

Miah Pierce, a student at Youngstown State University majoring in social work, participated in the Sojourn to the Past journey when she was a sophomore in high school. Sojourn is a leadership development, life changing, history immersion experience to the Civil Rights sites in the South. Students meet leaders and foot soldiers of the Civil Rights Movement and learn the lessons of the Movement: civic responsibility, justice, compassion, tolerance, hope, Principles of Nonviolence, and not being a silent witness. Miah, learned on Sojourn how Black people in the South were beaten, intimidated, humiliated, arrested, and even killed just trying to register to vote. She walked across the Edmond Pettus Bridge just as John Lewis and six hundred ordinary citizens of Selma did on "Bloody Sunday". They wanted equal rights and realized that "getting the vote" was the major way they would gain equal rights. Miah, met Minnijean Brown Trickey and Elizabeth Eckford, two of the Little Rock Nine, who integrated Central High School and as teenagers used their power to make a President act. She also listened as Janice Kelsey and Gwen Webb spoke of making the decision as teenagers to participate in the "Children's March" and be arrested using their power to help integrate the city of Birmingham. Miah met the family of Vernon Dahmer in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, who was killed by the Klan because he helped people pay their poll tax in order to be able to vote. His voter registration card came in the mail the day after he died. Miah realizes the right to vote is a privilege and a right, which all Americans should have. Upon returning home, Miah decided she must educate her peers about the importance of registering to vote and then going to the polls to vote. She helps with voter education and voter registration twice yearly at Youngstown State University. She has spoken with others about the need to register to vote and to vote wisely. As soon as she was old enough to register to vote, she registered and has voted in every election.

Miah's experiences on the Sojourn journey, have impacted her life. She has participated in numerous activities sponsored by Mahoning Valley Sojourn to the Past, a nonprofit created in Youngstown to take local students on the Sojourn journey. She realizes the importance of not being a silent witness, but to speak up when she sees a wrong. She helped create a memorial, a bench, in memory of those whose lives were taken through violence. She was a participant in the spoken word, "Say Their Names", which tells of the lives of people murdered in Youngstown. She has been an MC at the Nonviolence Week Parade and Rally in downtown Youngstown. Sojourn members were with Governor Kasich, when he signed their Ohio Nonviolence Week bill into law in 2013.

Miah and other Sojourn members researched and wrote an antiracism workshop and have presented it to all the Youngstown City School staff as well as numerous other educators, nonprofit organizations, counseling services, and religious groups. She has also presented the workshop to YSU students as part of their diversity class. Miah has spoken out about the need for gun registration and the need to participate in nonviolent action, to educate the community about social justice.

She created her own power point presentation for young girls at Taft Elementary School in Youngstown talking to them about self-esteem, bullying, pride. In addition, she has spoken to students at Martin Luther King Elementary School and Rayen Early College Middle School.

Miah is smart, energetic, focused, friendly, responsible, and reliable. She is committed to helping others see the responsibility they have to vote and be an active citizen. She is also committed to standing up and speaking out when she sees a wrong. And she is also committed to Dr. King's Principles of Nonviolence.

Penny Wells, Executive Director
Mahoning Valley Sojourn to the Past