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D.C. Families Star In A New Photo Exhibit At Hillyer

Mikala Williams

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Washington families are the stars of "Raising Our Youth."

IA&A at Hillyer

It was a little past 6:30 p.m. when Tyra Mitchell arrived at her photo exhibition's opening reception earlier this month, rushed but poised and bright-eyed as she composed herself to welcome her guests. "My Uber got pulled over and I was like, 'Oh my God, not today!'" she said as her team reassured her. She had made it. As the free wine and charcuterie made its way around the space, Mitchell smiled with relief as she saw the work she produced hanging on the walls of [The IA&A at Hillyer](#). Like many of the subjects of her photos, Mitchell remains resilient even in the midst of existential chaos.

An alumna of Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Mitchell's photography has been published in and received recognition from various notable publications like [W magazine](#) and [Refinery29](#). After freelancing and collaborating with other creatives in New York City for a few years upon graduating, she decided to bring her talents back to the District. But the warm, vibrant city Mitchell knew as a child had begun to take on a form that was almost unrecognizable.

"It's unfortunate. It's extremely disheartening watching my city change into this bland, cookie-cutter town. I've never known D.C. to be this way," Mitchell recalls, saying that when she was growing up, D.C. was the most vibrant and communal she's ever seen it be. "My city has always been rich in culture with the warmest people. Now, it's full of transplants who don't care about who or what was here before they arrived."

This comes as no surprise to many of the city's natives, as D.C. has been touted as the [most gentrified city in the country](#), and has seen episodes of tension between longtime residents and new neighbors, recently captured in the [#DontMuteDC](#) movement. Mitchell's [exhibit](#) at Hillyer, *Raising Our Youth*, was created to explore how Washington, D.C. natives—specifically younger parents and mothers—are living with the effects of gentrification.

Mitchell's exhibition is filled with photos of young black families, highlighting the impact gentrification has had on them in a place that now feels like strange terrain. Mitchell felt it was her responsibility as a native Washingtonian and artist to tie her art to homebase, so she found most of the photographed families through both street and online casting.

The families featured in her work have all expressed to her that they're "having their culture erased right in front of their eyes," Mitchell says. A common struggle among most of the families, she says, has been battling inflation in the city while having to settle in more affordable areas because housing options are scarce.



Tyra Mitchell's photographs focus on families living in a gentrifying D.C.
IA&A at Hillyer

As an artist and mother of two, Mitchell's work has long been focused on parenting. She also developed the project [ArtMom](#), an online platform for artist mothers around the world to collaborate and share personal stories, artwork, and tips.

"My daughters are my motivation," Mitchell says. "I can't be lazy and I have to show them and any other young woman that looks up to me that you can pursue those dreams you have as long as you're determined".

While the issue of gentrification has never been easy to wrestle with, Mitchell continues to work with the intent of keeping marginalized groups and people of color at the forefront.

"One of the reasons I decided to focus on young families is because we are the future and we're raising the future," Mitchell explains. "We grew up here and we love it that's why we want to keep our family growing in the city, but gentrification is making it hard on everyone."

Mitchell's images are meant to capture the strength of these families, like the Harrison family, who are pictured leaned into one another as they sit on the cement steps outside of their home, warm expressions of pride and satisfaction on their faces; or the mother-daughter duo Maleehah and Lucie, embracing each other with kisses in between bites of a chicken nugget on their cozy kitchen countertop. Mitchell says her overarching goal is to foster greater understanding across local communities.

"I want my viewers to understand that in the midst of the chaotic gentrification battle, there is still light and beauty within these families," she says.

Raising Our Youth will be on display at [The IA&A at Hillyer](#) through June 30. While admission is free, the Hillyer is accepting \$8 donations.



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