

Iziko Slave Lodge outing reflection

Some people will say they want to hear your story and will then proceed to tell you how to write it. There is a lot to be said about who owns the knowledge and who controls the narrative when it comes to writing our history. Our visit to the Slave Lodge shined a light on storytelling and what it means to reclaim the history of Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour in the Cape, in South Africa, and on a larger scale, in Africa. The work being done by the Iziko Slave Lodge is that of taking ownership of a story that is often told from a colonizer's point of view and rewriting it to fully depict the experiences of the enslaved, from their point of view. This point of view matters because their voices were silenced and cast away for centuries, and part of their emancipation and their freedom should mean their stories being told how they should have been told all along.

The truth is, we cannot completely talk about South African history without talking about slavery and the importance that this history had on the development of South African culture. The legacy of South Africa's slave history exists in many tangible and intangible ways today: in politics, in family histories, and in some of the oldest buildings and monuments in the country. It can even be said that one of the reasons for South Africa's vast cultural diversity dates back to its slave history. It is also important to reflect on this part of the nation's history so that we can shine a light on the many people who are still suffering to this day: people who are victims of modern-day or contemporary slavery. Despite a lot of work having been done over the centuries to emancipate enslaved people, it is still evident that many people's rights continue to be violated to build economies and to satisfy the desires of power-hungry oppressors.

Our trip to the Slave Lodge opened our eyes to the importance of being critical about the stories that are told about our histories. We saw how vital it is to pay close attention to how these pictures of the past are painted. Another important part of this experience was getting to reflect on all the ways in which our institutions operate, and in what ways our human rights are granted in the spaces that we occupy. This trip put emphasis on what it means to hold space, to be free, to fully be able to express oneself and to live autonomously. These are things we often take for

granted.

Oftentimes we talk about South Africa's slave history, colonial history, and Apartheid history amongst others in abstract and hypothetical ways, forgetting that some of the structures that existed then, exist in many systems today. It is so valuable to go to these museums and heritage sites to see these structures physically and not merely as easily forgettable ideas. Places like these allow for stories to continue to be told, and for the acknowledgement of the work that many people before us did so that we could exercise the freedom and the rights that we are granted today.

By Leonah Marewangepo