

# **The Trip to the United States<sup>(1)</sup>**

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After a very long trip that crossed the Atlantic, the plane landed at about 8 p.m. at the Atlanta airport, which is gigantic in size and impressive in beauty. Upon our arrival, the weather was moderate and calm. When we finished the entry procedures in the immigration bureau, Wafaa and I took the airport train towards the baggage claim gate and waited in a corner for Youssef, who had to go through longer procedures. A security agent ordered us to empty the place. It seems that the ghost of the 9/11 terrorist attacks still possesses the U.S. airports. Professor Samir El Azhar and Dbich had already gone outside the airport to reassure our American hosts who came to receive us.

We went out of the train straight forward to the exit gate... This is America which exposes itself as a naked body in front of the senses. I recalled a series of memories which brought me back to more than three decades ago. Memories of an age the bigger portion of which has gone with the wind before I could reach this time and place. The year of 1973, the baccalaureate diploma, the scholarship

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I received to continue my studies in the States, my mother's angelic face and her warm voice telling me "living outside your country is similar to death my dear", are all recollections that stroke the mind at once. I did my best to convince her that I would be among a family to which she replied "the stranger is he who is told that he is among his family and long distances separate them apart". I do not know of a woman more caring for her children than my mum. We grew up with distances and borders separating the nine brothers and sisters with their mother. However, once we meet, we all become children again standing in front of their mother after becoming parents for her grandchildren. As this article is about the trip to the States, I do not deem that it is the appropriate time or place to dig into memory. But isn't it true that we write to get what we lost, or what has been stolen from us? The heart-taking voice of Dr. Catherine Lewis, who has been very welcoming, grabbed my attention when she waved in our direction shouting "we are here". The whole group was waiting for us with genuine smiling faces. Waiting for Youssef to come, our luggage were put in the cars and left the airport in the direction of our place of stay in Springhill Suites. The following day, we had our first meeting in which each party in the project presented a working paper about their progress, achievements and future prospects of the partnership. In the end of the meeting, a camera gift to the Ben M'sik museum was handed to Professor El Azhar.

All the tasks mentioned in the agenda were accomplished respecting the time of their completion. I am going to be redundant if I continue citing what kind of undertakings we were involved in since Professor El Azhar is going to present a detailed report on that. However, I will only shed some light on the activities of the day we had during our first meeting to get an idea about the pace of our trip. After the meeting, we visited the University's museum, located in the same building where the meeting took place. The museum hosts a butterfly gallery, with all its different types alluding to clinging to life and refusing to succumb to death, portrayed by several tableaux that chronicle the genocide, the unavoidable result of the objectified rationalism that gave birth to totalitarianism. In the afternoon, we visited the Civil War Museum located a few miles away from the campus.

"The Americans do not venerate the brave leaders of the Revolution as much as they honor the founding fathers. The majority of Americans consider Independence and the Constitution the essence of the political wisdom and the supreme guide for America and the Americans." With these words the curator of

the museum started his speech carrying with the help of an assistant a rectangular flattened-container which he prudently put on the desk as if it were a piece of glass that would break into pieces if put otherwise. The shield was removed to have in front of our eyes a very old piece of cloth with white and blue and seven stars. It is the flag of the South during the Civil War. We saw the curator talking about the history of the priceless piece of cloth with so much affection. He continued talking about the factory where the garment was spanned drawing our attention to some iron pieces, the museum is proud to keep, that bear witness to that period of history. When he finished his thorough talk, the flattened-box was closed and softly put back to its place. We continued our walk through the gallery to see the first American train to travel on the railroad along with the library that has lots of invaluable history books and manuscripts. A few days later, in another museum in Washington D.C., we had a similar experience. We were able to see the first American flag, the sewing machine that was used to sew the flag and a black and white picture of the woman behind the masterpiece.

In the warmth of the spring weather, we headed to the Kennesaw State University's campus. What I discovered in this trip is that America that color the world with its culture, arts and music marketed in the different means of media is not the real America. America of Coca-Cola, Jeans, MacDonald's, Hamburger, and Rocking Roll music is the fake image of the United States that we receive in ads. The U.S. has got a different facet: a society of richness, power, affluence, precedence, excellence and freedom. The States is also a country whose citizens are actively engaged in building their homeland and their history with the numerous sophisticated technological means that they have in hand. We also enjoyed the cultural facet of the States; the country where you texture and appreciate your citizenship in the full sense of the word with a whole set of rights that is protecting it. You get the feeling of the mutual love that can effortlessly be discerned between American citizens and America. The world, in the Western understanding, has given Man the means and the tools to lead a better and comfortable life. I used to believe that Paris, with its Eiffel Tower, Louvre Museum and Versailles Palace is the ultimate symbol of culture and architecture. I have changed this belief when I visited only two States of the U.S., namely Georgia and Washington D.C. I was convinced that America constructs its history differently adopting a didactic approach. The numerous museums that can be found in the U.S. are designed in a way that paid attention to the smallest details. To my knowledge, this is the only country where there is free access to the world of

museums. I asked the curator about this issue to which he responded “the museums are there for the citizens. In fact, the country is there for the citizens, for all the citizens and not for a privileged segment.”

Not far from our place of accommodation, the KSU campus, a group of stylishly designed buildings, stands in a hill from which the Kennesaw city can be seen with its different gorgeous flowers. The pretty weather, the strategic location, and the attractive architecture of the buildings make of the campus a place where students can smell the aura of creation and imagination. KSU is a huge complex that encompasses the students’ campus, the teachers’ offices and the President’s headquarter. As for the classes and amphitheatres, they are equipped with the latest technological facilities. The eyes of the students are glaring with youth despite their different skin color. Here, diversity is welcomed and respected in a country with varied ethnic roots. I asked Professor Jennifer about the number of students at KSU. “24 thousand students,” she said. I repeated my question to get the same answer. That’s unbelievable! Think about the exam periods...

Dr. Dbich gave a lecture about the architecture of Fez to the students of Dr. Jennifer and Dr. Sandra Bird. After the talk, Professor El Azhar gave a well illustrated presentation about the modern architecture of Casablanca so that the American students could have an idea about the traditional and modern architecture of Morocco. Wafaa, Youssef and I were invited to Dr. Sandra Bird’s class. My talk tackled the issue of Women in Morocco. Youssef gave a small presentation about Metaphor in the Qur’an and the Bible. Whereas, Wafaa contributed by answering questions of the students. After dinner, we enjoyed watching an enchanting show performed and directed by the students. The theatre was full and admission was not for free so that future students’ activities can continue to exist.

### **April 15th, 2010**

It’s 9:15 a.m. Our destination is the government building of Georgia State. The lovely spring weather stretched our enjoyment while discovering some eye-catching sites in the Atlanta city: museums, theatres, open street concerts, architectural decoration belonging to the 18th century. It is truly an extraordinarily stunning and exceedingly clean city where there is very limited public transportation. In Atlanta, everyone has a private car. I cannot remember hearing the voice of a klaxon until I start doubting whether these cars have one. The quiet traffic in Atlanta is beyond comparison with that in Casablanca.

The government building is composed of two floors, the surface of each has a gallery of paintings by children who have not reached twelve yet; angelic artistic dances that enchant both the eyes and the heart. You pass those paintings to see other much more thought-provoking fine arts hanged on the walls of the buildings. Our group exchanged beaming glances. It seems that everyone got the message of the other; in here, you are welcomed by captivating works of art. In our homeland, you are welcomed by a policeman and interrogations about why you are visiting the building.

The Atlanta government's building is a showpiece of fascinating architecture: castles and halls full of colorful flowers. This was a day when the governor receives the Atlanta inhabitants. His welcoming reception has reflected his great interest in the university that hosted us and the university that we represent. After his welcoming speech, he asked a few questions about our university and the partnership we had with KSU while some journalists were busy taking photos. Some of the tableaux that the building is decorated with are devoted to the portrait of all the leaders that took the position of governor throughout the history of Georgia State. The portrait in the bottom of which is written the name of the governor and the period of his governance is there as a recompense for those influential personalities.

After the visit is over, we were split into small groups. Each group visited a part of the city. Youssef and I went to Martin Luther King's museum. The museum was not far from the government building. Stopping at this figure whose name has gone beyond the U.S. history and borders to be engraved in the history of all humanity was an unforgettable moment. Before getting inside the museum, along the way to the entrance gate are footsteps on which is written names of prominent figures in the city of Atlanta: Jimmy Carter, Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, to mention but a few. The museum has lots of artifacts and all that is linked to the African Americans. It essentially chronicles the life of Martin Luther King: his books, shoes, clothes, the plastic flower that he gave to his wife in the night of his assassination and the key of their room. The museum also has an amphitheater that broadcasts an interesting documentary about his militant life during a day. The movie recounts the story of Rosa Parks who refused to surrender her seat and go to the back of the bus. The movie casts light on his visit to India and how he was deeply influenced by philosophy and the Mahatma Gandhi's non-violence approach to solving political hitches and fighting for one's rights. The movie also focuses on the famous speech that he delivered

on August 25th in front of a crowd of more than a quarter million marchers from the black and the white. His wife narrates the story of the unusual plastic flower that he handed to her the night of his assassination. She said that she got used to receiving a red flower from King every morning. She asked him about the reason behind not bringing a real flower to which he answered jokingly: "This flower will stay with you forever and never will it wilt", as if he knew that he would never be able to hand her a flower gift after that night. The documentary ends with zooming in on the number of the hotel room where he was assassinated. On the right hand of the museum's exit is the house where King was born. With the company of a guide and other 10 tourists, we went on a visit to King's first dwelling. It is a house composed of two floors and seven rooms in total – three downstairs and four upstairs. The relatively comfortable childhood that he led is reflected in the family entertaining room that has some musical instruments (a piano and others) and lots of toys. His father used to be a priest in a time when black religious leaders had played a crucial role in the community. According to the guide, it was personal, social and political circumstances that have made of Martin the leader he had been.

### **Fair play and Fun**

Sports have never been my center of interest. In fact, I cannot bear watching a game of any kind of sports. I still recall going to Casablanca's stadium on its opening ceremony to watch a soccer game in the early 80s. It cost me losing a necklace that was aggressively stolen from me. That was the first and the last time to go to a stadium in my country. Unlike the unpleasant experience I had in Casablanca, watching a baseball game in Atlanta stadium was an unforgettable experience that had its unique flavor. The Americans have their own exceptional ways to celebrate the Baseball game that is watched by men and women from all walks of life and from all age groups. Waves of supporters were queuing to get their tickets in an atmosphere marked by much self-arrangement and mutual respect. A group of fans were drumming and dancing in harmony to encourage their team. Hundreds of hats that have the letter A, the first letter of the Atlanta city, were distributed to the supporters for free. When Dr. Catherine Lewis introduced us to the guide, we were warmly welcomed and were invited to the first rows very close to the players who were requested to sign on balls, T-shirts or even tickets by their admirers.

The huge Atlanta stadium was full to the teeth with supporters, had giant screens and cafeterias for selling fast food and coke.

Watching the baseball game in the stadium had an American taste; you watch, you eat and you drink coke. On the right side of the seat is a small hidden trash-can for throwing rubbish in order to keep the stadium clean. In this country, I find that everything is designed to keep the comfort of the citizens, who also contribute in making their space look beautiful. I cannot remember seeing a piece of paper thrown on the sides of the stadium. Everyone here feels responsible for keeping their stadium clean and eye-catching.

The game was shaped by fair competition away from violence among players. The audience supports their teams in a highly civilized manner. Winning the game did not seem to be the ultimate goal, but rather entertaining the audience who came to have fun. This reminds me of my homeland supporters who roar like a hungry beast with each violent tackle. The level of violence and that of the ecstasy of the supporters are always in positive correlation: the more violent the game is, the more joyful the viewers are. The soccer game of Egypt against Algeria is the best sample that can be brought up here. We came back to our place of accommodation in Atlanta by the subway. The subway in Atlanta is very much different from that in Paris, where young delinquents jump on its entrance door injecting their arms with drugs under the eyes of the public and under the protection of law as if they are running away from the world of matter, that kills Man towards the world of absence that annihilates human traits.

### **Washington D.C., the City of Magic**

If you want to know Washington D.C., take an egg and appreciate through touching the soft external shell and the blinding whiteness that stimulates your desire to the yellow yoke inside, which breathe life into its cells through the small holes in the shell. The cells, on their turn, full of energy and activity, sit on a multi-color tapestry anchored to massive flowered trees whose roots reveal their antiquity. The oval shape of Washington D.C. makes it possible to enjoy its arresting statues and historical monuments wherever you stand in the city. I very much enjoyed the visit to the Congress, which opens its doors to waves of visitors from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., especially, its library that has the original document of the Independence along with a huge archive. We were walking in a very fast pace on a day cramped with lots of activities. “We cannot get from the front gate”, said Dr. Jennifer in her usual serious tone worrying to lose some precious

second in our enjoyable trip. With a bit of luck, we were allowed to get there from the back door.

It is truly a culturally privileged milestone; it has a library, a gallery of oil paintings and panels, sculptures, audio-visual materials and offices for the supervisors. In addition to history books, the most predominant on its shelves, the library has newspapers that go back to the 16th century and computers to browse any book or document you wish. In the company of a guide, we visited the White House, the statues of Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt and Thomas Jefferson, the Egyptian Tower, and Vietnam Veterans Memorial which was initially for men only but later a similar memorial was erected to recognize the efforts of those women who actively participated in the war.

The guide pointed out that the Lincoln Statue stands facing the White House to remind any President dwelling there of the huge responsibility upon his shoulders. Our trip with the guide lasted for three hours in which we discovered the beautiful historical monuments of the charming Washington D.C. We passed by Gibran Khalil Gibran's Avenue and the Vice President's house before we reached the Embassies Avenue where almost all the countries' embassies can be found. Everything in this picturesque federal city is huge: buildings, statues, avenues, etc. What strikes my attention most is that nobody is watching your steps as you are visiting the city's landmarks and monuments. Furthermore, there are neither barriers that make a space between you and those monuments nor police whistles that would interrupt your contemplation and order you to keep a distance. I remember the guide using the phrase "my country" dozens of times whilst talking to us. He mentioned that the motto of the United States is that 'the country is for the people'. So, it is their legitimate right to have free access to the government buildings and historical landmarks, which are viewed as a public heritage. America is a mosaic of ethnicities, customs, religions, cultures and civilizations whose people are proud of being who they are and glad to put the well-being of their country ahead of their own.

### **The Holocaust History Museum :**

The idea of doing art for the sake of art has never been convincing to me. The Jocund painting that almost all people agree about its magnificent beauty does not appeal to me. I am very much for the art that puts me in a confrontational existence with the self – that's the reason why I found myself stuck in front of the tableaux of the Holocaust museum. I spent more than half an hour reading



the names of those who were massacred on the walls of big glass boxes. I was very taken by this topic since I started working on “Mustiness of Evil” where human behavior is a real threat to humanity and in which succumbing to death and punishment transform human beings to ‘lost beasts’ and the human character to a mere object that even animals would never want to be. It is where the human intellect produces fetid evil. It is where rationalism is diverted from its noble objectives and shapes the mind to a factory that produces futility.

The Holocaust gallery evokes a black history of totalitarian systems.

At that moment, Palestine jumped to mind with images of the last aggression on Gaza as the 21st century Holocaust. The museum has three giant floors full of images and tableaux that recount the history of the Holocaust. I still keep everything that my hand could lay on, sometimes with very suggestive comments. This is America that I used to judge as being historiless. The trip has given me a chance to discover how America builds its history following rigorous scientific methods. All the museums that we visited either in Atlanta or Washington D.C. are equipped with sophisticated computers and flat TV screens that broadcast presentations about each gallery in the museum. Here, you can listen to even the shoes talking about their stories of how they were able to survive amidst genocide and destruction. The shoes were lucky not to own neither a soul nor bones or flesh that would be punished to death.

After the Holocaust galleries, we paid a visit to the museum of the indigenous Americans who were exterminated to have the American civilization built upon their debris. Before getting into the gallery showroom, we were warmly welcomed by the gallery guides, who distributed some attractively designed leaflets that open your appetite to take a flight to those ancient civilizations to live a firsthand experience with the indigenous, some of the nicest people that the world has ever had. The two floor museum is designed in a way that each civilization hands you to the next: the Inca and many others. We watched a 15 minute interactive movie about those early civilizations with lots of thoughts invested in its direction. America has purchased all these artifacts and media productions to celebrate and to never forget the Native Americans who were heartlessly exterminated.

We left Washington D.C. at 5 a.m. in a shuttle that can accommodate ten passengers leaving the city rolling with its magical blanket cover amid splendid attractions. I find the city a beating heart that looks for its blood in science, culture and human development. We left with our chests filled with the Atlantic

breeze, which has an exceptional ability to relax the mind, revive the soul and refresh the body. In brief, the trip was an adventure beyond description.

When we arrived to the transit hall of Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris, we felt a vast gulf between the two countries. You do not need to go outside the airport to tell that France is far less developed than the United States, starting from the flights that rarely respect the scheduled time to the flight attendants who are not as energetic as the American ones in serving the passengers. France still exploits the femininity of the woman to the extent that you never find a stewardess in the French Airlines, which I am very used to, who is over forty while the stewardesses of the Atlanta Airlines are all in their fifties and sixties. Our flight from Paris to Atlanta lasted more than eight hours in which the American stewardess showed lots of hospitality and kindness passing each time with smiling motherly faces and asking passengers “coffee, tea, water”. Despite their old age, the American stewardess looked more active and more devoted to her job than that of France.

With a group whose company has been enjoyable, I have learned and discovered a lot in the trip.

- The procedures in the French and American airports are exacerbating and tiring. Nevertheless, the airports facilities are extremely clean – a characteristic that is hardly found in the Arab airports.

- Even though the procedures are longer after 9/11 for security reasons, the U.S. immigration bureau workers receive you with smiling faces and might even tell you a joke and you will certainly hear the phrase “welcome to the U.S.” when they hand you your passports.

- Our departure from the States was determined by the state of the Iceland volcano. Everyone, especially Youssef, wanted the volcano to stay active. Although I was very worried about my work leave period which was about to finish, I had a deep desire inside for staying, too. In fact, we started missing this beautiful country and the group who warmly hosted before leaving the U.S. borders.