

Alice Walker on Quilting

Reading for Information

INTERVIEW Excerpted is a 1992 interview Walker gave to Roland R. Freeman for his book *A Communion of the Spirits: African-American Quilters, Preservers, and Their Stories*.

Alice Walker } *on Quilting*

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. My mother also had a frame inside the house. Sometimes during the winter she would quilt and she often pieced quilts. Piecing . . . I'm really more of a piecer, actually, than I am a quilter, because I can get as far as piecing all of the little squares or sections together, and sometimes putting them together into big blocks, but then I always have to call in help—spreading it out on the frame, or spreading it out on the floor and putting the batting in and doing the actual quilting.

[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, and I had a beautiful dress made of it that I wore and wore and wore and eventually I couldn't wear it any more; 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 raised and the way that we were all wearing our hair in naturals 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.



Alice Walker among her many quilts