



The CommUUnicator

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Hallowed Ground and Juneteenth 2024

By George Thompson

On June 6, 1944, the world as we know it today began to tilt back toward freedom and democracy and away from the tyrannical, diabolical, and maniacal forces in Europe that led to the murder of more than six million Jews (and gypsies, LGBTQ, and others), the countless deaths and sufferings of civilians, and the millions of soldiers, sailors, aviators, and medical personnel who were killed and wounded. On June 6, 2024, the 80th anniversary of D-Day was commemorated and watched by millions around the world. The ceremonies included veterans now in their late 90s and early 100s, most of them everyday citizens like you and me who believed in serving a cause far larger than themselves: The future of the world was at stake.

I was incredibly fortunate to have visited the beaches of Normandy and walked in the adjacent cemeteries at the age of sixteen. To have stood where the Germans overlooked the beaches and envision how the Allies—with great courage, fortitude, and purpose—made their way through such tortuous conditions, to walk among the neat rows of some 9,400 white crosses and stars of David representing American dead, well, the experience was overwhelming to a privileged young lad like me.

Truly, the day spent at Normandy remains among the most impactful of my life. And so it seems with everyone who visits there. I steadfastly agree with the sentiment that every American who cares about freedom and democracy and equal justice and opportunity for

all should do all they can to visit this pivotal site in world history, to walk among those who gave their lives so we could overcome fascism and genocide and live free, to contemplate what sacrifice means and how, when we walk in the footsteps of history, we must strive to make this imperfect human world a better place for all.

As we celebrate Juneteenth in our country, there is another place that every American should visit for similar historical significance, contemplation, reflection, and enlightenment: Montgomery, Alabama, where the Equal Justice Initiative (EJI) has created [three unforgettable sites](#), each different but equally haunting and meaningful.

The Legacy Museum: From Enslavement to Mass Incarceration and National Memorial for Peace and Justice opened in 2018, and the new



17-acre Freedom Monument Sculpture Park along the Alabama River, where tens of thousands of Africans were sold into slavery, opened on March 26, 2024, but officially is dedicated on June

19th in celebration of the new federal holiday.

Cynthia, my sister, and I were able to visit the new sculpture park on June 7. Before long we were walking with an African-American family of five who were similarly awe-struck by what

they saw. A young grandson only 18 months old was as excited as he could be as he wandered from one sculpture to another. He often held the hand of his father, a first lieutenant in the Air Force who had just completed officer training at nearby Maxwell Air Base. His mother and grandparents were also interacting with the young boy.



At the end of the walk in the park is the massive National Monument to Freedom, upon which are engraved some 122,000 surnames of the 4.7 million people formerly enslaved as recorded in the 1870 U.S. Census. As the family posed in front of the monument for a group photo, the grandfather suddenly looked back toward the wall and pointed to a name: his family’s surname. To his grandson he said: “That’s our name.”

Hallowed ground. Hallowed history. Hallowed memory. This Juneteenth, let us remember and learn from the errors of our past so we do not repeat them.

Member News

Our UUFW poet, Joe Good, wrote a poem following his visit to the [Hawksbill Greenway](#) in Luray. It seems the town has created a “Poetry Trail” along the two-mile greenway, which follows the Hawksbill Creek. The Board of the Greenway Foundation loved Joe’s poem. They are planning to post it in its entirety in the kiosks on the Greenway Trail. And they plan to engrave

the first stanza and place it at one of the trees or shrubs along the trail. Way to go, Joe!

Hawksbill Creek

If beauty in the heart
Enters through the eyes,
That would be why I come to Hawksbill
Creek
In the month of sweet showers;

And if each flower of the dogwood
Were an angel,
And such may (who knows?) be the
case;
It is not mere guess

Why the branches float above the water,
And the night heron stalks
Beneath those angels,
And all, all, reflects into my heart.

Joe Good



A steady stream of shoppers at the Tree Streets Yard Sale on Saturday stopped to buy our bake sale goodies, and on Sunday morning, we brought the total take to \$515. Thank you to all who contributed baked goods and to Susan Clark for organizing this fundraiser.

