Mark Simmons

Dr. Phillip Barrish

LAH 350 3/13/16

Assignment 2

Home for me starts in my identity as a Catholic. My mother grew up in a Cajun Catholic family, Catholicism was a part of her cultural upbringing, even though the majority of her family ended up moving to other Christian denominations. My father was raised Protestant, but became Catholic when I was young. As long as I can remember, most of my closest friends were those that I went to both school and church with. Thus, the religious affiliation passed onto me by my parents has affected me not only in determining my personal values and ethics, it has also provided a large extent of my social community.

Those I know who have lived in various places throughout their lives often have strong attachments to the place they grew up in. I have lived in Austin my whole life, and while I love the place I have called home for these twenty years, I anticipate the day I can be somewhere else. That is not to say that I have experienced this city in the same way for that whole time, though. I grew up in Leander and Cedar Park, where generally most people look like me and talk like me. The only homeless and beggars I saw were scattered across a few highway intersections, while I could walk to school or go to the store thinking that everyone else was more or less as comfortable as my family. I only knew downtown after coming to UT Austin. Seeing homeless every time I walked down the Drag was a novel experience for me, and it eventually I began to ask myself why I have such a hard time giving a few dollars away when it’s so easy to spend much more on groceries or a nice meal out.

It took coming to Austin’s urban center to make me realize how much the comfort and cleanliness of the suburbs had formed my personality, and I’m sure it will take moving away from Austin entirely to appreciate how much this place has shaped me.

All cultures and places have a way of speaking which is peculiar to them. This is no pure accident of social or geographic separation, but rather a tool speakers capitalize on to construct and present their identity to others. Personally, I can identify a few phrases from my southern white vernacular that are precious to me as a means of expressing who I am. *Howdy* for me is a kind greeting, less formal than *good afternoon* and friendlier than a simple *hello. Y’all* is, of course, the logical plural of *you*, and I will viciously defend the fact that the words *pen* and *pin* should always be pronounced the same. For me, these are more than words that I can use with others who have the same dialect – I intentionally use them even when around people from other states (as long as I think they can understand me), and I teach them to my friends who are learning English as a second language.

These three characteristics – my religion, my socioeconomic upbringing, and my speech demonstrate how my environment has formed me, and how I respond in turn by choosing how to present myself and being analytic about in what ways my experience has been limited and incomplete.