

AFA's Gathering in Camden and Gee's Bend was Unforgettable by Joyce Cauthen



The AFA's Gathering in Camden and Gee's Bend on November 15 was a true success. For graduates of the Alabama Community Scholars Institute, the day began with a reunion and update session in Camden at Black Belt Treasures, an acclaimed gift shop and art gallery that features the works of artists and craftsmen of the Black Belt region.

At noon the Community Scholars were joined by AFA members and officers for a southern buffet at the GainesRidge Dinner Club in Camden where they elected AFA officers, and heard a brief talk by Betty Ann Lloyd on quilting as a community tradition in Gee's Bend. She was followed Dr. Amalia Amaki discussing the quilts of Gee's Bend as objects of visual study and showing, through beautiful slides of the quilts, their connection to African art.

A very crowded Gee's Bend Ferry carried us across the Alabama River to the site of the Gee's Bend Quilt Collective where we were greeted at the door with hugs from several of the quilters. They sang for us and talked about their faith, their lives, their quilting, and the joys of being honored across the nation for their art. Then they showed us stacks of quilts they had made.

We all felt exceptionally fortunate to have the opportunity to spend time with these wonderful women in the place where they have created what one art critic described as "some of the most miraculous work of art America has produced." Linda Vice, a graduate of the 2004 Alabama Community Scholars Institute, a founder of Black Belt Treasures, and a new member of the Board of the Alabama Folklife Association put this trip together for us and we greatly appreciate her work.