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Racial Geography Tour Reflection Essay

For my Free Choice Gem I chose to do the Racial Geography Tour. I found this tour interesting, because along with the racial aspects of the university that I didn't really know all that much about, they also covered the gendered aspects of the architecture and layout of the university. I wasn't really expecting to get such a comprehensive explanation of how the racial, gender, and other political factors affected the architecture of the university, and also how the architecture affected in the reverse.

This tour was really interesting. I really liked how it could help better paint an image in your head of the structure of the campus, due to the reasons why things are the way they are. I have a really hard time with directions and having a mental map but knowing the Quad and the Girl's Gym were originally the women's campus starts to help paint a picture in my head. Honestly, the virtual tour, with its arrows and overlays helps me more than any in person tour would, as I don't have to stretch my imagination to see things that were there in the past that are further away, instead they can just be pointed out extremely clearly and overlayed over my vision. I found the controls and knowing where to look kind of burdensome, but I'm sure with enough experience I could figure it out a bit better. I just wish they could guide your vision other than the arrows. If there were an option for your view to move on its own, that would be amazing. The ability to see exactly what the tour guide wants you to see is a huge plus to this format, and I think that feature would add to my enjoyment of that.

Throughout this tour I came to realize that this is pretty recent history, with a lot of the integration between the women's and men's campus, along with the racial segregation being removed, happening within my parents' lifetimes. This realization is kind of crazy to me as to just how recent these things are in the grand scheme of things. We've made a lot of progress in this amount of time, but there still seems to be a long way to go in terms of true gender and racial equality in general. I'm also surprised that a lot of the buildings have the same names and

carvings in them that they did back then, and that structurally not all that much has changed. I'm not sure how it makes me feel, or if the history and architecture has been recontextualized by the ensuing thirty years or so since this stuff subsided a bit. It's definitely going to take a lot more thought and maybe additional research for me to come to a conclusion on how the university's past makes me feel.

Going back to not knowing there used to be a women's side of campus is interesting, as while I live in Dobie now; I have had a short stay in Carothers during Boy's State between my junior and senior year of high school, where I was one of if not the only girl in the dorms and in attendance. Thinking back, that experience was in so many ways absolute hell, although I did manage to have some fun as one of the few people on the press corps. It's interesting that now a program marketed almost exclusively towards guys is hosted in the women's campus. Honestly, I don't know too much about the history of Boy's State and the University of Texas in general, but this is definitely an interesting look at both of those.

To wrap things up, the racial geography tour of UT was really enlightening to me about now just the history of UT when it comes to race but also gender, and how those things intersect. I'm going to walk away with a lot more knowledge, and a greater understanding as to the depth of the history of UT Austin.