

# THE ROAD TO JUSTICE

## DISCUSSION GUIDE



**SUPPORT  
MATERIALS  
FOR GROUP  
DISCUSSIONS  
ABOUT THE  
FILM**

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### **THE CONVERSATIONS WE MUST HAVE**

With Educator and Filmmaker André Robert Lee

Does the arc of history truly bend towards justice? And what does justice mean when the atrocities of our past are only a grandparent away? How can we heal as a nation without honestly confronting our history?

**[www.roadtojusticefilm.com](http://www.roadtojusticefilm.com)**

# ABOUT THE FILM

My name is Colleen Amberg and I am a former teacher at Morgan Park Academy in Chicago.

When looking for a powerful way to bring the lessons of the Civil Rights movement to life for my middle school students, I came upon an educational tour created by The Nation magazine. The Nation offered a unique perspective – founded by abolitionists in 1865, their journalists have been covering Civil Rights from Reconstruction through Black Lives Matter.

The stories from this trip are American history. Confronting them as a nation is long overdue. The people we met shared stories of heroic resistance and tenacious courage. The choices they made as individual changed our history.

I created this curriculum to use with the film. My hope that you see yourself in this history too. The curriculum is designed to be fluid and easily adjusted to the needs of different age groups.

The questions are meant to facilitate a conversation about hard history and the dangers we face as a nation if we continue to ignore it.

Thank you for taking this important step on the road to justice!

Colleen Amberg

## Included in materials:

- QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS
- WORDS TO DEFINE
- PLACES TO MAP
- PEOPLE TO KNOW
- TIMELINE ACTIVITY
- LINKS TO THE PLACES VISITED
- ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO EXPLORE

## THE ROAD TO JUSTICE

THE NATION AND DISTANT HORIZONS PRESENT A FILM BY KALIYA WARREN AND BRENDAN HALL  
EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY ANDRÉ ROBERT LEE EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY TERESA STACK AND JANET MOORE PRODUCED BY GRAHAM RAUBVOGEL

# Asking Questions

## INTRODUCTION

1. André starts the film saying “We’re going to learn some hard history.” What do you think he means by this? Is it important to study hard history? What are the risks if we do not accurately confront our past? (02:32)
2. Why is slavery called the Original Sin?
3. What are some ways the institution of slavery allowed early settlers to become wealthy and powerful?
4. What are some of the reasons the students give for participating in this experience? What reasons do the adults give for participating in this experience? (02:02) and (04:03)
5. What is the 15th Amendment and what did it do?
6. This trip was taken in 2020 before the state flag of Mississippi was changed. Look at the Confederate flag and then flags of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina and Mississippi. Why would states today still have some elements of the confederate flag in them? What message does that send? To whom?
7. In the film Bill tells us in a shaky voice that his grandmother was a slave and that he is trying to deal with his anger. What does this tell you about how close the history of slavery is to the present day? (05:48-06:19)

## MISSISSIPPI

8. Sylvester Hoover’s family were sharecroppers. In the film he says, “sharecropping wasn’t slavery, but it was slavery”. What does he mean? (07:14-07:21)
9. In what ways was the institution of slavery about maintaining power?

# THE ROAD TO JUSTICE

10. Look at a map of the United States, why do you think Sylvester said his sisters and brothers who were sharecroppers in the Delta “snuck to Chicago” and not some other city? Why did they have to “sneak”? (08:27-08:41)
11. Describe what you think it would feel like to carry a 200-pound cotton sack. (08:43-08:56)
12. What purpose did music serve to slaves and sharecroppers? (08:57-09:05)
13. One of the adults on this trip, Anne, shared that her ancestor owned slaves. Do you think this was brave of her to share this information? Put yourself in her shoes. What do you think she might have been feeling on this trip? (09:29)
14. There are images in the film from a Confederate Cemetery filled with fresh Confederate flags. What does this say? And to whom? (00:48)
15. Look at Doug as you listen to his reasons for coming on this trip (09:56-10:27). Describe what you think he is feeling.
16. In 1896 the Supreme Court decided that “Separate but Equal” was equal. What are some ways you can think of that having separate facilities would not be equal?
17. If a law is unjust, what is your personal responsibility?
18. From 11:22-11:48 we are introduced to Bryant’s Grocery store, where Emmett Till’s story starts and where the modern Civil Rights movement began. How did your expectations of the place compare to the reality of it? What does seeing this building in ruins say to you?
19. In 2011, Bryant’s Grocery Store was designated spot number 1 on the Mississippi Freedom Trail. Look up images of Bryant’s Grocery Store today. [Read this article](#). Who owns the property today? Why won’t they sell it? What do you think should be done with this property?

# THE ROAD TO JUSTICE

20. Use [this link](#) to view the jurors in the Emmett Till murder trial. What was unusual about the jury make-up?

21. [Listen to the lyrics](#) of this Bob Dylan song from 1962. How can music help to raise awareness to social issues?

22. Was it resistance for Jet magazine to publish Emmett Till's photos? In what ways? Describe. (12:25-12:36)

23. When something is wrong why is it important to let others know? Can you think of ways exposing injustices has led to change?

24. In the 1960's television, radio, and news publications were the best way to get news to people quickly. How has that changed?

25. What do you think the students were feeling hearing the story of Emmett Till at the site of Bryant's Grocery Store? What evidence do you have to support your conclusions? (11:53-12:25)

26. In the film Bill (13:10) tells the horrible story of his grandmother watching her father get killed by some white men. What does this story tell you about the proximity of racism to our own lives? In what ways does sharing this story help to further understanding the struggle for equality?

27. COFO (Council of Federated Organizations) (14:12) emerged in Mississippi to support the Freedom Riders and assist with voter education and registration. Is voter suppression an issue today? Why is this the case? Should something be done? What can be done?

28. Mr. Hezekiah Watkins was mistakenly jailed as a Freedom Rider and put on death row at age 13. How do you think this event changed his life? What did it teach him about the system? (14:27-17:58)

29. Have you ever participated in a protest? Is the right to protest important to you? Why? In recent years what kinds of protests or marches have you participated in or heard about?

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30. Why do you think in so many instances (the Children's March, the Freedom Riders, etc) it is the young generations who get involved and speak out against injustices? What prevents some older people from participating and/or getting involved?

31. What does the fact that Mr. Hezekiah Watkins was arrested 109 times tell you about the laws in Mississippi in the 1960's? (16:25-16:42)

32. Mr. Watkins said one of the most common questions he gets asked in his presentations is "Why did I do it?" His answer to the group of students is "I knew you guys was coming along." What did he mean by this? (17:15-17:22)

33. What is gained by diluting the harsher realities of our history? Who does this benefit? Why is it important to teach hard history? At what age should this history be taught?

## ARKANSAS

34. In 1954 the Supreme Court reversed its ruling on the Plessy v. Ferguson case of 1896 and ruled in the Brown v. Board of Education case that "separate but equal" was, in fact, not equal. This changed the law of the US and made segregation illegal. It was 3 years later when Miss Elizabeth Eckford and the Little Rock 9 were desegregating Little Rock High School. What does that tell you about change? What does it say about the law?

35. Miss Eckford refers to this image (see page 11, 3rd photo from top) when she is speaking about her first day of school. What is happening in this photo? (19:21-19:34)

36. Miss Eckford says the people who were not hitting her or beating her were "among the silent witnesses". What does this mean? Have you ever been a silent witness? What is the lesson here? What are you the silent witness to in your life, school or institution? (19:55-20:20)

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37. What does it mean to reconcile? What do we need to reconcile about our history to create a more just world?

38. Elizabeth Eckford says you can “never have true reconciliation until we acknowledge our painful and shared past”. What is she saying about history? What does this mean? (21:02–21:17)

39. Why do most people not study hard history? Why do most schools avoid teaching hard history? What is lost when we are comfortable?

## ALABAMA

40. In the film Catherine and Doug talk about growing up in Birmingham and accepting what was happening to the black community. Catherine mentions that her mother admitted to them that what was happening was wrong but that they were “not going to do anything about it”. If you choose not to speak out in a situation that is wrong, does this make you complicit? (22:35)

41. Is it possible to be neutral to history? Or is being neutral choosing the side of the oppressor?

42. Rev. Dr. Carolyn McKinstry tells us that the homes, churches, and businesses that were targets of the bombings in Birmingham in the 1960’s were all black families and no one was taken to justice. Is justice possible today? Explain. (22:45–23:01)

43. Doug says at 23:33 “I’m not responsible for what I was taught – I’m responsible for what I do with it.” Do you agree? Why or why not?

44. Kaylynn observes at the end that “everything happened so recently”. Why is it essential to be conscious of this fact? (23:36)

## TENNESSEE

45. How can learning about your past help you understand the present?

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46. Josiah says this “isn’t just black history, it’s American history”. Elizabeth Eckford talked about the “shared past”. Are there people who would disagree with these statements? What do they get from disagreeing with these statements? (24:02)

47. Research the world’s reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968. In what ways, if any, was his death a catalyst for change?

48. André says, “We need to be in this space and get angry. We need to be in this space and challenge each other...and then actually return to this space when it gets hard.” (26:29) Is it important to confront hard history? How can we build bridges between people to talk about issues that are difficult?

## NATIONAL MEMORIAL FOR PEACE AND JUSTICE

49. The trip ends at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice where the names of 4000 people who were lynched in America are acknowledged and commemorated. What is lynching? (26:45-27:39)

50. Who was Edmund Pettus?

51. Kermit says at the end of the film as the group is walking over the Edmund Pettus Bridge, “We have to work to move forward.” What kinds of issues need to be addressed today to help move our society forward towards justice? What can be done at the federal level? The state level? The local level? What can you do about them? (28:12-28:22)

52. This film was filled with stories of regular people whose lives were changed by the choices they made confronting injustice. History is filled with these people. Research more about a person whose life was changed by their decision to tackle an injustice in their society.

**"Preserve it, tell it,  
pass it down. And  
make sure it never  
happens again"**

## PEOPLE TO KNOW



**Elizabeth Eckford** - Member of the Little Rock Nine, the student group who were the first to desegregate Central High School in September of 1957. She was separated from the rest and entered the high school alone, crossing a fierce and angry mob and the Arkansas National Guard who were trying to prevent her from entering the high school. She continues to speak about her experiences as a youth in the desegregation/Civil Rights movement to this day.

**Medgar Evers** - Civil Rights Activist, first field-secretary of the NAACP, assassinated at the age of 37 outside of his home by Byron de la Beckwith in front of his wife and children.

**Fannie Lou Hamer**- American voting and women's rights activist. Leader in the Civil Rights movement. Worked with SNCC and helped to organize 1964's Freedom Summer in Mississippi. Ran for Congress in 1965. Famous quote of Ms. Hamer's, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."

**Martin Luther King Jr.** - Inspirational, non-violent leader of the American Civil Rights Movement from 1955 to April 4, 1968 who gave his life to the idea of equality for all. He was a spokesman for the Montgomery Bus Boycott; the president of the SCLC; brought attention to the segregation in Birmingham, AL; led the March on Washington where he delivered his "I Have a Dream Speech"; received the Nobel Prize; was instrumental in the passing of the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. On April 4th, he was assassinated on the balcony of the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, TN by James Earl Ray.

**Rev. Dr. Carolyn McKinstry**- survivor of the Civil Rights struggle, particularly in Birmingham, where she was present and witness to the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing which killed 4 young girls. She continues to speak about her experiences today.

**Bayard Rustin-** Leader in the social movements for civil rights, socialism, nonviolence, and gay rights. Organized the Freedom Rides, organized SCLC, helped to strengthen MLK's leadership. Devoted his life to the movement. Worked largely behind the scenes because of his sexuality.

**Emmett Till** -14-year-old boy from Chicago who was kidnapped and brutally murdered in Mississippi in the summer of 1955 by Roy Bryant and J.W. Milam. It was his murder that brought nationwide attention to the racial violence and injustice prevalent in Mississippi. After murdering young Emmett, his body was dumped in the Tallahatchie River. The funeral was open casket, by order of his mother, Mammie Till, so the "world could see what they had done to her son". Bryant and Milam were acquitted in a quick trial.

**Hezekiah Watkins** - Youngest Freedom Rider, arrested, sent to prison, and put on death row at age 13. He spent his life working as an activist organizing boycotts and registering Black voters in Mississippi. He was arrested more than 100 times and continues to speak about his experiences to young people to the present day.



# TIMELINE ACTIVITY

- **1865:** Civil War Ends
- **1865-1954:** Jim Crow Laws
- **1865-1877:** Reconstruction Period
- **1870:** 15th Amendment (Right to Vote)
- **1896:** Plessy vs. Ferguson
- **1954:** Brown vs. Board of Education
- **1955:** Emmitt Till Lynched
- **1955:** Rosa Parks makes a stand
- **1955-1956:** Montgomery Bus Boycott
- **1963:** MLK's Letter from Birmingham Jail
- **1963:** Children's March
- **1963:** Medgar Evers Assassinated
- **1963:** March on Washington
- **1963:** 16th Street Church Bombing
- **1963:** Emmett Till verdict
- **1963:** JFK Assassinated
- **1964:** Civil Rights Act passed
- **1965:** Bloody Sunday
- **1965:** Voting Rights Act passed
- **1965:** Malcolm X Assassinated
- **April 1968:** Martin Luther King Assassinated
- **June 1968:** Robert F. Kennedy Assassinated



# THE ROAD TO JUSTICE



## Words to Define:

- **Original Sin**
- **Segregation**
- **Systemic Racism**
- **FHA (Fair Housing Administration)**
- **Jim Crow Laws**
- **Civil Rights**
- **Sharecroppers**
- **Plantation**
- **Freedom Riders**
- **Lynching**
- **COFO, NAACP, SNCC, CORE, SCLC**
- **Student Activism**
- **Compliance**

## PLACES TO MAP:

- Jackson, Mississippi
- Mississippi Delta
- Chicago, IL
- Memphis, TN
- Little Rock, AR
- Montgomery, AL
- Birmingham, AL
- Selma, AL





## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

## PLACES TO EXPLORE

### MISSISSIPPI:

- Mississippi Civil Rights Museum  
<https://mcrm.mdah.ms.gov/>
- Medgar Evers Home Museum  
<https://www.nps.gov/memy/index.htm>
- Malaco Records  
<https://www.malaco.com/>
- Old Greyhound Bus Station  
<https://theclio.com/entry/5735>
- The Big Apple Inn  
<https://www.seriousseats.com/the-big-apple-inn-a-little-mississippi-diner-with-an-outsize-history>
- COFO Jackson State University  
<https://www.jsums.edu/cofo/>
- B. B. King Museum  
<https://bbkingmuseum.org/>
- Museum of the Mississippi Delta  
<https://museumofthemississippidelta.com/>
- Back in the Day Museum, Baptist Town, MS  
<https://hovertours.homestead.com/Backinday.html>
- Bryant's Grocery Store  
<https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/bryants-grocery/>
- Emmett Till Interpretive Center  
<https://www.emmett-till.org/>

# PLACES TO EXPLORE

## continued...

### ARKANSAS

- Little Rock Central High School  
<https://www.nps.gov/chsc/index.htm>
- William Clinton Presidential Library  
<https://www.clintonlibrary.gov/>

### TENNESSEE

- National Civil Rights Museum  
<https://www.civilrightsmuseum.org/>
- Stax Museum of American Soul  
<https://staxmuseum.com/>
- Slave Haven Underground Railroad Museum  
<http://slavehavenmemphis.com/>

### ALABAMA

- 16th Street Baptist Church  
<https://www.16thstreetbaptist.org/>
- Kelly Ingram Park  
<https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/kelly-ingram-park/>
- Brown Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church  
<https://www.nps.gov/places/alabama-brown-chapel-ame-church-selma.htm>
- Selma Interpretive Center  
<https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/selma-interpretive-center/>

- Edmund Pettus Bridge  
<https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/edmund-pettus-bridge/>
- Dexter Parsonage Museum  
<https://civilrightstrail.com/attraction/dexter-parsonage-museum/>
- Legacy Museum  
<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/museum>
- National Memorial for Peace and Justice  
<https://museumandmemorial.eji.org/memorial>
- Equal Justice Initiative <https://eji.org/>

## BOOKS TO READ

- Alexander, Michelle. **The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness.** The New Press, 2012
- Branch, Taylor. **Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63.** Simon & Schuster
- Branch, Taylor. **The King Years: Historic Moments in the Civil Rights Movement.** Simon & Schuster,
- Guralnick, Peter. **Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom.** Back Bay Books, 1999

## **BOOKS TO READ**

**continued...**

- Lewis, John. **Walking with the Wind: A Memoir of the Movement.** Mariner Books, 1999
- McKinstry, Carolyn Maull and Denise George. **While the World Watched: A Birmingham Bombing Survivor Comes of Age during the Civil Rights Movement.** Tyndale House Publishers, 2011
- McWhorter, Diane. **Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama: The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution.** Simon & Schuster, 2013
- Moody, Anne. **Coming of Age in Mississippi: The Classic Autobiography of Growing Up Poor and Black in the Rural South.** Dell, 1992
- Nicholas, Denise. **Freshwater Road.** Agate Publishing, 2005.
- Olson, Lynne. **Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970.** Scribner, 2000
- Pitts, Leonard. **Racism in America: Cultural Codes and Color Lines in the 21st Century.** Herald Books, 2016
- Stevenson, Bryan. **Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption.** Spiegel & Grau, 2014.
- Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. **From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation.** Haymarket Books, 2016
- Tyson, Timothy. **The Blood of Emmett Till.** Simon & Schuster, 2017
- Walls Lainer, Carlotta and Fraizer Page, Lisa. **A Mighty Long Way: My Journey to Justice at Little Rock Central High School.** One World, 2010
- Whitehead, Colson. **The Underground Railroad.** Doubleday, 2016
- Wilkerson, Isabel. **The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration.** Vintae, 2010
- Williams, Juan. **Eyes on the Prize: America's Civil Rights Years, 1954-1965.** Penguin Books; Reprint edition, 2013
- Wilkerson, Isabel. **The Warmth of Other Suns: The Epic Story of America's Great Migration.** Vintage, 2010

***What people are saying about...***

# THE ROAD TO JUSTICE

"*The Road to Justice* tells us as much about life in the segregated South, and the history of the civil rights movement, as many lengthy volumes. At a time when the achievements of the struggle for racial justice are under unprecedented assault, viewers both young and old will learn about the realities of our history and the heroism of those willing to take a stand for equality. It deserves wide distribution in schools, online, and wherever Americans wish to learn about the past and present of our society."

— **Eric Foner, Pulitzer-Prize winning author of *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* / DeWitt Clinton Professor Emeritus of History, Columbia University**

"Fantastic film! It is perfect for our current DEI initiative!"  
— **Deborah Glymph, Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Chatham Hall**

"A tremendously moving piece...completely enthralling."  
-**Matt Smith, Executive Vice President CIEE**



## **OFFICIAL SELECTION**

Baltimore International Black Film Festival  
DC Black Film Festival  
Holly Shorts Film Festival  
Portland Film Festival  
Cucalorous Film Festival  
Urbanworld  
UNAFF  
Black Bear Film Festival