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This summer, as part of the Institute on Memory and Human Rights, I had the opportunity to go on a civil rights tour of Alabama. In the six days I spent with the cohort we cried, laughed, and become more committed to the fight against mass incarceration and policing. I will always be thankful to have been part of such a dynamic group of people.

What inspired me to apply to the Institute was not just the subject matter. Of course, as someone interested in issues of mass incarceration and policing, I was excited that the Pozen Center was putting together such a trip. But what moved me to submit my application was the inclusion of Chicago police torture survivors and members of Chicago Torture Justice Memorials. Chicago Torture Justice Memorials is an organization dedicated to building a memorial for Chicago police torture survivors. At the University of Chicago, we often talk about topics related to human rights without actually seeing how those teachings can be applied in our surroundings. Getting to know individuals who had committed their lives to ensure justice and fairness for all was an invaluable learning experience.

The first two days of the Institute took place at the Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture. During that time, I had the opportunity to get to know others on the trip and talk about our shared goals. The most impactful moment for me was the panel on international torture and justice. In this panel, we listened to speakers from Brazil, Chile, and Vietnam speak to us about state violence. I vividly remember educator and artist Patricia Nguyen informing us how Jon Burge (a police detective who tortured black men and women on Chicago's south and west sides) trained in Vietnam, using the same tactics he learned there to harm those in Chicago. This panel confirmed for me that any movement against mass incarceration and policing must be international in scope.

A couple of days later, on September 10th, we left for Alabama. I have to give huge shout-outs to our amazing tour guide Mia Henry and bus driver Mr. Jones. Mia was so knowledgeable about everything on the trip and made time for us to rest, reflect, and relax. Mr. Jones was also extremely accommodating and showed us amazing southern hospitality. Despite the difficult topics we dealt with on the trip, it truly was a fun experience. I got to meet so many new people and make meaningful, lasting connections.

Throughout the four days spent in Alabama, I was most moved by our visit to the Equal Justice Initiative's Memorial for Peace & Justice and the Legacy Museum. The EJI Memorial pays tribute to the hundreds of black men and women who were lynched in the Jim Crow South. The memorial features steel rectangles, representing every county in the United States with a recorded lynching, hanging from above. The names of victims are etched in the steel.

Being a Chicago native, I immediately went to find the section of blocks for Illinois. I felt my heart stop when I saw the number of names. I could only imagine the fear that moved through black communities. Back then just as today, we were killed for everything and anything.

Later we visited the Legacy Museum, which traces the history of slavery to modern-day incarceration. I remember sitting down in the museum, listening to the stories of incarcerated men and women. Out of all the sites we visited, this proved to be the most emotional. It reminded me of my internship this summer, reading letters from those incarcerated and not being able to help. The Legacy Museum made me angry and enraged that such cruelty existed in the world. However, the museum also re-motivated me. Seeing the history of incarceration from slavery, displayed with stories and images, cemented my goal to become a human rights lawyer.

When looking back at my time at UChicago, I will always remember this trip. I only wish that more people were able to join us. The Pozen Human Rights Lab engages in the real-world fight for human rights. I am so thankful to have been chosen to be part of its history.