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A Walk Through The Pursuit of “The American Dream” Exhibit

Beginning my journey as I enter the exhibit, the title exudes sentiments of resilience and hope. “The American Dream” is one of the most patriotic and powerful ideas that helped shape the country we live in and immediately, I am intrigued. Not only does the subject matter lure me in, but I am captured by the physical layout of the title itself. In block letters, with a white background, the exhibit is simple and unassuming, but there seems to be a serious and compelling message that will be further explored. As I analyze the words in the title, I am not only drawn to the idea of the American Dream, but also to the context in which it is presented: through the lens of a less well-known author, Ed Bullins.

The description appears to follow in an organized manner, immediately after the title. As a result, it is only logical to assume it will further explain the importance and relevance of the title to the rest of the exhibit. It talks about how “The American Dream” is apparent in plays like *Goin’ a Buffalo* and in other artifacts throughout the exhibit. Looking at the description, it provides me with a general understand of the American Dream, but I am still intrigued how the dream is displayed throughout Ed Bullins’ works. As I finish the paragraph, it is evident what the central theme to the entire exhibit is: obstacles blacks faced in the 1960s that made it more difficult for them to progress in society and ultimately reach the American Dream. Right after the closing sentence of the paragraph, my eyes chronologically progress toward the “Object IDs and Captions.” Most likely, this is where the exhibit explores the other artifacts previously mentioned

in the description paragraph. I would expect to see a play and other artifacts that have a connection to both the American Dream and to Ed Bullins.

The first artifact presented is *Goin' a Buffalo*. The description of the online play is neatly organized in readable text and describes the most important ideas that Ed Bullins tried to communicate. The American Dream seems to be the most vital idea, as stated in the caption paragraph. The characters in Bullins' play faced inequality throughout their lives and strived to overcome the violence and poverty they faced. In my interpretation, the caption indicates that white dominance in society prevented blacks from reaching their goals. Blacks were limited because white people had such supreme control. This is unjust and unfair, but an issue that the author seemed to grapple with not only in his play, but throughout his entire life. I suspect that the rest of the exhibit will revolve around this same issue. Below this paragraph, bold letters introduce an interview with Ed Bullins.

The first object identification that is presented describes an interview with Ed Bullins by John O'Brien. A clipping of part of the interview shows the typewriter-like, black and white text. The dialogue is easy to follow, intelligibly showing the question asked by the interviewer and the response by Bullins. Underneath the interview a caption is conveniently placed that seems to uncover more information about the artifact. It discusses how one of Ed Bullins' focuses while writing his plays was to highlight issues of inequality, segregation, and racism throughout the 1960s. Because these issues clearly seem to have a personal effect on Ed Bullins and his life, it makes sense as to why he included them in his play. The purpose of the interview is to provide background information about the author of the play. In order to understand the play, it is crucial to understand where the author's ideas come from. The interview provides the link into Ed Bullins' mindset and can be used to clarify his opinions that are present throughout the play.

After coming away from this interview, it is easy to understand why it is critical to be informed about the author writing the play. If one were to read a play, having no prior knowledge about the person who actually wrote the play, the play would have less meaning. The play's intricate design and message would not be received as well as it could be if one were to not know any information about the author. So with that being said, it would be beneficial to get to know the author a little better. The first interview was effective in doing just that, and the following interview should be valuable as well.

Next, the exhibit moves on to two interviews by Sandra Loll. First, the placement of both object identification pieces is quite noticeable. Though I do not know simply by looking at them why the images are so close together, I can make an educated guess that they are related. As the object identification states, the interviews are on Compact Discs (CDs) and pictures are the front covers from each interview. Each image has several bullet points highlighting the content covered in the interview. Both interviews talk to Ed Bullins, but a few weeks apart, clearly stated in the object identification. It could be that the three images are close together because both interviews ask similar questions. As I progress through the exhibit, I am optimistic that this will be cleared up. Placed directly underneath the pictures, the writing confirms what was explored in each interview. It is clear after reading these two paragraphs that Bullins dedicates his life to black art and black theater. He also is immensely passionate about oppression and segregation blacks faced in the 1960s. Much of what he writes about are ideas and issues that are not only important to him, but even more, they are messages he wishes to share with others. Now it is clear why segregation and racism are present in his play *Goin' a Buffalo*. Bullins uses these ideas to emphasize the struggle blacks faced to reach the American Dream. The core idea in his play is confirmed and supported by the content of this interview. Regarding my previous curiosity about

the placement of the two object identifications, the caption paragraphs clearly state that the interviews share overlapping ideas, thus confirming why the two identification pieces are next to each other. After the paragraphs, my eyes move toward the black print below, another object identification. I read that it is from a photo collection and its title attracts my attention.

Next, in black in white and a sepia tint is an image. It shows admission to a circus, an automobile from the 1920s/1930s, and a sign reading “Darkest Africa, Strange People from Africa.” Without reading the following paragraph below the image, I can already make conclusions about it. The picture seems to characterize black people as “strange” and Africa as “dark”. It seems relevant to the rest of the exhibit, appearing to degrade black people and show the unfair treatment they were subjected to by white people. As Bullins makes clear, black people had a disadvantage in society. This image and text highlight these struggles and demonstrate the connection to the play itself. By using standard text and an image that stands out, it is easy to follow and shows the seriousness of the issue at hand. Looking below this image, there seems to be a similar artifact on the next page. The black bold font below confirms that it is an introduction to the new photograph that will probably share a similar message.

The object identification is plain, has no author, no date, and its title is quite startling. In the black and white image, there is a white man, reading a “Firestone Colored Employees Section” sign. The confused man may be wondering what the sign is for or what the sign means. Or even worse, he is the one that put the sign there. The principal themes apparent in this image are segregation, racism, and inequality. Because of the color of their skin, black people were required to sit in other sections, away from the rest of the white crowd. Furthermore, if blacks were to retaliate or fight back, blacks could be punished and not much would be accomplished in the white-dominated society. Blacks struggled with the pursuit of the American Dream because

they were, in some cases, physically unable to make a difference in their own lives. Just like Bullins admits in his interviews, blacks had an unfair disadvantage, making it harder for them to progress in society than it was for whites.

This final image captures the significance of Ed Bullins' work. Black people in the 1960s were subjected to racism, segregation, and oppression. These ideas were present throughout the sequential and organized exhibit, and all related back to the theme of the American Dream in Ed Bullins' *Goin' a Buffalo* and in other artifacts.