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Looking back on the Alabama Learning Trip

2 messages

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Three JMA supporters share their experience.

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The Alabama Learning Trip group in front of the mural at Freedom Riders National Monument.

Hi Lauren,

One of the highlights of 2023 was JMA's inaugural Alabama Learning Trip, where we invited supporters to get a glimpse of our work in the Deep South.

More so than many places, Alabama symbolizes the challenges—and possibilities—of achieving racial and economic justice in America. It was the site of so many Civil Rights struggles throughout history and in many ways, segregation is still alive and well there. The state has also seen an influx of global manufacturers who, lured to the state by generous tax incentives, promise to create jobs but for the most part have upheld the legacy of slavery by exploiting workers.

But it's also the site of a fighting worker movement, and one of the states where our [community benefits agreement with electric bus manufacturer New Flyer](#) is being implemented. We talked with three major JMA funders—Paula Litt, Allison Thomas and Celia Bernstein—who attended the trip about what they learned and how they'll support JMA as a result. Here are some highlights from our conversation.



Celia and Paula with JMA Co-Executive Director Erica Itheme and Strategic Researcher Desi Hall.

Paula, a longtime supporter of progressive causes, talked about how JMA's work, and seeing our organizers at the Learning Trip, gives her reasons to be optimistic:

"It's very hard to keep positive for many of us who have been at this almost 60 years now, feeling like a lot of things that we wanted to achieve we haven't achieved. We live in such a polarized society and especially when you live in a blue city, often the fight is over who's the most politically correct. When you go to a place like Birmingham you realize people don't have that luxury; they really have to get along and try to build a coalition of people. **What really hit me was the deep**

respect that JMA organizers have for the people they work with. I just think people could learn a lot of lessons from them.”



JMA Community Engagement Coordinator Larry Hodge at the Alabama Learning Trip.

Allison spoke about seeing the work of Larry Hodge, JMA’s Community Engagement Coordinator in Alabama, to implement the New Flyer CBA’s requirement to provide fair chances of employment to systems-impacted workers:

“We heard Larry talk about how he already got 22 systems-impacted people hired at New Flyer. People who’ve been in the system often don’t even apply for jobs because they’re usually turned down. The community benefits agreement says you don’t have to disclose a history of incarceration until you get an employment offer. That’s great, but you still need Larry to kind of push people along and say ‘go ahead, apply for that job.’ **These are 22 people—that’s not 22,000 people, but this is how it starts. I think it’s a real revolution going on at that grassroots level.**”



The Learning Trip group touring Sloss Furnaces, which exploited Black workers and used prison labor when in operation.

Celia discussed how her experience on the Learning Trip reaffirmed her support of JMA:

“JMA is really making a difference, with a blueprint for change that I saw it firsthand on the Alabama Learning Trip. I can’t wait to tell other people about our experiences. **If you want to learn about the South, if you want to learn about organizing strategies that work, if you want to experience something very powerful coming out of the South that can work all over the country.... learn about JMA. Be inspired.**”



If you want to support our work in the South and beyond, these and other JMA supporters are hosting an event in Santa Monica in February.

Who: Paula and Barry Litt, Celia Bernstein, Bradley Kesden, and Allison Thomas

What: A cocktail party to learn about JMA's work to leverage the power of public funds to create public good. Co-Executive Directors Madeline Janis and Erica Itheme will both be present, as well as California Director Hector Huezo, and Development Director Kris White to speak and chat about the latest work JMA is doing across regions.

Where: The Upper West - [3321 Pico Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA](#)

[RSVP for the event here](#)



JMA produced a video that shows the work we're doing from Los Angeles to Birmingham. In a little over two minutes, the video shares our vision to transform public spending in the new green economy, and the organizing we're doing to get there. You'll also see some workers who have benefited from the community benefits agreements we've won with cleantech manufacturers.

Watch the video [here](#).

Join us in the fight for good jobs and healthy communities.

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