

*Excerpt from LaShawnda Crowe Storm, explaining **The Lynch Quilts Project**:*

“The Lynch Quilts Project is a community based effort, which explores the history and ramifications of racial violence, specifically lynching, in the United States through the textile tradition of quilting. The project consists of a series of six quilts tackling the lynching phenomenon from various perspectives such as collective memory, communal conflict, gender, healing and politics. The quilts combine a variety of traditional and contemporary quilting techniques to examine how the past, present and future are intricately connected.

At the core of this project is not only a healing ritual, but a memorial process. The physical expression of this project is revealed when the softness and malleability of fabric intersects the hard and steady puncture of the needle. The act of sewing opens and reveals, then comforts and hides the complexity of these historical issues on race, violence, intolerance and the resulting impact of this legacy on our contemporary reality. Each stitch acts as a guide on the journey towards this possible future.

Quilting is the ideal choice to explore this history because of the great metaphors the quilting process personifies and the communal aspect of quilt making. Quilts and the quilting process epitomize reclamation and rediscovery. Quilting is about piecing together remnants of fabric and lost history, reclaiming tossed garments and forgotten lives, stitching together all of these fragments into a whole cloth that reflects a more balanced and total view of history, revealing multiple truths along the way. While the act of sewing opens and reveals, then comforts and hides the complexity of the history and ramifications of racial violence and intolerance. Each stitch acts as a guide on the journey towards this possible future.

The historic roots of quilting lie within the context of the communal circle. Thus, as the fabric can absorb the pain and the needle can guide the way through the process, the act of circling to sew for healing acts as the balancing force in the face of the legacy of lynching, leading the way towards a more tolerant and healed community. Quilt making is a complex or simple mundane task, which can produce fantastically, beautiful objects that are both utilitarian and necessary. And these are the same characteristics needed to build a new society.

From the beginning, this project was grounded in community. Initially, a sewing group was established specifically to complete the first quilt in the series, Her Name was Laura Nelson. But that wasn't enough. To bring as many people to this dialogue about race and lynching in America, a request for fabric contributions was sent out nationwide via letter writing and on-line support campaigns. These fabric contributions are used in the creation of the quilts and other community healing projects include baby bibs, handmade fabric, spiritual paraphernalia, wedding dresses and so much more. The white areas of Her Name was Laura Nelson, are comprised of these various fabrics.

Each time the project is exhibited complex discussions on race and lynching occur with many engaging in open conversation about their struggle with race and racism issues as they exist in America. Many also talk about the impact this violence had directly on their families, either as victims or perpetrators. At each exhibition, viewers have the opportunity to record their stories in a project journal and contribute fabric to the project. To date, dozens of stories and more than 150 pounds of fabric donations have been collected.

This history is seldom if ever taught in schools. To talk about this history is unimaginable in the minds of many, as it requires a true examination of our national character and/or one's personal and familial history. A direct challenge to our national myths, forcing each and every citizen that encounters these works to reconstruct one's personal, historical and national identity based on all the facts, hidden and untold, not just the sweet ones. To make art about lynching and actively place it into the public space requires engagement in forms of racial healing and conflict transformation.

America, we are at a cross roads and now is the time to choose a future based on the reality of history. For it is the only way to move forward.”

-LaShawnda Crowe Storm