

Still Standing



Hannah Price

I feel it is the heart, not the eye, that should determine the content of the photograph.

Gordon Parks

I first met photographer Hannah Price in January 2020. It was a cold winters day in Washington, D.C., when she photographed my headshot for the New Yorker’s February magazine story titled “The Fight to Preserve African-American History.” I remember vividly our instant connection, and how Price described her process for capturing authentic moments as a historical record. I knew on that day that Price would add value to the work of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund to help us amplify the power of place and historic preservation.

The African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund is a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the nationwide movement to protect cultural landscapes and historic buildings important in Black history. In 2018, we partnered with the Jesse Ball duPont Fund to establish our fellowship program and to make room for Black leaders, like Price, in our work to re-imagine interpretation of the past, and its impact on the present.

Price was invited to photograph historic assets in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh where we have long supported preservation efforts. I had anticipated seeing a kind of haunting beauty and stillness in Price's work. But instead, I would experience a personal shift in my own understanding of visual art as a form of social justice. Through her lens and impassioned heart, Price eloquently positions architectural landmarks as a backdrop to the Black communities she visited and for the very people whom they have long served.

Price found a way to showcase both people and landmarks as monuments and the subjects of their own stories, expressing the belonging and interconnectedness of human beings in place. While capturing beauty and resilience in physical forms, her photography forces the viewer to see themselves in our shared human experience and to consider their own vulnerability and strength. In essence, that sentiment is core to what the Action Fund is all about - protecting generations of Black history and culture.

Simply put:

Price's work is emotive.

Price's book unearths a fascinating and true American story. Her photographs serve as a reminder of our progress, and they remind us that our work is not complete. Ultimately, this work is about saving historic places and legacy in a way that does right by all those who came before us, and who worked hard to create the world of possibility we live in today. It also is for those who will come after, in the world that we are creating now, and will leave for them.

— Brent Leggs is the Executive Director of the African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund and Senior Vice President at the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Do your feet ever suddenly itch?

The top, bottom, all around? You rub them against each other to ease the irritation, however, instead it makes your feet feel like they are on fire!

Unable to control the burn has me frustrated.

The history kept from me.

I grew up in the white suburbs of Fort Collins, Colorado. We were homeschooled at first, but a car accident forced my dad to send us to public school. My father didn't believe in the government teaching his children and today as an adult I agree with him, especially with the controversy about Critical Race Theory being taught in elementary schools—we all know it's a course in law school. Books with Black authors are being banned in school libraries and in some schools, parents have the option to opt their child out of learning Black history.

This reminds me of my junior high school history teacher. After he finished teaching the Black history segment, he pulled me aside and told me that I had to learn about Black history on my own. He knew there was more for me to know. Unfortunately, instead of listening to him, my mind was occupied by the other children I finally got to go to school with. At that time, all I wanted was friends. I hated being homeschooled, we were up by 5 and done by 11. We weren't allowed to go outside till the other kids came home from school, so my siblings and I would drown out the day using our imaginations with each other.



Cellar, August Wilson's House, The Hill.

I don't know what it is.

The isolation and racism my family experienced growing up, or the fact that my education was whitewashed.

I've always known this, but for some reason, I am more pissed off today than ever. There is something about this time. It has been really hard writing this piece. I had no idea what to say.

It's a shame that Black people have to search for their history, but the beauty behind such an oppressive history is what connects us.

As a child growing up feeling isolated by society, every time we saw another Black person, my dad made sure they saw him wave, even if we didn't know their name. In Fort Collins, all Black people wave to each other, it was our way of connecting. Photography has brought me closer to the culture I missed out on. Not that we didn't have Black culture within my own family, but we didn't get to share it with other families besides our own.

Approaching the National Trust Fellowship had me in circles trying to come up with an idea. Ultimately, I wanted to have all this knowledge about my subjects and make clever work connecting them all. Unfortunately, I am not a research artist. I am a documentarian, artist, photographer. Ashamedly so, I didn't know who Paul Robeson was, though it makes complete sense why I didn't since he was blacklisted by the FBI. I'm sure my history teacher knew and probably remembered his story. It would have been great to learn it from him. As an adult, it's frustrating to frequently stumble upon your own history you didn't know about.

The AACHA brought this history to me and I am thankful for that. The opportunity to experience August Wilson's house (every house and structure) in the condition it was in was a privilege. Seeing the layers of wallpaper, experiencing the space. Walking in areas tourists will be prohibited from. I wish I could have walked inside the National Negro Opera House, but I guess we will have to use old photographs and our imaginations for now.



Paul Robeson's House, West Philly.

The National Trust asked me to document six historic structures in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I decided the preservation portion of this project is not only the structures, but the Black life that surrounds them. Along with documenting the structures, I decided to also make portraits of Black residents who live in the neighborhoods of these structures today.



James

showing me The Hill, Pittsburgh, from his back balcony. I randomly knocked on his door to ask if I could take a photo from his balcony and he kindly let me in. The New Granada Theater is below his collar, and the Black Beauty Bar is just down the street with the mural on the side.

I am the type of artist that has to include pain when I talk about race politics in my photographs. Over six years ago, the pain was a haunting darkness that followed nightly. In this book it's the weather before a storm. Making work about famous Black peoples' homes was intimidating, because I felt un-knowledgeable. I wanted to know every single thing about each person & their work. However visiting the sites, and finding a few residents who had an experience to share with them, whether it be themselves or a relative. I decided to make a book of my experience photographing the structures and meeting people along the way.

I began by chasing the clouds...

I wanted dark clouds before a rain storm. The weather before the storm is the oppression that follows Black people in our daily lives, but the beauty and excellence of the structures are still standing tall.



August Wilson's House, West Philly.

Pittsburgh

Pennsylvania



James and Ron were the first two people I ran into, up The Hill, behind the New Granada Theater.



James and Ron were the first two people I ran into, up The Hill, behind the New Granada Theater.



The New Granada Theater



Sandra, across the street of the New Granada theater.
I saw Sandra when I had a meeting with someone else. Turns out they had forgot and I ran after Sandra and asked to make her portrait. The next day, the purple weeds were mowed.



New Granada Theater women’s bathroom.



Derek at Grandma B's café.

I ate at Grandma B's often while shooting on The Hill. Great food and fun place to hang out.
A must visit!



August Wilson's House back room later acquired.



Ms. Denise



New Granada Theater main floor.





August Wilson's House. Main front room.



Detail side walkway to left.



Crawford Grill, former Jazz Bar.



Stacia, across the street, directly in front of the New Granada Theater.
Stacia used to live above the Crawford Grill and remembers sneaking into the jazz bar at a young age. A few times the end of the day I would relax with her at The Black Beauty Bar down the street.



Bolt. Musician, Artist. The Hill, Pittsburgh, PA.
After we met, later in the week I got to see and document one of his music videos.



Back inside of New Granada Theater where the Knights of Pythias would meet.





Jay after work, unfortunately our schedules didn't work out for a re-shoot in casual attire.



The back of the New Granada Theater. The Knights of Pythias would enter here.









New Granada Theater, second floor.





National Negro Opera House



Philadelphia

Pennsylvania



Marian Anderson's phone.



Doris, South West Center City



Marian Anderson's House.



David & Joan have been neighbors for at least 20 years.
We discussed developers harassing them to purchase their homes. They told me they will never sell.
West Philly.



Paul Robeson's Breakfast set up.





Joe Frazier's Gym.



Jeffrey & Aigner, Center City.



Marian Anderson's Front Room.







Marian Anderson's room.



Marian Anderson's House. Rittenhouse, Philadelphia, PA.
I planned to photograph her house at the beginning of the rainstorm in response to the pipe that burst in the basement a few years ago.



Paul Robeson's Piano.



Paul Robeson's Bedroom



Zina. West Philadelphia. Her Daughter attended Paul Robeson High School.



Amber & Taylin visiting, Philly Rittenhouse.



Mir and Mirah, North Philly.



Paul Robeson



Terese. North Philly.



Marian Anderson's Mother's room.



North Philly, down the street from Joe Frazier's Gym



Rodney in front of Joe Frazier's Gym.
He remembers attending the gym back in the day.



Tijuana across the street of Joe Frazier's Gym.



Aissatou, Rittenhouse.





Liyah, South West Philly.



Crystal, North West Philly.



One of Paul Robeson's Records



Demetrius accross the street from John Coltrans's house.



Kareem, Strawberry Mansion, Philly.



John Coltrane's House.



Found dancing on his porch, North West Philly.



Before I took his picture he expressed the “standing on the corner” stereotype, but understood it worked for the frame and best spot in the area. North Philly.



Thank you Brent for remembering me after those years and providing me with this educational experience and opportunity. I enjoyed learning about everyone as well as the places I documented. I especially remember the moment I learned about Paul Robeson's tomato that is named after him.

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Lastly, thank you August Wilson, Marian Anderson, Joe Frazier, Paul Robeson, Mary Caldwell Dawson, and all the other black excellences for being you.

— Hannah Price

