Discover Detroit's Black History

Whether you already live in Detroit or are just passing through, you may be surprised to find that the Motor City is also a hub of African-American heritage. Explore Detroit history at our many must-see museums, galleries, monuments and restaurants for a history lesson that’s entertaining, fulfilling and jam-packed with stories of courage, survival and superior talent.

TAKE YOUR TIME

FEATURES
Art & Culture, Food & Drink

DESTINATIONS
Downtown Detroit, Dearborn/Wayne, Greater Novi

1 DETROIT'S AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY: UNDERGROUND RAILROAD

In the mid 1800s, Detroit became a beacon of hope. It was the last stop in a long journey for fugitive slaves before crossing the river to Canada and freedom. There are numerous historical sites in Detroit that have maintained their original sanctity to preserve African-American history. They not only tell the story, they take you back in time to experience the moment.

An estimated 200 Underground Railroad stops were discovered in Michigan between 1820 and 1865. A number of these stops were located right here in Detroit.

The First Congregational Church of Detroit played a crucial role in the national anti-slavery movement. Refugees were hidden in the church until being led to boats on the Detroit River. Take part in an Underground Railroad Flight to Freedom Tour.

Upon leaving First Congregational Church, you will pass Second Baptist Church, another Underground Railroad historic site. From 1836 to 1865, Second Baptist sheltered and fed 5,000 fugitive slaves. The Underground Railroad Tour takes visitors by murals and exhibits and also stops in the
basement room known as the Croghan Street Station.

No place captures the story of slavery, African-American heritage and black history like the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History. See the And Still We Rise: Our Journey through African American History and Culture exhibit, which takes you through realistic African markets, a former holding cell, the Door of No Return display and a replica slave ship. Next, you will hear stories of African-American triumphs, including escapes to freedom as well as more recent successes of local African-Americans.

The Henry Ford Museum of American Innovation is a hub of American innovation and history. Come see the actual bus that Rosa Parks made famous in Montgomery, Alabama, when she refused to give up her seat. Next door at Greenfield Village, experience 300 years of African-American stories. Walk inside the Hermitage Slave Quarters, the actual dwellings of two slave families on the Hermitage Plantation near Savannah, Georgia. And visit the building modeled after the Missouri slave cabin where famous botanist and inventor George Washington Carver was born.

Other Historical Sights & Monuments

- Finney Barn Historical Site at the corner of State and Griswold in Capitol Park.
- **Tower of Freedom/Underground Railroad Monument** 200 Pitt St. E., Windsor, Canada
- **Sandwich First Baptist Church** was the first stop of the Underground Railroad in Windsor, Canada.
- **Detroit Urban League** at the corner of Mack Avenue and John R.
- **St. Cyprian’s Episcopal Church** 6114 28th St.
- **William Lennane Home** at the corner of Brush and East Ferry in Detroit’s Cultural Center.
- **Elmwood Cemetery** is the final resting place of William Lambert and many other abolitionist supporters.
2 AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE: ART, MUSIC & LITERATURE

Right across the street from the Wright Museum of African American History is the Detroit Institute of Arts, which features numerous galleries dedicated to African-American artists. These artists include Hale Woodruff, Betye Saar, Gilda Snowden, Charles McGee and more.

At the MBAD’s African Bead Museum, you can see sculptures, textiles, pottery and beads originating from Africa for hundreds of years. The museum offers guided tours and displays three public art installations: Iron Teaching Rocks How to Rust, The N’Kisi Iron House and the African Language Wall.

Shrine of the Black Madonna is a local bookstore where you can find authentic African books, art, prints and gift items.

Explore the local black history and music of Motown at the Motown Museum. This collection is an invaluable piece of Detroit’s history, the birthplace of notorious soul, blues and pop singers such as The Temptations, Diana Ross, Smokey Robinson, Marvin Gaye and The Supremes.

While in town you may want to check out Detroit’s Plowshares Theatre, the city’s only professional troupe devoted to presenting African-American content and talent.

Experience African World Festival at The Wright. Each year, usually in August, the Charles H. Wright Museum hosts this wonderful fest, which celebrates contemporary African art. The event features musical performances, poetry, arts and crafts, African drumming and dance, ethnic foods, and hundreds of vendors.
DONT FORGET TO EAT

Nothing tops off a day of African American history like enjoying some of Detroit’s favorite African American-owned restaurants and eateries.

- **Good Cakes and Bakes** on the Avenue of Fashion serves some of Detroit’s favorite classic and vegan baked goods.
- **Table No. 2**, also on the Avenue of Fashion, was started by Chef Omar Mitchell, who competed on the Food Network’s Chopped. This is one of the area’s first fine dining establishments in years, and many of his gourmet dishes are prepared table side.
- **Savannahblue** specializes in northern soul food and cocktails with a Detroit spin.
- **Beans & Cornbread** in Southfield has southern staples such as ribs, collard greens, and macaroni and cheese.
- **The Block** on Woodward Avenue is close to museums such as the Detroit Historical Museum and the DIA, so it’s a perfect spot to head to once the museum closes.
- **Detroit Vegan Soul** has two locations in Detroit, and they both serve up delectable twists on some comfort food favorites. You won’t even miss the meat and cheese!

Read more [Detroit attractions](https://visitdetroit.com/itinerary/discover-detroits-black-history/).

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