“Girlhood (It’s Complicated)” Select African American Object List

“Girlhood (It’s Complicated)” will feature over 200 objects from the National Museum of American History’s collections, including many African American stories. Below is a select object list, organized by exhibition section.

- **Naomi Wadler’s March for Our Lives scarf (2018)**
  
  *News and Politics (girls on the frontlines of change)*

  - At age 11, Naomi Wadler spoke before hundreds of thousands of people at the 2018 March for Our Lives to end gun violence. She gave an eloquent speech on the disproportionate effect of gun violence on black girls and women.
  - Naomi Wadler had one day to write her speech. The scarf was made by her aunt, Leslie Wadler, who knitted it while she watched two movies the night before the event. The “two-movie scarf” became Wadler’s signature.
  - How do girls have political influence?

- **Minnijean Brown’s graduation dress (1959)**
  
  *Education (being schooled)*

  - Minnijean Brown was one of the “Little Rock Nine,” who desegregated Central High in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1957. Brown thought she would receive a superior education there, but white students opposed to school integration terrorized her. After just a year, the school was shut down, and she had to leave her family and move to New York to complete her education.
  - To celebrate graduation high school, Minnijean designed this dress. “It was a perfect fit, and I felt perfectly beautiful in it,” she said.
  - Who gets to go to school and stay in school?
o **Portrait of domestic worker girl with child (ca. 1840)**

*Work (hey, where’s my girlhood?)*

- From slavery to Jim Crow segregation, black girls found themselves serving families and becoming lifelong nursemaids and domestic workers. Girls as young as three carried babies, scrubbed dirty diapers, and stayed up late to mend clothing. Girls who were enslaved as domestic servants could be the “property” of the younger children they cared for.
- These photos were popular because including the little girl showed the family’s wealth.

o **Dashiki (ca. 1970)**

*Fashion (Remix)*

- Wearing unisex or gender-bending clothing, young women incorporated fashion into political movements in the late 1960s and 1970s. Declarations of beauty could be revolutionary and defy stereotypes.

o **Pageant girl photos (1920s-2010s)**

*Wellness (body talk)*

- A selection of photos of pageant girls features girls from various time periods and from across the country, including Joyce Warner, Miss Black Florida, 1971; Rachel Lyn Oliver, Miss Black America, 1986; and Juneteenth Queen Briana Forbes, 2018.

o **Birth control and sterilization (1940s-1970s)**

*Wellness (body talk)*

- New developments in birth control experimented on poor girls and women of color—sometimes under coercion or without informed consent—including the forced
sterilizations of Black women. A photo in the exhibition depicts Mary Alice and Minnie Lee Relf, twelve- and fourteen-year-old sisters who were sterilized in 1973 through a federally funded family planning clinic. Their sterilization raised serious questions about racism and medical ethics, and prompted a lawsuit from the Relf family.

- Whose bodies bear the cost of creating greater personal choice for girls and women in the United States?

- **Dominique Dawes Olympic leotard (1996)**
  - *A Girl’s Life (Breaking barriers)*

  - Dominique Dawes set her sights on the Olympics at age 11. She began her Olympic career at age 15, winning four medals in three Olympics.
  - She wore this leotard at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, GA, where she was a member of the “Magnificent Seven” team that took home the gold.
  - Title IX barred discrimination based on sex and race and challenged beliefs that girls could not play.

- **Object has been 3D digitized.**

- **Simone Manuel’s Olympic Speedo (2016)**
  - *A Girl’s Life (Breaking barriers)*

  - Girls have always played sports, from all-girls basketball teams in the 1800s to the pick-up games that occur in every neighborhood. Yet they faced cultural and structural barriers that denied them the right to play. The federal government aimed to change that in 1972 when it added Title IX to the Civil Rights Act, barring discrimination based on sex and race.
Manuel committed to swimming at age 11 and went on to smash records in high school. She won four Olympic medals as a college sophomore in 2016, when she dominated the press coverage of the Rio Olympics. She wore this Speedo during the games, bringing home two golds and two silvers.