

Brooklyn's International African Arts Festival 2025 in Danger After Eviction From Commodore Barry Park

NYC Parks Department Says No Other Location Available After Infrastructure Repairs Forced the 54 Year Old Festival Out of Commodore Barry Park.

BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, NY, UNITED STATES, February 3, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Brooklyn's [International African Arts Festival](#), a perennial Fourth of July destination for thousands of New Yorkers and lovers of African culture from around the globe for more than five decades, needs a new home.



International African Arts Festival 2024 Crowd. Photo by Solwazi Afi Olusola

Going into its 54th year, the International African Arts Festival (IAAF), one of the oldest multi-day Pan African cultural celebrations in the country, has been kicked out of Commodore Barry Park in Brooklyn, NY for 2025 due to pending renovations to the park's infrastructure – and the city Parks Department says there is no other available park space in the borough organizers can use.

“

They tell us we're too big. We tell them we're scaling down. So why can't they find a place for us?"

International African Arts Festival Chairman Segun Sabaka

The free festival featuring hundreds of vendors, artisans from around the world and live bands has been held in Commodore Barry Park, on North Elliott Place near the Brooklyn Navy Yard, since 2002.

Festival Board Chairman and event organizer Segun (Shaygoon) Shabaka said Brooklyn Parks Commissioner Martin

“Marty” Maher’s office told him that “major renovations” were underway at Commodore Barry Park that would make it unavailable to host the event, which usually runs from four to five days around the July 4 week.

Parks officials also said there was no other Brooklyn park space available to host the festival during that time, Shabaka said.

“They tell us we’re too big,” Shabaka said. “We tell them we’re scaling down, we’re not doing four or five days, only two or three. So why can’t they find a place for us?”

The NYC Parks Department did not respond to requests for comment.

There are at least 60 public parks in Brooklyn, according to the city Parks Department website.

The festival began in 1971 as the African Street Carnival. It was created by The East, an Afro-centric Bedford Stuyvesant community organization, and was held in front of the group’s Claver Place headquarters for years before outgrowing the space and moving to Boys & Girls High School’s athletic field, where it remained for 25 years before moving to Commodore Barry Park.

The festival is run by a board of directors and small staff but relies heavily on seasonal workers and volunteers. Shabaka said the community spirit of the free (donations are encouraged at admission) event is such that “we’ve never had a security issue.”

Superstar musicians Lauren Hill, India Arie, The Mighty Sparrow, Blue Magic and Fela Anikulapo-Kuti are among the entertainers who have graced the festival stage.



Performer Works the Crowd at 2024 International African Arts Festival 2024. Photo by Solwazi Afi Olusola



A face painted smile at the 2024 International African Arts Festival. Perfromer Works the Crowd at 2024 International African Arts Festival 2024. Photo by Solwazi Afi Olusola

Shabaka said 2025 is a critical year for the festival as it continues to recover from the pandemic. The average 300 vendors on site each year before Covid numbered under 200 in 2024.

Longtime festival vendor Brenda Brunson-Bey, owner of Tribal Truths Collection, which designs African-themes clothing and accessories said the festival “brings us together as a people. It’s one of the biggest street festivals in the country, where African American, Caribbean and African people can celebrate our culture together.

“The festival gives us a picture of ourselves, who we are, and where we came from.”

A former buyer for Abraham & Straus department store, Brunson-Bey said the Festival’s current difficulties reflect gentrification of the surrounding Fort Greene neighborhood that has seen African American themed events eliminated from Fort Greene Park and BAM’s once sprawling Dance Africa annual event now shrunk to several blocks.

“This is a way to wipe out the culture of the people who live here,” Brunson-Bey said. “We pay taxes like everybody else.

“The city needs to find space for us.”

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