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THE CRESCENT AND THE CROSS:
ISLAMIC INFLUENCE IN SOUTHERN CULTURE

A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Mississippi

Jesse L. Wright

October 2010

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all the quilters and the staffs at the Tutwiler Community Center in Tutwiler, MS and the Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson, MS. These folks showed me how quilting can sustain a community, how a community can sustain quilting and how both of those things can sustain a thesis.

ABSTRACT

To a large degree, America has adopted African American culture as its own. One may hear and see African American influence in popular music, grammar, fashion and art, but rarely are the sources of these influences divined, in no small part to difficulties inherent in interdisciplinary studies. This thesis will examine the Islamic aesthetics in African American quilts.

This work focuses on design and color elements and I trace Islamic influence from West Africa to the U.S. South by way of the slave trade. The original scholarship comes from in the Mississippi Delta, although this thesis also uses quilt books from around the South in order to show widespread regional similarities.

Prior scholarship on the Islamic influence in the U.S. focused on a few remarkable Muslim slaves and how they expressed themselves within the region. This thesis relies less on personal biography and more on Islamic cultural diffusion in West Africa before and during the slave trade and then on the remarkable similarities between West African weaving and African American quilting traditions here.

PREFACE

This thesis is about the process of cultural diffusion and it is in two parts. First is the story the Muslim influence in West Africa. By the time of the U.S. involvement with the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Muslims and Muslim goods touched every major cultural group in West Africa. Therefore, the second part of this thesis involves the impact Muslim influence had on the South by way of those groups. I approach these topics through the disciplines of anthropology, art and history. To date, too few scholars have approached the process of Muslim influence within Southern culture and, of those who have done some work, my own theories and interpretations are unique. The focus here—especially in the original scholarship—is African American quilting. Despite the relatively narrow focus, the Muslim influence present in modern African American quilts indicates influence in other areas that anthropologists and historians have yet to uncover. Muslims in West Africa represented God (or, perhaps more accurately, Allah) in a visual way through their textiles and we may see this in African American quilts.

To begin any cultural study it is useful to revisit E. B. Tylor's classic definition: "Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor 1996 [1871]: 26).

It is no easy thing to diagram how beliefs, art, morals or any of the rest come to form or influence a culture. Marx and Engels argue that history and culture derive from social and labor conflict and thus, in a region riven with conflict and mobility, we ought to expect to find a complex web of cultural origins. Even prior to the development of

what would be the U.S. South, Africans lived in a world of perpetual conflict and evolving customs, and it was in this shifting cultural bedrock where some of our so-called Southern culture was born. Repeatedly, from about the seventeenth century onward in West Africa, as pressures from the international slave trade increased, dominant cultures exerted increased pressure on minority or enslaved cultures. This is not to say that the minority or enslaved culture acquiesced its identity. On both sides of this dichotomy, individuals played an important if often unclear role. This is especially true in the context of this thesis, which is, among other things, a long review of processual influence between dominant and sub-cultures. Hence, theories of agency have a particular importance in this study.

Laura Ahearn has provided a “provisional” (though rather high sounding) definition: “[A]gency refers to the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (Ahearn 2001:112) In other words, agency refers to the individual’s ability to act given legal, social and cultural constraints. Rather than limit the cause of social change to broad cultural or socio-political forces (e.g. the international and internal slave trade) or to ecological or biological forces, we should also pay some attention to the individual and his or her needs, wants, and dreams *in addition to* the desires of the dominant culture. Power structures offer the powerless ways to respond that accentuate differences and, therefore, justify the legitimacy of the elite. For example, dominant cultures can offer minority cultures freedom to express certain differences in visual arts, language, music, fashion, social behavior because those differences help accentuate the differences between the two cultures. This deviance is necessary and, as such, it might be the

wellspring for broad cultural evolution, given enough time (Foucault 1995:27). If we focus on agency, then, we may understand culture as the product of human endeavor in the face of oppression. That is, we might even see the human spirit itself (Roth 2004:14-15).

If cultural boundaries exist through admixtures of de jure and de facto circumstances, much is uncertain because while the laws of yesterday might be matters of record, de facto cultural boundaries were matters of individual preference and therefore these boundaries were not always put on record. For example, on a plantation in the U.S. South, slaves on individual plantations might all be enslaved, but they might also have very different experiences based on individual (that is, human) factors. This thesis will argue that fluid cultural identities and allowances—both legal and social—helped spread certain aesthetics preferences. This spread is the focus, not the groups per se. The exact numbers of Muslims enslaved in the U.S. is unknown. Alan Austin estimates just under 30,000 Muslims slaves while Michael Gomez estimates anywhere from thousands to tens of thousands (Diouf 1998:46). Rather than deal with vague, unsubstantiated numbers, a focus on agency and on individual action provides a clear theoretical framework for the process of aesthetic diffusion.

When collective individuals are taken as a whole, cultures too may have agency. Much of this thesis is an exploration of how minority cultures engaged with dominant cultures, sometimes passively and sometimes actively, and how each culture or group sought to maximize its perceived license. Sometimes these cultural clashes came as a result of slave wars or because of slavery, but not always. The cultural development of

Marx and Engels is not always the result of a violent struggle and, at least occasionally, rational choices, through dialog and mutual agreement and the law may result in considerable cultural diffusion and growth.

Historians and sociologists have documented plenty of individual narratives (and some group narratives) within the South. The experience of a slave, a slaver, a yeoman, a poor laboring free white, a plantation owner—all of these people have their space within Southern history. But the issue of this thesis—just as important—has been somewhat overlooked within any single discipline. More than anything else this thesis is a meditation on a theme: what happens to culture when you take an individual (or a large group) from one culture and put him in the midst of a new culture?

Tylor gives us some idea of what a culture is, but he is less help in discerning how the culture developed. The question of cultural development is not new and an entire historiography seems uncalled for here, but one book does deserve mention. Melville Herskovits's classic *The Myth of the Negro Past* is the first American anthropological text that argued that American black culture was the product of syncretism, or a blend of different cultures. Prior to Herskovits' book, popular thought held that Africa had no culture and that black folk arts and crafts did not derive, in part, in Africa, but were misinterpretations of European art and craft.

Herskovits argued that not only did Africa have its own cultures, he argued that the African Americans, far from being culturally retarded, had developed their own distinct culture in the U.S. through syncretism. Today syncretism is used frequently (and has a long history of use) by religious scholars to explain subtle corruptions of orthodoxy

by various cultures. Indeed, Arthur Ramos, a Brazilian, and one of the first anthropologists to study African culture in the Americas, used the term in this way. His work focused on the Bahia cults and he noticed that the members had given the names of Catholic saints to their old African gods and so while the cult members were all ostensible Catholics, they also worshiped things more African than Catholic. This process of religious syncretism happened across the New World. In Haiti, for example, it is said that 90 percent of the people are Catholic and 100 percent are voodoo. Herskovits also uses religion to make his point (he looks for Africanisms in Protestant churches) but he also argues that syncretism is part of an “acculturative continuum,” or an ongoing process across the entire cultural landscape. This continuum opens up the process to include all kinds of cultural practices (all of Tylor’s sense of culture now comes into play) and it leaves some members with strong links to X culture and others with strong ties to Y culture and a great many in between (Herskovits 1958:xxxvi-xxxix).

I argue that this process happened once in Africa between Muslims and West Africans and then again in the U.S. History will show the movement of people and the narrative here, but anthropology will provide the framework. Jan and Leo Lucassen argued a decade ago that the greatest interdisciplinary divide in immigration theory lies between history and anthropology. One discipline (history) focuses on the facts of the immigrant, his population numbers, his destination, et cetera, and the other discipline (anthropology) focuses on cultural diffusion and ethnic identity (Brettell, Hollifield 2000:2). Taken together in a study of the South, history and anthropology can reveal much new information. Many different groups have lived in the South and many legacies

are yet unexplored. In part this is because the fields of anthropology and sociology are relatively new (twentieth century anyway) but this is also because the dominant culture in the South failed to properly see the other.

From the early nineteenth century until the middle twentieth century, popular American opinion held that black slaves were simply Africans—sad, benighted creatures from a dark continent itself far removed from civilization. The people from Africa were a single people, all ignorant and savage. Meanwhile the narrative held that if slavery and colonialism were evil, they were evils that produced, well, civilization. Slavery was a benevolent, beneficial and civilizing influence. The white Southern man led himself to believe his slaves gained culture and that his slaves gave nothing except their labor—a small price indeed for a people who knew nothing other than brute labor, sickness and death.

Establishing who came from Africa has taken decades and in fact scholarship is still being introduced broadening and expanding the meta narrative, though this is a tedious process. Establishing origins bedevils historians because so much of the historical record is misunderstood. When they arrived, slaves were naked and Americans or Europeans grouped slaves by their “nation.” Historians have historically taken these names as suspect and assumed that white slave traders assigned nations. But this is not necessarily so and, particularly in Louisiana, the slaves themselves gave their “nations” of origin (Hall 2003: 66-68). Yet even in instances where slaves gave their own nations, confusion still exists.

Country names might have been kingdom names or clan names but whites also

confused language names and sometimes place names for country names¹. In particular, in the English colonies, the name Mina is problematic as it could refer to either the port Elmina or to the Akan people in general while in Latin America and Brazil Mina could mean anyone from West Africa (Hall 2003 68-70).

Finally, the people in Africa could change their “nation” of origin if it was in their interest to do so. Europeans did not wholly construct the idea of national associations in West Africa, but neither was the association fixed or predicated on one particular thing. National association could depend on such variables as language and occupational caste. Given the fluid nature of West Africa societies at the time of the slave trade, Africans could change their ethnicity and, on occasion, they could switch from being a slave to being a slave owner. Europeans used linguistics to determine nationality but, even when Africans identified as being a member of a specific linguistic group, our picture is hardly complete. About 50 different languages existed in West Africa at the time of the slave trade and, as one would expect, individual slaves could be expected to be multilingual (Lovejoy 2003:10-12). Even today, many African groups divide into subgroups that are distinct from the larger linguistic group. One example is the Bambara society in Mali. The Bambara are today the largest ethnic group in Mali and they are members of the Manding people (already eighteenth and nineteenth century slave traders have two possible names to confuse). We know that Bambara were one of the earliest and largest slave groups in French Louisiana but we do not know much else. For example, six smaller societies make up the larger Bambara group and two societies, the Dyo and

¹ And even a single country name could be spelled any number of ways therefore making it all the more difficult for future anthropologists to differentiate slave groups.

Gouan, lay far to the south, cut off from the main centers of Bambara culture, the cities of Segou and Kaarta. Western anthropologists knew nothing about the Dyo until the 1950s and it was not until 1974 when the Gouan got their first mention in Western anthropological texts (Hershey 1983:13). As it happens both of these Bambarran societies are old enough to have existed during the trans-Atlantic trade—the Bambara group was at its height at about 1760—and they happened to have different religious and social structures from their northern Bambarran neighbors (Imperato 1983:16-17).

Again, cultures evolve and mix by inscrutable degrees. Chinese restaurants exist in the deepest South, but their presence does not make the region any less Southern per se (although one might argue that the ubiquitous Chinese all-u-can-eat Southern buffet, with its requisite vanilla pudding and watermelon slices has become *less* Chinese and *more* Southern). Similarly, Muslims have lived in the South for hundreds of years. We know of individual Muslims present in the New World alongside Europeans, Christians, Catholics and Jews, each of which has had its influence within the modern South academically documented and certified, and we know (less) of Muslim culture in the region. Like the pudding at the vanilla Chinese buffet, Muslim influence sits on the periphery of academic study. But, there it is, none the less.

Even the few authors (notably Sylviana Diouf, Allan Austin and Michael Gomez) who have studied Islamic presence in the South seem reluctant to rip open Southern culture and search beyond small, singular examples (e.g., individuals, narratives and, in the case of Gomez, the rise of the Nation of Islam). But consider again the Southern Chinese restaurant. Not every dish on that buffet is Chinese and if we view the Southern

cultural expression as some large buffet, we will see dishes from around the world, including some with origins in Arabia. But, just as a Chinese buffet can remain a Chinese buffet with vanilla pudding and watermelon, so too can Southern culture withstand arts, linguistics, music and beliefs of Oriental origin (well, Middle Eastern anyway). In more academic terms, because scholarship focuses on tales of the personal, none of these aforementioned scholars focuses on the cultural legacy outside the personal and/or religious legacy.

Austin's book is a resource to any student of Muslim history in the U.S. as it chronicles the lives of numerous known Muslims. However, invaluable as it is, his book is limited only to slaves we *know* were Muslim and, on an individual level, there were very few of those. Austin's work is important because it shows how individual Muslims lived and that they did live in the South in some number, but his work does not show how these Muslims influenced African American and later black culture.

Diouf and Gomez extrapolate from Austin's work to show later Muslim influence. Between Diouf and Gomez, Diouf makes the best argument for the spread of Muslim influence in her book *Servants of Allah: African Muslims Enslaved in the Americas* although her title belies the limitations of her work. These historians are mistaken to credit the spread of Muslim influence only to those who were active Muslims, although Diouf does acknowledge, briefly, in her book that elements of Islam appealed to non-Muslims in West Africa (Diouf 1998:7). Even so, her book does not push forward any bold new arguments so much as it raises questions. Late in her book, Diouf iterates Gerhard Kubik's theory that Muslims influenced the blues but, outside that argument,

Diouf's theories are purely speculative and make up only the final 30 pages of a book of over 200 pages. The majority of her work is an examination of the lives of Muslims in the Americas (as her title would suggest) and Islam as a religion. In the end, she spends more time explaining why the religion did not survive whole cloth than explaining why and what elements survive today (Diouf 1998:179). At one point in her book, Diouf rejects out of hand any notion that Islamic icons could have survived because, according to her, they did not exist. Diouf compares Christian cultural transmission to Islamic cultural transmission and concludes that Christians had an easier time because they could use iconography—graphic representations of Christ and God et al—whereas Muslims had only Arabic (Diouf 1998:182). First, her claim about Islam and icons is incorrect—West African Muslims use icons, especially in its tapestries, and it has done so for hundreds of years. Second, her claim about Arabic is equally false as locally spoken creoles and languages as well as *Ajami*, a localized written form of Arabic—was common in West Africa at that time.

Diouf's point is that the pure transmission of the religion fell apart within the United States, and my argument is something else altogether. While Diouf's book definitely inspired the early stages of my work, my focus therefore is decidedly *not* on the religion or even its handful of famous historic practitioners. My focus is on the cultural impact of Muslims in the U.S. by way of quilts. I review a visual aesthetic inspired by Muslims in West Africa and then I show the spread of this aesthetic within the U.S. That is to say, I do not argue for the existence of any “hidden” Muslim societies within the U.S.; the influence I focus on is quite clear and present.

Of the major works on Islamic influence in the South, probably Gomez's work is most different from my own. In *Exchanging our Country Marks*, Gomez lays out a bold argument for deep Islamic influence, which he gives full form in the subsequent *The Black Crescent*. Like Diouf, Gomez focuses on the whole of the Americas.² In *Country Marks* Gomez examines how African cultures informed each other and specifically how non-Muslim peoples (the Bambara) could be influenced by Muslims and how Muslim culture shaped day to day life in the antebellum South (Gomez 1998: 44-48). This is a bold argument because it makes two important claims, both of which challenge popular belief, but seem valid. Gomez writes that the U.S. South reshaped the identities of African slaves after a few generations, but he argues the slaves' cultural background was similar enough to allow for an easy synthesis into an African American identity. His later book, *The Black Crescent*, argues something more problematic. In this book, Gomez argues that Islam was the wellspring for later black unity, in particular the Nation of Islam. While one might suppose that devout Muslim slaves kept the five pillars of Islam as best they could, one may be skeptical how they managed to influence African American culture to such a significant degree as to inspire a rebirth of Islam generations out of Africa.

Gomez concludes that African Muslims in the U.S. remained, to a large degree, culturally homogenous and, as such, these communities remained essentially Muslim. Gomez focuses on individuals and geographic regions (specifically the Sea Islands) instead of the whole South and he focuses on a wholly different sort of Muslim than the

² This approach seems to treat African Islam as a whole rather than as a series of interrelated but ultimately separately understood interpretations. This is important to remember: *al-umma*, the Muslim world, is

sort dealt with in this thesis. In fact, Gomez's seems to argue for a sort of mythical African American Muslim. Gomez argues that African Muslims were particularly devout and, because of their intense devotion, the majority of their faith survived through the ages in the U.S. South, hidden but intact (Gomez 2005:143).

He then goes on to make claims that he calls "speculative in the extreme" including that there might have been hidden and isolated Muslim communities in the U.S., including the Melungeons of the central South and the Ishmaelites of the northern South, both of which allegedly pre-date American independence (Gomez 2005:185-186).

Ultimately, Gomez connects Noble Drew Ali, the founder of the Moorish Science Temple, a forerunner to the Nation of Islam, to the Ishmaelites. (Gomez 2005:186).

Gomez writes that "... [I]n final analysis, Noble Drew Ali is necessarily the bridge over which the Muslim legacies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries crossed over into the Muslim communities of the twentieth and twenty-first" (Gomez 2005:203). What he means is, without Ali, we would never get the Nation of Islam. Yet we know very little of Noble Drew Ali's biography because, like many religious hucksters, he told all manner of tales to sell himself (Gomez 2005:204). In any case, Noble Drew Ali did not found the Nation of Islam and likely had only minimal impact on it. Wallace Fard Muhammad founded the Nation of Islam, and his biography is even more outrageous than Ali's story. Fard claimed to have been born in Mecca and educated in England. He told followers in Detroit that had given up the life of a European diplomat so that he could teach American blacks (whom he called "uncle") how to save themselves from the white devil. Fard told African Americans they were stuck in "the wilderness of North America, surrounded and

divided against itself even today and it was hardly more coherent in eighteenth century West Africa.

robbed by the Cave Man.” (Erdmann Beynon 1938:896-897).

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has 816 pages of material all available online about Wallace Fard. The FBI sums Fard up thusly:

Wallace Fard was born 1891 in New Zealand. He was the founder of the Black Muslim sect, "Lost-Found Nation of Islam in North America". Fard arrived in the United States in 1913, settling briefly in Portland, Oregon. He was arrested in 1918 for violation of the Woolwine Act (California prohibition law) and in 1926, for the violation of the State Poison Act (sale of narcotics) and was sentenced to San Quentin. After his release from prison in 1929, he went to Chicago, then on to Detroit as a silk peddler. In 1934, Fard left Detroit and was never heard from again. A San Francisco newspaper article written in 1963 exposed Fard as an enterprising racketeering fake.

(Federal Bureau of Investigation: 2010)

Considering Muslims influenced most of West Africa and given the widespread presence of West Africans in the U.S. South, vestiges of Muslim culture ought to be expected. While it is doubtful those West African Muslims gave rise of the Nation of Islam, those early African Muslims did affect Southern culture in profound and oblique ways.

Muslim influence in the U.S. South is the result of a series of cultural exchanges. The first cultural exchange happened about 1000 years ago when Arab traders made the first inroads into West Africa. The explosion of the trans-Atlantic and trans-Saharan slave trades and the attendant jihads that swept West Africa represented the second wave of cultural exchange and, finally, the third cultural exchange happened once those slaves arrived in the New World. Along the way the acculturation process affected the state as well as the society. In this way, the influence in African American quilts is the result of decontextualized cultural exchanges rather than a legacy of a particular African people.

The original work here will focus on the African American quilting tradition of

the South—specifically in Mississippi—and the origins of certain aesthetic tastes therein. Quilts hold as a rare place in African American cultural history in that the quilting tradition was one of the few cultural outlets available to slaves and, like slave music, the careful historian may read quilts as texts. Quilts are also useful because prior to the slave trade a weaving tradition existed in West Africa and, in the Americas, quilting has persisted until the present and in all cases rich cultural tradition surrounds the craft.

My thesis will show first how West African states and cultures welcomed Muslims and their culture, with a particular emphasis on textiles. Then the thesis will review a handful of common African American quilting designs and discuss their possible West African origins and their meanings to West African Muslims. I will also look at English textile history because it is possible that one common design arrived in the U.S. from England by way of Muslim traders.

In order to present a complete picture of cultural diffusion, this thesis will briefly examine other areas of Muslim impact in West African culture and then I will trace their development in the U.S. to show how Muslims in West African influenced the whole of Southern culture, rather than small collections of people in the South.

The first and middle sections—those detailing cultural development in West Africa and in the historical U.S. South—are longer than the final section, the review of modern quilting. Owing to the nature of the work—an effort to show the process rather than just the outcome—such length is necessary. Lastly, the thesis will examine modern African American quilting and show Muslim influence through a link some 1,000 years and thousands of miles distant. Much of the original research here will come from

extensive interviews among Mississippi artisans in an attempt to discern whether the Muslim aesthetic in Southern quilts is gone forever, or whether it is fading or whether it is a permanent part of the Southern folk culture. These interviews will provide some original conclusions allow for reinterpretations of Southern culture. Finally the thesis will set quilting alongside other elements of Southern culture that may have been influenced by West African Muslims, including blues music, language, clothes and food.

Bear in mind, as Herskovitz has already shown, African American culture was not African and it was not European and the syncretic process he described in *The Myth of the Negro Past* was not a neat, mathematical process. Muslims are not responsible for X amount of the South any more than African or European or Native American cultures are responsible for a quantifiable amount. Rather, the cultures live in men and women and quilts and paintings and songs and even dinner. It is who we are.

The cells of our bodies and the bodies of all mammals first appeared on this earth billions of years ago as plankton. Now, we can only speculate at the cause of this birth. Something changed at its core. Elements which had before been divided came together for the first time. A new thought perhaps took form. And the progeny of these plankton still float in the sea, not too close to the surface, not too far from the light.

— Susan Griffin, from *A Chorus of Stones* (Griffin 1992:3).

Every Name That Exists

*No atom exists
that is apart
from the sun*

*Every raindrop is from
the same ancient sea*

*Has no one a name
for this ultimate Truth?*

*Every name that exists
is already owned
by that Truth*

— Dara Shikuh, from *Love's Alchemy* (Shikuh 2006:93).

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CHAPTER I:
DANCES WITH ISLAM IN EARLY AMERICA

A September 2010 poll by the Washington Post and ABC sought to gauge Americans' views on Islam. The questions ranged from "...do you feel you do or do not have a good basic understanding of the teachings and beliefs of Islam ..." to "you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of Islam," and "[d]o you personally know anyone who is a Muslim, or not?" The Post has periodically asked these same questions since September 2001 and, perhaps surprisingly, almost a decade after the attacks, 49 percent of Americans have an unfavorable view of Islam—an increase of about 25 percent since January 2002, when only a quarter of Americans held unfavorable views of Muslims. Meanwhile, personal relationships with Muslims have increased only eight percent to 49 percent of the population (Washington Post-ABC News Poll: 2010). A month prior to the Post's poll, the Pew Research Center found that about 20 percent of Americans believe President Obama is a Muslim, and even at the height of his popularity, in October 2008, only 51 percent of Americans believed then-Sen. Obama to be a Christian. When the Pew pollsters asked how they knew the President is a Muslim, 60 percent said they heard it in the media and 11 percent said they knew from the President's own words and actions (Pew Research Poll 2010). Given those nonsense sources, perhaps the average American's professed knowledge of Islam ought to be reconsidered. Clearly, these poll numbers show (see figs. 1 & 2 p. 115-116) rising intolerance against Islam, but also there appears to be no clear idea of what, exactly, Islam is or who Muslims are.

Modern America is full of famous Muslims, from recent converts like Muhammad Ali and Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens) to national policy insiders like Zalmay Khalilzad, George W. Bush's Afghan advisor (and later United Nations ambassador) to Fazlur Rahman Khan, the architect who designed the Sears Tower (Washington Post:2001; Chicago Sun-Times:2009). Our history, too, is rich with Islamic presence. This is especially true of the South, where one may find traces of Islam in the food, the music, and the quilts. Indeed, Islam has been here all along.

In 1860 a Georgia doctor declared the region to be a “great hog eating confederacy” and “the Republic of Porkdom” (Brown 2001:46). With respect to the pig's popularity in the South, one might think it incredible that, only 17 years later, the state of Georgia felt obligated to proselytize the benefits of pig meat, but the Georgia Commissioner of Agriculture did exactly that. That agency produced a small book, *A Manual on the Hog* which offered hog meat as perfect diet for working men. “Besides the pieces proper,” the book declared, “the trimmings are made into the most delicious sausages which none but a Jew or Mohammedan could refuse.” This is the second reference to Muslims (and Jews) and it follows an acknowledgement that both groups represented “large religious sects” (Janes 1877:1, 17).

Indeed, by 1877, the U.S. had 100 years' worth of diplomatic experience with Islamic states—both in slave trade, in civil society, and in war. The South enriched itself first with indigo and then with cotton—both crops with historic ties to West African Muslims. On a national level, Presidents Washington and Jefferson created the country's first peacetime naval and marine forces in order to wage war against the Muslim states in

North Africa and, with that war, the U.S. also developed its earliest foreign policy (Allison 1995:30-34).

Jefferson's war with the Barbary States in North Africa in the first years of the nineteenth century show the African Muslims as a strong people, as a people who were wealthy and well organized and who controlled a powerful navy and trade routes in one of the most important bodies of water at that time. Those northern Barbary States had sturdy and ancient ties to West Africa through mutual commercial interests, Muslim theology, Muslim philosophy, art, and culture. There is some irony in that the same religious group that so terrorized the U.S. navy in the Mediterranean for two decades were also powerless to stop the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Slaves first set foot on the American mainland 350 years ago, beginning in the early sixteenth century and only the Civil War stopped their importation. For most of that time, West Africa was part of the equation. Until 1820, about four Africans emigrated to the Americas for every one European and, following the genocide of the American Indians, Africa emerged as the primary source for new people in the New World (Eltis:2007). By 1825 the United States of America—itsself not the biggest importer of African slaves—had imported almost two million Africans (Eltis, Halbert:2010). Most of those men and women came from West Africa.

In West Africa, Islam informed two distinct worlds. First Islam and Muslims influenced African states or kingdoms both in terms of actual statecraft as well as through economic activities like trade. Second, Islam and Muslims influenced individuals through the dissemination of a religion and technologies and aesthetics. In other words, one may

view Islamic and Muslim influence on a macro (state) level and on a micro (personal) level.

CHAPTER II:
ISLAM IN AFRICA: THE STATE

Almost all Muslims, irrespective of nationality, observe a whole host of customs from the cradle to the grave. The Five Pillars of Islam mandate individuals to express belief (there is no god but God, and Muhammad is his prophet), fasting, the giving of alms, the hajj (a trip to Mecca, at least once) and the five daily prayers. At its most elemental, Islam is a religion of the individual, independent of a complex church hierarchy and this means that Islam allows accommodations. Meanwhile, pre-Islamic kingdoms in West Africa enjoyed no woven textiles, no written alphabet and no organized school system. Just as Islam in West Africa would develop an African character, so too would West Africa adopt some Islamic technologies and customs.

Clifford Geertz illustrates well how Islam can adapt to its surroundings on the first page of *Islam Observed*, his short comparison of Islam in Indonesia and Morocco.

He writes:

...old wine goes as easily into new bottles as old bottles contain new wine. It is not only very difficult to discover the ways in which the shapes of religious experience are changing, or if they are changing at all; it is not even clear what sorts of things one ought to look for in order to find out. ... It is a matter of discovering just what sorts of beliefs and practices support what sorts of faith under what sorts of conditions. Our problem is ... not to define religion, but to find it. (Geertz 1968:1)

In his book, Geertz examines the al-umma (the Muslim world) within localized contexts and he discovers widely different adaptations of the faith. This speaks to problem facing modern day historians and ethnographers who, looking back at the trans-

Atlantic slave trade, have difficulty placing the role of Islam within it. No one denies that Islam had an impact on West African culture and even American culture. Even so, the size and shape Islam's impact is unknown not because we have not yet defined Islam, but because we try limit it to a singular definition.

From the outset in West Africa, Muslim relations with non-believers varied. By the eleventh century, when the Normans ruled England, Sunni Muslims had established the Kingdom of Gao in modern day Mali. In Gao, al-Bakri reported, devout Muslims ruled impenitent animists without any problem. Slightly earlier, in the ancient kingdom of Ghana, non-Muslim kings invited educated Muslims to serve royal courts. Meanwhile in the Takrur kingdom (which includes much of modern day Ghana), Muslim kings waged jihad against their pagan neighbors (Levtzion 2000:63-64).

Three centuries later in ancient Mali, one of the wealthiest kingdoms in the world emerged and while historians of Islamic history in West Africa point to the kingdom of Mansa Musa as an example of the Islam's influence, the reality is not quite so tidy. African historians call the Kingdom of Mali a sort of El Dorado and, at the time, its wealth rivaled the cities of Genoa or Venice (Pakenham 1991:16). The greater world learned of the Kingdom of Mali in no small part because of Musa's *hajj*—the trip to Mecca obligated by Islam—and the trail of gold he left in his wake. Musa set off for the Middle East in 1324 with 500 slaves, each of them carrying a six-pound staff made of gold. These slaves led the way across Africa while Musa and his personal entourage followed with 300 pounds of gold and a hundred camels. When he stopped in Cairo to pay a visit to the ruling Sultan, the Egyptian leader feted and greeted Musa as an equal

(McKissack, McKissack, 1995:60). Alas, outside his kingdom and closer to Arabian Muslims, Musa's peculiar brand of Islam became more incongruous. An Egyptian official reported that Musa was extremely devout except for his penchant for women. Apparently, Musa's subjects offered their daughters to the leader and he bedded them and then turned them out almost nightly. In Cairo, an Egyptian informed him that Islam did not permit this sort of behavior and Musa replied, "Not even to kings?"

After Musa's death, the Arabic historian and devout Muslim Ibn Battuta visited Mali in 1352-1353. The Moroccan historian reported that in Mali Islamic holy days were national feast days and that the religion had become an imperial cult. During Islamic festivals singing girls serenaded the sultan and poets would dress as birds and recite local histories in verse. Ibn Battuta was not impressed. By the fourteenth century the Islamic empire in Mali married traditional theology with sharia law and obligated all subjects to sprinkle dust or ash on their heads to show reverence to the king. This particular practice was obligatory in Ghana in the eleventh century, but only to *kafir* people—the secular leadership in Ghana did not force Muslims to supplicate themselves before an earthly king. In other words, Ibn Battuta reports that Mali was in some ways *more* offensive to Islam than neighboring secular states. He wrote that the marriage of traditional custom and Islam made "vile practices." In addition to the ash dust up, Ibn Battuta disliked the high status of secular poets in Mali and the obligation for women who appeared before the king to do so naked (Levtzion 1977:391). Whether Musa was a *good* Muslim is irrelevant here. Clearly he understood himself to be a Muslim, lest why else would he have made the *hajj*, and so his story well illustrates how, despite Islam's clear influence

in the region, local practices and beliefs continued apace even among the most devout.

From the north, Islam spread through Senegal and neighboring regions—not by outside Arabic influence, but by African Muslim traders who embedded themselves within communities. After trade routes, schools and mosques soon followed and, from that, widespread influence (Diouf 1998:4). Conversion was slow at first because Islam is not a proselytizing religion, but by the sixteenth century, conversion had increased dramatically and the tenants of Islam had gained significant inroads in the region (see figs. 3-5 pp. 117-119). Across the Senegambian region, Islam had established itself as a sociopolitical force of change (Gomez 1998:61). This sudden interest in Islam across West Africa starting in the sixteenth century was no accident. As the international slave trade ratcheted up pressure on the internal slave trade and as the latter became more profitable, sociopolitics changed. Larger kingdoms sought to solidify their positions, smaller groups sought protection by powerful allies and social movements swept the region to unify men and set the masters apart from the slave. By the dawn of America's entrée into the slave trade, the region was well acquainted with Islam.

The cultural response to the slave trade

Spain and Portugal initiated the earliest European slave trade with Africa as a response to earlier Muslim invasions and in conjunction with the Inquisition (Eltis:2007). This rather localized trade (limited to southern Europe and northern Africa) bore little relation in its size and scope to the later trade, but nonetheless it did launch the Atlantic

slave trade. Prior to the European raiders, African kingdoms had been a network of interdependent tribes and kingdoms, remarkable for their unique strengths and distinct identity (Gomez 1998:46). Michael Gomez describes these societies as something akin to a set of guilds or caste societies, as each group specialized in something useful to the whole (Gomez 1998:15). Prior to the slave trade, Muslim kingdoms, where they existed, sought peace with their non-Muslim neighbors and indeed, both sides had much to offer the other. Throughout the Senegambia region and for centuries, madrasas, or Muslim schools, taught non-Muslim students along with Muslims (Gomez 1998:67). This implies a comfortable level of interaction and it shows how Islamic ideas and culture made inroads into the wider African world. To some extent, slave wars changed this interaction but the change was neither immediate nor easily discernable. Muslim kingdoms did not suddenly wage total war on their pagan neighbors or vice versa.

At last, the crux of the problem: how did Muslim and non-Muslim people view each other at the time of the trans-Atlantic slave trade? One might imagine that the two opposites would each develop bulwarks against the other and each side—that of the non-believer and that of the believer—would become more distinct. This is not the case.

The United States' involvement in the slave trade peaked in a single century, from 1726-1825. From 1626 to 1725 the colonies that would become the United States imported a little over 6,000 Africans, but from 1726 to 1750 that number jumped to 34,000 and stayed high until 1826-1850 when the U.S. imported only 324 African slaves (Slave Voyages—Estimates).

But, leaving aside issues of slavery, reports from West Africa indicate that

Muslims, especially individual Muslims, willingly shared their space with pagans and vice versa, especially in times of peace. In short, there seems to have been no wholesale organic or self-imposed isolation from either side and neither was there an innate aggression and the historical record reflects this. The earliest jihad was launched due to the collective stress of slave raiders and its ultimate result was unity, not factionalism. Although in that instance Muslims launched the jihad ostensibly against local unbelievers, it included a specific admonishment *against* selling prisoners to slave traders (Curtin 1971:23). Nasir al-Din led this jihad in 1670 along the Senegambian coast and he called it the Tubenan Movement. The Movement was part millennial cult, cult of personality, and a move for religious leadership to supersede secular leadership (Curtin 1971:11). The Movement gained some traction among non-Muslims because the jihadists also fought to secure coastal borders against slave raiders and so the Movement won initial success (Gomez 1998:63). The Movement converted a good many kingdoms along the Mauritanian coast, mainly due to political instability within those groups rather than military savvy. In any case, the Movement came to sudden halt when, in 1673, al-Din pushed to collect the *zakat*. The *zakat*, a tribute to charity obligated by the Qur'an, is not a tax but in this case al-Din demanded that all subjects, Muslim and *kafir*, pay *zakat* to the state. Both Muslims and secular followers revolted and the Movement fell apart (Curtin 1971:13). The second jihad in the middle of the seventeenth century established the Bondu country, but multiple tribes lived there in something closer to a confederation rather than a centralized state. In any event, slave raiding was not the motivation for its establishment because not only was it a loose confederation, but it was almost secular in

its tolerance and makeup, especially in the face of the intolerance that would follow in the nineteenth century (Curtin 1971:23). Based on Portuguese records from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Rodney concludes that very limited slave trading occurred between the people along the Guinea Coast (Rodney 1966:434). Granted, some other explanations might explain the absence of slaves in Portuguese records. Some records might have been lost, or historians might still yet discover some records detailing an internal slave trade or perhaps the trade was too small to have been noticeable but, Rodney's larger point still stands. If Africans had been trading large numbers of slaves as part of a widespread internal slave network, the Portuguese would have noticed.

On one hand, historians like Rodney posit that Africa essentially had little to no slave trade prior to outside interference while other historians typically point to internal Islamic slave trade (especially slave trade that led to the Arabic Peninsula) as evidence that a rich and long history of slavery existed well before European involvement. Both sides seek to exculpate themselves and implicate the other, but, really, neither side is innocent here. Paul Lovejoy contends that the trans-Atlantic trade marked a sea change in the internal slave trade of Africa and this seems most reasonable (Lovejoy 1989:365).

Indeed, the Futa Jallon Jihad of 1725 may have been little more than a pretext for a slave raid (Curtin 1971:13). Assuming the trans-Atlantic slave trade did help drive the internal slave trade, this jihad, its date fits nicely onto the timeline of European influence. In any case, by the time Mungo Park visited the Senegambia region in the late eighteenth century, a healthy internal slave market existed.

Regardless of what precisely drove the internal trade, that trade did not easily cut

along Muslim/*kafir* lines. First, most Muslim communities in West Africa followed the Suwarian Precepts, a set of laws that allowed Muslims to live, work, and marry among non-believers (and these laws helped transform much of West Africa into a polyglot culture). Aside from the Suwarian Precepts, a set of laws that countries still respect today, capital governed the slave trade and to the capitalist, capital is its own justification. In short, although sharia law forbade enslaving Muslims, if the slave trader could convince himself that those whom he captured were not *really* Muslim (or not as Muslim as he) than he could capture whomever he wanted.

As the Atlantic slave trade developed, the parts of West Africa hit by the slave trade shifted. This meant that during some years slave traders took many more Muslims to the New World than in other years. There was no overarching sense of community among Muslims in West Africa and, consequently, never did all the Muslims present a real bulwark against the slave system. For example, one of the most successful jihads was the Pakao jihad in 1843 (outside the timeline, but relevant by way of example). This jihad pitted the Mandinka and Fulani against neighboring unbelievers—the latter apparently fired the first shots—in a war caused as much by trade imbalance as religious strife (Schaffer, Cooper 1987: 73-74). Together the Mandinka and the Fulani defeated the unbelievers but they were never allies and, in fact, they occasionally enslaved each other's people and after the war, they resumed their former hostilities (Schaffer 2005:339).

Of course, probably the most famous jihad during the peak slave trading years was Uthman dan Fodio's jihad. Again, any relation to the slave trade is tangential. Dan

Fodio launched his jihad against Muslims who opposed him after he criticized local Muslim leadership. Ultimately his 1804 jihad in northern Nigeria was a bid for regional control, which he got at a cost as he waged his jihad against other Muslims (Clapperton, Lander 1829:251). Dan Fodio's jihad birthed the Sokoto Caliphate, a kingdom that grew to one of the biggest slave economies in northern Nigeria (Tambo 1976:187-217). Much later in his life, the guilt he felt by causing the death or enslavement of Muslims eventually drove him mad (Clapperton, Lander 1829:254). Meanwhile, even during the height of the jihadist movement, throughout the interior of West Africa Muslims and non-believers depended on each other for trade, commerce and protection and although some of the most active people involved in the trans-Atlantic trade were Muslim, not all Muslim people were involved. Moreover, multiple independent groups of robber Muslims—more or less pirates—preyed on everyone in West Africa. French explorer Rene Caillie reported that, along the banks of the river from Jenne to Timbuktu a tribe of women known as the Dirimands, whose hair was decorated with glass beads and whose noses were pierced with metal and glass rings and who were armed always with pointed sticks were not to be trusted. Caillie wrote the locals call the Dirimands robbers and killers and yet Caillie observed them in the act of Muslim prayer (Caillie 1830:33). Farther down the river, he met the Tuaregs, more river pirates who, according to his hosts, would rob anyone, Muslim and *kafir* alike and they, too, were Muslim (Caillie 1830:34). Throughout the worst of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Muslims proved no threat to the Bambara way of life and it was not until the late nineteenth century, when the international slave trade was fizzling out, that Muslims began to threaten the Bambara (Imperato 1983:20). To

give some sense of the confusing admixes of the West African environment, Mungo Park, one of the earliest European explorers writes of the differences between the Muslim Fulani and Mandingo people in 1797:

[The Fulani] government differs from that of the Mandingoes chiefly in this, that they are more immediately under the influence of Mohammedan laws; for all the chief men, the king excepted, and a large majority of the inhabitants of Bondou, are Mussulmans, and the authority and laws of the Prophet are everywhere looked upon as sacred and decisive. In the exercise of their faith, however, they are not very intolerant towards such of their countrymen as still retain their ancient superstitions. Religious persecution is not known among them, nor is it necessary; for the system of Mohammed is made to extend itself by means abundantly more efficacious. By establishing small schools in the different towns, where many of the pagan as well as Mohammedan children are taught to read the Koran, and instructed in the tenets of the Prophet, the Mohammedan priests fix a bias on the minds, and form the character, of their young disciples, which no accidents of life can ever afterwards remove or alter. Many of these little schools I visited in my progress through the country, and I observed with pleasure the great docility and submissive deportment of the children, and heartily wished they had had better instructors and a purer religion (Park 1878:53).

Park traveled mostly through the Senegambia region, a region of Africa that was, even then, mostly Islamic. But even outside of the Senegambia region Muslims and pagans did business together and lived together because, especially outside of any central state, coalitions were necessary. The Juula people who came out of Mali were a stateless people³ who operated the trade routes in West Africa. Using the river networks of West Africa as highways, they set off in *dar al-Islam* (the land of Islam) for *dar al-harb* (the land of unbelief) and, months later, they would return with Akan gold or coastal salt. To understand how important the rivers of West Africa were for trade, the journals of Caillie

³ That is, their allegiance extended only to their clan or kinship group rather than to any centralized distant authority.

offer some insight. Caillie followed Park by about 20 years, though his exploration started further south, just north of Freetown and then moved up along the Niger River. First Caillie reported that Bambara houses looked remarkably like “Foulah” houses (this implies certain shared design principles as late as 1825, during a time riven with internecine conflict) and he reports that flotillas of between 60 and 80 canoes regularly made their way between Jenne and Timbuktu (Callie 1830:8-9). Although he does not specify the identity of these traders, they were probably Juula.

CHAPTER III:
MUSLIM RELATIONS IN TIMES OF PEACE

Prior to the slave wars—and even during wars—individual Muslims and Muslim groups continued to trade and live among unbelievers. Muslims had extensive networks out of Africa as well as precious technology, medicine, and education, while many non-Islamic kingdoms and groups controlled the vast resources of West Africa. These exchanges strengthened bonds between the two groups and helped facilitate trade, but these exchanges also bore new traditions, beliefs and aesthetics, including the very earliest examples in West Africa of the designs and patterns that would emerge on African American quilts, a world away. The Juula, the Muslim river traders, were one of the most active trader groups in this process.

The Juula were important middlemen because the interior Muslims states were forbidden from trading with unbelievers by Maliki jurisprudence. Maliki jurisprudence, one of the four schools of Islamic law, governed much of West Africa, including Muslim trade with infidels. Yet, within a confined area like West Africa, interdenominational trade is and was necessary. The Juula were Muslim, so they were able to trade in the *dar al-Islam* but they spent their professional lives in the land of the unbelievers, *dar al-harb*. But one can sometimes find loopholes even in Muslim jurisprudence and the loophole the Juula found was the Suwarian precepts, a seventeenth century set of quasi-legal codes that detail how a Muslim may live and work in *dar al-harb* without sin and without breaking the law. Even after three centuries, West African countries that are not Muslim,

such as Ghana, still employ the Suwarian precepts in their jurisprudence. Very briefly, the Suwarian precepts hold that, 1.) Unbelief is not necessarily the product of sin but of ignorance. 2.) In God's plan, some people must remain unbelievers longer than others must. 3.) Conversion can only come about according to God's will and thus proselytization is contrary to the will of God. 4.) Jihad against unbelievers is wrong unless the entire Muslim community is under attack. 5.) Muslims may submit to a secular rule of law so long as it does not prohibit the practice of Islam. 6.) Muslims must live pious lives so that when the unbelievers convert they have examples to emulate. 7.) Muslims must commit to continued religious education and learning so that they do not become apostate (Wilks 2000:95-99). Therefore, with seven more-or-less clear rules, Islamic traders could enter the *dar al-harb* without enmity and as teachers (to those who wished to learn) and this helped facilitate the spread of Islamic ideas among the pagans. By the mid-eighteenth century, the Juula had established a community in Kumase among the Ashante kings in what is now Ghana. Far from their *dar al-Islam*, these Muslims developed a visible and sizable presence among the animists so that by 1805, early missionaries commented on the ubiquity of so-called Moors (Wilks 2000:100-105).

Throughout hundreds of years of social and business interactions, cultures mixed, borrowed and traded and the Juula are important both as a metaphor and as an example of what that exchange looked like. The cultural synthesis between Islamic and native cultures that happened in West Africa gave much—language, music and, of course textile patterns.

The social response to Islam

Islam gained traction in Africa for two reasons. First, the religion offered real benefits to West African states, including commercial benefits as well as bureaucratic benefits, both of which allowed expansion into the global economy. Second, and perhaps more important, Islam offered individuals technology, crafts and superstition⁴—three areas of obvious importance to individuals across the region.

The Akan people of Ghana offer a striking example of the Islamic influence in West Africa. About 30 years ago archaeologists first discovered ancient copper basins with Arabic script. Archaeologists report that Muslim traders brought the first basins into West Africa some 600 years ago, following the discovery of the gold fields but later, within a few centuries of their introduction, local Akan artisans began to make their own bowls. Yet the Akan people were not Muslim and, weirder still, copper was not a local metal. Copper—unlike gold—was relatively hard to obtain on the Gold Coast and therefore their creation belies a native importance (Silverman 1983: 10-15).

Archaeologists are not sure how the early Muslims used these copper bowls although Tim Garrard, the late lawyer and Ghanaian art expert, believed these bowls were used for daily prayer ablutions. It is extremely improbable that non-Muslims would have valued mere ablution bowls. On the other hand, spell bowls, or ritual healing bowls, would have had significant value and, in fact, Muslims still use similar bowls today in the Middle East.

Always made of metal (silver or copper are popular), these bowls have a Qur'anic passage stamped on their outside or inside. The passage could apply to a specific condition or the message could be a general passage known to bring luck. Historically, popular phrases on spell cups or bowls include the Fatiha, the Bismala and the 99 names of God as well as other, more specific sura (that is, a passage from the Qur'an, usually relevant to some need). The owner of the spell bowl would then fill his bowl with water which would become imbued with the word of God and offer blessings or protection. The needy person would then drink the water and, he hoped, the spell would work—the word of God would make him well, repair his love life or assure his good fortune (Insoll 1999:124-125).

Various hadith⁵ report that not only did Prophet Muhammad know of their use, he encouraged their use. Abu Said al-Khudri reports that once he and some traders were camped in caravan when a slave girl approached from a nearby tribe. The girl asked if any of the Muslims could use magic to heal a tribal leader who had been stung by a scorpion. What happened next deserves full quotation:

A man went with her although we did not know that he any knew incantations (ruqayya). He did that and the man recovered and ordered that thirty sheep be given to him and he gave us milk. When we returned, we said to him, “Were you good in incantation? Did you used to perform incantations?” “No,” he replied. “The only charm I used was the *Umm al-Kitab*.” We said, “Do not say anything until we arrive (or until we ask the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.)” When we reached Madina, we mentioned that to the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, and he asked, “How did you know that it is an incantation? Divide and give me a share as well” (al Bukahari: Ch. 69).

⁴ I use superstition not as a pejorative but only to differentiate various apotropaic beliefs from a fully formed religion. In other words, while a warrior's apotropaic belief in Qur'anic scripture during battle implies a certain amount of faith, this is not of the same thing as the lifelong devotion of a lifelong Muslim.

⁵ Stories of the Prophet's life and his teachings.

Aisha, one of the Prophet's wives, reported that the Prophet also believed spells could cure snakebites and scorpion stings. Indeed, many early bowls feature benign or curative spells—pleas to God for better health and nothing more. If one may compare the bowls to anything, the messages on these early bowls seem like prayers. Once again, we see Islam is not so unlike Christianity except that while early Christians prayed for God's divine assistance in times of sickness, Muslims wrote down their requests.

Supernatural protection must have been important to early Muslim traders, far from home and among a foreign people, and the appeal to pagans is similarly easy to understand. Mungo Park, the late eighteenth century Scottish explorer, records numerous instances of West Africans employing spell bowls. The Akan bowls stand as one of the best arguments for decontextualized Islamic ritual in West African kingdoms but this is one of many such examples. As the bowls themselves imply, written spells and charms have been important in the region for centuries and thus we come to Ajami.

Ajami uses phonetic Arabic script to write African languages (particularly West African languages) but it is not African any more than it is Arabic. Ajami is a perfect synthesis of two cultural worlds although, alas, it is also something of a bastard child and for this it has suffered. The study of Ajami text in West Africa has, to date, been extremely limited and so scholarship is hard to come by. This is because much African scholarship has been from a Western viewpoint or even from a colonial standpoint and dismissive or ignorant of local languages. From Arabia comes a different prejudice altogether. The few times Arabic speaking Muslims have come in contact with Ajami they have shown little interest in a bastardized form of their sacred tongue (Jeppie,

Diagne 2008:vi; Cooper 2010:The Boston Globe).

Even the very name Ajami has its roots in the pejorative. Etymologically the word stems from the Arabian *'ujma* or barbaric, and this was a common epithet for lesser tongues. What the Arabs can *not* understand is barbaric, or *'ujma*, while true Arabian is *fasaha*, or eloquent (Hassane 2008:114). Nonetheless, among the faithful in West Africa (and even the pagan superstitious), Ajami functions⁶ in a way similar to the way Arabic did 200 years ago.

Because the Muslim Qur'an (unlike the Christian Bible) is the literal word of God, a curious sort of iconography developed. Muslims came to view the written form of God's word as apotropaic and hence, from its outset, Islam has incorporated the written word in its charms and effects (see figs. 6-8, pp. 120). Islam was not the first religion to employ writing for the express purpose of magic and much of Islam's magic has antecedent, especially in Aramaic (Noegel, Thomas, et al 2003:7-11). That said, the written word has a special place within Islamic magic. First, from the earliest days of Islam, Muslims understood the word of God to offer unique protection (Insoll 1999:124). Second, because of a general trend away from iconography, Muslim artisans feature calligraphy and pattern in far greater frequency than their monotheist counterparts do. Thus, in addition to the introduction of Islam into pagan societies, one may also trace the introduction of written spells⁷ into many of those same preliterate groups. Of course, Islam has its own sacred symbols, colors, et cetera, but still, none of that has ever matched the universal appeal of the written word of God nor have those symbols ever

⁶ Ajami is still used, although its importance is waning. Even so, the University of Boston has a nascent Ajami program within its African languages department.

been universally important in the Islamic world. While symbols may vary according to time and/or place, the words of the Qur'an remain universally relevant to Muslims.

The first African converts doubtless used Arabic to know God through the Qur'an but the alphabet itself provided a whole host of worldly benefits to Africans—Muslim and *kafir* alike. Prior to written language, data lived in memory, but the Arabic alphabet allowed for written records, the development of formal jurisprudence and, equally important, the alphabet allowed African traders and businessmen to plug into trade networks that stretched from North Africa all the way into Arabia and the East (Bravmann 1980:11). Local oral traditions trace Ajami to the seventeenth century and this timeframe fits in with an increase in Islamic cultural transmission. The development of Ajami may well be a byproduct of the slave wars but in any case, its impact and role in West Africa deserves closer study. Because Ajami—unlike Arabic—could act as a “local” product, it had a wide and powerful appeal in a way the Arabic language never could.

A brief aside here: Arabic also proved impractical as a mother tongue in West Africa because many African dialects do not contain the same sounds as Arabic and vice versa. Thus, learning would have required significant time spent in the presence of a native speaker as well as a familiarity with new linguistic sounds. Ajami required none of this. Within a century or so, Ajami spread across the region alongside Islam, popular for the same reasons as written Arabic and Islam were on the Arabian Peninsula. First, Qur'anic scholars used it to convert locals to Islam and later jihadists used the script to mobilize the newly minted Muslims for war (Hassane 2008:114). Thus did religion and

⁷ Obviously I refer here to spells and magic in a non-pejorative way.

language form collective identity and, from collective identity, states. Most famously, Uthman dan Fodio, the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate in the early nineteenth century used Ajami to rally the disenfranchised, but that aside, Ajami could be used in more pacific pursuits as well. Although scholarship in this area is still new, scholars have found Ajami documents in a number of fields including medicine, law, religion, plant science, personal and diplomatic communication and, interestingly, local traditions (Hassane 2008:115). This native coupling ought not to surprise. At a time and place torn apart by the slave trade and internecine wars, charms and spells were in popular demand and *marabouts*—those wandering Muslim teachers and clerics—held a special place in West Africa, almost regardless of faith (Diouf 1998:7).

Here at last, we return to a common area of Arabic and Ajami—spells. Centuries earlier, the elite within the Akan empire adopted Arabic spell bowls for their use. Now, with Ajami, the common African could also use written spells. Scottish explorer Mungo Park shows us how important writing could be, both for the author and for the reader. Park explored near the Timbuktu region in the late eighteenth century, a century before major colonial efforts and, unlike latter European accounts, Park's journals treat native belief and habit as worthy of respect or at least note. Park, usually half starved, lived day-to-day at the mercy of his hosts and he used every opportunity to improve his lot. At one point, a Muslim who had taken him in for the night finds out Park can write English. Assuming this language to have its own powers, he exchanges meals and lodging for charms. Park writes,

The proposal was of too great consequence to me to be refused. I therefore wrote the board full, from top to bottom, on both sides; and my landlord, to be certain of

having the whole force of the charm, washed the writing from the board into a calabash with a little water, and having said a few prayers over it, drank this powerful draught; after which, lest a single word should escape, he licked the board until it was quite dry, (Park 1817:357).

Clearly, the offer was important to Park, but it had obvious import to his host as well. Possibly, if not probably, the habit of drinking spell water had been born centuries earlier when Arab traders first traversed the region, but no doubt Ajami made charms more accessible to the masses. No longer did Muslims drink their spells from copper bowls embossed in perfect Arabic script, by the late eighteenth century they mixed their spells in calabashes and wrote them in Ajami with chalk. The similarities do not end with spell bowls. Recall the hadith wherein the Prophet allows for the use of Qur'anic phrases to heal snakebites and the like and then consider this early section in Park's journal. Park writes:

These saphies are prayers, or rather sentences, from the Koran, which the Mohammedan priests write on scraps of paper, and sell to the simple natives, who consider them to possess very extraordinary virtues. Some of the negroes wear them to guard themselves against the bite of snakes or alligators...(Park 1817:56).

If we combine language with superstition, we develop art. Islam, more than any other religion in the popular mind, has unique if not strict views on art. While many of our popular ideas of Islamic intolerance toward art are highly oversimplified, the culture of Islam does indeed favor certain aesthetic elements including symmetry, often in the form of tessellations—interconnected geometric shapes. Because this work focuses on modern quilts, only those aesthetic influences that appear in modern quilts are considered. First, color—specifically the color blue—and then design patterns will be considered. Although color symbolism does not appear to have survived to the present

day (at least, none of the quilters interviewed and none of the modern quilt books ascribed any particular meaning to any particular color), the color blue does have a remarkably long history within Southern black culture. The meaning of blue may be traced back all the way back to West Africa and, prior to that, Arabia and it retained a consistent and specific meaning well into the twentieth century in the South. Even if blue is not a survival per se, its history within the context of this thesis helps show how Islamic aesthetics have travelled—largely as a whole package—into the modern era of black Southern culture.

Color is—with few exceptions—a universal perception among humans. This perception is one of the most important qualities in our sense of sight. Yet beyond this dry, simplistic and utterly unsatisfactory definition, the idea of color and the meaning of color is so peculiar to a person and his culture as to defy generalization. The color blue may represent sky or water to a Westerner while to an Arab it might protect against the evil eye. What all this means is, color is ubiquitous *and* subjective.

Blue is important to this thesis because of its remarkable link to Islam, West Africa and the U.S. South. First, indigo flourishes in West Africa and hence, blue is and was popular in the region. Second, Muslims hold blue in particular regard for its visual link to paradise and for its similarities to green. Third, blue was popular among African slaves in the United States because blue was meant to protect. Much as language and magic, color can be a vital tool in understanding how culture spreads. Particularly because colors are so important to textiles, their history is of special importance.

Colors travel well, both in a literal sense as well as in a figurative sense. Blue

West African cloth and dye made their way into the global marketplace centuries before colonization or even the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Gilfoy 1988:23-25). Even today, the most frequent non-industrial dye in West Africa is indigo and prior to the advent of modern dyes, indigo reigned supreme. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the Hausa city of Kano was home to about 2,000 indigo dye pits (Picton, Mack 1989:35-37). This shows a cultural preference for the color and an easy availability. Since indigo is native to West Africa, one might suppose that the color would have been important even without Islam but, because Islam elevated that color above others, no doubt the color achieved greater importance.

The idea of natural selection in color preference might seem too obvious to mention, but limited supplies do bear a mention because in many cultures, the absence of certain dyes or minerals meant the absence of color from both art and culture. This is partly why the color blue plays little role in early European culture and art; if artists wanted blue, they had to pay for it or use an inferior dye. Lapis lazuli, the best dye, was an import and it was expensive, while the native woad plant, made a weak dye. Until traders imported indigo into Europe from Africa beginning in the sixteenth century, Europeans, if they had ever heard of indigo, assumed it was a mineral like lapis lazuli, so ignorant were they. Add to this the fact that the Bible never mentions blue, and there seemed little imperative to attach any importance to the color, both because of culture or nature (Pastoureau 2001:14-18).

On the other hand, blue is very important in Islam, where it is favored only slightly less than green. Green is prominent because it was the Prophet's favorite color

and besides, a desert people associated green with life, with oases, with paradise. Blue was important to Islam for similar cultural reasons (blue is associated with oases as easily as green is) and for natural reasons. Muslim artists could derive blue dye from plants or rocks all across the Muslim world, from indigo in Africa to lapis lazuli in Asia. Meanwhile in Rome, no one save the mad or the mourning wore blue. Romans went so far as to consider those with blue eyes freaks (Pastoureau 2001:27)

Aside from this rather benign history of the color, there is the disturbing fact that West Africa's indigo industry helped in part to drive the early slave trade. Up until the eighteenth century, European law protected woad, a plant native to Germany and France, from outside dye imports. For hundreds of years many in Europe knew of indigo more as legend than plant, until in the eighteenth century when European royalty opted for better dye over home team advantage. When Europe opened its doors to indigo, the marketplace flooded with demand. The dye was sturdier than woad and a fashion craze for blue clothes swept Europe. France, Spain, and England soon established their own cotton and indigo farms⁸ but, of course, cotton and indigo demanded warm climates and so these European powers turned to the New World. It is no coincidence that after Europe opened its doors to indigo, slave demand in the U.S. skyrocketed (Pastoureau 2001:125).

In the Middle East, the color spectrum divides into yellow, red, and green and so natives conflate blue with green (Blair, Bloom 2009: 503). To most West Africans, blue seems to have been benign, even lucky. Mungo Park reported seeing blue cloth everywhere across Islamic West Africa and at one point a man asked if Park could help him dye his gun barrel blue (Park 1817: 86,182).

Today the Tuareg (who are Muslim), dress is blue and are sometimes known as “blue men.” They believe their head wraps (worn by men instead of women) protect them from evil spirits that can enter their nasal cavities and mouths (Scott 2003:13). This could explain why these wraps are usually dyed dark blue. In the Arab Muslim world, blue has complex meanings. Arabic words often have root letters much as many Spanish words have Latin roots. The root letters of blue are z-r-k and this root appears in sura 20 aya 102⁹ in the Qu’ran, in a passage describing the guilty on the day of judgment. H.A.R. Gibbs argues in his 1953 *Encyclopedia of Islam*, that the color frightened Arabs who associated it with evil. Gibbs reports that many Arabs would not say the word blue, using green instead and Egyptians call a bad day a “blue day.” How much of this is accurate is highly debatable.¹⁰ That said, Gibbs reports that North Africans use blue beads and trinkets to ward off evil, especially the evil eye (Gibbs 1954: 706). A far more authoritative source, the Brill *Encyclopedia of Islam* reports that blue beads and trinkets are popular in the modern Middle East because they protect against evil in general and the evil eye in particular (Brill Online).

Without textiles, blue dye has limited application. Because Muslim traders introduced looms to the region, it is not at all surprising that Islam influenced weaving from the earliest days of the religion. Textiles hold a particularly important place in early Muslim culture because the first Muslims were nomads. Because of their portability, rugs

⁸ Thereby bypassing trade with Africa and centralizing the economy.

⁹The Qu’ran is divided into aya and sura, or chapter and book.

¹⁰ First, this is the only source to make any claim for blue-as-evil. Second, far too many mosques are decorated with blue tiles believe that blue is considered evil. Also, concerning the substitution of green for blue, one would expect to find such substitutions among a people who see little difference between the two colors. For instance, the natives of East Timor refer to blond headed foreigners as either yellow heads or red heads, interchangeably because they associate the two colors as somehow related.

had greater appeal to a nomadic culture than furniture. Not surprisingly early examples of rugs and textiles are rare because they were functional and so they wore out, but the few early examples we know of show intricate geometric designs, the same general style that today adorns mosques (Bamborough 1977:118). In Islamic design, interlocked tessellations add a sense of infinity, unity and harmony (Kahera, et al 1997:60). In short, tessellation patterns recall the presence of Allah. Just as god orders the universe, so too do weavers order cloth and, hence, those who view the designs will recall God's power over all things. This notion has deep resonance within the Islamic mind.

Arab traders brought the strip loom to West Africa. A strip loom is small, portable loom that, as its name implies, produces narrow strips of cloth anywhere from six to ten inches wide. This is also about the same width as strip quilts in the African American tradition. Just as a Muslim weaver would sew strips together to form a larger piece, black quilters sew together about 10 of these narrow strips to cover a bed. What is now an aesthetic choice was at first the result of those narrow looms. Because the looms produce narrow strips, large, complex designs are more complicated to realize than simple large patterns or smaller complex patterns and, so, they are less common in West African tradition. Martha Lattimore, a quilter from Tutwiler, recalled that no one ever showed her how to quilt, although her mother and sister quilted. Her so-called country quilts are strip quilts made up of five-inch strips and each strip Lattimore fills with smaller pieces and colors so that, from afar, the quilt looks impossibly busy. "They're small enough so you can get a lot in and so there's a lot in," Lattimore said of her quilts (interview with the author, June 18, 2010).

The earliest looms found in West Africa date from the eleventh century and they come from caves in Mali. Alongside these early strip looms archaeologists uncovered scraps of material which reveal patterns familiar in Islamic art today—checkerboard, lozenge motifs, et cetera—in whites, reds and, of course, blue (Gilfooy 1987:27). The looms and cloth belonged to the Dogon people, an Islamic people, although not all the patterns and colors relate to Islam in any obvious way. Of the Islamic-influenced designs used across West Africa, three stand out. First, the checkerboard pattern deserves attention as this pattern is ubiquitous in the region. Second, the use of tessellations in Islamic art and then in quilts will be studied and, finally, general strip techniques—a style more the product of a technology than a religion per se.

The checkerboard design was especially common in West Africa and archaeologists have found it not only in Dogon textiles, but also carved into masks and various other artifacts. Scholars believe that each square represented a spiritual word or concept that, when taken together contained a religious message (Gilfooy 1987:45). Such an interpretation is hardly unusual and it recalls the second type of pattern, the tessellation. Tessellations—interconnected geometric shapes across a plane—are common in Muslim art and they, too, express in a visual way the interconnectedness and orderliness of the universe. Although extremely complex tessellations do not appear in African American quilts, broad patterns, such as the rooftop (or pigpen or log cabin) design, with the repeated square-within-the-square, are simple tessellations. The third type of pattern, the strip weave, is less a pattern than a technique.

Within the strips, Muslims weavers commonly repeat patterns—either as

tessellations or as simple checkerboard designs—to recall the myriad names of God much like the Muslim layman uses *dhikr* (Grabar 2006: 27). The *dhikr* is used to remind oneself of God and this is possibly the most common prayer in Islam because it takes the form of active recitation as well as inactive symbolism. In other words, *dhikr* may be the vocalized repetition of the names of God or it may be a string of beads—known as *dhikr* beads—which recall the many names of God. The Prophet himself favored prayer beads as personal reminders of God and he praised *adhan*, public reminders of God (sunnah.org). One Sufi scholar writes “...*dhikr*, as an invocation of God, is not specific to the heart; rather, any deed that exhibits a remembrance of God is *dhikr* of Him” (Amuli: 2). Therefore, repeated patterns may be a meditation on God or the patterns may invoke the name of god in order to protect or heal, similar to spell bowls (see figs. 9-13 pp. 121-122). Considering these patterns survived more or less intact over nearly a millennium, one must suppose that they meant something more than the sum of their parts. Much like the gris-gris bag, Islamic design, with its roots ground firmly in the sacred, came to hold important apotropaic meaning in the popular mind. This transfer of meaning becomes more obvious when we move to the U.S., but in the meantime consider the origin of these sacred patterns.

In the wider Islamic world, Islamic artists often employ Arabic letters or words for similar effect, although obviously this presupposes literacy. For our purposes—that is, for our study of West Africa—we shall forgo an examination of sacred letters and words and instead focus on magic squares. Magic squares predate both Islam and Christianity and in fact, they come from Judaic tradition. Like a religious Sudoku game, magic

squares assign various letters numeric value. A magic square is a box—three small squares tall and then three squares deep—and each square contains a number which, when added by row, works out to a sacred word (see figs. 14-16, pp. 123).¹¹ Originally this technique used the abjad system, an alphanumeric system based on the Semitic alphabet, but by the Middle Ages Islam had its own system employing kufic symbols and lunette script, a stylized form of Arabic (Meri, Bacharach, 2005:795). The *Shams al-Ma'arif al Ku'bra*, a thirteenth century Islamic treatise on magic, owes much to Jewish and even Hellenic magical rites, but al-Buni, the author, is particularly interested in the apotropaic uses for the so-called beautiful names of God and the magic squares. After his book, magic squares began to appear all over the Muslim world on all manner of surface, but in particular squares were popular on cloth and clothing. Magic squares made battle shirts sacred so that the name of God himself would protect faithful warriors (Meri, Bacharach, 2005:795). At some point, and likely because of literacy issues, many of the magic square designs came to contain neither numbers nor letters and yet the presence of checkered squares across the Islamic world makes a case for continued importance of the design within the Islamic mind.¹² Tessellations as a design aesthetic preference peaked in popularity sometime in the fourteenth century, though the style never vanished and today

¹¹ Magic squares do not have to be three by three; I use this number only by way of example.

¹² This last claim might seem farfetched, that a symbol could shed part of its design (in this case the letters) and still remain relevant within the same context, but there is much evidence this is exactly what happened. Consider the personal writings of African-born American slave Umar ibn Said. Said was a slave in the Carolinas from 1819 until his death in 1864 and in his lifetime he wrote 14 manuscripts—including a 16-page autobiography—all in Arabic. Many of his manuscripts, reprinted in Alan Austin's seminal book, *African Muslims in Antebellum America*, end with a series of decorated squares and/or a star with a circle in its center (see figs. 17-20, pp. 126-127). Austin has no comment about the designs one way or another but clearly these designs were not idle doodles as these documents were important to both the author and his audience and because they reoccur frequently. Given that similar patterns show up on Islamic tapestry in West Africa, I venture to say that this design meant something. Considering Said's circumstances and his

is still quite popular (Irwin 1997:200).

None of this should imply that West African weavers took any particular meaning from Islamic aesthetic. Three types of quilts, the nine patch, the log cabin and the strip quilt adhere to these early Islamic design principles but of course no African American quilter today (at least, none interviewed for this thesis) believes her quilts have much to do with Islam. Today in West Africa, alternating light and dark squares—that checkerboard pattern so frequently used in Islamic textiles—represent male and female natures, day and night and other opposites. As we have seen from the earliest days of Islam in West Africa, local custom and belief have long lived beside Islam and so we should expect a rich mixture of innovation, borrowed tradition and invention (Shaw 2002: 102).

Finally, consider the work of contemporary artist Joyce Kozloff as a case in point. Her non-Western designs appeal to Western critics, but at least some of her aesthetic is ground firmly in African Islam. In the early 1970s when she began investigating geometric patterns,¹³ her interest led her to Islamic art and in 1975, she travelled to Morocco to study. One of her pieces, *Hidden Chambers*, could be taken almost directly from the wall of a mosque (well, not directly; certain design elements belie an American sensibility) with its emphasis on starbursts and the complex repetition of geometric patterns (Swartz 2007:77, 80). The idea that African artists were doing a millennia ago what Kozloff did 30 years ago should not surprise (see fig. 21, p. 124). Once the Arabic traders opened up West Africa to the world's trade routes, the region blossomed in its

faith, the possibility that these designs are meant to represent something sacred or contain apotropaic properties is high indeed (Austin 1997:129-156)

intellectual, artistic and religious development. The next section will review the impact of the slave trade on West Africa with the emphasis on benefits to the individual rather than the state.

Reconstructing the African culture of American slaves is difficult because of misunderstandings on the part of the slaveholder or misinformation as well as obvious lack of autobiographical slave data. That said, the historical record in early America and Africa provides some clues for a general sort of reconstruction. The first slaves to come to modern day Louisiana landed in 1719 when the territory was still a French colony. Antoine LePage du Pratz, the manager of the Company of the Indies, oversaw the arrival of those very first Africans and he chronicles their condition in his book, *The History of Louisiana*. He writes:

They are very superstitious and much attached to their prejudices, and their little toys which they call gris, gris. It would be improper therefore to take them from them or even speak of them to them for they would believe themselves undone, if they were stripped of their trinkets. The old negroes soon make them lose conceit of them [sic] (du Pratz 1947:358).

The “old negroes” of whom du Pratz writes accustomed the new arrivals to plantation life and although they may have helped those new arrivals hide their gris-gris, they did not stamp out the practice as today gris-gris bags still exist. In any case, these gris-gris bags were of particular importance in Muslim regions and, from the earliest imports of African slaves into Louisiana, enough slaves so that du Pratz does not qualify the paragraph with “almost all” or “many” clearly had some relationship with Islam. A few pages later du Pratz writes that the “best” domestic slaves are those from Senegal,

¹³ She helped found the pattern and design art movement in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

which was (as it still is), a Muslim region (du Pratz 1947:363). Gwendolyn Midlo Hall writes that, beginning in 1726, the slave imports increased dramatically in Louisiana and, even a decade on, the majority of those slaves were Bambara from Senegal (Hall 1995:100). These Senegalese slaves helped build Louisiana's infrastructure as well as culture. Today Louisiana creole is still spoken by tens of thousands of people, white and black—a legacy of those early Senegalese slaves who were prized well above other slaves precisely because they were “half-Islamized” (Hall 1995:196). Clearly, from the very beginnings of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, serious cultural exchange had already occurred in Africa.

As a side note on gris-gris, Islamic mysticism is not isolated to Africa and neither is it at odds with the orthodoxy. ‘Abd al-Salam Wahid Bali is a present day orthodox Saudi shaykh who specializes in the occult. His best-selling¹⁴ book, *al-sarim al-Battar fi tasaddi li-l-sahara al-ashrar*, lists in explicit detail how to understand witchcraft, how to deal with witchcraft and why the Qur’an and Haddith forbid witchcraft. There is no doubt Bali considers the occult to be a real threat and his book is practically a how-to guide for aspiring marabouts. Some occult practices are accepted even in orthodox Islam, including charm protection against the evil eye and some mystical cures (see figs. 22-24, pp. 124).¹⁵ Those early slaves du Pratz observed in Louisiana probably got their gris-gris from Mandingo marabouts who, at the time, were some of the most pious Muslims in West Africa and happily sold their charm bags to earn a living (Schaffer, Cooper 1987:70-72). Far from being enemies, both believer and non-believer needed one another, both in

¹⁴ In the Middle East, anyway.

times of war and in times of peace.

¹⁵ Bali apparently believes that, as long as Allah is credited as the agent of cause (and not the spell or the marabout) than some mystical rituals are alright.

CHAPTER IV:
THE ORIGINS OF ISLAMIC INFLUENC IN THE SOUTH

The first census of the new republic showed that by 1790, almost 700,000 slaves lived in America alongside almost four million free Americans. By this relatively late date slavery had already made disproportionate inroads in the South, and Virginia alone was home to almost 300,000 slaves (Taylor 1911:272). To understand the process of cultural decontextualization—wherein African ways become African American—one must consider the slave himself. Because the social and legal limits placed on slave agency, the institution of slavery must have forced at least some abrogation of African culture. Even so, we know from the historical record that slaves continued to place considerable reliance on their mother cultures and, when he could do so, the slave refused to acculturate. Immigration studies have long given the lie to the myth of the American melting pot for several reasons. First, cultural exchange does not occur across the nation in an even fashion (the nation is not a single pot). Second, the notion of assimilation might be agreeable to the dominant culture but it is often contrary to the desire of the immigrant group (Heisler 2000:79-81). Therefore, subcultural groups can and do actively seek to maintain their identities. Culture is not a single thing. One can understand culture as an imagined series of scapes and this is especially true in the case of slave culture. Slaves did engage in the white's financescape, but they had little reason to engage in his ideoscape, his artscape or other major cultural scapes. The dominant white culture offered little of value either in terms of an individual's survival or in his comfort and, anyway,

some whites punished slaves if they tried too hard to adopt white culture (Johnson 2003:28).

American Slavery existed because complete acculturation was impossible. That is, white Americans enslaved Africans *because* they could not easily blend in. The enslaved Africans must have realized that, even if they did not wish to stick out within a plantation, no amount of cultural appropriation would make them equal to the master or even low-caste whites. These conditions allowed and even encouraged African Americans to develop their own idiosyncratic folkways, with particular dependence from African and, of course, Islamic traditions.

Alejandro Portes developed a multi-part framework scholars can use to help predict (or at least understand) the evolution of immigrant cultural response to the dominant culture. We may use his framework to understand how African slaves were encouraged by the process of slavery to protect their native beliefs. First, Portes asks us to consider the immigrant's response to his migration. Whether an immigrant wants to immigrate or not determines how receptive he is to the new culture—the more unwilling the immigrant, the less he tends to acculturate. These immigrants then develop prejudices among their socio/cultural enclaves regarding the dominant culture and these prejudices reinforce the mother culture and promote less cultural integration (Heisler 2000:83). For its part, white culture only accentuated this maladaptive behavior because it refused to cede any of its cultural benefits to African slaves. Our understanding of this intercultural struggle is essential to understanding why we may expect to see greater Islamic influence in the South. In the case of slavery, this struggle was ideological and it was literal. When

immigrant groups are offered the rights of full citizenship and greater social acceptance and, when they may achieve upward mobility within the dominant culture, minority cultures do tend to integrate happily or at least adopt an outward deference to the dominant culture (Heisler 2000:85). Therefore, while the (relatively) few Africans in New England worked especially hard to erase cultural traces of their origins in order to gain some measure of acceptance, blacks in the South had zero incentive to follow suit. Finally, even in areas where slavery was outlawed, because of their idiosyncratic skin color, Africans and their descendents had a much harder time integrating than, say, Irish immigrants who, after a few American-born generations, could shed outward signs of their heritage if they chose to do so.

To see how elements of Islamic culture nudged their way into Southern culture, one must examine the geographic dynamics of the slave trade and the geographic dynamics of the plantation system. While Diouf and Gomez, inspired by Austin, examined the cohesion of Muslims across the New World, there is little evidence that Muslims necessarily self identified as Muslims within the U.S. (as opposed to, say, members of different kingdoms) and acted in concert to preserve their Islamic identity. Consequently, one cannot simply look at a map of the antebellum South, highlight areas where Muslims probably lived and worked and then assume that those areas are the wellsprings of Islamic influence in the South. Instead, because of the widespread Islamic influence in West Africa at the time of the slave trade and then given the massive internal migration of slaves in the U.S., one must consider the whole history of slave movement in the South.

In the earliest days of slave trade, most slaves entered colonial America through Chesapeake Bay or through Charleston, South Carolina (Gomez 1998:20). Later, After the Louisiana Purchase, New Orleans would become an important Southern slave port, but prior to 1804, slaves lived mainly along the eastern seaboard in the United States. Most slaves went to a handful of rich plantation owners who lived with their slaves in relative intimacy, an intimacy unknown to other immigrant groups in the North and West. This cultural intimacy would continue through the duration of slavery in the U.S. and it stands in marked contrast to the Caribbean plantation system, wherein owners would oversee hundreds of slaves (often from Europe). This proximity allowed for limited cross-cultural exchange, especially given that, in the U.S., 75 percent of slaves lived on plantations with fewer than 50 slaves (Gomez 1998:25). By no means did slave owners do the same work as their slaves, but many would integrate themselves among their chattel within the work and the domestic environment. Thus white American culture adopted or borrowed various African items including instruments, words, and music by the early nineteenth century. Even across the South, slaves were not evenly distributed. Plantation owners planted (or tried to plant) in the best soil and in the best climates and thus areas like coastal Georgia, the Carolinas, Mississippi and Louisiana—states with warm weather, flat land and abundant rainfall—came to have some of the largest slave populations. Although whites controlled relatively small numbers of slaves compared to their counterparts in the West Indies, the cultural imbalance on plantations and in slave regions still favored the slave.

In France's Louisiana colony, slaves, many of whom were Bambarra, always

vastly outnumbered whites there. Even in Mississippi as late as 1860, slaves totaled about 55 percent of the population (Gomez 1998:27). Also, within these states, slaves did not spread evenly across the landscape but lived in cloisters. This allowed for numerous African traditions to thrive and develop within a New World context. In these conditions, slaves had a relatively easy time continuing certain traditions, especially those traditions with utilitarian value like textile manufacture (Gomez 1998:48).

Slave life in the U.S.—the personal response

One may divide the history of slavery in the United States into two mass migrations. The first migration, of course, was the move from Africa, the Middle Passage, and the second mass migration was from the North and the Atlantic seaboard to the plantations of the deep South. When the Revolution ended, newly minted Americans began to stretch out in their country and American planters moved toward the warm, flat Southern lands. In 1804 Thomas Jefferson purchased the Louisiana Territory from the French and he promised to deliver an “Empire of liberty.” (Berlin 2003:163). The Purchase doubled the size of the U.S. and planters scrambled to make the most of the Purchase. Inside seventy years—from the birth of the nation until the Civil War, whites moved a million slaves southward, as they filled the land with cash crops like cotton and sugarcane (Johnson 2003:5). Of course, they did not mean to work alone and so began the second great migration.

The Constitution set 1808 as the terminal year for the trans-Atlantic slave trade,

but that date meant little. Imports of Africans declined, though Southerners did continue to buy African slaves imported through Spanish Florida as well as Mexico (Berlin 2003:166-167). Even so, from 1808 until 1863, only 786,500 slaves entered the United States illegally—a small number compared with the 4.5 million blacks already living in the country (Obadele-Starks, Ernest 2007:10). Indeed, almost a full century before 1808, slaves in colonial America could reproduce their numbers naturally. So, by the time of the cotton boom a ready, native workforce already existed. All the planters had to do was move it.

In 1812, the South produced fewer than 300,000 bales of cotton. Within the next decade the South doubled its cotton output and, during the 1820s, planters and slave traders moved 155,000 slaves from the Eastern Seaboard to the South. In the 1830s, almost 288,000 slaves moved South, in the 1840s, almost 190,000 slaves migrated and in the decade prior to the Civil War, some quarter million slaves went South. By that point, cotton production reached over four million bales (Berlin 2003:166-167; Johnson 2003:5).

This second migration transformed the South into a land full of young slaves. Planters preferred young slaves as they could bear children, they could best withstand the cross-country travel, and they would work the hardest to establish new homesteads (Berlin 2003:169-170). This second migration, more than the first, shaped African America lifestyle and culture in the South (Berlin 2003:173).

Plantation life was hard on popular forms of African artistic expression (e.g. sculpture and masks) as whites generally forbade expression that threatened their

hegemony or sense of security. In addition, the second migration inspired new labor expectations from planters that initially limited the slave's autonomy and his ability to shape his culture. Very early in the South's history, agricultural knowledge came from West African tradition. Gomez and Diouf have argued that early white planters had preconceptions that probably helped Muslim slaves negotiate slavery a bit easier than their counterparts, including preconceptions of high intelligence and high technical skill and these stereotypes led to positions of authority and responsibility on the Southern plantation. Perhaps these preconceived notions and these positions of power helped Muslim slaves influence what would become black culture. In any case, the stereotypes dovetailed with certain elements of fact as in the case of slaves from the Senegambia region—mostly Muslims—who did know quite a bit about growing rice and indigo (Gomez 1989:69). Specialized skills included domestic jobs and handicrafts and so, on early plantations across the U.S., slaves worked as nurses, livestock hands, breeders, farmers, musicians, accountants, blacksmiths, carpenters, field labor and more (Gomez 1998:82; Diouf 1998:101-105).

This work/life dynamic changed following the second migration. In addition to the sociological changes affected by the migration, the demands of cotton and, in Louisiana, sugarcane, introduced significant changes in the slaves' workday. On the frontier—especially in the earliest days—planters pushed their chattel hard, harder than most had worked in the east. Slaves—again, slaves of all backgrounds—worked so hard in Mississippi and Louisiana that they often died within a few years (Johnson 1999:23). Because the slaves were so young, they had no institutional memory of slavery and

planters used the cross-country trip to instill new labor standards. Gone were half-Saturdays and free Sundays and free evenings and, when possible, the responsibility for the slaves' home economy fell to the slaves. The brute labor requirements on these nascent plantations also did much to erode the African customs. Tobacco, rice, indigo—all these crops demanded laborers, but they also demanded artisans, carpenters and coopers to build barrels and barns and carriage makers. In the South where cotton was king, slaves just worked hard (Berlin 2003:178). In the cotton field, planters had less use for skills and, for their part, slaves had less free time to develop and pass on customs.

If any environment could rival the demands of the cotton field, it was the canebrake. As one former slave, Lewis Clarke, explained to abolitionists, “Why do slaves dread so bad to go to the South—Mississippi and Louisiana? Because they know slaves are driven very hard there and worked to death.” Jacob Stroyer, another former slave, explained the fear even more bluntly, “Louisiana was considered by the slaves a place of slaughter, so those who were going there did not expect to see their friends again” (Johnson 1999:23). After Haiti gained independence in 1804, sugarcane production moved stateside and, by 1860, 90,000 slaves worked full time on sugar plantations. Unlike the cotton planter, sugar planters had no illusions of a self-replicating labor force. The average length of time a sugar slave lasted was seven years and, as such, planters bought the youngest and strongest men. With such high mortality rates and such short life expectancies, African cultures fell to pieces on the sugarcane plantations (Berlin 2003:179-180).

Perhaps despite the brutal conditions or because of them, cultural blending and

decontextualization occurred. In the earliest days of Southern expansion, whites worked alongside their slaves. They had to fight Indians as well as nature in order to secure shelter and food and so planters gave their slaves guns and certain limited rights (Berlin 2003:181—182). Because the planter was so dependent on his slaves, slaves began to push for a return of free Sundays and half-day Saturdays and, in some cases, some slaves pushed for task labor as opposed to gang labor. Once they made those nascent inroads with their masters, microeconomies emerged. Even from the white's perspective, these microeconomies had benefits.

Masters quickly saw that slaves who grew their own food could sell their excess produce and earn their own money. Similarly, slaves who made their own quilts and other household supplies could also reduce the time and cost spent on the slaves (Berlin 2003:184-186). But in addition to benefitting the slave owner, these examples of limited autonomy also benefited an emergent black culture.

Wherever and whenever the slaves migrated, they tried as best they could to replicate what had been. Slaves had informal communication networks to try to keep track of family and friends across the South. Sometimes planters allowed their slaves to carry with them pots, pans, carvings, rings, combs and, of course, quilts. Like everything else, this allowance was motivated less by generosity than economy as whatever the slave brought with him would be one less thing the planter had to supply later. Lastly, slaves worked hard at retaining their cultural and personal histories. When planters sold slaves, the slaves often tried and succeeded in remembering quite a bit of their personal past with the hope that they would someday be able to relocate family. Indeed, some of these

efforts paid off. After the Civil War, a number of slaves did succeed in finding their kin, despite years and miles of separation (Berlin 2003:189).

From the nineteenth century onward the nuclear slave family became the locus of African American cultural traditions. (Berlin 2003:189-191). The traditions those slaves carried with them might have been strengthened by some of these circumstances but they could not have been culturally pure. Of course some Muslims did continue to practice their faith and, even in the middle of Mississippi, we know of at least one famous Muslim slave, but the preponderance of evidence shows slaves as divorced from any single African culture and influenced by many. Most cultural traditions that the slaves held onto were simple things, including how a mother nursed her baby, marriage songs, death songs, et cetera (Berlin 2003:192). Although very little historical data exists about which patterns slaves preferred, surely West African (and Islamic) aesthetic preference falls into this category.

Independent cultural foundations allowed slaves to assert a sense of self. Slaves—from the beginning of the institution until the very end, fought daily to retain some sense of themselves as individuals and as a collective whole. The master-slave relationship might have had legal consistency, but the social relationship shifted often based on all manner of external factors. Slaves maintained their own style of music, many recreated their instruments from home, they brought stories, religion, language, foodways and myriad other cultural markers to the U.S. (Berlin 2003:5).

We know that, in addition to music, West African slaves brought with them entire language and belief systems, color and aesthetic preferences. Art, especially crafts, are a

rich source of cultural data because slaves could make them openly (as most crafts were necessary) and, even if whites did not make note of aesthetic preferences among slaves, archaeologists today can help fill in important blanks. Whites allowed certain Africanisms so long as they conformed to preexisting ideas of Africa. As a consequence, certain charms and native (or folk) arts that whites saw as the product of childlike and superstitious people were allowed because these forms did not threaten white preconceptions (Arnett, Arnett 2002:38). In other words, whites could have allowed and even encouraged aesthetic differences in quilts because the designs of slave quilts proved white superiority. Black quilts, with their mismatched colors, weirdly bold patterns and long strips of color, posed no risk.

We have no clear idea of what exactly whites felt about slave quilts because the white slave owners left little written record of their opinions, but often whites and slaves (and their progeny) saw the same things in very different ways. For example, whites appreciated minstrel songs because they caricatured blacks. To the master, the songs were harmless, silly even. But to the slave, the songs served as mediums of protest and rebuke. Freed slaves continued to sing minstrel songs well into the twentieth century not because anyone forced them to do so, but because the songs still had powerful resonance and meaning (Levine 1977:193-194). In some cases—as with the song *Blue Tail Fly* (Jimmy Crack Corn)—the white community embraced the very songs that challenged their hegemony. Perhaps black quilting similarly influenced white culture. In the case of the former slave and late nineteenth century quilter Harriet Powers, we have at least one example of a white woman praising and rewarding black quilting. In this case, Powers,

who, after the Civil War, lived outside Athens, Georgia, displayed a Bible story quilt at the Cotton Fair there in 1886. This story quilt (that is, it used applique figures to tell a story in a series of square pictorials) caught the eye of Jennie Smith, a local art teacher. Shortly after the fair, Smith went to the artist's home to buy the quilt, but Powers refused to sell it until four years later, when she needed the money. Smith wrote an extensive history of how she first found Powers' quilt and how Powers reacted to the sale and, from that history, it is clear that Powers sold her quilt reluctantly. At the point of sale, she carefully explained to Smith what each pictorial tile meant and, as she told the story, Smith wrote everything down. Smith then displayed the quilt for other scholars and, in 1898, the wives of some Atlanta University professors commissioned a second Bible story quilt (Adams 1983:67-68). From this we know that at least in one instance the white community recognized distinction in black quilting traditions, but how widespread this recognition went is hard to say. We have no record of Smith searching for other black artists or asking Powers about any of her colleagues so we must take care not to make too much of this example. Perhaps the white community did understand black quilts to be unique and have some aesthetic value, but if they did there is almost no record of such sentiment. Perhaps the white community saw black quilts as unique but also common, everyday things. Perhaps white men and women bought black crafts, they used them until they wore out and so today neither a record of the crafts, nor their purchase nor their place within the quilting canon exists. In any case, whether whites appreciated them or simply ignored them, black aesthetic did develop on its own, with clear West African Muslim antecedent.

One link to Africa was—and still is—color. As in West Africa, blue was extremely popular among slaves. Archaeologists have excavated colonial and antebellum African American sites from Alabama, California, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, North and South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, Montserrat and Barbados and they discovered that while blue beads are not the outright majority, they are in the plurality and “the most consistent bead color present at each African-American site” (Stine, et al 1996:50). This prevalence is not due to a lack of other colors. For instance, archaeologists also uncovered at least 13 other colors or materials (including stone or shell). Moreover, when one examines specific sites, for example, the Georgia and Carolinas, blue beads make up over 50 percent of the beads found in African American dig sites, both in antebellum sites and in colonial sites (Stine, et al 1996:52). Yet archaeologists did not find blue beads in great numbers in areas of white inhabitation and this uneven distribution between the slave and white population has such contrast that it speaks of a distinct cultural preference (Stine, et al 1996:52-53). In short, while relatively few blue beads were found in “white” areas across the South (and from this we can gather that other colors existed in plentiful numbers), in “African” areas, blue beads are in the plurality, if not in the outright majority (and they often are in the majority). No matter how much of a slave’s cultural legacy was fractured in the Middle Passage, clearly color symbology stayed somewhat intact.

In addition to color preference, we know that African belief in marabouts translated into the African American belief in root doctors. Root doctors or gris-gris men have a lineage that dates into West Africa’s antiquity and that at least some of their

knowledge comes from Islamic mysticism. Often root doctors used blue stones, crushed blue glass and blue fabric to create their spells and frequently blue brought protection or luck or improvement (Puckett 2003:240, 330, 385). Early black quilters had a very similar belief about blue in quilts.

Without getting bogged down with the meanings of every color in a quilt, blue seems to have generally meant protection (Fry 1989:62). Raymond Dobard writes in Cuesta Benberry's book about Arkansans quilters that well into the nineteenth century white and blue were popular among African American quilters. Dobard credits this preference to the Ibo and Yoruba people of Nigeria but, given the lack of solidarity among the Igbo and Yoruba, Islamic influence is more likely, especially considering the fact that most of Nigeria had considerable Islamic influence (Dobard 2000:xii). Maude Wahlman, one of the earliest quilt scholars, has reported similar findings. According to Pecolia Warner, a Mississippi quilter whom Wahlman interviewed in the 1970s, blue means truth and Warner suggested that perhaps this comes from the color's association with protection and goodness. Wahlman writes that both Zora Neale Hurston as well as Mary Twining reported that, across the South, blue has historically meant luck and protection. If Wahlman knew of the meaning of blue in Islam, she does not explore the fact and so perhaps she was unaware of any connection. Rather, Wahlman writes that the colors reflect an African influence and she leaves it there (Wahlman 1980: 150-153). Still, the connection seems too obvious to dismiss.

That said, just as Islamic influence was not alone in West Africa, West African influence was not alone on the plantation. Depending on the artist, slave quilts could

range from almost totally African in their design to totally European (Fry 1989:20).

These variations in style do not reflect preference but rather living conditions. Some slave quilters had to make quilts either alongside white women or for white women and those quilts adhered to an entirely different aesthetic. The fact that females even were quilters itself was contrary to standard African cultural norms. Whereas in Africa men dominated the woven arts (as tailors could earn money), in the New World labor divisions adhered to European custom and women stitched and made quilts while the men did manual labor (Fry 1989:25). Sometimes particularly strong talents would be adopted by the mistresses and the slave woman and the white woman would exchange patterns and, hence, cultural data (Fry 1989:36-37).

Ultimately, this division of labor virtually guaranteed a successful transmission of some Africanisms as whites felt less threatened by slave women. Hence, even if slave women did work in anonymity they could at least pass on their skills matrilineally. Slave women could, on occasion, make a little money selling woven crafts to whites and help their families even as they kept African traditions alive by sewing for themselves at quilting parties (Fry 1989:26-28). Thanks to the WPA narratives from the 1930s, we know that some slaves had relatively frequent quilting parties (again, all over the South) and that these parties were, among much else, opportunities to pass down cultural traditions. Quilting parties functioned as a cultural nexus on plantations, in a role not unlike that which church would fill after the war. A quilting party was an opportunity to court, to show off food, music, folklore and folk art. Specifically slaves told stories and they showed off beads, earrings, jewelry and even hairstyles as well as, obviously, quilt

designs (Fry 1989:80-86).

To that end, quilting parties may well have been vital in the development of African American culture. In addition to color and aesthetic preference, quilting parties may have also helped develop and continue other folkways, including food, speech patterns, and musical traditions. Several scholars have compared the look and the feel of an African American quilt to a blues song or to jazz—in both the design's playfulness and self-confidence and, also, in its color scheme and finally because of the apparent syncopated rhythm of style (Wahlman 1981:8). In her introduction to the authoritative book on Gee's Bend, *Gee's Bend: The Women and their Quilts*, Alvia Wardlaw compares the quilting process to blues music. She writes that just as a blues singer can take a note and travel with it and bend it, so too can a quilter take a pattern and bend it, make it her own (Wardlaw 2002:18). What Wardlaw is describing is melisma—a style of note bending and, whether she knows it or not, melisma comes to the blues from Islamic influence on West African music. Blues scholar Gerhard Kubik was one of the earliest scholars to point out that proto blues music and jazz come from (in part) Islam. In the early 1970s musicologist Paul Oliver showed that the Guinea Coast was not the birthplace of the blues, as scholars had assumed. Rather, Oliver argued that the areas around Mali and Senegambia regions had far more in common with American blues. Kubik went one step further and he argued that many of those elements in West African music, including note bending (melisma), raspy singing and a lack of polyrhythm in favor of a prime off beat rhythm were all inspired by Islamic music (Kubik 1999:63). Although the blues is known for these characteristics, many of these elements may be found in

other types of African American music as well. In short, Kubik argues that the influence of Muslims on West Africa shaped African American music and, hence, Kubik's music scholarship here—although it takes up less than a full page—is one of the strongest arguments at present for widespread Islamic influence in the South.

One may, in fact, study quilts as one studies the blues. When presented with a finished, whole quilt, scholars may discern influence from particular West African cultures, much as a music scholar may be able to decipher specific influences within a whole blues song (Fry 1986:92). This has been done to some extent in order to discern the aesthetics from specific African kingdoms, but to date, no scholarship has sought to pick out Islamic influence.

By the eleventh century, West African cotton drove a thriving economy and, for most of its history, the West African cotton economy was regional powerhouse (Picton, Mack 1989:30). As early as the sixteenth century, European merchants bought cloth woven in Benin for trade along the coast and later traders used Yoruba cloth for trade in Brazil (Picton, Mack 1989:17). No doubt some of this cloth ended up in Europe, but more on that later.

Looms partially determine the cloth's look and its design so it is necessary to spend some time reviewing African looms here. The simplest loom in West Africa is the single heddle loom—the heddle is the shedding stick that separates the two long strands of thread and allows the textile worker to weave the perpendicular weft thread (see fig. 25, p. 125). Designs may vary in complexity depending on how many shedding devices a loom has. The single heddle loom is the same loom found in the Middle Eastern ground

looms (that is, those looms set horizontal to the ground). Today, all across sub-Saharan Africa, textiles workers still use these very looms and they may have been more widespread centuries ago (before sewing machines and industrial textile factories) as researchers have found examples cloth made on such looms in Nigeria and Cameroon (see figs. 26-28, pp. 126).

Because of the single heddle, the weft is inserted in short lengths—otherwise it could get tangled and it is difficult for the artisan to reach across a whole loom to weave the weft in and out. The *weft*, also called the woof, is the yarn woven perpendicular to the warp—the yarn that reaches lengthwise from one end of the loom to the other. Together the warp and the weft weave together to form the whole cloth. On narrow looms—especially looms with only one or two heddles—the weft is narrow because a very wide weft would be more difficult to weave and manipulate.

The double heddle loom—also an important loom across the greater part of Africa—is often called the treadle loom, the pit loom, the belt loom and the narrow strip loom. These names can mislead, but they pretty much all mean the same thing. The loom described here has two heddles, both of which hang above the cloth so that the worker's hands are free to manipulate the weft and create complex designs on long, narrow fabrics. Like the single heddle loom, these looms also originated in the Middle East (Picton, Mack 1989:93).

Both looms produce narrow, long strips (Picton, Mack 1989 61-65). This technique allows for considerable artistic freedom within the confines of the strip. A single cloth can bear intricate designs and designs across a very small space which can

add stunning visual complexity across a finished garment. Often in Islamic art attention is paid to tiny detail and this weaving style in particular lends itself to this aesthetic and, hence, patterns of clear Islamic origin, may be found around West Africa (Picton, Mack 1989:65).

Much of the weaving tradition in West Africa originated among the Mande people of present day guinea Bissau and the technology and the aesthetic moved down the Niger River into the hinterlands of West Africa. The Mande people have a long history of strip patterns, and rather plain strip patterns at that. The Mande often dye their strips indigo or brown although blue and white is also a popular combination (Picton, Mack 1989:96-98).

Among the Yoruba today, men still weave narrow strips which they then sew together to form larger pieces. As recently as 1953, in the Yoruba town of Iseyin, traditionally a major textile center in Yorubaland, 20 percent of the men were weavers and together they sewed a million miles of cloth annually. Most of the men were Muslim and a few even taught at the local madrassa. Weaving gained white collar status and the life of a craftsman was such a lucrative job that none of the men interviewed admitted to even part time farming (Picton, Mack 1989:108).

By the twentieth century, when scholars began to devote time to African textiles, they saw Qur'an board patterns were common and, somewhat bizarrely and less common, some modern Yoruba textiles include images of the Prophet Muhammad alongside the faces of local monarchs (Picton, Mack 1989:112, 157). Today in Ghana, even when textiles are imported, people sometimes paint magical Islamic inscriptions and designs on European cotton. Hausa textiles have historically been areas to transcribe Qur'anic

passages and charms that ward against evil and they are put to similar use today (Picton, Mack 1989:163). For centuries now, West Africans have used Qur'anic inscriptions for myriad reasons. Even non-Muslim peoples have adapted apotropaic, or protective, design and inscription to protect against evil or bring good luck (Picton, Mack 1989:164). Meanwhile, Uthman dan Fodio, a Muslim, used appliquéd flags with Islamic inscriptions to rally his men during his famous jihads. Today these flags may be viewed in the British museum (Picton, Mack 1989:173).

Embroidery is usually associated with the Muslim population of West Africa although, as most other things of Muslim provenance, the tradition has spread across cultural borders. Islamic scholars dismiss African Islamic art as somehow less than Islamic while African art scholars dismiss it as somehow less than African. And yet, Islamic influence is apparently everywhere, even among early cultures, such as the Dogon people of Mali. (Picton, Mack 1989:187-189).

Quilting is rare in West Africa. Even so, the type of quilts present in Africa and their use are quite different from modern American quilting and it is doubtful that one style gave rise to the other. Indeed, quilting as an African tradition exists in one of the warmest regions on the continent, in the sub-Saharan area. There nomads quilt armor for their warriors and for themselves as protection against weapons rather than cold (Picton, Mack 1989:182).

CHAPTER V:
AFRICAN AMERICAN QUILTING IN THE U.S.

Modern quilting caught on in earnest in the U.S. in the late eighteenth century (Cox, Gordon 2004: 10). By this time, the trans-Atlantic slave trade had been going on for centuries and, for that matter, so had non-slave trade between West Africa and Europe and West Africa with the Arabian Peninsula. The exchange of ideas and aesthetics argues for a *mélange* of influence between European and various African cultures. West Africa itself was a land of hybridization where Islam mixed readily with pagan and traditional styles. Hence, Islamic influence in the U.S. was less the product of practicing Muslims as it was the influence of those familiar with Islamic culture or Islamic aesthetic. No doubt Islam influenced much but, as this study is limited to quilts, this thesis will focus on a handful of patterns—the log cabin, the string¹⁶ (and the strip quilt style in general) and the nine patch—as products of Islamic aesthetic.

Modern scholarship on African American culture has been extremely hostile to definitions. With any area of cultural study, politics has had a hand in forming the conversation. In the late 1970s, African American quilts, like jazz and blues music two decades earlier, began to attract the attention of white scholars. Not every quilt scholar was white (Robert Farris Thompson first suggested a link between African textile traditions and African American quilt traditions) but enough were white to create, briefly, a feeling of white academic dominance over black art. Maude Wahlman, one of the

¹⁶ The string quilt is a type of strip quilt. The word string refers to narrow bands of fabric and each ribbon is sewn, diagonally, across the narrow rectangular strip.

earliest quilt scholars who specialized in the histories of African American quilts, was white and, because she developed arguably the first work solely on African American quilting, she framed the scholarship in her own terms, terms that later scholars declared immensely limiting and demeaning. Wahlman, a student of Thompson and William Ferris, interviewed 20 black quilters for her dissertation at Yale. Wahlman made the first claim (in scholarship anyway) that the African American quilt aesthetic includes large, asymmetrical designs, bold colors, strips, symbolic forms and improvised design and she concluded that these elements came from Africa, based on visual similarities (Huff 2006: 13). Even today, after I have reviewed hundreds of quilts in collections from across the South and after speaking with several quilt groups in Mississippi, I find Wahlman's conclusions are sound. Although African American quilters make quilts of different design, Wahlman's aesthetic is still more common in African American quilts than in Anglo American quilts. Nonetheless, Wahlman's great sin seems to have been her terminology. Unlike the terms blues and jazz, quilting does not have culturally neutral terms to differentiate African American from Anglo American and by naming a style the "African American" style, Wahlman excluded many black quilters whose quilts did not meet her criteria.

Cuesta Benberry, an important early African American voice in the debate, wrote that Wahlman's conclusions caused fragmentation within the African American quilting community. Who was any one person—let alone a white lady who only interviewed 20 people—to tell an entire (if informal) community what "their" style of work would be?

Benberry's groundbreaking work, *Always There: The African Presence in*

American Quilts (1992) was a solid rebuttal to Wahlman. Benberry argued that an African American quilt was any quilt made by an African American. She argued that African American quilters must be treated as their white counterparts—as individual artists, capable of their own voice and interpretation (Huff 2006:17). Benberry’s argument is sound, up to a point. A good many of the African American quilters did not make or even particularly *like* quilts that Wahlman would consider “African American.” Even so, Benberry, in her effort to legitimize African American quilts as American, has pushed too hard in the opposite direction. Plenty of quilters, white and black, incorporate aesthetic elements that bear a remarkable similarity to aesthetic elements in West African weaving and one cannot help but make some of the same conclusions Wahlman did over 30 years ago. The trick here is to make those same conclusions while avoiding hurtful, inaccurate and limiting terminology. This is not so difficult. To begin with, one must accept that a quilt design does not tell us a quilt’s authorship. Second, we must remember that a person’s ethnicity does not foretell her quilting style or her influences. All of these labels limit and none of them explain, since we have managed to move beyond these labels with regard to music,¹⁷ their currency in the world of quilting ought to have ended decades earlier.

Yet part of the problem with defining the community was that, until recently, the African American quilting community was so highly fragmented and autonomous that, even to insiders, an objective overview proved impossible. Unlike African American folk music, quilts had no record companies to promote individual artists and so quilting guilds

¹⁷ Terms like “race music” and “negro music” are offensive and limiting for much of the same reasons the term African American quilt ought to be considered offensive and limiting.

existed unknown to one another and without a coherent terminology until Carolyn Mazloomi established the Women of Color Quilters Network (Freeman 1996:60). Even with the network though, regional and even familial names of quilt patterns do exist, although over time these names may become footnotes, as greater internal communication leads to more standardized names.

I will refer to the quilters from the 1970s and earlier as first generation quilters. This does not imply any stylistic unity so much as a type of person. The quilting scholars in the 1970s interviewed a specific sort of African American quilter. Typically she was an older woman and her quilts were products of necessity as much as expressions of art.¹⁸ These early studies of African American quilting bemoan a lack of interest among younger generations. Often the scholar points to store bought blankets as the death of quilting. These early death notices proved premature but, that said, many of the quilters featured in the earliest scholarship were elderly. These women learned from a parent or grandparent and in some cases, their teachers had been slaves. For centuries, African American quilters depended on their families—usually the women—as the transmitters of cultural data. Aesthetic preferences—whatever they were, whatever their origin—passed within a relatively small community, and while aesthetics changed, they could not and did not change much.

The Internet changed how quilters communicated with each other and it changed how outsiders approached the craft. No longer were quilters hidden away at home or hidden away in small, isolated community groups. The groups included in this study

today depend on the Internet to help sell their product and earn money.

In 1996, subscribers to Prodigy's online service could join the African American Fabrics discussion under the Prodigy Crafts Board. This marked the inauspicious debut of the first online African American quilt community, and it grew rapidly as members shared patterns and stories. Quilters Newsletter Magazine has done several national studies surveying quilter computer usage and, according to their last study (in 2000) about three fourths of dedicated quilters (anyone who spends more than \$500 per year on supplies) are online. Quilter and quilting scholar Kyra Hicks launched her own survey and found, among dedicated African American quilters, a similar proportion of regular internet users (although they tended to skew a bit younger). However isolated the first generation of quilters had been, the final decade of the twentieth century shows a trend toward national and international dialog and an expanded community. Hicks' data shows that young people within the African American quilting community are becoming quilters despite having no familial connection to the craft (Hicks 2003:165-167). A quilt show inspired Hicks to quilt (Hicks 2003:3) and she suspects that a series of national African American quilt shows throughout the 1990s ignited the passion in a number of African American women (Hicks 2003:167-168).

I call these women the second generation. These women do not quilt in regional and/or personal isolation and, consequently, their influences are not limited to a few magazine patterns or familial tradition. Plenty of these women make quilts for display or for aesthetic purpose alone and give less thought to function. Today some African

¹⁸ These vaguely self deprecating comments are not elicited or encouraged by the interviewer per se but they are given freely by the quilter. I suspect this sort of self deprecation is a form of modesty and it ought

American quilters engage in their art in the same fashion as modern artists in any other medium, with an awareness of their craft's aesthetic history and its possibilities and a quick skim through any modern quilting book testifies to this.

Today few scholars would dare define African American quilts. Postmodern scholarship is rightly dismissive of top down classifications in that scholarly definitions can be limiting and ignorant. Artists have a literal voice, in their art they have a metaphoric voice, and they need no help in expressing themselves or defining their work. Even so, no less an expert than Roland Freeman concedes that quilting in the United States is not a homogenous craft and there is an African presence just as there is a European presence (Freeman 1996:119). But what is African American, if not American and if this is so, why insist on labels at all?

Labels—especially labels of origin—have value in that they help remind us who we are and where we came from although, therein lies part of the problem. As scholarship deepens, origins become diverse and ownership is less clear. The blues avoids labels of origins and, so, regardless of whether white musicians play the blues or an old Delta bluesman, the title is valid—and no side can really claim that the other is “stealing” anything. That blues scales and some instrumentations originated in Africa is widely accepted, but the fact that blues is an *American* art is also accepted. Such is the luck of the blues scholar; the politics behind appropriation and origins have little place in modern blues study.

This is not so with quilting. For the most part, I shall refer to the design elements according to their specific names but, on occasion I will use terms like African American

to be taken with a grain of salt.

with the ongoing caveat that this title refers not to the artist but to the origins of a few limited design elements. In any event, Benberry's claim that these elements have nothing to do with the African American community ring hollow when one studies the corpus of African American quilts on display in museums and in books and when surveys show that certain patterns do seem to be more popular among black quilters. Lastly, the fact that isolated black communities such as Gee's Bend are famous because of their so-called African American designs certainly implies the accuracy of Wahlman's thesis. The similarities in the Gee's Bend quilts and the frequency in which one finds designs such as the rooftop (their local name for the log cabin) and other strip patterns makes a strong argument for an African origin (Brackner 2006:11).

In 1997, when Yvonne Milspaw conducted a personal survey of 400 quilts in private collections, she found that so-called African American designs are not common among white quilters. Pennsylvania quilters seem to quilt the log cabin pattern most frequently but, even then, the design represents only about five percent of the total output. Another pattern popular across the South, the nine-block pattern, is popular both among black quilters and white quilters, from West Virginia and along the Eastern Seaboard, all the way down through Mississippi and Alabama (Milspaw 1997:371-377). The fact that these two patterns are so common in black quilting and that their presence in European quilts matches the African-American migration southward from the eastern seaboard implies a historical connection, not a modern connection, and it implies African origins as opposed to European origins.

Carolyn Mazloomi writes that black quilters who quilt in an African style often do

so because they consciously study African textiles and incorporate that aesthetic into their work (Huff 2006:20). While this is doubtless true in some instances, none of the women interviewed for this thesis claimed to have access to any books on African weaving. A handful of women claimed to eschew the use of any pattern books whatsoever and yet enough of these women choose to design strip quilts and string quilts and log cabins that one must conclude that either each of these women invents her own style every time she quilts or that these women are informed by an unconscious cultural aesthetic. In short, Wahlman's analysis may be too narrow for the present, but it is not wholly incorrect.

That some of this aesthetic has spread outside the realm of black quilters is neither surprising nor lamentable. That all of the women in Tutwiler quilt alone (or at least, when they quilt they do so removed from the other quilters) and that many of the Tutwiler and Port Gibson women learned from books and magazines rather than from a relative or even a member of the community ought not cause concern, either. The remnants of Islamic influence that survive, whether in music or in quilting, do so because the Southern community as a whole has adopted particular musical and visual aesthetics and made these things its own. Because of this process, the quilt styles, in total, represent a "Southern" style of quilting, neither exclusively black nor white. Given the ease of communication (e.g. the Internet and books) cultural data may be shared among this second generation of quilters at an unprecedented rate, although how all this is affecting the rate of de/recontextualization is not clear. In other words, more quilters across the country may be in dialog with one another and share patterns, but, overall, the quilt patterns and their meanings seem to be changing—but just how fast that process is

happening is anyone's guess.

The decontextualization that happened in West Africa between the Muslims and the non-Muslims totally reconfigured how people understood certain patterns. A Muslim textile worker might stitch a pattern full of reverence for Allah but, generations later, that same pattern might be popular for some other reason altogether. Likely this process also happened in the U.S. in the earliest decades of African American quilting. Today, as more white quilters (and other white artists) adopt African American aesthetic for their own reasons, this process continues apace.

The point of this study is to examine a few elements within some of the genera. The aesthetics of African American quilts, like every aesthetic in every art, inspire and they can influence individuals as well as the broader quilting community. Therefore one ought to approach a study of African American quilts as an engagement and a meditation on the process of acculturation, rather than as an attempt to limit or define a cultural aesthetic. The purpose here is to observe, over time and space, how meanings, patterns, and preferences change.

Sadly, very little investigation moves in the opposite direction, toward England. No wonder certain African American art scholars become piqued at the academy's persistent urge to disentangle their culture when relatively little effort has gone into disentangling Anglo-American styles. Arguably, the single most "American"¹⁹ design is the log cabin design. This design is nothing more than a series of concentric squares and quilt historians report that the middle square—a solid square—represents the hearth, or the metaphysical center of the home (see figs. 29-31, pp. 127). Despite its popularity

here, this design is not unique to America and today appears all over the world. In America, the design was quite popular in the latter half of the nineteenth century (Cox, Gordon 2004:6-10). It is quite possible this design has Islamic origins—possibly by way of West Africa. Although this is not a popular theory, it bears some consideration because it is and has been very popular within the African American quilt community.

To be sure, the design itself is so basic that artisans worlds apart may well have “invented” the pattern independent of each other and the simplicity of the log cabin makes its popularity hardly remarkable. Even so, various aesthetic markers show that it is unique from other English designs and indicate a possible Islamic root.

The log cabin design lends itself to the strip quilt. Not only could a quilter work a small series of log cabins into a single strip, but, if a quilter desired a larger log cabin pattern, she could easily alternate light and dark cloth in her strips for a fuller, larger design. Typically, a log cabin quilt features concentric squares, but the courthouse steps pattern, crosses and triangles are also possible. The important thing is, the quilt is pieced from narrow strips. This design is popular in West Africa and it happens to conform to Islamic aesthetic preference in that it is geometric and features a strong center point with symmetrical outward radiation. Nothing here suggests that Muslims *invented* the design, although they could have appreciated it. Given the aesthetics involved, it seems more African or Muslim than European, but even so, white quilt historians presume the pattern comes from England, although their arguments seem based more in myth than fact.

One theory is that the design came from the Isle of Man and migrated to the U.S., possibly by way of Canada. One legend claims that Mary Morgan, an Englishwoman,

¹⁹ In that this design is popular in the US and it has been popular throughout America’s quilting history.

brought a log cabin quilt with her from England when she moved to the U.S. South (Cox, Gordon 2004:10). There seems to be no historical basis for this claim and anyway, a single source could hardly have accounted for the national popularity of the design within a only few decades. One interesting—though equally unprovable—hypothesis is that the design came from ancient Egypt by way of English tomb raiders. By the early nineteenth century, British archeologists began bringing hundreds of funerary objects back from the Pyramids and, among those objects, were mummified cats. These cats are still on display at the British Museum and their linen wrappers do have a log cabin pattern (Cox, Gordon 2004:10).

If this theory is correct, it also speaks of a remarkably rapid process of dissemination as the pattern spread from England to the U.S. and Canada and became popular in these three countries decades of each other. It is more plausible that this pattern originated in Ancient Egypt and then made its way across the Arabian Peninsula where it could have been appropriated by Muslim artisans, centuries later. Given the fact that the design existed in Ancient Egypt and, given the proximity to the Arabian Peninsula, this theory seems at least plausible.

Janet Rae makes the argument that the design originated in England because of a single written mention of a log cabin quilt from 1745 and from a similar pattern on a perfume bag from about 1650. Rae believes the pattern is a reference to British strip farming, a technique that dates all the way back to the days of Roman occupation (Rae 1987:68). Yet, for all that, this is a style that is mostly absent in many textiles until the nineteenth century. We must at least consider the possibility that this design comes from

overseas. The question then becomes how much influence did the international textile trade have on England prior to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries?

By the eighteenth century, British cloth manufacturers sold material dyed indigo and Turkey red. The indigo came from Africa and the Turkey red was a dye process developed, obviously, in Turkey (Rae 1987:48-50). The notion that the artists and artisans worked in geographic and cultural solitude is ridiculous, especially when one considers that by the seventeenth century (the date of the very first log cabin designs in the British Isles, according to Rae) international trade routes included the Middle East and Africa.

The earliest English textiles did not include cotton, a plant that grows in climates far warmer than the British Isles. Cotton, in particular, came to West Africa and England from India by way of the Middle East and the Middle East, of course, is also the source for Islamic influence in West Africa and so it ought to be little surprise that the word cotton comes from the Arabic *Qutun* (or *al-Qutn*) (Brown, Ware 1958:1).

Historians may assume that when English textile manufacturers began to import cotton they saw foreign designs and if this assumption is valid, then English textiles manufacturers and merchants from across the country could have had considerable exposure to Islamic patterns. In seventeenth century England, textile manufacturing was hardly centralized and it depended on vast internal trade networks, meaning that a complex network of local influence contributed toward the total English textile industry prior to the later eighteenth century (Smail 1994:54-55). Therefore, even if cotton imports were rather small until the U.S. developed its cotton industry—and they were—there is

still plenty of possibility that unique African or Arabian cotton cloth patterns made their way inland as novelty items or as luxury items.

Continental Europe has long been in love with the Eastern product. Herodotus refers to the fiber as tree wool (which is exactly what the modern German word for cotton translates to). Alexander the Great also mentioned tree wool and Marco Polo claimed Indian cottons to be “the finest and most beautiful ... that are to be found in any part of the world” (Brown, Ware 1958:2).

Indeed, by the seventeenth century foreign—in particular Islamic—textiles had been in England for about 700 years. Archaeologists have discovered tapestries that exhibit a design and technique that likely originated in Iran although the particular cloth probably came from Syria. The design is highly ornate and complex—full of geometric designs common in Islamic textiles rather than the literal objects represented in most European textiles. Because of the Islamic invasion of the Iberian Peninsula, such cloth was not uncommon in Europe and, by the eleventh century, similar tapestry was manufactured in Spain and Italy. Archaeologists even found one example in London dating from the fourteenth century. In the middle of the design is a large star surrounded with Kufic script that reads either Allah or baraka (Crowfoot, Pritchard, Staniland 2001:108-109). I suspect that the script reads Allah rather than baraka (luck, or blessing), as a central star surrounded by smaller geometric patterns is a visual representation of God as the center of the universe (and this pattern itself bears a striking general resemblance to the log cabin motif).

Archaeologists have discovered similar cloth all across Europe, from southern

Spain to northern Germany from about 1000 AD onward—the result of massive internal trade networks as well as Islamic presence on the European mainland. More curiously still, archeologists tell us that the Muslims artisans who produced the cloth in Islamic Spain gave it to important members of the Catholic clergy, including St. Bernard and various European monarchs. What archaeologists have found, then, is perhaps one of the earliest examples on record of a non-Muslim population adopting an Islamic aesthetic for the sake of its beauty rather than for its deeper cultural meaning (Crowfoot, Pritchard, Staniland 1996:111-112). Cultural agency refers to any action born not out of a collection of random circumstances or coincidences, but rather it comes from individuals and groups with purpose. In medieval Europe, a cultural conversation occurred that was, at least in part, the result of rational dialog and mutual agreement.

In addition to early overland textile trade, Islamic textiles began pouring into England as soon as that country began seriously to pursue trade in the East. In 1413 England made its first significant foray into international trade when it sent a fleet of ships laden with, among other things, English wool, to Morocco. At that time the Portuguese, Spanish and various Italian city-states had tight control on the Mediterranean commerce and Genoese sailors seized the English ships. The English managed only intermittent sea trade for a century after that first aborted attempt, but finally in 1579 Queen Elizabeth signed off on the Turkey Company, an English trading outfit that lasted well into the nineteenth century. The Turkey Company succeeded in opening the Orient to English merchants (and customers) by way of Turkey and Persia (Cawston, Keane 1968:67-68).

The English traded tin and raw wool and in exchange the English public got regular shipments of raisins, currants, figs, dates, coffee beans, rare fruits, drugs, spices and, not least, silk. In the early seventeenth century, the English so loved Persian silk they bought about 300 bales a year of raw silk. Besides England, most of Europe, from the Mediterranean states to the German and Dutch states, traded with Turkey, Syria and Egypt and got in return their own silks, cotton, hemp, wool, and food (Cawston, Keane 1968:71, 77). The bulk of the imported material seems to have been unfinished but even so, one can imagine at least occasional finished pieces making their way back and forth between the cultures. English merchants so desired an open route to the Middle East that, at the dawn of the age of seafaring exploration, English sailors went east and into the Mediterranean, instead of west toward the Caribbean.

But the Mediterranean was a perilous place with Barbary pirates and other European fleets eager to outwit and sabotage the English and pirate attacks from trade groups in Southern Europe as well as Northern Africa stymied much English sea trade for centuries. Finally, in 1600, England chartered the East Indian Company and, in a couple of years, England had a steady supply of impressive Indian goods. According to Clawston and Keane, by the mid-seventeenth century posh Londoners could buy “rich velvets, satins, fine cutlery ... saddles and gay trappings, swords with damascene blades, choice pictures, cloth of gold and silver, flowered silks of gold and silver, precious stones set in enameled work ...” and on and on. The quality of imports was so great that they led to an idee fixe among the English that the Orient—especially India—was very wealthy indeed. This idea inspired much of England’s later drive to colonize Asia (Cawston,

Keane 1968:93).

In the Americas, English settlers grew cotton almost as soon as they landed. One of the earliest mentions of the crop dates to 1607 when settlers in the Virginia Colony planted it and settlers in Georgia grew cotton in small quantities as early as 1734. At that time, American farmers grew cotton for their own use rather than for export markets and so most English cotton continued to come from either Africa or the Middle East (Brown, Ware 1958:16).

If the log cabin pattern is essentially a foreign pattern that reached England by way of West Africa or the Middle East, then this timeline fits together rather neatly. Each country—first England and then Canada and the U.S.—had significant contact with the Middle East and West Africa for a couple of centuries before the design became widespread in the white community. One could explain this lag in cultural transmission as reluctance on the part of whites to adopt a foreign aesthetic, or it could indicate an ignorance of that aesthetic or it could mean nothing at all. To conclude, there is plenty of historical and archeological evidence to hint—at the very least—at an Islamic influence in the log cabin design, even if that design came to the U.S. by way of Anglo quilters. That such a proposition has not yet been made by quilt scholars speaks more to their lack of imagination and perhaps to the notion of England as the font of all American crafts rather than to any hard evidence.

Let us return to West Africa and consider again the strip loom, that piece of hardware that, like nothing else, helped establish certain aesthetics in the Southern quilt. Considering how easy these looms are to construct, one might expect slaves to have built

these same looms in the New World, but there is no evidence to support this at present. Therefore, one cannot account for the continued presence of narrow strips across the South as a product of strip looms alone or even at all. Perhaps on some larger plantations slaves made their own loom and made their own cloth, but in general, slaves used whatever material was on hand, including clothing scraps and various types of sackcloth. There is also evidence that slaves bought material when they had the money and opportunity to do so (Fry 1989 49-50). Therefore, while the width of looms in West Africa may have determined aesthetic, given the variables at work across the South, African American aesthetic seems to have existed *in spite of* materials and today one still sees African American quilters produce a considerable number of log cabin, nine patch, strip, and string quilts although, of course, none of these modern quilters weave his or her own cloth.

The State of Modern Southern Quilting

For centuries quilting passed lineally, from mother to daughter. This process lasted well into the twentieth century and, in some cases, even former slaves taught quilting well into that century (David Crosby 1999:3). But, by the 1970s, when Roland Freeman began his documentation work, quilting was on the decline in Mississippi, especially within the black community. Folks thought it was poor form to continue a tradition that, unlike the blues, yielded no money but, very much like the blues, seemed tied to a rural and impoverished past. In the 1970s if quilters did sell quilts, a full sized

quilt that took 100 hours of labor would go for \$12 or \$25 dollars (Crosby 1999:4).

About the same time as Freeman began scouring rural Mississippi in search of quilts and quilters, David and Patty Crosby, a white couple, moved to Port Gibson. The Crosbys fell into folk culture almost by accident but in the past 25 years they, more than anyone else in the lower Mississippi region, have supported the tradition of African American quilts and today their cultural center introduces the folk art to dozens of community youth and it allows local women to sell their products for a fair price.

David took a job in 1973 at Alcorn State and his wife, Patricia Crosby, started work for the census bureau. Through her work, she noticed that many local women quilted and around that same time they met Roland Freeman, who was finishing his quilt exhibit, *Something to Keep You Warm*. Inspired by the apparent wealth of local crafts, in 1978, the Crosbys formed the Cultural Crossroads, a community center in Port Gibson, to celebrate local culture. As part of that project, the Crosbys brought local craftsmen into contact with area youth. They brought artisans including Son Thomas and local quilters into the schools to teach younger girls to quilt. Within a year or so, quilts hung in the local high school. The Crosbys got a youth planning grant from the state for \$2,500 to support cultural enrichment programs in the school and that helped fund *I Ain't Lying*, a local magazine that aimed at recording traditional craft and oral culture. That magazine was modeled after a similar folk culture magazine in Georgia called *Foxfire*. Neither of the Crosbys had any formal education in cultural studies or in taking oral histories and neither did the local students they worked with (Interview with author, May 26, 2010). Despite those limitations, *I Ain't Lying* provides rare insight into late twentieth century

rural culture in Mississippi and the magazine remains an invaluable resource.

Among its myriad subjects, *I Ain't Lying* offers a handful of interviews with some of Mississippi's first generation quilters. One of the first quilters interviewed for *I Ain't Lying* was Malissa Banks. At the time of the interview, Banks was 76 and she claimed to have been inspired by God and the Sears Roebuck catalog. Also, her mother and grandmother used to quilt. Two of the patterns she quilts include the railroad pattern (a basic strip pattern) and a pigpen, or a log cabin quilt. The pattern name "pigpen" might be local tradition. Quilters in Gee's Bend, Alabama still use that name but, apparently, the name "pigpen" is not common up north or along the eastern seaboard. It is unlikely the Sears Roebuck catalog would have used either a regional name or a name as déclassé as "pigpen," though her cowcatcher pattern as well as her star pattern quilts may have come from magazines, considering the name "cowcatcher" was common in magazines and the star pattern is rather difficult without a pattern. (Morris 1981:14) All that said, some scholars believe that magazines that published patterns were playing catch up rather than leading any national pattern trends (Milspaw 1997:387). In any case, Banks said she sold many of her quilts for \$12 (Morris 1981:15).²⁰

Today Claiborne County quilts can sell for as high as \$1,000 and they sit in the state art museum, a testament to their certification by the white elite. While this recent certification is welcome, surely some of those quilts made in the early and mid-twentieth century by black artisans like Banks found their way into white homes and enjoyed an informal process of certification long before the state decided to follow suit. In this way,

²⁰ That is about \$28 today (<http://www.westegg.com/inflation>).

some of these quilts may have inspired white quilters. In general, race seems to mean less than one would think, at least in terms of arts and crafts.

For instance, quilts among white Appalachians are more similar to quilts made by Southern blacks than to quilts made by the Pennsylvania Dutch (Milspaw 1997: 380). Recently some folklorists have suggested that studies and surveys ought to treat whole regions as singular cultural melting pots and study white Southern quilts alongside black quilts and pay attention to similarities and compare those similarities against, say, quilts from New England. Due to time constraints, this thesis does not survey the whole South, but the theory seems sound. If it bears out, scholars would forever divorce themselves from such broad terms as “black quilts” and perhaps use regional names instead (e.g., Southern quilts) (Milspaw 1997:383).

To some very small extent, this theory is already provable. The nine-block pattern is a historically popular pattern among Southern black quilters. This should come as no surprise; like the log cabin pattern, the nine-block pattern has a clear antecedent in West Africa and in fact the pattern is one of the oldest textile patterns in that region. Yet, as with the log cabin design, this pattern is popular across the South and, to a limited extent, it is popular among white quilters along the Eastern Seaboard (Milspaw 1997:377). This swath mirrors historic slave migration patterns, but the popularity these patterns have among white quilters should not be so, unless we allow for cross-cultural dialog and treat the South as a single cultural melting pot. The South-as-a-unique-cultural-entity is hardly a novel idea, but even so, scholars try to disprove this all the time. Scores of books seek to show how each region—the piedmont, the Appalachian, the plantation, the city—

created different and distinct subcultures. All of that might be true for whites, but plantation slaves had not the social diversity of even poor whites. Perhaps this is why the only examples of regionally unique black culture come from extremely isolated examples, such as islands.

There are two reasons to argue for the South as one large melting pot. First, the slaves as individuals had very little say in their social and work conditions and, given that individuals had little hope of “passing” as white or socially climbing out of slavery, individuals would have had no reason to adopt much outside culture, especially if doing so might have subjected them to ridicule and opprobrium among other slaves and whites. Second, whites moved slaves en masse from the east to the Southern plantations as soon as the Louisiana Purchase opened up the land and hence, the Southern culture of the southeast moved south and southwest. Therefore, far from having Africans experience life in the U.S. in two distinct places with two distinct geographies, a single cultural unit moved overland.

If slaves managed to keep some of their cultural beliefs intact (and the study of blue beads indicates that there is some evidence they did), then it is quite possible that slave quilters influenced white designs across the South. Even today a certain amount of cultural dialog exists between quilters in Mississippi, even when very little dialog of any other sort happens between white and black residents.

Today the community of Port Gibson is still socially segregated. Almost all of Claiborne County’s white schoolchildren attend the two white segregation academies, while the public school is over 99 percent black. But when the Cultural Crossroads

Community Center opened in the late 1970s, Patricia Crosby wanted to honor the craft by sharing its history and technique with as many people as possible—regardless of race. She believed that honoring the history would itself lead to integration and, given the fact that the community center has in the past 30 years trained white women alongside black women, she has proven her theory correct, to some extent (Crosby: interview with Craft in America online).

Getting back to the rural black community of Mississippi, we see that cultural transmission changed, but only since the 1990s. Minnie Lou Buck of Claiborne County was 66 years old in 1981 and she had quilted her entire life. She learned to quilt from her mother and she claimed to have never used patterns until she got so old she could no longer quilt freehand (Clark 1981: 36-38). This bolsters Milspaw's assertion that early quilters depended more on local and familial custom than national newspaper or magazine patterns. Given the late date of the interview (the final quarter of the twentieth century) and the closed system of transmission, it is fair to say that the basic patterns examined here were common and important in the African American traditions even if they were not necessarily the only patterns.

One interesting case is that of Sarah Carpenter. Carpenter was 86 at the time of her interview and is remarkable because of her direct link to Africa. Slave traders brought her great grandmother to Mississippi from Africa and she, the great grandmother, lived long enough to tell her great-granddaughter about the experience. Carpenter said that her great-grandmother told her that the planters treated the slaves like cows and set them to work out in the field. Carpenter is a quilter, but her interviewer in *I Ain't Lying* never

asks about quilting, although four photographs of her quilts are published alongside her interview. One is a log cabin design (particularly interesting given the context here) and the two others appear to have a painted design. One design is clearly a cow's head and there is some illegible script above that (possibly inspired by the great-grandmother) and the last design is a series of large vertical diamonds running in strips, each strip separated by thick bars (Thomas 1981: 50-52). This design could well be of West African origin or at least inspiration in that the pattern is painted in narrow strips.

Hystercine Rankin was probably the most famous quilter in the Port Gibson area. Roland Freeman featured her in his books and one of her quilts—a story quilt that shows the murder of her father by a white man—gained national attention in her lifetime. Born in Jefferson County in 1929, Rankin learned to make quilts at the age of 12 when her grandmother taught her. Rankin, like many of the first generation quilters, had close ties to slavery and she was born, in fact, in a slave house. Rankin, more so than most of the other quilters, seems to have experimented the most with her quilts, but this is not to imply that she did not quilt simpler, more traditional styles. Indeed, she grew up quilting surrounded by her grandparents and siblings and, at the time of her interview in 1982, she was working on a string quilt as well as a nine patch (Davis 1982: 61-72).

Rather than list individually all the other first generation quilters interviewed in *I Ain't Lying*, most—if not all—of the women quilted at least some nine patch, pigpen or strip patterns and many of the women did not know any other style. Without limiting their repertoire—for Rankin clearly could quilt in different styles—most of these women were most familiar with Islamic-inspired patterns. This should be of little surprise given

their closed cultural grouping and their impoverished and rural setting, but those same patterns find their way into African American quilts today.

Unfortunately, none of the quilters interviewed mentioned the color blue or had anything to say about color significance. Possibly they did not have any such beliefs, although they probably did associate colors with certain properties, based on Wahlman's interviews only a few years earlier with nearby quilters. Perhaps the high school students who interviewed these women simply did not think to ask about color. In an interview, David Crosby said as much. "We didn't even know what questions to ask," he said. "We got a list of questions from *Foxfire* and localized them. ... what you know five years later would have informed some additional questions" (Interview with author, May 26, 2010).

Among the modern quilters interviewed, virtually none learned matrilineally. Only a single quilter, Essie Buck, learned from her mother. "She made me learn and I'm glad she did. She said I was going to have a family and we would need to keep warm" (Interview with author, June 1, 2010). She explained that none of the quilts her mother made had particular patterns, although her mother did particularly like a type of string quilt made from old bow ties. "My mother didn't know what a quilt book was," she said (Interview with author, July 1, 2010). Buck has been quilting with the cultural center for six years and in that time she has taught dozens of young girls to sew nine-patch quilts. For the most part these girls are high school students who learn as part of a summer program at the center. The elder quilters implied the summer program was only that—a summer affair rather than the beginning of a lifelong commitment to regional craft. Still, Buck's presence at the community center does provide a living and rare link to traditional

styles.

Most of the second generation of quilters learned to quilt quite late in life. These women, if they quilt traditional African American patterns, do so by informed choice rather than ignorance. While their grandmothers may have never owned even a single quilting book, these women have access to vast libraries and the Internet. These technologies can help preserve quilt patterns and folkways by saving them in a public space. Not only are the patterns saved on the Internet and in books, but the means of cultural transmission is broadened and thus, rather than depending on matrilineal passage, any potential artist can access and adopt the traditions at any point in her life.

This is not to say that the traditions have remained inviolate. None of the women I spoke with (including Buck) had any particular feeling for color symbolism. They may prefer certain colors, but no modern quilter seemed to regard blue in any special way. Alas, the meaning of blue may have faded from cultural currency, although from a review of the Gee's Bend quilts, the color is still quite popular²¹.

The biography of Josephine Dobbins Horgy, a quilter in Port Gibson, shows the meandering path of one current quilter. Horgy, who is now in her seventies, could not quilt when she joined the group. She could barely sew. Growing up, Horgy was a good student, eager to get out of rural Mississippi and her earliest memories of quilting are negative:

“My grandmother quilted and she had the quilting bees going around from house to house. ... “I would walk in there and she'd have cookies and cake and they'd talk and

talk and I'd see them and I said, I'll never spend my days doing that," she said. From what she can remember, her grandmother had access to designs and patterns and most of what she quilted (windmills, stars, etc) were European and not typical rural black quilts.

When she finished high school, Horgy went to college and did her best to get out and find a job, still too busy to learn any crafts "I was too busy making sure I was reading to get out of here," she said. She did escape her rural roots, but then one day she had a sort of epiphany.

"I had a coworker in Jackson and one day Judy said, Jo, guess what, and I said what. She said, when you get retired, you're going to have all your books on your bookshelf and someone's going to say, did you read all those books, and you'll say yes. But someday someone's going to come into my house and they'll see all my work around here and they'll say, did you do all that, and I'll say yes." She decided she would learn crafts.

A former professor at Alcorn, Horgy put her head into quilting as much as her hands and she began to read about the history of quilting in Southern black households. In particular, she has fallen in love with the Gee's Bend quilts.

"They're are more antique or old, because they came from South Carolina and they were put over on that island in Alabama and were isolated," she said of the Gee's Bend quilters.

Horgy has never sold a quilt because she prefers to give them away. Every member of her family has a quilt and, in the summer of 2010, she began a small quilt for

²¹ I should note that many of the famous Gee's Bend quilts were quilted by first generation quilters and anyway, modern attempts at the Gee's Bend style might incorporate color preference but fail to incorporate

her grandson who loves dinosaurs. The design is a log cabin with an appliqué dinosaur in the middle, a clever combination of something new and something old (Interview with author, July 1, 2010).

Farther up the Mississippi River in the Delta town of Tutwiler, Sister Maureen Delaney works with black quilters, organizing them and helping them sell their products around the world. Delaney works with between 15 and 18 quilters at the Tutwiler Community Center, where the women offer a small range of quilted items, including napkins, placemats and bags in addition to the more traditional bed quilts. Delaney says the products can earn up to \$65,000 in good years, 80-85 percent of which goes to the women. The women are not able to earn a living here, but Delaney said the extra income is useful for gas money, groceries and the like. Although the origins of the Tutwiler Center are quite different from the origins of the Port Gibson center, the result—cultural preservation—is similar.

Delany moved to Tutwiler in 1987 from San Francisco. She found a town without running water, high rates of malnutrition and infant mortality—basically a third world country tucked away inside the U.S.A. She discovered the town’s quilting heritage by accident—she needed something to keep warm and so she visited Mary Sue Robertson, a woman in her 70s, and found a large collection of tops, ready to be quilted. Delaney picked out a top but, because of her poor eyesight, Robertson could not quilt any longer, so Delany got someone else to finish the quilt. Delaney received compliments for the quilt and, inspired, she thought maybe others would like to have quilts (Interview with author, June 11, 2010). Thus, even though the aim of Delaney and her Sisters was not to

color meaning.

preserve a craft, but to give local women a chance to make some money through a common local skill, the Tutwiler Community Center functions not unlike its counterpart in Claiborne County.

The Tutwiler women have access to the Internet and to a good size collection of quilting books and magazines (all through the Center), but today most of the women learn the craft through other local quilters rather than matrilineally. Even so, common patterns and themes varied hardly any from the quilts in Port Gibson and this might be because, only a decade earlier, enough older women still quilted who had learned the craft from their mothers that the traditional style has remained more or less fixed. Another reason so-called traditional African American aesthetic continues to manifest itself is because of its salability. Most of the women sold their quilts and, aside from a few, most quilters depended on the money as a steady source of extra income. So long as quilt enthusiasts continue to ask for traditional African American aesthetic in the quilts, the aesthetic will survive. Indeed, many of the patterns I saw usually adhered to Wahlman's classic definition of "African American" aesthetic, which is to say that many of the quilts being produced were strip quilts with loud colors and offbeat (asymmetrical) patterns.

In 1998, Delaney travelled with some of the women to San Jose, California as part of a quilt show. The following is from a story in the *San Jose Mercury News* and it offers a colorful and scholarly analysis of the Tutwiler quilts.

Robin Treen is the director of the San Jose Museum of Quilts and Textiles, "I think people will be surprised at what they see. They're so full of life, enthusiasm and spirit; they're wonderful to look at. The Quilts are not dark or dreary or in any way restrained. They soar with spirit and the key word is improvisational. They're not well known and, like African American anything, they're less accepted.

These come from a rural area where poverty is a huge problem. They've had a hard time recapturing their own history. The African-American style quilt encompasses a different aesthetic and styles and techniques than the Anglo-American quilt. They have a lot of strips, a lot of bright colors, they're asymmetrical in pattern, they're utilitarian and made bed-sized so they're meant to be used and, above all, they're improvisational. One of the things every single one talked about was learning to quilt from their mothers, grandmothers and aunts and how much they want to pass this on to their own daughters who, for the most part, aren't interested," Treen says (San Jose Mercury News:1998).

Much of Treen's modernist assessment is questionable. Given Delaney's reasons for starting the quilting project, the quilters are business people with business savvy and so, far from improvising their product, they create that which the market demands. Even so, his praise alongside the economic rewards is meaningful not only to the women, but to students of cultural histories who treasure these traditional patterns. For this praise is itself an entreaty for a matrilineal tradition to continue through the marketplace.

So, while Treen's implication that traditional African American quilting was on its deathbed proved premature, his sense that matrilineal mode of transmission was ending was probably correct. Susan Rogers' story illustrates how this change occurs. Rogers moved to Tutwiler in 1988. The community center opened that year and she was 18 years old. From its outset, the center attracted her because she could remember her grandmother quilting. Rogers' mother told her that when she (Rogers), was a very small girl, six or seven years old, she would spend all day watching her grandmother quilt.

"I would ask my grandmother, why you doin' that for? And she said, 'You get cold, you wait and see—you'll be needing it. In those days they were just making blocks, sewing blocks, sewing quilt tops and when I got here it was very different from what I

was used to,” she said. “They had classes here and I think the classes helped me do different things.”

Mostly the classes focused on technique, but she also picked up some outside influence and, also important, she found a sense of pride through the quilting program. “At first I didn’t see myself as an artist, but once I got here I *did* see myself as an artist because they take these quilts out so people can see what we do. .. And I see myself as an artist because there’s a lot of people who can’t do it,” she said. In her own family her sister does not quilt, her mother never did quilt and her daughters do not quilt, although her grandbaby is interested in it a bit.

“It’s the Delta, but we can do things and make quilt tops and everything and I thank the Community Center for going out there and showing people, because people don’t know about us because we’re from the Delta and we’re in a small state,” she said.

Rogers’ favorite patterns include the monkey wrench and the pinwheel, neither of which is explicitly African in its origin. Even so, Rogers is an example of the hybridization of the modern black Southern quilter. She is aware of her grandmother’s designs and likes them well enough to do an occasional traditional quilt, but mostly she sticks to European designs. So, while the artist expands her repertoire, the old continues to live.

Rogers referred to the traditional quilts her grandmother made as “country quilts” (Interview with author, June 17, 2010). A few other quilters made this distinction as well, although I saw no other reference to the term in quilt literature. Perhaps, as its name implies, many of the Tutwiler quilters consider country quilts to be rural, but nobody

seemed particularly dismissive of the style and one woman, Martha Lattimore, quilts primarily in that style.

Lattimore has been quilting at the Community Center for almost two decades and she says her patterns come from herself because no one ever showed her how to quilt, although her mother and sister quilted. Her so-called country quilts are strip quilts made up of five-inch blocks. Lattimore fills each block with smaller pieces and colors so that, from afar, the quilt looks impossibly busy. She says this is the point.

“They’re small enough so you can get a lot in and so there’s a lot in,” she said of the blocks. “You don’t get bored looking at one thing.” She said that her quilts were a reflection of her personality. “I’m busy, so my quilts are busy,” she said. “I’m a little mixed up, so my quilts are mixed up” (Interview with the author, June 18, 2010).

Lattimore aside, few of the quilters—especially the younger quilters—seemed to have much of a family tradition. Like Horgy in Claiborne County, many of the women picked up the craft after retirement because for a long time, quilting was a social liability. After World War II, a demographic and economic shift occurred throughout the United States that greatly reduced the dependence on the home economy to handmade and handcrafted goods and this shift affected not only the migrants out of the South, but the communities in the South, too.

“There was so much emphasis on mass production and on doing things cheaply that hand crafted goods couldn’t compete in the marketplace,” David Crosby explained. “There was a social shame involved, if you couldn’t go out and buy a coverlet ... it was the sign of lower class struggle.” In other words, the free market put little dollar value on

a handmade product while society denigrated the activity. The craft lost value all around and that meant that by the 1970s, a time when the pre-WWII generation were growing quite old, young and upcoming quilters would have been scarce. Crosby recalls that even back then the best new quilters were sometimes elderly people.

“One of the best quilters, Christina Atlas, did not begin to quilt until she was in her sixties, after she retired from teaching. Her mother had quilted, but she refused to even learn until very late in life and, when she did learn, she refused to quilt the simplistic designs her mother knew and preferred to learn fancy quilting in books.”

Atlas’ rejection of her so-called roots or heritage must have pained some. Treen, the museum curator quoted in the *San Jose Mercury News* article certainly seemed upset at the prospect of black quilters abandoning their historic aesthetic. Of course, that rejection by black quilters of obvious African-American aesthetics came as a response to social pressures against all things African and all things handmade. This response existed in the white community as well as in the black community. David Crosby said he believes this initial kick back in the African American craft community to be responsible for the tremendous loss of other cultural values, like colors.

In Africa, textiles are full of meaning according to their color and design. I don’t think there’s very much sense of that at all and in many ways there’s a rejection of that in common, everyday quilters. They say, “I don’t know nuthin’ about no Africa,” or “I don’t want to be tarred with that brush.” It’s a testy issue (Interview with the author, May 26, 2010).

Today the earlier sense of shame in handmade goods might finally be easing as handmade folk arts gain popularity. The last quilter profiled for this thesis, Janice Mitchell, is young and she is atypical in that she embraces a lot of what an older

generation (even her mother's generation) would have dismissed. Perhaps she is an anomaly, but as the mainstream begins to accept and demand African American aesthetic on its own terms, at least a few quilters will see the economic and social benefit to their own aesthetic heritage.

Mitchell was born in 1966 and, professionally, she is a caregiver but she spends much of her free time quilting. Her mother and grandmother did not quilt and Mitchell's story about how she came to quilt is interesting at a personal level but also interesting in an existential way, too. Before she made quilts, Mitchell made jewelry, but she never really liked it. She said the material was expensive and her finished products never showed much skill. She said she prayed to God and asked for a specific talent and God inspired her to quilt. She approached her friends whom she knew to be quilters, but her friends refused to teach a novice and she got jealous and set out on her own.

"I just knew, I think you start with blocks," she said. "I hadn't seen any more than what they were doing, and those were always a work in progress." Her friends made "authentic" quilts—simpler patterns and larger stitches—strip quilts—and so she cut squares and rectangles from cereal boxes to shape her pattern. It took her a year to figure out how to put everything together—because she never read directions—and she said it did not come out all that well, but she loved it. After that, she bought a bunch of quilting books but, rather than inspirational, they were confusing.

I really did go to department stores, looking in the bedding dept at the quilts, thinking, this is what I'm trying to make. Then I made full use of the public library and that's when I learned there're so many messages in quilts and so many meaning behind them, there are different ways of knowing who has made these quilts, what region they're from. But for years I had a hard time trying to figure out, well where do I fit in at? I like *this*, but I don't want to make *that*, I do this

over *here*. Then I realized you don't have to fit in, you are a *quilter* and you're loved by all other quilters. You just have your own particular take on it.

Mitchell, like many of her cohort, creates pieces that straddle the line between so-called African American quilts and European quilts. One of the first good quilts she made was a patchwork quilt made up from an old baby blanket. She gave it to her son who, at the time, was on the football team and he used it to keep warm on the bus during away games. Now the quilt is with her godson and, a few new patches, it is none the worse for it.

I look at it like, yes, this is art, but it will be used on a daily basis. When I say I love for it to be used, if I make a quilt and pass it on, or if they ask me to make it, I feel like that's what it's for, it's to keep you warm, it's a hug from Janice to you. You picnic on it, it laughs with you, it holds cookie crumbs, it holds tears, it makes you feel good. Some of my friends say, "Oh, that's too much, Janice." But that's how I feel about it.

For seven years, her son's friends would gather at her house and she taught them, even though many were male. A whole group of neighborhood children, summer after summer, came over for punch, cookies and quilt lessons. They used squares and triangles—the basic building blocks of the strip quilt. "The only thing I asked the children was, during their lifetime, they have to teach at least one person how to quilt," Mitchell said.

She is one of the few quilters interviewed here who taught her child to quilt and her achievement is all the more remarkable because he was a boy on the high school football team at the time. For a brief time her son sewed for the Tutwiler quilters and turned in his patterns and, when he was in college, his quilting gave him gas money.

I wasn't sure how to approach it. If I had a daughter, oh, of course, that's

just a natural occurrence. Then I thought, so? I have a son, he can't learn? And what I did, to show him that it wasn't girly or that it would make him less masculine, I showed him that men made beautiful quilts and tapestry and they do today and I'd let him operate the machine. I told him that he could feel good about himself in so many ways, and this is just one more way. I really think there's a great need to teach children how to do things on their own, to show them how to be creative. It's cost effective and it's great for their self esteem and character. .. And to live in the Delta and to see the cotton grow, ugh, it's a shame they don't make the connection.

Mitchell is also the only quilter who feels the cotton fields are sacred ground.

Possibly this is due to her unique family history. Unlike the other quilters I interviewed at Tutwiler and in Claiborne County, Mitchell was born in Texas and moved around often because her father was in the military and so she avoided any direct experience in the cotton fields. Today, as an adult, when Mitchell speaks about cotton, she is effusive.

Whatever negativity is linked to [cotton], look at the positive aspects that have come from it. This is something that's helped me sustain a career. Everyone has told me, that's just your hobby, but this hobby has helped me raise my son and it's helped spark an interest that's led me to consider going back to school and studying art.

During harvest season she said all the loose cotton, wasted and blowing across the Delta, depresses her. "All the excess waste cotton that's blowing, I've literally gone out and picked that up and washed it in old panty hose and then plucked it and used that cotton to line quilts, just to get a sense, sort of, of what it must have been like for my ancestors" (Interview with the author, June 17, 2010).

CHAPTER VI:
ISLAM UNCOVERED

This thesis has argued two things. First, that Islamic influence was widespread in West Africa and, through a process of cultural diffusion first overseas and then in the U.S. South led largely by the agency of individual actors, much of this influence may still be seen in the South. Second, this thesis showed the effect of that influence in modern Southern quilts.

Yet quilts alone (and even quilts alongside the blues) make an unsatisfactory case for Islamic influence in the South. If the process of cultural diffusion happened as this thesis has argued, there ought to be other examples. In particular there ought to be examples along the Eastern Seaboard, in the so-called Gullah areas. Darnell Williams called this region the birthplace of black culture and language, so a careful study within this region for Islam ought to prove fruitful (Williams 1973:20).

In the South Carolina and Georgia Sea Islands, where there was a relatively large homogenous Muslim slave population, some Islamic traditions survived until relatively late in the twentieth century. As late as the 1930s, slave descendents on Sapelo Island and on Saint Simons Island (both off the coast of Georgia), recalled eating *saraka* cakes. *Saraka* cakes were rice cakes made on a certain day, each year. *Saraka* cakes seem to be related to *sakara* cakes, or special cakes made in the West Indies for the ancestors and both of these words seem to be related to *saka*—a gift given at the end of Ramadan by Muslims slaves in Brazil. Both words come from the Arabic *sadakha*, the voluntary alms,

often given during holy days (Diouf 1998:64-65). Well into the twentieth century black families in South Carolina ate rice cakes, although the religious association seems to have vanished (Opie 2008:57).

Because of restaurant chains, chain markets and national eating trends, foodways are perhaps more fluid than other folkways. Religious dance and song are not as subject to those outside economic pressures and, indeed, some of the oldest African American folkways still exist in the eastern parts of the South. The ring shout is of particular importance because it is the oldest African American performance art on record (Rosenbaum 1998:1). The shout connects us with Africa and, possibly, the earliest Muslim traditions there and the dance deserves its own book-length treatment.

In its most basic form, the ring shout (or *saut*) is a counterclockwise dance around a square and, at one time, communities across the South danced the ring shout. Dances similar to this may be found across West Africa and, while each culture seems to have its own beliefs about when to perform a ring shout and what the dance represents, enough uniformity exists so that both drumming and dancing in a counterclockwise pattern are common elements in the West African versions (Stuckey 1987:12-14) Some of the most famous ring shout performances as well as some of the earliest, were recorded on the Eastern Seaboard in the Gullah communities, but the dance was not an isolated phenomenon along the east coast. Although the dance is today popularly associated with that one part of the South, folklorists John and Alan Lomax recorded ring shouts in Louisiana (Rosenbaum 1998, 26). This makes sense, given the mass migration of slaves from the early nineteenth century onward. Relatively little of the ring shout tradition

survived in the twentieth century, in part because the dominant culture (both black and white) viewed it as a perversion, as something heathenish from the jungles of Africa. Even so, prior to about 1930 or so, the dance was at least modestly famous. An article in *The Atlantic Monthly* from 1864 described the dances as a way of life in the Sea Islands while another article in the *New York Nation* from May 30, 1867 reported efforts by white and black clergy to banish the dance (Rosenbaum 1998:20, 35). Indeed, through the first decades of the twentieth century, blacks in “any rural area of the South” still performed the ring shout (Courlander 1964:194). How important was the ring shout to those first Africans in America? Sterling Stuckey writes that the shout “was the main context in which Africans recognized values common to them” (Stuckey 1987:16-17).

So while scholars have spent more time with the shout tradition in the Sea Islands than any other region in the South, we should not forget that the tradition itself was never isolated to the tiny barrier island chain. In his study of the Gullah culture, Lorenzo Dow Turner recorded the word *saut* in his *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* as, “a religious ring dance in which the participant continues to move until they become exhausted.” Turner believed the dance came all the way from Mecca and its movement represented Muslims who would “... move around the Kaaba (the small stone building at Mecca which is the chief object of the pilgrimage of Mohammedans) until exhausted...” (Turner 2002:202).

Stuckey is not convinced of the Muslim origins of the ring shout and he rejects Turner’s claims. Specifically Stuckey writes that the Arabic *saut* refers to voice rather than screaming (or shouting). He notes that Marshall Stearns’ descriptions of a ring shout

in South Carolina include spiritual possession and religious hysteria and indeed, the Lomax recordings from Louisiana indicate that actual shouting could be a part of the ring shout. Stuckey concludes that, because spiritual possession is not a part of the Muslim ritual at the Kaba then the West African practice is original and wholly unconnected to the Muslim tradition (Stuckey 1987: 16-17).

Yet modern ring shouters often speak or sing religious praises rather than shout or experience religious ecstasy so, at least today, shouting is not an essential part of the ritual. Also, Sufism gained popularity in West Africa and Sufism promotes religious ecstasy and wild, uncontrolled behavior (the whirling dervishes being the most famous example) and anyway, there is no reason to believe that West African Muslims practiced their faith in identical ways to their counterparts of the Arabian Peninsula. Plenty of evidence (some of which I have shown) shows that Muslim ritual in West Africa could withstand considerable hybridization and so some dissimilarities in traditions would be expected.

Stuckey does believe that a “sizeable number” of Africans had contact with Muslims and he theorizes that because of this contact and because of Islam’s kinship with Judaism and Christianity, West African culture could easier accept Christian traditions in the Americas. I suspect that, given the work of Diouf, Austen, and Gomez, Stuckey might place even greater emphasis on this connection today and, consequently, perhaps rethink the origins of the ring shout (Stucky 1987:363) Like the individual quilt patterns, it is impossible to know with absolute certainty whether Muslims brought an organized and ritualized counterclockwise ritual dance to West Africa or whether a dance developed in

West Africa based on Muslim traditions but, given the presence of Muslims in West Africa and given their influence across the region, the ring shout could well have Muslim roots. Assuming this view is correct, Muslims have contributed much to Southern culture.

Much like sacred Muslim patterns in West African textiles, the dance did not vanish in America so much as it morphed and dissipated, and its meanings became reconfigured. The ring shout may have inspired the brass band funeral processions of New Orleans and the Cake Walk as well as numerous other, less famous African American musical traditions. Musicologist Johann Buis writes that the basic syncopated 3+3+2 “walking bass line” rhythm of the ring shout is the wellspring of early jazz. Buis also notes that the ring shout’s cadence as used by the McIntosh County Shouters (the modern Georgia ring shout group) has a “remarkable resemblance” to north Mississippi’s fife and drum tradition. That said, Buis is careful to note that the ring shout—like most of African American folk tradition—cannot be tracked back to any single source (Buis 1998:168-169, 172). Muslims alone did not give us the ring shout any more than they gave us the blues but, without them, the ring shout, and possibly ragtime, and the blues would not exist in their present form.

In addition to the ring shout’s unique time signature, its peculiar counterclockwise movement, and its etymological history, dress seems to be an important part of the dance. No scholar has yet studied the unique dress of the dance, but Art Rosenbaum’s authoritative *Shout Because You’re Free*, contains 26 photos and charcoal drawings that show an overwhelming preference by women for head coverings. Of the 21 photos that show adult women, 19 show the women wearing head coverings (Rosenbaum 1998:52-

84). Diouf has written that “Muslim garb ... served as an essential first element in the building up of a community” (Diouf 1998:82). No doubt slaves maintained culturally unique dress for the same reasons they continued to employ other unique traditions, that is, both as a way to assert themselves but also because the white elite preferred them to look and act different. By the late twentieth century when he wrote his book, none of the female dancers in Rosenbaum’s photos and drawings wear head coverings that are at all similar to modern Muslim women. Even so, the Muslim origins of the ring shout and the unusually high proportion of female head coverings call for further consideration.

More than music, art, clothing, and food, language might best show the spread of Islamic influence across the South. Ajami, that written, Africanized variation on Arabic script, was common throughout West Africa during the entirety of the slave trade and it was used for secular as well as sacred purposes. At present, scholarship has attempted to trace Ajami from Islam to the Americas, but there is considerable evidence the language crossed the Atlantic with the slaves.

Dr. Fallou Ngom, the director of the African Languages program at Boston University, is one of the few professors (possibly the only) in the U.S. who works with Ajami texts. His program teaches Ajami and his students then study African texts to better understand West African culture. Ngom has not yet studied Ajami in the U.S., but he believes it would be worthwhile to do so.

... [I]t makes sense, from a historical point of view, to assume that the slaves from already Islamized groups of Africans such as the Fula, Mandingo, Wolof, Hausa, some Yoruba, and others, who used Ajami to write their languages in Africa would not stop doing so because of their relocation. I suspect that there are more Arabic and Ajami texts to be uncovered in America and other parts of the Americas.

Ngom then explained that Ajami would probably have less grammatical influence and more lexical influence (e-mail to author, January 17, 2010). Since Ajami used local languages and then translated them into Arabic, rather than the other way around, this makes sense but, to date, very little research has been done in this field (possibly because of linguistic barriers). Still, some syntactical influence might be discerned if only given the extremely long timeframe of Arabic presence in West Africa.

In Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* he identifies dozens of words as Arabic in origin and in addition he identifies dozens of others as Mandingo that have clear Islamic histories. One example is *a'mara*, a personal name that translates to "a companion of the Prophet." Dow must have recognized the clear Islamic reference, even if he did not include it as an Arabic word per se (Turner 2002: 51). Likely dozens of Gullah words—especially proper nouns like *saraka*, and personal names like *a'mara*—have similar Islamic origins if they are not Arabic in and of themselves.

At present, the Gullah language and culture is isolated on the Sea Islands but at one time the blacks across the entire South shared a very similar culture and language. Darnell Williams studied Gullah culture and language in Mississippi in the early 1970s (with help from William Ferris) and although he reports similarities, he is careful to explain that one did not give rise to the other. Instead Williams argues the similarities may be explained through similar conditions (e.g., similar cultural isolation and similar inferior education). There would be some dissimilarity given the cultural disjuncture that surely occurred in the migration southward following the Louisiana Purchase, but, given the striking number of similarities between the two regions and given the similarities

across Southern black culture, I suspect there was also some cultural spread, too. That said, no doubt cultural isolation (at least, socio-economic isolation) and poor education allowed these unique folkways to continue and flourish.

Besides the nascent efforts to uncover Muslim influence in Southern crafts, music, dance, language and food, scholars must spend more time at doing field work. The first slaves and those isolated slave communities still hold secrets to early beliefs and cultures. Those earliest slaves had less chance to leave any kind of living legacy in that very few gave interviews, even fewer could write and so the majority of the millions brought here lived and died in total obscurity and so we can well imagine the wealth of data we do not have. The archeologists who studied bead colors at slave sites filled in some of the blanks, but more blank spaces remain. We know that Muslims have myriad unique cultural habits and, because we know these habits, we must be on the lookout for them in the historical record. Archeologist must look at grave positions, church positions—even cabin positions—for clues to how these first Africans lived in the U.S. We need to know about the first American gris-gris bags, about the first bottle trees and we need to know more about the earliest African utilitarian objects—which, like quilts, must have significance far beyond their ostensible purpose. Some of this data can be found with modern remote sensing technologies and ground penetrating rader, while other information (bead color, etc.) still depends on extensive fieldwork, but the result is the same: Library and archival research is limited because, until recently, historians and archaeologists did not know to look for Muslim habits among slaves. We have at last strong suggestion that a legacy exists and we know much more is buried. Now we must

start to dig.

This thesis has traced American black culture to the Sea Islands, to West Africa and, of course, to those early Muslim interlopers, en route from the Arabian Peninsula. Looking forward, black culture has inspired and continues to inspire much of modern America's popular culture. From dress, to dialect, to music, dance and food, no region of the country is today untouched by black culture. This admix is through design (that is, it happens because of popular culture's interest in self-replication) rather than chance and hence, the Muslim influence in black culture may now be seen as the Muslim influence in American culture. At the same time, much of the unique black culture that developed in the South, including quilting patterns and the ring shout, seem to be enjoying a renaissance, helped along (this time) by a clear acceptance within the white community.

CHAPTER VII: IN CONCLUSION

Like a lot of Americans, I didn't know much about Islam or the Middle East for most of my life. Living in south Texas, the terrorist attacks in 2001 had no direct impact on me. By the time I left the U.S. to join Peace Corps, Americans were only beginning to hate and fear Muslims. As the data I provided at the beginning of this thesis shows, after two wars in Muslim countries, a crippling recession and a concerted effort on the part of certain mainstream media to monger fear and intolerance, America as a whole seems much more intolerant today than it did a decade ago. Even so, when I left, the global war on terror had begun and our enemies were beginning to be cast according to their faith rather than country or intent or crime.

Yet when I went overseas, I met many different Muslims and what I saw seemed remarkably different from the two-dimensional noise I heard in the U.S. The cultures I observed seemed to have made room for Islam as well as animism, Hinduism and Christianity and much, much more.

I visited my first mosque in Malaysia. This mosque was the oldest mosque in the country and, down the road, was one of the oldest colonial hotels (with one of the oldest cocktail bars) in the city. I began reading up on the history of Malaysia and I quickly realized that, like most of East Asia, the country is a polyglot of cultures—Hindu, Buddhist and Muslim as well as animist—and it has been since time immemorial.

From about 2005—about the same time as the Bali bombing by Muslim

terrorists—I began to read all I could about how various ethnic groups have historically lived together and how cultures in Southeast Asia have been shaped by really different ethnicities. Southeast Asia became culturally vast and rich and highly complex. In East Timor, the mosque was (when I visited it) full of displaced homeless people—most of whom were deeply animist as well as Muslim. On one end of the street there was a bar for foreigners and, on the other end of the street, there was an evangelical church and the U.N. medical warehouse stood directly across the street from the mosque. Nobody I met particularly minded any of it, although some of my friends who lived nearby minded the first call to prayer of the day.

One of the things I loved about East Timor is how these groups—Muslims and Catholics and animists—could live next door to one another and how both cultures contributed to the whole. This idea of cultural intersection and interaction intrigued me like little else. In the U.S., we call ourselves a melting pot but at the same time so many of us want the nation to be explicitly Christian, or we seek to mandate a national language.

I do not believe that the U.S. is merely a Christian nation wherein everyone speaks English and so these spurious efforts to homogenize the nation seem to me as futile as they do ignorant. When I began looking at graduate programs I wanted to investigate something interesting (as opposed to merely practical) and I wanted to write something that could explain—if to no one else but me—how we as a nation came to be.

The Southern Studies program interested me because I had never considered the culture of the South. In fact, I knew more about Timor's culture than my own (let us

pretend Texas is part of the South). Early on, I wanted to study folk music. I know now that the Lomaxes are not particularly loved among cultural studies folks, but, as a music collector, I knew who the Lomaxes were and, generally, I knew the story of John Lomax, a victim of the Depression, a businessman turned academic or, more precisely, a music obsessed adventurer. I know now, he abused his subjects and his scholarship has left significant room for criticism but, even so, he cuts a romantic picture, a crazed white guy, rooting up the obscure and recording it for all the rest of the us to hear. He proved to the white elite that, guess what, there is a whole lot more to Southern culture than they really knew about (or valued anyway). I admired that before I knew Lomax's back story and, even now that I do know his failings, I still admire it.

This work is not that different from Diouf's work or from Michael Gomez or Alan Austin or even John Lomax. I suspect all of us *want* the South to be more than it is. We *want* to believe that hidden away, little bits of this or that still exist and thrive. I have tried to show how those little bits of this and that have crept in and where they now lie. The region is a better place with more, rather than less. Our music sounds better, our art look better and our food tastes better because of those extra bits. That those extra bits have a past and an origin does not make them any less ours or, for that matter, any less theirs. This Southern fabric belongs to us, as the threads belong to others. And that, of course, is the point of the whole thing.

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INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

January 17, 2010

Ngom, Dr. Fallou, the director of the African Languages program at Boston University (e-mail correspondence)

May 24, 2010

Crosby, Patricia and David—Interviewed at their home in Jackson, MS.

Mississippi Cultural Crossroads Quilters (interviewed at the center, Port Gibson, Mississippi)

July 1, 2010

Buck, Essie

Horgy, Josephine Dobbins

Tutwiler Community Center Quilters (interviewed at the Community Center, Tutwiler, Mississippi)

June 11, 2010

Delaney, Sister Maureen

June 17, 2010

Rogers, Susan

Mitchell, Janice

June 18, 2010

Lattimore, Martha

APPENDICES

FIGURE 1: WASHINGTON POST-ABC NEWS POLL

26. On a different topic, do you feel you do or do not have a good basic understanding of the teachings and beliefs of Islam, the Muslim religion?

	Do	Do not	No opinion
9/2/10	43	55	2
3/29/09	45	55	*
9/7/06	40	58	2
3/5/06	40	59	1
9/7/03	33	64	3
10/15/02	25	73	2
1/6/02	31	61	8
10/9/01	34	65	1

27. Would you say you have a generally favorable or unfavorable opinion of Islam?

	Favorable	Unfavorable	No opinion
9/2/10	37	49	13
3/29/09	41	48	11
9/7/06	41	45	14
3/5/06	43	46	11
9/7/03	39	38	23
10/15/02	42	33	26
1/6/02	41	24	35
10/9/01	47	39	13

28. Every religion has mainstream beliefs, and also fringe elements or extremists. Thinking of mainstream Islam, do you think mainstream Islam encourages violence against non-Muslims, or is it a peaceful religion?

	Encourages violence	Peaceful religion	No opinion
9/2/10	31	54	14
3/29/09	29	58	13
9/7/06	33	54	13
3/5/06	33	54	13
9/7/03	34	46	20
10/15/02	23	53	25
1/6/02	14	57	29

29. Do you personally know anyone who is a Muslim, or not?

	Yes	No	No opinion
9/2/10	49	50	*
3/29/09	47	53	1

SRC: Washington Post, ABC News

FIGURE 2: PEW RESEARCH CENTER POLL

Sharp Decline in Percentage Saying Obama is a Christian

	Mar	Oct	Mar	Aug	09-10
<i>What is Obama's religion?</i>	2008	2008	2009	2010	Change
	%	%	%	%	
Christian	47	51	48	34	-14
Muslim	12	12	11	18	+7
Other	2	2	1	2	+1
Don't know	36	32	34	43	+9
Refused	<u>3</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	
	100	100	100	100	

PEW RESEARCH CENTER July 21-August 5, 2010.
 Figures may not add to 100% because of rounding.
 "Do you happen to know what Barack Obama's religion is? Is he Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, atheist, agnostic or something else?"

SRC: Pew Research Poll

The Spread of Islam in West Africa

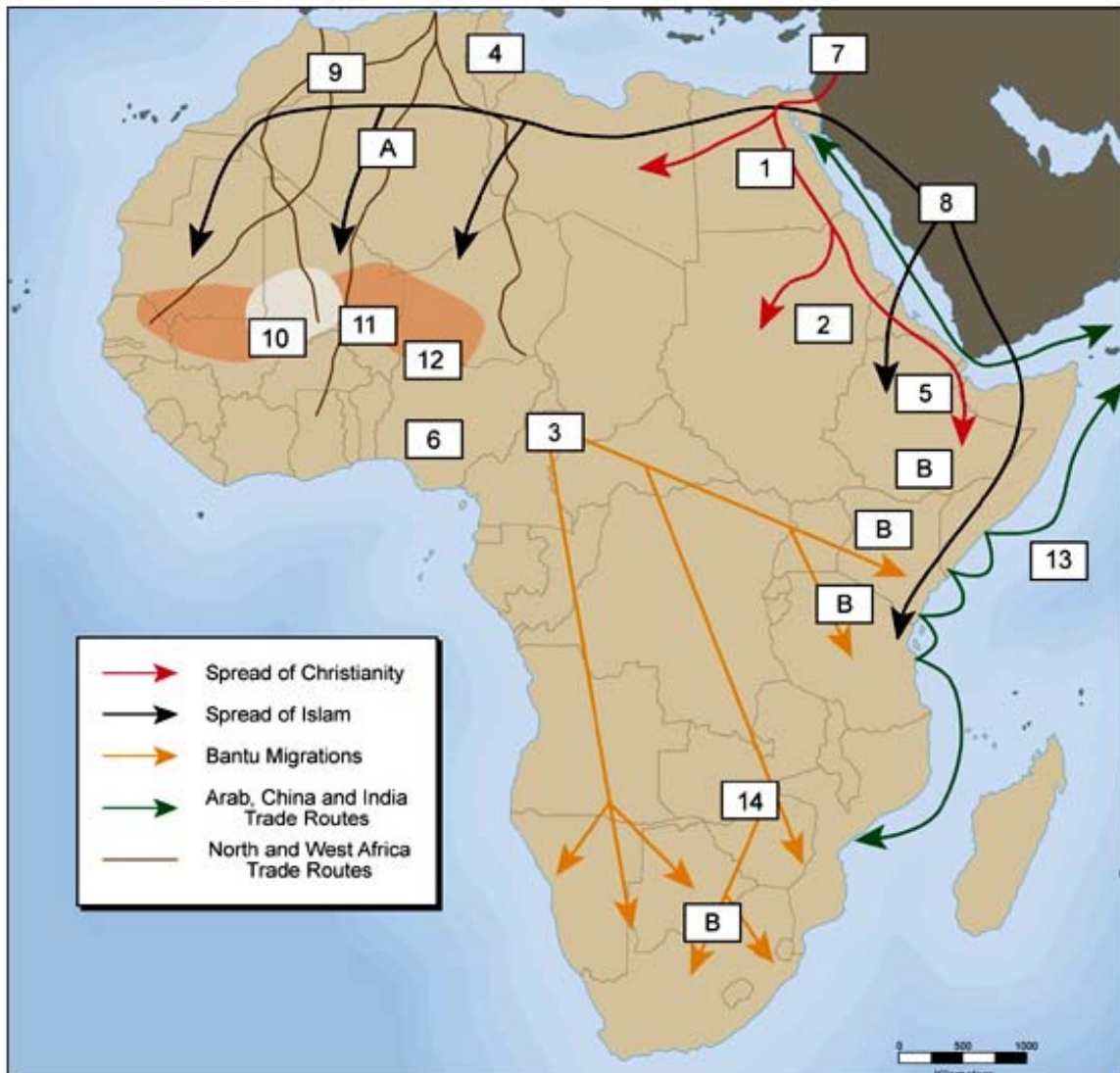


Fig. 1

<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m14/activity3.php>

Accessed Sept. 26, 2010

Dates of Islamic Spread

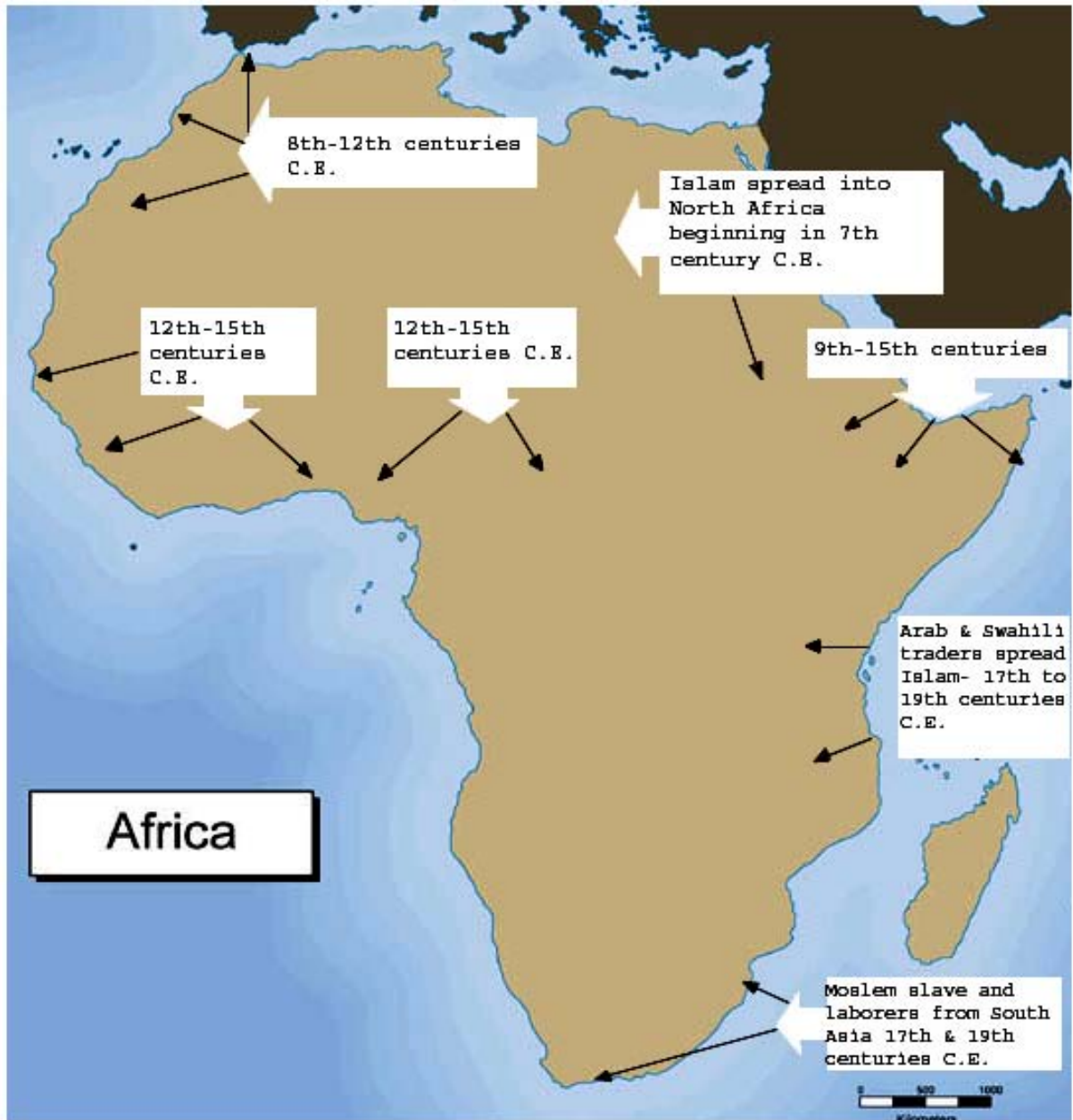


Fig. 2

<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m14/activity3.php>

Accessed Sept. 26, 2010

Islam in West Africa today

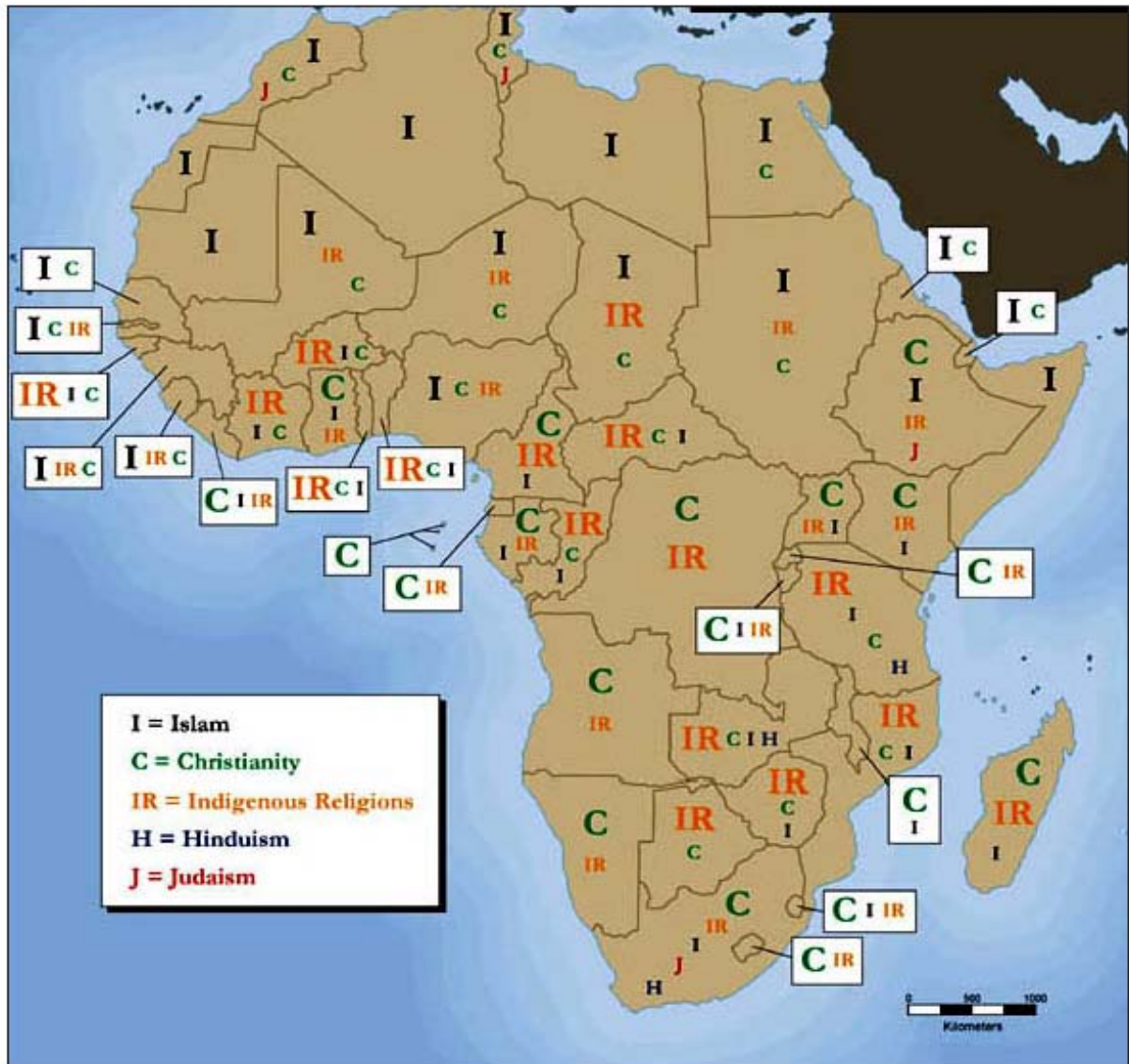


Fig. 3

<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m14/activity3.php>

Accessed Sept. 26, 2010



Fig. 6

This cloth comes from Egypt from about the eighth or twelfth century. As you can see, much common Islamic aesthetic is present.

src: Persian and Islamic Art



Fig. 7

This charm is of Berti origin. The Berti are a Sudanese Muslim people and this charm is meant to protect against misfortune. The name of the prophet lies at the center, surrounded by the names of god and angels. God or the Prophet is at the center point of much Islamic art and, hence, geometric designs are popular.

src: El-Tom, 1987:237.



Fig. 8

This quilt is from Claiborne County, Mississippi and it was made by Geraldine Nash.

src: Crosby 1999:12



Figures 9 & 10

This is an example of a Sufi dhikr, a repetitive, two line chant. In this case “Allahu akbar/Allahu akbar/La ilah ella Allah.” Note how the lines run together to form a visual tessellation. This is from the website:

“Sufism is all that’s left of the mystical aspect of Islam and embodies the word islam (surrender) completely, as the practitioner aims to vanish entirely into Love. The circling music, along with the circling dance that is so well-known, is one of the tools used by Sufis to reach a state of ego-less ecstasy.

“I had been wanting to experiment with concentric calligraphic designs for a while, but no appropriate theme had come to mind till I heard the dhikr and was struck with the idea of expressing it visually. Thus the two stanzas, and like the music and the dance, the design circles endlessly on the paper...”

src: Deviant Art

Al Adhkar : The Remembrance

“Remember Me and I will remember you.”
(Al-Our’an 2:152)

Weekly Circles
For the Remembrance of Allah

Brothers
Masjid Al-Quba, Rochdale
Monday 8.00pm
info@sufipath.net
07877 47566

Sisters
Jamia Chistia, Rochdale
Saturday 9.30am
tanzilakauser@hotmail.com
07800 64729

www.sufipath.net AL HAQQ FOUNDATION

This is another example of a modern dhikr. Again, note the shape and the tessellation. Circles, tessellations and geometric patterns with important centerpoints are common elements in African American quilts.

src: Ihsan Path

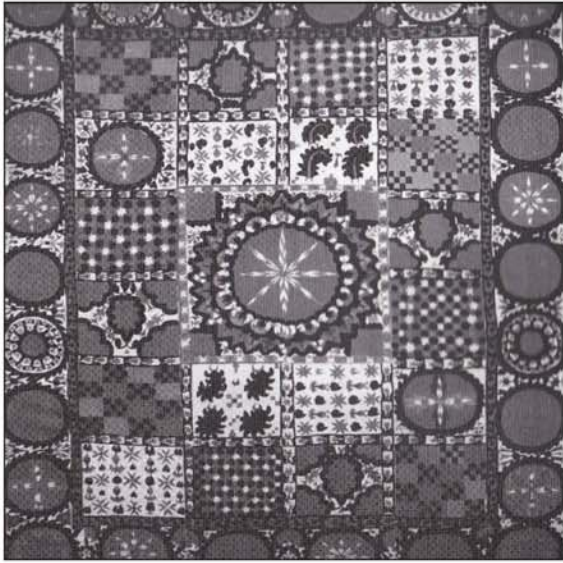


Fig. 11

This wall hanging from central Asia dates from the nineteenth century. Even given the geographic distance from West Africa and, even more so, the United States, similarities with African American quilts are obvious. The checkerboard “nine patch” design is present as well is the powerful center point star--a possible visual reference to God.

src: Bloom, Blair 2009:417

Fig. 12

Mattie Pickett born in Montgomery, Alabama and learned to quilt from her grandmother, a slave. This is a Texas Star.

src: Leon 1987:30

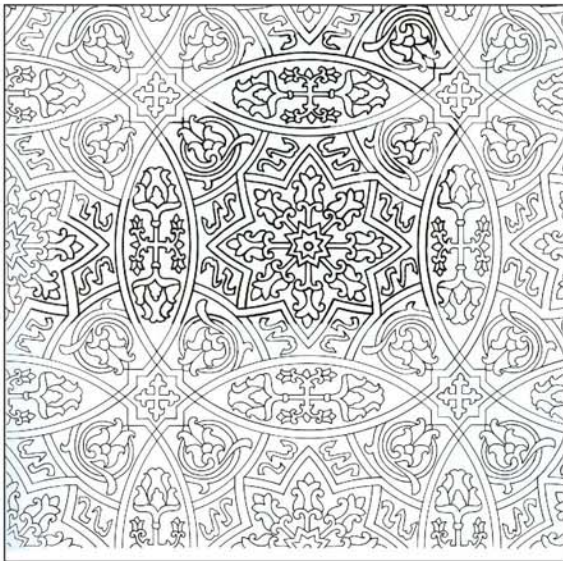


Fig. 13

This design is from a scrap of clothing found in England. The cloth dates from the Middle Ages and is Islamic in origin. The letters around the center star spell either baraka (blessing) or Allah.

Src: Crowfoot, et al. 2001:109.

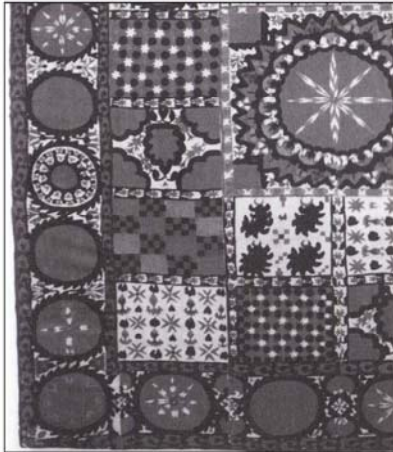


Fig. 14

This Islamic wall hanging comes from Central Asia and was made during the nineteenth century. Despite the distance, one can see obvious aesthetic similarities, especially in the checkerboard (nine patch) motif.

src: Bloom, Blair 2009:417



Fig. 17

This is from the Leeds Qur'an, a West African Qur'an copied by hand. It comes from Sudan and was probably written in the late nineteenth century. The lozenge motif seen here was commonly included to fill out pages.

src: Blair 2008:58



Fig. 15

This Ashante cloth is decorated with magical Islamic inscription. Note the checkered or nine patch design.

src: Picton, Mack 1989:162



Fig. 16

This nine patch quilt is from Claiborne County, Mississippi and it was made by Artemeasie Brandon in 1980.

src: Crosby 1999:17

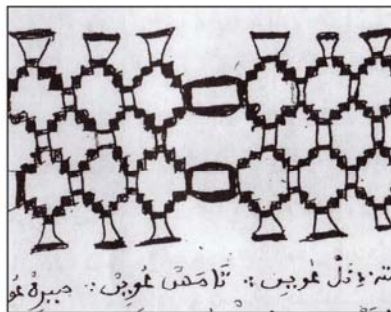


Fig. 18

Umar ibn Said often drew a similar lozenge pattern on his letters. Said was born in present-day Senegal in about 1765. In 1807 he was captured and taken to the U.S. where James Owen purchased him in Fayetteville, N.C. in 1811. Said wrote a biography, apparently in Arabic, and it, too, contains similar designs. This particular page contains the names of Owens' children and the *bismillah*.

src: Austin 1989:162



Fig. 19

This is similar to a Log Cabin in its design. Suttie Nelson, of Hinds County, MS made this in 1941. Nelson learned to quilt from her mother and she calls this pattern "Light and Dark." This patterns bears a striking resemblance to those earlier lozenge patterns and in fact this pattern is common across the South, especially in Gee's Bend, Alabama.

src: Freeman 1981:41



Fig. 20

Loretta Pettway from Gee's Bend. These are log cabins or courthouse steps. Note the similarities to the designs above

src: Beardsley, et al. 2002:295



Fig. 21

Joyce Kozloff's Hidden Chambers. Note the tessellations, the color and the emphasis on the middle section. Her work (and the work of her peers in the Pattern and Decoration Movement) is an example of aesthetic synthesis between the Islamic and Western world.

src: Earenfight 2009:29



Fig. 22

The Hand of Fatima, an apotropaic charm common in Muslim lands and used to protect against the evil eye. Note the color.

src: <http://www.handoffatima.com/>



Fig. 23

This Mende piece is from Sierra Leone and includes a variation on the Hand of Fatima and, possibly, a centerpiece representing an eye or Allah. Note also the similarity to the nine patch quilt design.

src: Gilfoy 1987:62

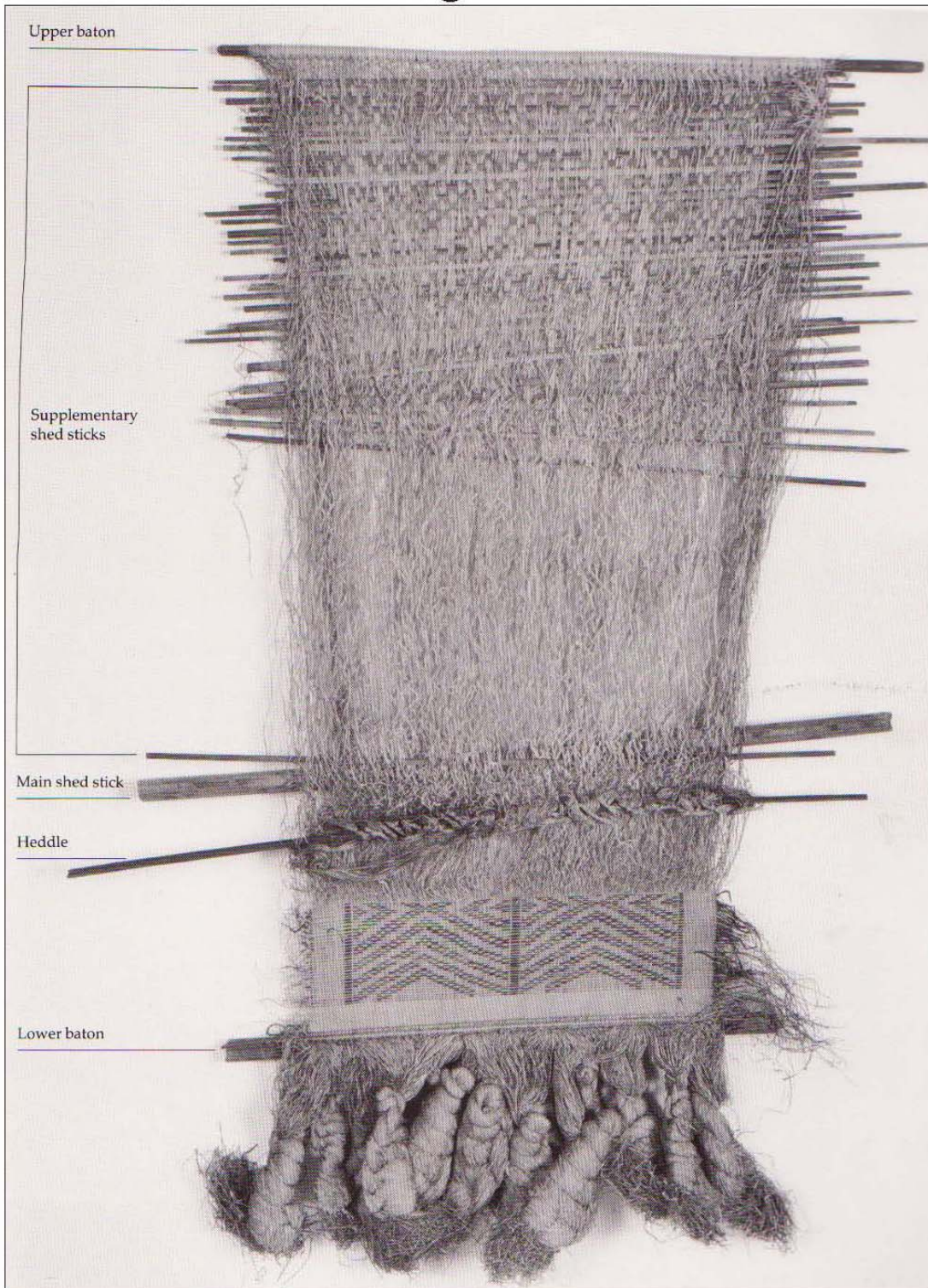


Fig. 24

This is a Pigpen Log Cabin quilt from Claiborne County, Mississippi and it was made by Malissa Banks in 1975. Note that the concentric squares act as a tessellation, while the "pigs" in the center seem to recall the Hand of Fatima.

src: Freeman 1981:25

Fig. 25



src: Picton, Mack 1989:91

Figures 26-28



This ground loom, from Cameroon, is smaller than commercial looms, but it shows the portability of the technology.

This photograph is from 1938.

src: Suscitate



This Fulbe boy is using a double heddle strip loom. This photograph was taken in Sierra Leon in 1973 or 1974 so, while the technology is both old and simple, it is still popular.

src: University of Wisconsin Digital Collections



Although not widespread in this country, some hobbyists still make and use strip looms. This woman is a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism.

src: Adventures in Wool Addiction

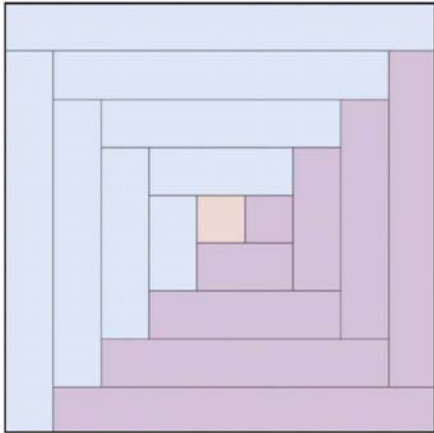


Fig. 29

The Log Cabin quilt is a strip quilt. In American quilt scholarship, the middle point is meant to represent the hearth, or the center or the home. However, in Islamic designs, a strong center point is often a visual reference to Allah, the source of all creation.

src: How Stuff Works



Fig. 30

This Log Cabin quilt was made by Mozell Benson, an Alabama quilter, in 1979. src: Wahlman 1993:40



Fig. 31

This Trip Around the World quilt is basically a Log Cabin string. It was made by Artemeasie Brandon in Claiborne County, Mississippi in 1990.

src: Crosby 1999:31

VITA

1978 Born, Vacaville, California

1978-1997 Grew up, Texas

2000 Bachelor's of Art, Communications, from Stephen F. Austin State U.

200-2003 Did stuff, Texas

2003-2005 United States Peace Corps, Haiti and East Timor

2005-2009 Did other stuff (even more fun than that other stuff), East Timor

2010 Masters of Art, Southern Studies, from The University of Mississippi