



Remembering Margaret Santiago...

The Association of African American Museums deeply mourns the passing and celebrates the life of our beloved national charter member, Margaret A. Santiago. She made her transition on Saturday, March 17, 2018. Margaret's life itself was a work of art - full of color, radiance, spirit, innovation, depth, and remarkable beauty. Margaret was a renaissance woman - mastering many crafts and gracing several endeavors with her empowering presence. Margaret was a family woman. She was born in 1931 in Spartanburg, South Carolina and lived across many states throughout her years, including Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and Atlanta, Georgia. She took pride in mothering and grand mothering her family.

Margaret was a trailblazer. She served as the first African American registrar at the Smithsonian Institution, enjoyed a 30-year career at the National Museum of Natural History and remained active in various professional associations.

Within her professional home, the Association of African American Museums (AAAM), Margaret was a beloved pillar. As a charter member who helped to found the organization in 1978 when it was the African American Museums Association (AAMA). She worked alongside each of the early founders and shared a particularly close friendship with Dr. Charles H. Wright. Throughout the years, Margaret could be found regularly at the annual conferences, enjoying the gatherings and sharing her zeal for the work with others. Margaret was a frequent AAAM conference presenter, and was an active part of the most recent 39th annual AAAM conference in Washington, D.C. in 2017.

Margaret was gracious in adopting and supporting younger people in the field. So many AAAM members attribute their knowledge about AAAM to conversations with Margaret, who knew all of the details of the early years. I am fortunate to have been one adopted by Margaret, and was entreated to fascinating first-hand accounts of AAAM's founding years. I was first introduced to Margaret in 2014 by my mentor, Juanita Moore. Margaret invited me to present on an AAAM panel with her during the 2014 AAAM conference in Birmingham, AL, which we both took great delight in presenting with each other. Margaret and I roomed together during that conference, and I had the great fortune of getting to know one of the most gracious, radiant, sophisticated, and warm-hearted women in the field. She had a lovely singing voice and gifted me with a gospel music CD of her powerful singing. Our friendship was a bond that strengthened and fortified me, and will be a source of tremendous inspiration for years to come.



Margaret was one of our strongest links to our early AAAM years. We rejoice that she remained so active, energetic, joyful, and committed to AAAM to the very end. We all learned so much from Margaret, and we are all better because of her vivacious and beautiful soul. May she rest in peace and power.

Reflection provided by: LaNesha DeBardelaben

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