



HARVARD-WESTLAKE

The day after graduation, a group of teachers gathered again—only this time, it was to fly to Japan to explore Japanese culture and art through the country's environment and history. Made possible by the Kutler family, the Kutler Center Faculty Summer Fellowship supports the Kutler Center's mission to cultivate interdisciplinary studies and independent research at Harvard-Westlake via a curated trip for HW colleagues. Today, we take a look back at last summer's Kutler Fellowship trip, which was focused on the African American experience in the American South.

Cheers, [Ed Hu](#) | Head of External Relations

A Powerful Journey Through the African American South

Not a day has gone by that I haven't thought of our trip through the South," reflects Middle School Science Teacher Daniella Ellingson. **"The experience had a truly profound impact on me and how I teach and engage with students, colleagues, and others."**

Ellingson was one of 13 faculty members who took part in a 12-day trip last June to explore

the African American experience in the American South as part of the Kutler Center Faculty Summer Fellowship. Led by Upper School History Teacher and Department Head of Interdisciplinary Studies and History Larry Klein along with Head of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Janine Jones, the fellows visited sites including Charleston, Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery, Selma, New Orleans, the Mississippi Delta, and Memphis, focusing on the civil rights movement and African American culture, music, and food. **Upon returning to campus in the fall, these Kutler Fellows talked about ways to use what they learned to enhance HW's interdisciplinary education and shared some of the highlights of the experience with their colleagues—and now, with *HW Life*.**

“This was living history that we got to experience, rather than history in a textbook. This was history from the source, hearing the actual *story* of history.”

Dean Coordinator and Counselor Camille da Santos

Charleston



Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church

Larry Klein: A white supremacist killed parishioners at this church in 2015. We met with the son of one of the women killed, **activist Chris Singleton, who is an amazing public speaker with a very moving message of forgiveness**, in his first appearance at the church since the shooting.



Gullah Geechee Tour of Charleston

Upper School Dean Teneice Wesson: This was the first official tour we had on the trip, and it inspired a riveting discussion at the end of that



day: Who does history belong to? Whose history becomes official?



Chickin Lickin

Archivist Alexis Sherman Arinsburg '98: The next day, we stopped at this hole in the wall in Hardeeville, South Carolina—and had the **best BBQ and mac and cheese ever**. Each meal not only provided glimpses into the local cuisine but also opportunities to connect with each other. The fellowship definitely brought us all closer.

Atlanta



Albany Freedom Singers

Larry Klein: The Albany Freedom Singers were established in 1962 and sing gospel songs and spirituals of the civil rights movement.

Upper School Science Teacher Ryan Ellingson: Their commanding voices gave many of us chills, and their personal stories made the songs' impact even more powerful.

“I’ve traveled in the South but never taken the time to really see the historical civil rights sites before. That kind of felt like educational malpractice, so I was so fortunate to have an amazing experience like this facilitated by HW. I can’t recommend this fellowship enough—every colleague should take this opportunity to challenge themselves and grow and learn from the amazing people at HW.”

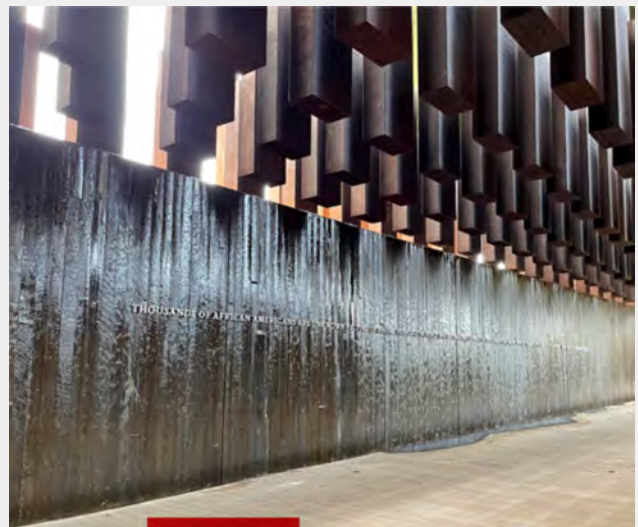
Upper School History Teacher Conrad Cuda

Montgomery



Dr. Richard Harris House

Daniella Ellingson: We got to visit with Dr. Valda Montgomery, who lived in this house as a child and told us about its importance as a **safe harbor** and strategic meeting place for civil rights activists. Sitting in the kitchen, walking up the stairs, feeling the physical objects of people’s lives and hearing the personal stories... it *brought* me to that history.



The Legacy Museum and National Memorial for Peace and Justice

Camille da Santos: The memorial to the victims of lynching is made up of steel blocks hanging overhead, each one representing a county in a state, with the names and dates of the people who were lynched there. As you walk through the memorial, the blocks keep getting higher and higher—

you have to crane your neck to look.

Upper School Visual Arts Teacher Brannon Rockwell-Charland Cook: Finding my family's surnames was huge—incredibly heavy.

Teneice Wesson: Being from the South, it was really moving. I saw counties I'd lived in. We were ruined in the most significant and beautiful way by this museum.

New Orleans



Bourbon Street

Brannon Rockwell-Charland Cook: We went from the Legacy Museum to the party on Bourbon Street. **It was nice to experience some joy.** We heard live acoustic jazz at Preservation Hall and then more incredible music at Louis Armstrong Park on Juneteenth.

“We sampled all kinds of soul food, and I was happy to learn there are few things that can’t be deep fried. It was also an incredibly emotional trip, presenting opportunities for conversations with colleagues that were more real and raw than I’ve ever had. It was a trip I’ll never forget, and I’m grateful for everything we experienced.”

Ryan Ellingson

Mississippi Delta



The Emmett Till Historic Intrepid Center

Larry Klein: Our guide at this museum was friends as a kid with the son of one of Emmett Till's killers. He told us that when he was a kid, he was playing right at the spot where he was talking with us, **watching as his dad was forced to scrub out the back of the killer's pickup the day after Emmett Till was murdered.**

Memphis



Royal Studios

Teneice Wesson: We went to Royal Studios, one of the longest running studios in the world. Al Green recorded "Let's Stay Together" there; Bruno Mars recorded "Uptown Funk" there. It's an area of Memphis where you won't see many tourists, but it still brings legendary and new artists in to record and learn from each other. At the Stax Museum, we learned about the connection between civil rights and the soul music of stars like Aretha Franklin and Otis Redding.



National Civil Rights Museum

Alexis Arinsburg: One of our final stops was the National Civil Rights Museum, which includes the site of the Lorraine Motel, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. **Having visited Dr. King's childhood home and the Ebenezer Baptist Church, where he preached, at the beginning of our travels made it feel as though our trip came full circle.**

Photos: Alexis Sherman Arinsburg '98, Scott Bello, Brannon Rockwell-Charland Cook, Camille da Santos, Daniella Ellingson, Ryan Ellingson, Janine Jones

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