

# SMITHSONIAN BREAKS GROUND ON BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM



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**WASHINGTON (CNN)** -- The Smithsonian Institution officially began construction Wednesday on a new museum dedicated to African-American culture and heritage -- a complex committed to the celebration and study of one of the central components of the American story.

Construction of the Smithsonian's 19th museum, the National Museum of African American History and Culture -- to be located on the National Mall -- is expected to last three years. The museum is slated to open in 2015.

The nation's first black commander in chief, President Barack Obama, delivered remarks highlighting the importance of the museum's location.

**National Museum of African American History and Culture.** "It was on this ground long ago that lives were once traded, where hundreds of thousands once marched for jobs and for freedom. It was here that the pillars of our democracy were built, often by black hands," the president said.

"And it is on this spot --- alongside the monuments to those who gave birth to this nation, and those who worked so hard to perfect it --- that generations will remember the sometimes difficult, often inspirational, but always central role that African-Americans have played in the life of our country."

The museum "will be a place where all Americans can learn about the richness and diversity of the African American experience, what it means to their lives and how it helped us shape this nation. A place that transcends the boundaries of race and culture that divide us and becomes a lens into a story that unites us all," according to

the Smithsonian website.

"This was true bipartisan effort, echoing the museum's message of unity. What a magnificent location, in view of powerful symbolism. It is a fitting home for this museum, invoking the indelible threads that connect African American stories to the American tapestry," said Wayne Clough, secretary of the Smithsonian.

Former first lady Laura Bush and Georgia Democratic Rep. John Lewis -- an icon of the civil rights era -- were among the other speakers celebrating the start of the museum's construction.

"I look forward to the day when I can amble through the exhibit, search through the archives, participate in a program, rest my tired feet in a cafe and get lost in history inside the granite wall of an idea whose time has finally come, " Lewis predicted. "We didn't give up, didn't give in. We didn't give out. We didn't get lost in a sea of despair. We kept the faith. We kept our eyes on the prize."

The five-acre site, selected six years ago by the Smithsonian, is located between the Washington Monument and the National Museum of American History. The museum will be the first environmentally sensitive "green" building on the Mall. It is expected to cost \$500 million, half of which will be covered by federal funds.



*Artist's rendering of the new museum.*