

Museum Without Walls Civil Rights Trip History, Justice and Freedom

The trip that we took was organized by Museum Without Walls, a tour company “dedicated to eye witness programs for extraordinary movements and moments in history striving to make history more alive through personal stories”. The trip participants were from several Washington UCC churches, primarily Plymouth and Mercer Island and included clergy and congregants.

Our time (from March 6-14) was spent primarily in Montgomery and Selma, Alabama with one day in Atlanta. The timing centered around the Selma Jubilee honoring the anniversary of Bloody Sunday. Here is a brief history of the significance of Bloody Sunday from the Museum without Walls material.

Bloody Sunday occurred on March 7, 1965, when 525 African-American demonstrators crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, demanding their right to vote. They were violently confronted by more than 50 state troopers, horses, and posse men, who brutally attacked them when they refused to turn back. This shocking event was broadcast nationwide, revealing the grim reality of racism in the South. Two weeks later, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. led 3,200 civil rights activists on a historic 49-mile march from Selma to Montgomery, which helped spur the passage of the Voting Rights Act.

We attended worship service at the historic Tabernacle Baptist Church in Selma and were fortunate to hear guest speakers and preachers such as Terri Sewell (US Congresswoman Alabama), Hakeem Jefferies, (Minority Leader of the U.S House of Representatives), and Rev Al Sharpton. The sermon was delivered by Senator Raphael Warnock. During and after the march over the Edmund Pettis bridge, we had the opportunity to meet foot soldiers, people who were on the frontlines on Bloody Sunday and hear their stories.

In Montgomery, we visited the very places where so much of the fight for equality unfolded. Some of the highlights were:

- Holt Baptist Church where the Montgomery bus boycott was launched and where a young Dr. King began his journey as a national leader.
- Rosa Parks apartment and the Rosa Park Museum

- Freedom Riders museum honoring individuals who challenged segregation on interstate buses often facing arrest and horrific violence.

We also visited the three Legacy sites, created by Bryan Stevenson the founder of the Equal Justice Initiative and author of “Just Mercy”. The purpose of these sites is to tell the story of slavery in the US and its legacy which shows up in numerous ways in American society, especially the justice system. The three sites are

- The Legacy Museum: The Legacy Museum tells the story of slavery in America and its legacy through interactive media, first-person narratives, world-class art, and data-rich exhibits. <https://legacysites.eji.org/about/museum/>
- The National Memorial for Peace and Justice: The National Memorial is a sacred space for truth telling and reflection about racial terrorism and its legacy and is dedicated to the Black Americans who were enslaved, terrorized by lynching, humiliated by racial segregation, and presumed guilty and dangerous. <https://legacysites.eji.org/about/memorial/>
- Freedom Monument Sculpture Park: Freedom Monument Sculpture Park honors the lives and memories of the 10 million Black people who were enslaved in America and celebrates their courage and resilience. At the heart of this 17-acre site rises the National Monument to Freedom, which honors four million formerly enslaved Black people who won freedom after the Civil War. <https://legacysites.eji.org/about/monument/>

Lastly, we visited with a senior staff attorney from the Equal Justice Initiative to hear about their work providing legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons.