

Prudence Phillips

ENGW 105-06

Professor Boylan

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Co-Curricular 3

National Museum of African American History and Culture

I visited the National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) on 14th April 2018. I got to see some of the things the Black forefathers had to endure during the horrible times of slavery and I was greatly overwhelmed with emotions after the experience.

First, I visited slavery exhibit on the ground floor of the museum which begins from 15th century Africa and Europe and extends to the 18th century. The exhibition started with talking about four countries- Portugal, Netherlands, England, and France which were the most involved in the Transatlantic slave trade. I learned that the Portuguese first visited Africa in 1441, and they tried to negotiate deals which benefited the Europeans and the African leaders. However, the Transatlantic trade changed from trading goods to trading humans. I was devastated to know about the conditions of Africans starting from their abrupt abduction to the traumatizing journey across the Atlantic. Their conditions were so inhumane and degrading that out of 100 people, 64 would survive from while traveling from the interior to the coast, and only 48 would reach America. One of the most dreadful parts was when we were told about the slave masters using hot iron rods to mark the slave. Another notable inhumane activity was the “seasoning” of slaves. It highlighted how the slave owners forced the slaves to get accustomed to the harsh and brutal work routine, give them less food, and imposed European languages on them. The auction block also grabbed my attention. The block itself was a sign of human devaluation and

humiliation as Africans were made to stand on the block and were auctioned and sold like an object. The museum exhibit said that “they were stripped naked, cleaned, oiled and attired for the highest bid”. Things started to get more interesting when the museum exhibits informed us about the Bacon’s rebellion. It comprised of white and black slaves, which terrified the landowners, but it ended up in the European slaves getting more rights and Africans losing their freedom.

I learned that when the slaves were transported, their initial arrival was mainly in Chesapeake, Carolina & Georgia, Gulf Coast, and the North. It was interesting to know how the slaves escaped slavery, settled in the swamps of Louisiana and established maroon communities. They used their technological knowledge not only to survive in the difficult environment but also to establish trade with Europeans and native Americans. The North had more free blacks than the South and there was a constant connection between the free and the enslaved black community, which gave the opportunity to make a black community and maintain their cultural connections. I think that this played a significant role in propagating the native African culture in present-day America and in African-Americans and gave the black community a greater strength to organize rebellions and voice their opinions to bring change in the United States.

Among the eminent black personalities, Benjamin Banneker stood out the most to me. He challenged the idea of inferior intelligence of African Americans in his bold letter to Thomas Jefferson. Using his knowledge, he constructed wooden clocks, compiled almanacs, and participated in the first land survey of District of Columbia. He proved that intelligence is not determined by skin color.

After completing the tour, I felt that African Americans should be given the credit they deserve because the profits that countries in Europe and America made were on hard labor and exploitation of Africans. From building the capital city of the US, to bringing rice cultivation techniques of West Africa to Americas, to manufacturing cotton and making “negro” cloth, to introducing negro goods like colored calico, woven hats, inexpensive shoes, and ready-made clothing, modern America was built by black labor.