

# Exhibit on 'Black Dolls' spotlights racial equity concerns

## Your Turn

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Guest columnist

In Rochester, an evocative exhibit titled "Black Dolls," is currently on display at The Strong National Museum of Play.

The exhibit showcases homemade dolls that tell a compelling story of African-American life from the 1850s to the 1940s, providing a sobering reminder of the oppression and racism endured by Black communities during that period. The dolls, created in the face of systemic discrimination, remind us of the dark history of racial covenants and the enduring legacy of environmental racism that still plagues our city.

These dolls are more than just relics from the past; they serve as a starting point for an important conversation about the persistent racial disparities in Rochester. While we have made significant strides towards dismantling racism, the shadows of past injustices continue to loom large over our community. One of the most devastating manifestations of this inequality is environmental racism.

In Rochester, the scars of environmental racism are still visible in the form of disproportionately high rates of pollution and environmental degradation in predominantly Black neighborhoods. Industrial pollutants and subpar infrastructure unjustly burden these communities, contributing to health problems including respiratory illnesses, cancer and developmental issues.

The first step towards change is acknowledging the problem. We must educate ourselves and our community about the damaging nature of environmental racism, and we should commend the efforts of organizations like The Strong National Museum of Play for shedding light on this issue through exhibits like "Black Dolls."

But awareness alone is not enough; it is action that will bring about the necessary change.

We need comprehensive policies that prioritize environmental equity, ensuring that all residents have access to clean air and water and green spaces. Furthermore, we must address the economic disparities that are linked to environmental racism by investing in education, job opportunities and infrastructure in the most marginalized communities. It is up to Rochesterians to step up within the community.

The "Black Dolls" exhibit reminds us of the strength and resilience of the Black community in the face of adversity. It is a testament to the fact that even in the darkest times, individuals find ways to resist oppression.

Now, it is our turn to resist the perpetuation of environmental racism in our beloved city of Rochester. We have the power to shape a future in which every resident, regardless of their race, can thrive in a healthy and just environment. Let us honor the spirit of resistance displayed by those who created these dolls and work together to dismantle the legacy of environmental racism that still stains our city today.

*Rory McIntosh of Pittsford is a Cornell University student.*