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“Why We’re Going to Pittsburgh”: ASALH Brings its Conference to the Keystone State with Annual Theme: “African Americans and the Arts”

PITTSBURGH, Penn.— **The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)** is proud to announce its 109th Annual Meeting in Pittsburgh from Sept. 25th to the 29th celebrating the theme **“African Americans in the Arts.”** The conference will feature a rich program of scholarly sessions, professional workshops, historical tours, a film festival, book signings, and many other events that illuminate the importance of the current struggle to own and control our own narrative.

During these uncertain times in which the very nature of the ways in which Black history can be legally taught are in peril, the conference provides an opportunity to explore various aspects of Black life and history from the relative safety of “the North” and allow for discussion of what that means in 2024 in a post-industrial city with a thriving arts scene. We hope that you will join us in Pittsburgh for an exciting conference that will challenge the current opposition to “woke history” and promote the study and learning of the African American experience.

According to ASALH President **W. Marvin Dulaney**, “While we are in Pittsburgh we will work with and promote the local arts community, patronize local African American businesses, and offer teachers and other educators the opportunity for in-service learning on teaching the African American experience...this marks ASALH’s third time meeting in the city in the 21st century. We are returning to Pittsburgh because we are always well supported by the community and conference attendees, and we always enjoy the city and its people.”

ASALH will be kicking things off on Thursday September 26th with a Plenary on **Place, Politics, and the Future of Black Pittsburgh History**. The **National Park Service** is up next on Friday the 27th at 4 pm with a **A Conversation about Black artistic expression in and beyond our National Parks**. The plenary on Saturday, September 28th will be an examination of how the arts have manifested in **Hollywood and Black Histories**.

The conference will begin with a joint program by ASALH with the **Heinz History Center**, Pennsylvania’s largest history museum and a proud affiliate of the **Smithsonian Institution**. The Heinz History Center sponsors a biennial Symposium on **Martin R. Delany**, the nineteenth century Pittsburgh abolitionist and nationalist leader. At the symposium, the **United States Postal Service** will unveil the **2025 Black Heritage stamp**, its tenth stamp in celebration of **Kwanzaa**, the Pan-African holiday that

brings family, community, and culture together for many African Americans over seven days, from December 26th to January 1st, each year. Art director **Ethel Kessler** designed the stamp with original artwork by Boston-based artist **Ekua Holmes**.

Other highlights of the conference will include three luncheon panels. Thursday's luncheon will feature African American education leaders from **Carlow University, the University of Pittsburgh, the Community College of Allegheny County and the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary**. For Friday's Carter G. Woodson Luncheon, Dr. **Kimberly C. Ellis**, August Wilson's maternal niece and Africana Studies Scholar, will present a keynote address on the life and plays of her Uncle, **August Wilson**.

Saturday's **John W. Blassingame Luncheon** will feature a panel moderated by Dr. **Sheila Y. Flemming**, a former president of ASALH. The conference will also feature Black Historical tours of Pittsburgh, a film festival, and the showing of all of the films of August Wilson's plays. The conference will conclude on Saturday evening with its traditional Awards Banquet that will honor individuals such as **Jesse Jackson, Sr., Sonia Sanchez**, former JAAH editor **Pero Dagbovie**, renowned labor scholar **Joe Trotter**, Black women's history scholar **Deborah Gray White**, and other noted individuals in the field of African American History and supporters of ASALH.

The award-winning playwright **August Wilson** wrote ten plays that captured the history and life of African Americans in twentieth century America, many of which featured Pittsburgh in a prominent way. He won all of the honors given to playwrights—Tonys, Drama Desk and Drama Critics awards—for his plays. We will also feature **Charles “Teenie” Harris** who was the photographer for the **Pittsburgh Courier**, one of the nation's oldest African American newspapers. Harris took over 125,000 photographs for the newspaper as well as for the city's African Americans who wanted to document their lives for posterity. ASALH's own **Edna B. McKenzie Branch in Pittsburgh** is named after the first female reporter for the Pittsburgh Courier. At one time the Pittsburgh Courier had one of, if not the largest circulations of any African American newspaper in the country and was known internationally. We will also salute jazz guitarist **George Benson**, another native of Pittsburgh who contributed mightily to its African American arts tradition.

Dulaney continues, “Just as we “ran to the fight” last year in Jacksonville to challenge the Florida legislature's draconian laws against the teaching of Black History, we are going to Pittsburgh to continue the fight and to highlight the current theme of “African American and the Arts” and other relevant issues including, but not limited to academic freedom, the Black Liberation movement, the importance of the vote and political action.”

Registration for in-person attendance is open to all at the following address: <https://asalh.org/conference>.

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