

AMERICA'S BLACK HOLOCAUST MUSEUM

Photo: America's Black Holocaust Museum

Breaking the chains

In Milwaukee, America's Black Holocaust Museum highlights the resilience of the local African American community—past, present, and future.



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Milwaukee may not be the first place you associate with significant moments in Black history. But soon, travelers who visit the city will find a museum that proves it's got the chops. **America's Black Holocaust Museum** reopens this month in the same Bronzeville, Milwaukee location where it was first built, then shut down 16 years later. Its modern rebirth not only offers a window into American history but also cements the legacy of its founder Dr. James Cameron, whose past is inextricably linked to the local landmark.

The only survivor of a 1930 lynching, Cameron founded the museum in 1984, but it closed in 2006 after his passing, ending a 22-year run. Six years later, grassroots efforts brought a virtual museum to life in its place, but hope remained that one day people would be able to visit the museum IRL. That day is February 25, 2022.



Photo: America's Black Holocaust Museum

“The reemergence of the museum’s physical space is critical at this time for Bronzeville, Milwaukee, and nationally,” says Dr. Robert “Bert” Davis, the museum’s president and CEO. “At a time of hyper-polarization, we are in dire need of safe spaces and opportunities created to bring us together to explore difficult issues, to learn, and to celebrate our history.”

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The exhibits cover more than 400 years of African American history. “They begin in pre-captive Africa, exploring centuries of life, culture, and community before the transatlantic slave trade and extend to present day,” says Cydney Key, the museum’s director of operations. Visitors will learn about the Middle Passage and exactly how Africans were captured and transported across the globe to be sold into forced labor, offering a critical look at slavery and its traumatic impact. There’s an immersive journey through the Black experience, including the Great Migration from the Jim Crow-era South; and a walk through of a recreated slave ship. The museum also highlights the incredible contributions of trailblazers like Shirley Chisholm, Rev. Jesse Jackson, and president Barack Obama.



Photo: Jazale's Art Studio

Beyond the museum

Along with all this, ABMH also has an exhibit on the surrounding neighborhood of Bronzeville. It's worth checking out and then going to explore the area as it exists today. Once the historic, economic, and social heart of Milwaukee's African American community, Bronzeville is finding new life thanks to a \$250 million investment, with more than 600 Black-owned services, shops, restaurants, and cafes.

The perfect itinerary: Swing by **Jewels Caribbean** restaurant for its colorful décor and island cuisine and **On the Bayou** for authentic Cajun and Creole food. Get a haircut or beard trim at Gee's Clippers, the go-to barbershop for Milwaukee Bucks players. If you're a theater lover, don't miss a performance at the **Hansberry-Sands Theater Company**, the oldest Black theater company in Wisconsin. In August, you can explore the work of talented local African-American artists at the **Bronzeville Art Walk**, when local businesses including **Jazale's Art Studio** open their doors to sell their work.



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