

HISTORY AND HERITAGE

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL MONUMENT

by Melissa Williams

Stepping onto the Middle Passage of the African-American Historical Monument, I am forced to remember my ancestors on the auction block, taken from the only world they had ever known. Forced to remember the civil rights movement, forced to remember the ones who fought for African Americans' rights to attend schools, sit anywhere on buses and to vote. I am forced to be proud.

As I watch people gather at the monument on the grounds of the South Carolina State House, I see a small elderly woman with tears in her eyes rub the bronze and granite heads, hands and shoulders extending out of the memorial; she has been there, she has lived it. In watching the children admire the monument, I realize that it is more than concrete representing history. It is also a symbol of heritage representing 300 years of African Americans' struggle for freedom. "These kids are amazed," said one woman looking over the children. "This is something that our children can learn from. African-American history is more than just Martin Luther King Jr., and this monument tells them that."

Sculptor Ed Dwight of Denver, Colorado, designed the monument. He thinks of it as a "time machine" that will carry the visitor from Charleston in the 1600s, through the civil rights era and into today. The monument, paid for by private donations, gives visitors plenty to see. The

floor of the monument is engraved with granite icons depicting the conditions of the journey slaves made to the Americas, also known as the Transatlantic Slave Trade, Middle Passage or the Bone Trail.

Bordering a 23-foot obelisk are two 25-foot curved granite walls that hold bronze panels that depict scenes through African-American history from the slave block, to plantation life, to the fight for freedom in the Civil War, to the struggle for civil rights and the emergence into mainstream America. At the base of the obelisk all visitors are encouraged to touch the "rubbing stones." These stones originate from Ghana, Sierra Leone, the Congo and Senegal—the four African countries from which most of South Carolina's slaves were taken.

South Carolina has a rich and diverse African-American history. The struggles, accomplishments and contributions of African Americans have played a major role in shaping this state. This monument is among the many ways that South Carolinians have chosen to show an appreciation of this cultural journey. The African-American Historical Monument is a place to witness this history and experience the road traveled

by South Carolina's African Americans.



IF YOU GO...

AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORICAL MONUMENT

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803-734-2430