



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.



3 DON'T FORGET TO EAT



- Nothing tops off a day of African-American history like enjoying authentic southern-style soul cooking. You will find this at [Beans & Cornbread](#), voted best soul food in the Detroit area.
- [Red Smoke Barbeque](#) serves the best barbecue in Greektown. Here, you'll get to choose from more than 12 sides to go with your slow-cooked chicken, pork, brisket, back ribs or spare ribs.
- While visiting [Greenfield Village](#), you can dine at Mrs. Fishers Southern Cooking. This barbecue stand serves up delicious house-smoked meats with classic sauces, sweet potato tater tots, sweet potato cheesecake and more.

Read more [Detroit attractions](#).

Photo Credits: Charles H. Wright Museum, Second Avenue Baptist Church, Greenfield Village, Motown Museum and Beans & Cornbread by Bill Bowen; Quilting Time courtesy of Detroit Institute of Arts