Selma to Montgomery 2014!

ALTERNATIVE SPRING BREAK
March 6 - 9

By

Berea College
Alicestyne Turley, PhD
Carter G. Woodson Center for Interracial Education
MANY THANKS TO OUR TRAVEL SPONSORS:
- Carter G. Woodson Center for Interracial Education
- Black Cultural Center
- President’s Office
- General Studies Department
- Center for Excellence in Learning Through Service
- African and African American Studies Program
- Peace and Social Justice Program

SPRING TRAVELERS

1. Lawynter Bailey, Sophomore
2. Ngoc Anh T. Cao, Sophomore
3. Anne (Sophie) Gabriel, Junior
4. Steven Hall, Freshman
5. Waylon McDonald, Senior
6. Kenneth McQueen, Freshman
7. Naliah Raymond, Junior
8. Carmanta Ridley, Freshman
9. Erica Scott, Senior
10. Laura Tate, Junior
11. Marissa Wells, Junior
12. Melissa Wills, Junior
13. Keith Bullock, Staff
14. Alicestyne Turley, Faculty
15. Wendy Warren, Faculty
16. Valeria Watkins, Staff

Schedule of Events

Thursday, March 6
9:00 a.m. Departed Berea College
Dinner and lodging in Montgomery, AL

Friday, March 7
Breakfast at the hotel
Depart for Selma
School Service Project – McRae-Gaines Learning Center
Mock Trial & Conversation - Dallas County Courthouse
Dinner with Berea College Alum Attorney Jeff Robinson and Civil Rights Activist Joann Bland

Saturday, March 8
Breakfast at the hotel
Rosa Parks Museum, Montgomery
Lunch – Martha’s Place, Montgomery
Tour Southern Poverty Law Center and Civil Rights Memorial, Montgomery
Selma Bridge Crossing Jubilee Street Festival
“Reflections on the Day”

Sunday, March 9
4:30 p.m. Returned to Berea College
In August 2013, twenty-seven Berea College faculty and staff members participated in the College’s first Civil Rights Seminar and Tour. The tour traveled through six southern cities, including Selma. During that time, we were introduced to Civil Rights activist, tour guide and 1965 Selma to Montgomery March participant, Ms. Joanne Bland. Ms. Bland shared information with us regarding the McRae-Gaines Center without our having an opportunity to visit the school. Without time to interact with students and faculty of the school during our initial visit, plans were made by Wendy Warren and Alicestyne Turley to discuss and possibly even schedule a return trip to Selma to explore the possibility of Berea College internship and service opportunities at McRae-Gaines Learning Center. This year’s event marked a continuation of prior discussions begun with Joanne Bland during the 2013 tour.

This year’s Alternative Spring Break Tour were designed as opportunities for students to travel; gain experiences in environments most had only read about in history books or viewed in videos; to engage in hands on learning and service projects; and to present each with an opportunity to feel empowered and capable of affecting change within their own communities. To that end, the trip was designed to be a mixture of fun, learning, service and continuing action based upon individual interests and academic majors. Thursday night’s arrival activities included time for fun and good food which resulted in major discussions concerning which Alabama city had the best barbecue – Birmingham or Selma.
Arrival at the McRae-Gaines Learning Center. Photo by Marissa Wells

Berea bus made an impressive presence on the McRae-Gaines campus. Photo by Alicestyne Turley
Putting service into practice, education major Anh T. Cao and others, aided McRae-Gaines students in planting their first garden. The Center is an historic educational initiative founded in Selma, Alabama in 1976 by the Black Belt Arts & Cultural Center. The school’s focus, was and has remained, the preparation of a diverse student body through a rigorous academic curriculum in reading, writing, math and science before they enter elementary school in the public school system. Its mission, established in the tradition of educators Mable McRae and Oralee Gaines, is to “to give our students the opportunity to receive an excellent education ‘from the least to the greatest.’” Existing for over 35 years, in what is now a predominantly lower-income neighborhood, McRae-Gaines Learning Center has educated thousands of children in Selma, assisting them to realize their potential by utilizing a proven curriculum. The Center attempts to provide “A Pathway to College,” which begins at an appropriate level the minute a child enters the school. McRae-Gaines’ students are usually reading at a competent level by the age of three and they are exposed to number theory, nature, music, art and basic theater production even at the pre-school level. http://www.mcraegaineslearningcenter.org/ 

Berea College students, faculty and staff were greeted at the Center not only by energetic welcoming students, but also by Board of Directors president, Mrs. Stephanie Dillon Hamm, a native of Selma currently residing in Huston, Texas. Mrs. Hamm, joined by her husband Bill Hamm, Retired Air Force Colonel, Treasurer and Chair of Finance, are major fundraisers and community volunteers for the Center. Along with her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Hamm and their daughter Mia Hamm have been active supporters of the McRae-Gaines Center for a number of years. Other McRae-Gaines Center board members and supporters include:

Dr. Margaret Hardy, Director of Unemployment Services, Retired
1st Vice President and Chair of Personnel and Academic Support

Dr. Bruce Taylor, Doctor of Internal Medicine, 2nd Vice President
Member of the Fundraising Committee

David Dagostino, Business Manager, Sarrell Dental, Chair of Building and Capital Improvements

Charles Johnson, Program Administrator, Alabama Department of Human Resources, Member of the Finance and Fundraising Committees

Collins Pettaway, Attorney-at-Law, Member of the Finance Committee

Daryl Thomas, CPA, Thomas Accounting and Income Tax Service, Member of the Finance Committee

Dr. Shawn Watt, Surgeon, Member of the Fundraising Committee

Malika Fortier, Attorney-at-Law, PTO President

Gary Chappel and Carl Pettway, PTO Fundraising Co-Chairs

As part of their service project, Berea College students worked with Mr. Jim Drury, a friend of the McRae-Gaines Center from the Selma community, to plant the Center’s first vegetable garden. Just as we do here at Berea, food from the garden will be used in the school’s cafeteria. For many Berea College and McRae-Gaines students alike, this event became their first garden planting experience.

Mr. Bill Hamm aids students in watering newly planted seeds. Berea students prepared the garden rows using picks, shovels, and hoes, providing a fun and interesting experience to observe. Photo by Alicestyne Turley
McRae-Gaines “Wish List”:

Upon our arrival, Mrs. Hamm gave us an extensive tour of the Center’s campus and classrooms, giving Bereans an opportunity to interact with the students. When asked, she provided us with her view of the challenges and successes of the Center, including her “Wish List” of items and projects the board, administrators and teachers needed and desired for their students, community and the school. That list included:

- A new roof and interior renovations for their aging building. Cost for new roofing on the Center is estimated as a $50,000 project
- Creation of an endowed fund to support the hiring and retention of qualified teachers that would allow them to remain competitive with current teacher hiring and retention
- A bus or other form of transportation to aid them in serving students at the Center and in the community
- Computers and ipads for their classrooms
- An updated computer system for the school that allowed them to track the progress of their students, even after they leave McRae-Gaines
- Additional qualified teaching staff

Our Berea College group found the students at McRae-Gaines engaging, very intelligent and great fun to be around! Student traveler and journalism major, Marissa Wells, penned an article regarding our journey highlighted on BC Now, the Berea College webpage [http://bcnow.berea.edu/2014/03/service-learning-spring-break-2014/](http://bcnow.berea.edu/2014/03/service-learning-spring-break-2014/).
Mrs. Stephanie Hamm and Wendy Warren worked with students to breakup newly turned soil of the garden rows, teaching them to enjoy the idea of “getting dirty.” Photo by Waylon McDonald.

Center director and teacher Mrs. Sadie Moss gives background regarding challenges and successes facing the Center. Photo by Waylon McDonald.
Following completion of their service project, Bereans had an opportunity to visit Selma Civil Rights locations including the Selma Voting Rights Museum; they undertook a walk across the Edmund Pettus Bridge, the site of the 1965 voting rights march led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and 58 Berea College students on their way to Montgomery. The group then departed for the Dallas County courthouse to observe the Mock Trail regarding the shooting death of 1965 Civil Rights worker, Jimmie Lee Jackson in Selma. Four members of our travel group were chosen from the audience to serve on the Mock Jury of the Mock Trail.

Students stop for a moment at the Selma Voting Rights Museum and a historic Selma park which served as a staging area for civil rights workers during the 1965 Selma to Montgomery March. Interested students and faculty also walked across the infamous Edmund Pettus Bridge. Unknown photographer.

Crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge following a day of service. Photo by Waylon McDonald.
The Selma Voting Rights Movement officially started on January 2, 1965 during a mass meeting led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Brown Chapel in defiance of the city’s anti-meeting injunction. Over the following weeks, SCLC and SNCC activists expanded voter registration drives and protests in Selma and adjacent counties.

As a permanent memorial to the history of voting rights in America, the National Voting Rights Museum & Institute collects, preserves, and displays the artifacts that portray and chronicle the events which fueled “Bloody Sunday” and the subsequent historical Selma to Montgomery March. The National Voting Rights Museum & Institute also hosts the Annual Bridge Crossing Jubilee Berea students participated in during their Alternative Spring Break.

The Jubilee is generally held on the first full weekend in March. Attracting over 30,000 people, the Bridge Crossing Jubilee is held in conjunction with the Southern Leadership Conference and the 21st Century Leadership Movement. The 2015 50th anniversary celebration is expected to attract an even larger crowd, including the President and First Lady, Barack and Michelle Obama.
Professor Wendy Warren and Naliah Raymond take the opportunity to enjoy Selma artwork. Photo by Melissa Wills.

A pause before the Southern Poverty Law Center Civil Rights Memorial in Montgomery, AL. Photo by Berea College parent, Mrs. Debra Scott.
Before departing for a day of service and learning in Selma, the group had an opportunity to have a wonderful conversation, a hearty buffet lunch at Martha’s Place in Montgomery, as well as receive inspiring words of wisdom and encouragement from the restaurant’s owner. The story of Martha Hawkins’ life has been featured on the Oprah Winfrey Show and captured in the 2010 Marcus Brotherton book, Finding Martha’s Place. Her wonderful restaurant has been featured in The New York Times, Oprah Magazine, Southern Living, Essence and Guidepost magazines. Photo by Waylon McDonald.

Before lunch, the group toured the Civil Rights district of downtown Montgomery including the newly created Rosa Parks Museum, just down the street from the state capitol, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Dexter Avenue Baptist Church and the Southern Poverty Law Center. The Rosa Parks Museum is managed by Michigan’s Troy University. Photo by Melissa Wills.
Naliah Raymond seeks to interact with donated 1960’s Klu Klux Klan regalia inside the Selma Voting Rights Museum. Photo by Waylon McDonald.
Arriving early at the Dallas County Courthouse to gain a good seat, Berea travelers awaited the beginning of “The Heirs of Jimmy Lee Jackson vs. the State of Alabama, et al.” A Mock Trail surrounding the shooting death of a Selma Civil Rights worker. The courtroom quickly filled to standing room only capacity before the mock trial began.

Several Festival honorees and Civil Rights activists were present in the courtroom, including activist Dick Gregory, pictured to the left with Berea College student Naliah Raymond. Other courtroom celebrities included, Lou Gossett, Jr., members of the original Jubilee Singers, and Rev. William Barber, President of the North Carolina NAACP. Four Berea College travelers were selected to serve on the mock jury: Keith Bullock, Valeria Watkins, Waylon McDonald and Lawynter Bailey. Mock Trial proceedings were aired during Mark Thompson’s “Make It Plain” SiriusXM Radio broadcast, reaching an estimated 20 million listeners.

Others in the city for the official Bridge Crossing celebration and Awards Banquet, included national NAACP President Ben Jealous, Al Sharpton, John Lewis, and a list of other Who’s Who.
VOLUNTEER ACTION PLAN:

Not simply wanting to be voyeurs and “tourists” on the trip, during our “Reflections on the Day” talk back, students expressed a desire to develop an action plan based upon the needs of the Center and the abilities and time of those traveling with the group things each person felt they could contribute. Each student and adult was encouraged to think of something they would be willing to do to further the success of the McRae-Gaines Learning Center. Special consideration was given to the fact that Berea College students, faculty and staff are extremely busy people. All were encouraged to be mindful of this when expressing a desire to help in making a meaningful impact and to be of service. Adopting this philosophy, no offer of service was rejected. The following volunteer projects are being pursued:

- Provision of at least one out of service Berea school bus that can be donated to McCrae-Gaines Center to transport students to various venues and events. Action volunteer – Keith Bullock
- Communication efforts to keep everyone connected within the project. Action volunteer – Marissa Wells
- Supplying reconditioned Berea laptops to McRae-Gaines students and teachers. Action volunteer – Waylon McDonald
- Creation of a “Kick- Starter” fundraising video to raise funds for McRae-Gaines. Action volunteer – Lawynter Bailey
- Creation of a website to connect the school with persons who may have an interest in volunteering or sharing resources. Action volunteers - Ngoc Anh T. Cao
- Grant research and development for funds to support the school. Action volunteers – Steven Hall, Kenneth McQueen, and Waylon McDonald
- Exploration of a “Berea Buddy” system with McRae-Gaines students perhaps as pen pals or Skype buddies, etc. Action volunteers – Naliah Raymond and Melissa Wills
- Creation of Berea teaching internships at McRae-Gaines to update computing and student tracking services – Wendy Warren, Esther Livingston, Alicestyne Turley

Sponsoring organizations are warmly invited to work with the Spring Break travelers and others who may have an interest in aiding the McRae-Gaines Learning Center.
The official 2014 Sunday morning Bridge Crossing. Berea travelers missed this event because of our early morning departure to return to Berea. Photo courtesy of NAACP


http://www.selmajubilee.com/