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Selma is America

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Selma is America

Abstract

During my recent trip to Selma, Alabama, I was overwhelmed by the tangible evidence that blatant racism and segregation still exists. In a town where many had made great sacrifices to combat America's racial injustices, it was disheartening to see how very little change had come to the town MLK described as the "most segregated" in America. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

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Disciplines

African American Studies | Higher Education | Race and Ethnicity | Race, Ethnicity and Post-Colonial Studies | Religion

Comments

Surge is a student blog at [Gettysburg College](#) where systemic issues of justice matter. Posts are originally published at surgegettysburg.wordpress.com Through stories and reflection, these blog entries relate personal experiences to larger issues of equity, demonstrating that -isms are structural problems, not actions defined by individual prejudice. We intend to popularize justice, helping each other to recognize our biases and unlearn the untruths.

SURGE

[VERB] : to move suddenly or powerfully forward or upward

SELMA IS AMERICA

March 19, 2015

During my recent trip to Selma, Alabama, I was overwhelmed by the tangible evidence that blatant racism and segregation still exists. In a town where many had made great sacrifices to combat America's racial injustices, it was disheartening to see how very little change had come to the town MLK described as the "most segregated" in America.



In Selma today, segregation is evident in every corner. I saw it on the [billboard](#) that welcomed visitors to Historic Selma by The Friends of Nathan Bedford Forest, the former Grand Wizard of the KKK.

I saw it in the neighborhoods as we drove through the town: seemingly abandoned houses on the east side of town that housed the majority of the city's 80 percent African American population stood in stark contrast to the sprawling Victorian homes on the west side of town.

I experienced it in church on Sunday as I and some of my peers unknowingly entered a segregated all-white church for Sunday service. Our group, consisting of two white students and six students of color, could feel the curious stares and our growing discomfort soon allowed us to realize our mistake.

I learned about it in the schools, all of which are still very much segregated. Public schools are where the black students attend; Morgan Academy is the all-white private school (named for another Grand Dragon of the KKK). It is no coincidence that Morgan Academy was established a few months after the March from Selma to Montgomery. There was a recent attempt to [integrate Morgan Academy](#) in 2007 by a five year old black girl, but she only lasted [two years](#) at Morgan.

This is sad, I thought. How can anyone flourish in such an environment? So much racism. There is so much work to be done in this town, I concluded.

It was easy to conclude that Selma had a long way to actualize the dream of equality that so many fought for and continue to fight for. I could see the racism, it was everywhere and I guess it was only natural that I reach such conclusions.

But racism and segregation is not just a Selma problem.

Even in our very “integrated” and “diverse” cities and towns, racism and segregation is alive and well.

It is in the chant of a group of college fraternity boys, proclaiming they’d rather see a n***** hanging from a tree than being a member of their group. While disappointing, it would be even more disappointing and naive for Americans to think that this is an isolated incident.

It is in the increasing deterioration of the country’s public school systems, like the Detroit city public schools, that caters to mostly black and brown students. The great white flight of the 1960s is still happening today. Now we call it gentrification, a phenomenon that disproportionately displaces people of color from their homes in cities that were once left to rot.

It is in the twitter hashtags #CrimingWhileWhite and #CrimingWhileBlack that shows how race influences the American law enforcement and justice systems.

It is the high ranking that Gettysburg continues to receive from Princeton Review year after year for being the school having the least interaction between people of different backgrounds.

Selma is everywhere. Selma is America.

In Selma, the black population is 80 percent of the total population, but holds less than ten percent of the wealth in the town. In America, the average black household accumulates [less than one tenth](#) the wealth of its white counterpart. Voter ID laws disproportionately discriminate against black and Hispanic voters, a gross violation of the right to vote, a battle we thought was finished after the March from Selma to Montgomery. People of color are arrested at a rate ten times higher than white people.

As we prepared to leave, I struggled finding an answer to the question that repeatedly kept coming to mind: why is it so easy to get so angry over these visible and tangible signs of racism and yet ignore the systemic racism in America.

It is one thing to work towards [changing the name](#) of the Edmund Pettus Bridge (yet another Selma landmark memorializing a KKK Grand Dragon) or feel accomplished for [changing the name of a school](#). But it is another to commit to the hard work of undoing the negative consequences of systemic racism. Our biggest mistake is to assume that racism is over.

There is no lesser of the two evils. Racism in both overt and systemic forms is wrong and continues to create negative consequences not only for its victims, but also for the people who benefit from this injustice.

In the words of Lynda Blackmon Lowery, the youngest person to march to Montgomery in 1965, “Racism never went anywhere. Racism just took a nap.”

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