

Civil Rights Museum captures MLK's legacy

By Kathryn Reed

MEMPHIS – Get to the back of the bus. I thought the man was kidding, but he kept repeating this mantra. No one had ever told me to do this before. I was not about to budge.

I was getting mad. Mad that someone whose skin color was the same as mine could even think of saying such a thing. Mad at the stupidity of it all, mad that it had ever come to this, mad that everyone is not created equal in the minds of some people.

I looked to my right. The woman next to me was not about to get up and move either, though she had done so countless times before.

Across the aisle was a stone casting of Rosa Parks, the legendary Civil Rights pioneer who helped abolish segregation with her refusal to go to the back of the bus. The bus I had boarded is just one of the many exhibits at the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis that brings to life the plight of blacks in the United States.

It was eerie to walk up to the Lorraine Motel. For a moment I felt like it was 1968. A couple of cars from that time are parked out front, just under the balcony where Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered. A wreath of flowers adorns the door of the room where he had been staying.

He was in town for a demonstration for striking sanitation workers. James Earl Ray made sure Memphis was King's last stop on a promising trip through the South to awaken America to the injustice of segregation. His legacy of changing society through peaceful marches and words of enlightenment lives, but

so does the prejudice he fought to abolish.

Having the Civil Rights Museum, which opened in 1991, incorporated into the infamous hotel adds a dimension of realism. For those of us who were too young to remember that fateful day and have only read about it, the site gives you a stark dose of reality.

It was time to go inside. To explore the 10,000 square feet of permanent exhibits that begin with black Africans being brought to the United States in barbaric conditions to be sold into slavery.

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Note: Since this was written the museum was renovated in 2014.