

## Discover The Motherland In Chicago

### [African Festival Of The Arts](#)



Have you ever been somewhere or seen something that you weren't looking for, but it turned out to be the best thing yet? Well, Labor Day Weekend in Chicago turned out to be one of those times. Here I was just going along for the ride to see some long lost family members and maybe check out a good party or two, only to discover a really wonderful event. I had never heard about the African Festival Of The Arts, or even knew such a thing existed in the US. But what's more shocking is that it's been going on for 17 years! I guess this journey I've been on to discover new things, especially new events, is beginning to really pay off.

If you haven't been following this blog, this is what happened. I was hanging out with my niece and nephews on Saturday, over the Labor Day weekend in Chicago, when the news came on and they did a story about the [African Festival Of Arts](#) going on that weekend. I quickly jumped on their website to get directions and more info about the event. I couldn't believe it; I had stumbled across something I had never seen before in the US, an African festival promoting arts, music, and the culture of the motherland. I couldn't wait to see what it was all about.

My traveling companion was Kenyan, so he was down when I told him about what I had found. We made plans to check it out on Sunday, September 3rd. It had been going on since Friday and we had missed performances from Kool Moe Dee and Guru at their new Hip Hop stage. I was devastated, but upbeat about checking out some local hip-hop artists, some world-renowned African artists, and George Clinton and the Funkadelics on Sunday. When we pulled up at Washington Park, the site of this year's event, I knew we were in for something special. There were no parking spaces anywhere close, and I could see tons of folks making their way to the park. After finally locating a spot, as well as a good brisk walk across the park, we were finally there. There was \$10 per person admission fee and we got a guide to all the stages, vendors, and schedules for the weekend. I walked in and discovered the sights, sounds, goods, and art of the motherland was on display in the heart of a major metropolitan American city.



I discovered new African art, sculptures, clothes, jewelry, music, food, scents, etc. Talk about being a kid in a candy store, I didn't know where to start. But what was really cool and different about this festival was it was all-inclusive. There were more African-Americans than Africans and that was nice to see. There have been many conflicts between brothers and sisters from Africa and their long lost brothers and sisters here. Here was an example of everyone getting together to learn about Africa and the very different cultures that make up the continent. I also liked the lineup of very different artists showcasing African American sounds, Hispanic music, and Africa. When you think about it, that's where it all started from anyway and it was nice to see Tito Puente Jr. talk about the collaborations his father was doing and where the music had come from. The slave trade had brought with it new music, food, and culture from the motherland that has been incorporated into the cultures of every region where they landed.

I also discovered some very talented brothers on the hip hop stage. Primeridian brought some true Chicago hip-hop to my virgin ears, with some positive vibes and wicked beats. The consciousness they evoked about the war in Iraq to the state of affairs of black people everywhere made me an instant fan. After their set, we did some shopping and walked around for hours taking it all in. We bought some beers and awaited the main attractions on the world stage and main stage. Zimbabwe's Thomas Mapfumo was definitely entertaining and a treat, but George Clinton with the Funkadelics were the stars of the night. Thousands gathered to the call of the funk at the main stage and everyone grooved to the strange sights and wonderful music that have come to highlight their shows throughout the years.



As our evening came to an end, I was a little sad that we would miss all the artists and performers at the grand finale on Monday, Labor Day. Dizzy Gillespie All Star Band, Tony, Toni, Tone, Little Brother, and so many more would be performing. This festival had found a way to bring people together through music, art, and culture like I've never seen before in the US. With the misunderstandings and conflicts arising in my own Minnesota from the influx of immigrants from Africa and South America, a festival like this is desperately needed. We need something to bridge some of the cultural barriers, languages, and different worldviews that come with the influx of diverse peoples into a homogeneous area. Could this be happening in my city next year? There are rumors, and rumors of rumors. I hope some of the rumors are true, because with an estimated 100,000+ Africans in the Twin Cities, it's about time. Not to mention the many more Hispanics and African Americans that call Minnesota home also. Not since Cedarfest has there been a festival that brings all Minnesotans together to learn, experience, and enjoy all that make us who we are. Another one is long overdue, now is the time.

### **History & Stats Of The African Festival Of The Arts**

**Africa International House (AIH) presents to Chicago audiences a multi-cultural art experience found nowhere else. Through the annual African Festival of the Arts, over 250,000 people come to Washington Park on the south side of Chicago to engage artists and other preservers of culture from all over the African Diaspora, including local, national and international performing artists, fine artists, fashion designers, galleries and art dealers, food sellers and many other cultural programs under specialized pavilions. The audience of the annual African Festival of the Arts is composed of the following ethnicities: African (6.96%), African-American (66.91%), Caribbean (2.64%), Hispanic/Latino (4.55%), Asian/Pacific Islands (2.52%), Multi-Racial (1.45%), and White/Caucasian (14.97%). In terms of**

**where the audience comes from, the following is a general breakdown: Chicago (56.85%), Chicago Suburbs (18.95%), Other States outside of Illinois (17.30%) and outside of the USA (6.90%).**

[Click here](#) for more info on this event and Africa International House

Sincerely,

NATHAN S. WHITE

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