

The Freedom Center

I wasn't sure what to expect, what I'd see, or how I would feel. I knew that the idea of slavery made me uncomfortable, and when we discussed it in History classes, I would shudder to think of the things the slaves had gone through. I was amazed at the lengths the people working the Underground Railroad had gone to in order to help other people. I used to tell myself that I would have done the same thing; risk my life to help others. The Freedom Center was an experience that really made me think about myself. I questioned whether or not I really *would* have done the same thing as Harriet Tubman or other famous 'conductors' of the Railroad.

When I first walked into the Freedom Center, I was excited to find they had an audio tour available. My previous experience with museums has been better when I have had a guide, rather than wandering alone. After getting off of the elevator, I gravitated first towards a large wooden building called the Slave Pen. When I began to listen to the narrative, I was floored. This was one of the very buildings that 75 slaves had been kept bound in prior to the slave auctions. The imagery presented by the narrator was strong and moving. I could picture the slaves being chained up and mistreated. They also had a narrative from a slave and the slave master – whose name was imprinted inside of the pen. It really gave me a sense for the fear of the slaves and the power the slave master held over them. Outside of the Slave Pen were letters written by the slave master; he requested more slaves, of certain ages, and listed the prices they were worth. The letter gave me chills because I was so angry that this man (along with many others) was so arrogant to believe he was above the slaves as human beings. The superiority he exhibited over the African Americans was overwhelming. I quickly began to resent the slave master and others like him.

I moved on to the artists' depictions of slavery. There was one mural that especially moved me. I felt grief and loss while simply looking at it. It depicted the African Americans in their original home, being uprooted and thrown onto boats in confined areas, their shackles around their neck, hands, and feet, and the many slave auctions that took place. The looks of pure pain and sorrow on the characters faces affected me more than I expected. They also had artwork that told a story. It was a huge piece of quilt work that began with ancestors' stories and lives. It was colorful and a very artistic way to describe their journey.

There were several videos that had been made specifically for the museum. They were reenacted in order to depict the stories of the slaves and incorporate you into their world, many years ago. Each video I became so enthralled that I felt like I too was a slave. I felt scared and tense and wanted the characters to escape safely. Some of the videos portrayed the slaves' strong spirituality, despite their hardships. I was amazed at how a person can trust in a higher power when they are being treated so terribly. The videos also emphasized a different sense of family. These people were family with anyone who was for the same cause: freedom. Northerners and southerners, regardless of color or race banded together to fight for freedom. They

risked their lives for people they had never met and would never see again. It was amazing the love and compassion people can show for strangers.

The last movie I saw was mostly about equality. It began with only African Americans but evolved into equality for people of all kinds. I think it was a great way to leave because it reminded me of why I was there in the first place. It was a chance to increase my own personal cultural competence and to learn more that I can pass on to others. I was appalled at the injustices done to the African American community in the past and realized that some of these same injustices are being done to other communities today. The law may proclaim equality, but not all people are treated the same.