

In the Fray: Black Women and Craft, 1850–1910

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Introduction

We bought the raw cotton usually, but sometimes we would grow a small patch. Then we would card it, spin it and weave on the big loom in the kitchen. I have spun many a broach.¹

—Rachel Cruze

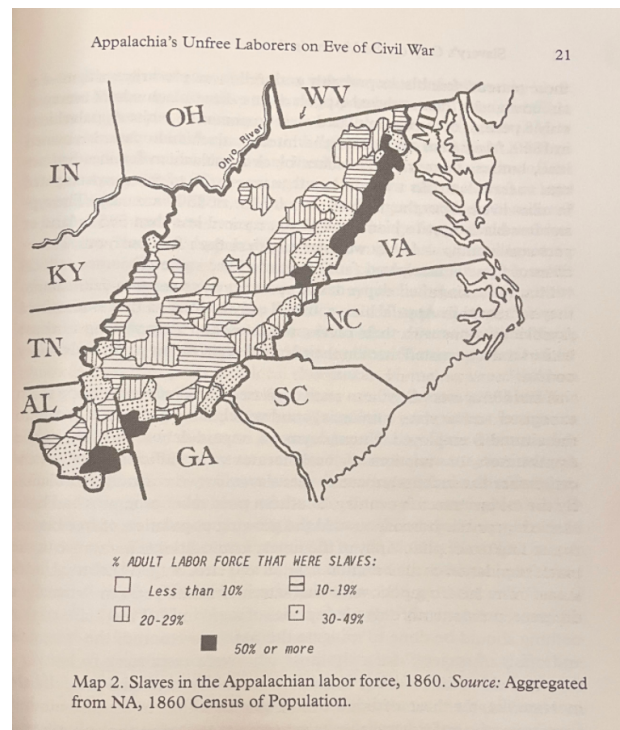
This quote by Rachel Cruze is just one of the thousands of accounts that tell the stories and experiences of enslaved seamstresses in the upper American South. These women were part of a class of skilled Black craftswomen who labored on plantations across the South, making all functional textiles from pillows to mattresses, from rugs to blankets, from coats to socks. My research examines the lives of Black craftswomen from enslavement and beyond emancipation, suggesting that these women have been historically invisible within and outside of the craft canon.² By examining craft through the lens of skilled craftswomen, this research centers on Black women who lived between 1850 and 1910, looking specifically at the change from craftswomen being enslaved to craftswomen being free women entering into institutionalized education. By taking the upper South, including the Southern Appalachian Mountains, as a geographical area of reference, this paper puts forth an analysis that refutes existing work that suggested that this area was without a Black craft history.³ Additionally, this approach highlights

¹ Rachel Cruze was born in 1856 on a plantation farm in Knox County, Tennessee. Wilma A. Dunaway. "Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South: Sources, Evidence and Methods," Virginia Tech, Online Archives. https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/faculty_archives/mountain_slavery/cite.htm

²Celine Harjani provides a definition of the canon largely as it relates to arts history, yet her definition is applicable to how I define the craft canon as Harjani suggests: "Broadly, a canon is defined as the ideal standard by which other things are measured ... the canon is defined by bodies of works that are of 'indisputable quality' within a culture or have passed an ambiguous test of value that deem the works worthy for study ..." Celine Harjani, Meanderings on "Art History Canon(s): Defined by Museums, Expanded by Exhibitions" *Medium* (August 8, 2020), <https://medium.com/@celinegh/meanderings-on-art-history-canon-s-defined-by-museums-expanded-by-exhibitions-56f024f6b591>.

³Upper South: Arkansas, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia, West Virginia. Southern Appalachia as defined by Wilma A. Dunaway: Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Tennessee, Maryland, West Virginia, and Virginia, Western North Carolina. Wilma A. Dunaway. "Slavery's Grip on the Mountain South" in *Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 15.

change over time in the upper South while resting on the context of Black life during this tumultuous period of American history.⁴



Dunaway, A. Wilma, "Slavery's Grip on the Mountain South" in *Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

My methodology is threefold. First, my it draws from historian Wilma Dunaway's analysis of slavery in the mountain south. Dunaway's purpose was to unearth "historical silences and misperceptions to offer unusual opportunities to explore several areas of omission and debate within international slavery studies."⁵ My work connects to this theory by examining enslaved women's labor as contextualized by craft discourse to question the craft canon's perception of Black craft history. Second, my methodology relies upon Black feminist theory as defined by anthropologist Whitney Battle-Baptiste, who examines issues of race, class, and

⁴ For more see these texts: Wilma A. Dunaway's *Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South*, Heather Andrea Williams's *African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, Stephanie Camp's *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, and Stephanie Shaw's *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era*.

⁵ Wilma A. Dunaway. Introduction in *Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

gender within the field of archeology to raise the voices of Black women who have been rendered invisible. Her research emphasizes a cross-disciplinary inclusionary framework to illuminate the significance of African American history through material studies.⁶ Battle-Baptiste's approach of using the lives and experiences of Black craftswomen as a way to reinterpret what is known about Black material culture positions Black craftswomen away from the margins of American craft and decorative arts to the center. Battle-Baptiste's repositioning centers Black craftswomen and their work so that it is valued by audiences beyond the African diaspora. Like Baptiste, my work is personal in that my aim is to reflect Black identity within the craft field as an invitation for other Black people to no longer feel "othered"⁷ by the presence of "whiteness"⁸ within the field, and instead feel welcomed. Third, my methodology seeks to explore Black women's identity as craftspeople through an analysis of craft education in the South as presented in narratives of former slaves, records from Black industrial schools and colleges, and through discussions on Black education by educational leaders and authorities.⁹ As historian James Anderson noted, Black education was "part and parcel of the larger political subordination of blacks, for it was the social system in which blacks lived that made their educational institutions so fundamentally different from those of other Americans."¹⁰ Through

⁶Whitney Battle-Baptiste, *Forward in Black Feminist Archaeology* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2011), 20.

⁷ "Othering is a way of negating another person's individual humanity and, consequently, those that are have been othered are seen as less worthy of dignity and respect." Kendra Cherry "What is Othering," Very Well Minded, December 13, 2020. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-othering-5084425#:~:text=Othering%20is%20a%20way%20of,prejudices%20against%20people%20and%20groups.>

⁸ "Whiteness and white racialized identity refer to the way that white people, their customs, culture, and beliefs operate as the standard by which all other groups of are compared." National Museum of African American History and Culture, "Whiteness," National Museum of African American History and Culture, <https://nmaahc.si.edu/learn/talking-about-race/topics/whiteness>

⁹During the time period examined in this research, 1850–1910, white missionary associations such as the American Missionary Association, were the predominant leaders of Black educational institutions and used their positions to set standards on Black education. Additionally, Black leaders such as Booker T. Washington and Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, used their leadership positions to weigh in on Black educational debates. Federal government agencies such as the Department of Interior's Bureau of Education used their power to examine and critique Black educational institutions and curriculums. For more see James Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*.

¹⁰James Anderson, "Introduction" in *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2.

this lens, Black craft education should be explored for both its ability to train Black women in craft and for its oppressive tendency of only training Black women in craft as means of furthering their larger political subordination.

Chapter One, *Craftswomanship of Enslaved Women, 1850–1865*, explores Black craftswomen in the antebellum South by investigating primary sources related to their lives and experiences. This section explores a contextualization of the craftsmanship illustrated in the handicraft work executed on plantations; relies on narratives from formerly enslaved women to address craft and identity; and explains how identity was dependent on the segregation of enslaved labor oriented around gender.

Chapter Two, *Black Craftswomen During Reconstruction, 1866–1877*, investigates craft during Reconstruction by mapping the transition of Black craftswomen's work as the women moved from slavery to freedom. This section begins with a survey of refugee camps for formerly enslaved people, referred to as contrabands, for an introduction to early forms of centralized education initiated by white missionaries who believed it to be their duty to prepare formerly enslaved people for future employment by creating industrial classrooms on the refugee sites, such as sewing and knitting rooms. This section also addresses how the craftswomanship exemplified by Black women on the plantation was not abandoned, as many of these women continued to pursue their trades, displaying their artistry and proving that the techniques they used during slavery were not products of forced labor.

Chapter Three, *Black Craftswomen During the Jim Crow Era, 1877–1910*, examines formalized craft education in industrial settings and in institutions such as high schools, colleges, and universities through the development of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The section focuses on how the guises of paternalism and patriarchy dictated the education of Black women. Newly freed Black women were mandated to learn vocational skills

such as basketry, sewing, and weaving in order to ensure that they would be productive assets of society. This section solidifies the through line of the history of craft and Black women.

To understand craft through the lens of Black women's experiences, one has to look for Black women's voices through sources such as narratives of former slaves. In these narratives, Black women described their labor and wrote about craft and gender roles from their own experiences. Additionally, they discussed educational structures created for Black women. By thoroughly pressing into evidence a variety of sources and interdisciplinary approaches, one can begin to depart from the current outdated and widely accepted narrative that American craft history is without Black craft contributions.¹¹

I have used a contemporary Black feminist framework to reapproach the history of craft, the decorative arts, and African American material culture related to Black craftwomanship. As anthropologist Whitney Battle-Baptiste notes, "[when] addressing the lives of African descendant people, a gendered approach can mean capturing often neglected details and ignored elements of women, men, and children of the past."¹² For example, Battle-Baptiste tells the neglected histories of western Massachusetts African American women. To accomplish this, she provides a framework of archeology based on gender and class such as an analysis of Lucy Foster. As Battle-Baptiste notes, Foster was "a freedwoman who lived in a house on the main road with a lifetime of experiences and stories. A gendered lens can reshape the discussion of

¹¹Folklorist John Michael Vlach's groundbreaking 1978 exhibition and exhibition catalog, *The Afro-American Tradition in the Decorative Arts*, highlighted the fact that Vlach's approach of noting Black craftspeople and their contributions were considered revisionist for its positioning of Blacks as creators of objects and contributors to craft and the decorative arts. Since Vlach's work, many scholars have published on the subject each refuting past claims that Blacks do not have a craft history. For more, see Mechal Sobel's *The World they Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, Robert Farris Thompson's *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*, James Newton and Ronald L. Lewis's *The Other Slaves: Mechanics, Artisans, and Craftsmen*, and Terri Klassen's "Representations of African American Quilting: From Omission to High Art," in *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 122, No. 485. (2009).

¹²Whitney Battle-Baptiste, *Black Feminist Archaeology* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press Inc., 2011), 29.

who she was and the possible alternative ways to see her as a woman.”¹³ Hence, I focus on Black women to understand craft history. Within this, I acknowledge the overwhelming implications that gender and domesticity have had on Black women’s craft practices on and off the plantation.¹⁴

Issues of race, including ideas about discriminatory practices, embedded in the American psyche have led to the marginalization and misinterpretation of Black craft history. Few are willing to recognize that a large component of craft history is deeply embedded in American slavery, and those crafts constituted a significant building block of American capitalism and culture. Only recently, thanks to research from scholars such as Stephanie Camp, Wilma A. Dunaway, Karen Hampton, Stephanie Shaw, Suzanne C. Schmidt, and Tiffany Momon, has American Black craft history been propelled into the craft canon with value placed on an analysis of seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Black craftspeople. I propose that this neglect is due to the dominant practice of viewing objects produced by enslaved people as only the result of their forced labor and not their artistry. This myopic view of Black craft stems from white supremacy and anti-blackness practices that have created barriers to the craft canon and are still employed by museums that seek to continue to uphold holding white supremacy and whiteness as the standard.¹⁵ Systemic racism dictates American society’s current use of aesthetics, a normative model of what is deemed culturally valuable, which in part governs how craft is understood and how culture is recreated. As aesthetic philosopher Sylvia Wynter states,

¹³Whitney Battle-Baptiste, “Constructing a Black Feminist Framework” in *Black Feminist Archaeology* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, Inc., 2011), 47.

¹⁴As Stephanie Camp notes, “Within plantation boundaries, women sometimes occupied spaces different from those of men. Many women served in the slaveholding homes at some point in their lives, ordinarily during childhood, pregnancies, and again in old age. Women thus found themselves in the yard, kitchen, and interior of slaveholders’ homes at intervals throughout their lives.” Stephanie Camp, “The Bondage of Space and Time,” in *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 32.

¹⁵Kate Brown, “Calls Mount for the Indianapolis Museum of Art’s Head to Step Down After a Job Posting Prioritized Maintaining It’s ‘Core White Audience,’” Art Net, last modified February 15, 2021. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/newfields-indianapolis-job-posting-1944092>

the use of aesthetics has produced “traditional barriers,” which has led to a reproduction of “cultural imaginaries.”¹⁶ Cultural imaginaries historically and currently allocate hierarchical culture-specific behaviors that marginalize and lack understanding of Black culture. Thus, traditional barriers have popularized the assumption that objects produced by enslaved people are viewed only as a result of forced labor and not an object of skilled craftswomanship. This introduces the assumption that enslaved people are not craftspeople. Moreover, there is a general lack of attention paid to historic Black craftswomen.

The neglect of recognition of Black craftspeople in the decorative arts is seen in institutions such as the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts (MESDA). In the museum’s archival Craftsman Database, out of 90,000 craftspeople, only 3,000 are Black.¹⁷ More pointedly, the historical representation of Black women in the area of craft is even less regarded than that of Black craftsmen in general. Of the 3,000 Black craftspeople in the MESDA archive, only seventy are women.¹⁸ The focus has been on Black craftsmen such as furniture maker Thomas Day and potter David Drake (Dave the Potter). Indeed, both men have been the subject of numerous exhibitions and books.¹⁹ Thomas Day, born in 1801, was a prolific furniture and cabinetmaker. Day’s work has been exhibited in many museums and cultural institutions such as the North Carolina Museum of History, the Renwick Gallery, the Smithsonian American Art

¹⁶ Sylvia Winter, “Rethinking ‘Aesthetics: Notes Towards A Deciphering Practice’”, in *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, ed. Mbye B. Cham (Trenton: African World Press, Inc. 1992), 261.

¹⁷ Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston Salem North Carolina, “MESDA Craftsman Database,” accessed September 27, 2020, <https://mesda.org/research/craftsman-database/>

¹⁸ Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Winston Salem North Carolina, “MESDA Craftsman Database” The lack of investigation and representation of Black craftspeople is the reason archives such as the Black Craftsman Digital Archive. The Black Craftspeople Digital Archive (BCDA) is a scholarly historic craft database. The digital database documents and disseminates the history of both free and enslaved Black craftspeople from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. “About,” Black Craftspeople Digital Archive accessed September 8, 2020. <https://blackcraftspeople.org/about/>

¹⁹ Thomas Day and David Drake are the subject of several books including Patricia Phillips Marshall and Jo Ramsay Leimenstoll’s *Thomas Day: Master Craftsman and Free Man of Color*, Rodney D. Barfield’s *Thomas Day: African American Furniture Maker*, Leonard Todd’s *Carolina Clay: The Life and Legend of the Slave Potter Dave*; Michael Chaney’s *Where is All my Relation? The Poetics of Dave the Potter*, and Jill Beute Koverman’s *I Made This Jar: The Life and Works of the Enslaved African American Potter Dave*.

Museum, and the Chipstone Foundation. David Drake's pottery frequently comes to market and commands high prices. As noted in an article written in January 2020, "The Metropolitan Museum of Art has purchased a rare stoneware storage jar by the enslaved African American potter and poet David Drake." The acquisition "celebrates the importance of David Drake and his creation of extraordinary, impressive, poetic objects."²⁰ Enslaved Black craftswomen do not get nearly the same recognition; none has been the focus of an exhibit at the Renwick Gallery, the Smithsonian American Art Museum, or the Metropolitan Museum of Art.²¹

Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois's 1902 report on the conference Study of the Negro Problems, titled "The Negro Artisan," is useful because it establishes an argument to position the products of the forced labor of slaves as artistry. Du Bois's analysis of antebellum Black artisans establishes them as highly skilled craftspeople. However, there is a lack of critical writing regarding the labor of craftswomen. Du Bois focuses on carpentry, blacksmithing, and skilled mechanic work, crafts that were mostly gendered and thought of as the work of enslaved men. Du Bois states:

[During] the days of slavery the Negro mechanic was a man of importance ... He was most valuable to his slave master ... Hence on every large plantation you could find the Negro carpenter, blacksmith, brick and stone mason ... The Negro blacksmith held almost absolute sway in his line, which included the many branches of forgery, and other trades."²²

²⁰The Metropolitan Museum of Art, "The Met Acquires Rare Inscribed Vessel by David Drake," February 28, 2020. <https://www.metmuseum.org/press/news/2020/the-met-acquires-rare-inscribed-vessel-by-david-drake>.

²¹ In 2013, the Renwick Gallery hosted the exhibition "Thomas Day: Master Craftsman and Free Man of Color." In 2010, The North Carolina Museum of History hosted the exhibition "Behind the Veneer: Thomas Day, Master Cabinetmaker." The Metropolitan Museum of Art is planning a 2022 exhibition featuring the pottery of David Drake titled "Southern Make." For more information, google "David Drake exhibits."

²²W. E. B Du Bois, *The Negro Artisan: report of a social study made under the direction of Atlanta University ; together with the proceedings of the seventh Conference for the study of the Negro problems, held at Atlanta University on May 27th, 1902.* (Georgia: Atlanta University Press, 1902), 14–17.

I do not negate the work of enslaved men as a necessary discussion, but to completely ignore the diverse artisanal contributions of enslaved women does not provide the complete history of the antebellum artisan. Moreover, recognizing that Du Bois refers only to occupations such as blacksmithing and carpentry exemplifies the gender segregation of work that existed on plantations. In an analysis of childhood education, Du Bois surveyed six hundred children in 1860 Atlanta, Georgia. The survey revealed, “there is no doubt but what the boys and girls naturally like to do with their hands.” Du Bois’s survey determines that a large number of boys wished to be artisans but does not mention the aspirations of the girls.²³

Appalachian Black craft history is not present within acclaimed examinations that are frequently referenced about the region, such as David E. Whisnant’s *All That is Native & Fine; Politics of Culture in an American Region*, Jane S. Becker’s *Selling Tradition: Appalachia and the Construction of an American Tradition*, *Encyclopedia of Appalachia*, and Allen Eaton’s *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*. I surmise that the neglect of Black craft history within the mountain South is due to the distorted stereotype that western North Carolina is a region divested of African American history and bereft of the horrors of slavery. As professor Wilma A. Dunaway notes, “mountain slaves have remained a *people without history* because too many researchers have claimed that ‘peculiar institution’ never influenced Appalachian culture and society.”²⁴ Subsequently, Black craft history has also been subjected to the same fate: Blacks are a people without a craft history.²⁵

However, this notion is false. Through my research, I am advocating that Black craft history has always been present; however, Black craft history has not been a part of American

²³ W. E. B Du Bois, *The Negro Artisan*, 22.

²⁴ Wilma Dunaway, *Slavery in the Mountain South*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

²⁵ As Marie Lo notes, “Often ignored or forgotten in the progressive genealogy of contemporary craft is the history of Black artisans, the impact of industrial education, and the work of Booker T. Washington, who vigorously championed handicraft as the means of Black uplift.” Marie Lo, “HandCrafting Whiteness: Booker T. Washington and the subject of Contemporary Craft,” *ASAP/Journal*, Volume 5, no. 2, (2010): 425.

craft history even though it did exist. I proclaim that craft was a fundamental component of Black women's identity before, during, and after the Civil War in the upper South. I will demonstrate how, apart from fieldwork, the labor of enslaved women was a network of craftwork in which these women were textile practitioners who produced apparel and other textile goods for their enslavers and the general population of the plantation. Although I have not found resources in which enslaved women verbally contextualize their work as craft labor, I suggest that, through an analysis of the production of apparel and home goods, it is quite evident that enslaved labor was based on skill and mastery of materials. For example, Dunaway notes, "Appalachian masters valued skilled artisans ... as Appalachian slaves carded wool, spun thread, and wove small clothes surpluses that were sold by their masters."²⁶ Enslaved people were commodified for the skills that they possessed; enslavers would pay more for slaves who had artisanal skills. This is exemplified through runaway slave advertisements and advertisements for the purchase of enslaved people.²⁷

I also propose that the development of institutionalized Black education was deeply embedded in craft education through vocational training. This is evident in the curricula designed for Black women of varying ages because the curricula primarily focused on domestic training skills such as sewing, basketry, and dressmaking. Furthermore, I suggest that institutionalized education was more than a mechanism to create productive assets in society. As professor and historian Stephanie Shaw notes, vocational and training schools were developed to prepare young Black women "for public work and reinforced family and community interests related to

²⁶Wilma Dunaway, "Black Appalachians in Manufacturing" in *Slavery in the Mountain South*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 106.

²⁷"ROSE, about 25 years of age, she has always been brought up to the house, and is a very good seamstress; she carried away with her several different suits of cloaths, of which was a habit of green plains, and one blue, with her summer cloaths, its supposed with a design never to return to her owner." "Rose—SEA10," Black Craftspeople Digital Archive, accessed February 27, 2021, <https://archive.blackcraftspeople.org/items/show/>

self-development and social responsibility.”²⁸ Patriarchal structures existed on the plantation and in the development of education programs that prevented Black women from other kinds of handwork such as carpentry and repairing furniture. Because of this, textile work remained a constant demand during and post antebellum America.

My analysis covers only a sample of the contributions Black women have made to the craft field and American history. By mapping the time period from 1850 to 1910 in the upper South, I analyze the relationship between craft and Black life as I demonstrate how craft is intertwined in African American history. This is accomplished first by contextualizing enslaved labor as craft labor. Through the horrors of enslavement, Black women exemplified mastery of the process and material knowledge through the production of apparel and home goods for the plantation owners and fellow slaves on the plantation. This paper will also discuss how, as free women, Black women did not abandon their crafts; rather, they continued to exemplify their artistry. Through the development of institutionalized education, vocational training reinforced craft practices in curricula taught to young Black women at industrial and normal school institutions.²⁹

²⁸Stephanie Shaw, ““We are not educating individuals but manufacturing levers’: Schooling Reinforcements” in *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 69.

²⁹ “A school is a school created to train high school graduates to be teachers. Its purpose is to establish teaching standards or norms, hence its name.” Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. “Normal school.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified April 20, 2016. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/normal-school>.

Chapter One

Craftswomanship of Enslaved Women, 1850–1865

African American handwork and material knowledge drove any plantation's economy and sustainability because craft was a significant aspect of enslaved labor.³⁰ Craft within slavery was a cruel and vicious component of forced labor while it simultaneously provided an opportunity for expression of the artisanal skill of the enslaved. As educator and founder of the Tuskegee Institute, Franklin County, Virginia, Booker Taliaferro Washington, proposed that slavery was a form of industrial training accomplished through a "crude" and "selfish purpose[s]."³¹ In this statement, Washington suggested that Black people received an education in craft to ensure the plantation's economic sustainability. Enslaved people were trained in carpentry, textiles, masonry, blacksmithing, and engineering.³² This chapter explores craft, gender, identity, and the transmission of craft knowledge by examining accounts of enslaved seamstresses and weavers to suggest that Black women embodied craft practices and artisanal skill by employing their knowledge during the duration of American slavery.

Craft and Gender

Enslavers recognized the skills of Black women. This is evident in advertisements about runaway slaves and slaves for sale. A 1852 runaway slave advertisement from Elizabeth City, North Carolina, for an enslaved carpenter named Dick and a seamstress named Marietta states:

Marietta left my premises on the 15th of the past month, is of rather dark complexion, below the medium height of women, twenty-three years of age and has a small scar under the inner corner of the left eye. Said girl is quite intelligent and effeminate; having been accustomed only to needle-work, her hands are quite small and very soft. When she left she had a large quantity of fine clothing, and always dressed neatly.

³⁰Dunaway, "Cultural Resistance and Community Building," 48.

³¹Washington, Booker T. "Industrial Education for the Negro." Teaching American History. Last modified January 28, 2013. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/industrial-education-for-the-negro/>.

³²Washington, Booker T. "Industrial Education for the Negro." Teaching American History. Last modified January 28, 2013. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/industrial-education-for-the-negro/>.

The advertisement offered a \$200 reward, which in today's currency is equivalent to around \$6,707.23.³³ The amount that the owner was willing to pay for the return on her slaves is indicative of the capitalistic value placed on having slaves who were skilled artisans. Slave owners relied on their human property for survival. Historian Walter Johnson provides an analysis of the antebellum slave market to discuss how slaves in the South were commodified not only because their labor was critical for the production of cotton, but also because they were valued based on the physical attributes and the skills they possessed. As Johnson notes, "having coopers, carpenters, and bricklayers on the plantation could provide labor at just the moment it was needed and could solve problems as quickly as they arose, eliminating the time it took for outside laborers to be contacted and contracted."³⁴ Johnson speaks to the necessity of enslaved craftsmen on the plantation by recognizing that enslavers were able to sidestep the cost of purchasing apparel or bedding from individuals or markets because enslaved women were expected to produce the necessities for the plantation's owner and his family.

As it was in plantations across America, slavery in Southern Appalachian states such as Georgia, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, and western North Carolina were engrossed in textile production; however, not in the same way as cotton production was in the lower South plantations. Plantation weaving rooms accounted for two-thirds of the Southern Appalachian textile manufacturers.³⁵ Many financially viable plantations often incorporated a spinning room managed by the enslaved women who were in charge of the textile production. These women carded cotton and wool, spun thread, and dyed it to produce textiles for the plantation and trade international markets.³⁶ As Dunaway notes, "[to] produce enough clothing and bedding for their

³³Ian Webster. "Value of \$200 from 1850 to 2021." CPI Inflation Calculator. accessed on February 18, 2021. <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1850?amount=200>.

³⁴Walter Johnson, "Making A World Out of Slaves" in *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 85.

³⁵Dunaway, "Black Appalachians in Manufacturing: Slave Labor in Plantation Manufacturing," 107.

³⁶Camp, "The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body," 80.

slaves to survive the winters, Appalachian masters pooled female slaves.”³⁷ Enslaved women were essential to the production of garments on the plantation. These craftswomen made everyday necessities such as coats, quilts, aprons, mattresses, rugs, and tablecloths, all of which were highly valued by slave owners. Without enslaved craftswomen, these objects would otherwise have had to be purchased.³⁸

During this period, there were 299 medium-sized textile mills in Southern Appalachia.³⁹ This was a significant number of mills for the time period as there were few textiles mills in the South during the 1880s until textile production became widely popular in Appalachia in the 1920s.⁴⁰ These mills produced many textile items such as mittens, hats, and women’s undergarments. They also carded wool and printed calico textiles. Large textile mills constituted one-third of Southern Appalachia’s textile mills. These mills relied on upward of fourteen laborers for production output and grossed \$12,475 annually⁴¹ (approximately \$418,363.52 in today’s currency).⁴² Enslaved women, men, and children who were skilled artisans not only labored on the plantation, but also were often hired out to tobacco mills, grist mills, and cotton mills by their enslavers. Dunaway offers an account of an “eastern Tennessee firm at which fourteen slaves operated three hundred spindles.”⁴³ It is an incredible task for only fourteen women to operate three hundred spindles. It requires immense proficiency and stamina as well as intricate knowledge of the process and an understanding of yarn production. From this one can also surmise that the factory did not have to employ many hands to get that job done. It is evident

³⁷Dunaway, “Cultural Resistance and Community Building,” 212.

³⁸ Lisa Farrington, “Art and Design in the Colonial Era” in *African American Art: A Visual Cultural History*, 20. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 25.

³⁹ Dunaway, “Black Appalachians in Manufacturing: Slave Labor in Plantation Manufacturing,” 111.

⁴⁰ Georgia State University, “Southern Labor Archives: Work n’ Progress, Lessons and Stories: Part III: The Southern Textile Industry,” last modified May 29, 2019, <https://research.library.gsu.edu/c.php?g=115684&p=751981>.

⁴¹Dunaway, “Black Appalachians in Manufacturing: Slave Labor in Plantation Manufacturing,” 111.

⁴² Ian Webster, “Value of \$200 from 1850 to 2021.” CPI Inflation Calculator. February 18, 2021. <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1850?amount=200>.

⁴³Dunaway, “Black Appalachians in Manufacturing: Slave Labor in Plantation Manufacturing,” 112.

that enslaved craft labor was oriented around capitalism; this labor sustained the plantation's financial wealth and the welfare of the plantation and the regional economy. Enslaved bodies, and more specifically those who possessed craft skills, were highly commodified by enslavers because they were seen as free labor. The idea of commoditization of enslaved bodies lends itself to a discussion of the physically grueling nature of enslaved craft labor and the effect it had on the bodies.

To understand the painstaking task of enslaved craft labor, we can refer to the narrative of former slave Betty Cofer, who was born in 1856 on a plantation in Wachovia, North Carolina (current day Forsyth County, Salem, North Carolina). Cofer offers an insight into the implications of a life entrenched by rigid handwork. She recalls a woman on the plantation where she labored who suffered from arthritic hands caused by a life dictated by needlework. She states, "One woman knitted all the stockin's for the white folks an colored folks too. I mind she had done finger all twisted and stiff from holdin' her knitting' needles."⁴⁴ Betty Cofer's account is far from an anomaly as Stephanie Camp notes craft work ...

... was physically taxing. The work required extremely long hours of constant repetitive motion well beyond the setting of the sun. Weaving engaged the whole body, compelling arms, and hands, which carried the shuttle between the warp threads, to coordinate with the efforts of legs and feet, which worked the pedals in rhythm with the movement of the shuttle."⁴⁵

Women bore the evidence of a lifetime of weaving and knitting as these women physically embodied the work through their bodies—twisted, stiff fingers from holding knitting needles, and multiple skeletal issues from weaving.

⁴⁴ P. J. Cross, "Aunt Betty Cofer" in *Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project: Vol. 11, North Carolina, Part 1*, (Washington, 1936), 169, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesn111/>.

⁴⁵Camp, "The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body," 81.

Plantation labor segregated by gender was common practice across America. Women worked alongside men picking cotton, plowing, and cutting wood; however, women were also obliged to be deeply engrossed in textile production such as hand dying, weaving, and processing cotton using a cotton gin (cotton engine).⁴⁶ Men worked with iron as blacksmiths and with wood as woodworkers. The relationship between time and gender on the plantation was also relevant. As Stephanie Camp notes, “Women’s second shifts of work intensified the time-based controls that enslaved people throughout the South experienced.”⁴⁷ In most instances, both women and men stopped working for their masters in the fields as day turned to evening. This indicated the end of the workday. However, for women the day did not end there; in fact, that was the beginning of their second shift.

Women often labored throughout the night weaving and spinning. Camp states “on most plantations the winter season greeted women with production quotas demanding that they card, reel and spin one or two ‘cuts’ (about ninety-one inches of thread per night).”⁴⁸ Sometimes they would work in the weaving room of their master’s house if they were making apparel or household items for their masters and mistresses. Dunaway refers to these laborious occasions as work parties, occasions designed to maximize textile output disguised as leisurely gatherings and conduits for comradery. Groups of women “spun and wove cloth, cut sewed clothing, produced household craft or manufactured quilts, blankets and mattresses.”⁴⁹ If and when women completed the labor for their masters and mistresses, they would then work in their own dwellings, as this was a time for the women to take care of themselves and other slaves. Here one may consider an aspect of Stephen Knott’s theory on amateur time as he notes, “an individual does not completely turn off in free time ... The making that takes place in the temporal zone

⁴⁶Camp, “Geography of Containment: Slavery, Space and Gender,” 32.

⁴⁷Camp, “The Bondage of Space and Time,” 34.

⁴⁸Camp “The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body,” 81.

⁴⁹Dunaway, “Cultural Resistance and Community Building on Mountain Plantations,” 213.

leads to temporary and differential experiences of time.”⁵⁰ Although the idea of “free time” is fraught with misunderstanding when discussing enslaved peoples, given that there is no freedom or leisure in slavery, this time was for the women to cook dinner, make and mend their own clothes and household textiles, and make necessities like soap and candles. The time-based controls on Southern plantations intensified during the second shift of enslaved women’s work.

As Camp notes:

Textile production complicated the plantation's temporal order along gender lines. The nighttime was less neatly “off” time for bond women than it was for men. While both women and men could quit working for their owners at sunset, many women began their second shift of labor, their nightly toil for their families. At night and sometimes on Saturdays or Sundays, after agricultural work was done, women had another set of labor to do for their own families.⁵¹

Through this example, it is apparent that the bulk of enslaved women’s labor was entrenched in craftwork through the making of essentials such as soaps and textiles for themselves and their families. In other words, enslaved women were constantly crafting. In regard to Southern Appalachian enslaved women, “most mountain slave women worked at their evening textiles production without white supervision, outsiders rarely interfered, as they wove their own view of the world.”⁵² While spinning and weaving or preparing dinner during the evening “free time,” many women transmitted genealogical information and socialized their children through the telling of stories and intergenerational oral histories. Children often held candles so the women could see as they spun the carded cotton and wool into thread for sewing clothing or worked on other material in the manufacture of household textiles. It is quite possible that, during these

⁵⁰Stephen Knott, “Time: The programmatic utopia of unalienated labor” in *Amateur Craft: History and Theory*. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015), 93.

⁵¹Camp, “The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body,” 80.

⁵²Dunaway, “Culture Resistance and Community Building on Mountain Plantations: Construction of a Counter-Hegemonic Culture,” 208.

processes, children gained an understanding of textiles such as spinning thread and weaving.⁵³ For many slaves, their enslavers and overseers were not present in the evenings inside the slave hermitage. Because of this, the slaves were able to exist as individual people and not as machines meant only to execute the demands of the plantation. Although these women were still engrossed in labor and craftwork, for some this was likely a moment of respite in the sense that they were not obliged to perform as enslaved humans. Enslaved women could tend to their own needs and care for their children.

⁵³Camp, "The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body," 82.

Craft as Identity

For enslaved women who endured physically demanding work, sexual abuse, and dangerous child labor, textile production was a means of empowerment and self-expression. Enslaved women used specific dyes and dress patterns when making garments for themselves. Many women were highly skilled in producing natural dyes from roots, bark, and berries, often dying intricate patterns into their own attire as markers of identity. As Stephanie Camp notes, “Women wove and dyed color, patterns, and designs into their clothing ... the creation and appropriations of cloth and clothing helped them to express their personalities and sense of style.”⁵⁴ Building on Camp’s argument, I propose that clothing was a marker of identity as women dictated their appearance through adornment. The apparel that enslaved women made for themselves was made from cotton that they raised and harvested, a process that manifested in a sort of reclamation over the of labor that these women endured while in the institution of slavery. A Virginia enslaved woman named Mary Wyatt provided an example of the recoupment of her own labor. Wyatt would often secretly wear a dress of her mistresses to secret plantation parties without her mistress’s knowledge. The dress would have been designed for an elite white woman, yet it was a product of enslavement because it was sewn by an enslaved woman from a textile woven by enslaved women using raw cotton picked and processed by enslaved women. When worn by Wyatt, the dress, for a moment, slightly altered her appearance to resemble a free white woman.⁵⁵ Through this lens, Wyatt used the act of creating a dress with black hands and wearing it on a black body to fabricate a temporary identity, thereby challenging power. Wyatt’s example of reappropriating one’s enslaver’s clothing was not unusual for enslaved women as these

⁵⁴Camp, “The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body,” 83.

⁵⁵Camp, “The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body,” 84.

women often worked in the homes of their mistresses performing domestic duties such as cleaning the home and making the apparel as well as cleaning it, maintaining it, and putting it away. Because of this, these women had access to their mistresses' clothing. As Wyatt recollects, "De debbil got in me good. Got dat down out de house neath my petticoat tied round me an' wore it to de dance."⁵⁶ This act of adornment was a way to reclaim power through textiles, especially using a garment to momentarily exchange one's identity from that of a woman in bondage to that of a free woman.

In the next section, I will account for the voices of enslaved women through the experience of women who were once enslaved. These case studies exemplify how the crafts of the enslaved shaped women's identities because the labor was executed based on their craft expertise. As Brenda Stevenson suggests, "Searching for enslaved women, often through the texts produced by those who enslaved them, is a daunting research exercise not only because of the difficulty of releasing the voices of these women bound in such texts, but also because of the diversity of these enslaved females' experiences, cultures, and perspectives."⁵⁷

As I will show, the narratives of former slaves suggest that enslaved people were not just executing duties through forced labor; rather, they exemplifying an understanding of craft practice, the material, and they placed identity (self) into the work.⁵⁸ Further, focusing on

⁵⁶Camp, "The Intoxication of Pleasurable Amusement: Secret Parties and the Politics of the Body," 85.

⁵⁷ Brenda E. Stevenson. "Introduction: Women, Slavery, and the Atlantic World," *The Journal of African American History* 98, no. 1 (2013): 1-6. accessed April 4, 2021. doi:10.5323/jafriamerhist.98.1.0001.

⁵⁸Objects were fabricated by enslaved hands that signify personal adornment, like a hollow-cast alloy fist-shaped charm excavated from around the homes of slaves at Andrew Jackson's plantation by archaeologists at the Hermitage in Nashville, Tennessee. Anthropologist Dr. Lori Lee notes "The fact that three fists shaped objects were found at Hermitage, although manifested in two different forms, suggests that the hand figure was more significant than the framing element to the people who were using these objects." These objects were possibly worn as belt fasteners or protection charms. Lori Lee, "Beads, Coins, and Charms at a Poplar Forest Slave Cabin (1833-1858)," *Northeast Historical Archaeology: Vol. 40, Article 6*, (2011), 117.

individual voices makes the invisible visible.⁵⁹ As Barbara Harrison suggests, autobiographical accounts “indicate the importance of language, accounts and narratives, self and subjectivity, and individual lives and their cultural context as revealed by the life story research.”⁶⁰ These narratives offer the possibility for telling stories that do not fit within dominant cultural narratives. Slave narratives offer fascinating accounts of identity embedded in craft of enslaved Black women.⁶¹ The interview provides a life story through a discussion of the work of these women who had once been enslaved: “the project of becoming an artist is achieved, but not [a complete account].”⁶² As Linda Sandino suggests, “coherent identity does not just refer to the singularity of that self but must also contend with the ascription of ‘artist’, the historical and cultural contingency of which is made manifest in the testimony of the life stories.”⁶³ We may refer to the narrative of former slave Betty Cofer, who provides an intimate account of the extensive knowledge of textile, fabric, and needlework executed on the plantation. She notes:

We raised our own flax an’ cotton an’ wool, spun the thread, wove the cloth, made all the clothes. Yes’m, we made the mens’ shirts and pants an’ coats. We wove the wool blankets too. I use to wait on the girl who did the weavin. When she took the cloth off the loom she done give me the thrums (ends of thread left on the loom) tied em all together with teensy little knots and’ got me some scraps from the sewin’ room and made me some quilt tops. Some of em was real pretty too!⁶⁴

⁵⁹“An important aspect of early feminist scholarship, as with oral historians, was a project to make the invisible visible. Barbara Harrison, “Editors Introduction: Researching Lives and the Lived Experience” in *Life Story Research*, ed. Barbara Harrison (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2008), 21.

⁶⁰Barbara Harrison, “Editors Introduction: Researching Lives and the Lived Experience”

⁶¹The interviews that I have incorporated were conducted during the late 1930s by the Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of North Carolina. A New Deal program from 1935 to 1942 hired unemployed newspapermen, librarians, historians, novelists, and poets. This came with its own plethora of problems in that Black people were still subject to extreme racism and the interviewees place negative assumptions about the interviewee.

⁶²“A text that is created from this encounter, supposedly the life of the artist’s self-become nevertheless an account of encounters with the world (people, objects, artworks) that show how identity created in narrative is always in process and incomplete.” Linda Sandino, “Artist-in-Progress: Narrative Identity of the Self as Another” in *Beyond Coherence*, ed. Lars-Christer Hydén, Maria Tamboukou, Marja Saarenheimo, Matti Hyvärinen (Netherlands: John Benjamin Publishing) 88.

⁶³Linda Sandino, “Artist-in-progress,” 87.

⁶⁴P.J. Cross, “Aunt Betty Cofer,” 168.

This quote is evidence that craftwork was a great part of the labor forced upon her as an enslaved woman, and thus craft was a component of her identity. This is shown through the emphasis she placed on her work, the pride with which she displayed in her labor, and her use of the word *pretty* to describe the materials she used. Her prideful recollections suggest that she closely identified with the labor and materials used. As a textile practitioner, Cofer possessed detailed knowledge of process and control of material, which fits the very definition of craft as suggested by Peter Dormer.⁶⁵ To me the essence of an artist is, in part, based on his or her mastery of self-expression and knowledge of media. As this relates to textiles artists, this breeds a relationship with the material, meaning if one can gain control over the material, say for instance an unruly piece of fiber, then the process of making is made easier as the artist is able to manipulate the fiber and twist or contort in a way that the hand intends to produce a fiber object. This artistry is exemplified by textile practitioners such as Betty Cofer. From the next quote, I suggest that she exemplifies a pride for her craft labor, an attention to detail, and a knowledge of the material the same way a modern textile artist might discuss his or her work, noting:

I was trained to cook an' clean an' sew. I learned to make mens' pants an' coats. First coat I made, Miss Julia told me to rip the collar off, an' by the time I picked out all the teensy stitches an' sewed it together again I could set a collar right! I can do it today, too!

Cofer's training in sewing, such as learning to make pants and coats, establishes her as a craftswoman, and her comments indicate that she took pride in her skill. As Knott suggests, the difference between amateurs and artists is that artists have received some

⁶⁵“Craft means a process over which a person has detailed control, control that is a consequence of craft knowledge.” Peter Dormer, Introduction to *The Culture of Craft*, ed. Peter Dormer (England: Manchester University Press, 2019), 7.

sort of training education in the discipline in which they are involved.⁶⁶ From this I suggest that the use of the word *trained* is her way of identifying herself as a skilled seamstress, because she homes in on a skill, which is an act of agency. Cofer's acknowledgment of a skilled craftsperson is also noted by the interviewer who notes "Again there is manifested a good workman's pardonable pride of achievement."⁶⁷ As Myriem Naji suggests, "a significant feature of craft is its embodied and 'processual' dimension ... material and physical aspects of making affect craftspeople and transform them morally."⁶⁸ In Naji's discussion of female Moroccan Sirva carpet weavers, she suggests that weavers exert agency through their weaving skills and "their craft knowledge was translated into symbolic and economic capital."⁶⁹ Myriem Naji's analysis provides a framework in which it is possible to analyze the identities of enslaved craftswomen. Although Cofer was presumably expected to reduce the stretch in the fabric until the collar was placed on correctly, I propose that the emphasis that Cofer places on the description of her work, noting, "I picked out all the teensy stitches an' sewed it together again I could set a collar right! I can do it today, too!"⁷⁰ This could be interpreted to mean that she was excited to tell the interviewer about her knowledge of properly sewing on a collar, a skill she acquired through a process of repetition until she mastered it and was able to apply meticulous attention to the necessary stitches. Cofer's unprompted sharing of this story when generally asked to recall her life as an enslaved

⁶⁶Knott, "Time: The programmatic utopia of unalienated labor," 95

⁶⁷The Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of North Carolina. *Slave Narrative*. 168

⁶⁸Myriem Naji, "Creativity Tradition in Keeping Craft Alive among Moroccan Carpet Weavers and French Organic Farmers" in *Critical Craft Technology Global and Capitalism*, edited by Clare Wilkinson-Weber and Alicia Ory DeNicola, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016), 153-167.

⁶⁹Naji, "Creativity Tradition in Keeping," 153.

⁷⁰The Federal Writers Project of the Works Progress Administration for the State of North Carolina. *Slave Narrative*. 168

woman shows the impact and significance of this experience on her as a craftswoman.⁷¹

As Gail Lewis notes, “‘voice’: a position from which to speak.” To speak is necessary “if the specificity of ‘black women’s experience’ [is] to be articulated and a claim to a self-defined womanhood made.”⁷² This is significant because it is Cofer’s voice.

A testament to skill possessed by enslaved craftswomen can be seen in an interview from Rachel Cruze, who was born in 1856 on a plantation farm in Knox County, Tennessee:

The material for the cotton clothes worn on the farm, in summer was woven right in our own kitchen. We bought the raw cotton usually, but sometimes we would grow a small patch. Then we would card it, spin it and weave on the big loom in the kitchen. I have spun many a broach. They take it off and wind it on a reel, and make a great hank of thread—there would be four cuts in a hand. They would first size the thread by dipping it in some solution, and then when it was dry, they would dye it. Dye stuffs would be gotten from the barks and roots of different trees, and with these we would be able to make red, brown and black dyes. We would then weave into jeans, a heavy cotton for men’s coats and pants or light linsey for women’s clothes.”⁷³

Cruzes’ quote shows she had an understanding of process, material knowledge, and dye technique just as today’s textile makers do. Her account makes evident the mastery over material involved in craftwork that relies on repetitive manipulation and transformation of materiality that is undertaken by craft practitioners. Evidence that Cruze was making her own dyes indicates that she understood the chemistry involved in the process of making a dye solution. An examination

⁷¹ As stated by the Library of Congress, “Private efforts to preserve the life histories of former slaves accounted for only a small portion of the narratives collected during the late 1920s and 1930s. The advent of the New Deal marked a new phase, for it was under New Deal employment programs for jobless white-collar workers that narrative collecting reached its zenith, first in 1934 in a Federal Emergency Relief Agency (FERA) white-collar project headed by Lawrence D. Reddick at Kentucky State College and subsequently in its successor organization, the Works Progress Administration.” Library of Congress. “The WPA and the Slave Narrative Collection: The WPA and Americans’ Life Histories,” *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers’ Project, 1936 to 1938*. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/slave-narratives-from-the-federal-writers-project-1936-to-1938/articles-and-essays/introduction-to-the-wpa-slave-narratives/wpa-and-the-slave-narrative-collection/>

⁷² Lewis, Gail. “Situated Voices: ‘Black Women’s Experience’ and Social Work.” *Feminist Review*, no. 53 (1996): 24-56. accessed April 4, 2021. doi:10.2307/1395660.

⁷³ Wilma A. Dunaway. “Slavery and Emancipation in the Mountain South: Sources, Evidence and Methods,” Virginia Tech, Online Archives. https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/faculty_archives/mountain_slavery/cite.htm.

of narratives of formerly enslaved women produced from interviews reveals their identity as craftswomen.

The interview is not a complete story in that the narrative identity (the identity revealed in the interview) is the vernacular of sameness (*idem*) and change (*ipse*) in one's identity.⁷⁴ However, Paul Ricoeur states, “the dual aspect of identity ... provides a way to unpack the ‘who?’ of the artist’s life stories, the intersection of the ipse and idem identity as it is recounted in the interview.”⁷⁵ The interview is reconstructed given that it is conducted under specific circumstances that dictate what the interviewee states and who may draw upon an already-told version of a story. The interview accomplishes an important component in analyzing and understanding enslaved Black women as craftspeople.

⁷⁴ Sandino, “Artist-in-progress,” 87.

⁷⁵ Sandino, “Artist-in-progress,” 101.

Transmission of Craft Knowledge



Lucindy Lawrence Jurdon, Age 79. United States Alabama, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp010242/>.⁷⁶

Lucindy Lawrence Jurdon, the woman gripping the spinning wheel in this picture, was born enslaved in Macon, Georgia, in 1858 on a four-hundred-acre plantation. In 1936, interviewers with the Works Progress Administration's Federal Writers Project visited Jurdon's home and spoke with her about her experiences during enslavement. The interviewer made a point of noting that, at the start of the interview, "She got out her old spinning wheel; sat down before it and beamed."⁷⁷ When asked about her experiences, Jurdon quickly answered, "My mammy was a fine weaver and did do work for white and colored. Dis is her spinning wheel, and it can still be used. I use it sometimes now ... [while enslaved]. Us made our own cloth an' our stockings, too."⁷⁸ Jurdon's story exemplifies the transition of craft knowledge from mother to child in that she continued to weave after enslavement using the skills she learned from her

⁷⁶Lucindy Lawrence Jurdon, Age 79. United States Alabama, 1936. Between 1936 and 1938. Photograph. <https://www.loc.gov/item/mesnp010242/>. This photo was taken in 1936 as part of the Federal Writers Project, "Slave Narratives: A Folk History of Slavery in the United States from Interviews in the United States."

⁷⁷Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, "It Aint the Same" Vol. 1, (Washington, 1936) 242, www.loc.gov/item/mesn010/.

⁷⁸Federal Writers' Project: Slave Narrative Project, "It Aint the Same" 242.

mother.⁷⁹ When questioned about other things that she might have learned on the plantation, Jurdon stated, “No’m, us never did learn nothing. If us tried to read or write dey would whack our forefingers off.”⁸⁰ In this example, we see that, while Jurdon was denied the opportunity to learn to read and write because she was enslaved, she was permitted to learn her mother’s craft.

Dunaway’s work provides more examples of enslaved women teaching their children craft. Dunaway notes, “Women socialized their children while they produced their nighttime quotas of spinning, weaving, quilting, and crafts.”⁸¹ During this evening textile work, women passed down cultural traditions and stories of the past, and they sang songs and discussed community secrets.⁸² Often the transmission of craft knowledge from mother to child occurred in what archaeologist Whitney Battle-Baptiste describes as the “domestic sphere.” According to Battle-Baptiste, the domestic sphere was the “center for life, culture, tradition, and humanity. It was one of the few places where captive women and men could gain their humanity and maintain and nurture their families.”⁸³ Through her research at President Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage Plantation in Nashville, Tennessee, Battle-Baptiste discovered that the domestic sphere went beyond the interior of slave dwellings into shared yard space or home space, transformed exterior spaces, in front of the dwellings.⁸⁴ Artifacts uncovered during archaeological

⁷⁹ Another narrative pulled from the Federal Writers Projects to note is Mandy McCullough. Although this is not a narrative from the upper South it still provides an interesting example of the transfer of craft knowledge between mother and daughter. Cosby was born 1843 on a plantation in Chambers County, Alabama. Mandy recalls: “My mother was a loomer. She didn’t do nothin’ but weave. We all had reg’lar stints of spinnin’ to do, when we came from the fiel’. We set down an’ eat a good supper, an’ ever’night until ten o’clock we spin cuts of cotton, an’ reel the thread, an’ nex’ day, the rolls is carded an’ packed in a basket to be wove. Spinnin wheels was in every cabin. Dere was so many of us to be tuk care of, it took lots of spinnin.” *Federal Writers’ Project: Slave Narrative Project, Vol. 1, Alabama, Aarons-Young*. to 1937, 1936. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, www.loc.gov/item/mesn010/91.

⁸⁰ Dunaway, “Culture Resistance and Community Building on Mountain Plantations: Construction of a Counter-Hegemonic Culture,” 208.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 207.

⁸³ Battle-Baptiste, “The Hermitage: The Captive African Domestic Sphere,” 87.

⁸⁴ Battle-Baptiste defines home space as “transformed exterior spaces” while noting that they were sites of Black cultural production. Whitney Battle-Baptiste, “The Hermitage: Homeplace, the Complexity Household and Domestic Exchange,” 100.

excavations revealed that women were using the shared home space in front of slave dwellings for a variety of everyday tasks including “clothing repair and adornment.”⁸⁵ The objects recovered at the Hermitage’s home spaces included straight pins, hook-and-eye closures, buttons, and clothing charms. This evidence suggests that women were sitting in these spaces in full view of others while they did their sewing.⁸⁶ By conducting their sewing work in the open, enslaved women not only shared craft knowledge among themselves, but they also had the opportunity to share this knowledge with their children, whom they watched while they sewed.

The transmission of craft knowledge between enslaved mothers and daughters and other enslaved women continued throughout the chaos of the Civil War. Enslaved women and men self-emancipated themselves from bondage and often fled to Union Army lines and contraband camps. Nearly three hundred contraband camps sheltered self-emancipated and formerly enslaved refugees during the Civil War.⁸⁷ In cotton fields and abandoned buildings spread across the southern coast of South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, and concentrated in Tennessee and along the western borders of Mississippi, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Louisiana, these encampments provided temporary housing, but also a platform for white missionaries interested in providing industrial education to newly freed Black people whom they felt were incapable of being self-reliant. In the interest of preparing refugees for future employment, duty-bound missionaries erected sewing rooms, “tailoring schools,” and “knitting schools” inside the camps. As Elizabeth Hyde Bostume, a white contraband camp missionary, notes, “We were convinced that plenty to eat would harmonize and Christianize them faster than hymns and

⁸⁵ Battle-Baptiste, “The Hermitage: Homeplace, the Complexity Household and Domestic Exchange,” 93.

⁸⁶ Battle-Baptiste, “The Hermitage: Homeplace, the Complexity Household and Domestic Exchange,” 104.

⁸⁷ The term *contraband* was coined on May 24, 1861, to refer to three runaway slaves near Hampton, Virginia, who were taken to Fortress Monroe by Union soldiers and deemed “contraband” of war. Ex-slaves were known as “contrabands.” As Elizabeth Bostume notes, runaway slaves “could not be called freedmen, as emancipation had not yet been declared.” For more, see Elizabeth Hyde Bostume, “Origin of the Name” in *First Days Amongst the Contrabands*. (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1893), 10.

sermons; and that needles and thread and soap and decent clothing were the best educators, and would civilize sooner than book knowledge.”⁸⁸ From the outset of claimed freedom, white northern missionaries sought to be in charge of the education of Black people through paternalistic control and by deciding which type of education was best for Black people. Contraband camps often had a captive audience of freed men, women, and children to educate. Bostume recalled that “[Black] women seemed to delight more in an old garment than a new one. They felt at liberty to cut and alter and patch it *ad libitum*; besides it gave them excuse for asking for “one needle and a leetle bit o’ thread,” which they always got.”⁸⁹

At war’s end, thousands of formerly enslaved craftswomen did not abandon their crafts. During her time in a South Carolina contraband camp, Bostume witnessed self-emancipated women and men walking towards the protection of the camp, and in some instances, Bostume became enthralled with the women, noting, “It was not an unusual thing to meet a woman coming from the field, where she had been hoeing cotton, with a small bucket or cup on her head, and a hoe over her shoulder, contentedly smoking a pipe and briskly knitting as she strode along. I have seen, added to all these, a baby strapped to her back.”⁹⁰ Bostume’s memories of the woman engrossed in her knitting while walking towards the camp is an example of the immeasurable connection between enslaved women and their crafts. This account pushes back on Bostume’s assumption that these women were without the forethought of self-reliance; indeed, the enslaved woman already possessed the skills for survival and practiced them as she claimed her freedom.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth Hyde Bostume, “Refugee Quarters” in *First Days Amongst the Contrabands*. (Boston, Massachusetts: Lee & Shepard, 1893), 234.

⁸⁹ Bostume, “Refugee Quarters,” 236.

⁹⁰ Bostume, “Within the Lines,” 53.

Chapter Two

Black Craftswomen During Reconstruction, 1866–1877

With the start of emancipation, newly freed men and women sought to claim citizenship, which had previously been denied to them. These men and women immediately recognized the need to learn to read and write and understood the power and opportunity that education could bring to their lives.⁹¹ Despite the forward thinking of freedmen and freedwomen and their insistence on being educated in ways of their choosing, white northern missionaries exercised their racial biases and sought to teach Black people what they thought Black people should know in order to support existing racial hierarchies. Armed with education, money, and authority, white northern missionaries opened schools for Blacks across the South. Between the years of 1866 and 1877, white northern missionaries opened thirty historically Black colleges and universities. During this same period, Black religious denominations opened only three historically Black colleges and universities.⁹² This chapter explores the lives and experiences of Black craftswomen during reconstruction through an examination of the formative years of Black education focusing on how the guises of paternalism and patriarchy dictated the education of Black women. Newly freed Black women were mandated to learn vocational skills such as basketry, sewing, and weaving in order to ensure that they would be productive assets of society.

In 1863, after the Emancipation Proclamation, historically Black colleges and universities along with vocational and training schools rapidly sprang up across the United States to

⁹¹ For more, see James Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*. Anderson states, "Former slaves were among the first native southerners to depart from the planters' ideology of education and society and to campaign for universal, state-supported public education". Additionally, historian Heather Andrea Williams argues, that freedmen and women "persisted in the effort to become literate, self-sufficient participants in the larger American society." Williams, Heather A. "First Moving's of the Waters: The Creation of Common School Systems for Black and White Students" in *African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, (Chapel Hill: The University North Carolina Press, 2005), 175.

⁹²United States Department of Education, White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, <https://sites.ed.gov/whhbcu/one-hundred-and-five-historically-black-colleges-and-universities/>.

transition slaves into “free” American society. These schools included industrial and normal institutions that often followed the philosophy that handwork was critical to the development of good moral character that sculpted a healthy heart and healthy mind.⁹³ The curricula for African American schools were based on paternalism directed by white Americans. As Marie Lo suggests, “the concomitant rise of industrial education in which handicraft was viewed as a means of racial assimilation ... that emerged to prepare recently freed slaves, American Indians, and the inhabitants of new American colonies for participation in the capitalist economy.”⁹⁴

Education for African Americans was determined much differently than education for white students in that education for Black students was based on paternalistic ideals unlike the curricula for White students which did not mandate vocational coursework being taught at their schools.⁹⁵ Paternalism stemmed from the threat white people felt of Black people gaining any type of intellect and status from being educated. As Heather Andrea Williams notes:

Whites worried that blacks would rise out of their traditional subservient place and as a result, that many whites would be left behind ... Both elite and poor whites then perceived the thought ... white elites worried that disgruntled poor whites might agitate for concrete, material social statuses. As a result, some elites made paternalistic gestures on behalf of poor whites, articulating concern for well-being.⁹⁶

⁹³Industrial institutes were vocational schools established for Black students and fireside industries were vocational schools established for white students. Anna Fariello, “Making and Naming: The Lexicon of Studio Craft” in *Extra/Ordinary*. ed. Maria Elena Buszek. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 2011), 34. Normal institutions were for the training of high school graduate students to be teachers.

⁹⁴Marie Lo, “Handcrafting Whiteness: Booker T. Washington and the Subject of Contemporary Craft.” *ASAP/Journal* 5, no. 2 (2020), 425–426.

⁹⁵ For more see Samuel Shannon, “Land-Grant College Legislation and Black Tennesseans: A Case Study in the Politics of Education,” *History of Education Quarterly* Vol. 22, No. 2 (Summer, 1982), pp. 139-157. Shannon discusses events at the University of Tennessee, a white college, and Knoxville College, an HBCU. Shannon notes, “While degree-granting programs in civil, electrical, and mechanical engineering were being introduced at the state university (University of Tennessee), Knoxville College students were taught manual training, domestic science and other courses deemed suitable for blacks. And while state university students had rebelled against the “manual labor” that accompanied “practical” agriculture, the Knoxville College students were expected to gain their “practical” knowledge by working upon the school Farm.”

⁹⁶Heather Andrea Williams, “First Movings of the Waters: The Creation of Common School Systems for Black and white Students” in *African American Education in Slavery and Freedom*, (Chapel Hill: The University North Carolina Press, 2005), 179.

Williams discusses a Wilmington, North Carolina, newspaper article from 1866 that stated that “the burden thus fell to southern whites to render African Americans industrious and worthy people,” claiming that their objective is not to deny Black people from being taught but stated that it is important for southern whites to direct their education.⁹⁷

Schools for Blacks were often cash strapped because they were not funded by the state. Because of this, the development of the schools relied on funding from private funders such as the American Missionary Association and the Freedmen’s Aid Society.⁹⁸ Private funders were able to dictate the curricula of the schools, and this is one of the reasons that vocational curricula were so prevalent in the schools. Furthermore, the coursework of Black students was dictated and primarily directed by white missionaries who were “also often paternalistic and even racist in their pronouncements.”⁹⁹ These missionaries felt that the basis of antislavery activism was enabling education and religion for both Black and white southerners that would lead to an acceptance of freed Black people, and would focus on freedom for Black people who had been enslaved. Professor and historian Stephanie Shaw notes, “[as] industrialists and philanthropists poured money exclusively into vocational education for Black people, Malcolm McVicar, superintendent of education for the Baptist Home Mission Society”¹⁰⁰ (an organization that aided the development of HBCUs Spelman and Hartshorn Colleges) advocated that education for Black people should incorporate vocational training but more importantly should concentrate on “missionary spirit” to train students to become leaders and instructors of “others.”¹⁰¹ In this example, “others” can be defined as Black people, as Stephanie Shaw quotes George Hall, a

⁹⁷Williams, “First Movings of the Waters: The Creation of Common School Systems for Black and white Students,” 183.

⁹⁸Williams, “We Are Laboring Under Many Difficulties: African American Teachers in Freedpeople’s Schools,” 97.

⁹⁹Stephanie Shaw, ‘We are not educating individuals but manufacturing levers’: Schooling Reinforcements” in *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 72.

¹⁰⁰ Shaw, ‘We are not educating individuals,’ 71.

¹⁰¹ Ibid 71

representative from the American Missionary Association, “[the students graduating from Fisk University] are to be the leaders of a people sorely needing leadership.”¹⁰² Furthermore, McVicar’s plan to train students as leaders did not necessarily provide Black communities with the leaders they needed. McVicar’s plan sought to train Black leaders that racist whites would be comfortable with. In the next sections, I will further discuss the education of Black women through case studies offered in an examination of prominent historical Black colleges and industrial institutes: Hampton Institute, Fisk University, and Berea College.

Hampton Institute

Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia, is by far the most written about and assessed Black college because it was a critical symbol of Black education. Many of the schools established at this time modeled their curricula after Hampton’s teachings. Hampton offered a six-week summer program for Black teachers from across the South to train them to integrate sewing, cooking, agriculture, and woodworking in their schools.¹⁰³ Founded by Samuel Chapman Armstrong, the son of missionaries, Hampton Institute opened in 1868. Armstrong, a Civil War general, established the school on the premise of John Ruskin’s head-hands-heart pedagogy for the uplift of Black and Native American people.¹⁰⁴ An integral part of women’s education were courses in sewing, cooking, weaving, basketry, laundry work, and gardening. As H. B. Frissell notes:

The Hampton laundry is one of the most important educational departments of the institution ... When the day’s work is over they go to the laboratory where they

¹⁰² Ibid 71

¹⁰³ H. B. Frissell, “Hampton Institute” in *From Servitude to Service: Being the Old South Lectures on the History and Work of Southern Institutions for the Education of the Negro*, ed. Boston American Unitarian Association (Cambridge: The University Press, 1905), 122.

¹⁰⁴ John Ruskin’s hand head and heart model facilitated craft curriculum into American Schools after the Civil War. Hand work was essential to vocational and industrial courses. Ruskin’s model was also intracule to Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute, which Washington modeled from inspiration after undergoing the curriculum of Hampton Institute. Fairiello, “Making Meaning,” 30.

learn by actual experiment how soap and bluing are made; they study textiles; under the microscope they watch the effect of hot and cold water upon woolen cloth.¹⁰⁵

All aspects of the curriculum were oriented around textile work. English and arithmetic classes related to laundry work as students learned how to analyze fibers and use mathematics to calculate the amount of soap to use when washing clothes. Students would write about what they learned about textiles during their English coursework. School officials believed that “the great mass of Negro slave women had no conception of the meaning of what a real home should be” so it was up to the school officials to provide young women with a curriculum to orient them to “perform the duties of mothers and home makers.”¹⁰⁶ This harkens back to the notion that Black women were directed to learn craft skills as a means to become productive assets of society. Hampton Institute sought to make leaders of Black students so that they could “be of service to the communities in which they lived.”¹⁰⁷ Students were given instruction on teaching pedagogy as students would often go into the Black community to teach early education such “cooking, sewing, basketry, and woodworking classes” to kindergarteners.¹⁰⁸ For Hampton Institute student Janie Porter Barrett, this call to leadership centered on her duty to her race. She noted that living conditions at the school were inhospitable. She was not pleased that the faculty hounded her about “her duties to her race.” According to the American Missionary Association, the purpose of the Hampton Institute was not so much to train “teachers as to put them out of sympathy with the peoples of their communities.”¹⁰⁹

Nearly every school funded by the American Missionary Association had a campus organization similar to or the same as the Circle of King's Daughters, a public benevolent organization that

¹⁰⁵H. B. Frissell, “Hampton Institute,” 133.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁰⁷*Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁰⁹Shaw, ‘We are not educating individuals,’ 90.

existed up until the 1940s. Under their guidelines, young women raised money to “pay the tuition and fees of their neediest classmates, bought food and clothing for those in need in the larger community, made plain garments and quilts for inmates at the local reformatories, and taught Sunday school.”¹¹⁰ At Hampton Institute, every young woman was automatically a member of the Circle of King's Daughters. Their membership referenced the idea of domesticity in that the curriculum for women and girls was dominated by the paternalistic and patriarchal belief that Black women were capable of doing only domestic labor. It was the women’s duty to care for those around them if they were to be productive members of society.



Darning and Mending at Hampton Institute, 1910. Photo by Department of Interior Bureau of Education. *Negro Education: Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in United States*. The image caption reads, “B. Darning and mending at Hampton Institute. Young women with training will be able to solve the problem of teaching the important everyday things.”¹¹¹

Fisk University

Fisk University, located in Nashville, Tennessee, was founded in 1865 by the American Missionary Association and opened on January 6, 1866. University President Rev. J. G. Merrill noted, “the social conditions of the South, separating the Negro from the Caucasian, afford the

¹¹⁰Ibid., 90.

¹¹¹Department of Interior Bureau of Education. *Negro Education*. 56

Negro an opportunity among his own that would have been denied him had he to come in competition with the educated white man.”¹¹² This separation was meant to separate Black students away from white students to ensure that they did not receive the same education, so that Black students were not provided the same opportunities that white students were afforded in the education that they received. Merrill went on to state, “the chief aim at Fisk, however, is not scholarship.”¹¹³ The aim of Fisk University was to equip their students with “training of the heart as well as the head and hand” to prepare them for “citizenship.”¹¹⁴ Education was under the management of the Daniel Hand Training School which “employed kindergarten methods as a pedagogical model” and industrial methods in its curricula for older students.¹¹⁵ Course work focused on teaching the students the “meaning of manual and industrial arts, demand for manual and industrial arts in education, manual and industrial arts relation to vocational guidance and their significance to undeveloped people.”¹¹⁶ Fisk is another example of how paternalism dictated the education of Black people. Implementing a manual and industrial education was for the procurement of Black students because students who were disciplined in craftwork would be afforded the skills necessary for one to acquire to become a citizen appropriate for white society. The auspices of paternalism were complemented by the patriarchy as it relates to the education of Black women.

The education for young women was to facilitate “true womanly conduct and character” by providing courses in nursing and hygiene, cooking, dress-making and plain sewing.¹¹⁷ This attempt to create true womanly conduct and character is also evident in the school’s regulations

¹¹² James Griswold Merrill, *Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee Founded 1866*. (New York: American Missionary Association, 1900), 6.

¹¹³ James Griswold Merrill, *Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee Founded 1866*, 7.

¹¹⁴ James Griswold Merrill, *Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee Founded 1866*, 7.

¹¹⁵ James Griswold Merrill, *Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee Founded 1866*, 7.

¹¹⁶ Fisk University, *Annual Catalog Number, 1918 – 1919: Fisk University* (Nashville: Press of folk-Keelin Print. Co, 1920), 50.

¹¹⁷ Fisk University, “General Information” in *Catalogue of Fisk University: Nashville Tennessee*, 16.

as during the early years of the University only the women were mandated to follow a dress code.¹¹⁸ Meaning that the students autonomy for self-expression was under the direction of the school officials so that the students embodied the school officials ideals of a proper Black women. Similar to the curriculum for Hampton Institute, at Fisk University, the education for women was for the uplift of the Black community as stated in a school catalogue “Fisk University recognizes the absolute necessity of the right education for young women. The highest of every community depends largely upon the intelligence, frugality, virtue and noble aspirations of its women.”¹¹⁹ The curriculum, specifically craft education was seen as a catalyst for Black women to acquire skills necessary to uplift the Black community. Although it is not of ill intent to consider the virtue of women to be the driving force of communal uplift, this harkens back to the notion of paternalism in that the school officials considered the Black population a people who needed guidance from white people. I do not deny the fact that Black people needed to be educated or have disdain for that education being a craft education. The ill intentment comes from the fact that the school officials wanted to dictate Black education so that Black students, as mentioned by the school president were taught an education different from white students. Craft education was of particular importance for Black people, but more specifically Black women as craft curriculum would allow them to be acquainted to a free white society and was the impetus for early education of Black women.

Berea College

One of the most influential craft schools was Berea College, located in Madison County, Kentucky. Berea College was built in 1855 by abolitionist and minister John G. Fee. Different

¹¹⁸ Fisk University, *Annual Catalog Number, 1918 – 1919: Fisk University*, 20.

¹¹⁹ Fisk University, *Annual Catalog Number, 1918 – 1919: Fisk University* (Nashville: Press of folk-Keelin Print. Co, 1920), 15.

from Hampton University and Fisk University, Berea College was enrolled both Black and white students. Following the Civil War, Fee set out to establish Berea as a location in the South where Black people could own property of their own so they could “contribute to national well-being by its active demonstration of principles.”¹²⁰ For the first fifty years of Berea’s existence, it was open to all races and genders.¹²¹ The building of Berea College was a somewhat serendipitous occurrence for Black people. Newly freed slaves who desperately needed work were employed for the construction. The majority of former slave youth in Berea, Kentucky, attended Berea College between 1865 and 1904. The building of Berea was a *paid* labor encounter of ten cents an hour. Fireside Industries was the crafts department of Berea that offered classes in carpentry, weaving, bookbinding, tin, and ironwork.

During this period we saw educational opportunities for Black women expand beyond the educational opportunities offered on plantations and in contraband camps. This period is significant because formalized education opportunities meant that Black women were taught a craft skill that could be honed to find jobs or create their own businesses, and becoming self-reliant by doing garment work such as mending and making clothing. Although, education opportunities provided by whites were often steeped in paternalism and patriarchy, Black women still found creative ways to express themselves through craft work. In addition, after receiving an craft education from schools like Hampton Institute and Fisk University, I will provide examples in the next chapter of how Black women demonstrated what white school officials intended craft education to do, which was for the uplift the Black community.

¹²⁰Montgomery Museum of Art & History. “Christiansburg Institute,” 2017. <https://montgomerymuseum.org/>

¹²¹Richard Sears, “One Blood: Berea’s Black Settlers,” in *Black in Appalachia* ed. by (Berea: Berea College, 1991), 15.

Chapter Three

Black Craftswomen During the Jim Crow Era, 1877–1910

The end of Reconstruction brought tremendous changes to the lives of Black women and men. States across the south enacted a series of laws known as Black Codes to limit the liberty and political gains that Black people enjoyed during Reconstruction. For Black craftswomen, this new period of racial subjugation ushered in more limitations on their lives. This chapter will discuss Black women's education from 1877 to 1910, focusing on the methods of Black educational leaders such as Booker T. Washington as well as predominantly white organizations such as the John F. Slater Fund and the Department of Interior Bureau of Education. Additionally, this chapter will delve into the lives and experiences of Black craftswomen beyond education by examining their professions and life experiences.

Black students were seen as people who were stunted due to the implications of slavery and systemic racism, although slavery was never recognized as a cause for the state of Black people during this period. This is noted by the trustees of the John F. Slater Fund, which described itself as a fund for “the condition of the race is such as to require for its uplifting the intelligent, persistent and united efforts of individuals”¹²² The fund was established in 1882 for the sole purpose of “uplifting” Southern states’ newly emancipated Black population through educational funding; for example, grants to establish higher education institutions such as high schools and colleges based in vocational and industrial training.

¹²²John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen, *Proceedings of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen. United States: The Fund*, (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co Publishing, 1891), 12.

The John F. Slater Fund gave money only to Black schools that focused on industrial education.¹²³ The distribution of the funding was solely based on training teachers to promote industrial education.¹²⁴ It was mandated that the schools implement normal and industrial courses. As noted by the Educational Committee of the Slater Fund, “In becoming a part of a public school system the sphere for usefulness and development has been widened ... aiding the school by insisting upon industrial education.”¹²⁵

APPROPRIATIONS, 1900-1901.

Normal and Agricultural Institute, Hampton, Va.....	\$ 15,000 00
Southern Industrial Classes, Norfolk, Va.....	2,500 00
Shaw University, Raleigh, N. C.....	2,500 00
Agricultural and Mechanical College, Greensboro, N. C.....	300 00
Clafin University, Orangeburg, S. C.....	4,000 00
Spelman Institute, Atlanta, Ga.....	5,000 00
State Normal School, Montgomery, Ala.....	3,500 00
Normal and Industrial Institute, Tuskegee, Ala.....	11,000 00
Tougaloo University, Tougaloo, Miss.....	3,000 00
Straight University, New Orleans, La.....	2,000 00
Bishop College, Marshall, Texas.....	1,500 00
Meharry Medical College, Nashville, Tenn.....	1,500 00

Appropriation of Funds, 1891. Photo by Proceedings of the Trustees of the John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen.

In 1908, The Clifton Conference was held to examine Black people's “mental, moral and religious condition” to assess if “it is practical for the International Sunday-School Association to furnish instructors to universities, colleges, seminars, and secondary schools already established for the education of” Black people.¹²⁶

In the period after Reconstruction, gendered segregation in craft practice and educational opportunities continued. As the founder and president of the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee,

¹²³ John F. Slater Fund for the Education of Freedmen, *Proceedings of the Trustees*, 12.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹²⁶ Hartshorn, W. N., and George W. Penniman. *An era of progress and promise, 1863-1910: the religious, moral, and educational development of the American Negro since his emancipation*. (Boston: Priscilla Pub. Co., 1910), 12.

Alabama, Booker T. Washington modeled educational programs after the programs of Hampton Institute where he'd once been a student having graduated in 1882. Washington quickly emerged as the premier authority of Black education garnering followers and supporters across the country, but his stance on higher education is not without controversy. Washington believed that handwork was essential to the mental and moral development of Black peoples' vital needs. At the Tuskegee Institute, the curriculum was designed to encompass industrial, mental, and moral training.¹²⁷ Booker T. Washington proposed that "in a certain way every slave plantation in the South was an industrial school."¹²⁸ However, vocational and training schools sought to systematize instruction whereas the training received on plantations had been more haphazard with regard to the hand movement.

It should be noted that Washington's ideals of what was permitted as sufficient education for girls and women were hyper sexist and centered on a gendered role of domestic labor. He noted that a woman whose knowledge was not dominated by domesticity would have an unfulfilled academic experience. Washington suggested that, after higher education, a woman would "find herself educated out of sympathy with laundry work, and yet not able to find anything to do which seems in keeping with the cost and character of her education."¹²⁹ For Washington, valuable education for a woman encompassed a "thorough training in the latest and best methods of laundry work ... The home, which she would then have been able to find by the results of work, would enable her to help her children to take a still more responsible position in life."¹³⁰ Tending to the home and textile work was the dominant narrative for Black women's

¹²⁷ Booker T. Washington "Industrial Education for the Negro." Teaching American History. Last modified January 28, 2013. <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/industrial-education-for-the-negro/>.

¹²⁸ Ibid.,

¹²⁹ Department of Interior Bureau of Education. *Negro Education: Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in United States*. ed. Thomas Jessie Jones Volume 1. (Washington: Washington Government Printing Office, 1917), 10.

¹³⁰ Washington, Booker T. "Industrial Education for the Negro."

education. Although this dominance was endowed in patriarchal bias, this approach enabled the creation of skilled craftswomen.

Washington is not alone in his sexist view of education for Black. In a report by the Department of the Interior Bureau of Education of an investigation of the status of Africa American education post emancipation, educator Thomas Jesse Jones presented a survey of colleges that public and private schools which concluded that the industrial and manual development of Black people required hand training in the practice of “arts, vocational outlook and elementary economics.”¹³¹ Jones suggested that the curriculum of the best schools in the South “incorporate many vocations taught in an efficient and effective manner ... The curriculum of these schools included the subjects and activities that are needed for the physical, mental, and moral welfare of their pupils.”¹³² Additionally, he advocated that, for rural southern education to successfully develop the physical, mental and moral welfare of the Black population, an educational system must implement course work that would include: “simple manual training adapted to boys and girls in elementary schools; trade school preparing industrial teachers and tradesmen for the mechanical pursuits and household art for women.”¹³³ Compared to white women and white children, Black women and children’s work outside of the home was perceived as a negative; the findings implied that the appropriate place for Black women was in the home. Thomas Jesse Jones notes, “[while] the race has made a real progress in the acquisition of property since the Civil War ... their economic status should be elevated sufficiently to enable the children to attend school and the women to give more time to the moral

¹³¹Department of Interior Bureau of Education. *Negro Education*, 92.

¹³²*Ibid.*, 88.

¹³³*Ibid.*, 90.

and hygienic development of the home.”¹³⁴ He determined that the appropriate coursework for women and girls generally encompassed only sewing:

the use and care of sewing machines; drafting; making underclothing; the mending of girls owns clothing; the repairing of linen for the boarding departments; the making of bed table linen, waitresses’ aprons and caps, and other household necessities in the industrial sewing room; rug weaving, including dyeing, rug designing, color harmony, and pleasing proportion; simple lessons in making over hats.”¹³⁵

This course work enabled to young women and girls to become self-reliant as they acquired a trade of sewing and weaving that they then used to mend and make their own garments and could find work making functional wears such as table linens, bed linens and rugs.



Students in Workshop, 1916. Photo by Department of Interior Bureau of Education. *Negro Education: Study of the Private and Higher Schools for Colored People in United States*.

This image is from the 1916 Bureau of Education report of African American curriculum post emancipation. The image was featured in the report without additional information, so, unfortunately, the year it was taken, and the school are not known; however, this image offers a visual representation of a classroom setting. It should also be noted that the students in the photo may not all be of African descent as these schools often enrolled Native American students as well. In an analysis of elementary education, Thomas Jesse Jones discussed an anomaly in

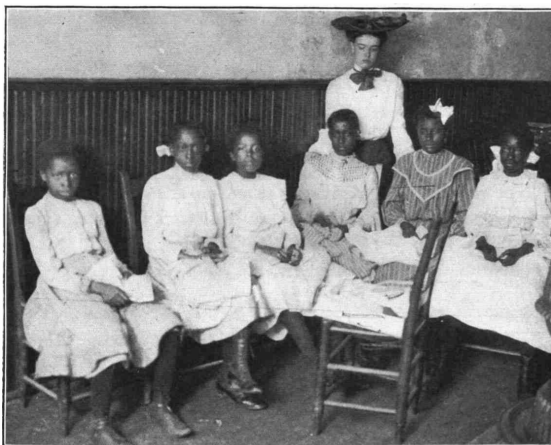
¹³⁴Ibid., 10

¹³⁵Department of Interior Bureau of Education. *Negro Education*. 92.

education of this time in which coursework for young women and girls, occasionally incorporated classes in carpentry, glazing, chair caning, shoe mending, soldering, and furniture repairing.¹³⁶ Coursework similar to what may be occurring in the above photo.

Hancock Street Chapel in Louisville, Kentucky, provides additional information about Black girls' coursework during the Jim Crow Era. At the Hancock Street Chapel, education was under the guise of the local Presbyterian Church. Presbyterian Church leadership was prompted by a note brought in signed by two students who allegedly stated that they did not own a suitable amount of clothing due to the fact that their mothers were unable to sew garments for them because of their heavy work schedules. As a result of this information, the Sunday school teachers started a course in sewing. As mentioned in a report from the school headmaster:

The prosperity of the missions began when the industrial classes were started. [The women instructors] in the Sunday-school saw the destitution of the children who were in their classes and a note brought in, signed by two [Black] girls, asking for the organization of a sewing school in our Sunday-school rooms, prompted them to art at a class in sewing.¹³⁷



ONE OF THE FIRST SEWING CLASSES. 1899
Some members are now making their own clothes, and one, good wages as a seamstress.



WEARING THEIR OWN HANDIWORK

Both images were taken from the report on the Hancock Street Chapel in Louisville, Kentucky, which was featured

¹³⁶Ibid., 150.

¹³⁷Hartshorn, W. N., and George W. Penniman. 1910. *An era of progress and promise*, 15.

The note from the students requesting the sewing class reflects back to the paternalistic idea that Black people had no way of taking care of themselves, so it was up to white people to help cure this deficiency and create courses that enforced structure in their lives. What the Sunday school teachers failed to address were the conditions of Black families in Louisville. A deeper investigation into the state of Black lives might have revealed that Black families often lived in poverty because parents worked long hours for small wages. Through this lens, the Sunday school teachers attempted to fix a busted pipe with a Band-Aid. The underlying problem was systemic racism that held Black families back despite their best efforts to move forward. Addressing that would have been more beneficial. Black people were not offered the opportunity to be employed at jobs that permitted them to spend extra time with their children, which would enable them to teach their children how to sew.

In a case study of a Hampton Institute graduate, we are provided an example of a Black women who demonstrates a life after having received a craft education. One female Hampton Institute student, whose name is unfortunately not provided, after graduating in 1885, taught for a year in Georgia and returned to Hampton, Virginia, where she married a Hampton alumnus. They built a home on the same street where the Hampton Institute was located. In an effort to help her neighborhood, she held weekly courses in her home, teaching young women enrolled at Hampton how to cook and sew. This group was known as the “girls’ club.” This club began with ten to twelve members, and over the course of a week, the club grew to over one hundred members.¹³⁸ As the girls’ club grew, she received help from three other Hampton graduate alumni who “offered their services cheerfully.”¹³⁹ In addition, her husband built a clubhouse to

¹³⁸H. B. Frissell, “Hampton Institute” in *From Servitude to Service*, 144.

¹³⁹*Ibid.*, 144.

accommodate the increasing number of students and additional courses being offered from one day to three days a week. The curriculum was expanded from just cooking and sewing to courses in “plain sewing, hemstitching, shirt waist making, basketry and cooking.”¹⁴⁰ This account is a perfect example of how the objective of Hampton to implement community service in its students was embodied by its students. As H. B. Frissell notes, “her effort developed into real social settlement work.”¹⁴¹ It is clear that she embodied the essence of the Hampton Institute curriculum. This case study is also an expression of the transmission of craft knowledge. After training, Hampton alumni were elevated to the status of craftswomen, and these women were able to pass knowledge of their craft skill to the next generation of young women enrolled at Hampton Institute.

When William Goodell Frost became president of Berea College in 1892, he enthusiastically encouraged handweaving and the selling of handicrafts to promote the aesthetic perception of the mountains. He noted, “Spinning, in fact, has ... [formed] the character of our race, and it is pleasant to find that here in Appalachian America it is still contributing to the health and grace and skill of womankind.”¹⁴² Newspaper ads for recruitment to Berea enticed women especially to acquire homespun goods. One newspaper ad from 1897 read:

Each girl must send in \$1 now to engage a room and bring as much as eleven dollars with her. To help her make up this money the College will buy good homespun linen at about 40 cents a yard, linsey and jeans at 50 cents, dress flannel 60, coverlids \$4, pair wool blankets \$5.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 144.

¹⁴¹Ibid., 143.

¹⁴²Fairiello, “Making Meaning,” 33.

¹⁴³Phillis Alvin, “Berea College and Fireside Industries.” in *Weavers of the Southern Highlands*, (Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), 35 - 55.

This did not exclude Black women. Therefore, I surmise that this meant that an equal proportion of the craft output was being produced by Black students at the same rate it was for white students at Berea. Sadly, the Day Law was passed in 1904, prohibiting both Black and white students to be educated at the same institution. A new college for African American students called Lincoln Institute opened in Shelby, Kentucky.

During the post-Reconstruction era of Jim Crow, the education for Black women did not differ significantly from the period of the Reconstruction era. Industrial and vocational skills were still permitted as the proper education for Black women as paternalism still determined the education for Black women. New regulations from government organizations such as the John F. Slater Fund and the Department of Interior Bureau of Education provided grants to historic Black colleges, universities and institutes for the sole purpose of embedding craft education into the curriculum. However, instead of only white education leaders determining the education for Black women, after receiving an education from Hampton Institute, Booker T. Washington became a prominent thought leader for Black education. Washington's notions about education for women were entrenched in a patriarchal framework as he believed that Black women would benefit most from an education oriented around domestic skills such as textile work, cooking, and cleaning. Although the constraint of paternalism and patriarchy dominated the curriculum taught to Black women, these women obtained craft skills that allowed them to gain self-empowerment. By acquiring skills for making garments and functional textiles for themselves and could position themselves for employment based on the skills that they now had from the education that they received. One can also see from the case study of the Hampton Institute graduate that after receiving a craft education some women went on to promote one of the central purposes of early education for Black women, which was for the uplift of the Black community. This Hampton alumni provided young women enrolled at Hampton Institute an education that would

afford them the ability to mend clothing and sew new garments which could then be translated to an opportunity for a job. This case study also portrays the transmission of craft knowledge as this graduate student took the education that she received from Hampton Institute to provided young women a craft education. From this experience, young women who received her training could have decided to do as the graduate student did and provide classes to other young women. Thus, continuing the transmission of craft knowledge.

The transmission of craft knowledge was a constant theme in my research as seen in slavery to emancipation, to freedom and beyond. Chapter three marks the end of a seemingly short exploration into sixty years of the history of Black women and craft. First, I provided an analysis of the foundation between the relationship of craft and Black women through an investigation of Black craftswomen in the antebellum South to illustrate handicraft work executed on plantations. Second, I explored craft during Reconstruction by mapping the transition of Black craftswomen's work from slavery to freedom. Through an introduction to early forms of centralized education and discussed how the craftswomanship exemplified by Black women on the plantation was not abandoned. Third, I examined formalized craft education in industrial settings and in institutions such as high schools, colleges, and universities through the development of historically Black colleges and universities. By focusing on how the guises of paternalism and patriarchy dictated the education of Black women solidifying the through line of the history of craft and Black women.

Conclusion

I am keenly aware that this paper discusses the assumed gender of cisgender Black women. Many of the resources that I have relied on in my research were conducted when gender identity within larger American societal norms were not critically discussed and analyzed. Because of this, I am left with a homogeneous heterosexual reference of gender. I wish to state that I do not want to negate nonbinary Black craftspeople during the period of which my research is focused.

By examining craft through the lens of skilled craftswomen, this research centered on Black women who lived between 1850 and 1910, by looking specifically at the change from craftswomen being enslaved to craftswomen being free women entering into institutionalized education. By geographically focusing on the upper South, including the Southern Appalachian Mountains, this paper postulates an analysis that refutes existing work that suggested that this was an area of America that was without a Black craft history. Craft was a fundamental component of Black women's identity before, during, and after the American Civil War. The strides that Black women made within craft is undeniable. Women like Tempie Herndon, Rachel Cruze, Betty Cofer, and thousands of others deserve to be recognized as part of a group of skilled craftswomen who were essential to the development of America's economic sustainability. Moreover, I suggest that the curriculum taught to Black women post slavery was more than a mechanism for creating productive assets in society. Historically Black colleges, universities and institutions erected during the Reconstruction Era were founded on a mission to educate Black people through craftwork. An education based in the head hand and heart. An education that white missionaries and white education leaders felt would impress upon Black students the character traits that would create a Black American suitable for a white society. Under the guises of paternalism and patriarchy as seen in examples from Hampton University, Fisk University and

Berea College, the education of Black women mandated that these women learn vocational skills such as basketry, sewing, and weaving. Although the history of Black education is saturated in craft, disappointingly, this history is rarely recognized as part of craft history.

Without a doubt, the craft history of Black people is underrated, under-documented, and widely unrealized. I say this with confidence because my search for representation of Black craftswomen in the upper South was more challenging than many other research endeavors for craft history that I have undertaken before, simply because the history is neither properly recorded nor adequately preserved. The challenges that I have faced in uncovering appropriate material to support my research are caused by the power structures that contextualize history. The craft history of Black Americans has been relegated to the fringe of history, like much of the history of Indigenous and people of color. Information about Anglo-American and European crafts is widely disseminated, and examples decorate the pages of many American craft books. The devastating scarcity of information and attention regarding this section of American craft history, caused by the disturbing effects of systemic racism and sexism in which Black women have been by far more easily disregarded than Black men is most disappointing.

As a Black woman, I wish to have been taught this history prior to becoming a craft scholar in my late twenties. It is unfortunate to have been subjected to the ignorance and racism that benefits and perpetuates the stigma that only white Americans have a craft history; yet these experiences, no less damaging, have ignited my journey into Black craft history. I did not expect the notion that Black people were without a history enriched with craft. With this in mind it is imperative that we consistently question narratives that are presented in that I am advocating that one question the voice behind the history that is being conveyed because the narrative will shift depending on who it is being told from.

It is not possible to state that this paper has a conclusive ending because much more research must be done to unpack the nature of Black women and craft during slavery and the Reconstruction era and post-Reconstruction era. My research has presented a marginally known fact that Black people not only have a craft history, but that craft is intertwined in the foundation of our cultural heritage. *In The Fray: Black Women and Craft, 1850–1910* repositions the forced labor of enslaved women as an apparatus for crafts and in doing so brings attention to Black women and craft history to contest the nature of the craft canon, suggesting that there is no canon, as craft histories that were not Eurocentric have been widely ignored within the canon. Through my research, I advocate that Black craft history has always been present; however, Black craft history has not been a part of American craft history.

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