

Selah

by [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I jog over some of the most beautiful and haunted geography. There is a place in Chattanooga where stunning nature collides with a series of heart-wrenching narratives.



In 1838, the Trail of Tears began here, when the government forced the relocation of over 16,000 Cherokee who refused to assimilate to European culture. More recently, I joined in prayer for our Mother Earth and the life-giving waters at the shore with a group of Native Americans as a part of an Idle No More protest.



Then, while jogging over the pedestrian bridge, I remember how an African-American man was lynched there. He had been accused of raping a white woman. His case had been appealed and had gone to federal court. Then a mob broke into the prison, dragged him out of his cell, and became his vicious executioners. The Baptist pastor in town preached against the act, and his house was burnt down that night.



This statue is on the south side of the river. It marks the place of “Camp Contraband,” which existed until the Civil War. It was filled with refugees, mostly freed slaves seeking safety. During the Civil War, it became a place where African-Americans soldiers were quartered.

I try to listen to the history and to the stories of the land. The loveliness of it often puts me into a meditative mode, as I try to sort out my role in the history and how all of it becomes entangled in our present situation.

In the past days, I have been thinking about the people of Ferguson, as their grief and anguish over Mike Brown's murder pushes them to the streets in a longing for justice. And this is when I'm not a very good blogger, because I haven't responded to anything for over a week. I know I should be ready for a smart retort in the midst of this. I should be eager to pound out all the fury that is bubbling up inside of me onto the keyboard—a call to unarm the militarized police force, to dismantle our New Jim Crow system, to stop the overwhelming and unjust incarceration of young black men, to stop the corporate greed that feeds off the privatized prison system, to allow for felons to work and provide for their families, to provide educational and economic opportunities to communities who have been cut off, to allow for peaceful protests in our country, to allow for freedom of speech. There are so many things that we need.

But right now, there are many people calling out, people who fear for their sons, people who are afraid of those who are supposed to protect them. And I just need to listen.

It reminds me of that Hebrew word, *selah*, which punctuates so many of the Psalms, instructing us to pause, reflect, listen, or maybe even weigh. I conjure up the ancient refrain as I read the twitter hashtag and consume the news reports.

Soon, I will need to act. I will need to write, protest, and call out for justice. But, for now, I am just listening to our past and our present, while I long for our future. Selah.