

# Born in Slavery



Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938

**An Archival Study of Visuality and Orality  
in the 1936-38 WPA Collection  
of Slave Narratives and its Parallel  
Photographic Archive  
(Library of Congress - American Memory Collection)**

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**Survivors of Slavery 1936-1938**

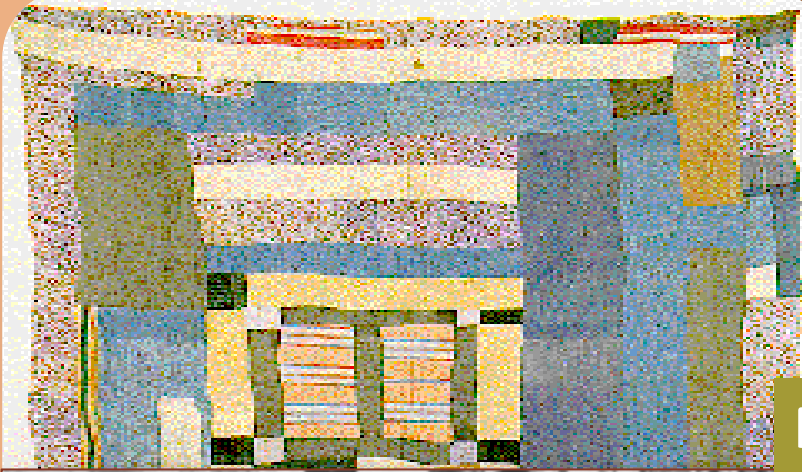
**Research questions:**

- **Did FWP policy and perceptions in the handling of the narratives further marginalize those persons who consented to detail their private lives under American slavery?**
- **How does the designation of folklife or folk history reflect on the categorization of materials in the realm of archivy?**
- **How might a critical re-examination of the Collection through an archival lens focusing on a non-textural paradigm offer new insights into African American cultural knowledge production?**

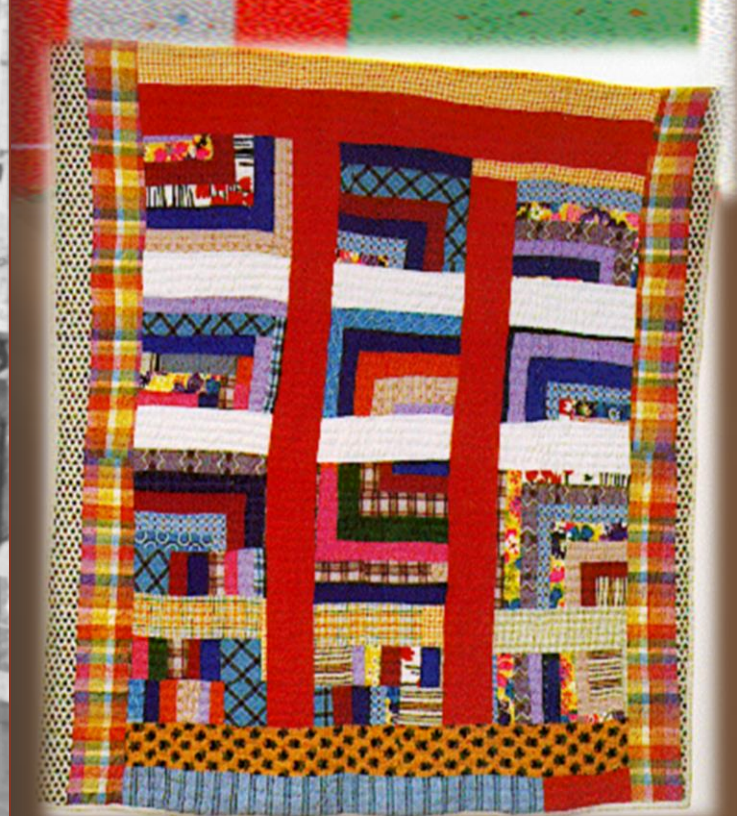


**“Yet the sitters in the pictures included here do not appear to be complicit in the ‘moonlight and magnolias’ fantasy.”**

Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer,  
Envisioning Emancipation



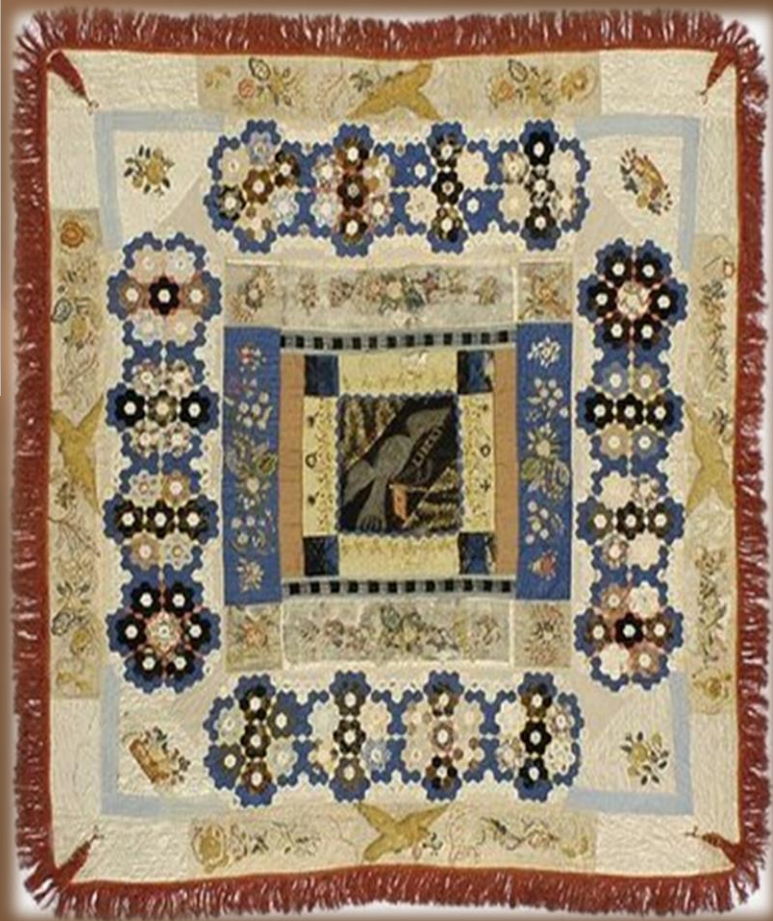
Mrs. Jorena Pettaway and relatives  
Gees Bend, Alabama, 1937





Behind the Scenes: Or, Thirty Years a Slave, and Four Years in the White House  
(1868)

Elizabeth Hobbs Keckley



Mrs. Elizabeth Keckley



Mrs. Mary Todd Lincoln





**Blacksmiths: Isaac Gardner and unidentified artisan (above)**

**Mr. Philip Simmons (1912-2009)**  
**Charleston, SC**







**Simmons' archive exists in spaces throughout Charleston, SC**

The broader our vision as archivists,  
the better we can help users of archives  
make those connections.

“This lack of questioning is dangerous because it implicitly supports the archival myth of neutrality and objectivity, and thus sanctions the already strong predilection of archives and archivists to document primarily mainstream culture and powerful records creators...Its rules of evidence and authenticity favour textual documents, from which such rules were derived, at the expense of other ways of experiencing the present, and thus of viewing the past.”

Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook "Archives, Records, and Power: The Making of Modern Memory," *Archival Science* 2, no. 1-2 (2002)