ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	SOAKED IN BLUE: INDIGO, ENSLAVEMENT, AND VALUE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH CAROLINA
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Indigo was the most exported product from South Carolina in the mid-eighteenth century, but little scholarship has been devoted to the enslaved laborers that manufactured indigo dye through gruesome conditions. This thesis highlights their experience and argues that they created value out of indigo through identity creation, spiritual significance, and connections with their West African homeland. By wearing indigo-dyed blue clothing, enslaved people could intentionally associate their identity with the color through repeated wear and trade to create specific blue looks. By painting their living quarters with leftover indigo residue, known today as "haint blue," enslaved communities received spiritual value from the protective quality culturally associated with indigo blue. By engaging with West African-inspired craftwork traditions that centered indigo, they furthered their heritage and created new significance for indigo within a new enslaved context. This research contributes new understandings of both the indigo industry and how enslaved individuals in South Carolina expressed humanity and choice.

SOAKED IN BLUE: INDIGO, ENSLAVEMENT, AND VALUE IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY SOUTH CAROLINA

by

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Introduction

When Henry ran away from his enslaver in June of 1774, he was wearing "a blue great coat, blue jacket and trowsers, blue yarn stockings, and a blue and white cotton and thread striped shirt."[1] The framing of this ad and many more from *The South Carolina Gazette* and other publications across the Carolinas and Georgia intrigued me, as blue appeared to be the color most often included in descriptions of runaway clothing during the eighteenth century. Why was blue so prominent in enslaved clothing? Was this a reflection of materials and availability, or playing into a bigger cultural notion around the color? Further investigation of South Carolina's history provided a clear origin of the color – South Carolina's primary export in the mid-eighteenth century was indigo, and it was practically the only source of blue dye that the English markets used during this time. The prominence of blue in the runaway ads and Henry's clothing had to be connected to this market in some way. But how did the use of this dye function in enslaved communities in South Carolina? Were the blue color and the plant connected in reality? And if so, what other ways could enslaved people who were totally surrounded by indigo and its production, even laboring to produce it themselves, interact with the dye product? What did they think of the indigo that quite literally dyed their world – their land, their hands, and their belongings, blue? My research looks at the ways in which enslaved South Carolinians interacted with the South Carolina indigo product that they themselves labored to create for their enslaver's benefit.

This thesis focuses on the scene of indigo production, in both time and place. Indigo was produced almost exclusively in South Carolina, which became identified with the plant

[1] *The South Carolina Gazette*. Charleston, South Carolina. *Center for Research Libraries*: 2013., June 20, 1774

throughout the eighteenth century. The industry got its start there in 1740s, when previously dominant rice production failed, and production of the crop rose and fell through the second half of the century. It began to decline a final time with the start of the American Revolution and was finally put to rest by the rise of cotton production in the 1790s. Indigo production was at its height in South Carolina between 1760 and 1775, but its production in the colony throughout the 1700s makes the entire mid- to late-eighteenth century my focus.[2] Most of my research is centered around Charles Town and the South Carolina sea islands because of the prevalence of sources created around cities, but the research likely rings true for much of eighteenth-century South Carolina and portions of the nearby Georgia coast.

I argue that enslaved laborers in eighteenth-century South Carolina obtained value from the indigo dye that they labored to produce through identity creation, spiritual significance, and connections with their West African homeland. This value was directly received by the laborers that manufactured it and other enslaved people throughout South Carolina – their family, neighbors, and peers. Value from indigo dye was the product of enslaved work and suffering. I demonstrate this value through three chapters. Each focuses on a different type of indigo-dyed material culture that enslaved people interacted with and valued. In Chapter 1, I examine enslaved clothing and reveal the ways in which personal identity could be formed through indigo-dyed clothes. I use runaway ads from *The South Carolina Gazette* and scholarship on the indigo industry, clothing, and runaway ads to demonstrate the prevalence of blue clothing on enslaved runaways and how those items were central in identity formation. Chapter 2 uncovers enslaved people's eighteenth-century creation of "haint blue" paint. A light blue paint tradition

[2] For more on indigo statistics, see: R. C. Nash, "South Carolina Indigo, European Textiles, and the British Atlantic Economy in the Eighteenth Century." *The Economic History Review* 63, no. 2 (2010): 362-92, http://www.jstor.org/stable/27771617.

still active in South Carolina today, it is associated with the Gullah people that have inhabited the South Carolina coast and sea islands since their ancestors' enslavement there. I piece together literature on Gullah culture and enslaved and West African spirituality alongside analysis of haint blue examples to show how Gullah ancestors created spiritual value by starting the practice of haint blue in the eighteenth century. In Chapter 3, I consider the evolution of two West African craftwork traditions steeped in indigo, from their West African practice to their reception by enslaved South Carolinians: Yoruba adire cloth and Asante and Mande patchwork textiles. I show how indigo was at the center of these crafts' journey and evolution across the Atlantic, and how enslaved people played a foundational role in the rise of American quilting through the adaptation of these practices.

While each chapter of my work builds on a distinct historiography aligned with its focus, the overall work is in conversation with Virginia Jelatis and Andrea Feeser, who have both framed the indigo industry within enslavement and material culture. In her 1999 dissertation, "Tangled Up in Blue: Indigo Culture and Economy in South Carolina, 1747-1800," Jelatis is one of the first scholars to devote attention to the cultural aspects of the indigo industry and to recognize the role of enslaved labor in its success and its meaning.[3] Feeser builds on these notions in her 2013 book, *Red, White, and Black Make Blue: Indigo in the Fabric of Colonial South Carolina Life*.[4] Feeser devotes even more attention to marginalized groups, both enslaved and Native American, and makes initial connections between textiles and clothing and the South Carolina indigo industry. Both women are writing against a dominant scholarship which has historically centered indigo's economic success and quality, considering the indigo industry in

[3] Virginia Gail Jelatis, "Tangled Up in Blue: Indigo Culture and Economy in South Carolina, 1747-1800," PhD diss. (University of Minnesota, 1999)
[4] Andrea Feeser, *Red, White, & Black Make Blue: Indigo in the Fabric of Colonial South Carolina Life*. (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2013)

the context of the greater English market rather than giving attention to those laboring on the dye in South Carolina. Their work is foundational in considering the indigo industry as an enterprise fueled by slavery, but their focus on this central enslaved labor and the experiences of those people is not the primary focus or goal of their work. Therefore, I further Jelatis and Feeser by expanding understandings of enslaved interactions with indigo dye. I dive into what the industry meant for laborers, centering enslaved perspectives throughout the thesis. I make connections between labor, dye product, and enslaved use, and work to understand how enslaved people's understandings of this dye was influenced by senses of identity, spirituality, and West African origins.

I use material culture to make these connections and often employ an upstreaming methodology to understand the experiences of eighteenth-century enslaved people. Few records of enslaved people exist, and those that do are written through the perspective of commodification, like runaway ads. I use sources like these to get a sense of enslaved clothing, of which very little physically remains, and to understand contemporary descriptions of these items, albeit through the lens of an enslaver. I employ physical material evidence of the work of enslaved people and items they used as it is available, reading eighteenth-century textiles for technique, skill, use, and labor, to better understand the role and understanding of the enslaved people who labored on them. Additionally, I use nineteenth and twentieth-century evidence, such as iterations of haint blue paint and reproductions of patchwork traditions, when eighteenth-century evidence cannot provide a full picture. These materials require an upstreaming method, in which I read chronologically later evidence to learn about the work and lives of people earlier. Later-dated materials provide evidence of iteration that began in the eighteenth century and how practices around indigo were passed down through communities, and they should not be

disregarded. Rather, they are valuable for understanding enslaved eighteenth-century people and the aspects of their culture that were significant enough to be continuously reproduced and reinterpreted through the twenty-first century.

This research provides more context for the indigo industry in South Carolina, by highlighting the role of enslaved laborers in bringing significance to the crop. It also reveals the ability of enslaved people in South Carolina to demonstrate humanity and even further, autonomy, through their use of indigo-dyed materials. Enslaved people exerted power to create meaning around indigo, and this expands understandings of eighteenth-century enslavement. By giving value to indigo blue and exhibiting choice to include it in their daily lives, I highlight a little-seen aspect of enslaved life that was primarily marked by struggle, loss, and violence. Indigo could be a bright spot in these conditions, marking the incredible ability of enslaved communities to claim a bit of value from their labor.

Chapter 1: "Blue Yarn Stockings": Identity and Indigo's Lifecycle of Value

Introduction



Figure 1. South Carolina State Flag as of 1861.
Flag of South Carolina. Encyclopedia Brittanica, 2018.

The white palmetto and crescent alongside their striking blue background on South Carolina's state flag have been emblematic of the state for centuries. This design dates back to the state's secession in 1861 and an earlier version of the flag (without the palmetto) was used early as 1775, raised by colonists in Charles Town Harbor on the eve of the Revolution.[5] Its color, a deep indigo blue, matches the state's official color. Selected in 2008, it was chosen for its roots to the colony's Revolutionary hero, Colonel William Moultrie's, uniform and its representation of the history of the indigo industry in South Carolina.[6] This industry was so robust by 1775 that the colony exported 1,122,200 pounds of indigo — such high production that

[5] W. Smith, "Flag of South Carolina." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 5, 2018.
[6] "An Act to Amend Article 9, Chapter 1, Title 1, Code of Laws of South Carolina, 1976, by Adding Section 1-1-710 to Designate the Color Indigo Blue as the Official Color of the State of South Carolina." South Carolina General Assembly, 2008.

the colony's business rivaled France and Spain.[7] And, as Virginia Jelatis summarizes, "indigo became a part of the colony's public and personal identity."[8] This color, formed through relentless physical exertion and horrible stench became emblematic of the colony. But what did this mean for those enslaved there? Was indigo a part of their identity too? How did they, and do we, reconcile the grueling labor required for producing indigo and other crops with the value they acquired from the blue that it produced? Runaway ads show that enslaved people often wore blue when escaping their plantations. What did this color mean for enslaved people that wore it? This chapter addresses these questions by arguing that enslaved people could create identity and therefore value from the indigo they and other enslaved people labored to create. This value was transferred through the lifecycle of indigo as enslaved people's clothing: producing, dyeing, wearing, and exchanging.

This argument brings together scholarship on indigo, clothing, and runaway ads to look at how the intersection of these elements demonstrate that enslaved people could create and take advantage of value. Each of these topics has been written about individually, but little attention has been devoted to the ways that they work together. The traditions associated with each strand of literature are important to acknowledge before bringing them together.

Through the 1980s, most literature on indigo focused on the economic nature of the crop and favored broader narratives about the trends associated with importing and exporting it. John J. Winberry's "Reputation of Carolina Indigo" is a foundational work from this time, and outlines many widely-held conceptions about the South Carolinian indigo industry, particularly

[7] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo," 371
[8] Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 42

the poor nature of the crop.[9] Jelatis' 1999 dissertation, "Tangled Up in Blue: Indigo Culture and Economy in South Carolina, 1747-1800," is early evidence of a changing narrative around indigo, as she works to incorporate content about the cultural significance of the industry. [10] She highlights the depth of the physical labor that enslaved people exerted to create the plant and its dye. Andrea Feeser heavily cites Jelatis' work in her 2013 book, *Red, White, and Black Make Blue: Indigo in the Fabric of Colonial South Carolina Life*.[11] Andrea Feeser continues to bring more culture into her discussion of the industry, even briefly diving into the connection between indigo and the clothes it dyed, and brings attention to Native labor in producing indigo. R. C. Nash's 2010 article, "South Carolina Indigo, European Textiles, and the British Atlantic Economy in the Eighteenth Century," is also significant.[12] Nash grapples with the assumptions made about indigo by Winberry and his contemporaries, and disputes some of them using data from Carolinian and British indigo trade. While Jelatis and Feeser both begin to pull culture into the indigo discussion, neither fully explores what it meant for enslaved people to wear indigo-dyed clothing or emphasizes the connection between the two industries.

There is more literature about clothing and their associated material culture in the eighteenth century. Kate Haulman's *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth Century America* outlines the scope of colonial clothing for all classes, and describes enslaved dress within that context.[13] Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor discusses enslaved dress and culture through the lens of the port-city market, and Linda Baumgarten does so through her larger presentation of colonial

[9] Winberry, John J. "Reputation of Carolina Indigo." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 80, no. 3 (1979): 242–50, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27567563.
[10] Jelatis, "Tangled Up"
[11] Feeser, *Red, White, and Black*
[12] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo"
[13] Kate Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion in Eighteenth Century America*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2011)

clothing from the Colonial Williamsburg collection.[14] Some scholars focus solely on Black dress, such as Shane White and Graham White, who explore the broader legacy of black clothing in *Stylin': African-American Expressive Culture, From its Beginning to the Zoot Suit*.[15] White and White highlight potential for enslaved people to "shape their appearance" in stealing, exchanging, and pairing clothing. Katie Knowles, emphasizing enslaved people's ability to lead the clothing industry, highlights the racial divide in eighteenth-century textiles.[16] Helen Bradley Foster looks at antebellum clothing by prioritizing oral history sources, while Laura Edwards explains the period's clothing by highlighting legal procedure.[17] While some context has changed between texts about the colonial and antebellum periods, there are still valuable arguments and research that can be used from antebellum studies in an eighteenth-century setting. Attitudes about enslaved clothing were similar. Some of these authors do begin to discuss the connection between indigo and dyed cloth, but none do so extensively.

Finally, there are a few authors who have written about the process of researching runaway ads. David Waldstreicher writes about colonial runaways, discussing how descriptions of clothing, trades, linguistic ability, and ethnic or racial identity functioned in the ads.[18] Jonathan Prude also writes about the eighteenth century in "To Look Upon the 'Lower Sort':

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[14] Ellen Hartigan-O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy: Women and Commerce in Revolutionary America*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Linda Baumgarten and Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. *What Clothes Reveal: The Language of Clothing in Colonial and Federal America*. Williamsburg Decorative Arts Series. (Williamsburg, Virginia: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 2002)

[15] Shane White and Graham White. *Stylin': African-American Expressive Culture, From Its Beginning to the Zoot Suit*. (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018)

[16] Katie Knowles, "The Fabric of Fast Fashion: Enslaved Wearers and Makers as Designers in the American Fashion System." In *Black Designers in American Fashion*, (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2021), 13-28.

[17] Helen Bradley Foster, *New Raiments of Self: African American Clothing in the Antebellum South (Dress, Body, Culture)*. (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1997); Laura F. Edwards, "James and His Striped Velvet Pantaloons: Textiles, Commerce, and the Law in the New Republic." *Journal of American History* 107, no. 2 (2020): 336-71, https://doi.org/10.1093/jahist/jaaa180.

[18] David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1999): 243–72, https://www.jstor.org/stable/2674119.

Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800."[19] Clothing is more of a centerpiece in Prude's article, as he argues that it is one of the most important elements in runaway ads and that it could create identity for enslaved people. Patricia Hunt-Hurst explores runaway ads from antebellum Georgia in a couple articles, including "'Round Homespun Coat & Pantaloons of the Same': Slave Clothing as Reflected in Fugitive Slave Advertisements in Antebellum Georgia."[20] Hunt-Hurst gives primary attention to the clothing in these ads, looking through them systematically and providing statistical information about aspects such as the textiles and styles used. These articles provided inspiration for the structure of my research and helped me understand some of the already-established trends present in the ads.

The primary sources used for this thesis are runaway ads from *The South Carolina Gazette*.[21] Runaway ads were published in newspapers all over the south to try to identify and recover enslaved individuals who had run away from their enslavers. These ads would describe aspects including clothing, physical appearance, skills, and any other identifying characteristics that might make it easier for someone to spot and recognize them on the run. Runaways were people who had the capacity to disguise and change as they fled, and ads include notes about the potential of a runaway to change appearance when the enslaver thought the situation would be likely. In this way, clothing was important in the process of self-liberation – the ability to change appearance by changing clothes, one of the only things an ad could describe, was valuable. This concept will be explored further in this chapter in "Part 4 – Exchanging."

[19] Jonathan Prude, "To Look Upon the 'Lower Sort': Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800." *The Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (1991): 124, https://doi.org/10.2307/2078091.
[20] Patricia K. Hunt-Hurst, "'Round Homespun Coat & Pantaloons of the Same': Slave Clothing as Reflected in Fugitive Slave Advertisements in Antebellum Georgia." *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 83, no. 4 (1999): 727, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40584195.
[21] *The South Carolina Gazette*. 1760-1775.

Ads were often marked by a "runaway" icon in the top left corner, notably similar to the icon for a lost horse.



Figure 2. The South Carolina Gazette runaway stereotype



Figure 3. The South Carolina Gazette lost horse stereotype

This icon was the result of a wood or metal cut stereotype cast, which was created to be used in a standardized way across many editions of a publication.[22] It is significant that both types of runaways happened frequently enough that the newspaper would invest in casts to represent them. Further, the stereotypes demonstrate the way in which enslavers saw their laborers as property instead of humans, as on par with disobedient horses. This caricatured symbol goes hand in hand with reading the ads, and further promoted stereotypic beliefs about Black South Carolinians. The parallel between these images was intentional, making it easy to understand that

[22] Elizabeth Stordeur Pryor, *Colored Travelers: Mobility and the Fight for Citizenship Before the Civil War*. (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 51

an asset with monetary value was lost and had to be hunted through a similar process of flagging and description.

Ads were posted by enslavers who were subscribers to a particular newspaper, in this case *The South Carolina Gazette* in Charles Town. Prude estimates that one of these ads would have cost about 10 shillings in the 1770s, and that 1 in 20 households were purchasing newspapers during that period.[23] Depending on the worth of the runaway, this cost versus the benefit was sometimes worth it for enslavers, particularly those who lived near the newspaper offices and had the money to spare. Some would continue to print runaway ads until the runaway was found or determined officially lost. Hector and Maidstone were advertised 37 times by James Sinkler, from April of 1771 until December of 1772.[24] This amount of reposting was rare, but most runaway ads were reposted at least once.

There is no way to tell why an ad stopped being posted – perhaps the runaway was caught, or the subscriber decided not to spend more money, or the runaway was considered officially lost or dead. This is one of the challenges of reading runaway ads – enslaved people (and their owners) are taken out of their context and dropped into a bounty hunt. We cannot get the full scope of reasoning behind either the runaway's decision to flee or the enslaver's decision to spend money to try to recover their laborer. Further, any information ascertained about enslaved people through these ads is filtered through the perception of the enslaver, who wrote and paid for the description. Ultimately, they present a potentially biased and inaccurate depiction of eighteenth-century runaways. But as these descriptions are one of the only sources of enslaved dress in the eighteenth century, and because there are so many instances of these runaway ads, they are a useful source in tracing the connections between enslaved dress and

[23] Prude, "To Look Upon the 'Lower Sort,'" 129
[24] *The South Carolina Gazette*, April 11, 1771

enslaved labor, despite their imperfections. This chapter makes inferences about the broader population of enslaved people in eighteenth-century South Carolina based on the information found about runaways through the ads.

The South Carolina Gazette was established in 1732 in Charles Town by Thomas Whitman, but by the 1760s it was published by Peter Timothy. In 1772, Thomas Powell and Edward Hughes published alongside Timothy, but by the end of 1773, Timothy was again the sole publisher. There were a few suspensions in publication: from March 31,1764 – October 1, 1764; October 31, 1765 – June 2, 1766; and January 25,1772 – March 26, 1772.[25] No explanation is given for these suspensions, but they are not included in the original source material and thus no runaway ads from these periods were recorded. I researched every edition of the Gazette published between January 8, 1760 and December 11, 1775. This added to roughly 760 individual issues, and within those issues I found 557 unique runaway ads. Most of these ads were repeated anywhere between 1 to 37 times, but my total only accounts for the ads the first time they were listed.

For each ad, I recorded the date, the number of runaways, their names, their gender, a description of their clothing if it was listed, whether blue clothing was mentioned, the type of blue clothing included, and the subscriber's name. 791 enslaved people ran away from Charles Town or the surrounding area between 1760 and 1775. Out of 557 ads, 441 (79%) listed only male runaways, 81 (15%) listed only female runaways, and 34 (6%) listed both male and female runaways. Only one ad did not indicate gender. These statistics are not surprising – women were less likely to run away because of their obligations to family, whereas men could easily leave

[25] Virginia Rugheimer, "South Carolina Newspapers, 1732-1782." Charleston Library Society, 1956.

without children.[26] Beyond these demographics, the ads proved to share insight about the ways in which indigo manifested in enslaved clothing during this period. The following sections will show how that manifestation was an intentional product of the South Carolinian indigo industry and in some cases, enslaved choice.

Phase 1 – Producing

Indigo had a short fame in the grander scheme of South Carolina's history. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the colony's largest exported product was rice, but periods of war introduced and strengthened indigo's position in the Carolinian economy.[27] The indigo industry was established in the 1740s during the War of Jenkin's Ear, when the rice industry collapsed and planters were looking for a quick alternative. The crop's worth and production rose and fell throughout the eighteenth century, but from 1760 to 1775 it steadily inclined. In 1775, South Carolina exported 1,122,200 pounds of indigo, surpassing rice exports by nearly £300,000. After the start of the Revolutionary War, the industry declined and never regained strength in South Carolina. The War slowed down production and exportation and threatened relationships with Carolina's largest indigo consumer, Britain. This chapter focuses on this period of growth during the 1760s leading up to the Revolutionary War because of the growth the industry experienced during this time.

There are a few reasons why indigo was successful in South Carolina. First, it was light, which made it easy to ship and transport. Lighter materials meant that more product could be packed into ships for Trans-Atlantic trade, making the industry more profitable.[28] Second, indigo

[26] For more on the ways gender impacted one's capacity to run away, see Stephanie M. H. Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. (Chapel Hill, NC: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2006), 28-34.
[27] For more details on indigo statistics, see Nash.
[28] Feeser, *Red, White, & Black*, 50

created a dye that could be used on many different types of textiles, making it more flexible and amenable than other dyes of the period.[29] Further, native Carolina indigo could be grown in areas of the colony that could not support rice, because of cost or climate. Known as *Caroliniana*, it grew well in sandy and dry soil, and was resilient to harsh climates.[30] This made it an appealing crop for smaller planters, as well as larger ones wanting to take a new product on. Additionally, it kept a relatively stable price as the industry waxed and waned from the 1740s through 1770s, which built confidence in the crop and encouraged more to invest.[31] These, among other factors, made indigo the primary source of blue dye in the eighteenth century, creating a high demand.

South Carolina indigo faced a harsh reputation, and modern scholars debate whether this helped or hurt its market value. The crop was widely known to be inferior to its French and Spanish competition, with a poorer quality that created inferior dye. Carolina indigo had a hard surface and was often not cured, or dried, fully in its center. Curing was time-consuming, and many South Carolina planters tried to cut corners by selling product that had not fully dried. Additionally, consumers would often find soil in the casks or starch in the dye, as if the final product was being intentionally diluted.[32] Critics of the colony agreed that South Carolina planters were focused on quantity instead of quality. They believed that in trying to earn a maximum profit from the newly widespread crop, planters valued exporting large quantities of poor indigo in bulk, rather than paying attention to the condition of the crop and exporting in smaller quantities, as France and Spain were said to do. This poor value is confirmed by probate inventories who rated the indigo as being of "medium or poor quality."[33] Although the quality of

[29] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo," 363
[30] Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 71
[31] Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 44
[32] Winberry, "Reputation of Carolina Indigo," 245
[33] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo," 383

indigo rose as the industry continued into the 1770s, with planters beginning to implement more production standards, the reputation associated with its product never left.

The poor reputation associated with South Carolina indigo made it more affordable than French and Spanish indigo. This is one reason why scholars believe that South Carolina became the major supplier of indigo for Britain. As the South Carolinian indigo industry grew over the 1760s, so too did the amount imported into Britain from the colony. From 1760-1763, South Carolina made up 35% of the country's indigo imports, but by 1772-1775, it made up 70%.[34] Twentieth century historians argue that South Carolina indigo became favored in Britain because the country had no other choice – war embargos prevented the importation of French and Spanish products, including indigo, during King George's War. These historians argue that, faced with the absence of their primary markets, English consumption shifted to South Carolina out of absolute necessity, which then increased its production and supply.

Nash disagrees with this argument, demonstrating that the English still had access to indigo from seized ships and from the Netherlands, meaning that their consumption of South Carolinian indigo was a conscious choice.[35] He argues that the English actively chose to import South Carolina indigo because of the ways in which its poorer quality made it more affordable. England knew that the pigment in Carolinian dye would be inferior, but affordability made it the better option for the textile industry, which was fast-paced and willing to sacrifice quality for quicker and cheaper production. A holistic understanding of the British indigo economy acknowledges both that French and Spanish supplies were lessened due to war, and they were not totally isolated from indigo from these countries or the Netherlands. Additionally, it recognizes that even after these embargoes ended with the end of the war in 1748, Britain

[34] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo," 366
[35] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo," 383

continued to choose South Carolina indigo for its textiles. Thus, the British began and continued to purchase the majority of their indigo supply from South Carolina plantations because of its affordability.

The process of producing indigo was long and laborious.[36] Enslaved people had to first plant the crop, ideally during the spring, and monitor it for weeds, pests, and moisture to ensure the health of the plants. They then cut surviving crops in bulk and brought them to a processing center with vats. This and the following steps are depicted in *Figure 2*, from the Parish of St. Steven in Craven County, South Carolina. They added the indigo to a large vat, along with water, and soaked it for anywhere from 12 hours to a few days, in the same way that alcohol is fermented. Once soaking was done, enslaved individuals squeezed the indigo plants to relieve excess moisture and drained this water into a second vat. In the second vat, they beat this water with paddles to expose it to oxygen and create a molecular reaction that produced a deeper blue color. This labor created a blue sediment that settled in a mud-like consistency at the bottom of the vat, which they collected and dried, known as curing, in "blocks", or osnaburg sacks. This sediment was known as indigo paste – the final product of indigo production. Once the indigo paste was dry, it was ready for sale or use as dye. Enslaved people discarded the remaining indigo plants, no longer necessary for production and removed from the process before the second vat. This was difficult, because they emitted a terrible smell that made being around them and handling them challenging. Further, they attracted flies, which created unsanitary conditions

[36] Find this process described in depth in Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 73-79. See personal accounts of indigo creation process in Bradley Foster, *New Raiments of Self*, 113.

at the processing site.[37]

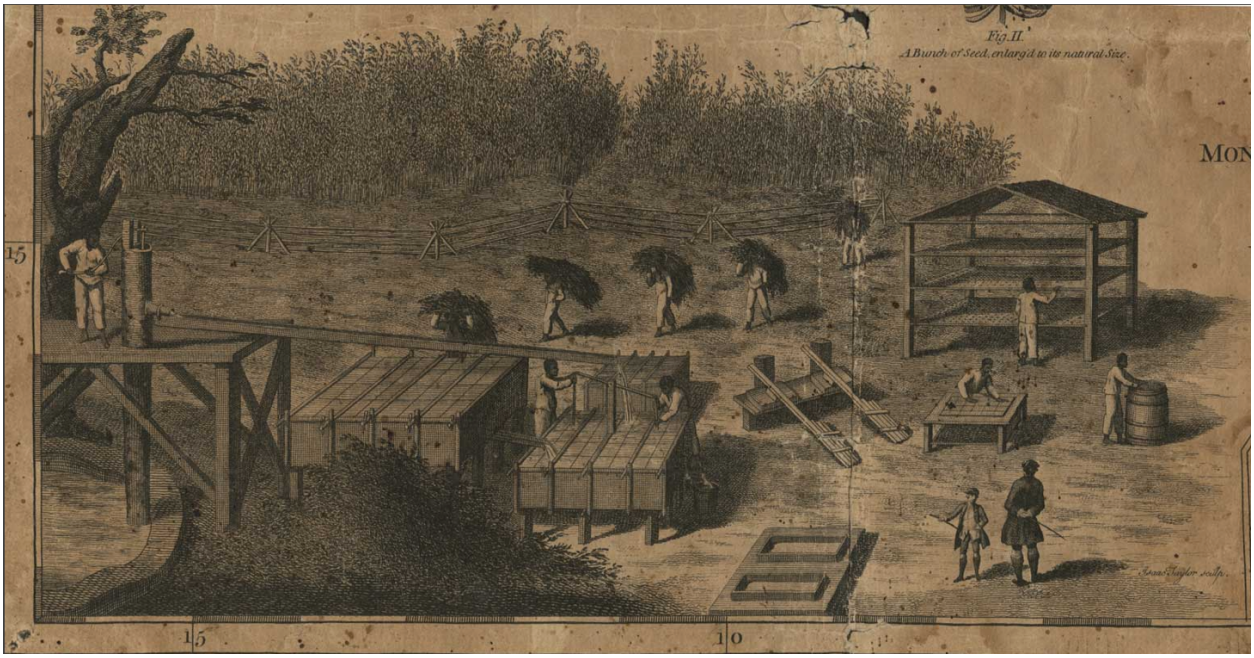


Figure 4: Enslaved laborers process indigo in eighteenth-century South Carolina.
Henry Mouzon, Jr., John Lodge. "A Map of the Parish of St. Stephen, in Craven County." South Carolina Historical Society. Charleston, South Carolina.

Enslaved people were responsible for creating indigo dye. They carried out the process from planting to curing, and each individual had a specialization.[38] Field slaves were responsible for planting and harvesting, and this labor was similar to that for rice or any other crop's production. The exertion necessary to bend over for planting and tending, swing reaping hooks to harvest, and carry bulks of cut indigo to quickly be processed was strenuous and severe, particularly in the South Carolina heat. Those who were responsible for tending to the vat process were considered "skilled," but their labor was just as demanding as that of those in the field. They had the expertise to understand how their actions would affect the quality of the resulting dye. They lifted piles of indigo plants into vats and knew and how to submerge the indigo stalks just right, so they would not float. One of the most onerous responsibilities for

[37] Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 158
[38] See description of indigo production in terms of the "task system," Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 147.

enslaved people producing indigo was undoubtedly beating the mixture, which could last for anywhere from an hour to a full day depending on the temperature. They would use physical strength to maintain movement in the vat with oars, and mental strength to monitor the mixture and ensure it was receiving enough oxygen and progressing as it should. Enslaved people would then drain these giant vats of water and collect the remaining sediment, all among a stench that would have been nearly unbearable, particularly in the depths of the Carolinian summer.[39]

The process of creating indigo dye was particular and required constant monitoring and knowledge of the particularities of production. The age at time of harvest, amount of handling in the field, amount harvested, amount of water in the vats, amount of oxidation and beating, and the time to cure could all affect the final indigo dye. Poor production in any of these areas usually resulted in a lighter dye that did not hold much color. Enslaved people brought a particular expertise to their production that made South Carolinian indigo sellable in a larger Atlantic market. Some regions of Africa produced and used indigo dye in the eighteenth century, including Angola and Senegambia.[40] When people from these regions became enslaved in South Carolina, they brought their knowledge of the indigo industry with them, and influenced the manufacture of indigo and the ways in which the dye was used to create certain patterns.[41] Further, Jelatis describes how enslaved people had a certain degree of "autonomy" in indigo production, because of the detailed knowledge they would acquire and contribute about the process and the ways in which that expertise helped them make decisions about dye production when necessary. Enslaved people producing indigo had a certain degree of authority on the

[39] Feeser, *Red, White, & Black*, 82-83.
[40] Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 152.
[41] Bradley Foster, *New Raiments of Self*, 112.

plantation as "skilled" and had the ability to supervise other enslaved people that were assigned to help with the process.[42]

All enslaved people were assigned value by plantation society for their ability to produce profit for their enslaver. Hartigan O'Connor says, "Enslaved people were a form of capital, returning income to their owners and retaining a certain value."[43] Enslaved people created wealth for the plantation, and thus they were an investment that held value. Their purchase meant that they were forced to carry out tasks assigned by the enslaver that would create profitable product. Enslaved individuals that grew indigo and tended to it in the field contributed their manual labor and knowledge of agricultural procedures towards the final indigo product. Those who worked with the vats and the dye-creation process had a particular value because of their unique knowledge of the dye creation process and their capacity to create sellable dye. They could control the quality and the amount of product that a plantation created and could sell, and therefore their presence and labor on the plantation was important and valuable to ensure good profits. Enslaved indigo producers had a value assigned to them because they completed tasks that required particular knowledge and technique acquired over time and experience. So, enslaved people who worked with indigo were valued, and may have been valued higher than other enslaved who did not contribute this specific and valuable labor.

The lifecycle starts with this valuation of the indigo that enslaved people grew and produced. Valued people carried out this labor to create value for the enslaver through the dye market product. It is through this valued labor that indigo obtained its ability to be sold in the market, dyed in clothing, and to create identity for enslaved people that wore it. In the production of valued indigo, enslaved people's value as laborers might have increased, intertwining their

[42] Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 157
[43] Hartigan O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy*, 116

work and their worth. It is important to remember that enslaved people were at the heart of the indigo industry, not only when thinking about the larger industry's success but also about the value that enslaved people themselves were able to reclaim from the industry. The first step of this reclaiming happened in the dyeing of fabric with indigo dye.

Phase 2 – Dyeing

For indigo's value to be reclaimed by enslaved people, clothing had to be produced with textiles dyed by the pigment. Enslaved South Carolinians received clothing from their enslavers typically once or twice a year, but this varied from plantation to plantation.[44] This clothing was either ready-made or handed down, and almost all enslaved clothing before 1775 was originally imported. While enslaved individuals had the ability to carry out repairs on damaged clothes and in the process, add patches and other details, most eighteenth-century clothing manufacturing was done in bulk in England and therefore enslaved people had little influence. Occasionally, some was produced from bulk-imported fabric in the colonies by tailors, planters' wives, and female "house slaves."[45] One can find ads in *The South Carolina Gazette* selling or looking for enslaved women who were seamstresses, indicating some clothing could have been created or altered on plantations.[46] However, most clothing was produced prior to reaching the plantation, and it is important to consider this distinction in contrast with nineteenth-century clothing production, when homespun dominated enslaved clothing. Eighteenth-century bulk manufacturing contributed to a sense of uniformity among enslaved clothing, but often meant

[44] Hunt-Hurst, "Round Homespun Coat," 728
[45] Baumgarten, *What Clothes Reveal*, 135; White and White, *Stylin'*, 9
[46] *The South Carolina Gazette*, April 26, 1760: "A likely young east-Indian girl, who is a very good seamstress, to be sold by Gibbes & Milner." January 26, 1765: "To be Sold: … a negro wench, about 25 years of age, an exceeding good cook, very good washer and ironer, a notable house-wench and seamstress.." January 30, 1775: "Wanted on Purchase, for Ready Money… a girl, 12 or 14 years of age, who has been brought up to the Needle."

garments were ill-fitting. Studying the runaway ads reveals many descriptions that resemble each other because this standardization created a few options for common enslaved clothing.

The textiles that could be used for enslaved clothing were dictated by the Negro Act of 1735. The Act limited fabrics to only the cheapest, which included "negro cloth, duffelds, course kearsies, osnabrigs, blue linen, checked linen, course garlix or callicoes, and checked cottons."[47] These textiles were coarse, rough, and of a much lower quality than the silk, chintz, and superfine wools that the elite wore. The colony passed the Act to make clear distinction between those who were enslaved and those who were free, creating a clear visual divide between the two. It aimed to restrict enslaved people's autonomy even further and exploited their appearance to immediately reveal their servile status. "Negro cloth" exemplifies this desire as one of the most used textiles in enslaved clothing. Knowles demonstrates how the textile was created for the race-based system of slavery in the Americas to further race-based notions of difference and class. Because "negro cloth" was labeled in a way that made the fabric inseparable from race, it furthered the idea that Black people could only be perceived as enslaved.[48] By wearing low-quality items specifically labelled with this term, Black South Carolinians were expressly marked by their unfree status and their appearance was controlled, in the same way that their labor and broader freedom was.

[47] White and White, *Stylin'*, 9. This act was expanded in 1740 to include other restrictions and this version is more often referenced than the 1735 Act.
[48] Knowles, "The Fabric of Fast Fashion," 20



Figure 5: Fabric samples for 'Negro Cloth' included in an 1835 letter from Rowland G. Hazard to Isaac P. Hazard of the Peace Dale Mfg Co.
Pictured in Madelyn Shaw, "Slave Cloth and Clothing Slaves: Craftsmanship, Commerce, and Industry." Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts, 2012.

While the Negro Act set the law, and while most enslaved people only wore the fabrics listed above, scholars including White and White and Hartigan-O'Connor argue that its rules were difficult to enforce and could easily be broken.[49] Runaway ads show this as well. Take Arabella, who ran away in July of 1768 wearing a callimanco gown, or Joe, who ran away in September of 1767 wearing a jacket laced with blue and white livery lace.[50] There's Tom, who ran away in August of 1763 wearing a double-breasted coat with gold buttons.[51] The materials and accessory details in these ads indicate a much higher quality of clothing than that ordered by the Negro Act. These individuals could have been assigned by their enslavers to wear these pieces daily because they were in front-facing or "household" positions, but the garments would have still broken the parameters of the Negro Act. Alternatively, they could have taken this

[49] White and White, *Stylin'*, 10; Hartigan O'Connor, "The Ties That Buy," 53
[50] *The South Carolina Gazette*, July 11, 1760, September 28, 1767
[51] *The South Carolina Gazette*, August 13, 1763

clothing only in the act of running away, but in each of these instances, the individual was not described as taking any additional clothing with them. This indicates that the clothing in the ads were what they usually wore – otherwise, they would have run away wearing their typical osnaburg and "negro cloth" items and carried these more valuable outfits in tow. That said, these were unique and atypical instances, and most of the enslaved clothing described by the ads fits within the constraints of the Negro Act fabrics. There are 109 mentions of "negro cloth," and 53 mentions of osnaburg clothing, among 11 mentions of linen, and many mentions of uncategorized "cloth." While certain scenarios could lead to enslaved individuals wearing higher quality garments, the overwhelming majority of clothing listed in these ads was low quality fabrics. On the whole, enslaved dress was restricted and poor.

The clothing produced for enslaved people was sometimes created from textiles that had been dyed with some sort of pigment. It was quite simple to make white, brown, or black textiles – these colors either did not require dye or could use pigments easily found in soil. Most enslaved clothing was created in one of these colors. Colors that required a more complex pigmented dye were also used, including green, red and purple, but sparingly in comparison to the amount that blue dye was used and is seen in the runaway ads. Of the 557 unique runaway ads posted between 1760 and 1775 in *The South Carolina Gazette*, 224 of these ads, or 40%, mentioned clothing. Since enslaved people would have only worn a couple different garments, clothing could provide further identification for a runaway. Because enslaved clothing was standardized, these descriptions were most helpful in catching the runaway when they were specific and described something unique or highly associated with the identity of that person. Of those ads that mentioned clothing, 119, or 53%, included at least one description of a blue garment or detail. The overwhelming majority of blue clothing mentioned is coats (41) and

jackets (44), especially those made of "negro cloth". There are 7 instances of blue breeches, 7 instances of blue waistcoats, 6 instances of blue trowsers, and 5 instances of blue gowns. Items including lace, buttons, petticoats, habits, stockings, and boots make up the remaining blue items. These numbers demonstrate that blue clothing was a common element in enslaved dress, and therefore blue dye was a common element as well. [52]



Figure 6: Blue dress depicted in "The Old Plantation."
John Rose. "The Old Plantation." *ca. 1790.* Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Art Museum, The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Williamsburg, Virginia.

The Old Plantation gives a glimpse into what some of these garments looked like. The painting is attributed to John Rose, a South Carolinian plantation owner in the late eighteenth century, and depicts an idyllic scene on the plantation with a group of enslaved individuals.[53] The painting is well known as one of the only representations of a possible African religious ceremony or dance, but it is also one of few visual depictions of enslaved dress during this time,

[52] *The South Carolina Gazette*, January 1760 – December 1775
[53] Jerome S. Handler, "The Old Plantation Painting at Colonial Williamsburg: New Findings and Some Observations." African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter 13, no. 4 (2010).

much of which has not been preserved. The individuals in this work are likely wearing their finest clothes, but it is still possible to imagine what kinds of garments enslaved people wore and how those blue jackets and coats mentioned in the ads might have looked. One can see how the layering of coats and jacket might have worked, what white and blue checked and striped patterns could have looked like, and can envision how blue dresses might have been worn through the white and green ones depicted here.

It is certain that the blue dye used on these textiles was created from indigo, because it was the favored dye for British consumption. There are a few reasons for its popularity in England among alternative dyes. For one, indigo was the most widely available source of blue, because it could be retrieved from many different genera of the indigo plant.[54] There were three types of indigo grown in South Carolina: *Carolina*, which was native, *Tinctoria*, originally from India and traded through France, and *Suffruticosa*, from Guatemala, but more varieties of the plant existed across North America, Africa, Central America, and India.[55] This availability made it easy to access to indigo plants. Additionally, indigo was historically favored by the British. Before the sixteenth century, the blue-producing woad plant was more widely used because of its abundance and accessibility in the country. Once the expensive indigo product became more prominent and cheaper through trade with the Middle East, the British determined it was a better dye and began to favor it. Indigo continued to grow in popularity as countries like France and Spain began producing it, and soon the British colonies, including South Carolina, did too.[56] By the eighteenth century, indigo was almost exclusively the only blue dye used in England. So, it is

[54] Jenny Balfour-Paul, *Indigo: Egyptian Mummies to Blue Jeans*. (Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Books, 2012), 89
[55] Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 71
[56] Feeser, *Red, White, & Black*, 16

safe to assume that any blue clothing worn in the eighteenth century, including that of the enslaved, would have been dyed with indigo.

This connection between the indigo industry and the clothing industry can further be traced to connect South Carolina indigo to blue clothing worn in the eighteenth-century colony. South Carolina indigo could have been used as dye for enslaved clothing in one of two ways. Less commonly, textiles were imported from England and then given indigo color and manufactured into clothing in South Carolina. The sheer volume of indigo in South Carolina implies that it would have been used to dye textiles in the colony in some capacity. However, there is little evidence to provide concrete examples of the widespread assembling of clothing or the dyeing of it on plantations. The more typical situation was that textiles and clothing would be dyed in England and then exported to the colonies. Ads posted in *The South Carolina Gazette* demonstrate this, proclaiming the import of blue "negro cloth," which could then be used to create enslaved clothing.[57] To review, from 1760-1763, South Carolina made up 35% of England's indigo imports, and by 1772-1775, it made up 70%.[58] These are high statistics – even the lower end of 35% of imports are a significant amount, equaling 397,000 pounds. They are large enough to suggest that over the course of 1760-1775, a large portion of the blue textiles and clothing imported from England for enslaved people would have been dyed from the very indigo that those enslaved people labored to create.

This connection creates a visible circle of value being traded from and then back to enslaved people in South Carolina. Those who worked to create indigo by picking it in the fields or transporting it to the vats or agitating the muddy water could very well have been wearing

[57] One example is from *The South Carolina Gazette*, September 22, 1766: "Atkins & Weston, Have just imported, in the Brislinton, from Bristol, A Choice parcel of white, blue, and green negro cloth…"
[58] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo," Table 2

some of the fruits of their labor. The dye that they created either dyed their clothing on their plantation, or it travelled across the Atlantic and back to clothe them. These individuals could have been cloaked in the products that they suffered to create for the benefit of their enslaver. It is easy to create a direct connection between the value of enslaved labor and the value that enslaved people were able to obtain from indigo in this scenario. It is even easy to presume this connection for enslaved individuals that worked on other tasks on a plantation that produced indigo, or for those who labored near an indigo plantation. The indigo they were wearing could have been from their community, thus transferring value not only among enslaved people but also among neighbors and potentially friends.

However, this 1:1 connection was not the case for the majority of enslaved South Carolinians. Textiles dyed with indigo overseas could not be directly traced back to a certain plantation and could have been from the 65-30% not produced in South Carolina. Further, not every black South Carolinian produced indigo or lived near such a plantation. Regardless of the origin of the indigo though, it was created by enslaved people in a European colony –whether that be South Carolina, another British colony, or one of the French, Spanish, or Dutch. Enslaved people were the heart of the indigo industry, and anytime an enslaved (or free) individual wore a blue piece of clothing, it could be traced back to group of unfree people. The value that enslaved people were able to get from blue clothing, as outlined in following parts of the lifecycle, were because of the labor of other enslaved people that produced the dye necessary for the color. Thus, when enslaved people wore clothing dyed with blue, they could benefit from a lifecycle of indigo value transferred among other enslaved people.

Phase 3 – Wearing

Enslaved people and the clothing that they wore were intrinsically attached in a way that formed identity. Although enslaved individuals did not legally own material items because of their unfree status, clothing was as close as one could get to ownership. Edwards says of the nineteenth century, "garments were so closely connected to the individual who wore them that they literally defined the essence of that person," and the same was likely true for those in the eighteenth century.[59] The need to import textiles meant that they were in even less abundance during this time, and enslaved people only received a few items of clothing a year, making them particularly valuable. The clothes that an enslaved person wore became associated with their identity because they defined how they were visually presented and understood. Since the clothes available to dress in were limited, each person became associated with what they wore. This is another reason clothing was included in such a high percentage in runaway ads – "describing the clothes was as good as describing the man or woman."[60] Runaway ads' descriptions of enslaved individuals could further solidify their association with their clothing, by promoting their identification through these details. Although the bulk production of clothing meant that many pieces of enslaved clothing looked similar, mentioning small details, distinguishing the color, and the act of pairing a specific outfit with the physical characteristics of an individual could still lead to the identification and capture of a runaway from the ad description. This is one example that demonstrates that enslaved identity was intertwined with clothing.

Because clothing contributed to identity for eighteenth-century enslaved people, the details in these textiles were important for identity creation. This includes the color. Blue clothing, dyed with indigo, become associated with the enslaved people that wore it, because

[59] Edwards, "James and His Striped Velvet Pantaloons," 240
[60] Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 252

their clothing was so associated with their identity. Wearing indigo meant that individuals could be recognized by that color. The creation of identity from a blue piece of clothing created "soul value" for enslaved people, because it was so intertwined with understandings of themselves. Berry coined and describes the concept of "soul value": "It was an intangible marker that often defied monetization yet spoke to the spirit and soul of who they were as human beings. It represented the self-worth of enslaved people."[61] Clothing, as the closest thing to their own material possession and as the thing that created one's visual presentation, contributed to enslaved people's self-worth. Their identity was associated with their clothing, and so their clothing held value. The indigo in that clothing contributed to this value.

Indigo could contribute to identity formation through clothing through the simple presence of blue dye in a worn garment, but there are some scenarios of particularly strong connections between indigo and identity. One scenario occurred when runaways were described as wearing "old" blue clothing, which could be an indication of a particularly strong bond between that item of clothing and its wearer. Most enslaved clothing was old somehow – it was either passed down, worn out by its wearer, or both. If the clothing was worn out by its enslaved wearer, this could indicate a particularly strong attachment between that piece of clothing, and further its color, with the enslaved person who wore it so much for it to be classified in an ad as "old." London ran away in March of 1765 wearing "an old pair of blue broadcloth breeches."[62] Broadcloth was worn by both enslaved and enslavers, but the material was particularly associated with the enslaved, so London could have received this garment used or relatively

[61] Diana Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grace, in the Building of a Nation*. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press Books, 2017),6
[62] *The South Carolina Gazette*, March 9, 1765

new.[63] Either way, his wearing of the garment – being likely one of the only ones he "owned" while he worked in a likely demanding position – certainly contributed to its status as "old" in this ad. The fact is that most enslaved clothing would have been worn in this manner. If these breeches were deemed "old" because London wore them out, he must have had a particular association with them and had worn them for a long time. A few months later, George ran away wearing "an old blue jacket, and a pair of high, blue colour'd breeches."[64] Not only would George's identity have been constructed through his fully-blue dress, but this ad indicates that he could have worn the jacket for long enough for it to be considered "old," creating an even stronger bond between the color and its dye and George himself. These hints that enslaved people wore blue clothing to the point of 'old'ness is not particular to clothes dyed with indigo – but it does show that indigo had the chance to contribute to a long-formed identity of an enslaved person, like London or George, by being worn by them for a long time, and thus contributing to their soul value through identity.

Indigo provided the opportunity for identity-creation through its combination with other fabrics and styles. Enslaved people were already marked as "other" by being provided with and wearing low-quality materials reserved for the poor and unfree. But enslaved people took this "othering" one step further by constructing outfits that were seen as "ridiculous" to their white enslavers. Eighteenth-century genteel fashion emphasized matching sets and clothing that came together in style and color.[65] Enslaved people broke these tropes – partially because they did not have access to the fabrics and styles which fit the larger trends of the period, but also because they could create identity from unusual pairings. White and White explain that these outfits

[63] Eulanda A. Sanders, "The Politics of Textiles Used in African American Slave Clothing." *Textile Society of America Symposium Proceedings*, 2012., 1
[64] *The South Carolina Gazette*, July 13, 1765
[65] Haulman, *The Politics of Fashion*, 28

would have come together over time, as enslaved people picked up different pieces of clothing and details that they liked and thrown them all together into one presented look.[66] This description indicates evidence of choice in clothing. The ability to choose certain items to wear or to add certain pieces to one's dress indicates a degree of autonomy, qualified by the fact that clothes were provided from the enslaver and anything additional was likely stolen or traded among enslaved people. These odd pairings created an identity with which enslaved people could have a hand in creating. Even through the nineteenth-century, black people were chastised for their clothing because of the tradition of enslaved piecing together collected items.[67] By breaking white fashion norms and engaging with fashion in a way unique to the enslaved, enslaved people created soul value for themselves, expressing choice and uniqueness in what represented them through dress.

Color contrast played a role in creating these mishmash dress combinations, making indigo-dyed blue cloth a tool. As the most widely used pigmented dye aside from white, black, and brown, blue had the potential to create clashing outfits. Abraham was certainly piecing together unique outfits in 1771. His enslaver describes him:

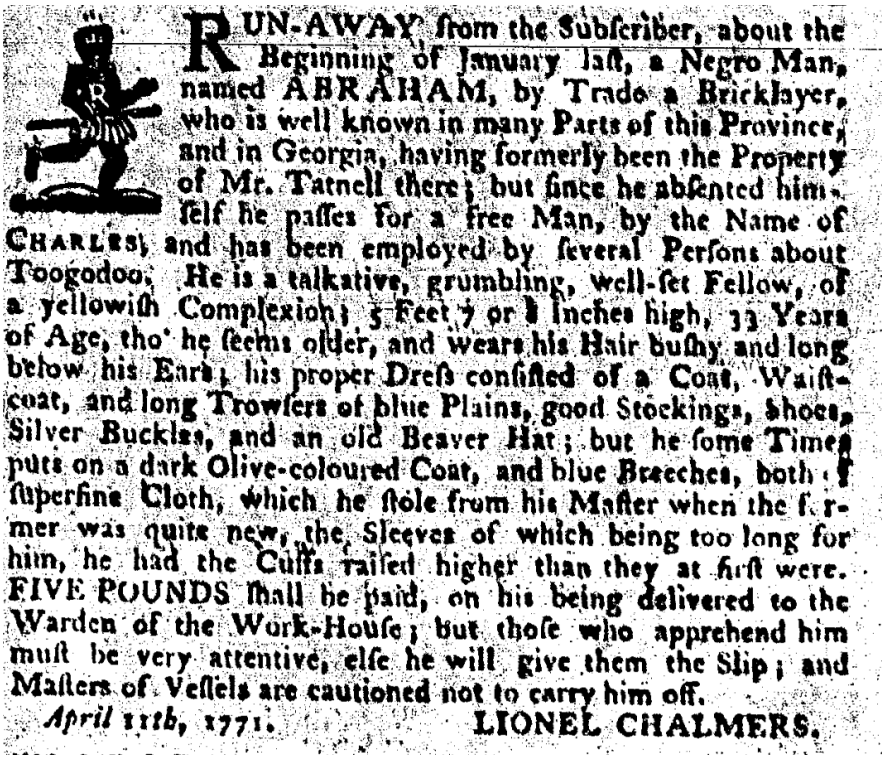
> "His proper dress consisted of a coat, waistcoat, and long trowsers of blue plains, good stockings, shoes, silver buckles, and an old beaver hat; but he some times puts on a dark olive-coloured coat, and blue breeches, both superfine cloth, which he stole from his master when the former was quite new, the sleeves of which being too long for him, he had the cuffs railed higher than they at first were."[68]

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[66] White and White, *Stylin'*, 17

[67] "The way women walked with a 'swaggering air,' and the vivid colors of their dresses sewn together in seemingly incongruent patterns, were for Brooks an eyesore." Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*. (Harvard University Press, 1998), 2. For more, see Hunter pages 182-183.

[68] *The South Carolina Gazette*, April 11, 1771



RUN-AWAY from the Subſcriber, about the Beginning of January laſt, a Negro Man, named ABRAHAM, by Trade a Bricklayer, who is well known in many Parts of this Province, and in Georgia, having formerly been the Property of Mr. Tatnell there; but ſince he abſented himſelf he paſſes for a free Man, by the Name of CHARLES, and has been employed by ſeveral Perſons about Toogodoo. He is a talkative, grumbling, well-ſet Fellow, of a yellowiſh Complexion; 5 Feet 7 or 8 Inches high, 33 Years of Age, tho' he ſeems older, and wears his Hair buſhy and long below his Ears; his proper Dreſs conſiſted of a Coat, Waiſtcoat, and long Trowſers of blue Plains, good Stockings, Shoes, Silver Buckles, and an old Beaver Hat; but he ſome Times puts on a dark Olive-coloured Coat, and blue Breeches, both of ſuperfine Cloth, which he ſtole from his Maſter when the former was quite new, the Sleeves of which being too long for him, he had the Cuffs raiſed higher than they at firſt were. FIVE POUNDS ſhall be paid, on his being delivered to the Warden of the Work-Houſe; but thoſe who apprehend him muſt be very attentive, elſe he will give them the Slip; and Maſters of Veſſels are cautioned not to carry him off.

April 11th, 1771. LIONEL CHALMERS.

Figure 7: The South Carolina Gazette, April 11, 1771

Abraham's dress consisted of a typical elevated or more proper combination – coat, waistcoat, and trowsers, complete with the details of the silver buckles. But he stole items from his master to put his own spin on his dress. Stealing two pigmented items, the green coat and the blue breeches, he could now create more unexpected color and style combinations. In a way that would have mocked elite fashion, he could dress in a more formal coat and pants to match the style of the period, but in a way that clashed by pairing green with blue. He also had the potential, either while on the plantation or in running away, to clash styles by pairing some of his work clothing with the finer items stolen from his master. The fit of the coat was certainly mentioned to draw more attention to how unusual Abraham must have looked wearing it. This mismatching created identity for Abraham, enough so that his dress was mentioned in his runaway ad. Abraham was associated enough with this dress that any sighting of it could identify him, but his clothing combinations also marked him as enslaved in a culture where throwing

different items together was commonly seen among those who were not free. In this way, the presence of indigo-dyed fabric created more opportunity for mismatched dress, and thus created identity.

Further, enslaved people were described as wearing all blue items of clothing. Take Henry, who ran away in June of 1774. He was described as wearing "a blue great coat, blue jacket and trowsers, blue yarn stockings, and a blue and white cotton and thread striped shirt."[69]

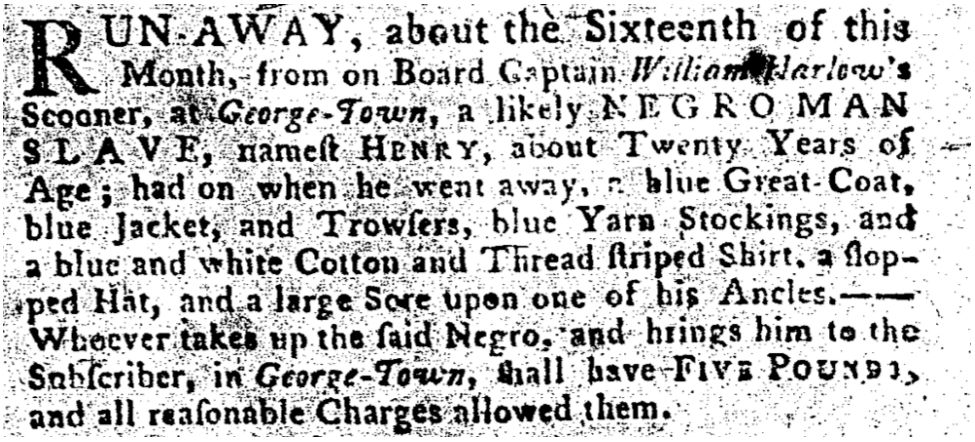

RUN-AWAY, about the Sixteenth of this Month, from on Board Captain *William Harlow's* Scooner, at *George-Town*, a likely NEGRO MAN SLAVE, named HENRY, about Twenty Years of Age; had on when he went away, a blue Great-Coat, blue Jacket, and Trowsers, blue Yarn Stockings, and a blue and white Cotton and Thread striped Shirt, a slopped Hat, and a large Sore upon one of his Ancles.—— Whoever takes up the said Negro, and brings him to the Subscriber, in *George-Town*, shall have FIVE POUNDS, and all reasonable Charges allowed them.

Figure 8: The South Carolina Gazette, June 20, 1774.

Henry was wearing blue from head-to-toe, from his coat all the all the way down to his yarn stockings. Because Henry's clothes were included with his description in this runaway ad, they must have gone hand-in-hand with his identification, and therefore contributed to his identity. Because he was only wearing blue items (detailed by the white stripes), the ways in which his clothing formed his identity were filtered through the color blue. Henry would have been inseparable from that indigo-created color, and therefore indigo would have contributed to his soul value. Further, he could have intentionally sought out these blue pieces to create his monochrome look, in the same way that Abraham pieced together items for his unexpected outfits. Henry could have chosen to clothe himself in blue, representing a particularly strong tie,

[69] *The South Carolina Gazette*, June 20, 1774

and further, identity, with the dye. Henry is not the only one described in all blue – Dick was described in 1767 as wearing "a blue watch coat & blue negro cloth trowsers, the other parts of his dress not remembered."[70] Dick and his blue clothing were so highly associated that his enslaver could not even remember what other pieces of clothing he stole. Dick's dress was encompassed in blue, with his blue jacket on top and blue pants on bottom, and that is the way he was identified for capture. Like Henry, this blue ensemble could have been a result of Dick's prolonged choices to pick up blue clothing items. These men's choices over a period of time could have led to their association with indigo – the same crop that other enslaved people labored to create. So, their identity was formed by enslaved-grown, indigo-created blue, as many others' who wore primarily or exclusively blue clothing would have been.

In this third stage of indigo's lifecycle, enslaved people wore clothing dyed by the crop and were impacted by the value that the dye provided through identity creation. This value was positive, particularly when enslaved people had the opportunity to exert choice to pick up blue textiles to add to their patchwork ensemble. Maybe they favored the pigment and intentionally sought it out for the association it created with their identity. It was clear that identity was created through blue clothing, and thus indigo manifested itself through soul value. Clothing dyed with indigo built worth and presentation, and so identity and value followed in this stage.

Phase 4 – Exchanging

Clothing was a valuable market item in the eighteenth century. Because most clothing was imported from England, demand could easily exceed supply. Most non-wealthy people would have owned one "decent" work set and another set for holidays, anything additional or

[70] *The South Carolina Gazette*, November 23, 1767

fancy being considered the "purchase of a lifetime."[71] It was not common to have a wide selection of clothes, but clothing was one of the items everyone owned in some capacity. Things like food and shelter were neither portable nor long-lasting, but clothing was. It made a valuable trade item because it was necessary for life, easily portable, and could aid self-expression and help one fit into a community style and create belonging.[72] Edwards says that "when people looked at a piece of cloth or an item of clothing, they saw pounds or shillings or dollars or cents," because of the inherent market value that came along with textile items.[73] For this reason, people were encouraged to take care of their clothing items and to trade these materials in the market.[74] Clothing was valuable, and as one of the only items that enslaved people had easy access to, they often stole textiles in order to trade them on the market for money, supplies, or other garments for disguise.

Enslaved people did not own their clothing, but it was immediately accessible to them and one of the easiest things to steal, since their regular uniforms lived in their quarters and on their bodies. For this reason, every time an enslaved person ran away, they took stolen clothing with them on their backs that they could use to bargain their way along the path to freedom. This clothing was valuable to the enslaver, adding yet another reason for the inclusion of clothing descriptions in runaway ads – the enslaver was not only hoping for the return of their laborers who could be easier identified by their clothing, but also the return of the clothing items themselves, which held monetary value.[75] In addition to that which they were wearing, enslaved people took additional stolen clothing more than any other supply, including tools, weapons,

[71] Prude, "To Look Upon the 'Lower Sort,'" 148
[72] "Clothing was the most valuable, portable possession," Hartigan O'Connor, *The Ties That Buy*, 167
[73] Edwards, "James and His Striped Velvet Pantaloons," 353
[74] "…and (to help preserve their fabrics) [clothes] were probably washed more often than the people wearing them," Prude, "To Look Upon the 'Lower Sort,'" 124
[75] Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways," 254

money, and food.[76] The loss of not only enslaved labor, but also enslaved clothing, justified these runaway ads, and show how enslaved people took advantage of other sources of value on the plantation to further their own goals of freedom.

Blue clothing was valuable because clothing was valuable, and this meant that indigo had value in the market as stolen blue clothing. It was just as, if not more, valuable than other types of stolen textiles. It is possible that the inclusion of the indigo dye would have made these items worth more money. The process of growing and dyeing with indigo was laborious and required special knowledge and work to produce successful dye. This specialty gives reason to believe that the inclusion of the plant would have added value to a dyed piece of clothing. The purchase of indigo dye to add color to a textile could have increased the price of that textile in comparison to a neutral-colored item. Dyed clothing required more components than undyed, and as blue was the most commonly used non-neutral dye, its use could have driven up the price of its products. Further, the possibility to create matching sets in blue and to match contemporary styles which often incorporated blue could have contributed to the garments' market value. It makes sense that trends could have created a demand that made blue textiles more valuable than their counterparts.

Additionally, the soul value associated with blue items for enslaved people could have made them more valuable in the markets where enslaved people exchanged them. As established, blue clothing provided soul value for enslaved people through the way they created identity in unique pairings, and therefore they could create self-expression through dress. The ways in which blue items could create a particular positive value for certain enslaved individuals could have made them a more valuable trading item on the market. The inclusion of indigo dye could

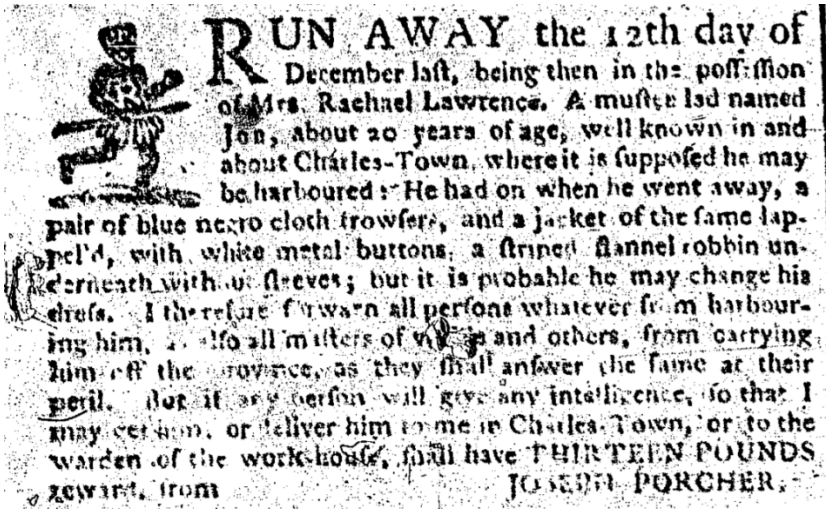
[76] Prude, "To Look Upon the 'Lower Sort,'" 154

have made enslaved people more willing to trade resources or other clothing for them, which would have promoted a runaway's aims by providing aid to move ahead or disguise to blend in. Others could be interested in adding the blue item to their ensemble or in the monetary value that the garments brought because of their dye. Even if these circumstances did not always come together to create a higher market value for blue garments, it is undeniable that blue clothing had some value because it was clothing. Thus, indigo proceeded to carry value as enslaved people exchanged that value to run away.

While all enslaved runaways had the potential to make use of their clothing's market value, there are some examples in the ads that make it clear that certain individuals were planning to do just that with their indigo-dyed clothing. The first scenario is when runaways are described as having multiple pairs of the same type of clothing, or taking additional clothing with them. In March of 1761, Eky ran away wearing a "blue negro cloth gown, but took with her several changes of jackets and petticoats, of check'd linen and striped cotton."[77] Eky not only had the potential to trade the indigo-dyed blue gown that she wore, but also the additional items that she intentionally took with her. Eky was prepared to exchange clothing to promote her running away, having not even one, but multiple pairs of jackets and petticoats that could fetch value in the market. Joe ran away prepared to barter in November of 1763. He was wearing "a blue negro cloth coat and waistcoat, and black worsted breeches, and carried away with him a blue broadcloth lapell'd coat."[78] In November, it is certain that his blue coat would have been valued, and he could use that market value to obtain supplies or disguise along his way. Both Eky and Joe had the potential to benefit from the blue items they carried, items that were dyed by indigo that was grown by other enslaved individuals.

[77] *The South Carolina Gazette*, March 21, 1761
[78] *The South Carolina Gazette*, October 29, 1763

Another scenario that indicated future trade on the market is a note in the ad that the runaway is likely to employ disguise. Disguise would have required exchange to receive the garments that differed from the runaway's original description. Jon was considered likely to change dress in December of 1764. He ran away wearing "a pair of blue negro cloth trowsers, and a jacket of the same lapel'd, with white metal buttons, a striped flannel robbin underneath with sleeves," but his enslaver intentionally added to the end of this description: "but it is possible he may change his dress."[79]



RUN AWAY the 12th day of December last, being then in the poſſeſſion of Mrs. Rachael Lawrence, A muſtee lad named Jon, about 20 years of age, well known in and about Charles-Town, where it is ſuppoſed he may be harboured: He had on when he went away, a pair of blue negro cloth trowſers, and a jacket of the ſame lapel'd, with white metal buttons, a ſtriped flannel robbin underneath with ſleeves; but it is probable he may change his dreſs. I therefore forwarn all perſons whatever from harbouring him, [illegible] alſo all maſters of veſſels and others, from carrying him off the province, as they ſhall anſwer the ſame at their peril. But if any perſon will give any intelligence, ſo that I may get him, or deliver him to me in Charles-Town, or to the warden of the work-houſe, ſhall have THIRTEEN POUNDS reward, from JOSEPH PORCHER.

Figure 9: The South Carolina Gazette, December 24, 1764.

In order to change his dress, Jon would have needed to take the only items of value on him – the clothes he was wearing – and exchange them for items that would have made him more unrecognizable to readers of the ad. This might have included trading his blue "negro cloth" trowsers. So, Jon was likely to have been exchanging an indigo product for valuable items of disguise, which would have promoted his ability to run away undetected.

Through exchange, indigo reached the fourth phase of this lifecycle, as enslaved people traded value created by indigo. By this point, enslaved individuals had grown indigo crops,

[79] *The South Carolina Gazette*, December 24, 1764

witnessed the dyeing of textiles with the dye product, worn those garments, created identity surrounding the dye's placement on their bodies, and now exchanged that value with others to promote their own aims of freedom. Value transferred in each of these stages. When enslaved people exchanged indigo clothing, it was in part because of enslaved South Carolinians laboring in the indigo industry that they were able to benefit from these trades. This transfer of value built a lifecycle centered around the struggle of the indigo industry, intended for enslavers' profits, from which enslaved people obtain some value in the end.

Conclusion

South Carolina's indigo flag still flies today, a symbol of a bustling mid-century indigo industry that clothed the colony's revolutionary heroes. The historic plant is intwined with the state's identity, and is even making a "comeback" now, with the emergence of workshops and retreats centered around the plant's production.[80] But this chapter has shown that the crop had a wide scope and created value for the enslaved that labored to produce it. Indigo did not only create an identity for white South Carolinians, but enslaved South Carolinians too, as it shaped the clothing they wore and the materials they used to form their identity. The value that became associated with indigo-dyed clothing created worth and furthered runaway's goals through its exchange. Indigo's legacy in South Carolina is much broader than a 50-year bonanza crop – its products impacted enslaved people in the colony so much as to create centuries-lasting stereotypes about black dress and identity. The indigo industry was significant in many ways, and focus beyond its economic scope and into the culture and value it fostered is necessary for understanding a modern state that cherishes the crop and its color.

[80] Barbara Noe Kennedy, "Indigo Is Making a Comeback in South Carolina - Here's Where to Find It." *National Geographic*, March 7, 2023, https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/south-carolina-indigo-artists-enslaved-plantations.

Chapter 2: "The hag is having a field day": Spirituality and Haint Blue

Introduction

When visiting the coast of South Carolina, a beloved tradition might immediately catch the eye – blue paint, or "haint blue." The light, periwinkle blue paint can be spotted on the doors, doorframes, porch ceilings, and window frames of homes and other structures across the coast, framed by locals as the most current iteration of a tradition originated by eighteenth-century enslaved indigo laborers to protect their homes from spirits. This practice is widespread in the state and highly associated with the architecture of the coastal and sea island region. The folklore surrounding the paint has grown beyond its enslaved origins and meaning, promoted by paint companies and news outlets to sell more product so that customers can get that perfect aesthetic "haint" color. In the academic literature though, the tradition, a representation of the legacy of the labor of the indigo industry, is barely addressed. This chapter traces the modern oral tradition and practice of haint blue back to its eighteenth-century origins and investigates the validity and significance of the story against the backdrops of colonial enslavement and spirituality. I will piece together a narrative that presents evidence supporting the origin stories surrounding haint blue and argue that eighteenth-century West Africans and enslaved South Carolinians shared a belief in the significance of indigo dye as indigo paint. South Carolinian enslaved communities obtained spiritual value from this protective blue "paint," made possible by enslaved indigo labor, and nineteenth and twentieth century receptions of the painting practice demonstrate this value.

The linguistic term "haint blue" is surprisingly modern – according to Christina Butler, an architectural historian and professor at the American College of the Building Arts, the earliest

found identification of blue paint as "haint blue" paint is in a 1985 newspaper.[81] Although this is a modern phrase, I will use "haint blue" in this chapter to refer to the historical practice, for lack of a known historic term. The tradition has assumed a new, more marketable, life in the creation of this term and is now a popular coastal South Carolina tradition across all demographics. But academic investigation and literature surrounding the tradition is vastly lacking, and no scholar has devoted resources to studying the origins and validity of the stories surrounding the light blue paint color. Did the tradition actually originate with the South Carolinian indigo industry, or should its beginnings be positioned much later? The topic is particularly difficult to track down due to inconsistent naming – academic sources do not use the term "haint blue," so searching is relegated to terms like "blue paint," "blue smearing," and "indigo paint," through the historical record. I argue that the tradition did originate with the enslaved smearing of indigo remnants, and I will demonstrate how the extant primary and secondary sources from the last three centuries uncover and frame the story of haint blue. This evidence, paired with the importance of enslaved spirituality and the significance of indigo in it, will demonstrate that blue paint was valuable for the eighteenth-century, South Carolinian, enslaved person.

Some notes about my methodology are useful for understanding my approach to studying West African culture and South Carolinian slavery. For one, I choose to embrace the method of "upstreaming." "Upstreaming," also referred to as "upsourcing," is a strategy rooted in ethnography, coined by William Fenton, an anthropologic scholar, in the 1970s. When using upstreaming, a writer uses stories, oral tradition, eyewitness accounts, material culture, and other forms of sources from later generations to learn about an earlier generation. This strategy takes

[81] Chloe Johnson, "'Haint Blue' Porch Ceilings Have a Tough History to Track." Bluffton Today, December 11, 2019. https://www.blufftontoday.com/story/news/2019/12/11/haint-blue-porch-ceilings-have-tough-history-to-track/2109006007/.

memory seriously as a source, recognizing the ways in which later reflections on and retellings of a group of people or event can contribute to a better understanding the topic in question. This decision fits within a recent trend of using upstreaming in historical publications. Robert Michael Morrissey, Paul Sutter, and Brooke Bauer acknowledge and use upstreaming outright in their 2022 and 2023 histories of native cultures in America. Native groups also left behind little primary source evidence, so the implementation of this strategy provides new insight that can be used in studies of enslaved laborers.[82] In his 2022 book, Michael Dickinson says that it would be a "disservice" to not include modern testimony in discussions of the eighteenth century Atlantic. He asserts the power of oral tradition to fill in historical silences.[83] Alexis Wells-Oghoghomeh does not use the term, but does explain and use the methodology in her 2021 book, which uses WPA interviews to discuss Antebellum enslaved women's religion.[84] My decision to use sources from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries – in addition to available eighteenth-century materials - to reflect on eighteenth-century behavior is consistent with this moment in historical writing, and will help provide a more full understanding of aspects of enslaved culture that have previously been avoided by scholars because of the lack of contemporaneous evidence.

Second, I choose to highlight the robust cultural transmission between West African culture and enslaved American culture in the eighteenth century. To understand this, it important to demonstrate the makeup of the South Carolina slave market in the middle of the eighteenth century. Charles Town was a major port for the Atlantic slave trade, and between 1740-1776,

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[82] Robert Michael Morrissey and Paul Sutter. *People of the Ecotone: Environment and Indigenous Power at the Center of Early America*. (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2022); Brooke M. Bauer, *Becoming Catawba: Catawba Indian Women and Nation-Building, 1540-1840*. (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2023)

[83] Michael Dickinson, *Almost dead: Slavery and Social Rebirth in the Black Urban Atlantic, 1680-1807*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2022), 7

[84] Alexis Wells-Oghoghomeh, *The Souls of Womenfolk: The Religious Cultures of Enslaved Women in the Lower South*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2021)

50,000 – 60,000 African people came through the colony as the entryway to the colonies. The majority of these people came through Charles Town itself.[85] This sets the scene for a vast influx of African people and their cultures along with them during this period on the sea borders of South Carolina. Many of these people became enslaved immediately in Charles Town and the surrounding area's plantations. In 1750, 62% of South Carolina's slaves were African-born, and leading up to 1750, 80-90% of the South Carolina slave population were in the Charles Town area.[86] Charles Town and its surrounding parishes were places of influx, and often had new African laborers joining their plantations. These high numbers of native West Africans making up the ranks on these plantations led Michael Gomez and Margaret Washington Creel to assert that the culture in these locations were heavily influenced by African tradition, and as Gomez says, they suggest "a society more African in culture and perspective than not, and consciously so."[87] The percentages of enslaved South Carolinians that were born in Africa in the middle of the eighteenth century is important to remember when considering the extent to which enslaved South Carolinian culture was influenced by West Africa.

Scholars like Walter Rucker, Dickinson, and Gomez have asserted the connectedness between the South Carolina coast and West African people, which, alongside these statistics, have led me to emphasize the role of African cultures in enslaved practices.[88] While it is important to acknowledge the ways in which African culture evolved in its transport to the Americas, as Vincent Brown, in his 1998 *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World*

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[85] Michael A. Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 31; William S. Pollitzer, *The Gullah People and their African Heritage*. (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1999), 43
[86] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 51; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 33
[87] Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 201
[88] Dickinson, *Almost Dead*; Walter C. Rucker, *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America*. (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 7; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 123, 163

of Atlantic Slavery, and Wells-Ogohoghmeh do, the presence of any African traditions at all in the face of the terror of slavery is significant and deserves attention in understanding the mid-eighteenth-century cultural landscape.[89] Knowledge of a large African-born population living in the Charles Town and coastal areas in the mid-eighteenth century gives insight into why West African traditions continued so strongly and why they should be studied. Additionally, I pay broader attention to African ethnicities in discussing West African cultural traditions, rather than focusing on particular groups. Wells Ogohoghomeh and Linda Stine, Melanie Cabak, and Mark Groover both use this approach, because transmission between African cultures was happening frequently between different groups in West Africa, even before enslavement in the New World.[90] Because African ethnic groups were not isolated and practices were shared among neighbors, evidence of interaction with indigo and spirituality in one community is likely not exclusive and instead, probably reflects beliefs in many regions and identities of West Africa. Therefore, identifying specific practices with specific groups of people would not add much nuance to this research, since many of these practices were widespread. I choose to highlight practices that scholars broadly attribute to West African cultures and emphasize connections between regions. In Chapter 3, more attention is given to particular West African groups and their interactions with indigo dye.

Gullah People

The local Gullah people are associated with the practice now called "haint blue," because folklore places the origins of the tradition with their eighteenth-century enslaved ancestors. As

[89] Vincent Brown, *The Reaper's Garden: Death and Power in the World of Atlantic Slavery*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 7, 8; Wells-Ogohoghmeh, *The Souls of Womenfolk*, 12
[90] Wells-Ogohoghmeh, *The Souls of Womenfolk*, 14; Linda Francine Stine et al., "Blue Beads as African-American Cultural Symbols." *Historical Archaeology* 30, no. 3 (1996): 53, https://doi.org/http://www.jstor.org/stable/25616476

the so-called agents of the practice, the Gullah people and their spiritual traditions should be established to better understand their expressions of spirituality through this indigo decoration. Directly descended from enslaved Africans brought to labor the land, Gullahs continue to carry out many traditions and beliefs inherited from their ancestors hundreds of years ago, including haint blue.[91] They inhabit the 400-mile coastline from southern North Carolina to northern Florida, but those on the South Carolina coast and sea islands have remained particularly strong and are where the group is primarily identified. In Georgia, the group is referred to as the "Geechees," with a similar culture and origins to the Gullahs.[92] The Gullah people are a unique reflection of Southern American history – due to their isolated nature on the Atlantic extremities of South Carolina, many scholars note that through the twentieth century, they avoided "direct exposure" to the dominant culture, and are therefore "evidence of significant combinations of traditional retentions, American acculturation, and intergroup socialization."[93] Gullah people, and the culture that defines them, have survived for generations through oppression and struggle, and now tell modern audiences about the experiences of their eighteenth-century family through their own imitation of their customs such as blue-painted doorframes.

Because Gullah people still inhabit the South Carolina coast, most research on their history has been written by anthropologists. These scholars thread together historical evidence with modern ethnographic study to better understand not only the historic Gullah subject, but also the modern person. William Pollitzer's *The Gullah People and their African Heritage* is a

[91] Mary Arnold Twining and Keith E. Baird. "Sea Island Culture: Matrix of the African American Family." Essay. In *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1991), 8
[92]Margaret Washington Creel*, A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1988), 18
[93] Quotation by Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 15. See also Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 9; Twining and Baird, "Sea Island Culture," 2, 14; Mary Arnold Twining, "Time Is Like a River: The World View of the Sea Island People." Essay. In *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*, 89–95. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1991), 89; Pinckney, *Blue Roots*, 5

successful and comprehensive example of this approach.[94] Pollitzer's work is one of the most researched resources on the African origins of the modern Gullah people, providing insight into the greater trans-Atlantic cultural connections between these South Carolinian inhabitants and their African ancestors. Historians have also examined Gullah roots in the region. Margaret Washington Creel's *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* historical research is another major reference for my work.[95] Her book pays special attention to the Christianization of the Gullah people in the nineteenth century – while out of scope for my work, she provides useful contextual research on the traditions of enslaved groups in South Carolina and eighteenth-century religious origins before conversion. Mary Arnold Twining's and Keith Baird's assembled volume of articles on many different aspects of Gullah life is also a helpful resource, covering topics like childbirth, crafting, language, and music.[96] Their work provides insight on more specific practices, like quilting, where other volumes lack this detail.

Another category of Gullah literature is that written by people from the South Carolinian coast and islands. Roger Pinckney's work, *Blue Roots: African American Folk Magic of the Gullah People*, is one from this category that I have chosen to use because it is intended as informative and non-fiction, as opposed to others in this genre that toe the line between reality and imagination.[97] Pinckney himself is not a member of the Gullah community, but was born and raised among them, citing his Gullah nanny as a source for much of his knowledge of the culture. This is a point for pause – it is difficult to know how Pinckney's depiction of Black South

[94] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*
[95] Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*
[96] Mary Arnold Twining and Keith E. Baird, eds. *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1991)
[97] Roger Pinckney, *Blue Roots: African-American Folk Magic of the Gullah People*. (Orangeburg, SC: Sandlapper Publishing Company, 2003). The *Water is Wide* by Pat Conroy is popular memoir about sea island culture that tows the line between nonfiction and fictional writing.

Carolinians has been influenced or distorted by his own whiteness. Additionally, while he is a practiced writer, he is not a trained historian, so his framing of the past should be investigated. That said, as a native of the area, his work is a good resource about the everyday experience and modern oral traditions surrounding Gullah culture where it exists, which other academic authors are not able to find or include. For that reason, I attempt to not take Pinckney's word alone for factual evidence in this chapter, but rather to let his assertion and description of Gullah people strengthen other authors' claims and historical evidence.

To establish the identity of the Gullah people, we can begin with their West African roots. In the eighteenth century, Africans were taken from West Central Africa to be enslaved in South Carolina, selected from specific regions based on preferences of the plantation owners. According to Pollitzer, 63,210 people were imported to Charles Town from Africa between 1744-1787. These people came from Senegambia, the Windward Coast, Angola, and the Gold Coast, in that order.[98] Laborers from each region were associated with certain stereotypes regarding their stature, knowledge, and temperament in South Carolina that motivated their capture and import.[99] In particular, agricultural knowledge cultivated around indigo production in the Gambia region and elsewhere was useful and desirable in eighteenth-century South Carolina. As established in Chapter 1, these skills would inform better indigo production and product in an industry where attention and care in manufacturing was vital. Many of the people imported into Charles Town would remain there, laboring on surrounding plantations and others across the state. So, these statistics describe the demographic makeup of Gullah ancestors, who inhabit Charleston and the Carolina coasts.

[98] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 43-45
[99] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 42; Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 36; Frederick Knight, "In an Ocean of Blue: West African Indigo Workers in the Atlantic World to 1800." Essay. In *Diasporic Africa: A Reader*, (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 28

The term "Gullah" does have early origins. The first known use of a variation of the term in print is in the May 12, 1739 edition of *The South Carolina Gazette*, in an ad for a runaway by the name "Golla Harry."[100] There are two theories for the origin of the term, based on this entry and its linguistic evolution. The first is that it is a shortened term for "Angola," the homeland of many enslaved South Carolinians. This theory is rooted in documentation surrounding the 1822 Vesey rebellion, in which the Charleston City Council refers to his coconspirator, "Gullah Jack," and his "Gullah or Angola Negroes." The connection between "Gullah" and "Angola" is strong considering the number of Angolan laborers in South Carolina. However, an 1822 document might not hold enough weight to determine the term's eighteenth century "Golla" form. The second theory claims that it is from the "Gola" tribe in Liberia, sometimes referred to as the "Goulah." The linguistic closeness of this option makes it possible as well, but just as the first, there is no true determining factor that this was the origin.[101] In either scenario, it is assumed that the term came from native African roots as a way to describe enslaved people from those homelands and eventually, all people of that ethnic group on the South Carolina coast. Early usage of "Gullah" terminology versions demonstrate the strength of the connection between modern Gullahs and their enslaved ancestors – South Carolinian and West African – because they were identified by such similar terms.

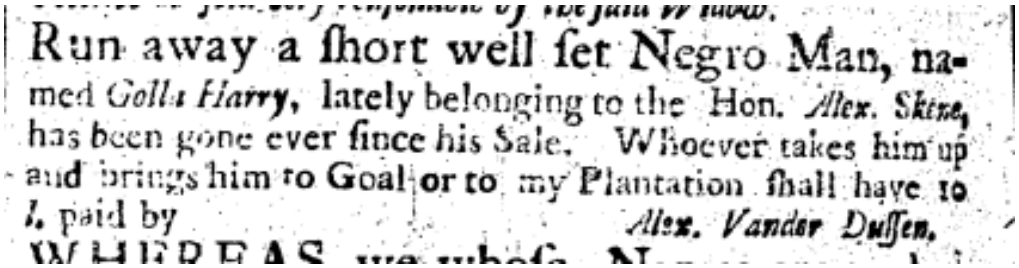

Run away a ſhort well ſet Negro Man, named *Golla Harry*, lately belonging to the Hon. *Alex. Skene*, has been gone ever ſince his Sale. Whoever takes him up and brings him to Goal or to my Plantation ſhall have 10 *l.* paid by *Alex. Vander Duſſen.*

Figure 10: The South Carolina Gazette, May 12, 1739.

[100] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 107
[101] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 107; Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 15

Community and familial relationships are important to Gullah people, historic and contemporary, and the continuity of this value is one example of a consistency in Gullah traditions over centuries. Close relationships were valued in many enslaved communities, but the notion is particularly strong among Gullah people, since their descendants can so closely attribute their inherited cultural customs and emphasize these relationships. Enslaved members of the community would form familial relationships with those outside of their own blood line, creating a new bonded family in the face of adversity. This family formation was a survival tactic in a society where blood lines where ruthlessly separated all the time and nothing was guaranteed. Rucker frames these relationships in opposition to a "common foe," or the planter and broader system of Atlantic slavery.[102] The all-encompassing family structure could bond people in shared trauma, and as Dickinson says, aid in "social and psychological survival."[103] The more unstable and terrifying the situation of enslavement, the more important these bonds were. Scholars agree that this valuing of family has continued into modern Gullah life structure, with Bamidele Agbasegbe Demerson even referring to it in his *Sea Island Roots* chapter as the "defining characteristic" of sea island people.[104] Into the twenty-first century, Gullah communities often reside in compounds, or groupings of households, together. A housing choice more uncommon in modern America, the persistence of this practice is a clear callback to ancestral practice and establishes continuity in Gullah traditions.

Spirituality – Indigo and Beyond

In the eighteenth century, spiritual traditions were carried from West African cultures to enslaved South Carolinian society, and then to their descendants through the nineteenth,

[102] Rucker, *The River Flows On*, 116
[103] Dickinson, *Almost Dead*, 121
[104] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 29; Bamidele Agbasegbe Demerson, "Family Life on Wadmalaw Island." Essay. In *Sea Island Roots: African Presence in the Carolinas and Georgia*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1991), 74

twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Indigo had a role in these beliefs as a protectant against ill-willing spirits, and it was this valuable spiritual power that manifested in blue-painted doorframes. The tenents of these regional spiritual beliefs should first be established to understand blue's place and later, its expression as paint. Further, asserting strong connections between West African and enslaved spiritual beliefs will strengthen the argument that blue was spiritually significant in South Carolina, because it also was in West Africa.

Enslaved South Carolinians strongly held and remembered West African spiritual practices, and over time, these practices transformed and blended with new traditions. In the mid-eighteenth century, planters were preoccupied by finance and did not see monetary benefit in actively pursuing the Christian conversion of their slaves, so laborers' spirituality was still highly associated with West African beliefs.[105] Animism and cosmological significance dominated spiritual thought, and relationships between the living and the dead were important and significant.[106] For this reason, the soul, or spirit, was valuable and a belief in an afterlife where spirits could thrive was certain. Slaves believed in both good and bad spirits, who had the power to influence the earthly happenings and more specifically, their everyday lives. This system encompassed herbalism and medicine, which was carried out by "root" or "conjure" doctors, who served as leaders in the community and could perform a full transformational treatment experience on one's physical health, rooted in spirituality.[107] Conjurers could use amulets or charms in these situations and more, as a means of communicating with the spirit world.

[105] Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 68; Stine et al., "Blue Beads," 59
[106] Brown, *The Reaper's Garden*, 65
[107] Sharla M. Fett, *Working Cures: Healing, Health, and Power on Southern Slave Plantations*. Chapel Hill, NC: (University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 39; Pinckney, *Blue Roots*, 6, 39

Beyond these more generalized spiritual beliefs, there are specific animistic practices that represent a strong bond between West African and early American religious practices. These traditions are primarily oriented around death and the afterlife, as the belief in a continuation of the spirit was a core concept in many West African groups and became foundational in enslaved spirituality. This is important, because folklore frames the significance of indigo, and further, haint blue, around its power fending off the dead who became spirits. Most West African groups had practices that involved interaction between the living and the dead because they believed in an afterlife. After a person's passing, their spirit, also known as their "soul, life, breath, shadow, or double," could either move on to the spirit world, as preferably intended, or remain near its mortal home or resting place.[108] In these places, West Africans believed that one could interact with their ancestors, and that spirits would attend gatherings like household meals and provide a quicker line to other beings in the spiritual world.[109] West African groups not only believed that the spirit could live on after a person's passing, but also that they could be related to and influence matters on earth. When enslaved, West Africans remembered the significance of the dead and established it in South Carolina, where it pervaded spiritual thought. [110] This belief, in fact, was essential for enslaved laborers – evidence of further life beyond the pain of enslavement was promising and reason for hope, and it could bond together those oppressed by their enslaved fate. Thus, it is reasonable that this piece of their spirituality would have many traditions designed to express and further these beliefs.

[108] Brown, *The Reaper's Garden*, 65
[109] Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 55
[110] Brown asserts that this was true in Jamaica. Using Rucker's argument about the similarity of the development of culture in Brazil and South Carolina, coupled with further evidence of South Carolinian slaves expressing connections with the dead, it is evident that enslaved people in South Carolina believed in the afterlife of the spirit as their West African ancestors did. See Rucker, *The River Flows On*, 97

Because of the belief in an afterlife, death was significant in African and enslaved cultures and deserved funerary recognition and action. Robert Thompson called the African funeral the "climax of life," which highlights the amount of care required to send a passed family member off.[111] Ensuring that a loved one went off with respect, and that a vengeful relationship did not linger through death was of the utmost importance.[112] Leaving mementoes on the deceased's grave was one method of demonstrating this respect and honor for the new members of the spirit world. Family members and others of the community would leave items like broken pottery, bottles, pots, and the last used items of the deceased on their grave. Amulets made of beads, bones, stones, and more could be left in a similar fashion.[113] Leaving these items behind reflected high esteem and respect for the deceased and was a proper demonstration for a passed member of the community who was loved, important, and/or well-connected. West Africans and enslaved South Carolinians both believed these items were connected with the spiritual realm, as a piece related to the dead, and that tampering with any of the dedication materials would bring bad luck from a lingering spirit.

West African music was prominent in eighteenth-century South Carolina and was oftentimes associated with funerary practices. Dance and song could be expressed daily and affiliated with different experiences, from grief to love and from work to rest. A duple meter, often with a syncopated rhythm, often characterized these beats on the sea islands and in the homeland.[114] A funeral, as a public gathering imbued with spiritual significance, could easily be the sight of expression through movement, as feelings of loss and hope for the future could be

[111] Robert Farris Thompson, "African Influence on the Art of the United States." *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter* 13, no. 1 (2010)., 150
[112] Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 55
[113] Pinckney, *Blue Roots*, 64; Rucker, *The River Flows On*, 119; Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 147; Stine et al., "Blue Beads," 54
[114] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 153

communicated through traditional dance with others. As Pollitzer says, the use of song and dance in a funerary setting is "an affirmation of life, a transformation into another form of life."[115] Dance in ring ceremonies are a concrete example of this practice – moving in a counter-clockwise circle, members would pray to the ancestors in recognition of birth, adolescence, elder-hood, and afterlife. A tradition heavily associated with the Kongo, but also present in other West African heritages such as Sierra Leone, the practice of dancing within the larger ring ceremony to interact with the dead in South Carolina reflected a connection with West African spirituality and practice.[116] Thus, a belief in the afterlife, funerary traditions, and commemorative dance are three examples of West African expressions of the spiritual significance of death that also existed in South Carolina, demonstrating continuity between the two cultures. Both believed in the ability of the living to connect with the dead, and that there were resources on earth, like indigo, to facilitate this connection.

Indigo was significant in eighteenth-century enslaved spirituality as a dyeing agent to create spiritually protective blue. Enslaved South Carolinians believed that blue could keep evil spirits away because the appearance of a heaven-like color would scare them away.[117] In modern folklore, the association of blue with the ocean would also be frightening for a spirit, but academic sources about the eighteenth century do not mention this connection. Specifically, the color was used to keep away hags, also known as witches in Africa, who were the "disembodied spirit of an old woman."[118] Unable to cross into the spirit world, they were prone to lurking in the mortal realm to wreak havoc on the living – but a touch of blue could ward them away. Indigo,

[115] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 154
[116] Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1987), 10; Rucker, *The River Flows On*, 105; Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 127
[117] Jelatis, "Tangled Up," 159; Stine et al., "Blue Beads," 49
[118] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 146

as the main source of the blue dye during the mid-eighteenth century, was the method for achieving this protection. Therefore, indigo had a spiritual significance and value through its spiritual property as a protecting agent against bad spirits.

Jenny Balfour-Paul demonstrates that this valuing of indigo for its spiritual use originated in West African practices. In areas of what is modernly Nigeria, Yoruba people reserved certain types of indigo-dyed clothing for special spiritual rites and ceremonies, including special robes for funerals. In Cameroon, indigo was used to dye ndop, a patterned cloth featuring indigo designs. Ndop was used in funerary rites as elements of mourners' sashes, arm bands, or belts. Further, people in Cameroon used "firecloth," or indigo-dyed strip cloth with depictions of lizards and cowries to wrap the dead in to promote "supernatural transformations."[119] The association of indigo-created blue in traditions surrounding death in West Africa and the use of blue as a spiritual protector in South Carolina are certainly linked. Enslaved individuals remembered these traditions and implemented them in their culture when and where able, as an expression of their spiritual beliefs. Asserting this connection demonstrates the origins of the South Carolinian beliefs in the protection of indigo.

The vast evidence of blue beads uncovered on gravesites through plantation archaeological digs further present the association between blue and the afterlife. These beads have been uncovered in bounties on eighteenth-century enslaved funerary sites and have been noted by the archaeological community for the prevalence of their color. According to Stine, Cabak, and Groover's archaeological analysis, blue beads are represented in colonial-era archaeological evidence from South Carolina and Georgia more than any other color of bead. Used in the formation of charms and amulets, the beads reflect West African burial traditions

[119] Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*, 187

which send the dead off with these powerful trinkets to promote personal success, cause misfortune for enemies, or protect from spiritual ill-will. The pervasiveness of blue in these amulets suggests that blue heightened their power. Stine, Cabak, and Groover argue that slaves could influence the bead market and encourage more blue bead availability, and that they did so because of their preference for its spiritual strength.[120] The prevalence of blue in funerary beads, deliberately chosen, asserts its spiritual strength and therefore, its spiritual value.

Enslaved spirituality and its connections with West Africa were valuable, so spiritually powerful indigo was valuable. For one, an expression of homeland beliefs could bring comfort among the toils of oppression through slavery. Dickinson calls these rituals "spiritually refreshing," emphasizing soul value in the rebirth of West African cultural traditions through their practice and interpretation on plantations. These practices were a moment of comfort and a chance to take a breath from the frustrations that everyday life in enslavement would bring.[121] Enslaved South Carolinians respected, remembered, and longed for their home, and used these feelings to create adapted versions of West African practices in the Americas. These experiences were not wiped away by their passage across the Atlantic – if anything, they were heightened in contrast to the isolation and struggle of the Americas. [122] Practice of West African-inspired spirituality could offer a moment within those memories and comfort through a connection with the culture and people of the homeland. Spirituality had value, then, as a reminder of one's origins and the senses of belonging, solace, and support that were affiliated with them. Indigo's cultural origins in Western Africa meant that its use in South Carolina was valuable for this reason.

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[120] Stine et al., "Blue Beads"
[121] Dickinson, *Almost Dead*, 97, 106
[122] "The testimony is overwhelming that native Africans were enamored with and thought very highly of their homeland…", Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 225

Additionally, the expression of spirituality through funerary rites and beliefs about death created social morals, a valuable aspect of shared community. Brown describes how "death rites thus provide an opportunity for people to enact social values, to express their vision of what it is that binds their community together, makes its members unique, and separates them from others."[123] Death, as a centerpiece in the enslaved lifecycle, as an act that commanded tradition and respect, gave people an opportunity to express what about a person was important and deserved recognition. A person's performance in their role in the community could be presented as an example for the living in that position. The ways in which the dead were honored created norms that other community members needed to fit in order to receive the same recognition one day, and these norms created a valuable society structure. Further, the dead came to comprise the community memory, creating a legacy of identity with which the living associated themselves with. A reverence and respect for the dead, associated with a spiritual belief in their continued life, meant that their stories were passed from generation to generation, creating an important and valuable tradition within which the community existed.[124] Additionally, as the dead could connect and become one with the larger spirit world, the community's belief in them was uniting, as the connecting link between mortality and the spiritual beyond. A universal belief in the afterlife, exhibited by the experiences of the dead, bonded slaves together as a point of hope. Indigo, as a tool for furthering connections with the spirit world and demonstrating a belief in life beyond the plantation, then had value too.

The ability to express African spirituality on South Carolina plantations was a point of liberation for their enslaved individuals. If one was spiritual, they believed that there was a larger group of spirits or God that had power over not only them, but the planters they labored for.

[123] Brown, *The Reaper's Garden*, 61
[124] Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 44

Because they believed in the spirituality of their ancestors – that they could become spirits in death and through that status, communicate the needs and wishes of mortal slaves with other powerful beings – they believed that they had a direct line to relief that went above the plantation owner. The smearing of indigo to ask for protection is a perfect example of this value. Further, the powerful roles of conjurer and doctor within the enslaved community to wield spirituality to transform and heal meant power was in the hands of Black laborers by the means of the spirit world, not the planter. In this role assignment, Black leaders subverted the owner's power.[125] These doctors sometimes prescribed blue "pills" to aid in healing, asserting the significance of indigo's value in not only spiritual communication, but also transformation.[126] In remembering that their planter could be subverted by not only their ancestors but also their counterparts, slaves could momentarily feel control and therefore, free.

So, in the eighteenth century, enslaved people in South Carolina had spiritual beliefs originating from West African traditions, demonstrated through their beliefs in the afterlife, their funerary traditions, and their use of dance. This spirituality was valuable for those who practiced it, offering solace, social structure, and modes of resistance. Blue had a role in this spirituality as a protector from bad spirits, and because blue was significant, so was indigo. Because spirituality was valuable, and indigo was a tool through which spiritual beliefs could be expressed and protection could be achieved, indigo itself had spiritual value. The same indigo that enslaved laborers toiled over in the fields and in the vats could produce a positive spiritual result for them through its use as a protective agent in blue paint.

[125] Brown, *The Reaper's Garden*, 62
[126] Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 321, Knight, "In an Ocean of Blue," 37

Haint Blue

Blue, indigo-created, paint is a way to see enslaved beliefs about the color's protective assets used. According to Gullah tradition, leftover indigo product from the dye vats was used by enslaved Africans on South Carolina plantations during the height of the indigo industry to decorate the doors, door frames, and walls of their homes. This practice would protect them from maleficent hags, in line with the spiritual capabilities of the color. In this telling, enslaved laborers tied to the indigo industry would themselves benefit from the product from its protective power on their entryways. After spending hours in the South Carolina sun, laboring over the intense work of indigo harvesting or vat maintenance, Black workers would smear some remaining indigo from their hands and bodies onto their dwellings. The legend of this tradition has carried through centuries of South Carolina history, transforming from a simple dye smear to a full paint product. Although there is no historical term for the practice, in modern South Carolina, it is referred to as "haint blue." The term "haint" refers to "haunt," and implies that the paint will protect from the haunts of spirits. Some today say that the color will deter insects, but this is a holdover from a historical iteration of the paint created with the combination of indigo and milk paint (milk, water, and lime), which would create lye that would repel bugs.[127] Recipes to create the paint have changed with the evolution of technology, but the core belief in the power of blue decoration has remained.

It is true that blue paint is not given much attention in the academic literature, an obstacle my work has tried to overcome in the pursuit of new research. Most scholarship that discusses Gullah people, their history, or a broader narrative of slavery in South Carolina give it a small mention. Many of these sources describe the tradition without citation or by citing another

[127] Gomez, Kelly. "What Is Haint Blue?" Forgotten South - Photography & Stories of Forgotten Places, November 14, 2022, https://theforgottensouth.com/what-is-haint-blue/

secondary scholar who brings up the practice briefly. Some works talk about the tradition broadly. In Twining & Baird's assembly of essays, Demerson says, "And a warning practice on many islands, that of painting outside door and window frames blue, is said to thwart malevolent spirits' attempts at entering the home."[128] Judith Chase presents the tradition briefly in a list alongside other methods of using blue paint, including in masks, pottery, and textile, without citation.[129] Maude Southwell Wahlman specifies the painting of shutters and the color's power to prevent "evil spirits" as a belief that still exists among Gullah people today.[130] Stine specifies that "attic louvers, gables, doors, and window molding" could all be painted blue, but does not expand beyond that.[131] For the most part, these authors use the practice of blue paint to make larger arguments about Gullah expressions of spirituality. Haint blue is just one method in which historic and modern coastal people applied their spiritual beliefs, and since this tradition is difficult to identify, these authors stop there.

A few authors go a bit further to affiliate modern haint blue with enslaved indigo laborers using excess indigo product to decorate their homes. Pinckney is one of these authors, noting "prior to the Revolution, when coastal plantations produced indigo dye for English cloth, planters gave their slaves the dregs from the boiling pots, which the slaves used to decorate window frames and porch posts."[132] His acknowledgement of the practice's origins suggests that this is still a prevalent association among Gullah people in coastal and sea island South Carolina. He mentions the tradition, uncited, because as a native of the region, that is what he has been told – and the affiliations with the English cloth industry align with eighteenth-century history. Feeser

[128] Demerson, "Family Life," 63
[129] Judith Wragg Chase, *Afro-American Art and Craft*. (New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1971), 46
[130] Maude Southwell Wahlman, *Signs & Symbols: African Images in African American Quilts*. (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood, 2001), 121
[131] Stine et al., "Blue Beads," 64
[132] Pinckney, *Blue Roots*, 63

trusts Pinckney's attribution enough to cite him as her source for the origins of haint blue with indigo vats.[133] When Washington Creel discusses the tradition, she cites WPA interviewers' belief that the practice started with enslaved indigo laborers and became an "unconscious holdover" in the modern era.[134] Knight claims that slaves used indigo residue to paint their doors, as a way to demonstrate how indigo was integrated into enslaved daily life, but he does not cite a source for this information, nor expand upon it.[135]

Thus, the academic literature leaves much wanted in the way of this blue paint's history. For this reason, more untraditional sources, such as local news articles and museum websites, are cited throughout the next sections as a way to get at beliefs surrounding blue paint. In some ways, these sources should be seen as promoting current folkloric beliefs about haint blue, and can be taken as community perspective on the tradition. In others, they should be questioned as sources written by white residents, who might not have given full care to the tradition and its Gullah origins. These sources are used to strengthen my analysis of haint blue and provide information about its iterations where academic literature cannot. My work traces the oral tradition, and these sources play a role in that story.

Further, by nature of the product and the time passed, there is not much primary evidence of indigo paint that remains from the eighteenth century. I focus on any remaining physical evidence and discussions around it. Indigo residue would not, and has not, last through the centuries. Colleen Kriger describes how "material evidence of indigo cultivation and processing the form of plant remains or prepared dyestuff tends not to survive in the archaeological

[133] Feeser, *Red, White, & Black*, 38-40
[134] Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 321. I was unable to track down this specific WPA interview with the Library of Congress or the South Carolina Library, so it is difficult to know how these interviewers came to that theory.
[135] Knight, "In an Ocean of Blue," 37

record."[136] This is from a general perspective; it's difficult to find evidence of any plant-based product or item from the eighteenth century because it was too fragile. Natural indigo is not colorfast and would particularly not be so in an environment exposed to the elements and daily wear and tear, as enslaved households were. Further, any evidence of original indigo smearing in buildings used after the eighteenth century would have likely been covered over by indigo-based, and then synthetic, blue paint. This would have been done not only by nineteenth century slaves living in the structures, but also by sharecroppers, living in the homes through the twentieth century and carrying on the protective blue paint tradition. Further, traveler diaries, plantation records, and other written records barely mention the enslaved – let alone a description of their living arrangements. Investigation of traditional eighteenth-century sources do not provide any description or mention of the tradition.[137] For this reason, it is easy to see and prove that enslaved

[136] Colleen E. Kriger, *Cloth in West African History*. (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2006), 120

[137] Eighteenth-century records and journals consulted: James Barclay "A Young Scotsman's Visit to South Carolina, 1770-1772." Edited by G. Melvin Herndon. *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 85, no. 3 (1984): 187–94, https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/27567855.; Jonathan Bryan, *Journal of a visit to the Georgia Islands of St. Catharines, Green, Ossabaw, Sapelo, St. Simons, Jekyll, and Cumberland, with comments on the Florida islands of Amelia, Talbot, and St. George, in 1753*. Edited by Virginia Wood and Mary Ricketson Bullard. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press in association with The Georgia Historical Society, 1996); William Drayton, "William Drayton's Journal of a 1784 Tour of the South Carolina Backcountry." Edited by Keith Krawczynski. *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 97, no. 3 (1996): 182–205, https://search-ebscohost-com.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=31h&AN=45789683&site=ehost-live.; Jennie Holton Fant, *The Travelers' Charleston: Accounts of Charleston and Lowcountry South Carolina, 1666-1861*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016); Isaac Hayne, "Isaac Hayne Journal," Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1740-1789, https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/267119.; Ebenezer Hazard, "A View of Coastal South Carolina in 1778: The Journal of Ebenezer Hazard." Edited by Merrens H. Roy. *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 73, no. 4 (1972): 177–93.; Henry Laurens "Henry Laurens Account Book," Lowcountry Digital Library, College of Charleston Libraries, 1766, https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:87881.; John Lawson, *A New Voyage to Carolina, 1709*. Edited by Hugh Talmage Lefler. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1967); John Pierpont, "The Journal of John Pierpont, Tutor on a Waccamaw River Plantation." Edited by Elise Pinckney. *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 87, no. 3 (1986): 148–61, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27567961.; Charles Pinckney, "Charles Pinckney Account Book, 1753," Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1753, https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/267977.; Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry. *The Papers of Eliza Lucas Pinckney and Harriott Pinckney Horry*. Edited by Constance B. Schulz. (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2012); Eliza Lucas Pinckney, "Eliza Pinckney Receipt Book, 1756," Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1756, https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:51509.; James Poyas, "The James Poyas Daybook." Lowcountry Digital Library, The Charleston Museum Archives, 1760, https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:46216.; Henry Ravenel, "Diary and Account Book of Rene Ravenel and

individuals used blue paint for protection in the nineteenth century, but more difficult to understand that use in the eighteenth century. I have completed extensive research on the remaining slave quarters standing today in South Carolina and Georgia and will present the most pertinent evidence of this historic tradition.

It is helpful to establish that indigo house painting was a tradition in areas of West Africa that newly enslaved Africans brought to South Carolina. Balfour-Paul asserts that this is a tradition among Yoruba people in Nigeria, where indigo is historically a significant and primary-used dye. There, excess dye was added to plaster used in home construction, and that the dye could prevent insects.[138] The immediate physicality of this protection from insects evokes an initial association between blue paint and its protective capabilities in West Africa. Patterning or application of the dyed paint is not clear, but it likely had a similar effect to the decoration one can see on the trimmings of modern Carolina homes. Looking at this tradition in modern Nigeria, a region many enslaved South Carolinians were from, against the similar haint blue painting technique in eighteenth-century South Carolina, it is clear that one practice came from the other. Further, because West Africans, including Yoruba people, have a tradition of believing in the spiritual powers of indigo around death, their indigo-dyed plaster would be affiliated with these beliefs, as the indigo-dyed homes in America were and are today. In this way, the blue paint assumed a spiritual protectiveness in West Africa as well. Altogether, this work asserts that Nigerians used indigo to decorate their homes in West Africa and continued to carry out that practice once enslaved in the American South. These are the origins of South Carolina's haint blue.

Henry Ravenel, 1731-1860," Lowcountry Digital Library, South Carolina Historical Society, 1731-1860, https://lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:124942.

[138] Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*, 211; O. L. Oke, "The Chemistry and General History of Dyeing." Essay. In *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*, 43–48. (Ibadan, Nigeria: University of Ibadan, 1971), 45

There are few remnants of the eighteenth-century indigo industry, and before the 1990s, it was believed that the only surviving indigo vats in the state were the three at the Otranto plantation.[139] These plantations were moved offsite to a preserved spot organized by the National Register of Historic Places in 1989, but since then, more evidence of indigo production has been uncovered, like this one, on John's Island on a family's private property:



Figure 11: Remaining indigo on eighteenth-century indigo vat.
Brad Nettles, *The ruins of an old indigo vat on the Kerr family's property on Johns Island,* 2019, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/indigo-is-long-gone-as-an-sc-cash-crop-but-traces-linger-on-the-lowcountry/article_395137ee-96af-11e9-ac0d-abac04e4e41e.html.

[139] Robert Behre, "Indigo Is Long Gone as an SC Cash Crop, but Traces Linger on the Lowcountry Landscape." The Post and Courier, September 14, 2020, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/indigo-is-long-gone-as-an-sc-cash-crop-but-traces-linger-on-the-lowcountry/article_395137ee-96af-11e9-ac0d-abac04e4e41e.html



Figure 12: Close-up: remaining indigo on eighteenth-century vat.
Brad Nettles, *The ruins of an old indigo vat on the Kerr family's property on Johns Island still has indigo stains from centuries ago when it was used,* 2019, https://www.postandcourier.com/news/indigo-is-long-gone-as-an-sc-cash-crop-but-traces-linger-on-the-lowcountry/article_395137ee-96af-11e9-ac0d-abac04e4e41e.html.

In the images, the bottom corner of a remaining vat is pictured, built into the landscape. The leftover indigo dye lining the bottom of the structure is clear and further asserts this building's role as an indigo vat. This evidence reflects what eighteenth century natural indigo smearing might have looked like. The color has certainly weathered over time, but the way that the color has seeped into the stucco through decades of indigo dye suggests that its current presentation of blue might not be so different from the original. I present this vat, only the fourth known in the state, to give a concrete feel of indigo production in the eighteenth century, and to demonstrate that indigo product was material made to dye, with its results lasting, in ideal conditions, for centuries later.

Those working in the vats would have been covered and soaked in indigo, just as this surviving vat was. They spent their lives laboriously beating indigo-dyed water to create a better blue color, and that dye seeped into their skin and clothing. That color would have easily gotten on other things they interacted with, which would have made it incredibly easy to use any excess lingering on their hands to smear on their door for spiritual protection. This would serve not only the practical function of getting one's body quickly clean but would also double as a spiritually significant act. Watching modern indigo producers gives one an idea of the extent to which eighteenth-century slaves were also drenched, soaked, and covered in indigo byproduct – in their hair, their clothes, and on their bodies.[140] Enslaved individuals on indigo plantations had the opportunity in their indigo-covered bodies, resources in abundant indigo production, and spiritual motivation in the significance of indigo to use remaining indigo product on their doors and window frames to further their beliefs. This is where the tradition gained ground in the Americas – a continuation of an African decoration practice by laborers covered in the color. Enslaved laborers, who had spent their entire day doing hard work in the indigo fields – picking plants and agitating water – would then return to their quarters and use the product of that labor for a bit of spiritual connection. Smearing indigo on the door or window frame of one's home was made possible because of the labor they were enslaved to do on the plantation for the enslaver. The physicality of being drenched in blue indigo byproduct was one small opportunity to initiate or further a valuable connection with the spirits. Mid-eighteenth-century South Carolina was a place soaked in blue, and this remnant vat is physical material evidence of that color, putting onlookers into the colorful contextual environment of the century.

[140] See modern indigo production: Mark Strassman, "How Indigo, a Largely Forgotten Crop, Brings Together South Carolina's Past and Present." CBS News, September 14, 2023, https://www.cbsnews.com/news/indigo-dye-crop-south-carolina-slavery/.

The best evidence of eighteenth-century blue painting or indigo smearing comes from the stable house of the Branford-Horry House in Charleston. Located at 61 Meeting Street, the stable was built in the 1750s to service the larger family home. Enslaved coachmen lived on the second floor of the structure, in the hayloft, and by 1792, 34 of these men lived in this area.[141] Today, the house is a residential home, and when the owners renovated it in the 2000s, they found evidence of slave-painted blue beneath the plaster on the second-floor stable wall that faced the Branford-Horry House.[142] The homeowners did not invest in further research or chemical analysis of the paint, but did recognize the color as haint blue and attribute it to enslaved that once lived in the loft.[143] When William Branford built the stable to accompany the larger house in the 1750s, he was a planter who owned substantial land in the area surrounding Charles Town, including Old Town Plantation. Given the context of the larger indigo industry during the mid-eighteenth century, it is safe to assume that this plantation produced indigo, as a profitable and desirable product of the time.[144] Further, Dickinson says that "urban Atlantic slave communities kept significant ties to plantation communities in terms of communication, commerce, and kinship."[145] This suggests that enslaved coachmen would have had access to indigo product

[141] Melissa Bigner, "Past Perfect." Charleston Magazine, July 29, 2020, https://charlestonmag.com/features/past_perfect.
[142] Christina Rae Butler, *Charleston Horse Power: Equine Culture in the Palmetto City*. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2023), 154
[143] Bigner, "Past Perfect." The location of this paint and the culture and recognition of the larger haint blue economy in Charleston are possible reasons why the homeowners attributed the paint to enslaved people living in the original stables. Sharing this information makes the house a more important of a historic site in Charleston, a place of surviving connections not only with the wealthy enslavers who built the stables but also with enslaved workers that lived there. This is valuable in the world of historic preservation, as more museums move toward centering Black experiences in colonial structures, but it is notable that the owners and the surrounding community has not shown enough interest in this early evidence of haint blue to include more than a line in one article about the discovery, nor a picture.
[144] Indigo production at Old Town also directly attributed by Charleston blogger, Ted McCormack: Ted McCormack, "The Beginning and Demise of an 18th Century Charles Towne Landing Plantation Home." Symbiotic Thoughts, December 24, 2022, https://symbioticthoughts.com/blog/the-beginning-and-the-demise-of-old-towne-plantation/.
[145] Dickinson, *Almost Dead*, 5

created on Brandford's plantations, and could have used it to decorate their stable home as early as it was constructed in the mid-eighteenth century. Thus, these coachmen had the opportunity and resources to start the tradition of painting blue color on the stable wall. When paired with enslaved beliefs about the power of indigo, it makes sense that a protective color was smeared on the wall of the stable house that went up against the enslaver's grand residence. This visual truly communicates the spiritual power of indigo – one of few resources available, its protection provided a bit of hope amidst the larger toils of enslavement, represented by the primary Branford-Horry house.

That said, it is unlikely that the layers that the contemporary owners uncovered are surviving eighteenth-century indigo. As with many of the following examples, the paint was probably done by slaves or servants in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[146] Instead, we can read them evidence of the continuation of a practice that started during the height of indigo production in the colony and held such strength that it continued for centuries after.[147] Through upstreaming, this extant later evidence is useful – it exhibits a repetitive practice that, when placed in context with the eighteenth-century indigo industry, folkloric tradition, and secondary attributions to the eighteenth century, can have origins dated to that time. These sources lead to the conclusion that the Branford-Horry stable paint was a practice begun in the mid-eighteenth century and carried through its later generations for its spiritual protection. Additionally, established interaction between city and planation enslaved communities suggests

[146] The stables were converted to a private home in 1913. "It was subsequently the home of U.S. District Judge Waities Waring, whose decision that the Democratic primary election was open to Black voters was a landmark civil rights case in 1947": "61 Meeting Street (Dependency of the Branford-Horry House)." Historic Charleston Foundation, https://charleston.pastperfectonline.com/archive/74E60880-184E-4F73-947A-563731628435.
[147] "61 Meeting Street." Charleston.com, August 16, 2018, https://charleston.com/charleston-insider/diary-of-a-charleston-tour-guide/61-meeting-street.; "59 Meeting Street - Branford Horry House." Charleston.com, August 6, 2018, https://charleston.com/charleston-insider/diary-of-a-charleston-tour-guide/59-meeting-street-branford-horry-house.

that those laboring to create indigo dye on Old Town Plantation in the eighteenth century smeared it on their dwellings too, just like their urban counterparts. Evidence of the tradition in one location, the stable house, asserts more widespread practice and belief, especially where opportunity and means were stronger, like on the plantation. Therefore, the Branford-Horry stables are a strong example of the earliest iterations of haint blue painting practice in South Carolina, demonstrating its coachmen's spiritual use of indigo's color. When eighteenth-century coachmen applied that indigo to the wall, they received spiritually protective value from a material that their enslaved counterparts on Old Town Plantation toiled to carefully produce. Thus, indigo had a significant spiritual power that was created by the labor of enslaved indigo workers on Branford-Horry's plantation.

The Owens-Thomas House's slave quarters present some of the most extensive evidence of haint blue in an 1820s structure created with indigo product.[148] Its ties with indigo assert the origins of haint blue with the dye, and evidence from this period demonstrates continuation of the tradition in the larger community subconscious.

[148] "Telfair Museums' Owens-Thomas House & Slave Quarters: Telling the Untold Story". Telfair Museums, November 2018, https://www.telfair.org/news/telfair-museums-owens-thomas-house-slave-quarters-telling-the-untold-story/.



Figure 13: Remnant haint blue paint on ceiling of Owens-Thomas slave quarters.
Telfair Museums, *OT-Haint-Blue*, 2018, https://www.telfair.org/news/telfair-museums-owens-thomas-house-slave-quarters-telling-the-untold-story/.

The haint blue paint can be seen here in a light blue fashion, lining the ceiling of the slave quarters located in the attic of the carriage house. In 2019, Telfair Musuems, the owners of the Owens-Thomas House and Slave Quarters, conducted chemical analysis on the paint as one part of a museum-wide effort to better understand the history of those enslaved there. They believed that the paint they saw was from the 1820s, when the house was built, but the analysis revealed that the top layers were a synthetic limewash with synthetic dye, technology only available after the 1830s. Instead, the natural limewash recipe they expected was found in deeper layers of the 14 uncovered. In these early coats, traces of indigo were found, which were added to the naturally gray limewash to get that spiritual blue color. These coats date to the house's construction, and this chemical research showed that layer after layer was added to the ceiling in the years since.[149]

[149] Tania Sammons and Telfair Museum of Art. *The Owens-Thomas House*. (Savannah, GA: Telfair Museums, 2009); Personal email correspondence with Markecia Koulesser, Associate Registrar, Telfair Museums, October 18, 2023.

This research makes a few things clear. First, it provides evidence that blue paint was often painted over again and again, supporting one reason for why eighteenth-century evidence is so difficult to find – it was often covered up. Layering also suggests a significant tie with the product – to intentionally add blue to a gray paint, and then to maintain that choice with a blue synthetic dye to decorate one's space shows consistency and specificity. To see this choice made not only in the Owens-Thomas House, but in others of the century, demonstrates a shared community belief about the power of indigo. Here, this protective color lined the ceiling of the enslaved servants' home through 14 layers of application, a clear defense from spirits that could come from the sky. This blue paint had meaning. Further, the transition from indigo dye to synthetic demonstrates that the two are linked. There's plenty of evidence of this synthetic dye, from its nineteenth-century origins through to modern twenty-first-century construction. The link between the natural and synthetic dye in this structure shows that there was, in fact, a connection between them, and that the modern practice of haint blue originated with indigo-made dye. This is important in asserting the tradition's eighteenth-century origins – because spiritually-significant blue paint was created with indigo, it makes sense that the practice originated when the indigo industry was booming in South Carolina and the color's spiritual significance was high. Therefore, the existence of blue-dyed paint in the Owens-Thomas House Slave Quarters demonstrates a strong connection between the indigo industry and its labor and spiritual benefit from haint blue paint.

The Davenport House in Savannah is another example of a layered haint blue ceiling that demonstrates iterative continuation of the practice from its construction in the 1830s to the 1890s.



Figure 14: Davenport House attic, with chipping haint blue paint.
Historic Savannah Foundation, *Davenport House 35 scaled*, 2020, https://www.myhsf.org/our-haint-blue-aint/.



Figure 15: Close-up view of Davenport House attic haint blue paint.
Historic Savannah Foundation, 2020, https://www.myhsf.org/our-haint-blue-aint/.

Like the Owens-Thomas House, the Historic Savannah Foundation, owners of the Davenport House, believed that the blue paint they saw lining their attic was done by enslaved residents, but chemical analysis completed in 2020 revealed that it too was a synthetic material and dated to the 1890s.[150] Researchers found additional layers beneath this top one, but the work was completed right before the COVID-19 pandemic and the museum lost touch with the scientists, so additional information about these layers is lost.[151] There are many connections between the Davenport House and the Owens-Thomas House that allow us to fill in some blanks about this history. Both houses were constructed in the 1820s in neighboring port cities by wealthy men who were slaveowners. Their enslaved laborers, fourteen in the Owens-Thomas House and nine in the Davenport House, lived in the cold and plain attics of the elaborate residences they served. Both houses have incredibly similar light blue paint lining their slave quarter ceilings – as the pictures show, it would be difficult to tell the two apart. Both houses were owned by wealthy families through the end of the nineteenth century that likely kept black servants in the same quarters, looking for the similar protective help from blue paint.

Establishing a second example of the Owens-Thomas Slave Quarters situation strengthens the idea that blue paint was believed across the coastal enslaved community to be spiritually powerful. Two residences of layered blue paint suggest the same choice being made time after time to maintain the color through technology changes. Enslaved people in coastal cities interacted with members of their community who struggled in the indigo fields and vats, and were able to obtain some spiritual value through a shared, painted, use of their indigo product. The paint's placement on the ceiling in these quarters fits with the folklore of protecting

[150] Jamie Credle, "Our Haint Blue...Ain't." Historic Savannah Foundation, March 16, 2020, https://www.myhsf.org/our-haint-blue-aint/.
[151] Personal email correspondence with Jeffery Freeman, Director of Operations and Collections Manager, Davenport House, December 14, 2023.

from hags, as the protective layer stood between the sky and the comfort of home below. The placement on the ceiling in these buildings calls back to the Branford-Horry stables' paint on the wall facing the enslaver – paint was applied in the direction that protection was needed. Further, it is likely that the indigo traces in the early layers of the Owens-Thomas House suggest that indigo was eventually found in the early layers of the Davenport House's paint – the discovery of post-1830s synthetic paint at the Davenport House imply that natural ingredients from the 1820s were safely resting underneath. A second connection between the indigo industry and haint blue folklore demonstrates a certain connection between the two. The enslaved labor required to produce indigo dye – the planting, harvesting, vat maintenance, and packing, all eventually led to a product that simultaneously fed the English clothing industry and promoted spiritual value for fellow enslaved Georgians and South Carolinians.

The mid-nineteenth century Point of Pines cabin, now located at the National Museum for African American History and Culture, had surviving blue paint around its doorframes and windows that show a continued belief in and use of haint blue from its enslaved origins through the 1980s.[152]

[152] "Cabin from Point of Pines Plantation in Charleston County, South Carolina." National Museum of African American History and Culture, n.d, https://nmaahc.si.edu/object/nmaahc_2013.57.; Haleema Shah, "This South Carolina Cabin Is Now a Crown Jewel in the Smithsonian Collections." Smithsonian Magazine, November 2, 2018, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/south-carolina-cabin-has-become-crown-jewel-smithsonian-collections-180970681/.



Figure 16: Point of Pines cabin in National Museum of African American History and Culture. National Museum of African American History and Culture, 2018, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/south-carolina-cabin-has-become-crown-jewel-smithsonian-collections-180970681/.



Figure 17: Newspaper found in Point of Pines cabin, partially dyed blue. National Museum of African American History and Culture, *Cabin from Point of Pines Plantation in Charleston County, South Carolina*, 1853, https://collections.si.edu/search/record/ark:/65665/fd549eeb381fb4944be8743e05c70cb74c2.

The Point of Pines cabin was one of a small group of structures built in the 1850s to house the 75 slaves on the Edisto Island, Point of Pines, plantation. After the Civil War, generations descending from its enslaved residents continued to live there until the 1980s. In 2013, the Smithsonian completely disassembled the cabin and transported it to D.C., where the structure was rebuilt and framed within the larger "Slavery and Freedom" exhibition.[153] It still stands there today as a centerpiece artifact, providing insight into the logistics and humanity of enslaved laborers. The whitewash covering the front face of the cabin today is tinted blue, but this is a recent edit on the plain white façade. At its disassembling, only the doors and window frames held that color, faded light by that time. This is further evidenced by the newspaper insulation found within the house stained blue. Some of the newspaper can be dated to the 1920s, which asserts that the blue color was at least during or shortly after this period.[154] This makeshift insulation, uncovered to the surprise of Smithsonian crew, demonstrates that blue not only decorated the house in the 1980s, but also as early as 50 years prior, establishing a continued belief in its spiritual power through the family's generations. In fact, placed in the larger context of the historical spiritual significance of this color and its use in structures like the Owens-Thomas and Davenport Houses, it is likely that blue decorated the cabin walls for most of its life, reapplied in layers through the years.

The blue paint utilized by residents of the cabin, enslaved and free, demonstrates the continued legacy of protection and spirituality surrounding the color. Even at the end of the slavery period and into Reconstruction, long after the South Carolina indigo industry died, Black

[153] Robbie Brown, "Haunting Relic of History, Slave Cabin Gets a Museum Home in Washington." The New York Times, May 18, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/19/us/slave-cabin-to-get-museum-home-in-washington.html. Erica Taylor, "Little Known Black History Fact: The Point of Pines Slave Cabin." Black America Web, May 20, 2013, https://blackamericaweb.com/2013/05/20/little-known-black-history-fact-the-point-of-pines-slave-cabin/.

[154] See mention of a 1920 tax on another sheet of the newspaper: "Cabin from Point of Pines Plantation in Charleston County, South Carolina."

South Carolinians implemented indigo-inspired protection on their homes. Mimicking a cultural act started in the mid-eighteenth century when indigo was abundant, that continued through the 1830s when synthetic dye became available, slaves in the 1850s continued to use blue color on their doorframes and windows. The Point of Pines cabin helps fill in the gap between indigo production and modern haint blue use by showing how that the color was used in this spiritually protective manner for the cabin's 130-year lifespan. The faded blue paint on the doorframes and windows found in 2013 kept generations of its residents safe from ill-meaning spirits that could sneak in an unguarded entryway. The legacy surrounding the color, originally made possible by indigo labor, was strong and lasting throughout the slavery period and beyond, providing protective value to the homes it decorated.

During the 1930s, the WPA conducted oral history interviews with formerly enslaved South Carolinians, and brought up the blue doorframes, porches, and windows that lined the coastal region and sometimes, the home of the interviewee. During this time, the folklore surrounding the practice was what it is today – that the tradition was passed down through generations, originating with early enslaved ancestors from Africa. WPA interviewers expected their subjects to confirm these theories, so it was to their surprise when they received denial. When asked about the tradition, some would say they "jest lak dat color."[155] Liza Small reflected on the origins of her own "sky blue" doors and windows simply: "Old man buy 'em." She went further, denying the protective power of blue, proclaiming, "That ain't so! That ain't so! I prove that. Sometimes they ride me till I can't keep up next day!"[156] This pushback on the significance

[155] Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 321
[156] Liza Small and Genevieve Chandler, "Visit with Aunt Liza Small (went to see the 'old bush')" Federal Writer's Project, Ex-Slave Unpublished Narratives at South Caroliniana Library. Project #-1655.; Charles W. Joyner, *Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 153

of blue paint does not negate my research, nor the fact that some Black South Carolinians had and have beliefs in its spiritual power, but there are a few things we can take from them.

First, it is well known that this collection of WPA interviews is often questioned because of its inconsistent and often biased lines of questioning. Critics of the interviews note that they were conducted so long after enslavement and that memory is fragile, so the stories and details communicated by the interviewees cannot always be trusted. This perspective tends to be too dismissive of the value of these interviews. As one of the only lasting pieces of primary evidence from American enslavement, listeners must invest in the emotional truths that interviewers share while acknowledging that some details might have been lost or changed over time. It is true that individual subjects might have simply forgotten the specific original significance of the blue paint and its color. The decades between their enslavement and these interviews could have erased that connection, leaving behind a simple fondness. That said, it is important to highlight that the interviewees do note a preference for the color, just not a reason. This preference is ultimately a reflection of an early belief in indigo's spiritual power. Even as twentieth-century community desire for the color, this preference had its origins in spiritual protection, indigo labor, and West African indigo practices.

In another way, it makes sense why the coastal Gullah community, so widely known as being directly descended from enslaved that labored in the region, might intentionally shade information about spirituality from curious white interviewers. Perhaps they knew the significance of indigo-inspired paint exactly but made an intentional choice to hide that knowledge in WPA interviews. These subjects were once enslaved – other interviews show that they remember the toils of living on a South Carolinian plantation and living without freedom, including spiritual. While eighteenth-century enslavers did not invest in converting Gullah

people, nineteenth-century owners certainly did, which meant African-inherited beliefs were no longer so safe.[157] They were merged with Christian beliefs imposed by plantation owners, who had shown themselves to be capable of violence and had reason to be feared. A child living in this environment would certainly carry memory of that fear, and then might later be hesitant to reveal their personal, community-driven, spiritual practices to inquisitive white government workers 80 years later. It is difficult to know exactly the reason why subjects in these interviews deny the folklore, but it is important to remember that these individual rejections do not necessarily speak for the whole community. Blue paint was widespread throughout the twentieth century, and I have demonstrated its historical origins, and these few denials do not negate the significance of a tradition extensively practiced and carefully inherited from earlier generations.

Today, it is evident that more than one person continued to believe in indigo's power through the 1930s, and passed those convictions down to their twenty-first century descendants. The tradition lives strongly in the culture of coastal and sea island South Carolina. Alphonso Brown, a native of Rantowles, South Carolina says that his family deliberately used the periwinkle blue color on their porch ceiling and window trimmings to ward off evil spirits. "People don't believe, they don't get into it. Meanwhile, the hag is having a field day on people."[158] Alphonso's beliefs exemplify the tradition alive and well, affiliated with its roots in enslaved spirituality, within the Gullah community. Pinckney's description of the tradition as associated with enslaved indigo vats also demonstrates the belief in the affiliation of slavery and modern haint blue in Gullah culture.[159] Historic institutions, like those previously mentioned, are recognizing the blue traditions they contain and devoting resources to uncovering their origins

[157] Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People*, 68
[158] Johnson, "'Haint Blue' Porch Ceilings"
[159] Pinckney, *Blue Roots*, 63

and meanings, like the Owens-Thomas and Davenport houses. Even some who did not grow up believing in the association of blue and spirits carry on the tradition through their homes, like Louise Miller Cohen, who denied the significance of haint blue, while living in a house colored that light periwinkle.[160] There are certainly still haint blue protection deniers, but they are overshadowed by the greater industry that has developed around the color.

Conclusion

Haint blue is no longer just for descendants of slavery – it's a larger trend in the coastal area that visitors and residents want to emulate to be a part of a larger history that they romanticize. Articles abound trying to sell certain colors of paint to get that perfect haint blue color. Tour companies use the tradition to get interest in a "spookier" side of Charleston and Savannah, promoting ghost and other tours of the cities. White authors write and benefit financially from ghost stories titled with "haint blue," without truly addressing the terms origins in slavery or the true spiritual powers of the color.[161] This modern culture does not acknowledge the hard enslaved labor that ultimately produced indigo-blue paint, nor the importance of its spiritual protection within the larger context of South Carolinian slavery. As with much of Black culture, the tradition has been co-opted and wiped of its origins in struggle. As Ellen O'Neill, former Creative Director at Benjamin Moore, said of haint blue, "First, there's the folklore… Then there's the feel-good factor."[162] Yet, haint blue is indeed a reflection of a longer tradition in enslavement that was forged despite the oppression of its eighteenth-century believers. It is the continuation of a cultural practice carried out by indigo laborers who had little to put their hope

[160] Shoshi Parks, "What the Color 'Haint Blue' Means to the Descendants of Enslaved Africans." Atlas Obscura, January 14, 2020, https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/what-haint-blue-means-to-descendants-enslaved-africans.
[161] Stephanie Alexander, *Haint Blue*. (Toronto, Canada: Bublish, Inc., 2021); Kim Johnston, *Haint Blue*. CreateSpace Publishing, 2016.
[162] Embry Roberts, "What Is 'Haint Blue'? Here's Why Southern Porches Have Blue Ceilings." TODAY, June 27, 2019, https://www.today.com/home/what-haint-blue-here-s-why-southern-porches-have-blue-t115573.

in – the calling on the protection of their ancestors through blue paint and indigo smearing was one of few avenues for personal expression in a society designed to eliminate their ways of life. This significance should be honored, respected, and remembered, among the larger modern economy built to profit off of the practice.

Thus, haint blue tradition did originate with enslaved indigo laborers in the middle of the eighteenth century through a larger narrative about South Carolinian enslavement. Carrying their beliefs about the existence of the afterlife and spirits, and their belief in the significance of blue in funerary tradition, enslaved Africans came to South Carolina and labored on indigo plantations where that very source of blue was available to them. There, they continued and molded their West African beliefs to their new circumstances and managed to practice this spirituality despite their status as property. This included a belief in the spiritual-protective power of blue, as demonstrated by their use of blue beads in a spiritual capacity. Like their beads, they took excess indigo from the vats where they or their counterparts labored and smeared it on their houses, as Pinckney and other scholars describe, and as the Branford-Horry stable house demonstrates. This tradition was passed down through generations and expressed by nineteenth century slaves using the materials available to them, as at the Owens-Thomas and Davenport Houses. The Point of Pines cabin shows how blue painting traditions were implemented during the Antebellum period in new constructions and passed down through Reconstruction and the twentieth century to the modern day.

Enslaved South Carolinians received spiritual protection from the blue paint they smeared on their homes. Today, their descendants continue to practice and feel this value through abundant haint blue decoration along the South Carolina coast. In its earliest forms, the paint was created using indigo, a product manufactured by enslaved laborers themselves. Slaves

endured terrible conditions and difficult manual labor to produce indigo product, but through a belief in the product's color's spiritual capacity, they could then achieve valuable protection from it in turn. This importance led them to continue using the blue color, even when paint technology evolved, cementing blue as powerful. Indigo was valuable for enslaved laborers and their descendants, and therefore provides another iteration of value in its implementation as paint on homes in the community that produced it.

Chapter 3: “Speckled like a guinea fowl”: Indigo Craftwork

Introduction

Craftwork is a unique creative outlet that promotes culture, tradition, and heritage. It is difficult to find evidence of creative works made by enslaved people in the eighteenth century, but the few that have survived share remarkable insight into the experiences and values of these individuals. Inspired by culture brought and inherited from West Africa, enslaved South Carolinians adapted craftwork techniques, patterns, and methods to establish their own new creative traditions within the confines of their enslaved reality. This chapter centers material culture as I examine West African textile traditions that were reinterpreted and transformed by eighteenth-century enslaved individuals in South Carolina. These West African pieces and their South Carolinian counterparts are characterized by their use of indigo dye, abundantly produced in both places in the eighteenth century. Building on understandings of indigo in clothing and haint blue paint, I highlight more methods in which indigo dye could be implemented by centering indigo craft traditions which had significant meanings and appearance. I focus on craft traditions made with textiles as I demonstrate how indigo was important to the dyeing practices and subsequent patchwork methods of South Carolinian textile creations made by enslaved individuals. This blue dye was important for understandings and memories of West African traditions, and therefore became an important piece of the American translations – a product of enslaved labor that became valuable through its use in these textiles. Yoruba, Mande, and Asante people created resist-dyed cloth and patchwork textiles using indigo in the eighteenth century and after their enslavement in South Carolina, adapted these techniques to create new textile traditions rooted in indigo. The labor of enslaved South Carolinians producing this dye was critical for the transition.

There are two large categories of secondary literature consulted for this analysis: scholars writing on West African craft and those writing on African American textile traditions. There are a few authors that provide excellent and detailed overviews of many West African crafting traditions, including John Picton and John Mack's 1979 *African Textiles: Looms, Weaving, and Design,* which is a foundational survey work in this field.[163] John Gillow's 2003 *African Textiles* and Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood and William Vogelsang's 2023 *Encyclopedia of Embroidery from Sub-Saharan Africa* follow in format and content, surveying a wide scope of primarily West African crafting and textiles traditions, complete with many image examples of the different techniques.[164] These texts can be supplemented with more specific studies on certain techniques, like those from Jane Barbour and Doug Simmonds and Solomon Marfo Ayseu, David Anokye, George Kwame Fobiri, Richard Acquaye, and Bernard Godomey.[165] Additionally, many works on African American quilting tradition touch these West African techniques in order to show continuity and influence. It should be noted that most of these sources come from European or American scholars, who are writing within their own biases about African culture and within a tradition of scholarship on African practices that has historically not given full respect or attention to these subjects. Some of the older literature on African craft relies on individual observation and one-off conversations with local craftmakers and does not take much native literature or historiography into account. However, because

[163] John Picton and John Mack, *African Textiles: Looms, Weaving and Design*. (London, England: British Museum Publications for the Trustees of the British Museum, 1979)
[164] John Gillow, *African Textiles*. (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2003); Gillian Vogelsang-Eastwood and Willem Vogelsang, *Encyclopedia of Embroidery from Sub-Saharan Africa*. (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023)
[165] Jane Barbour and Doug Simmonds, eds, *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*. (Ibadan, Nigeria: University of Ibadan, 1971); Solomon Marfo Ayesu et al., "Aesthetic and Philosophical Meanings of Indigenous Asante Kente." *Textile and Leather Review* 4, no. 4 (November 17, 2021): 267–81, https://doi.org/https://www.tlr-journal.com/tlr-4-4-2021-ayesu/.

English sources on West African material culture are limited, this work can prove useful as one of a limited number of ways into the field.

Black textile and quilt-making was barely addressed in the academic literature until the late 1980s and 1990s, when several authors began devoting time and energy into learning more about these traditions and tracking down material evidence of them. These authors include Gladys-Marie Fry, with her 1990 work *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South*, Cuesta Benberry, with the *1992 Always There: The African-American Presence in American Quilts*, and Maude Southwell Wahlman, with her 1993 *Signs & Symbols: African Images in African American Quilts*.[166] These women, writing at the same time, built off of each others' work and literature, all in conversation about building a history of Black American quilting. Each one acknowledges the West African influence in the greater scope of African American quilting and works to demonstrate the importance and influence of this artistic tradition. Judith Chase's research *in Afro-American Art and Craft* is also foundational for this field, writing about a wide range of textile and craft tradition, including but not limited to quilt-making.[167] Many scholars since these women have worked to expand this field, arguing about the significance of women's labor in building the quilting industry, including Elizabeth Higgs and Polly Radosh, Lisa Farrington, and Sally Price. These researchers have expounded the value and emotional meanings around quilting, demonstrating its comfort and potential for storytelling through generations.

I center my work as building from these American craft authors. I expand and emphasize understandings of West African influence and the ways in which culture and craftsmanship

[166] Gladys-Marie Fry, *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum South*. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Cuesta Benberry, *Always There: The African-American Presence in American Quilts*. (Louisville, KY: Kentucky Quilt Project, 1992); Southwell Wahlman, *Signs & Symbols*
[167] Chase, *Afro-American Art and Craft*

evolved in South Carolina, but I also argue that indigo was central in this process. I seek to create bigger context around enslaved textile creation, showing how the labor that many eighteenth-century enslaved South Carolinians endured on indigo plantations was foundational in creating valuable and artistic enslaved craft tradition. Indigo has been addressed in histories of eighteenth-century Northeastern textiles, where indigo resist-dyed bedding was popular and valuable (a tradition that does not appear to spread south), but the dye has not yet been considered central in these histories of craft in the South. This is where my research fits and creates new frameworks of understanding enslaved life and material culture.

It is difficult to find sources to write about most eighteenth-century history, but particularly that of enslaved individuals, who left little behind and who were not often included meaningfully in the historical record. This is further compounded when thinking about material culture – a topic which was rarely included in white observations of enslaved life, nor would have easily survived hard use to exist today, almost 300 years later. Runaway ads can be used to understand enslaved clothing, but other kinds of textiles that enslaved people owned are particularly difficult to find because there is little written evidence of them. Further, very few survived to the modern day because they could not endure the harsh treatment of lye soap washing on the plantation in addition to frequent use in harsh conditions.[168] Fire, theft, and sale all play a role in the loss of these textiles as well, in addition to the fact that many enslaved-made crafts, like quilts, remained in the possession of their enslavers.

If these quilts and craft textiles were kept by enslaving families, they were passed down through their family line, and many of these remain in white homes today – unknown, hidden,

[168] Jaqueline L. Tobin and Raymond G. Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View*. (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999), 33; Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 39-41

and likely in a process of decay.[169] This is the case for many enslaved-made quilts and textiles that were made for and used by the enslaving family. This category of quilts is the primary one researchers have access to today, because while most of these quilts are unidentifiable as enslaved-made, a handful of them have been passed down with a story or another sort of provenance of being made by enslaved individuals.[170] Many of these still sit in white homes, but some do exist in museums, archives, and historical societies, where researchers can find them. In these situations, material culture can be a helpful insight into enslaved labor and culture in places where written records fall short.

Eighteenth-century West African textiles are difficult to locate from a Western perspective, because archives and museum holdings are inaccessible. Additionally, governmental overturn and the challenges of colonialism have made finding and saving these textiles more difficult. My findings are limited to Western museum records and what has been published in secondary sources. These sources provide good insight into West African crafting traditions, but their materials are often from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For this reason, I will employ upstreaming methodology in this chapter, using more modern sources to better understand eighteenth-century practices. I believe that this methodology is relevant and justified in this space because tradition is central in many of these practices, with newer works working to emulate older techniques for the sake of historical connection and calling upon one's origins. This is further supported by the fact that crafting in West Africa and the Americas is passed down from generation to generation through family channels.[171] By learning a crafting technique

[169] Benberry, *Always There*, 21
[170] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 15
[171] Stuckey, *Slave Culture*, 44; Chase, *Afro-American Art and Craft*, 79; Southwell Wahlman, *Signs & Symbols*, 7; Elizabeth Higgs and Polly F. Radosh, "Quilts: Moral Economies and Matrilineages." *Journal of Family History* 38, no. 1 (January 2013): 55–77, 75, https://doi-org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/10.1177/0363199012470063

from one's mother or father, a technique that also existed in the eighteenth century, it is likely that little has changed about that technique over time and that the tradition of the practice is important enough that change is beside the point of the craft. Where patterns might have evolved, looking at a twentieth-century example still invokes the feeling and technique associated with a crafting practice, and is therefore still useful. This method will also be strong in discussing quilting practices, which are passed down through the family in a similar way and often call upon tradition in patterning and technique.

Dyeing

In the eighteenth-century Atlantic, indigo dyeing tradition and styles were carried from Yoruba adire traditions to specialized enslaved clothing. Indigo is an important economic industry in West Africa, and scholars agree it has been produced in the region for at least 1,000 years.[172] The dye is produced throughout West Africa, and familiarity with the industry is one reason why enslaved laborers from locations like Senegambia, The Windward Coast, and the Gold Coast were so favored on eighteenth-century South Carolina plantations. However, the African indigo dye-making process is a bit different from that in South Carolina, because of the goals of the industry. In South Carolina, two cisterns were required – the first, where whole plants ferment with water, and the second, where that water is drained and beat. The buildup on the bottom of that second vat after it's aerated became the indigo dye – small, dried, incredibly concentrated cakes that could be shipped overseas and created into liquid dye when needed. In West Africa, only one vat is needed. The indigo plants are first dried and formed into balls, and then mixed with alkaline water in the vat to produce liquid indigo dye.[173] The liquid product is

[172] Jane Barbour, "Adire Cloth in Nigeria - 1989." *The Nigerian Field* 55 (1990): 65–89.
[173] Mary Terrall, "African Indigo in the French Atlantic: Michel Adanson's Encounter with Senegal." *Isis* 114, no. 1 (2023): 2–24., 6, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1086/723496

meant to be used there and then, as opposed to the dried cake product which was intended for cross-Atlantic shipping.

Although only one vat is needed, these indigo vats are widespread and central to their West African communities. They add a colorful physicality to the landscape, dyeing their surrounding ground and infrastructure blue – from the mud, to the tools, to the clothes – particularly in modern Nigeria.[174] As on South Carolinian indigo plantations, towns that are particularly skilled in dyeing and are decorated with these vats are currently, and have been historically, characterized by the color indigo. In Nigeria, the dyeing process is not just for craftsmen, but a community practice that anyone can and does participate in, as they have for centuries.[175] In the eighteenth century as today, this dyeing practice evokes connection with one's community, including shared values. Indigo is identity-forming and reminiscent of home, and its skill is distinctly designed to be immediately used, to further indigo dye within the homeland and the larger West African region.

While many West African groups have indigo dyeing textile traditions, one group stands out with a strong practice that is influential and still in use today: Yoruba adire cloth. The Yoruba are a West African ethnic group that primarily inhabit Nigeria, but also have a presence in many other regions. They refer to their homeland as "Yorubaland," a title that crosses state boundaries. They have existed for many centuries and were certainly inhabitants of the modern Nigerian region in the eighteenth century. Because they are not isolated to Nigeria, Yoruba people would have not only been included in the 2.2% of Africans imported into Charles Town between 1749 and 1787 from the Bright of Benin, but also would have made up some portion of

[174] Nancy Stanfield, "Dyeing Methods in Western Nigeria." Essay. In *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*, Ibadan, Nigeria: University of Ibadan, 1971., 9
[175] Kay Triplett and Lori Lee Triplett. *Indigo Quilts: 30 Quilts from the Poos Collection*. Lafayette, CA: C&T Publishing, 2015., 14

the remaining imported from other regions of West Africa. This notably includes 13.1% of people imported from the Gold Coast and the 25.2% from Senegambia.[176] This is further supported by the fact that the Yoruba dyeing technique is found through much of West Africa, especially in St. Louis, Senegal, which is regarded by scholars as the home of complex stitch resist textiles, a variation of the Yoruba adire cloth.[177]

The term adire, meaning to take, to tie, and to dye, refers to a type of indigo-dyed cloth made with a resist technique. It is not clear when the technique was first practiced in Yorubaland, but it was used by the seventeenth century, recorded in journals of European explorers writing on textile production in Africa.[178] These travelers describe indigo-dyed cloth that they have seen, bought, or traded on their travels, and they describe such cloth in Yorubaland, where adire was made. One traveler's journal recounted the pattern as "speckled like a guinea fowl" in 1848, describing a circular adire pattern.[179] Though the technique is old, the term "adire" was only first used in the twentieth century, so this term does not exist in the historical record.[180] Popularity around the term grew in the 1920s as more European cotton cloth was imported to the region that could be easily used for the technique, and as time continued, the meaning of "adire" quickly expanded to characterize all indigo-dyed cloth, in addition to the specific Yoruba technique.[181] Because enslaved laborers were imported from Yoruba West African regions, and because the adire technique originated before the eighteenth century, enslaved South Carolinians would have

[176] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 43-45
[177] Vogelsang-Eastwood, Vogelsang, *Encyclopedia of Embroidery*, 110
[178] Judith Byfield, "Innovation and Conflict: Cloth Dyers and the Interwar Depression in Abeokuta, Nigeria." *The Journal of African History* 38, no. 1 (1997): 79, https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/S0021853796006883; Triplett and Triplett, *Indigo Quilts*, 11
[179] Barbour, "Adire Cloth in Nigeria – 1989," 65
[180] V&A South Kensington, "Àdìrẹ – 'tied and Dyed' Indigo Textiles." Victoria & Albert Museum, July 7, 2022, https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/adire-tied-and-dyed-indigo-textiles.
[181] Barbour and Simmonds, *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*, 6

known the technique and were able to adapt it in the New World, placing adire cloth at the right place and time for this research.

Today there are two types of adire cloth – adire oniko and adire eleko – but adire oniko is likely the only type that was made in the eighteenth century.[182] In the oniko technique, cloth is folded and then tied or sewn to create a pattern. This is called "stitch-resist," because the parts that are stitched will resist the indigo dye, because they will not be exposed. Typically, the cloth is folded into squares which are starkly divided by raffia-sewn lines, and then the individual squares are sewn in patterns.[183] Alternatively, strips of cloth can be placed on top of each other, stitched together in a pattern, and then dyed. Then, those strips would be sewn together to create one large adire cloth.[184] Keeping the modern American tie-dye practice in mind might be helpful for envisioning the goals of adire cloth. By tying or sewing certain pieces of the cloth together, they are hidden from the dye, and therefore stay white while the rest of the textile is dyed indigo. This creates a distinctive blue and white pattern. This image of a stack of cloths prepared for stitch-resist dyeing in early twentieth century Senegal is a helpful visualization of the technique:

[182] Barbour, "Adire Cloth in Nigeria – 1989," 65
[183] Barbour and Simmonds, *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*, 52
[184] Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang, *Encyclopedia of Embroidery*, 108



Figure 18: Stack of cloths prepared for stitch-resist adire dyeing.
Textile; sample. 1900-1913. Af1934,0307.328. The British Museum, London, England.
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1934-0307-328.

Once this cloth is dyed, only the cloth left exposed will be dyed blue. The stitches will be released to form patterns of white amongst the now-indigo textile. A similar outcome can be accomplished by tying the fabric, rather than securing it with stitches.

These stitch-resisted dyed cloths have significance that can be created or enhanced by their patterning. These patterns can change over time, and patterns can carry the same name, but have different interpretations. One example is "Olokun" cloth, named after a goddess of the sea and wealth, which always contains ten large squares, but the patterns of those squares varies based on the interpretation of the maker.[185] Many patterns featured circles, but the arrangement

[185] Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 157. See another example of 1971 Olokun cloth: *Adire*, 1971, Af1971,35.17, The British Museum, London, England. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1971-35-17.

of these shapes could differ and be identified in certain ways depending on the town.[186] Because patterns change and are subjective, it is difficult to know what eighteenth-century versions exactly looked like. However, I propose this 1960 *olosupa-eleso*, or "moons and fruits" patterns as providing possible insight.



Figure 19: 1960 adire cloth with "moons and fruits" pattern.
Àdìrẹ cloth. 1960-1969. CIRC.592-1965. The Victoria & Albert Museum. London, England.
https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O147380/%C3%A0d%C3%ACr%E1%BA%B9-cloth-textile-unknown/.

[186] V&A South Kensington, "Àdìrẹ"

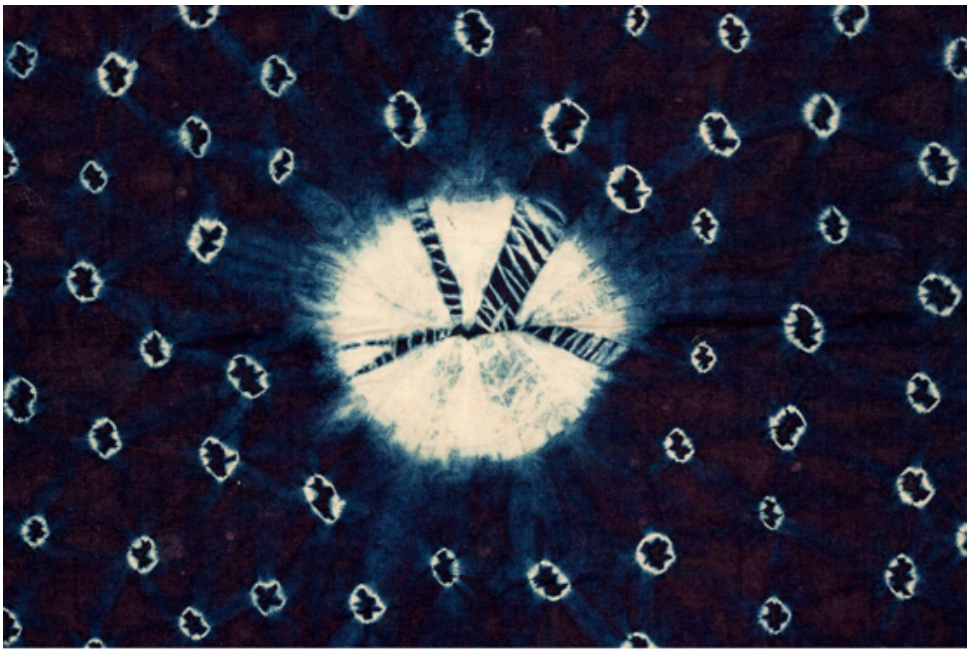


Figure 20: Close-up: 1960 adire cloth with "moons and fruits" pattern.
1960-1969. CIRC.592-1965. The Victoria & Albert Museum. London, England.
https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O147380/%C3%A0d%C3%ACr%E1%BA%B9-cloth-textile-unknown/.

This cloth is named practically. It is traditionally prepared by tying seeds into the cloth to create the smaller circles which decorate the majority of the cloth. The larger "moon" could be made by tying the textile tighter.[187] It is easy to imagine this kind of simple tying method, connected with the environment through its use of natural seeds, as possible in the eighteenth century. Further, this design fits the 1848 "speckled" traveler description, indicating that it might not be so far off from what eighteenth-century Yoruba craft makers created from their indigo dye. Whether a pattern was made with a deity in mind or was calling on celestial entities, they were intentionally created within a larger tradition in which they interpreted the creations of other dyers and invented upon them.

Indigo was significant in the process of creating eighteenth-century adire cloth for many reasons. One was its spiritual significance. Indigo was significant in many regions of West

[187] Jane Barbour, "The Origin of Some Adire Designs." Essay. In *Adire Cloth in Nigeria*, 49–80. (Ibadan, Nigeria: University of Ibadan, 1971), 52

Africa for its affiliation with protection, death, and the afterlife.[188] The use of indigo was intentional to call upon spirits and deities for help, comfort, and safety in life and beyond. This was true for the Yoruba people too, who believed in the goddess Yemoja, who is the "goddess of motherhood, mother of many other gods, [and] is associated with the Ogun River in Nigeria and the ocean in the New World."[189] Likely for this reason, Yemoja is associated with the color blue, giving indigo dye a spiritual significance. Many Yoruba resist designs can be traced to an affiliation with Yemoja, calling on a motherly figure for strength and protection. There is even a legend that says that Yemoja herself dyed textiles blue, certainly indicating a direct connection with indigo as it has been such a prominent industry in Yoruba-inhabiting regions for centuries. In this way, indigo-dyed adire cloth had a specific spiritual value which made indigo integral and vital to the cloth's meaning.

Additionally, although a range of differently colored dyes were available, blue is the only color that was used to dye cloth after it was woven.[190] Weaving is a large West African industry, complete with its own traditions and techniques that work to create the cloth that Yoruba and other people wore in the eighteenth century. For other dyes to be used during the weaving process, but not indigo, indicates a specific choice. Indigo is special and significant as the only dye used on a completed textile item. The blue color created by indigo dye was regulated and used intentionally through adire dyeing, rather than in the weaving process. Its color characterizes adire cloth, and the addition of this blue is intentional through the tie and stitch-resist processes. Adire cloth and indigo dye go hand in hand, and thus the plant is integral to understandings of the adire technique.

[188] For more on West African spiritual beliefs surrounding indigo, see Chapter 2.
[189] Southwell Wahlman, *Signs & Symbols*, 90
[190] Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 147

Further, indigo dye is noted by Picton and Mack as the most "extensively used dye in traditional Africa."[191] In addition to its use and significance in adire cloth, indigo was widely used to dye many kinds of blue and white textiles in eighteenth-century West Africa. These distinctive designs, with their contrast of indigo blue and bright white, created patterns that could easily be noticed from far away.[192] This patterning was important in cultures that valued bold and distinctive textiles, like the Yoruba. Indigo dyeing was the main type of dyeing completed in the West African textile industry, which was the dominant material commodity in the West African barter economy until the beginning of the nineteenth century.[193] This places indigo at the forefront of not only the Yoruba, but also the larger West African dyeing tradition, central to not only spirituality and formations of community identity, but also economic stability and profit.

As West African people were enslaved and shipped to South Carolina, these indigo dyeing traditions remained firm in their memories of their homeland. Once in the New World, they established dyeing traditions that resembled those in Yorubaland and elsewhere. Because most American textiles in the eighteenth century were manufactured in and imported from England, it is possible that some of this dyeing could have been done on white imported cloth. However, there is also reason to believe that some South Carolinian plantations manufactured some of their own cloth. Because all of this homemade cloth would naturally be a neutral color (as opposed to imported cloth, which could be purchased in a range of colors), it makes sense that dyeing would have been a common practice to achieve similar products as what could be purchased in the market. Further, some of that dyeing could be adapted by enslaved laborers with

[191] Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 37
[192] Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols*, 33
[193] Balfour-Paul, *Indigo*, 61

memories of their homeland traditions, using indigo remnants that would have been abundant on an indigo-manufacturing estate.

In John Lawson's 1709 travel journal, *A New Voyage to Carolina*, he records: "The Women are the most industrious Sex in that Place, and, by their good Houswifry, make a great deal of Cloath of their own Cotton, Wool, and Flax… so that they have no occasion to run into the Merchant's Debt, or lay their Money out of Stores for Cloathing."[194] This quote suggests that before the cotton industry gained ground at the very end of the eighteenth century, the manufacturing of cloth was done through alternative textile materials. Lawson notes that even though the English market provided opportunity to purchase clothing, as it did throughout most of the eighteenth century, there were some families who made the choice to make their own textiles and were able to do so successfully. William Drayton institutes some consistency in this practice and even establishes a connection between indigo dyeing and this clothing production, observing in his 1784 South Carolina travel journal: "This man, besides the Crop of his Field, makes all his Family's and his Negroes' clothing of wool, cotton, and flax; the cotton is neat and dyed with Indigo & the natural Earth, a kind of Ochre."[195] In 1784, a period at the end of the indigo industry's height and before the start of cotton's reign, Drayton recognizes that it was possible for some estates to be responsible for their own clothing, from the manufacturing down to the dyeing. While Drayton gives the enslaver credit for this little industry, it was the work of the people he owned to complete this labor, as they made clothing for themselves to wear from the very raw materials that they worked to create. Indigo dyeing was significant enough for Drayton to mention it by name, which goes to further demonstrate the potential for enslaved West Africans to engage in indigo dyeing practices in South Carolina.

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[194] Lawson, *A New Voyage*, 9
[195] Drayton, "William Drayton's Journal"

To further argue for the occasional existence of locally dyed cloth in eighteenth century South Carolina, there are a handful of runaway ads from this period, across a few Charles Town newspapers, that mention that a runaway's clothing was "dyed with indigo."[196] These mentions are rare enough that none occur in the 1760-1775 span of *The South Carolina Gazette* that was examined for Chapter 1. When runaways wore blue clothing, even though it was likely manufactured in England with indigo dye processed in South Carolina, the ads simply use the term "blue," not "indigo dyed." Therefore, these rare mentions of indigo dyeing are significant. Nonetheless, when they occur, these examples give insight into a local industry often hidden from historical view. The most significant example comes in 1758, when an enslaved man named London was described as being "remarkable for having but 3 toes upon one foot, which I think is the right, and his cloaths dyed with indico."[197] To put indigo-dyed clothing on par with having three toes here is significant, indicating that there was need not only to point out London's clothing by describing it as a rare "dyed with indigo," but also to emphasize its otherness by comparing it with a body irregularity.

Stanfield notes that in Nigeria, there is a "bright metallic sheen" to indigo-dyed adire cloth, which indicates that a garment was dyed with natural indigo. This is actually an indication of the overloading of dye before a proper wash, but this certain look is affiliated with Yoruba-dyed cloth.[198] This could be one element that makes London's indigo-dyed cloth stand out, in addition to a different saturation or other texture that a locally dyed cloth might have in comparison to a foreign one. Further though, one wonders whether it was solely the indigo-dyed

[196] *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*. Charleston, 1766-1775. *South Carolina Electronic Records Archive*: 2015., July 11, 1775, November 10, 1767. Other papers surveyed are the Gazette of the State of South Carolina, the Royal Gazette, and South Carolina and American General Gazette.
[197] *The South Carolina Gazette*, August 25, 1758
[198] Stanfield, "Dyeing Methods," 23

cloth that might have caught the eye of a passerby, or if a certain, potentially West African, indigo pattern would have made London's look "remarkable." Perhaps "dyed with indigo" indicated not only a color, but also a pattern that was affiliated with the indigo color that would have made it stand out from blue English cloth. In the ad, London is specifically mentioned as being from Gambia – this could be an indication that his clothing characterized his origins, as being dyed in a West African indigo pattern that would have been easily identified as foreign. There is something different about London's clothing, and it is centered around the fact that it is dyed by indigo, potentially the very indigo that London labored on himself. In this case, London could have felt the value of West African-dyed clothing, and the comfort of home and expression of African identity that came with those clothes, from the products that he was enslaved to make.

In a survey of eighteenth-century Charles Town runaway ads, there are four ads that mention enslaved runaways wearing "speckled" clothing. This language, rare in these publications, reminds one of how Yoruba adire cloth was described in the 1840s, as "speckled like a guinea fowl."[199] As a unique descriptor across the Western British and American cultures, it is likely that the African traveler's description of "speckled" matched these runaway's descriptions, indicating a sort of resist-dyed clothing in a circular pattern, like "moons and fruits". Out of the four mentions of this speckled clothing, two stand out. There's Pompey, who was described in *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal* on September 18, 1770: "…by trade a carpenter, an artful, sensible fellow…had on when he went away a jacket and pair of trowsers of blue pains, and a speckled shirt."[200] There's Quash, whose following ad was posted in *The South Carolina Gazette* on March 16, 1765: "…had on when we went away, a blue great coat, speckled shirt, and trowsers made of white plains, he is an artful rascal, speaks good

[199] Barbour, "Adire Cloth in Nigeria – 1989," 65
[200] *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, September 18, 1770

English…as he understanding caulking, is a jobbing carpenter and wheelwright…"[201] The remaining runaways who wore speckled clothing were not carpenters, but it is notable that both Pompey and Quash were.

Pompey and Quash were both carpenters who wore speckled shirts and wore blue clothing elsewhere on their body. The choice of blue indicates a preference for the color, meaning that they might have had a spiritual belief in its protection, potentially even a belief in its connection with Yemoja, if they were native Yoruba people. None of the descriptions include a color that these clothing items were "speckled" in, indicating perhaps that color was even so integral to the look of the speckle that it did not need to be named. This is certainly true for Yoruba adire cloth, which is so completely characterized by its indigo-ness that its title, "to tie and dye," only refers to the manufacturing technique. The indigo is implied in the culture surrounding the cloth, and the indigo might have been implied in Pompey and Quash's speckled shirts.

Further, it makes sense that carpenters would have the means and skill to practice a traditional dyeing technique. As carpenters, Pompey and Quash were considered "skilled" laborers.[202] They were responsible for both the construction of structures and items for the plantation's economic success, and for "shap[ing] the slave community's material life."[203] This included producing artistic items, including Pompey and Quash's indigo-dyed cloth. Enslaved carpenters regularly exercised architectural and aesthetic decision making in the construction of plantation homes and workspaces, and this visual-oriented mindset could have made these men

[201] *The South Carolina Gazette*, March 16, 1765
[202] On carpenters as skilled, Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 440 and Justene Hill Edwards, *Unfree Markets: The Slaves' Economy and the Rise of Capitalism in South Carolina*. (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2021), 180.
[203] Frederick Knight, *Working the Diaspora: The Impact of African Labor on the Anglo-American World, 1650-1850*. (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2010), 115

more inclined to work with design crafts like adire dyeing.[204] These crafts were inspired by their environment, including their heritage, available materials, and trips to the market. As skilled laborers, they went to the market to sell built items for their owners' benefit, but while there, they could purchase and be inspired by textiles and indigo products from other enslaved vendors.[205] Women who sold embroidered, dyed, or patchwork textile items in the market could spark ideas for these carpenters. In these ways, Pompey and Quash had the ability to produce the adire-type clothing that they wore when they ran away. It is certain that these men both were dressed in a special way that deserved a unique description in their runaway ads, and their clothing's connections with West African descriptions and their access to resources necessary for West African indigo dyeing practices make it likely that they were invoking their homeland with their speckled outfits. Indigo was produced by members of their communities that endured harsh labor to produce indigo dye, and in this way, Pompey and Quash had the opportunity to obtain a bit of value from the cruel and terrible system of enslavement.

Even when enslaved South Carolinians were wearing English cloth that had been dyed abroad, like most in eighteenth-century America, and did not have opportunities through their labor to further adire-like indigo dyeing, there were resources and potential for this dyeing to happen through the presence of the market. Justene Hill Edwards calls enslaved West African people "independent economic actors" in the eighteenth century, arguing that they had the opportunity to and would use self-hire profits to buy things including cloth and clothing on the market in South Carolina.[206] Because sewing was a common eighteenth-century task and skill for enslaved women, access to thread and needles would be available as well, making stitch-resist-

[204] Knight, *Working the Diaspora*, 118
[205] Hill Edwards, *Unfree Markets*, 29; Knight, *Working the Diaspora*,112
[206] Hill Edwards, *Unfree Markets*, 21, 29

type dyeing possible.[207] Indigo remnants were abundant in the colony as the most profitable export, meaning that if indigo was not available on one's own plantation, it likely would not be far away, as many enslaved Africans were forced into the struggles of indigo production. Having both the power of acting on the market and the memories of West African indigo dyeing meant that indigo-dyeing in this technique was possible and did happen in South Carolina, but enslaved craftspeople still had to overcome the barriers of enslavement, new culture, and the practical time and energy needed to produce this kind of dyed clothing, not to mention the labor required to produce the dye in the first place. Those actors who succeeded in their dyeing are reflected in these runaway ads, demonstrating the West African indigo-dyeing culture that existed in South Carolina.

Crafting techniques, including indigo resist-dyed cloth, were cultural traditions that were passed down from generation to generation in West Africa, and continued to be communicated that way upon arrival in South Carolina. African people, stolen from their homeland violently and suddenly, persevered through their culture and both knowingly and unknowingly passed on elements of their tradition and heritage through practices like craftwork and textile creation.[208] These techniques were not forgotten, but rather evolved, as the circumstances and resources available continued to change for enslaved Africans throughout the course of American slavery. These individuals were inventive and smart in their adaptation of home cultures, in the face of dangerous enslavers, harsh work, a lack of freedom, and the changing culture that came along with enslavement. In the same way that haint blue paint grew more significant meanings around protection in South Carolina, adire cloth evolved in its new environment.

[207] See next section for more information about eighteenth-century sewing by enslaved women.
[208] Twining and Baird, *Sea Island Roots*, 2

In a practical sense, it is likely that the patterns that indigo was dyed in evolved in the transition of the resist-dyeing technique from West Africa to South Carolina. Enslaved people would have changed these patterns, already so volatile and subjective in individual regions of West Africa and Yorubaland, as they adapted to their new surroundings. This is especially true as different West African enslaved artists interacted with each other. As West African people were imported to South Carolina, they were sold into plantation cultures where one's fellow laborers became family, particularly in the Sea Islands where Gullah ancestors lived. Yoruba dyers learned new techniques and visual effects from groups like the Hausa and Senegambian dyers who participated in similar dyeing cultures in West Africa but with different pattern templates, who might have been enslaved on the same estates. This intermingling of different people could have sparked new creativity and change around patterns, while maintaining the basic stitch and tying techniques. This change didn't have to be significant or large – "speckled" shirts in South Carolina and West Africa could have been loaded with different meaning, nuance, and decision-making, but would have ultimately been characterized by outsiders by their similar tiny repeating circles. This still represents an evolution in the practice of adire and other West African dyeing techniques, as new circumstances prompted a new physicality for the cloth tradition.

There were differences in the process of acquiring indigo and other materials for indigo dyeing as an enslaved person instead of free. Indigo was abundant in both Yorubaland and South Carolina, but the final product was different in the two places. Adapting to using a dried product versus a liquid one indicates a change in the resist-dyeing process, an extra or changed step that would have impact on its timing and potentially the quality of its result. Critics of the time agreed that South Carolina indigo was inferior, creating a shoddy dye that prioritized monetary

benefit over dyeing power.[209] This would have certainly impacted the visuals of the final resist-dyed product, and might have affected the process needed to get the right amount of dye concentrate into the fabric to make the blue and white pattern. The new adire cloth would be founded in South Carolina indigo, and the science and technicalities surrounding that indigo were important in the dyeing process, as in any indigo dyeing process.

It should be reiterated how central indigo was to both versions of resist-dyed cloth and how therefore, it and the labor that created it was integral in the evolution process that allowed a version of adire cloth to exist beyond its West African roots. First, it clearly characterized the look of adire cloth, and as the most abundant dye in South Carolina, did the same in the New World. Indigo is critical for the creation of adire cloth – it is the only dye applied after weaving, the only dye used in this resist technique. Indigo and adire are practically synonymous, and the description of "speckled" clothing in the South Carolina runaway ads suggests the same there. Color is not needed to describe the foreign indigo-dyeing practice, characterized by such distinct indigo circles. It is the abundance of indigo in South Carolina, manufactured by fellow bonded West African men and women, that made this transition possible. Without indigo, adire would not exist in South Carolina, and therefore without indigo labor, the significant and identity-forming technique would not exist.

Additionally, the spiritual significance of the color makes it vital to the integrity of both versions of the cloth. In Yorubaland, Yemoja is said to have produced this very cloth. Its connections with the deity are undeniable and imply strong significance with making and wearing the cloth that go beyond this life. An adire-dyed textile is more than a shirt or a robe, it is an item created with care and loaded with supernatural significance. That significance was

[209] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo," 383

heightened in the context of South Carolinian enslavement. This can be seen through haint blue paint, and it is further asserted through indigo-dyed cloths like those modeled off of adire and other methods. The toils of enslavement meant that more protection and more guidance was needed, and an indigo resist-dyed item of clothing could carry those requests. The indigo in the cloth is critical for this connection – without it, the spirits cannot be called upon in the same way. It is the continuity of the indigo in this dyed cloth tradition that allows for a continued significance of the cloth, which could be the main reason for its continuance. The indigo that West African people labored over on South Carolina indigo plantations could be a resource for them to express spiritual desires and beliefs through resist-dyed clothing.

These connections between indigo, spirituality, and the homeland certainly created value in the indigo dye product for enslaved laborers that created it and others in their community. An opportunity to connect with the homeland was valuable, as a source of emotional comfort and identity among the terrors of enslaved life. The ability to communicate with the spiritual world through one's indigo-dyed clothing was valuable, as these conversations were especially needed on the South Carolina plantation. Further though, it is possible that creating these indigo designs in an environment outside of the typical English clothing manufacturing industry could give one autonomy and therefore create value in a new way in a sense of empowerment. In addition to the few examples of South Carolinian dyeing presented here, it is possible that there was a more thriving economy of resist-dyed cloth that has been historically silenced through the degradation of the material and a refusal to address the foreign patterns by American and European enslavers and observers. Enslaved crafts people made their own decisions by resist-dyeing cloth, in bartering for certain materials and crafting a pattern and executing a stitch or tied technique. These were not decisions entirely regulated by the English industry, by the decisions of the rich

and white – but instead, expressions of creativity and called back to one's origins. This independence of sorts was rare in enslavement, and it presents another opportunity for value to be received from indigo dye and its production. By producing indigo dye, laborers provided themselves and their counterparts with the opportunity to engage with valuable resist-dyed cloth, and thus furthered bits of value within the larger system of oppression and struggle.

Patchwork

As dyeing techniques traveled and transformed across the Atlantic, the methods of assembling those dyed and other textiles in patchwork methods made the journey and evolved. Memories of and methodology surrounding patchwork traditions remained protected in the minds of enslaved West African people, as they endured horror across the Middle Passage. Upon their arrival in South Carolina, they were reestablished under new context, use, and supplies, as the traditional craft was furthered in ways that paid homage to enslaved origins. The following section explores two West African indigo-centered patchwork traditions and the implementation of patchwork skills, techniques, and patterns in eighteenth-century South Carolina, as the patchwork quilting industry emerged. Indigo was central to this transition, and therefore, it was central to the power of enslaved women as founders of the American quilting tradition and legacy.

Patchwork was most practically employed in both West Africa and in South Carolina to make small textiles bigger. In West Africa, many textiles were traditionally hand-woven, and the use of patchwork techniques meant that not all woven material had to be created to size. Instead, smaller weaves could be assembled together with a needle and thread to create clothing, blankets, and other material needs. Many of these woven textiles were dyed with indigo, making patchwork the end-destination of some indigo-dyed cloth described in Part 1. Strip patchwork is

emblematic of the West African region, and many scholars agree that the techniques practiced and strengthened through West African patchwork design and assembly formed the foundation of Black quilting traditions in the United States. I argue that indigo played a central role in this transition, as a critical characteristic of some *kente* and Mande patchwork practices and an important piece in early American quilting, particularly within the larger context of the South Carolina indigo industry. To demonstrate this connection, I begin with describing the crafting traditions of two West African groups whose members were enslaved in South Carolina: the Asante and the Mande. Then, I will describe the state of the late eighteenth-century quilting industry and demonstrate the evolution of these technical practices across the Atlantic.

The Asante, or the Ashanti, Empire reigned in the region of modern-day Ghana in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The traditional *kente* cloth created by Asante people is one excellent example of a West African patchwork tradition that later evolved in South Carolina. *Kente* cloth is a traditional woven cloth made up of narrow strips that can be crafted in a variety of patterns.[210] The term "kente" is not original to the technique or to Asante people, but comes from the Fanti, another Ghanian ethnic group, word for basket. This labeling emphasizes the interwoven look of *kente* cloths that Fanti traders received and bartered for.[211] "Kente" has evolved into a blanket term for silk cloths produced by Asante people, and might spark recognition with modern *kente* tradition both in West Africa and the United States, but the term was originally saved for textiles made in the strip patchwork technique. There are two types of *kente* cloth: the form that is totally secured together by weaving, and the type in which woven strips are attached together by a *nwomu* technique, in which decorative satin stitch is used to sew

[210] Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang, *Encyclopedia of Embroidery*, 123
[211] Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 126; Gillow, *African Textiles*, 32

elements together into a pattern.[212] Eastwood-Vogelsang and Vogelsang call this technique "decorative needlework," which suggests the skill, care, and creative eye needed to execute designs with this method.[213] *Nwomu* was practiced for long before the seventeenth century, and would have been used by Asante people who became enslaved in South Carolina.[214]

Kente cloth was assembled in specific patterns, each of which had a certain intentional meaning.[215] In the eighteenth century, the textile was reserved for royalty, which meant that patterns used on *kente* carried motifs of power, strength, and respect. They could be specially used by these rulers for funerary ceremonies, connecting the clothing with the afterlife and spiritual energy.[216] Importantly, during this period, only indigo and white were used to create the cloth, making indigo a central part of the origins of *kente* technique.[217] The connection between the use of indigo-dyed materials and funerary practices was common in West Africa, as described in Chapter 2, and indigo was important for bringing significance and meaning to this spiritual practice through dress. This 1918 example of a traditional cloth worn by chiefs after sacrificing to ancestors is one example that invokes a possible eighteenth-century look:

[212] Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang, *Encyclopedia of Embroidery*, 123
[213] Vogelsang-Eastwood and Vogelsang, *Encyclopedia of Embroidery*, 123
[214] Emmanuel Kodwo Amissah et al., "Nwomu: Hand-Made Embroidery Technique in Asanteland." *Journal of Literature and Art Studies* 6, no. 5 (May 2016): 500–511., 502, https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5836/2016.05.007.
[215] Ayseu et al., "Aesthetic and Philosophical Meanings," 268
[216] Gillow, *African Textiles*, 32
[217] Ayseu et al., "Aesthetic and Philosophical Meanings," 268

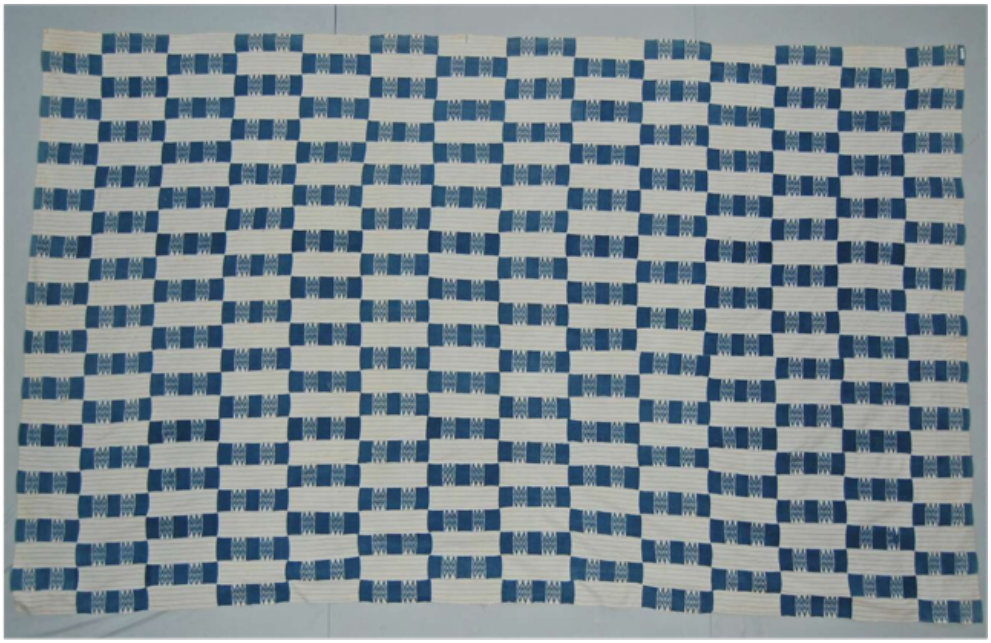


Figure 21: 1918 kente cloth, traditionally worn after sacrificing to ancestors.
Cloth. 1918. Af1981,23.1. The British Museum. London, England. https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/E_Af1981-23-1.

Because the artist, the chief weaver of the Asante people during its creation, tried to emulate traditional patterns and methods, it is likely that this representation emulates eighteenth-century versions of *kente* cloth in many ways. The patchwork assembly of woven strips, the basic block pattern, the use of a *nwomu*-like technique, and the simple two-color palette are all characteristics attributed to eighteenth-century *kente* designs. By wearing this indigo color, the chiefs' spiritual strength could be further empowered, as the color and material instituted a connection between the living and the dead. Further, this *kente* cloth is immediately visually characterized by its blueness, as eighteenth-century versions made exclusively in indigo and white would have been. These factors make indigo dye a foundational part of *kente* tradition.

Although *kente* cloth was technically reserved for royalty, other peoples under the Asante kingdom adopted the method for their own, including Ewe people.[218] This group began to imitate

[218] Gillow, *African Textiles*, 38

the *kente* cloth patchwork technique, using the similar resources that could be retrieved by the common person, and adapting the meanings of dominant and royal power to be more accessible for the everyday individual. It is likely that the inclusion of indigo remained consistent in this adaptation, as a readily available material in eighteenth-century West Africa. The adoption of this patchwork technique by groups like the Ewe meant that not only empirical clothing makers, but also many common craftsmen in the region had experience working with versions of *kente* cloth. This knowledge would have remained with them as they were enslaved and transported to the Carolinas, as they became laborers on indigo-soaked plantations. This cloth, imbued with spiritual power and the strength of empire, was recognizable by its indigo-ness throughout the Asante kingdom, so this blue color was foundational in its next iteration as South Carolina patchwork. Its emulation in South Carolina would adapt West African values and characteristics in a way that made sense for the context of enslavement and the eighteenth-century South.

Mande people were known for their distinct patchwork tradition in the eighteenth century. The Mande are an ethnolinguistic group who live in many regions of West Africa, and in the eighteenth century, they were primarily represented in Senegal and Sierra Leone. They are known as some of the oldest strip-weavers in West Africa, characterized by a woven patchwork technique similar to *kente* cloth. Many Mande people in the eighteenth century and today are Muslim, and some believe that the spread of Islam and strip patchworking could have spread together, first to the Mande and then to other African groups.[219] Because other West African groups, like the Asante, were engaging with strip patchwork textiles before the colonial period, it is clear that the Mande were also creating this craftwork by the eighteenth century, as pioneers of

[219] Gillow, *African Textiles*, 29

the technique. This 1973 Mande woven and sewn patchwork blanket is made in the style of the early Mande patchwork tradition.



Figure 22: 1973 Mande patchwork blanket
Woven Cotton Blanket. 1973. Private Collection of Maude and James Wahlman. Pictured in Southwell Wahlman, 30

As with all twentieth-century examples, this cloth's design is a translated version of eighteenth-century reality, likely made with faithful intentions that could have been accidentally influenced by any number of contemporary factors. That said, it does provide a helpful demonstration of the Mande patchwork tradition as it likely existed in the eighteenth century. It is complete with long, woven strips colored in both natural white and dyed indigo and sewn together in a rectangular-block pattern. Indigo was one of few natural colors used to dye Mande patchwork textiles, making the choice to use it significant and intentional, as its use in *kente*

cloth was.[220] Many of these features are reminiscent of the 1918 *kente* cloth, providing compounded evidence that they both closely represent eighteenth-century patchwork traditions. However, the spiritual beliefs associated with Mande patchwork cloth are distinct. Scholars attribute a belief in the power of blue, particularly blue beads, to eighteenth-century Muslim people. These tokens could frighten and ward off evil spirits, and this power was characterized by the blueness of the bead.[221] There is evidence of blue beads as the most consistent color bead found in South Carolina plantation archaeological digs, likely a connection to this Islamic belief and to enslaved Mande populations on these sites.[222] The use of indigo in both Mande and *kente* cloths evoked a spiritual power, but these abilities were nuanced and dependent on one's culture and spiritual and religious practices.

An additional facet of Mande beliefs was that spirits could only travel in straight paths – by introducing curves and broken lines and shapes, evil beings could not access the living.[223] Broken lines served a similar purpose as the protectiveness of indigo from ill-meaning spirits, emphasizing this as an established fear and shared aspect of Mande culture. This anecdote is often used to connect Mande traditions to American quilting traditions, as one of the characteristics of Black quilting is often a perception of mis-matched and freestyled patterning. The broken lines in this Mande-made traditional example speak to this belief and implies a stronger connection with Mande patchwork and spiritual and religious values, which could then be imbued in South Carolina-made patchwork. A secondary connection between Mande patchwork and spiritual power strengthens the connections between indigo in the textile and the

[220] Picton and Mack, *African Textiles*, 103
[221] Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks,* 94
[222] Stine et al., "Blue Beads," 50
[223] Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists*.)New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 29

spiritual realm, further arguing that indigo was important in Mande patchwork tradition. Once enslaved and laboring in South Carolina, Mande people remembered their homeland patchwork techniques and the power of this craft, and worked to replicate it and its required skills with the circumstances and resources available to them. Enslaved South Carolinian's ties with both spiritually powerful *kente* and Mande patchwork meant established textile work in the New World was more meaningful, as it could invoke these memories and take on new interpretations in its new environment.

In both West African patchwork textile traditions, Asante and Mande people centered indigo in their powerful craftwork. These pieces are characterized visually and spiritually by the dye, making it important for the integrity of the craft, and highly associated with memories of it. This connection with indigo was important, because when some of these West African peoples were enslaved in South Carolina, indigo was abundant and newly affiliated with harsh labor. The ways in which Asante, Mande, and other West African people made use of their new indigo resources and role on the plantation to further home beliefs, techniques, and patterns is meaningful to the creation of the American patchwork quilting industry, as they were done through with the tool of indigo blue.

From West Africa, patchwork traditions and techniques traveled to South Carolina through the minds and memories of enslaved individuals and transformed into the foundations of the American patchwork quilting industry. West African people adapted upon established quilting practices and contributed to the evolution of these techniques through the end of the eighteenth century. European quilting tradition was initially brought to the Americas with settlers in the seventeenth century.[224] A quilt is categorized by its three layers: a backing textile, batting

[224] Higgs and Radosh, "Quilts: Moral Economics and Matrilineages," 56

material for warmth in the middle, and a quilt top on top. These three layers are embroidered together with sewing techniques to keep the interior batting from moving around the quilt. The edges of a quilt are bound, to give the blanket a finished look, keep the three layers in place, and to protect the interior batting. Needed for warmth, quilts were a centerpiece of the American bed, carefully created and decorated by women of the household. Although the tradition dates back to the beginning of the colonies, quilt-making increased at the end of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, due to the rise of cotton materials. At this point in time, the ability to add more decorative pattern and flair made quilts a particularly central and emblematic craft. Quilting is more than a craft though, it is an item that symbolizes connection and history, and can create bonds between generations of a family through collective work and storytelling.[225] Black women were at the foundation of the rise and success of the quilting industry, aided by indigo traditions and resources that translated into quilting patchwork. This role in the late eighteenth-century rise of quilting is important and should be acknowledged within the framework of indigo craftwork practices.

To be so skilled in quilting, it was necessary for enslaved women to be skilled in sewing and embroidery traditions. These proficiencies were exercised in West Africa through the creation of patchwork textiles, using *nwomu* and other similar decorative techniques to attach woven strips together. West African people enslaved in South Carolina remembered and exercised their sewing skills, and then passed them down to their descendants and fellow community members.[226] This is demonstrated in the eighteenth century by the plethora of slave

[225] Lea Lane, "Belongings: Southern Quilts and the Material of Memory." Essay. In *Layered Legacies: Quilts from the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts at Old Salem*, 9–21. (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Museum of Art, 2024), 10

[226] Twining and Baird, *Sea Island Roots*, 2; Benberry, *Always There*, 13; Chase, *Afro-American Art and Craft*, 79; Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols*, 25

advertisements, for sale and runaway, highlighting the women's sewing abilities, describing how they were "extraordinary" in their skill or sometimes, how they were raised and trained in sewing. There was Charlotte in 1771, who was called an "extraordinary seamstress," and an unnamed girl in 1775, who had "been brought up to the Needle".[227] Both of these women were skilled enough in sewing practices for this to be a notable point, worth space in the ad, for Charlotte's identification in a runaway ad and for the unnamed girl's sale. While most clothing was ultimately imported from England during this time, American sewing abilities were critical for assembling imported textiles into completed clothes, and for altering and maintaining both locally constructed and imported clothing. As demonstrated by these ads, enslaved women were at the forefront of this labor, skilled in sewing not only for clothing care, but also for quilting.

Betty was another talented woman who ran away in March of 1761, with her enslaver describing her: "… is well known in Charles Town, where perhaps she may hire herself out at needle-work, being an extremely good seamstress…"[228] In this scenario, Betty's sewing skills were not only valuable to her enslaver, for producing goods, materials, and extra money for the plantation economy, but also for her own use. While enslaved, Betty's owner might have had control over the financial benefits of these skills – but once she ran away, Betty had the opportunity to reclaim them for resources to support her departure. Her ability to sew had the potential to make her escape easier, more successful, and more sustainable. Betty could have been such a talented seamstress because she had experience with complicated and decorative stitching in West Africa. Alternatively, she could have learned this skill in South Carolina, from her enslaver's wife or another white, European woman in the household, or she could have been instructed by an enslaved West African woman. It is likely that some kind of combination of

[227] *The South Carolina Gazette*, July 1, 1771; *The South Carolina Gazette*, January 30, 1775
[228] *The South Carolina Gazette*, March 14, 1761

these instructional methods taught Betty and others like her to sew and work with textiles. The plantation wife was invested in her economic capacity to produce for the benefit of the plantation and could have taught her these skills as a means of making her more profitable. That said, these techniques could have been reinforced, furthered, or even initially introduced by other enslaved women laboring beside her, who could pass on traditional West African meanings alongside the Europeanized skill, making her sewing work bigger than a plantation profit. These skills, with foundations in West African indigo-dyed cloth like adire, *kente*, and Mande patchwork textiles, created value for enslaved women in South Carolina by attributing a more cultural and spiritual significance to enslaved seamstress labor.

In the mid-eighteenth century, wholecloth quilts were the most common and popular type of quilt. These quilts were made up of textiles pieced together in order to make the whole larger. The arrangement of these textiles did not create any type of pattern or design on the top – rather, this came from decorative quilting embroidery employed both to secure the quilt layers and add an aesthetic draw. These quilts were primarily assembled with textiles of the same color, which gave them the appearance of one whole piece of cloth; hence, "wholecloth" quilts.[229] The decision to make these quilts was a product of the environment – textiles were not abundant, and since most had to be imported, they had to be used carefully. These projects were usually made from wool and linen, matching the agricultural availability of textiles in the eighteenth century, which would change sharply with the rise of cotton in the last decade of the century. Wholecloth quilts, where only one color was needed for the top, were both practical and warm, serving their

[229] Mary E. Gale and Margaret T. Ordoñez, "Indigo-Resist Prints from Eighteenth-Century America: Technology and Technique." *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal* 22, no. 1–2 (2004): 4–14, https://doi-org.proxy-um.researchport.umd.edu/10.1177/0887302X0402200102.

intended purpose. The additional flair of patterned embroidery added more sophistication to the quilt and was often completed in floral patterns.

The Charleston Museum has an eighteenth-century wholecloth quilt whose assembly and quilting is attributed to an enslaved woman:



Figure 23: White wholecloth quilt made by enslaved woman on El Dorado Plantation. Quilt Pieces. *1700-1799. HT 5122a. The Charleston Museum. Charleston, South Carolina.*

The quilt top is constructed of two pieces of fine white linen and is backed with a coarse white linen. The quilting embroidery is done in a pattern of flowers and geometric motifs, which is completed across both pieces of the quilt top.[230] This is an example of highly skilled embroidery, quilting, and general sewing work produced by an enslaved woman. The detailed stitching in assembly and decoration are notable, and the ability of the creator to pick up European designs and standards and execute them perfectly is work that reflects the accomplishments of many other unattributed enslaved women during this period. To accomplish such a piece of work in a

[230] Personal email correspondence with Virginia Theerman, Curator of Historic Textiles, The Charleston Museum, September 14, 2023.

European design, but to retain the attribution to an enslaved woman is significant and rare for the eighteenth-century South. It is not clear how the donor of the quilt was able to attribute the piece to enslaved labor, and unclear whether the name of the woman was ever associated with her work, or if it simply was forgotten over time. She was certainly skilled, perhaps because she had years of experience creating similar works in her homeland. Or, she was encouraged and educated by a West African mentor who passed these techniques on to her, along with a lesson on their use in the Asante kingdom or Senegambia. Ultimately though, the existence and attribution of this quilt is evidence that enslaved women quilted wholecloth quilts in Charlestown in the eighteenth century and were quite skilled and successful in their craft.

Because attributed evidence of enslaved craftwork is rare, my research rests on additional quilts that do not have an attributed maker to demonstrate the presence of indigo wholecloth quilting in the eighteenth century and the labor of enslaved women on such pieces. Take this late eighteenth-century indigo wholecloth quilt as example.



Figure 24: Eighteenth-century indigo wholecloth quilt.
1790-1810 Indigo Wool Whole Cloth Quilt. 1790-1810. TE.T17971. National Museum of American History. Washington, D.C. https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_629903.



Figure 25: Close-up: Eighteenth-century indigo wholecloth quilt.
1790-1810 Indigo Wool Whole Cloth Quilt. 1790-1810. TE.T17971. National Museum of American History. Washington, D.C. https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_629903.

The backing and top of this quilt are an indigo-dyed wool and were quilted together with an indigo-dyed thread. The National Museum of American History notes that the quilt endured so much use that a second cotton/silk lining was added later.[231] Given the evidence of enslaved work on wholecloth quilts and skill in sewing, the overwhelming presence of indigo dye through the end of the eighteenth century, and the presence of wholecloth quilts in South Carolina, this indigo-dyed example could symbolize an eighteenth-century, South Carolinian, enslaved-made

[231] National Museum of American History. "1790-1810 Indigo Whole Cloth Quilt." National Museum of American History, https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/nmah_629903.

wholecloth quilt. Enslaved women labored over quilts like this throughout the colony, made possible by the inclusion of indigo dye which was also produced by grueling enslaved labor.

Enslaved women working on indigo quilts like these had their craftwork process and the final result defined by that indigo color. Indigo dye, made by other enslaved individuals through grueling labor, was critical to the creation of these quilts. Quilts like this, invoking the indigo color so strongly, inspired memories of West African creations that also centered indigo dye – in Yorubaland, the Asante Kingdom, Senegambia, and elsewhere. It would have been valuable to enslaved quilters to work on a piece that raised these kinds of associations, that could bring on a sense of familiarity and spiritual significance through indigo. This connection between West African and South Carolinian textile craftwork was further connected through the similarities in the practice of sewing and embroidering required in each instance. That said, the indigo-ness of this craftwork was the focal point. The power to connect with protective spiritual beliefs, to be enabled to call upon ancestors and protective forces through interacting with indigo, was valuable. This opportunity was particularly available for enslaved quilters making these kinds of quilts for their own quarters – perhaps from scraps of material or cloth purchased in the market and completed on their own time. When quilting for the enslaver's home and family, there was likely a sense of spiritual significance and protection that came along with simply working on something made with indigo, sitting underneath it as one sewed it. These quilts would ultimately be taken from their creators and used by enslavers who gave the pieces different meanings, but this does not take away the value in the associations of protection and culture that enslaved seamstresses felt while making them. Perhaps they even provided a sort of comfort for enslaved people working in the enslaver's house, seeing indigo patchwork, even if they could not lay beneath it. The indigo in indigo wholecloth quilts was prominent and important, and the various

meanings affiliated with indigo and its dye did not go away in the context of quilting – rather, they would have been heightened.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the popularity of the wholecloth quilting tradition began to give way to patchwork quilting. This change can be attributed to the rise of cotton production in South Carolina, which meant that cloth was more readily available to people in South Carolina. The 1780s and 90s are a unique and specific time to examine American indigo quilting tradition, because they feature the intersection of indigo and cotton production in South Carolina. Quilts created during this time using blue were dyed with South Carolina indigo, because it was not until the mid-1790s that the indigo industry in South Carolina would fall to India's production.[232] Even quilts made immediately after this period would have still been touched by South Carolina indigo, as it continued to circulate in the market, locally and internationally, for years following its demise. Cotton took indigo's powerful place in the 1790s, with the introduction of the cotton gin and the increased efficiency of cotton manufacturing. The new abundance of cotton product coupled with the final years of indigo industry to provide quilt-makers an opportunity to begin developing the classic patchwork look that became emblematic of American textile tradition, inspired by enslaved memories of indigo-dyed patchwork.

It is helpful to outline traits typically affiliated with quilts by Black women to better understand eighteenth-century examples of quilting made by enslaved individuals and to further contextualize the tradition that grows in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Fry outlines "six major design characteristics…:

1. Vertical strip organization
2. Bold color
3. Large design elements
4. Asymmetry
5. Multiple patterning

[232] Nash, "South Carolina Indigo," 387

6. Improvised rhythm."[233]

It is easy to understand, when compared with West African dyeing and patchwork traditions, how these elements were inspired and why they came to be so foundational in African American quilting tradition. West African patchwork is also characterized by every one of those descriptors, making the connection between the cultures clear and intentional, as many enslaved and later Black women called upon their heritage. It should be noted though, that this description only accounts for a portion of quilts made by Black women and a fraction of those made by enslaved women, particularly in the eighteenth century. To designate all as such would not only be reductive, but historically inaccurate.[234] These women did not have the resources nor the societal and cultural opportunity yet to contribute such a large amount of inspiration towards their craftwork. Instead, they followed European standards and implemented their own creative design when and where possible in small amounts. Examples of late eighteenth-century patchwork quilts can be parsed for evidence of West African patterns, but should more importantly and easily be examined for evidence of patchwork techniques and significance around indigo, which is one major continuity between craftwork of the homeland and that which they could complete in South Carolina.

The most significant example of a turn of the century, indigo-centered quilt is one made in Virginia, specifically attributed to enslaved people that lived on the Bever Dam Plantation.

[233] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 10. These characteristics also described by Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols*, 122, and Tobin and Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View*, 48
[234] Benberry, *Always There*, 16; Chase, *Afro-American Art and Craft*, 56



Figure 26: Patchwork indigo quilt made circa 1800 by enslaved women. *Pieced Quilt.* 1800. The Valentine Museum. Richmond, VA.

The quilt is made up of off-white, blue, tan, and red hand-woven patterned and solid cottons and linens. The Valentine points out one crude block-printed cotton floral patterned textile, that makes up the four blocks in the center of the quilt. This quilt is perfectly emblematic of its time. Completed with likely locally grown cotton material, some elements were dyed and printed right on the plantation with a blue color. As this was completed right at the beginning of the nineteenth century, it is probable that the dye used to create these blocks was South Carolina indigo, still circulating on the market up into Virginia. The fact that this is attributed to enslaved quilters is rare – while their work was not unusual, it is difficult to find this attribution centuries later.

It is clear that West African patchwork traditions played a role in characterizing this indigo blue quilt. Gomez asserts that the demographics of the eighteenth-century South made it "a society more African in culture and perspective than not, and consciously so."[235] West African culture was present in the minds of enslaved quilters, and the practice and skill required for assembling West African patchwork strips in a pattern was certainly useful here to modify European patterns. Whether the quilters themselves were native African people who remembered patchwork traditions themselves or inherited the skill or meanings around it from West African relatives, it is likely that this quilt was made skillfully because of previous education or experience dating to West African patchwork. The look of the quilt is not so far off from examples of *kente* and Mande cloth that evoke eighteenth-century designs. This is evident in the consistency and skill of geometric pattern assembly executed with rectangular blocks in the West African examples and the similarities in this example from Virginia. The inclusion of so many patterned textiles and the irregular arrangement of them along some iterations of the square bordering are reminiscent of Fry's descriptions of African American quilts, which call upon West African patchwork. The strip-like nature of the square bordering, the mismatched placement of patterned textiles, and the non-uniform patterning of some of the small square block patterns in the borders evoke West African stylistic choices, and indicate more potential spots that enslaved quilters on Beaver Dam implemented their own heritage in their craftwork. Because West African patchwork is centered in indigo, it is equally notable that this quilt also uses indigo coloring to create interest and variety in the pattern. Without the inclusion of indigo in the examples of West African patchwork, the textiles would be plain and there would be no specific spots that draw the eye. Similarly, in this Virginian, enslaved-made quilt, indigo

[235] Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks*, 201.

emphasizes places in the quilt that are pulling focus, bordering the center and creating interest around the sides. Indigo creates a stronger bridge between West African and American Southern traditions here, making a clearer connection in the way that patchwork evolves through this blue color.

This example is from Virginia, but these enslaved makers existed in the same cycle of indigo value as their South Carolinian counterparts. Although they were not the indigo laborers themselves, these quilters, who suffered in enslavement themselves, benefitted from the toils of enslaved indigo processors in South Carolina, who lived and worked in a similar Southern enslavement environment. In this case, the labor of enslaved South Carolinians benefitted not only their fellow neighbors, but also others in the larger system of American enslavement, as Virginian slaves too were able to invoke their homeland in their work and receive value through those memories. The implementation of West African patchwork skills, techniques, and even designs came from a line of West African memory or from a West African craftsperson themself, who was able to express desire for home and receive and spread the solace of the homeland with others. This was true for the Virginian quilters that worked on this piece, but evidence of this quilt suggests other enslaved-made evidence in South Carolina as well.

This logic is strengthened by more evidence of enslaved quilting during this period. This quilt is attributed to an enslaved quilter in the 1780s, but scholars agree it was probably produced in the early 1800s, based on the materials used.[236]

[236] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 31

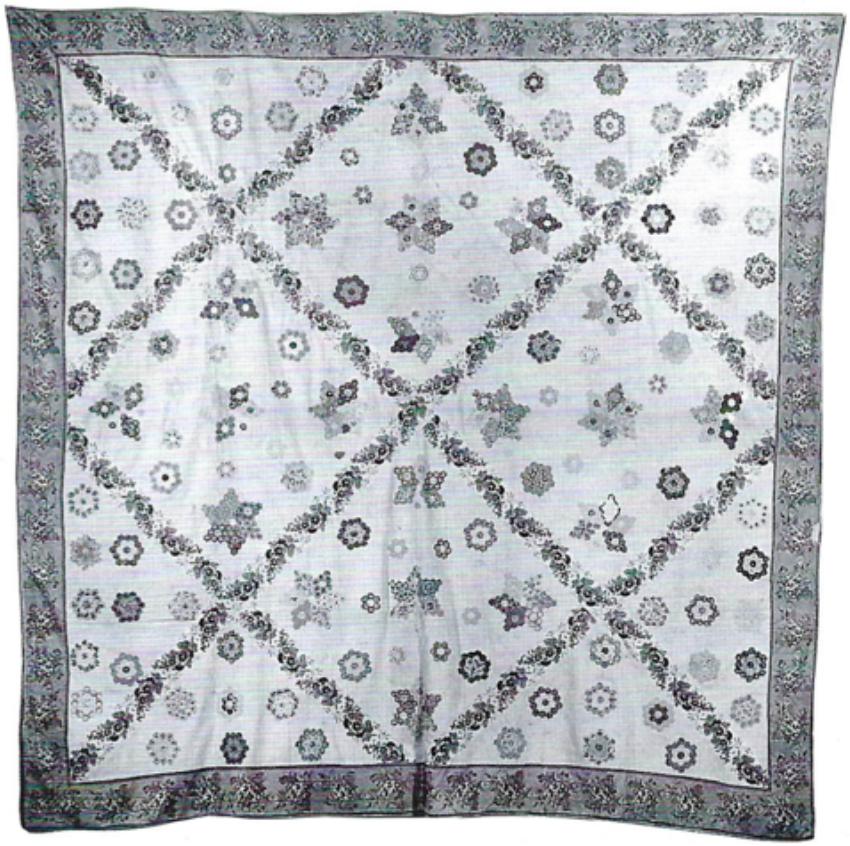


Figure 27: Early 1800s South Carolinian applique quilt made by enslaved woman.
Quilt Top. 1780-1800. The American Museum in Britain. Bath, England. Pictured in Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 31

Little information is available about this quilt – the only available image of the piece is this black and white picture from Fry's book.[237] It is an example of applique quilting work, a technique where pieces of textile are applied to the top of a quilt, like the flowers in this pattern are. Applique quilts gained popularity with the rise of cotton and patchwork quilting. There are a few key things to take away from this example. First, its attribution with an enslaved quilter is significant. At its base existence, this quilt asserts that enslaved women worked on quilting in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century in South Carolina, and therefore strengthens the possibility of more quilts like the Virginia one described above in the South and the Carolinas.

[237] The American Museum in Britain does not have an online catalog, and this quilt is not included in their published catalog: Shiela Betterton, *Quilts and Coverlets from the American Museum in Britain*. (Bath, England: American Museum in Britain, 1978). The museum has not responded to inquiries for further information about the piece.

Further, the elaborate design of this quilt suggests that, even though the image is in black and white, blue is likely present in some aspect of the quilt, and that blue would have been created with South Carolina indigo dye. This blue could be present in the dark border, or in the darker flowers pictured on the quilt. In this way, the indigo would serve to create contrast and specific emphasis, as it did in West African textiles. The working of indigo-dyed textiles, in addition to the careful sewing and embroidery skills necessary for this quilt which features such small flower details all would have been strengthened by the quilter's experience with or raising within a West African patchwork tradition. As these skills are filtered through indigo cloth in West Africa, their success by this enslaver quilter is supported by the history of indigo patchwork in West Africa and the transition to use of indigo in American quilting.

These quilts demonstrate several ways in which the traditions and techniques surrounding West African patchwork traditions evolved in their South Carolina iterations as quilts. Most notably, the patchwork patterns were different. In wholecloth quilts, there was no opportunity for creative patchwork assembly – rather, the physical needs of warmth and a larger surface area were prioritized within the limited restraints of textile availability. In these cases, technical skills strengthened by patchwork traditions continued. Once South Carolina began engaging with patchwork, West African creativity had more opportunity to visually peak through English design preferences. Overall, these quilts still reflect a European beauty standard, but the Virginia quilt features elements such a mismatched patterning, improvised rhythm, bold coloring, and strip-like patterns that evoke West African origins and suggest that enslaved quilters had the opportunity to slip memories of home in their craftwork. While patterns had to evolve to accommodate American desires and wants, the possibility for a certain continuance in visual

design was possible, and was made even more so as quilting continued into the nineteenth century.

Further, the technical skills needed to make and assemble West African patchwork were certainly applicable and in fact, critical to the American quilting industry. West African craftspeople were talented sewers, meaning not only that they could assemble textiles together in certain patterns and layouts, but also that they could accomplish complicated embroidery patterns, because they had experience with decorative seams like nwomu. This decorative talent was critical in completing embroidery for American quilts, and the development of this skill in West Africa and the generational inheritance of it throughout the eighteenth century played a part in enslaved success with American quilting. These craftmakers worked on new items and learned new assembly and embroidery skills, but these were founded in their homeland knowledge and were adjustments on skills the community already knew, marking an evolution in West African techniques in South Carolina.

The meanings of patchwork also evolved. American quilts did not have the *kente* cloth intention for royalty. Perhaps the notion of honor and strength in creating these cloths for empirical leaders evolved in the context of quilting for the enslaver. The notion of craftwork for an entity more powerful and different from oneself, in either the enslaver or the spirits, could have remained, but lost notions of highness and respect in the reality of the horrors of enslavement. Additionally, the significance of the quilt, emphasized in many cases by its indigo-dyed blueness, likely held different meaning in a culture where the need for protection was heightened.[238] The labor of sewing indigo textiles was a special opportunity to work with indigo colors or a chance to call upon spirits for help. Further, the protection of indigo might have taken

[238] See Chapter 2, "Spirituality – Indigo and Beyond" for more on West African and enslaved notions of protection.

on a very physical meaning in its presence in quilts, as a literal protectant from the cold in their own quarters, as enslaved individuals encountered temperatures colder than they experienced in West Africa. Quilts in enslaved cabins were made using scrap material from clothing production or other textiles gathered from the market in the eighteenth century, providing an opportunity for color and even choice among one's likely uncomfortable and crowded bedding. The meaning of indigo could be physically embodied and materialized this way, furthering both the importance of the quilt itself and the spiritual manifested power of the indigo dye in the craft. Indigo itself stayed significant through the transition of culture, but the desires and realities surrounding the power of indigo changed in the context of American enslavement.

Because indigo was so central to West African patchwork and understandings of those practices, and because indigo was still an available and widely used resource in eighteenth-century quilting, it was a source of consistency at the center of this evolution. Indigo characterized West African *kente*, Mande, and other patchwork cloths, and its affiliation with these traditions would be tightly tied with the work of the craft in the minds of enslaved West African people. Upon their arrival in South Carolina, they implemented and labored on crafts similar to those they remembered from their home, and these memories were fueled by the ability to use a familiar indigo dye in their work. Connected through blue, West African patchwork found a new form in eighteenth-century South Carolina.

There are many reasons why indigo quilting, made possible by enslaved production of the dye for the greater Atlantic industry, was valuable for enslaved South Carolinian craftspeople. In a very clear connection, there was the potential to use quilts for one's own warmth in the slave quarters. Very few of these examples exist, and when they do, they are from the nineteenth century. But this does not mean that they were not made and used in the eighteenth century –

likely, they were used so hard for critical warmth and comfort that the textiles degraded too much to survive to the modern day. Fry presents a collection of three quilts made by enslaved people for their own use in the nineteenth century, asserting the rarity and fragility of such materials.[239] It is likely that pieces like these existed in the eighteenth century too, for practical reasons of warmth. These quilts could have been created from old clothing and other materials acquired through the market and assembled in mismatched fashion quickly to make a warming blanket fast.[240] The use of quilts made by enslaved people, for enslaved people, suggests very real value gained by those eighteenth-century people. Not only would they have received valuable warmth, comfort, and temporary solace by lying beneath a quilt with others, but this might have also been an opportunity to display West African techniques in the privacy and lower stakes environment of the slave quarters. This could have been one way in which West African-trained patchwork skills and techniques were strengthened and passed down through generations, promoting an emotional and genealogical heritage value among enslaved South Carolinians.

Additionally, scholars attribute the comfort of a physical outlet with quilting work.[241] Being skilled in a craftwork meant time to develop creative talents, within the scope of the enslavers' desires for the end product. The acquisition of and strength in a creative skill involving choice and aesthetic design was rare for enslaved South Carolinians, and the ability to practice this work in addition to or instead of the hard agricultural labor of the plantation was emotionally valuable. Further, craftwork, iterative and technical, is known to be an outlet as a physical way to release emotions like anxiety, frustration, and worry. This kind of "psychological respite" was not a part of Southern enslavement, so the ability to process and

[239] Fry, "Stitched from the Soul," 40
[240] Fry, "Stitched from the Soul," 43
[241] Fry, "Stitched from the Soul," 1; Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image*, 26

release emotions in this skilled way had further emotional and mental value.[242] These comforts are in addition to the emotional comfort of memories of West Africa that could be invoked by participating in similar craftwork. A moment to remember one's home, family, friends, and culture was valuable in a culture of oppression and separation. Since the transition of quilting tradition was made possible by indigo, difficult indigo labor was at the center of creating this value in the eighteenth century. Enslaved people working on indigo plantations suffered to develop dye for the Atlantic market. But in moments like these, they and those near to them could receive bits of value from that indigo product through patchwork traditions.

As the cotton industry took off, American quilting took on a new life in South Carolina, becoming a quintessential industry widely practiced from the nineteenth century, onwards. Because indigo labor and use was foundational to this industry and characterized its eighteenth-century origins, this labor created value not only for its eighteenth-century users, but also its nineteenth century quilters. These craftspeople, enslaved women, were critical in the rise of the quilting industry, and learned the techniques and skills that made this rise possible from their mothers and ancestors who passed down crafting traditions and practice.[243] Further though, they inherited visual preferences and West African patchwork aesthetics, which they could implement in their own quilting with the expansion of the industry in the nineteenth century, and then further with their freedom in the twentieth century.[244] In these connections, Black quilters in the nineteenth century receiving value from their quiltmaking practices were tied with eighteenth-century craftspeople and indigo laborers.

[242] Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image*, 26
[243] Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols*, 25; Benberry, *Always There*, 23
[244] Southwell Wahlman, *Signs and Symbols*, 7; Chase, *Afro-American Art and Craft*, 90

Indigo was significant in nineteenth century quiltmaking, indicating a continuation and value transaction from eighteenth century labor. Quilts made of blue material were believed to protect the quiltmaker, granting power to craftswomen even when they were not the final owners of their work.[245] This belief descends from West African spiritual powers imbued with indigo, and therefore indigo took on a new protective strength in nineteenth century quilts. Further, quilts were often placed on graves to keep evil and spirits away from a loved one's resting place.[246] This practice appears to be linked again with the spiritual protectiveness of indigo blue, and practices with the dye around funerals and burials, both in West Africa and in eighteenth-century South Carolina. Quilts centering indigo are present throughout the nineteenth century, inheriting a significant meaning from eighteenth century craftsmen who also prioritized indigo dye in their meaningful textile creations.

Nineteenth century enslaved women gained value from making indigo quilts through "quilting bees," or social gatherings centered on quilting. These parties became common as patchwork quilting became more widespread in the South, as enslaved women were made to devote more of their time to this craft. They were organized in slave quarters in South Carolina and elsewhere, as an opportunity for enslaved women to come together and work on quilting labor in a community setting.[247] By promoting interaction with other enslaved women, they received social value. They were able to commiserate on the struggles of enslavement, share stories and gossip that entertained and inspired, make bonds that helped each other endure the conditions of enslavement, and help the tedious work of quiltmaking go faster. Further, quilting was affected by these meetups, promoting exchanging of patterns and techniques, which likely

[245] Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 65
[246] Tobin and Dobard, *Hidden in Plain View*, 49
[247] Higgs and Radosh, "Quilts: Moral Economies and Matrilineages," 58; Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 49, 71

furthered West African patterns and skills even in the nineteenth century. By creating a community identity embedded in craftwork with women who were or were descended from West African people, these women could more easily identify with an inherited culture and further those connections through patchwork quilting patterns, particularly those done in blue. In this way, these quilting bees were valuable for furthering one's own history, memories, and family.

In addition to furthering one's West African history, nineteenth-century quiltmaking also served as a storytelling method, allowing a quilter to pass down their own memories and experiences down to the next generation through their craftwork. This could be done through the use of certain materials which reflected one's own condition and experience at the time, such as old clothing and other textiles they encountered or used.[248] Alternatively, identity and values could be passed down through applique patchwork, in which experience could be literally shared through cut-out figures that reflected Bible and family stories.[249] Through these quilts, children learn lessons and understand values of the family members that came before them. Physically too, quilts provide a significant material item that can be inherited and passed down over time, serving as a physical connection to one's ancestors in communities where these material indicators do not often exist. It is significant to own something that a mother or grandmother poured time and heart into, and this significance was increased in the context of enslavement, where items could not actually be owned and there were few, if any, material items that one could "inherit."

[248] Pollitzer, *The Gullah People*, 197
[249] See Fry, *Stitched from the Soul*, 84-91 for information about Harriet Powers, a nineteenth-century Black quilter known for her applique Bible quilts.

Farris notes how "art shapes a community; colors of roadside signs, quilts, and paintings create a sense of place as surely as they are created by it."[250] Indigo was critical in the development of quilting traditions in South Carolina through its ability to promote an evolution of West African techniques. Once present in quilts, it only furthered these connections, making indigo important for the continuation of inherited culture in these communities. Further, as a spiritually significant material that could invoke the protection of ancestral power, indigo characterized these quilts with a sense of strength imperceptible to enslavers. This quilting art both reflected the values of indigo dye and furthered its meaning and beliefs, promoting blue-centered quilts even through the twenty-first century. Indigo was significant in eighteenth-century quilting, but its meaning and place has only grown stronger over time – all attributed to the labor of eighteenth-century indigo dye creators who suffered under the industry of slavery to produce that blue dye.

Conclusion

The evolution of West African dyeing and patchwork traditions demonstrate the transition of indigo-centered techniques in eighteenth century South Carolina to new versions. These new iterations, dyed clothing and quilting, carried similar but changed meanings, techniques, and patterns, all fitted for the resources and cultural context of South Carolinian enslavement. Indigo remained at the center of these crafts, prompting spiritual protection in various forms in each implementation, making it critical for the development of enslaved craft tradition. In this way, indigo could both be manufactured by enslaved South Carolinians and

[250] Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. (New York, NY: Random House, 1983), 2

used by them for valuable craft-making, giving indigo labor a nuanced value that could be achieved by the indigo-makers themselves.

Conclusion

Indigo was not only abundant in eighteenth-century South Carolina, it was given a meaningful role in enslaved society and understandings of identity, the afterlife, and heritage. A crop chosen by enslavers to make an economic profit across the Atlantic in English markets, indigo dye was difficult to produce, requiring hard and demanding labor from people enslaved in South Carolina. Unable to reap the monetary profits of their work, enslaved people formed different kinds of value around the blue dye that seeped into their lives, their pores, and their world. Indigo was ubiquitous and important, and its role should be recognized larger scholarship on South Carolinian enslavement.

The centrality of indigo in enslaved culture is immediately visible through runaway ads, one of the most complete and available depictions of enslaved people in eighteenth-century South Carolina. My research on 15 years of these ads from *The South Carolina Gazette* demonstrates how enslaved people on indigo plantations used their labor to create and express identities through indigo's lifecycle. The labor required to manufacture indigo dye was gruesome and difficult, and the need for precision and expertise created a certain desire, and therefore value of, enslaved laborers who could complete this work well. Once produced, indigo dye was shipped to England and used to create textiles and clothing that would be sent back to the Americas for those very enslaved producers to wear. Black individuals imbued value in this blue clothing, using it to create and display identity through repeated, unique, or totally blue wear. Because clothing could contribute to identity in eighteenth-century South Carolina, indigo blue could contribute through its presence in enslaved clothing. Therefore, this dye was valuable to enslaved communities, including individuals who may have produced the initial dye themselves.

Indigo had a spiritual meaning, developed in West Africa and brought to South Carolina by those enslaved there, including the Gullah people of the South Carolina coast and sea islands. Enslaved communities believed in the animistic power of the dead, asserting their ability to influence the living for better or worse. Indigo was a method of making this connection with a passed ancestor. The findings of modern archaeological digs, which have uncovered large numbers of blue bead amulets, strengthen our understandings of the power of blue to connect with spirits. Enslaved laborers used excess indigo product, inevitably left on their bodies and their surroundings, to make this spiritual connection, by smearing it on the doors and window frames of their living quarters. A tradition still thriving in contemporary culture, haint blue paint is found in many historic homes from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as the Branford-Horry House stables and the Owens-Thomas House. The spiritual significance of indigo and the context of the South Carolina indigo industry, paired with the iteration of this tradition through these homes, present the motivation, opportunity, and evidence of enslaved people starting the haint blue paint tradition in the eighteenth century, taking advantage of their labor to call upon the spirits.

This spirituality was invoked by West African and South Carolinian craftworkers who used indigo to create culturally significant textile craft. Yoruba people in Nigeria embraced adire dyeing tradition during the eighteenth century and today, using indigo dye to resist-dye white textiles in meaningful patterns. Indigo was central to the look and significance of adire, and enslaved individuals used abundant indigo in South Carolina to recreate versions of this adire practice within their new means. Runaway ads provide insight into how this "speckled" tradition evolved from West Africa to the New World and how use of indigo this way created value through a connection with both the spiritual world and the homeland. People in the Asante

Kingdom, in what is now Ghana, created patchwork *kente* cloth, which required technical skill to assemble indigo-dyed and white textiles together for royalty to wear. Similarly, Mande people created their own patchwork tradition inspired by their Muslim origins that centered indigo-dyed cloth in a skillfully crafted assembled craft. These patchwork traditions were remembered by those that were enslaved and brought to South Carolina, and these craftspeople reignited patchwork tradition within the confines of European quilting in the Americas. The presence of and spiritual associations with indigo made this transition possible, at the center of both West African and American patchwork. The ability of enslaved women to become skilled in this art and express some valuable creativity, emotion, and remembrance of their origins can be attributed to the meaningful indigo that made the transition simpler.

Although the South Carolinian indigo industry collapsed in the 1790s, the value that enslaved communities created around the plant and its dye has continued to be held in Black culture for centuries after. The eighteenth-century identity-creating, spiritual, and cultural attributes given to this plant remain relevant and deserve attention in modern scholarship on enslavement. The use of indigo through clothing, paint, and textile craft all present scenarios of enslaved people embracing choice and culture and provide insight into enslaved lives beyond their capacity to carry out forced labor. The choice to pick up indigo-dyed fabric on the market to wear or craft with, the choice to assemble patchwork in a certain way or with a certain technique, the choice to decorate one's doorframe with an indigo blue smear, are all evidence of everyday enslaved individuals exerting decisions and judgement, painting a fuller picture of them and their life among a historical record that has left little about them behind. This material culture evidence, when placed in the context of the indigo industry, its labor, and its significance,

provides new insight into the perspectives of people enslaved in South Carolina and provides a better understanding of their legacies through these surviving items and descriptions.

Further, indigo was considered foundational in building the modern state of South Carolina, creating its wealth for the entire second half of the eighteenth century. The enslaved laborers that made this industry possible have been left out of this narrative for too long. By studying not only the demands of their labor, but also the meanings of this work and its products to enslaved communities, we understand the indigo industry better from those at the center of it. Still today, evidence of indigo remains and circulates. Haint blue covers the porch ceilings, walls, doors, and window frames of many South Carolinian homes. Many Black artists, embracing their ancestry, have created textile works with West African-inspired patterns, influenced by enslaved quilters who promoted similar patterns and skills through indigo. Local South Carolinians have started indigo-dyeing projects and experiences, to offer travelers and natives alike the opportunity to connect with the state's history through an indigo-dyeing workshop. Indigo is foundational to South Carolina, but it is also foundational to the lived experiences of the enslaved laborers that made the industry possible – experiences which we should continue to honor and replicate through paint and craft, but with a better understanding of the sacrifice, struggle, and value they emerged from.

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