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Star Tribune, Minnesota Monthly and Minnesota Public Radio

BLACK NATIVITY: A SEASON FOR CHANGE

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Presented by Target**

**December 3 - December 27, 2009
Previews December 1 & 2**

CONCLUSION

Piecing together alternate histories is paramount to a more complete understanding of the development of modern-day societies. Gleaning data from non-traditional records is a challenging, complicated task. However, as Gladys-Marie Fry's work on African American quilting demonstrates, or Arnold Rampersad's research on Langston Hughes proves, the fruit and findings of such labor are invaluable. This kind of research only deepens and adds more texture to the remarkable history of this country.

The maintenance of an alternate, parallel history that valued their experience is one of the primary factors that sustained a cohesive sense of culture, pride and community for black Americans throughout the years. If limited to official documents, little would be known about the early black experience in this country. It is instead through alternate records that we uncover the rich legacy of African Americans that extends back into the 15th century. "Denied the opportunity to read or write, slave women quilted their diaries, creating permanent but unwritten records of events large and small, of pain and loss, of triumph and tragedy, in their lives. And each piece of cloth became the focal point of a remembered past."¹ This is the remarkable and harrowing story of the triumphant survival of a people against incredible odds. The pride and purpose of our ancestors, their resilience, determination and humor have set down a path upon which we can walk today with our hearts full and our heads high. If we were to ignore methods of documentation that were limited or artistic, we would drain our cultural history of the nutrients and flavors necessary for cultural nourishment and continuity. Langston Hughes and Harriet Powers are just two examples of people whose personal ethos and passion for black culture was strong enough to move each to create a legacy to which we can look for guidance, reference and inspiration.

As America grows increasingly more diverse, incorporating new populations and adjusting the mixtures of the old, it is necessary to consider alternate modes of historiography and documentation of events and experience. America is hailed as a place to come aground, a promised land for weary travelers and those seeking refuge and solace from tyranny and despotism. If we are to truly embrace all peoples who broach our shores and our borders as we so pledge, without attention to race, creed or color, we must learn to appreciate their customs, their languages and what comes enclosed in their hearts. It is only through a search for connection that we can find our way to understanding. Without those common themes that stitch together the human heart, each of us would blister in the cold winds of seclusion. As we

¹ Fry, Gladys-Marie. *Stitched from the Soul: Slave Quilts from the Antebellum Period*. (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). 1.

celebrate this holiday season, in the name of peace, prosperity and health, let us weave our stories together into one mighty patchwork under which we can all find warmth and safety.