

Upcoming civil rights 'pilgrimage' translates history to a personal level

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CHaSS faculty members Jason Gilmore, Francois Dengah and Marcus Brasileiro during a student research expedition to Brazil in summer 2016. This spring, Gilmore and Dengah will guide a pilgrimage of four student scholarship winners to sites important to the Civil Rights Movement.

Deadline is Oct. 6 for scholarships to make the life-changing tour

April 4, 2018, will mark the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., by James Earl Ray in Memphis, Tenn.

Has it really been a half-century since 1968 when the nation experienced this tumultuous time of civil-rights battles, assassins and political animus? For those who remember it, it seems like yesterday.

That connection — through time, immediacy and presence — is the goal of “King’s Road: the 2018 USU Civil Rights Pilgrimage.”

The four students and two faculty members who’ll make up the pilgrimage team will travel to the American South for a seven-day expedition beginning March 31. Along the way, they’ll stop at the Lorraine Motel, the site of King’s murder. The trip will be “transformative,” said the tour’s adviser, Jason Gilmore. “It will be a journey of discovery on many levels.” Applications for scholarships to cover the bulk of expenses will be accepted through Oct. 6.

The student travelers will follow “King’s Road,” which begins in King’s birthplace of Atlanta, then lead leads through some of the locations “where his work was most pivotal,” said Gilmore. These include stops in the Alabama cities of Montgomery, Birmingham, Tuscaloosa and Selma.

Their destination on April 4 will be the Lorraine Motel in Memphis where King was shot in 1968 as he exited his motel room. The USU team will take part in events

organized by the National Civil Rights Museum that is now located at the motel site.

Gilmore, assistant professor of global communication, will be joined by anthropologist Francois Dengah, an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology.

Gilmore says ordinary classroom lessons are important in an individual’s learning journey.

“But since this history belongs to all humans,” he said, the pilgrimage allows students to “connect to history on a personal level as well. Because we engage with people who have lived the history, it changes how we understand the world around us.”

To bring the impact of the dramatic events of 1968 closer to home on the USU campus, Gilmore’s department is sponsoring Bob Zellner, who will speak as part of the 2017-18 *Tanner Talks* series. Zellner, one of the most influential leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, will present a free lecture at Thursday, Oct. 5, at 6:30 p.m., in the Eccles Science Learning Center, room 130.

Prior to their departure next spring, the scholarship students have a hefty reading list that takes them though the tumultuous era. On the required reading and viewing list are more than 15 books, documentaries and documents, including Zellner’s memoir, *The Wrong Side of Murder Creek: A White Southerner in the Freedom Movement*.

The pre-trip reading, said Gilmore, helps students “view the issues of civil rights through a historical lens as a way to help them better understand our country’s history and to contextualize issues that are still relevant today.”

The scholarship includes ground transportation through the South, motels, meals and museum fees. The pilgrimage is co-sponsored by the College of Humanities and Social Science.

To download the application, visit https://gallery.mailchimp.com/43436483d263cfbc7174ded3c/files/4ad44875-a725-4908-80be-6e2bc11f2c33/Civil_Rights_Scholarship_April_2018_FINAL.pdf

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