

ChaiLights

Social Justice Trip: The Heart of the NEMJDS



The Equal Justice Initiative, the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Civil Rights Memorial Center, and the Rosa Parks Museum all opened their doors to educate N.E. Miles Jewish Day School students recently on the Upper School Social Justice trip to Montgomery.

Our students spent the day learning about social justice issues our country has faced and continues to face. Students were well prepared for the emotional stories and challenging situations presented to them on the trip; they had prepared for this trip in all of their classes, from reading court cases in Language Arts class to dissecting what it means to be a nonprofit in Youth Philanthropy class.

The first stop on the trip was the Equal Justice Initiative. Students learned about personal stories which exemplify the importance of fighting for justice, from children who are tried as adults to innocent people freed from wrongful convictions.

We had an unplanned surprise at the Equal Justice Initiative as well. Anthony Ray Hinton, an innocent man wrongfully convicted of murder who was recently freed from 30 years on death row due to the work of the Equal Justice Initiative, spoke to our group about his experiences. Mr. Hinton's passion for life and ability to forgive were not only educational, but also inspiring. He talked to our students about appreciating everyday they have and also the realities of racism he experienced. He charged our students with a responsibility. He explained the "only way to wipe out racism starts with you young people."

After a meaningful and emotional morning, we headed to the Civil Rights Memorial Center and Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) to hear from founder of the SPLC, Joe Levin, a member of the Montgomery Jewish community. Over lunch, Mr. Levin explained a court case he took on where he fought for equal benefits for men and women in the military, and we also learned of his lawsuit which economically drained

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the Ku Klux Klan. After hearing about his remarkable work to help start the SPLC and fight for equality, Mr. Levin left our students with a charge; he said, "You don't have to do this kind of work to participate in this kind of work." He explained that regardless of profession, our students can fight for and represent equality. The students then signed the Wall of Tolerance, committing to fight injustice and hatred.

We finished the day at the Rosa Parks Museum. We looked at where Rosa Parks was arrested and how the events of the famed Montgomery bus boycott were executed. Students deepened their knowledge about how people came together peacefully to create change.

Although we ended the day at the Rosa Parks Museum, this experience is not over for our students. Social justice and leadership are at the heart of the N.E. Miles Jewish Day School program. Our students learn how to be leaders, how to act with integrity, and how to stand up for their beliefs, and we look forward to fostering further discussion and action based on the stories our students were fortunate enough to hear in Montgomery.