

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.



Sketches by artist and designer Linda Lee of key women at the summit. (Photo courtesy of author)

Environmental Justice in Washington, D.C. is an exhibition that showcases the role that local women have played in local environmental justice movements as well as national ones. Divided into two rooms, the exhibition utilizes different colors of the rainbow to indicate shifts in narrative focus.

The first room that you enter—“Stitching Together a New Movement”—highlights the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, a four-day event sponsored by the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice.¹ Attended by over 1,100 people, the summit took place in October 1991. This room featured many photos and items related to the summit, including a memorial quilt with squares representing people who died from environmental issues such as pollution, fires, and relocation, along with sketches of key women at the summit drawn by artist and designer Linda Lee. A television in the rear of the room showed a recording of a reunion, hosted on Zoom, of many of the women who participated in the first summit.

The introductory room serves the purpose of situating visitors in a crucial moment when environmentalism expanded beyond the preservation of wildlife and the natural environment. Summit attendees advocated for environmental justice or “the idea that all people are entitled to healthy environments in the

¹ The October 1991 summit influenced President Bill Clinton to sign an executive order that required federal agencies to address the environmental and human health effects of their actions on minority and low-income populations. “Summary of Executive Order 12898 - Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,” United States Environmental Protection Agency, <https://www.epa.gov/laws-regulations/summary-executive-order-12898-federal-actions-address-environmental-justice>.

places where they live and work.”² A lasting testament of the summit was the publication of “Principles of Environmental Justice,” which outlined seventeen tenets and laid the groundwork for the future of the environmental justice movement.³

The second and larger room of the exhibition is divided into five different narrative themes: “Where We Work,” “Where We Play,” “Where We Live,” “Where We Pray,” and “Deep Roots Nourish New Growth.” Each theme is represented by a different color, and the panels are adorned with quotes from various activists, as well as health statistics.

Visitors are introduced to local women of color who advocated for the health of themselves and others in the community. Many of the activists had a local impact: Hien Vu, Tina Pham, and Sapna Pandya and their DC Safe Nail Salon Project fought to protect nail salon workers and their children from the toxins found in nail polish



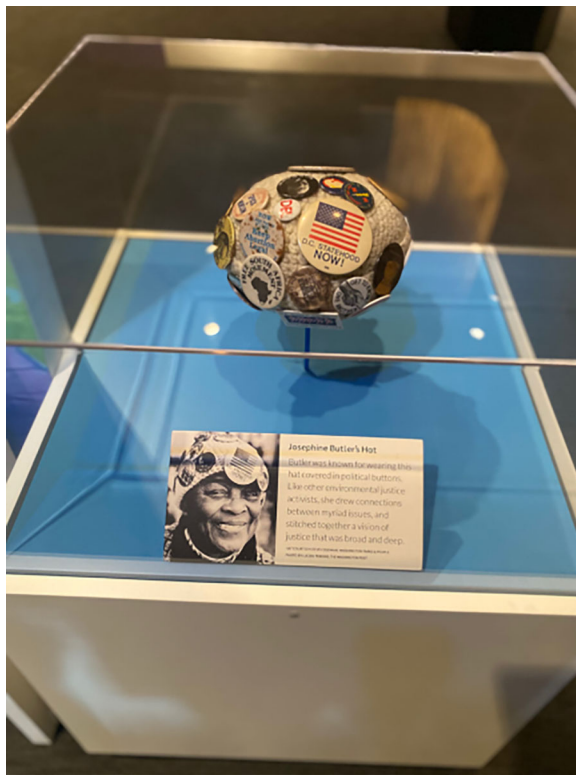
Young African American women in cooking class, Washington DC (photo taken between ca. 1910 ca. 1940). (Library of Congress)

2 Laurie Ann Mazur, “30th anniversary of 1st National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit—Looking Back, Looking Forward,” The Kresge Foundation, November 17, 2023, <https://kresge.org/news-views/roundtable-30th-anniversary-of-1st-national-people-of-color-environmental-leadership-summit-looking-back-looking-forward/>.

3 “Principles of Environmental Justice,” United Church of Christ, https://www.ucc.org/what-we-do/justice-local-church-ministries/justice/faithful-action-ministries/environmental-justice/principles_of_environmental_justice/.

and nail polish remover.⁴ Some of these stories included both national and international scopes and aims: for example, in 2017, Jamie Margolin, Nadia Nazar, Madelaine Tew, and Zanagee Artis founded Zero Hour, “a youth-led movement creating entry points, training, and resources for new young activists and organizers (and adults who support our vision) wanting to take concrete action around climate change.”⁵ A television screen mounted to the wall shows C-SPAN coverage of a speech given by youth activist Jansikwe “Jansi” Medina-Tayac (Piscataway) at the 2019 DC Climate Strike Rally.

Historical figures were showcased as well. Nannie Helen Burroughs (1879–1961) was an activist and reformer who saw the connections between education, labor issues, and voting rights. She drew inspiration from her mentors, Mary Church Terrell and Anna Julia Cooper (both are featured in the



Josephine Butler’s hat covered in campaign buttons. (Photo courtesy of the author)

4 According to a study by the UCLA Labor Center and the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative, the “U.S. nail salon workforce is 81 percent women and 79 percent foreign-born. Of immigrant manicurists, about three-quarters are from Vietnam.” https://www.labor.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/NAILFILES_2019jan09_FINAL_5a.pdf.

5 “Our Story,” Who We Are, Zero Hour, accessed October 27, 2023, <https://www.thiszerohour.org/>.

exhibition).⁶ In 1909, Burroughs founded the National Training School for Women and Girls. Located in northeast DC, the goal of the school was to educate Black women for jobs outside of domestic service. It also housed a medical clinic, a cooperative farm, and a grocery store.⁷

Josephine Butler (1920–97) was a founder and chairperson of the DC Statehood Party. After suffering from tuberculosis in the 1950s and 1960s, Butler dedicated her life to fighting against air pollution through her work as an educator for the DC chapter of the American Lung Association. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of Earth Day in 1995, she organized a parade of four thousand people from the Adams-Morgan neighborhood to the Capitol, where she addressed a crowd estimated at 250,000 people.⁸ Many artifacts from her lifetime of activism are on display, including a bell that she rang at many events, as well as her famous knitted hat that was covered in political



The exhibit's quilting station, which asks visitors to make a quilt square responding to the question, "What would environmental justice look like to you?" (Photo courtesy of the author)

6 Terrell and Cooper were amongst the founders of the Colored Social Settlement, the first settlement house established for Black people in the country. Founded in Washington, DC in 1902, one of the stated goals of the settlement house was to "[t]o investigate industrial conditions and social problems, and to promote individual, neighborhood and municipal improvements." See "The Colored Social Settlement: What It Is and What It Does." The Colored Social Settlement Washington, D.C. https://dh.howard.edu/ajc_css/1

7 Traki L. Taylor, "Womanhood Glorified": Nannie Helen Burroughs and the National Training School for Women and Girls, Inc., 1909–1961," *The Journal of African American History* 87 (2002): 390–402.

8 J.Y. Smith, "Josephine Butler Dies," *The Washington Post*, March 30, 1997, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1997/03/30/josephine-butler-dies/235830ab-9652-4237-b77f-130ad424aa00/>.

buttons.⁹ In addition to her environmental activism, Butler was a fierce advocate for DC Statehood, a fact that was recently commemorated by a mural commissioned by the League of Conservation Voters and the statehood advocacy group 51 for 51. The mural, created by artist César Maxit, is prominently featured in the exhibit.

The exhibition featured display cases with several artifacts related to its corresponding themes. Two items of particular interest were the scrubs and COVID-19 Vaccination Record Card of Sandra Lindsay, a nurse who was the first person in the US to receive a COVID-19 vaccine in 2020. There are interactive components as well, some of which were directly inspired by displayed artifacts. Visitors are prompted to respond to the question, “What would environmental justice look like to you,” by designing a quilt square that they can then add to a wall, which forms a quilt compiled from visitors’ answers.

Although the exhibition space of the ACM might be considered small in comparison to other Smithsonian member institutions, this exhibit goes a long way to show the importance of community museums. On its website, ACM establishes itself as a museum that “documents and preserves communities’ memories, struggles, and successes, and offers a platform where diverse voices and cultures can be heard.”¹⁰ Once I finished viewing the exhibit, I spoke with Andrea Jones, Associate Director of Education. She recounted a story to me of a woman who recently visited the exhibition. The woman used to be ashamed that she grew up in Anacostia; *To Live and Breathe* gave her a reason to be proud. As I headed to my car, I walked past a farmers market set up near the entrance, as well as a community fridge located in the parking lot itself. I pondered on a quote from Nannie Helen Burroughs that was featured in the exhibit. It perfectly encapsulates not only the overall theme of the exhibit, but the museum itself: “Nothing has been done to improve the conditions of the Negro working woman. **We must, therefore, paddle our own canoe.**” (Emphasis by the museum)

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“*Yet She Is Advancing*”: *New Orleans Women and the Right to Vote, 1878–1970*. The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, LA. *Elizabeth Neidenbach*, Curator. April 28 to November 5, 2023. <https://www.hnoc.org/virtual/yes-she-advancing>

When Susan B. Anthony visited New Orleans for the World’s Cotton Centennial Exposition in 1885, she was surprised to find a new ally. A woman named Caroline

⁹ Butler’s use of the bell was inspired by the words of the Queen Juliana of the Netherlands (1909–2004), who said “We must always listen to the smallest bells, for they are symbols of justice.”

¹⁰ “Mission and Values,” Mission and Vision, Anacostia Community Museum, <https://anacostia.si.edu/mission-and-vision>.