

Montgomery Reflections

I signed up for the Montgomery pilgrimage in March thinking that the trip would enhance my knowledge and recent studies of race, poverty and injustice. But this experience taught me things I did not know and opened my eyes in more ways than I ever imagined!

The Legacy Museum portrayed stories of enslaved individuals dehumanized and families ripped apart – and showed how these injustices have morphed since emancipation into convict leasing, Jim Crow laws, and today's mass incarceration, which has a shocking bias against people of color. At the beautiful and poignant National Memorial for Peace and Justice, I stood in judgement as I faced the hanging "coffins" inscribed with the names of thousands who died at the hands of lynch mobs who practiced domestic terrorism. One of my fellow travelers shared, "we have worked so hard to cover our own eyes so we don't really see". I wondered what I was shielding my eyes from even *today* – and the prayer to forgive me those things I had done, and those things I had left *undone* pounded in my ears.

The Civil Rights memorial told the stories of many who died unjustly as they merely tried to live within the laws of a democracy that did not protect them. Walking through Selma, I heard the voice of 14-year old Joanne (now a weary, but still fierce 68 year-old woman) who participated in Bloody Sunday, turnaround Tuesday and the courageous 50-mile march to Montgomery. Why did a young girl take such risks? She simply wanted the "freedom" to spin on a drugstore stool and eat an ice-cream cone like the other little (white) girls in town.

It was welcome respite to meet Wanda at the Dexter Avenue Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery, where Dr. King served as pastor. Her message of forgiveness, love and hope – despite all that people who looked like her had experienced while people who looked like me "went along just to get along" – both soothed and challenged my soul.

I have never considered myself an activist. Not like the brave men, women and children we learned about who marched from Selma, joined the Freedom Riders or supported the bus boycott with Rosa Parks. But it dawned on me during this trip that *I need to get active*. I don't know what I am going to do. But I'm going to do something, because I have the privilege and power to make a difference. And when Joanne hugged me as I left Selma, I told her that I would.