Our Opening Year
An Overview
Our first full year of operation left us excited and proud to see the National Museum of African American History and Culture changing the way people learn about the African American experience and the myriad ways it shapes our nation and the world.

There are two things that make the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture special: The people built it and the people turned out—in staggering numbers—to see it. During our first year, nearly three million visited—that is roughly 7,000 people per day. They came from across the country and around the world, including nations in Africa, the Caribbean and Europe. Many were visiting a museum for the first time in their lives.

Visitors included senior citizens who came with their grandchildren, quite literally bridging the lived experiences of one generation with the exuberance and expectancy of another. There were teenagers visiting with their peers and sharing their excitement via social media. Elementary school teachers, learning innovative ways to teach their pre-teen students the painful history of racism, made the Museum a cornerstone of education. There were also young adult visitors, launching their professional careers and choosing to make their first charitable donations to this new national treasure.

What brought them here? Twelve inaugural exhibitions and three temporary exhibitions; treasured artifacts, including an early portrait of Underground Railroad conductor Harriet Tubman; award-winning interactive kiosks; and 70 diverse public programs, including film screenings and panel discussions, from Curtis Mayfield and James Baldwin to the Little Rock Nine and the Tuskegee Airmen.

Many—nearly 200,000—chose to do more than visit; they stepped forward to become members who supported and championed the museum. And for that, we are eternally grateful.

This is a museum with a mission. It is a museum living out a commitment to educate, celebrate, engage and create. It is a museum providing a space to honor the past and reflect on it.

Thank you for your continued support. We ask that you join us in celebrating our remarkable opening year.

Lonnie G. Bunch, III
Founding Director
National Museum of African American History and Culture
By the Numbers

ENGAGING VISITORS

Nearly 40,000 objects in Museum collection
About 3,000 objects on display
10,000 collection objects available online

12 inaugural exhibitions
3 temporary exhibitions
70 public programs
Hosted more than 30,000 student groups

Average length of visit: 4.5 hours

In the News

The Washington Post
Crowds at African American museum are expected to get even bigger
Mar. 23, 2017

The Atlantic
The Museum Grappling With the Future of Black America
Sept. 30, 2017

Woman Sees Her 'Slave Cabin' Birthplace in African-American Museum
Apr. 11, 2017

Smithsonian Anthology of Hip-Hop and Rap Bows Kickstarter Campaign
Oct. 17, 2017

Sweet Home Café is telling the American story, one plate at a time
July 16, 2017

African American Museum To Digitize Vintage Photos, Videos For Black Families
Nov. 21, 2017

In 'More Than A Picture' Exhibit, History Happens Now
Aug. 26, 2017

A Pilgrimage to Smithsonian's Black Museum
Nov. 23, 2017

The African American Museum a year later: Still the hottest ticket in town
Sept. 22, 2017

African-American History Seen Through an African-American Lens
Dec. 19, 2017

2017 Award for Excellence in Architecture, American Institute of Architects (AIA|DC)
2017 Thea Award for Outstanding Achievement, Themed Entertainment Association
2017 James Beard Nominee, Best New Restaurant, James Beard Foundation
2017 Gold MUSE Award, Interactive Kiosk Category, American Alliance of Museums
2017 Best Teaching Mobile App, American Association of School Librarians
2017 People's Choice for Website Design, Webby Awards
2017 NAACP Image Award, NAACP (Lonnie Bunch)
2017 XCEL Award, BLACK ENTERPRISE (Lonnie Bunch)

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2017 NAACP Image Award, NAACP (Lonnie Bunch)
2017 XCEL Award, BLACK ENTERPRISE (Lonnie Bunch)
Within its first full year of operation, there was little doubt that the Smithsonian’s National Museum of African American History and Culture had become a cultural touchstone for America and the world.

Inspiring Generations

In the first year, the Museum’s critically acclaimed exhibitions, provocative public programs and dynamic digital interactives drew a total wave of nearly three million visitors from across the country and around the globe. And the museum’s dwell time—the length of time a visitor stays in a museum—was unparalleled—averaging four and a half hours or more on weekends, compared to 75 minutes to two hours for most museums.

In the words of one visitor: “As a white person, it was an educational experience to see history, of which I had learned the most basic outline, fleshed out and given much more context. Seeing it all together made me realize just how much I didn’t know. It also gave me enough background to think critically about the history I’m witnessing and what is or is not included in it.”

Visitors were immersed in 12 inaugural and three temporary exhibitions focusing on broad themes of history, culture and community. Many of the more than 3,000 artifacts on display elicited emotional responses from visitors who shared their reflections through letters, social media and more than 39,000 personal videos. For instance, thousands wept upon seeing a pair of tiny shackles—less than two inches in diameter and designed for an enslaved child. Others laughed with excitement while visiting the Robert Frederick Smith Explore Your Family History Center and uncovering little-known facts about ancestors they did not know they had.

A visitor comes prepared to document her visit to the Museum.

I felt proud to be African American and walk through here and see so many years of perseverance, struggle, and overcoming a lot of different things, but also success. That’s what the Museum represents.

CANDACE PARKER, MUSEUM VISITOR
The temporary exhibitions also drew tremendous positive responses. "More Than a Picture," the inaugural exhibition in the Museum’s Special Exhibitions Gallery, explored ways photographs reflect important moments in history and memory, and how they shape the understanding of African American experiences. The 150 photos featured in the exhibition included works by both notable and amateur photographers and incorporated thematic images; portraits of recognizable black figures, such as Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois and Rosa Parks; as well as depictions of African Americans in everyday life. Visitors voiced their pride and enthusiasm after seeing their lived experiences captured and displayed in this exhibition.

Similarly, "Everyday Beauty," within the Museum’s Earl W. and Amanda Stafford Center for African American Media Arts, featured 100 images and rarely seen films from the Museum’s growing photography and moving image collection, and chronicling the humanity and dignity of black life through five themes: Self-preservation, Courtship and Family, Faith and Activism, Education and Uplift, and Work and Play. "Everyday Beauty" challenged negative stereotypes and provided nuanced examinations of black homeownership, higher education, family gatherings and entrepreneurship.

As soon as it opened, the Museum became the go-to repository and added to its collection of nearly 40,000 objects. New acquisitions included:
—The political and cultural memorabilia collection of Julian Bond;
—The Howland photo album, including a previously unknown photograph of Harriet Tubman taken before she had turned 50 (a joint acquisition with the Library of Congress); and
—The personal effects and oral history of Albert Woodfox, a longtime inmate of Louisiana’s state penitentiary, known as Angola.

Above: A visitor is captivated by items on view in the "More Than a Picture" exhibition. The exhibition opened May 5, 2017, the first in the Special Exhibitions Gallery.

Above right: A visitor looks at photos capturing everyday people through several generations that paint a picture of a diverse culture in the "Everyday Beauty" exhibition.

Carte-de-visite portrait of Harriet Tubman, Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture shared with the Library of Congress
Sharing the Knowledge

The Museum established a reputation early on for telling the unvarnished truth about the African American experience. As soon as it opened, the Museum became the go-to repository for and authority on African American life past and present.

With 42 billion media impressions in 2017, the Museum’s exhibitions, public programs, centers of study, Sweet Home Café and educational initiatives extended to new online audiences around the world. The Museum shifted, changed and provided historical context to national conversations on race and social justice. Print and broadcast features underscored, above all, that the African American story is an American story.

Features and general news stories, including opinion editorials in The New York Times (“A Noose at the Smithsonian Brings History Back to Life”) and The Washington Post (“Protests in Sports Aren’t New at All”), authored by founding director Lonnie Bunch, provided scholarly insight and historical context—and expanded the discourses on lynching and social justice in the wake of rising signs of racial intolerance.

Additionally, the Museum’s Education Department hosted a series of workshops designed to assist teachers in introducing and engaging students in dialogue about race and culture. Programming such as “Let’s Talk!” offered digital resources to facilitate positive exchanges. NMAAHC educators shared their groundbreaking work with museums worldwide in the Journal of Museum Education. The March 2017 issue, “Race, Dialogue and Inclusion: A Museum on the National Stage,” was authored solely by the Museum’s Education Department.

Learning your history gives you a sense of value in this country; this type of information has not been readily available, so it’s a great thing to be in the building.

VICTOR PURCELL, MUSEUM VISITOR

Visitors explore inspirational quotes in contemplative court.

Visitors learn about the Middle Passage in the “Slavery and Freedom” exhibition.
Book discussions, film screenings, concerts, staged readings and dance performances captured the attention of audiences of all ages. For one such program, the Museum collaborated with The Atlantic to host a conversation with Ta-Nehisi Coates, a MacArthur Fellow and National Book Award winner, about his latest work, *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. Coates discussed his collection of essays in which he revisited each of President Barack Obama’s eight years in office through his personal experiences.

Book publishing remained a high priority for the Museum. *Fighting for Freedom*, the fifth volume in the Museum’s *Double Exposure* series, used searing photographs from the NMAAHC collection to tell stories of patriotism and courage among African Americans throughout military history—from the Civil War to the Iraq War. Other titles released include *From No Return: The 221-Year Journey of the Slave Ship São José*, *Dream a World Anew: The African American Experience and the Shaping of America*, and *The Official Guide to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture*. These publications are available to purchase at the Museum Store or by visiting the online Smithsonian Store.

The Museum’s curators shared their passions and expertise as contributors to a number of scholarly journals and books. Topics were as diverse as Resurrection City and the Poor People’s Campaign of 1968, Louisiana’s Angola Prison, African American athletes, and Cold War politics.

NMAAHC held its first “Morning at the Museum” program for families with children with cognitive or sensory processing disabilities. The Museum opened early to welcome more than 700 visitors—a record for this Smithsonian-wide program. Other educational opportunities offered throughout the year included workshops and professional development programs that attracted more than 500 early childhood educators and museum professionals. The Museum provided a “Pop-up Story Time and Reading Room” to audiences that included adults and children. A student film competition ended with the screening of 25 short films in celebration of National History Day.
Paying Tribute

NMAAHC shows how core American values like resiliency and optimism are deeply rooted in African American history and culture.

The Museum recognized the sacrifice and bravery of the Little Rock Nine who integrated Little Rock’s Central High School in 1957. Six of the Little Rock Nine participated in a panel discussion, “Reflections of the Little Rock Nine, 1957–2017.” The panel discussion, like many held at the Museum, drew more than three hundred visitors. The panel engaged visitors in a lively discussion about their experience as young students during that tumultuous time in the nation’s history. They also explored the U.S. Supreme Court’s landmark decision on Brown v. Board of Education, which banned segregated schools and the impact of integration on American education.

The Museum gave center stage to a group of Tuskegee Airmen, who told riveting stories of the courage they mustered and racism they endured as the country’s first black military aviators.

The Tuskegee Airmen served with distinction in World War II as members of the U.S. Army Air Corps, eventually winning the Congressional Gold Medal. An open cockpit biplane used to train the airmen for bomber escort duty is on display at the Museum and is one of the few remaining 1940s aircraft with direct ties to the legendary pilots.

Shining a spotlight on unsung “sheroes” of American history was the goal of the #HiddenHerstory social media campaign. This series raised awareness about lesser-known African American women who broke barriers and blazed new trails, including Annie Minerva Turnbo Malone, founder of the Poro Method hair styling system, and The Leesburg Stockade Girls, a group of 15 young females arrested and imprisoned in a Leesburg, Georgia, stockade for challenging segregation laws.

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You need to spend more than a day here. Just like soak up everything that’s inside of here and within our culture. Realize the strength that we have, how far we’ve come but respect it... respect the past, respect our ancestors, and do what you can to not let history repeat itself.

KELLY ROWLAND, SINGER / SONGWRITER / ACTRESS

Above: Tuskegee Airmen recount stories from their service in the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II.

Opposite: Collage featured in the #HiddenHerstory social media campaign.

#HiddenHerstory
MORE THAN 1,100 INTERNATIONAL VISITORS

Sample of Countries Represented:
Canada, China, Cuba, Egypt, Benin, Ireland, Haiti, Latvia, Germany, Romania, Turkmenistan, United Kingdom

NEARLY 3 MILLION VISITORS—ABOUT 7,000 PER DAY

GLOBAL OUTREACH

Visits from nearly 20 professional sports teams from MLB and the NBA, NFL and WNBA as part of the Museum’s Game Changer initiative

EXPANDING OUR COMMUNITY

Nearly 200,000 Museum members

Social Media Highlights

613,308 social media fans
5 million interactions per month
60,000 mobile app downloads
500,000 views
50,000 active users

Museum website:
4.5 million visitors
and 10,000 daily active users

Nearly 230 Visitor Services Volunteers

105 special events
Celebrating Collaborations

The National Museum of African American History and Culture joined forces with other Smithsonian museums to create powerful exhibitions.

The National Museum of African American History and Culture presented its “City of Hope: Resurrection City and the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign” at the National Museum of American History (NMAH). The exhibition commemorated the 50th anniversary of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s final human rights campaign. It was designed to call attention to the poverty that crippled millions of Americans—blacks, whites, Native Americans and Hispanics. The show included rare archival film footage from 1968 and wooden tent panels and colorful murals created and used by some of the nearly 3,000 people who occupied the National Mall in Washington, D.C., for six weeks.

NMAAHC also collaborated with NMAH to present “Changing America: The Emancipation Proclamation, 1863 and the March on Washington, 1965,” an exhibition that explored the historical context of these two events, their accomplishments and limitations, and their impact on the generations that followed.

Another collaboration was “Many Lenses,” an online exhibition developed by curators from NMAAHC, the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of American History. This exhibition focused on various objects drawn from each museum’s collection. The curators sought to demonstrate how perspectives—based on areas of expertise, lived experiences, and cultural backgrounds—result in varying interpretations of art, artifacts and ephemera. This online forum also provided educators and students the opportunity to see the coexistence of...
A visitor learns about traveling in the segregated Jim Crow South in the award-winning “Follow the Green Book” interactive.

Differing, and sometimes even opposing, interpretations of objects.

A Digital-First Museum
State-of-the-art technology—including 155 video programs, 59 touch-screen interactive stations and 14 tablet-based interactive stations—gave visitors hands-on connections to history.

“Follow the Green Book,” an interactive 1949 Buick sedan with a touch-screen dashboard, shows the challenges African Americans faced when traveling during the Jim Crow era.

The Webby Award-winning website gave more than 3.4 million users access to the Museum’s collection of more than 10,000 digitized objects and collection stories. More than 60,000 users downloaded the Museum’s “Mobile Stories” app, named one of the Best Apps for Teaching & Learning by the American Association of School Librarians.

Inside the Smithsonian Anthology of Hip-Hop and Rap. The anthology is expected to be released in the summer of 2019. Photograph by Michael G. Stewart and Jati Lindsay.

An average of five million people a month engaged with the Museum’s Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat social media channels. Through creative use of hashtag narratives, compelling stories and visual media, the Museum sparked, led and supported marginalized voices in the digital sphere.

A visitor learns about traveling in the segregated Jim Crow South in the award-winning “Follow the Green Book” interactive.
Notable Accessions

“I AM A MAN” placard carried by Arthur J. Schmidt in Martin Luther King Jr. memorial march, Memphis, 1968

Violin owned by Ginger Smock
Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Lydia Samuel Bennett

WWI Officer Stetson Campaign Hat belonging to Peter L. Robinson, Sr.

Dress worn by Viola Davis to the 2015 Emmy Awards ceremony
Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Viola Davis

Untitled (Wash Day: Scrubbing the Clothes) by Clementine Hunter
Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift from the Collection of Sabra Brown Martin, © Cane River Art Corporation

Pocket watch likely carried by Matthew Henson in 1908-1909 Arctic expedition
Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture
Exploring Our History

Museum volunteers joined with volunteers from FamilySearch International to index the names of 1.8 million emancipated men, women, and children found in the records of the Freedmen’s Bureau.

These names were entered into a digital database linked to digital scans of the original documents created by the Freedmen’s Bureau between 1865 and 1872 and now preserved in the National Archives.

The Museum is collaborating with the Smithsonian’s Transcription Center to fully transcribe the Bureau’s nearly two million documents—the largest crowdsourcing project ever sponsored by the Smithsonian. The name index will be combined with these transcribed documents to form a searchable database to help the public search their family histories and learn more about the Era of Reconstruction.

The Museum’s Oral History initiative proved popular during 2017. Making use of three Reflections Booths in the History Galleries, more than 39,000 visitors recorded short video statements describing their personal reflections on the Museum’s exhibitions. A visitor said, “After this experience... I want to stand up for something. I see these people who fought so hard to do something for me and my family and all who come after me... I am so inspired to do better.” #VisitorVoices is available through the Museum’s YouTube channel.

For many years, the Museum and the Association of African American Museums (AAAM) have collaborated on initiatives that preserve and promote African American history and culture. In 2017, the Museum hosted the AAAM annual conference.

Each indexed document brings us closer to reclaiming our ancestral heritage and historical past.

HOLLYS GENTRY, GENEALOGY SPECIALIST
Nearly 500 people attended the conference, making it the largest convening of African American museum professionals in the association’s history.

The Museum’s Robert Frederick Smith Explore Your Family History Center provided digital resources supporting the preservation, digitization, and sharing of African American family history. More than 8,000 visitors received expert guidance on genealogy, oral histories, and how to preserve family films, videos, and photographs.

Visitors spanned all 50 states, the Caribbean, Africa, South America, Europe, and Asia.

The Museum’s “Community Curation” program, a multi-city public outreach initiative, encourages people to digitally document and share the history and culture of our African American communities to a cloud-based platform accessible to the public. Partners include religious organizations, African American museums, black Greek-letter organizations, civic organizations, individuals, and families. The first program was held Nov. 3–12, 2017, in Baltimore, Maryland.

Nearly 3,400 unique objects have been digitized and more than 5,000 images produced. The Baltimore program also provided informational sessions, including Personal Digital Archiving and Preservation of Sacred Things.

Contributions came from more than 14,000 donors—corporations, foundations, organizations, and individuals; 10 percent of those gifts were $1 million and above.

The gifts supplemented federal funding for the costs of construction, education, public programs, exhibitions, collections and other mission-critical initiatives.

New friends who pledged their support for educational projects in 2017 included former Sacramento mayor and former NBA player Kevin Johnson, whose $1 million gift will support projects and programs that explore the intersection of sports and African American history. In addition, the PwC (PricewaterhouseCoopers) Charitable Foundation, Inc. funded the $3 million Digital Education Initiative. Once launched, the initiative will share the Museum’s research-based curricula with educators worldwide.

Many of the generous donors who supported the capital campaign provided additional gifts to support the Museum’s future. In 2017, for example, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., matched its capital campaign gift to provide an additional $500,000 donation, resulting in a total gift of $1 million to the Museum.

The Museum’s membership program boasts the largest number of current members of any Smithsonian museum. Since its inception in 2009, the membership program has enrolled nearly 200,000 people, and has raised $375 million in unrestricted funds. It has also cultivated a new generation of philanthropists. In 2017, the number of new members increased by 30 percent, and cash revenue from appeals exceeded fiscal year 2016 by an impressive 41 percent. More than one-third of those who contributed to the Museum were first-time members and donors to the Smithsonian.

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Investing in the Future

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Since its founding in 2003 through December 2017, the Museum raised more than $425.8 million.

It means a lot, and now that [the Museum is] finally complete, you can finally understand why it took so long. And just the effort, just the uniqueness that it has to me, it’s the best museum on the Mall.

BRADLEY BEAL, WASHINGTON WIZARDS
Recognizing Our Donors

The Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture is grateful to Congress and the American people for their financial support. The museum also acknowledges the generosity of our Founding Donors. Founding Donors who made a commitment of $1 million or more to the National Museum of African American History and Culture prior to its opening in 2016.

$100 Million and Above
- American Express
- AT&T Inc.
- AT&T Network
- Bank of America
- The Boeing Company
- The Coca-Cola Foundation
- Carnival Corporation
- Dr. and Mrs. T.B. Boyd III and Family
- The Batty and Batts Families
- The BMW Foundation
- The Bunting Family
- Cyrus S. Tang
- BlackRock Foundation
- Bloomberg Philanthropies
- The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
- The Blackstone Group
- The Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- The Cambria Foundation
- The Charles and Mary F. Fipps Foundation
- The Cities of Giving Foundation
- The Citi Foundation
- The Clorox Company
- The Canada Trust
- The Coastal Community Foundation
- The Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta
- The Community Foundation of Greater Milwaukee
- The Community Foundation of Northern California
- The Community Foundation of Southeast Arizona
- The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta
- The Community Foundation for Greater Greensboro
- The Community Foundation for Greater Houston
- The Community Foundation for Greater Richmond
- The Community Foundation for Northern Nevada
- The Community Foundation for Southeast Michigan
- The Community Foundation for the Capital Region of New York
- The Community Foundation for the Berkshires
- The Community Foundation for the Greater Columbus Area
- The Community Foundation for the Greater Rochester Area
- The Community Foundation for the Greater Twin Cities Area
- The Community Foundation for the Heartland
- The Community Foundation for the Inland Northwest
- The Community Foundation for the Mississippi Valley
- The Community Foundation for the Ohio River Valley
- The Community Foundation for the Philadelphia Region
- The Community Foundation for the Philadelphia Region (PA)
- The Community Foundation for the Yellowstone Area
- The Community Foundation for Western Pennsylvania and West Virginia
- The Community Foundation for Western Washington
- The Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas
- The Community Foundation of Southern New Mexico
- The Community Foundation of the Central Valley
- The Community Foundation of the Heartland
- The Community Foundation of the Peace Region
- The Community Foundation of West Virginia
- The Community Foundation of Wyoming
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Left: The Ballou High School marching band of Washington, D.C., participates in the first anniversary celebration.

Below: Visitors are silhouetted against the Museum’s beautiful corona metalwork.