

Exploring the Civil Rights Movement

Trip Report: Dec 2022

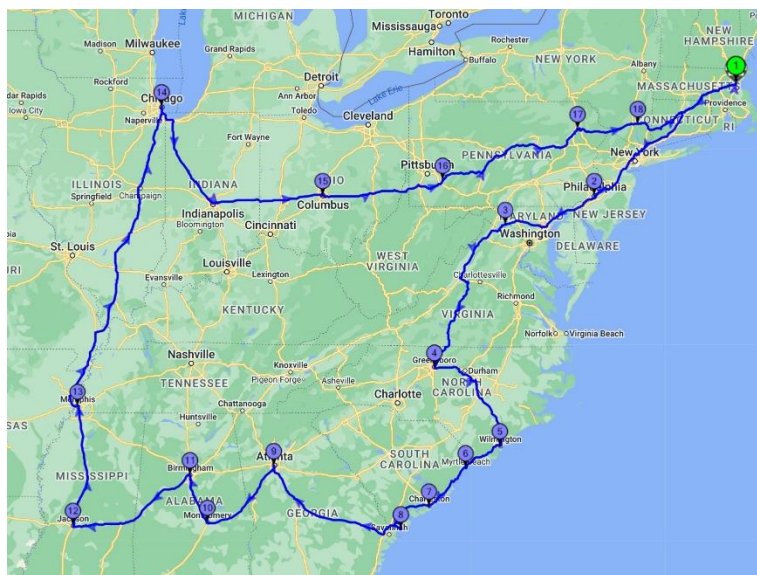
Overview

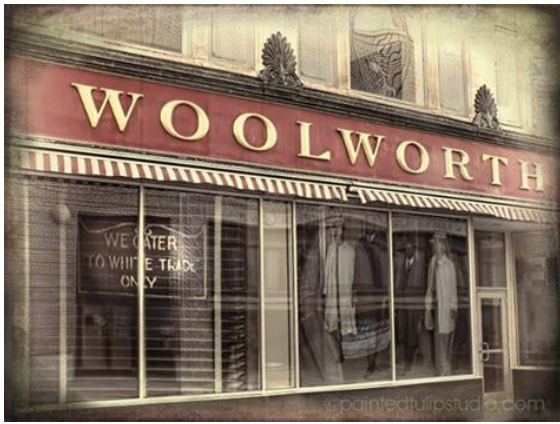
We spent an intense 15+ days exploring the iconic locations of the 1960's Civil Rights Movement – Atlanta, Birmingham, Selma, Montgomery, Tuscaloosa, Philadelphia (MS), Jackson, Memphis, Greensboro. We visited many museums, memorials, bus terminals and walked some or all of the paths of multiple marches. We also explored Charleston (McLeod Plantation) and Tuskegee (Airmen's training field). We saw where Emmett Till's body was recovered and where the Freedom Fighters were murdered.

Each place added details that were impactful, emotional and significant. A recurring theme across the trip is that human beings appear to have an unlimited capacity for cruelty and inhumane treatment for other human beings. Money, greed, financial gain and power are drivers of many of the decisions to mistreat others.

The failure to “stick with it” until the work is done after Reconstruction and indeed after the successes of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, has led us directly to where we are today. With black men incarcerated at extraordinary rates and the electoral college disenfranchising the majority of voters. Not to mention the roll back of voting rights and women's rights. In each case, “compromises” have been made for short term gains that have allowed re-entrenchment of the worst, rather than the best, of what this country can offer.

Itinerary





- **Greensboro, NC:** Institute of Civil Rights Museum in the location of the Woolworth Counter. The site of the first sit-ins at lunch counters.

<https://www.sitinmovement.org/tour-opportunities>. The counter is still there (it's huge) and the museum provides a broad overview of the Civil Rights movement

- **Raleigh, NC:** Visited Shaw University the founding location for SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee). Ella Baker, a Shaw alum and later professor, was the founder. John Lewis and other leaders of the sit-in movement were part of SNCC.



- **Charleston, SC:** McLeod Plantation does an extraordinary job of describing plantation life and post-Civil War life for enslaved/formerly enslaved people. The tour is deeply moving. This area of the country is where Sea Island cotton was grown – much more valuable and labor intensive. The tour also describes in detail how cotton is grown, harvested and processed.



- **Hilton Head Island, SC:** Gullah Tour including Mitchellville describes the self-governing free people of the Low Country

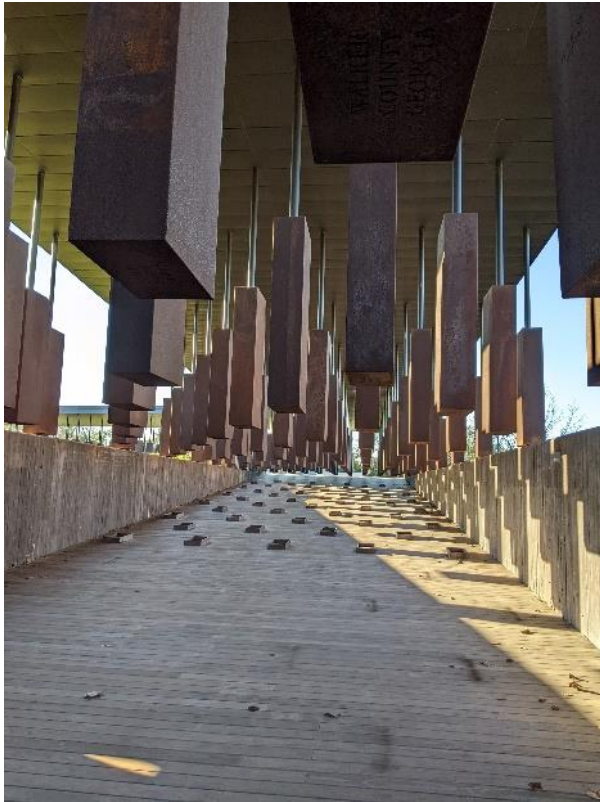
- **Atlanta, GA:** One of the best museums on the trip – [Center for Civil and Human Rights](#). Focuses in on the politics of the Civil Rights Movement with compelling videos from many politicians of the time. Reenactment of the Woolworth counter is terrifying. Basement level has MLK documents. Atlanta also has the MLK National Historic Park, Memorial and his birthplace.



- **Tuskegee, AL:** National Historic Site – fascinating to learn about the training and bravery of the Tuskegee airmen, but critical to understanding the civil rights movement is the segregation and discrimination against these servicemen. This becomes a recurring theme in other museums – particularly how returning servicemen fought for equality after serving their country.

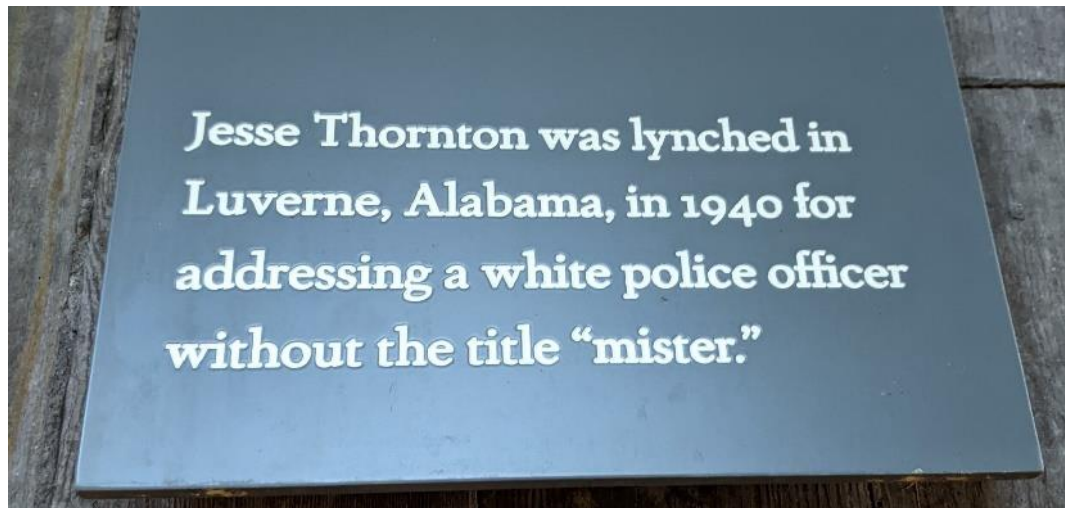


- **Montgomery, AL:** Many museums! [The Legacy Museum and Memorial](#) take an entire day.



Reentry is allowed so you can leave for lunch. This museum starts with the capture of people in Africa all the way through mass incarceration. The exhibits are interactive (including holograms of slave experiences, listening to individuals currently incarcerated, etc). This museum deftly illustrates the human cost of slavery, failed reconstruction, Jim Crow through today.

The Memorial is a separate site (there's a shuttle) and has slabs for every county where a lynching has occurred. Names are on the slabs of those individuals that can be documented two ways. The scale of lynching as a political tool to maintain control over the black population cannot be overstated. It is the main impetus for the great migration to the North (which ironically has made Southern states go from some of the richest states to the poorest in the country).

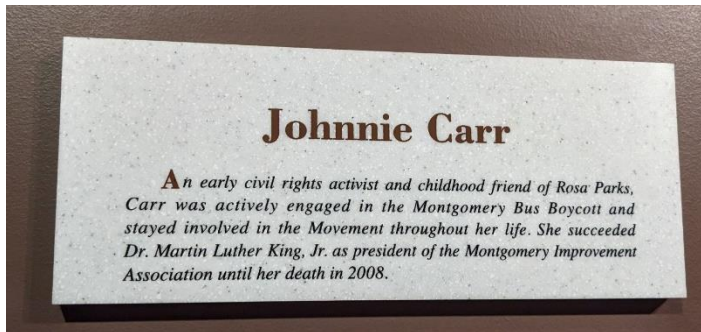




Freedom Rider Museum is in the actual Greyhound station where riders were beaten upon arrival in Montgomery. Tour of the Capital building (and nearby First “White House” of the Confederacy) makes it clear how entrenched white supremacy remains in AL. Streets and buildings are named for Lurleen Wallace (wife of George and briefly governor).



- *Rosa Parks Museum* provides deep detail into the organization of the Montgomery bus boycott. At lunch nearby, we met the great grand-daughter of [Johnnie Carr](#) – a close friend of Rosa Parks.

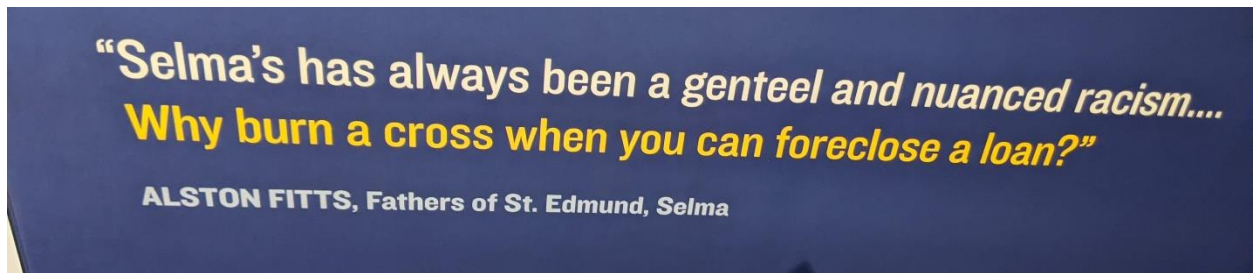


- *Dexter Avenue Parsonage*: Where MLK lived while in Montgomery. Our tour guide showed us a picture that included her, at 6 years old, celebrating her grandfather's and MLK's birthday in the parsonage. Coretta King is in the group shot, MLK had briefly stepped away for a phone call.

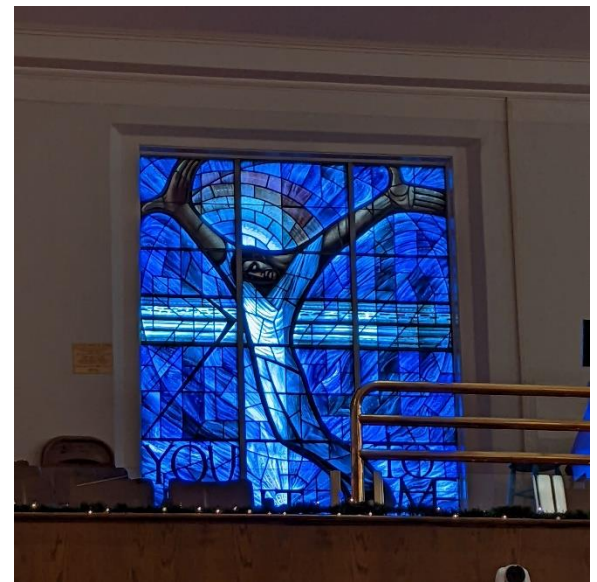


- **Selma, AL**: the town is a shadow of its former self, but it was moving to walk across the bridge and view the memorial on the Montgomery side. All the museums were closed, it was Saturday morning, not clear if they are still open regularly. Selma is one of the

locations working to get their Legacy Memorial slab installed and we saw the first required signage to support that.



- **Birmingham, AL:** Toured the 16th Street Baptist Church and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. Both added to the narrative and built on previously seen museums. Kelly Ingram park is directly across the street from both with many commemorative art installations. This was a staging site for the Birmingham marches and the location where Bull Connor used hosed on the marchers. We followed the path of three of the marches from that area to the City Hall – they each had a different route and purpose.



- **Tuscaloosa, AL:** University of Alabama where George Wallace stood in the doorway to block integration of the school. A thoughtful monument to the students now faces those doors.





- **Philadelphia, MS:** Met a deacon of the Mt Zion Church which was burned down by the KKK and the site of arrest of Chaney, Goodman and Schwerner.

- **Jackson, MS:** Civil Rights Museum is really good and tied up quite a few loose ends. This museum clearly talks about the failures of Reconstruction and the decision to withdraw Northern troops in exchange for getting Taft elected. It also has dedicated exhibits to the murders of Emmett Till and Medgar Evers (you can drive by his house). Mississippi is the site of the most extensive racial terrorism in the South (the most lynchings and “enforcement” of Jim Crow policies); the museum does a really good job of covering it. The attached Mississippi history museum is less impressive, but probably much needed to provide historical context.





- **Sumner, MS:** Emmett Till Interpretive Center – dedicated to Till’s murder. Recreation of the spaces is interesting, but didn’t add any new facts. This museum is remote and pretty out dated.



- **Memphis, TN:** *National Civil Rights Museum* at the Lorraine Motel is two museums. One in the hotel, the other in the boarding house across the street where James Earl Ray fired from. The museum is quite good and has excellent details around the Selma march (dates confusion resolved). Unexpectedly moving to see the actual, preserved hotel rooms.

