

Freedom Within Quilts
By Erika Garcia Gonzalez

The Underground Railroad is known today as a secret system that slaves used to escape their owners in the early to mid 1800s. African American slaves went through decades of suffering and oppression with no hope of a free future. The Underground Railroad was the beginning of hope for many slaves and one of the first organized systems which led thousands to freedom. Since the Underground Railroad was kept a secret, many different codes and signals had to be used. These codes gave slaves cues on where to go and what steps to take to safety. Some of these codes lied within handmade quilts. According to “The Underground Railroad and the Secret Codes of Antebellum Slave Quilts,” Raymond Dobard mentions in his book, *Hidden in Plain View: A Secret Story of Quilts and the Underground Railroad*, that “secret codes were incorporated into quilts that were used by slaves to help them find their way to freedom along the Underground Railroad” (44). A “Flying Geese” Pattern Quilt made in 1861 resides at Houston Baptist University’s Museum of Southern History. This quilt might seem like a simple artifact with interesting colors and shapes; however, it symbolizes freedom and was part of a secret code that guided slaves in the Underground Railroad to escape the Antebellum South.

The “Flying Geese” Pattern Quilt from the Museum of Southern History is an off-white quilt that consists of squa 612 792t5 234.65 ne0 612 792 reW*ñBT/FT/FTm Tm0 2392 reW*12 Tf1 0 0 1 499nt

hold the most importance, not their colors. As previously mentioned, this quilt was made in 1861, the year in which the American Civil War and the fight for slavery began. The quilt won four 1st place prizes in the Louisiana State Fair due to its importance in the Underground Railroad. This quilt was one of many that helped get slaves to safety. An African American quilter, Ozella Williams, was one of the first to confirm the myths that these quilts were indeed used in the Underground Railroad (“Quilts to Freedom” 6). Before Williams, there was no knowledge about the actual importance of these quilts. Apparently, quilts were suspended or displayed outside either on fences or windows. Once they were seen by slaves, they were supposed to have “memorized the order in which patterns were displayed,” which ultimately taught them “when and how to escape” (“Quilts to Freedom” 6). These quilts held immense significance for these fleeing slaves. Aside from the direction these quilts provided slaves with, they also served as a beacon of hope. The “Flying Geese” Pattern Quilt is one of the many quilts that are known today as the **Historic Quilts**. 1 0 7(ni0 g roun)56(d 12 Tf 1 0 7ou /22h in12 Tf0 0 1non)

The “Flying Geese” Pattern Quilt is one of the many quilts tied to historical periods and events. Quilts have been involved with the history and culture of “Native Americans, western pioneers, slaves escaping through the Underground Railroad, and immigrants from Europe and Asia” (McCoy 46). However, for the “Flying Geese” specifically, m ” specificall

African American slaves. The decades of oppression that African Americans went through, along with the ongoing racial discrimination that is occurring in today's society, makes the display of artifacts such as this quilt immensely important. If this quilt were to be seen in the mid-1800s, most people would not know its meaning. However, most people then did not understand the injustices of slavery. Today, people are more aware of human rights and the racial injustices of

