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By Chloe Arrojado • June 17, 2024

5 Black History Landmarks in the U.S. You've Probably Never Heard Of

There's plenty of Black history in the buildings and streets around you—if you know where to look.



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The Harriet Tubman National Historical Park was established in 2017. Photo by Zack Frank/Shutterstock

Museums like Nashville's National Museum of African American Music and the [International African American Museum](#) in Charleston, South Carolina, are some of the [best places to learn about Black history](#). But do a bit of digging and you can find plenty of landmarks around you. That's what Lauri Williamson discovered when researching her upcoming book *III Places in Black Culture in Washington, DC That You Must Not Miss* (which will be released June 19, 2024). The D.C.-based tour guide set out to write *III Places* after feeling that not many African American stories were being told regularly, then finding a wealth of places related to Black history. But Williamson had to do some investigating first.

"There are a lot of places I would find that are not marked. They don't have plaques or anything to tell you that something important happened here. So sometimes it would take a long time to really get down to the bottom of facts about some information," Williamson says. "For instance, the largest recorded escape attempt from slavery happened right here in Washington, D.C. There is a plaque to that, and it's in a place that is very difficult to find. But I found it, and it's one of the places in the book."

You don't need to be a well-seasoned tour guide to find Black history in the places you visit. Williamson advises travelers to use tourism bureau websites, as many of them have Black history and culture highlighted. "And if not, you just call [the tourism bureau]. That's what they're there for—to bring visitors to the city and to help explain what's in the city," she says.

To inspire you to find the lesser-known Black history landmarks in the places you visit, here are five that Williamson wants to spotlight.

Harriet Tubman's New York home

- **Location:** Auburn, New York
- **Book a tour:** [Harriet Tubman Home](#); tickets are \$7 for adults (18–64), \$5 for college students and seniors (65 and above), \$3 for youth (6–17 years)

Williamson sometimes leads tours to Maryland's Eastern Shore, where Harriet Tubman grew up and initiated her trips on the Underground Railroad. The [Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad Visitor Center](#) and the [Harriet Tubman Museum and Educational Center](#) are a few places that explore the life of the abolitionist and human-rights activist, who made 19 journeys to the South and rescued about 70 people enslaved people to the North.

In 1859, Harriet Tubman moved to a house that she purchased in Auburn, New York. The home is now part of a [National Historical Park](#). The property also includes the [Tubman Home for Aged and Indigent Negroes](#) (which was a health-care facility for those in the community) and the Harriet Tubman Visitor Center.

Frederick Douglass's house

- **Location:** Washington, D.C.
- **Book a tour:** [Frederick Douglass National Historic Site](#)

While researching *111 Places*, Williamson said she was surprised to find that there weren't many D.C. historic homes still standing, as many had been either razed or transformed into something else. But a few remain, including the home of abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Born into slavery in Talbot County, Maryland, Douglass escaped in 1838 and became well-known for his writings. He eventually moved to a home in Washington D.C., which he called "Cedar Hill," and lived there until his death in 1895. Today, the estate is a [National Historic Site](#), and the National Parks Service offers tours of the 21-room mansion.

A bombing killed four young girls at the 16th Street Baptist Church in 1963. Photo by Brett Welcher/Shutterstock

16th Street Baptist Church

- **Location:** Birmingham, Alabama
- **Book a tour:** [16th Street Baptist Church](#); tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for students

The 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, was the first Black church in Birmingham and a headquarters for organizers during the Civil Rights movement. In 1963, a bombing during a Sunday service killed four young girls, shocking and enraging people across the United States. According to Williamson, “It really brought a spotlight in the world on racial violence.”

The church reopened in 1964 and still gives services today, as well as tours for those wanting to learn more.

“There are a lot of places of historical significance [where] tragic things might have happened,” Williamson says. “So it might not be a person’s favorite place to visit, but it’s an important place to visit because all of the stories are part of the American story.”

The site of the Pearl Incident

- **Location:** Washington, D.C.

Today the Wharf neighborhood on **Washington, D.C.’s** waterfront is home to some of the best restaurants and **hotels** in the nation’s capital. But 176 years ago, it’s where the largest recorded escape attempt by enslaved persons in the country took place. In 1848, 77 enslaved men, women, and children boarded a schooner called *The Pearl* for the free state of New Jersey. Enslavers captured the escapees when the schooner was docked near Point Lookout, Maryland, due to opposing winds. After the event, several of the enslaved people were sold to enslavers in the South, and the attempt for freedom became known as the “Pearl Incident.”

Besides being a co-pastor in Ebenezer Baptist Church, Martin Luther King Jr. was also baptized there. Photo by Nagel Photography/Shutterstock

Ebenezer Baptist Church

- **Location:** Atlanta, Georgia

One of the most famous leaders of the Civil Rights movement, Martin Luther King Jr., was a pastor of the Ebenezer Baptist Church alongside his father, Martin Luther King Sr. (Travelers may not know that Martin Luther King Jr.'s mother, Alberta Williams King, was shot in the church.) Ebenezer Baptist Church is a part of the nearly 40-acre Martin Luther King Jr. National Historical Park, which is also home to the “**Behold**” **monument** and **The King Center**, where the tombs of King Jr. and his wife, Coretta Scott King, are located.

Chloe Arrojado

Chloe Arrojado is the associate editor of destinations at Afar. She's a big fan of cafés, dancing, and asking people on the street for restaurant recommendations.



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