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Turning Point Essay

Before this trip began, I had never actually given Atlanta that much thought. As awful as that may sound, it was never a place that I dreamed or aspired to go to. That being said, when I signed up for this class I began to think about everything I had ever heard about Atlanta and what I expected my time there to be like. I knew my experiences would be different than anything else because I would not have access to any technology, which is something I am not used to at all. I think overall that had the most impact on my changing views of Atlanta. It is now a city that I found so many unique qualities within, that I had never seen before, that was not only changed through my personal experiences, but what we learned in class.

When I think of Atlanta I mostly think of the Olympics, Coca-Cola, and a city in general that had the task of combining southern hospitality and busy city life. I was interested to see everything I would learn about the city, and how my expectations would differ from reality. The first day when we had our initial walkabout, everything I saw was what I expected from Atlanta. The hustle and bustle of the city, people walking with a purpose, areas less secure than others, and sounds everywhere. I noticed a lot of things that related back to our reading “Evicted”. There were many homeless people on the streets, and it made me question what their stories were and how they ended up on the streets. My experience the first day was with the quintessential city, and I was sure that all of my expectations were going to be correct throughout the next few days. I realize now that on my first day I was too quick to judge my surroundings. I let my prior knowledge to city life influence how I looked at Atlanta, and the next few days I made sure that did not happen.

The second day I traveled to Grant Park and the Oakland Cemetery. This trip began to change my view of the city in many ways. After getting thoroughly lost on the Marta buses, we arrived at a place that wasn’t like a typical city at all. Grant Park was so full of green space, neighborhoods, high schools, and friendly people walking their dogs. It made me realize that just because we were in a city didn’t mean that we couldn’t find not only green space, but a place that people had the opportunity to call home. As we traveled to the cemetery, the city feel began to return, seeing that the location of the cemetery was not in the safest place. Once we entered the cemetery, though, we began to understand why it was something worth seeing. The cemetery was so enriched with history and the further you walked in the farther from the city you felt. It amazed me that there was something so peaceful within a city, and it made me realize that cities might not have been everything I assumed.

The next day was by far my favorite day, and my opinions of Atlanta changed drastically. I traveled to Decatur. It was such an interesting place, and nothing reminded me of my hometown more. It was full of people who were nothing but kind to each other, and full of history. It was just a great place to be, and if I didn’t know where we were, I would not have associated it with a city. The day we were there the town was having not only a church ceremony where they were blessing the pets of people, but an alumni event from UNM. It really showed me how close the community was. It was full of life, and a place that I never would have expected to find in a large city.

As I reflect on my time in Atlanta, I realize now that I was too quick to judge my surroundings. As I was thinking about it, I kept referring back to our Ted Talk, “Danger of a Single Story”. I realized that I was trying to give Atlanta a single story at the beginning of this trip. I only had prior knowledge that made me expect certain things, but as the days went on my mind was completely changed, I started to see different sides of the “story”, and I allowed myself to form my own opinions rather than believe what others had told me or what I automatically assumed about cities. This experience was such a great one for me, and I am so grateful for the experience and skills it gave me when it comes to not only mapping, observing, and communicating with people I didn’t know, but allowing myself to open up my senses and take in everything around me fully.