Interview keywords/topics: Ireland and Appalachia, Community

Interviewer: Dr. Jessica Martell
Interviewee: SU

SU (00:01):

This interview is part of an oral history project for, uh, WRC 2202, a spring course about Ireland and Appalachia. This semester we discuss different ways of using and understanding historical information and we are creating our own historical documents in this project.

Dr. Martell (00:15):

Do you wanna introduce yourself and say where we are?

SU (00:18):

Uh, I'm SU, a sophomore at Appalachian State University. Uh, I'm here with Dr. Martel. We are in the fourth floor special collections, uh, building.

Dr. Martell(00:27):

Yeah. And there is a stuffed goose with sunglasses on, [00:00:30] um, in this reading room, which is setting the, the tone <laugh>. And I think, do we say the date? It's April 18th, 2024. And it's a beautiful spring day. It's very classic Boone. Um, so we're both happy to be here. So SU, to begin, how would you describe your identity or identities in particular as members of different groups of communities? How has this changed in your lifetime? And is there anything you want people to know about them years from now?

SU (00:53):

Uh, I would consider myself, uh, a southerner, mainly a redneck. Um, I grew up in kind of like a, [00:01:00] a smaller Texas town, um, pretty adjacent to a lot of like countrysides and, and farms. Um, I consider myself probably upper middle class. Um, I come from a pretty well off family, not really religious. Um, I identify as male. And then, uh, another big thing that I think kind of ends up shocking people based on my background is, uh, I consider myself like a, a radical leftist. Like a lot of my personal opinions on policy are very, um, I guess what most people in like the broader [00:01:30] global political landscape would consider, like socialist adjacent. So yeah, that, those are some of my bigger, like, identification markers about myself.

Dr. Martell (01:40):

Yeah. Well, maybe if I could follow up on that. How do you, um, are there any particular like political issues that you feel particularly engaged in right now?

SU (01:48):

Um, I'm very big into economics. That's my major. Right. Uh, so I do tend to kind of focus a lot on like issues with income inequality or educational availability in America. Um, more recently [00:02:00] though, I've been very focused on the, uh, Israel-Palestine conflict. I personally choose to call it the Israeli genocide of the Palestinian people. Um, I think a lot of like popular media considers it a war. Um, I don't really consider it a war given that, you know, lots of innocent lives are being lost at a rate where it's probably three times higher than their intended targets. Um, but that, that's a hotly contested issue. <laugh>,

Dr. Martell (02:25):

Yeah. It's a huge thing when people are talking about it, it seems very hotly contested. And you're right that it is a question of [00:02:30] language too. Where do you usually get your information and news from?

SU (02:35):

Um, I read a lot of, uh, like the mainstream news. Um, but I try to digest both sides of it to kind of understand how both parties or, I guess, viewpoints, especially in America with how polarized we are. Kind of just view how they spin information. So like I'll read Fox News, um, to see how the right is attempting to portray things. And then I'll go look at like a more neoliberal point of view through, um, CNN [00:03:00] or one of the major outlets. And then after viewing like the, the main articles that kind of like break news the fastest, I tend to try and look for primary sources in the situation. So like with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I've been reading a lot of like Al Jazeera, which is a, uh, a news source that's kind of like based in the Middle East and tries to focus a lot on like, firsthand accounts of, uh, reporters. Um, but for the most part it's mainly just getting my initial news from, from the mainstream sources and then going to alternative sources after that for more of like a [00:03:30] boots on the ground kind of perspective on the situation.

Dr. Martell (03:33):

One of the questions that you had listed here was how well informed would you consider yourself about what's going on locally, statewide, nationally, globally? And it sounds like quite a lot. Is one of the strategies that you use to stay informed, like multi- reading, multiple points of view. Why is that important to you?

SU (03:47):

Um, I think personally multiple points of view is important to me just to kind of understand everyone else's perspective on the issues. 'cause I would like, I tend to get into a lot of debates on like global politics with people. Um, [00:04:00] especially in like econ-related majors or my friends who have, uh, any sort of like global business degree. There tends to be, uh, a focus on global affairs 'cause that affects a lot of business situations and like profit margins and stuff like that. Um, so I kind of like to look at the mainstream view so I can see what everyone else is thinking. Also, it's just that we live in a constitutional republic, so everyone's voice is kind of weighted the same ideally. Although given some of the political systems, it's not exactly balanced. Um, I just, I think it's important [00:04:30] to know what other people are thinking. And then also, uh, reading multiple sources kind of guarantees that I'm not getting a very like, tailored perspective on the issue. Um, even if I might disagree with a lot of the information I see pretty frequently.

Dr. Martell (04:44):

Do you have general opinions or beliefs about going to college in general? The value of a college education?

SU (04:50):

I think nowadays the value is probably not as high as it used to be. Um, surely for the fact- or just mostly for the fact that education is [00:05:00] or, or higher education is so like widely pursued by a lot of people to the point where you see like a lot of your trades and stuff starting to make upper tier amounts of money. Um, not to say that, uh, an advanced degree isn't important. Um, I think it kind of just

depends what field you're going into, if college is right for you. Like if you're gonna be a lawyer or a doctor, you, you have to go to school or some sort of like business executive, you probably have to go to business school. Whereas like, yeah, if you're gonna work a sales job, you can arguably get the right footing without [00:05:30] going to school if you have enough connections.

SU (05:32):

I think it just depends on a case by case basis. But for me, um, the main choice in pursuing higher education was just opening up a lot of doors for myself. Um, trying to make it so that if I decide I don't like what I'm doing, I have a degree that gives me enough flexibility to kind of shift course. And, uh, I kind of see myself being someone who maybe works in a lot of different fields throughout my life just because I like switching my discipline and my focus pretty frequently. 'cause I feel like it gives me a good, well-roundedness,

Dr. Martell(06:00):

[00:06:00] One of my, uh, mentors when I first started graduate school said, um, when asked like, what is the value of a liberal arts education? Said, if you're in a plane crash in Alaska, you have to have something to think about <laugh>. I do feel like that's a good, that's a good life lessons. Um, but yeah. But it's nice for you to think about flexibility too because our economy is gonna be so radically different. Um, it changes all the time, but like having, setting yourself up to have a life in which there are multiple phases and you get to explore is really, um, really great. Like what a, what [00:06:30] a great strategy to do it. Um, I'm kind of curious about if there's something that you might take away from 2202 this semester, your work in Irish studies or Appalachian studies. Is there anything that feels particularly memorable about the course?

SU (06:42):

Uh, I think I definitely gained a lot of insight into the Irish conflicts. Just the overall like domestic politics of the region. Um, I think it was an interesting perspective to kind of tie that into the Appalachian region. Um, you can kind of see a lot of like parallels that wouldn't be readily available to [00:07:00] someone who's kind of just glancing at information at face value. I think the oppression of the Irish people is pretty similar to a lot of marginalized groups in America, although to a different extent. I also think it's probably helped my ability to just overall assess global politics. Like, uh, I saw on social media the other day there was a, a car bombing or like they were throwing Molotov cocktails in Ireland after the, the Good Friday like peace celebration for this year's anniversary. And I actually could like understand the, uh, [00:07:30] the background behind all of that. And it gave me enough context to kind of like understand what this group's beliefs probably were and kind of like what motivated that, that sort of behavior. So yeah, I think it just gave me like a good ability to assess domestic politics, well-rounded, and then also just I think it's good to expand your horizons beyond America centered history. And I think it's just gives you a good perspective on the world overall.

Dr. Martell (07:56):

I'd say maybe to, to kind of wrap this up here, have you enjoyed your time at Appalachian [00:08:00] State and is there anything that you would change about App State and if so, why?

SU (08:05):

I think I've enjoyed the environment. Um, I think the university has a lot of things that they could work on. Um, I think probably recently given a lot of the, the events going on on campus, I think safety of students is a big concern for a lot of people.

Dr. Martell (08:21):

Do you wanna share any specific details about what happened on campus last week for our future listeners?

SU (08:25):

So there was a, uh, there was a stabbing at Peacock Hall. There was, um, which [00:08:30] is where I attend a lot of my, my economics classes. Um, and then I haven't been able to like verify all this information fully, but I've been hearing a lot of, um, allegations I guess or maybe rumors of, uh, people finding air tags in their cars and zip ties on mirrors of cars parked at River Street parking deck and the library parking garage. So apparently there's a whole human trafficking, I don't even know what the right word is. Maybe scandal going [00:09:00] on on campus.

Dr. Martell (09:01):

No, I have not heard that.

SU (09:02):

I haven't been able to like independently verify any of the information I've seen, but I see a lot of people on the, uh, the school like, uh, forums talking about how it might be a concern. Um, and then I think another; this is a, a gripe that I have with my own degree personally. Um, I have 120 hour degree and 33 hours of that is even remotely related to my major, which is a little bit frustrating. Um, I think they could probably do a better job of offering [00:09:30] more, um, advanced economics courses and just more like focused in on certain things that could definitely help me in the business environment. Um, but overall, yeah, it's a, it's a great institution. I just, I think it needs a little bit of work like every other school out there, everyone's got their flaws. No one's perfect.

Dr. Martell (09:47):

It's definitely true. It's been such a crazy week that I think, um, reflecting on what Appalachian State, you know, is as an institution and what its values are, I think it's a good moment of, you know, there's always, there's always an [00:10:00] opportunity in every crisis Right. To refine and, and recommit to the values that you have. And depending on, yeah, there's been so many controversies on campus about, um, L-G-B-T-Q visibility about student safety. We've had some crazy weather events also. We've had some landslides. Yeah, just for future listeners, like both of the major arteries going in and out of Boone have been closed like 321 and 105. Both have had landslides because of so much rain. So there's just been like chaotic traffic patterns. There's a blackout in our last class meeting [00:10:30] <laugh>. Yeah. And so there just seems to be like, um, yeah. And I suppose maybe the one last detail that might hold it all together is that there was a major solar eclipse last Monday, and so perhaps the eclipse is messing with everybody's, I don't know, <laugh> energy, cosmic energy or something. But I'm glad that you still feel like you have some positive aspects of the education, um, here. Alright, I, um, any last comments or final thoughts?

SU (10:55):

I don't think so.

Dr. Martell (10:56):

Alright, let's go ahead and wrap this up. Thank you so much for joining us. Of course. Today, [00:11:00] SU <laugh>. Alright.