

Ingrid Askew on the purpose of the Interfaith Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage

The idea was to begin a process of healing the wounds of slavery, looking at racism, which is the legacy of slavery. And so she said that she would like to have her order (Nipponzan Myohoji) initiate a pilgrimage that would do that, and that we would go to Africa, where it all began, and retrace the Middle Passage journey, back through the Caribbean and possibly Brazil, and to the United States.

And I told her I thought it was the most incredible idea that was ever presented to me, or project for me to get involved in, but that I wasn't sure if I knew any people of African descent that would want to go to Africa to leave it again. And so I said, "Let's restructure it. Let's really look at this. Let's look at reversing the history. Let's retrace the journey." It's— Because for—for—for me personally, and for African Americans (I think I can speak for all of us), when you lose something, you— what do you do? The first thing to do is, you retrace your steps. You lose your car keys or your house keys or your wallet. Where was I? What was the last place I was, and the place before that, and the place before that? And so you retrace until you find what you lost. And so that's how I felt the journey should be taken. And Clare agreed. And so I says, "No, we must start here and move backwards, until we go back to the mother continent."