



Travel Journal: Bosnia

For two weeks in March 2002, I had the honor of traveling to Bosnia Herzegovina under the sponsorship of The United States State Department. Face-to-Face Interreligious Services of Sarajevo worked in tandem with the United States State Department to plan and arrange aspects of this tour. I am grateful to both organizations for their interest and efforts in making this tour so successful.

I functioned as a cultural ambassador presenting music of the American experience. The concert programs consisted of American songs and African-American spirituals. Performances occurred in music schools, concert halls, seminars and the US Ambassador's residence. One performance at the Dom Armije included the local Pontanima Choir of Sarajevo. They are an interfaith choir whose participants represent Jewish, Orthodox Christian, Islamic, Catholic and Protestant traditions. Their singing was fabulous! Their interest in bringing people of different traditions together is noteworthy and was one clear sign of hope.

Though Bosnia is still in the process of healing the wounds it has sustained from ethnic strife, it is a country of hope and promise. The hearts of the people of Bosnia have not been broken. Much like the enslaved African-Americans of the 19th century, there is in the Bosnian people a determination and inner drive to persevere.

The spirituals seemed to strike a resounding cord with the Bosnian people. This music offers hope in the face of adversity through a connection with the Transcendent One. Here optimism dwells, freedom rings, dignity and respect reside and faith is never lost. This universal idea seemed to bring us together around our common hopes and fears and tied us together in our common humanity.

Through their folk songs, the Bosnian people inspired me with their passion and commitment to life. I will perform some of their music in the future. It was a wonderful tour and I am pleased to be able to present a glimpse of my experience to you.

