Mo Smart

Instructor Name

Course Number

1 July 2019

Title: Personal essay

The decision to move to California came when I was still a freshman at a community college in Macon, Georgia. My parents had decided to move to Alabama while I had to move to California to finish college and settle in the West Coast. Moving from one town to another opens you to a unique experience and allows one to explore and experience new aspects of life, however, my experience of shifting to another state was a completely life-altering experience. It initially felt hard to leave everything behind and head West to start a new life, since I had grown up in Macon, and every friend I had and everything I knew about life had been associated with the City. Nevertheless, my experience of moving to California, despite certain barriers, was largely a positive one, which I shall proceed to further illustrate in this essay.

The South is generally known in America as ‘The Bible Belt' due to the region's deep religious and conservative tradition. The South is historically known for valuing tradition and generally be suspicious of change. At the same time, it enjoys a positive reputation for its friendliness and Charm, though you tend to still feel like an outsider if you are not a true Southerner. The business culture in the South mirrors the nature of its citizens and is generally very hard for a newcomer to break into (Gray and Robinson). Conversely, the West Coast is generally known for its adherence to liberal values and political positions. Southerners tend to see it as an overly trendy place where style is valued over substance and reinvention is encouraged. Moreover, life here is fast and the cost of living is considerably higher than in the South. The business culture, likewise, mirrors the nature of its citizens and values style and innovation.

Even for a generally confident Individual like me, moving to a new state and region substantially pushed me out of my comfort zone. I was in a new living space which, despite being more progressive, felt unnerving. I would frequently find myself lost in time, and ended up late wherever I seemed to go. I did not have my network of local friends and colleagues to rely on and was thus without a safety net. The sheer distance between Macon and California would often make me wonder If I had made a mistake coming here.

Yet as I began to spend time in the city and intermingle with people, I started becoming more familiar and comfortable with the new environment. The lifestyle of people at the West Coast was generally much healthier not just because of the better health policies of the State, but also the environment and the landscape. Moving to the West Coast pushed me to venture out into the wilderness to explore beautiful places. People in the West Coast have access to the most beautiful parks and public forests and I found myself surrounded by people who loved venturing out into nature. The West Coast boasts of some of the most beautiful places on Earth and I realized that it’s hard to appreciate its beauty just from the pictures alone.

However, even as I became more familiar with the environment, there were a lot of challenges and barriers that I had to go through on a daily basis. One of the key barriers came in the form of language when I realized that nearly everyone had difficulty understanding me communicate in my thick Southern accent. Although the Southern accent is generally seen to be ‘entertaining', the problem came when most of the people around me seemed to converse in Standard ‘TV English'. It took a lot of people a while getting used to my accent and understanding what I say. The ‘surfer dialect' in my speech was distinct and obvious, and people would see that as unique and entertaining. Prompted by the accent, I would frequently hear people ask where I was from. However, that initial interest and curiosity would often be followed by difficulty in sustaining a conversation as I saw people finding it hard to understand everything I said without frequently asking me to repeat.

Another major difference I experienced in daily living was the food. Southerners are considered to be the true American foodies. Most southerners tend to be familiar with the fruit and vegetables that we grow on our own, and are particularly conscious about it. Conversely, food in California seemed to be more about buffets in fancy restaurants with people hardly knowing about the endless variety of vegetables that make up the food which we in the South were familiar with. For Georgians like me, dinner would be a full mid-day meal while supper would be a huge evening feast. The people tend to love their food to the extent that they would find an excuse to eat the entire day. On the other hand, I found that Californians tend to believe more in healthy living and diet, and found them to be much more concerned about controversial ingredients such as gluten, meat, or sugar, than what I was used to back at the South. Healthy living is a trend in California and people tend to be much more conscious about what they eat and tend to eat at a controlled frequency.

One of the most enjoyable things I found in California was that social activities were not restricted to just restaurants and bars. In a few months that I have spent here, I have camped with friends over the weekend at a state park, enjoyed craft beers at mountain tops, visited breweries, hiked a number of hills, hosted a BBQ, and have had potluck dinners at my friend’s places. It made me realize that people at the West Coast take their entertainment seriously. I found myself having more dinners during my stay here than possibly the previous 4 years of my life at Macon. Moreover, social activities are inexpensive and frequent and it is one reason why I became assimilated in the place so quickly. Healthy social interaction helped me familiarize with the environment quickly and helped me develop a new network of friends that I could rely on.   
 As I began to socialize with people of my age, I realized that California had a lot of wealthy young entrepreneurs. In the south, we had to wait for our grandparents to get old to see any visible changes in income and parents would usually help their children start a business or buy a home. On the other hand, I saw and met a number of young people who had become rich on their own. The culture seemed altogether different and intermingling with the people made me realize that I had to step up my own game to compete with the others here. The other thing I noticed while socializing that California’s culture is still highly influenced by the Hippy culture. The culture is open where everyone seems to believe in ‘live and let live’ instead of being too caught up in tradition, though I often find myself missing the small little traditions associated with various occasions in the South.

Another major difference I observed after moving to the West Coast was that people were generally more relaxed. Southerners like me are more used to a direct way of speaking, while the culture here at the West is more laid-back. People prefer to dress casual and try to relax. People talk about themselves, express their view on life more candidly, and seem genuinely interested to hear my view on life. I would have a number of meaningful and thoughtful exchanges with people and found people to be more accepting of who I was. In my experience, this nature of personal chat does not seem to exist in other states or parts of America and is something unique to West Coasters. People are more accepting of social differences compared to the conservative South, they are more casual, and less oriented towards religion and tradition. These differences can create a significant difference in one's interpersonal relations and I knew I had to take them into consideration as I networked with peers.

To conclude, moving from one state to another, especially from the South to the West Coast, can be a tough transition for anyone. Moving to California from Macon was not as easy as I had earlier anticipated, even for a confident and optimistic person like me. However, with time I grew fond of the West Coast and socializing with its people made me realize a lot of things that I was missing in life. I also learned that competing with my peers here would require me to step up my game and explore the various opportunities that the place presents. One of the major downsides of living here is that I am not close to my family or friends, and it was the first time when I had to move and survive in a place where I had to endure on my own. However, since then, I have developed new social networks and contacts and have a considerably busy social life to go about. Despite some of the barriers I faced in assimilating into the new environment, the experience of moving to California from the South seems to be a highly positive one.

# Works Cited

Gray, Richard and Owen Robinson. *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*. 1st. Hoboken: Wiley, 2008.