

# An American Trauma: International African American Museum [C1]

A Charleston, nella Carolina del Sud, è sorta una potente testimonianza della resilienza e dell'eredità degli afroamericani: The International African American Museum è uno struggente promemoria dello straziante viaggio affrontato da innumerevoli individui dall'Africa occidentale agli Stati Uniti. Approfondiamo il tema con la curatrice d'arte del museo.



---

The International African American Museum (IAAM) in Charleston, South Carolina opened in 2023 after a twenty-year campaign [to raise](#) the \$100 million to build it. The museum stands on Gadsden's Wharf, where an estimated 45 per cent of enslaved Africans entered the US after a journey from West Africa to America, across the so-called Middle Passage. On [on arrival](#), women, men and children were [shackled](#) in a [storehouse](#) until they were sold in the city markets. Martina Morale is the director of curatorial and special exhibitions at the IAAM. We began by asking her how you begin to address the [sheer](#) scale of cruelty and suffering. As she explained, the location of the museum is considered a sacred site because so many human beings were tortured and died there. **Martina Morale** (American accent): Our building is actually physically [lifted](#) up on eighteen

pillars so as not to disturb the sacred site, which is an African Ancestors Memorial Garden. Our garden represents the honouring of our ancestors. So we have a granite wall, for example, that has verses from the Still I Rise poem by Maya Angelou... You can see in the ground the brick [outline](#) of where the [storehouse](#) once stood.

## THINK AND REFLECT

We then asked Morale how the museum is internally organised. As she explained, the space as well as its content offer opportunities for reflection.

**Martina Morale:** Our museum space is on the second floor. So you'll ascend the staircase. And when you enter the museum in the lobby, you'll first be greeted by an eight-screen installation that is actually just pictures and moving images of the African diasporas. You'll see everything from athletes to celebrations, carnival, Mardi Gras... But you'll also see, of course, the somber moments of the Middle Passage. And then you'll have time to think and reflect about being in the space before you enter our nine galleries. We have several exhibitions within those galleries. We start in West and West Central Africa and move through the low country of South Carolina and Georgia and through the United States history as a whole through the lens of the African diaspora.

## LOST FAMILIES

According to a [survey](#), around a third of Americans do not know their family history beyond their grandparents. This is particularly true among Black Americans. The Center for Family History hopes to change all that, says Morale. **Martina Morale:** Our Center for Family History is a space where you can get [tips](#) on how to research genealogy and how to trace your own roots through various tools and activities we have available for the public. It's estimated that about [five out of ten](#) African-Americans can trace at least one ancestor to the port in South Carolina.

## CRITICAL TIMES

And, she says, while the museum arrived late, it is also a little miracle.

**Martina Morale:** Opening a museum is a feat in itself, right? So to be able to kind of live and experience it is amazing. But it also comes at an important time where we're talking about African American history and the contributions of African descendant people across the world. And so we're happy to be in that space.

## THE TRUTH

And in these critical times it's important that the true story be told, despite some Americans' resistance to it. Martina Morale: You get the good and the bad. As a person who's always taught African-American history and been in the museum space, you understand that you're going to get the good with the bad. So we try to kind of tune that out and just make sure, again, that we're thinking about safety first. And as long as it's not a direct threat, I think that we're going to keep doing our work and encourage others to continue to do their work as well. [www.iaamuseum.org](http://www.iaamuseum.org)

---

# Glossary

- **storehouse** = magazzino
- **lifted** = elevare
- **on arrival** = all'arrivo
- **feat** = traguardo
- **despite** = malgrado
- **five out of ten** = cinque su dieci
- **to raise** = raccogliere
- **sheer** = puro e semplice
- **outline** = contorno
- **tune that out** = ignorare
- **threat** = minaccia
- **shackled** = incatenare
- **survey** = sondaggio
- **tips** = consigli