



## CRAFTING CHANGE

### An Afternoon with the Social Justice Sewing Academy

Thursday, April 14, 2022

Friends of the USC Libraries Lecture Hall, DML 240  
University of Southern California

#### KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

- In a panel discussion, members of the Social Justice Sewing Academy will speak about their experiences as “sewcial justice” warriors and makers from diverse backgrounds and marginalized communities. They will address their collective call for anti-racist actions in the sewing industry and to amplify the place and voice of Black and Indigenous sewists and makers of color.
- After the panel, Social Justice Sewing Academy founder Sara Trail will lead a hands-on workshop. Small groups will brainstorm and create justice-oriented quilt blocks that will be incorporated in future SJSA community quilt and embroidery projects.

#### ABOUT THE PANELISTS

**Kimberley Bennefield** is an avid sewist, modern quilter, and bagmaker. She combines her passion for crafting, sewing, and technology through her company, BlackWebDiva.

**Chawne Kimber** is the Thomas Roy and Lura Forrest Jones Professor of Mathematics at Lafayette College. In 2008, she began creating and blogging about politicized quilts. Her work has been associated with the “modern quilting” movement, with geometric designs and provocative content dealing with social issues including sexual assault and racist violence. Her quilts have been shown by the Paul Mellon Arts Center and included in the Quilts and Human Rights exhibit at the Pick Museum of Anthropology at Northern Illinois University.

**Caster Pettway** is a master quilter at Gee’s Bend, a peninsula of land formed by a bend in the Alabama River where enslaved people made quilts to stay warm. Over time and through many periods of hardship and oppression, their descendants carried on the tradition. Today, several generations of people from Gee’s Bend continue making quilts that are now recognized as works of art and sold to the public via Etsy.

**Eulin Toussant** is the creator behind seweu, an athleisure brand where weird is the norm.

**Sara Trail** is an author, sewing teacher, and pattern and fabric designer who learned to sew at the age of four. She wrote *Sew with Sara* at 13, starred in *Cool Stuff to Sew with Sara* DVDs at 15, and then created two fabric collections for Simplicity. While attending UC Berkeley, Sara created a quilt in memory of Trayvon Martin, and her love for sewing and passion for social justice intertwined. After graduating from Harvard University Graduate School of Education, she founded the Social Justice Sewing Academy.

**Shannon Gibson** (moderator) is a faculty member and professor of international relations and environmental studies at USC, where she teaches courses on social movements, environmental politics, public health, and social justice and normative research. After being gifted her grandmother's handmade quilts, she taught herself the craft through YouTube.

## THE SOCIAL JUSTICE SEWING ACADEMY

The Social Justice Sewing Academy is a nonprofit organization that aims to empower individuals to utilize textile art as a framework for activism. Their offerings include workshops, a business incubator to support young entrepreneurs with creative or social justice-oriented business ideas, quilt projects, and the book *Stitching Stolen Lives: The Social Justice Sewing Academy Remembrance Project*. SJSA was founded in 2017 and is based in Antioch, California.

## SEWING IN CONTEXT

Sewing is an ancient art and craft that has been practiced for thousands of years, with different sewing and stitching techniques being deeply rooted in different cultures. The Industrial Revolution brought mechanization and mass production to what was once a handmade and often household-based craft, but hand-sewing still endures as both a regular and a reclaimed practice. In many cultures, sewing has been primarily considered “women’s work,” along with other domestic arts. Feminist scholars have traced the impacts and implications of this gendering, and feminist artists and activists have variously reclaimed and reconsidered the art and craft of sewing.

For hundreds of years (at least), women have gathered in sewing circles where they could discuss politics or charitable causes while sewing. There were abolitionist sewing circles in the pre-Civil War United States, and “Stitch ‘n’ Bitch” groups during World War II and later revived in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

## FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- What experiences or associations do you have with sewing or quilting? Did this workshop shift your perception in any way?
- What injustices exist in the sewing industry? How are the activists of the Social Justice Sewing Academy challenging them?
- How can textile arts be utilized in social justice activism?

## VOCABULARY CORNER

What is “modern quilting”?

“Modern quilters work in different styles and define modern quilting in different ways, but several characteristics often appear which may help identify a modern quilt. These include, but are not limited to: the use of bold colors and prints, high contrast and graphic areas of solid color, improvisational piecing, minimalism, expansive negative space, and alternate grid work. ‘Modern traditionalism,’ or the updating of classic quilt designs, is also often seen in modern quilting.”

—The Modern Quilt Guild



## IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- 🕒 [Social Justice Sewing Academy Online](https://www.sjsacademy.org) | [sjsacademy.org](https://www.sjsacademy.org)
- 🕒 [The Quilts of Gee's Bend: A Slideshow](https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2015/quilts-gees-bend-slideshow)  
[arts.gov/stories/blog/2015/quilts-gees-bend-slideshow](https://www.arts.gov/stories/blog/2015/quilts-gees-bend-slideshow)
- 🕒 [@BlackWebDiva](https://www.instagram.com/blackwebdiva) | [@blackwebdiva](https://www.instagram.com/blackwebdiva)
- 🕒 [@seweu](https://www.instagram.com/seweu) | [@seweu](https://www.instagram.com/seweu)
- 🕒 [Modern Quilt Guild](https://www.themodernquiltguild.com) | [themodernquiltguild.com](https://www.themodernquiltguild.com)
- 🕒 **Upcoming Visions and Voices events:**
  - 4/15:** [Make Mend: Kintsugi Hack](#)
  - 4/20:** [Earth Week Celebration featuring Ron Finley and the Arts and Climate Collective](#)
  - 4/21:** [Ku'er Worlds: Queering Chinese American Identities in Art and Film](#)
  - 4/22:** [Ku'er Worlds Workshop: Art and Filmmaking Workshop](#)
  - 4/29-30:** [South of Expo: Art, Artists, and Cultural Spaces Since the 1960s](#)

## DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

Ariana Varela of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about this event. Electronic resources are accessible through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at [libraries.usc.edu](https://libraries.usc.edu) but may require the user to log in using their USC credentials.

### BOOKS

- 🕒 Nancy Callahan, [\*The Freedom Quilting Bee: Folk Art and the Civil Rights Movement\*](#) (Tuscaloosa: Univ. of Alabama Press, 1987).
- 🕒 Elizabeth Garber, Lisa Hochtritt, and Manisha Sharma, [\*Makers, Crafters, Educators: Working for Cultural Change\*](#) (London: Routledge, 2018).
- 🕒 Kyra E. Hicks, [\*Black Threads: An African American Quilting Sourcebook\*](#) (Jefferson: McFarland & Co., 2003).
- 🕒 Marsha MacDowell, [\*African American Quiltmaking in Michigan\*](#) (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1997).
- 🕒 Marsha MacDowell, and C. Kurt Dewhurst, [\*To Honor and Comfort: Native Quilting Traditions\*](#) (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 1997).

### DATABASES

[Art, Design, and Architecture](#)      [Public Art Archive](#)

### JOURNALS

[American Craft](#)      [The Journal of Modern Craft](#)

### STREAMING MEDIA

[Craft in America. Quilts](#) (Arlington: Public Broadcasting Service, 2019).

