

Transcript of Interview with Andrew Small by Erika Knox

Interviewee: Andrew Small

Interviewer: Erika Knox

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Transcriber: Angelica Gallegos

Abstract:

This interview shares the early-on Covid-19 quarantine experience of Andrew Small, a second-year Asian studies major at Northeastern University. Andrew talks about where he was in the middle of March when universities started to shut down and send their students home, where he went, how quarantine and at-home learning affected his first year at Northeastern and touches upon what his reaction to how the state of Maine and how America responded to the pandemic. He also speaks briefly on how he thinks this will affect the future actions of Americans and what the pandemic has revealed about America. This interview was conducted as an assignment for HIST 1215: Origins of Today, instructed by Molly Nebiolo.

Erika Knox 0:03

Hello, welcome. Today's date is the 20th of September of 2020. My name is Erika Knox. I am a fifth-year history major at Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts. And today I'm joined by Andrew Small who is a second-year Asian Studies major at Northeastern as well. So, we'll be covering initial responses to the COVID-19 pandemic, and Andrew's experience with quarantine and his opinions on the general state of America right now. This interview will be uploaded to the COVID-19 Archive Project as a testimony for those living through the pandemic. And I just wanted to ask Andrew, are you all right, and do you consent to the interview being uploaded and used as an oral history narrative?

Andrew Small 0:48

Yes, no problem.

Erika Knox 0:50

Perfect. Okay. So, we'll get started, um, I was talking about your initial reactions in mid-March. So where are you living in in mid-March when lockdowns went into place, and university started to shut down?

Andrew Small 1:06

So, I was my- it was in my first year. So, I was living in Stetson East, which is the kind of a small, little freshman dorm with like tiny rooms. And the first two weeks of that month were kind of weird, because my roommate is from Korea, and he had family issues like, he had to go back for, right before that. And which, of course, became a mess once everything hit. So, he was actually in quarantine in Worcester, I think, or somewhere outside of Boston for pretty much the entire- the first two weeks of March. So, I was kind of alone in the room. Like, I was- like my first time, kind of living on my own. So, it was a long way of saying that I was living in a dorm. And basically, when the- my plan was- because my family had just- my family lived in Japan at that time. And they basically came back right before everything hit. So, my plan when classes got canceled was to just stay on campus. Stay in the dorms, because like, I had already paid for it. So that just kind of seemed like it didn't- I wasn't really aware of the situation, really. And then I think it was March 15th, or 16th, was when Northeastern told us- gave us the email with 72 hours' notice to vacate. So yeah, at that point, I kind of just quickly packed up all my stuff. And yeah, and then eventually, my parents had gotten back from Japan and drove from-, they were staying at our summer slash winter house in Maine. and drove down to pick me up, I think on the 17th. And yeah, from that point on, I was in Maine the entire time.

Erika Knox 3:04

Yeah, I definitely think of March 15th as like a stopping point. Like, I think I even have like a calendar thing that's like stuck on that. I have one of those things you rip off.

Andrew Small 3:13

Yeah.

Erika Knox 3:14

Like when everything changed, March 15th, 16th.

Andrew Small 3:17

Exactly, exactly.

Erika Knox 3:19

So, you said you decided to leave- you were going to stay but you decided to leave Boston and you went to Maine, how was your experience with that?

Andrew Small 3:28

Um, it was, it was a weird adjustment. Just because I lived pretty much my entire life and like the biggest city in the world, and in the downtown part, like of the biggest city in the world. So, I've never really not lived in a city before. And from, like, my personal adjustment to Boston was like, it took a little bit to get adjusted when I first moved here. So, going out to the really like rural area, it was a town of like, 800 people. Um, yeah, it essentially, at that point with the Maine weather in spring. It's not very nice.

Erika Knox 4:03

Oh, yeah.

Andrew Small 4:05

It kind of sucks. There was a lot of like mud and gray and stuff. So yeah, it was a little bit of an adjustment. But yeah.

Erika Knox 4:15

Um, how did you think the state reacted to COVID-19 and like, their initial response? Like with stay in place, stay at home orders and everything. Did you feel safe like, how was your experience?

Andrew Small 4:32

Maine in general did a very, I think did a very good job of putting strict orders in and requiring facemasks in public and stuff. In the area that I was- is extremely rural, so the only really place where we'd see people was at the grocery store. Or just like when we'd kind of grab stuff and then go back to our house. And everyone there seemed to take it very seriously, everyone was wearing gloves and masks and hand sanitizer and all that. So, for the most part, I felt pretty safe just because, I mean, I felt personally safe in terms of my health. But it was more just like observing the, the country kind of shut down and stuff, that's more, I guess that was more worrisome for me.

Erika Knox 5:22

Yeah, um, how was your adjustment to online learning? So, having to leave your freshman year must have been really hard, because you're just getting to school?

Andrew Small 5:33

Yeah, I never actually used- I never heard of Zoom before.

Erika Knox 5:36

Neither have I, so yeah.

Andrew Small 5:39

Like, I don't know, I guess it's kind of a- at that point, it was kind of a business thing. But it was, it was interesting, it felt good to kind of have a structure in my day, just with like daily Zoom calls, or like Blackboard Collaborate, I think was back when we were using Blackboard, and just kind of seeing everyone's faces and stuff. It was nice. Just because I was kind of in like, a very isolated place.

Erika Knox 6:06

Yeah.

Andrew Small 6:08

But it was- I personally am, like, I really value kind of like face to face interaction, especially in my learning and stuff. So, it was hard to kind of completely manage my own time and my own like reading and my own kind of everything, it felt- There was a little bit more pressure, I guess, on me to kind of go through the day and stuff.

Erika Knox 6:34

Definitely. Um, yeah, so continuing on. I feel like a lot of what the pandemic has brought up a lot in other people, people living in America has been like a nervousness and anxiety to the situation. And if you're comfortable talking about it, did you have any specific anxieties like, from like, traveling from campus to Maine? With your family moving from Japan to here? Like, how is that for you?

Andrew Small 7:07

Um, yeah, it was, it was interesting. Just because this was- last year was kind of my adjustment year to moving to the US. And then I was supposed to work at- I was supposed to go back and work at the Olympics, this summer.

Erika Knox 7:24

Yeah, I completely forgot that.

Andrew Small 7:27

Yeah, exactly. So that's not happening, or that didn't happen. Um, so once I figured that out, and once like, my visa status in Japan is no longer valid. So, I'm like a foreigner, and it's closed off to foreigners. So, once I realized I wasn't going back for at least like, eight months, that was a lot of anxiety.

Erika Knox 7:47

That must have been really tough.

Andrew Small 7:49

Yeah, it was- I don't know. It was - yeah, anxiety is kind of the only word to describe the situation, I guess. But yeah, for me, that was more the anxiety that I felt compared to like everyday life, just because I was in like, in a rural place and getting infected wasn't really on my mind as much.

Erika Knox 8:11

Yeah. All right. How do you feel like the national response has been in America? A big question to take on.

Andrew Small 8:26

Yeah. Where to start? Um, I think it's been pretty bad. My parents, when they came back from Japan, this was in March, like when it was kind of becoming- we all kind of knew that things were not going great inn terms of COVID. They didn't have any questionnaires. There was no, like, when they came into the country, there was no contact racing, there was like, no infrastructure at all for monitoring people. That's just like one very small-

Erika Knox 8:56

Yeah.

Andrew Small 8:57

-thing that I think the government should have done sooner. And, you know, no, one- they didn't implement any, like face masks or anything. Yeah. And like, yeah, it was definitely just too little too late. I guess that's how I sum up the response.

Erika Knox 9:13

Yeah. Um, so this is gonna be our last question. But, um, broadly speaking, what permanent changes to your way of life or to our way of life, if any, do you think will remain after all of this settles down more, I would say?

Andrew Small 9:32

I think- I feel like the last six months have definitely been shaped by the pandemic, but there's been so much other stuff in terms of like, BLM, in terms of, I mean, what Ruth Bader Ginsburg died like, yesterday, like, there's been just so many kind of like, holy crap moments that I feel like everyone in this country has experienced. So, I definitely think there's going to be kind of, or that we are in the midst of kind of a reset, in terms of how we view ourselves, particularly in like social justice and racial matters.

Erika Knox 10:09

[unintelligible] put on a good word for that.

Andrew Small 10:13

Yeah. And I don't know, I'm kind of a just everyday level, I feel like, I don't- like I'm from Japan, and people wear masks all the time, no question if they're sick anyway. So, I feel like that'll kind of become more of a cultural thing here, because it kind of should have been all along. But yeah, I definitely think, we'll see. It'll be interesting to see what changes and how things change. I guess.

Erika Knox 10:38

That's a good response. Well, thank you for chatting today and talking about your experience with everything that's going on. Um.

Andrew Small 10:46

Of course.

Erika Knox 10:47

Yeah. Thank you, bye.