



In Memorium:

Portia James began her career at the Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum in May of 1984. Throughout her stellar career, that spanned more than 30 years, she significantly shaped the work of the museum, and its responsibility to the communities and people for which it was established. As the museum's Senior Curator, she was responsible for the exhibition program, publications and collections. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Wayne State University and a master's degree in political science from Howard University.

The Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum has lost one of its own: Portia James, Senior Curator March 11, 1953 – December 2, 2015

James' exhibition work included *Real McCoy: African American Inventors and Innovators* (1989); *Black Mosaic: Community, Race and Ethnicity among Black Immigrants in Washington, D.C.* (1994); *Down Through the Years: Stories from the Anacostia Museum Collection* (1996); *East of the River: Continuity and Change* (2007); *Jubilee: African American Celebration* (2008); *Exercise Your Mynd: BK Adams I AM ART* (2012); *Arture* (2012); and *Hand of Freedom: The Life and Legacy of the Plummer Family* (2015). She was the supervisory curator for all major exhibition projects, including the exhibitions *Ubhle Women: Beadwork and the Art of Independence* (2013), and the current exhibition *12 Years That Shook and Shaped Washington DC: 1963-1975* (2015).

James pioneered the ACM approach to museum collections. Her philosophy engaged community members in the preservation of their history and resulted in a significant body of material focused on neighborhood history, family, and community

life, placed within the broader context of national history and historic events.

James' publications include *The Real McCoy: Invention and Innovation, 1619–1930* (1989); "Exhibitions and Building a Community-based Identity at Anacostia Museum," *Curator*, (March 1996); "Black Immigrant Community Life in Washington, DC: A Public History Approach," *Trotter Review*, (July 1996); "Changing Role of the Curator," *MAAM Forum*, (June 1997); and *Black Washingtonians* (2005).

For her entire career, Portia James was a teacher and mentor for numerous colleagues, interns, volunteers, and researchers. Her quiet dignity and razor-sharp intellect served to inspire a higher standard for the content and impact of community museum work. Her legacy carries on for all those who had the privilege to work with her, to know her, and to be inspired by her profound body of work.