

combines the immersive experiences including the music and the zine with the more conventional exhibit pieces, such as Kaino's artwork. This combination provides visitors with a unique experience of visiting the past. This exhibit traces the memory of a family while making a crucial intervention in the narratives of Japanese American experiences.

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Reflections on Grief & Child Loss: Understanding History (and Ourselves) Through Empathy. President Lincoln's Cottage. Callie Hawkins, Director of Programming and Executive Director. November 12, 2020–Ongoing. <https://www.lincolncottage.org/>

Reflections on Grief & Child Loss: Understanding History (and Ourselves) Through Empathy, an exhibition at President's Lincoln Cottage, does an outstanding job expanding understanding about Abraham Lincoln, exhibit design, and the process of grieving—both individually and collectively.

One of the lesser-visited historic sites in the nation's capital, President Lincoln's Cottage is an independent nonprofit located in northwest Washington, DC and operated through a cooperative agreement with the Armed Forces Retirement Home and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Surrounded by the grounds of the Soldiers' Home, which has housed retired veterans since the 1850s, the Cottage served as a retreat for Abraham Lincoln for almost a quarter of his presidency. The Lincoln family first moved to the Cottage in the summer of 1862 in order to grieve the recent death of their son Willie more privately. This exhibit, located in the Visitor Education Center, seeks to connect this personal story of the Lincolns to the experiences of modern bereaved parents, reflecting on "the ways that the shared experience of grief can link parent to parent," as explained by the introductory panel. The exhibition's curator, Callie Hawkins, Director of Programming and Executive Director of the site, is herself a bereaved parent and adds that the exhibit is designed to help facilitate broader societal efforts to confront our collective discomfort with grief.

Approaching the exhibit, visitors first encounter a large wall introducing the exhibit's theme within the context of the Lincolns. Photos of the six Lincolns are arranged near a timeline, which visually highlights the tragedy of Mary outliving her husband and three of her four sons. A glass door in the center of this wall offers a partial glimpse of a stylized weeping willow, the central interactive element of the exhibit. Passing through this door, visitors can explore different themes arranged around the perimeter of the circular single-room gallery. Although the walls are gently angled to allow each theme to be experienced individually in any order, there is a logical progression from left to right. The first wall introduces, with photos and brief biographical statements, nine modern



The opening timeline is a powerful visualization of Mary Lincoln's grief. This effect is enhanced in a panel late in the exhibit which argues that, because Mary and Robert were estranged for the last years of her life, "she effectively lost her fourth and last son" as well. (Photograph by Chris Ferenzi)

families who shared their bereavement experiences with the curatorial team. This section, entitled "Our Stories," sets the stage for the first-person reflections which are featured throughout. Next are six walls pairing information from the Lincolns and the modern families on themes related to the grieving process: Ritual, Support, Expectations, Place, Memories, and Change. The final wall surrounds the question "How can I help?" with a variety of answers and offers a take-away card entitled "To Help Someone Who Grieves" which provides suggestions of what to "do, act, say." The willow tree in the center of the gallery is covered with paper leaves, each bearing the name of a child added to the tree by an exhibit visitor. The names will eventually be transferred to seed paper and planted as a permanent memorial.

This exhibition, packed with content and powerful emotion, succeeds in several important ways. First, the exhibition does an excellent job of integrating multiple values which many museums have identified as an important goal. For example, *Reflections on Grief* is an outstanding illustration of historic relevance. It connects the story of the Lincolns' loss and the museum's site to contemporary bereavement and to important societal issues. Some of the families who joined in the creation of this exhibit lost children to illness; others were lost to gun violence or the fentanyl crisis. In addition to their relevance, these issues are presented in a way that enacts



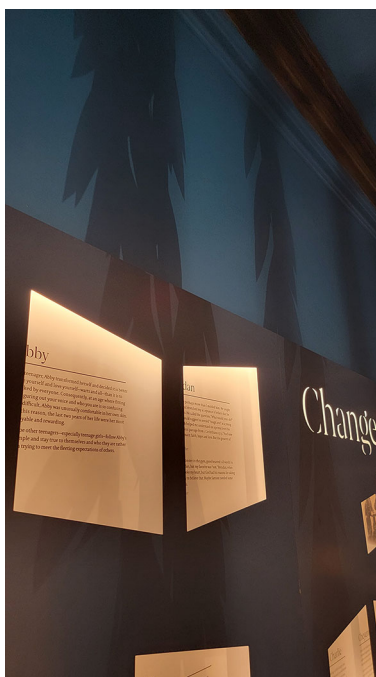
The stylized willow tree, seen through the glass entrance door, is the central interactive feature of the exhibit. (Photograph by Chris Ferenzi)

the exhibit's stated goal of empathy. Empathy is shown toward the Lincolns, Mary in particular, as well as toward the contemporary families who are allowed to share their grief and raise specific issues in their own voices.

Design is another strength of this exhibit. A great deal of information is presented in a surprisingly small space without it feeling physically overwhelming. The thematic, non-linear structure makes it possible to experience the contemplative tone of the exhibit at a slow pace without feeling like one is interfering with others even as the room fills. The most striking and successful design element is the willow tree that draws visitors in from their first encounter with the exhibit space. It stands in the center of the gallery as a singular interactive experience while simultaneously tying the entire exhibit together. If one is facing the tree, the themes are visible through the branches. If one is facing the walls, the tree is present in subtle shadows cast upon words and images. A common nineteenth-century symbol of grief, this willow is made up of contemporary names, once again connecting the Lincolns to today. Finally, the exhibit has excelled as a catalyst for a large slate of programming. It is a mark of the exhibit's success that the museum has now become a host site for bereavement support groups. This is not surprising given the inclusive approach the curatorial team took to research. Not only were the families included, but the work of historians was combined with input from mental health and grief professionals.



Visitors can continue to engage with the themes of the exhibit while standing within the branches of the willow tree. (Photograph courtesy of author)



Shadows of the willow tree provide an additional interpretive layer to the exhibit text throughout the gallery. Variation in font and in panel shape helps the visitor identify different levels of interpretation in each section. (Photograph courtesy of author)

The only shortcoming of the exhibition is the failure to identify objects and documents as reproductions. Although the photos included appear to be graphics rather than originals, it is not clear that a letter by Mary to a friend and a note by Abraham to Charles Sumner are facsimiles. However, because the quality of the reproductions is quite high (I thought I had seen the original Ashley's Sack until I commented on it to a staff member and learned I had not), this oversight does not detract from the artifacts included.¹

The awards that *Reflections on Grief* has received have been well deserved. Through creative collaborations and exceptional use of the past to inform the present, this exhibit is, in the words of the NCPH Public History Project Award description, an outstanding "model of professional public history practice."² This exhibit has something to add to what we all know about Lincoln and to what we all have experienced of grief.

E. Claire Jerry, National Museum of American History

To Live and Breathe: Women and Environmental Justice in Washington, D.C.

Smithsonian Institution's Anacostia Community Museum, Washington, DC.

Melanie Adams, Roger Ferguson, and Annette Nazareth, Directors; Rachel

Seidman, Curator of Women's Environmental History. May 19, 2023–January 7, 2024. <https://anacostia.si.edu/liveandbreathe>

Growing up in the DC suburbs of Maryland in the 1990s and early 2000s, I frequently traveled into the city for work and for leisure. However, Anacostia was a neighborhood that I rarely visited or even thought about. Not only did it have a reputation as a less-than-desirable place to live, its location on the east side of the Anacostia River created a physical separation from the rest of the city as well. Historically, the river has been plagued by pollution thanks to untreated sewage entering the waterway. As a direct result, the health of those who live along the river is under constant threat.

Over the last few decades, several activists and advocacy groups have worked to improve the health of not only the river but also other aspects of the environment. The Smithsonian's Anacostia Community Museum (ACM) is the perfect place to share this story with the broader community. *To Live and Breathe: Women and*

¹ Sometime in the 1850s, Rose, an enslaved woman in South Carolina, made a sack for her daughter Ashley when they were to be separated by Ashley's sale. In 1921, Rose's great-granddaughter embroidered their story on the sack, now on loan by Middleton Place to the International African American Museum. Tiya Miles tells Rose and Ashley's story in her book, *All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, A Black Family's Keepsake* (New York: Random House, 2022), winner of the 2023 NCPH Book Award.

² In addition to the 2022 NCPH Outstanding Public History Project Award, this exhibit also received the 2021 SEG D Global Design Award Merit Award (to firm Howard+Revis Design), a 2022 AASLH Award of Excellence and 2022 History in Progress Award.