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A Summer to Remember: Lancaster ISD Students Take a Historic Civil Rights Tour



Lancaster, Texas/Lancaster ISD

On the 50th anniversary of the landmark Civil Rights legislation of 1964, which outlawed unequal application of voter registration and racial segregation in schools, at the workplace and in public accommodations, Lancaster ISD "My History Bowl" winners and chaperones explored the historic events leading up to this ground-breaking legislation.

This summer, students and staff boarded a bus and traveled throughout the South for a 3D history lesson. Students traced the paths of blacks in America from the infamous middle passage to present times. They walked in the footsteps of civil rights activist Rosa Parks and got an closer look at significant events like the Montgomery Bus Boycott, Little Rock Nine, 1963 March on Washington, culminating in the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel.

In Memphis, Tennessee, they visited the National Civil Rights Museum (Lorraine Motel). After peering into Dr. King's motel room where his half-eaten meal and ruffled bed pillow is preserved for eternity,

they then walked across the street to the assassin's lair. The partially opened bathroom window, where James Ray fired his fatal shot and his subsequent capture and arrest gave students a profound understanding of the fragility of life and a look at the complexities of politics leading to such actions.

From Memphis, the tour continued to Atlanta, Georgia to the King Center. Students traced the steps of a young Dr. King by visiting his boyhood home, Ebenezer Baptist Church and his mausoleum floating in a cascading reflecting pool.

“Across from the reflecting pool, is the eternal flame,” Executive Director of Teacher & Leadership Development Connie Isabell said. “This reminds us of the continual impact of the Civil Rights Movement on our lives today.”

While travelling, inclement weather in Atlanta, forced the tour group to alter its walking tours of three Historically Black Colleges/Universities -- Morehouse College, Spellman College and Clark University to a bus tour. The distinguished institutions gave students a peek at the role of education in producing outstanding ethical leaders.

Later, the group visited Tuskegee University, Tuskegee Airmen Museum and the Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery.

“The majestic Tuskegee University, home of Booker T. Washing and George Washington Carver was the highlight of the trip,” Isabell said. “With 125 years of academic experience, it was ranked by U. S. News as Best Regional College-2004.”

The tour included the George Washington Carver's Museum, the Church of the Singing Stained-Glass Window, Booker T. Washington's statue, “Lifting the Veil”, as well as eating lunch at college food court. Afterwards, they visited Moton Airfield, the military training grounds of the famous Tuskegee Airmen (Red Tails). Students were able to see the planes, equipment as well as try on the flight jackets and uniforms of that time. This exhibit allowed them to see that, with perseverance, there is no limit to what they can achieve.



One last stop was in Montgomery to visit the Southern Poverty Law Center— which honors the achievements and memory of those who died during the Civil Rights Movement. This memorial fountain is a rounded black stone in the shape of an inverted cone where a film of water flows over the events from *Brown v. Board* (1954) to the assassination of Dr. Martin L. King, Jr in 1968.

Dawn Woodyatt, who served as one of the coaches of the winning elementary teams said that the trip was beneficial to the students.

“It was incredible to watch the students make connections between people from history and themselves,” she said. “It sparked their interest and had them really thinking about what they want to do in life. It was like opening a new world for them.”

The Lancaster Public Schools serve more than 6,000 pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students in 11 schools. The mission of the Lancaster Independent School District, a leader in providing innovative, quality programs, is to educate every student with the knowledge; skills; and principles to succeed and contribute in a competitive and technologically advancing world by providing rigorous and engaging learning opportunities that promote diversity; create an environment of integrity and respect; and establish a commitment to continued improvement in partnership with families and community.

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