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Evolutionary revolutionary

My mother always told me, "Democrats are the good guys and Republicans are the bad ones." I learned pretty fast this was just her simplification of the truth.

Research says we model our political opinions off our parents, but I'm not fully convinced. Maybe I *did* have a bad habit of parroting everything my mother said — what can I say, I'm a mama's boy — but I've found that my own views developed alongside my critical thinking skills. I'm constantly having political disagreements with my family. On the contrary, it was my environment that shaped my political views.

In seventh grade, I did a book report on Charles Darwin. Despite having no natural affinity for the evolutionary sciences, Darwin's theory has always stuck with me. Darwin proposed that as animals — he used the example of finches — geographically isolate from one another over a long period of time, they develop new traits to adapt to their respective environments.

Sometimes I feel like a finch that has been separated from everyone else at UC Berkeley for the entirety of its life. Being an out-of-state student in a sea of Californians can be unsettling. Aside from the minute cultural differences — thinking Safeway was a gas station for the majority of my life and brutally mispronouncing Yosemite — I feel fundamentally separated from my peers because of my upbringing.

I didn't even think much of politics before moving, aside from a select few issues such as gun control and LGBTQ+ rights, and this was generally true for most of my peers. But

the problem wasn't just Virginia — it was my own stubbornness that kept me from thinking about the society we live in more critically.

I was, admittedly, a raging capitalist. I believed in lowering taxes for the rich and adopting United Kingdom-esque austerity policies. Yet here I am, nearly four years later, writing this article on the other side of the spectrum. Trust me, I didn't expect this outcome either, but the sudden shift in my cultural background radically changed the way I think about society.

When I first moved to California, this newfound leftist scene felt like a "radical liberalism," when in reality it's a completely divergent field of thought. The main factor in my enlightenment was the prevalence of drug problems in San Francisco. It's easy to pass off drug addiction as some unimportant issue when you haven't ever seen anyone actively struggling to cope, but living in San Francisco made me think about what could be done to help these people. And the answer sure wasn't conservative policies, as I had once believed.

Separating myself from where I grew up opened my mind to a world of contemporary issues that I wasn't aware of before, like the institutional issues affecting those who face homelessness, the futile war on drugs and the unnecessarily taboo nature of sex work. Geographical isolation led me to view these issues as reflections of their seemingly "immoral nature" — when in reality the discourse surrounding these issues is merely a reflection of the close-minded attitudes held toward them.

I've found that those of my friends who hold revolutionary sentiments toward our government have been directly affected by the capitalist-imposed obstacles that cause them to gain what Marx and Engels describe as class consciousness. But living as a cisgender, straight-passing male in a predominantly white community led me to adopt

the status quo as a survival tactic, like a chameleon blending into its surroundings. It was easier to let others do the thinking than to do it myself.

Sometimes I'm jealous of my friends who grew up in California. But at the same time, I think about how I wouldn't be *me* without my background. I wouldn't be *me* without Virginia. The culmination of every minute detail of my childhood led to the mindset I hold today. It's realistic to think that I would be a completely different person if I grew up in San Francisco.

Americans are indoctrinated constantly. Every aspect of our personal lives has some biased innuendo swaying our perception. We quite literally live under social constructions. Your gender? That's a social construct. The idea that you have to work a 9-to-5 job for the rest of your life? Yeah, that's a social construct too.

At this point, it's very hard to have genuine, unbiased reactions to events — everything feels fake, whether it aligns with your point of view or not. It's a perpetual, thoughtless cycle: Wake up, read some fake news, eat some fake food and go to sleep in your fake bed.

I was so absorbed within my community that I relied on identity politics to shape my political outlook. Coming to California heightened my critical understanding, and ultimately moving to Berkeley away from my entire family led me to a more "woke" point of view. I am no longer constrained by my community's bias — instead, I'm surrounded by thousands of people with thousands of different stories.

People insisted that Berkeley would "radicalize" me. And well, they weren't completely wrong. But I view my "radicalization" as *education*. Truthfully, if every American were to be educated on income inequality, for example, we would have a much smoother time

adopting beneficial social policies. What we need more of in the United States is experience. In order to create a civil society (because we clearly haven't achieved that point yet), we need to encourage others to experience ideas outside of their comfort zone.

So while many of my acquaintances and family members view my newfound "revolutionary" sentiments as negative consequences of my environment — I view these beliefs as my evolution.

Ryder Mawby writes the Monday column on his transition from the East to West Coast. Contact him at opinion@dailycal.org. LAST UPDATED: OCTOBER 4, 2020