups involved non-kin neighbors, or a mix of kin and non-kin neighbors, who were of the same age group.

Mutual-aid quilt groups resembled fieldwork as an activity where cross-household mixing among women was normal. But cross-household quilting differed from fieldwork in that women interacted for the most part only with other women, maintaining privacy relations with children and complementarity with men, whereas in fieldwork they normally mixed with these other household social groups. With membership criteria that were variable except for propinquity and gender-group identity, quilt groups provided women with an exceptional cross-household mixing relation. Whereas fieldworkers were
mobile and dispersed, quilters sat next to or across from each other for hours, a stable sedentary arrangement that facilitated conversation. Also promoting conversation was the common choice of repetitive quilting motifs whose rendition became automatic and needed little coordination among quilters.

Although women also had cross-household mixing with minimal presence of men and children at meetings of women’s church groups and with home demonstration agents from the extension office, such activities had a set agenda and leadership. By contrast, quilt groups dispersed authority according to criteria such as whose top was being quilted, the presumed expertise of elders, or who was “the bossiest” (CS 15:11). As open forums for conversation with dispersed authority and variable membership criteria, quilt groups were an arena where women had special capacity to preserve and generate culture and to shape identities and social relations, while also linking their households in mutual-aid networks.

Small-farm quiltmaking had some social uses that Annette B. Weiner (1992) and others (for instance, Buggenhagen 2012:30-31 and throughout) have attributed to women’s “keeping-while-giving” textile exchange traditions in small-scale societies, such as collective identity and social reproduction. But I place it in the less symbolically potent, more utilitarian category of “mutual-aid activities” for several reasons. First, whereas symbolic gift-giving with obligatory reciprocity is a key component of ritualistic exchange systems, small-farm quilts rarely were gifts. Makers in this era commonly exchanged labor and knowledge, but quilts almost always stayed in the household of the woman who pieced the top and provided the materials for batting and backing.

Second, due to their utilitarian status and subsequent ephemerality (most were ragged after a few years), quilts in the small-farm era were weak sources of individual or
kin-group prestige and did not serve as heirlooms. They were not “inalienable possessions”
that individuals kept out of circulation to enhance their social status. Third, quiltmaking
social relations were too particularistic and domestic to comprise a collective ceremonial
social form. For these reasons, I view quiltmaking in the small-farm era as a mutual-aid
activity rather than a ritualistic exchange tradition.

 **White ethnic groups.** Mixing among white ethnic groups was normal in quiltmaking,
as it was in marriage, place of residence, and occupations. By the mid-1900s, people of
British Isles descent (English, Scots Irish, Irish, Scottish, Welsh), who were the great
majority of the white population, had intermarried with each other and with the minority
of people who had German or southern European ancestry. Although not obviously
reflected in quilt-group memberships, there was some evidence of ethnic-group separation
in quilt traits. In light of previous quilt-studies research and consultant comments
regarding maker ancestry, the traits of some quilts documented here expressed German or
Scots Irish heritage.

The above account of particularistic quiltmaking social relations testifies to a
capacity for individual expression and improvisation in the social system under certain
conditions.

**Small-Farm Social Principles and How They Applied to Quiltmaking**

**Small-Farm Social Principles**

In this section I posit six principles that guided small-farm social relations. Three
guided behaviors under ideal, normal conditions: clear-cut identity, pride and civility, and
mentoring and neighborliness. The other three were fallback strategies: deferential helping, role substitution, and righteous indignation. These fallback principles emphasized individual agency and structural flexibility as a means of coping with flaws, gaps, and failures of the first three. In addressing both normal and fallback conditions, these principles echo Linton’s distinction between ideal patterns of “proper behavior” that express recognized “ideas and values,” and the “overt” actual behaviors that occur as people adapt ideal patterns to “actual conditions” (1936:97-101). They also overlap substantially with values such as “cooperation, deference to others, [and] hospitable treatment of guests” that Jason Baird Jackson sees as part of a “harmony ethic” that upholds “the integrity of the ceremonial ground community” among Yuchi, Cherokee, and other native people in Oklahoma in the late 1900s and early 2000s (2005:189, citing Thomas 1961, 1962; and 2003:205).

Clear-cut identity. People had clear-cut roles in particular spheres of activity based on their social-group identities. Noting gender roles, for instance, Goldie Harwell (1960-, black) said, “There was certain things that girls did, that ladies did or women did, and then the men did certain things” (23:13); and Lucille Hight (1927-, white) observed that women had “had their own chores to do. You know, we milked cows and, um, [Me: “Gardened”] Oh, yes [Me: “Canned”]. Well, the men always put in the garden” (20:15). Noting age-group roles, Jeanette Holloway (1952-, black) said,

  Let me tell you, in the black community, everybody had a job. My cousin, I remember my cousin and I, I didn’t work the fields and neither did my cousin, but even though we were nine and ten, we stayed home and babysat. We were the babysitters.... So everybody had a share in taking a part in the responsibility. [5:13]
A person’s social-group identities designated the activities where it was appropriate for her or him to have authority, expertise, and responsibility as well as those in which to be deferential, ignorant, or amateur. Based on their identities, subjects knew their options, their limits, and their proper roles in particular spheres of activity. They also recognized circumstances that required or offered flexibility. Under certain conditions, subjects could choose among the roles associated with their multiple social-group identities or, sometimes under pressure of necessity, take on roles of other social groups.

**Pride and civility.** People had reason to take pride in competently performing their social-group roles since this contribution to the social order gave them the right to be treated with civility and respect. For instance, wives who produced warm quilts for winter deserved their spouse’s respect, as did husbands who chopped wood, cared for livestock, plowed fields, or hunted while their wives sewed. Such role competence could bring material rewards. For instance, in the early 1930s, a large-farm-owner had recognized superior workmanship by paying Opal Brack (1919-, black) and her mother more than the going rate of 45 or 50 cents a day for chopping cotton, plus fringe benefits. Said Brack:

> He wanted to keep us. He said we were good hands and, uh, everything, and 12 o’clock came, he would tell us, “You all go to the house, get in the shade, and eat your dinner.” We had our dinner with us. We’d go to his house, get in the shade of the house, on the porch, eat our dinner, sit there, go to sleep on the porch until one o’clock.... He saw we were so good. He said, “I’m gonna give you all 60 cents,” paying more than the other folks around there were paying. [1:10, 11]

Brack’s perception that the employer had rewarded outstanding competence with civility and fair treatment affirmed her pride and earned him her respect and loyalty.

Although many whites did fieldwork, consultant reports of fieldwork expertise always referenced African Americans. For instance, Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale
County, white) recalled the mythical productivity of black field hand Will Taylor on her aunt’s and uncle’s farm: “He picked cotton in two 9-foot cotton sacks that had been sewed together. When he went up to weigh up, both ends of his sack touched the ground. That’s how big his cotton sack was. And I bet he was close to seven foot tall” (3:7, 8, 13). Ollie Moore’s (1942-, black) grandmother, at age 60, “would work in the fields and beat us working” (13:9). And Ida Mae Coleman (1941-, black), who was picking cotton by about age ten, testified to her grandmother (“Mama”) Helen Jones’s expertise as well as her kindness:

She could pick cotton like nobody's business.... At the end of the day, you know, when you get paid, we would always be the group that got the most money.... In the morning, we [Jones and three grandchildren] got into the field maybe like seven, six or seven [o’clock].... We had to pick the first sack of cotton before the dew dried off because it weighed more.... You were there to pick cotton until time for your lunch. Then after you had lunch you went back to that field and you picked cotton until almost dark, and sometimes the rows were so long you could not see the end of them.... And my grandmother would carry four rows at one time.... They always thought of me as being the little meek weakly type, you know, so I always had to pick right beside her, and as she picked it, she’d put some in her sack, she’d put some in mine.... I think sometimes Mama's sacks weighed like maybe 200 [pounds]. [22:6, 7]

The association of fieldwork chops with African American rather than white small-farm workers indicates that this realm foregrounded racial-group as well as economic-group identity (Figure 3.3, page 164, shows Lucille Hight’s painting of African Americans picking cotton). As such, it may be a case where a certain behavior was valued differently for one ethnic group than for the other as a means of upholding a caste system. In a social system whose viability depends on “ethnic distinctions,” Fredrik Barth finds,

The organizational requirements are clearly, first, a categorization of population sectors in exclusive and imperative status categories, and second, an acceptance of the principle that standards applied to one such category can be different from that applied to another. [1969:17]
Without such mechanisms, ethnic identity would become ambiguous, as in the hypothetical case of a white person who excelled in cotton-picking.

**Mentoring and neighborliness.** People with relatively greater resources were supposed to use their good fortune to help worthy associates who had less. Mentoring and noblesse oblige were forms of this principle, as when Henry G. Hill of Memphis had given Delois Baggett’s (1933-, white) father a Depression-era livelihood by hiring him to build and then run his dairy complex. Said Baggett, “It was his, Dr. Hill’s, plaything” (9:1). Additional examples are: white large-farm owners who promoted black field hands to foremen (overseers), a position often awarded to whites (Jeanette Holloway; Bob Bond; Tina Turner 1986:4); homemakers who taught their daughters to cook (Anne Baird; Ollie Moore); and farm-owners who gave Christmas gifts to their tenants or sewed clothes for tenant-children (Lollie Mann; Ollie Moore).

Neighborliness and charity also expressed this principle, sometimes in cases where the giver was a social subordinate of the receiver. For instance, the day after Mary Jane Baggett’s (1962-, white) father died, “Willie T. was up here bright and early: ‘Is there anything I can do for you?’ ” (9:8, 9). Willie T. Mann was a black neighbor who owned his home but had long worked for the Baggetts. And in northern Mississippi, where Jean Bolding (1932-, Lauderdale County, white) had grown up about 50 miles south of the Tennessee border, a black man had given her father lifts to town:

> They were about the only ones in the community that had a car.... We lived out, 12 miles out of Pontotoc, and Pontotoc was the town, the county seat, and he would take him there when my dad needed to go.... He [Bolding’s father] probably paid him, or paid gas, or done something [for them] to take him. [3:8]
In Bolding’s account, blacks and whites were in the same community. Ollie Moore’s (1942-, black) grandmother and brother had sold vegetables from their truck patch, but to neighbors they were free: “Whichever neighbor wanted something to eat, they would come over and asks you, and you’d say, ‘Go on out there and get it.’... And when somebody kill a hog, everybody had meat” (13:4, 5). Married couples took in widowed mothers, bachelor uncles, and nieces or nephews whose parents could not care for them; elders took in grandchildren. Such behaviors expressed belief in mutuality, that “we’re all in this together,” across economic- and racial-group lines as well as in families and households.

Deferential helping. This fallback principle is a form of hierarchic collaboration that occurred when a person who lacked authority in a certain realm of activity based on her or his social-group identity helped someone who had authority and expertise in that realm. It assumes a broader context of complementarity, with a division of labor reflecting social-group identities. Thus, Opal Brack (1919-, black) had “helped” her husband by driving the tractor (2A:1), and Betsy Waddell’s (1951-, white) mother had “helped” bale hay (19:4). Earl Beard (1915-2012, black), on the other hand, had “helped” his wife make quilts since quiltmaking was a woman’s realm of authority (14:2, 6).

Helping could refer to a formal economic relationship: an employee might say she helped her employer. But it also could be a tactful framing of a situation where the person who was supposed to have authority lacked endurance or competence, due perhaps to aging or lack of education, and where the helper wanted to honor the person’s standing regardless. For instance, Rosie Lemons’ (1943-, Lauderdale County, white) mother had helped her mother-in-law quilt quilt-tops (24:14), and Ida Mae Coleman (1941-, black) had helped her mother piece quilt-tops:
Like I said, I was married, and I’m the kind of person, you know, if my mom is doing something, I just can’t sit there and see her do it and not do something to help her, you know. So this is what I did. And I mean I would go over at night, and she’d be doing this, and I’d cut the little pieces, and we may stay up, oh, who knows what time. Then I’d go home. [22:5]

Deferential helping expressed recognition that social groups had distinctive areas of competence and responsibility but were interdependent.

Role substitution. This fallback principle holds that in situations where the person with the proper social-group identity is absent or lacks ability, someone else should or can step in. The choice of a substitute varied depending on conditions such as household resources, economic-group values, and individual qualifications and personality traits. If a farm-owner needed help with fieldwork, he would hire a hand if he could afford it. If he could not, his wife, son, daughter, or all three might step in although fieldwork was understood to be a man’s job.

In two cases of role substitution documented in my work, gender roles and kinship preempted age-group seniority. In one, Anne Baird’s (1922-, white) father had returned home to take on head-of-household duties when his father died: “My father was working out west in the oilfields, I believe. And Uncle Jim Tipton wrote him and told him he needed to come home and take care of his mother and his sister” (16:2). In the other, a divorced tenant farmer who was raising several grandchildren had relied on the oldest boy, Ollie Moore’s (1942-, black) brother, to handle financial dealings:

We gave them [the landlord] so much of what we worked off the farm, made off the farm. But, like the chickens and the hogs and all that, the truck patches we had with the okrie and peas and beans and things, that was ours.... We made that after our, after my brother would sell it.... And then in wintertime we would get the corn, shell it. At night, we’d start shelling corn, and then my brother would take it to the mill, and that’s how we got our corn meal.... When we picked cotton, they would sell the cotton, and that was our cash. [Me: “You would sell the cotton?”] My grandmother and my brother. [13:2]
In such cases of missing husbands, the choice of a substitute followed the custom that a household’s external financial dealings were a male realm of authority, even if a female had age-group seniority.

In another case, age group and kinship took priority over gender roles. By about age ten, Barbara Callery (1940-, white) was doing fieldwork on a rented farm with her father, a black woman and her son who were tenant farmers of the land-owner, an uncle who was three years older, and a brother who was 18 months younger. Said Callery, “I was raised just like the boys were. I worked in the field and drove the mule and plowed whatever” (17:2-5, 12, 13). Facilitating her male fieldworker role was a live-in grandmother to fill an oldest daughter’s normal role of helping her mother with housework.

In four cases of missing spouses, substitutions emphasized gender- and age-group roles over racial- and economic-group difference. In one, mentioned above, a black hired man had offered help following his white employer’s death to the man’s wife and daughters (DB 9:8, 9). Also, Carolyn Simpson’s (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) great-aunt Isadora Scallions had filled a wife’s role by cooking meals for Will Taylor, a black hand who lived alone on her and her husband’s farm (3:7, 8, 13). The other two of these missing-spouse cases were double substitutions. Anne Baird’s (1922-, white) mother, wife of a small-farm-owner, had cooked lunch for Mary Taylor, a single-parent black tenant, and her children on days when they were doing fieldwork (16:12). Whereas Taylor was filling a husband’s head-of-household role, Baird’s mother substituted for the food-preparing wife that the breadwinner should have had. In the other double substitution, black large-farm wife Idella Evans had sewed clothes and baked cookies for her black tenant’s grandchildren. She had
taken on this part of a mother’s role since the divorced tenant-farmer was filling a husband’s breadwinner role (as well as her adult children’s parental role) (OM 13:1, 2, 11).

Such cases sometimes expressed principles of neighborliness and deferential helping as well as role substitution. They show how the fallback principles promoted systemic viability by providing methods for coping with contingent, abnormal conditions.

**Righteous indignation.** The third fallback principle, righteous indignation, occurred in cases where a failure of ideal behavioral principles (clear-cut identities, pride and civility, mentoring and neighborliness) was blamed on a particular subject rather than on contingency. An example is Anne Baird’s (1922-, white) memory of a white tenant on her father’s farm who had lacked civility and neighborliness: “He wasn’t worth a hoot. He did away with some of Mama’s good fryers” (16:13). And in a case mentioned above, Lucille Hight (1927-, white) conveyed indignation at her father by noting his use of curse words and by using a high, whiny voice to imitate how he had sounded when he showed impatience with his wife’s quilting: “ ’When you gonna get through with this quilt?.... When you gonna take this quilt down?’ ” (21:3, 16). His behaviors had violated principles of mentoring (setting a bad example for his children), clear-cut identity, and pride-and-civility (criticizing a wife who was conscientiously performing her homemaker role).

Opal Brack (1919-, black) expressed indignation when her oldest daughter, Robbie Jarrett-King (1939-), challenged her use of the “Nine-Patch” pattern name for a quilt that she had made (“Nine-Patch” pattern blocks each consist of nine square pieces in a tic-tac-toe configuration). As four family members, a friend, and I examined the quilt during a group interview, Brack said, “That’s called a Nine-Patch.” I responded, “Is that a Nine-Patch?” Jarrett-King said, “That is not a Nine-Patch. That’s just scrap.” Noting Jarrett-King’s
contradiction, I said, "Whoa." After some conversation, Opal Brack said again, "That’s a Nine-Patch." When Jarrett-King replied, "I don’t think so," Brack responded firmly, "I know so" (2:4-5). She likely interpreted her adult daughter’s disagreement, especially in a group situation, as conveying a lack of respect for her identity as a parent and as an elder with specialized quiltmaking knowledge, thus as a violation of pride-and-civility.

In cases of perceived injustice, righteous indignation could take the form of courage. Lollie Mann (1936-, black) cast herself as courageous in telling how she had negotiated with a large-farm white man in the early 1960s to pay her and other fieldworkers $4 instead of $3 a day for chopping cotton (1:9). Given her subordinate occupational and racial-group status, her behavior had violated principles of clear-cut identity and pride-and-civility. But since the farm-owner had already failed in pride-and-civility by initially expecting her to work for less than the $4 a day that his wife had been paying her for domestic work, her violation was cast as courageous resistance, as righteous indignation justified by his violation. In this period of the 1960s, people’s condemnation or support of Civil Rights-related protests can be seen as a reflection of whether they viewed such activities as a violation of clear-cut identity and pride-and-civility or as righteous indignation justified by other people’s abuse of those principles.

In two cases where principles were violated, extenuating circumstances tempered indignation. One was an account by Woodlawn community African Americans (Opal and Cobon Brack, their daughters Robbie Jarrett-King and Lillian Maynard, and family friend Lollie Mann) of a white woman who in the 1950s had persuaded some local blacks, including Cobon Brack’s mother, “Mama,” to sell heirlooms for amounts that likely were far below market value. Said Jarrett-King:
She started out with $2, and Mama said, “No, this is my grandmother’s bowl.” She went up to $5, and Mama sold that bowl to the woman. And you know what? She ended up—She had so many antique things in the home, and a house fire burned down everything. [2:6]

In this case, a contingency had punished the perpetrator and thus indignation possibly was tempered with a sense that justice had been done. In the second case, planter family descendant Bob Bond (1962-, Madison County, white) told of black tenants who in the 1930s had absconded with gold that his ancestors had buried during the Civil War and then forgotten the location of:

Father said some of the hands here on the farm were plowing, and they plowed up the gold and found it and, uh, he said he saw some of it, but that they left and went to St. Louis. They took that gold and that was their opportunity, their golden opportunity [laughs] to get off the farm. [Me: “So much for loyalty, family loyalty”]. Well, you know, I can’t blame them. [25:15]

In this case, Bond’s empathy for the farm hands’ desire to improve their circumstances apparently lessened the basis for indignation.

This section has presented principles of study-area social organization. Those of clear-cut identity, pride and civility, and mentoring and neighborliness expressed ideal normal conditions. They posited a system of relations between social groups that were interdependent and viewed each other as having goals that reflected mutuality. The fallback principles of deferential helping, role substitution, and righteous indignation, on the other hand, expressed conditions of fate, human error, or individual goals that required subjects to adapt normal relations.
How Social Principles Applied to Quiltmaking Situations

In this section I show how particular quilts that my consultants recalled from the small-farm era illustrate the social principles discussed above. These situations illustrate normal and exceptional relations between various social groups in the sphere of quilting and also show how normal relations in quilting sometimes differed from those in other kinds of housework and in fieldwork. Sets of social groups considered here are: small-farm wife and husband, black and white women, women and children, and women’s kin and age groups.

**Small-farm wife and husband.** The normal complementarity relation of small-farm men and women in the same household, in which men supported women’s quilting but did not join in the construction process, expressed principles of clear-cut identity (foregrounding gender) and pride-and-civility (taking pride in one’s own role and treating others who did likewise with civility and respect). These same principles aligned with relations in other housework, except that quilting was an unusually strong demonstration of pride-and-civility because it involved a relatively high level of men’s support (such as the purchase of a sewing machine and tolerance of major time and space demands) due to its scale and complexity. Fieldwork relations expressed these same principles although the gender roles were reversed (women were viewed as supporting men) and complementarity more frequently gave way to deferential helping (since men commonly needed women’s “help” at certain stages of cotton farming).

Cases of cross-gender mixing in quilting, where a husband joined in the construction process, were rare. In these cases, the deferential helping principle justified behavior that might have appeared to violate clear-cut identity (as it normally applied to
quiltmaking). Factors that promoted a deferential helping interpretation were that the husband was cast as “helping” his wife, recognized her authority, and gave priority to normally masculine activities such as wood-chopping and coon-hunting. The role substitution principle also applied, in that men participated only when their wives lacked women’s help and companionship, as conveyed by Earl Beard’s (1915-2012, black) comment, “I’d just quilt with her some nights when she was lonesome” (14:7). These cases thus were cast as respecting the normal gendered division of labor (as was women’s participation in fieldwork), although in fact subjects had adapted this norm to their own goals as well as to contingencies. The view of quiltmaking as a particularly adult activity relative to other housework may have facilitated men’s quiltmaking by allowing them to cast it as an expression of clear-cut identity foregrounding not just gender but kinship and age, identities that husband and wife shared.

None of the principles justify the behavior of the husband reported to have complained about his wife’s quiltmaking (and to have cursed in front of children). Such behavior violated pride-and-civility with its mutuality (common-interest) underpinning of a married couple’s normal complementarity relations. Calling her mother “a jewel,” Lucille Hight reacted to her father’s disruption of social order with the righteous indignation principle (21:3, 16).

**Black and white women.** Upholding clear-cut identity (foregrounding racial group), black and white small-farm women normally had a separation relation in quiltmaking even when they were neighbors, whereas neighboring small-farm women of the same racial-group identity normally had mixing relations. In such cases, racial-group identity overrode cross-racial-group facets of identity that were a basis of mixing among same-racial-group
subjects, such as economic group, female gender group, adult age group, and propinquity. Cross-racial-group separation inhibited cross-racial-group mutuality and thus application of pride-and-civility and mentoring-and-neighborliness across racial-group difference. Because most other housework activities normally were done on an individual separation basis, regardless of racial group identity, they are not comparable to the quilt-group realm. However, cross-household quilt groups did align with the normal separation relation of black and white women in cross-household visiting: They did not visit each other’s homes for social reasons. Cross-household quiltmaking differed from outdoor fieldwork and mutual-aid activities, where small-farm white and black women commonly mixed. Outdoor activities apparently foregrounded cross-racial-group identities such as economic group and neighborhood, thus promoting pride-and-civility and mentoring-and-neighborliness across racial-group lines.

I interpret the three cases of cross-racial-group mixing in quilt groups as expressions of clear-cut identity in which subjects foregrounded cross-racial-group identities such as economic group, neighborhood, gender group, and age group. These cases aligned with normal relations in outdoor activities in defining mutual-aid networks to include cross-racial-group interests (such as the small-farm homemaker’s need for help in producing warm bedcovers for her household). These cases had more capacity than those with separation relations to uphold principles of pride-and-civility and mentoring-and-neighborliness across racial-group difference. As noted above, the spheres of cross-household quilt groups and other housework are not comparable since the latter normally had separation relations regardless of racial-group identity.
In the special case of small-farm white women who had black domestic workers, a combination of complementarity and separation was normal in quiltmaking although they commonly mixed in other housework (but only in the white household) and in outdoor activities. The domestic might help the homemaker-employer with mounting the quilt-top, batting, and backing on the frame to be quilted, as would a husband, but also like a husband, would not join in the sewing (Lucille Hight). The black and white women had complementarity in such cases, but it was not that of a married couple but rather a cross-household form in which the employer paid the domestic cash or goods for labor (which possibly included quiltmaking support), which the domestic then used to support her own household. Although domestics with families of their own commonly would have been quilters, they and their homemaker-employers did not exchange labor as same racial-group women normally would have in a cross-household quilt group. Rather, these subjects interpreted clear-cut identity to foreground occupational and racial-group difference over shared identities of gender group, neighborhood, small-farm (broadly defined) economic group, and possibly age group. Role substitution can account for cross-racial-group mixing in non-quiltmaking housework, with black domestics cast in kin roles such as oldest daughter or live-in mother, but does not explain why subjects rejected this option in quilting. I interpret this contrast as evidence of the special role that quiltmaking had in small-farm ideology as a symbol of homemaker competence, distinguishing them from large-farm women.

In the realm of commercial quiltmaking, both black and white women held small- and large-farm roles. Whereas large-farm women normally bought blankets and bedspreads (which usually were not quilts), they also inherited quilts, made quilt-tops
designed as bedspreads rather than for warmth and paid small-farm women to quilt them, and/or bought quilts from small-farm women who made quilts to sell. Small- and large-farm women in this commercial realm of quiltmaking had a complementarity relation based on their roles in exchanging goods and services for money. This cross-household transaction relation expressed clear-cut identity, interpreted here to emphasize economic-group difference. It upheld pride-and-civility but mentoring-and-neighborliness less so, since it lacked a mutual-aid component. It affirmed quiltmaking, especially the quilting stage (since large-farm women sometimes pieced tops), as a marker of small-farm (cross-racial-group) identity. This realm resembled outdoor activities such as fieldwork in its emphasis on economic-rather than racial-group identity. However, it expressed racial-group difference to some extent in that the great majority of large-farm women were white. Also, based on reports from my consultants, small-farm black women may have more commonly sold quilts that they had made, and small-farm white women may more commonly have quilted other women’s tops.

Women and children. Normal relations of privacy between women and children in quiltmaking expressed clear-cut identity foregrounding age group. This relation, reflecting women’s preference to work on quilts when children were not around, contrasted with the cross-age-group mixing that was more common in other housework. Mixing reflected a generally lower level of complexity and detail work, meaning that women more often performed other housework when children were present and, in some cases, expected them to help. However, given the common condition of large families and small houses, especially in winter when most quiltmaking occurred, privacy sometimes gave way to complementarity, that is, women gave children a role in quiltmaking. In such cases,
principles of mentoring and deferential helping came into play (as also occurred in other housework). In fieldwork, like housework, women and children mixed more than they did in quiltmaking.

In a rare case of a household where a woman and her children (and her husband) mixed in quiltmaking, subjects interpreted clear-cut identity to foreground kinship and household identities over age-group (and gender-group) difference (Lue Vennia Robinson). Quiltmaking in this case resembled other housework and fieldwork, where cross-age-group mixing was common. This household quilt-group situation expressed principles of mentoring and deferential helping, given that the mother directed operations.

Women's kin and age groups. Cross-age-group mixing was normal in quiltmaking among kinwomen (including in-laws) living in the same household. This relation expressed the clear-cut identity principle, here foregrounding kin, gender, age (adult), and place of residence. It upheld the mutuality-based complementarity relation with men in the household and pride-and-civility in cross-gender relations. The mentoring principle also applied in cases where elder makers initiated young wives. Cross-age-group mixing among kinwomen in one household also was normal in other housework and in fieldwork, although some homemakers did not join in fieldwork and elders eventually retired from it.

Cross-household mixing was normal among women at the quilting stage of quiltmaking, although separation also was common at this stage, whereas separation by household was more common when homemakers were making quilt-tops. The top-making stage aligned with the cross-household separation of other housework, expressing clear-cut identity that focused on women's kin and/or household differences. But the cross-household mixing that was common at the quilting stage differed in this regard from other
housework; it expressed mentoring-and-neighborliness, emphasizing neighborliness since it was a mutual-aid activity. Whereas women normally pieced tops and did other housework at their own homes, often involving other family members, many left their homes to attend quilt groups with women from other households for the time-consuming process of quilting their tops. Such groups typically rotated among member houses, met at one or two centrally located or relatively spacious houses, or met at a semi-public location such as a store or school. These mutual-aid groups all foregrounded female, adult, and neighborhood identities. But whereas some centered on kin, including different generations of one family (and possibly a cross-kin neighbor or two), others comprised non-or-extended-kin women of the same age group. Mutual-aid quilt groups, then, differed from fieldwork and other housework in providing a privacy relation between women and men of the same household (although complementarity ultimately held sway since group-quilted quilts came back to the top-maker's household, and since quilt groups forged mutual-aid networks that benefited husbands as well as wives). Other cross-household women’s events such as church group meetings and county extension office-sponsored demonstrations (for instance, on mattress-making) also involved cross-gender-group privacy, but interaction among members was more structured and limited at such events than it was in quiltmaking.

The cases discussed above show how subjects applied social principles to normal and particularistic situations, selecting among them and interpreting them, adhering to them and adapting them to accommodate contingency, human error, and personal goals.
Quiltmaking, more than less complex, more routine housework, was a resource for women in configuring household and cross-household social relations (see Klassen 2008).

A Symbiotic Model of Agency and Structure

My construct of a system in which people have multiple facets of identity that coordinate with spheres of activity aligns in many respects with Linton’s more comprehensive model of a system in which statuses (socially recognized positions, or identities) are organized in patterns of social interaction (Linton 1936:103-105, 113). But our conceptions of a stable system differ. Linton views a “well-adjusted” social system as relatively static, with rigid patterns and dominance of ascribed (inherited, preordained) over achieved statuses (129-130). A system is “maladjusted” when patterns are in flux, which leads to higher valuing of achieved statuses, given that “the development of new social patterns calls for the individual qualities of thought and initiative” to adapt to “new or changing conditions” (129-130). Linton thus tends to see structure and agency (achieved status) as oppositional: when one is weak, the other is strong. I, on the other hand, see stability as enhanced by a dynamic, symbiotic relationship between agency and structure, as a by-product of flexibility that inheres in individuals’ ability to improvise.

In the historical context of the 1930s, Linton strikes an ideological middle ground by stating that a society of rigidly separate but interdependent castes or classes has benefits for individuals at all levels. He writes,

Americans have been trained to attach such high values to individual initiative and achievement that they tend to look down upon societies which are rigidly organized and to pity the persons who live in them. However, the members of a society whose statuses are mainly prescribed are no less happy than ourselves and considerably more at peace.... Membership in a rigidly organized society may deprive the individual of opportunities to exercise his
particular gifts, but it gives him an emotional security which is almost unknown among ourselves. Which of these is best or which makes for the greatest happiness to the greatest number the reader must decide for himself. [1936:130-131, see also 127]

This position counters the nationalistic paradigm of American exceptionalism, which emerged in the 1930s and valorizes the New World potential for individuals to achieve social status according to their efforts and ability rather than their birthright (Wise 1979:306-307, 334). But it also implicitly defends the U.S. against Marxist critiques of capitalism by rejecting the presumption that laborers in inherited class systems necessarily experience oppression. In suggesting that a system with social mobility is not necessarily better than one without, Linton questions the premises of those who celebrate a capitalistic democracy for offering mobility as well as the premises of those who criticize capitalism for denying mobility to laborers.

Although Linton takes a functionalist approach in viewing a well-adjusted system as rigid, he acknowledges a capacity for agency (that is, achieved status reached through individual initiative) in noting, “Although the individual is dominated and shaped by his social environment he is not obliterated by it. Under favorable conditions he can even change and mold it” (1936:95). However, consistent with a functionalist framework, these “favorable conditions” for agency occur when the status quo structure is vulnerable, that is, amid “new or changing conditions,” when “changes within the culture or in the external environment produce maladjustments” (129-130). Linton also notes that people’s “overt” (actual) behaviors may diverge from the “proper behavior” prescribed by a society’s “ideal patterns” (100-101). However, in perceiving that a society clings to ideal patterns regardless of divergent behaviors, he discounts the potential for change-producing agency in those who perform such behaviors (100-101).
My interpretation of the study-area social system synthesizes aspects of Linton’s static structure-dominated and his volatile agency-dominated systems. I do not consign agency (the “individual thought and initiative” associated with achieved status) to maladjusted conditions but posit it as an elastic dimension of identity that operates in concert with assigned (ascribed) status to keep a system adapted to actual conditions (129-130). This position reflects my perception that people’s divergent behaviors, utilizing systemic flexibility that allows improvisation, serve to attune patterns to actual conditions, adapting them as needed so that they continue meeting people’s needs (the same or new needs) as conditions evolve due to contingency or historical change.

As noted above, Linton recognizes that behaviors do not always follow patterns, but he perceives that the patterns survive in spite of the divergence. On the other hand, paradoxically, he finds that patterns are always changing, that behaviors may change patterns, and that patterns change if their prescribed behaviors do not produce desired results under “actual conditions”:

When the behavior which the ideal patterns enjoin departs too far from that which is advantageous under the actual conditions, the patterns themselves change. If they failed to do so they would become a liability to the society rather than an asset... Actually, we find in all cultures that the patterns are normally in process of change. They follow the trends of changing behavior but usually lag somewhat behind them. [1936:100]

In his view, apparently, it is when conditions undermine the effectiveness of ascribed-status behaviors that a system becomes maladjusted and achieved-status behaviors kick in to “change and mold” patterns so that they once again are in synch with “actual conditions” (95, 100). The study-area social principles outlined above as expressions of “ideas and values” (95) encompass both rules geared to ideal circumstances and fallback rules for coping with contingencies (actual conditions) or serving purposes that diverge from 149
established ideal conditions. In my view, particular patterns and the overall system endured only as long as people had enough agency to adapt and preserve them, and benefited from them enough to be motivated to do so.

This view bridges Linton's functionalist notion that much of identity and behavior is predetermined (based on set patterns) (95-96, 115-129) and Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam's process-oriented perception that people constantly improvise in everyday life because no system of codes, rules and norms [that is, patterns] can anticipate every possible circumstance. At best it can provide general guidelines or rules of thumb whose very power lies in their vagueness or non-specificity. The gap between these non-specific guidelines and the specific conditions of a world that is never the same from one moment to the next not only opens up a space for improvisation, but also demands it... [2007:2]

In my Tennessee Delta fieldwork area, subjects followed patterns but also improvised, drawing on a range of justifiable alternative behaviors to interpret patterns in terms of individual situations (which were subject to historical change).

Although more agency-oriented, my model resembles historian Mark Schultz's concept of personalism, by which he accounts for the substantial variability in cross-racial-group relations that he found in rural Hancock County, Georgia, between World War I and the Civil Rights Movement (Schultz 2007[2005]:4-11, 72). As he uses it, personalism "refers to the personal nature of power in rural Hancock" and to the "face-to-face nature of rural communities," meaning that whites and blacks dealt with each other based not only on stereotypes or urban segregationist "Jim Crow" standards of behavior but on particularistic personal histories of interaction (7, 66-96). Schultz finds that the rural social system allowed such flexibility subject to conditions including sphere of activity, and that this capacity for agency coexisted with a dominant white-supremacist ideology (67, 4). He finds that "these personal ties moderated the harshness of white supremacy even as they
undermined black solidarity” that might have generated a local protest movement to change systemic white supremacy (127).

Viewing “personalism” in relation to mid-1900s Haywood and Lauderdale counties, I argue that under conditions of cross-racial-group economic interdependence defined by labor-intensive cotton agriculture, many blacks experienced enough agency in their everyday lives to keep them invested in existing patterns (which their behaviors may have been adapting in response to changes in actual conditions). This capacity for agency existed in social as well as economic spheres, in all-black social networks, and in personalist relations with whites.

I argue in chapters 6 and 7 that the Civil Rights Movement in the study area and probably elsewhere in the rural South owed much to the decline of cross-racial-group interdependence in agriculture, as large-farm owners (mostly white) moved to capital-intensive agriculture and small-farm people (mostly black) got city and manufacturing jobs by choice or necessity. When racial-group identity moved out of the agricultural sphere due to these historical changes, other facets of identity associated with other spheres of economic activity came to the fore. These new conditions disrupted the reciprocal roles of caste-like (ascribed) racial identities rooted in labor-intensive plantation agriculture, in line with Linton’s observation (noted above), “When the behavior which the ideal patterns enjoin departs too far from that which is advantageous under the actual conditions, the patterns themselves change” (1936:100). When farm-owners replaced laborers with machines and chemicals and laborers found better-paying city jobs, the former farm laborers found the hierarchic behaviors keyed to racial-group identity to be “too far from that which is advantageous under the actual conditions” (100).
Clifford Geertz’s study of an outmoded funeral ritual in early 1950s eastern Central Java serves to illustrate my model of interdependent structure and agency (1973[1959]:152, 147). Geertz finds that changes in political and economic patterns changed social-group relations on which the funeral ritual relied (164-169). He does not report how the ritual developed in the years after the existing form lost its viability, but his subjects must have developed alternative behaviors (in Ingold and Hallam’s terms, improvised) that ensured its survival by adapting it to the new conditions, since they surely continued to need a ritual to cope with death. In such case, this response would illustrate how agency resuscitates structure (or pattern): structure dies unless people value it enough to adapt it to new conditions. This example shows how a social system with dynamically interacting agency and structure maintains some continuity concurrent with incurring limited change in response to contingency or historical change.

In my view, Linton underestimates the role that agency (achieved status) and individual initiative play in keeping a system viable (that is, reasonably well-adjusted) by adapting its patterns to actual conditions and keeping them synchronized with each other. For instance, in my fieldwork area, people developed new meanings and behaviors that ensured the continuation of quiltmaking when the conditions that had justified its existence in the small-farm era ended. In this way, people apply their agency to adapt patterns as needed (thus avoiding disruption and chaos) to keep a system viable without sacrificing order and stability.

Whereas Linton finds that societies succeed only if they have patterns that give people concrete rules of behavior (1936:96-97), I posit the following corollary: a society succeeds only when people have agency and the order-and-continuity-embracing
motivation to develop behaviors that mold patterns and rules as needed to keep them viable amid inevitably changing conditions. Following Ingold and Hallam, this ability can be interpreted as a capacity for improvisation, the process of responding creatively to always changing conditions “with judgment and precision” (2007:2).

Summary

In this chapter I defined key terms: social group, identity, context-based, sphere of activity, facet of identity, role, household, propinquity, contingency, and mutuality. I noted the primary identities of quilters as well as exceptions that demonstrate a systemic capacity for agency and flexibility in coping with particularistic conditions. I identified kinds of social group relations (mixing, privacy, separation, complementarity, otherness, reciprocity) and social principles (clear-cut identity, pride-and-civility, mentoring-and-neighborliness, deferential helping, role substitution, righteous indignation), and discussed how they applied to small-farm quiltering. Finally, I posited a study-area social system with a symbiotic relation between agency and structure and compared this paradigm with the work of other scholars, especially Linton.

This household-oriented analysis of study-area social relations provides a context for my discussion in subsequent chapters of quilt-culture meanings in the small-farm era, amid labor-intensive agriculture; and in the modern era, as small-farm people switched to a more urban, consumer-oriented way of life concurrent with the Civil Rights Movement.
Fig. 3.1 Nine homestead maps that consultants drew or helped me draw. Adobe Illustrator technician: Liam Quyle.

1. Delois Baggett family store (#1, #2), Keeling, southwestern Haywood County near Tipton County, 1930s-40s. Members of First Baptist (#11, black) and Keeling Baptist (#10, white) churches listened to each other’s revivals from outdoors. All white households except “#8 black home owner, cook” and “#7 black tenant.”
2. Anne Baird family homestead (white, with two black tenant houses: “Covingtons” and Taylors”). Just west of Brownsville, Haywood County, 1930s-40s.
3. Earl and Virtress Beard homestead, Haywood/Lauderdale County border at Durhamville, 1930s-40s. Black domestics lived in the “lot,” an area next to the white farm-owner’s house. All African American except “Carl & Ella Nunn” family.
4. Cobon and Opal Brack homestead, on Briar Creek Road near Woodlawn church, north of Highway 19 between Brownsville and Ripley. Northwestern Haywood County, 1940s-50s. All black except two white tenant farmers: “Kents” and “Crossens”.
5. Barbara Callery family homestead, north central Haywood County, 1949-54. All white except “Aunt Mag & Buddy” household. Text cut off at left reads “Hatchie River bottoms for fishing,” and at upper right, “Little camp houses.”
6. The X labeled “Irma Steele m. [married] Willie” is Lucille Hight’s family home, Pea Ridge community, northeastern Haywood County near Madison County, 1930s-40s. Willie Steele worked at the Christmas gin and “bossed three sons who thirded [sharecropped] for Mrs. Powell” (his daughter Lucille’s teacher). He later managed the Christmas store. All white except African-American tenant houses at lower left.
7. Jones family quilter houses (including cousins Goldie Morris and Rosa Morton) and neighbors, Brownsville, 1940s-50s. All African American. Map by Goldie Harwell and Ida Mae Coleman.
9. Betsy Waddell’s family home ("X"), near her grandparents’ “Home Place” where the quilt group met. Holly Grove community, northeastern Haywood County, mid-1950s. All white. Cut off from the quilt-frame diagram at lower right are three “x”s on the other long side.
Fig. 3.2. Two Haywood County churches, one black, one white.

Woodlawn Baptist Church (black), est. 1866, northwestern Haywood County, 2007.

Stanton Presbyterian Church (white), est. 1870, southwestern Haywood County, 2008.
Fig. 3.3. Lucille Hight painting of people picking cotton.

This painting portrays fieldworkers as African American although many whites also picked cotton, suggesting an association between racial-group and occupational identity in this realm of work. At Lucille Hight's house in Brownsville, 2009.
Ch. 4. A Shibboleth of Small-Farm Identity

Mining oral history interviews, I focus here on the meanings that quilts and the quiltmaking process had in the rural Tennessee-Delta households of my consultants in the 1920s to 1950s, before the small-farm way of life dissolved amid capital-intensive cotton agriculture and local access to cash-paying manufacturing jobs. Consultant comments show quilts and quiltmaking to have been a hybrid realm of meaning, with subsistence and expressive dimensions serving social and psychological as well as practical uses. I argue that, in aligning with small-farm social principles, quilt meanings increased the viability of the existing hierarchical social system (from the perspective of small-farm people) by promoting small-farm women’s authority, small-farm household self-sufficiency, and the solidarity and ethnocentricty of this subordinate economic group. Based on small-farm consultants’ proprietary view of quilts and quiltmaking, I argue that this realm was a shibboleth of small-farm identity in the study area. It fostered a self-confident mindset that, in the case of African Americans, encouraged participation in civil rights activities when systemic changes separated the household economies of large landowners and those who historically had farmed their land.
Quilt Uses and Meanings

The most common quilt use that consultants reported was a practical one: to provide warmth on cold nights to people who lived in drafty houses heated by fireplaces and wood- or kerosene-burning stoves, who could not afford to buy blankets or to live in insulated houses with central heat (Figure 4.1, pages 195-199: small-farm houses).

This meaning is in Cobon Brack’s (1916-, black) assessment of his mother’s 1952 Star quilt: “You won’t get cold under that one [laughing],” (Figure 4.2, page 200), in his memory of sleeping under “a foot of quilts” (1:1; 2:4); and in Lue Vennia Robinson’s (1922-, black) response to my question of whether her family had had quilts on every bed: “Mmh, yes, Ma’am. More than one to warm on cold nights [laughs].... In those days we didn’t have nothin’ to buy no quilt with” (7:4). Warmth is also the theme of Peggy Staggs’ (1938-, white) account of quilt use in 1940s Henderson County, two counties east of Haywood:

At the head of my bed was this great big homemade wooden green box, and it was packed full of homemade quilts. That my mother made. And those quilts of course would be packed in that through the summertime. And we’d take them out in the winter. And sometimes those quilts would be so heavy at night that you couldn’t turn over.... We didn’t have indoor plumbing and the water would freeze in the water buckets.... But we had featherbeds, and we would get down i-i-in those feathers.... The feathers would come up around you, [Me: “insulate”] and then you’d get about four or seven or eight or ten quilts on you, and you couldn’t move [laughs]. [18:5-6] (Figure 4.3, page 200, shows a quilt box)

As their laughs suggest, these consultants recalled quilts fondly as sources of warmth, comfort, and a secure home environment.

Such accounts often represented the provision of quilts as an expression of adult responsibility for children. For instance, Jeanette Holloway (1952-, black), said, “We couldn’t afford to go somewhere and buy one, so we—And we need to keep warm. We need
to keep the children warm, you know. You had a bed full of babies” (6:5-6). Lucille Hight (1927-, white) said of her husband’s maternal grandmother,

When they were making the quilts it was because they needed those quilts for their warmth, their heat at night, because we did not have central [laughs] anything. We had wood fireplaces, and then they went to coal fireplaces, and they had to have it for heat. And Romus’s grandmother had a big family. She had several boys and several [girls], you know, and they had to have a lot of quilts made. [Me: “A lot of quilts.”] So Miss Ida made—that was Mawmaw Herbert—she made a lot of quilts.... Because she wasn’t doing it for pleasure. She was doing it for need. [20:3-4]

In the view of these consultants, quilts and quiltmaking were an unavoidable consequence in small-farm households of having children.

A practical use of newly made quilts, reported only by black consultants, was as commodities: They were sold to white women to increase household income. Of the women who did this, Lollie Mann (1936-, black) said, “It was really prestigious because it would be beneficial to your family” (2:12-13). In such cases, quiltmaking subsidized the purchase of other necessities (or amenities).

Additional practical uses, mainly of old quilts, were as pallets for children to sleep on when their beds were needed for overnight visitors (18:12); and a safe play area for small children when spread on the floor, in the yard under a tree, or at the end of a cotton row on which the child’s caretaker was working (18:12-13; 6:5; 3:11). Quilts served one father (Earl Beard) as a means of getting children to go to bed, as he would warm a quilt by the fire, wrap it around his children, and carry them to bed (14:4). Some quilts provided padding for people sitting in the back of a wagon or truck (5:11) and, when too deteriorated for use on beds, batting for a new quilt or rags.

In these uses, quilts had meanings as tools for childcare and as a means of: expanding domestic space, enhancing a household’s capacity for hospitality, extending
domestic security into a semi-public work space (when no babysitter was available), making domestic comfort portable, and thrift (avoiding the need to use fresh cotton or buy batting). Quilts thus upheld values of family continuity (raising children), women’s household authority, women’s role as helpmates to men, women’s contribution to a good quality-of-life, community (through hospitality), agency and improvisation (figuring out how to enhance the environment), and household self-reliance (minimizing expenses, earning income). The presence of quilts in a small-farm household meant that a woman, often facilitated by a man, was using her specialist knowledge to promote family survival and well-being.

Concurrent with these practical uses, quilts had expressive and social uses. They could enhance the domestic environment by making the surface of a bed into a visually pleasing design, strengthen social bonds when given as gifts (usually across kin-group generations), be made into tents under which children played, and evoke pleasure as users recognized family members’ clothing in some of the pattern pieces. In these uses, quilts had meanings as an affordable means of: decorating a house, strengthening kin bonds, and generating a sense of household pride and mutuality.

Quiltmaking Behaviors and Meanings

Given that people needed warm covers and couldn’t afford to buy them, quiltmaking was a prerequisite of quilt use in small-farm households. The quilt realm thus necessarily included quiltmaking activities (see Klassen 2008, especially page 23: “Quiltmaking Space Needs”). Such activities varied according to particularistic circumstances but typically
included many of those listed in Table 4.1 below (Figure 4.4, pages 201-202, shows equipment).

Table 4.1. Common Steps in Small-Farm Quiltmaking.

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Make a wooden quilt frame</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Put hooks in the ceiling for ropes that can be tied to the frame so it can be raised and lowered</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Build sawhorse-like “horses” on which to rest the frame when quilting is under way</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Make a quilt storage box</td>
<td>men</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Acquire and store factory-made equipment such as a sewing machine, scissors, thimble, needles, pins, and thread</td>
<td>men or women</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Acquire and store fabric: commodity sacks, sewing scraps, old clothes and linens, textile factory remnants, store-bought cloth (including low-cost “quilt bundles,” composed of remnants), croker (burlap) sacks (used in cottonpicking)</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Save the thread from commodity sack seams</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Bleach and dye plain white or beige sacks, which often were used for sashing strips, borders, and backing</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Acquire batting: after the cotton that household members had picked was ginned, retain some of it rather than sell it all; “batter” the cotton with a “switch” to get the “trash” (dust) out of it (1:2; 16:3); collect lint from around the gin; wash cotton with soap and water in a bucket and dry it in the sun to make it white and fluffy; card ginned cotton to make it fluffy and evenly sized (3:3; 16:3); recycle old sheets, blankets, or quilts; buy a batt (9:4)</td>
<td>women; men and children help</td>
<td>solo or group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Choose a pieced design for the top</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Cut pattern pieces, often using paper or cardboard templates; for string-pieced quilts, sew scraps of cloth onto a paper template</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Sew pieces together to make a design, often hand-sewing them into pattern blocks but machine-sewing blocks together with sashing strips and borders</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Lay blocks out on a bed to figure how many are</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>needed and how to arrange them</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>On string-pieced tops, tear out the paper backing once the top is made</td>
<td>women, children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Sew large pieces of cloth together (often plain-colored sacks) to make a back</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Mount the back, batting, and top on a frame for quilting (&quot;put the quilt in&quot;)</td>
<td>women; men help</td>
<td>two or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>In some cases, convene a quilt group</td>
<td>women; children are messengers</td>
<td>solo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Choose a quilting motif. In some cases, mark it with chalk or pencil on the quilt back (but many eyeballed it). Quilt or tie the layers together. Raise and lower the frame as needed since quilting took several hours, possibly spread over a few days, to make room for other activities (houses often had just two or three rooms). Frames usually hung from ceilings and were tied to chairs or horses for stability.</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo or group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Finish the quilt edges, often by sewing the edge of the back over the top or vice versa.</td>
<td>women</td>
<td>solo or group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the above steps indicate, quiltmaking required specialized knowledge and social interaction at several stages as makers learned and practiced methods of construction and passed these on, coordinated aspects of the project with other household members, shared designs and materials with other homemakers, collaborated with neighbors (especially at the quilting stage), and in some cases shopped and consulted published patterns. The complex process of integrating resources and labor had meanings of: authority, agency, and devotion to family as components of small-farm womanhood; and quilts as a form of ephemeral wealth (a supply that continually had to be renewed). Opal Brack (1919-, black), for instance, described her grandmother who had made quilts as “an industrious person.... She would work and do, and she had ten children....” (2A:3). Perceived as a capacity of
small-farm households to meet a subsistence need, quiltmaking upheld values of self-sufficiency, work, thrift, providence, ingenuity, and neighborliness.

**Themes of Quilt-Related Discourse**

Several quilt meanings recurred in oral history interviews with my consultants. They are not necessarily common to all consultants, but most were shared across racial-group lines. The first themes discussed below reflect the dominant subsistence meaning of quilts and quiltmaking; the second group testifies to a coexisting plastic expressive dimension that expanded or contracted subject to particularistic circumstances.

Requirements for making a subsistence quilt were: basic needlework competence and supplies, substantial batting, reasonably durable and pleasant-to-touch cloth to make the top and backing, and a size that covered a bed. Within these parameters and subject to resources of material, tools, time, and knowledge, makers had discretion regarding the design of the top. Traits that marked a quilt as dominantly expressive, meant for bedspread (decorative) use, were: thin or no batting, since the quilt then would fail to meet the need for warmth; and substantial investment of resources in the design and execution of the top, since this would make no sense on a bedcover that was meant for everyday use by children. Almost all small-farm quilts were subsistence quilts, but resources invested in aesthetic expression varied greatly.

**Subsistence Quilt Themes**

Following are eight themes of subsistence quilts that recur in consultant interviews.
Household quilts were evaluated in terms of practical use (Figures 4.2 and 4.5, pages 200, 203-204, show quilts made to practical criteria). Several consultants expressed this meaning. For instance, Cobon Brack said of his mother’s Star quilt, which was batted with an old quilt, “You won’t get cold under that one” (1:1); Delois Baggett (1933-, white) noted that her grandmother’s ca. 1940 String quilt was made “for warmth” (9:3); and Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) told me that his wife “just make a quilt ‘cause we needed ‘m” (14:15; emphasis added). Looking at the ca. 1950 Two-Patch quilt that he had brought to his daughter’s house on the outskirts of Brownsville to show me, he said,

She put this together, and then after she put it together, she didn’t put—Ain’t no cotton [batting] in this.... A good heavy quilt, you put cotton in it from all the way over and then quilt it.... It [the flannel sheet that his wife had used as batting] ain’t as heavy as that cotton, if you got cotton in it. It won’t be warm. But this quilt will do all right. [14:16]

His focus on the absence of cotton conveys a perception of a quilt as an insulator. His comment that the thinly batted quilt would “do all right” probably upholds the pride-and-civility principle in relation to his wife, Virtress Beard (1921-59).

Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) also foregrounded practical uses: “Well, I never thought of a quilt as being fancy. It was something you needed to keep you warm in the winter. That’s just—when I grew up—that we had quilts, not blankets” (15:1). Practical priorities were the basis of her opinion that: “My mother-in-law did not make good quilts. Hers weren’t long enough. This would barely have covered a full-size bed, you see” (3:12). This critique addresses not design or needlework quality but whether the quilt provided adequate cover.

The above comments show that these consultants valued quilts based on whether they met practical needs.
Quiltmaking promoted self-sufficiency in households with little cash. Noting that scraps from worn-out clothes and dressmaking projects had gone into her mother’s quilts, Anne Baird (1922-, white) said, “We didn’t have money to buy” (16:6). Ollie Moore (1942-, black) said of her grandmother, a divorced woman who had raised ten grandchildren,

She would make quilts because, uh, she didn’t have the money to buy ‘m.... The quilts you made was heavy quilts, because they would stuff ‘m, and they was heavy. [13:3]

Whatever we was wearin’ that was too old, she would cut it up and make quilts out of it. You didn’t throw away nothin’. If you had a pair of blue jeans, they was cut up and put in the quilt. If you had a dress or something, that was cut up. If you had a flour sack, that was cut up.... And then the bottom part [back] most time was cotton sacks, you know, like you pick cotton in. She would wash ‘m and bleach ‘m, tear ‘m apart if they was old, and there would be the bottom part of the quilt. [13:6]

My shirt, if it got too old and I wasn’t going to use it no more or was faded or tore up or whatever, and she couldn’t fix it, she didn’t throw it away. She had a bag she put all of it in. [13:8]

Every week she would be washing them [blue jeans], and if they got a hole in them, she would always patch it. And when they got so she couldn’t patch it no more, she would cut ‘m up and make a quilt, put it in a quilt.... Whatever was there to use, like a blouse that had wore out, and you couldn’t fix it no more, she would always take the buttons off it and save those in case you needed a button for something, and cut the blouse up and put it in the quilt. You didn’t throw away nothin’. [13:13-14]

Thrift was a pre-requisite of self-sufficiency in this household, one of two that consultants mentioned that had had no sewing machine; in the other case, cited by Peggy Staggs (1938-, white), this lack was temporary.

Quiltmaking also had been part of a self-sufficient way of life in Barbara Callery’s (1940-, white) family, although this household had had more material means than Moore’s: “We raised—in fact, we’ve laughed about it—most of what we ate, with the exception of things with—the flour, we had to buy flour, we had to buy sugar, salt, um.... Didn’t have
much cash, so we didn’t need much cash” (17:6, 11). Her mother “looked at a quilt as something that she had to do. Because they—they couldn’t afford to go out and buy big heavy quilts.... It was strictly done out of necessity” (17:17).

For people in small-farm households, quiltmaking was a means of using what they had to meet subsistence needs with minimal cash expenditure.

Quilt-top designs were basic. For instance, Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) said, “Most of their pieced quilts that I remember that came from my family, my mother’s family, were simple quilts.... Nine-Patch was a plain old quilt and that’s what ‘most everybody did” (15:3) [Figure 4.6, pages 204-205: Nine-Patch quilts]. Ollie Moore (1942-, black) said that her grandmother didn’t have pattern names but had used “just squares” (13:8, 16). Anne Baird (1922-, white) said,

Anything that Mama made had to be just as simple as could be because she had such a big family and it took so—You know, it takes a certain amount of time. So nothing fancy was made in the quilts when she made them. And sometimes instead of quilting them she would tack them. [16:13]

By “tack,” she meant that her mother would tie the layers of a quilt together using short pieces of yarn or thread, which was faster than hand-quilting.

The quilts made by Barbara Callery’s (1940-, white) mother and her mother’s mother, who lived with the family, “were utility quilts. They were not show quilts [laughs]” (17:4). Of the patterns, she said, “What they made, I think, was fairly basic. No really fancy arrangements on the quilt. They would do, uh, squares. [Me: “Like a Nine-Patch?”] Yes, like a Nine-Patch.... The quilts were a thing of need” (17:8-9). Her mother, Ellen Marbury (1917-2003), “had those babies every other year, and she had to feed folks, ... and sewing clothes. She really didn’t have the time to make fancy quilts” [17:10].
When I asked Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) if his wife’s ca. 1950 Two-Patch quilt was meant for everyday use, he agreed, “Everyday use. [Me: “It was nothing fancy?”] No, it wasn’t nothing fancy about it. It was just made for the children...to keep warm” (14:4). Said Jean Bolding (1932-, Lauderdale County, white), “Back in my early days, and I’m sayin’ in the ‘40s, that I remember my mother quilting, most of hers were string quilts or just little square quilts [Carolyn Simpson (who participated in the interview): “Nine-Patches”]—Nine-Patches” (3:3). As noted in chapter 3, string quilts were made by sewing narrow scraps (typically three to ten) onto paper templates that had been cut in the shape of pattern pieces (usually squares or diamonds), then trimming the cloth along the edges of the template. Makers (or their children) usually tore out the paper backing.

The meaning of quiltmaking in these comments is that of an obligation whose fulfillment depended not on complex design and fine needlework but on quantity, insulation capacity, low cash investment, and efficient use of time.

Small-farm women made quilts for the sake of their households. This perception of selfless dedication underlies Earl Beard’s (1915-2012, black) comment that: “My wife would do it ‘cause I had 11 children.... I got six boys and five girls, and so I had to have some quilts” (14:13). Considering what qualities made a good quilter, Barbara Gallery (1940- , white) said that she would be someone who was able to evaluate household needs and resources, answering questions such as, “‘How big is it [the quilt] gonna be?’ ‘Will it fit my bed?’ You know, ‘How many beds have I got to cover?’, and ‘How many kids have I got to keep warm?’.... And, ‘Where do I get my stuff from? Do I have any fabric that I could spare?’” (17:16). Her focus on household management posits quiltmaking as a family service rather than as an arena of individual expression.
For Callery’s mother, who was from a "high-class family" but married down,

Quiltmaking was like washing clothes out in the back yard. It was having to do something for the purpose of keeping your children warm and dry and like, you know, feeding your children. Like eating, cooking beans [laughs]. [17:9, 20]

As noted on page 2, Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) echoed this view of quiltmaking as a mundane obligation: “This was a woman’s duty.... And if you didn’t have quilts for your family for the winter to keep them warm, then that was the equivalent of leaving your dishes unwashed or your floors not swept” (3:16). Simpson had not learned to make quilts as a young woman because rising cash incomes in the 1950s had made it unnecessary as she approached homemaker age: “You know, quilts was something you had to have and you had to do for survival. But when you got enough money to go to town and buy a blanket, you were moving up in the world” (15:6, 8). Her comments assume that households engaged in quiltmaking and other subsistence activities because they had to, due to low cash income, and that they would switch to buying necessities or paying someone else to make them if they had enough money.

The view of quiltmaking as a woman’s contribution to her household also applied to cases where women made quilts for sale, as expressed in Lollie Mann’s (1936-, black) comment quoted above: “It was really prestigious because it would be beneficial to your family” (2:12-13, emphasis added).

In the view of these consultants, quiltmaking was evidence of a homemaker’s commitment to her household’s survival, achieved by diligently husbanding household resources to meet subsistence household needs.

Quilts were short-lived due to necessary use and contingencies. Among the forces that threatened quilts were children, house fires, mice, and cleaning. Upon not finding a
certain quilt that she remembered among those stored at her mother’s house, Robbie Jarrett-King (1939-, black) said, “We probably wore it out, ‘cause we lived here—eight kids. We wore out a lot of quilts” (2:4). Many households had several children, and they often slept more than one to a bed.

House fires destroyed Barbara Callery’s (1940-, white) mother’s quilts in 1954, and those of Mary Rose Halliburton’s (1939-, Lauderdale County, black) grandmother in 1963 (17:1-2; 24:3). Small-farm houses were susceptible to fire because they were heated with fireplaces and wood or kerosene (“coal-oil”) stoves. In Callery’s case, new electrical appliances including a washer and refrigerator had overloaded the wiring (17:16-17).

After being washed, quilts were dried on clotheslines and fences. Ollie Moore (1942-, black) said,

We had clotheslines, some of ‘m, and then if there’s just a fence there, they would hang ‘m on the fence if they didn’t have clotheslines. [Me: “Like a split rail fence?”] No, like a barbwire fence. [Me: “Like a barbwire—They’d hang a quilt on a barbwire fence?”] Right, that’s what we had, and that’s what we would use: A barbwire fence. [Me: “So they weren’t worried about having a little tear, or?”] No, you didn’t tear ‘m. You took your time. [13:4]

Small-farm users extended quilt durability by: storing quilts in relatively secure locations such as wooden quilt boxes, closets, and the space between the mattress and bedspring on a bed; airing quilts outdoors rather than washing them with a tub and washboard (and hanging them up to dry carefully); mending tears; and recycling irreparably worn quilts as the batting in new quilts or as rags. In some cases, neighborhood or church groups compensated for the loss of a quilt by making one for house-fire victims.

Quiltmaking required a provident mindset. In order to decide how much cotton to save out of the fall harvest for quilt batting, households had to assess how many quilts would be needed for the next year’s winter. Black and white consultants alike told me that
most of the work involved in replenishing the quilt supply for the upcoming winter had to be done months in advance, before women were consumed with outdoor work in summer and fall. Reflecting this seasonal cycle, Jean Bolding (1932-, Lauderdale County, white) said of her mother (in northern Mississippi),

She only quilted in the winter months. [Me: “How come?”] Because in the summertime she had the garden and working in the field, and she did not have the time. And so her quilting, she might piece some in the summertime but most of all her quilting was in the wintertime with the fireplace for heat. And we, um, and we had, uh, just, uh, her, uh, quilting frames was hung from the ceiling, and she put them down and up in the daytime, and a lot of her quilting was at night, sitting around the fireplace after she had done all the chores for the day. [3:2]

Women commonly pieced tops at their own houses in winter, after the cotton harvest, and quilted them alone or in groups in the spring while men were plowing and children were at school. The new quilts would then be ready for use the following winter.

Said Barbara Callery (1940-, white), “Usually the quilting even took place in the winter because they could have the fire going, and then some in the summer. But usually in the summer, spring and summer, people were busy out gathering and sowing and...putting away....” (17:4). Said Lollie Mann (1936-, black), “They would top ‘m and hand-stitch ‘m in the winter, and then in the spring, everybody would have their own quilts [quilt-tops].... They would have sort of like a quota for doing every—every winter” (1:12; 14:15). Her sister Julie Taylor (1938-) said, “That meant that they would do so many for a winter, like maybe if this lady wanted two or three, this lady wanted four or five, whatever, you know, like that” (14:15). Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) also observed a quantity-oriented approach:

Their big thing was getting enough quilts and clothing for the winter for the family. And sometimes it would be three or four families working together doing this.... When my family got together to quilt, my mother might have
two quilts, one of her sisters might have two quilts, [Me: “You mean tops.”] yeah, tops, her mom might have two, and somebody else might have two. And they just quilted until they quilted everybody’s quilts. [Me: “But by doing it together—”] It was faster. That was one thing. [3:6; 15:9]

The time-consuming multi-stage nature of small-farm quiltmaking fostered a provident mindset, demanding that people coordinate time, labor, and resources in the present in order to be able to meet future needs.

Women made a common quilt culture through regular interaction. In the Pea Ridge/Holly Grove community, where Lucille Hight’s (1927-, white) mother had quilted with neighbors in the 1930s,

The houses was just like in almost hollering distance of each other. [Me: “And would they—all the houses be on the road?”] Yes.... Well, the farm area’s all back behind the houses, back yonder. [Me: “So that’s very sociable.”] Oh yeah, they were very sociable, but you know how women are: I’m out here, and I’m out there, you know how.... Like, I was just thinking, like six or eight or ten women of the little community there. Now some of them was widow ladies that didn’t have husbands or, or they could do what they wanted to, and it was close enough to walk. We didn’t have automobiles back then. [20:14-15]

Opal Brack (1919-, black) described similar conditions in a group interview that included her husband, Cobon Brack (1916-), and Lollie Mann (1936-, black). Opal Brack’s quilt-group “friends” had lived “right across the field” and had walked less than a mile to get to her house (1:11-12). Said Mann, “The houses were closer together. It was a lot more people than there are now” (see Figure 3.1, pages 154-162, for maps of consultant homesteads).

Opal Brack described the layout as follows:

Houses all around, down on this side of us, right across from us, then back in the fields there, then back on the other side back there. We had houses all around. And you could smell people cooking. They’d be cooking bread or something, and you could smell it. [Cobon Brack: “Ham.”] You could smell it.... You’d be in the field working and say, “Somebody cooking some bread. I can smell it.” [1:11-12]
Such conditions promoted the sharing and merging of inherited and published quilt designs and construction methods.

Many consultants viewed quiltmaking as having been common culture among women in their locale. For instance, Delois Baggett (1933-, white) said, “Everybody around here quilted” (9:8). Her grandmother Rachel Davis (1869-1952) had always used the same quilting motif (squared shell [my term, not hers]) and, “It was the style everywhere” (9:5). Lollie Mann (1936-, black) also said of quiltmaking, “Everyone did it about the same way” (1:5). Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) said, “Nine-Patch was a plain old quilt, and that’s what ‘most everybody did” (15:3). And Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) said, “Most of the folks in the country quilted at that time. [Me: “All the women did.”] Back in that time. You could go ‘most anywhere and they’d be quilting” (14:12). These comments show that quiltmaking had a meaning of culture that was shared among women who lived within a few miles of each other, although there usually were closer relations between those of the same racial group.

Quiltmaking was a shibboleth of small-farm identity. In the experience of some black consultants who had lived in predominantly black rural areas such as the Woodlawn and Durhamville communities (see Figure 1.22, page 45, for a map of consultant locations), small-farm people were black, and thus quilters were black. “White people didn’t make quilts much no way,” said Lue Vennia Robinson (1922-, black). When I asked why more black people had made quilts, she said, “ ‘Cause they didn’t have nothin’, I reckon. They just have old dress tails and anything [to] make quilts out of” (7:9). Robinson associates quiltmaking here with the condition of having no money. The white woman for whom she worked as an adult had bedspreads, not quilts (7:7).
Jeanette Holloway (1952-, black) saw quiltmaking as evidence of the providence, hard work, and ingenuity that had especially characterized black people due to their especially low-cash condition:

The white woman could, in some cases, could afford a quilt and a bedspread.... Well, you know, I remember my grandmother and other black ladies always finding ways to make sure that they had what they need and that meant working from day in to day out. [6:6]

Asked if the wife of the white farm-owner for whom her uncle had worked had made quilts, Holloway speculated that “Miss Tillabell” (sp?) had not had “the mindset” (5:9-10). Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) saw quiltmaking as an activity of rural women, who in his experience had been black:

No, I never see no white ladies quilting. But, see, we were way out in the country. We wasn’t in town. I just mostly see only colored women quilting.... It was all in the country, right in that neighborhood, black folks, and so they just got together and quilt. [14:12]

In the experience of blacks in such areas, most whites were large landowners or town-dwellers. “Every white person in the neighborhood had a black cook,” said Beard, and Robinson observed, “Most white peoples lived in town” (14:13; 7:7). Their strong association between rural black women and quiltmaking reflects their sense that small-farm people and black people were the same population. Thelma Austin (1944-, black), on the other hand, knew that some white women had made quilts and thus linked the practice more to economic-group identity: “The rich people, they didn’t quilt. They would get other people to do their quilting” (12/28/06).

Like consultants in black quiltmaking households, those in white quiltmaking households perceived themselves as having been different from households that did not make quilts. But in their case the difference was rooted in economic status with no factor of
racial-group identity (for evidence of economic-group difference among whites historically, see pages 52-55). When I asked Lucille Hight (1927-, white) if the wife of the man who owned the house and land where her family had sharecropped had made quilts, she said,

I wouldn't imagine so... I don't know anything about those ladies. They didn't associate with us.... [Me: “So there's a class thing going on.”] Yeah, I'd say class in some of those things. [Me: “As far as quiltmaking.”] Mhm, mhm. ‘Cause I can't see any of those people getting down and putting in a quilt, you know. [21:3-4]

Awareness of economic-group differences among whites also underlies Delois Baggett’s (1933-, white) comment, noted above, that the Shelby County dairy farm where her father had worked was the “plaything” of the owner, a Memphis doctor (9:1).

The situation of Anne Baird’s (1922-, white) grandmother, Sarah Ann King (1871-1965), demonstrates that quilt-using whites were divided into economic groups that were distinguished by relatively greater reliance on manual labor or on cash. Members of the cash-rich group often did not use quilts. If they did, they bought them from stores or from members of the manual-labor group, or sewed fancy quilt tops and paid members of the manual-labor group to quilt them. Members of the manual-labor group made quilts out of necessity for their own households, and in some cases made quilts to sell and/or earned money quilting other people’s tops. This distinction emerges in Baird’s account of her grandmother’s quilting business:

My grandmother quilted for people, and I think they might have paid her $5. I don’t think they paid her much.... They would have the top made. [Me: “They'd bring her the top.”] And the material for the backing. [Me: “They’d bring her the backing. And the cotton filling? And then she would put them together.”] Mhm.... They would decide from the pattern what kind of design they were going to use. [16:7]

Their attention to coordinating the pieced pattern with the quilting design suggests that they saw these quilts as bedspreads rather than sources of warmth.

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The above comments show that quiltmaking was a shibboleth of small-farm identity and, in the case of people who perceived that all small-farm people were black, a shibboleth of rural African American identity. It utilized small-farm resources and testified to the family devotion of small-farm women. It satisfied this economic group’s distinctive need for and valuing of self-sufficiency, a condition that enhanced a household’s quality of life, its economic independence, and in some cases, its pride.

Expressive Quilt Themes

Although my consultants impressed on me that small-farm quiltmaking was a subsistence activity, some of their comments reveal that it had an expressive dimension. I present here seven themes of expressive quilt discourse based on consultant interviews.

Quilts made for practical purposes could have “pretty” tops. Said Ollie Moore (1942-, black) of her grandmother, “She enjoyed sewing... And she made quilts for all the beds in the house, and she would make the quilts for them. [Me: “Were they pretty?”] Yeah, they was pretty” (13:12). Viewing my digital-camera image of one of her grandmother’s ca. 1940 string quilts, Delois Baggett (1933-, white) said, “That’s pretty” (9:5) (Figure 4.7, pages 205-206, shows Baggett’s grandmother’s string-quilts). Said Peggy Staggs (1938-, white), “Well, from where I remember, when we really had to have the quilts, we didn’t care about fancy [laughs]. We just needed a quilt. But they were usually pretty” (18:4). Comments such as these show that quilts could decorate domestic space (based on the design of the top) concurrent with providing practical insulation.

Quiltmaking could be fun. Said anonymous consultant BR (ca. 1930-, black), “It was so much fun, and you know we would quilt until late at night [about ten o’clock]. At that
time we were living in the country, and in the wintertime we didn’t have that much [to do]” (8/19/07) [I spoke with BR informally after a Woodlawn Church service but never managed a followup meeting due to her health issues]. As noted in chapter 3, quiltmaking also had met Lue Vennia Robinson’s (1922-, black) family’s need for a pastime on winter evenings (7:2). In such cases, it was entertainment.

Women also had enjoyed cross-household social quilting with other women. Such quilt groups often rotated, meeting at the house of whoever had a top to be quilted; in other cases quilters commonly met at one place: a house that was centrally located or that had a good space for quilting, or a semi-public location such as a country store or schoolhouse. Said Lucille Hight (1927-, white), “When they were having little quilt—quilting teas, [Me: “Teas, yeah.”] they would—the ladies in the community got together. Yes, they had a good time [laughs]. But see they would quilt a quilt in, like a couple of days” (20:14). Solitary quiltmaking also could be a source of pleasure. After much trial and error, Opal Brack (1919-, black) had learned from her mother “how to make short stitches. And I quilt all of my quilts with those short stitches after I learned how to quilt. And I just loved it. After everybody go to bed I would sit down and quilt until maybe 12 o’clock” (1:3; 2A:2). For her, quiltmaking provided much-valued private time (she also enjoyed quilt-group meetings).

Responding to my comment that women had invested more time in quilting than was needed for practical purposes, beauty shop-owner Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) said,

Probably because that was the only time some of the women could leave their homes. You know, and I’ve learned this from women over the years, there was a time, and it may still be so in some areas, where a woman was a man’s property, and she wasn’t allowed to leave home except to do something like that that would benefit the family. [15:10]
In such cases, quiltmaking had allowed often-homebound women to build peer-group
networks and to access an authority other than that of their husbands.

These comments show that small-farm quiltmaking met not only subsistence needs
but psychological and social needs for fun, relaxation, and peer-group camaraderie.

Some quilt traits had a plain or fancy identity. Peggy Staggs (1938-, white) said that
her mother’s plain-quilt designs were string, Nine-Patch,

and I don’t remember the names of a lot of them. And sometimes we would
go with a Flower Garden design or a Wedding Ring design if you wanted one
really pretty [see Figure 4.8, pages 207-210].… Some was quilted “by-the-
piece,” and that means, like if you have a Flower Garden, each little piece was
quilted around…. But if it was just one that she didn’t care too much about it
being really pretty or anything, she would just quilt the whole thing, just
maybe a swirl design or straight through. [18:4-5]

By “swirl” she meant the shell quilting motif (“Shell—that’s the word I was trying to think
of,” meaning sets of concentric arcs [see page 266 lower left, 273 bottom]); “straight
through” meant parallel straight lines across the quilt (see page 277 top, and 280). Pattern
and quilting motif thus were traits by which makers placed a quilt on the common-to-
bedspread quilt continuum. Jeanette Holloway (1952-, black) made such a distinction
between her grandmother’s 1960s tied Bar and Housetop quilts (Figure 4.9, pages 210-
211) and the quilts that her aunt’s quilt group had quilted in the 1950s. The latter (of which
she has none) “was designs that was made for the eye,” with “painstaking stitches”:

Those with the quilting parties were consistent. They meant business. They
meant real business. My grandmother just basically was trying to make a
quilt, and she wanted to make sure that she used material that she had
available to her. [6:4]

Holloway thus contrasted her grandmother’s thrifty approach, marked by scraps, a basic
design, and tacking instead of quilting, with quilts that were meant to give visual pleasure
through consistent designs and fine needlework.

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Comments such as these made me realize that even quilts that were made for warmth could have bedspread traits, which conveyed a meaning of fancy.

The way quilt layers were joined (quilted or tied) had an aesthetic component. Lollie Lee Mann (1936-, black) said that “Miss Lonnie,” who had tacked quilts, “put four or five or six colors [of yarn] together, like she wanted it” (2:14). Opal Brack (1919-, black) said that she first saw quilts that were tied rather than quilted in the 1970s, and, “I just didn’t care for that” (2A:4; 2:15). Her husband, Cobon Brack (1916-), said, “My mama said, ‘Your toenail get hung in ‘m’ [laughing]” (2:15). Opal Brack said, “It takes longer to quilt them than to tack them. It looks nicer [without] threads sticking up. With tacking, you got to tie” (2A:4). She likes her quilts to be smooth. “They hold together better with quilting. They look so much neater. My mother and mother-in-law never tacked” (2A:4). Her preference for quilting thus had multiple components: practicality (it holds the quilt together better, no problem with snagging toenails); aesthetic taste (nicer, smoother, neater); loyalty to family elders; possibly habit; and possibly an affinity for the ongoing repetitive motion of quilting as opposed to cutting and tying (“with tacking, you got to tie”). By subsistence criteria, the additional time required for quilting counted against it, but since Opal Brack enjoyed sewing alone late at night, she may sometimes have been in no hurry to finish a quilt (1:3).

These comments testify to an expressive component in a maker’s decision to quilt or to tack, and then in choosing a quilting motif or color of yarn.

Quilt color schemes often were intentional. I heard many accounts of makers who had invested time and sometimes money in achieving a particular color scheme, although such care did not improve a quilt’s insulation capacity. Opal Brack (1919-, black) bought
yellow cloth to make sashing strips for her ca. 1945 Butterfly quilt (Figure 4.10, page 211) and said that her mother-in-law had dyed some cloth purple for a ca. 1952 Star quilt (2:17; 1:2) (Figure 4.2, page 200). Ollie Moore (1942-, black) said of her grandmother (who raised her from age three after her mother died),

Like if she cut up a pair of blue jeans, she had that pair of blue jeans cut there. If she had a blouse or shirt or something, she’ll have a little pile of that blue jeans, a little pile of that shirt, a little pile of that blouse, and then when she gets ready to sew them together, she just takes one of each and just sew them together. [13:1, 16]

This organized approach suggests that her grandmother had maintained some color consistency in her pattern blocks, an aesthetic rather than a practical concern. To Moore’s knowledge, none of her quilts survive to serve as evidence.

Referencing her mother-in-law’s early 1950s Two-Patch quilt (a pattern consisting of squares or rectangles in two alternating colors; see Figure 4.11, page 212), Peggy Staggs (1938-, white) said, “She would take tobacco sacks and unravel them and wash them, and then she would dye them, and she would stack them up until she got enough to piece them together” (18:6). Her mother-in-law, Verniece Staggs (1915-2002), invested substantial time and some money for dye in the yellow-and-gray color scheme, a fashionable combination in the 1950s. Lue Vennia Robinson’s (1922-, black) mother also had dyed commodity sacks, but for quilt backs: “They’d dye them with walnut hulls.... Peel off the walnut and boil it.... [Me: “What color does that make?”] It make it purple to me” (7:10). Jean Bolding’s (1932-, Lauderdale County, white) mother also had dyed sacks for quilt backs (“linings”), using a resource (red clay) that women in the study area did not have:

She used the fertilize sacks, and she bleached them out, and they would be snow-white. And in the hills of North Mississippi there is red clay. She would dig a hole outside the house on the hillside. [Me: “Now that would be some hard digging.”] She would pour the water in.... She would take the fertilize
sacks—She had already seamed it up. She had an old pedal-type, Singer-type sewing machine, and she’d already seamed the lining up, and she’d put it in this red clay, kept water on it, and I presumed it stayed about a week. And she’d turn it every day or two, make sure the color was going to be even all through the material..., and the hole was about like this, about the size of a washtub, and she kept adding water to it to make sure that it’d stay moist all the time. [3:1]

Bolding’s mother went to great lengths for the sake of pink: She bleached the sacks to get rid of the label and turn them a brighter pink, dug a washtub-size hole in clay, replenished the water for several days, and stirred the fabric to get the color even.

These examples of makers who invested substantial effort in particular color schemes testify to an expressive dimension in subsistence quiltmaking.

Quilt tops had a variety of designs. Maker approaches to repertoire included: reusing the same two or three designs; acquiring designs from neighbors and relatives; using published patterns; and developing variations that sometimes combined elements from these sources. A possibly original design element of Frankie Lee Bailey’s (1921-2002, Henderson County, white) ca. 1945 Star quilt, which had a common block pattern, was putting vertical sashing strips between every other row of blocks instead of every row (Figure 4.12, page 212). Bailey (consultant Peggy Staggs’ mother) may have been improvising because she didn’t have enough of one material to put matching strips between each row of blocks.

Opal Brack got the pattern for her ca. 1945 Butterfly (a fashionable quilt-pattern theme of the time with many published versions) from her mother-in-law, but chose a different quilting motif (squared shell instead of variable shell; see Figure 5.1, page 266 lower right, 267 top) and yellow sashing strips instead of pink (Figure 4.13, page 213, shows Opal Brack’s and her mother-in-law’s Butterfly quilts). Opal Brack also got published
patterns from an older (black) neighbor, likely copied from a newspaper or farm journal (2A:1):

Cousin Becky Reed would send me patterns.... So many quilts I would piece by the pattern that she sent me.... She would piece a sample block, then send it to me.... I would look at it. Then I would take a piece of paper and turn it bottom up and measure how she had that pattern made on the bottom. Then I would cut me one like that. [1:3] (Figure 4.14, page 214, shows a quilt Brack made based on a sample block from Becky Reed)

The ingenuity and, in some cases, pleasure with which women emulated and adapted designs show engagement with aesthetic as well as practical issues.

As an aspect of quiltmaking that had minimal effect on insulation capacity, the diversity of quilt-top designs shows that subsistence quilts were an arena of aesthetic expression.

Makers upheld needlework standards, subject to circumstances. For instance, to assure consistency, Anne Baird’s (1922-, white) mother and grandmother had marked the quilting motif on the top before stitching it: “They would take a piece of string and hold it like that, and take a pencil and go like that [Me: “Oh, arcs?,” that is, shell quilting] Yeah.... They’d draw it” (16:3-4). Opal Brack (1919-, black) was taught to make “short stitches” (as noted above) although a quilt would have been done faster using larger ones (1:3). And Lue Vennia Robinson (1922-, black) aimed for consistently sized blocks: “All the blocks have to be the same size.... A lot of ‘m don’t come out like that.... I’d rip ‘m out, cut down, make it, you know, come out like that” (7:10). Robinson worked for a neat appearance although a quilt with blocks of uneven sizes could have been just as warm.

Makers thus avoided approximation and variability in some cases for the sake of appearance rather than to enhance a quilt’s practical use value.
The above themes drawn from oral history interviews show that subsistence and expressive meanings co-existed in the small-farm quilt realm. While the requirements for a quilt to meet subsistence needs were set (substantial batting, durable material, competent needlework, large enough for the bed), the scope of the expressive dimension was plastic, subject to particularistic circumstances.

**Quilt Realm Meanings and the Social Structure**

The meanings of quilts and quiltmaking that I outlined above stabilized the small-farm social structure by engaging with its social principles (discussed on pages 129-139). The quilt realm upheld principles that were geared to ideal normal conditions (clear-cut identity, pride and civility, mentoring and neighborliness) and applied the fallback principles (deferential helping, role substitution, righteous indignation) as needed. I present here some examples of how this occurred.

The realm of quilt use and quiltmaking upheld the clear-cut identity principle in relation to economic-group (small-farm) identity, but did not consistently mark racial-group identity (except when these facets of identity coincided). In addition, the quiltmaking process (but not necessarily quilt use) upheld this principle as a marker of womanhood (gender- and age-group identities).

The expressive dimension of quiltmaking in particular enhanced small-farm cultural complexity as an arena in which women with shared social-group identities (economic group, gender group, and age group) could differentiate themselves as individuals. They did so artistically, through their quilt designs, and socially, in choosing whether to work alone or to collaborate, and if the latter, with whom (household members or cross-
household peer groups with affinities such as kinship, neighborhood, age group, racial
group, church membership, or skill level).

The quiltmaking process upheld the pride-and-civility principle as a realm in which
small-farm women earned respect by meeting community standards for being a competent
child caretaker (with components of mother and wife). It was the basis of a distinctive
women's subculture since only specialists, of whom the great majority were women, knew
its methods, designs, and multiple steps. And quiltmaking upheld mentoring-and-
neighborliness as a skill that young women learned from elders, and as an activity that
often involved mutual aid (mainly at the quilting stage and in sharing patterns).

The fallback principles sufficed in quiltmaking as in other spheres of activity to give
subjects flexibility in social interactions when conditions were not ideal and normal, or
when they preferred an alternative to ideal normal behaviors. For instance, deferential-
helping applied when a woman got help with quiltmaking from her children or husband,
whose normal roles did not include this activity. Role-substitution applied when a mother
could not play her proper childcare role, perhaps because she had died or was away
working, and a grandmother or aunt therefore took over her childcare duties including
quiltmaking. Righteous-indignation applied in two cases where the pride-and-civility
principle was violated: As a consultant’s reaction to a man (her father) who had
complained about his wife’s quiltmaking, and as a mother’s reaction to an adult daughter
who contradicted her name for a quilt pattern (LH 20:13; OB 2:4-5).

The integration of the quilt realm with general social principles shows that it had
meanings of continuity and stability in small-farm culture. People used it to negotiate a
good quality of life with the existing structure rather than to change the system.
Conclusion

In a region long dominated by plantation culture (see pages 49-51), quiltmaking was an expression of yeoman-like self-reliance in the small-farm households of my consultants, whose economies were interdependent with those of large-farm households. It embodied personality traits such as “frugal,” “industrious,” “provident,” and “prudent” that state Commissioner of Agriculture Joseph Buckner Killebrew had extolled in a post-Reconstruction promotional brochure that advised landless and yeoman households in West Tennessee on how to get ahead (1879:38-39; see my discussion on pages 62-64).

Killebrew was in large part trying to attract white immigrants to fill the labor shortage that large-scale cotton planters experienced when the slaves were freed. But as cotton agriculture developed in southwestern Tennessee by the late 1800s, its workforce included black and white sharecropping tenant farmers, wage laborers, land renters, and small-farm owners (many of whom also sharecropped). Many of them had not advanced by the middle 1900s to the yeoman status that Killebrew had aimed to facilitate. But many had built activities into their way of life that moved them along the continuum from planter-dependent laborer to economic independence. Such projects included quiltmaking and quilt sales as well as truck-patch gardens.

Quiltmaking foregrounded the contribution of small-farm women to this process. Quilts were a form of wealth, and women were the agents whose knowledge and labor realized the latent value of worthless and low-cost materials (facilitated by men who provided equipment and supplies). The view of women as factors in the advancement of household well-being aligned with Killebrew’s observation that a small-scale farmer whose
wife operated a truck-patch garden (raising produce to be sold) “was soon observed to leave his fellows in the race for fortune far behind” (1879:38-39).

The consultant view of quiltmaking as common culture among small-farm social networks but rare among large-farm women indicates that it was a shibboleth of small-farm identity in the study area in this period. In some cases, small-farm consultants, both black and white, reported a family heritage of quiltmaking dating to the late 1800s or earlier. Their proprietary view of quiltmaking as a distinctive small-farm competence is evidence that this socially and economically subordinate group had the capacity to see itself as culturally exemplary and was turning to popular culture (published patterns) rather than elite (planter class) models. These trends suggest that the self-sufficient yeoman-like aspect of small-farm identity was ascending over that of deferential laborer (see my discussion of dual occupational identities, pages 85-87).

For small-farm blacks in particular, this development marks a shift away from economic and social interdependence with large-farm (planter class) whites toward more independent common culture with small-farm whites, whether vernacular or popular (as in quilt culture accessed through elders and neighbors or through mainstream publications). I argue that such experiences of independence and self-reliance in everyday life psychologically prepared small-farm blacks to participate in civil rights activities when the rise of capital-intensive cotton agriculture greatly diminished the interdependence of small-farm blacks and large-farm whites.

[Cross-racial-group mentoring did occur. Mary Rose Halliburton (1939-, Lauderdale County, black) told me that her grandmother had used published patterns and added, “White people raised her,” by way of explanation (24:3-5). African American quiltmaker
Lillian Beattie “learned to piece quilts as a girl while living in the household of a white family in Athens, [East] Tennessee” (Ramsey 1989:20). At 14, Tina Turner (1939-, black) worked for a white family in Ripley, the Lauderdale County seat, “taking care of the baby and helping Miss Connie around the house,” but at the same time,

I was learning about this other world—the white world, I guess—with magazines and books and culture. I worked for the Hendersons, and I cleaned for them, but I wasn’t just a maid. I was a part of their life; I lived there.... They taught me so much, those people. They were really like parents to me, and they corrected old patterns of mine. [Turner 1986:24-25]

These mentoring relationships had a strong component of economic-group as well as racial-group difference.]

The themes of quilt discourse discussed in the body of this chapter indicate that factors in the vernacular small-farm quilt culture of my fieldwork area were: stable social networks, authority dispersed among makers, shared meanings in maker networks, multiple production (since quilts wore out with use and a household needed many), limited time and materials, and a mix of subsistence and expressive quilt uses. I argue in a later chapter that these conditions fostered an improvisational approach to quiltmaking.

In chapter 5, I focus on study-area quilts as objects in quilt-historical space and time. I interpret their traits as the intersection of small-farm practical and social needs, makers’ knowledge and taste, local resources and conditions, and historical and contemporary design influences.
Fig. 4.1. Small-farm houses in Haywood and Lauderdale counties, and in a vintage print.


Emma Lee Randolph (1919-2007, Elkmont, Alabama, black) treasured this print as a reminder of her childhood on tenant farms in northern Alabama and southern Middle Tennessee. Courtesy of Lois Wiley (Randolph’s daughter, 2007 interview).

Childhood home of H. L. Mitchell (1906-89, white, co-founder of Southern Tenant Farmers Union), northeastern Lauderdale County, as pictured in his autobiography (1979:100a).
Lettie Rogers (1885-1971, black) raised several grandchildren including Ollie Moore in this Woodlawn-community tenant house in the 1950s. Image from the biography of Clay Evans (1925-, black). He lived here as a child, moved to Chicago in 1945, became a gospel singer and radio and television evangelist, led the 5,000-member Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church, and was active in the Civil Rights Movement (Rose 1981:23, 16-48).

These undated images from the Clay Evans biography show outbuildings on the Evans/Rogers homestead: a smokehouse (above) and a henhouse (below) (Rose 1981:25).
These interior images of the house in which Ollie Moore lived in the 1950s likely date to the 1960s or 1970s, after she had left and her grandmother had moved out (Rose 1981:24).
Ellen and Robert Marbury (white) rented homestead, north central Haywood County. The house burned on daughter Barbara’s (1940-) 14th birthday. Courtesy of Barbara Callery.

Cobon and Opal Brack’s (black) owned home, northwestern Haywood County, 2007. Note quilts on chairs near Lillian Maynard and Lollie Mann, and the quilt-hanging frame at left.
Fig. 4.2. Mary Frances Brack made this 1952 Star quilt to provide warmth at low cost. Opal Brack, her daughter-in-law, helped her quilt it. At Opal and Cobon Brack’s house, 2007.

Fig. 4.3. Anne Baird inherited this quilt box, seen here upholstered and repurposed in a utility room at her house in Brownsville, 2009.
Fig. 4.4. Small-farm quiltmaking equipment.

Virtress Beard’s (1921-59, black) Singer treadle sewing machine. Seen here in a bedroom at her husband’s home near Glimp in Lauderdale County. Courtesy of Earl Beard.

Quilt frame set up on “horses” for me to see at Carolyn’s Beauty Shop in Curve, Lauderdale County. (The shop also serves as a library). In many small-farm houses, such frames hung on ropes from the ceiling so that a quilt-in-progress could be raised to make way for other activities. Courtesy of Carolyn Simpson.
Miss Monroe’s U.S.A. Best Flour sack used as backing on Opal Brack’s ca. 1945 Butterfly quilt. Courtesy of Opal Brack.

Old Rip Table Salt sack ("10 Lbs. Net") used as backing on Goldie Southall Morris’s ca. 1950 Improved Nine-Patch quilt. Courtesy of Goldie Harwell.
Fig. 4.5. Three quilts evaluated by practical criteria.

Delois Baggett’s grandmother, Rachel Davis, made this ca. 1940 String quilt “for warmth.”

Earl Beard said that his wife made quilts such as this ca. 1955 Two-Patch “’cause we needed ‘m.” At his daughter Lollie Mann’s house near Brownsville.
Carolyn Simpson (left) said that many of her mother-in-law Ruth Simpson’s quilts, like this ca. 1985 Flying Swallow, were “not good” because they were too small for full-size beds.

Fig. 4.6. Two Nine-Patch quilts.

Virtress Beard’s ca. 1955 Nine-Patch quilt has adjacent pattern-blocks and seams where tears may have been mended. Courtesy of Earl Beard.
I photographed this ca. 1960 Nine-Patch with turquoise strips and brown cornerstones in the nursing home room of anonymous consultant RJ, in Brownsville. Her daughter purchased it at a yard sale. Unknown maker.

Fig. 4.7. Three 1940s string quilts with patchwork crosses, pieced by Rachel Davis, quilted by her quilt group. Courtesy of Delois Baggett (Davis’s granddaughter).
The black sashing strips of this quilt were apparently of fragile material.
Fig. 4.8. Flower Garden and Wedding Ring quilts (and tops). Peggy Staggs said that small-farm women considered such patterns “fancy.”

Flower Garden crib-quilt top, Sarah Ann King, 1940s. Courtesy of Anne Baird.


Lucille Hight with 1980s Flower Garden made by Mildred McCool, her paternal aunt.
Wedding Ring top, Tennie Callery, ca. 1940.

Wedding Ring, Frankie Lee Bailey or Verniece Staggs, 1940s.
Delois Baggett with 1959 Wedding Ring made by Cassie Binford Taylor.

Fig. 4.9. Two tied quilts that Maggie Holloway Tyus made in the 1960s. Courtesy of Jeanette Holloway (Tyus’s granddaughter).

Housetop quilt (related to the Log Cabin pattern style).
Bars, or Strippy, style quilt.

Fig. 4.10. Opal Brack's Butterfly quilt, ca. 1945, with yellow sashing strips made of cloth purchased for that purpose.
Fig. 4.11. Verniece Staggs’ early 1950s Two-Patch tobacco sacks quilt. 23 x 8 = 184 sacks.

Fig. 4.12. Frankie Bailey’s ca. 1945 Star quilt: strips between alternate vertical rows, string-pieced blocks in lower rows, and at upper right an unpieced block and odd-color sashing.
Fig. 4.13. Butterfly quilts: Mary Frances Brack (top), daughter-in-law Opal Brack (bottom).
Fig. 4.14. Opal Brack made this 1940s Star quilt using a sample block from her neighbor Becky Reed. *Woman’s Century* printed a slightly more complex version as “The Dandy Quilt Block” around 1910 (corners of the blocks were made of two triangles) (Brackman 1993:210-211, #1680). Reed likely got the pattern from a periodical that copied it from *Woman’s Century* (a common practice in quilt-pattern publishing). The *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* (Brackman 1993) lists only the 1910 pattern.
Ch. 5. An Expressive-Subsistence Genre in Time and Space

In producing quilts for everyday use on beds rather than as art objects for display only, the quiltmaking done in the small-farm households of my consultants falls into the “surround” category of Dorothy Noyes’s four-part system of vernacular aesthetic genres (2014:140-149). Such genres are integral to the everyday environment, “not sought out as unusual experiences but taken for granted as already present;” they are “frameworks of social interaction,” are “reproduced and modified without much conscious reflection,” have “the tendency to conformity and habituation” and “the force of repetition and redundancy,” and are “associated with comfort and having things nice around us, insofar as [the surround] is stable and also insofar as it is of our own making” (146-148). These general conditions accurately describe quiltmaking in the small-farm era.

Quiltmaking is among several such surround genres that have subsistence as well as expressive dimensions, meeting needs for shelter, dress, food, or childcare. To account for this apparent link, I propose that, in cases where subsistence genres are relatively ubiquitous and plastic, subjects enhance their usefulness by instilling them with an expressive dimension of meaning. A genre’s construction process and product then become not only a source of survival or physical comfort but also of social organization and cultural reproduction, equipped to meet social and psychological as well as subsistence needs. I
refer to such double-duty genres here as “expressive-subsistence.” Food, clothing, and architecture—as universal human needs that are met in wildly different ways across cultural settings—are expressive-subsistence forms that receive particularly intensive study by material culture-oriented folklorists. The popularity of quilts in both the American popular imagination and as a topic of extensive folkloristic inquiry may similarly be rooted in their strongly dual character as a form that is richly expressive as well as a means toward easy-to-appreciate practical ends.

In this chapter, my analysis of study-area quilt traits demonstrates how subjects may add an expressive dimension to a class of objects whose manifest purpose is to meet subsistence needs. I find that women did so by yoking traits that met practical needs to those that served purposes related to social organization, such as maintaining cultural continuity and marking social-group identities. Their selection of traits also reflected particularistic contingencies of material resources, time, and money. I examine here how these purposes and conditions intersected in the aesthetically expressive arena of quilt construction: the visually apparent design of the top. The main components of quilt-top design were, first, pieces of fabric in various (usually geometric) shapes, prints, and colors that were sewn together to make the top; and second, thousands of tiny indentations made on the top by stitches of thread that held the top, batting, and backing together (or, in the case of tacked quilts, tens or hundreds of short knotted threads or bows).

The trait combinations of particular quilts show that small-farm women by the mid-1900s had selected among and added to traits of earlier quiltmaking styles to develop a style that used low-cost materials to meet their subsistence, social, and psychological
needs. As an activity that enhanced household self-sufficiency and the everyday quality of life, it was a source of agency for small-farm quilters and their cash-poor households.

Quilt traits also show that much of quiltering was shared culture among small-farm households of African, English, Irish, Scots Irish, and (relatively rare) German ancestry, although some traits express social differences related to economic, historical, and ethnic or racial-group identity. It testified to the productive homemaker role of small-farm women and to values and contingencies associated with the living conditions of this occupational group.

Small-Farm Quilts in the Study Area, 1920s to 1950s

Local Small-Farm Conditions

A range of underlying local conditions promoted and shaped the activity of quiltering in the small-farm households of my consultants. A key condition was climate: without a cold season people would have had no need for warm bedding. The common condition of cash-poor household economies promoted quiltering as an alternative to buying bedding. The seasonal nature of farm work also was a factor, in that there was time for non-crop-related activities between the harvest in fall and planting in early spring. In addition, lack of electricity and motor vehicles resulted in limited entertainment options that encouraged people in many rural households to turn to quiltering as a pastime.

Another key factor in the popularity of small-farm quiltering was the availability of low-cost materials and equipment. For example, many had: cash-free batting (since almost all small-farm people grew cotton and picked it); scraps resulting from the common practice of sewing clothes at home; cash-free or low-cost remnants from nearby textile
mills; cloth commodity sacks obtained automatically, at no extra charge, with the purchase of staples such as flour, sugar, fertilizer, and chicken feed; and affordable sewing machines.

Demographic factors also shaped Tennessee Delta quiltmaking. These include a heritage of certain ethnic- and racial-group-related experiences (English, Scots Irish, Irish, African, and German; some residents had American Indian ancestry but identified first as black or white); and historically variable levels of contact among people of these groups. In addition, conditions of geographic mobility and access to published quilt patterns through newspapers and farm journals promoted cross-regional consistencies in quiltmaking.

Given the above-listed conditions, the mainstay of quiltmaking in the small-farm households of my consultants was well-batted, hand-quilted quilts with tops pieced of scraps by hand and machine in a mix of vernacular and published designs. Data from my consultants indicate that small-farm women in the Tennessee Delta were producing large quantities of such quilts annually by the early 1900s. Barbara Callery [1940-, white] and Lollie Mann [1936-, black] both estimated that their mothers had produced about four a year, with help from relatives and neighbors, in order to maintain a constant household supply [2/10/14]). They drew construction and design methods from cross-generational family transmission, cross-household social networks, and mass media.

Traits of Common Quilts

The traits of study-area common quilts are the result of makers adapting vernacular and published construction methods and designs to their needs and living conditions. These included: warmth and tactile comfort, sized to cover a bed, minimal cash outlay, productivity as well as relaxation and camaraderie achieved through time-saving methods.
and group quilting, and visual attractiveness achieved with techniques that did not overly inhibit productivity or relaxation. Traits that upheld these practical, social, and psychological priorities marked a quilt as “common.” On the one hand, they equipped a quilt to enhance household self-sufficiency, meeting a subsistence need of people who could not afford to buy blankets or live in insulated, centrally heated houses. On the other, they equipped it to satisfy the small-farm concept of a quilt as something that should look “pretty,” whose top should have a pieced pattern, and whose construction process should entail a pleasant social or psychological event. The traits that small-farm makers selected reflected these latent social and psychological needs as well as the practical ones. Following are two lists of traits, one geared to practical purposes and one to social and psychological purposes such as prettiness and quilt-group camaraderie. I follow these by discussing two examples of common quilts.

**Practical traits of common quilts** (see Figure 5.1, pages 263-268, for quilts with the traits discussed below, identified as such in captions). Substantial batting was a primary practical trait of common quilts, typically in the form of carded or ginned cotton or an old blanket or quilt that would provide good insulation. Another practical trait was a low number of quilting stitches per inch, typically three or four, reflecting the difficulty of stitching through thick batting and/or heavy cloth, and the valuing of productivity (speed) and relaxation over fine needlework that did not enhance insulation capacity.

Materials that expressed practical concerns with minimizing waste and cash expenditure were commodity sacks (acquired as packaging for flour, chicken feed, fertilizer, sugar, salt, and tobacco), scraps left from sewing clothes (often made from print commodity sacks), textile mill remnants, good parts of worn out clothing, “quilt bundles”
(packets of factory remnants that dry goods stores sold at low prices), and even burlap croker sacks (used in picking cotton). Another common trait that expressed practical priorities was a chaotic appearance, which occurred if a maker relied heavily on scraps and lacked the non-scraps materials, time, or desire to order them in a visible pattern (contrasting dark and light colors or solids and prints).

The common use of sashing and border strips in quilt-top designs had a practical as well as an aesthetic dimension, as a means of fitting a quilt to a bed while accommodating limits on time and material. Makers could use them to save time, since a quilt with sashing and border strips needed fewer pattern blocks. But the strips required a larger investment in non-scraps material to effectively unify a design. Thus, decisions about sashing and border strips often involved consideration of a trade-off between time and material. Partial blocks also were a common trait that reflected practical concerns. Some quilts had a row of them along one or two edges because a maker had cut blocks in half to make the quilt the right size or had folded the back of the quilt over the front to finish an edge. This trait suggests a maker who was competent in vernacular process-oriented size management techniques that promoted productivity, who did not invest time or material in a more formal symmetrical layout.

The use of repeating, all-over [consistent across the quilt-top] quilting motifs such as shell, variable shell, or squared shell was a trait with practical as well as social and psychological dimensions. Done in rows of shares, or tasks, which did not need to be exactly the same, such motifs were standard among particular social networks and promoted group quilting, camaraderie, productivity, and individuality. They saved time by
not needing to be marked in advance (although shell and squared shell sometimes were), and freed attention for conversation since they could be done automatically with practice.

Also practical was the use of designs that had only straight-edged pieces, especially squares. These promoted efficiency and a smooth surface since curved pieces are harder to sew together smoothly. The use of pieced rather than appliqué patterns also was practical. Pieced patterns reduced waste and promoted productivity and relaxation since appliqué involves sewing pattern pieces onto a cloth foundation, often involves curved pieces, and tends to take more time and specialized skill.

Variable piecing also was a sign of a common quilt. This scavenger approach to piecing, where a maker diverged from the dominant pieced design in certain areas of a quilt [for instance, including an alternate (unpieced) block and string-pieced Stars in a repeating block quilt of eight-pointed Stars (PS), or filling in a border area with variably sized and colored rectangles (MFB)] possibly saved time (using odd scraps rather than making additional pattern blocks) or required a greater investment of time (in the making of string-pieced Stars) in order to economize on materials (use up tiny scraps). The absence of embroidery on common quilts upheld priorities of productivity and insulation quality since it took much time but did not enhance warmth.

Prettiness (aesthetic) traits of common quilts (see Figure 5.2, pages 268-287, for quilts with the traits described below, identified as such in captions). In addition to the traits noted above, which express the manifest practical purpose of making common quilts, these quilts from my consultants’ families have traits that show their makers’ engagement with aesthetic design, thus reflecting the latent social and psychological purposes of quilts and quiltmaking. For instance, makers often bleached and dyed plain (off-white) cotton
commodity sacks in order to get rid of company logos that were printed on them and use them to make solid-color pattern elements, such as sashing or border strips, that unified quilt-top designs. Consultant households had tended to reserve items of dress and household linens that were white, and thus quick to show dirt or stains, for Sundays, when they did little work; colored fabrics were suited to everyday use because they brightened the indoor environment but did not show dirt as easily as white.

Another method of making a common quilt pretty that I saw on quilts from consultant households is that of creating the effect of “borders” by changing the color of pieces along the edges of the quilt (often on just two opposite sides) but not the pieced pattern. This trick, which I refer to here as “color-only borders,” added symmetry and unity to the design without major investment in non-scrap materials or planning time. Another low-cost design method that I saw on consultant family quilts was the creation of a center focus through color placement or a “framed-medallion” set, in which several borders expand out from a central element. A few pieces of bright-colored material or a striking color scheme in one center block could create a center focus, with little need for non-scrap materials or pre-construction planning. In addition, the framed-medallion set facilitated process-oriented time-efficient size management, as borders could be added around a center until the top was the right size.

“Color contrast” was another basic, low-cost design method, in which makers made pieced designs show up as visible patterns by making them with alternating high-contrast colors or solid colors and prints. This technique is the basis of Two-Patch (rows of same-size square pieces in two alternating colors), Four-Patch (a square block made of four same-size squares, with each pair of opposite squares in one color that contrasts with that
of the other pair), Nine-Patch (a square block made of three rows of three same-size squares, usually of two alternating colors), and many other patterns. It contrasted with the chaotic look that occurred when makers submerged the pieced pattern by putting low-contrast pieces next to each other.

The technique of “string-piecing” is a prime example of how makers in the households of my consultants yoked prettiness to a value of thrift that expressed the contingency of low-cash household economies. On the practical side, they minimized the need for non-scrap materials by investing extra time in making individual pattern pieces from scraps that were too small to make whole pieces, and thus would have been wasted. This process involved a sacrifice of time (and productivity) in order to save on investing in non-scrap material. As noted earlier, it involved sewing these small “strings” of cloth onto a paper template (usually a square or diamond), then trimming the overhanging edges and (often) tearing out the backing. Design techniques that promoted prettiness in string-pieced quilts included: sewing string-pieced diamond pieces into eight-pointed (multi-colored) stars in a block with a solid-colored background; and sewing strings of the same color diagonally across the middle of four string-pieced squares, then joining the squares in a quadrant block so those strings made an X.

A prettiness trait that I refer to as “block autonomy” involved making a “repeating block” quilt-top (made of blocks with the same pieced pattern) in which the blocks had different color schemes although each was internally consistent. This scrap-friendly technique kept a pattern visible but did not require the large quantities of particular fabrics that were required to make all blocks in the same color scheme, which was a trait of formal,
fancy quilts. With block autonomy, makers did not need enough of certain materials to make 20 or 30 blocks, but only one.

Also seen in the quilts of my consultants is the “mutating pattern effect,” so named by quilt historian Fawn Valentine in her study of West Virginia Scots Irish quilts (1995:20-23, 39). This trait occurred in quilts with block autonomy when blocks had different arrangements of high- and low-contrast colors. In such cases, the pattern appears to change, or “mutate,” although the blocks are pieced the same. The trait indicates that the maker did not have the time, the materials, or possibly the desire to achieve the consistent color scheme associated with a formal quilt design.

Another design trait that Valentine identifies and that I also saw in the small-farm quilts of the Tennessee Delta is that of “clustering” (Valentine 1995:21). It occurs when makers who are taking the block autonomy approach end up with a few blocks in each of several color schemes. In such cases they often “clustered” them, putting those in the same color scheme adjacent to each other rather than distributing them across the top. This trait likely resulted in cases where a maker pieced as many blocks as she could in a certain combination of materials (until she used up her supply of one of them), stacked the blocks in the order she made them, and then drew from that stack as she sewed blocks together for the top. This trait reflects a process- and productivity-oriented approach to design rather than a formal-design approach, that is, one that values consistency and symmetry. The processual approach may express a maker’s aesthetic preference (a design that reflects contingent conditions), time constraints, or her notion of quilts as a surround genre rather than one that is intended for performance and display (as opposed, possibly, to painting or even clothes-making).
An aesthetic component of all quilt-top designs, whether common or fancy, is “set design,” that is, the overall organization of the top. The women who made the quilts that I documented in the Tennessee Delta used a variety of set designs to satisfy the notion of a top as something that had a pattern. Common set designs are listed in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Common Set Designs for Quilt Tops.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mosaic</td>
<td>A design made entirely of same-shape, same-size pieces, such as squares, diamonds, or hexagons; often given a pattern through color placement, as a Nine-Patch made of alternating high-contrast squares or a Flower Garden made of concentric rings of hexagons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bars</td>
<td>A design made of long parallel strips of cloth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Framed medallion</td>
<td>A design made of concentric borders (“frames”) around a central “medallion” (often a pieced square or rectangle); the borders may be wholecloth or pieced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quadrant</td>
<td>A design made of four large blocks in the same pattern, with or without sashing strips and borders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeating block</td>
<td>A design made of rows of blocks that are the same size and pattern (such as four rows of five or five rows of six), either “straight set” (rows parallel to the sides) or diagonal set (blocks set “on point”); “sashing strips” may run the width and length of the quilt between rows, often with square “cornerstones” where the strips intersect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternate blocks</td>
<td>A design in which pattern blocks alternate with wholecloth blocks (usually all of the same color)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patchwork cross</td>
<td>An optional secondary design in a repeating-block set, in which four blocks are set with mini-sashing strips and a cornerstone to form a square, and these mini-quadrant blocks are then put in rows with strips and stones.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thequilting stitches or ties that held the layers of a quilt together were a practical necessity, needed to keep the batting (the main source of insulation) evenly distributed. But a maker’s decision about how to arrange them, referred to here as “quilting motif,” had an aesthetic dimension (see Figure 5.2, pages 268-287). Its main cost was in time rather
than materials (thread, needles, and thimbles). The most basic motifs were parallel straight or diagonal “lines” (rows of stitches). Complex motifs that usually signified a quilt that was intended for bedspread use were: by-the-piece (quilting stitches follow seams of the pieced design); double by-the-piece (quilting stitches outline both sides of seams); by-the-block (sections of the pieced design have different motifs, such as by-the-piece in pattern blocks and straight lines in borders); cross-piece (my name for geometric motifs in which quilting lines connect certain points of the pieced pattern, following some seams and crossing others); and figural (such as leaves or geometric or abstract figures, usually done in wholecloth [unpieced] areas such as alternate blocks).

The most popular motifs on common quilts (but also acceptable for bedspread quilts) were repetitive designs that were more ornamental than straight lines but required less thought than by-the-piece or figural motifs: shell, squared shell, and variable shell. In the shell motif, also called fan, rainbow, or squared shell, sets of concentric arcs radiate out from a corner, done in rows starting along outside edges of the quilt. In squared shell, also known as squared shell, sets of concentric right angles or “L”s radiate out from a corner, done in rows starting at the edge of the quilt. “Variable shell” is my name for an improvisational motif in which sets of shells may be oriented in different directions and mixed with squared shells and straight lines; I have seen it most often on quilts that African Americans made.

Other quilting motifs are: chevron, known in England as wave (parallel zigzag lines); grid (perpendicular vertical and horizontal lines, often a background filler); and crosshatch (diagonal lines crossing vertical or horizontal lines, making diamonds; often a background filler). Among the quilts that I documented, “tying” or “tacking” (tying quilt layers together
with short pieces of string or yarn that were knotted on the front or back of the quilt) and machine-quilting occurred rarely in the small-farm era (1920s to 1950s). They became more common in the late 1950s and after. Possible reasons for this are that, in the later period, women valued handwork and needlework less, and quilts tended to be lighter and thus easier for household sewing machines to sew through.

Examples of common quilts. I discuss here how makers blended practical and prettiness traits in two common quilts that I documented: Rachel Ann Davis’s ca. 1945 Patchwork Cross String (quilted by her quilt group); and Virtrress Beard’s ca. 1945 Framed Medallion (possibly group-quilted).

Some traits of Davis’s (1869-1952, white) quilt express practical priorities of warmth, everyday use, economy over design consistency, productivity over fine needlework, and size management (Figure 5.3, page 288). Among them are: string-pieced pattern blocks (four rows of three); little use of white, a color associated with Sunday clothes and bedspreads; sashing strips in several print materials, indicating use of scraps rather than purchased material; no borders, possibly indicating a less formal design; a size that was geared to a child’s bed (about 4 feet, 11 inches by 5 feet, 6 inches); substantial batting; squared-shell quilting (a group-friendly motif that promoted camaraderie); and quilting at about three stitches per inch (a low rate that increased productivity and probably relaxation).

“Prettiness” traits that contribute aesthetic design and pattern to this quilt are: consistently colored patchwork crosses in most blocks; an “X” in most blocks formed by consistently colored string pieces; two alternating prints (black, gray and pink checks; pink with gray or black stripes) in all three sashing strips that cross the entire width of the quilt;
consistently colored cornerstones (black and pink print); matching cornerstones (turquoise print) in all of the patchwork crosses; and binding strips that match at top and bottom (turquoise) and at opposite sides (white with pink and turquoise sections), made by turning the striped flannel-sheet backing over the edges of the top.

Turning to Beard’s (1921-59, black) framed-medallion quilt (Figure 5.4, page 288), practical traits are: heavy batting (a ragged old quilt); several types of cloth (cotton, wool, Jacquard weave), indicating reliance on scraps; mostly dark colors; a framed-medallion set (borders surrounding a center) that uses only square and rectangular pieces (easier to piece than diamonds, triangles, hexagons, or diagonal elements, thus promoting productivity); variable-shell quilting, promoting productivity and camaraderie (suggesting that there was more than one quilter and that the quilting motif was not marked ahead of time); relatively large quilting stitches (about three to the inch); sized for use on a double bed (about 5 feet, 7 inches by 6 feet, 4 inches); worn-out condition with some repairs, suggesting long-term everyday use; and borders with variable color schemes and variable piecing (including different numbers of borders on different sides), suggesting a processual approach that promoted economy (use of scraps) and productivity (little time invested in planning). These traits testify to Beard’s competence in using small-farm vernacular methods to make a viable quilt (one that provided warmth and covered people on a bed) without pattern instructions while economizing on materials and on time needed for planning.

Aesthetic design traits of this quilt include: a center focus created by a single patchwork-cross block (with a green centerstone); sequences of high-contrast same-sized pieces (black, dark olive, purple, and dark green alternating with light browns and grays);
an approximately consistent, complex system of borders, including a narrow dark strip that separates wider pieced borders on all four sides; and quilting that is denser than that needed for insulation purposes, indicating a time investment that possibly promoted quilt-group camaraderie as well as design complexity.

Highlighting two examples, the above discussion shows how makers of common quilts used vernacular design methods to integrate expressive and subsistence traits amid limited resources. It shows how these methods allowed them to make tradeoffs among time (for planning or construction labor), materials (non-scare or scrap), and prettiness (design complexity) to suit their particularistic conditions.

Traits of Bedspread Quilts

Like common quilts, bedspread quilts were for use on beds and subject to conditions of limited time and money. But their makers’ primary purpose was to add prettiness to a living space rather than to give warmth. They thus had an element of luxury and, in contrast to common quilts, were protected from everyday wear. Their relatively formal designs required more time for planning and execution, and greater investment in material resources to achieve consistent (non-scare) color schemes.

A primary indicator of a bedspread quilt is light batting, which indicates that warmth was a secondary purpose and also promoted fine quilting (more stitches per inch). Extensive use of white or light-colored material also is a bedspread-quilt trait, since light colors showed dirt more easily and thus were less suited to everyday use by children. A consistent color scheme also is a sign of a bedspread quilt, since a maker could not just use up scraps to achieve it but needed enough of each material to make a certain element
wherever it occurred on the quilt top, such as particular pattern pieces, sashing strips, borders, cornerstones, or alternate blocks. Makers typically had to buy cloth or dedicate entire commodity sacks to the project (rather than first using the sacks for clothing and relegating the scraps to quiltmaking), and often bleached and dyed them if they were plain-colored (unbleached cotton). Typical color-design components of bedspread quilts were: no more than two or three materials (often blue and white or red and white); a consistently colored background (often white or pastel); and alternate blocks (often white or pastel).

Bedspread quilts also tended to have a consistent and symmetrical pieced pattern, that is, no variable piecing or partial-block borders, but all pattern blocks pieced the same and matching borders on opposite sides. And they almost always used wholecloth pattern pieces (cut from one piece of cloth rather than string-pieced), indicating a higher investment in (non-scrap) materials.

A complex design also was a sign of a bedspread quilt. Elements that added complexity, indicated by greater demands on time for planning or execution and on needlework skill, include non-square (diamond or triangle) pieces, curved pieces, block patterns with relatively many pieces, appliqué patterns, embroidery, diagonal and zigzag sets, borders, secondary patterns, and cross-block unifying themes. Makers also used published patterns, such as Wedding Ring, on bedspread quilts more than on common quilts, because they tended to be more complex and fashionable than vernacular designs.

Certain quilting traits were associated with bedspread quilts. Among them were the detail-oriented by-the-piece, by-the-block, and figural quilting motifs. These motifs required more concentration to execute than the shell, squared shell, and variable shell motifs, which were ubiquitous in given quiltmaking networks and could be repeated more-
or-less mindlessly across the quilt. Quilters used these group-friendly motifs on both bedspread and common quilts. But they used the eminently timesaving techniques (straight-line quilting and ties) only on common quilts. Quilting at more than four stitches to the inch was evidence of a bedspread quilt and, possibly, of a skilled seamstress who valued fine needlework. Closely spaced quilting lines also were a trait of bedspread quilts until about 1960, when sparser quilting became fashionable with the post-World War II devaluing of domestic handwork generally.

Finally, a commemorative purpose, symbolism, and verbal elements were traits of bedspread quilts. Such traits were rare on quilts that were made before 1980. Examples of commemorative quilts are those that were made for a wedding or the birth of a grandchild. Symbolic traits that occur on my consultants’ family quilts include a red, white, and blue color scheme, to express patriotism; and appliquéd strawberries, a local crop, to express regional pride. Examples of textual elements that I saw on quilts, embroidered or written with a colored marker, were signatures and the year in which the quilt was finished.

**Examples of bedspread quilts.** As examples of quilts with bedspread traits, I discuss below two that I documented in my fieldwork: Tennessee Callery’s 1940s Anna’s Choice Quilt (published name) and Mary Frances Brack’s early 1940s Butterfly (family’s name).

Tennessee Callery (1890-1982, white) lived in southeastern Haywood County, on the Hardeman County border, and was the grandmother of Tom Callery, the husband of consultant Barbara (Marbury) Callery (Figure 6.9, pages 369-373, shows images of her and her quilts). Bedspread traits of her Anna’s Choice quilt (Figure 5.5, page 289) include: thin batting; double by-the-piece quilting; a complex, published block pattern with diamond and triangle pieces (28 pieces per block, published in a 1941 *Kansas City Star* as “Anna’s Choice
Quilt”); and a consistent color scheme with light colors (blue, green, and white) (Brackman 1993:161, #1141a).

Mary Frances Brack (1882-1966, black) lived in Haywood County’s rural Woodlawn community, northwest of Brownsville (see images of her on pages 22-23, and of her Star common quilt on page 200). She was the mother/mother-in-law of consultant Cobon Brack and his wife, Opal (Williams) Brack. Bedspread traits of her Butterfly quilt (Figure 5.6, page 289) are: a fashionable appliqué pattern with many published versions; embroidery; white background; pattern consistency; consistently colored sashing strips, cornerstones and borders; borders on all four sides; dense quilting (lines an inch or less apart); and variable-shell quilting (Brackman 2009:144, #51).

Tempering the bedspread identity of these quilts are traits that result from vernacular methods and contingent conditions, that also occur on common quilts. For instance, Callery probably dyed commodity sacks to get a consistent color scheme, and she pieced one block differently from the others (third row from top, center), probably by accident. Brack probably made her butterflies out of scraps, dyed commodity sacks to make consistently colored strips and borders, and quilted at about three stitches per inch.

Summary of Common and Bedspread Quilt Traits

Traits that point to a common-quilt identity are: substantial batting; scraps; different cloth types in one quilt; a simple set design; a simple pieced pattern; vernacular methods for making patterns with scraps; variable piecing and color scheme; bright and dark colors; a group-friendly quilting motif; a timesaving quilting motif; and quilting at three or four stitches to the inch.
Traits of bedspread quilts were: thin batting; a complex set design (with elements such as borders, sashing strips, cornerstones, alternate blocks, and secondary patterns); a complex pattern (with elements such as many pieces per block, non-square and curved pieces, appliqué, and embroidery); a published pattern; a consistent pieced pattern; a consistent color scheme (suggesting high investment in non-scrap material); alternate blocks (suggesting high investment in non-scrap material); white and pastel colors; by-the-piece, by-the-block, and figural quilting motifs (shell, squared shell, and variable shell also were acceptable); and five or more quilting stitches to the inch.

**Regional Historical Influences**

In this section I draw from quilt studies scholarship in placing the traits of quilts that I documented in my fieldwork in context with traits of local and regional antecedents. I contrast Tennessee Delta quilts from the small-farm era of about 1925 to 1955 with two sets of antecedents. One consists of ten quilts dating from about 1875 to 1915 that I encountered in my fieldwork. The other set consists of southern linsey quilts, a style that was prominent in the U.S. South in the decades after the Civil War. Since I found no such quilts in my fieldwork, I rely on quilt-studies articles and images for data. I include this late 1800s style here because it had a strong subsistence component and almost certainly was common in the study area, whereas the antecedent quilts that my consultants inherited tend to be bedspread quilts (although the later ones, dating from about 1900 to 1915, have more common-quilt traits). I propose two likely reasons for this preponderance of bedspread quilts in the antecedent group. One is that fancier quilts got less wear and thus lasted longer than common quilts. The other is that a democratizing trend in quiltmaking in
the late 1800s and early 1900s means that earlier makers tended to have higher incomes, which promoted the production of bedspread quilts. These same factors may explain why I encountered no 19th-century or early 20th-century quilts in black consultant families: most of their ancestors lived in households that lacked the means for bedspread quilts.

Fieldwork Antecedent Quilts (see Figure 5.7, pages 290-294)

In this section I compare and contrast the traits of ten antecedent quilts and quilt-tops that were made in Tennessee Delta families between about 1875 and 1915 with those of consultant quilts made in my focus period of the 1920s to 1950s. Three of the antecedents came from Tom and Barbara Callery, three from Bob Bond, two from Anne Baird, and one each from Sue Keathley and Betsy Waddell. The trends that I note reflect the emergence of the small-farm common-quilt style of the mid-1900s out of more bedspread-oriented styles of the mid-to-late 1800s. As one might expect, the later antecedents, the four that were made about 1900 to 1915, have more in common with the focus-period quilts than do the earlier ones, which date from about 1875 to 1892. I discuss continuities and areas of change, then summarize how quiltmaking evolved during this time.

**Continuities.** In both periods, makers preferred pieced designs without appliqué, alternate blocks, or wholecloth tops. All ten antecedent quilts were pieced; only one had alternate blocks, which were set with a pieced sashing (1875 BC). This also was the case with the great majority of focus-period quilts. The preference for piecing expresses a scrap-friendly value of cloth economy, as appliqué involves sewing pattern pieces onto a larger background cloth, alternate blocks require relatively large (unpieced) pieces of material,
and wholecloth quilt tops consist of one large piece of cloth (or a few large pieces of the same material) whose only pattern is the quilting motif.

Also in both periods, quilts had no borders or various forms of simple borders. Three antecedent quilts had none (1875 BB, 1880 BB, 1892 MK); two had strip borders on two opposite sides only (1890 AB, 1900 BC); one had three borders (1875 BC); three had strip borders on all four sides (1890 BB, 1900 AB, 1915 BC); and one had complex borders of different widths at top and bottom only (1915 BW). Most focus-period quilts also had no borders or simple borders. Another continuity is that, in both periods, some quilts had a set design of adjacent pieced blocks, with no sashing strips or alternate blocks. Three antecedent quilts had this trait (1892 MK, 1915 BC, 1915 BW), which makers also used in the later period. Makers in both periods also commonly used set designs with repeating blocks, sashing strips, and borders. Designs with these components facilitated a process-oriented approach that reduced the time needed for planning and exact measurement. Variables were the number of rows of blocks and the width of the sashing and border strips. Bilateral symmetry, where one half of the top mirrored the other, and a center focus also were common traits in both periods.

In both periods, makers used both published patterns and vernacular methods. All the antecedent quilts correlated more or less closely with patterns published starting in the late 1800s by sources such as Hearth and Home (a periodical established in 1885 in Augusta, Maine) and the Ladies Art Company (a mail-order quilt-pattern company established about 1889 in St. Louis) (Brackman 1993:523-524). Another continuity is that quilts usually were quilted rather than tied. Only one antecedent quilt was tied (1892 MK), and ties were rare on focus-period quilts until the 1960s.
Thick batting and scraps were markers of common quilts in both periods. An exception was the crazy quilt (1892 MK), in which lack of batting combined with embellishments such as embroidery framed a patchwork top as “art,” intended for display in a parlor rather than for use on a bed, even though it was made of scraps. In presenting scraps as a component of fashion, the crazy style that became a fad in the late 1870s complicates the association of scraps and patchwork with thrift and poverty. As I noted in chapter 2, Mary Blair, of northwestern Arkansas, conveyed this positive aesthetic valuing of scraps in an 1883 letter to her aunts in East Tennessee (Roane County), writing, “I am piecing me a very pretty scrap quilt called Winding Blades” (Ramsey and Waldvogel 1986:90). In both periods compared here, quilt fashions could frame scraps as evidence of either gentility or poverty. For instance, the Wedding Ring quilt that Cassie Binford Taylor (?-?, white) gave to Delois Baggett in 1959 had scraps in some areas but was marked as a bedspread by its complex published pattern, by-the-piece quilting, thin batting, matching Four-Patches, and uniformly light-blue background (see Figure 6.15, page 381 bottom).

Quilts in both periods rarely had curved pieces or embroidery. These occur on only one antecedent, the crazy quilt (1892), and also were rare in the middle 1900s. This absence served the goal of productivity, but since it applied to bedspread quilts in the late 1800s, it also may express a notion of quilts as a dominantly surround rather than display genre. Foundation-piecing occurred in both periods, but in different forms. Among the antecedents, the crazy and possibly the Log Cabin were made with this method, in which a block was made by sewing pieces onto a cloth template. In the late 1800s, foundation-piecing was used in fashionable quilt styles that used variably sized (crazy) or long and narrow pieces (Log Cabin). The study-area Log Cabin, however, dating to around 1915, is a
democratized common-quilt rendition of the pattern. By the 1890s, makers were using this construction method to make string-pieced quilts, often with a paper backing. In the focus period, foundation-piecing occurred mainly in string quilts. It upheld the small-farm value of economy, putting the smallest scraps to good use.

Several methods of achieving pattern visibility were common to both periods. These include block autonomy, organization of scraps through uniformly colored elements, alternating high-contrast colors or solids and prints, a consistent color scheme with two or three colors, and a figure with pieces made of the same material.

**Areas of change.** Whereas one antecedent quilt had variable piecing (the pieced pattern varied across the top), this trait was common in the later period. This trend suggests a different valuing of consistency and formality, possibly due to makers in the focus-period having different living conditions, taste, and/or uses of quilts. The early example, a ca. 1915 “feathered” Double Star (meaning that rows of triangles edged the star figures), was made late in the antecedent period by consultant Betsy Waddell’s great-grandmother, Mary Etta Cobb Brantley (1871-1935, white), and Brantley’s daughter Gladys A. Brantley (1895-1984). One of its six star blocks is smaller than the others and lacks some of its edging, and some of the triangles in other blocks point in different directions.

Another difference between the two periods is that diagonal set designs, which were more complex than straight sets, were more common on the early quilts than they were in the focus period. Of the six antecedent quilts with repeating blocks, two had diagonal sets (1875 BB; 1890 AB). In the later period, diagonal sets were rare. Cornerstones, on the other hand, were common in the focus period but occurred on only one antecedent quilt (1890
AB). They were a simple way to add design complexity and were scrap-friendly, since they broke sashing strips into small pieces.

Quilting motifs were another area of change. By-the-piece and by-the-block were the most common motifs on the early quilts; just three had all-over motifs (shell: 1875 BB, 1890 AB; variable shell: 1915 BC). But the repetitive all-over motifs were the most popular in the focus period, and the choices had increased to include squared shell. This move toward group-friendly motifs that typically did not follow the pieced pattern promoted productivity, camaraderie, and relaxation. As distinctive bedspread-quilt traits, by-the-piece and by-the-block motifs were relatively rare in the later period until about 1960, when quiltmaking shifted to a primarily expressive activity.

Whereas two antecedent quilts had cross-block zigzag designs built into the pieced pattern (1875 BC, 1880 BB), I did not see this trait in the focus period. Makers may have been unfamiliar with it or lacked knowledge of how to execute it, or they may have thought that its aesthetic appeal did not justify the extra investment in time (for planning) and non-scrap material (consistently colored elements across the top). A trait that was common in the later period but does not occur in the antecedents is “scale expansion,” in which one block pattern is expanded to make an entire quilt top or one of the four blocks in a quadrant quilt. Such quilts often had a mosaic set design (made mostly of same-shaped pieces, usually squares, diamonds, or hexagons). The perception of expanded scale often derived from a color-based central focus (such as color-coded rings of hexagons expanding from the center to the edge of the quilt). This trait was a clever way to make a showy design with scraps: small amounts of bright or high-contrast materials anchored the center while outer rings had more variable color schemes.
Another trait that was well known in the focus period but absent from the antecedents is the patchwork cross (although it is seen on late-1800s quilts outside of the study area). This method of enhancing a repeating-block set (four pieced blocks put together with short sashing strips and a cornerstone to form a composite block) apparently grew in popularity with the rise of common quilts. It was an accessible means of adding interest to a simple block patterns. Depending on a maker’s resources, the patchwork cross could emphasize formality (if done with uniform colors in all blocks), or it could be scrap-friendly (if done with block autonomy). Like sashing strips, cornerstones, and borders, it added complexity but did not require much time for planning or the time and skill needed for appliqué and for curved pieces.

Summary of how quiltmaking evolved between the two periods. Some traits declined or were dropped. Among these were diagonal sets and zigzag designs, which made demands on time, material, and individual attention that apparently outweighed their aesthetic value; and by-the-piece and by-the-block quilting motifs, which in following the pieced pattern apparently did not foster camaraderie or relaxation as much as repetitive all-over motifs.

Some traits were added: cornerstones, patchwork cross, scale expansion, and squared shell quilting. These traits added complexity or showiness to simple block patterns or expanded group-friendly quilting options but did not require extensive planning, construction time, or needlework skills.

A number of traits were continued and in some cases expanded. Among these were the repeating-block and medallion set designs, which minimized the time needed for planning and measurement; and process-oriented size-management techniques such as
sashing strips, border strips, and partial blocks. Also expanded were scrap-friendly pattern techniques that reduced the need for large quantities of particular materials, such as block autonomy, the mutating pattern effect, alternating high-contrast colors, string-piecing, and a center focus. Finally, makers also expanded on variable piecing, which emphasized process and productivity over planning and formality; and repetitive all-over quilting motifs that promoted productivity as well as camaraderie and relaxation.

One trait, foundation-piecing, was transformed. The string-piecing technique that was an eminently economical means of using up the smallest scraps in the focus period apparently evolved from the foundation-piecing method that was common in fashionable quilt styles of the late 1800s. Whereas makers in the focus period often used mail-order catalog pages as disposable backing for their string-pieced blocks, those in the late 1800s commonly used cloth backing.

The Southern Linsey-Quilt Style (see Figure 5.8, pages 295-298)

No linsey quilts turned up in my fieldwork, nor have I found published references to any in the Tennessee Delta. But this late-1800s common-quilt style that was defined by its use of home-woven “linsey” cloth undoubtedly occurred in my study area, as examples have been found in surrounding areas and it shares many traits with the mid-1900s small-farm quilts of my consultants. My discussion of this style thus complements the emphasis on bedspread quilts in the earlier section on antecedent quilts from consultant families. I draw extensively here from the research of quilt historian Merikay Waldvogel, who co-authored the Tennessee quilts survey book with Bets Ramsey (1986) and later published an article (1994) on linsey quilts. She writes, “Southern pieced linsey quilts contain quilt
blocks and quilting designs that are among the simplest known.... These cast-off quilts were not the ones proudly brought to quilt documentation days in Tennessee” (Waldvogel 1994:124-125).

“Linsey” is a coarse, heavy cloth that was woven on farms and plantations in the middle to late 1800s (123). Slave narratives mention it, and it was made into clothing and quilts (128-129; Stamper 1989:47; Valentine 2000:142). Use was widespread, documented in eastern Canada (often in Scots- and German-settled areas, 1850-1900), central Pennsylvania (“hap” bedcoverings), Georgia, West Virginia (Scots Irish and German heritage), East Tennessee (Greene, Knox, Roane, and Sevier counties), south central Kentucky (Barren and Russell counties), Mississippi, and central Missouri (in a Calloway County farm woman’s diary, 1869-70) (Waldvogel 1994:123-127; Holstein 1982:2 [Russell County, Kentucky]; Valentine 2000:140-143 [West Virginia]; Stamper 1989:46-47 [Mississippi]; Irwin 1984:16-19, 161 [East Tennessee]; Ramsey and Waldvogel 1986:98 [East Tennessee]).

In the 19th-century U.S. South, linsey was made of wool and cotton in dark solid colors, stripes, or checks (Waldvogel 1994:125). It was popular due to its low cost, easy construction, and in the case of quilts, good insulation, sometimes enhanced by use with a featherbed (126). Production was rare by 1900 due to expanded manufacture and distribution of affordable factory cotton cloth (130). Many Southern linsey quilts were made between 1865 and 1890 out of worn-out clothes from the Civil War period, when women revived home-weaving after losing access to Northern textile mills (127).

Extant linsey quilts have a variety of set designs: repeating blocks with sashing strips or alternate blocks in a straight set (with or without cornerstones), repeating blocks
on point (diagonal set) with alternate blocks, bars (in this case, plain strips alternating with rows of adjacent pieced blocks), and medallion (center focus). Many have scrap-friendly traits such as block autonomy and variable color schemes. In some cases, the blocks in one row do not exactly align with those in the next, suggesting approximate measurements.

Simple linsey-quilt patterns (all pieced rather than appliquéd) include Bar, One-Patch, Nine-Patch, 16-Patch, 13-Patch, and Streak of Lightning (125; Irwin 1984:161; Valentine 2000:143). More complex designs are Nine Diamond (or Nine of Diamonds), LeMoyne Star (made with eight diamond pieces), 54-40 or Fight, Turkey Tracks, Flying Geese, Evening Star (square center with eight triangle points), and Kentucky Sun (Ramsey and Waldvogel 1986:98; Waldvogel 1994:122-126; Valentine 2000:140-141; Kentucky Quilt Project 1982:2).

Waldvogel notes, “The quilt pieces are rarely curved and never appliquéd. The coarseness and thickness of the cloth limited the quilting stitch length and the quilting designs” (1994:125). Quilting motifs, often at about four stitches per inch, include shell but also all-over designs that do not easily divide into individual shares, such as parallel diagonal lines and chevron (124 [image], 125).

Jonathan Holstein, an art critic, quilt collector, and curator, calls a ca. 1880 medallion-set, probably foundation-pieced linsey quilt made by Nancy Miller Grider (white, south central Kentucky [Russell County]), “a free and exuberant creation... Its construction is more like the randomness of a Crazy quilt than any of the more ordered American types, yet it has little to do with the Crazy quilt convention.... One would not be surprised to hear it was influenced by another aesthetic tradition” (1982:2). It was “quickly made with little regard for niceties of stitching, edging, etc., coarse quilts for cold nights,” and has a “vital
and strange quality” (2). Although Holstein does not specify what he meant by “another aesthetic tradition,” his perception of this design as “other” reflects the difference between more formal designs and those of Southern small-farm vernacular quiltmaking.

Based on Waldvogel’s and Holstein’s comments and on published images, the linsey style shares many traits with study-area common quilts. These features include dark colors, low-cost materials, warmth, scraps, repeating-block and medallion sets, simple pieced patterns, and a mix of vernacular designs and more complex, possibly published patterns. The (undated) linsey quilt that Waldvogel refers to as “Fifty-four Forty or Fight” is an example of one with a pattern that may have been published (1994:122-123). The Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns lists it as “Sun Ray's Quilt,” published in the Kansas City Star sometime after 1927, and it may have appeared elsewhere earlier (Brackman 1993:207, #1623). Other areas of overlap between Southern linsey quilts and the small-farm quilts that I documented from the 1920s to 1950s are the general absence of appliqué work and curved pieces, around four quilting stitches to the inch, all-over quilting motifs, foundation-piecing, partial blocks, and variable piecing. For linsey quilts with variable piecing, see Figure 5.8, pages 296 top, and 297.

On the other hand, some linsey quilts have traits that were rare in the (extant) common quilts that were made in the small-farm households of my consultants. These traits include alternate blocks, on-point (diagonal) sets, and some quilting motifs that are not easily executed in individual shares. A possible explanation for greater use of alternate blocks by linsey-quilt makers is that at least some had more of the larger pieces of cloth that are needed to make them; perhaps there was a time during Reconstruction when women still had swathes of home-woven cloth on hand after they regained access to
factory cloth for clothing. A possible reason for linsey-makers’ greater use of diagonal sets is that they had more training in needlework, including that competence. Their lesser use of group-friendly quilting motifs may indicate that they did less group quilting.

As a group, Southern linsey quilts testify to the existence by the late 1800s of a pool of vernacular design methods for quilts that were meant to serve as high-insulation, low-cost, everyday bedcovers. Waldvogel’s article does not mention squared shell quilting, nor is it discernible on any quilts pictured in the above-cited sources. But I speculate that it descended from the all-over chevron or wave motif (parallel zigzag lines) that appears to be part of the quilting design on the lower half of a south-central Kentucky (Barren County) linsey quilt and that was common in early quiltmaking of Ireland and across from it in western England (Waldvogel 1994:124; Osler 1987:70, 116; Wilson 1992:150; Valentine 2000:40-42). I did not see chevron quilting in study-area quilts although many consultants had Irish and Scots-Irish roots, whereas the squared shell motif was common but apparently emerged in the 1900s. Since chevron quilting can be interpreted as a row of squared shell motifs (joined at the tips of the “L”s), perhaps makers who wanted to foster group quilting transformed it into an individual-task-oriented motif.

**Cultural-Group Considerations**

In this section I consider Tennessee-Delta quiltmaking in light of research on quilt traits of makers who are treated as a group based on having a common ethnic- or racial-group identity and, in some cases, a common geographic location and historical experience. Using a white maker’s quilt and a black maker’s quilt as examples, I show how study-area
quiltmakers’ use of traits that some studies have associated with ethnic- or racial-group identity transcended such boundaries.

For this purpose, I use a range of quilt history studies that reflect the ethnic origins and racial-group identities of people in the Tennessee Delta, the English and Irish origins of U.S. quiltmaking, and the prominent participation of German Americans and African Americans in quiltmaking (although neither had Old-World quiltmaking roots). One set of sources that I reference here provides data on English and Irish quiltmaking before 1830, when these Old-World styles dominated U.S. quiltmaking, after which it became distinctive (Colby 1970 and 1971; Osler 1987 and 1995; Rae 1987; Wilson 1992; Quilters’ Guild 1995; Valentine 2000; see also Frisch 2013). A second data set is Valentine’s research on Scots Irish quiltmaking in southwestern West Virginia, with quilts dating from about 1860 to 1940 (1995 and 2000). My third set of data is Suellen Meyer’s study of German quiltmaking in east central Missouri, with quilts dating from about 1880 to 1940 (1985). A fourth is representative studies of quiltmaking of African Americans with roots in the rural U.S. South (most quilts date between 1920 and 1980) (Wahlman 1981 and 1993; Benberry 2000; Gordon 2006).

Opal Brack’s Star Quilt (Figure 5.9, page 298)

I first discuss a 1940s quilt that its maker, African American Opal Brack (1919-), called “Star.” It is a variation of a pattern that a ca. 1910 issue of The Woman’s Century published as “The Dandy Quilt Block” (Brackman 1993:210-211, #1680). Many traits of Brack’s Star quilt testify to the English and Irish roots of U.S. quiltmaking (Colby 1970:22-
24), including the repeating-block straight set design, sashing strips and cornerstones, borders on all four sides, and all-over quilting motif.

In England, the repeating-block set had been subordinate to the framed-medallion set. But it was favored across the settled U.S. by at least 1850 (Colby 1970:96-127, esp. 102-103, 109; Horton 1995:Section III-4). All of the U.S. immigrant-descendant groups that I consider here (English, Irish, Scots Irish, African, German) participated in that trend. But makers differed in whether they preferred a straight set (blocks in vertical and horizontal rows) or a diagonal set (blocks “on point,” in diagonal rows). West Virginia Scots-Irish quiltmakers favored a straight set (Valentine 1995:21). The great majority of east central Missouri German quilts had diagonal sets (Meyer 1985:108). Sources on African American quilts do not comment on this trait, but images show that black makers in Arkansas and Gee’s Bend, Alabama, for example, used both straight and diagonal sets (for diagonal sets, see Benberry 2000:92, 97-98, 109, 112-113, 126; and Gordon 2006:117-119). Brack’s choice of a straight set on this Star quilt aligned with the Scots Irish, not the Germans.

I have seen no images of pre-1830 English or Irish repeating-block quilts with sashing strips (Colby 1970; Osler 1987; Rae 1987; Quilters’ Guild 1995). But possible Old-World antecedents for this common U.S. trait are the plain strips that sometimes alternate with rows of pieced blocks in strip (or “bar”) quilts; and the strip borders (or “frames”) that occur on early (1796-1830) framed-medallion quilts (see Colby 1970:107, Fig. 123; 108, Fig. 125; 113, Fig. 126; and Rae 1995:19, Fig. 11; 23, Fig. 16; 29-30, Fig. 21).

Sashing strips, sometimes with cornerstones, are standard on West Virginia Scots-Irish quilts and common on Missouri German quilts. However, whereas the former did not use alternate blocks, about half of the German quilts have them (Valentine 1995:21; Meyer
1985:106-108). Brack’s quilt thus aligns in this regard with both regional ethnic groups, but diverges from the Missouri German affinity for alternate blocks. However, her solid-colored sashing strips align more with the Germans, whose strips were “almost always solid rather than printed” (Meyer 1985:108-109). Meyer’s statement, “In a typical scrap quilt, the setting or sashing is so much stronger than the blocks that it creates an overall design of its own” (108), also applies to Brack’s quilt. By contrast, West Virginia Scots Irish often used print fabric for sashing, which created a chaotic look when placed next to print pieces in pattern blocks (Valentine 1995:21; see also Figure 5.3, page 288). Tennessee-Delta makers of English, Irish, or Scots-Irish heritage used both solid and print strips.

English and Irish framed-medallion quilts also offer models for Brack’s quilt in having borders on all four sides, although they often had several borders that were made of pieced designs. Brack’s border design also is four-sided, but it has just two layers (green strips and red strips) that are minimally pieced (cornerstones on the red strips; a short red strip in the middle of the green top strip). Her border style aligns with Valentine’s West Virginia Scots Irish, whose borders were “absent or inconspicuous,” and with Meyer’s Missouri Germans who used no borders or simple borders, “often one or more bands of contrasting colors” on two, three, or four sides (Valentine 1995:21; Meyer 1985:110).

I find no Old-World model for Brack’s variable-shell quilting motif, which in the study area was used most often by African Americans, but posit it as a distinctive New- World blending of the shell, chevron/wave, and parallel lines motifs that English and Irish immigrants brought to America in the 1700s and early 1800s (Colby 1971:50-59; Adams and Long 1995:124-126; Valentine 2000:40-42). Absent from Brack’s Star quilt (and relatively rare among small-farm quilts in my focus period) are English quilting motifs that
coordinate with the pieced pattern: by-the-piece, by-the-block (including background fillers such as parallel lines or crosshatch), and figural. Such motifs also were rare on West Virginia Scots-Irish quilts, but Missouri German quilters favored them and rarely used repetitive all-over motifs such as shell or squared shell (Valentine 1995:21, 2000:88; Meyer 1985:110). Brack thus aligned with the Scots Irish in using an all-over motif although hers differs from the one that they most commonly used (shell, or “fan”). The shell motif that was common among the West Virginia Scots Irish is a New World contrast with the chevron/wave quilting that was ubiquitous in 19th-century Ireland (north and south) but never became widespread in the U.S. (Valentine 1995:29, 2000:40-42).

Another trait of Brack’s Star quilt is that of design revision, by which I mean that it adapts rather than exactly emulates a model. It is a slightly simplified version of the published “Dandy” pattern mentioned above, in that it has square pieces in the four corners whereas the published version divides each corner square into two triangles. The change may have originated with Brack, with the neighbor who gave her the sample block, or with a publisher that Brackman overlooked in compiling her encyclopedia (1993:211, #1680).

The variability of patterns and materials in pre-1830 English and Irish quilts testifies to “design revision” as a historical feature of quiltmaking: individual makers created distinctive versions working from models, whether accessed through relatives, neighbors, or published sources (Colby 1970:77, 118-120; Rae 1995; Travis 1995; on pattern transmission in the 19th-century U.S., see Valentine 2000:9-10). Valentine does not discuss the issue of design revision in her article (1995) on Scots-Irish quiltmaking, but a comparison of her quilt images with published patterns in the Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns (Brackman 1993) suggests that U.S. Scots-Irish makers often did not alter complex
published patterns (although Valentine’s West Virginia quilt-survey book [2000] shows that they made quilts in vernacular designs that surely did not derive from published patterns). In rural Gee’s Bend, Alabama, at least, black makers have engaged in design revision: they use “experimentations” of, or “reinvent,” standard patterns (Gordon 2006:112-113). Meyer does not discuss whether Missouri Germans revised pieced patterns but finds that they sometimes simplified figural quilting motifs (1985:110-111).

Brack’s pattern blocks have the mutating-pattern effect that Valentine cites as part of a Scots-Irish quilt aesthetic (1995:21-23, 37-39). Quilts of African-American women in Gee’s Bend also have this trait, which Maggi McCormick Gordon describes as “divergent visual effects... brought about through the use of different materials, even though the pattern is the same” (2006:109).

While shared by Scots Irish- and African Americans, the mutating-pattern effect is uncommon on Missouri German quilts. Meyer finds that, although some women use scraps in their designs, “Most German quilts have a clearly organized color scheme. Typically a quilt will use two, three, or four fabrics carefully planned and repeated” (1985:108-109). In the view of my consultants, this level of formality was a bedspread-quilt trait.

In summary, early English and Irish quiltmaking offers models for many traits of Brack’s Star quilt although her use of sashing strips and cornerstones is much amplified, her quilting motif synthesizes Old-World motifs, and her block pattern reflects the expansion of complex pieced patterns in the late 1800s U.S. Made by a Tennessee-Delta black woman, this quilt shares with the West Virginia Scots Irish a straight set, all-over quilting style, and mutating-pattern effect; with the Missouri Germans, solid-colored
sashing strips and design revision; and with both groups, sashing strips, cornerstones, and simple borders.

May Hight’s Patchwork Cross Four-Patch (my pattern name) (Figure 5.10, page 299)

Like Brack’s Star, May Hight’s (1907-80, white) ca. 1940 quilt has many traits that quilt scholars have associated with more than one ethnic or racial group. Brackman’s encyclopedia lists the pattern as “Country Lanes,” attributed to Mountain Mist, a batting company that has offered patterns by mail-order and on batting wrappers since at least the 1920s; and as “Cross in the Square,” from a 1976 book on Amish quilts (1993:232-233, #1829; 525, 521; Bishop and Safanda 1976). Hight’s Four-Patch quilt has the mutating-pattern effect that Valentine cites as a Scots-Irish trait and that Gordon sees in quilts made by black women in Gee’s Bend, Alabama. Hight’s sashing strips and cornerstones are common in West Virginia Scots Irish, Missouri German, and Arkansas African-American quilts, but her solid-colored fabric aligns more with Missouri Germans and African Americans; Scots-Irish makers often used print fabrics (Valentine 1995:21; Meyer 1985:108-109; Benberry 2000 images).

Early English and Irish quilters made the repeating-block straight set and the Four-Patch pattern, but the use of patchwork crosses apparently developed in the United States as part of the great expansion of complex pieced patterns in the late 1800s. State quilt-survey books show that women in the U.S. South were using it by the late 1800s but cite no ethnic or racial-group origins (see Ramsey and Waldvogel 1986:19 [Middle Tennessee, ca. 1896]; Williams 1992:36, 65 [Alabama early 1860s, Florida 1887]; Johnson 2001:103 [Mississippi ca. 1905]; also see Brackman 1993:232-243). I have not seen any
early Old-World repeating-block quilts with this feature, but a quadrant figure at the center of a ca. 1795 English medallion quilt may be an antecedent (Colby 1970:99, Fig. 114).

Hight’s border design, a single strip at the top and bottom of the quilt, aligns with the trait of no borders or simple borders that quilt scholars have cited for both West Virginia Scots Irish and Missouri German quilts (Valentine 1995:21; Meyer 1985:11). Her quilting is by-the-block squared shell, that is, squared shell motifs are coordinated with rather than independent of the pieced design. The by-the-block approach is common in Old-World quilts, but squared-shell quilting does not occur unless in the form of one zigzag section of chevron/wave quilting or one section of the “Scotch diamonds” motif (Osler 1987:59, Fig. 31c; also see Colby 1971:58, Fig. 72, third row, right side). Chevron/wave quilting was widespread in Ireland in the 1800s (Osler 1987:70, 116, and 1995:Section I-4; Wilson 1992:150-151 [northern counties of Antrim and Down]; Valentine 2000:42).

In my study area, both black and white makers did squared-shell quilting (see pages 266 lower right, 276, 279 bottom, 284). Additional examples by white makers (probably of English and Irish heritage) are Hight’s ca. 1950 quadrant string Star, Frankie Bailey’s ca. 1945 Star, and Elizabeth “Bett” Moore’s ca. 1945 Fan. Black-maker examples are Opal Brack’s ca. 1945 Butterfly and Virtress Beard’s ca. 1935 Bird’s Nest. And squared shells were included in variable-shell quilting, which was used primarily by black women.

Hight’s set design, pieced design, color scheme, and quilting motif show her use of vernacular rather than published patterns. The design surely existed long before a 1939 Kansas City Star published a version listed as “Thrifty” (Brackman 1993:205, #1602). Old-World quiltmaking offers models for all of Hight’s traits except the patchwork cross and possibly her squared-shell quilting. She shares the mutating-pattern effect with Scots-Irish
and black makers; sashing strips and cornerstones with Scots-Irish, black, and German makers; solid-colored sashing strips with German and black makers; simple borders with all three groups; by-the-block quilting primarily with Old-World and German makers; and repetitive all-over quilting primarily with Scots-Irish and black makers.

The above discussions of two quilts from consultant households show that black and white makers used many of the same design traits. Upholding Valentine’s finding “that environmental and socio-economic factors may sometimes influence aesthetic formulation more than factors of race or ethnicity,” I find that much quilt culture was shared among small-farm women, regardless of their ethnic- or racial-group identity (1995:20).

**Popular Culture Influences**

Starting in the 19th century, mass media fostered the sharing of quilt culture across regions and social networks (Brackman 1993:4-6). Newspapers, farm journals such as Birmingham, Alabama-based *Progressive Farmer*, books, booklets, and mail-order companies distributed patterns. The *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* “indexes patterns that appeared in print as early as the 1830’s,” but, “During the 1890’s, the number of patchwork features increased significantly in the needlework and reader’s exchange columns of women’s magazines and farm papers” (Brackman 1993:4-5).

For quilters in the Tennessee Delta and across the nation, the worlds of contemporary mass media, face-to-face exchange, and handed-down designs were not separate (Valentine 2000:9). Some women accessed published patterns through sample blocks that they got from neighbors, and some adapted published designs. Conversely,
published designs often derived from pre-existing vernacular or reader-designed patterns, as noted by pattern-encyclopedia compiler Barbara Brackman (1993:5) and indicated by these quotes from Kansas City Star quilt columns of 1928 to 1931: “The album quilt is a real old-timer...,” “Here is a prime favorite of quilt makers...,” “Several requests for this quilt pattern have been received...,” “The ocean wave quilt pattern is one of a series of authentic old-fashioned quilt patterns...,” and, “The design was contributed by one of our readers” (Groves 1988:2, 4, 7, 12, 34); also, “The friend from whom we got this pattern...,” and, “Recently a quilt collector found a beautiful old ‘Mexican Star’ quilt...” (McKim 1962[1931]:54, 103). On occasion, new designs appeared: “Here is an entirely new quilt that you will want...” (McKim 1962:95). Quilt-column writers thus could function as switchboards, linking makers in different locations, time periods, and social networks.

The following discussion of two quilts from consultant households, “Wrench” and “Bird’s Nest,” illustrates the interplay of published and vernacular influences. On the one hand, mass media promoted the development of a national quiltmaking tradition across social groups and regions (enhanced by the geographic mobility of makers); on the other, makers kept that tradition variegated by vernacularizing published material. The pattern names I use here are not from consultants (in this case, family members of deceased makers) but from Ruby Short McKim. McKim wrote columns for the Kansas City Star from 1928 to the early 1930s and also distributed patterns through McKim Studios of Independence, Missouri; booklets; a mail-order service; and her book 101 Patchwork Patterns (1962[1931]) (Groves 1988; Brackman 1993:524-525).

The Wrench (Figure 5.11, pages 299-300). In 1931, McKim described the Wrench pattern (published with the same name in an 1896 Ohio Farmer) as “simple to piece,
adapted to the use of odd scraps, ‘dark and light’ ” (McKim 1962:90-91; Brackman 1993:235, #1850). She noted that the pieced blocks could be set “either with alternate plain squares or lattice [sashing] strips;” and suggested that making the pattern blocks out of white pieces and pink print pieces and putting them together with pink sashing strips “would make a pretty...quilt” (McKim 1962:90-91).

Tennie Callery’s (1890-1982, Haywood/Hardeman counties, white) 1920s Wrench follows the “adapted to the use of odd scraps” part of the column rather than McKim’s suggestion that white and pink would “make a pretty...quilt,” and her choice of sashing (“lattice”) strips rather than alternate blocks is scrap-friendly (alternate blocks require a large amount of one fabric). The quilt has vernacular common-quilt design principles of block autonomy, mutating-pattern effect, sashing strips (in several print fabrics), cornerstones (all in solid red), partial blocks, and minimal borders (only a binding strip).

Whereas McKim did not mention the possibility of cornerstones or give any advice on quilting motif, cornerstones are a key element of Callery’s design, and she chose by-the-piece quilting (double by-the-piece in some places). These traits of Callery’s quilt demonstrate a maker’s ability to personalize and vernacularize published models to suit her taste and/or conditions. McKim facilitated this process, recognizing her readers’ competence and their different tastes and purposes, by offering options in some areas (scraps or coordinated colors; sashing or alternate blocks) and remaining mum in others (quilting motif; possibility of cornerstones).

Bird’s Nest (Kansas City Star, June 15 and 19, 1929; and in an 1894 Ohio Farmer) (Graves 1988:39; Brackman 1993:390-391, #3237) (Figure 5.11, pages 300-301). In her syndicated newspaper column, McKim suggested using white, tan, and turquoise in the
pattern blocks and setting them with white alternate blocks and either a white 6-inch border or a pieced border of blue squares and white triangles. She suggested ornate figural quilting motifs for the plain squares (“President’s Wreath”) and the border (“twisted cable”), if the maker chose to make the border white (Groves 1988:39; McKim 1962:75). The following comparison of her published design with Virstress Beard’s (1921-59, black) ca. 1935 quilt is limited by the worn condition of the latter, which had been stored in the barn. As with Callery’s Wrench quilt, Beard’s design may derive from a sample block that someone gave her or from a published version of the pattern that Brackman’s encyclopedia (1993) does not list.

Beard simplifies McKim’s pattern by using a basic patchwork cross (four rectangular pieces and a square) in a pastel print rather than by making it out of nine blue diamonds and 24 white triangles (Figure 5.11, page 301). She uses sashing strips and cornerstones instead of alternate blocks, and squared shell instead of figural quilting. She uses block autonomy rather than McKim’s consistent cross-block color scheme but adheres to the spirit of McKim’s color advice in using mainly light prints and solids, including a blue that reflects McKim’s reference to the patchwork-cross diamonds as “nine bright blue-green cubist eggs” (thus evoking the pattern name) (1962:75). Although the light colors and complex design suggest that Beard saw this quilt as a bedspread, she applied local common-quilt principles to the published pattern by using the simpler patchwork-cross design, a scrap-friendly color scheme, and a group-friendly quilting motif.

The above examples show that women in the small-farm households of my consultants were attracted to the often-complex published designs, but adopted only parts of them and yoked these to traits that reflected their local and personal conditions.
Conclusion

In this chapter I placed my consultants’ family quilts in broader stylistic contexts of time and space. Focusing on those made in the small-farm era of the 1920s to 1950s, I compared their traits with those of bedspread and common (linsey) quilt antecedents, and identified areas of continuity and change. I then placed my consultants’ quilts in the larger context of U.S. quilt studies, with historical, cultural (ethnic or racial-) group, and popular culture (published pattern) components.

I noted two main trends in the development of study-area quiltmaking as a sphere of activity in black and white small-farm households of the 1920s to 1950s. One was the decreased use of traits that had promoted formality in late 19th-century bedspread quilts through investment in materials and in time for planning. Examples of such traits are diagonal and zigzag elements, consistent color schemes, and quilting motifs that were coordinated with the pieced design.

The second trend was the expansion of traits that helped small-farm women fashion a quiltmaking style that met their practical, social, and psychological needs. For instance, traits of this style that satisfied criteria for low cash outlay were frequent use of scraps and commodity sacks but low use of alternate blocks and consistent color schemes (which required having a lot of a certain material on hand). Traits of the small-farm style that reflect the need for productivity are flexible, process-oriented techniques such as variable piecing, clustering, the mutating-pattern effect, optional and variable borders, and few quilting stitches to the inch. Traits that facilitated the use of quiltmaking for fun and relaxation include group-friendly quilting motifs, pieced rather than harder-to-execute appliqué designs, straight-edged rather than curved pieces, and adaptation of published
patterns. Traits that promoted pattern visibility and design unity in scrap quilts, so that they might contribute to a "pretty" indoor environment, were consistently colored sashing strips and cornerstones, block autonomy, high-contrast colors, use of color to create a center focus or borders, and complexity-enhancing elements such as the patchwork cross, cornerstones, and published patterns. The small-farm women of this time and place thus favored aesthetic features that served practical goals and tolerated contingent conditions; for instance, block autonomy accommodated scraps, and group-friendly quilting motifs promoted productivity.

This case of small-farm women developing a quiltmaking style supports my argument, introduced at the end of chapter 3, that social structure and agency are not oppositional but interdependent: to the extent that people have agency to improve their quality of life within the social structure, they promote the structure's survival by adapting it to better serve their needs. The agency that small-farm women exhibited in developing a quilt style that enhanced their quality of life while accommodating their contingent conditions can be seen as a form of improvisation. Following Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam's use of the term, improvisation is the process of responding creatively "with judgment and precision" to the always changing conditions of everyday life (2007:2).

Facilitating the agency of small-farm women in this case were historical changes of the late 1800s. Among these changes were expanded factory production of affordable cloth and sewing machines, a reduced workload for rural women with the shift to factory-made cloth, and increased mass-media distribution of patterns. Another possible factor in cotton-plantation areas is that the rise of the sharecropping system in the late 1800s may have given small-farm households greater access to field cotton (for batting). These changes had
a leveling effect, making quiltmaking more accessible to women with less money, less of a 
fine-needlework heritage, and more need of quilts for warmth than display.

This chapter also offers evidence that some quilt traits that scholars have linked to 
ethnic or racial-group identity were, in the mid-1900s, actually cross-ethnic, cross-racial-
group traits of either common-quilt or bedspread-quilt identity. As such, they express a 
maker’s living conditions (possibly related to regional location and ethnic identity), the 
Old-World roots of U.S. quiltmaking generally, the capacity of mass media to create 
common quiltmaking culture, and a quilt’s intended purpose rather than, or in addition to, 
ethnic or racial-group identity.

The notion of quilt traits as expressions of ethnic or racial-group identity emerged 
as a quilt-studies research paradigm in the late 1970s and 1980s. In this period, some 
scholars recognized a common-quilt aesthetic defined by criteria that differed from those 
of fancy quilts and, in some cases, interpreted it as distinctively African American (see 
Holstein 1972; Twining 1977; Vlach 1978; Wahlman 1981; Thompson 1983; and my 
discussion of this issue in Klassen 2009). Scholars such as Geraldine N. Johnson (1982), 
Ramsey (1989), and Valentine (1995) responded by documenting white participation in a 
common-quilt aesthetic, with traits that scholars such as John Michael Vlach and Maude 
Southwell Wahlman had perceived as distinctively African American. Johnson and 
Valentine associated a white common-quilt aesthetic with U.S. Anglo, Appalachian, or Scots 
Irish identity, and contrasted it with a more formal quilt aesthetic that they saw as German 
American. Thus, Johnson wrote of Anglo-Appalachian women who made fancy quilts:

The model they follow, however, is not that of their own region, but rather 
the Pennsylvania-German model which has set the standard for this most 
recent quilting revival....[On common quilts,] their pieces did not match and 
their stitches were sometimes too large, but these quilts too reflect an
aesthetic that has only begun to be explored among some black quilters. White non-Pennsylvania-German quilts also deserve attention. [1982:28, 33]

This excerpt shows Johnson's association of traits with ethnic and regional identity.

My data, however, indicate that the development of quilt styles dominated by either common or bedspread traits reflects the historical experience and living conditions of the makers, subject to local material resources and occupational identity as well as ethnic- or racial-group roots. Johnson and Valentine also recognize that socioeconomic conditions influence quilt style: Johnson notes the “low income” of Blue Ridge women as a factor in their vernacular style, and Valentine cites “environmental and socio-economic factors” as a possible reason for shared traits of some African- and Scots Irish-American quilts (Johnson 1982:33; Valentine 1995:20).

Most differences between Tennessee Delta and Missouri-German quiltmaking are attributable to the common-quilt emphasis of the former and the bedspread-quilt emphasis of the latter. Study-area bedspread quilts have traits that Meyer (1985) associates with the east central Missouri Germans, and Missouri-German common quilts have traits that often occur in my consultants’ family quilts. The Missouri-German focus on bedspread quilts may be attributed to historical experience, environmental conditions, and economic-group status. Among these factors are the use of featherbeds, wool blankets, and wool-stuffed comforters historically (rather than quilts) for purposes of warmth, access to cotton primarily as a commodity (whereas it was a cash-free source of batting in Tennessee-Delta households), and, probably, a higher average-income level.

I also posit historical experience, with a component of racial-group identity, as the basis for two areas of difference in the quiltmaking of white and black consultant households, these being the more common use among black women of variable piecing and
variable-shell quilting. These traits were not absolute markers of racial-group identity, as black makers made some quilts without them, and white makers made some quilts with them. I speculate that the variable-shell motif was most common among African Americans because, as a group, they had needlework inputs from New-World whites of different ethnic and economic-group backgrounds. By contrast, small-farm white makers had more homogeneous family-based needlework contacts. The greater propensity of black makers for variable piecing reflects economic and social conditions under which quilmaking was particularly valued as a realm of self-sufficiency, productivity in spite of limited time and materials, relaxation, camaraderie, and individual expression.

In line with these interpretations, I find that the study of quilt traits is better served by seeking explanations in living conditions, historical experience, and intended use of the quilt than by focusing on ethnic or racial-group identity. The latter should be considered, but as a component of the other three factors (see Klassen 2009:306-308, 328-329).

Expressive-Subsistence Genres

The ability of women to mold quilmaking to meet various needs through their selection of traits (drawing from vernacular and published resources) testifies to the plasticity of quilmaking. This quality allowed makers to use it as both a subsistence and an expressive activity, responsive to the limits and opportunities of their conditions. This capacity paid high dividends in households where self-sufficiency was a key factor in the quality of life and thus justified a high investment of resources in subsistence genres. It allowed subsistence (common) quilmaking to do double-duty as an expressive genre, meeting social and psychological as well as physical needs. Genres with this dual capacity
are especially likely to end up in the surround category because meeting a subsistence need makes them an ongoing part of everyday life.

Tennessee Delta Fieldwork Data as Grounds for Structural Analysis

Although the quilt scholarship that I discussed above provides historical context that is an important factor in interpreting my consultants’ quilts, I recognize that there is the potential for further analysis to interpret the traits of their quilts as symbols of their worldview and core beliefs. Such a study is beyond the scope of the present work, but will be the grounds for future research. The project of discerning a unified regional worldview is complicated in this case by the differential identities of consultant families, given their various routes to the Tennessee Delta, their different arrival times (1820s to early 1950s), instances of having lived elsewhere, and variable use of published patterns. Nevertheless, I find that some recurring traits combined with consultant comments in interviews offer preliminary evidence of a “cultural [symbolic] code,” which, Gary Witherspoon writes, is based on “an ideological system by which the world is defined, described, and understood” (see his book Language and Art in the Navajo Universe 1977:4).

One “value orientation” (1977:4, 179-194) that might qualify as part of a Tennessee-Delta symbolic code is “inclusivity,” a democratic orientation with components of thrift, not wasting anything, and tolerance for imperfection. In quiltmaking, I perceive it in the widespread commitment to using up scraps, regardless of color, shape, size, or fabric type. Jeanette Holloway’s (1952, black) comment regarding her grandmother’s quiltmaking conveys the concept: “She wasn’t concerned, I feel, [that] some of the little strips are cut different sizes. She was just concerned about, well, you know, this little piece of material is
still okay. It’s just one piece coming from wherever or what’s left, and I’m going to use it” (6:6). Each piece contributed to a project larger than itself.

“Self-sufficiency” also might qualify as a value orientation, that is, commitment to meeting household needs through ingenuity and the sweat of one’s brow, relying minimally on cash income. Components of self-sufficiency were providence, productivity, hard work, and child-care. In quiltmaking it accounts for an emphasis on practical traits such as thick batting and for impatience with time-consuming needlework that enhanced only appearance (see Opal Brack’s and Lucille Hight’s comments on page 1.)

These preliminary observations suggest that there is more to be learned about Tennessee-Delta culture through this sort of analysis of my primary data.

In chapter 6, I will focus on the changes that occurred in the quiltmaking and the social relations of my consultants as people with small-farm backgrounds adopted a more modern, urban way of life.
Fig. 5.1. Some practical traits of common quilts (11 images).

Substantial batting. Where brown pieces of Virtress Beard’s ca. 1945 framed-medallion quilt have worn through or come apart, one can see the ragged red, white, and blue quilt (possibly ca. 1900) that she used as batting (detail).

Chaotic effect. Adjacent prints and a variable color scheme submerge the pattern in Rachel Ann Davis’s 1940s string-pieced quilt with patchwork crosses.
Sashing strips, cornerstones. Red strips and blue stones organize the variably colored blocks of Isadora Scallions’ ca. 1960 Bowtie top and also make it larger (quilted later).

Borders. Rosa Morton lost consistency and symmetry but saved time and money by using scrappy common-quilt borders on a fancy field of Butterfly and alternate blocks, c. 1950.
Sashing strips, cornerstones. Apparently lacking enough of any one material, Tennie Callery used several to make the strips of this ca. 1925 Wrench quilt. The red stones unify it.

Partial blocks. Rather than take time to plan a symmetrical top, Minerva Yochum cut some blocks in half to make this early 1950s Nine-Patch Variation (or 13-Patch) quilt the right size for a bed. She likely put the other half of the brown-and-green block in another quilt.
Partial blocks. Apparently valuing efficiency over consistency and symmetry, Frankie Bailey finished this 1940s Star quilt by turning the back over outside edges of blocks.

Quilting motif. My renditions of shell or fan quilting (left) and squared-shell quilting (right).
Quilting motif. Sections of variable-shell quilting (my term), copied from Opal Brack.

Variable piecing. Frankie Bailey made most of the stars on this 1940s LeMoyne Star quilt (detail) using eight diamonds cut from the same material (left). But she string-pieced the diamonds on a few blocks (right).
Variable piecing. On this 1952 LeMoyne Star quilt (detail), Mary Frances Brack used pieces of various shapes and sizes (and colors) to make borders (here, on left).

Fig. 5.2. Aesthetic traits of common quilts (39 images). Citations with page and pattern number only reference the *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* (Brackman 1993).

Color-only borders, color contrast, mosaic (a field of same-shaped pieces); squared shell and straight-parallel-lines quilting. Virtress Beard, ca. 1955 Two-Patch (157, #1101 variation). The borders and pattern rely entirely on color arrangement.
Color-only borders (red alternate blocks at top and bottom), repeating blocks set with alternate (plain) blocks; by-the-block and by-the-piece quilting. Lela Kate Carlton, 1940s Four-of-Diamonds top (301, #2375a, #2385 var.); quilted later.

Center focus, color contrast, clustering, mosaic field (squares on point), variable-shell quilting. Lue Rena Mann, ca. 1940 Trip around the World or Postage Stamp (289, #2293). Seen with Brownsville States-Graphic reporter Jerry Wilson and quilt owner Lollie Mann. The pattern and center focus rely entirely on color placement.
String-piecing, quadrant, sashing strips, cornerstone; squared-shell quilting. May Hight, ca. 1950 Stars (455, #3754 string star; 491, #4005 [whole-top]).

Repeating blocks, string-pieced, matching red Xs, patchwork crosses, matching strips and stones; squared-shell quilting. Rachel Ann Davis, ca. 1940 (165, #1181-1182). The partial-block borders at left and top are a common-quilt trait.
Block autonomy, repeating-block set; cross-piece quilting (see detail below). Tennessee Callery, 1940s Improved Nine-Patch (61, #306; 329, #2689).

Detail of the back of Tennie Callery's quilt seen above. Quilting: cross-piece (follows some seams, crosses others). At right, red fabric on the front bled through.
Mutating pattern (blocks are pieced the same but pattern “mutates” due to different color combinations), block autonomy, repeating blocks set on point with alternate blocks; by-the-block quilting (detail below). Goldie Morris, 1950s Spinner detail (173, #1265a).

Back detail of quilt above. Quilting: double by-the-piece (both sides of seams in pattern blocks), straight lines or shell (in plain blocks), diagonal lines (in borders).
Block autonomy, adjacent blocks, shell quilting (see below). Minerva Yochum, early 1950s Nine-Patch Variation/13-Patch (303, #2413). The partial blocks are a common-quilt trait.

Detail of Minerva Yochum quilt above. Quilting: shells. A set of shells with five double rows of arcs curves from upper right-center to lower left across the block with brown patches. Part of an adjoining set of shells can be seen at right.
Block autonomy, mutating pattern, repeating-block set, sashing strips, matching red stones; cross-piece quilting. Tennie Callery, 1920s Wrench detail (235, #1850). The unmatched sashing strips are a common-quilt trait. Stain discolors two blocks at left center.

Mutating pattern, repeating-block set, matching strips and stones, variable-shell quilting. Opal Brack, early 1940s Star quilt (detail) (211, #1680).
Mutating pattern; block autonomy; repeating-block set; matching strips, stones, and borders; cross-piece quilting (see below). Irma Steele and Lucille (Steele) Hight, 1963 Stars quilt (detail) (207, #1627).

Detail of the Stars quilt above. Quilting: cross-piece (follows some seams, crosses others).
Clustering, repeating blocks, block pairs, matching strips and stones, squared-shell quilting (see below). Frankie Bailey, 1940s Star (453, #3735). The variable piecing (some blocks string-pieced, most not) is a common-quilt trait.

Detail of the Star quilt above (upper right corner). Quilting: squared shell (a set of concentric “L”s expands from upper right).
Bars set (vertical; 83, #475/475.5), fancy cloth (remnants from the curtain factory where the maker worked), straight-lines quilting. Top: Mary Lucille Broadstreet, ca. 1950. Quilted: ca. 1967 by her daughter-in-law (Carolyn Simpson's mother).

Bars set (horizontal; 83, #475); alternating rows of pink and green ties. Maggie Holloway Tyus, 1960s. The variable shape of pieces is a common-quilt trait.
Block autonomy, quadrant set, mosaic, pieced sashing (purple and green squares on point), grid quilting (vertical and horizontal lines). May Hight, ca. 1945 Trip around the World var. (289, #2293). The pattern relies on color placement; all pieces are the same shape and size.

Medallion set, mosaic, shell quilting. Minerva Yochum, 1963 Hexagon (31, #160), group-quilted. The pattern relies on color placement since all pieces are the same shape and size.
Block autonomy, repeating blocks, matching strips and stones, solid-color patchwork crosses (i.e., navy blue at upper right, pink at lower left), squared-shell quilting aligned with blocks (detail below). May Hight, ca. 1940 Four-Patch (157, #1101 var.).

Detail of Hight’s Four-Patch above. Striped flannel back. Quilting: squared shell (concentric “L”s expand from lower right, above horizontal white-stitched line).

Mosaic (rectangles), dyed tobacco sacks, straight-line quilting. 1951-52, Verniece Staggs, Two-Patch (detail).
Quilting: diagonal lines. Tennessee Callery, 1940s Pontiac Star (detail) (473, #3871).

Quilting: figural (box with X in plain blocks), double outline on curved sections (both sides of seams). Frankie Bailey or Verniece Staggs, 1940s Wedding Ring (detail) (59, #303).


Quilting: shell. Probably Rozelle Sanford, ca. 1890 Eight-Point Design var. (detail, back) (207, #1631). The stains show it was stored between a mattress and bedspring.
Quilting: squared shell aligned with pattern blocks (note two short fill-in lines at upper right corner of the block). Elizabeth Moore, 1940s Fan quilt (detail) (401, #3329-3330).

Quilting: squared shell (one set expands from lower left with at least 19 “L”s; a second set starts at lower right of the butterfly). Appliqué, embroidery. Opal Brack, ca. 1945 Butterfly quilt (detail) (Brackman 2009:144, #51).

Quilting: semi-variable shell; May Hight, ca. 1955 Mexican Star (back detail) (357, #2937).
Quilting: double-lines variable shell. Appliqué; embroidery; matching strips, stones, and borders. Mary Frances Brack, early 1940s Butterfly (Brackman 2009:144, #51).


By-the-block quilting (double parallel lines in plain triangles, double by-the-piece in pieced blocks). Secondary pattern (Birds in Air/Flying Birds/Flock of Geese in border and corners of Double Star blocks [381, #3161]). Mary Etta and Gladys Brantley, ca. 1915 feathered Double Star quilt (detail shows border [above] and parts of two blocks [below]) (459, #3784 var. [no “feathered” triangle edges]; see 277-281 for “feathered” stars).
Fig. 5.3. Example of a common quilt (white maker).

Rachel Ann Davis. 1940s string quilt with patchwork crosses. The patchwork-cross strips match in each block but differ from block to block (block autonomy). In most blocks, matching strings are placed to make “X”s. Adjacent print fabrics create a chaotic look. Cornerstones match (turquoise print) but blend in rather than unify.

Fig. 5.4. Example of a common quilt (black maker).

Virtress Beard, ca. 1945 framed medallion. A patchwork-cross block creates a center focus. A mix of strip and pieced borders of different widths (about seven at left and top, eight at right, six below) makes the quilt asymmetrical. Alternating light and dark blocks give an orderly look. The red-and-white plaid is apparently concurrent with the heavier solid-colored materials. The ragged red and white is an old quilt used for batting.
Fig. 5.5. Example of a bedspread quilt (white maker).

Tennessee Callery, 1940s Anna’s Choice Quilt (note the variation, probably unintentional, in the pieced pattern: second row from bottom, middle) (Brackman 1993:161, #1141a).

Fig. 5.6. Example of a bedspread quilt (black maker).

Mary Frances Brack, early 1940s Butterfly quilt (Brackman 2009:144, #51).
Fig. 5.7. Ten study-area antecedent quilts, ca. 1875-ca. 1915, in chronological order. I derived pattern names from the *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* (Brackman 1993).

1875 BC: Tennessee Callery (1890-1982) family (her mother or stepmother?), Triple Irish Chain zigzag var. (see Brackman 1993:83, #484; 149, #1053.9; 285, #2283b). Courtesy of Tom and Barbara Callery (grandson and his wife).


1890 AB: Rozelle Tipton Sanford (1852-1930), ca. 1890 Eight-Point Design var. (207, #1631). Courtesy of Anne Baird (granddaughter).

1900 AB: Laura Applewright Tipton (1832-1913) or her daughter Rozelle Tipton Sanford (1852-1930), Four of Diamonds top (301, #2385 var.). Courtesy of Anne Sanford Baird.

1900 BC: Tennie Callery (1890-1982) family, Spool/Arkansas Traveler var. quilt (187, #1407a; 185, #1400 var.). Courtesy of Tom and Barbara Callery (grandson and his wife).

1915 BC: Tennie Callery (1890-1982), Log Cabin quilt (folded in half), Barn-Raising layout (319, #2573). Courtesy of Tom and Barbara Callery (grandson and his wife).
Fig. 5.8. Linsey quilts (West Virginia, East Tennessee, and Kentucky) (seven images).


Ca. 1880 Star quilt. Note variable piecing [non-Star blocks]: second row from top, second from left; third row from top, third from left. Rebecca Jane Fleshman Bower (1844-1921; white), southwestern West Virginia (Valentine 2000:140-141). Used by permission of the West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search, Inc.

Ca. 1900 13-Patch/Nine-Patch variation. Virginia C. Davis Shumate (1852-1923; white), southwestern West Virginia (Valentine 2000:142-143). Used by permission of the West Virginia Heritage Quilt Search, Inc.
Possibly 1880, Kentucky Sun (family's name). Nancy Miller Grider (?-?, white), Russell County, south central Kentucky (near Tennessee). *Kentucky Quilts 1800-1900* (Kentucky Quilt Project 1982:2). Used by permission of Shelly Zegart, Kentucky Quilt Project.

Ca. 1900 linsey-cloth skirts, clothing such as was made into quilts when it wore out; anonymous maker; Roane County, East Tennessee. Collection of Mary J. Browning. Photo: Terry Wild Studio. “Southern Linsey Quilts of the 19th Century” (Waldvogel 1994:129). Used by permission of Merikay Waldvogel.

Fig. 5.9. Traits that some scholars associate with ethnic- or racial-group identity, in a quilt that a black woman made. Star quilt, Opal Williams Brack, early 1940s.
Fig. 5.10. Traits that some scholars associate with ethnic- or racial-group identity, in a quilt that a white woman made. Patchwork Cross Four-Patch, May Hight, ca. 1940.

Fig. 5.11. Mass media and vernacular influences on study-area quilts: two examples.

Instructions for making a Wrench quilt in Ruby McKim’s *One Hundred and One Patchwork Patterns* (top half of left page, lower left on right page) [1962(1931):90-91]).

Virtress Beard, ca. 1935 Bird’s Nest var. The *Encyclopedia of Pieced Quilt Patterns* lists a more complex version as #3237 Bird’s Nest, published once: *Ohio Farmer*, December 6, 1894 (Brackman 1993:390-391). Though not in the encyclopedia, Ruby McKim published it by that name in the *Kansas City Star*, June 15 and 19, 1929, and in her 1931 collection, *One Hundred and One Patchwork Patterns* (see below). Since both her Wrench and Bird’s Nest patterns had appeared with those names in *Ohio Farmer* issues of the 1890s, I speculate that she used this magazine as a resource for her column.
Detail of Viritress Beard’s Bird’s Nest (most of a pattern block is visible in right half, lower three-fourths of image). Note squared-shell quilting.

This is the pattern labeled “Bird’s Nest” in Ruby McKim’s book, *One Hundred and One Patchwork Patterns* (1962 [rev. of 1931]:75). When Viritress Beard made it, she used a simple patchwork cross (four rectangles and one square) instead of the vertical and horizontal rows of nine squares-on-point with 24 small triangles filling in along the edges.
Ch. 6. Ambiguous Meanings: Quilt Culture and Caste after Small-Farm Life

In this chapter I examine the effect that historical changes of the late 1950s to 1970s had on quilt culture and the small-farm social system of my Tennessee Delta consultants. In this period, large-farm owners replaced manual labor and mules with machinery, herbicides, and pesticides; small-farm people found manufacturing jobs with better pay and shorter hours than farm work; cross-racial-group relations changed as white landowners and black farm laborers became economically independent of each other; and quilt culture transitioned from a dominantly subsistence activity that marked economic-group identity to a dominantly expressive activity that marked individual identity.

Mechanization began with tractors in the 1940s. Burr Hight (1901-76, white) gave a mule team to his son Romus and his wife, Lucille, when they married in 1945. But when the young couple started farming for Romus Hight’s uncle a year later, he “had tractors galore” (LH 20:10). Cottonpicker machines came in a few years later (Figure 6.1, pages 356-357). The year that Lollie Mann’s (1936-, black) father-in-law died, “The Man [white landowner] had a man come in with a cottonpicker, and we wondered what he [her father-in-law] would have thought if he had seen that cottonpicker work, and that was like ’57 or ’8” (1:7). Said Bob Bond (1962-, Madison County, white),
The cottonpicker really came in in the '60s here. By the mid '70s, the manual labor was pretty much a thing of the past... And all the [tenant] families moved to town, you know, they left the farm. There was nothing for them to do here. [25:14]

Cottonpickers came in while Barbara Callery (1940-, white) was away at nursing school, around 1960: “Everything changed,” she said (17:7). Manual cotton-chopping (using hoes to space plants and get rid of weeds) continued for somewhat longer (17:8).

Many small-farm blacks in my study area had moved north in the Depression years of the 1930s, and many small-farm blacks and whites moved north after World War II (Springfield 2000:68; LH 20:18-19). Small-farm whites started getting local business and manufacturing jobs in the 1950s; about 1965, local plants (some based in the North) started hiring blacks (LM 1:7; Springfield 2000:174, 179). As cottonpickers and herbicides greatly reduced the need for farm workers, those workers were getting better-paying non-farm jobs that allowed them to buy land, live in insulated houses with central heat, switch from subsistence (often mutual-aid) activities such as quiltmaking to store-bought goods such as electric blankets, and have time for hobbies. In her family history, Haywood County native Raye Springfield (1945-, black) summarizes changes of the 1960s as follows:

Opal [Springfield’s mother] always said that the children would have an opportunity to find better jobs if they left Brownsville....

Farming in Tennessee had undergone profound changes over the past four years since Tonnie [Springfield’s father] had left the business [in 1963].... There was now a greater degree of specialization with higher capitalization, which yielded higher production efficiency. The big farmers in the county were able to adjust to these radical changes.... The impact felt by the advent of the spectacular change in agriculture was palpable. Not only were there fewer farm workers, but the small farm, operated by families like Tonnie’s, which was unable to afford costly machinery and keep pace with the changes, had all but ceased to exist. Many either sold or lost their land. They left the country and moved to town, or they left Brownsville and went north.... In Haywood County, there were now a lot more farmers who held full-time jobs in industry. This contributed greatly to the level of living for the farm people. [2000:185-186]
The rest of this chapter examines how these changes in the agricultural economy affected quilt culture and the small-farm social system, especially cross-racial-group relations.

**Signs of Change**

The following trends testify to the decline of the tenant farm-sharecropper economic system in which small-farm workers (most of them black) and large-farm owners (most of them white) were interdependent.

Small-farm young people were leaving home to continue their education or get town jobs. “You’d see a lot of people in the country but there ain’t many people in the country like that now,” said Earl Beard (1915-2012, black). “All the young folks going to town now. They going to town. They’re working these jobs, see” (14:17). Among them were Romus and Lucille Hight (1927-, white), who gave up sharecropping and moved to Brownsville about 1947, two years after they married; and her three brothers, who settled elsewhere after serving in World War II (20:10). Ollie Moore (1942-, black) left the Woodlawn community in 1961 to attend (historically black) Tennessee State Agricultural and Industrial University in Nashville, then moved to Chicago a few years later. There she worked for a year at a sock-making factory, then as a medical secretary at St. Joseph Hospital for 30 years before returning to Brownsville (13:17). Barbara Callery (1940-, white) left to study nursing about 1960 (17:7). Cobon and Opal Brack’s (1916- and 1919-, black) eight children attended black schools in Jackson and Nashville in the late 1950s and 1960s, then settled in Nashville, Arkansas, Texas, Kansas, and California as well as Brownsville (OB 2A:3; RJK 8/19/07). Julie May Taylor (1938-, black) moved to Saginaw, Michigan, in 1964 and got a grocery-store job that paid $3 an hour, as much as she would
have earned in a 10- or 12-hour day of picking cotton (10/16/08; LM 1:7-8). Said Lucille
Hight (1927-, white):

After the war, they went north, so many blacks.... When they worked on the
line—I call it “the line”...it was a lot easier, easier than chopping and picking
That carried a lot of black folks up north. And white, too. [20:19]

Common destinations were St. Louis; Indianapolis; Decatur, Illinois; Chicago; and Michigan.

“If you went to Decatur, they would tell you that’s Little Brownsville,” said Bob Bond (1962-
, Madison County, white) (25:14). Anna Mae Bullock (1939-, black) picked strawberries for
Delois Baggett’s (1933-, white) in-laws and attended Ripley and Brownsville high schools
before moving to St. Louis in 1956, joining Ike Turner’s Kings of Rhythm, and becoming
“Tina Turner” (10:7; Turner 1986:30-64).

Some small-farm women were boosting household incomes by getting jobs in local
towns, a trend that probably started when men were away during World War II. Carolyn
Simpson’s (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) grandmother got free remnants from the
Memphis curtain factory where she worked around the 1940s to 1950s (3:12). Anonymous
consultant RJ (1925-, white) started work at a Brownsville glove factory around 1945 (RJ
10/19/08:3). Rosie Lemons’ (1943-, white) mother got a job about 1955 at a coat factory,
“the first factory that ever came into Lauderdale County,” earning 25 or 35 cents an hour:
“Of course, that was a lot of money then” (24:10, 14). The Brownsville Sears store hired
Betsy Waddell’s (1951-, white) mother about 1957 (19:17).

In 1965, at about age 29, Lollie Mann (1936-, black) hired on at Brownsville’s Sarkes
Tarzian television tuner plant, which was headquartered in Bloomington, Indiana. “They
pulled the black women out of the field,” said her friend, Robbie Jarrett-King (1939, black)
(1:7). Said Mann, “I was the first lady in the crowd that said, ‘Okay, I’m going to get me a job
because I’m tired of this” (1:8). At the plant, she earned more than four times what she had made chopping cotton and doing domestic work ($1.65 an hour compared to 40 cents an hour or less [$4 for a 10- or 12-hour day]). Buoyed by her wages, she and her husband paid off his debt to the man whose land they had been sharecropping, bought an acre lot, moved a house to it, and remodeled the house. Then her husband also got a factory job (1:7-8).

As in Mann’s case above, tenants, sharecroppers, and land renters increasingly had enough money to buy land. After sharecropping on a tenant farm, Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) bought 65 acres about 1951 (1:7). After renting land, Barbara Callery’s (1940-, white) parents bought a farm in 1956 (17:3-4). Ola Jean Currie’s (1942-, black) parents, who had been tenant farmers, bought a 42-acre farm about 1960 (11:2).

Small-farm households were getting electrical service and could afford to buy appliances. Earl and Viritress Beard (1915-2012; 1921-1959, black) got their first refrigerator about 1951 while still tenants, shortly before buying a farm (JT 5/29/13). Appliances such as a washer, refrigerator, and freezer overloaded the wiring and caused Robert and Ellen Marbury’s (1917-2003, white) rented house to burn in 1954 (BC 17:16). Rosa Lee Morton’s (1914-95, black) and Luella Carter’s (1922-, black) daughters got teaching jobs and bought their mothers washing machines in the early 1960s (23:14; 24:13) (see Figure 1.5, page 21: Opal Brack with an old-fashioned “Maid-Rite” washboard).

The above trends are evidence that the small-farm era was ending, that mutuality in households and neighborhoods and small farm-large farm interdependence were no longer tenets of the economic system.
The Civil Rights Movement

The changes noted above that ended the need for subsistence quiltmaking facilitated the participation of small-farm African Americans in civil rights activities in the 1960s. As rural households got electrical service in the 1950s, radios and televisions gave access to national news that presented alternative views of racial-group relations and reported on blacks who were famous in fields such as music and sports. Blacks who did not depend on white landowners for their livelihood, who owned land and had manufacturing jobs that paid better than “common [farm] labor” (CB 1:10), could join in organized efforts to get blacks registered to vote without fear of eviction by white landlords (Springfield 2000:158-159).

Ola Jean Currie’s (1942-, black) family was one that had this protected status after moving around 1960 from a tenant house on the Jessie Castellaw farm in the Holly Grove community to land that her parents had purchased in the Jones community (11:1-2). In the 1960s, “When white people came down from the North with all that civil rights, they stayed at my mother’s house,” Currie said (11:1) (see page 29 for a picture of Currie’s mother, Johnanna Bullock [1913-96]). In the 1950s, her mother had done domestic work for several white women and, for a few years around 1950, was in a quilt group with three other black tenant-women domestics and three large-farm white women. Said Currie,

  When all this segregation [civil-rights] stuff came along, they had quit [the mixed-racial-group quilt-group meetings]. Mostly all of the black folks had moved off the white folks’ farms by [that time], and those that hadn’t, they made them move off, if they got involved in that segregation anyway. [11:2]

But even landowning blacks were not immune if they joined in civil-rights activities; some banks and stores refused their business, and “the mob” (the term by which local blacks
referred to Klan activities) threatened and, in some cases, injured them or their property (Springfield 2000:166-169).

The creation of a Brownsville branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1939 failed in its goal of registering blacks to vote in the 1940 election. Leaders in that effort included black Brownsville business people, a minister, and a laundry worker among the 52 people who paid $1 each to qualify for NAACP branch status (Springfield 2000:70-71, 76, 246). A Ku Klux Klan “mob” of some local whites including law enforcement officials had crushed the effort with “a reign of terror,” attacking and threatening those involved and running several of the leaders out of town (2000:69, 70-94). Although “at the organizational meeting of the NAACP branch some of Brownsville’s most prominent white citizens were present and encouraged colored citizens to register to vote in the fall presidential election of 1940,” those white citizens did not protect would-be voters from the wrath of other whites (2000:74-75).

In this period, conservative forces held sway. NAACP branch president Elbert “Dick” Williams was lynched June 20, 1940, in Haywood County’s Hatchie River bottom, south of Brownsville (2000:33, 77-81; Couto 1993:142-153). Blacks who had been setting animal traps near the river and secretly observed the event “recognized some of Brownsville’s prominent citizens in the crowd, which included women and children” (Springfield 2000:79-80). Williams, a Brownsville laundry worker, was beaten, hung from a tree, and shot; his tongue was cut out, his genitals were cut off and stuffed into his mouth, and his body was thrown in the river (2000:80). According to local black woman Arizona Taylor, he “always did have a temper” and “wouldn’t ever want to appear afraid of the white men” (2000:33, 80-81; see also Couto 1993:147-149). If so, some area residents may have
perceived that he challenged social principles of clear-cut identity, pride and civility, and mentoring and neighborliness, although others may have seen his behavior as a case of righteous indignation in the face of injustice.

Springfield writes that there were reports among blacks that a seven-year-old black boy was lynched at about the same time and place as Williams because he kissed a white girl, and that two other black men whose bodies were unidentifiable were lynched and shot at the same time (Springfield 2000:83). But Richard A. Couto (1993) does not mention these. Other local NAACP leaders left town, fearing for their lives (Springfield 2000:84-85; Couto 1993:149-151). National NAACP leaders demanded action from federal authorities, who investigated but made no arrests (Springfield 2000:85-94; Couto 1993:153-175).

In 1959, a more vigorous and deep-rooted civil rights movement, whose agenda included job-hiring as well as voting rights, gained momentum with the establishment of the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League and ultimately achieved many of its goals. My comments on this period rely on research by historians Couto (1993:189-216) and Springfield (2000:156-178); see also Cynthia A. Bond Hopson 2005. Couto contrasts the social bases of the earlier and later movements as follows:

The league’s charter members were people quite different from the NAACP members of 1940. The 1959 group came predominantly from the rural areas of Haywood County, while the NAACP members of 1940 had been primarily from Brownsville. The 1959 group represented ordinary African-American folk, farmers, unlike the group in 1940, who were teachers, professionals, and wage laborers of the African-American community.

One important segment of the 1959 group consisted of land-owning African-American farmers from the Douglas community of Haywood County. These families had become land-owners through the New Deal's Farm Security Administration program and its Haywood County Farm Project.... This group of African-American land-owners demonstrated...the crucial correlation of economic security, land-ownership, and political participation. [1993:193-194]
Thus, in Couto’s view, increased participation of rural blacks, especially those who owned land, was an important factor in the success of the 1960s movement.

Several additional factors contributed to the success of this later movement, as Couto and Springfield report it. One was the involvement of Currie P. Boyd, a local black who returned home in 1958 and promoted rural black involvement in civil rights activities by speaking at black churches. He had taught school and had been allowed to register to vote in Decatur County, a county three counties east of Haywood that did not share its plantation-culture history. Also important was the presence of black Memphis lawyer James Franklin Estes, who gave legal advice, and of black Brownsville grocery-store owner Odell Sanders and his wife, beautician Marge “Sis” Sanders, who were founders of the Haywood County Civic and Welfare League. Odell Sanders was run down and left for dead, and their house was dynamited (Springfield 2000:169; Couto 1993:214);

Other factors were the courage of white Haywood County merchant Pat Mann, who stood up for fair treatment of a black league member (Springfield 2000:167-168), and of black teen-agers who joined protest activities. Also important was the collaboration in 1963 of rural black churches with white Jewish CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) members to train local blacks in non-violent protest techniques (Couto 1993:190; Springfield 2000:157-173). CORE member Eric Weinberger in particular led Haywood County’s first civil rights protest, in 1963, with Edna Jones, a black women in her twenties, and nine mostly teen-aged blacks (Springfield 2000:170-173). The later movement also benefitted from activist federal authorities who used legal means, such as filing injunctions, to enforce federal civil rights legislation at the local level.
Substantial numbers of Haywood County blacks began registering to vote in 1960, 203 that year in spite of delay tactics and reprisals, for the first time since about 1890 (Couto 1993:67-70, 198-202, 211). Many voted for the first time in their life in 1963 (Norris 2000:98). Black county residents had voted and held office during Reconstruction, but Jim Crow took hold in the late 1880s. Klan members intimidated blacks at the polls in 1888, and state laws passed in 1889 allowed local poll taxes and voter registration regulations that discouraged people who were poor, illiterate, and/or black from voting (Couto 1993:67-70).

The TV tuner plant in Brownsville and the Winter Garden vegetable packing plant in Bells (in Crockett County north of Haywood) began hiring blacks in the mid-1960s (LM 1:7-8; Springfield 2000:179-180). Brownsville’s black Carver High School closed in 1970, to the regret of many local blacks for whom it was a source of pride and community; it became a vocational education school, then a community center, then a museum and cultural center (Figure 6.2, page 358) (Springfield 2000:199, 229; Norris 2000:102; Couto 1993:223).

**Quilt Culture amid Historical Change** (Post-1955)

As the small-farm social system ended and homemade quilts were no longer necessities, quilts and quilting acquired different purposes in the lives of my consultants. Quilt meanings were in flux in this period, as people abandoned this relic of the small-farm lifestyle or adapted it to their present conditions. In this section, I list post-1955 uses of old quilts (those made under conditions of labor-intensive cotton agriculture) and then consider quiltmaking and the uses of new quilts in the modern (post-1955) era.
Modern (Post-1955) Uses of Old Quilts

Some people continued to use quilts as they had in the small-farm era, for subsistence purposes. Earl Beard, for instance, (1915-2012, black) was still sleeping under quilts that his wife, Vrirtess (1921-59), had made in the 1940s and 1950s when I visited him at his farm near Glimp, Lauderdale County, in 2009. Having sharecropped until he was about 37, Beard bought a 65-acre farm in the early 1950s and maintained some aspects of a self-sufficient lifestyle into the 21st century (LM 1:7). Ollie Moore’s grandmother, Lettie Rogers (1885-1971, black), stopped making quilts in the mid-1950s, but the ten or so grandchildren who lived with her kept sleeping under them until they wore out, while also using store-bought blankets (OM 13:11, 18). Mary Jane Baggett (1962-, white) and her sister Susan slept in the 1960s under string quilts that their great-grandmother and her quilt group had made about 1940 (DB 9:4-5).

Quilts deemed too outmoded or deteriorated for use on beds were sometimes demoted to menial status (see Figure 6.3, pages 358-359). Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) kept a worn-out ca. 1935 Bird’s Nest variation quilt for use in the barn. Bob Bond’s (1962-, Madison County, white) family had used a 1940s Nine-of-Diamonds for purposes such as furniture padding and a dog bed (25:7). Paint spots on Anne Baird’s (1922-, white) ca. 1890 Eight-Point Design variation suggest that it had served as a drop cloth.

Consultants had lost some old quilts due to contingencies. A 1954 fire destroyed quilts in Barbara Callery’s (1940-, white) household (17:1, 20), and a 1963 fire destroyed Mary Rose Halliburton’s (1939-, Lauderdale County, black) grandmother’s quilts (24:3). Some consultants who had none of their mother’s or grandmother’s quilts suspected that other family members had gotten them. For instance, Anne Baird (1922-, white) has several
old family quilts but none that her mother made: "We used them all, and if we had them, they were left in the house with my brother and his wife" (16:3). Earl Beard had none of his mother’s quilts but guessed that his nephew in St. Louis may have had some; “Oh, I know I’m getting one,” responded his daughter, Julie May Taylor (1938-, black) (14:20, 3). Having spent most of her adult life in Chicago, Ollie Moore (1942-, black) did not know the fate of her grandmother’s quilts (13:17).

Some consultants used old quilts as cross-generational family bonds. When Lue Vennia Robinson’s (1922-, black) mother died, her quilts were distributed among her grandchildren (7:8). Lollie Mann (1936-, black) kept two of her mother-in-law’s quilts but gave the rest to her children, in Nashville, Atlanta, New Jersey, and Michigan (2:16; 8/19/07). Jean Bolding (1932-, Lauderdale County, white) gave her mother’s Nine-Patch to her daughter, “and I intend for her to hand it down to her daughter” (3:7). Ida Mae Coleman (1941-, black) kept some of her mother’s quilts and gave others to her daughter, a cousin, and her mother’s cousin’s great-niece (22:10; 8:1-2).

In some cases, old quilts were stored. Goldie Harwell (1962-, black) told me that her great-aunt Goldie Morris (1916-99) had slept under store-bought blankets and bedspreads since at least the late 1960s while storing quilts that she had made in the 1940s and 1950s in a linen closet (8:7). Likewise, Bob Bond’s (1962-, Madison County, white) mother had stored quilts that her ancestors had made in the 1800s as well as ones that she had made before her marriage in a wooden box in the attic, while using store-bought spreads and blankets on family beds (25:6-8).

Some members of consultant families had abandoned old quilts, while others salvaged them. Barbara Callery (1940-, white) and her husband, Tom, got his
grandmother’s family quilts because the maker’s children (Tom Callery’s father and his two aunts) didn’t want them (10/19/08). Jean Bolding (1932-, Lauderdale County, white) got her mother’s 1930s Nine-Patch because her sister did not want it (3:7). Lucille (1927-, white) and Romus Hight got some of his mother’s quilts because his two siblings’ (both brothers) families didn’t want them (20:21).

Some consultants who had old quilts (or tops or blocks) were concerned about repairing and conserving them; others kept them as they were. Anne Baird (1922-, white) had washed one old quilt, made two sets of old pattern blocks into quilts, and paid someone to quilt a top that a friend had bequeathed her. Peggy Staggs (1938-, white) had a friend “restore” one of her mother-in-law’s Two-Patch tobacco-sack quilts “that was not in very good shape” (18:6). Upon finding a dead baby mouse among the quilts that were stored in a closet at her parents’ house, Lillian Maynard (1947-, black) said, “They going to have to be washed one at a time,” to which her mother, Opal Brack, responded, “Lord have mercy” (2:17). Bob Bond (1962-, Madison County, white) asked my advice on how to clean one of his family quilts (25:7). When Carolyn Simpson’s (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) sister inherited their grandmother’s 1930s Dresden Plate quilt, “She cut it apart because it was rags on the back.... You see where she ripped it apart. And she framed it [each of the blocks]. She gave me two,” and distributed the others to their siblings (3:12).

Some preservers did not mention any plans to clean, repair, or otherwise change the condition of old quilts, including Barbara and Tom Callery (his grandmother’s quilts), Lucille and Romus Hight (his mother’s quilts), Earl Beard (his wife’s quilts), Goldie Harwell (her great-aunt’s and great-aunt’s cousin’s quilts), and Delois Baggett (her grandmother’s quilts).
In summary, the roles of old quilts in the modern-era lives of consultants include warmth on beds (continued subsistence use), menial use, lost to contingency (fire, other family members), intergenerational gift (family bonding), stored treasure, abandoned relic, upgraded and conserved heirloom, or heirloom kept in original form.

Case Studies of Old-Quilt Uses

As elders died and households dissolved, some consultants had to figure out what to do with old quilts. Since quilts generally were not needed for warmth in the modern era, their fate hinged on the meanings that they had for descendants and, in some cases, on contingencies. The diverse uses and valuing of old quilts after 1955 indicate that the meaning of quilts and quiltmaking was in flux at this time along with the social system. Following are some examples of how my consultants used old quilts in this period.

Earl Beard, Ollie Moore, Delois Baggett: Continued subsistence use. Beard (1915-2012, black), who was the oldest person that I interviewed for this study, embraced the small-farm lifestyle into old age and mourned its decline. He continued subsistence uses of quilts that his wife had made before her untimely death, at age 37 in 1959 (1:13). He took pride in his occupational status as an independent farmer, achieved about 1952 after many years of peddling vegetables and sharecropping on the fourth (giving the landowner a fourth of the crop, since he owned his own mules and equipment; those who used the landowner's equipment gave half). “I finally bought me a farm,” he said (14:19). Evidence of his continued adherence to the small-farm lifestyle was his choice of a girlfriend who, he told me in 2008, was the only person he knew who still made quilts other than his daughter Julie Taylor (1938-), who had taken it up in retirement as a hobby (14:10).
Beard continued to uphold the small-farm principle of neighborliness by practicing exchange and reciprocity. After he nursed a retired (black) schoolteacher “like she was a baby” at the end of her life, she willed him her Lincoln Continental Congressional Town Sedan (Figure 6.4, page 360). “That’s where that car came out of: patience,” he said. “She got to where she was falling out of bed, so I had to stay with her.... I drive that dude to church every Sunday. I drive it everywhere: drive to town, drive to the doctor’s” (3/16/09). And after a neighbor (white) brought him a cake and a pecan pie, “I got ready, and I got her, when I’m having the barbecue, I sent her a lot of barbecue,” which he had made for his family homecoming on Labor Day 2008 (3/16/09). These accounts show that the neighborliness principle could cross racial-, gender-, and occupational-group lines.

The traits of most of Beard’s quilts indicate that they were made for everyday use on beds, which was the purpose to which he put them. The fact that they survive testifies to Virtress Beard’s competence in subsistence quiltmaking and, perhaps, to their having been used by one adult rather than by several children sharing a bed.

Moore (1942-, black) and Baggett (1933-, white) also reported cases of old quilts that were used as bedcovers beyond 1955, but by children. The outcomes for their quilts differed. Moore’s grandmother’s (Lettie Rogers, 1885-1971) quilts apparently did not survive use by the grandchildren who lived with her until the 1960s. Baggett’s grandmother’s (Rachel Davis, 1869-1952) quilts, on the other hand, were used on Baggett’s children’s beds in the 1960s but then stored in the attic and kept “for sentimental value” (9:5). Since Baggett will never sell them, they have become inalienable possessions (10:4).

Three contrasting conditions may explain the different outcomes of the latter two cases. First, Moore had lost track of the quilts since she left home in 1961 and did not
return to the area until about 2000, whereas the Baggetts stayed at their home place. Second, the Baggetts were small-farm-owners with hired hands; as a divorced tenant farmer who was single-handedly raising several grandchildren, Lettie Rogers had less means to buy blankets to replace quilts before they wore out. Third, the fact that Rachel Davis, maker of Baggett’s quilts, died in 1952 probably promoted their rise to heirloom status, whereas Rogers lived until 1971 (although she stopped making quilts in the 1950s).

In summary, Virtress Beard’s (1921-59, black) quilts retained subsistence identity and survived, albeit the worse for wear. Lettie Rogers’s (1885-1971, black) quilts retained subsistence identity and wore out. Rachel Davis’s (1869-1952, white) quilts transitioned from subsistence to expressive identity and survived, albeit the worse for wear.

**Goldie Harwell and Bob Bond: Storage and legacy.** By the mid-1960s, Harwell’s (1960-, black) great-aunt, Goldie Southall Morris, and Bond’s (1962-, Madison County, white) mother, Alice Amis Bond, both were storing valued old quilts while using store-bought spreads and blankets on beds on which people slept. But the meanings that they gave old quilts differed in some respects. Alice Bond’s (?-1987, Madison County) use of off-white store-bought bedspreads on family beds expressed her household’s large-farm status (Figure 6.5, pages 360-361: Bob Bond’s new house and old barn). Said her son, Bob Bond,

> Everything I had was store-bought, and it was always the finest of whatever they thought they could afford.... I know my father always had the saying, “We don’t have shoddy clothes. We only buy the very best.” If you’re gonna have shoes or clothes or something of that nature, you buy something that’s substantial and fine.... And then, you know, that sort of translates over to: You certainly don’t wear anything that’s homemade, homespun. Because that—that would not look right. [25:16]

His mother distinguished between old quilts that were common, allocating them for menial uses, and those that were bedspreads or heirlooms, storing them in a wooden box in the
attic (25:6-8). Said Bob Bond, “I've got, look, I don't know how many sets of china and, uh, silver and everything in this house that Mother never used because it was [I laugh] heirlooms. We just didn’t use it. So it’s the same thing with those quilts” (25:8).

A ca. 1945 Nine-of-Diamonds had a different status:

I guess it was instilled in me, it was a lot more utilitarian than those others, because we used it to wrap furniture or whatever when we were moving things, or.... if a dog had to come in on a cold winter night, then, you know, it might have slept on that. [25:7] (Figure 6.3, page 359 top)

A black grease stain on this quilt may have contributed to its menial status or occurred as a result of it. After asking if I knew how to get the stain out, Bond said,

See, I feel guilty about it.... I have assumed this guilt about it because at some point in time I did value quilts.... Well, it was probably as I got to be a teenager, or even older, I recognized it. It’s really part of something unique and part of my heritage and part of my culture that I really—Growing up it was a, a utilitarian object that really wasn’t differentiated in any way. [25:7]

He thus perceived that an inheritance bestowed not just wealth but responsibility.

The quilts in the attic all came from his mother’s family, which had been of less means than his father’s. Among them were three of the antecedent quilts discussed in chapter 5 (Figure 5.7, pages 290 bottom, 291 top, 292 top) and two 1950s Tulip quilts that his mother had made before her marriage (Figure 6.6, page 361). Bond’s discovery of those quilts in the attic when he was in his twenties had cast his mother in a new light.

It was almost a disconnect, because I looked at them, and I thought, “I didn't know my mother did this kind of sewing.” You know, this was like something from her past that we pulled out of the quilt box and we looked at as an artifact. And I thought, “Oh, okay, this is from an earlier period of Mother's life that she doesn’t live anymore,” because sewing that quilt was almost shocking to me to think about, you know, that mother would have done that. [25:16]
His reaction reflected the general perception of quiltmaking as a small-farm activity, a context that differed from the conditions of her married life. His interest in the old family quilts had led his mother to tell him of her ancestry:

I remember bringing them down out of the attic and asking about them.... And she told me the story. She, she knew the story about, uh, her grandmother being such a good seamstress, having learned from Mr. Glass, the tailor.... And she told me about the sisters learning how to sew from their mother, and, uh, how Aunt Anis had made those quilts and, uh, that when, uh, when Aunt Anis died, uh, I think they came into possession of—probably be my [maternal] grandfather and my grandmother. [25:8]

In this case, quilts had been a means by which Alice Bond, not long before her death in 1987, had passed on her knowledge of her ancestors to her son, which in turn had led him to value the quilts as part of his cultural heritage.

As a widow from a small-farm background who was an active quilter, Goldie Morris (1916-99, black) did not sleep under her quilts because she valued them more than store-bought bedcovers and wanted to preserve them. She kept most of them, old ones from the 1940s and 1950s as well as new ones, in a linen closet. Although she sometimes had a quilt on a guest bed, the bed was not slept on but was a means of display. Said Goldie Harwell (1960-), her great-niece and namesake who cared for her in her old age,

Everybody knew she quilted. And most times you’d go down there, and she was actually quilting...., [I'd] say, “Goldie, what quilts you done finished?” She would say, “Well, I got one back here on the bed.” Or she might be working on one, or she would be finishing up one. [8:16]

The spread on Morris’s bed, which was factory-printed with a Wedding Ring pattern, was a kind of fake quilt that allowed the real ones to be preserved. “I think she felt like the deterioration of the air and all that would do something to them,” said Harwell (8:7). When Morris was in a nursing home and Harwell brought one of her quilts to put on her bed, “She
didn’t want that because she was afraid somebody would take it” (8:6). These comments show that Morris viewed her quilts as treasures.

Having no children, she left Harwell not only five quilts but a Duncan Phyffe living room suite that she bought in 1946 while working in Decatur, Illinois; and a white sugar bowl that the white family who had owned her grandmother, for whom she still worked after Emancipation, had given her as a wedding gift (8:4, 10) (Figure 6.7, pages 362-365).

She said, “I know you’re going to take care of this. I know you’re going to take care of my children.” I said, “Yes, Goldie, I’ll preserve it. I’ll take care of it.” And that’s what I’ve tried to do. [Me: “She put the pressure on.”] She did [laughing]. You better believe it. She did. But it was a good thing. [8:15-16]

The two earlier quilts, dating to Morris’s time in Decatur in the 1940s and 1950s, blend bedspread- and common-quilt traits. The later three, dating from the late 1960s to 1990s (she died in 1999), are more purely bedspreads, expressing the view that quilts were for display and worth time for planning and money for material. Morris’s shift from a ceiling frame to a quilting hoop by the 1960s also testifies to her participation in popular-culture quiltmaking trends (see page 362 bottom: Morris using a quilting hoop).

Harwell felt that her great-aunt had given her a sacred trust by leaving her her prize possessions. In an essay that accompanied the quilts at a quilt exhibit at Brownsville’s First South Bank during the 2008 Hatchie Fall Fest, she wrote, “I truly feel honored that Goldie wanted me to have her beautiful work” (10/19/08 photo; see page 362 top). With her namesake’s help, Morris reconfigured a once-subsistence activity as a hobby, distinctive identity, and extension of her mortality.

In the above cases, inherited quilts from the subsistence era evolved into inalienable possessions, casting descendants of makers as crucial links in the family chain upon whom obligation was bestowed along with wealth.
Jean Bolding, Lucille Hight, Barbara Callery: Relics as trash or treasure. As makers died and households were dissolved, descendants had to figure out what to do with old quilts. Choices varied, indicating that quilt meanings were in flux. For instance, Jean Bolding (1932-, Lauderdale County, white) and her older sister valued their mother’s quilts differently in this period. She had made them in the 1930s and 1940s on their 40-acre farm in Pontotoc County, Mississippi, 80 miles south of Haywood County. Interviewed while having her hair done at Carolyn’s Beauty Shop in Curve, Lauderdale County, Bolding said,

By the way, this quilt that I have came out of the attic of my mother’s house, and my sister had bought the house, and she threw it out of the loft, out of the attic, and I said, “What are you going to do with that?” And she said, “Nothing.” I said, “You sure you do not want it?” “No.” “I want it. Can I get it?” “Yeah.” And that’s how come we own that quilt. But Margaret just didn’t see [Carolyn Simpson: “The value of it”] the value of it. And I really highly prize it, took care of it, and I handed it down to my daughter, and I intend for her to hand it down to her daughter. [3:7]

The materials of the Nine-Patch quilt represented the three sisters’ identities:

My oldest sister, her color was blue. Mine was green, and my baby sister, hers was pink. And the scraps from these dresses that my mother made, they were all in the same pattern. She bought it from the store. They were always the same pattern, but they always was blue, green and pink. And then she made the quilts out of that. [3:1]

This account shows the widely variable value of small-farm quilts in the modern era, ranging from trash to treasure.

Lucille Hight (1927-, white) and her husband ended up with some of his mother’s quilts because his two brothers’ families did not want them when she died (she had no daughters) (see Figure 6.8, pages 366-368: May Hight and her quilts). Lucille Hight said,

Anything that was new, that’s what they took... It was when everything was separated at the farm. When, after the boys [her brothers-in-law]—After it [the farm] became ours, they got what they wanted, and then it was some things left out there, and that’s the reason I know about those two quilts: that blue one, that heavy one [quadrant Trip around the World], and then the one
I brought from the lake [patchwork cross Four-Patch], ‘cause I had carried it down there just to throw over their laps. [3/18/09; 20:21]

These two quilts and a quadrant String Star that May Hight (1907-80, white) also made were of low status in her daughter-in-law's eyes. Dating from the 1930s to about 1950, they were in vernacular patterns that Lucille Hight described as “easy-to-do,” “the old-timey kind,” and “made in Year One” (20:4; 20:21). Of the two quadrant quilts (each with four large blocks), she said, “My mother wouldn’t have made one like that, with the blocks about this big” (3/18/09). She likes newer “pretty” quilts, with smaller blocks, white grounds, and more complex patterns, which tend to be from published sources (3/19/09). Of her mother-in-law’s heavy wool Trip around the World, she said, “Nobody wanted that one. I didn’t want it either. Took it home and threw it in the utility room” (3/18/09).

Two additional quilts that Lucille and Romus Hight got from his mother, that were newer and had more bedspread traits, attained the rank of heirloom: a 1950s Mexican Star (a complex published pattern); and a ca. 1960 Sun and Shade, of which May Hight made one for each of her three daughters-in-law one Christmas. Lucille Hight recently passed hers on to her daughter Judy Carlton (1956-).

The fate of May Hight’s three common quilts is uncertain. Whereas two of her sons and their families did not want them, family loyalty thus far has prevailed over taste in Lucille Hight’s decision to keep them. One possibility is that Lucille Hight’s older daughter would take them, given that she has bought quilts that her mother considers “old and dirty and used” [Me: “They’re ugly?” Hight: “Yeah. To me.”] (21:1).

Like Jean Bolding, Barbara Callery (1940-, white) saved old quilts that other family members did not want. As with Lucille Hight, they originated with her in-laws. When her
husband’s grandmother, Tennessee (Tennie) Callery (1890-1982), went into a nursing home, Barbara Callery asked her father-in-law about the quilts:

“What are you gonna do with them?” He said, “Probably throw them away.” And I said, “Don’t do that.” I said, “Don’t the girls [Tennie Callery’s twin daughters] want them?”… They didn’t want them. One had no children. The other had two boys. I said, “Don’t throw anything away. I’ll take everything that nobody else wants.” [10/19/08]

Tennie Callery’s family quilts, dating from about 1875 to 1945 (the early ones likely made by her husband’s mother or her stepmother), will go with other heirlooms to her grandson Tom Callery and wife Barbara’s children and grandchildren (Figure 6.9, pages 369-373). Like Goldie Morris’s quilts, many are stylistic hybrids, mixing bedspread- and common-quilt traits, and show signs of wear. The mix of traits reflects her identity as a woman with a relatively privileged heritage who married down, “probably for love,” to an Irish immigrant’s son who trained other people’s horses (BC 10/19/08) (page 369 shows Tennie Callery with her birth family and with her husband).

Speculating on why Tennie Callery’s daughters, Irene and Lorene, had not wanted the quilts, Barbara Callery said, “I think they had just seen them enough…. Back then, saving things did not seem to be as important” (10/19/08). Old quilts had had a strictly utilitarian value in the eyes of Barbara Callery’s mother and grandmother, and perhaps in the eyes of her husband’s aunts as well. Barbara Callery, however, valued them by expressive criteria: their capacity to access family and cultural heritage. Three conditions may have enhanced her appreciation of them: Her own family quilts had burned in a 1954 house fire; not being a quilter, she may have viewed them less critically than would a quilter, such as Lucille Hight; and she apparently had positive feelings toward the maker. In contrast, when
I noted that Lucille Hight’s praise for her mother and father-in-law had not extended to her father or her mother-in-law, Hight said, “We’ll leave that alone [Both laugh]” (21:16).

Particularistic views of the small-farm past, of family heritage and individual ancestors, and of modernity explain why some descendants sought and others rejected family quilts. Those who kept or treasured them honored or at least respected some aspect of the past or their heritage, and/or appreciated the quilt aesthetically. Those who rejected them either chose to forget the past or aspects of it that quilts represented, or preferred to represent the past with other relics, or possibly lacked storage space.

Ida Mae Coleman, Lue Vennia Robinson, Lollie Mann, Carolyn Simpson: Family glue. Several consultants used old quilts to strengthen bonds among family members who in some cases were widely dispersed. Upon her mother’s death, Ida Mae Coleman (1941-, black) distributed her quilts to family members who she thought would value them. Goldie Harwell (1960-), whose great aunt was a cousin of Coleman’s mother, remembered,

When they got ready to clean out the house, uh, Miss Ida Mae called me and said, “Come over here, and we’re gonna divide what she had,” and went up in the attic, and there was a lot of old quilts up in the attic. So I have some of the quilts that belonged to Mrs. Rosa Lee. [8:2] (see Figure 6.10, pages 374-376) Coleman said,

When my mom died, I gave Goldie some, and I gave some to my children. [Harwell: “That’s the one I have at home here.”] ‘Cause I knew she would take care of them. And I gave some to my—my daughter. I didn’t give my son any. Because I—I didn’t know if the ladies he would marry would—And then I have one cousin that I remember if I gave her one quilt. You know. But people that I knew that would treasure—yeah, I gave them—. [22:10]

As an only daughter who was about 54 when her mother died, Coleman did not keep all of her mother’s quilts but used them to strengthen bonds with selected relatives, those who she deemed likely to honor her mother’s legacy.
Lue Vennia Robinson (1922-, black) and Lollie Mann (1936-, black) also distributed old family quilts to younger generations rather than keep them. Robinson gave her mother’s quilts to her children: “I imagine the children got ‘m around ‘cause, when my mother passed, we all divided the stuff up with every one of ‘m.... [Me: “But you didn’t get any?”] No, Ma’am. I was grown then. I had my own quilts” (7:8). Mann gave most of her deceased mother-in-law’s quilts to adult children and grandchildren who lived as far away as New Jersey and Michigan: “That’s the reason I only have two: I’ve given them to my children” (2:16) (Figure 6.11, pages 376-377). Such gifts stood to remind descendants of their family roots and, possibly, of their ancestors’ small-farm values.

As noted above, one of Carolyn Simpson’s (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) sisters cut out and framed individual blocks of a ca. 1940 quilt that their grandmother Mary Lucille Broadstreet (?-ca. 1956) had made, and gave them to her siblings (3:12) (Figure 6.12, page 378). Her action implies that she valued the quilt higher for expressive than subsistence use, defining it as an heirloom and perhaps as needlework art (its back was worn out, and people by then had money to buy bedcovers). In giving the framed blocks to her siblings, she posited their ancestor’s work as a common basis of pride, expressed here by Simpson:

My grandmother was from Arkansas, and I have no idea who taught her how to do it, but she did an extra just exquisite handwork. She could crochet. She could embroidery. She could quilt.... That grandmother was really talented.... My daddy’s people were German. But I think all of her people were really talented. They cooked good. They did handiwork. [3:5, 15]

Her mention of Broadstreet’s distinctive trait of German heritage indicates that, in this case, family identity had an ethnic component.

The above accounts show that the meaning of old quilts was in flux as the subsistence need for quilts ended. Some people saw them as irrelevant to the modern way
of life; others found new uses for them that, in most cases, foregrounded the expressive capacities of quilts. Under continued subsistence use (which usually was what their makers had intended), they endured to a point and then wore out, in which case their expressive capacity remained forever latent except in the realm of memory. Those placed in storage entered a liminal state, out of which they emerged as relics (in Bob Bond’s word, “an artifact”) that were variably viewed as useless and ugly or as inalienable family treasures. For those who saw them as treasures, they embodied cultural, regional, or family identity that linked them to ancestors and/or to kin of different generations and locations.

**New Quilts and Quiltmaking after 1955**

As the manifest (subsistence) purpose of small-farm quilts and quiltmaking lost potency after 1955, the overt justification for a realm of material culture that also had had latent social and psychological purposes disappeared (see chapter 3, page 107, for Robert K. Merton’s concept of manifest and latent functions). With no subsistence need for quilts, quiltmaking no longer counted as a homemaker’s duty, her contribution to household self-sufficiency (except when women earned money by selling quilts or quilting services).

At this point, women who recognized its social and psychological uses began to focus on its expressive dimension. Among them was Verniece Staggs (1915-2002, white), who switched from making common to bedspread quilts in the 1950s (Figure 6.13, page 379, shows two of her quilts). According to her daughter-in-law, Peggy Staggs (1938-),

> When she started making the really pretty quilts, they didn’t just really have to have them [quilts]. But before that, just like my mother, they had to have some to use. But these were mostly—The later ones that she made was really for show. Sometimes she would put them on top of her bed with a bed-skirt, you know, just to display the, uh, quilts. [18:7]
This account indicates that some makers knew how to move quilts along the subsistence-expressive continuum depending on their intended purpose.

Changes in the material conditions of makers meant that quilt culture had to change, even if they had wanted to retain subsistence practices. For instance, once women started buying clothing, they had far fewer sewing scraps, which had been a major source of material for subsistence quilts. As Beth Cunningham (?-, Lauderdale County, white) observed, “A lot of times, if you made your own clothes, you had the scraps…. That’s why they made quilts: ‘cause they had the scraps” (24:8, 10). She thus expressed the small-farm value of using skill and labor to make trash useful. Manufacturers removed a major small-farm source of material when they switched from cloth to paper packaging and bulk delivery in the 1950s and 1960s (Jones 2002:182). Even in cases where cloth sacks were available, modern households had less need of the baking and farm supplies that had come in them (flour in 48-lb. sacks, sugar, fertilizer, chicken feed). Also, those who gave up cotton-farming no longer had free field cotton to use for batting, and modern households were not keyed to the seasonal work cycle that had left small-farm women with free time in winter. And with electrical service and motor vehicles, women had leisure-time alternatives to quiltmaking.

At this point, quilt culture might have died out if it had had only subsistence uses. Indeed, Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) saw the making of “hand-pieced and hand-quilted” quilts as “a dying art,” and this view was implicit in Goldie Harwell’s (1960-, black) sense that, for her childless great-aunt Goldie Morris, quiltmaking “was one of her ways of preserving an art that none of her nieces, her immediate nieces, had an interest in doing” (15:13; 8:1). However, quiltmaking survived among women with
small-farm backgrounds because some reconfigured it to make it relevant to their new living conditions. They made it into a “hobby,” that is, a voluntary activity and product that served social and psychological rather than subsistence purposes (LC 24:11).

As such, the social base of makers was older women who had adult children rather than homemakers who were raising children. This population had two parts: an older generation of women, who in earlier days had made subsistence quilts to warm their children; and a younger generation, who had left small-farm life as young women in the late 1940s to early 1960s, before becoming homemakers, who thus had little experience with making subsistence quilts but took up expressive quilters in later life. For members of both groups, quilt culture often was a means of building valued aspects of the small-farm social system into their modern way of life. It served this purpose in the following ways.

Gift quilts and cross-generational quilters fostered family cohesiveness, which helped to replace the experience of mutuality that was inherent in the small-farm household economy. As an opportunity for collaboration across kin-group generations and cross-kin households, quilters maintained a realm of women’s community, upholding the small-farm principles of clear-cut identity (gender-based in this case) and neighborliness. Quilt culture met the need to be productively busy and provident that was engrained in small-farm culture. Gift-quilters and cross-generational quilters were ways for elders to connect with young people, given that mentoring had lost its potency in this regard; young people had little need of small-farm wisdom and skills, such as hog-killing. Finally, quilt culture granted elders a distinctive facet of identity that derived from individual creativity, taste, and skill rather than from social group-defined roles (given that
social-group definitions were in flux in this period and that the small-farm homemaker role in particular barely existed in the modern social system).

With the above strategies, people developed a modern-era quiltmaking culture that served social and psychological purposes. These purposes are as follows.

Small-Farm Era Continuity

Some older women with small-farm backgrounds continued to make vernacular subsistence-style quilts into the 1960s, possibly because they enjoyed it and possibly because they still adhered to small-farm values that it expressed, such as providence and thrift. Jeanette Holloway’s (1951-, black) stepmother, for example, “taught me the value of buying in bulk. And it is embedded in me,” and her grandmother Maggie Holloway Tyus (?-1988) continued making scrap quilts even after she had the money to buy material due to her “mindset” of thrift (6:7) (Figure 6.14, page 380, shows two of her quilts). Apparently responding to the lower status of handwork in the modern era, some such makers made more use of timesaving techniques such as tacking and machine-quilting; Opal Brack first saw tacking in the 1970s (2A:4).

Rejection of Small-Farm Culture

Increasingly after 1955, women who made quilts used bedspread styles that distanced the maker and the product from the small-farm context. As I noted in chapter 5, bedspread traits that moved a quilt from the subsistence to the expressive realm included: a coordinated color scheme with minimal use of scraps, emphasis on white and pastel colors, thin batting, consistently pieced designs, complex designs, fashionable designs,
designs with alternate blocks, by-the-piece and figural quilting motifs, embroidery, and appliqué. Such traits indicated that a maker saw quiltmaking not as a homemaker's contribution to her household’s survival but as a hobby, that is, an arena in which to express her taste, skill, originality, and artistry; and that she meant her product to be admired, treasured, and handled with care.

Using Gift Quilts to Express Affection, Strengthen Cross-Generational Family Bonds, and Create a Legacy

 Consultants mentioned a few cases in the small-farm era of women who had made gift quilts or quilt-tops for adult children who were getting married or for grandchildren, usually with traits that marked them as intended for everyday use. But in the modern era, with a social base of older women who usually were not raising children and did not need subsistence quilts, gift quilts were a common aspect of quiltmaking. In most cases, they were quilts with at least some bedspread traits that went to younger family members, typically daughters, sons, grandchildren, nieces, and daughters-in-law, which thus had the capacity to serve as the maker’s legacy if recipients preserved them. Luella Carter (1922-, Lauderdale County, black) was one who valued the legacy capacity of quiltmaking: “I wanted to leave several. I know a quilt will last 50, 60, 70, 80 years if it’s treated right.... So I want to leave stuff for my 23 grandchildren that they can have 50 years.... [Me: “After you’re gone.”] Yeah, after I’m gone” (24:21). As with Goldie Morris, her gifts to descendants entailed responsibility.

 Following are examples of modern-era gift quilts (see Figure 6.15, pages 381-388).

 Minerva Paralee Yochum (1887-1967, Lauderdale County, white) made ten tops in the complex Pickle Dish pattern in the early 1950s: five in red and green for her daughters
and five in red and white for her daughters-in-law. Granddaughter Rosie LeMons (1943-) showed me the quilt made with one of them during a group interview at the Halls senior center. She said that Yochum had bought the material at Black and White Department Store in Ripley: four yards of one color and five of the other for each quilt (24:5; 3/20/09).

In 1959, Cassie Binford Taylor (?-?, white) gave a lightly batted Wedding Ring quilt with a light-blue background and by-the-piece quilting to her young friend Delois Baggett (1933-, white) at about the time that Baggett married and moved from Keeling in southwestern Haywood County to Tibbs in the north central area) (9:7-8). When Baggett showed me the quilt almost 50 years later, it was in pristine condition.

May Hight (1907-80, white) gave Sun-and-Shade quilts to her three daughters-in-law (including Lucille Hight) for Christmas around 1960, adapting a complex bedspread pattern with vernacular traits such as scraps and squared-shell quilting (LH 3/18/09). And Lucille Hight got a “pretty” Flower Garden quilt from her father’s sister, Mildred McCool, about 1985 (when Hight was about 58). She had it displayed on a guest bed when I visited her in Brownsville in 2009 (3/18/09). Hight in turn has made quilts for her two daughters, two granddaughters, and two grandsons (20:20).

Verniece Staggs (1915-2002, white) “had to have a quilt for every kid [six of them], and then she started in on the grandkids,” said Peggy Staggs (1938-), who married one of her sons in 1957 (18:10). And Opal Brack (1919-, black) made a quilt for each of her eight children as they left for college.

Isadora Scallions (?-1990, Lauderdale County, white) gave her great-niece Carolyn Simpson a Bowtie top when she married in 1967 (3:13). Said Simpson,

She probably considered that a fancy quilt. [Me: “How come you say that?”] Because it had a pattern in it. Most, like I said, most people did Nine-Patch
quilts, or string quilts, simple, just something, you know, that had no design to it. She did that Bowtie that had a pattern in it, and she probably, and especially since she gave it to me for a gift, she probably considered that a fancy quilt. [15:13-14]

Starting about 1960, Luella Carter (1922-, Lauderdale County, black) also made Bowties as gifts (in addition to a few Nine-Patches), one for each of her 23 grandchildren (24:15, 21). Participating in the group interview at the Halls senior center, she told me that the eight-pointed Star was her hardest pattern and Bowtie the next, a step up from square-patch designs such as Nine-Patch and Four-Patch (24:15). Sadly, she had forgotten to bring her quilts to the center that day.

Carolyn Simpson’s mother-in-law, Ruth Simpson (?-?, Lauderdale County, white), made Strawberry appliqué quilts for 11 of her 12 children, and a Maple Leaf for the boy who didn’t want a Strawberry (3:11). And Ola Jean Currie (1942-, black) chose a Strawberry appliqué pattern for a niece’s wedding quilt in 2007. Anne Baird (1922-, white) made quilts for her two grandchildren in the 1980s. One was a Flower Garden, with hexagon pieces. On the other, she quilted around pre-printed Sunbonnet Sue figures and embroidered, “For Mandy Made by Nana 1980” (6/11/09).

Modern-era makers in the Tennessee Delta as elsewhere in the U.S. often made gift quilts using published patterns that were geared to landmark life events, such as a Wedding Ring for a marriage and appliquéd girl or boy figures for a grandchild (known as Dutch Doll, Dutch Girl, Baby Girl, or Sunbonnet Sue; and Dutch Boy, Overall Sam, or Overall Bill). Pauline Pillow (1942-, white) made a Dutch Doll “baby quilt” for her nephew (Carolyn Simpson’s son born in 1973), and Lucille Hight made “Baby Dolls” for two granddaughters (8/22/07; 3:14; 20:20). Allie Lovelace (1910-?, Lauderdale County, white) made a Dutch Doll for her son, who was born in 1933.
Sharecropper Laura Carroll (?-?, Lauderdale County, white) made an unusual, possibly original rendition of Overall Sam for her grandson (consultant Norma Horvath’s husband) in 1960 (NH 3/20/09). In contrast to published versions in the Encyclopedia of Appliqué, the circle on top of the body is a face (not a hat), embroidered with eyes, nose, and mouth rather than a hatband; and the arms reach up, not down (Brackman 2009:141).

Consultants mentioned a few cases where modern-era makers and their recipients valued gift quilts differently, based on whether they saw it as a legacy and a token of high esteem or as an object intended for everyday use. One such discontinuity concerned the Bowtie top that Isadora (“Aunt Do”) Scallions gave to her great-niece Carolyn Simpson (1946-?, Lauderdale County, white) when she got married in 1967. Simpson is sure that her great aunt intended her to turn it into a quilt and use it for warmth on beds:

And see, like, Aunt Do, she didn’t realize she was passing on something to me that was an heirloom, would be an heirloom some day. I was getting married, and she knew I needed a quilt... to keep warm. That was her, uh, I mean to her, that was probably the best thing she could give me.... Like that was considered a nice gift back in those days. Like if somebody gave you a quilt or a quilt top, it was a nice gift. [Me: “Ah. Something you would give to someone you really cared about.”] Yes. If you didn’t really like them, you wouldn’t have gotten a quilt. She’d’ve gone to Ripley and bought a dishtowel or something. If you got a quilt from somebody, it meant they really liked you. [15:2]

But quilts were no longer necessities, and Simpson never quilted the top:

People were getting—using blankets, electric blankets, and things like that, and after the ’60s, maybe through the ’60s, they [quilts] went out of style, and then, maybe in the later part of the ’60s and early ’70s, they started coming back in then, as fancy quilts. [15:2]

The Bowtie top sat in her closet until the late 1990s, when she paid a woman in Kentucky $35 to bat it, back it, machine-quilt it, and bind it.

You see, that’s why—the main reason I had it quilted is because I knew she [Scallions] would of wanted me to have it quilted, and she would of probably been mad if she knew I had it up in the closet.... She would be bent out of
shape with me if she knew I had been married almost 50 years and that quilt was still up in my closet. [15:2]

Although she got it quilted, Simpson has no intention of using it as her great-aunt intended.

“I don’t dare use that quilt,” she said. “Because I want to keep it.” [Me: “It’s an heirloom.”] “Yes.” [Me: “It became an heirloom.”] “Yes.” [Me: “She didn’t mean it to be one.”] “No, but that’s what it became” (15:2).

In another case that Simpson described, the quilt recipient rather than the maker had the subsistence meaning:

My mother-in-law, she had one daughter that she had given her new quilt, and she would lay ’m in the floor and let her kids play on ’m.... It just really bothered her.... She would go to her house, and here was this quilt down in the floor with a bottle of milk squirted out on it or something. Or use it to cover her sofa up to keep ’m from getting dirt on her sofa. Her new quilt. ‘Cause she [her mother-in-law] had told me before, “I cannot believe that,”.... And I couldn’t believe it either. Here I’ve got this one wrapped up in the cedar chest for 20 years. [4:1]

In this case the recipient, who was a few years older than Simpson, had made everyday use of an object whose maker had intended it to be treasured.

A third discontinuity involved a quilt that Betsy Waddell (1951-, white) and her first husband received from his grandmother when they married in 1970. When they divorced,

He took that, which was fine with me. I didn’t care.... I can’t even remember what it looked like now. Isn’t that awful?.... I think probably because of my age. I wasn’t into quilts at that time.... I think it’s funny that it [quiltmaking] was fascinating to me when I was younger, but then as I got into bein’ 19, at 19 you want all the store-bought everything.... I wanted people to go to somewhere where I had registered and buy me something. [19:15-16]

The maker surely had seen her quilt as a gift of high value that would be her legacy to her grandson and his bride. To Waddell in her youth, however, the homemade had taken a back seat to the store-bought. Her low valuing allowed it to stay in the maker’s family after the divorce.
Discontinuities such as these in how maker-givers and receivers valued gift quilts are evidence of the ambiguous meaning that quilts had in this period. Depending on the person, a quilt could be seen as an object for everyday use or a treasure to be preserved.

Maintaining a Sense of Women’s Community through Quilt Groups

Whereas both small-farm and modern-era quilt groups met social and psychological needs of their members, the former also had met subsistence household needs. The modern-era groups that my consultants described met only the individual social and psychological needs of their members, although doing so often resulted in gifts to family members and friends. Below are accounts of some modern-era quilt groups.

Betsy Waddell’s (1951-, white) grandmother’s quilt group of the mid-1950s had about eight members. They all were white and belonged to Zion Baptist Church in the Holly Grove community. “I think a lot of it was like a way to get together and visit,” Waddell said (19:12). Meeting weekly in winter at her grandmother’s, they made color-coordinated blocks for tops that they quilted together and gave as gifts, often to newly-weds or couples with new babies (19:12). Most members made small even stitches and were frustrated with one whose stitches were too big. “It didn’t look uniform with the others,” Waddell said. “I think they thought maybe she needed to take it a little more seriously” (19:10).

Because the women didn’t drive, their husbands dropped them off and then picked them up before dark. As for Waddell’s grandfather,

A lot of times he would take a book and go—I guess he would go out to the barn and read. I don’t know. I remember he would feed the animals and then come in about the same time that all of them were getting ready to go home. Their husbands would come and—Because it was always a big thing, you know, when they would get ready to go, and they would get their things
straightened up, and then they would pull the (rack) back up to the ceiling. [19:12]

When they finished a quilt, they wrapped it, put it in a box with a card, and got one of their husbands to deliver it (19:16, 17).

They did a lot of that big sending stuff. Like when people would die or something, they would—My grandmother would have like funeral food or death food or something somewhere, and—and she would always have my grandfather carry it... instead of them [the women who made it] having to get dressed up. [19:17]

The quilt group members also made quilts individually at their homes, but these were less elaborate and meant for their own use.

Slightly later, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Jeanette Holloway's (1952-, black) aunt and grandmother also had distinguished between home-pieced tops that they quilted or tied on their own at home and those that they brought to a group for quilting. As in Waddell’s account, those brought to the group (all black in this case) were fancier than those done at home, such as the two 1960s tied quilts that Holloway inherited from her grandmother Maggie Holloway Tyus (?-1988) (see Figure 6.14). On the quilt-group quilts,

Everything would be coordinated.... Those with the quilting parties were consistent. They meant business. They meant real business. My grandmother [on the two tied quilts] just basically was trying to make a quilt, and she wanted to make sure that she used material that she had available to her.... Those [the quilting party quilts] was designs that was made for the eye. [6:4]

On quilt-group quilts, the stitches were “painstaking,” big stitches were re-done, quilting one quilt took more than a day, and the stitches made a “really nice” design on the back of the quilt (6:4). “When they set them horse things up, they meant business,” Holloway said. “When they set those up, we knew then there was going to be a journey of time-consuming process” (6:4). In this period, “It wasn’t like, ‘Wow, we got to quilt this because we going to freeze in the winter.’ But no, it was a social time, and when they finished, it was a beautiful
spread that they had” (5:7). These “quilting parties,” held in Haywood County’s Woodlawn community, had an age-based division of labor: “Mostly middle-aged women and older” sewed; younger women minded the children and cleaned the kitchen (6:4; 5:13).

Women in Verniece Staggs’ (1915-2002, white) quilt group, which met in Brownsville in the 1970s, were in their fifties and sixties, all white, and “real close neighbors” (PS 18:8). They were widows except for Staggs, who, however, was separated from her husband (18:8, 11). Staggs hosted the group almost daily in winter. Daughter-in-law Peggy Staggs (1938-) often “sat in” (18:8):

They’d have the biggest time. She’d get her neighbors over there and, uh, she would cook. She would go cook lunch for them. And then they’d take...time out to eat, and then they’d get right back in there. It’s like a job. They’d start at a certain time in the morning. They’d quit at lunch, when she’d get their lunch fixed for them, and then they’d go right back to quilting. And they had a certain time they’d quilt, kind of like a quilting party. [Me: “Like eight to 12, one to five?”] They had a big time. Well, they’d start like maybe six or seven o’clock in the morning. And [laughs at my look of surprise]—Oh, they’d get an early start.... I think they quit about four. [18:8, 9]

No men were involved: “Just a hen party. And they loved it” (18:9).

An aunt and cousin of Bob Bond (1962-, Madison County, white) were in a rural group that met in the 1960s and 1970s to make quilts that were sold or raffled off at a bazaar to raise money for Providence United Methodist Church (BB 25:1, 2). Members were mainly older women who were full-time homemakers, many of them related, and the meetings were “more a social thing than it was really to raise money” (25:1-3). No men were involved.

Different ones in the family would go and either quilt or just, just go to visit.... This was strictly, uh, the hen house.... And I think, in some sense, this was sort of a reminiscing, uh, event for them because they grew up with it, and this gave them a reason to do something that reminded them of their families and their past and do something interesting. [25:2]
Bond estimated that the event had ended in the late 1970s. “The people died off, or they just weren’t able, or it just wasn’t enough of interest in the getting together and doing something so time-consuming” (25:2). In the 1960s and 1970s, a “cultural shift” had occurred:

Women, girls, were less apt to be domestic. They certainly, when I was going to school, didn’t want to much think about home ec or, uh, anything of that—It was sort of insulting to a lot of sensibilities about that time to say that a girl was gonna take home ec. [25:3]

For girls of his age group, who were in their teens in the 1970s, attending the quilt group meetings “would have been passé.... It wouldn’t have been hip” (25:3).

Some consultants mentioned modern-era quilt groups that had consisted of an older woman and younger relatives who helped her. For instance, although Ida Mae Coleman (1941-, black) “just never had an interest in sewing” (22:4), she had helped her mother as a child, and,

I was still doing it even when I was married. She lived right next door to me, and I would go over there some nights, and she’d be doing things, and I’d cut some pieces for her.... I’m the kind of person, you know, if my mom is doing something, I just can’t sit there and see her do it and not do something to help her, you know.... Because see, for her, sewing, quilting, and those kind of things, gardening and all, this was a relaxation. [Me: “Relaxation.”] Oh yes, she loved this. [22:5]

Coleman’s compulsion to assist her mother shows that the small-farm principle of deferential helping endured after the small-farm economic system changed.

Linking three generations, Minerva Yochum (1887-1967, Lauderdale County, white) had pieced tops and quilted them in the 1950s and 1960s with her mother, three adult daughters, and a daughter-in-law (24:9, 14) (see Figure 6.16, pages 388-389, for quilts of inter-generational groups). Her son’s daughter, consultant Rosie Lemons (1943-), was not allowed to help because her stitches were too big (24:9). Lemons’ mother (1926-?; 24:14)
did not piece tops but helped quilt Yochum’s, on whose farm they lived: “You could sit on her front porch and watch the boats go up and down the [Mississippi] river” (24:9-10).

Lucille Hight (1927-, white) collaborated in 1998 with her daughter Judy Carlton’s daughter, Jessie (1985-), on quilting a 1945 top that was a wedding present from Carlton’s husband’s grandmother to his parents (the maker’s son and daughter-in-law) (3/16/09) (page 389 top). The project linked four generations and affirmed bonds of two kin groups joined by marriage.

Commemoration

In their practical ephemeral identity of the small-farm era, quilts were not suited to commemoration. But the modern view of new quilts as treasures to be preserved made them viable vehicles for honoring a particular entity (Figure 6.17, pages 389-394, shows commemorative quilts discussed here). Minerva Yochum (1887-1967, Lauderdale County, white), for instance, honored her mother by emulating her ca. 1903 Pickle Dish quilts. “She drew the pattern from her mother’s quilt and, uh, she used pages of Sears Roebuck catalog as the backing,” said the maker’s granddaughter Rosie Lemons (1943-) (24:5).

Another form of commemoration was the practice of finishing a quilt that a deceased relative or friend had started. Delois Davis Baggett (1933-, white), for instance, planned to finish a ca. 1995 whitework quilt that her older sister, Lillie Mae “Sissy” Davis Hightower, an avid quiltermaker, had begun: “This is one that my sister designed herself, and it’s got to be finished.... I have got the other strip that goes with it. She designed this herself” (9:16). In the 1980s, Anne Baird (1922-, white) made a quilt using Improved Nine-
Patch blocks that her daughter-in-law’s mother had made in the 1940s, and about 1995 she made one with ca. 1845 LeMoyne Star blocks that she had inherited (10/19/08).

Lue Vennia Robinson (1922-, black) made a red, white, and navy blue quilt in 2005 whose stripes and color scheme honor the U.S. flag and her husband, a World War II veteran who died in 1975 (8/23/07). Ola Jean Currie (1942-, black) commemorated her parents and their descendants by embroidering their names on her ca. 1995 Bullock Family Tree quilt (8/24/07). Given that strawberries are a common truck-patch crop in the area, both Currie and Ruth Simpson (ca. 1910-1990s, Lauderdale County, white) commemorated regional identity by making quilts with appliquéd strawberry blocks, in 2007 and 1992 respectively (Simpson made several) (OJC 8/24/07; CS 8/22/07).

These examples demonstrate the effectiveness of expressive quiltmaking as a semi-public means by which older women honored and celebrated entities that were important in their lives (see Klassen 2007 for a study of commemorative quiltmaking in ca. 1850 southern Indiana).

A Realm of Creative Expression and Recognition
Whereas quiltmaking in the small-farm era was perceived as a woman’s contribution to her household, a quilt made in the modern era was seen as the individual maker’s expression. This promoted the use of quiltmaking and its product as sources of pride, recognition, and creative pleasure, as well as a means of recreation, relaxation, and income (see Figure 6.18, pages 394-396). For Lue Vennia Robinson (1922-, black), it was a defense against loneliness: “That’s the reason I quilt, ‘cause I get lonesome sittin’ up here,” she told me during an interview at her house in Brownsville (7:6). But it also was a source of pride, a
expressed by her response when I said at after our interview that I was ready to set up the quilt stand and photograph her quilts: “Thank you,” she said. “I’d like to look at ‘m myself” (7:11). We both were disappointed to find only a few quilts in the shed behind her house; others may have been in a storage unit that was not easily accessed. A ca. 1970 quilt from the shed shows her use of quilts as a realm of inspiration: A Valentine’s candy-box doily was her template for the embroidered hearts figure (8/23/07) (pages 394-395).

Quilts also were a realm of pride and pleasure for Lucille Hight (1927-, white): “Now, Teri, that’s a pretty quilt,” she said as I photographed her 2005 Redbird quilt in her garage in Brownsville (page 395). It featured appliquéd flying-bird figures that she got from a magazine, traditional Birds-in-Flight pattern blocks, and red quilting thread (3/19/09). And as we photographed her ca. 2002 Texas Star, she exclaimed, “Now, see, that’s pretty.” On this one, she had added asterisk shapes to a block pattern from a magazine (page 396). “It was just my brain working that day,” she said (3/19/09).

As noted earlier, Hight, Goldie Morris (1916-99, black), and Verniece Staggs (1915-2002, white) were among makers who in the modern era had utilized beds as display stands. As Peggy Staggs (1938-) said of her mother-in-law’s quilts, “The later ones that she made was really for show. Sometimes she would put them on top of her bed with a bedskirt, you know, just to display the, uh, quilts” (18:7).

In summary, Tennessee Delta quiltmaking had mainly social and psychological uses in the post-1955 period. People used it to continue, idealize, or reject small-farm culture. They made gift quilts to express affection, strengthen cross-generational family bonds, and create a legacy. They participated in quilt groups to maintain a sense of women’s
community. They made quilts to commemorate or honor particular entities, for the pleasure of creative activity, to win recognition, and to leave a legacy.

Several trends emerge in this discussion of modern-era quilt culture. Quilts were not ephemeral, constantly in need of replenishing due to everyday wear and tear, but were irreplaceable handmade treasures. A quilt did not just go on whatever bed needed warmth, but expressed specific personal meanings. Quiltmaking was not an obligation of small-farm homemakers or a shibboleth of small-farm identity but was optional, a hobby that met individual goals. In order to create a product that would be admired and endure, makers turned away from thrifty vernacular improvisation-promoting construction methods that yoked design to contingent conditions. They spent more time planning and executing designs, often incorporating fashionable and original elements, and they spent more money on materials. Cases in which people differed regarding the appropriate use of a given quilt indicate that quilt meanings were ambiguous in this period. Mass production took the form of a woman making enough quilts in one design to go to each of her children, grandchildren, or daughters-in-law; rather than the small-farm custom of making several scrappy tops in simple designs and getting friends to help quilt them so that they would be ready for the next winter before women got busy with outdoor work. And finally, quilt group members tended to be older women with adult children who were making bedspread quilts rather than women who needed common quilts to cover their children at home. Unimpeded by seasonal deadlines and small-farm responsibilities, modern-era groups could meet more often and for longer times, and could spend more time on each quilt.
Modern Tennessee-Delta Quiltmaking in Relation to Textile Exchange Traditions in Small-Scale Societies

In their edited volume, *Cloth and Human Experience*, Jane Schneider and Annette B. Weiner find that “capitalist production and its associated cultural values,” by “altering the process of manufacture,” prevent individuals who have woven and dyed cloth in small-scale societies from instilling it “with spiritual value” (1989:4; see also Cathy A. Small’s discussion of Tongan immigrants in the United States in the 1980s who started buying the tapa cloth or tapa-cloth backing that they needed for ceremonial gift-giving and in some cases gave crocheted blankets [1997:173-176]).

In the present case, capitalism (in the form of access to jobs that paid higher cash incomes) enabled women to live in centrally heated, insulated houses and buy bedcovers rather than make subsistence quilts. This change made it possible for women who so desired to adapt quiltmaking to serve a new range of symbolic purposes, although it cost them the use of quiltmaking as a collective identity that had been a source of respect and agency for small-farm homemakers. Although on an individual rather than collective basis, modern-era expressive quiltmaking in the Tennessee Delta has served some of the purposes of ritual textile exchange systems in small-scale societies. Among these are the use of gifts to link kin generations, construct cross-kin social networks, connect the present to the past, and bestow responsibility as well as honor on descendants.

In the modern era, access to motor vehicles facilitated replacements for rural social networks and self-sufficiency-based entertainments. Under modern living conditions, my consultants variously socialized at church and school activities, beauty parlors and senior centers, Labor Day family reunions, and the Hatchie Fall Fest, and took up hobbies such as painting, flower gardening, and in some cases, among older women especially, solitary or...
group quilts. Some consultants continued the small-farm custom of propinquity-based social relations even in town, living next door or a few blocks away from kin and quilting with neighbors (for pleasure, not necessity). Both solitary and group quilting occurred in both small-farm and modern settings, but solitary quilting was more common in the modern era, foregrounding individual expressive purposes rather than human and social reproduction.

Weiner recognizes women’s participation in textile production and exchange networks as a component of gender complementarity in a social system (1992:3, 138). “Men’s autonomy is held in check, undermined, supported, confounded, or even, at times, superseded by women’s economic presence,” she writes (1992:3). For the most part, the men in my consultants’ households upheld such complementarity as a component of clear-cut identity and mutuality. They saw quilting as an expression of women’s adherence to small-farm values of providence, productivity, self-sufficiency, and neighborliness, which aligned with existing economic-group relations. Men’s support for quilting acknowledged women’s responsibility and authority in domestic and child-care realms as crucial to human and social reproduction in the household and small-farm culture.

**Conclusion**

Changes in technological conditions, economic circumstances, and social structure weakened small-farm social principles and offered new opportunities to Tennessee Delta people with small-farm backgrounds. The advantage of the modern era was that people had more opportunity to be evaluated as individuals rather than by their economic- or racial-group identity, a democratizing capacity that was a goal of the Civil Rights
Movement. They had a choice of jobs that paid better and demanded less grueling labor than did small-farm work. “That so cheap, cheap labor,” said Cobon “Li’l’ Bit” Brack (1916-, black), referring to having earned 45 cents for a ten- or 12-hour day of “common labor,” chopping cotton, in the 1930s (1:10). Lucille Hight (1927-, white) described it as, “Hard, hard work.... Just hard work from sun up to sun down” (20:10).

Small-farm people who got town and factory jobs in the late 1950s and 1960s accessed another way of life. As Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) said, “When you got enough money to go to town and buy a blanket, you were moving up in the world.... When your panties didn’t say ‘Mother’s Best’ or ‘Mother’s Pride’ [brands of flour] on the seat of ‘m” (15:8). Rosie Lemons (1943-, Lauderdale County, white) and Betsy Waddell (1951-, white) recalled the attraction that store-bought goods had had for small-farm people. When Lemons’ mother got a job about 1955 at a coat factory, “the first factory that ever came into Lauderdale County,”

The first thing she bought was each of us a dress. Up until then we had mostly had dresses made at home. And our coats were made at home.... She bought each of us a red, black, and white-striped satin dress with a white collar and took us to town and had our pictures made at the photographer’s.... Up until then most of our dresses were made out of flour sacks. [24:10]

After Waddell’s mother started work at the Sears store in Brownsville around 1957,

I can remember the first birthday cake that my mother ever bought at a store, for my brother’s birthday.... And that was a major major thing. I mean, we just didn’t want to touch it. We just stared at it, made pictures of it, and all kinds of things, ‘cause it was just such a thing. [19:17]

Modern-era conveniences and amenities included: shopping for necessities and discretionary items, utility hookups (no need to fetch well water, chop wood, or heat irons on the woodstove), radio and television, and mobility beyond “walking distance.” Freed
from the demands of productive subsistence activities, people with small-farm backgrounds had time and money to pursue hobbies.

In line with the economic shift to emphasizing individual rather than social-group identity, hobbies were realms of individual expression and recognition. Quiltmaking in its hobby form was not a chore, not an obligatory contribution to the household, but a choice. In the late 1950s, Lettie Rogers (1885-1971, black) gave it up and focused on growing flowers. Said granddaughter Ollie Moore (1942-),

Mama would always have a all kind of flowers. And she would take her hoe, and you didn’t have a sprig of grass in the yard because she would cut all the grass out of the yard, and everywhere there was some grass there was a flower. All around the house, all upside the bank, all everywhere she could put a flower she had a flower.... And, uh, ’61 was when I left, she still had them. And they would come by and take pictures of the yard. People coming from church would stop and take pictures of the yard. [13:14-15]

Ellen Upton Marbury (1917-2003, white) quit making quilts in the mid-1950s but played piano and organ at church, gave music lessons, took up oil painting (Figure 6.19, page 397), and sewed fancy dresses including her granddaughter’s wedding dress in 1989 (17:9; 10/20/08). Barbara Callery, her daughter, said of the wedding dress,

Somehow or other it got down here to the fair in Memphis, to the state fair. It won top thing. It was in a big glass thing that rose high and hung in there the whole week for people to see. She was so proud of that. It was wonderful. [17:8]

According to my consultants, many women who made quilts in the modern era did it as a hobby, because they enjoyed it. They took pride in making pretty quilts that were “for the eye” and “eye-catching” (JH 6:4; RJK 2:9), in displaying them and having them admired, and in giving them to specific individuals whom they expected to treasure them.

In hobby quiltmaking, the maker’s agency was vested in planning a design or emulating a model rather than in knowledge of processual methods that, under constraints
of time and material, guaranteed a product that met practical needs. Referencing Dorothy Noyes’s four-part classification of folkloristic genres (2014:140-149), Tennessee-Delta quiltmaking shifted in the modern era from the surround category to that of “art.” In contrast to surround genres that give a sense of comfort and “wellbeing” while being “taken for granted,” those in the art category “are consciously evaluated for their beauty and skillful execution.... Their practitioners consciously intend to excel” (141, 140; see also my discussion on page 402). Implicit in this description is a focus on individual performance. Although study-area quiltmakers in this period did not see themselves as artists, their focus on design, originality, and display is evidence of this shift, as are descendant references to quiltmaking as an “art.”

The modern-era emphasis on individuality diminished the efficacy of small-farm social principles, which assumed conditions of interdependence, complementarity, and mutuality in a society where individual identity was rooted in social group-based roles. As discussed in chapter 3, pages 129-139, I posit six principles of small-farm behavior. Three of these applied to normal ideal conditions: clear-cut identity, pride and civility, and mentoring and neighborliness; and three were backup strategies that accommodated contingencies and built flexibility into the system: deferential helping, role substitution, and righteous indignation.

As I noted above, people with small-farm backgrounds reaped many opportunities through entering a world that was not ordered by these principles. However, there also were disadvantages: the loss of mutuality that was built into small-farm households through a division of subsistence labor based on clear-cut social-group identities (gender, age, and birth order); the loss of community and neighborliness that, before people had
motor vehicles and substantial cash incomes, had been based on propinquity and cross-household participation in mutual-aid activities; the loss of pride and civility that had been rooted in etiquette defined by social-group identities (especially age-, racial-, and economic group); and the loss of mentoring relations that had linked age groups when young people had needed to know skills that their elders could teach them.

As cited above (chapter 3, page 147), social anthropologist Ralph Linton argues that there are advantages and disadvantages both to a modern social system that emphasizes individuality and to a caste system that defines roles based on social-group identities (my study-area social system was not as rigidly organized as the caste systems he references). Comments from some of my consultants indicate that they shared his insight regarding the disadvantages of a modern lifestyle. Both Jeanette Holloway (1952-, black) and Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white) mourned the present-day loss of mutuality. Holloway called this condition “ownership mentality,” meaning that individuals want to own things rather than give or share them (6:8). Simpson described it as people being “competitive” or “jealous.” Referencing the Little House on the Prairie television series that was based on Laura Ingalls Wilder’s (1867-1957, white) autobiographical books about a family in the rural U.S. Midwest in the 1870s-1880s, Simpson said,

When people started making money..., then they got where they tried to get ahead of their neighbors. Now, instead of, when I was a little girl, if somebody went to church with a new dress on, “Oh, I love your dress. It’s so nice,” they’d be thrilled to death. Now, if somebody goes with one on, next week you gotta have one better than that.... Now I have seen that evolve since I’ve been a child...., that type of change. Everybody was thrilled when their neighbors got something better back, back, sort of like the Ingalls on TV. But then when it got to be where you were getting more things, people started getting jealous of each other. [15:10-11]
Of a modern-era quilt group of older (white) women who met in Curve, she said, “It was competitive: ‘Oh, my stitches are littler than yours,’ or, ‘You’ve really improved. Your stitches are almost as little as mine’” (8/22/07). Holloway valorized the 1960s small farm-style quilmaking of Maggie Holloway Tyus (?-1988, black), who was blind in one eye, as an expression of mutuality (5:9, 6:6):

When I look at those quilts of my grandmother’s, I look at a woman who used what she had, a woman who had a deep care for her children and grandchildren, and she was going to make sure—just like lining her grandchildren up to make sure we took that medicine—she was gonna make sure that she had enough things on hand to hand out to her sons for their family.... And what she was concerned about, not the material, not the matching [of colors], but about the love that went into it, and being able to have it available to whomever may need it, and having plenty of it.... She was just concerned about, well, you know, “This little piece of material is still okay. It’s just one piece coming from wherever or what’s left, and I’m going to use it.” [Me: “It’s going to play its part. It’s going to contribute to the whole.”]

Exactly. And when I look at it, that’s why it’s so precious to me. Because she sat down, and she did all of that work..., and she did it from her heart. [6:6]

The idea of mutuality is evident in her perception of Tyus’s quilmaking as an act of “love.”

Lue Vennie Robinson’s (1922-, black) comments that contrast group quilmaking in the small-farm era with her present-day solitary quilmaking also express nostalgia for mutuality:

[Me: “So it was mostly just a family thing?”] Just about, but it ain’t a family thing now. They [her sisters] quilt them themself, and I quilt mine.... [Me: “But your mother liked to quilt. Why did she like to?”] You have to do somethin’, sittin’ up there. I’m tellin’ the truth. That’s the reason I quilt, ‘cause I get lonesome sittin’ up here. [17:4, 6]

These comments from Robinson, Holloway, and Simpson indicate that they value mutuality and find it lacking in the modern way of life.
The perceived decline of another small-farm principle, that of civility (as it ordered cross-racial-group relations in particular), is implicit in Robinson's response when I asked, “Did your family ever have any contact with white people?” She said,

“No, not that I know. I don’t know... I can't remember one. We were, we lived out in the country.... Most white peoples lived in town. We didn't believe in picking at people then. Now, they picks at one another now. [Me: “What now?”] Now they picks at one another. Now they makes trouble for themselves. [17:7]

In her view, the civility principle that had ordered ideal normal cross-racial-group relations in the small-farm era is lacking in the modern era.

Anti-modern sentiment also underlies the perception of some consultants that a hand-stitched, homemade gift quilt is worth more than one that is purchased. Said Simpson,

If somebody gives you a quilt, it’s, it’s like giving you part of them. They have put a lot of work, a lot of love—I mean this is a—A hand-made gift is just special.... Anybody can go out and buy a book or something, but this is something they made. It took time. It took thought. And, and they have to really like you to give you something like that. I think. [4:1]

Anybody can sit down and run one of those things under a needle in a machine.... But not everybody can do a hand-pieced, hand-quilted quilt.... I think that’s why people like hand-pieced and hand-quilted. It’s a dying art, and they feel like they’re getting more for their money than if it’s somebody—’Cause I think we feel like anybody can run a machine.... The machine is the one doing the work. [15:13]

This ideological valuing of hand- over machine-work echoes in Robbie Jarrett-King’s (1939-, black) response to my observation that one of her mother’s quilts was machine-quilted: “Now that’s when Mama started cheating: using the sewing machine” (2:4). Her mother, Opal Brack, however, defended her use of the machine:

I learned not to piece quilts on my hands, with my fingers. I got on the machine. And I learnt to piece quilts on the machine. And my quilts, they are,
a lot of them are, on the machine pieced.... I didn't wear my fingers out sticking them up [with needles]. [1:1]

Speaking with the experience of an older generation, Brack (1919-, black) represented her use of a machine as practical and progressive, a step up from handwork. Jarrett-King's view, like Simpson's (and probably Holloway's) expresses the younger generation's psychological use of quiltmaking as a link to an idealized past. In such case, handwork symbolized human skill and emotion as opposed to the ostensible anonymity and mindlessness of a machine.

The modern-era trends of quilt culture show that it was for some of my consultants a source of continuity and stability in this period of social change. As noted earlier in this work, Clifford Geertz observed a similar phenomenon in his early 1950s fieldwork with Javanese peasants who continued to use a village funeral ritual after they had moved to the city. He interpreted the persistence of the outmoded ritual in an urban environment as evidence of a conservative impulse to seek stability through the use of familiar culture forms (Geertz 1973:164-165). In the case he studied, "discontinuities" or "incongruity" between the village culture form and the urban social system led to ambiguous meanings that caused the form to break down (164-169). In the Haywood-Lauderdale county area, however, the form (quiltmaking and use of quilts) was reconfigured to meet contemporary needs. Surely Geertz's urban peasants eventually reconfigured the village funeral ritual as well, since all people need to give meaning to death.

Major factors in the reconfiguration of quilt culture that adapted it to modern conditions are that it lost much of its meaning as a shibboleth of small-farm identity, it kept its meaning as a realm of women's identity, and it acquired new meaning as a realm of elder age-group culture and as a means of accessing valued aspects of the small-farm past.
Modern-era quilt culture served to recover, or to compensate for the loss of, valued aspects of the small-farm social system in several ways, as follows.

In remaining a strongly gendered realm, as indicated by use of the terms “hen house” (BB 25:2) and “hen party” (PS 18:9), it upheld the principle of clear-cut identity based on social-group membership. It offered women an individual hobbyist and gift-giver identity to replace the homemaker identity whose agency had been rooted in contributions to household self-sufficiency. In the form of quilt groups, modern-era quilmaking offered a surrogate family to women whose family members were geographically distant, deceased, or busy with their own lives. Also through quilt groups, it upheld the small-farm principle of neighborliness and provided a community to fill in for rural social networks that had been based on propinquity and mutual-aid activities. Modern-era quilmaking offered an opportunity for pride in workmanship and productivity that did not rely on outmoded definitions of occupational identity. As a realm of cross-generational interactions in which elders were the authorities, it upheld principles of clear-cut identity (here based on age group), mentoring, and deferential helping. As Carolyn Simpson observed,

My mother-in-law did this because this was something she could do that none of her daughter-in-law could do. She had one daughter that quilted, and that was the only daughter that quilted, but none of the rest of us could do it. Not a daughter-in-law could quilt. So this was something she could do that we couldn’t do. She was kind of competitive. [Me: “So she could show off a little bit.”] Yes, this was her way of showing off. ‘Cause everybody oohed and aahed over them, and it was just, this was her thing. [3:16]

In addition, while taking on the new role of marking elder age-group identity, quilmaking in the modern era retained its small-farm-era capacity to mark the racial-group facet of clear-cut identity. This capacity is evident in Ola Jean Currie’s (1942-, black) observation in 2007 that, to her experience, white makers had switched to cross-stitched quilts: “All I see
now is cross-stitches. They’re beautiful. But they don’t do the old-timey quilts. But black ladies do” (11:2). Here she associates quiltmaking style with racial-group identity.

As a hobby, modern-era quiltmaking provided creative engagement that could defend against loneliness for a woman such as Lue Vennia Robinson who missed the companionship of live-in family members. Finally, its gift-giving capacity could uphold family solidarity across generations and distance, replacing the mutuality that small-farm households had achieved through enforced propinquity and participation in subsistence activities. These capacities of quiltmaking as it was reconfigured in the modern era testify both to the plasticity of the genre and to people’s exercise of agency in improvising on a (malleable) facet of the past to improve the quality of life in a changed present.

In addition to quilt culture, instances of personalism across economic- and racial-group lines indicate that some people continued to uphold valued aspects of the small-farm social system in the modern era. The individualism of the modern era may, in fact, have promoted this aspect of the small-farm way of life. Following are some modern-era examples of personalism that consultants mentioned in interviews.

A retired teacher (black) who small-farm-owner Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) nursed “like she was a baby” for the last ten or 12 years of her life willed him her Lincoln Continental Congressional Town Sedan (Figure 6.4, page 360). And after a neighbor woman (white) brought him a pie, he reciprocated by bringing her some of the barbecue from his next family reunion (3/16/09). Lucille Hight’s (1927-, white) daughter Judy Carlton and her family have Carlton’s former boss, an African American man, over for breakfast on Christmas morning. Said Hight, “That is the changes coming. Right. And Obama is here, to stay. [We both laugh loudly. Me: “Is that a good thing?”] Yeah, it’s a good thing. As far as I’m
concerned.... A whole lot better than the one we had the last eight years” (20:8-9). Another instance of modern-era personalism came from Bob Bond (1962-, Madison County, white): An African American woman who lives near him and works for an investment broker dealer in Jackson (the county seat), “called me up this week and wanted to know if she could have a party for her sister, having her 50th birthday party out here in the field house later this year. And I said, ‘Of course you can’” (25:12). And when Anne Baird’s mother, Frances Sanford (1895-1960, white (see Figure 1.3, page 17 bottom) was dying of cancer, her former tenant Mary Taylor (black) came from Decatur, Illinois, to spend a week with her. Sanford had often made dinner for Taylor and her children when Taylor was doing fieldwork (16:12).

These examples show how people used personalism as well as quilt culture to preserve aspects of the small-farm social system in the modern era. As traits of expressive quiltmaking did not meet small-farm needs, so traits of subsistence quiltmaking could not meet modern-era needs. I argue that hybrid forms (those whose traits can be varied to place objects at various points on the subsistence-to-expressive continuum) stand a better chance than less plastic genres of surviving social change. In the case of quilts, such variable traits included the quantity of batting and store-bought material.

In an earlier era, the late 1800s, historical changes had enabled the democratization of quiltmaking, allowing it to acquire a new social base of small-farm households. Among these changes were: expanded factory production of affordable cloth and sewing machines; possibly, in the South, increased access to field cotton (for batting) through establishment of the tenant farm-sharecropping system; and mass-media distribution of quilt patterns. Amid changes of the 1950s and 1960s, by contrast, quiltmaking did not shift to a different
economic group. Rather, economic conditions of its existing social base changed so that women with small children no longer needed to make subsistence quilts, whereas older women had new needs that expressive quiltmaking in some cases could fill.

Chapter 7 relates my findings based on data presented in previous chapters to other scholarly work. I account for the ubiquity of expressive-subsistence genres by proposing that they are a means by which members of a group produce an experience of community and thus create social stability. I argue that the breakdown of small farm-large farm economic interdependence was a key factor in the success of the Civil Rights Movement. I propose a scheme for the effects of social change on cultural forms. And I argue that improvisation is cross-cultural, results from historical conditions, integrates agency and structure, and is a means by which subjects keep social systems viable. Finally, I suggest avenues for future research.
Fig. 6.1. Tennessee Delta cotton-farmers switched from manual labor and mules to cottonpicker machines and herbicides in the late 1950s and 1960s.

An anachronistic mule in northwestern Haywood County (3/20/09). Farmers were switching from mule-drawn equipment to tractors in the late 1940s to 1950s.

Hand-picking cotton (note foreman on horse), across the Mississippi River from West Tennessee. This ca. 1930 image, “Courtesy Arkansas History Commission,” is in Donald Holley’s article, “The Plantation Heritage: Agriculture in the Arkansas Delta” (1993:274).
Undated image (cropped at top) of “Mechanical cotton pickers. Courtesy Diana Lee Wilson,” from Holley’s article on Arkansas Delta agriculture (1993:275).

Cotton-gathering time, northwestern Haywood County between Nutbush and Curve (10/17/08). The machine at top center may be an herbicide sprayer.
Fig. 6.2. This sign on Brownsville’s Courthouse Square in August 2007 announces a new use for the building that was Haywood County’s black high school until 1970. Anna Mae Bullock (1939-), later “Tina Turner,” attended the school in the mid-1950s.

Fig. 6.3. Three old quilts that were relegated to menial uses in the modern period.

Virtress Beard’s ca. 1935 Bird’s Nest variation, retrieved from her husband’s barn (near Glimp, Lauderdale County) for this photograph.
Probably Mallie Palmer Amis, 1940s Nine of Diamonds (detail), at her grandson Bob Bond's house in western Madison County. Not visible here: a black grease stain.

Laura Applewright Tipton, Rozelle Tipton Sanford, or Sarah King, ca. 1890 Eight-Point Design variation. At Anne Sanford Baird's house in Brownsville. White paint spots suggest that at some point it served as a drop cloth.
Fig. 6.4. Small-farm principles of exchange and personalism in the modern era.

Earl Beard at his farm near Glimp, Lauderdale County, with the car that a retired schoolteacher (black) left him in gratitude for nursing services. “I took care of a lady about ten or 12 years, and that’s how I got that car,” he said. “She willed me that car” (3/16/09).

Fig. 6.5. Bob Bond’s new house (with my 1987 Chevy Nova) and old family barn, 2009.
Fig. 6.6. Alice Amis Bond’s 1950s Tulip quilts at a Brownsville quilt show, made probably for her mother and herself before her marriage. The Kansas City Star published the pattern as “Tulip Appliqué” November 9 and 13, 1929 (Groves 1988:60). Ruby McKim republished it in One Hundred and One Patchwork Patterns (1962[1931]:60). It is #28.19 in the Encyclopedia of Appliqué (Brackman 2009:101).
Fig. 6.7. Goldie Southall Morris portraits, sugar bowl, and quilts.

Photograph of Goldie Morris (1916-99), ca. 1950? and an essay by her namesake Goldie Harwell. At the First South Bank quilt show, Hatchie Fall Fest, Brownsville (10/18/08).

Goldie Southall Morris hoop-quilting at her Brownsville home, 1970s?
Goldie Morris’s grandmother got this sugar bowl as a wedding gift from the white family for whom she worked, whose slave she once was. Goldie Harwell’s kitchen, Brownsville.

The Spinner, 1950s. First published late 1920s (172-173, #1265a).

Goldie Harwell in her driveway with a quilt Morris made in 1968. Published as Rosalia Flower Garden in a 1939 Kansas City Star; and as Jack’s Chain in 1978 (70-71, #430).
Early 1970s. Published as Farmer’s Daughter (#419) by Ladies Art Co. in 1901, and as Jack’s Blocks, etc. in the 1930s-50s (Brackman 1993:366-367, #3034; 2009:190).

Ca. 1995 Maple Leaf (?) appliqué (see Brackman 2009:133, #43.12).
Fig. 6.8. Of May Hight's five quilts that descended to Romus and Lucille Hight (her son and his wife), three are common (vernacular) quilts, while two have more bedspread traits.

May Hight (1907-80) and her husband, Burr (1901-76), with pet, ca. 1970?

Common: late 1930s Four-Patch with patchwork crosses.
Common: 1940s quadrant Trip around the World (Brackman 1993:288-289, #2293).

Common: ca. 1950 quadrant String Star (made with string-pieced diamonds).

Bedspread: ca. 1960 Sun and Shade (per Lucille Hight); Log Cabin variation (McKim 1962:110); Unnamed (Brackman 1993:508-509, #4120).
Fig. 6.9. Tennessee (Tennie) Callery, her family, and her family quilts.

Tennie Callery (1890-1982) as a child (right) with her family (note the fancy dress).

Tennie Callery as a young woman with her husband and child (note the plain dress).
Ca. 1875 Triple Irish Chain, zigzag variation (Brackman 1993:148-149, #1053).

Ca. 1900 Arkansas Traveler variation or Spool (185, #1400; 187, #1407a).
Ca. 1915 Log Cabin (folded in half), at Tom and Barbara Callery's home east of Brownsville (319, #2573).

Ca. 1925 Wrench, Churn Dash, etc. (234-235, #1850).
Ca. 1945 Pontiac Star (folded in half, with shadow on right) (472-473, #3871).

Ca. 1945 Wedding Ring (58-59, #303).
Ca. 1945 Anna’s Choice (160-161, #1141).

Ca. 1945 Improved Nine-Patch (60-61, #306).
Fig. 6.10. Rosa Lee Morton’s portrait and four of her quilts (those that her daughter Ida Mae Coleman gave to their relative Goldie Harwell after Morton’s death).

Rosa Lee Morton (1914-95).


Ca. 1965 Nine-Patch variation, 13-Patch (303, #2413); Album variation (303, #2414).

Fig. 6.11. Lue Rena Mann’s portrait and two of her quilts that daughter-in-law Lollie Mann has left after passing most of them on to her children (the maker’s grandchildren).

Lue Rena Mann (1894-1980).
Ca. 1940 Trip around the World var. (Brackman 1993:288-289, #2293).

Ca. 1965 string quilt (164-165, #1181, 1182, 1191; 314-315, #2547 var.)
Fig. 6.12. In the modern era, an old quilt could achieve heirloom status and testify to the common heritage of the maker’s descendants.

After Mary Lucille Delancey Broadstreet died (ca. 1956), a granddaughter cut her ca. 1940 Aster (Dresden Plate-style) quilt into blocks, framed them, and gave them to other descendants (Brackman 1993:420-421, #3485).

Fig. 6.13. Two quilts made by Verniece Staggs (1915-2002, white).

1952 common quilt: Two-Patch (dyed tobacco sacks) (Brackman 1993:25, #131).

Fig. 6.14. Maggie Tyus (?-1988, black) made these subsistence-style quilts in the modern era, when households no longer needed quilts for practical purposes.

Ca. 1965 Housetop, or Log Cabin var. Some Four-Patch centers, pieced borders.

Ca. 1965 tied horizontal Bars (or strip) quilt with two opposite borders.
Minerva Yochum pieced the Pickle-Dish top of this quilt and nine others in the early 1950s (Brackman 1993:61, #304/305). She gave red-and-white ones to her five daughters-in-law, red-and-green ones to her five daughters. Quilted later. Courtesy of Rosie Lemons.

Delois Baggett with her 1959 Wedding Ring (59, #303). Cassie Binford Taylor made this quilt for Baggett when she married and moved to another part of Haywood County.
Ca. 1960 Sun and Shade (509, #4120). May Hight made this quilt and two more in the same pattern for her three daughters-in-law for Christmas one year. Courtesy of Lucille Hight.

1985 Flower Garden (30-31, #160k). Mildred McCool gave this quilt that she had made to Lucille Hight, her niece (seen here).
Isadora Scallions gave the Bowtie top of this quilt to great-niece Carolyn Simpson (at left) in 1966, for her wedding (315, #2533; 435, #3608). Quilted later.

Ruth Simpson made this 1992 Strawberry quilt and ten more for her children and their spouses. It is likely a published pattern but is not in the *Encyclopedia of Appliqué* (Brackman 2009). The twelfth child got a Maple Leaf quilt. Courtesy of Carolyn Simpson.
2007 Strawberry quilt (folded). Ola Jean Currie made this as a wedding gift for her niece Sonja Walker (published pattern not listed in Brackman’s *Encyclopedia of Appliqué* [2009]).

Anne Baird made this ca. 1985 Flower Garden for a grandchild (30-31, #160k var.).
Anne Baird made this 1980 wholecloth quilt for a grandchild, quilting a pre-printed Sunbonnet Sue/Overall Sam top.

Baird embroidered this message on the back of the quilt shown above.
Pauline Pillow made this Dutch Doll or Sunbonnet Sue quilt, held by Carolyn Simpson for a nephew (Simpson’s son) who was born in 1973 (Brackman 2009:139).

Lucille Hight made this “Baby Doll” quilt in 1998 for a granddaughter (139). Courtesy of Judy Carlton (the maker’s daughter).
In the lower right corner of the quilt shown above, maker Lucille Hight embroidered her signature and the date. Courtesy of Judy Carlton.

Betty Lovelace (above) says that Allie Lovelace made this Dutch Doll in 1931 while pregnant with Betty Lovelace’s husband (139). She may be recalling an earlier quilt as I date some fabrics in this one to ca. 1970.
Laura Carroll made this 1960 Overall Sam var. for a grandson (141). The teardrop corners of the blocks form a secondary design. Courtesy of Norma Horvath (the grandson’s wife).

Fig. 6.16. Intergenerational quilt groups in the modern era.

Minerva Yochum’s mother, daughters, and daughter-in-law helped her quilt these quilts: 1950s 9-Patch var. and 1963 hexagons framed-medallion (Brackman 1993:303, #2413; 31, #160 var.)
Lucille Hight and granddaughter Jessie Carlton quilted this 1945 Four-of-Diamonds top in 1998 (301, #2385/2418 var.). Jessie’s father’s grandmother, Lela Kate Carlton (1883-1964), had given it to her son and daughter-in-law as a wedding gift (JC 3/16/09).

Fig. 6.17. These modern-era quilts served commemorative purposes (eight quilts).

Minerva Yochum modeled the pieced pattern of this 1950s Pickle Dish quilt on a quilt that her mother made about 1903. Quilted later.
Delois Baggett plans to finish this whitework quilt (with an original quilting motif of stars and rosettes) that her older sister was working on when she died, in 1998.

Anne Baird made this quilt in the 1980s using Improved Nine-Patch blocks that her daughter-in-law’s mother pieced in the 1940s.
Anne Baird made this quilt about 1995 using an inherited top. The LeMoyne Star blocks are ca. 1845; the strips and stones late 1800s (see Trestain 1998 for fabric-dating).

Detail of Anne Baird’s quilt above (right edge, fifth and sixth blocks from the top).
Lue Vennia Robinson honored her deceased husband, a World War II Army veteran, and her country with the patriotic color scheme of this 2005 framed-medallion quilt.

Ola Jean Currie’s ca. 1995 Bullock Family Tree quilt (folded) honors her family.
One block of Ola Jean Currie’s Bullock Family Tree quilt shown above.

Ruth Simpson commemorated regional identity with this 1992 Strawberry quilt.
Ola Jean Currie commemorated regional identity with this 2007 Strawberry quilt (here folded), made as a wedding present for her niece.

Fig. 6.18. Quilts that show quiltmaking as a hobby in the modern era.

Lue Vennia Robinson modeled the embroidered blocks on this ca. 1970 quilt on the doily from a box of Valentine’s chocolates. "It sure done faded," she said (8/23/07).
Detail of an embroidered block from Lue Vennia Robinson’s quilt above.

Lucille Hight (shown here) got the template for the red birds on this 2005 quilt from a magazine and appliquéd them on traditional Birds-in-Flight pattern blocks.
Lucille Hight was inspired to add asterisk figures in contrasting colors to the Texas Star blocks of this ca. 2002 quilt, a pattern that she probably got from a book or magazine.

In the modern era, women such as Lucille Hight (seen here at her house in Brownsville) sometimes displayed their quilts on beds because they were pretty to look at, 2009.
Fig. 6.19. When quiltmaking was no longer a necessity, some small-farm women gave it up and took up hobbies such as flower-gardening and oil-painting.

Ellen Marbury painted this scene on a box lid, signing it “Ellen 82” (barely visible at lower right). At Barbara and Tom Callery’s house, east of Brownsville, 2008.

Ellen Marbury also painted this scene, captioned at the bottom, “Marvin's Chapel.”
Ch. 7. Findings

In this final chapter, I relate the findings of this study to existing scholarship. First, I address the role of small-farm quiltmaking in contexts of social stability and change. Second, I consider the role of improvisation in social systems and expressive genres, especially quiltmaking. In the third section, I contrast my finding of a cross-racial-group quiltmaking culture with the assumption by some scholars of racial-group-based cultural difference. Finally, I propose directions for future research.

Study-Area Quiltmaking in Contexts of Stability and Change

Although consultants perceive that quiltmaking was primarily a survival mechanism in the small-farm era, it also stabilized the rural socioeconomic system. As labor-intensive agriculture gave way to higher-paying non-farm jobs in the 1950s and 1960s, qualities of confidence and self-reliance fostered by self-sufficiency-enhancing activities such as quiltmaking helped equip small-farm blacks to protest against Jim Crow laws that upheld a racial-group-based caste system. Entering this modern era, people with small-farm backgrounds adapted the cultural form of quiltmaking and the strategy of personalist social relations to meet needs for continuity and meaning under changed socioeconomic conditions.
Stability

Two cornerstones of social organization that emerge in anthropological studies of indigenous horticultural societies are, one, a gendered division of labor, with women anchoring home-based subsistence activities; and two, household economies that rely on interdependent realms of internal productivity and external exchange (Weiner 1976, 1988, 1992; Malinowski 1984; Guss 1990; Keane 1997). Among small-farm households in the Haywood County area, however, the systemic emphasis on racial-group and economic-group identity detracted from these potential sources of social stability. I find that quiltmaking tended to restore their effectiveness in three ways. First, whereas the principle of gendered labor was weakened by the fact that many small-farm women did “men’s” work (working outside of their homes in the fields and, in the case of African American women, in other people’s homes), quiltmaking upheld this principle by marking domestic and childcare activities as women’s work. Second, whereas dependence on large-farm-owners skewed the economic balance of power in tenant, sharecropper, and renter households toward external exchange, quiltmaking and other household subsistence activities helped correct this imbalance by enhancing internal productivity. And third, whereas the domestic work that many small-farm black women did for white families undermined both principles (since they were working outside of their own homes and since this work tipped their household economies toward external exchange), black women who made quilts for their own households upheld the model of women anchoring household productivity. In these ways, subsistence quiltmaking in the small-farm households of my consultants countered systemic challenges to stabilizing techniques of a horticultural social system while also aiding in physical survival.
**Expressive-subsistence culture and social stability.** Many scholars have recognized the merging of practical and expressive purposes in creative activities. Cases in which an indigenous horticultural society builds an expressive dimension into a subsistence activity include the Trobriand Islanders’ construction of ornamental yam storage and display houses (Malinowski 1984:168-170 and plates xxxiii and xxxiv) and the Yekuana Indians’ use of contrasting color designs in woven work baskets (Guss 1990). Referencing Lewis Binford’s perception (1962) that artifacts have three potential “levels of function,” each of which “applies to a different aspect of a people’s behavior,” James Deetz notes that some artifacts have both utilitarian (“technomic”) and expressive (“socio-technic” and “ideo-technic”) purposes (1977:51).

This theme also surfaces in Michael Owen Jones’ study of southeastern Kentucky chairmaking, which had utilitarian criteria but also was “communicative, expressive, or even symbolic” (1989:249-250). Henry Glassie finds that in Turkish traditional art, “Decoration connects to utility; utility connects to decoration” (2002:852). And Richard Bauman notes the potential for verbal communication to have both practical and expressive (“performance”) dimensions. He writes, “Performance is a variable quality among multiple possible functions of communicative acts, such as informational, rhetorical, and phatic,” adding that its role in the overall act may be relatively small or large (1999:44). (For the multifunctional analysis of communication, see Jakobson 1960.) Small-farm quiltmaking in the study area also had this dual, or multifunctional, capacity.

**Surround genres and stability.** Expressive genres that meet practical, subsistence needs are implicitly associated with stability in Dorothy Noyes’s cognitive psychology-based categorization of folklore (expressive) genres (2014). In this system, Noyes places
folklore genres in one of four categories (although some genres can shift between them) based on whether or not audience members (rather than makers) consciously focus on the performance or content, whether or not they seek out the genre, and whether they want it or have it imposed on them. Subsistence need is not a stated criterion of any of the categories (art, occasion, news, surround). But Noyes puts forms that meet subsistence needs (with headings such as “built environment,” “craft and domestic arts,” and “everyday adornment”) in the surround category (141). Subsistence quiltmaking presumably falls under “craft and domestic arts.” Surround criteria are “no conscious focus” and “unsought but wanted” (141). Surround genres are, “Taken for granted; noticed when disrupted or absent,” and have an affect of “lulling-wellbeing-calm-boredom” (141). These qualities frame the expressive-subsistence forms of the surround category as sources of continuity and well-being through which audience members enhance their quality of life (“surround”) by engaging productively with rather than by challenging status-quo conditions. Noyes’s system implicitly supports my view that small-farm quiltmaking contributed to structural stability rather than change.

From network to community. I interpret this propensity of people to generate a body of vernacular expressive culture rooted in common solutions to subsistence needs as an effort to increase stability by turning neighborly “networks” into “communities.” Differentiating these related concepts, Noyes contrasts “the empirical world of day-to-day network contacts” with the “dense multiplex sociability” of community, having components of voluntary association, shared recreation, collective performance, and bonds of ideology and emotion (1995:468-469, 471). “The community exists as the project of a network or some of its members,” she writes (471). As diffuse, semi-private activities, expressive-
subsistence genres offer a bottom-up alternative to the community-building of public, centrally-organized ceremonies. Jason Baird Jackson notes the “integrative function” of such public activities in his study of contemporary Yuchi ceremonial life, counting them among “the cultural forms and social institutions that provide expression of Yuchi identity” (2003:275-276). In the small-farm households of my consultants, voluntary interactive participation in subsistence activities gave people who already were connected in neighborly networks the capacity to generate the common meanings and emotional bonds that could turn relations rooted in propinquity and necessity into an affective experience of community. Makers who had neighbors of the other racial group but quilted only with members of their own in a sense imagined those neighbors as non-community, given that frequent face-to-face interactions provided the building blocks of genuine community (Anderson 1993). However, reasons other than racial-group difference could account for neighbors not quilting together as same-racial-group neighbors did not always quilt together.

Change

As a subsistence activity that enhanced the quality of small-farm life under the existing conditions of labor-intensive agriculture, study-area quiltmaking was a conservative force. As Richard A. Couto observes in his study of efforts by Haywood County blacks to win voting and other civil rights, “Attaining a degree of self-sufficiency made one’s private space less vulnerable to violation,” but it did not change the caste system (1993:255). Quilt culture was built into a way of life under which, according to ethnographers who studied areas of Mississippi in the 1930s, blacks lacked the capacity to
initiate change in the caste system (Dollard 1957:427-433; Powdermaker 1993:370-372; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1988:401-421; Davis 1965:337-338). While participation in subsistence activities did not change or directly motivate rural blacks to challenge the caste system, it did, I argue, foster a sense of agency and psychological independence that prepared them to do so when economic conditions changed.

As labor-intensive agriculture ended and small-farm blacks became more engaged with the capitalist economy, they were faced with the urban Jim Crow caste system, which was based more exclusively on racial-group identity than was the personalism of the rural caste system (Schultz 2007[2005]:128-130). As elements of personalism and economic interdependence in cross-racial-group relations declined, I argue, the sense of agency and the self-reliance that small-farm subsistence activities had fostered were factors in the choice of rural blacks who protested against the caste system amid this new socioeconomic configuration. Participation in subsistence household activities promoted economic independence and a self-confident personality structure that scholars associate with black participation in Civil Rights Movement activities (Davis 1965:343; Couto 1993:193-194; Dittmer 1994:30, 42, 126, 424; Sitkoff 2010:13, 218; Lau 2006:198).

Rural blacks and the Civil Rights Movement. Scholars cite several conditions that set the stage for the successes of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and early 1960s by strengthening external and internal pressures for change. Among external pressures were: national prosperity that led to increased demand for labor, Cold War tensions that pressured the U.S. to model its democratic ideals on the world stage, and the growth of television that showed the world the violent reactions of some white Southerners to blacks who were involved in school desegregation and in civil rights protests. Among internal
pressures were: rising income and education levels for blacks, their greater exposure to non-caste cultures overseas during World War II and in northern U.S. cities, pro-civil rights Supreme Court decisions of the mid-1950s that raised black expectations of equal treatment, and modernization of cotton farming that resulted in many Southern blacks (as well as whites) moving to towns (Davis 1965:339-342; Sitkoff 2010:12-20, 215-224).

In addressing the role of rural blacks in the Civil Rights Movement, scholars point to the structural conditions of labor-intensive agriculture as an obstacle that eventually was countered by exposure to urban culture or by the outreach efforts of NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People), SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee), or CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) workers who were relatively well-educated, middle-class, and, often, non-local. In focusing on structural and external forces, this analysis does not consider how small-farm people viewed their life under conditions of labor-intensive agriculture and as these conditions changed. Two additional influences on the timing of rural black involvement in protest activities, both rooted in the perceptions of small-farm people, emerge from my data and from additional locale-specific studies (Couto 1993; Dittmer 1994; Springfield 2000; Schultz 2007; Lau 2006). I discuss these factors in more detail below.

Scholars have described black tenants and sharecroppers as “subordinated,” “intimidated,” taught “to accept their helplessness,” “subjugated,” “powerless,” “marginalized,” and “trapped” (Davis 1965:337, 338, 339; Sitkoff 2010:12; Lau 2006:191, 224; Dittmer 1994:42). In such circumstances, outside forces were needed to change small-farm consciousness in ways that would permit their involvement in an effective civil rights movement. Allison Davis, for instance, ties the rise of black civil rights activism to
acculturation that resulted from urban migration. "Wider education, a rising standard of living, and migration to the city have accelerated the pace of acculturation of southern Negroes," he writes (1965:339). Under the “color-caste system” of Mississippi cotton plantations that he studied with Burleigh B. Gardner and Mary R. Gardner in 1933-1935 (Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941), landlord and police violence had enforced the "helplessness" of blacks “to oppose the white system which exploited, segregated, and disfranchised them” (Davis 1965:339). Accounting for the strength of the Civil Rights Movement in 1955-1965, he emphasizes the leadership of the NAACP, “young educated ministers” such as Martin Luther King Jr., middle-class blacks, and black college students. Rural blacks are cast in a crucial but supporting role, in that their migration to cities contributed to “unrest” (339-342). In this account, blacks had to leave rural areas to acquire the cultural meanings and personality structure that they needed to directly protest against the caste system.

Harvard Sitkoff, in his 1975 essay “The Preconditions for Racial Change,” perceives that the move to cities had a liberating effect on small-farm blacks. In rural areas they were subject to “the dominance of cotton culture and the need for an underclass of subjugated laborers;” in urban areas they were “freed from rigid caste structure” (2010:12, 14). As “a power shift from rural areas to cities" occurred in the 1950s and 1960s, “the old system of caste relations had no place in the new economic order” (12).

Psychological factors, which sociologist Talcott Parsons and his student Clifford Geertz (in his early work, at least) referred to as “personality structure,” figure in both Davis’s and Sitkoff’s perceptions of small-farm black oppression (Parsons 1951:6, cited in Geertz 1973:145-146). For instance, Davis writes, “The Negro in the deep South...had been
trained by the economic and caste systems not to use the potential bargaining power he had” (1965:337); and Sitkoff finds that, in an urban environment, blacks “could turn aggression toward the oppressor, not one’s self” (2010:14). In the views of this anthropologist and this historian, the rural socioeconomic system immobilized small-farm blacks.

Two later studies that focus on specific rural-South locations foreground the work of non-local organizers who were associated with the NAACP, SNCC, and or CORE as a factor in broadening rural black involvement in protest activities. In South Carolina starting in 1948, middle-class black NAACP organizers went “into the backwoods, cotton fields, and rural county churches,” often recruiting high school students first and then their parents (Lau 2006:184, 201-202). They had, “by the first years of the 1950s created an opening for the nation’s most marginalized and least powerful citizens to speak and act for themselves” (2006:224).

In early 1960s Mississippi, a key factor in Civil Rights Movement successes was the expansion of its social base through inclusion of rural blacks into a “grass-roots insurgency” (Dittmer 1994:428). Writes John Dittmer,

Not until the civil rights movement of the 1960s would activists attempt to register and organize the hundreds of thousands of black sharecroppers and unskilled workers.... SNCC organizers in the Delta found the rural poor to be their natural constituency. Not since Reconstruction had anyone seriously proposed that illiterate sharecroppers had the same right to the franchise as did teachers, lawyers, and doctors. Donning overalls and work shirts, SNCC workers sneaked onto the vast plantations to talk with people who had never thought about voting in an election. [28, 125]

Dittmer thus attributes the movement’s expansion in large part to the ability of outside organizers to win the trust of local small-farm blacks and urban workers: “Without the support and example of the outsiders, local people would have remained trapped in the
cycle of intimidation and reprisal that had succeeded in stifling the movement in the mid-
1950s” (424-425). In contrast to the overview essays by Davis and Sitkoff, these more
recent location-specific studies find that small-farm blacks had the capacity to protest
while still in rural areas. But they needed the impetus of an alternative authority to move
them to do so.

In place-specific accounts of the Civil Rights Movement in Haywood County, Couto
(1993) and Raye Springfield (2000) cite a mix of external and internal factors in the
successes of the 1960s (see also Wynn 2002 and Hopson 2005). In contrast to a stymied
1940 effort to get Haywood County blacks registered to vote (see chapter 6, pages 308-
310), external forces in the 1960s movement included an activist federal government and
northern white students (including white Jewish CORE members, according to Springfield)
who stayed with local blacks while leading and facilitating voter registration efforts.

The primary internal factor was the increased involvement of rural blacks
(“ordinary African-American folk, farmers”), whereas NAACP members who lived in
Brownsville (“teachers, professionals, and wage laborers”) had led the 1940 effort (Couto
1993:193). Based on interviews with my consultants as well as published works, I perceive
four major factors in the expanded rural involvement. First is the greater need for non-farm
jobs in the later period. Writes Springfield, “Blacks in the county were demanding not only
the right to vote, but also jobs. As farming lost its predominance as a primary source of
income, blacks demanded jobs in order to earn a decent living to support their families”
(2000:175). A second factor is increased landownership, which protected participants in
civil rights activities from eviction (although not from other, sometimes violent, forms of
reprisal). Noting the prominence of black farm-owners in the Douglas community in the
1960s movement, Couto points to, “the crucial correlation of economic security, landownership, and political participation” (1993:193-194). Third, awareness of the Civil Rights Movement was more widespread, conveyed by radio and television coverage that households in 1940 (lacking electrical service) had not had. Springfield writes of her mother’s experience in summer 1963, “Opal said it seemed that every time she turned on the television or read the paper, there was something about marchers and sit-ins” (2000:173). And finally, local blacks such as attorney James F. Estes and schoolteacher Currie P. Boyd who had been educated elsewhere returned to the region (Boyd to Haywood County, Estes to Memphis) with enhanced confidence and legal expertise to work with local blacks to change legal manifestations of the caste system.

As they were in South Carolina, young people were the most receptive audience for change among rural blacks in Haywood County. Springfield’s father, a small-farm owner who was born about 1903, “never considered becoming involved with the voting rights efforts. He was a member of the majority, which welcomed progress, but he left the fight to the young folks” (2000:158). Tonnie and Opal Springfield first voted in 1968, for Democrat Hubert Humphrey (2000:198). In the 1980s, Haywood County African Americans “had to be encouraged to register to vote and then to cast their ballot;” although they “could make the difference in an election, if they participated and organized,” a local black politician had “lamented that there was not enough of either participation or organization” (Couto 1993:246). Black voter registration likely has increased: I observed a long line of mostly black people registering to vote at the Haywood County Courthouse in October 2008, shortly before the Obama-McCain presidential election (see Figure 7.1, page 433 top).
Following earlier scholars, I acknowledge structural and external influences on the decisions of rural blacks to negotiate within or protest against the caste system. But building on the work of Couto (1993) and Springfield (2000), I find that their subjective perceptions also were a factor. I argue that the agency, autonomy, pride, and fun that consultants experienced in some spheres of small-farm life tended to discourage disruptive protests as long as that way of life endured.

Based in part on primary sources in Sunflower County, which was the site of the Dollard and Powderrmaker studies in west central Mississippi, Valerie Grim also finds that rural blacks had enjoyed aspects of small-farm life:

Between 1900 and 1950, African American rural culture was energetic and diverse and included many social, spiritual, and educational activities. Through their ideas and the ways they interacted and behaved, rural African Americans created an identity that embraced their expressions and empowered their sense of blackness. [2003:128]

Her observation that blacks had an “empowered...sense of blackness” under small-farm conditions aligns with my perception of a second internal influence on rural black attitudes toward the caste system. This influence, I argue, is that some spheres of small-farm life, including quiltmaking and the operation of black social institutions, fostered traits of confidence, self-reliance, and self-respect. While such activities did not inspire rural blacks to protest against the caste system as long as their livelihood and, in some cases, social network were closely tied to that of local whites, the traits that these activities fostered enhanced their capacity to do so once external changes increased their economic independence and the chances that the protest would succeed. This insight also occurs in historian Jeannie Whayne’s study of black agricultural extension agents in the South in the 1910s to 1960s: “By encouraging the greater economic independence of black
sharecroppers, Extension agents were laying the groundwork for freedom from the dominance of planters,” she writes (2003:164).

The changes of the transition period of the 1950s and 1960s were reflected in my consultants’ growing prosperity and ability to purchase land, increasing independence from large-farm owners, and connections with external civil rights organizers. It was in the 1960s that: Bob Bond’s (1962-, Madison County, white) father laid off the last of his tenant farmers, many of whom moved to Jackson, the Madison County seat; Lollie Mann (1936-, black) demanded and received a raise from $3 to $4 a day for cotton-chopping, then got a job at a Brownsville factory that enabled her and her husband to pay off his debts and buy land; adult daughters of Luella Carter (1922-, black) and Rosa Lee Morton (1914-1995, black) were earning enough to buy washing machines for their mothers; having bought land a few years earlier, Ola Jean Currie’s (1942-, black) parents were able to host white students from the North without fear of being kicked out of their home; and Thelma Austin (1944-, black) and her high school classmates marched with Martin Luther King (6/26/11). These new capacities and behaviors show that some rural blacks were perceiving that the time was right to apply the confidence gained in certain spheres of small-farm life to broader realms of custom, law, politics, and business.

In at least some cases, rural blacks were discouraged from participating in systemically disruptive activities in the small-farm era not just because structural conditions oppressed them, but because they experienced agency, pleasure, and stability in some realms of life under that structure. I argue that this experience, the dissolution of these realms of activity with the shift to a more urban consumer lifestyle, and the recognition that the confidence and self-reliance gained in realms of small-farm life could
apply to broader contexts were key factors in the evolution of rural black involvement in protest activities.

Evidence in the work of other scholars supports this interpretation. For instance, Davis's statement, “Technological change has driven the cotton tenants off the land into the towns and cities” (1965:342), indicates that they went reluctantly and thus apparently valued aspects of their rural lifestyle. Likewise, Dittmer refers to older small-farm blacks in Mississippi who stayed in the country even when they couldn't find work there (1994:125). Scholars also report cases of rural blacks who joined in protest activities without benefit of urban "acculturation" (Dittmer 1994; Lau 2006).

Additional support for this interpretation is Mark Schultz's observation (also noted here on page 150) that the personalist social relations that operated in areas of rural Georgia under labor-intensive agriculture had inhibited rural black participation in protest activities. He writes, "In the rural South these [cross-racial-group] personal ties moderated the harshness of white supremacy even as they undermined black solidarity. Perhaps personal relationships acted as a pressure valve, keeping the entire system from boiling over" (2007:127). In his view, rural social relations had discouraged small-farm black protest not because they enforced caste rigidly, as Sitkoff perceives (2010:14), but because the flexibility of the caste system under conditions of labor-intensive agriculture had granted a degree of agency and autonomy that rural blacks valued. Without small farm-era conditions of personalism and cross-racial-group economic interdependence, racial-group identity became a more dominant factor in individual cross-racial-group relations and set the stage for a protest movement that was based on racial-group solidarity.
I argue that small-farm blacks’ perception of their everyday life is a key factor in the timing of their involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. Attention to this issue is one way of answering Sitkoff’s call for “more contextualizing and less editorializing” among civil rights historians (11). His comment, “Questions remain, moreover, as to the relative importance of, and relationship between, external factors and protest activities” in the Civil Rights Movement suggests that he has not considered the issue of rural blacks’ own perception of their experience as a variable in this relationship (11, emphasis added).

Small-farm people and social change. Scholars view social change as an interaction between subjects and dynamic structural conditions. For instance, Davis writes, “The Negro civil rights movement in Mississippi, as in the deep South generally, has emerged from many social and economic forces” (1965:339, emphasis added). Sitkoff specifies that individuals working for social change succeed only if structural change is already under way: “Fundamental social change is accomplished only when individuals seize the moment to mobilize the latent power inherent in an institutional structure in flux” (2010:17, emphasis added). And Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward write in their book, Poor People’s Movements, “Both the limitations and opportunities for mass protest are shaped by social conditions” (1979:36; see also Dittmer 1994:429, 512.). These statements foreground historical conditions as a dynamic variable in structural change but overlook the personal experience of potential protesters as a similarly dynamic variable on the agency side of the equation. A subject’s experience affects her or his personality structure and her or his disposition to act, to (in Sitkoff’s words) “seize the moment,” rather than stand by (2010:17).
I find that small-farm blacks faced limitations under conditions of labor-intensive agriculture and the rural caste system, but that these limitations co-existed with and in some ways contributed to living conditions that fostered traits of confidence, self-reliance, and agency. Such planks of personality structure equipped rural blacks to protest the caste system once “social conditions” were right, when the “institutional structure [was] in flux” (Piven and Cloward 1979:36; Sitkoff 2010:17). The structural limits of the system and consciousness-changing external influences were not the only factors in developing this disposition.

The effect of social change on cultural forms. In his study of a rural Javanese funeral ritual that fails when attempted under conditions of a changing urban social organization, Geertz (1973) attributes the breakdown to ambiguous meaning rooted in discontinuities between a village cultural form and an urban social system. The decline of subsistence quiltmaking in the small-farm households of my consultants and the rise of rural black involvement in protests against the caste system occurred as these cultural forms (quiltmaking and the caste system) developed ambiguous meanings due to the shift from labor-intensive agricultural to urban industrial socioeconomic systems.

As small-farm people transitioned to higher-paying jobs and more consumer-oriented lifestyles, expressive quilt-culture meanings such as “gift,” “hobby,” and “heirloom” competed with the subsistence associations of small-farm quiltmaking. Caste, tied to occupation-based racial-group difference, took on new meanings from the upward mobility of rural blacks in the economic realm. This occupational mobility, like black participation in the armed services, downplayed racial-group difference. But local customs and laws maintained old meanings of black social inferiority, even as the forces of
capitalism gave small-farm whites access to social advancement. Thus, the economic success of individual blacks contradicted meanings of racial-group-based difference and black social inferiority that underlay the caste system.

Fredrik Barth finds that if caste identities are relevant in only a few realms of a social system, that such identities will not be an important element of social organization (1969:19). With the breakdown of economic complementarity that had existed under the sharecropping system of large-farm owners (most of whom were white) and laborers (most of them landless blacks), the role of distinctive ethnic identities in social structure was greatly diminished. Barth also notes that if an ethnically stratified system depends on the differential distribution of assets (such as land or money), and if circumstances change so that assets are obtained in ways that don’t depend on ethnic identity, that that will tend to blur ethnic boundaries and weaken a system based on ethnic dichotomy (1969:28-30).

In Haywood County in the 1960s, the breakdown of the sharecropping system as it operated under labor-intensive agriculture, the rise of manufacturing concerns with relatively racially blind hiring practices, and the enhanced ability of blacks to own land had such an effect on the distribution of assets. The Civil Rights Movement can be seen as a response to these changes, correcting for the greatly diminished relevance of distinctive ethnic identity in social organization by shrinking the role of, if not entirely abandoning, the caste system.

In another study of social change, Geertz interpreted the persistence of an outmoded rural funeral ritual in an urban environment as evidence of a conservative impulse to seek stability through the use of familiar cultural forms (1973:164-165). In the Haywood County area, such an impulse toward continuity may account for why some
people (black and white) have retained forms of personalism and quiltmaking long after the demise of plantation-culture agriculture and the small-farm way of life. However, being voluntary and adapted to present-day needs, these forms have new meanings that have kept them relevant. Thus, their capacity to provide continuity hinges on their capacity to change.

Based on the above discussion, I propose four principles that govern relations between cultural forms or systems and structural conditions of stability or change. The first is based on studies of cross-racial-group relations in the 1930s U.S. South, the second on small-farm quiltmaking in the Tennessee Delta, the third on Geertz’s study of the Javanese funeral ritual, and the fourth on the caste system in the U.S. South as it evolved after the Civil Rights Movement.

The first principle is “unlikely to change.” I argue that a form or system (such as the complex of cultural values and social practices that comprised the caste system of the U.S. South during my study period) is unlikely to change if it is integral to a functioning socioeconomic system. This principle follows the view of scholars who studied areas of the rural South in the 1930s that the racial group-based caste-and-economic-group system was unlikely to change in that large farm-small farm period without external intervention to bolster black access to education and political leadership (Dollard 1937; Powdermaker 1939; Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941). I conceive “caste,” like “economic group,” to have social, cultural, and occupational components, following Davis, Gardner, and Gardner 1941 and Alex 2009.

The second principle, “adapted or abandoned,” applies in cases where historical (socioeconomic or political) change ends a need that a cultural form or system has been
filling. Under such conditions, users will abandon it as irrelevant or will adapt it so as to provide both continuity and new meanings that meet their needs under the new conditions. Such was the case when Tennessee Delta quiltmaking shifted from a subsistence context under small-farm conditions to an expressive context under consumer lifestyle conditions.

The third principle is “adapted or replaced.” If historical change disables a form or system whose meaning people continue to need under the new conditions, they will experience stress until they either adapt or replace the disabled form so as to meet the need under the new conditions. Alternatively, subjects may adapt their behavior in ways that allow them to continue using the old form. Geertz’s study (1973[1959]) does not address how the Javanese urban peasants resolved their dilemma in the long term, but in the short term, several individuals adjusted their behaviors and expectations in ways that allowed the funeral to be completed, although it fell short of its village model.

The fourth principle is “overthrown in the interests of social change.” Historical change may turn a cultural form or system into an ideological battleground if it acquires new meanings and the new and old meanings align with conflicting interest groups. Such was the case with the Javanese funeral ritual when a Moslem religious official declined to officiate at the funeral of a Permai (anti-Moslem) man’s son (Geertz 1973:150-155), and such was the case in the U.S. South when the racial-group-based caste system associated with a large farm-small farm division of labor was dismembered under an industrial manufacturing economic system. The legal basis of this cultural form collapsed not in the 1930s, when it was upheld by large-farm-owners’ continued need for cheap manual labor, by lack of job alternatives for field hands, and by the federal government’s continued laissez-faire approach to Jim Crow laws; but in the 1960s, when farm-owners were
modernizing, field hands had alternative job options and resources to buy land, Northerner-owned Southern factories were hiring blacks as well as whites, blacks could afford the markers of a middle-class lifestyle, and the federal government was under Cold War pressures to more accurately model its democratic ideology on the world stage. These changes contradicted the meanings of inherent ethnic difference that underlay the caste system.

**Improvisation in Expressive Genres and Everyday Life**

Combining data from this study with existing scholarship, this section addresses the role of improvisation in everyday life and expressive genres. I posit the social system as one type of the conditions on which people improvise in everyday life, and propose that this system has a built-in capacity for improvisation that helps maintain equilibrium between agency and structure. I identify elements of social organization in the small-farm era that gave subjects the capacity to improvise on identity and social relations and suggest that studies of improvisational genres should seek links to situational and historical variables.

Some recent works conceive of improvisation, defined as processual creativity, as a universal aspect of everyday life and as a cross-cultural occurrence in expressive genres. Tim Ingold and Elizabeth Hallam write in their book, *Creativity and Cultural Improvisation*,

There is no script for social and cultural life. People have to work it out as they go along. In a word, they have to improvise... Improvisation is the way we work, not only in the ordinary conduct of our everyday lives, but also in our studied reflections on these lives in fields of art, literature and science. [2007:1]

Citing Edward Bruner (1993:326), they say, “People everywhere ‘construct culture as they go along and as they respond to life’s contingencies’ ” (2007:2). Improvisation thus is cast
in terms of subjects interacting with conditions of their environment, for either practical or expressive purposes. Extending Ingold and Hallam’s work, I propose in the present study that subjects access agency through certain methods of improvisation that engage with certain aspects of everyday life. In southwestern Tennessee’s small-farm society, certain elements of social organization allowed subjects to improvise on identity and social relations. I discuss this process in more detail below.

Like Ingold and Hallam, Gabriel Solis views improvisation as cross-cultural, but his work focuses on an expressive genre: music. In the book *Musical Improvisation*, he writes, “Improvisation—in the broadest sense, the practice of making compositional decisions in the moment of performance—is part of virtually every musical tradition in the world” (Solis 2009:1). However, his comment that improvisation is no longer part of Western classical music indicates that while it is cross-cultural, it is not central to every music genre (2009:1). Expanding this view of improvisation as cross-cultural but not universal, or universally prominent, in expressive genres generally, including quiltmaking, I propose an overarching variable of historical context to account for why it is sometimes but not always present or prominent.

Expressive Genres

Improvisation is prominent in some genres or genre styles and minimal or absent in others. For instance: in the realm of quilts, makers in some cases use improvisational methods and in others follow set patterns, color schemes, or instructions provided by other quilts, newspaper columns, or mail-order kits; in the realm of music, improvisation as a learned skill used to be part of “the Western classical tradition” but now is not (Solis
2009:1); and in the realm of Turkish traditional arts such as carpet-weaving and ceramic painting, improvisation is prominent in one of the three styles, canh, whereas control dominates the other two (Glassie 1993:848-857). To account for this variability, improvisation has been linked in studies of particular genres to variables such as time period, ethnic heritage, place, and situational conditions.

**Time period**, for instance, is referenced in Solis’s comment above that Western classical music lost its improvisational component “only recently” (Solis 2009:1). Similarly, scholars recognize the late 1870s as the start of the improvisation-friendly crazy-quilt style (Gunn 1997:142-147). Quilt studies scholars represent ethnic heritage as a factor in improvisation when they associate improvisational quiltmaking with African Americans (for instance Twining 1977; Vlach 1978; Wahlman 1981; Johnson 1982; Thompson 1987) or white Scots Irish/Anglo Americans (Johnson 1982; Valentine 1995), but view it as atypical of white German Americans (Johnson 1982; Valentine 1995). In ethnomusicology, Solis casts ethnic heritage as a factor in improvisation when he refers to “the kind of improvisation characteristic of jazz and other African American traditions” (2009:11), and in the study of improvisation when he notes that improvisation is “underrepresented” in the study of “traditions where it operates in an unacknowledged way, such as Anglo-American folk traditions” (4). Place is referenced when scholars associate improvisational quiltmaking with Africa, in the case of U.S. blacks (for instance, Thompson 1990:17-18), or with the Blue Ridge area of the Appalachian Mountains, in the case of U.S. whites and blacks (Johnson 1982:33-34).

Scholars in several fields including developmental psychology, education, performance studies, musicology, and ethnomusicology have identified situational
conditions that facilitate the use of improvisation in creative activities. I interpret such conditions here as principles that could potentially apply to diverse cultural contexts and genres or styles. Some apply to makers who are interacting in the process of performance and others to an individual maker who improvises in how she puts given materials together. One of these conditions is a period of informal interaction among makers or performers geared to developing common understandings about how to perform an activity (Baker-Sennett and Matusov 1997:208; Pressing 1998:52; Berliner 1994:243-244). Another condition is multiple possible ways of accomplishing a goal (Baker-Sennett and Matusov 1997:209). A third condition is multiple production opportunities to practice known methods and develop variations (Berliner 1994:226-227, 243 [quoting jazz musician Gary Bartz]). A fourth condition is a structure that combines “fixed elements” or established methods with “instantaneous decision making” and variations (165-168, 205, 221-222; Pressing 1998:52-56). And a fifth condition is diffuse rather than central authority, that encourages individual responsibility (Baker-Sennett and Matusov 1997:204; Pressing 1998:48).

In the present study I propose that improvisation as a trait of expressive genres is a variable that can be accounted for by various combinations of the factors listed above. I posit all of these factors together as comprising a composite variable of “historical context.” Geraldine Johnson models this multi-faceted approach when she links improvisational “plain” quilt styles to ethnic heritage (African Americans and white Anglo-Americans but not Pennsylvania Germans), geographic region (U.S. Blue Ridge), and socioeconomic conditions (“ingenuity and skill” in using available resources to “keep warm in an area with low income, cold winters, and drafty houses”) (1982:13, 17, 33-35). Fawn Valentine also
models it when she links a Scots Irish-American quilt aesthetic to historical experiences of this group and cites common improvisational traits of some African American and Scots Irish-American quilts as evidence "that environmental and socio-economic factors may sometimes influence aesthetic formulation more than factors of race or ethnicity" (1995:20).

I recommend that studies of improvisational expressive genres seek to identify historical conditions associated with its occurrence. For instance, the following conditions emerge from studies of improvisation in musical and quiltmaking genres, some of them obviously related to the variables cited above: democratization of the social base through increased access to knowledge, authority, equipment, materials, or leisure time; development of stable maker networks that promote development of common meanings and values and a diffuse (vernacular) cultural authority; the rise of a technology that tends to increase production opportunities, such as better transportation and improved roads or the sewing machine in quiltmaking; and a shift from a dominant expressive context geared to display and commemoration to a subsistence context that demands multiple productivity.

This notion of historical context as containing variables that may affect improvisation across social group boundaries aligns with Ingold and Hallam’s perception that all people have some improvisational skill derived from their everyday life experience, and with Solis’s observation that improvisation occurs in music genres of diverse cultures, albeit not prominently in all music genres. In this framework, the occurrence of improvisation is tied to historical and situational factors that are not exclusive to a certain ethnic heritage or culture although they may align more with some than others. This view
of improvisation predicts that it could be used by quilters of diverse ethnic backgrounds, including German American and Native American, if they were subject to certain contextual conditions. Some supporting evidence for this view may lie in the enduring appeal of crazy and Log Cabin quilt styles, given that they are well suited to variation and improvisation but not associated with makers of a particular ethnic heritage.

My data in the present study echo Johnson’s findings in the Blue Ridge in testifying to a cross-racial-group vernacular improvisational quilt culture. The fact that some traits are more common among makers of one racial group, such as the variable-shell quilting motif that was popular among black women, reflects the common occurrence of quilt groups that were all-white or all-black. While lacking extant quilts to prove it, I hypothesize that this quilt culture blossomed with the democratization of quiltmaking in the late 1800s and early 1900s, in rural areas where whites of primarily Scots-Irish heritage and blacks had similar living conditions, sometimes lived on adjacent homesteads, experienced common historical trends, occasionally formed cross-racial-group quilt groups, and had some contact with German-, Anglo-, and/or Native-American makers.

**Everyday Life**

Extending Ingold and Hallam’s work cited above, I posit a social system as one of the sets of conditions on which subjects improvise in the course of everyday life. I find that certain elements of social organization built a capacity for improvising on identity and social relations into southwestern Tennessee’s small-farm social system. Elements of social organization that gave subjects this ability were: multi-faceted identity, multiple spheres of activity, personalism (negotiating social relations one-on-one rather than based on social
categories), and the social principles of deferential helping and substitution (accessing another social category’s sphere of activity through either “helping” or substituting for a member of that category). These elements of social organization provided methods for coping with contingency and granted agency in the form of choice. For instance, Earl Beard (1915-2012, black) strengthened cross-gender-group affinity by picking up a needle or scissors in the evening and “helping” his wife make quilts (Figure 7.2, page 433). His use of the social principle of “deferential helping” to re-draw social boundaries can be interpreted as a form of social system improvisation. Girls and women such as Barbara Callery (1940-, white), Opal Brack (1919-, black), and Betty Sullivan (1925-96, white), who filled in for missing male family members and saved the cost of a hired hand by driving a plow, tractor, or farm truck, could view this performance of men’s work as a burden, if they preferred women’s work, or as a pleasure, if they preferred outdoor work or, as in Sullivan’s case, if they loved working with their husband. In some cases, their household economy gave them little choice; in others, this principle of role substitution allowed them to improvise on social norms.

Multi-faceted identity, spheres of activity, and personalism. Scholars have long recognized elements of social organization that give subjects flexibility in constructing identity and conducting social relations. Davis, Gardner, and Gardner (1988[1941]) identify several “factors” in mid-1930s southern Mississippi that “tend to cause limited variations” in the “general etiquette” of cross-racial-group relations. Among these were “permanent sex affairs,” “occupational relations,” and social-class positions (1988:49-50). These exceptions to the norm demonstrate the capacity of individuals to improvise on social structure (the authors do not use the word “improvise”).
Fred Gearing (1962) finds that men in Cherokee village society of the 1700s participated in several “structural poses,” each with its own social organization and set of roles geared to a certain purpose. Poses included the household, all-male hunting trips, clan meetings held to deal with crises or legal issues (murder, marriage, allocation of garden plots), the village-wide war organization hierarchy, and possibly, collective agricultural rituals and work projects (18-28). The social structural concept of “pose” is comparable to my notion here of spheres of activity that foreground particular facets of identity. “Kinship, sex, and age were the constants of village structure,” Gearing finds (15). A father and son were together in the household, foregrounding kinship, but separate at clan gatherings, foregrounding age-group difference. Subjects related to each other in different ways depending on what pose they were in.

Roger D. Abrahams’ concept of a “structure of context” for actor-audience interaction also implies a capacity for improvisation in social relations. In such a structure, “the focus is on the way in which actors and audiences interrelate and on how situation or occasion affects this relationship” (1976:198). To the extent that interactions are not only scripted but allow for spontaneity tied to situational conditions, there is potential for improvisation.

In the introduction to an edited volume on caste systems with contributions from Scandinavian anthropologists, Barth recognizes “sectors of activity” as a variable in cross-ethnic-group social relations: “Ethnic categories...may pervade all social life, or they may be relevant only in limited sectors of activity” (1969:14). In realms that are limited to people of the same ethnic identity, subjects could play different roles than they could in activities where groups interact.
Attesting to a "culture of personalism" as the model of cross-racial-group relations in pre-1950 rural Georgia, Schultz cites several contextual factors that enabled variable relations between individual blacks and whites (2007:174). Among those figuring in instances of cross-racial-group neighborliness were the type of locale (rural rather than urban, outdoors more than indoors), and local customs regarding racial group-mixing in particular spheres of activity such as baseball games, camp meetings, fishing, trips to town, and card games. Multi-faceted identity also was a factor: "Various overlapping identities of religion, neighborhood, and especially class complicated and sometimes diluted the significance of rural racial identities" (129). On the one hand, "Racial identity drew lines that separated people from one another. Yet there were other ways of 'picking sides,' other forms of identity. Friendship, clearly, could be one such form of identity" (173-174). Personalism allowed subjects of different racial-group identities to improvise on the caste system, within the limits of local custom, in their relations with each other.

In my study (2007) of quilmaking in southern Indiana in the 1840s, I find that members of diverse white settlement groups strengthened their cross-group social networks by participating in patriotic activities associated with the Mexican American War (1846-48). These patriotic spheres of activity expanded subjects' choices in social relations by foregrounding cross-settlement-group identities of gender, age group, and citizenship (county, state, and national) over differences in ethnic heritage (English, German, Scots Irish), length of time in the New World, language (German, English), religion, and sometimes, political party (Klassen 2007:31-36). By participating in patriotic activities, subjects could strengthen relations based on common citizenship and age-group identity across settlement-group and kinship differences.
Ray Cashman (2007) finds that Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland foregrounded sectarian difference in the situational context of an urban parade, but downplayed it in telling local character anecdotes at a neighborhood bar. Whereas,

the Twelfth parades are agonistic, oppositional statements of differential identity.... Local character anecdotes are socially solidary, transcending sectarian lines to exert a centripetal, unifying force within self-identified local communities. [23]

As with structural poses, structures of context, personalism, and sectors or spheres of activity, participation in diverse situational contexts gave subjects flexibility in their social relations.

Adding my southwestern Tennessee fieldwork data to the works of these scholars, I find that the combination of multi-faceted identity and diverse spheres of activity is a resource for improvising on social relations. This capacity is probably greater in the informal spheres of activity associated with rural and domestic life, such as quiltmaking and fishing in the U.S. South, than in more visible, formal public and political realms such as Gearing’s Cherokee clan meetings, Geertz’s funeral ritual, or public buses in the Jim Crow-era U.S. South. The foregrounding of different facets of identity in different spheres of activity means that people are united, separated, and hierarchically ordered in different ways based on the different criteria of different spheres. The fact that social boundaries are set by different facets of identity, depending on the social context, gives subjects some flexibility in conducting social relations. In my study area, as everywhere, subjects may interact in one sphere in ways that would be unacceptable in others.

Accounting for cross-racial-group mutual-aid quiltmaking. Improvisation using concepts of “multi-faceted identity” and “spheres of activity” figures in two possible explanations for the occasional cross-racial-group neighborliness that helped maintain a

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mixed-racial-group quilt culture under a racial group-based caste system. One of the explanations derives from the different standards for racial-group mixing that held sway in spheres that were work-related as opposed to those that involved voluntary socializing. The subsistence context of quiltmaking cast it as “work,” a realm where cross-racial-group mixing was common and appropriate (see also my discussion on pages 124-125). Although quiltmaking often involved voluntary, non-work-related socializing, the work context countered the stigma against cross-racial-group socializing. It allowed women in mixed-racial-group neighborhoods to engage in cross-racial-group, mutual-aid quilting if they enjoyed each other’s company and/or needed each other’s help.

The second explanation that these concepts provide for development of a mixed-racial-group quilt culture is that quiltmaking foregrounded cross-racial-group facets of identity, such as gender, economic group, age group, and homemaker status; and cross-racial-group needs and values such as industry, thrift, ingenuity, maternal domesticity, and providence. As with patriotic activities in 1840s southern Indiana, Cherokee clan meetings of the 1700s, and late 20th-century tale-telling at a Northern Irish pub, quiltmaking in mid-1900s southwestern Tennessee offered a realm where subjects who were separate in spheres that emphasized other facets of identity could choose to mix (Klassen 2007, Gearing 1962, Cashman 2007).

**Culture Study Using a Mixed-Racial-Group Social Base**

My finding of a mixed-racial-group quilt culture in the Tennessee Delta counters the assumption by some scholars that U.S. whites and blacks are culturally different. Hortense Powdermaker, for instance, influenced by Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville
Herskovits’s “Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation” (1936), writes, “No pattern which is taken over from a dominant group by a group in subjugation can be said to retain its original significance unmodified. It acquires new implications by the mere fact of transference” (1993:61-62). Applied to the current study, this statement oversimplifies the process by which U.S. blacks learned quiltmaking. It does not address the situation of a cultural form that is in some cases generations removed from the time of transference, given that some blacks participated in quiltmaking by the 1800s to 1830s (Allen and Tuckhorn 1995:50-51, 64-65; Dunton 1946:187-188; Virginia Consortium of Quilters 2006:120; Weinraub 2006:154); and whose originators (mostly of Anglo heritage) and assimilators (American Indians, African Americans, German Americans, etc.) have had the potential to accumulate common meanings over generations of interaction. Nor does it consider the great historical diversity of experiences and cultural influences related to aspects of identity other than racial group.

Herskovits, who co-authored the above-mentioned “memorandum,” reiterates the notion that borrowers change meanings in a later discussion of religious revivals:

> Whether Negroes borrowed from whites or whites from Negroes, in this or any other aspect of culture, it must always be remembered that the borrowing was never achieved without resultant change in whatever was borrowed, and, in addition, without incorporating elements which originated in the new habitat that, as much as anything else, give the new form its distinctive quality. [1967:225]

One problem with this scenario is the assumption that the whites and blacks remain distinctively separate while and after the borrowing occurs. While recognizing that borrowers will change a form, Herskovits does not consider that different lenders might have had different versions of the form or that post-transfer interactions might change the form for both lenders and borrowers, thus developing common meanings among
succeeding generations that would reflect age-group or regional affinity rather than racial-
group difference.

More recently, this paradigm occurs in a jazz studies context. Ingrid Monson writes,

Regardless of how well a white American or other non-African American may
master the sonic parameters of African American musical style, as long as a
racially stratified social structure exists, she or he will have a different social
relationship to the music than will an African American. [2009:33]

Although she acknowledges differential identity within racial groups, noting that “race is
inflected by gender, class, shade of color, sexuality, ethnicity, and national origin,” she does
not address the possibility that these differential identities could result in members of the
same racial group having different relationships with jazz, and that the relationships that
certain blacks have with jazz might resemble those of some whites more than those of
some other blacks (33).

Based on the meanings that quilting had for my consultants, I find in the present
study that the meanings of a form that passed from people of one ethnic heritage to those
of others over a period of generations under diverse conditions should not be assumed to
be generalizable based on a maker's ethnic heritage: Quiltmaking did not have the same
meanings for all blacks or for all whites, and some of its meanings crossed racial-group
lines based on cross-racial-group experiences and facets of identity, such as gender,
economic and social status, age group, and propinquity.

On the other hand, while aiming to avoid essentialism, I recognize that some
quilting meanings were racial group-specific, although not necessarily common to all
members of the group, due to certain aspects of history and experience. For instance, some
black women with small-farm backgrounds associated quilting with middle-class white
families for whom they had worked in their youth, whereas white women with small-farm
backgrounds generally did not have this experience in the South. On the other hand, many black and white women (and men) associated quiltmaking with their mothers and grandmothers.

Also, the middle-class view of quiltmaking as a marker of small-farm drudgery that was held by some rural white women who had married down (or up) was less likely to occur among black makers since few had been born into middle-class families. However, Davis, Gardner, and Gardner found that some urban blacks in 1930s Mississippi viewed quiltmaking as “old-fashioned,” and in the present study, some younger-generation rural blacks viewed it as tedious (1988:226). Finally, while many small-farm blacks and whites were proud of quiltmaking competence, quiltmaking that black women did for their own families was a particularly potent symbol of autonomy and womanly domesticity given that many of them worked for white households (see also Klassen 2008:22-23, 44-45). Additional cross-racial-group quilt meanings were: mother love, sparse resources, ingenuity, peer-group or family camaraderie, and warmth on cold nights.

**Directions for Future Research**

I call for more recognition of expressive-subsistence surround genres, those that express values related to the needs of everyday life, as a resource for understanding why certain conditions cause subjects to invest in or try to change a social system (Noyes 2014). In addition, studies of improvisation in everyday social relations and activities could increase our understanding of how subjects seek and sometimes achieve social change while retaining cultural continuity.¹

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I propose two lines of study to promote the use of improvisational genres for insights into historical trends as well as user experience. One is to achieve a better understanding of improvisation in expressive genres by identifying particular historical conditions and life experiences that promote its use; the other is to identify and differentiate among improvisational methods or styles that are distinctive to genres of music, verbal expression, and material culture, and that are dominantly subsistence-oriented or expressive. A grasp of these historical and generic variables should facilitate research on the relationship between expression, agency, and structure in different social settings and historical epochs.

In U.S. quilt studies, I would like to see close study of the democratization period of the late 1800s to early 1900s. Issues of particular interest are: the development of quilting motifs (including any association between motifs and makers of certain regions, economic groups, ethnicities, or racial groups); relations between linsey, crazy, string, and Log Cabin quilt designs, especially as used in scrap quilts; and relations between vernacular and published quilt-design sources. Data from such research also could be fruitful fodder for folkloristic studies bearing on the dynamics of quilt-design fashion development; on the components of emulation, improvisation, and innovation in the individual creative process; and on the relationship between vernacular and popular (mass) culture.

Given southwestern Tennessee’s distinctive heritage, it is a promising site for regional or community studies of various expressive genres. Particular to the region are its mix of Chesapeake, Upland South, and Lower/Deep South influences; and its range of black-white social relations (areas of racial-group separation and of blacks mixing with whites of different economic groups). I would especially like to see research on small-farm culture
across racial-group lines in the late 1800s to mid-1900s in areas such as sacred and secular music, foodways, dress, architecture, tales, and lore (about horse-racing for instance) as well as quiltmaking. Another direction of study that would build on the present work would be the evolution of southwestern Tennessee expressive genres among its many residents who migrated to Decatur, Illinois, in the mid-1900s, a city that several consultants laughingly refer to as “Little Brownsville.”

Endnote

1. Surround genres such as “weather lore” and subsistence quiltmaking have long been the focus of “folklife studies” within the broader folklore-studies disciplinary frame. But like the quiltmaking transition studied here, the meanings and practices of this part of my discipline have been in flux for at least two decades, with divergent and contradictory meanings and practices found among my colleagues. The relationship between cultural history, cultural anthropology, cultural geography, and folklore studies is one of many issues at play here, as is the changing role of folklife-focused public folklore practices in the U.S. These issues are beyond the scope of this work, but I am mindful that, in proposing more attention for “expressive-subsistence surround genres,” there is a sense in which I am calling for renewed attention within new intellectual frameworks, such as those provided by Noyes’s theorizing for folklore genres in general.
Fig. 7.1. Woodlawn Church members sing in front of the Haywood County Courthouse and Confederate soldier statue at the Hatchie Fall Fest in Brownsville. As the Obama-McCain presidential election approaches, the Obama T-shirt on the woman at left shows black involvement in politics, 10/18/08.

Fig. 7.2. Earl Beard used his ability to sew to improvise on the social system. Here he wears overalls that he had mended with knee-patches. Lauderdale County, 2009.
Appendix A: Chronological List of Consultant Contacts (Partial)

(includes all machine-recorded interviews [CDs] and a partial list of additional contacts; recorded interviews usually were accompanied by written notes and photographs)

12/28/06
Written notes (Indianapolis [Haywood County native], black): Thelma Austin

8/19/07
Written notes (Haywood County, black): women (including BR) who approached me after I announced my project at a Woodlawn Missionary Baptist Church service

8/20/07
CDs 1 and 2 (Haywood County, black): Opal Brack, Cobon Brack, Robbie Jarrett-King, Lillian Maynard, Lollie Lee Mann

8/22/07
CD 3 (Lauderdale County, white): Carolyn Simpson, Jean Bolding
CD 4: (same as 3, but Simpson only)
CDs 5 and 6: (Haywood County, black): Jeanette Holloway

8/23/07
CD 7 (Haywood County, black): Lue Vennia Robinson
CD 8 (Haywood County, black): Goldie Harwell
CDs 9 and 10 (Haywood County, white): Delois Baggett, Mary Jane Baggett

8/24/07
11 Written notes, photographs (Haywood County, black): Ola Jean Currie

8/31/07
Letter (Haywood County, white): Anne Baird

9/13/07
12 Written notes, phone call (Oak Park, Michigan/Haywood County, black): VW
10/13/08
Written notes, phone call (Haywood County, white): Anne Baird

10/16/08
CD 13 (Haywood County, black): Ollie Moore
CD 14 (Haywood County, black): Earl Beard, Lollie Mann, Julie Taylor

10/17/08
CD 15 (Lauderdale County beauty shop, white): Carolyn Simpson, Jean Bolding, EP, MF
Written notes (Haywood County, white): Delois Baggett

10/18/08
Written notes and photos: quilt show
Written notes (Haywood County, white): RJ (nursing home resident)
Written notes (Haywood County, black): Opal Brack

10/19/08
CD 16 (Haywood County, white): Anne Baird

10/20/08
CD 17 (Haywood County, white): Barbara Callery
CD 18 (Haywood County, white): Peggy Staggs
Written notes, photographs (Haywood County, black): FD (senior center patron)

10/21/08
CD 19 (Haywood County, white): Betsy Waddell

3/16/09
Written notes, photographs (Haywood County, white): Judy Carlton
Written notes, photographs (Lauderdale County, black): Earl Beard

3/17/09
Written notes (Haywood County, white): Anne Baird

3/18/09
CDs 20 and 21 (Haywood County, white): Lucille Hight

3/19/09
CDs 22 and 23 (Haywood County, black): Goldie Harwell, Ida Mae Coleman

3/20/09
CD 24 (Lauderdale County senior center [Halls Commission on Aging]): Betty L. Lovelace (white), Rosie Lemons (white), Mary Rose Halliburton (black), Norma Horvath (white), Luella Carter (black), Beth Cunningham (white), Gertrude Jones (black)
3/21/09
CD 25 (Madison County, white): Bob Bond

11/29/09
2A Written notes, phone call (Haywood County, black): Opal Brack

6/26/11
CDs 26 and 27 (Indianapolis/Haywood County, black): Thelma Austin

5/29/13
Written notes, phone call (Haywood County, black): Julie Taylor

5/31-6/3/13
Phone calls and e-mail: Debbie Lewis, Rawls Funeral Home, Brownsville

1/7/14
Phone call: Cobon Brack, Robbie Jarrett-King

1/8/14
Phone call: Lollie Mann

2/9/14
Phone calls: Ollie Moore, Barbara Callery, Robbie Jarrett-King, Lollie Mann
Appendix B: Consultant Initials and Names

(42 [6 anonymous, 2 autobiographies, 1 family history, 1 biography]; Haywood County residents unless otherwise noted)

AB  Anne Sanford Baird (1922-, white)
BB  Bob Bond (1962-, Madison County, white)
BC  Barbara Marbury Callery (1940-, white)
BCu Beth Cunningham (?-, Lauderdale County, white)
BL Betty L. Lovelace (?-, Lauderdale County, white)
BR Anon. (?-, black, Woodlawn Church member)
BW Betsy Waddell (1951-, white)
CB Cobon Brack (1916-, black)
CE Clay Evans (1925-, Chicago [Haywood County native], black [biography: Rose 1981])
CS Carolyn Simpson (1946-, Lauderdale County, white)
DB Delois Davis Baggett (1933-, white)
EB Earl Beard (1915-2012, black)
EP Anon. (1933-, Lauderdale County, white, beauty parlor customer)
FD Anon. (?-, black, Brownsville senior center member)
GH Goldie Harwell (1960-, black)
GJ Gertrude Jones (?-, Lauderdale County, black)
HLM H. L. Mitchell (1906-89, Lauderdale County, white [autobiography 1979])
IMC Ida Mae Coleman (1941-, black)
JB Jean Bolding (1932-, Lauderdale County, white)
JC Judy Hight Carlton (1956-, white)
JH Jeanette Holloway (1952-, black)
JT Julie May Beard Taylor (1938-, black)
LC Luella Carter (1922-, Lauderdale County, black)
LH Lucille Steele Hight (1927-, white)
LM Lollie Lee Beard Mann (1936-, black)
LMa Lillian Brack Maynard (1947-, California [Haywood County native], black)
LVR Lue Vennia Robinson (1922-, black)
MF Anon. (1925-, Lauderdale County, white, beauty parlor customer)
MJB Mary Jane Baggett (1962-, one of Delois Baggett’s two daughters, white)
MRH  Mary Rose Halliburton (1939-, Lauderdale County, black)
NH  Norma Horvath (?-, Lauderdale County, white)
OB  Opal Virginia Williams Brack (1919-, black)
OJC  Ola Jean Bullock Currie (1942-, black)
OM  Ollie Moore (1942-, black)
PS  Peggy Bailey Staggs (1938-, white)
RJ  Anon. (1925-, white, Brownsville nursing home resident)
RJK  Robbie Brack Jarrett-King (1939-, black)
RL  Rosie Lemons (1943-, Lauderdale County, white)
RS  Raye Springfield (1945-, black) (family history: Springfield 2000)
TA  Thelma Austin (1944-, Indianapolis [Haywood County native], black)
TT  Tina Turner (1939-, black/American Indian [Haywood County native] (autobiography: 1986)
VW  Anon. (1930-, Michigan [Haywood County native], black)
Appendix C: Deceased Quiltmakers (46)

(Haywood County unless noted)

Adna Williams [1893-1975, Opal Brack’s mother, Lauderdale County, black]
Alice Amis Bond [? -1987, Bob Bond’s mother, Henderson County native, probably German heritage, white], Madison County
Allie Ern Marbury Brantley [1871-1935, Betsy Waddell’s grandmother, white]
Betty Brantley Sullivan [1925-96, Betsy Waddell’s mother, white]
Cassie Binford Taylor [? -after 1959, older friend of Delois Baggett, white]
Elizabeth “Bett” Moore [? -?, Beth Cunningham’s great-grandmother, Dyer County native, white], Lauderdale County
Ellen Diora Upton Marbury [1917-2003, Barbara Callery’s mother, Arkansas native, white]
Frances Amanda King Sanford [1895-1960, Anne Baird’s mother, white]
Frankie Lee Bailey [1921-2002, Peggy Staggs’ mother, Henderson County native, white]
Gladys Anna Brantley [1895-1984, Mary Etta Brantley’s daughter, Betsy Waddell’s maternal great-aunt, white]
Goldie Southall Morris [1916-99, Lula Jones Southall’s daughter, Goldie Harwell’s great-aunt, cousin of Rosa Morton (Ida Mae Coleman’s mother), black]
Helen Jones Boone [? -?, Rosa Morton’s mother, Lula Southall’s sister, black]
Ida Herbert [? -?, Romus Hight’s maternal grandmother, May Hight’s mother, white]
Irma Steele [1905-77, Lucille Hight’s mother, white]
Isadora Scallions [? -?, Carolyn Simpson’s great-aunt, white], Lauderdale County
Jean Bolding’s mother [? -?, white], northeastern Mississippi (Pontotoc County)
Johnanna Bullock [1913-96, Ola Jean Currie’s mother, black]
Laura Applewright Stone Tipton [1832-1913, Anne Baird’s paternal great-grandmother, white]
Laura Carroll [? -?, Norma Horvath’s husband’s grandmother, white], Lauderdale County
Lela Kate Carlton [1883-1964, grandmother of Judy Carlton’s husband, white]
Letticia Frances Tate Hazelwood Howse [1830-1902, Tennessee Callery’s paternal grandmother, Virginia native, white]
Lettie Rogers [1885-1971, Ollie Moore’s grandmother, black]
Lue Rena Davis Mann [1894-1980, Lollie Mann’s mother-in-law, black]
Lula Jones Southall [ca. 1878-1958, Goldie Morris’s mother, Helen Boone’s sister, black]
Maggie Holloway Tyus [early 1900s-1988, Jeanette Holloway’s grandmother, black]
Mallie Palmer Amis [1882-1964, Bob Bond’s maternal grandmother, white], Henderson Co.
Maria A. [Applewright Hill?] Brown [1809-71, Anne Baird’s paternal grandmother’s
grandmother, Laura Tipton’s mother, North Carolina native, white], Tipton County
Mary Etta Cobb Brantley [1871-1935, Gladys Brantley’s mother, Betsy Waddell’s maternal
great-grandmother, white]
Mary Frances Brack [1882-1966, Cobon Brack’s mother, Opal Brack’s mother-in-law,
Robbie Jarrett-King’s and Lillian Maynard’s grandmother, black]
Mary Lucille Delancey Broadstreet [?-ca. 1956, Carolyn Simpson’s grandmother, Arkansas
native, German heritage, white], Lauderdale County
Mary Jones [?-?, grandmother of Goldie Southall Morris and Rosa Boone Morton, black]
Mary Keathley [?-?, relative of crazy-quilt owner Sue Keathley, white]
May Hight [1907-80, Lillian Hight’s mother-in-law, white]
Mildred McCool [?-?, Lucille Hight’s aunt, white]
Minerva Paralee Yochum [1887-1967, Rosie Lemons’ paternal grandmother, Missouri
native, white], Lauderdale County
Mollie Green [?-before 1942, Ola Jean Currie’s great-grandmother, black]
Mollie Green Williams [c. 1875-1964, Ola Jean Currie’s grandmother, black]
Ollie Taylor [?-ca. 1969; her son gave eight or nine of her quilts to FD’s husband after
she died (10/20/08), black]
Rachel Ann Williams Davis [1869-1952, Delois Baggett’s paternal grandmother, southern
Illinois native, Union veteran’s daughter, white]
Rosa Lee Boone Morton [1914-95, Helen Boone’s daughter, Ida Mae Coleman’s mother,
cousin of Goldie Harwell’s great-aunt Goldie Morris, black]
Rozelle Tipton Sanford [1852-1930, Anne Baird’s paternal grandmother, Tipton County
native, white]
Ruth Simpson [ca. 1910-90s, Carolyn Simpson’s mother-in-law, white/American Indian],
Lauderdale County
Sarah Ann Alston Read King [1871-1965, Anne Baird’s paternal grandmother, white]
Tennessee Tate Howse Gallery [1890-1982, Tom Callery’s paternal grandmother, Hillville
community, white], Haywood/Hardeman line
Verniece Staggs [1915-2002, Peggy Staggs’ mother-in-law, white]
Virtrress Beard [1921-59, Earl Beard’s wife, Lollie Mann’s and Julie Taylor’s mother, black]
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Monson, Ingrid

Morton, Dorothy Rich

Neth, Mary
Netting, Robert McC.

Nickolds, Mary Costillo

Norris, Sharon

Noyes, Dorothy


Osler, Dorothy


Painter, Nell Irvin

Parsons, Talcott

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Schneider, Jane, and Annette B. Weiner

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Sims, Martha C., and Martine Stephens

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Turner, Ann Eliza Jones

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Twining, Mary  
1977  An Examination of African Retentions in the Folk Culture of the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Folklore, Indiana University, Bloomington.


Uselton, Darrell B.  
1996  Irish Immigration and Settlement in Memphis, Tennessee, 1820s-1860s. WTHSP 50:115-129.

Valentine, Fawn  


Virginia Consortium of Quilters  

Vlach, John Michael  

Wahlman, Maude Southwell  


Waldvogel, Merikay  

Walker, Melissa  

Wax, Rabbi James A.  
Weiner, Annette B.


Weinraub, Anita Zaleski, ed.

Whayne, Jeannie

Wilk, Richard R.

Williams, Charlotte Allen

Williams, Samuel Cole

Wilson, Sadye Tune, and Doris Finch Kennedy

Wilson, Valerie

Wingfield, Marshall
1949 Tipton County, Tennessee. WTHSP 3:5-26.

Winters, Donald L.

Wise, Gene

Witherspoon, Gary

Wynn, Linda T.

Zuckerman, Michael
Objective: Independent scholar, consultant, curator, and collections research in folklore, quilt, and material culture studies.

Degrees
1986  B.A. (Phi Beta Kappa), IU School of Journalism.

Selected Publications
2009  Vernacular Quiltmaking in Mid-1900s Western Tennessee. Blanket Statements (American Quilt Study Group quarterly). Fall 2009, 97:1, 3-5.
Curated Exhibits

2002  “Quilts from Monroe County African-Americans.” Sixty-two quilts, text and labels with quilter profiles and photos. Monroe County History Center, Bloomington, IN. February-March.

Selected Papers, Diamond Sessions (7-minute PPTs), Lectures

2012  “Continuity and Relevance in Mid-1900s Southwestern Tennessee Quiltmaking.” American Folklore Society (AFS), New Orleans.
2011  “Quiltmaking as a Lens on Race Relations in Mid-1900s West Tennessee.” AFS, Bloomington, IN.
2009  “Quilt Aesthetics and Cultural Values in the Mid-1900s Rural U.S. South.” International Quilt Study Center Symposium, Lincoln, NE.
2006  “Polk’s Fancy: Quiltmaking, Patriotism, and Gender in the Mexican War Era.” American Quilt Study Group, Hartford, CN.

Positions, Selected Grants, Teaching

2014-2017  Research Associate, Mathers Museum of World Cultures
2013-2014  Editorial assistant, Museum Anthropology Review
2010-2011  AAUW American Fellowship
2010  Harry and Alma Egan Fellowship
2009 and 2010  Instructor, F360 Indiana Folklore, IUPUI Anthropology
2008  American Quilt Study Group Lucy Hilty research grant
2007  Project on African Expressive Traditions research grant

Research Statement

I study vernacular material-culture forms and their linguistic representations to understand the living conditions, history, and social relations of their makers and users. My fieldwork includes fancy quilts of Germans and Scots Irish in 1840s Indiana, utility quilts of blacks and whites in the mid-1900s Tennessee Delta, how black and white quiltmakers ordered domestic space in the Depression era, representations of African-American quilters in the 1900s-2000s, how early-1900s postcard-writers expressed social-group identity, and how Eastern Band Cherokee expressed identity in 1970s tourist-doll-making.