American Museum of Natural History Encyclopedia Article

American Museum of Natural History

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American Museum of Natural History

New York City's American Museum of Natural History—with its giant dinosaur skeletons and detailed dioramas—is both a primary repository for the scientific discoveries relating to the natural world and a major tourist attraction. Opened in 1869 when the Upper West Side of Manhattan was still on the edge of civilization, the fortress-like Museum later added wings reaching Central Park West and a major planetarium wholly updated in the 1990s. From a few hundred mounted birds and mammals, the museum's collection has grown to include more fossils, mammals, and dinosaurs than any other museum in the world. Critics have charged the museum with being an agent of colonialism and exploitation and have found the statue of President Theodore Roosevelt on horseback flanked by a walking Black and American Indian in front of the principal entrance an apt symbol of their charge. Such criticisms have not minimized the pleasures of the millions of people who visit the museum annually. In *The Catcher in the Rye* J. D. Salinger captured the delight of many visitors when his character Holden Caulfield fondly remembered his regular school visits to the museum, saying "I get very happy when I think about it."

Further Reading:

Oliver, James A. "American Museum of Natural History at 100."*Nature* March 28, 1970.

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Titcomb, Mary. *American Museum of Natural History.* Austin, Texas, Booklab, 1991.