

2022 Democracy Camp in DC Daily Journal**Written by Tatiana Butte****May 22, 2022**

Today was a day of remembrance and reflection. We were touring the National Mall in DC, although I have my reservation on what a mall resembles, let's not get into that. In today's venture, we had our first stop at the Jefferson memorial; at first glance, you're taken back by the Potomac River surrounding the monument. You see the Washington memorial overlooking the district, then through the cherry blossoms tree not yet in bloom, view the south side of the White House lawn. Our tour guide informed us of the cherry blossom rebellion, which depicted the making of the Jefferson monument. Once we stepped inside the coliseum, the quotes of Jefferson stood ominously staring down the statue. I particularly like the quote "I am not an advocate for frequent changes" At first, you question his perception and motive but realize we as a society have evolved over the decades and continue to be enlightened by the discoveries we make.

We traveled through the mall to all the monuments, but I have to say what stood out the most personally was the MLK Memorial. Before we entered the memorial, our tour guide stopped to reflect on the civil rights movement and the making of the monument. Our tour guide began giving the formation of the civil rights movement by speaking about the haunting death of Emmet Till. She got emotional retelling the heart-aching history of the treatment of African Americans in America. At first, you see a mountain of white ash with a big cut out between looking into the Potomac, and the rocks are far removed with marks on the sides. The carving on the side of the rocks is a depiction of the generational oppression and pain wanted to reflect in the monument as both a reflection and remembrance of our ancestors. Walking in between the

stones and viewing the oppression and generational trauma black and brown people suffered and continue to endure in this country got me emotional. I had no words but a reflection of the past.

Later on, we then crossed to the Lincoln Memorial, where MLK held his I have a dream speech- I listened to it while looking over our nation's capital. I listened to the teardrops of words flow through my face. Remembering our country was divided and recalling how my grandparents, 59 years ago, stood in the glaring heat in August to witness history. I realized I am a byproduct of the change of my grandparents to MLK and the civil rights movement brought to young women of color like myself. Throughout the day, we visited many monuments; you would believe the day was over; however, the fun was just begging. Even though most of us were tired and our feet were sore throughout the mall, we walked to a play called *Sheer Madness*, an entertaining interactive play where the audience is included in the show. It was a taste of fun before our week of networking, meetings, and shared uncontrollable laughter.

May 23, 2022

On our first official day of the program, we went to Capitol Hill and the U.S House of Representatives. At the beginning of the day, we received an introduction to the history of the formation of DC, cultural-historic landmarks, and the scandals that lurk in this city. Let me tell you, they have a lot of them. After this, we had our first meeting with two people, one worked on the Hill and the other worked for the House of Representatives; Stephanie Perra and John Lawrence. In the session we discussed the January 6 insurrection; this topic was on our minds given our location and we wanted to know what had changed after that day in Washington. The response we received was very shocking. There was no trust anymore on the Hill from the perspective shared, which was very sad to hear. Then we asked questions about working on the Hill prior to January 6 and if there is any chance for bipartisanship in the future. We left the

meeting with realism and sadness since a seasoned veteran of politics mentioned their professional opinion which was not what we wanted to hear but in the end, it was a realistic approach.

After the meeting, we transitioned to Capitol Hill. When we arrived at the U.S. Capitol we were taken back by how big the Hill was where prominent figures such as AOC worked, then we began our tour. We witnessed beautiful pieces of art such as the Magna Carta replica, the Apotheosis of Washington, and statues, and also viewed the first Supreme Court chambers. After the tour, we had scheduled meetings with two different offices: Congresswomen Doris O. Matsui and Congresswoman Barbara Lee. We met with their staff who were not only kind to us but gave us insight to their roles, chain of command, and how it is working for congresspeople. During our meeting with Congresswoman Matsui's office staff, they were discussing how legislative policy usually works and one of the DC in DC cohort members gave a pitch to try and gain support for a bill for Underground Scholars. The pitching delivery was spot on and the staff was impressed with the pitch and willingness to be vulnerable. They are going to connect in the near future and discuss the endeavors forward. As a cohort, we were very proud of them for how they were outspoken and determined to achieve their personal goal.

After the meeting on the hill we went to the U.S. Senate to have our last tour and meeting of the day with a former Berkeley Bear, Kevin Figueroa. He was very compassionate about helping the cohort share their experience and how they got to where they are. Sharing words of wisdom and encouragement, Kevin said BIPOC voices like ours are needed in D.C. Today's theme is perception in my opinion, the perception of what could be the change in society, by adding more BIPOC individuals of all backgrounds to spaces like Capitol Hill and the House and Senate.

May 24, 2022

Today's venture was a last-minute surprise. One of our coordinators was able to get us tickets to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, which are very hard to get. Everyone was filled with excitement about going to the museum. When we arrived at the museum, it was a breathtaking sight. The architecture was amazing to see. I thought to myself, "I could not believe what could be inside." I was nervous to go inside, since from word of mouth the museum is very emotional but excited to learn. Each level of the museum gave a different part of African American History. I went to the bottom floor first which was the beginning of slavery. I was filled with emotion walking down the halls listening to and seeing what our ancestors underwent is horrific in itself. Especially what happened to pregnant slaves and the tools that were used on them sickens me to this day. Moving to the other floors became more lighthearted, each floor displaying black excellence and how African Americans have contributed to each aspect of life. The museum even helps with genealogy tracking, I never knew they provided this service.

Then after walking through the museum we had lunch in the museum, the Sweet Home Cafe. They serve authentic Southern soul food. The food did not disappoint. It was very delicious food all around. As we finished our delicious soul food, we transitioned to make our way to the White House Complex, notably the Eisenhower Executive Office Building. We were all nervous going into the White House with the President's historical moments taking place, but what was nerve-racking was getting past security.

Once we got past security as a group we were stunned to be on the White House grounds making our way up to the three meetings. In our first meeting, we met with Julie Chavez Rodriguez, second Fayrouz Saad, and third Phil Stupak. In the meetings, we discussed topics of immigration, cybersecurity, generational trauma, and gun violence. These heartfelt meetings were met with sensitivity and honesty for us to learn the truth and realize everyone is faking it till they make it no matter what position you hold as long as you have determination, passion, drive, or lived experiences that can catapult you to dreams you never would have thought of. Later on, we went to a famous hot spot in D.C. called Ben's Chili Bowl, which I may add hosted us with kindness. The restaurant is a staple because of the instrumental role it played during the civil rights movement and riots after the MLK assassination. We had great chili dogs, the best banana pudding you will ever taste, and a great dance-off at the end. Later on, some of the cohort members indulged in a "friendly" game of Uno which ends up in a rivalry against each others that is carried through the rest of the program.

May 25, 2022

Today, we stayed at UCDC having meetings with many individuals on topics ranging from tech policy, grassroots work, and research. During the week we spoke with a wide range of people who work in public service and their pathways. After the meeting, we had free time to get ready for a reception hosted in our honor. We met Berkeley alumni who work in law, education, homeland security, public health, and the military. These sectors of government were all in one room as we were networking with them. Some of us discussed the opportunity to intern next summer and job offers after graduation. At the end of the night, we realized our tenacity and background made us who we are today, and are committed to serving, reclaiming justice, and most importantly representing our sleeves at the table loud and proud.

May 26, 2022

On our last day of the venture, We woke up very early to make our way to the Supreme Court of the United States. Given the climate of the country, it was exciting and intimidating at the same time. Once we arrived we saw the gates protecting the Court, police and military surrounding the area yelling at drivers to Move Along. When we were escorted into the Supreme Court premises you just saw white marble everywhere. Before we entered the building we were given trivia questions that I believe no other person would know unless you work there. After the trivia questions, we were escorted into the building, passing through security, and we witnessed so many statues of Supreme Court Justices and their portraits. The first one you'll see is the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg's oil painting. Then we made our way to the Supreme Court where big cases of our time have been disputed, the first African American justice was appointed, and will soon welcome newly appointed Justice Jackson, the first black female justice ever to serve on the Court. Being in the courtroom felt ominous and overwhelming. Thinking of the history that has occurred on these walls was an overwhelming experience. We then moved into other rooms and discussed more of the history of the Supreme Court. After the tour at the Supreme Court, we walked over to the Library of Congress where we were able to walk around and see a multiplex of historical remnants, items, and architecture.

After the Library of Congress, we made our way to the National Press Club, an exclusive club in which you need to be a member to be able to step foot into the building. We had lunch with members of the club and discussed topics of immigration, financial aid, and gun control. They were testing us with journalistic questions that did raise some feathers amongst the cohort, however, our cohort members not only stood their ground but stood up for the cohort. At this part of the program, we had become like family to one another. Later that evening we spent that last

remaining time in D.C. having “friendly” matches of Uno, Pictionary and rode scooters around the National Mall and downtown D.C. at night admiring the city and the friendships we made along the way.

May 27, 2022

Today was our last in D.C. - for some of us, I should say. We began the day with a meeting with recent alumni talking to us about D.C. culture, potential job interests, and most importantly, where we can get good food in the district.

Before we left we hung out and debriefed about our experience in D.C. the good and the bad which in all solidified not only our experience but the bond we created along the way. We were left with the cheerfulness and excitement of the desire to come back to D.C. one day. Throughout the day we hung out until our flights arrived. However, there was a tornado that delayed most of our flights heading out of D.C. I stayed one more night since my flight was severely delayed while the rest of the cohort went back to California, reflecting on our time in D.C. and the bonds we made during our time together.