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Poverty Point

In northeast Louisiana, in a town of only a few thousand, lies one of the most important and overlooked archaeological sites in all of the United States. The intention or the reason behind the inhabitants constructing Poverty Point (given its name in the early 20th century by a nearby plantation) is not exactly known. However, what is known, is that whether a religious center, trading center, or just a settlement, it has been the source of much curiosity and research. Equivalent to the workmanship of the Egyptians and their pyramids, the Poverty Point inhabitants of around 3500 years ago, constructed one of the most impressive yet mysterious sites in America.

Poverty Point was constructed around 3500 years ago. “The Poverty Point inhabitants, like the ancient Mayans, set for themselves an enormous task as they built a complex array of earthen mounds and ridges overlooking the Mississippi River flood plain” (“Poverty Point”). The design of Poverty Point is unlike anything found anywhere else. The accomplishment of such a construction is undoubtedly impressive, especially for a non-agrarian society. “The central construction consists of six rows of concentric ridges, which at one time were five feet high. The five aisles and six sections of ridges form a partial octagon. The diameter of the outermost ridges measures three-quarters of a mile” (“Poverty Point”). This non-agrarian society is one of the most unique cases in that there is a very little amount of knowledge of any other hunter-gatherer groups constructing large scale monuments. The Egyptian Pyramids and Stonehenge were both constructed by societies founded on agriculture. The Poverty Point inhabitants used and developed a great many in number of tools and devices. They used the nowadays called “arrow heads”. Even with its unique size for its age, it is estimated to have only taken ten years to construct. “Poverty Point is impressive by any standard as it involved the movement of 750,000 cubic meters of earth to form a complex of integrated architectural elements covering five square kilometers” (Sassaman, 338). “In its unique monumental architecture, Poverty Point culture was unlike other cultural traditions. Monumental or ritual centers worldwide were duplicated in form across the landscapes of their respective cultural milieus, reflecting literally the histories of migration, diffusion, and colonization that linked communities of people across regions and generations” (Sassaman, 337). Poverty Point is very different however form the other monuments around its time. Though archaeologists are not sure why Poverty Point was constructed, the one thing that separates it from any other monument is that it was not attempted to be copied. Why all other important sites were and Poverty Point was not is just another mystery.

Poverty Point is northeast Louisiana’s claim to fame. However, the truth is that this magnificent and impressive monument is not famous. Why it is not given the credit the pyramids or Stonehenge got, is a mystery in itself. What is not a mystery though, is that Poverty point stands as one of the most impressive and important archaeological sites in all of the United States.

Works Cited

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