

*[Photo: A logo reads, "Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum."]*

Narrator: Smithsonian Anacostia Community Museum presents the 2021 Women of The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit with Susana Almanza, Dr. Mildred McClain, Vernice Miller-Travis, Donele Wilkins, and moderator Katrina Lashley.

***[Video: Susana wears a colorful black blouse.]***

Susana Almanza: I was real fortunate to have them as my parents.

Susana Almanza: I come from a family of 10 and basically everyone in my neighborhood

Susana Almanza: had large families. And so, when two families got together,

Susana Almanza: the kids got together, you thought a baseball tournament was happening,

Susana Almanza: but it was just two families getting together. That's the way things were

Susana Almanza: forced in a segregated part of east Austin,

Susana Almanza: the streets were not paved. There wasn't lighting. All of the things that,

Susana Almanza: you know, people take for granted now, you know, gutters, lighting, sidewalks,

Susana Almanza: all this stuff did not really exist in the segregated part of,

Susana Almanza: east Austin but I feel real fortunate,

Susana Almanza: my realization in,

Susana Almanza: the environment and recognizing is because, like I said,

Susana Almanza: even though we were in the urban core, we had chickens,

Susana Almanza: we had chickens and we had rabbits and my mother garden, we grew lettuce,

Susana Almanza: tomatoes, beans, and my mother also was a healer.

Susana Almanza: So, we always had a big spider net on the side of the house that my mom would not

Susana Almanza: let us touch.

Susana Almanza: We could feed it ants and watch it because that was the natural band-aids for

Susana Almanza: cuts and so forth in our community.

Susana Almanza: And so, that really grounded me.

Susana Almanza: We were rooted very much rooted in the Earth and that's how I see the

Susana Almanza: environment through a real

Susana Almanza: indigenous perspective that the Earth was not just a planet.

Susana Almanza: It was a mother, it was Mother Earth to us.



***[Video: Mildred wears a white headscarf and a matching blouse with glasses.]***

Dr. Mildred McClain: I would be always in the streets

Dr. Mildred McClain: playing barefoot and grew to really love the soil.

Dr. Mildred McClain: My mama said that I used to eat up the Georgia red clay. It was so sweet,

Dr. Mildred McClain: but I think more than being sweet, it was very healing

Dr. Mildred McClain: and like Susana said our parents, our grandparents, our aunts,

Dr. Mildred McClain: they all engaged in what we call now alternative

Dr. Mildred McClain: or traditional medicine.

Dr. Mildred McClain: My ancestral connection to the ocean is very deep

Dr. Mildred McClain: but here in Savannah, during my growing up,

Dr. Mildred McClain: we could not go to the ocean in Savannah.

Dr. Mildred McClain: We had to travel all the way to a place called Hilton Head, South Carolina.

Dr. Mildred McClain: And it was there that black men let me repeat that

Dr. Mildred McClain: black men owned three beaches in

Dr. Mildred McClain: South Carolina. So, my mother,

Dr. Mildred McClain: one of her requirements after my father,

Dr. Mildred McClain: her boyfriend had to have a car because on every Sunday he had to take us to

Dr. Mildred McClain: the ocean in South Carolina.

Dr. Mildred McClain: And we learned a reverence for the ocean.

***[Video: Vernice wears a coral sweater and white blouse with glasses.]***

Vernice Miller-Travis: We were a textbook case of where you didn't want to live,

Vernice Miller-Travis: what you didn't want to live next to and how you didn't want your children to

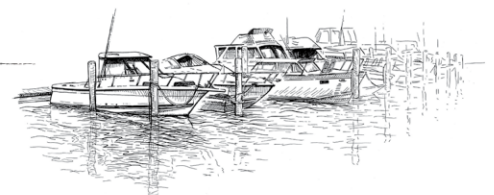
Vernice Miller-Travis: have to live like that. And so, for some reason,

Vernice Miller-Travis: we stumbled across this information. Every junior high school,

Vernice Miller-Travis: every middle school in northern Manhattan was built next to a bus depot.

Vernice Miller-Travis: There are seven municipal bus depots. I think they're eight. Now in Manhattan,

Vernice Miller-Travis: seven of them are in northern Manhattan,



Vernice Miller-Travis: right where the black and brown people were.

Vernice Miller-Travis: So, we have particulate pollution. We had abnormally high asthma rates.

Vernice Miller-Travis: We, everybody always had asthma when I was growing up.

Vernice Miller-Travis: I was fortunate, and I did not have asthma,

Vernice Miller-Travis: but everybody else in my class always had asthma.

Vernice Miller-Travis: It was a huge issue for us and nobody could put their hands on it until we

Vernice Miller-Travis: started doing the organizing that that we did

Vernice Miller-Travis: for west Harlem Environmental Action.

Vernice Miller-Travis: It was a difficult place to be from an environmental standpoint,

Vernice Miller-Travis: but yet just south of us well, first of all,

Vernice Miller-Travis: next door to us were very affluent community.

Vernice Miller-Travis: So, New York is a really odd bird like that.

Vernice Miller-Travis: Our zip code, which was 10035

Vernice Miller-Travis: was one of the poorest zip codes in

the entire United States at the time.

Vernice Miller-Travis: Adjacent to us is the upper east side of Manhattan, the Silk Stocking District,

Vernice Miller-Travis: right, which is one of the most affluent zip codes in the entire

Vernice Miller-Travis: United States of America has always been.

Vernice Miller-Travis: And so, there was that poverty and that affluence jammed right next to

Vernice Miller-Travis: each other. And so, as black and brown people, you would get on buses.

Vernice Miller-Travis: So, if you seen that movie Claudine.

Vernice Miller-Travis: Diahann Carroll is a maid in that movie and she gets on a bus in Harlem

Vernice Miller-Travis: and the bus travels uptown

Vernice Miller-Travis: and it goes to the Bronx to a neighborhood called Riverdale, which is, you know,

Vernice Miller-Travis: people think of the Archie Comics and thinking it's a made up place.

Vernice Miller-Travis: No, it is one of the most affluent communities in the

Vernice Miller-Travis: United States of America. And it's right there in the Bronx,



Vernice Miller-Travis: the same Bronx that holds the south Bronx also holds Riverdale, right?

Vernice Miller-Travis: And so, that juxtaposition is all over New York City and as people of color,

Vernice Miller-Travis: your face is grounded in it every day.

**[Video: Donele wears gray blouse with glasses.]**

Donele Wilkins: I'm like Dr. McClain, it is where I live. It is where,

Donele Wilkins: I worship in play and I am educated and love.

Donele Wilkins: That's the environment for me.

Donele Wilkins: And it happens to embody the air that we breathe and the water that

Donele Wilkins: we drink and the playgrounds we play on.

Donele Wilkins: That's the environment for me. Similarly, I

Donele Wilkins: I'm not sure what justice is.

Donele Wilkins: I remember thinking when I started the Green Door Initiative is

Donele Wilkins: if environmental justice hit me in the face with, I recognize it,

Donele Wilkins: what does it look like? What does it feel like? What is environmental justice, right?

Donele Wilkins: And we fought so hard.

Donele Wilkins: My bio didn't include my first 15 years of working in the movement

Donele Wilkins: because I started the Detroiters Working for Environmental Justice, where there,

Donele Wilkins: we wanted to make sure that environmental justice was a household phrase and

Donele Wilkins: that it was something that we had to fight for and achieved. But in this moment,

Donele Wilkins: my thing is trying to manifest what that

Donele Wilkins: looks like for the people in my community,

Donele Wilkins: what it looks like to be able to enjoy clean air,

Donele Wilkins: what it looks like to be able to drink safe water,

Donele Wilkins: and they have access to affordable water.

Donele Wilkins: What it looks like for my children to be able to go into school buildings and

Donele Wilkins: not have asthma triggers and,

Donele Wilkins: or be on top of some kind of contaminated site, because of all of the,

Donele Wilkins: manufacturing legacies that left a bunch of dirt,

Donele Wilkins: and mess and toxins and whatever for us to deal with.



Donele Wilkins: And then get  
blamed that our city is dirty and  
nasty and

Donele Wilkins: what's wrong  
with black people kind of  
narrative.

*[Photo: A logo reads,  
"Smithsonian Anacostia  
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URBAN WATERWAYS

