

**The National Civil Rights Museum's
National Competitive Context**

September 10, 2006

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Setting The Stage

"The \$100 million (National Slavery) museum, which is being designed by architect Chien Chung Pei, will be built on 38 acres in Fredericksburg's Celebrate Virginia development, on a hill overlooking the Rappahannock River."

- *Washington Post (6-5-06)*

"A proposed \$69 million International African-American Museum for Charleston is on a slow but sure track, according to Mayor Joe Riley's office."

- *The State (Charleston - 8/24/06)*

"280,000 have seen the story of the Underground Railroad in the year after the Underground Railroad Freedom Center...since its glitzy opening with Oprah Winfrey and First Lady Laura Bush."

- *The Cincinnati Enquirer (8-6-05)*

"The glamour, the popping camera lights of the paparazzi, and an impressive lineup of movie stars such as Jim Carrey, Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, and Chris Tucker gave a glitzy Hollywood feel to the grand opening of the Muhammad Ali Center in this horse-racing town. Lonnie Ali, the boxing champ's wife, could barely hold back tears as she stood in the shadow of the \$75 million center with its soaring butterfly roof and its dozens of exhibits, replete with LeRoy Nieman paintings of "the greatest" in his glory days.

- *Washington Post (12/6/05)*

"The International Civil Rights Center and Museum needs untold millions - maybe six, maybe 10, maybe more - before officials can swing open the double doors and show the world where the sit-in movement was born...The catch: These African American history museums aren't just competing with schools, churches, and nonprofit organizations for money. They're competing with each other."

- *News-Record (Greensboro - 3-21-06)*

"The largest black museum, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American history in Detroit, where Rosa Parks's body was viewed, is struggling for money and attendance. The African American Museum in Philadelphia, with its half-million dollar debt, was nearly forced to shut its doors for good this year."

- *Washington Post (12-6-05)*

"Museums are morphing. Once they were chroniclers or collectors, gathering objects and facts and putting them on display. Now many have become crucibles: places where a cultural identity is hammered out, refined, and reshaped. Along the way they also have become community centers, where a group gathers to celebrate its past, commemorate its tragedies and convey its achievements to others."

- *New York Times (7/20/06)*

"But the question can justly be raised: with three new museum projects in the pipeline (Washington, DC, Fredericksburg, VA, and Charleston, SC) plus two major museums that opened in 2004 - the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center on Cincinnati's riverfront

and the Reginald F. Lewis Museum of African American Culture in Baltimore's Inner Harbor - is all this museum activity too much of a good thing?"

- *Black Issues in Higher Education* (2004)



On the 28th of this month, the National Civil Rights Museum will commemorate the 15th anniversary of its opening in 1991, and it finds itself in an increasingly demanding competitive environment that results from a proliferation of heritage museums and historic sites, the emergence of new major competitors, a revolution in technology, competing demands for increasingly scarce funds, and most importantly of all, a dramatic shift in consumer expectations.

In fact, the African American Museum movement now under way at times seems as powerful as the civil rights movement that inspired it in the first place.

As a result, these are challenging days for museums, and the National Civil Rights Museum is no exception. In the past 15 years, it has established a strong foothold in the marketplace, born of its distinctive position as a sacred site in American history, positive reviews by national media, the lack of reliance on government funding, and the willingness of its board to make tough decisions with a strong business mindset.

These have served the museum well in the past and form a solid foundation as its leadership charts a course for the future in which the National Civil Rights Museum competes on a national stage to strengthen its position as one of the leading heritage museums in the country.

The museums that succeed in this highly competitive environment are those who seek and identify ways to adapt to the changing cultural world of the United States. Already, a number of museums have faced some grim realities. The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit is struggling for revenues and attendance; the African-American Museum in Philadelphia nearly shut its doors earlier this year; the African American Museum in Tacoma, Washington, closed last year. Meanwhile, a number of smaller African American heritage sites have shut their doors, saddled with debt and declining attendance.

This stress is not, however, confined to African American sector of museums. Also closed have been the Children's Discovery Museum in San Diego; the James Dean Museum in Fairmount, Indiana; and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Palm Beach, Florida. Meanwhile, other destinations as notable as Colonial Williamsburg report that attendance is down by almost half while Maryland Historical Society labors under a \$1.2 million deficit.

The American Association of Museums reports that attendance has been relatively flat since 2000, and in the face of higher gas prices, a drop of school trips, and shrinking interest in history, even tougher times are forecast for the future.

And yet, in the face of these sobering trends, a number of cities nonetheless are betting on African American museums as the spark for downtown development and making major investments in massive, architecturally stunning centers. It is hard to call the facilities museums in the traditional sense of the word, because they are

geared as much toward entertainment as education, making use of cutting edge technology, interactive experiences, and “starchitecture.”

In the past two years alone, at least seven major black museums, cultural centers, and memorials, amounting to about \$1 billion in capital costs alone, have opened, had groundbreaking, or begun planning.

Opened in this same period of time are the \$110 million Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati; \$75 million Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville; \$33 million Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture in Baltimore; and \$20 million Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco.

Meanwhile, a number of other ambitious museum projects are being developed - \$200 million National Slavery Museum in Fredericksburg, Virginia; \$16 million International Civil Rights Center and Museum in Greensboro, North Carolina; \$69 million International African American Museum in Charleston, South Carolina; a proposed Museum of African-American Music, Art and Culture in Nashville; and the \$500 million Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture to be built on the Mall in Washington, D.C.

If that isn't enough, at the same time, dozens of museums with broad arts and historical missions are organizing and sponsoring new, major exhibits dealing with the African-American experience.

While the National Civil Rights Museum helped to inspire this renewed interest in African-American heritage, it is now in danger of losing ground to newer, more technologically advanced museums. Swept up in the glut of museums, consumers can end up confused and place more pressure on the National Civil Rights Museum to position itself distinctively and strongly.

Framework for Decisions

There are more than 5.5 million “museums, historical sites, and similar institutions” in the United States, according to the Statistical Abstract of the United States. Sales, revenues, receipts, and shipments total more than \$6.5 billion a year, and the annual payroll is about \$2 billion for 91 million employees.

Among these institutions are African American museums like the National Civil Rights Museum, and at times, it seems that every major city has its own facility. The African-American Museums Association, in a survey of its members, reported that black museums tend to be history museums (42%), ethnic cultural centers (19%), art museums (15%), and historic houses or sites (13%). The vast majority - 89% - are located in cities, and 23% had budgets of more than \$250,000 a year with an average staff size of seven.

Many of the museums were said to exist on a month-to-month basis without a formal plan for the current year, much less a five-year plan. The respondents to the survey listed their priorities in order as fundraising, more paid staff, physical plant concerns, collections preservation, staff training, and collection acquisitions.

Trends are clear and unmistakable. Arts, cultural, and historical institutions are dividing into two groups - the fewer large museums that appeal to markets on a national, and even international scale, and the more numerous small institutions targeting niche markets. Those institutions caught in the middle will find the coming years cruel and unforgiving.

That's why the real benchmark of success for the National Civil Rights Museum is to elevate and strengthen its position as a museum of national importance and international scope. That then is the challenge for the charrette -- to create a plan for the future that establishes the museum as a bona fide member in the first-tier of museums.

The essential functions of museums today can be summed up in three ways:

- 1) They are sources of entertainment, enrichment and fulfillment for visitors.
- 2) They are vehicles for the preservation and transmission of culture, history, and values.
- 3) They are the sources of benefits at the personal, community, and national levels - openness to new ideas and creativity and broader personal competencies; social and economic benefits such as promoting livability, economic activity, and pride, and cultural diversity and pluralism at the national level.

In considering the future of the National Civil Rights Museum, a key strategic question involves the core decision on how to increase participation, and generally, this presents three options - broadening, deepening, or diversifying it. In broadening it, the Museum captures a larger share of the existing market. In deepening it, the Museum intensifies the level of involvement by current visitors and supporters. In diversifying it, the Museum carves out new markets of people who are not typical visitors and supporters.

The fundamental challenge for the National Civil Rights Museum is to develop its unique position in a changing world increasingly more competitive and complex. The proliferation of African American museums can create consumer perceptions that every city has one and they are just "more of the same."

That's why the deliberations of the charrette process are seminal to the future of the Museum, because it is in defining the "big picture" that a shared narrative and vision is produced. It is within this context that the National Civil Rights Museum, when compared to its competitors, would appear to have the competitive advantages of human scale, authenticity, inspiration, and most of all, its location at the site of a major historical event that defines a people and a nation.

The opportunity for the Museum, it would seem in analyzing the national competitive environment, is to build on the foundation of authentic and personal experience to expand its impact on the national stage. The Freedom Awards was a step in that direction, and it is in using them as the springboard to create a "living" museum that the National Civil Rights Museum can attract new attention and support.

As the Museum identifies the best course for its future, it will do it within the context of consumer realities affecting every cultural institution in the U.S.:

▶ Principle #1

Consumers are being pulled in a multitude of directions by convenient opportunities for entertainment that are increasing exponentially. More and more, people want what they want when they want it and where they are. Arts, cultural, and historical institutions are normally place-specific, and because of it, it must find ways to compete with entertainment that can be downloaded, podcast and Tivo'ed. New ways are needed to connect with people where they are and to tap into a growing interest in being participants, rather than mere observers.

▶ Principle #2

Each museum is a small island in a sea of cultural bounty. It won't stake out its place by having a range of average activities, but by identifying a distinctive niche and producing "peak experiences" that differentiate it as the best at what it does.

▶ Principle #3

Cultural and historical enterprises of all kinds are seeing the ground shift underneath them. There is the need for reinvention because audiences seem to be declining across the board for many traditional cultural anchors, including museums, movies, theaters, symphonies, and dance. Industries like music are clinging to old business models, and in time, they will yield to forces unleashed by technology and consumer expectations. The winners in this environment are those who fight commercialization that tends toward generic, derivative products. Authenticity and intimacy are ways to stake out distinctive territory.

▶ Principle #4

Walker Percy said the problem with cultural institutions like museums is that we must wrest meaning from experiences that inevitably come to us prepackaged and disconnected from our own assumptions and expectations. Ways that connect more viscerally and more personally with citizens and visitors can build a binding narrative for the National Civil Rights Museum, jolt the imagination, and raise expectations.

▶ Principle #5

In the U.S. about 44 percent of whites, 28 percent of African-Americans and Haitian and 23 percent of Hispanics attended an arts/culture event or institution in the past 12 months. Education and income are the strongest indicators of cultural support. More college graduates - 64 percent - attend than high school graduates - 25 percent - and the higher the earnings, the greater the attendance at cultural events. While these groups are lucrative target markets, museums must make extra efforts to be accessible and meaningful to all citizens.

▶ Principle #6

Special events are proven ways to animate and punctuate the life of a museum. These kinds of events offer unexpected surprises and speak to the values of the community and to the symbolic importance of events as rituals of hope and meaning for the museum.

Historical Framework

In 1991, State of Tennessee contributed \$4.4 million to build the National Civil Rights Museum, envisioned originally as a regional exhibit to honor Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement. There is no question that the state's investment in the Museum has paid rich dividends far beyond any expectations at the time of its construction funding.

Some benchmarks for progress since the opening are:

- No requests for operating funding from State of Tennessee in the previous 13 years
- Development of a highly effective board of directors and staff skilled in fundraising and generating earned income
- Creation of the prestigious Freedom Awards to honor national and international legends of the civil rights and human rights movement
- The doubling of exhibition space with the \$11 million *Exploring the Legacy* expansion in 2002
- Named one of 10 national treasures by *USA Today Weekend*
- One of the top four most popular museums in Tennessee
- Hundreds of news stories by regional and national media, from *Ebony* to *MTV* and *Discovery Channel* to *New York Times*, with an advertising value of \$2 million
- One of only three U.S. museums named to the International Coalition of Historic Sites of Conscience
- Accredited by American Association of Museums, one of only 750 of 16,000 museums in the U.S. and one of only three African-American heritage museums

An indicator of success is its positive national media exposure, which has included *MTV's True Life*, *Discovery Channel 100 Greatest Americans*, the movie *Elizabethtown*, *Southern Living*, *Ebony*, *Chicago Tribune*, *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, *ABC's Good Morning America*, *Jet*, *Detroit News and Free Press*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, *New York Times*, *Las Vegas Review*, and more. In fact, the reputation of the Museum is so widespread that it has even been a question on *Jeopardy!* and one of its exhibits has appeared on a United States postage stamp.

It is inarguable that the National Civil Rights Museum has been successful beyond all expectations. In fact, when state officials endorsed the Museum in the late 1980s, they said that eventually they expected that state government would eventually take over its operations, because it would be dependent on Tennessee funding for survival.

Recognizing the attendant risk in relying on public funding for operations, what happened was just the opposite. The Museum adopted a philosophy in which private, corporate and philanthropic funds paid yearly operating costs, and this emphasis on self-sufficiency prevented an overdependence on state funding. This philosophy also guided capital investments.

The general timeline for milestones in the life of the Museum are as follows:

- 1982 -- Foreclosure of the Lorraine Motel and the purchase by the Martin Luther King Memorial Foundation
- 1986 -- State of Tennessee Governor-elect Ned McWherter advocates construction of a civil rights museum in Memphis and calls on Memphis and Shelby County Governments to commit matching funds to the design developed by former Smithsonian Institution designer Benjamin Lawless
- 1986 -- State government commits \$4.4 million, and city and county governments each commit \$2.2 million, for construction. The Tennessee Building Commission is responsible for the design and construction of the museum project and Tennessee state architect Mike Fitts directs the project
- 1987 -- Groundbreaking for National Civil Rights Museum
- 1991 -- The Museum opens on September 28; the first Freedom Awards Ceremony was held
- 1998 -- Operating revenues exceed \$750,000, with no funding from State of Tennessee, City of Memphis, or Shelby County
- 2001 -- Groundbreaking for \$11 million expansion of the museum, "Exploring the Legacy," and State of Tennessee provides \$1 million to the capital campaign

Operating revenue exceeds \$1 million a year, with no funding from State of Tennessee, City of Memphis or Shelby County
- 2002 -- Opening of the major expansion on the Museum's 11th anniversary
- 2004 -- Attendance doubles from opening year
- 2005 -- Operating budget nears \$4 million annually

The Museum Movement

Prior to the mid-20th century, the major repositories of African American art and artifacts were historically black universities and libraries, such as Hampton University, Howard University, Spelman College, and Fisk University.

The major burst in the development of African American museums began 35 years ago and has picked up momentum in the past decade. Some have been little more than vanity projects by individuals in a city, and others have been substantial projects funded by government. It is a reflection of the times that several of these closed quietly only a few years after opening.

The list of the major openings are as follows:

1970 - African American Museum of Nassau County in Hempstead, NY

1971 - Black American West Museum and Heritage Center in Denver

1971 - DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago

1974 - Museum of African American Life and Culture in Dallas

1976 - Afro-American Historical & Cultural Museum in Philadelphia

1976 - National Afro-American Museum and Culture Center in
Wilberforce, Ohio

1976 - Great Plains Black Museum in Omaha, Nebraska

1979 - Black Fashion Museum in New York City

1979 - Delta Blues Museum in Clarksdale, Mississippi

1979 - George Washington Carver Museum in Austin, Texas

1979 - Mary McLeod Bethune Museum and Archives in Washington, D.C.

1980 - Booker-Thomas Museum in Lexington, Kentucky

1983 - Chattanooga African American Museum

1983 - Great Blacks in Wax Museum in Baltimore

1985 - Avery Normal Institute in Charleston, South Carolina

1985 - Harriet Tubman Historical and Cultural Museum in Macon, Georgia

1985 - Avery Research Center for African American History & Culture in
Charleston, South Carolina

- 1988 - America's Black Holocaust Museum in Milwaukee
- 1988 - Motown Historical Museum in Detroit
- 1988 - Arna Bontemps African American Museum in Alexandria, Louisiana
- 1989 - African American Cultural Complex in Raleigh, North Carolina
- 1990 - National Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City
- 1991 - Museum of African American Art in Tampa, Florida
- 1991 - Black History Museum and Cultural Center in Richmond
- 1992 - Birmingham Civil Rights Institute
- 1993 - Eubie Black Museum and Cultural Center in Baltimore
- 1993 - African American Museum in Dallas
- 1994 - African American Museum & Library at Oakland, California
- 1997 - Jazz Museum in Kansas City
- 2000 - African/African-American Historical Museum in Fort Wayne, IN
- 2003 - African American History and Cultural Center in Cedar Rapids, IA
- 2004 - Underground Railroad Freedom Center in Cincinnati
- 2005 - Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco
- 2005 - Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History and Culture in Baltimore
- 2005 - Muhammad Ali Center in Louisville, Kentucky

A major impetus for the explosion in the number of museums was the advent of cultural tourism, a concept that was developed in Memphis in the mid-1980s in a national conference organized and funded here.

Museums

The following selective listing of museums is a telling indication of the competition that exists in the marketplace for consumers for African-American institutions:

Birmingham Civil Rights Institute

Birmingham, AL

Mission: To document the struggle of black citizens of Birmingham in the struggle for equal rights

Location: Modern, 48,000 square foot building built in 1992 includes an archive, galleries, meeting rooms, and rotating exhibit space

Other: The Institute strives to be a forum for study and dialogue on civil and human rights issues; conferences; walking tours; human rights award dinner

Admission: \$9 adult

www.bcri.org

Rosa Parks Library and Museum

Troy University, Montgomery, AL

Mission: To provide an understanding of the famous bus boycott

Location: Modern, three-story, 55,000 square foot building

Other: Multi-media auditorium; children's wing; exhibits reminiscent of National Civil Rights Museum

Admission: \$5.50 adult

www.montgomery.troy.edu/museum

Little Rock Central High Visitors Center and Museum

Little Rock, AR

Mission: To challenge people by documenting and interpreting the history of the 1957 crisis

Location: former Mobile gas station

Admission: free

www.centralhigh57.org

California African American Museum

Los Angeles, CA

Mission: To honor black contributions to California history

Location: Exposition Park in modern, attractive building, renovations under way as well as long-term expansion study

Other: Permanent exhibits concentrate on art and African artifacts' 13,000 glass-ceiling sculpture garden, conference center, weekend programming, art classes for youth' part of the state museum system

Admission: free

www.caamuseum.org

African American Museum & Library

Oakland, CA

Mission: Dedicated to the discovery and preservation of the African American cultural and historical experience in California

Location: In a former library

Other: Emphasis on archival and reference materials

Admission: free

www.oaklandlibrary.org/AAMLO

Museum of the African Diaspora

San Francisco, CA

Mission: To promote, explore, and appreciate the contributions people of African descent

Location: 20,000 square feet on the first three floors of a new, 40-story St. Regis Hotel adjacent to the Moscone

Convention Center and the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and near the Mexican Museum and Contemporary Jewish Museum

Other: Opened with two contemporary art exhibitions and loaned objects from the British Museum on loan for the first time; only 3,000 square feet of permanent exhibition space; the museum owns no artifacts or objects

Admission: \$8 adult

www.moadsf.org

The Amistad Center for Art & Culture

Hartford, CT

Mission: To interpret and celebrate African American contributions to the humanities

Location: At Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art

Other: 7,000 works of art and artifacts that made up the Randolph Linsly Simpson Collection

Admission: \$10 adult

amistadartandculture.org

Anacostia Museum & Center for African American History and Culture

Washington, DC

Mission: Smithsonian Institution's museum of African American history and culture

Other: library, Museum Academy for youth

Admission: free

anacostia.si.edu

Black Fashion Museum

Washington, D.C.

Mission: Researches, collects, and displays garments from the slave era to the present.

Admission: Tours by appointment.

members.aol.com/money4bfm/BFM/splash.htm

African American Museum of the Arts

DeLand, FL

Mission: To provide artistic excellence that reflects African American and Caribbean American culture

Location: In a suburban type house

Other: Largely masks and artwork; performances

www.africanmuseumdeland.org

Lucy Craft Museum of Black History

Augusta, GA

Mission: Promote the legacy of Ms. Lucy Craft Laney

Location: In restored home of Ms. Laney

Other: Youth leadership academy, senior citizen programs, conference center, exhibits, lectures and tours

Admission: \$3 adult

www.lucycraftlaneymuseum.com

Tubman African American Museum

Macon, GA

Mission: To educate people about African American art, history, and culture

Location: a former warehouse and nightclub in downtown Macon; new domed, 49,000 square foot, \$15 million museum under construction

Other: children's arts classes, a weeklong festival, a summer Heritage Camp for children 7-12

Admission: \$5 adult

www.tubmanmuseum.org

DuSable Museum of African American History

Chicago, IL

Mission: To correct the institutionalized omission of black culture in education

Location: Former park administration building and new wing built on park land; expansion plans under way

Other: Exhibits focus heavily on Illinois' black historical figures

Admission: \$3 adults

www.dusablemuseum.org

A. Philip Randolph Pullman Porter Museum

Chicago, IL

Mission: To promote, honor, and celebrate the legacy of Randolph and the African-American labor movement with a focus on railroad attendants.

Admission: \$5 adult

www.aphiliprandolphmuseum.com

Archives of African American Museum & Culture

Bloomington, IN

Mission: To establish a unique collection of primary and secondary source materials on African-American music and culture where such materials are scarce or nonexistent

Location: On campus of Indiana University

Other: Extensive recordings, research and archives

Admission: Free, cost for dubbing

www.indiana.edu/~aaamc

African & African American Historical Museum

Fort Wayne, IN

Mission: To preserve local African American history

Location: Historic home housing 25 years of material collected by two local teachers

Other: 10 major exhibits

Admission: \$3 adult

www.myblackinfo.com/african_americanfw.htm

African American Historical Museum & Cultural Center of Iowa

Cedar Rapids, IA

Mission: History of African Americans with emphasis on Iowa

Location: In the heart of the city's cultural arts district

Other: Celebration hall, library

Admission: \$4 adult

www.blackiowa.org/

Kansas African American Museum

Wichita, KS

Mission: Dedicated to the education, identification, acquisition, research, collection, exhibition, presentation, and preservation of visual art forms and documents

Location: In former Baptist Church

Admission: Free

www.thekansasafricanamericanmuseum.org

Muhammad Ali Center

Louisville, KY

Mission: an international education and cultural center inspired by the ideals of Muhammad Ali, the center is a place to explore the greatness that lies within you and find the inspiration to pursue your potential

Location: \$80 million, six-level, 93,000 square foot museum

Other: Markets nontraditional museum experiences and interactive technology; impressive board of advisors and broad mission to engage in international understanding

Admission: \$9 adult

www.alicenter.org

Kentucky Center for African American History

Louisville, KY

Mission: To enhance understanding of the role of African Americans in the history of Kentucky

Location: Four historic trolley barns

Other: Museum, research center, artists' studio, sculpture garden, and commercial ventures

Note: The \$25 million project's construction was delayed amid questions about irregular use of federal funds, and at this time, it needs \$7 million to complete the project originally scheduled to open in spring

Admission: Undetermined

www.KCAAH.com

Arna Bontemps African American Museum

Alexandria, LA

Mission: To highlight the life of noted black poet and author and promote appreciation for black culture

Location: historic home of Arna Bontemps

Admission: free, donations welcome

www.arnabontempsmuseum.com

River Road African American Museum

Donaldsonville, LA

Mission: Educate visitors to the African American history of communities between Baton Rouge and New Orleans

Location: Historic home in downtown

Admission: \$4 adult

www.africanamericanmuseum.org

Reginald F. Lewis Museum of Maryland African American History & Culture

Baltimore, MD

Mission: Serve as a repository of books, papers, oral history and educational resources on the African American experience of Maryland

Location: New \$40 million, 82,000 square foot building on the Inner Harbor

Other: Three permanent galleries, 200-seat theater, café, oral history recording and listening studio

Admission: \$8 adult

www.africanamericanculture.org/

The Banneker-Douglass Museum

Annapolis, MD

Mission: Dedicated to preserving Maryland's African-American heritage

Location: Former church with expansion completed in 2006

Admission: Free

www.dhcd.state.md.us/Website/programs/bdm/index.html

Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists

Boston, MA

Mission: Dedicated to the celebration, exhibition, collection and criticism of black visual arts heritage worldwide

Location: In a historic building

Admission: \$4 adult

www.ncaaa.org/museum.html

Museum of Afro-American History

Boston, MA

Mission: To preserve and interpret the contributions of African Americans to the common cause of liberty and justice

Location: Four historic sites including the oldest African meeting house in the U.S.

Other: Rotating exhibits

Admission: \$5 suggested donation

www.afroammuseum.org

Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History

Detroit, MI

Mission: To serve as the world's largest museum of the African American experience

Location: a 28,000 square foot building built in 1985 and a 120,000 square foot expansion built in 1997 as part of the University Cultural Center

Other: Seven exhibition areas, a glass dome; interactive, multi-level exhibit; research library; cafe

Admission: \$8 adult

www.maah-detroit.org/

Motown Historical Museum

Detroit, MI

Mission: To celebrate the roots and remarkable impact of Motown on 20th century popular culture

Location: Berry Gordy's house that also served as company headquarters

Admission: \$8 adult

www.motownmuseum.com

Jim Crow Museum

Ferris State University

Big Rapids, MI

Mission: To collect, exhibit and preserve objects and collections related to segregation, civil rights and anti-black caricatures

Location: "A little room with a big purpose"

Admission: Free

www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/menu.htm

Delta Blues Museum

Clarksdale, MS

Mission: To continue the musical traditions of the Mississippi Delta

Location: Former Yazoo and Mississippi River Valley Railroad Depot, plans for expansion to create a new wing

Other: Permanent collection features legendary black blues artists

Admission: \$7 adult

www.deltabluesmuseum.org

B. B. King Museum and The Delta Interpretative Center

Indianola, MS

Mission: To honor the blues legend and his musical genre

Location: In a historic cotton gin where B.B. King once worked plus expansion of 18,000 square feet

Other: The \$10 million project is scheduled to open in 2007

Admission: Underdetermined

www.bbkingmuseum.org/

American Jazz Museum

Kansas City, MO

Mission: To celebrate and exhibit the experience of jazz as an original American art form through research, exhibition, education, and performance

Location: In historic 18th and Vine District

Other: Interactive exhibits, a working jazz club, and 500-seat performing arts center

Admission: \$6 adult
www.americanjazzmuseum.com

Negro Leagues Baseball Museum

Kansas City, MO

Mission: To honor the talents of extraordinary athletes in a segregated sport

Location: In historic 18th and Vine District in a 10,000 square foot museum

Admission: \$6 adult

www.nlbm.com

International Civil Rights Center and Museum

Greensboro, NC

Mission: Exists to preserve, protect, maintain and promote a critical piece of American history

Location: In the old Woolworth's that was the site of the 1961 sit-in that was a definitive event in the civil rights movement

Status: Fundraising is under way to raise \$16 million for the renovation of the historic building; the museum was 12 years in the planning stage

Admission: Undetermined

www.sitimovement.org

African American Cultural Complex

Raleigh, NC

Mission: To make people aware of the contributions of African Americans to North Carolina and America through structured educational programs

Location: Several rustic buildings along a nature trail

Other: A \$5 million fundraising campaign is under way to build a new building

www.aaccmuseum.org

African American Heritage Museum of Southern New Jersey

Newtonville, NJ

Mission: To portray artifacts of African-American culture and life

Location: 10 trailers with 10,000 square feet of exhibits

Other: Exhibits are also taken on tour
www.aahmsnj.org/

African American Museum of Nassau County

Hempstead, NY

Mission: To showcase local and national African-American artists

Other: A department of the county parks department

Admission: Free

Louis Armstrong House & Archives

Corona, NY

Mission: To preserve and promote the cultural legacy of Louis Armstrong

Location: The music legend's brick home

Other: Archives

Admission: \$8 adult

www.satchmo.net/

National Afro American Museum and Cultural Center

Wilberforce, OH

Mission: Educate the public about African American history and culture from African origins to the present

Location: Adjacent to Central State University

Other: Permanent exhibit on black life in the 1950s, a Music As A Metaphor video, and history of Ohio black poets and artists

Admission: \$4 adult

www.ohiohistory.org/textonly/places/afroam

National Underground Railroad Freedom Center

Cincinnati, OH

Mission: To be a living and learning center which offers reflections and lessons about the ongoing struggle for freedom

Location: Three dramatic buildings costing \$110 million and housing 158,000 square feet of space

Other: Billed as part of a new group of "museums of conscience," along with the Museum of Tolerance, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the National Civil Rights Museum, the Center

offers lessons on the struggle for freedom; summer camp; lecture series

Admission: \$12 adult

www.freedomcenter.org/

African American Museum

Cleveland, Ohio

Mission: A place of learning, enrichment, educational enlightenment.

Location: A former library in an inner city neighborhood.

Other: Frequent financial issues and rudimentary services.

www.aamcleveland.org

African-American Museum

Philadelphia, PA

Mission: Honors contributions of African Americans in the Delaware Valley

Location: In a building built by city government in 1976, includes four galleries and an auditorium; 500,000 objects, images, and documents

Other: Gallery talks, interactive storytelling, workshops, lectures

Admission: \$6 adult

www.aampmuseum.org

August Wilson Center for African American Culture

Pittsburgh, PA

Mission: Interprets and preserves the art, culture, and history of African Americans in Pittsburgh and of people of African descent throughout the world

Location: A stunning \$36 million, 67,000 building scheduled to open in 2008 and reviving a formerly seedy area of the city

Other: Permanent gallery, changing galleries, café, 500-seat theater, classrooms

Admission: Undetermined

www.africanaculture.org/

Avery Research Center for African American History & Culture

College of Charleston

Charleston, SC

Mission: Tells the story of black Americans from their origins in Africa through slavery,

emancipation, segregation, migration, the civil rights movement, and the ongoing struggle for social and political equality

Location: In a building at the College of Charleston

Other: Museum, historic site, cultural center, and archives

Admission: Free

www.cofc.edu/avery

International African American Museum

Charleston, SC

Mission: Embody the histories, cultures and experiences of Africans in the Americas, with a specific focus on Charleston and South Carolina

Location: Just west of the Cooper River and near the Aquarium

Other: The \$69 million project has no construction schedule and is still in the fundraising phase

Admission: To be determined

Slave Relic Museum

Walterboro, SC

Mission: To document, preserve, interpret, and celebrate the history and culture of peoples of African descent.

Location: In a historic house

Other: Seems to be a collection of artifacts donated with no particular narrative in mind

Admission: \$6

slaverelics.org

Chattanooga African American Museum

Chattanooga, TN

Mission: To explore the unique history of Africans in Chattanooga

Admission: \$3 adults

Other: Tour begins with a thriving 12th century African village mural, stucco Ethiopian church and a multi-media wall telling the history of slavery

www.caamhistory.com/

Beck Cultural Exchange Center, Inc.

Knoxville, TN

Mission: To inform people of all races about the rich history of Knoxville

Location: Temporarily housed in former visitors center
Other: Primarily framed photographs and rudimentary exhibits
www.discoveret.org/beckcec/welcome.htm

Museum of African-American Music, Art and Culture

Nashville, TN
Mission: To pay tribute to the African-Americans who have contributed to Nashville's cultural traditions
Location: Undetermined
Other: Nashville's proposed budget would provide \$5 million in funding for the long dormant project

George Washington Carver Museum and Cultural Center

Austin, TX
Mission: To celebrate the history of African Americans in Texas
Location: 36,000 square foot facility built in 1999 and operated by the City of Austin Parks Department
Other: Four galleries, conference room, classroom, darkroom, dance studio, 134-seat theater and archives
Admission: Free
www.ci.austin.tx.us/carver

African Americans Museum

Dallas, TX
Mission: Only museum in Southwestern U.S. devoted to preservation of African American art and culture
Location: Massive, domed building in Fair Park
Other: Relies heavily on changing exhibits; library and research center; summer camp
Admission: free
www.aamdallas.org

National Cowboys of Color Museum and Hall of Fame

Ft. Worth, TX
Mission: To provide a true and complete historical perspective of the people and

activities that built the unique culture of the American West

Location: Currently raising \$3 million to renovate a donated "big box" building, the present building is a low-slung, one-story building

www.cowboysofcolor.org

Buffalo Soldiers National Museum

Houston, TX
Mission: To honor the brave men and women of color who courageously fought in every great American war
Admission: \$2 adult
www.buffalosoldiermuseum.com/

United States National Slavery Museum

Fredericksburg, VA
Mission: To vitalize and interpret more completely the human drama and toll of slavery in America
Location: \$200 million, 100,000 square feet building on 38 acres in the 2,100-acre Celebration Virginia development
Other: Library archives, theater, oral histories, papers, rare editions and video; indoor and outdoor exhibits
Admission: Not determined yet
Status: Fundraising under way for the \$100 million that will begin construction; about one-half of the goal has been raised or pledged, but it has been much slower than sponsors expected
www.usnationalslaverymuseum.org

Black History Museum and Cultural Center

Richmond, VA
Mission: To serve as a permanent repository for visual, oral, and written records commemorating the lives and accomplishments of blacks in Virginia
Location: In historic home in Jackson Ward district of Richmond
Admission: \$5 adult
www.blackhistorymuseum.org

The Fight for Funds

There has never been a more competitive time for fundraising for museums, and that is especially the case for those concentrating on African-American themes. While the battle for grants and corporate donations has become more demanding since the National Civil Rights Museum opened its doors, it is even more intense today with massive, new museums in the works.

The realities of the current fundraising environment are demonstrated in the development of the highly-publicized U.S. National Slavery Museum. Even with the active involvement of Bill Cosby, Ben Vereen, and former Virginia Governor Doug Wilder, the \$100 million needed to begin construction has been slow in materializing.

Meanwhile, in Louisville, even after the celebrity-studded opening of the new \$80 million Muhammad Ali Center, organizers are complaining about fundraising difficulties, especially from African-American athletes and celebrities. At this point, even with a relatively modest yearly operating budget of \$3 million, fundraising and attendance will not be enough to cover costs, and that it meets its projections for \$800,000 in retail sales, \$350,000 in corporate sponsorships and space rental, and \$500,000 in memberships.

To complicate the fundraising landscape even more, the Smithsonian Institution is also raising money for its proposed \$500 million, 350,000 square feet Museum of African American History and Culture. In approval of its initial funding, the U.S. Congress suggested that half of the costs for the museum should come from private fundraising.

In other words, never have there been so many people raising money for so many high-profile projects, not to mention the regular fundraising that continues for operating funds for existing museums.

At the same time, budget pressures are increased by trends of declining attendance. Despite impressive national publicity, dramatic architecture, and celebrity spokespersons, the Underground Railroad Freedom Center reported 280,000 visitors during its first year, which is when a new museum normally records its highest attendance.

In hopes of attracting money and visitors, some cities have chosen to a “build it and they will come” approach with prominent buildings designed by “star-architects” and housing cutting edge technology. This decision will create even more stress on the museums that made this decision. For example, the Underground Railroad Freedom Center reports a program services budget of \$6.4 million, almost twice the entire National Civil Rights Museum budget. In its most recent report (2004) to the IRS, the Cincinnati museum reported yearly expenditures of \$15.7 million, including \$6.2 million for fundraising. In its 2004 IRS report, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History in Detroit reported expenditures of \$9.7 million.

The Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco attracting 40,000 visitors in its first six months of operations with an annual budget of \$4-5 million, or put another way, it's spending is \$50-60 to sell its \$8 admission ticket.

While the future is volatile and unpredictable and promises scenarios where some museums face such harsh realities that they close their doors, one thing is unquestionably certain -- the National Civil Rights Museum is now challenged to succeed in the most competitive environment imaginable.

Differentiating the Museum

The word, museum, comes from the Greek *mouseion*, meaning a place of contemplation, and used by the Romans to describe a place of philosophical discussion. It is in returning to the original meaning of the term that the National Civil Rights Museum can distinguish itself from other institutions with similar missions.

African-American museums run the risk of creating a dearth of difference that can lead to lowered consumer interest and to generic experiences. Fortunately, the National Civil Rights Museum has some competitive differences that are crucial to its future - its sense of scale, its emphasis on the personal experience of visitors, and its authenticity as a site where a pivotal event in American history took place.

These are more than positive attributes for the Museum. They are in fact its competitive advantages. As Michael Porter writes, in an era of globalization and mass marketing and the homogenization of culture, it is difference that is the key to economic success.

In this regard, in keeping with the National Civil Rights Museum's emphasis on the personal and the authentic, it has the opportunity to establish a competitive beachhead by expanding its impact through an ambitious program of civic engagement.

In its earliest days, Museum supporters made the wise strategic decision to bestow Freedom Awards to individuals who are leaders in the struggle for human rights. In this way, the Museum has developed a cadre of advocates who are ambassadors for it. These awards give a "face" to the work of the Museum and engage it in the continuing national and international debate about equal rights (as defined in the broadest possible terms).

As competition among museums becomes even stiffer in the years ahead, many will begin to look for ways to emerge from the rest and establish themselves as one of the preeminent African-American museums that demand and deserve to be a national destination. The National Civil Rights Museum can stake out this territory by using the museum as the platform for serious analysis and problem-solving on critical issues.

In establishing itself as the place where the most meaningful exploration of human rights is taking place and where a living historic museum mobilizes its influence to look to a better future, the National Civil Rights Museum can carve out a distinctive position for itself.

At this time, no museum has embarked on this kind of journey. A handful are holding seminars, a few have a speakers series, and some have research facilities and archives for scholars and others to use, but none has taken the kind of bold step that can become the differentiating strategy for it in the marketplace.

Instead, universities and libraries continue to be the places where serious research and study take place, such as University of California Berkeley's African American Studies Department, Yale University's African and African-American Studies, Cornell University's Africana Studies and Research Center, University of Virginia's Carter G. Woodson Institute, Harvard University's W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research, and Columbia University's Institute for Research in African American Studies.

At the same time, there are notable archives and special libraries used by researchers and scholars at Duke University, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the New York Public Library, Howard University, Temple University, Tulane University, and Cornell University.

With these well-established centers, the decision by some museums to pursue programs of on-site research and to develop archives may in the end do nothing to differentiate them in a way that becomes a competitive advantage.

Meanwhile, a few museums, such as the Underground Railroad Freedom Museum, are sponsoring speeches by nationally recognized authorities, but these appear to be "one off" events with no sustained theme or purpose.

All of this indicates that as the National Civil Rights Museum seeks a way to differentiate itself and elevate its national importance, an area with the most potential is through a program directed at sparking a national conversation on issues of importance for a fair and just United States. This could be in the form of a series of speakers who are asked to specifically answer a critical question with definitive recommendations, or in the form of research that is more actionable than academic, or in the form of a conference that convenes the best thinkers on an issue to draft recommendations for cities.

In this way, the National Civil Rights Museum could distinguish itself as the place that does more than talk about issues. It becomes the place that creates the new thinking that produces innovative, transformational recommendations that can create real change. In this role, the Museum positions itself as the place where a new national dialogue is under way, but more to the point, as the place where the dialogue is all about producing recommendations that are actionable for leaders wherever they live.

In this context, there are a number of options to be considered:

- *Think tank.* The Museum can convene the best thinkers in a process that targets a specific issue. At the end of a specified time, the think tank would produce a seminal piece of work to spark national debate.
- *Research.* The Museum can fund major research into human rights issues and present the results in major national forums.
- *Lecture Series.* The Museum can bring in innovative thinkers and proven leaders to speak to topical issues in ways that produce actionable strategies for individuals and communities.

- *Conferences and workshops.* The Museum can assemble experts to engage the leaders of various cities in discussions and problem-solving that leads to specific plans of actions.
- *Scholars-in-residence.* The Museum can designate nationally known leaders as its experts-in-residence each year and charge them in that year to address a specific issue of timely interest.
- *Fellowships.* The Museum could fund fellows who would spend six months in Memphis engaged in research and writing that would be then widely disseminated.

These kinds of initiatives have the ability to spread the word about the core values of the National Civil Rights Museum and its beliefs about the kind of citizens needed to assume responsibility for better communities. In this way, the Museum is established not only a moving place to visit, but a place where the best thinking is being brought to bear on the problems of race and class facing the U.S. and the battle for equal rights around the world.

With speeches, research, actionable strategies, and writing under the aegis of the Museum, it can take full advantage of technology to webcast and podcast discussions and position the Museum as a definitive leader on these civic engagement and human rights questions.

Whatever the Museum does, it must keep in mind the importance of protecting its brand. Whatever it does must be done with high quality and impact, because whatever course it decides up, the Museum must establish itself as the premier organization undertaking the work. In this way, it meets the test of offering a “peak experience” for which consumers are looking and which will divide the winners and losers in the marketplace.

In this regard, it could be beneficial to affiliate a new initiative with an institution that brings instant credibility to it, such as the Clinton Library and Museum, Harvard University’s W.E.B. DuBois Institute, New York Public Library’s Schomburg Center for Research, or Duke University’s John Hope Franklin Collection. Associating with any organization with less than a national reputation does nothing but diminish the National Civil Rights Museum’s existing brand.

Another way to strengthen the brand would be for the theme of each year’s Freedom Awards to also serve as the theme for the year’s focus in its civic engagement work. In this way, the Museum aligns its resources and its energy in a way that produces more awareness and loyalty with supporters. It does this most effectively with a signature initiative that differentiates the National Civil Rights Museum by positioning it as a living place where the lessons of the past infuse plans of action for a better future.

