

Pride and Prejudice

Junior Year Declamation Winner

I heard only steers and queers come from Texas, and you sure as hell don't look like a steer, so that pretty much narrows it down. No, I do not ride a horse to school. Yes, sometimes I wear cowboy boots. No, I don't live on a ranch, or on a plantation. Yes, I say the word "y'all". And no, my sister and my uncle are not first cousins.

Being from the South, I am confronted with many questions whenever I meet someone new. People assume that because I am from a certain part of the country, that I will fall into predetermined stereotypes of a Southern boy. Many of these stereotypes are true. I do play football. The sport is a religion in the South. You'd be hard-pressed to find anyone, anywhere, on a Friday night, not at a high school football game. Our Sunday morning newspaper has a few pages about world news, a handful of stories about professional sports, and a six page color layout on high school football. Seriously. Most of us do drive pick-up trucks or huge jacked-up SUV's. And although I might look sorta funny wearing "blue-jeans" or a college football helmet with a big 'ol mullet coming out the back, you have to realize that we all look like that, and we're damn proud of it.

Now, when I return home from boarding school, my friends have a few opinions of their own about where I have been. They think that everyone from the North is always in a hurry, very unfriendly to strangers, extremely liberal, and only care about money and buying nice clothes. While...some of these opinions are correct...they are a bit exaggerated. The first time I came up here, and heard the words "sketchy", "danky" and "wicked", I immediately started laughing hysterically; "Oh boy, I can't wait to tell the guys back home about this one." I soon looked up to see that I was the only person laughing. Where else in the country do the biggest teenage boys not play football because they don't want to get hurt for hockey season? And who said it was cool to wear highlighter-orange pants? Whatever, I learned that this is the norm up here. And since I sort of represent both sides of the equation, Yankee and Redneck, I've kinda come to grips with the understanding of each side's viewpoint.

See the thing is, if you took a kid from Greenwich, Connecticut, and stood him side-by-side next to a kid from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, you would be able to tell the difference. America, more than any other country, has many distinct subcultures. And each one has very opinionated views about the other ones. No other country is the same in that America is a melting pot of so many different cultures. And because each section of the United States has strong opinions and stereotypes about the other ones, a sort of rivalry has developed. Each of us can be distinguished by the ridiculous stereotypes that have been established; whenever you meet someone, you can generally make a pretty good guess about what part of the country they're from. If you meet a kid with longish hair, skateboarding shoes, and who thinks things are "hella-cool", you'd automatically assume he's from the West Coast. Likewise, upon encountering a guy with a Polo shirt with his collar up, blood-red khakis, a belt that looks like a ribbon with pink whales on it, and brown moccasins, next to a girl with a "Lilly dress", you'd instantly know they're from the North. Midwesterners say "pop". Northerners say "soda". Southerners say "coke", regardless of brand or flavor. I think you get the point.

People from one section of the country would under no circumstances want to be identified as being from another. Southerners would be embarrassed, irate, outraged if someone thought they were from New York, and people from the Northeast want absolutely no affiliation with people from Charleston, South Carolina. But, you see, that's the thing that makes America great. Because our country has such a limited past, naturally, Americans need an identity, something they can call their own. And the very unique regions that separate our country provide just that. Every man and woman in the world is proud to be from their respective countries; just watch the Olympics. Everyone is a patriot. But the thing about America is that no matter where you live in this country, you have something to be proud of, something to stand up for. And if y'all don't like it, you kin kiss my grits, cuz that's just the way it is.