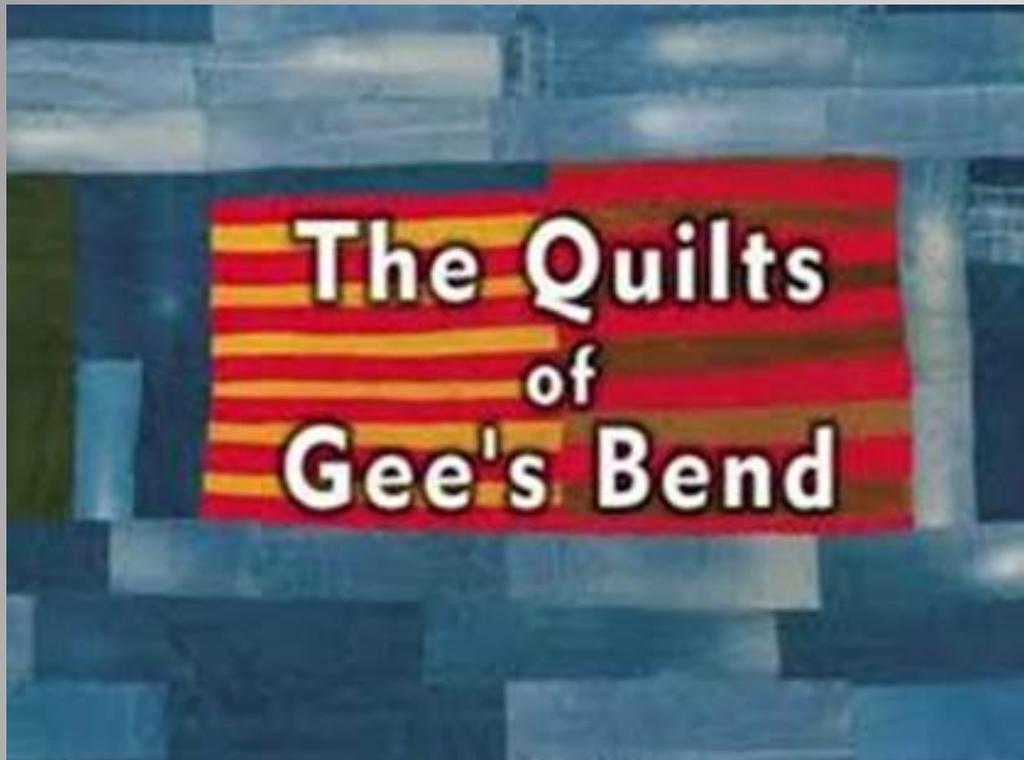


ARS Northeast Area Engagement

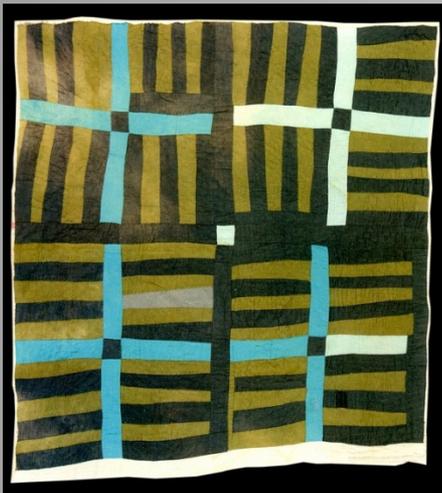
On February 23, 2015, in honor of
Black History Month,
the *ARS Northeast Area Diversity Taskforce*
hosted a Lunch and Learn
presentation about the **Quilts of Gee's Bend**.





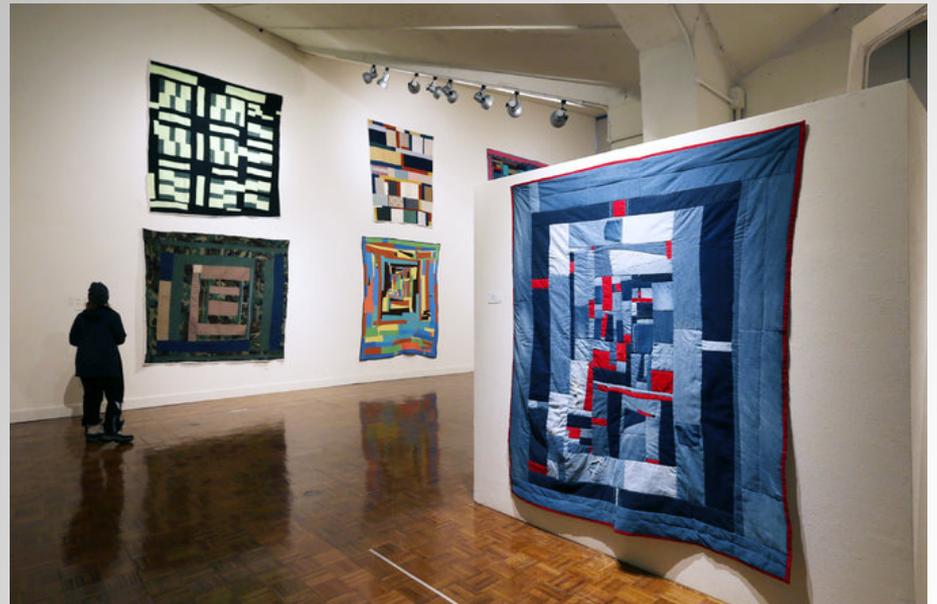
The quilting tradition in Boykin, Alabama (also known as **Gee's Bend**) goes back to the 19th century, when the community was the site of a cotton plantation owned by a Joseph Gee. Perhaps influenced in part by patterned African textiles, female slaves pieced together strips of cloth to make bedcovers.

Throughout the post-bellum years and into the 20th century, Gee's Bend women made quilts to keep themselves and their children warm in unheated shacks that lacked running water, telephones and electricity. Along the way they developed a distinctive style, noted for its lively improvisations and geometric simplicity.



The quilts have been exhibited at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the Indianapolis Museum of Art, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Whitney Museum of American Art, among others.

The Whitney venue, in particular, brought a great deal of art-world attention to the work, starting with Michael Kimmelman's review in *The New York Times* which called the quilts **'some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced'** and went on to describe them as a version of ***Matisse*** and ***Klee*** arising in the rural South.





Verneta Gaskins, Plant Pathologist with the **ARS Food Quality Lab** (in Beltsville) and member of the **NEA Diversity Taskforce - *Special Emphasis*** subcommittee, introduced the featured guest speaker and quilter - **Levern Allen...**

Levern Allen's very impressive resume

PROFESSIONAL/PERSONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- **The first African American to attend Western Carolina University (1957) later appointed to the Board of Trustees.**
- Served Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ for more than 50 years in several volunteer capacities.
- Member of a comprehensive team that developed the Individual Educational Plan in compliance with Public Law 94-142 and trained DC Public School personnel.
- Initiated speech and language program in the Mecklenburg County Schools, Charlotte, North Carolina



WORK HISTORY

- **Speech and Language Pathologist - Public Schools of the District of Columbia 1967 - 1991**
- Staff Assistant - Office of Management Planning, Agency for International Development, Washington, DC 1960 - 1965
- Speech Correctionist, Mecklenburg County Schools, Charlotte, NC - 1956 - 1958

EDUCATION

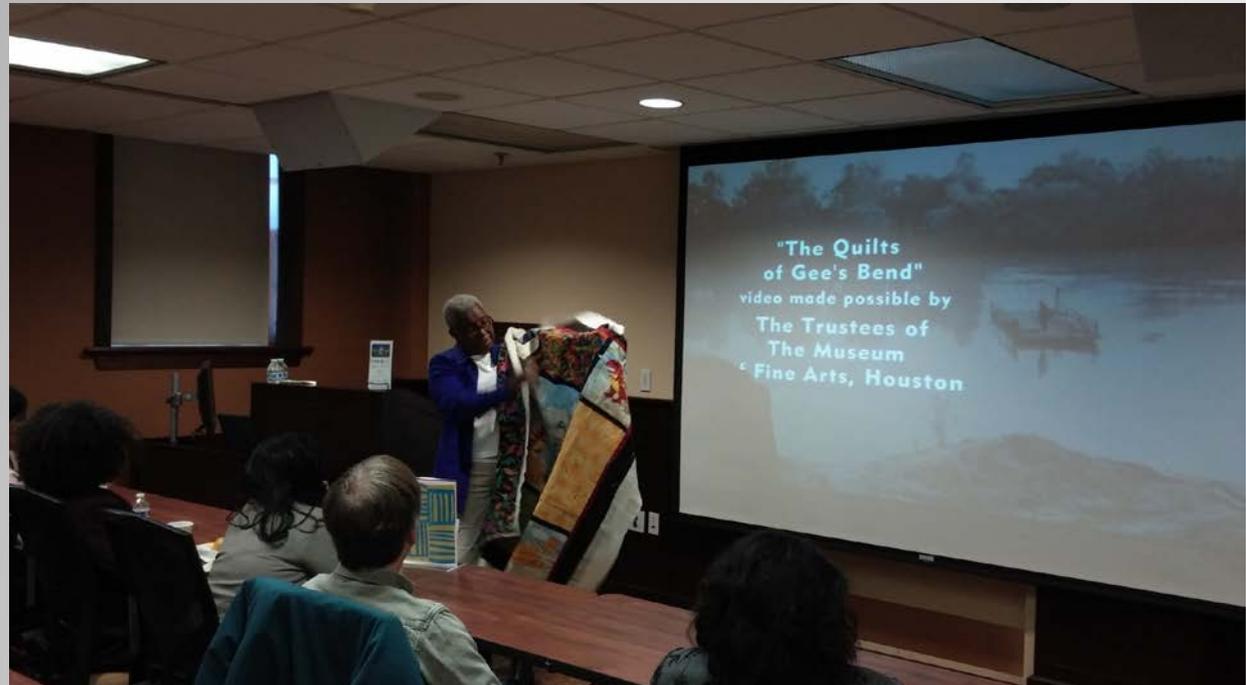
- **The George Washington University, Washington, DC - MA, Early Childhood, Special Education - 1978**
- University of Maryland, College Park, MD - MA, Speech and Hearing Science - 1971
- Hampton University (Institute), Hampton, VA - BS, Speech Correction - 1956
- Also studied at Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC; Catholic University, Washington, DC; University of Virginia, (Extension), Washington, DC; Hollins College, Roanoke, VA

Levern talked about and showed some of her beautiful quilts using the Gee's Bend style. "The Quilts of Gee's Bend" video (shown afterwards) was the *perfect* backdrop for her presentation.











Magnificent!



**About 30 people, including our
NEA Director - Dr. Swietlik and BARC Director - Dr. Harris
thoroughly enjoyed Levern's presentation.**





Levern answered several questions posed by the audience

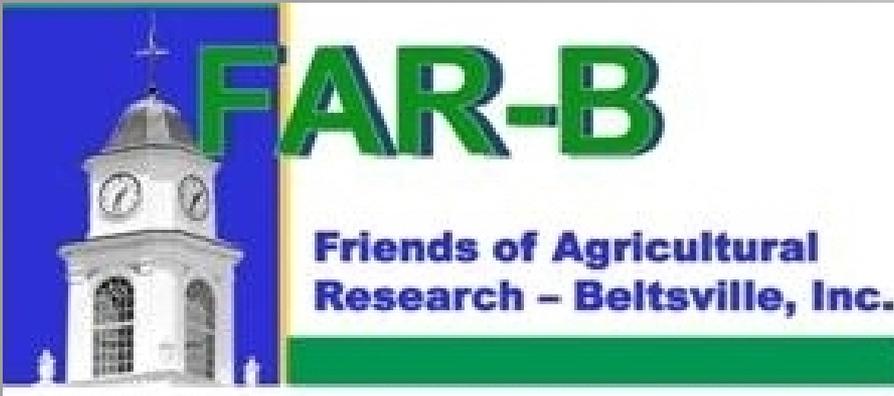




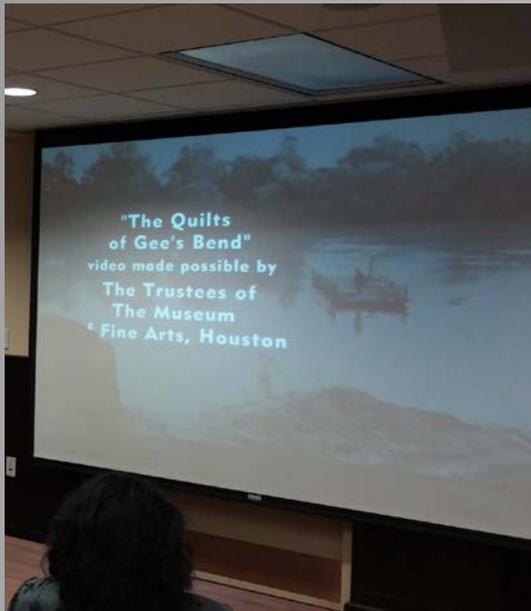
Dr. Swietlik thanked Levern and the Taskforce for a fascinating and stimulating presentation!



Special thanks was given to the *Friends of Agricultural Research – Beltsville (FAR-B)* for their never-ending support of such events, including sponsorship of the refreshments.



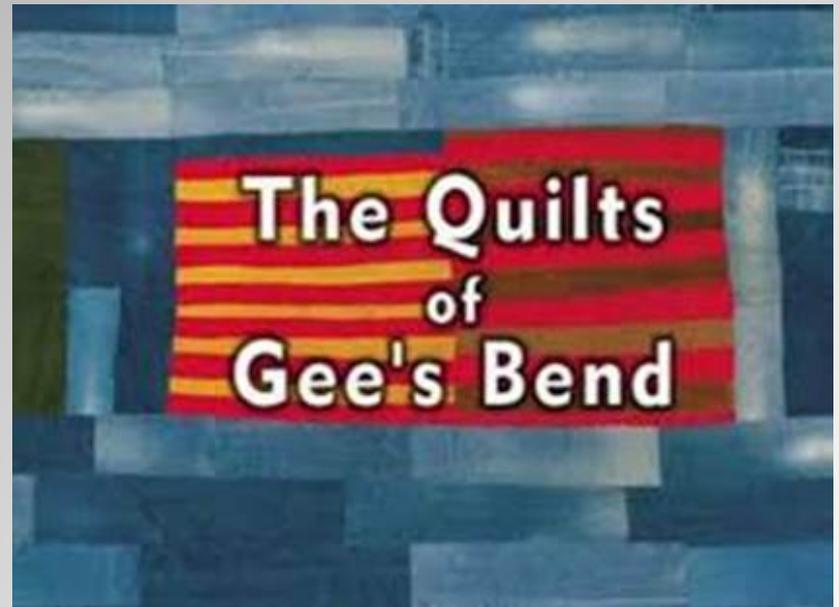
Some people then stayed to watch
“The Quilts of Gee’s Bend” video



You can watch or re-watch it
here for FREE!

<https://vimeo.com/50454661>

(~ 28 minutes)



In fact, it was so popular,
we had an encore presentation!

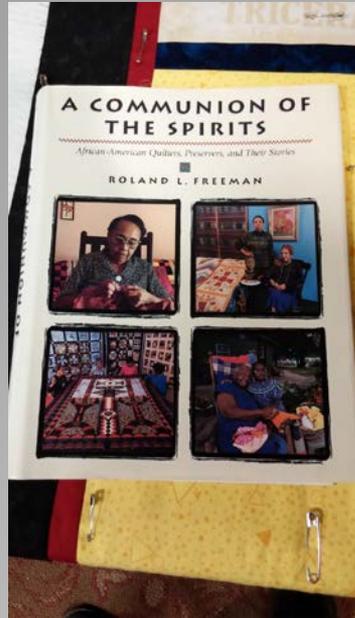
People continued to admire Levern's quilts, and browse through various historical and present-day *Gee's Bend* quilting books and information on display.



EXIT











Levern's resume SUMMARY

After a while you learn the subtle difference between holding a hand and chaining a soul and you learn that love doesn't mean leaning and company doesn't always mean security. And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts and presents aren't promises and you begin to accept your defeats with your head up and your eyes ahead with the grace of a woman, not the grief of a child and you learn to build all your roads on today because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans and futures have a way of falling down.

"After A While" by Veronica A. Shoffstall.



Levern's PRESENT goals

Enjoying adult children and grandsons.

Building my roads on today!

