Traces of a Hidden Culture: Memorializing an African-American Farming Community

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It is only when we participate emotionally in a landscape that its uniqueness and beauty are revealed to us.
— J.B. Jackson'

...exploring along what trace its origins were and along what trace it has developed.
— Sigmund Freud'

STUDIO CONTEXT

The curriculum requirements for third year design fall quarter focus on the relationship of architecture to site. The fall studio represents the first design course in the curriculum that exposes students to building design principles. This also is the gateway quarter in the curriculum when new transfer students arrive from two year programs into the third year fall sequence of program, contributing 20-30% of the students in the design studios. Integrating tool building with the development of architecture is an important mechanism for building a cohesive studio community and a common language for responding to cultural issues in the design studio environment.

PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES

The range of media's used were purposely wide, to make sure that all students had a foundation from which to spring from in developing their design projects. The attempt here was to develop a mechanism to assure that all students in the class would participate equally in the show and tell aspects of responding to design problems.

The skill building and design exploration were combined (since the craft and the execution of the work were not separated) to provide a strong connection between media used and design process discovery. The visible design process documentation (both analog and digital) was required of all students and emphasized to be an important part of the design discovery process. Students were always required to configure their design work in an established matrix (analog - See Figure10 and digital - See Figure 14). This process documentation was on the Web and also visibly layered on the walls in the studio, to provide a resource for students to make critical assessments of strengthens and weaknesses regarding craft skill level and development of concepts into architecture. In both the Web documentation and analog documentation of process, it seemed that the *archiving of the learning process,* enabled students to understand *where they started* as a way to define *where they were going.*

In the use of the Web[s] (Figure 14, 15, 16) and related computer applications, the design process drove how the technology was used, as opposed to having the technology inhibit (or drive) the creative
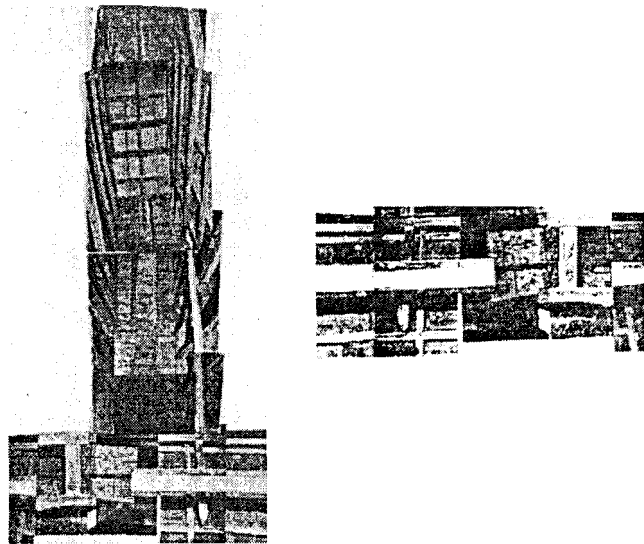

Fig. 1. (left) Tobacco barn collage by author. Fig. 2. (right) Site artifact provided to students for interpretation,OtherSide(s) project by author.

Fig. 3. Artifact interpretations, OtherSide(s) Project Computer models (From left to right) by Jason Brown, Jason Flores and Rahael Zewdu.

process. 2-D and 3-D computer applications were used as an integral part of the design process.

On one level, the Web became the on-line meeting place for students to discuss assigned readings. Weekly readings included articles from each one of these categories: design process craft (skill building), culture, and architectural precedent. A sampling of readings include: Arnheim's, *What is Abstraction*; Sylvester & Tripp, *The Search for Authenticity in Drawing;* Carroll's, *Romare Bearden The Prevalence of Ritual;* and Purves, *The Persistence of Formal Patterns,* just to list a few. The Web provided a continuous thread for design dialogue that extended and motivated discussions beyond the physical space of the studio. This medium seemed to galvanize the studio community, since all students had equal voices on-line in

contributing to the discussions (and this provided the foundation for the in-class debates that followed). Students were also paired up weekly as discussion leaders to both generate the initial reading questions for discussions on-line (Sunday and Monday), and then to moderate the follow-up in-person classroom discussions (Wednesday) to allow for the face to face debate of positions established on-line.

On a second level, the Web became a place for students to document their design projects during the process (Figure 14), which provided an additional venue for design discovery. The medium of the Web provided a mechanism to archive the design work coupled with the student discussions. The last strategy was to have students send weekly e-mail journals to the instructor every Friday, to provide responses to three questions: What contributed to your learning this week? What is your design project plans for the following week? What role did the use of computer technology have on the impact of your design process? Journal feedback from students provided an invaluable insight into students' view of the process and also provided a mechanism for the instructor to make adjustments to schedule as needed.

> ...The dining room was papered...We used paper from the catalogues and pretty pictures, and we tore them out and mixed a paste out of flour and water.
> — Interview, "Life in the Farm House"[4]

> Colored magazines sometimes find there way into the village and occasionally pages are torn from them and attached to the matting at the base of the ceremonial house facade...the pages selected were brightly colored, usually food advertisements...
> — Forge, Learning to See in New Guinea[5]

> (Collage present in African textiles and religious costumes) In African-American hones, putting newspaper or magazines on the walls keeps out the cold and the evil spirits, since it is believed that they must read everything before they can do any harm.
> — Thompson, Flash and the Spirit[6]

> Romare painted and glued, then tore sections of the paper away, always attempting to tear upward across the picture plane until some motif appeared.
> — Greene, Romare Bearden, The Prevalence of Ritual[7]

STUDIO FRAMEWORK

Projects 1-4 (each of these projects was one week in duration) established the foundation for project 5 (4 weeks in duration). The studio weekly meeting template was structured as follows: on Mondays — all projects started with a lecture by instructor, followed by a class period charrette (activities ranged from — rip & tear corrugated cardboard models, reductive charcoal drawings, collages, etc.). On Wednesdays — interim project reviews and in-class reading discussion debates. On Fridays — final project reviews and new project information provided.

There were established inter linkages between the sequence of studio projects to provide threads for building on prior lessons learned. All projects required clear process documentation (Figures 10, 18). There were also either physical constraints for the envelope massing imposed on projects, or the requirement to apply the principles learned from prior design exercises into current work. These activities included, but were not limited to: analysis of existing farming structures/community farmer values and farming lore, and application of readings/discussions and short charrette exercises.
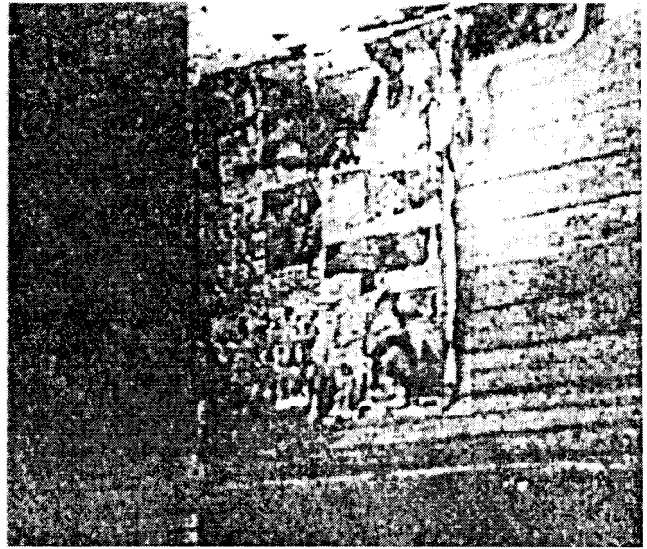

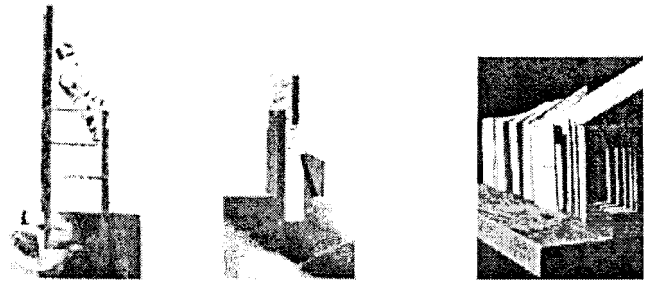Fig. 4. Photograph detail of farm house dining room collage by author

Fig. 5. (left amd middle) Collage sections Farming Tools Memorial (From left to Right) by Kara Brown. Fig. 6. (right) Model - Farming Tools Memorial by Richard Gan & Arthur Chang.
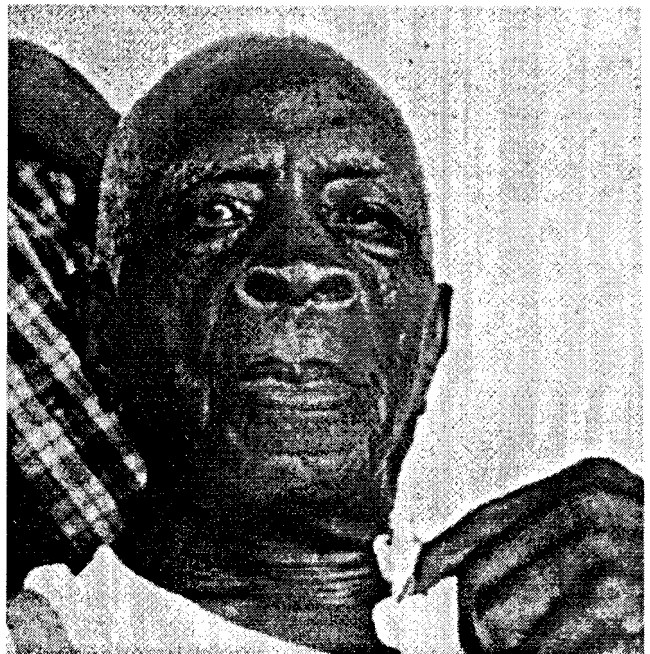

Fig. 7. Photograph of senior community farmer by author

STUDIO PROJECTS

1.The Other Side(s) (Figure 3) — This was a warm-up exercise to accomplish the objectives of setting the pace and parameters for studio skill building and media ranges for design process. Students were required to speculate on the origins of site artifact (Figure 2), without knowing the source (Figure 1). Computer models (Figure 3), drawings and narratives (See Page 8 - Note 9) were developed.

2. Farming Tools Memorial Wall — Development of 12 ft. wide x 60 ft. long x 30 ft. height envelop into a memorial wall for the display of farming tools. The focus of this project was in the sectional development of the wall using collage as the medium for investigation (see Figures 5, 6). The use of collage was framed as a medium that does have ties to African-American culture (See Notes 4.5.6, 7). The photograph of an -American farm house found on the site used collage in the dining room (Figure 4). Romare Bearden an African-American Artist, (who grew up on a Farm in North Carolina approximately 30 miles north of the project site), used collage as a discovery tool for finding *emerging motifs*[7]

3. Farmer Interview Analysis (See Note 9 and Figure 8) — All students were assigned two *African-American farmer interview texts*[8] to read, and analyze (in terms of values, farming rituals and farming lore). Life sized portrait (Figure 9) drawings were developed of these farmers based strictly from reading interview texts (limited photographs of farmers were available, See Figure 7).

Farmers were also adopted as the clients for the analysis of the *Vernacular Structures and Farming Fields* and for the design of the *Farming Community Memorial* projects.

4. Vernacular Structure (Figures 11, 12) and Farming Field Analysis (Figure 13) — Students were assigned one of the four African-American vernacular structures found on the site (tobacco barn, farmhouse, packhouse, or transverse barn) to analyze. Students developed strategies for a kit-of parts analysis of these structures and for establishing the relationship to the landscape. The design mediums included a 4 ft. x 4 ft. collaged painting (See Figure 13), various models (physical — See Figure 11, 12; and computer), along with drawings and narratives.

5.Farming Community Memorial and Collaborative Main Street — The program for the memorial structure included a main space. a gallery space, and support facilities, and also included a garden on the back side of structure and on the front side a design for a main street entry sequence. The structure was developed within a 12 ft. wide x 60 ft. long x 30 ft. height (Figures 17-27. 28) envelope. Design of a garden was 12 ft. wide x 30 ft. length field and the design of an entry sequence was within a 12 ft. wide x 30 ft. length field. The entry sequences of each student project had to be coordinated with adjacent neighboring projects, which as a whole contributed to the design of an entire main street space (which was representative of the collective values of the African-American farming community).

Fig. 8. (left) Collage of African-American farmer by Romare Bearden. Fig. 9. (right) Face detail of life-sized farmer portrait by Arthur Chang.
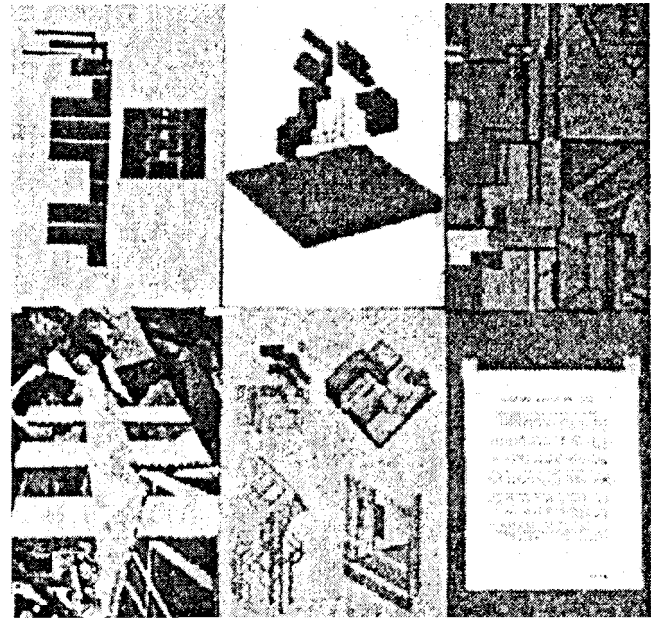

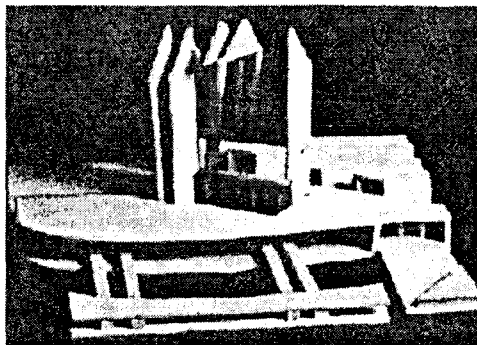Fig. 10. Tobacco barn analysis. Process board by Jacqueline Murillo.

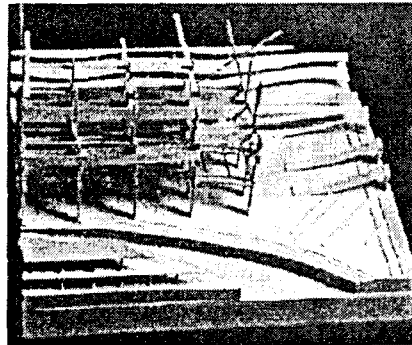Fig. 11. Tobacco barn analysis by Jacqueline Murill.

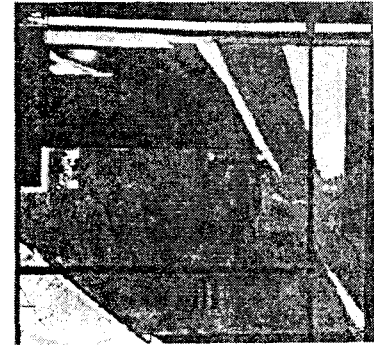Fig. 12. Transverse barn analysis by Jason Flores.

Fig. 13. Field analysis painting by Jason Flores.

CONCLUSION

Non-traditional uses of design media such as computer modeling or techniques of collage were used for the purposes of enhancing the design investigation process. Collage was used as a predominate investigation tool. This medium enabled the students who were not that experienced as designers, to quickly develop a language for developing strategies in connecting to cultural issues of project. Use of the computer technology media, from Web to computer modeling during the process of design provided additional venues for seeing.

The lessons learned from using this technology in the design studio were as follows: it made learning about design more interesting, thus motivating students to develop a stronger sense for project materially (interior and exterior) of designs. Secondly. use of these tools provided a more collegial and collaborative environment for students to work together to solve problems of how to use the technology to accomplish particular project tasks. And finally, the need to use these technology tools were matched with specific learning objectives focused on the content of the design investigation but coupled with learning about these tools.
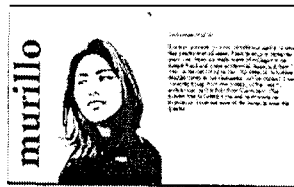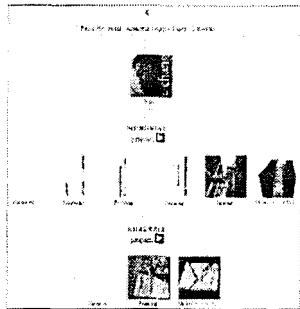

Fig. 14. (left) Web portfolio page by Arthur Chang. Fig. 15. (right) Web bio page by Jacqueline Murillo.
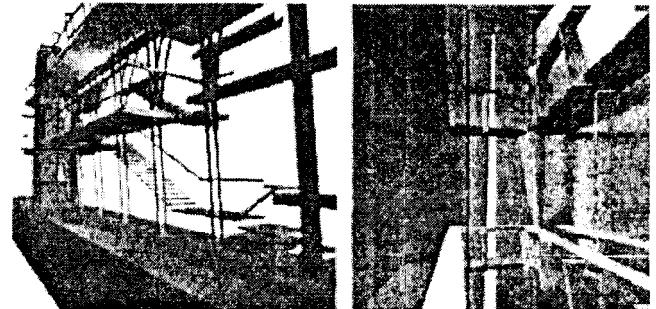

Fig. 19. *Farming Community Memorial Structures.* Interior computer images (from Left to Right) by Jason Brown & Richard Gan.
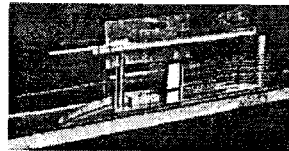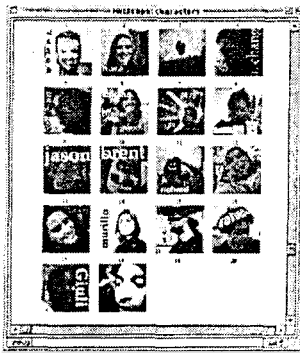

Fig. 16. (left) Community Web page by students in the design studio. Fig. 17. (right) *Farming Community Memorial Structure.* Process found materials model by Jason Flores.

Fig. 20. (left) *Memorial Farming Community Structure.* Cross-section drawings by Jason Brown Fig. 21. *(right) Memorial Farming Community Structure.* Longitudinal section drawing by Richard Gan.
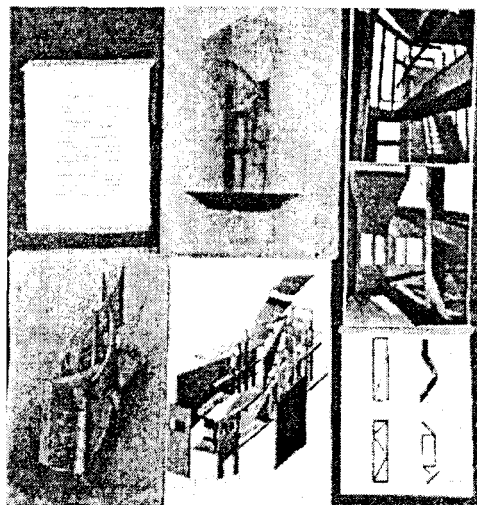

Fig. 18 *Farming Community Memorial Structure.* Process board by Louie Garcia
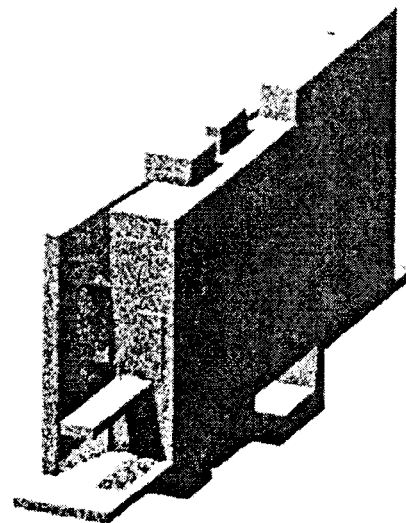

Fig. 22. *Memorial Farming Community Structure.* Computer model by Brent Freeby.
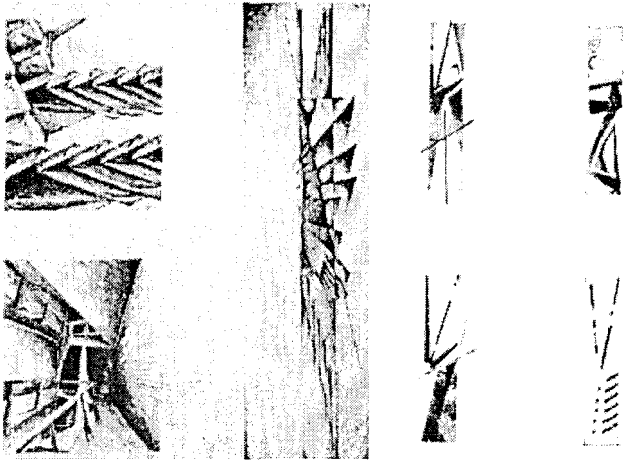
Fig. 23. (left) *Farming Community Memorial Structure.* Building detail (upperright comer), interior, plan by Richard Gan. Fig. 24. (right) *Farming Community Memorial Structure.* Collaged diagrams *by* Richard Gan.
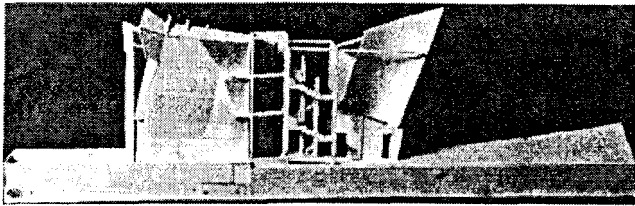

Fig. 25. *Memorial Farming Community Structure.* Basswood model by Richard Gan.

Fig. 26. (left) *Memorial Farming Community Structure.* Studio collaboration: process clay models partial gardens and main street spaces. Fig. 27. (right) *Memorial Farming Community Structure.* Studiocollaboration: Basswood models partial gardens and main street spaces.

Release
Slowly, cautiously, quickly
Slithering across the wide open
Unfolding, unfurling, untouched
Speed building and front straight
Pushing, catching, using
Grasp of the wind giving potential
Up, down, turnaround
The bow, slicing into fullness
Lifting, floating, carrying
Your reach, hovering masterfully
Beginning, ending, continuing
Take me beyond.....sail away.....
— Poem from OtherSide(s) Project"

...The transformation of darkness symbolizes one of my clients strongest values: the ability to arrange things in order to transform them into beautiful significant. For instance, she will sand the wood of her house to make it look white and clean...
— Concept Excerpt from Farmer Analysis Project[10]

Date: Tues 21 Oct 1997
From: jgarcia
Subject: Journal Week #4
...As for the drawing that I did before I left Wednesday of a farmer, I had fun with it. I did also learn plenty on my venture home that relates to design. AH-HA! I ran into many issues of culture on my trip home. Some examples include the

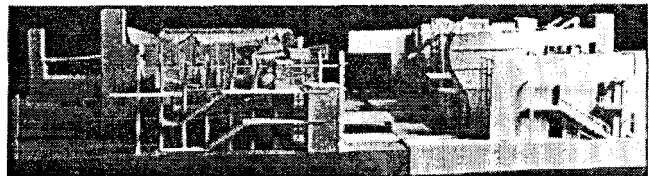Fig. 28. *Farming Community Memorial Structures.* Final outdoor school wide review.

Fig. 29. *Memorial Farming Community Structures.* Studio collaboration: Elevational view of basswood models.

discovery of my heritage through my family that I (have) never seen before...

Date: Fri 5 Dec 1997
From: Adrianna
Subject: journal. week # 11
...This class has been a great experience to me...Computers give us the opportunity to see our design in a different way.
— Excerpts from Weekly E-Mail Journals"

QUILTS
The values of my client are expressed in the design process through the patterns of a quilt as a journey that my client has to take to accomplish his work.
— Concept Excerpt from Farming Memorial Project[12]

NOTES

[1] J.B. Jackson, *The Necessity for Ruins and Other Topics.*
[2] Sigmund Freud, *Future of Illusion* (New York: WW Norton & Company, 1961), p. *5;* original intent of quote modified substantially.
[3] Web Site URL: <http://suntzu.larc.calpoly.edu/cids/FQ97/ads/syllabus.html>.
[4] Interview by Author of Community Farm House Inhabitant - Irene MacIntyre, "Life in the Farm House," *The African-Anierican Family Farm Past Bellum To 1900: Operation Reachback, The Farmers Speak* (Freewoods Foundation, 1991).
[5] Forge, *Learning to See in New Guinea,* p. 184-61.
[6] Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
[7] Greene, *Romare Bearden: The Prevalence of Ritual,* p 4.
[8] Interviews of farmers from community, *The African-American Family Farm Past Bellum To 1900.*
[9] "Release," by Jason Flores, Poem from *OtherSide(s) Project.*
[10] Concept excerpt from *Fanner Analysis Project,* by Adrianna Cuellar.
[11] Excerpts from Weekly E-Mail Journals.
[12] "Quilts," by Rahael Zewdu, Concept Excerpt from *Farming Memorial Structure Project.*

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