

Social Justice Committee Trip to Civil Rights Museum



On November 21, DCPC's Social Justice Committee led a group of some two dozen DCPC members to the International Civil Rights Center and Museum (ICRCM) in Greensboro, North Carolina. Founded in 2010, the ICRCM consists of 35,000 square feet of exhibits devoted to understanding and advancing civil and human rights in the U.S. and around the world. It is housed in a restored F.W. Woolworth Company building on South Elm Street, where on February 1, 1960, four Black freshmen from North Carolina A&T State University staged a sit-in at the whites-only lunch counter. The students --David Richmond, Frank McCain, Ezell Blair, and Joseph McNeil--were subsequently

joined by other students from area colleges and even local high schools. Their six-month campaign of non-violent, direct action not only succeeded in desegregating the lunch counter at Woolworth's, but also inspired similar sit-ins in 55 cities across 13 states. These efforts revitalized the Civil Rights Movement, challenging Americans to make good on their Constitution's promises of freedom and equality.

Led by two of the ICRCM's knowledgeable and passionate docents, the DCPC group toured the Center's fourteen permanent exhibits, labeled "The Battlegrounds." Each room documents a different chapter in the story of the Civil Rights Movement, using original artifacts, photos, interactive exhibits, and powerful storytelling. The tour begins in a "Hall of Shame," which documents the violence against civil rights protesters of all races. Then visitors enter a large room with the massive L-shaped Woolworth's lunch counter, carefully restored on its original footprint, complete with original signage, coffee pots, and all the other accouterments of a 1960s lunch counter. The remaining exhibits take visitors back in time, revisiting many of the people and events in America's long struggle for racial justice. From slavery, through Reconstruction and the Jim Crow Era, to the Civil Rights Movement of the '50s and '60s, and up to present times, the exhibits recall many tragic figures and events. There are memories of lynchings, the reign of the Ku Klux Klan, the murder of Emmitt Till in 1955, and the March on Washington in 1963. One exhibit, featuring 1,200 mug shots of protestors arrested across the South, is titled Jail, No Bail! The exhibits also celebrate the many heroes of the cause, from Rosa Parks, to Martin Luther King, Jr., to more contemporary leaders. A Wall of Remembrance pays respect to dozens of men, women, and children who lost their lives in the battle for civil rights. The Center also highlights the connections between the U.S. Civil Rights Movement and other struggles for racial freedom and justice around the world.



DCPC members on the tour learned a lot and were profoundly moved by the tour. Mary Thornberry reported that being in "the same building where the sit-ins occurred moved me greatly." Lynn and Tom Cushing wrote that the museum, "with its engaging narratives" and "wonderful displays and artifacts," provided an "exceptional perspective on the struggle for civil rights in the U.S." The Cushings called their visit to the Center a "marvelous, hopeful day, spent with our friends in Christ!" Li Hogan noted the "power of individual stories" and was impressed by "the resilience and courage of people." She also found the "passion of the tour guides . . . impressive." Robert Alexander was humbled and inspired by the visit, and he appreciated the museum's efforts to tie the work of those

courageous college students to “the larger works of justice that were happening and are still happening in the US and around the world.”

The ICRCM is part of the U.S. Civil Rights Trail, a collection of churches, courthouses, schools, museums, and other landmarks across 15 states that played a pivotal role in advancing civil rights and social justice in the 1950s and 1960s. The ICRCM has also been designated a National Historic Landmark, and the Center is currently undergoing a ten-year review process to gain recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The ICRCM is just an hour-and-a-half drive from Davidson, with tours starting at just \$10 for students and \$15 for adults. To learn more about the museum [CLICK HERE](#), or visit <https://www.sitinmovement.org/>.

If you would like to learn more about the DCPC Social Justice Committee and our many justice priorities contact Committee Chair Mike Hogan at jmh32@psu.edu or visit www.dcpc.org/social-justice.

~written by Mike Hogan (Chair of DCPC’s Social Justice Committee)

