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The Smith Family Farm: Rewinding History

Artist's Statement

The Tullie Smith house is a small plantation house that was built in the 1840s by Robert Smith. The house, located in DeKalb county, lies on 800 acres of land that survived the destruction of Atlanta during the Civil War. The great-great granddaughter of Robert Smith, Tullie, was the last person to occupy the house, and the house and its detached kitchen were moved to the Atlanta History Center in the early 1970s and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The house and the separate kitchen are currently surrounded by a dairy, blacksmith shop, smokehouse, double corncrib, slave cabin, chicken coop and barn, along with traditional vegetable, herb, field, flower, and slave gardens. The farm features first-person, costumed interpreters who portray the Smith Family members, neighbors, and plantation slaves. Visitors of the farm can interact with the actors and gain insights of the daily challenges of antebellum Georgia farm life. After visiting the site and becoming a part of its history through the interpreters, we wish to let the audience interact with the site itself through our video. However, the Smith Family farm actors and representations greatly downplay the role that slaves had on the plantation. As we walked through the site, the vast differences in the living arrangements and day to day life of a slave and white resident were very obvious.

The main focus of our video is showing the injustice of the treatment and standard of living of slaves on the Smith Family Farm in comparison with the white masters that resided on the plantation. The video leads the viewer through the plantation with series of pictures and videos. We juxtapose the slave and master quarters by the repetition of pictures of where the Smith family lived and where their slaves resided and worked day to day. The repetition along with the zooming and freeze frame of specific images exemplifies the argument that there was a large discrepancy between the way that African Americans were treated even after the Civil War had ended.

In between the images and video clips of the farm, we inserted clips from the J. Cole music video "G.O.M.D". This music video portrays J. Cole as a slave who sparks a revolution on a white-owned plantation. The video was created to make a call for unity and togetherness rather than express racial tensions. This video was significant in the meaning behind our film because it added a sense of personality that the audience could relate with and related our video to the theme of the afterlives of slavery. It also connected the past with the present day and added to the argument that the past very much affects society today.

The audio throughout the video consists of several different pieces of music and vocal clips. The instrumental version of the song "Alexander Hamilton" from the musical *Hamilton*, voice clips from Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and the instrumental version of J. Cole's song "G.O.M.D." were all used in our video to add further meaning and artistic expression behind our video. The musical *Hamilton* is a play written by Lin-Manuel Miranda that uses all non-white actors to play the white founding fathers. This use of reverse roles served as a source of empowerment among minorities. The famous "I Have a Dream" speech

by Martin Luther King Jr. talks about the inequalities among minorities, but it also provides a source of hope for change in the future. The repetition of several powerful phrases such as “we can never be satisfied” and “the negro is still not free” is very significant throughout our video because it brings attention to not only the injustices of slaves during the time of the Smith Family farm era but also the injustices of 50 years ago and of today. The pictures and videos in the film transition with the beat of the music to bring an aesthetically pleasing and entertaining aspect to the audience.

At the end of the video we quickly reversed the whole video and ended with an image of J. Cole pumping his fist into the air. We chose to do this to further express the afterlives of slavery theme. Some people may wish to forget the occurrences of the past as if history could be rewinded, erased, or even forgotten. As a society we need to recognize the truth and significance of slavery in order to move forward and lessen the injustices of today. Slavery was unfortunately the foundation of America, but equality among all is the current strength of this country that is one of the most diverse in the world. The ending image of J. Cole throwing his fist in the air reflects empowerment and hope that all people regardless of race, gender or religion will one day be treated irrevocably as equals. Reversing the past is impossible, but we hope that remembering the past can bring a positive change to the future.