

NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTION CENTER PRESENTS SPECIAL EVENTS, WORLD DEBUT EXHIBITION, AND ARTIFACTS AS PART OF BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION

Philadelphia, PA (January 12, 2009) – In celebration of Black History Month, visitors to the National Constitution Center in February can learn about the influence of African Americans in our nation's history during special events, through the world debut of the **America I Am: *The African American Imprint*** exhibition, and through its interactive permanent exhibition, *The Story of We the People*. Guests will have the opportunity to pay tribute to inspirational African Americans from the past, while honoring those who will continue to make history well into the future.

The schedule of special events is as follows:

Tuesday, February 3, 6:30 p.m.: *And Justice for All*

Mary Frances Berry, Professor of History at the University of Pennsylvania and former chairwoman of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, will share the extraordinary story of the Commission and the struggle for justice in America as told in her new book *And Justice for All*. Admission is free, but reservations are required at 215.409.6700.

Wednesday, February 11, 6:30 p.m.: *NAACP at 100*

The Center will host a special program commemorating the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Centennial and addressing its profound impact on the country we live in today. The NAACP has a rich and unique history, and is responsible for a number of victories in the struggle for justice and equality in America. Theodore Shaw, former Director-Counsel and President of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund and 2008 Visiting Scholar at the Constitution Center, will lead this conversation. Admission is free, but reservations are required at 215.409.6700.

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ADD ONE/BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Saturday, February 14, 2009 – 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Sunday, February 15, 2009 – 12:00 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Monday, February 16, 2009 – 11:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.

Culture, Custom, and Convention: A Celebration of the African American Influence

FREE with museum admission

Visitors can learn about the lives of African Americans and the achievements that have helped shape America's promise. Visitors will also have the chance to participate in a special artifact workshop to learn more about the African Americans who lived on the site of the Constitution Center, including James Dexter.

Monday, February 23, 6:30 p.m.: *August Wilson and the Century Cycle*

In a unique Constitution Center event, American theater scholars, historians, and professional actors will participate in a special two-hour program celebrating and exploring the work of playwright August Wilson in relationship to the American theater and to the social, political, and historical experience of African Americans. August Wilson is among the most influential and successful African American playwrights of the twentieth century. In Wilson's *Century Cycle*, he dramatizes the African American experience and heritage of the twentieth century. The evening will feature dramatic readings from some of Wilson's most famous works performed by a company of professional actors. Admission costs \$15 for members, teachers, and students and \$20 for non-members. Reservations are required at 215.409.6700.

In addition to these programs, the National Constitution Center is hosting the world debut of **America I AM: *The African American Imprint*** from January 15 through May 3, 2009. The exhibition, which celebrates nearly 500 years of African American contributions to our history through more than 200 artifacts including documents, photographs, music, and multimedia components, presents a historical continuum of pivotal moments in courage, conviction, and creativity that solidifies the undeniable imprint of African Americans across the nation and around the world.

Among the poignant pieces in the exhibition are:

- "The Doors of No Return" from the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, which enslaved Africans passed through to board ships to the "New World"
- The typewriter Alex Haley used to write the groundbreaking book, *Roots*
- A first edition of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*
- Objects representing the African American troops that fought and impacted the outcome of major U.S. wars
- Malcolm X's diary and personal Koran
- The door key and stool from the Birmingham jail cell that held Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he authored his infamous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail"
- Frederick Douglass' clothing and letter from President Lincoln that was designed to protect him from harassment as he moved about the nation's capital campaigning for African American rights

-MORE-

ADD TWO/BLACK HISTORY MONTH

- The robe that Muhammad Ali wore during the “Rumble in the Jungle,” where he defeated world heavyweight champion George Foreman
- And many other important items from the beginnings of our nation through contemporary popular culture

Visitors to the **America I AM: *The African American Imprint*** exhibition in February will also have the opportunity to witness a moving theatrical experience based on first-hand accounts of the lives of brave African American women who entered the armed forces during World War II.

Set in a time when the U.S. military was segregated and many African Americans were determined to make a stand against racial discrimination, the dramatic presentation will illuminate the many struggles and victories experienced by African American women in our nation’s military service and the impact they had on American culture and society.

This special theatrical production will open on Tuesday, February 3, 2009, and will run from Tuesday through Saturday between 10:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. and on Sundays between 12:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. for the month of February. Additional performances are scheduled at the African American Museum in Philadelphia to coincide with their *Soul Soldiers* exhibition on Saturdays in February from 12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

America I AM is presented by broadcaster Tavis Smiley and is made possible by Walmart Stores, Inc., which serves as its presenting sponsor. The exhibition is sponsored by Northern Trust and is presented locally by Coca-Cola. CBS 3 is the official media partner for the Center’s showing of **America I AM**.

Admission to **America I AM** is \$17.50 for adults, \$15.50 for seniors ages 65 and up, and \$9 for children ages 4-12. Group rates are also available. Admission to the Center’s main exhibition, *The Story of We the People*, including the award-winning theater production “Freedom Rising”, is included. Active military personnel and children ages 3 and under are free. There is no upcharge for school groups to tour **America I AM**. iPod audio tours are also available and cost \$2 for members and \$3 for non-members. For ticket information, call 215.409.6700 or visit www.constitutioncenter.org.

ADD THREE/BLACK HISTORY MONTH

In addition, visitors to the Constitution Center's permanent exhibition, *The Story of We the People*, will have the opportunity to view several artifacts that highlight African American contributions to the country's constitutional history, including a copy of the first printing of the Dred Scott Decision from 1857, John Lewis' pen used to sign the Voting Rights Act, a button from the March on Washington, an NAACP Voters Guide and Poster from 1965, and a poll tax receipt from Travis County, Texas.

Guests can also learn about African Americans' impact on the Constitution in the "American National Tree", which highlights 100 people who have helped shape the Constitution over the last 200 years. The Tree includes information about influential African Americans such as Rosa Parks, Muhammad Ali, Jackie Robinson, Barbara Jordan, Booker T. Washington, Harriet Tubman, and Elizabeth Eckford.

Visitors can examine the exhibit panels on the Dred Scott Decision, the Emancipation Proclamation, voting rights, and the 1960s Civil Rights movement, which includes pertinent details about the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, the March on Washington, and the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The National Constitution Center, located at 525 Arch St. on Philadelphia's Independence Mall, is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing public understanding of the U.S. Constitution and the ideas and values it represents. The Center serves as a museum, an education center, and a forum for debate on constitutional issues. The museum dramatically tells the story of the Constitution from Revolutionary times to the present through more than 100 interactive multimedia exhibits, film, photographs, text, sculpture and artifacts, and features a powerful, award-winning theatrical performance, "Freedom Rising". The Center also houses the Annenberg Center for Education and Outreach, which serves as the hub for national constitutional education. Also, as a nonpartisan forum for constitutional discourse, the Center presents – without endorsement – programs that contain diverse viewpoints on a broad range of issues. For more information, call 215.409.6700 or visit www.constitutioncenter.org.

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