

Sankofa Collective Memoir (with a focus on the Lorraine Motel)
Written by Sarina, Sydney, Rena, Thulani, Liora, Christian, and Leor

Sarina: It is a bright and sunny day in Memphis, Tennessee; almost completely in contrast to what I'm feeling as I look up to the numbers 306, the wreath on the ledge. This is the place of MLK's assassination. The death of a dreamer. There is a large sign: Lorraine Motel.

Sydney: I remember as we walked over towards the motel and Reverend Love was sharing her memories of when King was shot. As she was talking, she started to tear up.

Sarina: We approach the gate.

Rena: We stepped onto the staircase. The ground was concrete and each step felt dreamlike, weighted in the way that steps are when you're dreaming. The teal metal handrail filling my palm, concrete steps heavy and hard under my shoes. I turned to step on to the main balcony, counting the doors. 300, 301, 302... I saw the memorial wreath up close and noticed fake carnations. Red, like the ones King gave Corretta so she'd 'have something that would last'.

Sydney: Rena was already emotional and I consoled her for a bit.

Rena: Rena: I counted two more doors. 304, made bed – 306, unmade. I turned around and stood there for a while, staring at the corner and thinking, "Dr. King was shot there. He bled there. A dreamer was shot *right there* – I saw the picture."

Sydney: I was envisioning myself as King himself. It dawned on me that I was literally walking the same steps a great leader once walked. What an honor. Looking out from the balcony across the street back at the museum at the window, you can't explain it, you just feel it.

Liora: It was a humble door, like every other one near it, marked with a number, like every other one near it. Yet it meant so much more than any other door near it. That fact astounded me. The normalness was what scared me. It made me realize that Martin Luther King was just a man. (pause). I don't think Thulani and I spoke. I think we just walked for a bit, very slowly, and kept quiet. We didn't have to speak. We knew just what each other was thinking.

Thulani: At the motel I really didn't say anything to Liora. I wish I could have shared some words, and let her know how I felt, but I felt like I couldn't. I was so speechless. All I could share at the time were tears, tears for Dr. Martin Luther King, the prince of peace, a man who only wanting justice, peace and equality for all mankind. I cried because most people are not fulfilling his legacy, many people are still experiencing injustice, inequality, and racism.

Liora: But the entire time during that moment we took, we were linked arm in arm, connected. As if we were telling each other “It's ok, I am here for you”. She was holding me up and me her. I was afraid that if I let go we would crumble.

Sarina: I look around at my peers crying. Why can't I feel anything? Where are the tears? It was as if my heart was numb. Maybe it just hadn't hit me yet, but as I kept walking I wondered if it ever would.

Christian: When we went up on the balcony I was surprised that we both stayed silent. I think the heat of the moment both had us choked up and quiet. Liora and I talked a lot during the trip about various things including race, and civil rights topic – but I really didn't know what to say at that moment.

Leor: And yet we could just read how we all felt from the expressions on our faces. We were all so overwhelmed, standing on the concrete in front of the motel and just looking at room 306 in awe. This was the place where a leader was killed.

Christian: We had spent so much time engulfed in our Civil Rights journey that Dr. King's death felt personal to us. On this trip I had made a direct connection to Dr. King and the message he preached. The thought of how he was gunned down in cold blood made me both angry and mad. As more and more people started to cry and get emotional, I too became emotional on the inside. I didn't end up crying, which I'm surprised about, but I did sit in silence for a long time.

Sydney: When I came down the stairs and started walking out of the gate to the grass, that's when it hit. It was just like this unexplainable overwhelming emotion that just came out all at once.

Rena: I started weeping, bawling nasty and harsh. Taurean sat down next to me and then he did something braver than I've seen any man do: he cried beside me. To sit down next to a crying soul and cry along with them is true bravery. He put his arm around me and after a very good, very long time he said, “This is harder than I thought it would be.” And I waited to process what he'd said instead of speaking

immediately just to fill space because a teacher of mine once told me that conversation doesn't always require speech. Finally, I said, "Thank god it's hard."

Christian: I started thinking of how important a figure like Martin Luther King could be to a black youth. If you ask any young black male who their role model is, more than half of the time it's President Obama. Why, because he is an example that shows that African-Americans can succeed, and can even run the country that once enslaved, and discriminated against them.

Thulani: I gave Liora a hug and suddenly in the middle of Kings memorial site everyone formed a group hug, We formed a big circle everyone held hands and begin singing, praying and sharing how they felt. We joke about how ugly each of our cries were and why we were shedding tears.

Sydney: My crying is amplifying off of everyone else's and it's just a big mess! But I didn't need to have a lengthy conversation, all I needed was for the people I was spending my time with to be there for me and they were in more ways than one.

Leor: When we got back on the bus, we talked about the quote that was on the plaque in front of the balcony Martin Luther King was assassinated on. It went something like, "You can kill the dreamer, but you cannot kill the dream," and that really stood out to us. We were the dream: riding in that bus, talking, and thinking about carrying out our ideas and continuing our relationships. That's what Sankofa was about; the realization that we *are* the dream. The realization that we need to fight to keep that dream alive and to not give up.

Sydney: The journey does not stop here; our journey together has just begun.

Sarina: Together, black and white, Jewish and Christian, we took in the end of the dreamer, but not the dream.