



TAVIS SMILEY PRESENTS



The African American Imprint

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THE STORY OF WE, THE PEOPLE.

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AMERICA I AM: *The African American Imprint*

Developed in partnership with Tavis Smiley and organized by
Cincinnati Museum Center and Arts and Exhibitions International

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Introduction

Scholar W.E.B. Du Bois once wrote, "Would America have been America without her Negro people?"

To examine the answer to that question, **AMERICA I AM: *The African American Imprint*** will be mounted as the broadest museum exhibition of its kind. An assembly of poignant artifacts representing nearly 500 years of American history, the exhibition will convey and celebrate the undeniable imprint African Americans have had on the country and the world.

Core Themes

Covering history from the arrival of Africans to the present day, the exhibition will present a collection of pivotal moments of African American courage, conviction, and creativity that have shaped the culture and society in which we live today.

The exhibition will examine four themes in particular: economic, socio-political, cultural, and spiritual impact on America. These themes will serve as recurring touch points throughout the galleries, as visitors discover how each of many realms has been shaped by African Americans throughout history.

America I AM provides an opportunity for people from all walks of life to explore this uniquely American story. With the inauguration of the nation's first African American president upon us, **America I AM** endeavors to bring together Americans of all backgrounds to achieve a greater understanding of their shared culture and history.

Walking through the Exhibition

The exhibition is divided into twelve galleries, leading visitors through time on a journey from struggle to triumph.

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ADD ONE/EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Entrance & America I AM: Your History

Visitors begin their journey in a passageway filled with depictions of African Americans leading them back in time, beginning with present-day icons and ending with Africans from generations ago.

America I AM: Africa

Artifacts and text depict African society and show how the slave trade began, as well as how it made its impact on the Atlantic world. Visitors will pass through the “Doors of No Return” from Cape Coast Castle in Ghana where captive Africans were housed under lock and key, sometimes for months at a time, awaiting ships that would take them to the Americas.

America I AM: Inextricable

Enslavement was critical to this nation’s growth. During this time and despite the bleakness of slavery, African Americans engendered four kinds of major imprints on America: economic, socio-political, cultural, and spiritual. These are recurring themes throughout the rest of the exhibition.

America I AM: Justice

In this gallery, visitors will see how free and enslaved Africans fought in wars dating all the way back to the Revolutionary War, before freedom for the colonies also meant freedom for them, and what their sacrifices ultimately meant for the nation.

America I AM: The Voice of Freedom

Visitors will next enter a maze-like gallery that, through its physical design, will reflect the ups and downs endured by African Americans after the Revolutionary War and through the Civil War to Reconstruction. This gallery showcases objects and discusses the impact of the abolition movement on the rest of the world, the role of black Civil War soldiers, and the constitutional Amendments that grant citizenship and the right to vote to African Americans.

America I AM: Denied but not Defeated

This emotionally powerful gallery will relate some of the positive imprints made during the dark days of the Jim Crow era. The gallery will detail economic imprints like the increase of African American college graduates via the founding of historically black colleges and universities. It also will convey cultural imprints, such as artistic contributions, and the impact of black soldiers in both world wars. A video created by African American filmmaker Madison Davis Lacy showcases some of these contributions and what they meant in the social context of the era.

America I AM: Spirit

This gallery will explore the spiritual imprint of the African American community – from its impact on how other communities worship to nineteenth century churches that took a role in the fight against slavery.

-MORE-

ADD TWO/EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

America I AM: Double Victory

This gallery offers insight into the discrimination African Americans endured as soldiers and how the black press' Double V campaign during World War II changed the military.

America I AM: Your Conscience

This gallery will offer a fresh look at the modern Civil Rights Movement in terms of how it impacted social movements, from the women's movement to anti-apartheid and others. There will be an exploration of the Voting Rights Act and how electing African Americans to office affected the course of history.

America I AM: Triumph

Through objects, photos, and an inspiring video presentation, this uplifting gallery will celebrate the imprints African Americans have had through the four themes (economic, socio-political, cultural, and spiritual) over nearly 500 years, including the election of the first African American president, Barack Obama.

What Is My Imprint?

At the end of the exhibition, visitors will be invited to leave a video recording of what the African American imprint has meant to them. These video imprints will be added to a growing oral collection throughout the exhibition's four-year run.

America I AM: *The African American Imprint*

January 15 through May 3, 2009
National Constitution Center in Philadelphia

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. More details about the exhibition, including a gallery walkthrough moderated by Tavis Smiley, are available at www.AmericaIAM.org.
