

ecumenical civil rights

PILGRIMAGE

selma and montgomery, alabama


*The National Memorial
for Peace and Justice in
Montgomery, Alabama*

New Castle Presbytery
Episcopal Church in Delaware
September 21 – September 26, 2024



...UNTIL JUSTICE ROLLS DOWN LIKE WATERS
AND RIGHTEOUSNESS LIKE A MIGHTY STREAM

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR



*I care so deeply about these issues
– racial justice, civil rights, human
rights – and learning more about
the civil rights movement that made
it possible for us to live with the
freedoms we have now. – Jill*

Ecumenical Civil Rights Pilgrimage

September 21 – September 26, 2024

Episcopal Church in Delaware

New Castle Presbytery

Forward

The idea of a pilgrimage to Montgomery and Selma, Alabama, developed in 2021 after reading an article about Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice. At the time, I was serving as co-chair of the newly created Racial Justice and Reconciliation Commission (RJRC) in the Episcopal Church in Delaware. I shared my idea with my co-chair, the Rev. Chuck Weiss and Bishop Kevin S. Brown. They both supported the idea and encouraged me to pursue a pilgrimage. After some discernment, I felt the need to approach this from an ecumenical perspective.

After consulting with Sue Linderman, chair of the Peace and Justice Work Force, Westminster Presbyterian Church, she directed me to the Rev. Shannon Hanson, who oversees the Montgomery Fund for the New Castle Presbytery. Shannon and I met in June of 2023 and discussed the idea of an Ecumenical Civil Rights Pilgrimage. We both believe that in spite of our churches' history of complicity and outright support for slavery, Jim Crow, and systemic oppression, with commitment and hard work, they can become catalysts for racial awakening, healing, reconciliation, and justice in both church and community.

Together we identified and invited individuals to join us in this holy endeavor as members of the organizing committee. For one year, the organizing committee met and planned the pilgrimage. Our goal was to invite members from both churches and the community who were committed to learning about and/or are already engaged in racial justice work. We wanted individuals who would walk this journey together as pilgrims and provide support and encouragement when this holy work becomes difficult. We also wanted individuals who would witness the hallowed grounds of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Movements in community and would commit to take an active stand to advance the work of racial justice.

Organizing committee members were Dr. Sheridan Quarless Kingsberry, the Rev. Shannon Hanson, the Rev. Dr. Tracy Keenan, the Rev. Terry Dougherty, Sue Linderman, and Lori Yadin.

Funds to support the pilgrimage came from the Montgomery Fund of the New Castle Presbytery, the Jessie Ball duPont Fund, the Episcopal Church in Delaware and its Racial Justice and Reconciliation Commission, and from individual pilgrims.

We thank Cynde Bimbi, director of communications and public relations for the Episcopal Church in Delaware, for accepting our invitation to join us on this pilgrimage, both as a fellow pilgrim and as its documentarian. Through photos, stories, and videography — shared across digital and print media — she has superbly captured our deeply moving experiences as we traversed the hallowed grounds of a painful history.

— *Dr. Sheridan Quarless Kingsberry*



Cheryl stands beside a water fountain labeled “colored” at the National Voting Rights Museum & Institute in Selma

Contents

- 6 | Go Back and Get It: Putting all the Pieces Together
- 22 | Pilgrim reflections
- 24 | Photos of pilgrims
- 28 | A pilgrim’s poem

The following is a glimpse into the transformative journey of 30 pilgrims from Delaware and nearby regions as they set out on a civil rights pilgrimage through Selma and Montgomery, Alabama. Beginning on September 21, 2024, this meaningful experience was organized by the Episcopal Church in Delaware in partnership with the New Castle Presbytery.

On the cover

At the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, a pilgrim painfully reads a marker detailing the terror lynchings from 1877 to 1950, memorialized at this site.



Photo credits, unless otherwise indicated: Cynde A. Bimbi

Booklet published October 2024 by the Episcopal Church in Delaware

by Cynde A. Bimbi

Go Back and Get It:

Putting all the pieces together



Jordan reflects on a wall of photographs, honoring the Black individuals who were imprisoned during the Montgomery Bus Boycott

Cecilia stands in a reconstructed cell for Black individuals in the National Voting Rights Museum & Institute in Selma



Understanding history is a key to understanding ourselves, a belief deeply rooted in the West African concept of Sankofa, which means “to go back and get it.” The Akan People of West Africa believe that the past illuminates the present. This idea guided our group of 30 pilgrims, as we were encouraged to set aside our expectations as we stepped into the living history of Montgomery and Selma. Though we had studied the horrors of slavery, racism, and the cruelty that plagued these places, seeing the past through our own eyes reshaped our understanding in ways that would forever be imprinted on our souls.

This pilgrimage was not only a journey through historical atrocities but also a reflection on the biblical motif of merism, as Chaplain Terry Dougherty shared during a morning meditation. Merism calls us to see creation as God does — through a lens of pure love, inclusion, and diversity. “Separating or excluding any part of God’s creation,” Terry reminded the pilgrims, “is a denial of its inherent beauty and purpose.” As we moved through the landmarks of the Civil Rights Movement, we were invited to hold in our hearts, with love and reverence, the individuals who stood courageously on the merism of civil rights — an inclusion intended by God. This sacred

continued on next page

continued from page 7

journey would not only revisit history but also honor the full spectrum of human dignity, rooted in divine love.

Mornings started early, with breakfast at 7:00 a.m., followed by morning prayers, songs, and meditations. Each day, we boarded the bus to visit multiple destinations. Evenings concluded with a reception and dinner, followed by group reflections and smaller, more intimate discussions in Circle of Trust groups.



Note: The pilgrimage did not follow the chronological order of historical events, as the itinerary was shaped by museum hours and the availability of guides.

Day 1

We stood in the footsteps of history, witnessing firsthand the places where resilience and courage shaped the civil rights movement. From the powerful legacy of the Montgomery bus boycott to stories of defiance against segregation, the day was rich with significance.

A local historian and guide, Wanda, joined us on the bus for a private tour of Montgomery's historic African American community. Her deep knowledge and warm presence quickly endeared her to the group, and by day's end, she had become an integral part of our journey.

Our first stop was the Holt Street Baptist

Church Museum, where we learned about the history of the Montgomery Bus Boycott. While the movement's roots stretched back before Rosa Parks' arrest, it was her defiant stand on December 1, 1955, that ignited a 13-month protest. The boycott culminated in a U.S. Supreme Court ruling declaring segregation on public buses unconstitutional.

We then visited the parsonage where Martin Luther King, Jr. lived for several years, known as the Minister's House. Just a few doors away stood the Harris House, where Dr. Richard Harris Jr. and his wife provided refuge to 33 students from Nashville, Tennessee. These students, known as the Freedom Riders, were testing interstate bus segregation laws. They were met with brutal violence upon their

continued on page 10

**Oh Freedom, Oh Freedom
Oh Freedom Over Me.
And Before I'll be a Slave,
I'll be Buried in my Grave.
And go Home to my Lord,
and be Free.**





Clockwise from top left: Alabama State Capitol; Civil Rights Memorial; Terry and Beverly read the plaque at Rosa Parks' former residence; Martha stands at the Minister's House, once home to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.;

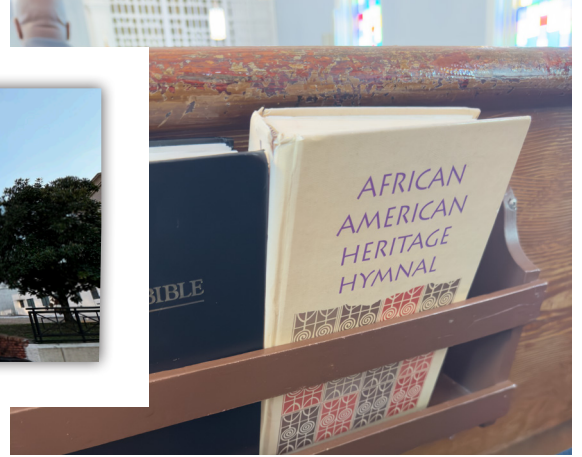
arrival at Montgomery's Greyhound Bus station, and the Harris House served as both a safe haven and a strategic gathering place.

We also viewed Rosa Parks' home, and ended the day at the Civil Rights Memorial. This serene granite circle, reminiscent of a sundial, is etched with the names of 40 individuals (some accounts say 41) who were killed between 1954 and 1968 while fighting for equality. A thin layer of water flows over the timeline, a quiet yet powerful reminder of the sacrifices made for justice.

During our tour we drove by the Alabama

State Capitol and the historic Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, where Martin Luther King, Jr. served as pastor. The Capitol, once a symbol of segregation, now stands as a reminder of the long struggle for equality. Meanwhile, the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, just steps away, played a central role in the civil rights movement, with King leading from its pulpit. These landmarks added another layer of depth to our understanding of Montgomery's place in civil rights history, emphasizing both the political and spiritual foundations of the fight for justice.

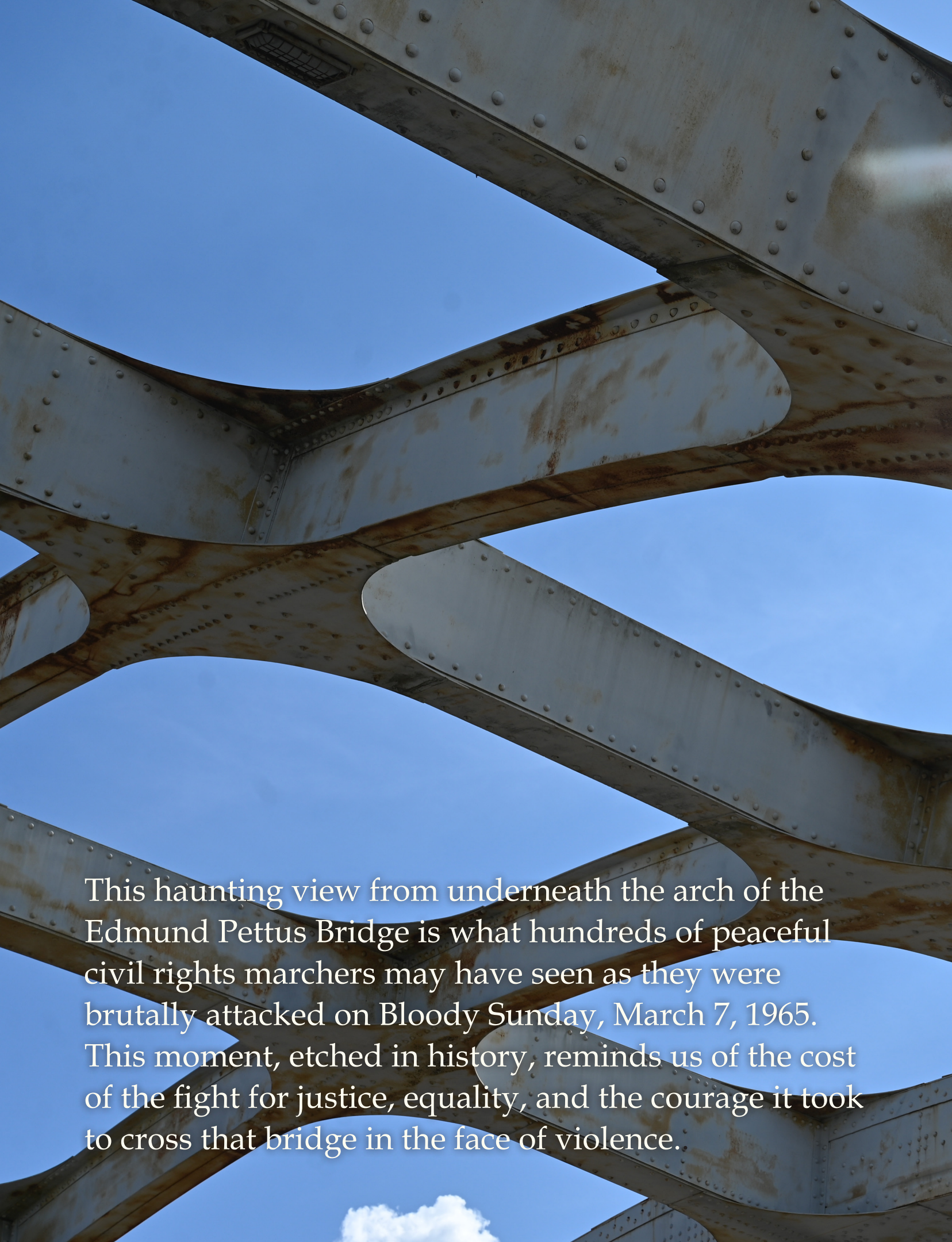
Sunday
Morning
in
Montgomery



*Left to right:
Sheridan attends
Sunday service at
Dexter Avenue
Baptist Church;
church front from
Dexter Avenue;
hymnal and Bible in
pew at the church*

The first day was a time of remembering the past, facing the realities of the present, and moving forward together in the pursuit of justice. This journey was more than just a trip; it was a call to reflect, to act, and to carry forward the legacy of those who fought tirelessly for freedom.

continued on page 15

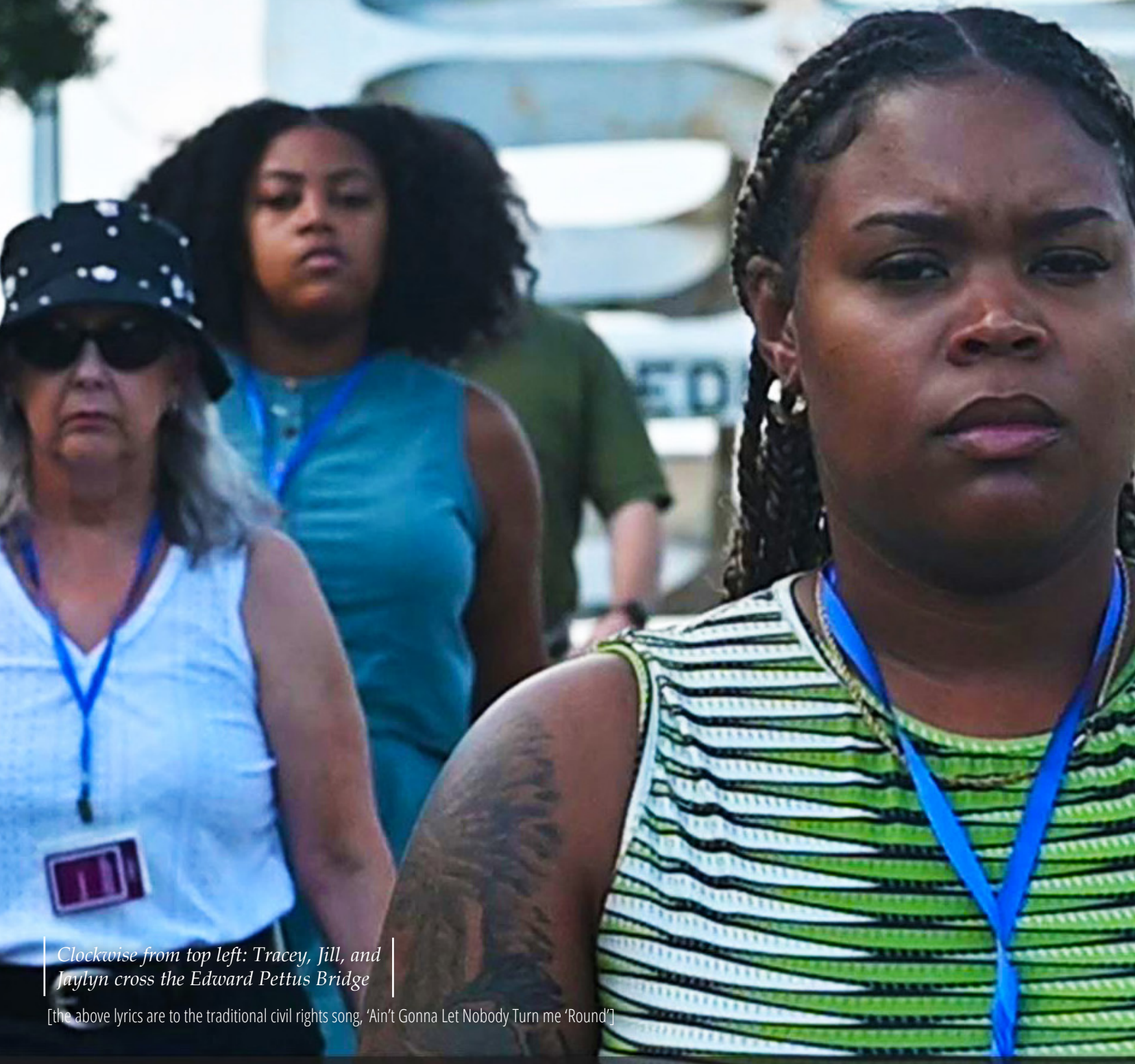


This haunting view from underneath the arch of the Edmund Pettus Bridge is what hundreds of peaceful civil rights marchers may have seen as they were brutally attacked on Bloody Sunday, March 7, 1965. This moment, etched in history, reminds us of the cost of the fight for justice, equality, and the courage it took to cross that bridge in the face of violence.



EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE

Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round,
turn me 'round, turn me 'round,
Ain't gonna let nobody turn me 'round
I'm gonna keep on a walkin', keep on a-talkin',
Marching up to freedom land.



Clockwise from top left: Tracey, Jill, and Jaylyn cross the Edward Pettus Bridge

[the above lyrics are to the traditional civil rights song, 'Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn me 'Round']



Day 2

The second day marked another transformative day of the pilgrimage. By now, the pilgrims understood that this journey wasn't just about visiting historic sites — it was about sharing these profound experiences together, strengthening bonds, and carrying the lessons of the past into the future. United in purpose, we honored the legacy of those who fought for justice and deepened our commitment to the ongoing work of racial reconciliation.

Our day began with a bus ride to Selma, where we experienced a privately guided tour. In front of Brown Chapel AME Church, we listened to a moving account from our tour guide who

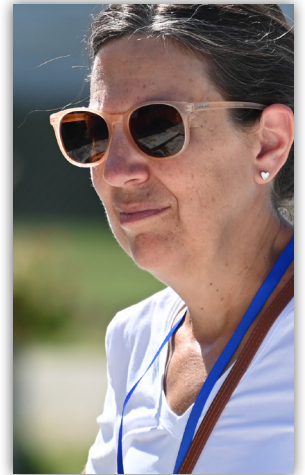
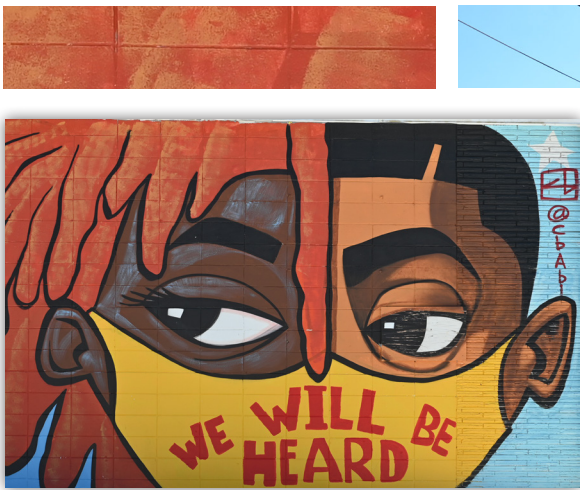
experienced life around the church firsthand as a child during the height of the civil rights movement. This iconic church served as the meeting ground for many pivotal gatherings. Surrounding the church are homes — still occupied today — where some of the movement's key community leaders lived, often offering shelter to civil rights activists. Among them was Episcopal seminarian Jonathan Daniels, later canonized by The Episcopal Church for his sacrifice. Our guide lived in one of these homes during the movement.

We toured Selma, exploring its historic African American community, and later heard from a woman who had

joined the movement at just fifteen years old. She shared her firsthand account of walking the Edmund Pettus Bridge on Bloody Sunday, as well as the following two marches across the bridge. The day culminated with our own walk across that same bridge, ending at the National Voting Rights Museum and Institute. Some pilgrims crossed the bridge in silence, while others walked in song.

Crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge was a deeply moving experience for many. Walking the path where so many brave souls risked their lives for justice brought history to life in ways that words could never fully capture.

continued on next page



Clockwise from top left: A vibrant mural at the Foot Soldier Park in Selma captures the spirit of the Civil Rights Movement; Brown Chapel AME Church, where marchers gathered before making history; Lynne reflects on the journey; the serene Alabama River, a silent witness to the struggle; pilgrims engage with a tour guide, absorbing the weight of history



Day 3

Wednesday was a day steeped in both remembrance and reckoning. As pilgrims, we stood in the presence of history, confronting its painful truths and reflecting on its lasting impact. From the Freedom Monument Sculpture Park to the Legacy Museum, we were called to bear witness to the long arc of racial injustice while honoring the resilience and courage of those who endured.

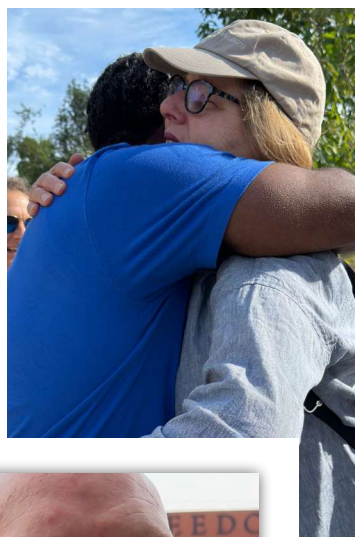
Our day began at the Freedom Monument Sculpture Park, a 17-acre site overlooking the Alabama River — the very river where tens of thousands of enslaved people were trafficked. This sacred ground is dedicated to the 10 million Black men, women, and children who were enslaved in America. Surrounded by breathtaking art and historical artifacts, we walked through a space that not only commemorates their suffering but also celebrates their strength. The sculptures and monuments invited us to engage deeply with the stories of those whose lives were torn apart by slavery, and we reflected on their courage, perseverance, and enduring legacy.

As we journeyed through the park, the gravity of the place — once a hub for the trafficking of enslaved people — pressed down on us. It was a visceral reminder of the dark chapters in our nation's history, but it also served as a beacon of hope, illuminating the resilience of those who fought for their dignity and freedom.

From there, we traveled to the Legacy Museum, a powerful space that allowed us to explore America's history of racial injustice at our own pace. Built on the site of a former cotton warehouse where enslaved Black people were forced to labor, the museum traces the time from slavery to mass incarceration. Through

immersive exhibits, interactive media, and first-person narratives, the museum exposed the brutal reality of racial oppression in the United States.

The Legacy Museum challenged us with uncomfortable truths. The exhibits compelled us to confront the painful history of racial injustice and recognize the continuing struggle for equality today. As we bore witness to the suffering and exploitation of the past, we were reminded that the fight for racial justice is far from finished.



Clockwise from top left: Pilgrims offer comfort to one another during an emotional day's journey; Diane seeks deeper understanding; a billboard honors Jonathan Daniels, canonized by the Episcopal Church for his heroic sacrifice during the civil rights movement; Mike pauses in reflection after walking through the powerful Sculpture Park



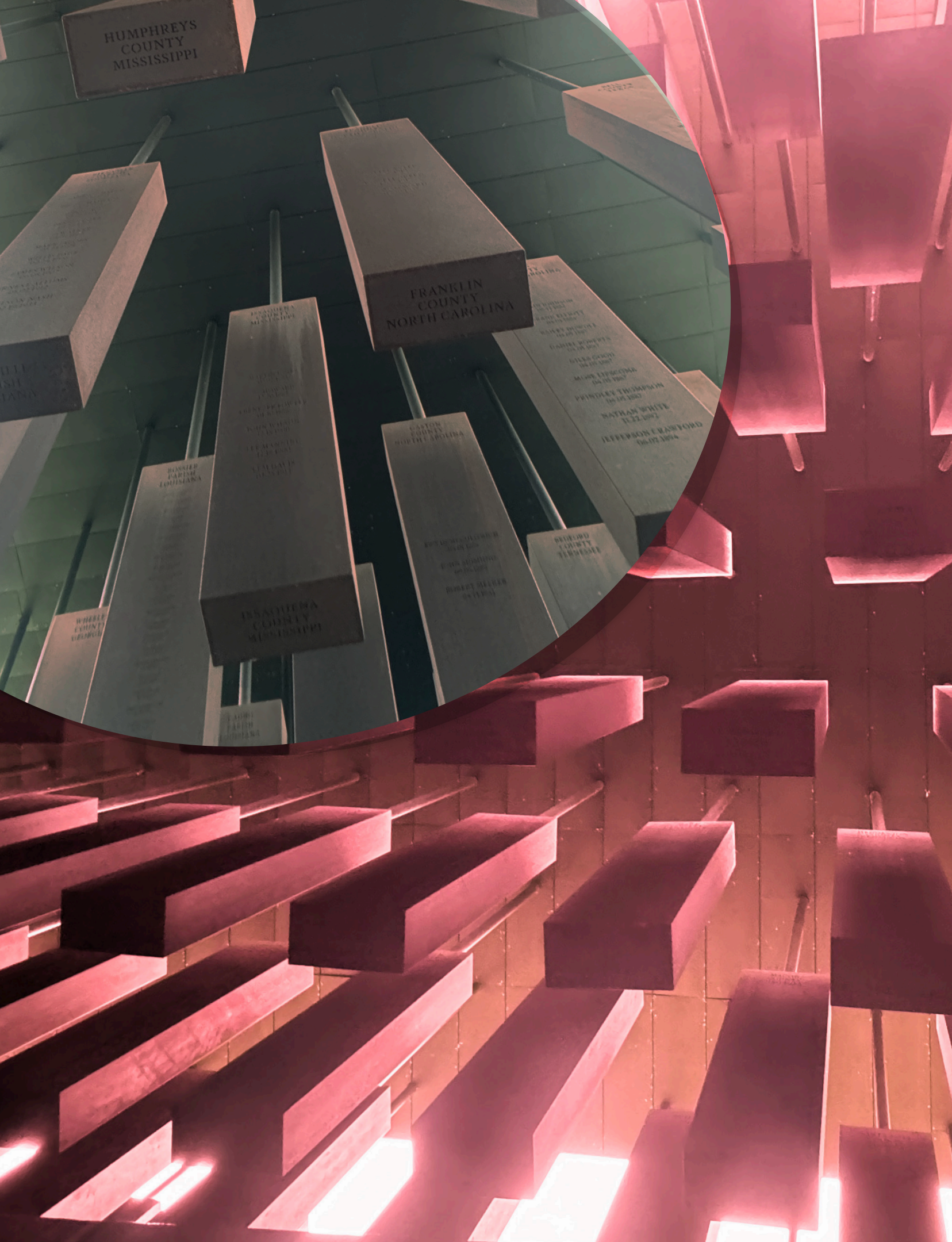
PHOTO CREDIT: DIANE DUDDERAR

FREEDOM MONUMENT SCULPTURE PARK



It was a day of two deeply powerful experiences, but ultimately one collective journey toward understanding. As pilgrims, we felt the weight of history upon us, yet we also felt a renewed commitment to carry forward the lessons we had learned.

continued on next page



HUMPHREYS
COUNTY
MISSISSIPPI

FRANKLIN
COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA

ISAAC HERRERA
CORRIE
MISSISSIPPI

GASTON
COUNTY
NORTH CAROLINA

FRANKLIN COUNTY
MISSISSIPPI
WALTER BISHOP
1840-1890
GARRET POWERS
1818-1861
GILES GOUGH
1810-1887
MELBA LEECHONA
1840-1900
FRINDLEY THOMPSON
1810-1887
NATHAN WHITE
1822-1892
JETERSON ERASMO
1802-1864

HANNIBAL
PARISH
LOUISIANA

WHOLE
COUNTY
MISSISSIPPI

LAUREN
PARISH
LOUISIANA



Day 4

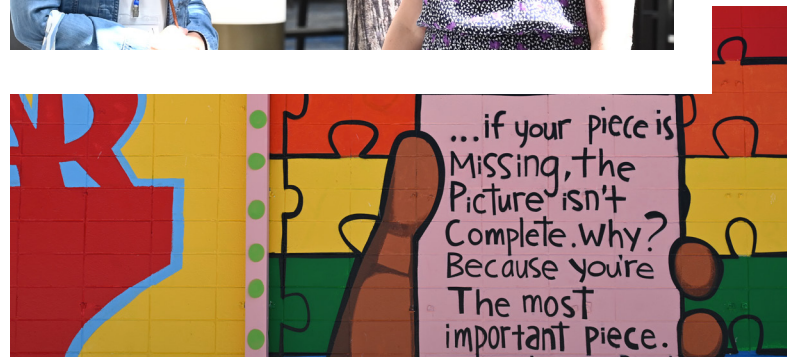
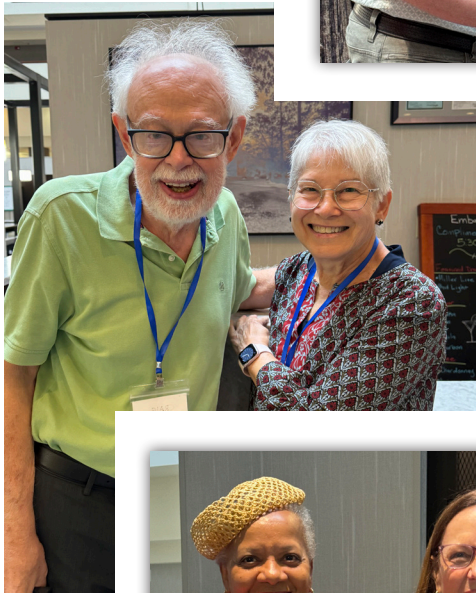
On the final day of our pilgrimage, we walked through the National Memorial for Peace and Justice under a heavy, rain-soaked sky. The weight of history felt even more profound in this sacred space, which honors the thousands of Black lives lost to racial terror lynching. As we stood before the stark representations of those horrific acts, the gravity of the atrocities committed against our fellow human beings took our breath away, leaving us speechless. The sadness was overwhelming, and yet, it deepened our understanding of the painful legacy we carry as a nation. This experience left an indelible mark on our souls, one that will remain with us as we continue to grapple with the past and work toward justice and healing in our current day.

continued on next page



Day 4, continued

When we returned to the hotel, it was time to say goodbye. The friendships and bonds we had formed over the course of these days were grounded in shared experiences and a profound journey taken together. The hugs and goodbyes were filled with emotion, not out of formality, but from the genuine sense of connection and solidarity that had grown between us. These relationships will be cherished for years to come.



In conclusion

This Civil Rights Pilgrimage was more than a journey; it was a transformative experience, a call to listen deeply, learn profoundly, and recommit ourselves to the ongoing work of racial justice and understanding. It invited us to bear witness to the past, not as distant history, but as a living narrative that continues to shape our present and future. Through every site visited and every story shared, we felt the weight of both the suffering endured and the courage displayed by those who fought — and continue to fight — for freedom and equality.

As one pilgrim put it so simply, “We know what we know, and we have seen what we have seen.” These words resonate with a new sense of responsibility. We cannot unsee the truths we encountered, nor can we remain unchanged by them. The pilgrimage called us to go back and understand the struggles that brought us to where we are today — placing together all the pieces from the past through today. But it also urged us to move forward with purpose, carrying the lessons of the past into our lives and communities, challenging systems of injustice, and working for reconciliation.

As the pilgrimage came to a close, one pilgrim shared a deeply personal reflection: “The trauma of what we witnessed still weighs heavily on my heart and mind. I’ve seen movies and read books about slavery, but nothing has ever felt as real as what I experienced in Selma and Montgomery. My hope is not for white people to carry shame for what their ancestors did to mine, but that they will instead commit to educating others about the true history of these events. I find myself praying several times a day, asking how the God I love and trust with all my heart could allow such tragic events to happen. I know I’ll need to lean on my pastor more than ever. My heart is so heavy.”

These two pilgrims capture the raw emotion and profound questions that emerged from our time together on this sacred journey to Montgomery and Selma. And yet, this is not the end of the journey — it’s a new beginning. Empowered by what we’ve learned, we move forward with the commitment to be voices for justice, advocates for change, and co-creators of a more inclusive and equitable future.

Left to right: Raymond, Beverly, Mara, Tracy, and Shannon cross the Edmund Pettus Bridge



REFLECTIONS

REFLECTIONS



I will think about the joy in the people we met, and the despair in the places we visited in Montgomery and Selma for a long while . . . there were a few times I felt hopeless about the future. Seeing new Confederate flags recently placed on the graves at Old Live Oak Cemetery was particularly chilling.

In 1963, author James Baldwin appeared on a PBS television show called, "The Negro and The American Promise," and stated "The future of the Negro in this country is precisely as bright or as dark as the future of the country itself. It is entirely up to the American people, and our representatives, whether or not they are going to face and deal with and embrace this stranger." Baldwin was so far ahead of his time. The Legacy Museum exhibition guide includes a quote that asserts "hopelessness is the enemy of justice," which I will remember to inspire my own work to advance justice. *Karen*



The trauma experienced is still heavy on my mind and heart. I have seen many movies and read many books about slavery. However, nothing is more realistic than what I experienced in Selma and Montgomery. My hope is that white people do not feel shame for what their ancestors did to my ancestors, instead it is my hope that they will educate others on the true history of all that occurred. I pray several times a day in order to understand how can the God I've dearly loved and trust with all my heart and soul allow such tragic events to occur. I will need to lean on my priest more often than ever before. My heart is so heavy. *Cecilia*



History matters. It's that simple. I was truly unprepared for the social, cultural and economic devastation that I witnessed in Selma. The community was punished and abandoned because it won the right to vote. How could we win and lose at the same time? Yet in spite of terrorism and abandonment, the community of 17,000 people left behind to raise themselves up by their bootstraps, after their boots had been snatched away, 87% of whom are African American (the foot soldiers in the fight for justice), remains resilient and hopeful for a better future. My heart aches for Selma. We who have borne witness cannot remain quiet and complicit.

We must use our voices to sound the alarm and call attention to the needs of Selma and all of the other communities, including Wilmington, that are suffering because of past and current racist policies and practices. *Sheridan*



If American history is a tapestry, this trip contained many of its most important strands. It was such a privilege to immerse myself in these devastating stories in a place whose ground and air still contain the vibrations of them. "Take these stories home with you," our guides said, the memorials said, "and don't ever forget them." I now know even more firmly than I ever have that we must not scrub away these stains, but challenge ourselves to overcome them in our own communities so that the

blood that has been spilled was not spilled in vain. *Mara*



We shed many tears, for things that happened 60 years ago; and for things that happened 200 years ago. This is good and necessary. Those things need to be grieved, and those tears need to be shed. The question for me, however, is this: how much grieving are we doing, and how many tears are we shedding, for those things that are happening right now, in our own city? What are those things that are occurring now, in our own city, that will cause people 60 years from now to grieve and shed tears? And

what is God calling us to do about them? *Jordan*




From the moment my feet touched the Alabama soil, I felt profoundly connected to human suffering. The pain in the place was palpable and never really left me. It was intense and not always easy to manage. At the same time I clung to Bryan Stevenson's words about survival and maintaining the capacity to love as forms of resistance. I was awed by the courage and tenacity of all the resilient "foot soldiers" who did and still do fight for our civil rights. Being with a supportive spiritual community of pilgrims

enabled me to share and feel as deeply as I did; it deepened this experience for me. I am more determined to keep on. *Susan*







*Let it die
the legacies of genocide and slavery that made America
the lies of conquest
the lies of pilgrims
the lies of White supremacy*

*Let it die
the deceit of redlining, Jim Crow, mass incarceration and...
from this fetid rotted death of so much possibility wasted
let us free the America that can be to emerge*

*Winnie Varghese
Priest for program and ministry coordination, Trinity Wall Street*

The Confederate Flag:
What Makes You Proud?

What makes you proud to stand below
that flag that speaks what we all know?
Not for freedom and liberty,
but for bodies hung from a tree.
What history sets you all aglow?

Is it really the status quo
of ancestors who struck the blow
against all men to not be free?
What makes you proud?

Is it the power that you know,
coming from bondage and Jim Crow,
and held over people not to be
seen as human like you and me?
But only as lowly Negroes?
What makes you proud?



The above poem was written by Joan Bobnick, a pilgrim, in response to seeing hundreds of Confederate flags flying in the Cemetery for Confederate Soldiers in Selma, Alabama.

The Ecumenical Civil Rights Pilgrimage 2024
to Montgomery and Selma

organized by the
Episcopal Church in Delaware

in partnership with the
New Castle Presbytery



*Through the generosity of an anonymous donor,
printed copies of this booklet were provided for all
pilgrims and organizers.*



MOVEMENTS FOR SOCIAL
CHANGE ARE LIKE
JIGSAW PUZZLES

EVERYONE
IS A UNIQUE &
SPECIAL PIECE

IF YOUR PIECE IS
MISSING, THE PICTURE IS
NOT COMPLETE. WHY?
BECAUSE YOU'RE THE
MOST IMPORTANT PIECE

-JoAnne Blanc



WHAT IS

YOUR

DATE