Cohort 4 Returns from Montgomery Immersed In Transformative Movement-Building

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Move to End Violence’s Cohort 4 just returned from their fifth convening in Montgomery, Alabama, land of the Muscogee/Creek people who have lived in the region for hundreds of years. We made an intentional decision to be in the South and to center Black women’s leadership and organizing. This sounds straightforward, but it took work for us as a program to get here. We have had a history of choosing retreat-like convening sites and of sticking with places we are familiar with. But instead of simply asking what is beautiful and comfortable or where have we been before, we are now asking ourselves: Where do we want to connect with land, peoples, and histories? Where can we be supporting people of color and Indigenous economies? Where is there critical organizing we should be aware of?

It was the right decision.

Montgomery and its surrounding areas is where white settlers used violence, coercion, and the government to force the Muscogee/Creek people to cede 21 million acres of land, and the vast majority were forcibly removed through the Trail of Tears and other acts of displacement and genocide. Montgomery and its fertile land was turned into the center of where enslaved Black people were trafficked, confined, and sold. Sacred Native burial grounds were destroyed to build banks and hotels to support the commerce of slavery. It was the cradle of Jim Crow and the Confederacy. The pain, loss, and inhumanity are palpable.

It is also the heart of Black Civil Rights organizing, including where Rosa Parks brought Recy Taylor after her assault, where the Montgomery Bus Boycott began, and one of the places from which Martin Luther King, Jr. organized. Despite its desecration, we could feel the sacredness of the area, along the Alabama River, and we made offerings and prayers to honor the thousands of Indigenous and Black lives that were lost.

Being here required us to center healing and ritual so that we could show up whole and present throughout the week. To help us ground spiritually, we brought together a stellar team of healing practitioners for this convening: Naimah Efia, Cresta White, Kifu Farug, and Harmony Phoenix. From anchoring Spirit Space, which has been a regular feature of our convenings this cycle; to providing oils, plants, herbs, and cleansing water; to setting up self-care stations; to offering readings, touch, talk, and yoga. Their presence and expertise held us as we dove into our collective work for the week.
Montgomery is also where the Equal Justice Initiative has led audacious, visionary work to compel our country to face the horrific truth of hundreds of years of racial terrorism perpetuated and sanctioned by our government and institutions. Ashley Adams and Breana Lamkin of EJI joined us to talk about their collective work to literally change the landscape and transform narratives that continue to dehumanize and criminalize Black bodies, demonstrating the clear throughlines between slavery, lynching, and modern day mass incarceration. We visited EJI’s National Memorial for Peace and Justice, where we grieved, mourned, prayed, and expressed gratitude for our ancestors.

At the National Memorial for Peace & Justice
To help us continue to ground in local organizing, we were joined by two Black women leaders based out of Birmingham. Darones Duncan-Boyd is the new executive director of Trans United and founder of TAKE Resource Center. She shared about the importance of being deeply rooted in community, putting relationships at the center, and doing the hard work of responding to the multiple needs of trans women rather than focusing on single issues. She cautioned that those of us who say that we serve trans women must be prepared to actually respond when a trans woman is in crisis. Nyesha Black, a local demographer and sociologist, discussed the need to democratize data and research and the importance of storytelling in creating change.
Storytelling was in full force at our first-ever Freedom Futures Camp! Coming out of the International Exchange, where we experienced vibrant intergenerational movements, plus being in the heart of Montgomery in the middle of summer, provided us with an opportunity to provide family programming for the first time. MEV has always welcomed parents and guardians to bring their dependents to convenings and this was an exciting extension of our practice. To plan and lead it, we partnered with Lorena Estrella; MEV Cohort 3 member and consultant at Sadie Nash Leadership Project, and Crystal Des-Ogugua, formerly of Sadie Nash and now with Black Feminist Future. Through visual arts, storytelling, play, and local field trips, the camp helped our young people connect the rich history and present of Black and Indigenous resistance and resilience in Montgomery.
We are in an important political moment where the upholding of patriarchy and white supremacy feels relentless at the same time as movements for social justice are gaining ground day by day. The truth-telling, clarity, and courage that we experienced in Montgomery will stay with us as we continue to build a world free from violence.

**Resources to Continue Learning**

It was essential for us to prepare and ground in the local context before arriving in Montgomery. Here are some of the resources we found helpful – please share your own as well!

**Native American Communities**

- Brief [history of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation](#)
- Current day activities of the Mvskoke Nation in Alabama
- A brief [video from Equal Justice Initiative about the history of Montgomery](#)

**Recy Taylor**

- Documentary film “The Rape of Recy Taylor”
- A [Democracy Now story](#) on the documentary and the critical role of Rosa Parks as the NAACP’s chief sexual assault investigato
• Brief article about work being done in Birmingham by and for trans women of color
• Brief article on how Black women are being impacted by the Alabama abortion ban
• Column from Alicia Garza on Abortion Bans in the South

**Equal Justice Initiative**

• Article in the New Yorker from 2016 “The Legacy of Lynching, on Death Row”
• Documentary film “True Justice”
• *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson