

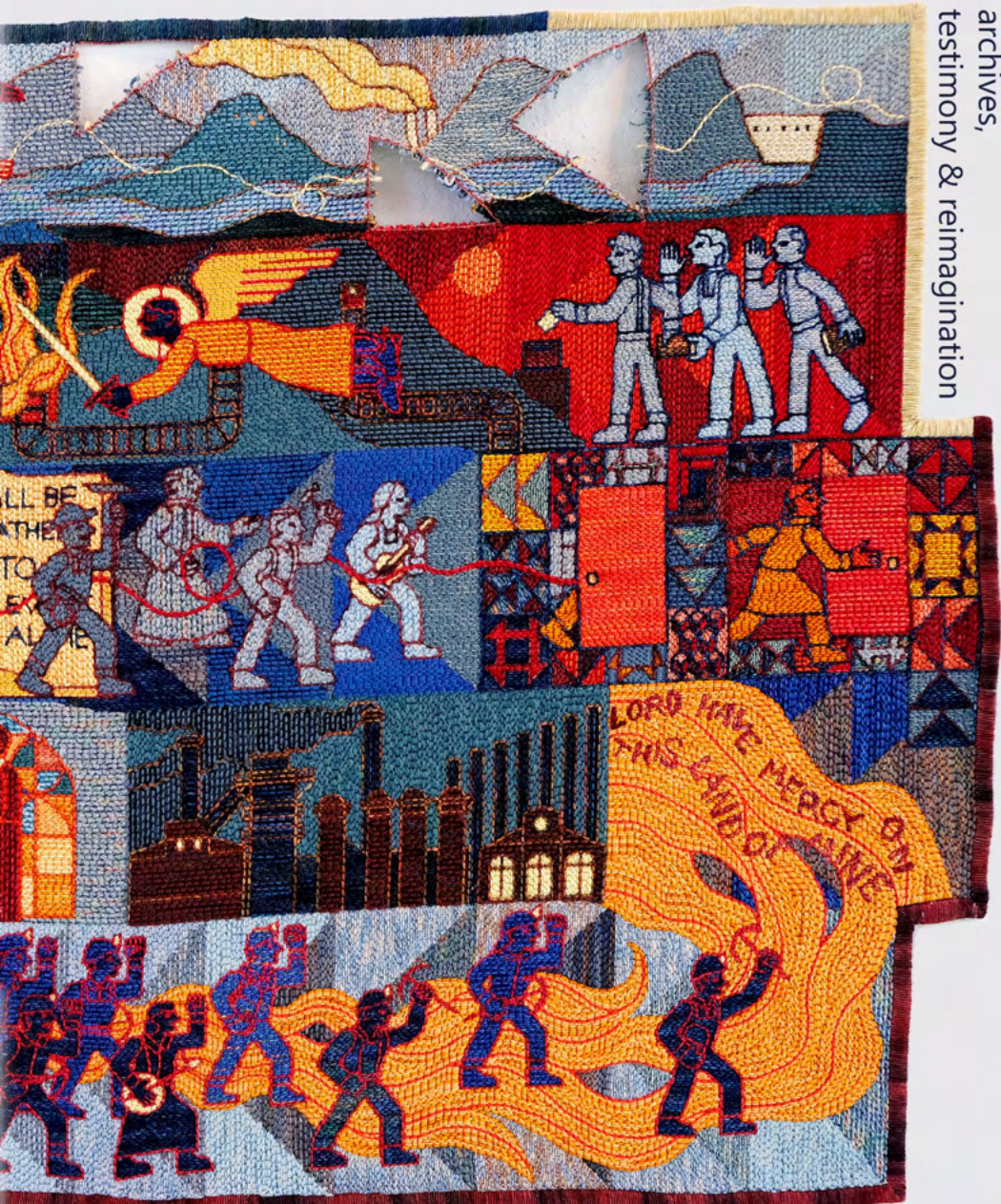
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TRANSVERSIONS

archives,
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a special issue guest edited by **ALEX MARZANO-LESNEVICH**

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A CONCISE CARTOGRAPHY OF DEEP GRIEF OBJECTS

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An Introduction

The title, “A Concise Cartography of Deep Grief Objects,” is inspired by W.H. Finlay’s astronomy and astrophysical text *Concise Catalog of Deep-Sky Objects*, and the piece is guided by my paternal ancestry. To develop the map and metadata, I used a combination of archival documents, family folklore, imagination, and geography—including places that can no longer be located on a modern map. Google Maps layered current street names over the names of places that no longer exist. It provided street-level images of what can still be located. The past brought forth and visualized with the use of modern technology. Scanned archival records—census and military documents, the latter fascinated me with the field: “NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS.” The narrative metadata connects the ancestors I can name through the kind of storytelling that Saidiya Hartman has referred to as “critical fabulation.”

The coordinates represented in the metadata are the closest geographic identifying information I had access to. The places disappeared or no longer accounted for in static mapping systems—structures that once occupied the land: a house in Columbus, Georgia and Montgomery, Alabama. At least two houses razed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania for urban renewal. The plantation. Does the land remember they were there?

In an essay about Julie Dash’s 1991 film, *Daughters of the Dust*, Gladstone L. Yearwood stated that “as a grand signifier of the African diasporic experience, migration has deep structural power that informs narrative activity in Black cultural tradition.” Thinking of grief as its own

constellation and migration as a “deep power” structuring generational grief, and borrowing loosely from astronomy, I separate my paternal ancestors into two groups on the map: Stellar Association and Moving Group. In astronomy, a “stellar association” is a very loose star cluster. According to astronomer Mark Allison, the “components of these associations are recently formed stars” that “are not strongly bound by gravitational forces; so they are fairly short-lived phenomena.” This group represents my paternal ancestors who did not migrate North. My paternal ancestors who migrated North or were born first-generation Northerners are represented by the Moving Group: “the stars in a moving cluster appear to be traveling towards the same point in the sky, called the convergence point.”¹

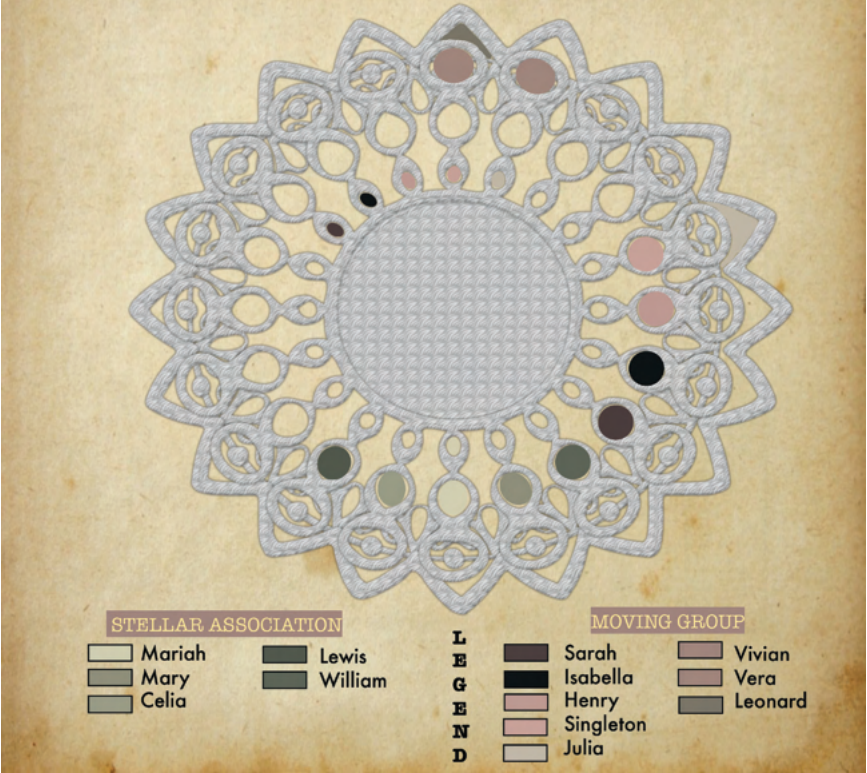
To build the map I knew I wanted something from the past. I chose the doily for its textured intricacy and the way it evokes nostalgia.² It reminded me of a constellation and of my grandmother’s house, which was always adorned with doilies—on the table, the arms of the couch, the headrest of a chair. I then generated the legend colors by inputting available birth date information into the CMYK color scale.

I am the daughter of Leonard; the granddaughter of Vivian; the great-granddaughter of Julia and Singleton; the great-great-granddaughter of Isabelle and Lewis; the great-great-great-granddaughter of Sarah and William; the great-great-great-great-granddaughter of Celia, Mary; the great-great-great-great-great-granddaughter of Mariah.

1. Allison, Mark. *Star Clusters and How to Observe Them*. London: Springer-Verlag London Limited, 2006, 38 and 42.

2. Negro Expression Meaning, Crochet Doily Png, <https://www.pngaaa.com/detail/1730789>.

A CONCISE CARTOGRAPHY OF DEEP GRIEF OBJECTS



METADATA

STELLAR ASSOCIATION

MARIAH (B. 1820)

37° 32' 10.82" N, -77° 27' 24.85" W
Richmond, VA to Columbus, GA
William's Grandmother, Mary's Mother

They sold me down river. Ain't even get a chance to set eyes on none of my kin. They say it might be better that way. Lest we all want to run off. All I got to leave with was the baby inside of me.

WILLIAM (B. 06/1869)

32° 27' 32.6"N 84° 59' 39.2"W
Columbus, GA – Mary's Son, Mariah's Grandson,
Sarah's Husband, Isabella's Father, Singleton's
Grandfather

I own this house outright. Ain't too many Colored folk 'round here that can say that. I work the iron. They don't pay me what they pay white folks but it ain't sharecropper wages. Mama said daddy died in the field. Sometimes I think he just run off. Don't make no difference. Slavery took him just the same.

CELIA (B. 1843)

32.9048° N, 84.3121° W
Blackankle, Upson, GA – Lewis's Mother,
Singleton's Grandmother

Yessuh. It's just me and my three boys here. Zack, he the oldest. He 8. Lewis 5 and Jones right here be 1.

MOVING GROUP

SARAH (B. 09/30/1874)

32° 27' 32.6"N 84° 59' 39.2"W
Columbus, GA to Pittsburgh, PA – William's Wife,
Isabelle's Mother, Singleton's Grandmother

Belle, that ain't the point. I didn't get a fresh start like you getting. Wasn't no leaving behind my sorrow. I was sleeping in the bed with it. Packing yours up and taking it North feel like a choice to me.

JULIA (B. 09/11/1917)

40° 26' 39.2"N 79° 59' 11.7"W
Montgomery, AL to Pittsburgh, PA
Singleton's Wife, Vera & Vivian's Mother,
Leonard's Grandmother

Singleton? I like that name. Where yo people from?

ISABELLE (B. 01/18/1899)

40° 26' 42.0"N 79° 59' 00.2"W
Columbus, GA to Pittsburgh, PA
Singleton & Henry's Mother, Vera & Vivian's
Grandmother, Sarah's Daughter, Lewis's Wife

Hank, how the hell you let Jimmy walk off with \$164 of your money? Bet you stay out of Gerri's now.

VIVIAN (B. 01/24/1938)

40° 26' 18.3"N 79° 58' 34.3"W
Pittsburgh, PA
Singleton & Julia's Daughter, Leonard's Mother

Leonard just came home from 'Nam. We're having him a "Welcome Home" party!

VERA (B. 01/24/1938)

40° 26' 14.6"N 79° 57' 39.6"W
Pittsburgh, PA
Vivian's Twin Sister, Henry's Niece

I know white folks did something to my uncle.