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What this experience has done for me is indescribable. I had my doubts (naturally) and thought this would just be another boring history lesson, and I'm glad I was wrong. Even before the trip, meeting up with everyone in this program showed me that I was going to learn about my past, and that even though we were going to talk about the harsh reality of it, it would still be a fun experience. Even after joining the program, going to these meetings, and even on our way to Alabama, I didn't think I believed it till I stood foot out of the bus. Seeing that I was in a different location, or well feeling that I was in a different location, was unsettling at first, as I don't normally go out, but as I stepped out I took it all in seeing that the paths were different, the trees were different, the flags, even the birds. I looked around and I said to myself, I'm definitely in the south now.

One thing I will say that I was fearful of was that after meeting all of these people in this program, it felt like they were all so successful and that they were doing something to change, and I thought that it would discourage me from wanting to be part of something greater. Thankfully, it didn't. Instead, it made me feel like I can do something, and it wasn't just my ego telling me that.

A big thing that I think carried with me that bothered me was the lack of education that we get from the school system when it comes to these topics. I am turning 18 years old, and if I hadn't gotten the chance to experience this program, then I wouldn't know the depth or severity of the past and why it still matters. I mean, think about how many kids, no think about how many adults don't even know what has happened for us to get to this point, it's sad and I think its not just the fact that yes some people choose to be ignorant about it but in other maybe most cases some people are just not educated in it.

When we visited the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute or the EJI Museum, for instance, what stood out to me was that, unlike school, it didn't soften the impact of what happened in the past. It gave a raw feeling and experience. It didn't try to make me comfortable instead, it made me aware. And that awareness, that honesty, is what changed me. This trip didn't just teach me about history, it taught me about myself and my place in the world.

Now, I carry this with me not as a memory, but as a responsibility. My responsibility to keep learning, to keep asking questions, and to speak up, even when it's easier to stay quiet.

If there's one thing I want to leave you with, it's that: you don't have to have it all figured out to make a difference. You just have to care enough to try. I'm glad I did and I hope you do too.

Thank you.