



Media Contacts:

Brady Smith, chief communications officer  
412-454-6459  
[bmsmith@heinzhistorycenter.org](mailto:bmsmith@heinzhistorycenter.org)

Lauryn Nania, communications coordinator  
412-454-6382  
[lnania@heinzhistorycenter.org](mailto:lnania@heinzhistorycenter.org)

**History Center to Honor Black History Month with Special Programs**  
***-Annual Black History Month Lecture to feature renowned historian and author-***

PITTSBURGH, Jan. 19, 2026 – The Smithsonian-affiliated Senator John Heinz History Center interprets and preserves African American history and culture year-round through a variety of events and exhibitions curated by the museum’s African American Program.

In recognition of Black History Month, the African American Program at the Heinz History Center will offer special programs and exhibitions.

**Black History Month Lecture: Deborah Willis**

The 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Black History Month lecture on Friday, Jan. 30, from 6-7:30 p.m. at the History Center, will be led by renowned historian and author Deborah Willis, Ph.D., will explore her groundbreaking book, “Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present.”

In recognition of the 25th anniversary of “Reflections in Black,” Willis will reveal stories about the photographers and artists whose work reshaped how Black life has been seen, and too often overlooked, in mainstream culture. Her scholarship also connects deeply to Pittsburgh’s own photographic legacy, including the nationally significant work of Charles “Teenie” Harris, whose images of Black life in Pittsburgh stand remain among the most celebrated and influential in American photography.

A MacArthur Genius Fellow and Guggenheim Fellow, Willis serves as professor and chair of the Department of Photography & Imaging at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts and directs NYU’s Center for Black Visual Culture/Institute for African American Affairs. Her research explores photography’s multifaceted histories, visual culture, contemporary women photographers, and evolving representations of beauty.

Drawing on her decades of expertise, Willis will explore how photography has captured the depth, creativity, and complexity of the Black experience across generations. A Q&A book signing will follow the presentation.

**From Slavery to Freedom Film Series: “Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America”**

The History Center’s popular **From Slavery to Freedom** Film Series continues on Wednesday, Feb. 18, from 5:30-8 p.m. with a virtual screening of, “Who We Are: A Chronicle of Racism in America.” The film explores a stark timeline of anti-Black racism in the United States, from slavery to the modern myth of post-facial America by interweaving lecture, anecdotes, interviews, and shocking revelations. The virtual screening is free with advance registration.

Visit [heinzhistorycenter.org/events](https://heinzhistorycenter.org/events) to register for Black History Month programs.

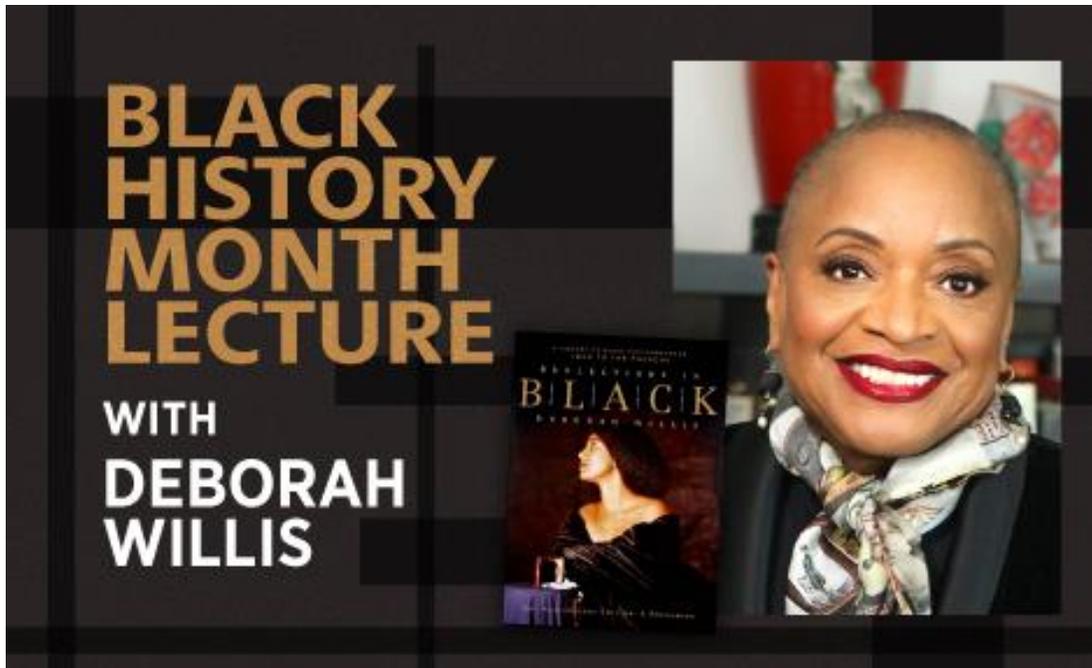
**Long-Term Exhibits Highlight Black Heritage in Western Pa.**

In addition to Black History Month programming, African American history is on display daily within the History Center’s six floors of exhibitions, including the award-winning **From Slavery to Freedom** exhibition, which explores more than 250 years of African American history in Western Pa. The long-term exhibit highlights the enslavement of Africans and its effect on the American economy, the history of the anti-slavery movement, the Underground Railroad, and the impact of 19th-century activism on the modern quest for civil and human rights in Pittsburgh.

The **Pittsburgh: A Tradition of Innovation** exhibition honors several African Americans who made trailblazing breakthroughs, including Dr. Velma Scantlebury, the nation’s first African American woman transplant surgeon and student of UPMC’s late Dr. Thomas Starzl.

**MEDIA NOTE:** Samuel W Black, the History Center’s director of African American programs, is available for interviews to discuss these exhibits, events, and the importance of preserving Black history in Western Pa.

The **Senator John Heinz History Center**, an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution and the largest history museum in Pennsylvania, presents American history with a Western Pennsylvania connection. The History Center was voted as the #1 history museum in America by readers of USA TODAY (2024, 2025) and “Pittsburgh’s Best Museum” by Pittsburgh Magazine (2022, 2023, 2024). The History Center and Sports Museum are located at 1212 Smallman Street in Pittsburgh’s Strip District. The History Center’s family of museums includes the Sports Museum; Fort Pitt Museum in historic Point State Park; and Meadowcroft Rockshelter and Historic Village, a National Historic Landmark located in Avella, Pa., in Washington County. The History Center and Fort Pitt Museum are always free for kids, supported by the Kamin “Free for Kids” Initiative. More information is available at [heinzhistorycenter.org](https://heinzhistorycenter.org).



The History Center's African American Program will host its annual Black History Month Lecture on Friday, Jan. 30, at 6 p.m., featuring historian and author Deborah Willis, Ph.D., who will discuss her book, "Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present."

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