



ATLANTA THROUGH EGYPTIAN EYES

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A Journey Begins

Almost three months have passed since I first arrived at Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport. At the start, I only knew Atlanta's general information, like how the Atlanta airport is the busiest airport in the world, and how Atlanta is one of the most welcoming cities for immigrants in America. I also knew a few facts about the city from watching the hit Hulu show "Atlanta."

A few minutes after landing I was taking the MARTA train to Lindbergh Station to stay with a host family during my time in the city. During the ride, I found myself listening to a conversation between two women talking about daily life, work, and children. I found myself in an environment that reminded me of Cairo, Egypt.

How did I get here?

In the spring of 2024, I served as a Community Engagement Exchange (CEE) Fellow at the Mayor's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs. I was selected to be an intern because of my interest in cultural diversity, youth empowerment, civic dialogue, and peace building.

Although this internship was a golden opportunity for me to deepen my understanding and develop my professional skills, the experience of living and working in the city of Atlanta had the greatest impact on me. The cultural differences and similarities between Atlanta and Egypt motivated me to share my experience.

A Construction of Culture

Before I arrived to Atlanta, I had the impression that there is one American culture – the one I saw portrayed in Hollywood movies. This includes one language, one accent, and one lifestyle. I realized the absurdity of this stereotype after a few days of living in Atlanta.

The cultural diversity between states and cities is worth paying attention to, as it is very similar to the cultural diversity in Egypt. However, in America it is more visible and vibrant.

People often think of Egypt through its Pharaonic history. The media focuses on showing this stereotype, especially with Egypt's reliance on tourism to its dozens of pharaonic sites. Over the millennia, many diverse cultures and people have lived in Egypt, and while the Pharaonic civilization spanned more than 7,000 years, Egypt also has a rich history of Greek, Roman, Christian, Islamic, and Arab cultures. During this time, diverse communities from Europe, Asia, and Africa lived on the land, contributing to the modern culture.

My family belonged to the Nubian civilization in southern Egypt before my grandfather moved to Alexandria, a city located in the north on the shores of the Mediterranean where I was born and raised. The difference between my family's culture and the culture of Alexandria has reinforced the concept of cultural diversity. It has also sparked my interest in social inclusion and how to design a city to be more welcoming to everyone.

Despite the increasing focus on one Egyptian culture, Egypt contains many diverse cultures, dialects, and societies. I believe that promoting these cultures, while strengthening the mechanisms of integration between them, re-enforces the social fabric. I believe that diversity does not divide, but strengthens society.

Unraveling Misconceptions on American History

Another thing I was wrong about was my perception of the history of America. Prior to my visit, I did not expect to visit many museums because I assumed the U.S. did not have much ancient history.

I think this perception is due to my impression as an Egyptian. For Egyptians, history often thousands of years of civilization and grand monuments. Before this experience, my perception was that America is a country of democracy, capitalism, and a strong economy.

During a tour of the history of black Americans at the Hammond House, the guide pointed out that every society has a history. This history may be represented by ancient civilizations, the economy, politics, or culture. Regardless of how a history is represented, what matters most is how you use that history presently to make a change.

This perspective represents my current impression of American history. In my perspective, modern history is the greatest influence on American society today. Now, I am more interested in museums that focus on narrating history and its relationship to modern society than I am interested in museums that focus on ancient civilizations. This makes me more interested in reading and visiting other states in the future.



Translating Cultural Concepts Across Continents

The CEE program implemented by IREX and supported by Department of State includes a six-month online training, a three-month practicum with a civil society organization in the U.S., and a graduation project upon returning home.

This September, I will implement an educational and cultural project for Egyptian youth in cooperation with an NGO in Cairo. This project seeks to empower youth through culture, based on an approach that integrates history, cultural diversity, philosophy, and the promotion of civic dialogue.

Using the lessons I have learned at the Mayor's Office of International and Immigrant Affairs, I seek to build this project into a larger program in the future. This project will serve as basic building block for an organization I plan to create to promote cultural diversity and empower the youth through culture. ◆

