

Actress Issa Rae at Destination Crenshaw groundbreaking: 'We're not going anywhere'

The outdoor museum will celebrate black history and culture along Metro's new rail line

By [Jessica Flores](#) | [@jesssmflores](#) | Mar 2, 2020, 9:40am PST | [15 comments](#)



Hundreds gathered Saturday to celebrate the start of construction. | Courtesy of Destination Crenshaw

The centerpiece of Sankofa Park—one of the gathering places that will be built alongside a new train line through South LA—will be an elevated structure and viewing platform

that will allow visitors to look north to the world-famous [Hollywood Sign](#) and south along [Crenshaw Boulevard](#), the historic main street of black Los Angeles.

The park will be built at the intersection of Leimert and Crenshaw boulevards, and it's where hundreds gathered Saturday to celebrate the start of construction for [Destination Crenshaw](#), a 1.3-mile open-air museum that will feature trees, small parks, and public art celebrating black history and culture.

“This notion of a forward and backward is what the design was based on,” said Zena Howard, Destination Crenshaw’s lead architect and art curator.

[Sankofa](#) is a Ghanian word that means “go back to the past and bring forward that which is useful.” The Sankofa bird is depicted with its head turned back carrying an egg in its mouth while its feet are faced forward.

Designed by [Perkins + Will](#), the firm that co-designed the [award-winning Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture](#) in Washington D.C., the \$100 million project will run along Crenshaw Boulevard, between 48th and 60th street. Nearly 1,000 trees and more than 30,000-square-feet of landscaping will be planted.

On Saturday, local vendors and organizations lined up along Leimert Boulevard selling t-shirts, jewelry, and art. Food trucks dished out free samples of fried catfish, veggie rolls, and beignets. The Southwest Carpenters’ African American Task Force staged a mini boot camp to teach community members about their trade and enlist local workers for Destination Crenshaw.

The project will contain 10 community gathering spaces organized in four principal themes—“improvisation,” “firsts,” “dream,” and “togetherness”—and will feature work by black artists.

“Destination Crenshaw is the result of this community’s demands to be given adequate resources to enrich our neighborhoods and fight back against those who seek to push us out of our homes,” community activist and urban gardener [Ron Finley](#) said in a statement.



A rendering of Sankofa Park. | Courtesy of Destination Crenshaw

Destination Crenshaw originated out of fear that Metro’s soon-to-open [Crenshaw Line](#) would harm businesses along the Crenshaw corridor. The train will travel through parts of South LA and the South Bay and is scheduled to open this year.

“Streets are being torn up, the rails have cut off the streets, and it has cut the community in half,” Assata Umoja, president of the [Hyde Park Organizational Partnership for Empowerment](#), said in September while speaking at a [panel on gentrification](#). “The construction has been awful. You used to be able to cross the street to go to the bank, post office and copy center. Now you have to walk to the end of the street just to cross the boulevard.”

Raven Lawson grew up in South LA and said this project is “really important... especially because a lot of the [area is being gentrified](#), and a lot of the history and culture that I grew up is slowly disappearing.”

“I think it’s important that we work on ways to preserve that,” she said.

But Lawson, 19, does fear that beautifying the neighborhood could further drive up [housing costs](#) and propel demographic changes in the area.

“When things start looking nicer, that’s when more people want to move, and it’s kind of an unwanted consequence... that could raise prices,” she said.

Actress Issa Rae was one of many guests who attended the ceremony. As a native and entrepreneur who owns businesses in South LA, Rae said this project is special to her.

“This project is for us by us, so please take ownership of it,” she said to the crowd. “Make your voices heard. This land is our land, and we’re not going anywhere. We are here to stay.”