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SOC147 Our America

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Reflection Essay

As soon as I walked into the African Burial Ground National Monument, I felt a deep sense of grief. While I was there, the only thing that I could think about was how being a black person in America is a blessing today. While some may look at the color of their skin and be reminded of how racially biased and evil America can be, I was appreciative of everything my ancestors went through so we could have the freedom we do as Black people today. In this paper, I'll talk about what I thought and felt about the museum, its exhibits, and what it was like to visit such an important historical site.

The African Burial Ground National Monument is significant because it commemorates the finding of a 6-acre burial site where free and enslaved Africans who lived and worked in colonial New York were buried. Archaeologists discovered the location in 1991 while developing a federal office building. They discovered human skeletal remains on 290 Broadway, which is 30 feet below the city's street level. When the burial ground was found again, new information about how slavery helped build New York City came to light.

The exhibits at the museum were not only informative, but it was truly heartbreaking to be reminded of how Africans were brought to America. The most interesting thing to me was the statue of the black family in mourning, which was centered close to the front of the museum. The statue was so lifelike that I could almost feel their pain and grief. I also found it intriguing that, despite being buried and forgotten for centuries, these people's bones and belongings provided

valuable insights into their lives and treatment. Archeologists were able to uncover evidence of the physical toll of slavery on the body, such as scarring and bent bones, by carefully examining the remains. These discoveries serve as a powerful reminder of slavery's inhumanity and the tenacity of those who endured it.

When I walked into the museum, there were only two staff members there. Although they were kind and helpful, I did not feel that the museum staff represented the people's monument well. Nothing about them suggested slavery or Africans being brought to America. One worker was white, and the other was black. Looking at them did serve as a reminder that there is freedom today in America, but they didn't authentically represent the topic of this museum.

Overall, the African Burial Ground National Monument was impactful for me. It was truly difficult to see how brutally and inhumanely the African slaves were treated. Reading through some of the documents and seeing pictures of these people being treated like animals was very hard to see. There's a quote on the wall by John Jea that stuck out to me because it described the condition the workers were obligated to work. The quote says, "Our labor was extremely hard, being obligated to work in the summer from about 2:00 in the morning until about 10:00 or 11:00 at night... The horses usually rested about five hours in a day while we were at work; thus did the beasts enjoy greater privileges than we did." This highlighted the harsh reality of their life. As much as it was disheartening, it was also impactful. I will be recommending my friends and family to even visit this museum.

Works Cited

"History and Culture - African Burial Ground National Monument (U.S. National Park Service)." History & Culture - African Burial Ground National Monument (U.S. National Park Service), www.nps.gov/afbg/learn/historyculture/index.htm. Accessed 23 Mar. 2023.