

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 TWO (July 19, 2016)

Wright recounts his family history, as well as his father's Depression-era and wartime employment history. He discusses his graduate training at Columbia (1950-1954/1956), including his 1951 master's thesis (a content analysis of magazine advertisements) and his 1954 doctoral dissertation project (a study of professional socialization in graduate student research training). The session includes more recollections of Columbia sociology figures, including Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Morris Rosenberg, Robert K. Merton, and Herbert H. Hyman. Wright describes his experience teaching, as a graduate student, in Columbia's Contemporary Civilization course, as well as a variety of undergraduate sociology courses (1952-1956). Wright's early years in UCLA's Sociology and Anthropology Department are covered, including his work on what became the 1959 book *Mass Communication: A Sociological Perspective*. That book's relationship to sociology, psychology, and Mertonian functionalism is discussed. Wright returns to the theme of his collaborations with Hyman, including a pair of re-analyses of survey data on Americans' participation in voluntary associations (1958 and 1971). Wright's early 1960s work on public leadership, and on access to commercial survey research, was also covered. The impact of Wright's 1963 visiting professorship in Santiago, Chile, sponsored by the Organization of American States, is recounted with a focus on his subsequent teaching style.

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, July 19, 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, July 19, 2016. Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Library Archives, University of Pennsylvania, mp3 file.

Transcript

Bibliography: Wright, Charles R. Interview by Jefferson Pooley. Transcript of audio recording, July 19, 2016 Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Library Archives, University of Pennsylvania. **Footnote example:** Charles R. Wright, interview by Jefferson Pooley, transcript of audio recording, July 19, 2016, Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Library Archives, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 34–35.

Transcript of interview conducted July 19, 2016, with CHARLES R. WRIGHT (session two)

Haverford, PA

Interviewed by Jefferson Pooley

POOLEY: This is day two 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. The date is July 18th, 2016. So, I wanted to start out today asking about your parents and whether they both had full-time jobs, and what kinds of work they did?

WRIGHT: Well, that's a good start ... I'm not sure I can answer it completely. I was — am I getting through there? Yeah. I was born in the Roaring Twenties, but I don't remember that. But they tell me that was when I was born, so I believe that. Those were relatively good economic years in the U.S. but they didn't last very long. From our point of view the Economic Depression started around 1930 or '31. My father was laid off. They didn't sugar-coat it in those days by saying they were "downsizing" or anything. You were just "laid off," done. So, like thousands of other men, he started looking for work, but there was not work. And I have memories of our going around in downtown Camden, New Jersey and over in Philadelphia and I saw blocks of men lined up hoping for work for even a day ... Job in the commercial world until the late 1930s just before we got into World War II. But, part of the time that he was unemployed was taken up — fortunately — by Works Project Administration [WPA], which at the least managed to put food on your table. And at the best sometimes turned out to be interesting jobs that the WPA was doing because the private economies couldn't afford it. Like the road work, bridges, and libraries, murals were going up. The WPA employed people in all walks of life. That was very important because, we know from sociological studies, and other studies that when man loses their employment they gradually sink into a kind of social isolation, their lives get less rich and they get depressed. So that really helped us a lot. It also ... there was a second program called Surplus Food Program. Farms were producing lots of food, if you didn't have the money to buy it. That surplus commodity was distributed to people who were in hard times. Uh, there was a third kind of program put in by the federal government back then called CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps. Saved spirits, and saved lives at the time. So, we got through that and then my father got a regular job as a mechanic. **[5 MINUTES]** He

worked on the brake systems on these big tractor trailers and also on private cars ... He knew a lot about that and it worked out very well, until a freak accident put him out of work again. The accident was that he was driving a pickup truck with the breaks, wherever he was going to another garage or going back home, I'm not sure, and the truck, his truck, got hit by a fire engine. Threw him out of the truck and onto the sidewalk, and after that he couldn't proceed to lift big wheels and things like he did before, so he took a forced retirement and went south where they thought the economy would be stronger and where the climate was certainly better than up here in New Jersey. My parents stayed down there for a while, and the last thing he did in Florida was get a little ice cream truck and went around the neighborhoods. The children liked that, they'd come running out to get the ice cream, and he enjoyed that part too and it got him out of the house and got some income and he likes children and he thought that was OK. And then his health turned bad and he came back up north where he thought medical attention would be more to his liking. So basically ... my family was a modest income, working-class family and their friends were about the same station in life as that. My father was, himself, born in the late 1800s when it wasn't common that all the children went to school. So, I really never really knew how far he went but it was probably what we call in the elementary school, maybe up — who knows, I don't know [inaudible] didn't know enough to ask him the right questions and I didn't want to embarrass him in any way whatsoever. He was a hard working, honest man. My mother did not work after she got married. When she was a late teenager she worked in Philadelphia in some kind of clothing business — I never was clear in my own mind — she just said they made men's clothes, and I let it go with that. But after she got married the home was her work and that was OK. They never skimmed on schooling, they wanted me to go as far as I could and was able to get through high school graduation. There was some strain on the family, but we made it alright. Um, any more specific things you'd like to know?

POOLEY: Do you know anything about the family history? You know, the ethnic heritage of your parents? When their families came over from Europe?

WRIGHT: No, they didn't come over from Europe. My family — my father came over from Philadelphia, my great grandfather Wright was in the Civil War, in the Union, but what he did or what he was like I have no idea because he was dead before I was born. **[10 MINUTES]** My father's mother came from English background but I think she was born here in Philadelphia herself. But her mother was from England somewhere, where I don't know, never could find out what town they came from. My father's father — all I knew was that he was born in Philadelphia and his father as I mentioned. And on my mother's side, her father was English background, perhaps a Quaker but perhaps not. He was, he died when my mother was a child so she really didn't know a lot about him and didn't have much to say. He worked for a

publishing company in Philadelphia, he was a pressman with them. Her mother, I think, was born here but her parents would have been German but I'm not sure where they came from — what town or what area. Um, my step-grandfather, the one who replaced my grandfather when he died, was a, he worked for a paint factory and had much to do with their selection and mixture of colors. And I can remember to this day that he had a little room in the house that he used for all the available colors we had. He put that on his desk and put a sheet of glass over that, so you look through the glass and you saw the colors and I just didn't know there were so many colors. It was just fascinating. In addition to his work, which brought him from south Jersey over to Philadelphia and got used to that and went through what is now Society Hill, and took a ferry boat from Jersey shore across the river to the Pennsylvania shore and he used to take us as children, once in a while, to short walks around the Society Hill area to look at Benjamin Franklin's grave, for example, and of course Independence and Carpenter's Hall and all that. And in those days, things were open and free and secure. So, we just wandered through those old historic buildings. There were some, security people I'll call them, who would stand at the door and mostly what they would do is say, "Don't touch," and so we as children would, had a tendency to go over and touch the chair or sit in it or whatever. No you couldn't do that but you could wander freely though, and, no one took advantage of it in a evil way. It was just a part of our growing up. We went several times to historic areas ... that's about the extent of — oh, my mother had a, had a sister but she didn't work she raised six children and that was plenty for her [chuckles] to do. You wanted to ask something?

POOLEY: Yeah, I mean, moving onto the Navy, you had talked last session about your decision to enlist and also your reaction against the hierarchy that you experienced there. Was there anything else about your role in the Navy during those couple of years that you recall that you think might be worth mentioning?

WRIGHT: Not really. I did get my belly full of technical stuff because they trained us — I came out of the Services Aviation Electronics Technician Class II but I never followed that up in civilian life. **[15 MINUTES]** It got mixed up with my attitude about taking orders [laughs] I didn't like that. I don't think it influenced me in any other way. I'm glad I went in and did what I could to help in the Second World War but I couldn't see it as a career. That would not have been good for me. Career choices, I didn't — unlike some college studies in the day — I didn't go in knowing I was gonna be a doctor or a lawyer — I didn't know what I was going to do! I wanted to have enough freedom to be myself, and I did.

POOLEY: And last time you also talked about the Columbia Graduate Department of Sociology, and you mentioned in passing your master's, and we didn't have a chance to talk about it and I

wondered if you could say something about your master's project and who the supervisor was if you remember any of that?

WRIGHT: Yeah, I might have the dates a little mixed up because that was a long time ago! Columbia was a major sociology force back in when I came out of the service. I came out in 1946, started graduate school that fall, fall of '46. The department at Columbia at that time had Paul Lazarsfeld, Robert Merton, Robert Lynd, of Middletown fame, Robert Maclver, that was his retiring year as I recall — I took his courses. Who else? I'm stuck, hmmm ... Edmund Brunner, but he was over in Teacher's College most of the time, did give a graduate course or two in the sociology department. So did William Casey, who was mainly an undergraduate start lecturer, but who also gave graduate versions of his work. I'm sure I'm forgetting somebody, those are the people I recall at least, at the very beginning. By the time I got out, that was five years later, they had added Seymour Martin Lipset and Sigmund Diamond, a historian from Harvard, William Gould [sp], a sociologist. Now I'm drawing blanks again, sorry. It'll come back ...

POOLEY: Who did you work with on the master's?

WRIGHT: I started with Lazarsfeld and increasingly worked with Morris Rosenberg, Manny Rosenberg, who had gotten his degree at Columbia at that time and was starting up teaching. Those were the only two I really worked with on the master's degree — an ultimately stupendous project that I wouldn't dare let a student try to do today. It involved a content analysis and I must've acquired a hundred or more magazines that I was doing this content analysis with and I was working on day and night. It took forever! But I finished it. It was preposterously positive about all the findings. **[20 MINUTES]** I wouldn't go so far today, but it was a student's effort and I did a good job on it, and Manny helped. It was good. I did it in a year. The normal was two years. But my GI Bill was running out, I had just one year left. I thought, well, I better get the master's degree. I didn't even think of a doctorate — master's degree — that would put me one step up on the occupational-seeking ladder. With a bachelor's degree in 1944, no I got my dates, in 1944 I got the bachelor's degree. I'm getting mixed up on years again. [sigh] '44 I went out to the service. That's it. I started graduate work in '46 and then that first year I did the master's degree and then I got it straight. It was called "Mass Frustration Caused by Public Advertising" — impossible. [laughs] I didn't know it was impossible, I couldn't do it! And I did it. Probably why I can't see so good today, sitting up there all night looking at, doing content analysis. But it worked. Now we sort of slide over into the graduate department. I think I told you last interview that I really didn't know what I wanted to do beyond the bachelor's degree, and I had taken this diverse spread of courses to taste different fields, didn't like the taste of economics and so forth. I was very interested in public opinion and communication. Went to see my undergraduate teacher, William Casey, who said,

No need to look any further, you stay right here at Columbia, just go one block down the street from the undergraduate college, and we have some of the country's leading researchers, at that time in this field. And so I did, I went there. I didn't have any of my undergraduate teachers again — I had different faculty over there. When I went in it was, [inaudible] Lazarsfeld, Merton, and eventually ... eventually Seymour Martin Lipset ... eventually, Phil Kingsley Davis was there in those days. It's coming back slowly.

POOLEY: What made you decide to stick around for the doctorate after you had completed this content analysis?

WRIGHT: I couldn't get a job! I thought, Well, I couldn't get a job, and I can't afford to go any further but I will try. That first year I was on my own with the GI Bill, that was OK. But I had established myself as a person in the field, in the study in the field anyhow. I know I told you this last time — Lazarsfeld called me and saved my neck, to be his assistant, and from there I was in pretty good shape and moved from one assistantship to another and so on. I had been up for a fellowship the second year but we didn't — it was hard economic times again and they didn't have any fellowships, so that was alright.

POOLEY: You mentioned the course with Lazarsfeld, and you also mentioned a couple of classes with Herbert Hyman. I wondered if there were any courses that stood out for you, or even any other fellow graduate students from that period, that stood out for you as future collaborators or just as impression-makers?

WRIGHT: Well, you pretty much hit all of them, because it was an all-star team. **[25 MINUTES]** People sat in the hallway, they could hear Merton's courses, the rooms weren't big enough to hold the students! Lazarsfeld was a natural for me because of his line of research. Oh we had Daniel Lerner who gave a course on Psych War, Psychological Warfare in World War II, and that made an impression on me. I took work with Lynd. He was like grandfather of the field. I took Maclver. That went over my head. He had obviously been thinking a long time on what he was talking about. His course was on social change, and it was a mixture of European ideas and American research. It was a good course. It was OK. Had a course with Lipset later, some other folks that slipped by me. I should mention that my minor was in social psych, so I had taken the psychology, straight psychology course in the College with [Fred] Keller, I've forgotten his first name. A super lecturer, and a real scientifically oriented person. He gave a course with a lot of emphasis on Pavlov and conditioning and he brought some orientation from Bales up at Harvard, so that was a good, that was a good course. I took a couple of courses with Otto Klineberg, an internationally known social psychologist at the time. Later he went to Europe and, I think, worked with the United Nations. His specialty was race relations, and what is race.

You hear the same questions today — half a century and we haven't solved that problems. There were some other psychology type people I don't remember, to tell you the truth. There's not doubt the whole department's weight was in sociology, and social psych was a secondary minor for people to take, and I took it and it was OK.

POOLEY: Was there a secondary minor in communication or mass communication?

WRIGHT: No, no. There were no schools devoted to just communication that I knew about. It's possible there was, were some on the West Coast but I don't think so. It was primarily Columbia, and heavily influenced by wartime research that they did on morale and civilians and studies on that type. [Inaudible]

POOLEY: When it comes to your exposure to opinion research, to survey research methods, did you get most of your exposure through the Bureau or through coursework by Lazarsfeld, or coursework with Hyman, or where did you pick up your survey research training?

WRIGHT: In my opinion it was most heavily from the course work. But I'd also got my hands on real data and did survey stuff and the like. The formal training came, I think, from the work with studying the work of Lazarsfeld, and doing the work with Hyman. That was a good combination.
[30 MINUTES]

POOLEY: Hyman was working in this period, maybe in the early to mid-1950s, on a compendium or almost textbook, on survey research analysis. Something that was published in 1955, and I don't know if you were involved at all or if ...

WRIGHT: I can't spot what you're talking about. Herb wrote a lot of different ones ... secondary analysis book. Interviewing, I think, I don't remember.

POOLEY: It was an overview of survey analysis and survey research.

WRIGHT: He did his memoirs around that. That book I know he did. I'm having trouble zeroing in on this one that you're recalling.

POOLEY: You spoke so movingly about your connections with him, and I wondered if since he wasn't in the department when you started out, if you remember your first encounters with him or the very first, or initial course you took?

WRIGHT: [Sigh] no. The impression that was going around amongst the students and others that we were getting an expert on survey research coming in from NORC [National Opinion Research Center] and the background that he had. And the next thing you know he was giving the course and we took it. I liked it, I learned a lot from it, and then I became his assistant after Lazarsfeld, Merton and then it was Hyman ... and it was a lucky day for me that that worked out because, we were just very compatible. It worked out very well. I used to kid and say Herb could start a paragraph and I could finish it for him. You know, it's ... which was true. But, it's a really strange thing, training for ... I didn't think I was going to be a survey researcher and I never really was — did projects that used it but I didn't tout it as the way to go. So, it's funny how you learn, and what I'm getting to is that my association with Hyman taught me a lot about balancing work and family and relaxation and all that. He was not a too briefcase-carry-home-every-night guy. He had other interests and a nice family, we got along, OK it was good. And I thought, yeah that's, that's good. I don't want to be a workaholic, but I want to do enough to achieve some satisfaction and some pleasure out of what I'm doing and not neglect home life and occasional baseball game or something like that. And that worked out well. It turned out that the two families got along fine, and we usually arranged it, not every summer but some summers, we would take a place in an interesting area like Italy or something, and Herb and I would just squirrel away and work from nine or eight in the morning till lunch time and then after lunch we would work till six or seven and quit. That was it for the day. And that was a good balance.

POOLEY: Speaking of Herb, you were beginning to teach probably in this period while you were still a graduate student at Columbia. Were you called on maybe in towards the 1953-54 period to teach in the department? I don't know if there were any memories you have about that early teaching ...

WRIGHT: Oh yes, oh yes ...

POOLEY: ... and the courses? **[35 MINUTES]**

WRIGHT: If I recall correctly, in 1952 or 3 I gave my first course in the College, in the first year or maybe or maybe first two years — very beginning, anyhow — I taught this Contemporary Civilization in the West. Way over my head. But I knew something of that stuff, and I have to give myself a C+ [laughs], and I figured out later what the problem was. The problem was that I was really set on, You've gotta have data, and it's gotta be produced in a scientific way — not with a particular methodology but where your work could be replicated ... if somebody wanted to, they could challenged it, they could work on it, that sort of thing. You had to have data. And that Contemporary Civilization program, that was a lot of talk. Bright and famous philosophers

in the past, back to the Greeks, back to the Romans, here and there, but not much data. If we're going to discuss something, and these young students would be giving their opinions and I'd say, Well where [laughs] where's your data, what's evidence of it? So we didn't, we weren't on the same page ... I just never had been comfortable with the grand theorists who don't have anything to back up ... but they have brilliant ideas! And it's worthwhile to know about them, and it's worthwhile to teach them, but not in my world. [Laughs] So yes, I had difficulty there. I thought for many years that the difficulty came because I couldn't direct the discussion or get it going or something, but no, that wasn't the problem. The problem was that we were on two different pages. And I came back full circle the last ten years or so when I ... not too slowly, but rather slowly, began to shift away from lectures and into smaller group discussion things where I did pretty well. And sometimes lost one or two students who didn't want to do that, but we did all right. I didn't like that a free, just-anybody's-ideas type thing. I had assigned readings and centered around them. I tried to pick readings that either used or failed to use some sociological concepts in their analysis. That's why — getting ahead of myself now — but that's why I came to Penn — I wanted the students to have the option of thinking of analysis in terms of society and its characteristics and so forth. Much of the work that was being put out in the ... what was beginning to be called the communication field — it still wasn't — much of that was biased towards individualistic psychology — looking for the personality of man or whatever, the brains or the genes or whatever. And less attention was being given — by some places, not all — less attention was being offered to students to think about the impact of the economy or the roles that they were playing, at occupations, things of that sort — not that they were any better than the psychological ones, but they were different. And I wanted students to go out equipped to think in those terms rather than just about the ego and the whatever they had in mind. **[40 MINUTES]** So, it took a lifetime but I came back to not only know why I wasn't so good in this first courses but to do something about it, and I did do something about it.

POOLEY: Did you teach in the sociology graduate program during that stretch, either during your dissertation phase or afterwards before you left for UCLA?

WRIGHT: [Sigh] no, I didn't list a graduate course. It's possible I was asked to come in and give a guest talk or whatever but my courses were undergraduate courses for those four years of '52 to '56. I knew I couldn't stay because Columbia rarely kept their own doctorates on the faculty. They might give you a step up as they did with me. I became an instructor — a term that's hardly used [inaudible] departments, so ...

POOLEY: Did you teach in sociology for the college or was it always Contemporary Civilization?

WRIGHT: Oh, no it was sociology.

POOLEY: What kinds of courses?

WRIGHT: I taught a course in communication. I taught a course in urban sociology. It was a good course, I liked it. I'm not all certain in my memory whether I gave anything in methodology. I don't think I did, but I might have. But it was mainly the Contemporary Civilization course. Oh, I moved into the second year of that — not the same course again but a second one, which was not designed to be like a panoramic history, but was great ideas in, whatever — I've forgotten what they were now. So I had that — I had the CC still, and I had the urban sociology, and the communication course. I think that was enough [laughs].

POOLEY: And how would you put together a communication class when that field really didn't exist? I mean there might be people who said, I do communication research, but there weren't communication researchers. Do you remember how you would go about teaching this non-field?

WRIGHT: Well, I taught about other people's studies and the nature of the sociological approach and that sort of thing. I was working it out. I didn't have it all packed up in my briefcase, so it was fun, and I liked those students better than the poor kids who were just starting out and had Dante's Inferno to talk about or something. That was good too. We'd get along alright there, but I knew that time was running out at Columbia and I had to find a job some other place and so I started the job hunt crawl type thing, and I was interviewed at a few places. Oh, I'll tell you an anecdote: I went to — I won't name the place — I was interviewed by a [inaudible], a very good sociologist, that was good. I told him what my interests were, what I had taught, what I could teach. That was good, we were going along very happily, and he said, Well, that's fine, he says, Of course — oh I forgot — you will coach the lacrosse team. I said, I'll do what? [laughs] I said, what's lacrosse? [continues laughing] **[45 MINUTES]** Crossed that one off my list, not much heartbreak about it. Too bad. It was a nice little school. I think I would have been happy there except I got hit over the head by a lacrosse — I think they carry a stick — anyhow ...

POOLEY: Well, before leaving Columbia, I was just curious if there were any graduate students at the SAME time as you that you were close with or that you remember as being, you know, outsized personalities or anything like that? Because it was an interesting group that went on to accomplish quite a lot.

WRIGHT: No, we were friendly ... As it turned out, my wife and I had some dinners or some meetings with Manny Rosenberg and his wife. I was friendly with Al [Allen] Barton but we didn't

socialize a lot ... I don't know. It was just some good people, and there was this mixture between the department and the Bureau that went on and so there were some folks who worked in the Bureau who were part of the social world. But I don't think that there was — oh, Lenny Pearlman was one of our friendly people, we'd go to — Lenny, Lenny ...

POOLEY: Did you encounter Elihu Katz there much?

WRIGHT: Well, encounter is a strong word, but we would meet. We were not socially close. I was living up on Morningside Heights, and I think he was — I don't know where Elihu was — he might have been back in Jersey ...

POOLEY: And I was curious too about, you know, whether you felt like the Cold War context ever made itself felt, you know, in those years? I know the Bureau was in some instances using contracts from various government or military agencies — you mentioned the *Psych War* class from Daniel Lerner ... I just was curious given that the Korean War was going on, the Cold War had heated up right in those years. Was that a felt presence for you in the department?

WRIGHT: Not for me, no ... just ... we went other ways ... As sort of why I get into sociology, even though I didn't see the connection at the time, but there were a lot of us who just sort of felt that the Nazi propaganda had been effective in ... We could counter it in some way, but research didn't really show that. That it was that way, but that was one reason for getting in there, you thought, well, if the other guy is using it, let's use it too. But that wasn't a prime motive.

POOLEY: And I was also interested, since your book — which I want to turn to in a few minutes if that's OK — coming out later, was indebted to Robert Merton and his version of functionalism and his, I guess, the first version — the first edition — of that *Social Theory and Social Structure* book. I was curious about whether you took a course on functionalism with Merton or if that book had an outsized presence in the department ... ?

WRIGHT: Yeah ... that's very hard to say. I took the theory course with Merton and that blended in some functionalism but wasn't strictly that. It was ... his courses were unique and you always felt like you knew more than when you went into the lecture. **[50 MINUTES]** As I mentioned, people sat in the hallway hoping to catch some of it. He'd come up a long way, too; he was born of immigrant parents, I believe, and not too wealthy. They were, had a place in South Philly somewhere, and went to Temple and then from there to Harvard on a scholarship. So, it wasn't handed to him, here you are. He had worked his way up. Lazarsfeld probably came from at least moderate if not better background ... The other faculty I didn't know about. Later I got to talk

about Herb's background. His father was a doctor in Harlem, I think it was in Harlem at that time. And you didn't ask people that thing, you just, learned through seepage [laughs] little bit of information here or there. But Herb, I got to know him very well ...

POOLEY: And what about the dissertation project? I'm wondering, you know, it was on the effects of training in social research methods on professional attitudes, and it was 1954, and I wondered if it was tied in in anyway — I think it was a Rockefeller or Ford or both funded project, and I also recall that Merton and Lazarsfeld had proposed a professional school of training to be this, what became instead the Center for the Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences out in Palo Alto, and that was maybe in the early 1950s. So, I guess I'm wondering, is it attached to that proposal that didn't get won but lived on inside the Bureau? Where did it come from and who was your formal advisor?

WRIGHT: I ... One of Lazarsfeld's lifetime ambitions was to set up an institutionalized — he called it professional school program. It would, had he done that, it would have stressed methodology for the sake of social science. It would go a little beyond what they had in the academic classes. Beyond that, I don't know what he had in mind, but he was concerned with whether it would work in a sense of turning out people beyond the Ph.D. who had a commitment to scientific research in sociology, and therefore he was receptive to any kind of research that would him to foresee, or perhaps avoid, the mistakes that led students not to want to be scientific in their research. So, that was one of the ideas that was out there and struck me as interesting, as ... with hindsight, I can see that in many ways — not always self-evident — the different projects I worked on tied into the socialization process. And there was also a big push at Columbia at that time for the study of professions. **[55 MINUTES]** Merton had a big study with Cornell Medical School and published some of the results about the same time that Chicago had published works on medical socialization. So [inaudible] did some work on socialization. So the concept of professional attitude was floating around out there and interested me. As I said, throughout — looking back at it — throughout time most of the work I did in some way or other tied in with changing people through socialization. I never spelled that out, but I look back and I can see that it was there. I think I said in our last interview, one of my quirks or idiosyncrasies is that I like to try to explain things to people in ways that they can understand and be interested in. So you won't find in any of my — well I shouldn't say any, that's too strong — but you won't find a lot of jargon. I tried, if I can't say it in simple terms, then I don't understand the concept myself, is the way I feel and I stuck to that mostly. Occasionally it gets heavy because the data are heavy, you have to deal with it ... But I only see this with hindsight, that I realized that's what I've been doing, is trying to say things in language that can be understood by the interested and intelligent reader and not — I'm not building some big theoretical framework. And I think that's the right choice for me. It has the drawback

that it doesn't quite draw the attention of big thinkers, big thinkers like big words — that's too bad for me but ...

POOLEY: Well, I want to ask you about a book that was hugely influential — and I know I'm skipping ahead a little bit, and I want to return to your decision to go to UCLA but — I presume you were at UCLA when you began work on what became *Mass Communication*, the 1959 book, and I was curious if you could discuss how the idea came about for the book, and the working conditions writing it?

WRIGHT: I started a course at Columbia and it was really derivative of Lazarsfeld's work and Merton's approach and the like, and I didn't realize it at the time but looking back I can see now that there wasn't anything that took that approach at that time. You had people who gave journalism courses or TV courses or whatever it was. They were always centered around the technique used by the communicator. I didn't want that. I wanted to see what the sociological connections were and there wasn't anything out there to use, and it maybe was there but I didn't see it. So, I kind of limped putting the course together and those couple of years at Columbia ... When I got to California there still wasn't any book I could assign to the students to read, so I wrote that little book for students. And, I wrote it on two levels. I don't know how I did this. But I did two levels. If you approach the book the right way you'll find that there are scores of ideas [60 MINUTES] for dissertations in there — questions that haven't been asked. They all centered around some sociological approach but I didn't turn on a flashbulb and say, Look, here's how you do it! I put it out there for students to think about, talk about. I knew what I called it, a perspective. I felt I better do it myself, because nobody else was doing it that I knew of, and somebody might. And they did later, but I was first. And I tried to stick to that up to the last time that I gave what turned out to be a discussion course. The reading list lays out the framework well. It was part frustration that there wasn't something, and it was part uncertainty about whether, was I doing the right thing or not doing the students any favors by taking a different approach? I decided to stick with my approach and were I healthy enough to be doing it for the next ten years, I would feed in the digital stuff that is around now. The frame is there. Things have changed, people may and do have wider contacts with a lot of people with their [inaudible] and their Twitter and all that. So that's a change, but not a change in the basic orientation of what's going on. What I get... so, I have to backtrack. When I got the offer from UCLA to come out there, and I packed up everything and packed up our doggie and put them on a plane and off they went ... and we got out there and found a place to stay for a few days — a motel which could take the dogs and all that — but I said to my wife, look we're in Los Angeles. I better go check in to tell them I'm alive and I arrived here. And so I go over to UCLA and I hunt around and I find the department of sociology, only it was sociology and anthropology. That didn't faze me too much because I knew I wasn't an anthropologist. I could live with them, so

alright. So I go up to see the chair and I say, I'm Wright, I'm here, and he said, Oh, thank god you're here! He says, you'll be teaching demography, introductory sociology, and something else. I said, demography? I'm not a demographer. I have never even had a course in demography — I can't teach demography. He said, You see that building over there? That's called the library. Get over there and start reading. [laughs] And so I did. Was one of the courses I've ever given [laughs] because I was learning along with the students. We had fun. Then I had my communication course, which I was trying to organize my thoughts with, and I had the introductory course, which I thought, Well that's OK, I can do that. It's gravy, you know. They tell me it met at eight o'clock in the morning. Well, I was the new boy on the block and couldn't say much about that, but I said to the chair, look, You give me things I've never taught before, and he said, You're the new boy here. I said, oh OK. So I go to the introductory class — I'm sure I told you this one — and there's about a hundred students... What am I gonna do? There's a hundred people. I don't know any of them. So the second time we met I said, look. I'd like to know more about you guys. I have a little — and it was short — one-page questionnaire about why you'd taken this course and what do you feel about the field and stuff like that. I take them back to my office — I shared an office then with another sociologist — and I start to read them. You know why they took my course? They said very clearly, eight o'clock you can get a parking space. **[65 MINUTES]** [laughs] That's why they took the eight o'clock course, so they could park their car out in the ... and get a spot. That deflated my ego a little bit. I thought, Well, that's what they want, that's what they'll get. But I gave them a regular course, a pretty good one too. So my little communication course was my little cave, my haven, to rush to, and I enjoyed writing the book. Updated it a little bit for a second version, and they asked me to do a third version, but now this would have been close to the 1980s, I'd say, to the third edition. And that edition I had trouble with the publisher, who had done some kind of market survey or whatever and knew what the students wanted, he said. But I said, I don't care. I'd like them to hear what I've got to say, not what they want to hear. But we went around. I should have listened to him. I'd have been rich because introductory books back in those days were relatively rare and they sold like hot cakes.

POOLEY: So you decided to subtitle the book, the original 1959 book, "A Sociological Perspective," and you were mentioning a few minutes ago about psychology and how psychological mindset seemed to dominate the study of communication. So I wondered if that subtitle, and the motivation to write the book, were linked together?

WRIGHT: No, not really. Not back then. When I came to Pennsylvania I was much more conscious of the need to sell sociology to people who were now in what was becoming an established field of communication. I kept close ties to sociology intellectually, and much — maybe even all — of the work Herb Hyman and I did together was sociologically motivated, and

we used that. As it turned out, It was a kind of influence in communication in each of those areas. The first book that we did back in 1954, I guess it was. That was the *Encampment* book. It was a mixture of my interest in people changing and being socialized in a particular way, but it went beyond our first book on that, because the sponsors of the program had repeated their performance in California as well as in New York and so on. But, we were interested in change, if there was any change. The second book on changing communities was not in that it was a different approach. But then we get into the impact of schooling and that was once again not spelled out, [70 MINUTES] but it was a study in socialization which it turns out probably involved a lot of face-to-face communication too. So I stuck with that, and again it sounds kind of weird but I was as interested in people who didn't change as in the ones who did. That was an interest that I still have.

POOLEY: And it was a theme in the book — the 1959 *Mass Communication* book — where the emphasis was, in some ways, on reinforcement of social norms, and it was explicitly a functionalist approach you took, and you have this amazing functional inventory in the book. And so I wanted to know where or why you took the functional approach? Was it something that you had in the air, was it from Columbia, and then where this inventory came from?

WRIGHT: It was a little of all of that. You see a hint in the master's thesis, what did I study, I studied how people were frustrated by promises or offers that were prominent in advertising and that they would never achieve even if they bought the product. Advertisement for a car, scantily dressed lady drooped over the hood or something [laughs] And I asked, you know, what does that make you want? The girl! To heck with the car! You're not gonna get that girl. First of all she probably doesn't even exist — an artifact of the photograph and touching up the models so they look better than the real person maybe. But in any case it's not gonna happen. Same way with foods: eat this and you'll be Jack Armstrong, the all-American man. No you'll be fat but you're not going to be Jack Armstrong. So, that was irritating me. There was a book published by two psychologists called [John] Dollard and [Leonard] Doob on frustration and aggression [*Frustration and Aggression*, 1939]. Their theme was that frustration leads to aggression, and I thought, Yeah, it does ... How much are we frustrating people through our mass media? A lot. I spent hours going through those magazines. So there was a continuity there [inaudible]. I absorbed as much as I could absorb of Merton's functionalism and I liked it because, among other things, it drew attention to both the negative and the positive consequences of whatever it was that you were studying. And I wondered about that and I thought that's a good term. I think, without spelling it out, that I was influenced by Herb Hyman's ideas on reference groups and reference individuals and that crept into my perspective and into my perspective on a lot of things that I didn't necessarily publish. So I got the idea, Let's not just blue sky the good effects or downplay the whole thing [inaudible].

Depends how you're looking at it, from the bottom up or the top down, and I wanted to do that as systematically as I could based on what was available in the research market at that time. So I started, and I ended up with this humongous chart with all these things in it, and it was useful in both reminding you to look at both sides of things, and in organizing it in some way, but I never found it useful in setting up hypotheses for research and so forth. **[75 MINUTES]** I just stalled at that one, but I kept it because it didn't serve those earlier purposes. The rest of the book, some of it was rethinking on my part. I rethought a little bit the [inaudible] area and tried without success to get students or other people to see these as roles that some people are allowed to play in some area of life but they're not generic, you know, have some person who is the personal influential. It didn't work. I tried...

POOLEY: Why didn't it work?

WRIGHT: I tried with Muriel Cantor out in UCLA, where I said, Look, there aren't just people who influence others, or others who are being influenced. There are people who just avoid the whole area, and I got that idea from Manny [Morris] Rosenberg's paper. He wrote a paper — I forget what journal that appeared in — back in the mid or early 1950s on politics as a game, and it made a point that a lot of people are just spectators but not at all interested in getting involved in it. And I thought, Yeah, there are people who just aren't interested in politics, they don't talk around about it, they don't pay any attention, and the same thing is probably true with every other subject that we're all trying to study: food, cooking, maybe religion — these are taboo topics for many people, especially if you happen to be thrown in with the people who think the opposite from you. You don't talk about it, you avoid it. Merton did an interesting paper, you probably know it, on housing projects and whether people made friends disproportionately large or small in number. In his case he was looking at race: Did different kinds of architecture impede or encourage friendships amongst blacks and whites. That was the big mixture back in the late 40s early 50s. Housing projects were being made and that, it was, there was political pressure to make them diverse and so forth. He looked at two projects, one that had achieved this by sort of random assignment, so people ended up with people of a different race living around them — and the other was where they thought they were achieving diversity by putting people on separate floors [laughs]. You had a white floor, a black floor [laughs]. That didn't work so hot in terms of friendships forming or something because, they weren't next-door neighbors. They were something else. He worked out mathematically what proportion would be ... whether interracial friendships were greater in number than what you would have gotten probability wise just by the distribution of people in the projects, and he called it — I don't know how to say it because I get the words mixed up, but he put names on it — one was called homophily, and one was called heterophily. **[80 MINUTES]** And, I've read

authors who've gotten them backwards [laughs] and that didn't help very much, but that's life. Anyhow, how did we go down that path?

POOLEY: Well, it's very relevant in part because I'm wondering about the thoughts you have about the revival, I guess you could say, of a certain kind of functionalism in the uses and gratifications approach that itself had roots, I guess, in the 1930s, with Herta Herzog, but which Elihu Katz and Jay Blumler revived in the early 1970s and it was a kind of functionalism. I noticed you wrote a paper for their edited volume — they had a collection, maybe in 1974, and you assessed this revived functionalism, and I thought you might ... I just was wondering if you could say something about your thoughts on that influential research stream?

WRIGHT: I have high regards for Elihu's work and Jay Blumler's work too. I don't remember what I said in that paper ... I somehow have the feeling that they were using the word in a different way, I'm not sure. I wouldn't want to be quoted on that.

POOLEY: As I remember, re-reading that piece recently, you were talking about how the social or system level of analysis wasn't captured in the uses and gratifications approach — that it focused mostly on individuals' wants and gratifications.

WRIGHT: It's escaped me now, I'm sorry.

POOLEY: No problem at all. And I wondered, given that you wrote a second and then a third edition in the 60s and in the 70s, there was such a backlash, at least within sociology, against Parsons' brand of functionalism — you know, structural-functionalism. There were criticisms of Parsons in particular as being conservative or focused on stability to the exclusion of change. You know that Lockwood critique and there were others, Dennis Wrong, the idea — the oversocialized concept of man. I wonder if any of that sort of ferment around functionalism had any impact on your teaching or your research?

WRIGHT: No, I'm sorry it didn't reach me.

POOLEY: It wasn't really focused on Merton and his approach anyway. It was more on kind of a high-altitude Talcott Parsons. So I was curious about the sociology department at UCLA. When you were opting where to go, you mentioned that Berkeley was a possibility in its journalism school but that you chose UCLA's sociology program.

WRIGHT: Yeah, Professor Merton said to me, Whatever you do, make sure that you have access to graduate sociology students, even if the school's called journalism or whatever. But he said, I

don't know what's going on at Berkeley but I have a friend in Los Angeles. Call him, tell him I said to give you any information on what's going on. So I called UCLA and spoke with the chair and said I'd like to know what kind of arrangement they have up at Berkeley. Would I have sociology students or have you heard anything or whatever? He said, Well Berkeley's a good journalism school but why don't you come here to UCLA? We have an opening in sociology and anthropology. So I said — I jumped at it. And you can imagine the pay scale in California was very attractive. **[85 MINUTES]** I had been doing two jobs in New York to pay the rent and keep coin. Now I could go and take one job in California, which was fine, and I did. The chair was Leonard Broom, whose work I knew and I liked him and that was no problem. They had Ralph Turner and, oh God, Donald Cressey in criminology. They had [Eshref] Shevsky — I've forgotten his first name. They had [inaudible], who had gotten pregnant that semester and that's why I was gonna teach demography! Oh whatever. Oh, they had hired another young fellow, Raymond Murphy, and I can't remember the others — oh Council Taylor, I don't know whether he was ... he was an anthropologist. They had this thing, this distinguished group of anthropologists. They had Ralph Beals, Harry Hoijer, oh, I've forgotten the name of the archaeologist — this young fellow who was alright. It was a good department. Alright to handle two disciplines at that time. Later it grew, we got about 20 members and decided to split then between anthropology and sociology, which was a good decision. I can't remember the other colleagues that I had.

POOLEY: Was there anyone in those early years or even through the 1960s in the department that you spoke with a lot or considered an intellectual friend? I mean, you mentioned Muriel Cantor and I know that was later, but was there anyone in the department in sociology or anthropology who you considered kind of a close colleague?

WRIGHT: No, there were social friends ... Joe [inaudible] was a friend of mine, but nobody in ... and Ray Murphy and I were friends. But no, I don't think any outstanding ones ... Wendell Bell was there at the time. He's up at Yale now, retired, I think. Who else, who else? Those were our stars.

POOLEY: And there was a project you were working on with Herbert Hyman and the first publication of it was in 1958 and it was about voluntary association membership. I think you two did a reanalysis of someone else's data?

WRIGHT: Those were two journal articles we wrote, yeah. Herb was big on secondary analysis. I wish he were alive today to give his reaction to big data. We didn't have the data and when we manufactured the necessary piles of data for our analysis on the impact of education on later life and then with them ... these were the days when printouts came by reams of paper, so we

had — I don't know how many — boxes of all these data from public opinion surveys in the U.S. for the previous, I'm not sure, 20 or 30 years. **[90 MINUTES]** What we wanted to analyze, we had to code around these big cartons of data. Now you put it all on the computer — it'd be alright, it's no problem: You get a computer record and play it. But we had that, and we arranged to work together for a month or so on a little island off the coast of Italy, tiny little island. The only way you could get to the island was to take a rowboat, and the only way you could get a rowboat was to hire a fisherman. So, we hired a fisherman, in his little rowboat to tote these reams of paper, my god! We were crazy, but we had all the data that we needed there and we went to work on it. That was ... [phone rings] Anyhow, that was on the lighter side of the work that we did. Oh. I lost something. Anyhow, what got lost in our interview so far was the fact that unconsciously — but with hindsight now I can see it — unconsciously, I used a big chunk of my life to learn something, and to learn something that would be useful in training students or just advising them or whatever. Let me just give you a little story. Back in those days at Columbia, we had evening seminars of very lively very mixed sort, mainly dealing with methodology but other things. Paul Lazarsfeld ran the seminar. I believe Ernest Nagel was a member of the seminar, and Nagel was very interested in what we were doing and he and Lazarsfeld wrote a paper on the logic of analysis, and some other luminaries. And I was in the seminar because Lazarsfeld wanted me to be the secretary of the seminar and take notes and see what happened, but I had to take my turn to do something. So I had this set of data — I've forgotten where they came from — Elmira? Or they came from Sandusky? Whatever — but they were political data and voting data and communication data, and my turn came with all these luminaries there and a graduate student — you're scared to death on that stage. But I had done my analysis, run the data, felt I was solid there. I just had to get over the stage fright of having people like Nagel and others listening to what I, poor little student from South Jersey, had to say. So, I get up to the board and I start putting up the numbers — whatever we were doing, I don't know what it was — and I had the numbers for men and I had them for women, and Lazarsfeld stops me. He says, Wait. He says, Why'd you do that? Why did I do it? Everything I read always separated the men from the women ... and I said, That's the way you always do it. He says, no, no, no. **[95 MINUTES]** Why did you do that? I said, That's the way it's done. No, no, no, no. He says, Well, go ahead. Give your paper tonight, tomorrow you'll do it right. [laughs] I was about to die, my professor and he's just wringing me out there to dry, but I did it, and presented the paper and it was alright. He kept it fine; it took me at least 30 years to know what he was saying. He was asking me, Why did you do that? What theoretical idea did you have? What hypothesis? Why did you do it? You don't just do it because someone else did it. You have to have a reason. It took me all that time to realize that's what he was asking me, and how clever he was not to leave me hanging out there to dry, and I must have been a big disappointment to him, but I went back and I did it right the next time and I thought, That's, that's interesting. Why would he do, why would he not just say to me, what is your theory? He

wanted me to realize you had to have a reason for doing any kind of analysis. You don't just run the number through like a dope. And I remembered that when I taught students. I'd ask them, Why do you start out on race, why do you want to start out on sex, why do you wanna start out on anything you do? It could be lots of reasons. It could be only a grand Parsonian theory that comes down to this. It could be that you're just fishing around, so that after the fact you can say, look we got a correlation between X and Y. Not good enough. You should have some reason for what you're doing, I believed. And I think that's what he was ... but he wanted me to come to that insight. Right then and there. I didn't, couldn't do it. But I realize it was for my own good. I'd spent thousands of hours running things because that's the way we did it — no good.

POOLEY: I love that story and I wondered, thinking about work you were doing after Lazarsfeld in this 1950s to early 1960s UCLA period, and there was a book, that I have now looked at that I had never heard of before ...

WRIGHT: *Public Leadership*.

POOLEY: *Public Leadership*, published in 1961. And I wanted you to just give me a bit of background on where it came from.

WRIGHT: Wendell Bell was talking with somebody, I don't know who it was, important, had some connection with a publishing company or whatever, and he was saying that we had so much research on public leadership. [inaudible] They encouraged him and he got a contract and he asked, Wendell, Dick Hill, to be one of the team to get out this book, and me to do my part on it. We all had sort of overall responses we could give to [inaudible]. Basically my contribution was, I don't remember now, was one or two chapters on public leadership and that Then I read the rest that was mainly written by Dick Hill and by Wendell and, it's outdated now obviously. **[100 MINUTES]** We thought we were telling the world something when we said we never had a woman president but, it's still true today. [laughs] My part was the communication part of that book. Dick Hill went on to be a sociologist at Texas and then up in Oregon. In Oregon they liked him so much they made him provost [laughs] of the university. I saw him at a sociology conference later and I said, Dick, what made you succumb to being a provost? And he said, well, I thought I had some ideas and I thought I could really put them to work if I was a provost. But, he said, I was wrong, because what the provost does is put out fires every day. And he said, I never had time to make my own fires. [laughs] Oh, bless him. He was a neat guy and a good sociologist — not very terribly famous but he did good work, he had been in — he got his degree from Washington, University of Washington, where he had studied sociology. But there was communication mixed in with it too. He'd been involved with some project

where they dumped leaflets out of an airplane to see whether the population paid any attention to it ... I didn't follow the whole project, but he had that one foot in the communication area, public opinion. He's dead now, Dick is, rest in peace.

POOLEY: There was another really interesting project you did in the early 1960s and it was, it seems like, commissioned by the AAPOR [American Association for Public Opinion Research] on the use of commercial surveys. You were sort of tasked with, it sounded like, and you published it eventually in the *Public Opinion Quarterly*, but that must have been a politically delicate task given AAPOR's membership, its mix of commercial and academic survey researchers, and it was a very tactful publication in *POQ*.

WRIGHT: Yeah, it was very frustrating but it wasn't nasty or anything like that. These were people who, themselves were social scientists of some sorts. Some of them had worked at the Bureau [of Applied Social Research] and whatever it might be ... and what I did was I kept running my head up against a stone wall. They wanted to help but they, their job wouldn't let them help, because it was proprietary and, I assume, had its effect on the income of the sponsors. This was not up for grabs, so I thought, What am I gonna do? I've said I am gonna write a paper, and I can't deliver. Because I can't get the stuff that we need. So I said, well I [inaudible] the problem and I wrote the paper, not angry at anybody or anything like that. I wasn't revealing a scandal or anything, I just ... the commercial world and the academic world didn't always connect together. I was disappointed but I was glad to be able to get my argument out into the field. So, that's interesting because, as a graduate from Columbia I ... when I started looking for jobs, I looked in the commercial field as well as the academic field. I was not comfortable, but ... except for not doing the lacrosse team, I had alright relations with the academic people and we ... that was fairer play there. **[105 MINUTES]** And the other one too, the commercial people. They were friendly and they would like to help, and they did help as much as they could. I understood that. But then I thought, I would be bound by the same sorts of conditions and rules if I had gone the commercial way. I was glad I picked academia where you could publish anything except slanderous stuff or whether. Yeah.

POOLEY: I wanted to ask you about the 1963 semester I think you spent down in Chile. Was that in Santiago? And what brought you down there and was it a good experience?

WRIGHT: I'm glad you brought that up because that represented one of the major learning experiences in my life, and changed my life. I went down partly because of the influence of two people who were getting their degrees at UCLA at the time. I taught what was like the undergraduate level of my communication course, and I taught a course, I think I taught down there on survey research but don't hold me to it. I may have gotten it mixed up. I arrived there

at the Catholic university, within which there was a program called the School of Sociology, “Escuela de Sociology” in Spanish and I thought, what am I doing here, why did they ask me down here? I don’t speak Spanish, how am I gonna teach these people? So I said, I’m happy to come down here, I’m happy to be here, but I don’t speak Spanish, I can’t lecture in Spanish. They said, Oh no, no. We don’t want you to lecture in Spanish, we want you to lecture in English because a lot of our students wanna come up to the U.S. and do their graduate work there. They need to hear things said in English, with your accent and all your slurring of words and everything. Bring it all [laughs] and come over! So that was very good, and I — the School of Sociology was five years long. So they had a fifth year that we didn’t ordinarily have and that in my judgement was probably equivalent to the first year of graduate work [inaudible]. So I gave my course down there and I was ... I wanted to give them the experience speaking English before I wanted to give them to experience speaking English before a group of people so, I cut the lecture shorter and shorter and began to have little conversations. And I went through this semester having taught a course, at least, to the first year, second year, third year, fourth year, and fifth year people! Though, sometimes was the same course and sometimes it was different. Didn’t matter. When we were ready to leave, come back — take a little trip around South America and come back to Los Angeles. Now, the students wanted to give us a send off. So, the first-year students and the second-year students combined, bought us a record. It was folk songs from Chile, South America. That was nice! That was very good. The third-year students and the fourth-year students had a little tea party, invited my wife, and that was nice. The fifth-year students had a regular party [laughs] with alcohol and everything! **[110 MINUTES]** It’s alright. They were a little older and they were happy ... And my wife said to me afterwards, You know what they said to me — to her? I said, No, what’d they say to you? They said, Thank you for sending your husband down here. We were terrified. We’d never spoken English in a classroom before, and we were so afraid he would make fun of us because of our language, but he didn’t make fun of us, and he listened to what we were saying. Now we feel much better. Now we can go any place; we could understand things. And then I realized what was going on. There was a functionary in the school — I don’t know what his title was — but he was European descent — that’s alright. He had told them, You people are gonna have to shape up, the North Americaner is coming down here and he’ll make you shape up! So they were thinking Simon Legree was about to come in the room. I’m glad I didn’t behave like Simon Legree. I carried that away and thought about it, and that changed my approach to teaching quite a bit. And, as I’ve said earlier in the interview, the longer I taught the more I listened to students and discussed things with them in ways they could understand, and, I thought, That’s progress. I had been invited to a dinner — some kind of commemorative dinner of some sort — held in a public building like the Union Club in Philadelphia-type thing, and the dinner was supposed to be eight o’clock I think — about then. But I knew that the norms in that community were that you eat later, partly because they take a break at lunchtime and not go back to work until maybe five

o'clock or four o'clock, because the heat of the day was oppressive. Those norms were probably formed before air conditioning, but they stayed the way tradition does. But you always figured you'd go a little later than [laughs] ... so I get down there maybe ten minutes before the affair was gonna start. I knew I'd be too early, but I didn't want to be embarrassingly late, so I made my best guess at it. There was only one person there, that was this functionary, and he says, These people, they never on time! I said, Well, if you know they're never on time, come later yourself! But he was alright. They gotta learn. It's their country, it's their way. I had to learn for ... He says, Come, I'll show you some pictures! So there were pictures along the wall of this club or whatever it was we were in. And he says, Look, look, look. Ah, there. See those soldiers? They are about sixteen, seventeen, just the right age for soldiers. I'm standing here [laughs] And he goes on about time. Then he says, I think I'm getting married in May. That is the right age to be married — the right time — I will get married in May. [laughs] **[115 MINUTES]** I thought, Good grief, this guy's got his life [laughs] ironed out by the day, by the hour, by the minute. And he was the one who was surprising my students by telling them that the villain was coming down.

POOLEY: But it sounded like a really profoundly important time, that it changed your teaching, and your attitude.

WRIGHT: Yes, it did. There were a couple of things involved. One, I figured, Catholic university in South America? I'm a Protestant. What kind of problems am I gonna have trying to teach sociology to ... not a single problem. It was hands off, you're in charge. That's that. Then I got thinking about Catholic universities in the States. They're probably very similar. But when I was here I never gave that a thought. I just assumed you were limited by what you could do in places like Villanova or St. Joe's. You're not limited. I mean there are probably some things that are taboo, but they would be taboo anyhow. One of the things I frequently would say to new graduate students when they'd come for advice and so forth, and they were wanting to study something sociological about religion, and I said, That's OK, but don't trash a religion now, you'll need it. [laughs] And I never took a study or a paper that trashed somebody's religion. That's my quirk, but I felt that way about it. So, that changed and also the openness to the students changed. Not that one experience alone but thread going through my way of doing things. I don't think you see anything that Herb did or that I did that trashed his, the Hebrew religion or the Christian or the Catholic, the Protestants. It didn't matter. I don't know about ISIS. I wouldn't say that I identify with, not encourage people to follow that. It's more a political movement anyhow, I think.

POOLEY: Well, you know, I think it's a good moment for us to wrap up today, because we've got through to your time at UCLA. We can wrap up with that in our next session, and talk about the

NSF [National Science Foundation] and then the decision to go to Annenberg, when we pick up next time.

END OF SESSION TWO