

illinois

African American
History



illinois' african american history & heritage

Take in the rich legacy of Illinois' African American history

In Chicago and throughout the state, African American history is deep-rooted in Illinois. Discover museums that celebrate African American culture and art. Visit the sites where freedom seekers traveled along the Underground Railroad. Indulge in African American culture through flavorful food and soulful music. Wherever you explore, Illinois welcomes you to embrace the powerful legacy of its African American roots.



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The Art Institute of Chicago



African American Cultural Center



Black Ensemble Theater



Kingston Mines



Bronzeville Neighborhood



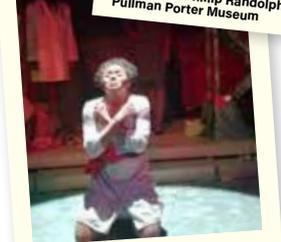
Obama Family Home



DuSable Museum of African American History



National A. Phillip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum



Eta Creative Arts Foundation

Many places have reopened with limited capacity, new operating hours or other restrictions. Inquire ahead of time for up-to-date health and safety information.

Day 1 Downtown Chicago

Chicago's African American community has had a major impact on both American and global culture, so there's no better place to start your exploration than downtown Chicago. Start the morning at the [Jean Baptiste Pointe DuSable bust](#) on Michigan Avenue; the Haitian-born fur trader is recognized as the founder of Chicago.

Make your way to the [Art Institute of Chicago](#), where the permanent collection hosts works from preeminent artists of the African diaspora including Archibald John Motley Jr., Charles White (both Chicagoans) and Elizabeth Catlett. Well-known sculptor Preston Jackson is professor emeritus of sculpture at the [School of the Art Institute of Chicago](#). (A native of Decatur in central Illinois, Jackson eventually settled in Peoria. It's here where he and fellow Black creatives launched the [Peoria Guild of Black Artists](#). On your journey to Springfield, detour to Peoria to see his works of art including sculptures lining the [Peoria Riverfront](#).)

Next is a stop at the [African American Cultural Center](#) at the University of Illinois at Chicago, where student-curated exhibits, performances and workshops foster dialogue on thought-provoking topics and celebrate African-American heritage. Or visit the [Chicago History Museum](#), where interactive exhibits showcase how African-American culture is woven throughout Chicago's past and present. As evening approaches, visit the [Black Ensemble Theater](#) for a performance from one of the most diverse theaters in the nation.

Two of the best ways to experience Black culture are through food and music, and there's no shortage of both in Chicago. Indulge in French toast flights and country scrambles at [Batter & Berries](#) and [Sweet Maple Cafe](#) or opt for southern-inspired dishes with a side of gospel music at the famed [House of Blues Gospel Brunch](#). Enjoy soul-food classics at [MacArthur's Restaurant and BBQ](#), and hot honey chicken at [Lil' Delta](#) and [Lexington Betty Smokehouse](#), both located

in [Dr. Murphy's Food Hall](#). Finally, get your fill of blues and jazz at various lounges across the city, such as [Buddy Guy's Legends](#), [Kingston Mines](#), [Andy's Jazz Club](#) and the [Green Mill Cocktail Lounge](#).

Overnight in one of the hotels near [McCormick Place](#) like the [Hyatt Regency](#), [Hilton Garden Inn](#) and [Hampton Inn](#). Other options include [The Sophy Hyde Park](#) and [The Blackstone](#) across from [Grant Park](#).

Day 2 Bronzeville & South Chicago

Day two begins on the south side of Chicago, starting in the historic [Bronzeville neighborhood](#). Known as "Black Metropolis," Bronzeville became a hub of Black life and culture in the 20th century, molding greats like Louis Armstrong, journalist Ida B. Wells and singer Nat King Cole. Tour the neighborhood with the [Bronzeville Visitor Information Center](#) or simply stroll the [Bronzeville Walk of Fame](#): 91 bronze plaques and monuments honoring former residents who've made contributions to American culture and history.

On the way to Hyde Park, cruise by the [Obama family home](#), then head to the [DuSable Museum of African American History](#), the oldest independent African American history museum in the nation. A few miles south is the [National A. Phillip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum](#), which provides a deeper look at Black labor in the United States. The contributions celebration at this museum helped lay the foundation for the modern day Civil Rights Movement. There's also a new visitors center in the works. Once complete (estimated 2021–2022), it will share stories of Pullman through exhibits and displays and serve as the gateway to the [Pullman National Monument](#). The South Side is also home to the [Eta Creative Arts Foundation](#) for original theatrical works, [Pilgrim Baptist Church](#) aka the birthplace of gospel music, and the future home of the [Obama Presidential Center](#).

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There's a wealth of Black-owned restaurants in South Chicago. [Pearl's Place](#) in Bronzeville is known for their southern comfort food buffet, while folks rave about both [The Soul Shack](#) and [Virtue](#) in Hyde Park. Or, support entrepreneurs testing their concepts at [One Eleven Food Hall](#) in Pullman. Rest up at [Sophy Hyde Park](#), a boutique hotel filled with works by artists from the community.

📍 Day 3 Chicago Suburbs

It's off to the 'burbs today with your first stop at Oak Brook for a tour of the [Graue Mill and Museum](#), a water-powered gristmill that served as a safe harbor for runaway enslaved Africans on the Underground Railroad. Continue on to Lombard to the [Sheldon Peck Homestead](#), the 1839-built home of Sheldon Peck, a fierce abolitionist and fine art portrait artist. Peck and his wife gave shelter to freedom-seeking people throughout the 1850s, and the home is registered on the NPS Network to Freedom and features an exhibit of his original paintings.

In nearby Wheaton, [Blanchard Hall](#) at the Christian, liberal arts [Wheaton College](#) also served as a haven for enslaved persons, and their memory is honored by a permanent exhibit about the history of African-American worship. If time allows, take a detour to Princeton to visit the [Owen Lovejoy Homestead](#), the former home of abolitionist Reverend Lovejoy who openly housed travelers along the Underground Railroad. Both the homestead and [Colton Schoolhouse](#) on property are available for tours.

Travelers will find a cluster of chain hotels like the [Chicago Marriott Oak Brook](#), [Hilton Chicago/Oak Brook Suites](#) and [Comfort Suites Oakbrook Terrace](#) near the [Oakbrook Center](#), a shopping mecca 12 miles east of Wheaton.

📍 Day 4 Springfield

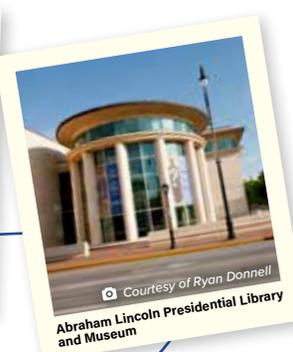
Today you'll visit the town of the 16th president, Abraham Lincoln. Begin your day in Springfield at the [Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum](#) to walk in Lincoln's footsteps through interactive exhibits covering his childhood, 1860 presidential campaign,



Graue Mill and Museum



Lincoln's Tomb



Courtesy of Ryan Donnell
Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum



State House Inn



Lincoln-Douglas Debate Statues in Alton



Old Rock House



Hamilton Primary School



Underground Railway walking tours

the Civil War and ultimately his untimely assassination in 1865. Pay your respects at [Lincoln's tomb](#), then take a deep dive into the history of slavery, the dividing issue of Lincoln's presidency, at the [Springfield and Central Illinois African American History Museum](#).

Springfield is marred by its own history of racial violence, but the city is on a path to reconciliation. One such dark time was the 1908 Race Riot, where a mob of more than 5,000 white residents lynched Black residents and burned Black neighborhoods to the ground. Many Black residents fled Springfield never to return. Both the Acts of Intolerance Sculpture and the multi-media [1908 Race Riot Mural](#) in downtown Springfield memorialize this tragic event.

Stay the night at the [State House Inn](#), a historic hotel within walking distance to the [State Capitol](#).

📍 Day 5 Jacksonville & Alton Area

Discover more stops along the Underground Railroad in Jacksonville, such as [Congregational United Church of Christ](#), the oldest church in town known as "the abolitionist church" during the 1830s. [Congregational Church](#), [Beecher Hall](#) at Illinois College and the Huffaker family who owned [Woodlawn Farm homestead](#) all risked prison time and fines in order to provide shelter, food, clothing and transportation to freedom seekers.

In Alton, book a [guided shuttle tour](#) of select Underground Railroad sites via the Great Rivers & Routes Tourism Board. Stops include a visit to the [Alton Museum of History and Art](#) which pays tribute to the African-American church, school and community leaders in Alton; [Old Rock House](#), the site of the [Anti-Slavery Society](#); [Hamilton Primary School](#), one of the earliest integrated schools in Illinois; and so many more. Dr. JE Robinson, an Underground Railroad expert, also hosts private [Underground Railroad walking tours](#). If time allows today, take a detour to the [Dr. Richard Eells House](#) in Quincy, Illinois, the first Underground Railroad station across the border of slave-holding Missouri.

