

NATIONAL AGENDA SPEAKER SERIES

DAVID JOY

HOSTED BY Center for Political Communication
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David Joy North Carolina based author writing “Appalachian
Noir”; dark, gritty stories with realistic characters
rooted in Jackson County, North Carolina.

Transcript of Event

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DR. HOFFMAN: Good evening everyone. Thank you for being here. This is the seventh annual National Agenda Speaker Series brought to you by the University of Delaware Center for Political Communication with support from the office of the Provost and the College of Arts and Sciences. Tonight's event is also cosponsored by the Department of English. I am Dr. Lindsay Hoffman. I'm the Director of the National Agenda Program and the Associate Director of the CPC. This year we're delving into the many divides facing Americans in 2017. With nationally known speakers including one former Vice President of the United States that you might recognize we're going to explore the many divides that exist including gender, geography, religion, partisan, cultural and more. We encourage students, faculty, staff, and community members to encourage, to engage in the semester-long conversation. We've already heard from a first-time Congressional candidate who was motivated to run based on her experience with online harassment. You can watch Brianna Wu's talk at cpc.udel.edu/nationalagenda. Coming up we'll talk with a Muslim journalist, a standup comedian with Cuban roots, two former congressmen from opposite sides of the aisle, and of course Joe Biden. You can find the full schedule at udel.edu/nationalagenda. And, if you appreciate these events please sign up for our email list right outside in the foyer before you leave. And consider supporting the CBC so we can continue to bring you this high quality programming. You can just go to cbc.udel.edu/support. Tonight's event is free and open to the public like all National Agenda events to create a space for thoughtful dialogue. I encourage audience participation, both from the audience here in Mitchell Hall and via Twitter. Just tweet @udelagenda to join the discussion. But, before we get started, I'd like to remind our audience that civil and respectful dialogue is

expected. It's vital to the success of National Agenda. While we may seem more divided than at any time in our memories we are still bound together as Americans and as human beings. 2017 brings us an era of incredible discord; overt racism, and violence, and a seeming inability to bridge our differences. But it is possible. That's what we do here at National Agenda. We demonstrate civil dialogue so you too can bring that civility to your conversations. Our goal is to tamp down the heat, to abate the anger, to recede from hate. Instead, we hope to inspire curiosity, foster compassion, and offer real solutions for constructive communication. So, let's all agree to be candid but courteous of other's views tonight. We're also a little more interactive this year. When we begin the audience Q &A we'll be using a catch box. This is a microphone that we are literally going to toss back and forth throughout the audience. So we'll have two student volunteers in each of these center aisles who will facilitate. I also want to point out that this year is new for our Voices of the Divide Audio Essay Contest. It examines the impact of a nation divided on UD students. Do you think that America has become more polarized? Have you ever felt marginalized? How has that experience shaped your own life and the lives of those around you? Have you; how have you managed those challenges? With support from UD's library, The Writing Center, and many other units on campus we've got everything you need to put together a high quality audio essay. And, as an added bonus, there are cash prizes. But tonight, let's get to our speaker. David Joy is a North Carolina based author writing "Appalachian Noir," dark, gritty stories with realistic characters rooted in Jackson County, North Carolina. Joy's first novel, *Where All Light Tends to Go*, debuted to great acclaim and was named an Edgar finalist for Best First Novel. His stories and creative nonfiction

have appeared in *Drafthorse*, *Smoky Mountain Living*, and *Wilderness House Literary Review* among others. He is also the author of the memoir *Growing Gills: A Fly Fisherman's Journey*. His most recently published book, *The Weight of This World*, is in part about a veteran who returns to a changed hometown devastated by drugs and a lack of jobs. I'm not ordinarily a reader of fiction I have to admit to you but I simply I could not put, put these books down. They were stunning and entertaining and fascinating reads. If you enjoy his talk tonight I encourage you to purchase a signed copy of one or both of his books in the lobby outside from the UD Bookstore. He's here tonight to shed light on the geographic divides facing the nation. How we often misperceive people in different parts of the country and what it means to feel connected to a place that is characterized by ugly stereotypes that often inaccurately emphasize ignorance, a lack of personal responsibility, and violence. In many ways Joy's writing reflects exactly what we encourage students here to submit to our Audio Essay Contest. He writes from a very personal perspective to address what divides us and also what brings us together. So please give me; join me in giving a big Blue Hen welcome to author David Joy.

MR. JOY: Okay.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you.

MR. JOY: Yeah. I'm just going to sit down. I, I learned early on that I'm so tall that if I stand up it's a lot further to fall than if I, if I sit down. I know it's a short fall from here to the ground. I want to thank everybody for coming and, and especially the University of Delaware for having me. I thought I would read a little bit tonight from an essay which is kind of how Lindsay wound up finding me. I wrote an essay for the *Bitter Southerner*, wound up, you know, getting some

traction and getting picked up in different places. Typically I write fiction, you know, I write novels. That's how I make my living. I live on a farm; I do farm work and I write novels. So, when I write a, typically when I write an essay it's either because I feel really moved to do so or it's because I'm pissed off. With, with the essay that she read I was pissed off. With the essay I'm going to read from tonight I think I was angered but, but not, not in the same capacity. And so a lot of times I wind up writing these essays to try and explain something that I think maybe readers are missing. And so I was going to read a little bit from this essay and it was called "One Place Misunderstood," which is a reference to that Eudora Welty line that "one place understood helps us understand all places better." But it was originally published in a place called Writer's Bone which is just a website I really like and then later on it was picked up by the Huffington Post. But it's a, I kind of wanted to read it because I think it, it helps define Appalachia. I think we have a tendency especially outside of that region to think of Appalachia as a, as a very small place, you know? And, and so if you're not from there, if you've never been there and you hear the word Appalachia you think of, of a place about the size of, I don't know, maybe Delaware -- you know - - versus, versus you're talking about a region that stretches, you know, from, from Mississippi to New York. A very vast region. And so, I think a lot gets lost in the conversation because people don't know how, how drastically different that place is and how rich it is, how complex it is. So I was going to read a little bit from this. It won't take very long, if you'll bear with me, then we can talk the rest of the time.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and, and I should clarify. I asked if he could read from some of his work. I'm, I'm sort of channeling Terry Gross a little bit here. Like

can you, can you read from your most recent work. So, I think his words speak for himself, for itself. So, I, we, I think we'd appreciate it. Thank you.

MR. JOY: All right.

When I sit down to begin a story, the canvas isn't blank because there is already a setting. There are mountains, streams, buildings, and roads, so that when a character finally arises, that character claws himself from the ground. Because he emerges from that place, he already has a name, an accent, and mannerisms that are tied directly to the dirt from which he rose. That place for me is Jackson County, North Carolina. At the same time, I don't write books about Jackson County. Nor do I write books about Appalachia. I write stories about desperation. A fellow writer and friend, Brian Panowich says I write love stories, and while I don't necessarily know whether that's true, I know it's a lot closer to the truth than to entertain that my stories are snapshots of a region. I write tragedy. I write the types of stories that I like to read; stories where any hint of privilege is stripped away so that all we are left with is the bitter humanity of it, stories about lives pin balling between extremes because there is nothing outside of sheer survival. Within those extremes, there is gut-busting laughter, and there is heart-wrenching sadness, there is murderous anger, and there is lay-down-my life love. That, for me, is the human condition. Yet, because of where my stories are set, I have people all the time, particularly people from outside this region, who ask how my work represents Appalachia. They ask whether the drugs and the violence that I write about are the cold reality of the place where I live, to which I always respond, "No more than right here." I once had some ritzy media escort wheeling me around in a Mercedes through some noisy city who asked what people where I'm from thought of my work, before

stuttering, “Or can they read?” If it’d been a man, I might have hit him, but it wasn’t and so I ate it. I let that feeling roil around in the pit of my stomach for a moment, then responded simply, “Yes, we can read,” then lifted my feet from her floorboard and shook my boots adding, “We even have shoes.” I can give you a singular image of Jackson County’s landscape. Our mountains are steep and almost every road follows water. We split the highest mountain on the Blue Ridge Parkway, Richland Balsam, which is also one of the 20 highest summits in the entire Appalachian chain, with neighboring Haywood County. We’re home to the headwaters of four rivers: the Tuckasegee, Whitewater, Horsepasture, and the Chattooga—that being the same Chattooga that Burt Reynolds paddled in “Deliverance,” but higher, up where that river starts as a creek, not down in the hot country running the Georgia/South Carolina line. In summer, the place is eaten with green, so much of it that that one of my mentors who came to these mountains from the desert said that she felt strangled by it. In winter, the trees are stripped down to their gray bones and in that nakedness you can see the contours of the mountains, the hollers, and coves smoothed and weathered over the past 480 million years. There’s some farmland along the river bottoms, but not near as much as say Haywood County to our east or Macon County to our west. The land here is too steep for the most part, a place better suited for black bear and deer, turkey, and salamanders than people.

Drawing a singular image of our people, that’s where things get difficult, or, rather, impossible. I can take you to someone whose ancestors were some of the first to settle here, people with names rooted to this place, names like Hooper, and Woodring, and Broom, and McCall, and Dillard, and Rice, and Messer, and Mathis, and Farmer, and Coward, and on and on till the cows come

home. I can introduce you to people who still run bear with walker hounds and plots, people with wild ramp patches they hold in secrecy as if those onions were as valuable as ginseng. I can take you to front porches where people still gather on Sunday afternoons to pick stringed instruments and sing old ballads and hymns they've memorized like recipes. At the same time, I've sat in a bar in town and listened to a reggae band one night and then turned around and heard world-renowned jazz guitarist Freddie Bryant grace the same tiny room the very next. Just a couple weeks back, I went and listened to a Pulitzer -winner read from his work on a Thursday, then went to watch "Midget Wrestling Warriors" beat the ever-loving hell out of one another in a high school gymnasium two nights later. There are hard working people and there are deadbeats. There are god-fearing people and the godless. There are outlaws and lawmen, just as there are millionaires hitting golf balls on Tom Fazio-designed golf courses just over the ridgeline from people surviving off of mayonnaise sandwiches. All of this is true. All of this is within Jackson County. Come here and I will show it to you. Spend enough time here, keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth closed, and you may come to know this place. Know this place and you will know a part of Appalachia. But you will not know Appalachia as a whole any more than I do. This is a region that stretches from the hill country of Mississippi to New York, an area covering 205,000 square miles across 420 counties in 13 states. I know people from Kentucky who will cut you for not pronouncing Appalachia the right way. "App-uh-latch-uh," they'll tell you. But I also know a woman born and raised in McKean County, Pennsylvania, a county just as Appalachian as Jackson, who will tell you her people say Appa-lay-sha, that her people don't dig ramps but they do dig leeks. Jackson County, North Carolina is not the coalfields of

Kentucky or West Virginia. Coal isn't destroying our mountaintops; ours are threatened by unrestricted land development. What passes for mountains in the tip of Alabama would feel flat as a hoecake to someone who'd never been off the Balsams. Trying to unify this region under a singular paradigm is like trying to calculate string theory on an abacus. It's an absurdity. I've lived here most of my life and I can't. As writers, we often stand painting a wall gray while people behind scream, "I love that it's black," or, "I hate that it's white." So often readers just don't seem to get it. Recently a fan from Denmark contacted me to ask about Appalachia following an article that ran in a Danish newspaper, Berlingske, a daily with a circulation of around 100,000. The title of the May 5, 2016 article loosely translates to "Way Out Where the White, Fat, and Poor Live." In it, the author, Paul Hoi, used the Rhoden family massacre in Ohio and the novels of Daniel Woodrell and Donald Ray Pollock to argue that Appalachia is, "a heroless, malnourished, and uneducated America, where all of the goodness and normality has been sucked out to leave a tribe of murderous weirdos with rotten teeth." The bottom line is that someone who reads Daniel Woodrell and asks about Missouri (Missouri and its Ozarks being a long way from Appalachia) or who reads Donald Ray Pollock and asks how that book captures the Ohioan experience, is asking the wrong questions. These aren't books about the South or about Appalachia. These are books about desperate people who have been backed into a corner and are left with no other option than to fight for their very survival. These are stories that, as Rick Bragg once put it, are "about living and dying and that fragile, shivering place in between." That's where the power of writers like Woodrell, and Pollock, and McCarthy, and Larry Brown, and William Gay, and Ron Rash, and Harry Crews has always lain, and that's not an

Appalachian story or a Southern story. That's a human story, one that could've just as easily been set in New York City. This is what Eudora Welty meant when she wrote, "One place understood helps us understand all places better." So if you want to know what it's like in Appalachia read broadly. Read novelists like Silas House and Lee Smith. Read Robert Gipe's *Trampoline* and Crystal Wilkinson's *The Birds of Opulence*. Read Jeremy Jones memoir *Bearwallow: A Personal History of A Mountain Homeland*, who by the way does play the banjo, but also has a full head of teeth and an absolutely wonderful smile. If you want to know about the South read writers like Jill McCorkle and George Singleton. Read Rick Bragg's *All Over But The Shoutin'*. Read poetry, for God's sake, read poetry. Read Wendell Berry and Maurice Manning, and Jane Hicks, and Darnell Arnout, and Denton Loving, and Rebecca Gayle Howell, and Frank X Walker, Ron Houchin, Ray McManus, Tim Peeler. But don't think of the people you meet in these books as Appalachian or Southern. To regionalize is so often to marginalize. Instead, see the humanity and question that rather than where they come from. Over and over, we all keep looking for differences. But now more than ever, I think, we need to start seeing our similarities. That's the end of that essay.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you.

MR. JOY: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: [Applause].

MR. JOY: [Indiscernible]. Did you want me to read from this? Thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah, I, I had asked David if he could read from his most recent novel, published novel, *The Weight of This World*. Some interesting

components I found in that book were kind of the, the struggle of rural white Americans with immigrants and --

MR. JOY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: -- with other people coming in and, and maybe taking, perceived as taking their jobs, and I thought this is a really insightful section. So again, in Terry Gross's best voice, I'd like you to read. If you can begin on page - - actually what page is that?

MR. JOY: I think I got, I think I got it.

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay, you got it. Thank you.

MR. JOY: Yeah, I think with, with this book one of the people was a, a, he worked construction and so he built houses for a living. And, and that's very indicative of, of where I live. Most people either work in some type of construction field if they're from there or they work in some type of landscaping. And, so there was all this money being dumped into the county with, with part time residents, typically second and third homeowners building houses up on the ridgelines. And during the early 2000s a buddy of mine said, he jokes and he says we all had 20-dollar bills falling out of our pockets. And that's very much how, how things were going. But when the bubble burst, you know, and, and all that money dried up. There was kind of a vacuum left where a lot of these people didn't have jobs. And so this section of the book was, was kind of referring to that and this, and this person, you know, thinks the, thinks a lot of the Hispanics have gotten jobs that maybe he should've gotten. Before the apartments were built, Tommy Pressley kept the Mexicans stacked in buses like cordwood. For years, his family had brought the migrants in at seed and harvest, worked them to the bone for wages no white man would have broken a sweat

over. They housed the workers in the same buses used to haul them from field to field. That was the start of it. That was when the Mexicans first came to the mountains and to Jackson County. They could just as easily have been Guatemalan or Honduran or Salvadoran or Colombian or anything else, but none of that mattered to people who'd never seen them before. They were Mexicans. They were farmhands who worked spring and fall, and outside of those times were nowhere to be found. Then one year, Tommy Pressley got the bright idea to build dormitories that later became apartments. The idea came to him just the same as it had to mill owners who built the houses where the workers lived and paid them in scrip. Build the world they live in and they wind up handing back the same money they're paid. That was the idea, that's what he'd done, and that how it started. The problem was that once those Mexicans had places to live that weren't just seasonal; they had to find ways to earn a living outside of farming. Most had trades they'd learned back home, trades like Aiden, who mostly laid rock, but could do about anything with his hands. They were stonemasons and plumbers and framers and painters and electricians and roofers and operators, and some hung drywall and some hung gutters and some hung hardy board and some did grading and some poured concrete, and all drank Tecate and shared lunches of beans and spiced meat with tortillas and two liters of orange soda. Their work was just the same as any white man's and they did it for eight dollars an hour at first, then negotiated to ten, which was still a break because none of the locals would even think of lacing up their boots for anything less than fifteen. This meant higher margins for contractors, so they came to prefer the work of Mexicans to white men: two-thirds the wages and no need to pay taxes or 1099 them. Done deal. Aiden still found work when the

market was strong because there was just that much work to be had. Developments popped up along every ridgeline in Jackson County faster than contractors could pull permits, so fast that the county had to build a second permitting office at the southern end just to try and keep up. But when the market crashed and the plug was pulled and construction sites dried up overnight, leaving houses that were half-finished abandoned like the end of the world had come, the white jobs were the first to go and the Mexicans lost theirs not long after. None of that mattered because they were there by that point, whole families filling every trailer park and apartment slum from Cashiers to Cullowhee. Cantinas popped up all over the place and their parking lots were always filled with foreign cars with South Carolina tags, all of those Mexicans learning quickly that they could register the cars they shared in the state below without a lick of insurance. If one of them crashed drunk at night, he'd pop the tag off with a screwdriver, leave the car in the ditch or wrapped around a tree, run like hell, and have the same plate on a new ride by morning. All Sheriff Deputies had were blood trails that trickled out away from the crash. Nobody to arrest. Nobody to charge. Just a mess to clean up. There were some jobs starting to pop back up now, two years after the housing bubble burst, but that same pattern from before now worked in reverse. The first jobs went to Mexicans who'd do the work for half the price, and so the market coming back didn't mean a thing to Aiden. He was still out of work and carried all of that hatred with him as he headed up the gravel drive to the apartment building where Eberto lived. Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you.

AUDIENCE: [Applause].

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you very much in describing the remote for the slide

show. So these are the two books you've published so far. *Where All Light Tends to Go* which was, as I mentioned, was up for an award, and *The Weight of This World* which is what you just read from. I think I should mention to the audience that part of the reason I invited you here was because I also am from Kentucky, which is a different place from where you're from but a place that's often misunderstood I think, or people don't understand what it's like to be from a different region of the country. And so, I thought it'd be very helpful to have a perspective on life in a different part of this country. And particularly since we saw post election a, a sort of misunderstanding of people who were in more liberal east coast west coast locales not understanding the appeal of Donald Trump and that, we saw that in a lot of states like North Carolina Trump had a huge appeal. So, I was wondering if we could just start with his, Trump had a slogan called "Make America Great Again." And, how did that appeal to people in Appalachia? How did that resonate with them?

MR. JOY: Yeah, I think, I think for a lot of people where jobs pulled out, so at some point when there was industry, so, so, you know, if we're, if, if we're talking about the coal fields of Kentucky and West Virginia and we're talking about coal jobs leaving, or if we're talking about where I live it was primarily at one point in time a paper industry, you know, it was paper plants. And there were; there were a lot of other plants so there was a rubber plant for instance. But, so there were all these plant jobs and you go back and you watch decade and decade of this and they weren't, they weren't great jobs but they were decent jobs and they were jobs that, you know, retirement, and had benefits, and allowed these people to buy houses, and allowed them to do these things without, primarily without education. I think, I think that may be key as well is that

a lot of these people may not have gone to college and they were able to get into these, these jobs in plants without a degree. But so I think when you watch decades and decades of, of kind of this it might not have been the American dream but by God, it was good in their minds. You know, I might not have had excess but I could buy beer and hotdogs kind of mentality. And then to watch all of the industry collapse and leave in the same way that it left, you know, places like Detroit, I think for those people when they heard make America great again there were good old days for those people to look back on. And so as comical as that, as that slogan may sound to people who have, who have, you know, never had anything, to those people it meant something. You know, I read something one time where it was saying, you know, it was asking, you know, how was it great for a lot of the marginalized people back then, you know, when we talk about the good old days, and it wasn't. And I think that's why that slogan is so comical to a lot of; a lot of other people is that America for them hasn't been great. There, there wasn't a time when, when the things I'm talking about existed. But for these people it did and I; and I think maybe that's part of it.

DR. HOFFMAN: How can students who, who, you know, we are on an East coast campus with probably a majority of more liberal or Democratic leaning students, how can we encourage empathy and openness towards these different perspectives because as a professor the day after the election coming into class I felt my students wanted an explanation. They wanted to understand where Trump supporters were coming from, and again, this a, a nonpartisan event that we sponsor here but we like to bring in lots of different perspectives. And I think having come from a place where you were surrounded by a lot of Trump supporters, how can we encourage students to open up their minds to, to

different perspectives?

MR. JOY: I think, I think an event like this is a, is a prime example in the sense of encouraging dialogue and meaningful dialogue. When I look back at that year I, I'm ashamed of some of my actions in the sense of hearing things and not, not having the gall and the gut to speak up because maybe it was easier. And when I'm saying this I mean with family, I mean with friends. You know, I can remember my dad -- you know, I don't, I don't know who my dad voted for, I know he hated Hillary Clinton. I don't know why. But I never, you know, when he would get to talking I'd just ignore it because it was easier or, you know, when a friend would, would get to talking and, and say something I would ignore it because it was easier. And looking back that was an act of cowardice and, and maybe I haven't, I haven't ever really thought about that until right that second but I, I think it was. And, I think that it takes bravery and it takes empathy to be willing to walk into those conversations openly and want to listen to the other side in hopes that, that you can have a dialogue where, where something meaningful comes out of it. I think there, there's an American tendency nowadays where a lot of times people are afraid to talk to one another because nobody talks, we all scream. You know, we've created a society where, where the only dialogue we have are 140 character tidbits, or, or we post a Facebook update and either somebody likes it or they don't but there's no type of meaningful dialogue coming out of it. In a lot of ways we've destroyed that forum and I think maybe, you know, working, working on that. You know, sitting in that class today, they all had good questions and, and I learned from them and they learned from me and, and that's a matter of, of, you know, sitting down and desiring to have that conversation.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, I think along the lines, and, and I told I'd, I'd like to bring in my students questions and other conversation and then we'll open it up to the audience in about 20 minutes or so. Jordan asks, you talk a lot about the sort of stigma associated with the, the term trailer --

MR. JOY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: -- and, and trailer park. If you had it your way what would you want people to think of when they hear the word trailer and what does the word trailer mean to you and why is that sort of such a, has, has such a negative stereotype?

MR. JOY: Yeah I think, so, so this essay was, this essay was called "Digging in the Trash" and the way that the essay came about was that there was a critic from Boston who didn't like my books and that's perfectly fine, you know, my books aren't for everyone, you know, lots of people might not like my books, but he said you need to come down out of the holler, leave the peeling trailers and try writing about people for a change. And he italicized that word people as if to say that the people I'm writing about and the people who come out of the holler and out of the trailers aren't human. And I, I felt rage. I mean, there's really no other word for it than rage. But we were having this conversation earlier and I was talking about, you know, when you see a, a news story and, and something that's taking place in a trailer park, they never say so, so and so was inside their home. That word home is left out of the conversation. They say so and so was inside their trailer and, and for me that is a very, very distinct difference in the language that they are choosing to use. Growing up I had tons of friends who lived in trailers. My grandfather lived in a trailer. I don't, I knew that there were people who, who looked down on it. But I, I don't think ah, it was

something that ever came into my mind and it was because, you know, I went in there and we played like kids play anywhere. Or I went in there and somebody's mamma made me a sandwich or we drank Kool-Aid or, you know, whatever. We did the things that kids do whether it's in a house or in an apartment complex or wherever it is. And so for me I grew up in a, in a way where there was always humanity and dignity attached to that place so that I didn't look at it with that type of negative connotation. If you, if you hear that discussion when people talk about trailers, when trailer parks are portrayed in, in whatever context it's always in a very demeaning way. When, like, the reality is, is where I live I would say, I would say 30 percent maybe of people in that country live, live in mobile homes and, and part of it is, is out of necessity. They're, they're cheaper, that's cheap places to live. Part of it might be that, that you can't build a house where they live. Lots of times, hell it's on the side of a hill. You couldn't grade it out to put a house there. And so I think there's a lot of reasons that go into why somebody lives in a trailer. And I think we need to, when we have conversations about trailers and trailer parks and people that live in these places you, you, it's easy. That's their home. It's no different than your house. You know, the, the idea that we always throw trash on the end of that phrase is, I, I don't know, despicable.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, a lot of the students that you met today are from the Northeast, the East Coast of this country and even one student, Steven said, I've personally never traveled further south than Richmond, Virginia and with that said, what would you say are some of the biggest misperceptions or stereotypes that people, we're in the Mid-Atlantic region or people in the Northeast, that we have, what are the biggest misperceptions that you perceive we have of people who are in Appalachia or in, in the southern states?

MR. JOY: Racists. You know, I, I, when I think about the, the primary stigma attached to the American South for decades it's been race, racism. And that's not to say that racism doesn't exist in the South, it very much does, but the idea that the majority of people in the South are racists, or, or even if it's not the majority that it's a, you know, a really high percentage, I think is, is often very incorrect. You know, I, and the other side of it is I've got, I've encountered racism everywhere I've ever traveled and if you, if you look at where hate groups exist, if you go to the Southern Poverty Law Center and look at where hate groups exist in America they exist all over the place, and it might surprise you to get onto that list and look at that map and see somebody who's in your backyard. And so I think, I think racism is, is one of it. I, I think that's the biggy.

DR. HOFFMAN: Okay. Thank you. So, I, I think our students were sort of fascinated by your lifestyle in our, our class discussion today, and we had a, a pretty long conversation about gun ownership and having a gun and I was wondering if you could elaborate upon that a little bit because you do hunt and fish and you mentioned that about 90 percent of your diet comes from hunting or from things that you've planted in your own backyard. What, can, can you help explain what that experience is like to people who maybe are only familiar with shopping at grocery stores for their, for their food?

MR. JOY: Yeah, well, I think most of my life, you know, I was like everybody else, I, I shopped at, at, at grocery stores and I think there for awhile I went, I went full blown vegetarian and, and so I started really thinking about eating more responsibly then. But, but so really how it came about was just the idea of trying to take responsibility for where my food comes from, knowing where my food comes from. I also think that there's a, there's a, I don't know,

there's, there's something really special about, about being that tied to your food source in a way that our culture has gotten away from. Most people, they, you know, there's a lot of people in this room especially the students who may have never eaten anything where they knew where it came from aside from the grocery store or in some fancy-ass restaurant where they say locally, you know, grown whatever and all it came from down here. But they've never seen where that, where that meat came from. And I think, I think our culture has, has lost a lot because of, because of that shift. You know, I think of a writer like Wendell Berry, I think, I think that's a lot of what Wendell has been preaching since the 70s. I think he had solutions to a lot of what, the things that we've seen in his desire for us to move back to those types of communities. And so for me it's a, it's about that. It's about being tied to that place. It's, it's about taking responsibility for that act. It's about when I eat a meal I know, I, you know, I've been eating; we typically eat about two deer a year. The deer we've been eating I can remember, you know, the last steps that that animal took and there is a, an immense reverie attached to that. And every time I eat it I'm incredibly thankful. And so I, I think, you know, that type of relationship with the land and that type of relationship with the environment is something that's very valuable to me.

DR. HOFFMAN: So, we got a question from Twitter. We have some questions coming in from Twitter. From someone named Phoebe, how does, how do you feel about the recent removals of Confederate monuments in the South?

MR. JOY: Yeah I think I, you know, we're seeing that right now in, in where I live in, in downtown Sylva there's a monument that overlooks that, that, what stands at the Courthouse but the Courthouse is up on a hill so it overlooks

the whole town. You can't be in downtown Sylva and not see that, that statue. At the same time I don't necessarily think a lot of people think about it but regardless it's there and it was put there with a pretty clear intention. I find myself really torn and I think it's, I think I've, you know, I've found it hard to have this conversation and part of it is there is a pride in where I come from. You know, I, I know the names of my Confederate ancestors, you know, and, and that was instilled in me all my life. They were typically, well they were all poor sharecroppers; none of them were slave owners. They were all very poor sharecroppers. But, I think what a lot of people who are like me are missing is that you can have a pride in where you come from and still reach an understanding that what was going on during that time was wrong. The reason that war was fought primarily was wrong. And, and, you know, I think a lot of people aren't willing to recognize that just yet. And so, so I think that's where this, this conversation is, is kind of coming from and that's where the clash is happening. At the time in places where I live, what I, what I would really like to see happen is I would like to see them put it on a ballot. You know? And I think that's a responsible way for politicians and communities to address it, is that then there's no, you know, shit on your shoes for lack of a better way of putting it. You know, as if, if you say, all right, we understand that there's a whole lot of people in the community who want this gone, we understand that there's a whole lot who don't. You know? And you put options out there. And maybe the option is to move it into a museum, or maybe the option is to take it down completely. But, but then you, you try to create a forum where people can have a dialogue and a say without standing in front of it at each other's throat with some people tearing it down and some people reaching for their guns. I think, you know, in a lot of

ways that's the local government's fault for, for allowing that type of thing to happen.

DR. HOFFMAN: So we've seen a lot of removals of Confederate statues over just the past year particularly since Charlottesville, the Charlottesville protest, and a lot of communities are doing this sort of in the secret of night kind of going in. So you're suggesting that's not probably the best way to deal with it?

MR. JOY: No, no I, I don't think, I don't think vandalism is ever the, you know, the right way to handle something. And, and I think it, in a lot of ways the people, the people who are standing there waving Confederate flags are a lot of times that just is fuel for the fire for them. And, and so I think, you know, I think there are more responsible ways to address it. And, and, and I wholeheartedly agree with, with, you know, removing these statues. You look at the history of when they were put up and it is impossible to deny why they were put there. You know, and, and so you look at the facts and you look at the history and, and it's pretty clear-cut. But at the same time I think, I think there's always a responsible way to try and progress and, and I don't necessarily think that, you know, vandalism and chaos is, is, is going to do, is going to help things.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I want to get back to a question from a student in my class, Kelly, who -- I should have meant that we've all been following you on Twitter and so we're paying attention to things you're tweeting about and you're Instagram which is mostly as we discovered big fish and hunting with your dog -- but, but a student, Kelly, noticed that you tweeted last week about how your lifestyle is drastically different from 99 percent of Americans judging from their conversations, and she was wondering sort of what motivated that or where that came from. Are you, are you talking from, from your, as a writer or from

someone who is from this more rural background?

MR. JOY: Well, it was a, it was in an airport. It was yesterday I think.
But I was sitting there --

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, it was yesterday.

MR. JOY: Yeah. Yeah, I'm pretty sure. I was listening to these two, these two people and one of them was having a conversation about a new Kroger in his neighborhood and, you know, if it wasn't for this Kroger he doesn't know, he doesn't know how he lived before Kroger. And before this Kroger existed and he got his Kroger credit card and he could walk out his door and shop at the Kroger, you know, life was hard.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: And Kroger I should say is, is Acme basically for, for not -- we don't have Kroger up here.

MR. JOY: Okay, I, I guess it's like Winn Dixie here.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yes.

MR. JOY: But so I was listening, I was listening to that and I was thinking, you know, I, I typically don't talk anyway so most of my time is spent listening but I listen to things like that and I just think how, how different my life is from, from kind of a, a city life and how incredibly grateful I am for that. You know, I, I love the, the lifestyle that I live and I, I couldn't imagine it being any other way. But, yeah, I, I think the majority of this nation is, is kind of moving towards a, towards a more urban lifestyle and I just, I'm not cut out for it.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, and I appreciate you, I do appreciate your appearance here. I read somewhere you had written that you'd be happy never travelling 500 miles outside of your home and I, I looked it up, we're about 630 miles. So --

MR. JOY: [Laughter.]

DR. HOFFMAN: -- I appreciate you bridging that divide there. Let's get back to your writing a little bit. One is one of my students, and we've got a question from Twitter that asks, you've based a lot of your characters on people that you know, people that you've grown up with. Is it emotionally difficult writing your novels since they're based on friends and experiences that you've had?

MR. JOY: Well, I --

DR. HOFFMAN: [Indiscernible].

MR. JOY: -- I don't know that my, none of my characters have ever been based off of, off of people I know. There are events that, that really make me think about things. And so, so for instance, with the weight of this world one event is, is in the very opening page, this child witnesses his father murder his mother and commit suicide. That happened, you know, just a few doors down from my parents' house. And I just, when my mom told me that all I could wonder was, you know, what is going to happen to that kid. And I've kind of, and that question just evolved and evolved and so part of that story came from there. The other side is with the character Thad and I think maybe that's what, what this person's referring to. And I had a really good friend named Paco, I grew up with, you know, had lots of good times with. Loved him to death. And he, he joined the military at some point and he was in multiple deployments in Iraq. And I don't know what he saw there. I didn't, you know. I, I, I know photographs I saw. And so for instance, I saw pictures of him with, with two prisoners with black bags over their faces and him standing there with his thumbs up like the Fonz, them on their knees. What I do know is that when he came home he walked into his house one day and he shot his brother and he shot his father and he killed

himself. And I can remember the way that that was portrayed on the news and I can remember the way that in that story he was completely stripped of his humanity. And that greatly bothered me. And I think really if we get to the root of most of my writing that's what I'm doing, is I'm trying to go to the darkest places imaginable and find humanity. And so, so with this character in this novel it would, I had been reading a lot of things. I was reading books like Sebastian Junger's *War*. Or, David Grossman's *Own Killing*. I was reading a whole lot, you know, war literature. I was also following a whole lot of things. So for instance, there was this British marine who had, who had massacre these, these people in this town and, and I was going through these transcripts of his defense and part of the defense was all of the things that he had seen and, and how it had conditioned this in him. And, and I mean things like, like dismembered bodies hung up in trees like wind chimes. And I, I just remember thinking, you know, how much all of that had to have weighed on him and I, and I think so kind of all of that kind of, you know, melded into what became the character Thad Broom in this, in this story. And I think that's indicative of most, probably most fiction writers anyways but especially, you know, I, I can speak for myself and say it's true for me in that most everything I write is kind of a collective of, you know, all different things that I, I pick up. Different mannerisms that people do, little, you know, little anecdotes people say. And, and so it all kind of just comes together.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well I have up here, you tweeted, I think this was last week September 15th; you were looking through the galley pages for your next novel. Can you tell us a little bit about what's that about?

MR. JOY: Yeah, I think, I think kind that I always say that there's like a trigger event and all my novels have something that kind of at the very beginning

kicks everything off. And with this novel it was, it was a guy who had been hunting, it's getting late in the evening and he can't see real well but he hears something across the cove and he looks through the scope and he thinks he sees a pig and so he shoots this pig. And when he gets up to it, it was a man digging ginseng, pouching ginseng. And, which, which is, has happened, it happened right there in Macon County, a game warden had told me that story. And so I was kind of wondering, you know, about that and so I kind of made the guy that he had killed kind of from this notorious family. And so this, this guy's brother winds up kind of finding out; he knows that his brother is missing but, you know, he kind of winds up following a blood trail and, and that's, that's really how the book starts. It's another feel-good book.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter].

AUDIENCE: [Laughter].

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, the other thing that came up in class today and that we've talked about throughout the day is the opioid epidemic that's sweeping the nation but that, you know, there has been a drug epidemic in Appalachia and in rural southern America for a long time. What are your thoughts on what the government or what should be done to kind of tackle these issues of increased drug use that you, you write about in your books, and the crime that goes along with that?

MR. JOY: Yeah, I, I, well I think my, my only thing I would alter about that statement is I don't think that there's a drug epidemic directly tied to Appalachia. I think there's a drug epidemic that has been sweeping across this country for decades and decades and decades. One of the thing that we, that we talked about earlier in that class was that this is a more recent conversation

and in my opinion the reason that it's a more recent conversation is because suddenly you have middle class and upper class white kids and their parents who are, who are facing this, you know? And until heroin reached those communities it was a, it was a conversation that, that most people didn't want to have because it didn't affect them. And so I think part, I think that's part of what we're witnessing as far as why the conversation is starting to take place. And that's a good thing that the conversation is starting to take place but, but the reality is that, you know, the people who have been facing the drug epidemic and, and bearing that burden for decades have been people of poverty, and lots of times people of color but most often marginalized people in general. And I think, I think when we look at, at, you know, what has happened I think there's two things that need to be done and there's, and, and one thing is that the conversation we keep having is the idea of drugs being brought into this country and, and it's, it's a conversation where it's like, you know, where we can build a wall and by God we'll fix it. Well number one, that's just lunacy. That's not true. But the other side of that is, is that I don't think that's the right conversation. The conversation that we never have is, is about big pharma, it's about pharmaceutical companies who for decades have handed out prescription drugs to everybody under the sun, especially people of poverty, you know, and, and that's, that's what we're witnessing. We are witnessing the effect of a culture who has been sedated and drugged for decades. And that's the reason it's reaching these people. I think, I think of, you know, my mom, you know? My, when my mom fell and broke her wrist one time she'd go and they fill up a bottle with Oxycontin. You know, that, that's the conversation that we need to have. And the reason that they don't want to have that conversation is that's where the

money is coming from. And, and so, you know, when I was saying that I, I think we're having the wrong conversation that's what I mean. The other thing that we're witnessing is, is people pulling all of the funding out of the resources. You know, somebody in your class was, was talking about a, a, a friend of theirs who was being sent to rehab down in Florida -- or, or no, it was her brother working at a rehab facility in Florida -- and that basically the only people who could get to these facilities are, are, you know, for the most part upper middle-class and upper-class white families. They're the only ones who could afford it. And, and so you have facilities available but they're only available if you can pay. The facilities we do have that have served, you know, communities and particularly lower-class communities, they're losing funding. You know, they're pulling all of the money out of that. And, and what I, what I was telling those students earlier is that one way, one way or another you're going to pay for it. As a taxpayer you're going to pay for it. The one way you pay for it is, is throwing them in jail. The other way you pay for it is, is with some type of treatment and in my mind one is a whole hell of a lot more constructive than the other. And I know if I, if I could get my tax dollars to go somewhere I'd much rather get my tax dollars going somewhere where hopefully we can, we can address an issue and try to help somebody rather than put them in a situation that's only going to worsen, you know, that reality.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I've got one more question from Twitter before we literally toss the questions to the audience here. So, I'll ask Katie and Sarandu to meet with Nancy and kind of get that catch box set up and ready to go for us to have a Q & A. But this question came from Sean on Twitter and I, I think it, it's, it really hits at the heart of the purpose of this series is, he says how do we validate

the struggle people feel while also potentially challenging their perspective? How do we maintain that empathy while also trying to persuade or to influence?

MR. JOY: I think there's a, and it, and it's really a -- you know, I was laughing earlier because I, I am a walking talking contradiction. You know, people look at me and they would think a very certain thing about me and I was joking about how if you could guess what book I had in my bag it probably wouldn't be that I had been sitting there reading Tikna Hanh all day but I have, you know, that's what I spend all day reading. But I think like somebody like Tikna Hanh and I think about active listening and I think, I think that's key and I think --

DR. HOFFMAN: And we should explain for those of you who don't know, it's a, a Buddhist writer who --

MR. JOY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Yeah.

MR. JOY: Yeah. It kind of just a, a philosopher but a, a -- they, you know, I think when we, I think what I witness a lot of times nowadays is that when, when we're having a conversation people aren't actually listening to what the other person's saying. They're actually waiting for their moment to speak because in their mind I already know what he's going to say and I have a response and, and that's what they're focused on. They're focused on the response. They're not focused on the listening. And I, and so I think number one, I think when you go into any type of dialogue especially, especially when you're talking about a dialogue where there is going to be difference. You know, where there is going to be two sides and we are not in agreement, I think you have to go into it with a very open mind and your hands like this. And, and so I

think through active listening and through sitting there and letting somebody pour themselves onto you I think by that very process you are going to open something up in them so that, so that by them feeling valuable and by them feeling listened to they, they almost feel obligated to return that, that favor. And, and so then, you know, then is your time to talk. And, and I think, I think if we can get to a place where, where people are able to have constructive conversations again. I think that is, I think that's one of the greatest things that has disappeared from this country is that everybody is angry. You experience it even on the highway in the driving. Everybody is at each other's throats and, and when you walk into a conversation like that nothing constructive is happening. Nothing. It's, it's like arguing with a five-year-old. Or, it's, it's like that, like that metaphor of playing chess with a pigeon, you know? And at the end of the, it doesn't matter if you win the game of chess, the pigeon is still going to shit on the board and strut around.

DR. HOFFMAN: [Laughter].

AUDIENCE [Laughter].

MR. JOY: And, and I think that's true. You know, I think that's true and I think that comes out of the, the fact that we are all just coming in with, with so much emotion and I think one of the, the best things we can do is take a step back and say you know I'm going to, I'm going to approach this differently. And, and part of that is, is trying to create a, a, a moment of community but part of that is also, can be, can be selfish. It can be this is the most constructive way for me to try to get my point across. And that's okay.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Well, I think then, in that light, we should listen to some folks in the audience and see what perspectives they have. So thank you,

Katie and Sarandu, they're going to come up to the front of this, the room here and if you just want to raise your hand we are literally going try and throw this thing around the room and answer some questions. So, who has the first question?

MR. JOY: There's a gentleman right there.

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, I see.

MR. JOY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: Right, right over there. Can you do it? She's walking to over.

MR. JOY: [Laughter].

DR. HOFFMAN: Wow.

MR. JOY: I kind of want to her throw this box.

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh. Good job.

Q: Do I just talk into the box?

MR. JOY: Oh, I can hear you.

DR. HOFFMAN: That's exactly.

Q: I particularly enjoyed the voice you have in your novels. I have to admit I have some prejudice. I wonder where you found that voice in Appalachia. What, what are the schools like there?

MR. JOY: Are you, do you mean the language of, of the writing style?

Q: Yeah.

MR. JOY: Okay. Yeah. I, I didn't know if you meant that or my accent.

Q: No, no, no. I mean, I mean the, the song you sing.

MR. JOY: Ah, thank you. Thank you.

Q: To put it another way.

MR. JOY: Yeah, yeah. I think that's a great way to put it. I think of, you know, my biggest influences have been writers like, well, one of my mentors is Ron Rash. And I think Ron Rash writes some of the richest, most beautiful prose in America. You know, he's a poet at heart and to hear him read and to spend time with him and, and that attention to detail I think that's a big part of it. He talks about, and this is how nerdy he is, he talks about enjoying the way that consonants and vowels rub against each other in a sentence. That sounds like lunacy to somebody who, who doesn't get off on those things. But that's exactly right. You know, I, I think when I get to a sentence, especially when a sentence is working, the thing that makes me happiest is the rhythm of it and it's the music of it. And I think that's what made writers like Larry Brown and William Gay really stand apart was -- even Cormack McCarthy, you know -- I, I think a lot of these writers are coming out of him. But, there is a very, very close attention to language. And at the end of the day that's, that's what I'm most interested in is the language and I, I think, you know, I don't know it just makes me happy. I, I don't know of anything that makes me happier than when a sentence is working.

DR. HOFFMAN: I think, yeah, I think the question was more, you know, coming from a, a, a different background what are the schools like there? Were you encouraged by a particular teacher? Was there a writing program that, that -

MR. JOY: Yeah, okay, okay, yeah. I went to Western Carolina University which is in Cullowhee in Jackson County. Ron Rash is an instructor there. So, I mean, we've got, we've got probably the undisputed king of Appalachian literature there and so I think that's a big part of it. He was a teacher of mine. I think really my biggest influence was a professor named

Deidra Elliot and she was the one who in that essay was from out West who said she felt strangled by the trees. But she was a beautiful essayist. Some of the best essays I've ever read were written by her. But I think she really encouraged me. I think she spent a lot more time with me than she had to. And, and so really at the end of the day when I think about who I owe it to the most as far as, not as far as where the story telling comes from, and not as far as where my desire to write comes from, but where the real honing of craft took place. It took place with her. I, I, I owe everything to, to her.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well, I think it's worth noting we had a conversation earlier about how you were writing before you could spell. That this is something that you've enjoyed from the time of early childhood.

MR. JOY: Yeah. Yeah, I think, well I think that's true of most artists. I think artists -- you know, lots of people think oh, I, I think it might be fun to paint or I think it might be fun to write a story. Well, there's a drastic difference between somebody who wants to do something and somebody who feels compelled to do so. And, and so for me I think there was always a, a, a very deliberate compulsion. I, I couldn't avoid it. If nothing had ever been published I would still do it. Those novels would still exist. They would be in a drawer but they would still exist because I felt compelled to do that. I, I don't, I don't get that type of enjoyment out of much. Maybe fishing.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right. Let's have another question from the audience. Right over here if you can toss it over, Katie. And then we'll hand it over to Sarandu. Oh, perfect.

MR. JOY: That was a pretty good catch.

Q: It's called a body catch. It, it; I could be wrong about this by

it strikes me that so many people in the North don't go to the South. And, I went to school in North Carolina so I, I know it's a really fine state and I have, I still have relatives in the western part. But what, what, what in your mind would make, in order to bridge this gap of differences that people feel, what, what would it, what would it take to make northerners or Midwesterners or whatever go to the South and experience some of the culture that's there?

MR. JOY: I think what brings people to a place like where I live is, is --

DR. HOFFMAN: I'm going to pause you just for a second because --

MR. JOY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: -- I wanted to put up a tweet that is related to your conversation. There's an irony in outsiders flocking to the mountains to witness an eclipse, the metaphor in coming to Appalachia just to stay in the dark.

Because you were in the heart of this eclipse that came --

MR. JOY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: -- came about a month or so ago and you remarked today about people coming to visit to just sort of witness it and --

MR. JOY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: -- then leave.

MR. JOY: Yeah.

DR. HOFFMAN: So --

MR. JOY: I think, I think what brings people to the, I didn't even know people read the stuff I tweeted. [Laughter].

DR. HOFFMAN: I told you, I've been, I've been following you.

MR. JOY: [Indiscernible]. No, I, I think a lot of people come to the mountains for, for the natural beauty. You know, I think that's what brings people

there. I've traveled all over this country and there have only ever been two other places that I've ever been where the landscape felt that overpowering. You know, you live in a place like where I live and you cannot ignore what's around you. I mean, I look out my window and I am surrounded and, and, and there's, and so I think there's that. As far as, and so I think that there are a lot of people who come from the North to Appalachia and to North Carolina. I think that's largely why they come. Here's the problem is that, so we have a giant influx of, of people who move here, move to Jackson County putting in second and third homes and, and typically their license plates say Florida but they're not really from Florida, they're from, you know, New York or somewhere else. They moved down to Florida and then they're; now they're in the mountains. The problem with the way that those people interact with locals is that they come into the conversation with a, an immense air of superiority as: stand back boys; I'm bringing big city brains to the holler.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter].

MR. JOY: Like, that's kind of how the, the conversation starts. And I think the minute that a conversation starts that way those people become incredibly skeptical. And so, you know, I think a lot of people come there and they want to change things and the thing is these people are happy. They're happy with a lot of the way things are. And that's not to say that there, that there can't be a lot of, a lot of improvements, you know, with, with diversity or with resources or with jobs. But that is to say that culturally in don't know that people there want to be changed. Culturally we are very happy. I could make a single phone call and I could have whatever resources at my house immediately. There is still that type of sense of community there. Those people would lay down their

lives for their neighbors. And that is a type of thing that does not exist very many places in this country anymore. And so I think, I think largely when people do come to areas like this they need to understand that, that life has been going on there for a long time, you know, and, and people, people have a way of getting by. And, and if you can, if you can watch that and you can embrace it, by simply embracing things it's going to open up a, an avenue for conversation and suddenly, you know, things that really do need to change, things like, you know, diversity or things like jobs or, or land development or anything else suddenly there's an avenue for that conversation. You know, again it goes back to us not being, you know, butting up against each other.

DR. HOFFMAN: Another question from the audience? Maybe from over on this side of the room. Right here?

SARANDU: Okay, are you ready for it?

Q: Thank you. And thank you for being here. You write a lot about people that are under economic stress that occupy a certain geography, but how would you compare or contrast those to people in other parts of the world that face economic stress or have maybe similar experiences because of that?

MR. JOY: In other parts of the world and, or in other parts of the country?

Q: No, other parts of the world. I mean, this is a, a, not a unique human condition that you find in Appalachia.

MR. JOY: Yeah. I think I would have a hard time making comparisons globally, one, out of sheer ignorance in the sense that I, I, I wouldn't want to speak out of turn. The other thing though is that I think, I think what happens in

this country for the most part is a very, very unique and American identity. Culturally we are vastly different from most of the rest of the world. You know, just with everything. Just with our mentality. And, and, and so I think, I think I would have a hard time making that comparison. I can make that comparison within this country though. And thinking about; and so when we talk about people in Appalachia, you know, we, we want to make them very, very different than people in a, in an inner city or, or something like that. And, and I don't necessarily think that's true. I was having a conversation recently -- there's a really great movement happening in Appalachia called the Affrilachian Artist Project where a lot of African American artists are really pushing work out of that region and saying we are here. And, and so then we get great artists like Marie Cochran and, and Frank X. Walker and a lot, a lot of great folks. But anyways, me and Marie Cochran went to lunch and we went to lunch with this lady named Selma Sparks and Selma Sparks was a civil rights activist back in the 60s. She was from; I think she was from Harlem. But she led, she led the march to the, to the United Nations building in, in New York. But she was also the only female ever granted an interview with Malcolm X at Liberator Magazine. She worked alongside James Baldwin. This woman lives in Franklin, North Carolina in the middle of the mountains which is bizarre to me. How the hell she wound up, up there? But when I was sitting there with her what blew me away were, were all of the, the, all of the similarities with the issues. And a lot of what she said was that that was one of the biggest mistakes of, of, in her mind the civil rights movement, and, and particularly this, this, this last election was, was not going into places and getting them to recognize that at the end of the day they're wanting the, the same, same things and that the same things are happening to them. And so,

you read a lot nowadays about gentrification in cities and, and people especially African American communities being forced out of, out of places where they've lived for generations, being forced out of these places by white, white people wanting to live closer to the city. That same thing is happening in, in Appalachia. You've got an, you've got an influx of outsiders going into places, buying up land, sky rocketing land prices, and we call it land rich because you might have 200 acres that's been passed down generation to generation but you're so poor you can't pay the taxes on it. And so it, so, with an idea like even gentrification, you know, when we had that conversation we have it about inner cities; we don't have it about Appalachia but poverty is poverty and, and I think when you start to look at it that way you realize that the same issues are facing people regardless of where they're coming from. If you're poor it's the same things. These are marginalized people and, and I think if we can reach a place where we, where that becomes a unifying theme look the hell out. You know? I think you could make a lot of progress in a moment like that.

DR. HOFFMAN: All right, there's another question over on the side there, Sarandu. Yeah. Go ahead and toss it. Oh.

MR. JOY: [Laughter].

Q: Thank you.

DR. HOFFMAN: Here you go.

Q: In listening to what you, you speak -- I come from a construction background so I understand the, the, the, how jobs kind of changed and things like that. But what can Appalachia teach us because you've talked about the similarities. You've talked about poverty being poverty. You've talked about the needs that everybody faces whether you're in Delaware, whether

you're in Vermont, whether you're in Idaho. What can Appalachia, what can you as a writer and Appalachia as an area teach the rest of this country as far as civility, getting together? You mentioned community and being, being there. But, what can you teach us because it seems like, like you say, we go there to change you.

MR. JOY: Yeah.

Q: What, what can you do to say this is what you need to recognize?

MR. JOY: Yeah. I, I --

DR. HOFFMAN: Good question.

MR. JOY: -- I think, I think one is resilience. I think when you look at the Appalachian people you look at people who've been exploited from the very beginning of that history. And so, in the very beginnings it was timber and when the timber was gone -- and in a lot of places it was coal or in a place like mine it was unrestricted land development -- and you've always had big money interests come in and exploit the place and then when everything was gone they left. But through all of that there's been a, a very resilient population of people who have survived. And so I think one of those things is, is just that, that, that dire sense of survival. I think the other; when I think of the most important writer alive in America I don't know that I could think of anybody more important than Wendell Berry. I think Wendell Berry is, is -- I do; I think he's the greatest American writer alive. And if you look at everything that Wendell has written out of Kentucky since, you know, the late 60s, early 70s what he has consistently said is that we need to get back to communities where, where we take care of ourselves. He, he very much believes in kind of a, in a, you know, an agricultural type of society.

But, but when I look at a lot of the things that happened I, I think that's something to learn. I think there's, I think there's something incredibly valuable about that type of lifestyle. And the more that this country, you know, becomes urbanized, and, and the more people move away from that type of culture, I think, I think it's been devastating. I, I think it's been, I think it's created an immense of loneliness. You know, people don't feel tied to the place they're around. People don't feel tied to the land. People where I live do, you know, and I think that's an incredibly valuable thing. I think that sense of community and that value for the land are, are incredible values to, to take away.

DR. HOFFMAN: Thank you. That was great. Another question? Okay, we might have to get it all the way over to the complete opposite side of the auditorium. Do you think -- you can toss it. Try it.

MR. JOY: That's a long toss.

Q: I can get it to the end of the row.

DR. HOFFMAN: It'll, it'll get there eventually.

MR. JOY: Oh, yes it will. I think it's like a beach ball.

DR. HOFFMAN: Oh, yeah.

MR. JOY: Like you're supposed to just toss it around.

DR. HOFFMAN: There you go. All right, let's keep it going. Oh, here we go.

MR. JOY: Oh, I like this.

AUDIENCE: [Laughter].

DR. HOFFMAN: All right.

MR. JOY: That was a good toss.

DR. HOFFMAN: Nice job.

MR. JOY: He, he wins a free book. At the end you should come over

and I will give, I will give you a copy of this book for that toss.

DR. HOFFMAN: Wow.

MR. JOY: Deal.

Q: All right , so I, I wanted to ask you, because a lot of the things that you've mentioned in your readings and in your, in just talking and in answering questions has to do with human transformations or sometimes the, the resistance to transforming. You talk about how when you were younger you went to your friend's house, you know, and whatever kind of house it was, whether, whether it was a field or a house or a trailer and, you know, you ate food with their family and you, you enjoyed life and you didn't think anything of it, and how when people get older they, they get angrier, they get stubborn (sic). They, they have preconceived notions about how society should work, how they can improve an area without talking to people there. In, in your travels and in hearing these stories have you sort of identified a, a point in someone's life where this change occurs and have you, have you thought about how we as a society can reach people before they become angry and stubborn and set in their ways and then try to broaden their, their perspective?

MR. JOY: Yeah. Well, I don't know that I've put a lot of thought into that but I will tell you a, a tweet that I read today. And it was in a series of tweets from the Southern Poverty Law Center and it was talking about the primary agenda of the Alt-right and it was Richard Spencer and Richard Spencer had made a quote that the place to target people was universities. And his reasoning for that was that he felt that was the most moldable time in a person's life, that once they got out of that environment they were pretty much set in their ways at that point. And, and so, I think, I think there's a lot of value to that. I think he's

probably, in a lot of ways he might be right. Luckily we've got a whole hell of a lot of people working hard in universities to, to kind of combat that. But yeah, I think, I think the way that you've always been able to transform a society is through education and, and maybe education is, is the biggest thing that's under attack under, under the administration that we're currently facing. You know, the, the shift to want to privatize public education; the complete dismantling of, of, of the public education system in, in America. That will be devastating in places like Appalachia; it'll be places in any place where you have a marginalized people. And, and, and so I think that's, I think that's key, is, and, and I'm not, I'm, you know, I'm talking education from the ground up, from, from the moment you enter school through, through college, I think that's really the place where, where those types of changes happen, you know. And after that it really, you know, I think in, in some ways that, that comment by Richard Spencer, he's probably right, you know? Yeah, there, there probably does come a time when, when you leave and, and, and you, you're living your life and you're, and you're kind of tied down to that, whatever that belief system you've developed is. And so I think, you know, I think that's what we need to look at and I think, I think we need to look very hard at the, at the education system in this country and, and try to figure out a way, you know, whatever that may be to, to make that better. And then the other thing is that we need to be supporting our teachers. You know, we need to be putting good teachers in those places. They can't keep teachers in the county where I live. The pay is so horrible that those people cannot afford to drive there to those schools and teach. They can't afford it. And, and so I think, I think as a country we have to completely change the way that we even think about that. We have to think about what, what do we want to value. And we need to come

up with, with, if its education then great. And when, when you come up with a certain group of things that you value then you say that's where my, that's where I want my money to go. If at the end of the day that's where my tax dollars go take it. I'm happy. And, and so I think, I think that's kind of a roundabout answer to your question.

DR. HOFFMAN: Well and I, I hope that that's what we're fostering here with, with this audience in this place over the course of every Fall semester is having dialogues that may not be easy but they help us see different perspectives. And I think you're right, that college age is a really fundamental period of discovery for young people. So, I really appreciate you all being here. I want to give you a couple of announcements before we thank David for being here. Our next speaker is two weeks from today, Wednesday, October 4th. We'll be featuring an NPR correspondent, Asma Kahlid. She covered the 2016 election by traveling across the country and interviewing people from all different spectrums, all different parts of the world, all while being Muslim. And she actually has an article that she wrote, it said, covering the campaign while being Muslim. So, she should offer a very interesting perspective for us. I also wanted to remind you about the audio essay contest that I mentioned earlier. This is open to all University of Delaware students. The deadline is December 1st. It's a great opportunity to share your perspective and to potentially, you know, win some cash prizes. So, I want to thank you all for being here and please let, give a great round of applause to David Joy.

MR. JOY: Thank you, thank you. Thank you.

AUDIENCE: [Applause].