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Going to Puerto Rico was influential to my artist processes and how I interpret and view other cultures. Being that I am a visual person, I felt the best way to document my understanding of the country was to take photographs of my everyday experience. Looking back, I realize how the pictures I took show the honest approach of me trying to capture what I felt was necessary to share with others from my travels. I realized that my artist process revolves around the want to show others my own experiences and struggles in an honest documentation of photography. I am hoping to show my experiences and Puerto Rican cultural knowledge I accumulated through mixed media pieces this semester.

I was captivated by the colors of Puerto Rico. There were several visual motifs that stood out to me, such as the bright colors of houses and the way everything was surrounded by a gated community. It was also interesting to see the importance of the Puerto Rican flag, which hung from several balconies in big cities and rural parts of the country. By the flags hanging everywhere, I was influenced by how much pride everyone had in being Puerto Rican. It was inspiring to see people who had so much pride for their own country.

I visited various places that exposed the different traditions of the Puerto Rican culture such as attending a cockfight, hiking up the rainforest, visiting museums, and going to a traditional festival in Old San Juan. The cockfight was one of the most eye-opening experiences for me because of the all male environment of the Puerto Rican

elite. It was interesting to see the spectacle of a cockfight because it is something that is considered normal in Puerto Rican culture, where here in the United States it is illegal. I was especially captivated by the culture's traditions when I attended the *Calle San Sebastian* festival in Old San Juan. There I was able to photograph the activities, the parade, the art, the music, the people, and general excitement of the event. By attending all of these places and events I feel I got a sample of the traditions of the Puerto Rican culture.

I was in Puerto Rico for eleven full days, and I felt I got a decent dose of what the culture is like. Yet, the language barrier was tough for me because speaking Spanish is a huge part of building their community. Even though most people are bilingual, I felt guilty for not being able to communicate better with the people I encountered. This is something I hope to work on in the future to further my understanding of being part Puerto Rican.

Prior to leaving, I conducted an interview with my grandpa Juan in his home in Lorain, Ohio. I discovered he was brought to the United States under a contract to work for the National Tube Steel Company in Lorain. I learned that he has only been back to Puerto Rico for a short period of time fifty years ago. I also discovered Juan has not seen his brothers or sisters there in over twenty years. His brother, William Torres, resides in Luquillio, Puerto Rico, and I was fortunate enough to meet with him and my great aunt, Nada. In addition to the culture's events I mentioned before I also took several photos of myself in my grandfather's hometown of Luquillio, and with our family.

My photographs summarize the places, events, and people I encountered on my trip. I am planning to incorporate these photos in a bigger mixed media project for my

senior studio thesis show on April 25. Currently I am taking all the experiences I had in Puerto Rico and working through ideas of my family history, cultural assimilation, and trying to understand what it means for me to be part of this community I finally got to learn about and see first hand. In addition to these mixed media pieces I am hoping to form a self portrait series showing me in the different landscapes of Puerto Rico, expressing my desire to become a part of the environment. This trip gave me the chance to learn more about where my part of my family is from, and what they experienced in their different stories of migration. From my photographs I am able to bring back my grandfather's family in Puerto Rico, here to the United States. I am fortunate enough to come back and share a family history no one in my family has explored before.