

Here are three **primary sources** and one **secondary source** on quilting. The first two selections are interviews, one with Alice Walker (the author of "Everyday Use") and one with Nikki Giovanni (the author of "Hands: For Mother's Day"). The next selection is an **oral history** of a quilter that was tape-recorded in the Southwest in 1975. She speaks a distinctive regional dialect that differs in many ways from standard English. The last selection, the secondary source, is a newspaper article about one family's modern version of the family-quilt tradition.

PRIMARY SOURCE

INTERVIEW

Interview with Alice Walker

from *A Communion of the Spirits: African American Quilters, Preservers, and Their Stories*

Roland L. Freeman



Alice Walker at home with her quilts.

I asked Alice to talk first about the tradition of quilting in her family.

Well, my mother was a quilter, and I remember many, many afternoons of my mother and the neighborhood women sitting on the porch around the quilting frame, quilting and talking, you know; getting up to stir something on the stove and coming back and sitting down.

The first quilt I worked on was the *In Love and Trouble* quilt. And I did that one when I was living in Mississippi. It was during a period when we were wearing African-inspired dresses. So all of the pieces are from dresses that I actually wore. This yellow and black fabric I bought when I was in Uganda,¹ and I

1. Uganda: country in central Africa.

had a beautiful dress made of it that I wore and wore and wore and eventually I couldn't wear it anymore; partly I had worn it out and also I was pregnant, so it didn't fit, and I used that and I used the red and white and black, which was a long, floor-length dress that I had when I was pregnant with my daughter, Rebecca, who is now twenty-three. I took these things apart or I used scraps. I put them together in this quilt, because it just seemed perfect. Mississippi was full of political and social struggle, and regular quilts were all African American with emphasis on being here in the United States. But because of the African consciousness that was being raised² and the way that we were all wearing our hair in naturals³ and wearing all of these African dresses, I felt the need to blend these two traditions. So it's a quilt of great memory and importance to me. I use it a lot and that's why it's so worn.

I asked her what happens when she sleeps under that quilt.

Oh . . . I am warm and I am secure and I am safe. I feel that I know how to create my own environment, and I know how to protect it. And I know how to choose it. I realize that my quilts are really simple, and yet, they give me so much pleasure, because even in their extreme simplicity they are just as useful as the most complex. And in their own way, they are beautiful because they do express what I was feeling and they clearly mark a particular time for me.

2. **the African . . . raised:** reference to the increased pride that many African Americans were taking in their African ethnic heritage in the early 1970s.

3. **naturals n.:** African American hairstyles that don't involve chemical straightening.

I asked her if she had made a quilt for her daughter.

No. I'm sure that she will make her own quilt. I'll be happy to leave her these if they are not worn out, which they will probably be, but I hope that she will make quilts for her own grounding and her own connection to me and to her grandmother and to her great-grandmother. I've seen quilts that my grandmother made. They tended to be very serviceable, very heavy and really for warmth, and, well of course, beautiful. My daughter has a quilt that she travels with. It's just a beautiful simple quilt that she loves. I gave it to her because she just feels like you can't sleep under just any old thing. It's got to be something that is congenial⁴ with your dreams—your dream sense, your dream-time. I'm trying to think of where I got it. I think that I just bought it somewhere. I believe it is from Texas.

I asked Alice what she'd like to say to people in general about quilting.

That they should learn to do it. That they should think less about collecting quilts and give more thought to making them. Because, really, that is the power. It may do all kinds of good things, too, to collect what others have made, but I think that it is essential that we know how to express, you know, our own sense of connection. And there is no better sense of understanding our own creation than to create, and so we should do that. ●

● **EVALUATE**

Do you agree with Walker's **opinion** that there is power in making and creating? Explain.

4. **congenial adj.:** agreeable; in accord.