

****Press Release****

CAPITAL JEWISH MUSEUM OPENS SPECIAL EXHIBITION
ESTHER BUBLEY: PHOTOGRAPHING THE HOMEFRONT

More than 70 photographs reveal everyday life, transformation,
and contradictions in World War II-era Washington, DC

Washington, DC (September 23, 2026) - The Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum is pleased to announce that the special exhibition ***Esther Bubley: Photographing the Homefront***, will open October 22, 2026.

The Museum's first art exhibition will feature the work of Esther Bubley, one of the twentieth century's most compelling documentary photographers, and her unique vision of Washington, DC during World War II. Most of the photographs in the exhibition were commissioned by the Office of War Information, the federal government's wartime propaganda agency established by President Franklin Roosevelt.

Featuring more than 70 black-and-white photographs taken in 1942 and 1943, the exhibition explores a capital city transformed by war. As thousands of soldiers, federal workers, and families arrived in Washington, neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, and public spaces changed around them. Rather than focusing on battles or political leaders, Bubley turned her camera toward everyday life: movie theaters, boarding houses, children, students, commuters, government workers, and soldiers on leave. Her photographs reveal how the homefront was experienced not only through historic events, but through ordinary moments.

Bubley's photographs and writing also captured realities that complicated the government's official story of the homefront, including segregation, inequality, loneliness, and the challenges of life in a rapidly changing city. The exhibition uses Bubley's own words alongside her photographs to explore the tension between the images she was hired to create and the Washington she encountered "beyond the marble."

Highlights include:

- Photographs of uniformed soldiers on leave, DC monuments and architectural landmarks, Dissin's Guest House, Arlington Farms, Glen Echo Amusement Park, and Woodrow Wilson High School (now Jackson-Reed)
- A children's section, featuring photographs of children hung low on the wall and age-accessible captions
- Esther Bubley's original cameras and never-before-seen contact sheets, on loan from the Bubley family archive

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- 60+ WWII-era artifacts from the Capital Jewish Museum collections

"Esther Bubley had an extraordinary ability to find history in the everyday," notes Bea Gurwitz, Executive Director of the Capital Jewish Museum. "Her photographs show us a Washington transformed by war, but they also ask us to look beyond the familiar story of the homefront. Through her attention to ordinary people and the complexities of their lives, Bubley captured a city, and a country, grappling with profound change."

The exhibition of Bubley's work will be complemented by a selection of artworks by current students at Jackson-Reed High School, DC's largest public school and one of the exhibition's thematic sections.

Bubley, the daughter of Jewish immigrants and a young woman working in wartime Washington, was a contemporary of documentary photographers like Gordon Parks and Ben Shahn, yet her work remains less widely known today. This exhibition places her photographs in conversation with her personal Jewish story and the experiences of Jewish Washingtonians during the war. Through photographs of places including Dissin's guest house and materials from the Capital Jewish Museum's collections, the exhibition offers a new perspective on both Bubley and Jewish life in the nation's capital.

The exhibition will also feature objects from the Museum's collection and never-before-displayed items on loan from the Bubley family archive, including Bubley's cameras and marked-up photographs. Together with personal artifacts, oral histories, and other collection materials, these objects provide additional context for the lives Bubley documented and for Jewish Washington during this transformative period. This is the first exhibition of Bubley's work to focus on her photography in relation to her personal Jewish story and the Jewish histories of Washington, DC.

On view: October 22, 2026 - February 28, 2027

Location: Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum, 575 3rd St NW, Washington, DC

PRESS PREVIEW

Tuesday, October 20, 2026

10 am-12 pm

Media interested in attending the press preview should contact Clara de Pablo at cdepablo@capitaljewishmuseum.org.

HOURS AND ADMISSION

Wednesday-Sunday, 10 am-5 pm

\$12 Adults

\$10 Seniors 65+ and Students

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Free for children ages 12 and under
Free for Members

EXHIBITION SUPPORT

Esther Buble: Photographing the Homefront is made possible in part by Richard Small Alper; Roselin Atzwanger and Eddie Lenkin; Marcella and Neil Cohen; Diane Lipton Dennis; Sue Ducat; Eli and Judith Lippman Family Foundation; Dr. Robert and Patricia Silverman; and the Stieber Family. Exhibition donors as of September 15, 2026.

Major support for the Museum is provided by DC Commission on the Arts & Humanities and the Jewish Federation of Greater Washington.

ABOUT THE CAPITAL JEWISH MUSEUM

The Lillian and Albert Small Capital Jewish Museum collects, preserves, and shares the diverse stories of Jewish history and culture in the National Capital Region. Through exhibitions and programs, we build connections across generations and communities, encourage reflection on the relevance of the past to today, and inspire civic and community engagement.

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For additional information, please contact:

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