

Communication Scholars Oral History Project
Annenberg School for Communication Library Archives
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA

CHARLES R. WRIGHT

interviewed by

JEFFERSON POOLEY

June 10, July 19, and July 27, 2016

Haverford, PA

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BIOGRAPHY

Charlie R. Wright (b. 1927) is a distinguished sociologist of mass communication, noted for his functionalist analysis of media as codified in the 1959 book *Mass Communication*. After graduate training in sociology at Columbia University in the 1950s, Wright taught at UCLA and, since 1969, at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania — where he remains Professor Emeritus. Born in 1927 in Pennsauken, New Jersey, Dr. Wright grew up in a working-class family during the Great Depression. His father was unemployed on and off through most of the 1930s, until the economy picked up on the U.S. entry into World War II. After getting turned back as a 16-year-old, Charlie successfully enlisted in the Navy a year later, serving as an electronic technician. With the war over, he enrolled as an undergraduate (1946–1949) at Columbia with only a vague interest in public opinion and communication. A charismatic teacher, the sociologist William Casey, encouraged him to apply to Columbia's graduate program in sociology, whose affiliated Bureau of Applied Social Research was already celebrated for its work on mass communication. In the graduate program (1949–1954) Wright served as an assistant to Paul Lazarsfeld and Robert Merton, and began a lifelong collaboration and friendship with survey researcher Herbert Hyman. Wright took up a sociology post at UCLA in 1956, after a post-doctoral stint as a Columbia instructor. At UCLA he continued his work with Hyman, which over the decades spanned projects — and major monographs — on education (1975, 1979), program evaluation (1962), and international development (1967). Wright also wrote his groundbreaking *Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective* (1959) volume as a UCLA sociologist, along with a much-reprinted journal article (1960) making the case for a functionalist approach to communication. For decades, and across three editions (1975, 1986), 1959 book, *Mass Communication*, has stood as a leading primer for students and faculty, charting an approach to media that foregrounds the social. Especially in the discipline's early years, when psychological and medium-specific assumptions guided most research, Wright's book served as an influential and widely read plea to incorporate norms and roles, childhood socialization, and even social order into communication studies. Wright took a leave from UCLA in the late 1960s to serve as the National Science Foundation's program director (1967–1969) in sociology and social psychology, after which he accepted an offer to join the still-young Annenberg School. For over 30 years, and well after his formal retirement in 1996, Wright taught his signature course on the *Sociology of Mass Communications* to generations of Penn PhD students. That course — and indeed Wright's career-long project to instill a sociological sensibility into communication research — had its roots in his mid-1950s teaching as a Columbia graduate student and instructor. In the intervening decades, Wright has left his mark on hundreds of colleagues and students, has devoted his long and distinguished career to bringing sociology to bear on the young discipline of communication.

ABSTRACT – SESSION ONE (June 10, 2016)

Wright discusses his early childhood growing up in Pennsauken, New Jersey, in the Great Depression, his decision to enlist in the Navy in World War II (1944-1946), and his emerging aspiration to attend college. Wright describes his undergraduate education at Columbia University (1946-1950), including the special importance of the sociologist William Casey. Wright's graduate experience at Columbia as a sociology doctoral student (1950-1954/1956), including his administrative assistantships for Paul F. Lazarsfeld and Robert K. Merton in the early 1950s, is recounted. Wright discusses his encounter and early collaborations with the social psychologist Herbert H. Hyman at Columbia in this same period. Wright describes the grant-funded project on the Encampment for Citizenship summer camp evaluation research in collaboration with Hyman, conducted in the early 1960s. Other topics include communication as a social process distinct from psychology, the publication history of *Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective* (1959), the place of communication in sociology and in journalism schools, the history of sociology at Columbia, efforts to establish quantitative research in journalism and in sociology at UCLA in the late 1950s and 1960s, his writing style, and his graduate teaching philosophy.

RESTRICTIONS

None

FORMAT

Interview recorded on a Tascam DR-680MKII Portable Multichannel Recorder.

TRANSCRIPT

Transcribed by Beatrice Field and Jefferson Pooley. Audited for accuracy and edited for clarity by Jefferson Pooley. Transcript reviewed and approved by Charles R. Wright and Jefferson Pooley.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND CITATION FORMS

Audio recording

Bibliography: Wright, Charles R. Interview by Jefferson Pooley. Audio recording, June 10, 2016. Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Library Archives, University of Pennsylvania. **Footnote example:** Charles R. Wright, interview by

Jefferson Pooley, audio recording, June 10, 2016. Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Library Archives, University of Pennsylvania, mp3 file.

Transcript

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Transcript of interview conducted June 10, 2016, with CHARLES R. WRIGHT (session one)

Haverford, PA

Interviewed by Jefferson Pooley

POOLEY: OK, this is day one of an oral history interview of Charles R. Wright, conducted by Jefferson Pooley in Dr. Wright's home in Haverford, Pennsylvania. The interview is part of the Oral History Project of the Annenberg Library Archives of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and the date is June 10, 2016. So, welcome to the interview, Charlie, and I wanted to start off talking about your biography and in particular your early childhood. Please tell me about your early childhood.

WRIGHT: My what?

POOLEY: Your early childhood.

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. As time goes on, you remember less of some things and more of others. And so I'm going to tell you a few stories because I've taken from those stories something, some impressions, that have influenced my personal life and my professional life. First of all, I was born over in New Jersey, so I have all the New Jersey folklore [laughter] up in my head. I came from a working-class family of modest means but I was born during the beginning of the Depression, the great economic Depression of the 1930s and early 40s, so for a substantial part of that decade or so, my father was out of work. Lots of people were out of work. I was only a little boy then, at the beginning of it, but I could see the lines forming around the streets around plants like Campbell Soup in New Jersey in Camden, and RCA Victor, and they were hard-working men who were looking for any kind of income. They'd work for a day or work forever if you hired them — that would be fine. But that left a deep impression on me — not so much economic insecurity, though a little of that, but just despair that all these good men who wanted to work couldn't find work, and that continued during the 1930s till the year or two before the Second World War started. Then jobs begin to open up and did open up. Things economically improved. So anyhow, I come with that background and that memory of the frustration that working people have when the economy is flat, or when the economy is dipping — it's not even flat — it's crashing. So that's, that stuck with me. I went to public schools, and in those days you hardly saw a man teaching in public schools in the elementary level. It wasn't until I was in the sixth grade that I saw a man teaching anything. I don't remember much about him at all, so why do I bring him up? Well, he contacted my parents and said I wasn't going to go anywhere or any place in life, because I read too slow. Hello! And that upset them. And it

just baffled me, because I knew I could read. I started, I learned to read before I went to school. My father taught me — I guess I was about five years old — and he started with the newspaper, and I got up on his lap and we'd read something, and he'd tell me what it was. I had a pretty good start, in fact, because I could read when I got to first grade. Now, incidentally, we didn't have kindergarten or pre-kindergarten in our public school system at that location, anyhow. So they skipped me one semester **[5 MINUTES]**, and I jumped ahead. My father was proud, my mother was alarmed. He'll be in there with people older than he is, she said. And I was with people — and I've been comfortable with that all my life. It didn't bother me. Anyhow, to get back to the point. The sixth grade teacher tells my parents, He's not going to be anything in life, he can't read fast enough. And that stunned me. I enjoyed reading. I thought I read fast. I used to ponder that, what was the problem? And the only solution I could give to myself, whether it was right or wrong, was that I thought, I'd read a couple sentences and then I'd stop and think about them. That takes time [laughter]. That's the way I read for the rest of my life. And, in terms of my occupation, it was fine. It was better to read less and think more, than to read lots of pages quickly and only hit the highlights, because often the interesting things maybe weren't intended by the author but nevertheless you put them together as you stop and think about what this said here and not what it says back there and all that. So, that didn't bother me. Well, it bothered me, but I overcame it, for my purposes. I didn't overcome it if I really wanted to just read in a hurry, and dash on, but I didn't. That worked out OK. Secondly, we had excellent teachers back then, despite that one flaw, this poor man. I ... I didn't realize how truly excellent they were till years later when I got out my old yearbook from the high school like we all do, and for the first time paid attention to the credentials that they had. They had PhDs from Penn, master's degrees from Temple. They were a very good, very well-educated people, and they cared about their students. So that made an impression on me later in life. During the time, I was just as much a smart-alecky teenager as everybody else was. By the time I graduated, at the age of 17, I knew everything in the world — which was nothing, but that's the way it worked out [laughter]. So I came out of high school. I'd had enough schooling anyhow. I wasn't going to, I was going to out to work or something like a real man should. But we were in the middle of the Second World War, and that sense of patriotism drove me to volunteer rather than wait for the draft. We had a draft of young people at that time, most of whom were, I think — I never saw figures on it but — most of whom headed for the Army for the draft. But I volunteered, and volunteered for the Navy. I was not yet graduated. I was 16 [laughter]. And off I trotted to enlist in the Navy, and they said, Come back when you grow up, boy [laughter]. I was stunned again. But I waited a few more weeks, and I was 17, and three of us from the class went up to New York all independently — we didn't collude on it, we just happened to all go, and went to New York to volunteer. New York grabbed us up like in a minute. But, I must say, they were good about it. They said, Look, you've only got six week or so to you graduate, so what we'll do is sign you up now, but you're on inactive duty for the remaining **[10 MINUTES]** part of your schooling or semester, and then we'll call you up and send you to boot camp. They had that — that was the elementary training centers for the Navy. And they were as good as their word. They did that. So we all got our diplomas and went into the service. So that chapter of my life was over, except in my memory. It stayed there. But I thought, everybody played fair and square. That was good [inaudible]. When I was in school, in high school, and we only lived across the river in Camden, New Jersey, Merchantville to be exact, used to come down. They

ran ferry boats from Camden to docks in the Philadelphia shore. But that was a good place for us to go, we young fellows, to go and do some window shopping or go to theaters. We had theaters in Philadelphia then and they had Broadway-type plays, often before they went to Broadway. They used Philadelphia as a tryout center, you know. So you'd do that. What I'd like to do on Saturdays was catch the boat over to Philadelphia. They landed around the foot of Market, or maybe, perhaps Arch, or some other... I didn't know just where the dock came in. But I would head over to Market Street, and start to walk just to see what I could see. And those were good walks. I usually ended up at City Hall. That's about as far as I could get. But I saw shops that manufactured or sold, or both, men's clothing, hats, interesting things for a boy to see. And sometimes I got up as far as Franklin Institute, and that was a fun house. At that time, they had lots of machinery that you could work with in the museum and I thought, wow, maybe I'll be a scientist. Wow, you can do all these things! But I didn't, I was... After I was graduated, I went into the service. On one of my walks up, I got as far west as Drexel [University]. That was a long walk from the Delaware River up across the Schuylkill [River] to Drexel. And I didn't know anything much about it. I saw a sign that said, "Drexel University" — I don't know where it was. And I thought, wow. I wonder if I'd ever be able to get into a place like that? That was way above my head, I thought. So I had that memory. I went into the Navy. I had been pretty good at mathematics and I had a knack for interpreting schema of wiring or where pipes went or whatever, so the Navy put me through a long training process and I came out an electronic technician. At which I was not bad. And I made, finally made second class — petty officer, second class. But somehow, almost like Pavlov's dogs, I got to associate the technical way of working with the hierarchical military system. And I didn't like the latter very much. I understood it was necessary to have a hierarchy. And you were going to go into danger perhaps. You just had to work that way. But when I came out, they said, "You know, well, stay in. Next thing you know you'll be first class, then chief. And you can really waddle around and do things." And I said, no, I want out. And I got out. While I was in the service, I observed how, how far you could not go **[15 MINUTES]** if you didn't have more schooling, let's put it that way. So I began to change my attitude about additional schooling, but I also changed my attitude about the areas that I would like to do that in. I wanted nothing more to do with engineering and technical stuff, because I think of that psychological melding of the two in my own brain. So ... and I had read a book while I was in the service by a man — at that time, he was just a man to me — named Jacques Barzun, a famous historian at Columbia [University]. And he'd written a book called *Teacher in America*, and it really grabbed me. It was very interesting. I thought, that's a place I'd like to go. But I'd never get in there, my gosh. Columbia was like on a Mount Olympus up there. But I knew I had to go to college, or junior college, or anything to get more schooling, unless I wanted to be taking orders all of my life. And I'd had enough order-taking in the military. I didn't want any job where people would tell me what I had to do. I thought, what kind of jobs might that be? Now, my fantasy brain said, right now [inaudible], go down in the Caribbean and sit on the beach and have a good time. My rational side said, I don't think you're going to do that, but I'm going to try. But it wouldn't hurt to have a little college education too. So I picked out three schools that offered what I thought I'd like. Columbia was one of them, University of Chicago was the second one, then I thought, I better have an ace in the hole. I'll apply to Rutgers [University]. Rutgers could never turn down a citizen of the state just coming out of the military and all that. So I wrote off to all three places, and I got accepted in all three

places [laughter], and I had to make a choice. And I picked Columbia partly because of the influence of Barzun's writing, partly because of the glamour and excitement that New York City offered compared — well, Chicago wouldn't have been a bad choice, but New York was it. So up I go, trot, trot, trot, to New York. I'm off to great start, I get on the wrong subway, and I ended up not at Columbia on Morningside Heights, but on 116th Street down in Harlem, which was on a plateau a little bit lower down than Morningside Heights. Here I am, I'm a terror now, I've been in the service, I know my way around, blah, blah. But I didn't. Where am I? I'm sitting here on this corner of 116th Street, and I couldn't see what the other street was. Well, I must say, the people were marvelous. No problem. They said, "Oh, you've gotten on the wrong subway, kid. Go here, go do that. You gotta be up there"... So, I found my way, but I was left with a nice impression of the citizens of New York. They were like people in Philadelphia were you needed help, they'd give you some. Not like it is nowadays. The climate was very different. And if you were a service man, or an ex-service man, nothing was too good for you. They'd just welcome you. So off I went, and started my schooling. I took liberal arts, a little of everything, but sampling some things. I thought, well, I'm going to be this hotshot, cigar-smoking author of racy novels. I better see if I can write [laughter]. So I took a summer course — I don't remember the instructor's name now — where we did some writing and turned them into him. And I can remember to this day him standing up in front of the classroom **[20 MINUTES]** and giving back the papers with the comments, until he came to mine, and he said, "Go get some experience" [laughter]. That's all he said. And I figured, OK, he was being kind and telling me that I hadn't grown up yet, despite my background. So I put that aside and went to take more other courses. Took Barzun's courses, realized for the first time that I didn't know enough to gain what I should've gained from his lectures. He was up here and I was still down there. Well, that was a good lesson to learn. And I read stuff I'd never read, and ran across names of people that I've never heard of in my life and put that all in my — if not in my pocket, at least someplace, in my sock maybe. I kept those memories.

POOLEY: Can you mention some of those?

WRIGHT: Oh, excuse me.

POOLEY: Can you expand on some of those names that you encountered?

WRIGHT: Oh, I'm missing you.

POOLEY: Can you expand on those names, those figures, that you encountered when you were reading about Barzun, people that were kind of influential to you at the time?

WRIGHT: Well, the reason I was reading Barzun. Now, I'll take that back. You're right, I just picked it off the shelf and read it. But, you want me to, do what? Tell you what?

POOLEY: Were there other memorable figures or classes or teachers that you encountered at Columbia?

WRIGHT: Oh, at Columbia? Yes. The most memorable one is one that, no offense now, you've probably never heard of. Why have you never heard of him? He never published a word. He did all of his teaching orally, and refused to publish anything — literally, refused it — with the saying that, he would, it would, by the time it got published it wouldn't reflect his latest thoughts [laughter]. I'd put it that way. But he was a spellbinding lecturer, and his room was always packed. Almost everybody who went there took his course. It became known as... His name was William Casey. His course became known as Casey-ology, rather than sociology, and it was, it was exciting. Now I'm going to digress a minute. Years later, when I was out here on the East Coast again, I found a book. He didn't write it, but two of his former students tried to put together his lecture ideas and notes, and it helped a bit, but it wasn't... It didn't carry quite the excitement as his delivery did of that. But I read him and it was OK. Then one of the editors on the first, no the third edition of my paperback book on the sociology of communication, one of my editors at Random House was Prof. Charles Page, and he had been a student at Columbia, generations before, maybe, but he'd been there. He had come to Columbia because Casey had moved to Columbia from, I think, the University of Illinois. And Page was so captivated by his class and so forth that he followed him to Columbia and got his graduate work done there. And he wrote a book years later when he retired called *50 Years in the Sociological Enterprise: A Lucky Journey*, in which he... It's his memoirs, basically... And he says in there he wouldn't have been in sociology if it hadn't been for Casey and his teaching and his style of teaching and his concern about students and so forth. **[25 MINUTES]** And Page says when he, Page, got his first job — or a job, I take back the first part — he tried to, well, imitate's the wrong word. But he tried to follow the style of Casey, and he said it didn't work. It wasn't the same person as that. And the same thing's true with me. I didn't teach the same way that Casey did. It took me decades to get my own style, which I did. I was really teaching with, from my strong hand by the time I retired, officially retired back in 96. It got better when I was just doing that one course at Annenberg. I had a different style. It was good. Anyhow, [inaudible]. So that was a person. The second person, I don't know his name to this day, I didn't even remember it. He gave... I took two courses with him, "Introduction to Economics," and then "Intermediate Economics" or something like that. It was the next step that you took. Because again I was exploring, would this be an area that I'd like to spend my life doing things in? They were the most boring courses I ever took in any place, and I'm, to this day I'm indebted to that instructor, that didn't jazz it up or anything. He just gave it the way it was, and I thought, I don't want to play with supply and demand curves in this or that. Where were the people in here? I couldn't find them. So I ... That helped me not to go into a field, or I would've been uncomfortable or unhappy even, at the time. So, yes, let's call that nameless influencer number one [laughter]. Casey was a positive influencer. There were others that I had that influenced me in different ways. I took Fred Keller's psychology class. So I think, psychology, I'd be interested in that. It's about people, yeah... We ran rats through the cages emulating... What was the name of the famous psychologist who did the rats? Anyhow, it was an interesting course, and I almost went into it, but I thought no, not quite right. The course involves the laboratory and that was good and I learned about laboratory work. We worked with partners. I had a classmate as a partner. And we, we met eye to eye pretty much. He couldn't do mathematics very well, poor guy. I could do mathematics with my left hand, so that was no problem. So I said, well, how are we gonna work this out? I said, I don't really want to handle those rats. He says, oh I don't mind

that. OK, you handle the rats. So he'd set up the experiment. I'd take the numbers down and between the two of us, we made a success of it for us, yeah. And I thought, well, maybe that's the field I'll end up in, psychology. I talked with Fred Keller. He said, well, you really should take a course in physics, and one in this and one in that. And I thought, it's going to be a long time before I'll see anything except rats. I don't know if I want to do this or not. I'll think about it. I went to see Bill Casey. He said, what are you really interested in boy? And I said, well, I'm sort of curious about public opinion and the mass media, and how one influences the other, so I think I'll go on to graduate work in some school that has that kind of courses. And he said, well, that's fine. **[30 MINUTES]** He said, all you gotta do is go down the street one block. I said, what do you mean? Well now, I have to sidetrack. Columbia at that time was very distinct. Columbia College was a unit in the University, and very few graduate teachers taught in the College. So I'd never been exposed to this literal crew of fascinating, intelligent, hard-working sociologists in the Graduate School. It wasn't in the College. So he says, you don't have to go, just go down the street. He says, we have a couple of the nation's leading researchers in public opinion and communication. He says, just go down and talk with them. And he mentioned a couple names. Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton. I said, OK, thanks, I'll go down and see what they do. And I went down. I don't remember to this day who I ended up talking to, but I got kind of a feel and an outline for the kind of work that was going on in the graduate department. I said, yeah, I've found my place. This is it. So I went in. Never regretted anything in the College that had been different, because I learned from the differences and I learned, and was prevented from making mistakes, that could have affected my whole life. So I went there to the College... To the graduate work. You don't want to hear about that now, you want to go, do you? We're going too fast for you.

POOLEY: No, I do have a question though. Was it Bill Casey who convinced you that... Was it Bill Casey who convinced you to major in sociology and did you end up making that your formal major?

WRIGHT: No, I liked Casey's courses. They were terrific. And I learned a couple things from them, not substantive but rather things about dealing with students again. I was always worrying about that. Casey gave a final examination that would have buried anybody. How in the world you could take that examination in the two hours they gave to you? So, a number of us, independently, just couldn't finish that exam. You really had to take it home and work on it. He'd given us all the questions in advance, but you never knew which ones would be on the exam, so you were reading like a maniac to catch up. I said, I'm sorry, I couldn't finish. He says, that's all right. You are going to finish, aren't you, young man? Ahh, yeah, yeah, I'm going to finish. He says, well, in that case, I'll give you an IOU. Here's your grade, and he wrote the grade on there. And he said, live with it. And he said, I'll see you later when you finish your paper [laughter]. And I was... I'm graduating from college. He was right. It took me two years, but I finished the doggone paper. I already was in graduate school. I took it in. He said, I knew you'd come through for me, old boy. [Inaudible] OK.

POOLEY: Do you remember what the paper was on?

WRIGHT: No, I don't know what it was. It was... in response to one of his many questions about big institutions like financing in London or banks in London or... [Inaudible]. But I learned to be a little patient with my own students if I thought they were going to come through. If somebody was just dogging it, yeah that was it, they were gone. But that, that became an important part of my outlook. If they are good and they're smart, and they just need a little more time — little more [inaudible] — it was OK. And he said, I'll tell you, he says, never in my whatever years I've been teaching at Columbia has anybody reneged on their promise. I thought that was astounding, [35 MINUTES] because they were doing other things, going to med school or law school or whatever. That was the hold he had on you. You couldn't disappoint that old man and look yourself in the face in the morning and shave. Yeah, I finished it.

POOLEY: And so you told him that you were interested in public opinion and communication. Did you have any coursework as a Columbia undergrad on communication, in the sociology program or anywhere else?

WRIGHT: No, no.

POOLEY: How did you develop this interest?

WRIGHT: We didn't have a major in communication. I took sociology and the two just melded later and so on. No... when I went to the graduate school part, I had a number of courses that were relevant to communication. They weren't called communication, though, they were just... Took Daniel Lerner's course, for example, in *Psych War*, he called it, with psychological warfare in the Second World War. That was relevant. Took all of Lazarsfeld's courses on political behavior and communication. That was relevant. We're getting sort of ahead of the story, but the fact of the matter is, Casey was right. We had down the hallway exactly the figures who emerged later as important contributors to communication. But, then, they were also working in other areas of sociology. Merton did studies on a housing project, and he did studies on medical education and the socialization of the students into medical practice. Lazarsfeld did stuff on consumer behavior, personal choice. So they had other, other fish to fry, but they did make major contributions to communications. If I had known that I was, was going to go into the area — and I didn't know it, and I did really go completely in, that's another story — but had I known that, I don't think there was anything like the Annenberg School existing at that time. You had journalism departments, but not schools of communication. They had schools of journalism, yes, but there's a big difference, and it's an important difference and I'd like to talk about that to you. But I don't want to get ahead of the story or out of whack. Well, you could always fit in chronologically if you wanted. How can I put this without sounding like I'm criticizing, and I'm not criticizing anybody. There are different approaches to the study of communications, and I think — but don't quote me on this — but I think the most common, at that time at least, would be you'd have a course on newspapers, or you'd have a section or chapter on newspapers, radio, television, other things. Depends how far you want to go. Telegraphs, why not? They're very good and they're very important, and they are useful to students who take them. I didn't want to do that. It may sound like verbiage, but it's not. I was beginning to view communication as a social process, and the machinery or tools were part of

the process, but they weren't the whole thing. And you approach it differently if you take my point of view, and, although maybe under pressure occasionally I would have a look at the newspapers or TV, what it's like, that's all right. **[40 MINUTES]** But I'd be approaching them with an eye to their social side in the production and in the distribution of information or opinions or whatever it is you've got. That was well-received when I first did it. By the time I got to my third edition, we changed publishers, and I had a little tug-of-war with the editor of the third version, who wanted me – and, sometimes, I think I should have listened to him, who had done some kind of a market survey, and he said, the readers want to read about whatever it was, this, that, the other thing. I said, I don't want to write about this, that, or the other thing. I've got my own point of view, and I want to introduce that to the readers. I wrote that book mostly... The first edition was when I was out in California. By the third edition, I was here in Pennsylvania, I think, and I wrote that one. If I had listened to that editor – well-meaning, but he was stubborn, and I fought with him – if I had listened to him, I would've had a moneymaking sale, because that's what they did. They'd go out, find out what the kids in this college or that, they would want, and you put a book together like that, and you sell a lot of copies, and you go to Bermuda and you smoke your cigar and you lead the life. I don't want to do that. So, but people who did buy it liked that very much. And the approach that was there, which does not exclude the other thing. It's just in addition to it. I came to Penn – this is gonna sound very fuzzy minded, perhaps – but I left a good job in California, the Garden of Eden and paradise, 20 minutes to the beach. I left it all behind, because I thought I'd get students at Penn who would be interested in the kind of things I was selling or teaching. And I don't regret that, except on a cold February or March day. Then I regret it [laughter]. But, otherwise, intellectually I don't regret it. I did get more students who were interested in that – not scads, but enough to make it worthwhile. My mission that I put on when I came to Annenberg was that I hoped to suggest to graduate students, PhD particular students, how there are different approaches to understanding a phenomenon like mass communication. They were mostly biased towards a psychological approach. It just rang in that, everybody's mind, you can understand that so-and-so is whatever, paranoid or whatever they're going to do. I wanted them to think about the world surrounding that person, and how economic and the normative systems – families, structures – were important in shaping how he or she got their news, got their information and the like. It sounds simple, but believe me I was working hard at it for 60 some years. But, like Casey, I didn't push it prematurely into print. I had, I'd drop in a hint here or there, and sometimes it grew and sometimes it didn't grow. But at least I gave them a chance to not just think about the individual and his or her psyche and so forth – and that's why they got along or that's why they turned to dope or that's why they did this or that – there's pressure going on them from peer groups, from reference groups, from the economy, from the opportunity structure that is not there when they go to look for work, **[45 MINUTES]** and the like. Again, further out of context, I'll tell you a story from when I was director of programs, research programs in sociology and social psych – that's how I got my two exposures, communication came later – I'm sitting in my office down in Washington, and they've got a lovely barrier system, person to get, would have to go to the head secretary of the unit, and then she let them pass to the individual secretary for the program directors. Then you get to see them [inaudible]. Or you wouldn't get to see them if they didn't get through the barrier system. It worked out pretty well. But one day I'm sitting there and, it was around

lunchtime, and a man appears at my door. The secretary hadn't buzzed me. And he says, are you the director of the program? And I said, yeah, grants — grants program is what they were. He said, oh great, I've been looking for you. I think, uh oh, is this some rejected candidate who's going to come out and pull the gun out or something? No, he was a pretty calm fellow. He comes and sits down and says, I've been working on something. He says, this idea came to me when I was on KP in the Army. Oops! What? What idea came to you? And he says, and I have it all here. I've got the secret to the cosmos and the secret to human behavior and the third area. I don't know what it was. Oh, yeah, that's interesting. And he says, well, I've gotten this far. I'll tell you about it. Starts to tell me about it. And I'm thinking, where is that secretary? Is there **for** a buzzer here? He says, so what I want now, he says, I've got to bring all those great ideas all together, so give me some money [laughter]. I said, now, what am I going to do? I don't want to hurt this fellow's feelings and set him off into a rage. Well, I listened, and I'd say, well, that's very interesting, yes, that's interesting. Unfortunately, I don't have the authority to just give out money. I have to take all requests to a committee. I'm playing the bureaucracy game with the guy. So, I'll have to run your ideas through a committee first — and I'm taking this paper he's got there. And all of a sudden, he grabs the paper back, he says, you're not going to tell anybody my ideas, are you? And I said, I have to. No you don't. I'm not going to stand for that. I'm not going to deal with you. Out the door he goes [laughter]. Thank God for the bureaucracy, and he was gone. After a while, I said, Mary, why did you let that guy into the office? He's discovered the universe and the human body and all else, and she said, oh, I didn't see him, he seemed like a nice man. That was my story from there... It wasn't her fault, she was a perfectly good secretary. He slipped by somehow.

POOLEY: And just to clarify, this was the NSF?

WRIGHT: Yeah, but don't quote that please. I don't want to get them in trouble. They were very fair to everybody. If he had written that down and handed it to me to go, I'd have taken it to the committee. I never saw any bias. That was a good two-year experience for me. I went in having been fed the stereotypes that people had in the newspapers about how they're wasting the taxpayers money and this and that — pointy-headed bureaucrats — baloney. Those are hard-working, smart, well-schooled people doing a job. They didn't hand out grants to their friends as a favor, or... **[50 MINUTES]** And they didn't, they weren't biased against anything. The question was, can it be done and can this applicant do it? Now. The first part, you can have discussions, even debates whether this problem could ever be solved with that technique that they were going into. And we did talk about it. Sometimes, I'd be given ideas to go back to the applicant with, and say why don't you resubmit and make sure to have, whatever, a control the next time, or something like that. That worked all right. And sometimes they'd say, oh, Joe X, he hasn't finished the project in 30 years or something. OK. But they were fair about it. They weren't anti-qualitative. We had qualitative research. Didn't get many applications. I think, but I'm not sure, that the person's record played a great deal of influence on open-ended qualitative thing — was this someone you really could bet on if they're going to do a good job. Whereas an experiment or something, you can see how it's going to, how it's laid out. But they weren't against qualitative work, or pro-quantitative work. It depended on the problem. It was

good experience for me and I came away very impressed. Yeah, anyhow, but to get back, where were we [inaudible]?

POOLEY: Well, can you take us back to 1949, when you're thinking of a graduate program in sociology at Columbia? Can you take us to that moment? What was going on, how did you get admitted to the graduate program, and what are your impressions of it?

WRIGHT: OK. I got admitted like anyone else would. I wrote an application and they accepted me. That was fine. My experience in the program couldn't have, could not have been better. It was a wonderful educational experience, but it also was a wonderful, never articulated learning experience about research, teaching, people, all together. There was at that time ... Well, back stop, sociology didn't come to Columbia until the early part of the twentieth century. It didn't come to the U.S. until the early part of the twentieth century. There had been a chairman — now I don't remember the exact dates anymore — but, in the very beginning, Franklin Giddings his name was. And he, I think, first had a chair in economics. I'm not sure about that but like that. And then, as the request for sociological training began to grow, the department added people and it grew. But at one time, in the very beginning, the president of Columbia had seriously entertained the idea of throwing it out [inaudible]. There was a common faculty — economists, that one sociologist and some others — and then there was the bigger faculty of the Graduate Faculty of Columbia. Somebody convinced the president of the university to call a faculty meeting of the big faculty to vote on whether to get rid of sociology. And they voted no, they would keep sociology. So, that set the stage for future growth if possible. It could've been just dumped. There were a number of people in charge, **[55 MINUTES]** and I don't know them all [inaudible]. But, one early one at least was Robert Maclver, who was a, technically a political scientist, I would say, but a very broad-ranging Scottish-trained scholar. And then there were some others, I don't know who they were. What was going on over the country, I think, was similar in big universities, that sociology started out as either an appendage to economics or, basically, a social philosophy department. It wasn't until World War II that the empirical side of the field got strengthened and grew and eventually took over. That was partly because of the research that they were asked to do during World War II, like on morale of the troops and things like that. And partly because of the background and nature of some of the recruits into sociology like Lazarsfeld and Merton and others ... So it wasn't dying. It was growing, but you had a tension that continues today in many universities: the quantitative versus the qualitative. There's no versus. They could both work. They do different things, in my opinion. I'm just giving my opinion now. You get very rich material from qualitative research, and some people are very good intuitively at putting it together and making an interesting and fairly accurate story. A shortcoming, because it was never intended to do this, a shortcoming of some qualitative research is, you come out never knowing how common or how peculiar the cases that you looked at were. Are you dealing with just a fringe, or is this a majority feeling and so on? As soon as you take that step to want to know how many and what kind and where are they, you're going quantitative. But that's not hostile to the original thing. They got, made a good narrative out of it. So I saw that going on — well, I didn't see it at the time. Later, I looked back, I could see that was happening, and is continuing as I said. And here I'm on, next step I'm on so much shakier ground, but I think I see the same pattern going on in communication between

the 1930s or 40s and now. It's moved more and more... I have no idea what this big data thing's going to turn out to be and I'm too old to start learning [inaudible]. You see the movement going on. Well, in journalism that was actually a tension between the old-style journalists and professors of journalism — we called them the eyeshade group — and the young, quantitatively oriented people like Steve Chaffee and others. I was in California at a time when a fairly large number of those young people were starting a, I don't know if they started a division in the society, anyhow, they were forming a unity, Jack Lyle was in it, Steve Chaffee was in on it. A few others. And they, I think they called themselves the quantitative group at that time. I'm not sure of that, but I think they did. I haven't kept up with them, Steve Chaffee's dead, Jack vanished — I don't know where he went to. But, again I'm getting off track but, at that time — that would've been back in the 19, either the late 50s or the 60s, Jack Lyle from, [60 MINUTES] who was in the journalism department at UCLA, a man named Walter Wilcox I think it was, myself, somebody from psych, I forget who it was, anyhow, we all formed a group to help to steamroll the — what do I call it? — Journalism Department is what it was. To really get it on a sound footing, to get PhD's and things like that. I don't think they ever got it through. Now, not the same group, but some of the same group of people and myself again, looked around and we said, in order to train graduate students in doing research, we really need to have a laboratory or institute or some administrative body that will help us to get going. So Jack and I and the others we kept knocking ideas around, and we finally worked out the proposal — very modest. Which we took to the whoever was in charge of that at UCLA, the whole package. I forgot now whether we had, wasn't a provost, but they had some title. Including a budget. And we had figured out that to get established, hire a secretary so she could do some of the work, little equipment, whatever, we needed a startup grant. You know how much we asked for? Take a guess?

POOLEY: Five thousand.

WRIGHT: How much?

POOLEY: Five thousand.

WRIGHT: You're not far off. It was more than that. It was about, but it wasn't anything like the figures today. We thought we could do the whole thing for, tops, 30 grand, maybe. No, no... They'd already budgeted and started and had operating a social science research unit up at Berkeley, Berkeley campus. I don't want to sound like a kid saying, you like me better, I like you better than she likes me. No, it wasn't that way. But Berkeley was a bit ahead of us. Many of the state people, state legislators, had gone to Berkeley, they liked it. And it's good, a good school. They had some terrific faculty. For a while, the research unit that they did set up was run by... I'm sorry, I'm losing names now. It'll come back to me anyhow. He was a good man, and he did well. We didn't ask for a hundred thousand or a million or something. Thirty-thousand bucks. Didn't get it. And, as I say, communication was involved, or journalism, the department, was involved in that, trying to get that center set up, and also trying to get a doctoral program going. Very, very strange.

POOLEY: Charlie? Can we go back to 1949 in 1950 and the Bureau and the Department of Sociology?

WRIGHT: And what? Oh, the department?

POOLEY: The department, and the Bureau, and the interaction between the two. I think you were the administrative assistant for a couple of years there in the department. The recollections you have of the Bureau and the department, together, one another.

WRIGHT: I'm not sure my view is right. I was looking to it, from the junior fellow trying to get ahead. Well, you know the history of the Bureau, and how it started out in Newark and splintered over in ... Lazarsfeld was mainly interested in, I think, in establishing an advanced research methods program type thing, and that was separate from the Bureau. **[65 MINUTES]** The Bureau was not part of the department, but it was affiliated in some ways. The directors were professors in sociology. There as an exception or two, but mainly it was that. I don't remember them all now. You had Edmund Brunner from rural sociology, Teachers College. And he was a big player in it. You had .. well, Lazarsfeld was director for a number of years, Merton took over for a number of years. Most of the big research that the Bureau did was with the principal investigator who was a prof there too. The Bureau provided the bread and butter for a heck of a lot of us graduate students. I only worked part-time at it, and had some role, but I wouldn't say ... There was some students who started at the Bureau and never left, and there was some like myself who dipped in a little bit and dipped out. If the profs got a big project, they usually had it administered through the Bureau, which had its own hierarchy of people in it and the like. I don't where, where to take the ... I had a little, worked a little bit on some projects that never, maybe later they came true. But I just did scut work like coding and whatever, carry papers around, do interviewing. The only big project that we got involved in was a project on the Encampment for Citizenship. That was a biggie. The board of directors, I guess, of the Ethical Culture Society managed a summer institute that they would increase young people's willingness and ability to be active democratic citizens, small "d," not political. And they came to the Bureau, because somebody recommended the Bureau as an independent agency that would help them. And it shuffled around and landed finally down in, on Herb's doorstep. And he recruited me right away to be his number one person on there. What can I tell you? It started out as.. well, I have to backtrack. The board for the American Ethical Culture Society that sponsored the whole thing had been sponsoring it for about nine years, they were coming on their tenth year, and they were curious about several things. One, did it work at all in getting the young people the willingness and the ability to do things, democratic? And, two, what worked and what didn't work? And, three, they were looking to the future, should they expand this thing by making five or six encampments, or more, or whatever they wanted to do? They didn't want to dump their money down a hole, that was not their purpose. They wanted a successful program, but they, and, if all they wanted was the feeling of success, **[70 MINUTES]** they had letters from alumni saying, oh, you changed my life, what a wonderful thing this summer was. Which was sincere. But, again, coming back to our differences, you never knew, was this just a flaky example of somebody who did benefit all by themselves, or was it a majority or whatever? So, they wanted to evaluate it and that's where Herb and I came in. Herb

was especially interested in figuring some method for determining what worked and what didn't worked, and how much didn't. And I was interested in that too. It was clear that the project was going to take a fair amount of leg work. That was the qualitative part of it, and I did that [laughter]. And it was going to take a fair amount of paperwork. Computers were not so advanced as they are now – put it that way. So we did a lot of work ourselves that machines could do now, I guess. And we got interested in it. Now, how did we do it, so to speak? First of all, Herb and I agreed, we really had to pin down the people who were running the programs and see what they were trying to do. It was all there in black-and-white, but there were these vague terms — make better citizens, or whatever? Come on? What are you talking about? So I would say, we spent at least the first two months just talking to these people. Both Herb and I would go. We talked to them. And we began to get a feeling and then to get more than a feeling, to get some precision on the kind of changes they were hoping to make, or the kind of use they were hoping to reinforce if not change them [inaudible]. And the pie-in-the-sky stuff that, you know, whatever... And we worked that out and then we went back to them. Now a couple months have gone already. We go back to them and said, this is, is this what you're trying to do? And they say, yeah, yeah that's what we're trying to do. So then we went on from there to develop our design, our questionnaire and the like, knowing that we weren't just fiddling with something that was just pie-in-the-sky. It was concrete. And that was hard work, hard intellectual work, trying to sort these high-minded but vague ideas and concepts into something that you could measure and see whether it had grown or not or even regressed. If you wanted to think about it as regression, whatever it was. But we didn't leave it at that. Things happen that the sponsors and doers and programs don't expect, and some of the things could be counter to their intentions. So, we did, Herb and I did a pretty good job, I think, of searching the literature for any, other studies of evaluations of a general type that we were interested in. And we could see what they found and the like. The nearest thing that we found was a study done of a, save me, oh God, I'm sorry I can't remember the name of the organization now. It's well-known, it was Quaker, Quakers had it.

POOLEY: Friends Service Committee?

WRIGHT: Beg your pardon?

POOLEY: The Friends Service Committee?

WRIGHT: I think it was, but, look, you're going back decades in my brain here. And the study had been done by a good social scientist, Henry Riecken. [75 MINUTES] And we wrote to Hank, and he said, we wanted to take some questions, not the whole thing, but some questions that we thought were relevant in our case. And we told him the study we were doing, and he was quite cooperative. So that worked all right. We didn't find any other studies that were similar enough in intent or style. There may have been, but we didn't find them. That we at least found his. And from his study we could pinpoint some unexpected negative effects and see if they occurred in our project — or is the intention of the Friends wouldn't be the intention of this Ethical group, but they happened. For example, one thing that, I think Hank was looking at — I guess, but it's a long time ago, we may have done it on our own. But one thing that would be

negative would be if the participants in this summer camp came out snobbish. Now, I know how things go, you know... And, look, they wouldn't really want that. They wouldn't want that. So we had to, you can't just say, are you a snob now? Yeah, I'm a snob now! No, we had questions that we would interpret that way, what it was. I don't know... It didn't happen, anyhow, so fortunately, we didn't have to take that any further. That was comforting to say, you're not doing any harm. You're doing all this good, and you're not having the bad effects. That's good. So we did that, we worked out our overall design, which consisted of — I don't remember now, exactly how many, but — three or four surveys with the participants, including one survey before they ever got to the place, two surveys while they were attending the summer camp, and one survey about two months after they were back home, to see whether things lasted or they encountered problems that they hadn't expected and all that sort of thing. So it was, it was a tight little job. And we built in different kinds of controls. You can't make a laboratory type control when you're doing fieldwork. Fieldwork is messy. One of the things which seldom gets talked about in the literature is that there's no such thing as a pure control group. Because, during that six months, if you have a control group, something's happening to them. Who knows what? [Inaudible] So you got to somehow compensate for that. And we figured out ways to try and do it, and I think we did a workmanlike job. Maybe not quite as good as the Wizard of Oz, but not all fantasy either. It was OK. What else? Anyhow, we were happy when it came out... That this... We were just, both Herb and I sat down and said, suppose this all comes out bad for their group. How can we face these nice people and say you've wasted 10 years or whatever? But it didn't happen. And they were happy to get the report. So happy that they created more encampments, one on the West Coast, up around Berkeley, I think, and others. That was several years after we'd done the initial study, I was up to my neck at work in California, so Herb got another co-author involved, Terry Hopkins. Terry's dead, unfortunately. Or you could talk with him about that. But, basically, he did, among other things, but he was mostly responsible for the follow-up with college students, [80 MINUTES] and what difference it made with them, and so forth. So it was good. He added to the study, and it was fine. Having done a much larger study, Herb and I decided to put it together into that monograph, which we did. I made the drastic mistake of suggesting a publisher for the manuscript. They accepted. They published, but they didn't publicize. So it didn't go very far. Never made the *New York Times* bestseller list, put it that way. But we were happy to have it academically published and available to other scholars and we weren't looking to have a racy, bestselling novel. It was a piece of work.

POOLEY: You mentioned Herbert Hyman.

WRIGHT: Who?

POOLEY: Herbert Hyman. Herb? And, I'd just be curious to hear how you first met him, whether it was through a course and, you know, the collaborations you did with him even before this project, with the Encampment?

WRIGHT: Herb came to the Columbia graduate department somewhere around 1952, I'd say. I was by then — I had my master's degree, that's another story — but I was a doctoral student.

That would be in, that would be by my third year, I think, yeah, it would have been. He came to, among other things, to bring his knowledge about survey research to the Graduate School program. And he taught the basic methodology course. He taught some other courses too. And I took some of the other courses. He took a ... he ran a seminar on secondary analysis, and so I took it. And, anyhow, we just clicked, from the beginning. We found we were on the same page, but enough difference that we would complement one another, I think. I would say it was one of the luckiest things, one of the most blessed things that happened to me. It changed my whole life. I don't know how much you want to get into the graduate department. I was ... well, I'm really going to backtrack now, you're going to have to straighten it out. Some students didn't like Columbia graduate department. They thought the teachers didn't pay any attention to them. All they did was their research. They weren't worried about their courses. Nonsense. I went in, and I got my masters degree, and the department put me up for fellowship for the next year after I'd had that one year for the masters degree. So I was all set. I had just gotten married, and here I had a fellowship coming to me. And Bob Merton called me in, and he said... He was chair at the time. Or maybe it was Lynd? I think it was Merton. He says, I've got bad news for you. The department didn't get any fellowships. And you were our candidate, but they didn't get any fellowships. They were on an economy kick at the main office. [grunt] I'm crushed. I go home. What are we gonna do? What are we gonna do? What are we gonna do? I'm down in the dumps. A couple of weeks later, a phone rings. He says, Charlie Wright? And I said, yes. He says, Paul Lazarsfeld. He says, oh good. He says, I'm in a terrible fix. I hope you can help me out, this is a terrible ... I said, what is it? He says, well the student I want for my assistant next year, he can't make it, and I'm desperate. Would you please be my assistant? What I please be his assistant? You know. But, that he was so thoughtful to turn it around, that I was doing him a favor, **[85 MINUTES]** when he was literally saving my butt. He could do no wrong. And so I became his assistant. Did that first for his courses, where again there are some side lessons that I want to get on record here. And I'll tell you about them. But then he became chair, and he said — and Manny Rosenberg, who had been his chair administrative assistant, rather — had finished his degree and was off doing something else. So he says, Charlie, will you be my administrative assistant? I said, yeah, why not? So I took that. The next year, Merton was the chair, and he says, you got to be my assistant. You've got all this experience with Paul. I said, ok. [Inaudible] Easy street. On that street I saw the back door of some things, not always intentionally. I heard Lazarsfeld and Merton discussing another student. I didn't want to hear that. But they didn't mention his name, so that was alright. And I heard Paul say, I'm so desperate, I want to help this fellow, and he'll probably finally get his degree, but, he just, he will never practice sociology the way he should. And Bob said, yes, I understand. He doesn't realize that getting a PhD is a way of life. And I think to myself, oh my god, what have I gotten into? They think you're going to spend your life getting a PhD! It wasn't until later, I thought, reflected on it, what they were saying was, he's got to be socialized to a style of academic life if he's going to get anywhere in academic life. That's what they meant. They were worried about this fellow. They weren't trying to knife him or chop his head off or anything. They were concerned. That impressed me, very much. And, for the rest of my time when I got to be a professor, I didn't think my job was to get rid of somebody who just didn't live up to snuff. It was to find them the right path where they could succeed. We don't want to turn out failures.

We want them to succeed. So that was, again, an unintended lesson about academia that I happened to overhear, shamefully. But I did happen to overhear, when I was an assistant.

Was impressed me. The second thing that impressed me was different styles of leadership. I loved Paul, especially after he saved my life. So I was thinking, I, I you know... That's neat. And he gave me some things to do while I was assistant and when I was just a student. Didn't bother me. We were taking, I was taking a seminar, and had done some analysis of voting for the book that was working on with Bill McPhee, I think, and some others. And the peace that he wanted me to do was to look into class consciousness. And he was puzzled, and I think somewhat appalled, that we didn't have the organization and sense of brotherhood among the working class that he had seen in Europe. Probably true. They had it in France, they had it in Austria, I'm sure all over. So I spend a good part of the semester doing library research on that, and that was OK. But then he gave me access to the data and I worked out a project of my own to present at a seminar that night. Big seminar, with Lazarsfeld, Ernest Nagel, other people. I think Nagel was there. **[90 MINUTES]** I may be confused. Again, there were different seminars where Nagel came in. And so, it's my turn. I go up to the blackboard. We had blackboards. We had chalk. Up I go to the blackboard, smug as can be. Because I had worked that boy, I got that, I was going to show them. And I go... At one point I had run the data separately by gender. We had only two in that days. They were males and the females. And I run them off, and he says, stop! He says, why did you do that? He says, why'd I do that? Yeah, you know, why'd you bother doing that? I said, well, everybody does that. And they did. You couldn't pick up a study where they didn't put the man on one side and women on the other. He says, no, no, no... That's, that's no good. I'm standing in front of this group [laughter], and my teachers telling me that's no good. What am I going to do? He looks up, and he says, well, tomorrow you do it the right way. Tonight, go ahead, do what you did [laughter]. I'm I'm [inaudible]. Then, it wasn't until later, that I figured out what he had said. Why did you do that? I didn't have a theory that men and women behave differently on this thing. I wasn't expecting to find differences. Why did I do it? I might not have had a grand theory, but I should at least have had some reason to do it. And I thought about it. And it stuck with me. You don't just do something because everybody did it. You do it because you have a reason to do it. You want to separate by age? Why do you want to compare the old and the young? There's gotta be a reason. You expect to find a difference because their socialization is different? Ahh! We're getting down to something here now. I wasn't smart enough to see that as a student. And it took me a year or two to realize what it was. What a dope I was! But he was gentleman enough to let the student off the hook... Go ahead, play that tune if you think it's worth listening to. That impressed me, and again fed into my counter belief with the other students that somehow they didn't care about, they only cared about was the research, they didn't care about the... They cared about people! Big mistake. The same kind of philosophical look, I guess, that made them think that you couldn't have both Merton and Lazarsfeld on your thesis committee, because they'd be fighting. You wouldn't be able to please both of them. They never got along. They got along beautifully. There's no problem. And they were both gentlemen enough to, and experienced

enough, not to crush a student. And I tried that. And I don't know if it always worked, but I tried it. All again get off track here. About several years ago, I'd given my little seminar, and it was small. But it was the way I wanted to teach, and I had encouraged them to discuss their ideas and that sort of thing. Course was over, grades were in, no problem. This fellow I didn't know before, from another department, came in and he said, I just, I'm going home now, I just want to stop by and thank you for saving my life. I said, what do you mean, saving your life? He said, well, the semester before last, he said, I had a seminar with Prof. X – I won't mention his name, was not a professor at Annenberg school – another department – and he said, he just crushed me. He stepped on anything I said and just ridiculed me. At the end of the term he said, **[95 MINUTES]** I felt I must have chosen the wrong field. I think I'll just drop school and drive a taxi or something. But he said, you never embarrassed me, you never ridiculed, and you listened to what I said. You didn't always agree, but you listened to it. And he said, I want to thank you for that. Well, that was the fruit to the seeds that were planted on me back in graduate school. And I'll never forget it. I'm babbling, but nevertheless, that's. I've come to the conclusion that you, things that either hurt you very much for that you like, did very good for you, they stay in your memory 80 years later, 70, 60. They can, they might have seemed trivial at the time, but they had their impact. So I got a little piece from Casey and his trust that I would do the job that I should've done right then and there. I got good help from Lazarsfeld, courteous treatment, good from Merton, wrote me nice letters after I got my job in California. That was very good. So I was happy with that. And, I've had a blessed life that way. Very good. I can't complain.

POOLEY: Can you say more about your relationship with Herb Hyman

WRIGHT: What?

POOLEY: Your relationship with Herb Hyman? In those years he arrived, you said, in 1952 or '3 and you took courses with him...

WRIGHT: Herb, Herb was like the brother I never had, OK? We not only clicked professionally, but we clicked socially and personally. Helen, his wife, and Anne-Marie, my wife, got along superbly. The two of them would be making the dinner for Herb and me, or whatever, when we were working, chatting away, having a good time. They... And I watched his three kids, different stages of growth, and we talked about work but we also talked about life. And I miss him very much. And I never found another person I could work with that well. I'm not exaggerating when I say, he'd be writing something at the typewriter and get called away at a phone call or something, I'd sit down and finish it. Not the book, but a paragraph or whatever. We just thought alike. But not me-too-ism. We would discuss differences. And work them out, what to do. We had, basically, similar views on all kinds of social things, but occasionally there'd be a difference. I'm a South Jersey boy, people in my family hunted, had guns. Herb was strictly anti-gun, yeah. So, we were different. That's all right.

POOLEY: Do you remember...?

WRIGHT: And we liked bargains in shirts. We could go to... They had retail discount, no, factory outlet stores up in Connecticut. He and I would haunt them. Trying to get the cheapest, the best-looking shirts on the market. That's kind of fun. To do that with your ex-prof is double fun.

POOLEY: Do you have any class in particular that you took with Herb in the Graduate School. That you remember fondly? You mentioned the class on secondary analysis? And it seems as if you wrote a paper out of it around that time with another graduate student named Williams?

WRIGHT: I don't know... which, which project you were talking about? We deliberately planned to do our joint work in the summertime. The clear objective of that was not to be interrupted by telephone calls or students coming to the door and so on. Because, even though they've forgotten it now in some places, **[100 MINUTES]** the fact is most academic appointments are for 10 months, and the only reason they pay you the other months is they've taken it away from the months you should've been paid. They wanted to work out an even flow of income, but you should... your summers are free. So we would do our work in the summer. And both of us thought, might as well do it in an exciting place for a fun place, interesting place. And one project — oh [inaudible] I don't remember which one it was, because there were a number of them where we had printouts. It might have been the effect of education later in life. We had reams and reams of computer printouts, and we... Herb had found a place for us to work off the coast of Greece, yeah. And there we were, it turned out, the place couldn't be reached by land. You had to go over water, and the only way to go over water was in a rowboat. And the only way to get a rowboat was to hire a fisherman who was out of work at the time. So, he'd come with his big pile of printouts in a rowboat being swamped with water. That was interesting. And we didn't lose any data. Nowadays, you wouldn't have all that paper to tote. I don't know what you're fishing for. Let me put it this way. When I, before I started any kind of college education and so forth, I was impressed by print. And I thought, wow, wouldn't it be neat if someday, in the distant future, your name got printed. Maybe like in a footnote. Wouldn't that be great. Now that's lurking back here in my brain. I go up to Columbia, and... But a few people had their name in a footnote. Thought that was good. We could do that. Paul Lazarsfeld, who had me working on this class consciousness thing, out of which I wrote a paper, but not for publication. Just for his eyes only. When his book came out on voting, there was a little section on class consciousness. He put a footnote in there that says, thanks to my assistant Charlie Wright, yeah? I saw my name in a footnote [gasp]. Seventh heaven! I decided I didn't want to be, and probably didn't have the ability to be a, superstar. But I've been very happy to be what they used to call in vaudeville a second banana. And, so, it never bothered me if we wrote something, whether Herb was first or I was first or somebody else might be. I was there. I was present. And that meant a lot to me. And Columbia did that, and Herb's generosity did it a lot too. Some articles we would just flip a coin who was going to be the first or we'd take it alphabetical or something like that. It didn't bother me. I was proud to be attached to somebody whom I respected. The ideas, or some of the ideas, that Herb either invented or extended or something, have played a very important part in my thinking, but — and now I digress — **[105 MINUTES]** I made my mind up very early in the game that I would make my writing as simple as possible so that the average intelligent person could read it, and not have to figure out some Germanic twists to go on, where a paragraph takes the whole page. And you

get down to the bottom, you got to go back to remember what they said. I didn't like that. But putting things in the language that people can understand detracts from your... What should I call it?... Glamorizing as an intellectual or whatever. I don't, didn't bother me. So the ideas of reference group and the ideas of reference individuals, for examples, I use them but I never called them that. I just used them in my analysis, and didn't... I should have put it in, put a footnote, for the intellectual, this means reference group [inaudible] ... talk about, talk about the family or the friends. We have, now with the digital stuff, we have all these networks going out. Well, networks, that's good, that's a good idea. But you had with [Jacob] Mareno years ago very similar ideas. The only thing that stopped him was it got out of hand. You couldn't make picture diagrams of a real big network. You're done! It's going to [inaudible] up. Mareno turned it all over to the social psych section of the ASA [American Sociological Association] and it's gone far. That's good. Now with this network thing, that's going to take off. And I don't know what the future will look like, but I think networking is, it's been here and it will stay here, the idea of reference individuals, reference groups. The only, not the only, but a major danger is that people will use the terms interchangeably when they're not really interchangeable concepts. You got to go back to the original concepts. I went back to [Walter] Lippmann's book on the study of man. That was the earliest I could find use of status and role. Is that ever vague? Yes. You can see why others, as they begin to use them have modified them such and so forth. So our terms are initially often very vague or very limited — it could be the other extreme. But I try not to get into those theoretical but linguistic arguments that go on. I don't know if I succeeded or not. I know I was not able to avoid it completely, but in my little book I tried back then to just... I wrote that book for students, strangely enough. And the second edition and the third... As I said, the editor didn't like the third because he wanted marketable ideas. Get another author. He did. I could've been rich, rich! But I didn't do it. Yeah, it was fun.

POOLEY: In the 1950s, you were in the sociology department. You had an interest in communication and you were working with, and being trained by, two psychologists, Lazarsfeld and Hyman. I was wondering what the relationship between, in particular, sociology and psychology — both the kind of sociological social psychology and the psychological variant — were for you?

WRIGHT: Yeah, what's your question again?

POOLEY: Well, well, I mean, the relationship between sociology and psychology, as two of your three disciplines, what that was like for you?

WRIGHT: It's that last part I'm not hearing.

POOLEY: Oh, in the 1950s, **[110 MINUTES]** what, what, as you were trained by Hyman and by Lazarsfeld, both psychologists, how did you integrate and think of yourself in terms of these two disciplines?

WRIGHT: I thought of myself as a sociologist, no doubt about it. But I minored in social psych., but I never... And I used some of that when I was with the NSF, because I had to find out what

was going on at that point in history and what would be new research and what was... So, I didn't abandon it. So I thought of myself as a sociologist. I probably slipped into social psych. to in my own thinking. I didn't see a conflict. The only conflict I saw was going on in the academy where they couldn't decide, should I be in psych. or should I be located in sociology? The social psychology I'd studied was well, kind of broad, I'd say. I studied with Otto Klineberg, an interesting fellow and all that, but he was more of a global figure himself and did work on race and things like that. Don't think I had any other social psych., but — oh, you know there was another man, I've forgotten his name. Yeah. I think had there been a social psych. program that leaned more to the social and less of the psych., I would've been comfortable and able to work in there. But the other way around it worked just as well. And why should we let academic distinctions shape the way we think about reality and so forth? What, as I said before, what I was trying to do with the graduate students, especially the doctoral students at Penn, was at least to keep them open to have, to bring those variables in like ... I should have had an answer when Lazarsfeld said, why did you put [laughter]. I didn't have an answer. I should've had one. But the students that I've worked with — not all of them, but they always work on their own problems. I don't give them a problem to do, I don't have a multimillion dollar project and slice off a piece. I find out what they're interested in and help them to shape it into a workable project. That's OK. In shaping their thoughts I hope they will take into consideration the background of people and not just go immediately to the brain or to the heart. What's the heart got to do with you, anyhow? Oh [inaudible], sorry heart! So, I tried as much as possible not to ignore the communication scholars. I got along well with them and I read their work and I like it. But I wanted to add the sociology part to it. Now, that's a very fine tightrope to walk for 40 years or so. You get tempted to be seduced into doing things the way they're going into communication, and I tried to not lose my sociological perspective. Put it that way. If I had another lifetime to develop it, I probably wouldn't have got any further, either. Just the way it is. And... [inaudible] I couldn't have been happier than I was at the Annenberg School. It's really, really been a good place. I've been able to do my own thing **[115 MINUTES]** and a large part of my work is, doesn't explicitly deal with communication but implicitly it's in there. Like in that Encampment study, at the very end we concluded that the didactic part of the program was important, but so was the social activity that went on in the barracks overnight. They talked to one another and the face-to-face communication... Mass media not so much. A little bit. What it is now I don't know with all the digital, with the wristwatch you can talk to [inaudible]. If I had another 60 years I'd look into it, but I don't have another 60 years. That's what I am.

POOLEY: Let's take a break there. We've done a full two hours, and there's so many rich topics that I want to return to, so I'm sure that we're going to have at least two more sessions, if that's OK. To pick up, in fact, talking about the *Mass Communication* book itself. You mentioned it came from your students and, or you wanted to write for your students. I'd love to pick that thread up. So let's plan on talking again.

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah, I'll talk about that. May not always make sense and there are some smaller sections in there, I had to finally give a little bit to the poor editor so that he or she would earn their salary, whatever they were doing. I wanted to talk about my own point of view in the

book, and I did. And just never brought a fourth edition, that was... Now I don't know what I would do with all the digital stuff [laughter].

POOLEY: Well, thank you for today.

END OF SESSION ONE