

A Liberal Critiques the Liberal Bubble

When my brother moved from Western Washington to Texas last year, many of his relations in uber-liberal Seattle wanted to know the answer to one uncomfortably-asked question above all others:

“Does he, you know, agree with their politics *down there*?”

Their assumption was, of course, that the state of Texas was about 95% Republican. Apparently, they were not aware of that 43% of voters in the state cast their ballots for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election, or that Austin [ranks](#) as the 14th most liberal city in America, or that in addition to Austin, Democrats govern major Texas cities such as Dallas, Houston, and El Paso.

[A recent opinion piece for the Indianapolis Star](#) highlights that this same stereotype of “red states” is shared by other blue state residents on the East and West coasts. After moving from California to Terra Haute, Indiana, for her husband’s job, Leah Singer—[a presumptive Democrat](#)—explains that she was subjected to similar queries as my brother:

As I settled into life in the Midwest, I heard the same assumptive questions: “Did everyone you know vote for Donald Trump?” “Are there African-American, Jewish, Asian, LGBTQ people in Indiana?” “Do people make fun of you for listening to National Public Radio?”

Never does one ask about Indiana’s history as a blue state (Indiana cast its electoral votes blue for President Barack Obama in 2008). Never does one ask how the Indiana public schools provide many opportunities that have been cut from California’s public schools because of one budget crisis after another. Never does one ask about the low cost of

living that is allowing us to pay off the mountain of debt we accrued in California. And never does one ask about my fellow community members, who are running successful businesses, enriching the city's arts and making a difference for the local environment.

As I got to know my new Midwest home, I realize how living in a bubble and subscribing to the Middle America stereotypes is truly damaging to this country.

On the perception that red states are high on racism and low on diversity, Ms. Singer had this to say:

While it is true there are far fewer African-Americans living in Terre Haute than San Diego, that doesn't mean the city is a bastion of racism either. In fact, very few people know the Lost Creek community in Terre Haute was a stop on the Underground Railroad that helped escaped slaves enter the free state of Indiana before the Civil War. The diversity may not be as evident, but the city has a history of activism.

In Terre Haute, I witness a different kind of diversity: economic diversity. Here, [27% of residents](#) are living below the poverty level (compared to [14% in all of Indiana](#)). And [57% of the students](#) attending Vigo County public schools in Terre Haute receive free or reduced price meals, meaning their families earn the [equivalent or below 185%](#) of the federal poverty level.

Southern California is diverse racially and religiously; it really is not with respect to class or working poor. This is especially the case in San Diego County, where it's becoming more difficult for middle-class families to own a home or afford rent, with 41% of homeowners and 57% of renters spending [30% or more of income on housing](#), all while incomes stay stagnant, according to the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce.

In my experience, the stereotype works both ways. Upon hearing that I'm from Washington state, I've met many people in the Midwest who assume that half the residents in Washington are either gay, have multiple piercings, or are hippies. When I was in graduate school in Pittsburgh, one of our neighbors assumed that my wife and I would really like Carson Street because "they have a lot of tattoo parlors there."

On this score, Ms. Singer also admits:

To be sure, there are plenty of individuals living in the Midwest that would also benefit from getting to know their coastal neighbors. The bubbles do not just exist on the East and West coasts. And I'm certainly not suggesting that life in California is terrible, or living in the Midwest is the answer for everyone.

It's easy to condemn people we don't know on social media. It's harder to take the time to step out of our own bubbles and understand each other.

Living in Indiana, I now have an understanding of America that I did not before. I wish more people living outside the middle took the time to get to know the others living a few states away. I did, and I am a better person because of it.

For the sake of reducing the growing divide in America, let's hope that we can all find some ways to step outside of our ideological bubbles. To do so is to see that the real world is much more nuanced and complex than the one portrayed by partisan politics.