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Montgomery Place – Armstead

Tour Reaction

The first piece of literature that I read in preparation for the Spicebush tours was a study done on the Native Americans that lived in the Hudson Valley. Initially my reaction to this piece was amazement. I never would have imagined that the Native Americans living in this valley had such a rich and complex culture. Within the general grouping of the Algonquian name lied many subsects that were each distinguishable in tradition and organization.

During the tour, being surrounded by woods and forest I can understand why the Algonquian tribes were able to live off of the land as forest hunters and fisherman. Professor Chris Lindner, our guide on the tour, talked to us about the numerous amount of sturgeon that lived within the Hudson River allowing the Algonquian tribes to prosper in this lifestyle. I could also see how the landscape, full of thick forests and plants, caused the Algonquian to have to adapt to a new way of life, and they did it well.

As I continued to read the literature on the Hudson Valley Indians I learned that many of the Algonquian lived in very small bands along the banks of the Hudson River. They built Wigwams, which are dome like dwellings, to live in and used plant material to build their housing. I was able to visualize their way of life to some extent on the tour as I looked along the path leading up to the Spicebush excavation site. The small banks and multiple streams of water that ran throughout the landscape seemed to be formed specifically for the purpose of sustaining life in that area. The thick bush around the bank also seemed like a perfect place for the natives to provide protection and to avoid detection in their homes if necessary.

As the tour continued I was also able to understand why this land might be so desirable to the Dutch settlers. With ample conditions for growing crops, a steady supply of food coming from the woods and the river, and a direct route for fur trade along the Hudson this area was an ecological gold mine. Unfortunately, while continuing to read the literature for this tour I learned that because of the Hudson's abundance of natural wealth, the Algonquians were met with a challenger for their land. Bringing with them epidemics such as smallpox, measles, and typhus the Dutch wiped out 90% of the Algonquian population. Firearms and the fur trade were also introduced to the Algonquians increasing both intertribal warfare and increase in agricultural and economical imbalance, forcing the natives to eventually have to migrate to survive. This once beautiful nation of flourishing natives was eventually destroyed by the Dutch erasing the culture that once prevailed.

The third tour that I went on revealed more of the history of the settles in the Hudson Valley. Montgomery Place, 380 acres of cultivated land, is more of an artificial beauty that lies within the Hudson Valley, but wonderful nonetheless, and an important part of this area's native history. Background research has shown me that the land that Montgomery place now occupies was originally occupied by Native Americans, until European settlers colonized the area.

When first touring the grounds of Montgomery Place I was amazed by not only the detail which had gone into making this place what it is today, but also its elegance. Many of the architectural structures exhibit the characteristics of upper class life in America throughout generations. The estate also places an emphasis on human interaction with nature. Many of the structures built there use the outdoors as a center point of attraction, as if the architects purposefully built everything around nature rather than on top of nature.

The beauty of the outside of the estate matches the beauty within each building on Montgomery Place property. With Romantic influences, extravagant flower gardens, and buildings that reflect the popular architectural styles of past decades, I was definitely able to see how the influence of American culture had changed the landscape over the years and how valuable this property is in preserving American societal history.

The river tour, my second tour, was probably my favorite tour overall. Exploring the Hudson River in this way allowed me to appreciate the environment around me for all it was. I can understand why the Native Americans in the Hudson Valley valued nature so much. Looking up at the sky brought a feeling of peace and serenity to me and I felt as if I was one with my surroundings. The Romanticism movement definitely played a huge role in the increase of American settler's interactions with and perceptions of nature, and is a big part of why we were able to tour it as we did today. This river was a perfect place for the new wave of picturesque tourism that was inspired during the 19th century. As described in *The Revolution of Seeing* by Richard Gassan, I saw that the Hudson River was a perfect midpoint between being sublime and beautiful and it created an image in my mind that was breathtaking and memorable. This tour constantly reminded me of the beautiful history that lies behind the diverse culture that exists within the valley, and it did it in a way that made me come to appreciate it.

In whole these tours have reminded me that the traditions of the Native Americans that first came to the Hudson Valley should be reserved, respected, and remembered for all of the innovation and beauty that they brought. Because without it, part of history would be lost.

They have also shown me that the Hudson Valley itself has a lot more to it than initially meets the eye, and that we should work to spread its history for all to enjoy. The Hudson Valley and all of its landmarks have a permanent place in history that will not soon be forgotten.