

» **Print**

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to colleagues, clients or customers, use the Reprints tool at the top of any article or visit: www.reutersreprints.com.

Renovated civil rights museum reopens in Memphis

Sat, Apr 5 2014

By Verna Gates

MEMPHIS, Tennessee (Reuters) - The National Civil Rights Museum, housed in the converted motel where Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, reopened on Saturday after a \$27.5 million renovation, offering new interactive exhibits chronicling the civil rights movement.

The museum reopened one day after the 46th anniversary of King's death. On April 4, 1968, the civil rights leader was shot and killed while standing on the balcony of the Lorraine Hotel in downtown Memphis.

About 200,000 people visit the museum each year, including 50,000 to 60,000 school children.

The exhibit begins with a global perspective of the slave trade, where panels track the path and the numbers of people captured and traded, and the wealth their labor created.

Visitors can try to crouch down and fit into the slave ship galley or sit in a mock courtroom and listen to the Supreme Court arguments in the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case that ended segregation in public schools.

"Today, people learn differently. They want to be engaged, immersed and to feel," said Beverly Robertson, the museum's president.

The museum also added 40 new films, along with listening posts and 260 new artifacts, which officials hope will eventually help double attendance, according to Beverly Sakauye, the museum's development director.

In another exhibit called "The Children's March," visitors walk up to big screens showing video footage of teenage civil rights marchers being attacked by police dogs and fire hoses.

Nearby, an interactive map allows visitors to select a U.S. state where desegregation battles were fought in public education. Few states are not represented.

"This is not a story about civil rights. It is a story about America," said Robertson.

Other exhibits immerse visitors in recreated scenes from the civil rights era, ranging from sitting at a segregated lunch counter to crossing a bridge where state troopers in gas masks await on the other side with billy clubs.

A video of King's final speech, which was given the night before he was assassinated, is shown on a large screen.

Some displays from the original museum remain, including a replica of the bus ridden by civil rights icon Rosa Parks.

Parks' refusal to give up her seat on a segregated Alabama bus for a white man in 1955 sparked a boycott that galvanized the movement for equal rights for blacks in Montgomery, Alabama, and across the country.

The museum also retains one of its original highlights - the hotel room where King stayed before he was killed.

The museum tour winds down with visitors passing by a lighted table filled with material on issues like poverty, women's rights, war and racial integration. Visitors are invited to touch an issue and vote on a way to take a stand.

At the exit, visitors are joined by a shadow of people marching and holding protest signs, suggesting the civil rights struggle continues today.

(Editing by [Kevin Gray](#) and Dan Grebler)

© Thomson Reuters 2014. All rights reserved. Users may download and print extracts of content from this website for their own personal and non-commercial use only. Republication or redistribution of Thomson Reuters content, including by framing or similar means, is expressly prohibited without the prior written consent of Thomson Reuters. Thomson Reuters and its logo are registered trademarks or trademarks of the Thomson Reuters group of companies around the world.

Thomson Reuters journalists are subject to an Editorial Handbook which requires fair presentation and disclosure of relevant interests.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to colleagues, clients or customers, use the Reprints tool at the top of any article or visit: www.reutersreprints.com.