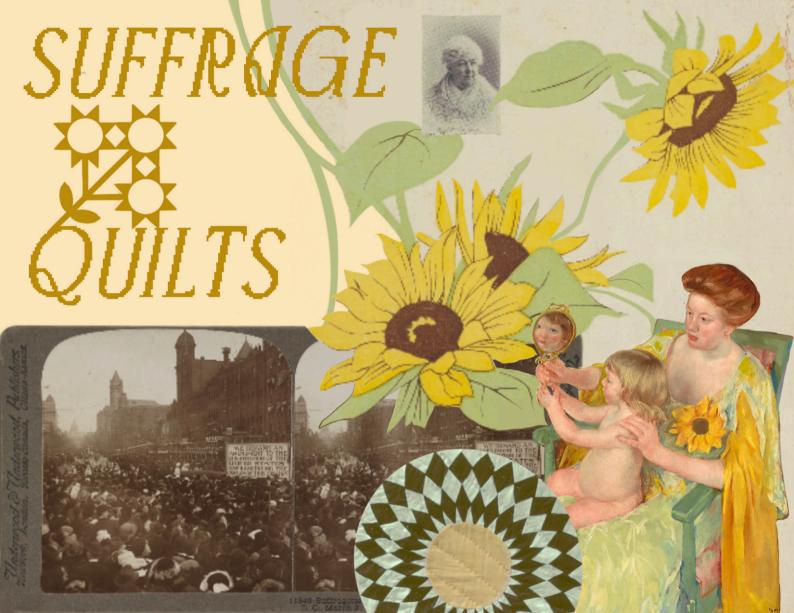
piece by piece

quilt symbols and stories



the eight-pointed star

The Eight-Pointed Star pattern is used in traditional Lakota quilting to symbolize fulfillment, escaping darkness, and the beginning of a new day. Common colors used in Lakota star quilts are black, red, yellow, white, green, and blue, representing the six directions of west, north, east, and south, in relationship to the earth and sky. Star quilts are important objects to the culture's gift economy, often created for giveaway ceremonies to honor individuals during important rites of passage. Births, graduations, weddings, and funerals are among the many opportunities for these quilts to celebrate the lives and identities of community members. As quilting replaced buffalo robes and bed coverings during nineteenth-century colonial buffalo hunting, quilt patterns replicated the geometric sunburst paintings used to decorate buffalo hides. The star quilt has become a vital ceremonial and utilitarian object in Lakota culture, exchanged as a gesture of reverence towards loved ones from generation to generation.



the sunflower

Sunflowers emerged as a symbol of the movement towards women's suffrage in the mid-19th century. In 1867, suffragettes in Kansas named the state flower as a primary symbol of their campaign, later influencing the National American Woman Suffrage Association to use its image as their logo in 1896. The artists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Mary Cassatt contributed to the sunflower's prominence in the movement. Stanton used the pseudonym "Sunflower" to publish the first women's newsletter, and Cassatt's painting Woman with Sunflower became an icon for women's rights. Sunflower pins and badges were worn by suffragettes to engage support for women's right to vote, printed with "We Want to Vote for President in 1904". The symbol was adopted as a pattern by suffragette quilters to identify their artistry with women's rights activism.



the pink triangle + the red ribbon

During the Holocaust, Nazis forcefully sewed inverted pink triangle badges onto the uniforms of LGBTQ+ people inside concentration camps. This visual identification led to an even harsher level of mistreatment from guards. Later, the symbol gained popularity as it was reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community during the mid-1980s AIDS crisis. Act Up (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) used the pink triangle to promote AIDS research and queer justice. The slogan "Silence = Death" often accompanies the pink triangle on blocks of the National Aids Memorial Quilt, urging viewers to resist complacency in the face of devastating loss perpetuated by the inaction of the US government.

Along with the pink triangle, the red ribbon frequently appears in applique on the National Aids Memorial Quilt, a recognizable image representing HIV/AIDS awareness in the 1990s. The symbol was originally designed by the Visual AIDS Artists Caucus in 1991 to encourage public commitment toward fighting the ongoing AIDS crisis.



the 'ulu

'Ulu, the Hawaiian name for breadfruit, is a staple crop of the islands, symbolizing life's abundance and the fertility of the landscape. The word 'ulu has a double meaning, as "tree producing fruit or "to grow". The flourishing tree embodies both growth in sustenance and wisdom. Breadfruit is rendered in many variations within Hawaiian quilt patterns but typically takes on a symmetrical form. This symmetry is achieved by cutting a design from fabric folded into eights, a technique similar to making paper snowflakes. Cut fabric is then unfurled into an intricate and balanced design. Many quilt motifs from the islands may have stemmed from the designs printed onto the organic fabric, kapa (barkcloth). Hawaiian quilters reflect a shared respect for their environment that can be seen in several popular designs such as taro, mango, pineapple, and red ginger, among many others.

the hawaiian coat of arms

The Hawaiian coat of arms presents itself throughout its quilting history, representing alliance to the land and Hawaiian sovereignty while protesting United States colonization. The symbol consists of a crown decorated with kalo leaves, a shield, and two men in feather cloaks and helmets representing the sacred royal twins Kame eiamoku and Kamanawa. The coat of arms is often accompanied by the Hawaiian flag, as many Indigenous Hawaiians were concerned that their flag would be lost after the Hawaiian monarchy was overthrown and annexed by the United States. Often, words like "Ka'u Hae Aloha", translating to "My Beloved Flag" are embroidered into quilt designs.

THE FREEDOM (S)



the housetop

The Housetop pattern is a variation of the Log Cabin pattern, replacing its uniform contrasting dark/light colors and arrangements with a more experimental approach to color and form. The Log Cabin pattern originated in the 1860s and gained popularity during the Civil War, referencing Abraham Lincoln's abode. Quilts using this pattern were often sold in fundraisers for the Union army. The Housetop pattern is made from concentric squares, combining rectangular strips of cloth to frame a central patch on the quilt. Its simplified form allowed room for quilters to create abstract improvisations from the basic pattern. The Freedom Quilting Bee was an organization based in Wilcox County, Alabama. It served as a cooperative for southern Black women to supplement their income, advocate for the Civil Rights Movement, and promote artistic expression. Women in the Freedom Quilting Bee often implemented elements from their rural environment into the Housetop pattern, such as fabric from denim work clothes and linear arrangements similar to the overlapping wood rafters on a barn roof from a birds-eye view.

the pine burr

The Pine Burr pattern reflects the long-standing traditions of Black American quilters. Its design combines overlapping diamonds to form repeating three-dimensional circles throughout a colorful quilt. Pine Burr quilts were popular among women involved in the Freedom Quilting Bee, sold to raise funds for the Civil Rights Movement in the early 20th century. Later, the Pine Burr quilt was designated as the official state quilt of Alabama in 1997, influenced by the quilts produced within the organization.