

Collin Olsen

Instructor Smith

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Peace for the Gardens

The International Peace Gardens is a botanical garden that is located on the bank of the Jordan River, at 1000 South 900 West, Salt Lake City, Utah. The Gardens currently represent 28 countries efforts for cultural diversity and peace. Each garden has a taste of the home country that sponsored it, such as their flag, native plants, and sometimes even miniature replicas of popular landmarks. Also, 84 peace poles, from the 2002 Olympic Winter Games, can be found in a circle to show the countries that participated in the games, as well as unity. These once majestic gardens are currently in ruins. How can Utah let this tragedy happen? These Gardens should be fixed, maintained, and improved from their current diminished state, because of their unique cultural value to the community.

The International Peace Gardens are culturally significant to the community. Mrs. Otto Wiesley, a local Utah citizen, decided to create the gardens in 1939, “for good citizenship and to give foreign origin groups a specific part in the beautification of the City for the coming Centennial Celebration of 1947” (Salt Lake City International Peace Gardens). One website dedicated to the Salt Lake City International Peace Gardens explains, “[e]ach of the nationality groups is allotted a garden section which they design, create[,] and plant at their own expense.” The groups’ nations can be quite generous in this process. For the Japanese garden, 1,000 cherry trees were sent by Boy Scouts of Tokyo, although they were burnt because they violated

U.S. Plant regulations, along with a Japanese Tea House and Tori gate from the Japanese government. Alice Kasai, a founder of the Japanese Peace Garden, overcame “enormous obstacles... leading to an exchange of zoo animals [and] rare birds... (International Peace Gardens Academy). Besides the Gardens themselves, there are other things to do like attend festivals, have picnics, go on a tour, or even have wedding photos taken there (International Peace Gardens Academy). The Gardens are also home to the People’s Market, where local produce and entertainment are enjoyed by many (People’s Market). With this being one of the two peace gardens in the United States, it has to be saved. The Gardens offer a place to sit and think in a tranquil atmosphere, a short distance away from the city.

“Much of the garden architecture at the International Peace Gardens has suffered wear over time; some have even been vandalized, stolen or removed. A number of national plants have not survived in Utah’s climate” (International Peace Gardens Academy). When the Dutch garden was finished in 1955, there was a 15 foot high “... wooden shoe, [a] windmill, and two ponds, and ... approximately 25,000 bulbs” (International Peace Gardens Academy). “Today however, only a lawn exists and a small flower bed spelling out ‘Holland’[.] What a shame that this most attractive Garden has all but been forgotten by time” (International Peace Gardens Academy). A lot of the gardens are in great need. When I visited, there was graffiti on the Olympic peace poles, broken statues, and plaques where things had once stood. Its tragic sight now weakens the sense of peace, and instead gives off the feeling of not being safe. In previous years, “there were numerous ponds complete with fish. But today those ponds are not maintained... (Explore Utah). Many of the ponds are no longer there, while others that remain are swamp like pools of water. “The wooden structures have suffered damage and

some of the tile on the roofs are broken” (International Peace Gardens Academy). The magnolias that were supposed to “remind Americans of the friendship of Chinese loyal to the Republican cause”, are nowhere to be found.

Another problem is people stealing things from the gardens. “The International Peace Gardens in Salt Lake had the distinction of being the third place to receive a copy [of the bronze Little Mermaid statue] with permission from the Danish King and the sculptor...” (International Peace Gardens Academy). The statue went missing and was found a month later in bushes with minor damage. Other things have also been stolen with no luck in finding them. In their place are plaques where they once stood. Sadly, some of the indigenous plants from foreign counties have been dug up and taken (International Peace Gardens Academy).

Since the botanical garden is a cultural bouquet, why wouldn't it be fixed, maintained, and improved? For one thing, it would cost money. The city would have to increase taxes, which no one likes, but isn't the cultural learning experience worth it? Considerable amounts of time and money were spent to make the Gardens peaceful and pretty, so why let that go to waste? If more effort was put into preserving the gardens, more people would visit, enjoy, and appreciate them. Salt Lake City International Peace Gardens currently estimates that 20,000 people visit the gardens from around the world each year, therefore fixing, maintaining, and improving the gardens would impress tourists and help increase tourism in Utah.

Another reason the International Peace Garden's condition is declining is that it is in a bad neighborhood. People don't want to invest time and money into something, if the same types of criminal activities are going to continue to occur. What most people don't know is the

International Peace Gardens Academy has been trying to put together a neighborhood watch, to prevent criminal behavior, as well as raise funds to strengthen security.

The International Peace Gardens was once a great place to explore different cultures and get away from the city. The Gardens have been wrought with vandalism and neglect from the city. People are no longer feeling safe in this once tranquil place. The Gardens can still be restored to the beautiful cultural bouquet they once were, or even improved if more money is set aside to fix, maintain, and improve them. If other states can take care of their community parks and tourist attractions, we should be able to take care of ours.

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