

What do you think of when you think of a big city? Is it the attractions that a big city has? What if you were to look at a city differently? I am from Atlanta and, even growing up in the city, I did not know about problems there until I started doing volunteer work. After finding out that sex trafficking in Atlanta is the highest in the United States, I knew I wanted to help.

I researched different issues in Atlanta: sex trafficking, the drug hub, and gangs. This information changed my view about Atlanta. Atlanta might be an attraction for sports teams, the aquarium, and Coca-Cola, but there is a dark side that most choose to ignore. How can one ignore these social ills?

I chose to work with wood to make the surface of the sculpture look clean, as a way to represent the main attractions in Atlanta. The 3-dimensional letters, however, force the viewer to physically lift open the front of the box to see what resides underneath. This play in perspective is meant to generate a different viewpoint to shift the viewer's internal perspective.

I hope to inspire people to get involved in helping out non-profit organizations to make a difference. Even though we want everything to be peaceful, it is not. By forcing you to open the letters, I want you to confront the truth that social evils reside. The sex slavery industry takes and sells children for profit. Heroin kills more teens in Atlanta each year. Violent gangs are growing and migrating to Atlanta in large numbers. What if something tragic happened to your child, your nephew, or your sibling? Ask yourself to face the truth and, once you do, get involved in your community.

Katherine

Atlanta is one of the major cities in the United States. When you think of big cities, what do you think about? I think of all the reasons you may want to visit Atlanta and the people that it attracts. Behind all of the tourist attractions and sporting events is a dark side in Atlanta, for drugs, prostitution, gangs, sex trafficking, and more. A city curates an identity through various means, the culture, geography, and structures, just to name a few. Atlanta is best known for its musical culture, Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, sports teams, southern hospitality, being the birthplace of the Civil Rights Movement, and the largest Hindu Temple outside of India. People who live in Atlanta hear that there is a sex trafficking problem or a drug problem, but they do not do anything about it. It is important to educate people on what is actually going on. Not everybody understands or sees the dark side of Atlanta because they are either in a bubble and truly do not know, or they chose to ignore it. I live on the outskirts of “The Bluff” and inside “the perimeter.” I can tell you that the people who live in the perimeter do not do anything about it; I found out how big of a problem it was when I started volunteering at The Atlanta Dream Center. They have a program called “Out of Darkness” which rescues women off of the streets. Working through them, I learned the issue in Atlanta is just getting worse and nobody is doing anything about it. The first step to doing something is to educate.

Atlanta has an area known as “The Bluff.” The Bluff is in west midtown it is the counties of Berkeley Park, Loring Heights, Atlantic Station, Home Park, Georgia Tech, Vine City, Bankhead, Knight, Park, West Midtown, and English Avenue. The Bluff is most known for its open-air drug market. An open-air drug market is where anyone is able to go in and any drug is available to you off of the streets, even if you are a teenager. In the mid-twentieth century, The Bluff was a middle-class neighborhood populated by educated African-Americans, and over the past few decades it has become a magnet for people seeking and selling heroin. It is a pocket of poverty marked by boarded up houses—it is a place lacking in chain grocery stores, social services, and schools. The Bluff as a whole is the most dangerous part of Atlanta.

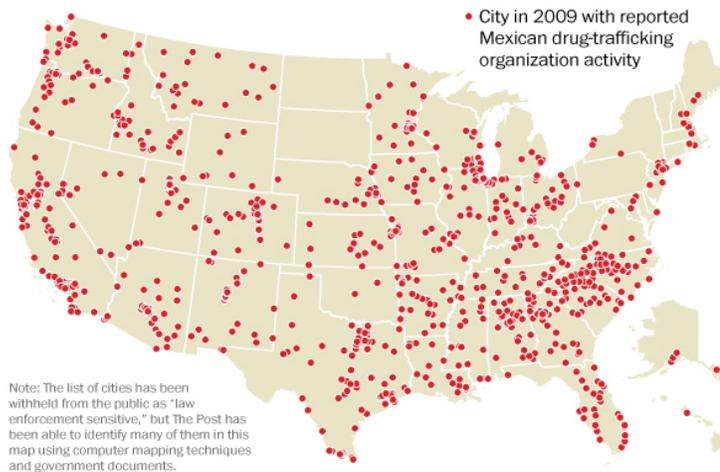
A man named Oscar Reynoso was a drug dealer and he owed his bosses \$300,000. His bosses are in the cartel; they took him and chained him up to a basement wall by his hands and ankles. They starved him, gagged him, and beat him for six days straight. People that are a part of the Mexican cartel were holding him. Atlanta has become a stopping point for truckloads of Mexican cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine. They are held in drug-houses in Atlanta and then distributed along the East coast. This has made Atlanta a major destination for those seeking drugs. Atlanta has an increasing Hispanic population which is making it easier for the Mexican cartel drug trade to blend in. "In Gwinnett County, the drug dealers are able to hide in plain sight," county District Attorney Danny Porter said. "To combat this, we have to be much more coordinated between my office, the police department and the federal authorities. The presence of the organizations is a dilemma enough that we have to develop new tactics."¹ Gwinnett County in Atlanta has had a rocketing Hispanic population. In 1990, there were 8,470 Hispanics in Gwinnett and in 2000 there were 63,727 Hispanics. The cartel is able to hide in plain sight throughout Gwinnett. Just like Oscar Reynoso, there are people being held in basements in Atlanta. The federal agents in Atlanta have connected most of the drug crimes to the two most powerful Mexican organizations, the Sinaloa cartel and the Gulf cartel. A battle of drug routes has been blamed for violence in the Mexican border towns, bloodshed that has killed hundreds of people to date. It is hard for anybody to tackle the cartel because of how dangerous they are, and any information that is known about the cartel (if it is exposed) puts one at too much risk. They are very private and the information is concealed. They will do anything to keep

¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2009/CRIME/03/19/atlanta.drug.cartels/index.html?iref=newssearch>

their business running if it includes killing or abducting people. There is a fear that the battle will extend into Atlanta and the rest of the states. “The fear is that the battle will extend deeper into the United States, causing more to suffer a fate similar to Reynoso's ordeal in the Gwinnett County basement.” Reynoso was lucky that federal agents had a wiretap on his phone and the agents stormed the house. If the debt was not paid, he would be killed according to the federal agents on the wiretap.



Map of the Mexican drug routes in the United States.



Map showing where the Mexican drug trafficking organizations are.

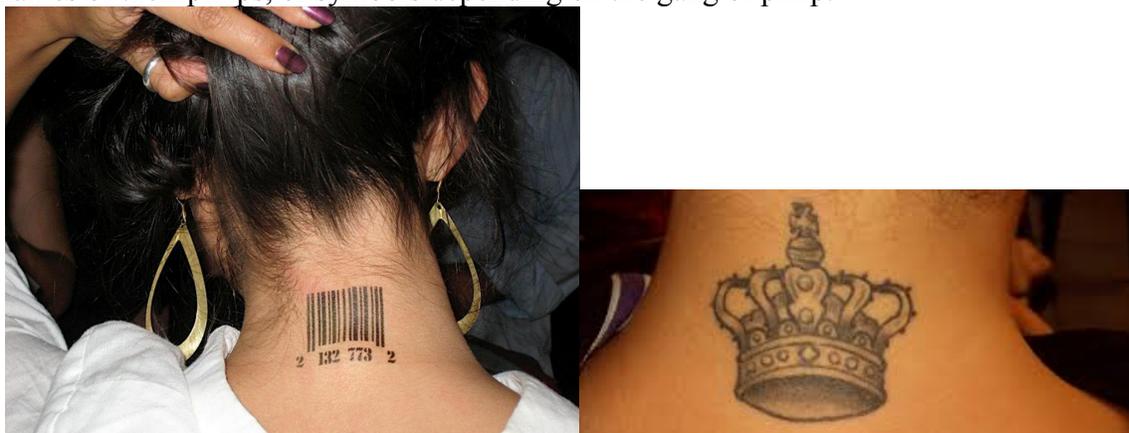
An open-air drug market means that anybody can have access to hardcore drugs. A new fear of a type of heroin user is emerging. High-schoolers are driving from the suburbs into the city for heroin. Most high-schoolers that are switching to heroin are switching because the other opioids, such as painkillers, are more expensive. When a painkiller prescription is filled, it cannot be refilled constantly. Painkillers are expensive, especially when you build a tolerance and need to take higher doses to feel the same effect.

“Heroin is not addictive at first” is one of the biggest rumors. Heroin has a peak high that lasts five to six minutes; after that, it does not go down for four to five hours. While people are coming down, their dopamine levels are lowered and they feel the need to fix their low with

more dopamine. That is where the name of “a fix” comes in. Heroin is affecting Atlanta because more young adults are getting into it way too fast and are unable to stop. The young adults doing heroin are spreading HIV and hepatitis back to the suburbs, making it a public health issue.

The Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition is a street outreach program based in The Bluff. Executive Director, McDowell, says that he has seen a steady stream of suburban heroin users slip in and out of the neighborhood. Not only does this bring up that more young adults are overdosing because of easy access, but it is spreading HIV. The Coalition volunteers help heroin addicts. Visitors discreetly accept a paper sack containing an assortment of condoms, syringes, alcohol swabs, small bottles of bleach, and rubber sleeves made for spark plugs that double as crack pipes. The organization meets people where they are provided food, showers, clothing, and counseling. They try to build relationships with the addicts and gently urge them to seek treatment. Around seventy clients are referred to detox programs every year. Volunteers collect around four thousand used syringes a month in a needle exchange program to prevent the spread of disease. There is controversy about what the coalition does. Half of the people say that it is influencing drug use and say that it is ok, when that is not their goal. The people doing heroin are unable to stop, so if they do it they might as well try to prevent the spread of HIV and hepatitis. The Coalition looks at it as a way to help the public health. The Coalition serves 150 people a day off of a budget of \$341,000 a year, a staff of three full-time people, and three part-time workers.

The drug hub in Atlanta is not the only hub. Atlanta brings in around \$290 million dollars each year in the illegal sex industry. Atlanta’s international airport is the busiest international airport in the world. Sure, it is good for having direct flights and lots of time options, but men can fly in and be gone in two hours. Men can purchase a minor to have sex with and be gone before they can get caught. In June 2014, DeKalb County’s ICAC and Vice Unit conducted an operation to find underage victims and put undercover agents through an escort site to arrange a “date.” Pimps have been tattooing and branding the girls, and Atlanta agents noticed a girl in an area frequently with a fresh tattoo and saw others with the same one, leading them to discovering how fast it has spread in Atlanta. There are many different kinds of tattoos that are branded on these girls. “That’s one of the new things from pimps. They put their logo on their girl.”² Some of the brandings are a barcode that you would see at a grocery store. The tattoos vary from initials, names of their pimps, or symbols depending on the gang or pimp.



<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/human-traffickers-victims-branded-like-cattle-9763468.html>
<http://www.snopes.com/crown-tattoos/>

² <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/20/us/sex-trafficking/>

Human trafficking has become a \$40 billion dollar business worldwide. Chevalier said “human trafficking had become a \$40 billion business worldwide and was set to surpass every other type of organized crime.”³ This passes every other type of crime. The average age for boys and girls that get forced and enslaved in this business are twelve to fourteen. Children are the most vulnerable and are coerced for food. This is not only a problem in the United States, but many other places. Every minute in Bangkok, Thailand there is a woman or child forced into sex slavery. Uzbek is a powerful gang there that forces women and children into slavery. There is an ongoing investigation to try to shut them down and a documentary that explains it called *Sex Slavery in the 21st Century*. Nightlife International is an organization in Thailand that helps the women. Not all women are forced into sex slavery, but they desperately need money. In the documentary, *21st Century Sex Slavery*, that is based in Thailand, ten years ago you could only find five Uzbek girls in one area. Now, there are around eighty Uzbek girls per hour counted in the same area. This is an example of how fast it can grow and it is continuing to grow in Atlanta. The statistics on sex trafficking in Atlanta is an estimate because the business is so secretive and so hard to put a stop to. It starts with small communities getting involved.

It takes years for an investigation to be conducted. Even though there are millions of girls in this business being enslaved; when we bust a group, we only get a small amount of victims. FBI agents and police officers stormed across the country in June 2014 in a weeklong effort to rescue child trafficking victims. They recovered 168 juveniles. Out of these kids a lot were never even reported missing. Georgia passed a law that expands on who can report a child as missing to include any caretaker or government entity responsible for the child, not just the parent or guardian. Six to seven percent of child sex traffickers still live at home. “He said parents and guardians should be on the lookout for signs their child might be involved in sex trafficking, since 6 to 7 percent of the children sold still live at home.”⁴ This is a major problem because the industry in sex trafficking they are willing to do anything to keep their business running. They threaten the kids and know where they live if they do not follow their instructions. The missing children center received more than 57,000 missing-child reports from 2009 to 2013. The organization says that two-thirds of the children missing were likely sex trafficking victims in the care of child welfare systems when they ran away. That way, if a kid does not have a very close relationship with their parents or legal guardian and are staying somewhere else, then that caretaker is allowed to report them missing.

Atlanta has great attractions. It has the Braves, sporting events, the world of Coke, the Georgia Aquarium, etc., but all of those attractions also bring more crime. Big cities have more than the average person thinks is going on. It is time to educate more people and keep a safe look out for children. Atlanta is one of the easiest places for kids to get drugs, and those kids abuse drugs and overdose. I, unfortunately, have known multiple people who have passed away too soon due to this. My brother’s best friend was in rehab for a couple months while my brother was at a yearlong program in Arizona. His friend, Robert, was supposed to come join him out in Arizona in a week. His dad insisted on bringing him home one last time. That is highly unrecommended for kids coming out of a short rehab program because they tend to go back to the same crowd. It was Robert’s seventeenth birthday; he had a group of friends over and they brought drugs. In the morning, his mom left home to go to work, and when she returned home, she found her son and another high-schooler named Jonathan passed out. They had been doing cocaine and heroin. She is a nurse and tried to save her son as she felt his body still warm. She

³ ibid

⁴ <http://www.atlantaintownpaper.com/2014/06/child-sex-trafficking-figures-offer-sobering-reality/>

knew in her mind it was too late to save him. She went over to Jonathan and tried to help him. Jonathan was in a coma for a week and ended up coming out of it. Robert did not. He was a week away from making it out to Arizona. There is a saying that my brother, Cort, goes by. "It takes one to fall for others to live." Yesterday he got it tattooed on the back of his right shoulder. He did not get it right after because he knew he was going to have more friends pass away. More kids have passed away, but nothing will compare for him to Robert. What is scary is that teenagers and young adults are paying for painkillers that are more expensive, so eventually if they keep going they switch to heroin. Educate yourself, your family, and the others around you. Reach out to organizations by volunteering and getting involved; or, if you do not have time, then donate money to the cause. Sex trafficking has been behind the curtains too long and now it's a business that is making billions of dollars. It needs to be stopped and we will not be able to stop it immediately. Police and FBI agents are learning more and more about how the business is handled.

Ask yourself, "What if this was my kid?" Your child gets sold into sex trafficking, is involved with the drug crowd of that city, and becomes a part of a very dangerous gang. I challenge you to put yourself in that situation since so many parents and guardians are. What would you do? Would you want to make a difference?