



Photo courtesy of America I AM: The African American Imprint

Rosa Parks, affectionately known as "the mother of the civil rights movement," is seen being fingerprinted in this photograph depicting her history-making arrest in Montgomery, Ala., for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger. Framed along with her fingerprint card, this is one of hundreds of pieces featured in "America I AM: The African American Imprint" now on display at the California Science Center.

From struggle to triumph — 'America, I AM' exhibit opens

Touring multi-media exhibit chronicling 500-year journey of African Americans launches at L.A.'s California Science Center

From staff reports

LOS ANGELES—A touring exhibition that celebrates nearly 500 years of African-American contributions to the United States has launched in Los Angeles.

The showing at the California Science Center began last Friday and runs through April 10. This is the third stop on the exhibition's 10-city, four-year tour following Philadelphia's National Constitution Center and the Atlanta Civic Center.

"America I AM: The African American Imprint" is a nearly 13,000 square-foot presentation of pivotal moments in courage, conviction and creativity that celebrate the undeniable imprint of African Americans on our nation and around the world. Through more than 200 rare historic objects, documents, photos and multimedia, visitors can explore how African Americans have contributed to and shaped American culture across four core areas: economic, socio-political, cultural and spiritual. The exhibition relates important events and people from the beginnings of the nation up through the present-day inauguration of the first African-American president.

Exhibition organizers worked with some of the most notable scholars in

the field to develop America I AM, one of the broadest exhibits on this subject ever mounted.

"We are pleased to host this exhibition, together with 'RACE: Are We So Different?' and related programming with the California African American Museum," said Jeffrey Rudolph, president of the California Science Center, in a prepared statement. "The two exhibitions are complementary; America I AM highlights the contributions of African Americans and opens a dialogue about our collective experience and the RACE exhibit encourages guests to explore the science and everyday impact of race and racism."

The exhibit is developed in partnership with Tavis Smiley, and is organized by Cincinnati Museum Center and Arts and Exhibitions International (AEI), a division of AEG Live. AEI also organized the King Tut exhibition that drew nearly 1 million visitors to LACMA in 2005.

"America I AM: The African American Imprint encourages all people to connect in a meaningful way with the foundations of democracy, cultural diversity, exploration and free enterprise, which began when the first Africans arrived in Jamestown," Smiley said in a prepared statement. "By telling the stories of the events of the past, we can help the leaders of the future set the

stage for active participation in the democratic process for years to come."

Through 12 galleries, the exhibit conveys a journey from struggle to triumph to celebration. Visitors will walk past the "Door of No Return" and view personal artifacts and innovations from African-American artists, activists and inventors. An interactive area allows visitors to leave their own video "imprints," a collection that will grow throughout the tour with the potential to become the largest recorded oral history project in U.S. history.

Notable artifacts include the doors to the Cape Coast Castle in Ghana, author Alex Haley's typewriter used to write "Roots" and the personal effects of Malcolm X. The exhibit also encompasses an educational component developed by noted educators, which responds, in part, to a question asked by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1903: "Would America have been America without her Negro people?"

The county board of supervisors last week proclaimed the exhibit's opening day, Oct. 30, as "America I AM Day" in Los Angeles County.

Tickets and information are available at www.californiasciencecenter.org or by calling 213-744-2019. The Web site features a teacher's guide including lesson plans, supplemental activities and an extensive bibliography.