

COLLECTION HIGHLIGHTS



**Smithsonian
Institution**

OCTOBER 2020

THREE MUSEUMS DOCUMENT THE PROTEST AGAINST ONGOING RACISM IN AMERICA

The **Anacostia Community Museum** (“ACM”) continues its longstanding tradition of documenting local efforts to address social and racial injustice by photographing and collecting from recent activist work around these issues. Beginning with their “Moments of Resilience” initiative that launched in May 2020, which collects stories about how communities are coming together in the midst of a global pandemic, ACM has extended this work by photographing rallies happening around the greater Washington, D.C. area. By collecting protest signs, art, and other ephemera used and displayed at Lafayette Square (“Black Lives Matter Plaza”), and coordinating with organizations across the city and region, ACM documents the civic engagement that complements the museum’s advocacy around these issues.



Atiim and Kecia Penn, along with their daughter Kaiia, pose in front of the large Black Lives Matter banner affixed to the fence surrounding Lafayette Square (June 10, 2020). Credit: Samir Meghelli, ACM Archives, Smithsonian Institution

The **National Museum of African American History and Culture** (“NMAAHC”) has engaged communities across the country to collect artifacts to preserve, share, and conduct future research on this moment in history. In early June, they collaborated with the **Anacostia Community Museum** (“ACM”) and the **National Museum of American History** (“NMAH”) to collect objects related to protests at Lafayette Square in Washington, D.C. The range of materials included protest signs, an art installation in front of the Lafayette Square Park fence, and the large Black Lives Matter banner that flanked the gate at Lafayette Square. Additionally, Mayor Muriel Bowser donated street signs used to rename 16th Street as Black Lives Matter Plaza. The street signs and banner will be shared with ACM and NMAH.

Benjamin Crump, the attorney for the Floyd family, donated through the Secretary’s Office George Floyd’s memorial service program and obituary. The museum also worked with the Smithsonian’s Office of Public Affairs to issue calls for object donations across the country and have narrowed responses to 75 offers that are in different phases of consideration. Currently, 15 priority offers have been identified. These offers range from mural panels, banners, photographs and photography archives, to clothing, tear gas cannisters, and rubber bullets from protests.

Additionally, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and St. John’s Church, both at Lafayette Square Park in Washington, D.C., have offered banners, protest signs, and murals that surrounded their buildings during the June 1, 2020, standoff between demonstrators and law enforcement. The museum cannot take all of the mural panels or protest signs offered and plan to work with both institutions to help them identify other possible repositories across the country.



Credit: Manuel Balce Ceneta/AP, Three Black Lives Matter Plaza street signs donated by Mayor Muriel Bowser and the City of Washington, D.C., which NMAAHC shares with NMAH and ACM.

The **National Museum of American History** (“NMAH”) has a broad commitment to documenting, preserving, and sharing objects and stories related to the Black Lives Matter movement from 2012 onward in partnership with local communities. As part of their curatorial practice they will sharpen their focus on Black life, Black activism, Black cultural producers, and Black protest.



Tsione Wolde-Michael (NMAH) and Samir Meghelli (AMC) collecting in partnership with community groups at Lafayette Square.



White House Fence, NMAH collection.



*Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London. London: Academic Press, [etc.], 1833-1965.
biodiversitylibrary.org/page/31207013*

The **Biodiversity Heritage Library** (“BHL”) Secretariat staff at the **Smithsonian Libraries and Archives** has helped organize and support COVID-19 related telework projects for BHL partner staff at 10 institutions in three countries (US/UK/Australia) since March 2020. Secretariat activities include facilitating project work, managing over 300 user accounts across five consortium-wide systems and seven listservs, producing enhanced training and documentation materials, and improving reporting processes to help prioritize curation work. These telework projects have resulted in improved descriptive information (metadata) for BHL collections, including defining thousands of additional articles and correspondence, reconciling over 2,000 creator names with duplicate entries or bad characters, and enhancing page-level descriptions for over 2,000 volumes. Through the BHL Flickr project, designed to help improve image discoverability, the Secretariat has supported 38 staff members at eight institutions in their work to upload over 60,000 new images to Flickr since March 2020, bringing BHL’s total Flickr collection to over 220,000 free nature images. The Secretariat has also supported several BHL partners in their transition from digitization of physical holdings to a focus on uploading existing electronic content to BHL’s collection.

The Biodiversity Heritage Library is the world’s largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. BHL is revolutionizing global research by providing free, worldwide access

to knowledge about life on Earth. BHL operates as a worldwide consortium of natural history, botanical, research, and national libraries working together to address this challenge by digitizing the natural history literature held in their collections and making it freely available for open access as part of a global “biodiversity community.”

A NEW BIOREPOSITORY FOR SCIENTIFIC COLLECTIONS AT SCBI



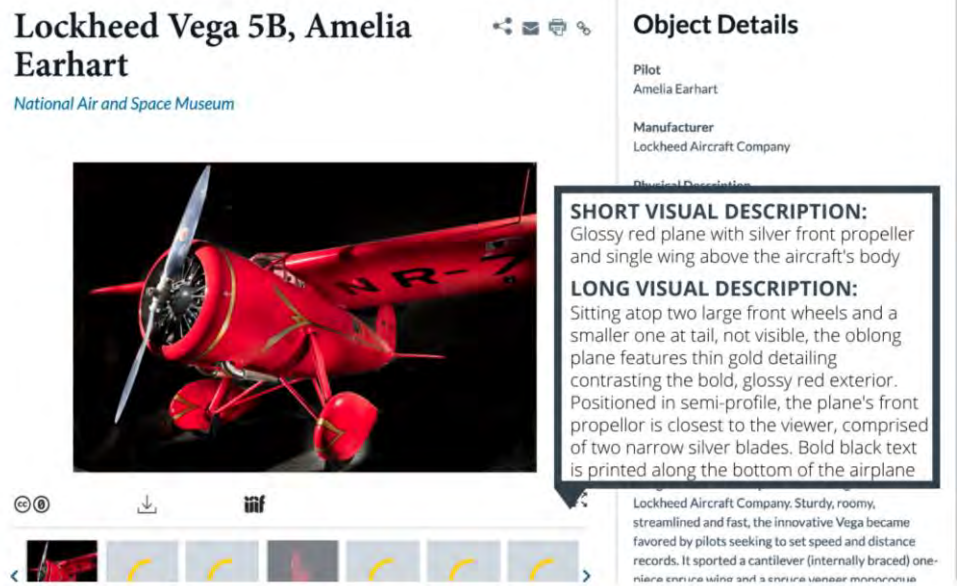
The construction of a new biorepository for scientific collections was completed in March 2020 at the **Smithsonian Conservation Biology Institute** (“SCBI”) in Front Royal, VA. The project was partly funded with a \$1.7 million gift from the Swiss Village Foundation in Rhode Island. The renovated building houses the “Dorrance Hamilton Cryo-Conservation Laboratory,” a 2,500 sq. ft. space for processing biomaterials and storing up to 1.6 million frozen samples from rare and endangered animal species in ultra-cold freezers and liquid nitrogen tanks.

Thousands of samples from current collections that were previously scattered in different laboratories have already been transferred to this state-of-the-art biorepository. This includes cells and tissue samples from hundreds of animal species as well as a large collection of samples from livestock heritage breeds.

This long-term storage space will contribute to Smithsonian research efforts geared towards the understanding and sustaining of biodiversity.

ENHANCING ACCESSIBILITY WITH IMAGE DESCRIPTION

Image descriptions, also known as “alt text” are used by individuals with disabilities, especially those who are blind or have low-vision, when navigating websites using assistive technology. To ensure equitable online experiences as we reach one billion people a year, all images of objects in the Smithsonian collections, events, programs, and graphics on the Institution’s websites must be described. Visual elements on our digital platforms provide critical information about our content. It is essential that the Institution approach the practice of creating image descriptions thoughtfully and with intention.



The screenshot shows a museum page for the Lockheed Vega 5B, Amelia Earhart, from the National Air and Space Museum. It features a high-quality image of the red airplane. A pop-up window is overlaid on the image, providing detailed visual descriptions. The pop-up includes a 'SHORT VISUAL DESCRIPTION' and a 'LONG VISUAL DESCRIPTION'. The long description notes the plane's unique features like the cantilever wing and the propeller. Below the main image, there are navigation controls and a small thumbnail gallery.

Lockheed Vega 5B, Amelia Earhart
National Air and Space Museum

Object Details
Pilot: Amelia Earhart
Manufacturer: Lockheed Aircraft Company

SHORT VISUAL DESCRIPTION:
Glossy red plane with silver front propeller and single wing above the aircraft's body

LONG VISUAL DESCRIPTION:
Sitting atop two large front wheels and a smaller one at tail, not visible, the oblong plane features thin gold detailing contrasting the bold, glossy red exterior. Positioned in semi-profile, the plane's front propeller is closest to the viewer, comprised of two narrow silver blades. Bold black text is printed along the bottom of the airplane

Lockheed Aircraft Company. Sturdy, roomy, streamlined and fast, the innovative Vega became favored by pilots seeking to set speed and distance records. It sported a cantilever (internally braced) one-piece engine wing and a one-piece monoplane

Design mockup of an Open Access landing page displays an image of a red airplane with a pop-up window providing short and long visual description text.

The image description project initially began in 2018 at **Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum** (“CHSDM”) with funding from the **Smithsonian Accessibility Innovation Fund**. Staff created a training course hosted on Moodle and published Guidelines for Image Description. With the shift to telework in March 2020, Cooper Hewitt saw an opportunity to make progress on the thousands of images that needed to be described, while keeping frontline staff members engaged during a time where the campus closure meant their day-to-day responsibilities were not needed. A cross-departmental team averaging 25 members from Visitor Experience, SHOP, Library, Advancement, Curatorial departments and volunteers have authored over 4,500 descriptions. This is still just a fraction of the over 210,000 objects in Cooper Hewitt’s collection, but is important progress that demonstrates commitment to digital inclusion.

Staff at several other units have begun grassroots efforts on tackling the challenge of creating image descriptions including the **Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, National Air and Space Museum** and **National Museum of Natural History**. Members of these units initiated discussions across the Institution about best practices for authoring descriptions and are currently exploring the necessary technical factors to tie their work to online collections. Staff are also collaborating to experiment with several software tools that support a more robust workflow and repository for descriptions including Coyote, and open-source software developed initially by the MCA Chicago as a sector-wide solution for addressing image descriptions, and an internal tool created by the Office of the Chief Information Officer built from the transcription center model. With the right resourcing and proper tools, the aim is to expand efforts of image description work across the Smithsonian.

As a virtual Smithsonian gains even more significance during the pandemic, it is essential that people with disabilities are considered in the design and delivery of online experiences. Deliberate planning and execution are necessary for websites to be born accessible, and the need for inclusivity online will only increase as the Smithsonian continues to expand digital offerings. The description project is a prime opportunity for the Smithsonian to broaden its reach by welcoming audiences with disabilities, and must be prioritized to ensure the institution delivers upon its mission.

BOOSTING WOMEN'S HISTORY WITHIN SMITHSONIAN COLLECTIONS, PROGRAMS, AND EDUCATION



The **American Women's History Initiative** ("AWHI") offered two competitive awards to support collections acquisitions, programming, and education related to women's history. The submission deadline for both is October 30, 2020.

The **AWHI Virtual Programs and Education Fund**, will provide awards of up to \$40,000 per proposal for programming related to exhibitions, collections, or education. The proposed programs are meant to enhance Smithsonian collections or exhibitions dedicated to women's history. Competitive proposals will show innovation and creativity in approaches to reaching new audiences and deepening the work of the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative particularly in efforts to bring to light previously suppressed histories of American women.

The **AWHI Acquisitions Fund** will provide awards of up to \$100,000 per proposal for new acquisitions related to women's history. These new acquisitions are intended to address gaps in collecting across disciplines. The proposals should identify a specific audience to be engaged by the acquisition and show how that audience will be connected to Smithsonian collections, scholarship, or exhibitions dedicated to women's history. Competitive proposals will show innovation and creativity in approaches to reaching new audiences and deepening the work of the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative, particularly in efforts to focus on diversifying Smithsonian collections.