

Twanna Dewdney: Education at a Community Salon, Florida

As told by Twanna Dewdney
Bartow, Florida

Introduction:

In early 2020 (just weeks before the pandemic), Smithsonian staff and their storytelling partners at the Peale, Baltimore, traveled to multiple states in the U.S. to ask residents of those states about voting experiences, the current state of American democracy, what issues brought them to the polls, how they made a difference in their communities, and what Americans' civic responsibilities were, among other complex questions.

Story Narrative:

Twanna Dewdney: Hello, my name is Twanna Dewdney. I'm an advocate for HIV/AIDS, homelessness, and also women in prison. And some of the information and topics that we discuss in my community would have to be improving race relations. I know we need to get together, come together and collaborate about what the issues are in our community and discuss those.

One of the ways that I got involved with what's going on in the community was I saw so many injustices and inequality in my community, and I wanted to be part of the solution, if not the solution.

Often around election time when a candidate is running for public office, they'll usually seek me out to help them with their campaign. And I know it's because they know I'm involved with my community, I'm involved in my church. And most of the leaders in my community come to my salon and I service them as a client. So that information is valuable.

Being that I'm a hairdresser, people from the community, they come to my salon because they trust me. They know that I'm up on the current events, who's running for office, and I'm able to enlighten them about the election process as well as register them to vote.

Another unique thing about being a hairdresser and working in the salon is when I give my clients their client profile sheet, I will slip in a question, "Are you registered to vote?" And that'll give me the opportunity to go and get a form, so they can fill it out right there on the spot and drop it in the mailbox because the post office is right down the street.

Salon Ashanti is like a lighthouse in our community. People come in and they ask questions. And I think they feel comfortable talking with me about the election, the election process. And I'm glad to be there to answer those questions. I'm grateful that I'm one of the people that others seek out to come and get information. Because they know my

connection with the community, they come to me, and I'm grateful that they think that much of me.

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