

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 THREE (July 27, 2016)

The interview, after filling in gaps from Wright's Columbia period in the 1950s, focuses on his experience at UCLA in the 1960s, including his recollections of the sociologist Ralph Turner and journalism scholar Jack Lyle. Wright describes his two-year stint at the National Science Foundation (1967-1969), and his 1969 decision to move to the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. He recounts his decades of teaching and research at Annenberg, including his recollections of George Gerbner, Larry Gross, Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Ray Birdwhistell, and Michael Delli-Carpini. Other topics addressed are his collaborations with Herbert Hyman on expert opinion in developing countries and on education in the U.S., a graduate training program at UCLA, his writing and teaching styles, and his relationship with his late wife Anne Marie Krefft Wright.

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 27, 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 27, 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 27, 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 27, 2016, Communication Scholars Oral History Project, Annenberg School for Communication Library Archives, University of Pennsylvania, pp. 34–35.

Transcript of interview conducted July 27, 2016, with CHARLES R. WRIGHT (session three)

Haverford, PA

Interviewed by Jefferson Pooley

POOLEY: This is day three 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 27, 2016.

WRIGHT: Yeah, well, one of the afterthoughts that I had, that was, I think a slight handed my use of functional analysis. I don't want to put it down — I didn't... It turns out that it has been useful for me — you know, organizing thoughts. And that would apply not just to Communication but a lot of things: new developments, new inventions, whatever it might be, because that little framework that I laid out in the beginning leaves spaces that you can put in things that are — that you think are functional, dysfunctional — the whole business that I tried to stretch out into a paradigm in the early work, and I think it still does. It's not much use if you're gonna use it for testing hypotheses, but it's very good for making you call attention to both the negative effects of the kind of items or processes that you're looking at, as well as the positive ones. For example, when Herb and I were doing the study for Encampment, where we had the young people before and after they'd had the exposure to this program that the Society [for Ethical Culture] was conducting. We thought — we spent a lot of time with the directors and the people involved in the program to see what they thought they were doing with the program and the goals that they had set out and the like, but naturally people don't automatically think of the negative effects that they might have, and hadn't, intended to happen. So Herb and I thought about it ourselves, but we also looked into the literature to see what kind of possible negative consequences it could be, of this — of organized program of that type, and the best example we could find was Henry Riecken study of ... I wonder if I got the names right, but he had done a similar type study, but different from ours, but he had looked to see whether there were negative effects or potentially negative effects. We wrote to Hank and he was generous, allowed us to modify his — some of his questions a bit to fit our program, and that was very helpful to us. The same thing could be used for example, when people are talking blue-sky-wonders of the digital age, and there's negative effects possibly there too. Now, we

were not — I wasn't at least — in any way interested in trivial positive or negative effects. In my functional analysis thing, I was very careful to point out that Merton's theory — he focused on what had become taken-for-granted types of requirements or whatever the components might be of the program. So — but I never wrote all that out all the time. [laughs] You plant the seed and you hope that it will grow, and people will use their own backgrounds, theories, and so forth to fill in the expected or unexpected consequences that, that whatever it is they were studying—whether it was a program or a process of working or however—might have either positive or negative consequences. One thing I left out — I think I left out — I didn't go back talk to look this up at any chance, [5 MINUTES] but I think I left out the term for behaviors or actions that had no significant function or dysfunction or so I could [inaudible]. Otherwise you would be sitting around playing with trivia for ever and ever because things are interlinked. So there's a lot of qualitative judgement and opinion built into this scheme that I laid out, and I didn't so much drop it as internalized it, and used it, [laughs] and put it that way. But when you'd asked me what to elaborate, I think I'd given the back of the hand to it but I shouldn't have done that. That's important. I do wanna make that clear.

POOLEY: Can I jump in with a question as a follow up to that, which is: You already, in the book and in one of our earlier sessions, noted that Merton and his brand of functionalism was very important for the book. What about the broader Bureau of Applied Social Research findings on media? I'm thinking of Joseph Klapper and his dissertation that summarized the media effects research at Columbia, and then the book he published close to the time when you published yours, that was called *The Effects of Mass Communication*, which has had as its punch line that media tend to reinforce beliefs. That was the overriding theme I think, and I'm just wondering if that kind of Klapper line of reinforcement had anything to do with your own thinking about media and its functions for society.

WRIGHT: No, well, Joe and his work was a little bit ahead of mine. We all knew what he had done in the book, all [laughs] fellow [inaudible] or whatever you were gonna say, but I didn't use that as a point to start or refer to it or that. It was another thing that students wanted to know about, read about. Yeah, but I was influenced directly by working with Merton and Herb Hyman, and Lazarsfeld of course. It was the first-year, first-term graduate student who in the department had a party welcoming new students, that kind of thing, and various faculty members said a few words. I remember Lazarsfeld stood up and he said he had new interests. He says, And here comes Charlie Wright to study communication with me, and it's not my main focus anymore. [laughs] I said, Imagine you're a graduate student and you hear that, [makes choking sound; laughs] What have I done? But he underestimated the amount of attention that his work and he would get in the communication field. There was no communication field at that time. It was — you could see the seedlings: Wilbur Schramm was doing what he did and —

I forget what — [Claude] Shannon and [Warren] Weaver were taking things in a different direction, but there ... Schools were just being established, and as we mentioned last time, many of the traditional schools were doing journalism-type work, and that's good if you wanted to do that — that was very good. Columbia didn't — had its own school of journalism which was, touched base with the sociology thing but was primarily its own school. I can't say about other universities because as a student I'd just hear about it and I'd know. But the reason I — one reason I stayed at Columbia was that I was interested in other things in addition to communication. It's very funny the way areas of interest struggle to get academic credit **[10 MINUTES]** — credentials — and that, I think, was going on at a lot of places at that time. You had also, a lot of first-rate brains coming back into the field after having had experience in the military with communication problems or programs or whatever it might be, and they took their particular style of research with them when they were able to set up programs at different schools — like Carl Hovland up at Yale, and others that you know about, I'm sure. But the Columbia one was very diverse, it had practical implications for the military and civilian problems during World War II, but basically they brought field research into the forefront, I think, rather than laboratory-type experiments, which Hovland was doing up at his place, and that excited me and interested me very much. I've forgotten the different places that they — you had to classify what you did, and I looked for some reference to communication, but sociology was solid in there so was psych — but took a long time before you began to see that as a box that could be checked. Somebody was doing communication research, what's that? [laughs] We found out what it was, and it's continued to change — that's exciting too. If I were starting out now I think I could not absorb the amount of published material that I did absorb as a graduate student. The field has grown so big now, you got stuff in neuroscience, you got this, you got that. It's fantastic — very exciting.

POOLEY: Since you brought up the topic of sociology and communication research establishing itself, I wondered if you had experienced, either at UCLA or Annenberg, the claim that's made by Elihu Katz and others that — and you, in fact, in a piece you wrote in 1986 — that American sociology had, somewhat at least, abandoned the study of communication research, maybe in the 1960's, and this is a claim you hear from time to time. What do you think of that argument that sociology, in the U.S. at least, abandoned communication research?

WRIGHT: I don't know. I don't remember reading that comment any place. Certainly I don't think Elihu abandoned it, he continued to do work ...

POOLEY: Well, he said that people who were sociologists who got — who remained interested — got hired by communication programs and schools, like himself, like you.

WRIGHT: Yeah, well, I think that's probably true. The Langs [Kurt and Gladys], I think he — one of them took a sociology post, the other one took a communication post — Kurt took the communication post. Elihu and I [inaudible] went in and out of departments, but he stayed basically with sociology, and so did I in my research. So I don't know what to make of that comment. I think it certainly must have looked like that for young people who were looking for jobs, [laughs] but they were hiring in sociology. They were hiring some people who had, at least as one of their specialties, communication. Again, I haven't researched this myself but I do recall various points in the history of academia — let's call it that — you would find that communication and public opinion linked, or some other kind of link that would carry communication with them or it would carry there, but I don't know which. **[15 MINUTES]** Now it became globalization, and put that word in with communication and you're OK. I guess the technical side has excited people and prevailed, and the globalization — as we mentioned. There was always a little bit of it, but for many years it was basically American study, American communication systems, and some studied other ones abroad. The Bureau [of Applied Social Research] did a series of studies back in the late 1940s, early 50s on the Middle East. Communication — and the very same countries that they're working on nowadays. They did stuff on that back there.

POOLEY: Yeah, I wonder if Daniel ...

WRIGHT: ... there was interest in Africa and all. It was there but it wasn't called globalization at that time — and globalization means somewhat more than just studying particular individual countries. You asked about Columbia again, we've talked — well, we've we seen the work of Lazarsfeld that's there, and Merton's work on Kate Smith and things of that sort. And Herb Hyman was very heavy on survey-type research — national and international — and did a lot of work with and NORC, National Opinion Research Corporation, or Center, pardon me. But we also had on the faculty Dan Lerner who taught *Psych War*, and that reached out and began to shift over towards development of countries and their different viewpoints on it, I guess. But I do remember one early point in the stage, when they were — there was talk about how do you bring countries that had not really independently grown in production and other forms of commerce, and in government, and there were other things. Because there was thought to be a shortage of teachers in those areas and for a while the argument was made that radio would be a direct and fast way to bring whole generations up to more formal schooling than they had. They didn't have enough teachers around, they thought, to do it. This would give it a big boost. And there was research on the effects of these programs too.

POOLEY: Daniel Lerner himself didn't he write up some of that Bureau research on the Middle East in that *The Passing of Traditional Society* book? I don't know if that was ever in the air at

the Bureau — that work on the Middle East, and Daniel Lerner's ongoing interest in modernization?

WRIGHT: Yeah, I'm not following you, I'm sorry.

POOLEY: Oh, well, I just wondered if in the *Psych War* class or otherwise, if this work on modernization in the Middle East, if it was discussed a lot at Columbia?

WRIGHT: Well, maybe in some of the seminars — not in any that I took. But I'd say, yes, it probably was there with Lerner spark-plugging some of that. There were other people involved too, and I just can't think of any off hand.

POOLEY: You did want to mention other graduate students at Columbia that you had connections with or friendships with?

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah. Well, I became good friends with some people that I had known before. **[20 MINUTES]** Robert Williams was at Columbia College as well as graduate work, and we were friends, and he was bent towards psychology, and I was bent towards sociology. [laughs] So we didn't have much common experience on the courses, but we did take a few — we took a seminar with Herb Hyman and that's where we got the idea for the paper that we did, which is long, long gone. [laughs] I couldn't even find a copy. [laughs]

POOLEY: I have one if you ...

WRIGHT: It's lost out there — I beg your pardon?

POOLEY: I have a copy.

WRIGHT: Oh, you have a copy? Thank you. It lives! You've still got a copy. Bob's gone. He died a few years ago, and we never went any further. He did go further himself with it. He made that become his focus for his dissertation in psychology. But, then, personally ... and he taught psychology with some communication stuff in it I'm sure, but I didn't look at his courses so I wasn't sure what he did. But he didn't — he wasn't happy with academia, and he went into marketing-type research — of which there was a demand back then. Still is. Several of my students have gone into the "industry," as they call it, and they do very well. I'd say at least two of them that I know went into measuring the audiences for news on television and radio — that sort of thing — which makes sense. You could see how that would be of interest to

communication people, and the like. [phone sounds] Please. Thank you. [phone sounds again] Oh, I'm sorry Jeff.

POOLEY: No it's OK, let's just wait until she hangs up if that's OK, and I will cut this part out. No trouble whatsoever. But just while we're off camera — it's still recording, but I'm gonna cut this out — but if you want to mention the other Columbia graduate students that you had written to me about, you know, you ... don't do it yet. Let's wait until the phone call is off, but I just wanted to prompt you about that, because I can always include a footnote but it would be better if you spoke about it, you know.

WRIGHT: OK, are we back? Oh, we're back, OK. Well, I think I had mentioned earlier, there was at Columbia, at the same time that I was there, a great interest in professionalization and a particular interest in medical areas. George Reader was from Cornell University or their medical school in New York. I've forgotten the name now; they've changed it recently. And that school was — that medical school — was beginning to experiment with an approach to medicine that took into account the whole person not just his or her kidneys or heart, but other environmental [inaudible] ... their family set up, work problems — whatever they had. Looking at the whole person and their — now they would call it all of their networks I guess. But we didn't use that then — that sort of thing. They came to the Bureau for help and advice and performance evaluation of their progress, and another graduate student, Mary Goss was ... went to work with Reader in the hospital there, and she stayed there, and was one of the early — what we now call medical sociologists — and was very successful at that. **[25 MINUTES]** So George and she and I were friends and later Mary's husband joined our group, and we'd go to conventions together — things like that. So that was a close connection, and got me a little interested in medical, the growing field of medical sociology. Pat Kendall did some of that too — and others at Columbia, and that was good. Bob Williams, I mentioned, was a friend who then went on the psychology bent, not sociology. I don't know who else I mentioned or have forgotten, to tell you the truth. I don't know. It was a friendly group at Columbia but my tendency was to do my own thing, and I did that. It's very hard to trace back what influences you — or did influence you — and all that. Makes me nostalgic [laughs] just talking about it.

POOLEY: Yes. Well ...

WRIGHT: I did more — I didn't do much collaboration except with Herb, except with a couple of my own students later on like Muriel Cantor out at UCLA. She was not just a student — became a friend of Ann Marie's and mine, and her husband became our friend too. He was an interesting fellow — a psychologist. After he retired, he became an anthropologist. That's an interesting combination. But he got interested in the same communication areas as his wife

Muriel did and they wrote several books later on that. Her dissertation became a book — was on the producers of television evening dramas. I don't know if you wanna use anecdotes or not, but I remember full well she'd been my assistant at UCLA for a couple of years and I really had a project I wanted her to work on, but she didn't — she wasn't really very interested in doing that. The project I wanted her — didn't — never got to be solid research but the idea that I was playing with was that opinion leaders were more likely — some of them at least — more likely to be playing a role, that was, somehow they got cast into rather than that there was a dynamic, gregarious person that would get it all, but I didn't develop it. I wrote about it a little in the book but didn't follow up. So her dissertation had to do with producers and their role — what we now would call the role set: directors, actors, writers. And her focus was, what in particular did these role interactions have to do with the final content that came out in this stuff at night? She said, I look occasionally at the evening stuff and it's not very exciting or very good or even just strange, and I look around at my neighbors—she lived in Brentwood—she said, They're bright, intelligent people. I wonder why are they turning this stuff out? That's what she started to study it, and then it grew from that into a more interesting thing now. I remember I mentioned in the first interview we had that I've always tried to put things in clear, simpler language and not necessarily dress it up with jargon. **[30 MINUTES]** I don't think she ever uses the term "role set" but that's what she's working with, and wouldn't gain anything by naming it then. Did a lot by describing what was going on. So it — and as I said that became a nice friendship that we had. I miss her and I missed her husband both — they're both gone now. But she stuck with it, she became chair of sociology out in Washington. What's the name of that college there? It's slipping me — nice little school out in Washington, DC. Anyway, so she stayed in sociology, didn't go into communication — she studied communication, but didn't go and do it.

POOLEY: So ...

WRIGHT: And then here at Penn I also did some collaboration with Jo Holz, who this past year or so been back at Penn working in the Kathleen [Hall] Jamieson shop next to us [the Annenberg Public Policy Center]. Had a great student Hannah Kliger—the last I heard she was with Penn State Abington. But she didn't study the ... they all — they were all doing communication stuff, but hers turned out to be focused on interpersonal rather than mass media, but some mass media. What she was studying with was the history of voluntary associations of immigrant groups in the U.S. in the — from the early twentieth century until she did her dissertation. And that included then the foreign language papers that their group made and distributed and helped to keep together as a community. And there were a few other students of that type who were exceptionally good, I thought, and I enjoyed working with them. I enjoyed working with all of my graduate students. It was always fun to see somebody

have an idea of their own, and nourish it, and make it grow, and bring in some sociological concepts even if they didn't spell it out. You could tell they were thinking that way, and that's why I came to Penn — which we will cover next time if you're here or later today, whatever your plan is on that. So — but again, my social life — it wasn't built around the university or student activities. A little more so at UCLA, maybe, because it was Hollywood. [laughs] Whatever we did was fun.

POOLEY: Well, can I ask about UCLA? I have two related questions, one of which is about Ralph Turner and his role. I saw you wrote about that experience, and the other is about your role as the head of the graduate research training program. It looked like in the period from 1963 to 1967 you were in charge of the graduation research training program, and that may have been significant — it may not have been — but I was curious in part because of your dissertation at Columbia, and whether — and your discussion just now about graduate students—what that was? **[35 MINUTES]**

WRIGHT: I'm not sure I follow the train of it all there. When I went to UCLA it was a joint department: sociology and anthropology. Shortly before or maybe a little after — it was tough in time to distinguish it—the department split, and sociology went one way and anthropology another. It was, I thought, a very interesting and very exciting department to be in; it was my first real job, not counting the Columbia experience, which was real enough but I was teaching in my own school in New York at Columbia and [inaudible] feel different when you start a new job across the continent [laughs] and you don't know a soul to begin with. I think I told you that the chairman had handed me three different courses to teach than I had originally talked about giving. Eventually I got my own package in but I had to put in my time as the young boy on the block [laughs] and fill in for somebody who was sick or ill or on sabbatical, or whatever it was. I don't think we had — or I had — much formal influence from the anthropologists. I knew a few, I knew [inaudible] very well. His specialty was blood-types. Anthropologists studied blood-types? That's what he did, he went to Australia I think. Well, anyhow, I talk with him a lot. Ralph Turner was a good friend. He was trained at Chicago, and despite that he was [laughs] a good fellow, but didn't do much on communication. Nobody did that, except for some people in journalism. Jack Lyle in Journalism was a good friend of mine, he worked with Wilbur Schramm on several projects, and Jack also headed some extension program they had in Hawaii — I've forgotten the name of it. The connection here is that after I had been at UCLA for, I don't know, four — about five or six years, maybe a little bit longer—several of us came to the same observation and conclusion that we needed to have a research institute of some sort that would provide the opportunity for our students to put into practice some of the methodology we were teaching. Oh, I lost my glass of water. Oh, here it is, excuse me—throat's getting dry. And we formed a committee. I can't remember all of the people involved. One was Leo Reader,

who was a very prominent medical sociologist, one was Jack from journalism, and the chair of journalism, Walter Wilcox, myself, I think somebody from political science, but I can't remember who it was, and several people from journalism — Jack and Wilcox, being only two of them. But we came up with a plan to have a very modest research institute, mainly survey-type research but other things possible. And we were careful — worked it out, **[40 MINUTES]** and we figured it could be done on “X” number of dollars, and we trotted off to the administration and presented our plan. It would have cost \$30,000. [gasps] In those days that was considered outrageous. [laughs] OK, so we didn't get it — it didn't come through. But we didn't quit. We had a couple anthropologists interested too. Our little proposal was sitting inside somebody's desk drawer and [laughs] that was the end of it. We came to the ... I wouldn't say conclusion. That makes it sound too final, but amongst us the idea came up that we ought to split the things up an organization might do, and try to get them funded somehow, inside or outside or whatever. And so we did that: we got a grant for training, and then a research part. Well, people splintered off and did, but the availability was getting better as years or so went by and finally the UCLA unit was approved through the School of Public Health, and Leo Reader was in charge of it. And they couldn't have picked a better person. He was a good man, and knew his research and knew his medical stuff, so that worked — that was a good move — and we ... some of the others of us, including Ralph, applied for a training grant and got that. And I directed that for a while, and I thought it was a successful program in getting people to learn more about ways of social research and how they might fit into the problems of health and public health and medicine and things of that sort. I don't know how many of our people limited themselves to medicine or went primarily into it or whatever it might be, because I left UCLA in '67 — didn't leave it, I took a leave of absence to go with the National Science Foundation, and then as fate had it I didn't go back to UCLA. I came here to Penn, so I couldn't follow up any of the bright people — they were bright people — and I think they were influenced by the training program. I was certainly influenced. I was beginning to learn what and how you can teach things, and I got not a very original idea but nevertheless I got it and tried it. I set up a seminar where the students had to read a workbook or article, didn't matter, by the faculty members in sociology and some other areas if it fit. They'd read it and then in the seminar we would invite the author to come in, and students would have prepared questions like, Why did you do this, or why did you do that? And the faculty were amazingly candid about the problems, the real problems, of getting research done out in the field, and I think that sunk into the students pretty much — I hope so. We had one faculty member, I won't mention his name, but he had written a very successful book through what could loosely be called participant observation and face-to-face interviews with people **[45 MINUTES]** — that sort — and I said to him, Will you let the students read that and tell them the problems you had and why you decide this or that or the other? He said, Yeah, I'm willing to do that but I want tell you in advance, in my opinion good interviewers and participant observers

are born and not made. [laughs] I said, Well, OK, just tell us how they were born for the study you did. Well, he did — he said ... well, first of all he took a long time to do the book, and in that sense he was more like an anthropologist than sociologist was at that stage. And he said he wanted to talk with the workers and all that, and he found out that what they liked to talk about most were sports, and baseball in particular. So he trained himself: he read the statistics on who threw so many pitches—this, that and the other thing. And they absorbed him into the conversation, and eventually he'd also just learn other things about the informal structure of the business, you know. The formal structure you can get. There's the president, the CEO [inaudible]. He found out how things really worked — the shortcuts that had to be taken and the like. So, I hoped that what the students heard all that it would sink in that you don't just walk in unprepared and you're gonna be swept into the arms of the — [laughs] you gotta earn your way, and respect, and the like. I remembered that. So, whenever I would hear arguments in that department or wherever about we gotta have a course in qualitative interviewing or qualitative research, I think, No, you gotta have somebody who does it, and can do it well, and can talk about how to do it. But it's — you know — it's not like ... you can write a book about how to do survey. You gain a lot of personal experience. Experience counts — Herb just knew, by instinct, many things. He could tell you but you don't learn it until you do it. So, that was a good experience for me and I thought that the sponsors got their money's worth in young talent that might become interested in public health or medical problems, and some did, I'm sure. I just didn't follow them up very much. The other thing that that training program did, I guess, was strengthen our traditional training by giving them more variety and more experiences and focusing it all more. I began to think more and more about what teaching consists of and how you ought to do it. And some of it I was able to put into practice. Some of it not. I don't know. Is that the sort of thing you wanted to hear?

POOLEY: Absolutely, and I wanna just ask about one more mid 1960s project and this was, I think, a collaboration with Herb Hyman, and funded by the United Nations, about expert opinion, and ...

WRIGHT: Oh, yeah!

POOLEY: ... it led to a book in 1967 called *Inducing Social Change*.

WRIGHT: Yeah, yeah ...

POOLEY: So it came from the UN, I suppose, and if you have any thoughts about that study and working with Herb on it ... **[50 MINUTES]**

WRIGHT: That study was part of a trilogy that Herb was going to do, and I was gonna help him. Part one was ... well, the big problem was how can you help developing countries get more modernized, for lack of a better word. So the first part was what we published. What Herb and I both thought, Let's talk with people who have been doing that for a number of years, and just get them to tell us what were some of the obstacles to putting in a new well or whatever it might turn out to be. And we did that. It was a complicated and difficult survey of people who'd spent a large number of years on developing projects in different places and all of that, and it was a good study I think. Interesting and fun in some ways, but we were well into the study when some feedback would come from somebody who would send in a questionnaire six months too late or whatever, but they'd been up in some [laughs] mountain somewhere in a remote tribe and they couldn't fill it out but they told us what had happened. That was kind of fun. The second phase was going to be — now here's where my memory may distort things and I may get it wrong, so I don't want to say this is the ultimate truth. But the second part was to do comparisons of successful and unsuccessful efforts at development [inaudible]. That never got off the ground. Why? Nobody would say their project hadn't been wonderful [laughs] and successful, and so we would — just didn't get the documentation we were hoping to get. I honestly don't remember what part three was. It didn't happen because part two never happened [laughs] so whatever were we gonna do, I don't know. So part one stood on its own legs, may ... there may have been some surprises in it, maybe not, it depends on the reader. But I know that it was built on solid data. It had good data and people were frank about it. I would have thought, Well ... well, we didn't even think about part two and three until we had finished part one, anyhow. I wasn't involved in parts two or three, or what happened to them I don't know. We certainly didn't carry it further than that. Herb may have given a paper or something but I didn't. Why does that particular project tickle you or [laughs] your curiosity?

POOLEY: Well, I was in part curious about it because of the timing. It was that period when there were lots of modernization studies going on — I think of Wilbur Schramm's *Communication and National Development* — and by the time you published part one, I think it was 1967, you know, that was when some of that modernization work was coming under criticism, maybe just during that period and into the early 1970's, and I didn't know if you continued on — it sounds like you didn't maintain an interest in those topics?

WRIGHT: No, no. No, we didn't. I didn't anyhow. I don't recall Herb working with anyone else on any parts of it. **[55 MINUTES]** I may be getting projects confused in my mind as it was so similar. I'm sorry, I should have done my homework on this and refreshed my memory. No, I don't know. Gene Levine worked on some projects with us and Terry Hopkins worked on the *Encampment* study. Gene, who was a friend of mine, I don't ... he was in Geneva too, so it had

to be connected with the UN. Maybe he did some work — I think not, I think he may have worked on the stuff we hadn't had. I'm sorry I just don't ...

POOLEY: No problem. So let me ask about another 1960s event, which was you moving to the National Science Foundation in Washington, taking the leave from UCLA. What motivated you to take that post, and if there were any highlights from those two years of service?

WRIGHT: I'm glad you brought that up. Yeah, what motivated me was a ... it was an important agency and therefore, wanted to be sure that they got the service that they needed, and that sounds corny but I'm patriotic. [laughs] I thought it was a good thing to do. I also thought I could personally benefit in the sense that I would be up to date on things that people wanted to do research about, and better than that I would be seeing stuff that wouldn't be coming out in publications for another half a year or year with time delay in publishing, and that was a boost, I think. And it was true — it was actually true. I learned what the future interests were, and some important projects, and I suppose, selfishly, the idea of living in Washington for a year or two was appealing. [laughs] I'll put it that way. And, strangely enough, in a non-publishable way, I was right, because what I found was I got to know several people — a lot of people at the ... from the NSF but several other people in Washington that are often scoffed at as, oh, the pointy-headed bureaucrat and all that. No, it wasn't true. I had two advisory committees because I was handling both sociology and social psych — excellent people, people like Don Campbell and so forth. And there was no sloppy way of handling the reviews. They were good reviews of the projects proposed — very honest — and those guys on those committees had to read, eventually, hundreds of applications, and they would — we would sit, when we had our annual meeting or — it's not annual — we had our meetings, we had about three every year I think, they'd work until eight, nine o'clock at night from having started at nine in the morning. The reward would be you could — you get a dinner. [laughs] No, thanks a lot — easier way to earn a dinner! Anyway, they were good natured about it, and they worked hard and gave good tips to me about what to say to the researcher if there were some problems with their thing, and it usually — often were. So that was a personal experience. **[60 MINUTES]** I just cringe every time I hear a person say that, the bureaucrat's spending our money — taxpayers' money! They're not — they weren't throwing it away. They were careful about it right then. That changed my attitude. And most of them stayed there for a long time so they were ... they knew the formal and informal structure of government and what not to do and what to do to make the place work right, and it was very good. Those were, you know — I didn't even put that in writing anywhere. It didn't have anything to do with it, but I felt I lent a hand. Well, I should mention the NSF also at that time was, if not the only, one of the few government-supported agencies that took what we used to call "pure research" stuff, because it wasn't applied [inaudible] research problems that might come up from military or some other

branch. We had agencies that did that. People could get grants from Defense Department or whatever thing. But you had the NSF as the place you could go and where you could simply study the problem from a theoretical, research point of view. It was very good. Got tighter as the budgets got shorter, and this was a place that could squeeze it a little bit, and it just changed over time up and down as everything in Washington seems to do. What's another point? Oh, yeah a second thing that I learned — I should have known in advance but I didn't — there was all this quarreling going on in departments of sociology, social psych, and communication, but I didn't get very many applications for that at the time because we ... but in any case there was always fights in departments about the quantitative versus the qualitative thing — baloney. We didn't favor quantitative research over qualitative. We looked at the whole project and what it was going to do, and I think that a key question, not "the" but a key question was: can these people do it? If they'd already built a record, then that was in their favor. But everybody has to get started so you were a little more lenient maybe with a new person. But it wasn't a matter of, They're qualitative — oh take them, or, They're quantitative — oh take them. Baloney — and I still hear it today! Not about NSF in particular, but the notion that you only do one type thing — it's baloney. We even mixed qualitative and quantitative research, Herb and I, in our own studies. So that was a awakening for me that, No, we're not biased in favor of this or that or against this or that. We're biased in favor of good research, good work — publications, things of that sort. Yeah.

POOLEY: So ...

WRIGHT: And I also got — from a personal point of view — a very good feeling that sociology and social psych were being represented in the agency, and that was important. They've rearranged, I'm not sure what the current structure is like. It's a little different. I think social psych, if I'm not mistaken, has been cut off and put into medical, biological, that unit — I think — less in the social unit. Sociology still stands by its guns there. I don't know about anthropology or political science, whatever. **[65 MINUTES]** One thing that was developing at NSF — hadn't quite gotten strong structure at that time. Now, we're talking about 1967, '68, but what was being under consideration — not by me but by another unit called "Special Projects" headed by a psychologist Murray Aborn, I think his name was — what came out to be was the big national surveys where they could change the topics each time that it was done, and when they kept some topics to have continuity through it. That was partly, I think, an effort to give social scientists the machinery that physics people would have. But now think of it, of course we gotta have a whirlicon [laughs] and it's gonna cost 10 million dollars. Oh that ... [laughs] wanna do a survey that's gonna cost a million dollars [gasps; laughs] and [inaudible]. But it works, this works — or it did work, I assume it's still working now. That — almost everyone I talked to thought that must be a nifty idea to have a commonly shared survey like

that. And common sharing is a touchy point, as I found out when I tried to get my hands on some commercial research. As if I could use it commercially. I wouldn't know what to do with it. [laughs] So you like coffee 'X' better than coffee 'Y'? Gee, that's nice, come on have a sample. No. So, that was a good experience. I also got a feel for Washington and it was nice compared to the terrible things that have happened recently with — a week ago, sitting in the park — what is it called — across from the White House? Lafayette Park. Have lunch if you want, eat a sandwich, nobody bothers you. Couldn't walk into the White House, obviously not, you don't want that, but you didn't feel like you were somehow in a place that had security people in every corner. [laughs] Didn't need it then, or didn't think we needed it. I know I'm leaving out some things but I can't remember what they are. Things that I wanted to bring up in our conversation but I don't know.

POOLEY: Do you want to look at your notes? Do you want to take a look at those notes?

WRIGHT: Oh, the notes. I think we covered them in a strange way, but we did cover some. [inaudible] I've got them. Well, it's out of sequence but I know you were interested in Ralph Turner, and I don't know what I can tell you. Let's see, he represented the Chicago School, and well ... he did work on collective behavior and that brought in some communication stuff from wherever it was — was in psych or anthro or sociology? He was a gentleman, a good teacher, a good colleague, a good chair. He steered us after we split from anthropology. I liked him a lot. **[70 MINUTES]** He was an Anglophile. [laughs] He loved everything British! And he involved me in his study of the earthquake stuff. While I was here at Penn I was a consultant on that project. It was a good project. I don't know [inaudible] if you ever saw his book called *Waiting for Disaster*? Oh, what happened was the federal government got interested in — they have emergency set-ups, and some how physicists had learned a way to predict where earthquakes might be, but not with precision. They'd say, It'll be Havertown [Pennsylvania] or whatever. They were ... somebody in the government asked Ralph at UCLA, could they do a study of how people felt about the media presenting the scientific predictions about earthquakes — which they were doing. And so he decided he could do it himself and replied — wrote a proposal and they said, Yeah, go ahead. And he took this project on. Very fascinating because all the research prior to that having to do with earthquakes, and other kind of emergencies, primarily consisted of going in after the event had happened and studying how people reacted: how they saved themselves or others or their property or whatever it might be. But now we had something new, a prediction of a ... of a earthquake that could be studied and people's reactions to it. And it'd be simplified but it won't do it justice this way. To no one's surprise he found that the initial news about the prediction and so forth reached people quickly by radio and newspapers — the mass media. And he did a continuing survey several months apart, like a panel study, and it wasn't much but at the end of their time period — they studied for a couple of years, I think —

people were shifting and getting their information from other people more than they did in the beginning. So that, you know, fed into the ... some of the personal influence stuff or whatever it might be, and I helped a little bit on that. But, anyhow, that was a good study — I think vastly overlooked by ... and I used it in my graduate class, I used it at the — and they would just take a look and they'd say, Oh, 1969! [laughs] I tried, I never really quite succeeded, with some students I did, but most not. I tried to get them not to think of this not as an earthquake prediction, but disaster, as Turner called the title. What are the things around us that would predict a terrible thing happening that's gonna happen somewhere around where you live but we don't know quite where, and it's gonna be big but we don't know quite how big it's gonna be, and well, maybe it won't. Well, we think it's gonna happen but we don't know just when. I said, What have you got? You've got terrorism. Think of — try to get rid of the dating detail and think, How do people handle this kind of threatening? We had it with the atom bomb back in the 1950s. We've got it now with terrorism — whatever name you want to call it **[75 MINUTES]** — that's going on around there. How do you live with that? What do you do? If they say, It's an earthquake coming someplace around the Delaware Valley, I don't know quite where but it's gonna come, but, well, maybe not this year, but it's coming. People are gonna get hurt or we don't know how bad. How do you live with that? That's the study, I think. That's the problem, and they get diverted by other stuff that [inaudible]. I don't care, I haven't ... and I just have not learned how to get students to generalize and then predictorize afterwards. I don't know how to do it. I can tell them, [laughs] that that's why I put the reading on the list. They have to make the connection somehow, I think. And I've been trying to do that with other things besides terrible disasters — you know, just to get them to not worry about, Is it the newspaper, or is it — unless it's relevant, but if it's not relevant why bother with it? And now I'm gonna hang up my guns and [laughs] I never will find out how to get them to think that way. I do that with dissertations too. The original idea sometimes just doesn't click, but you can go back and say, What was I really trying to do? And I don't know how ... I'm boring you with the details [laughs] of teaching, which you know well — you're trying it yourself. You'll get new experiences and you'll change your style or your mind, and thank goodness good universities and good colleges make enough allowance — I don't think they ever spell it out, but that's the freedom in the classroom. You can fiddle around a bit and try to get people to see things. Don't we learn anything from the past? No. [laughs] Anything from the past? Just watch the current convention — the previews to the convention, some of the stuff that the candidates were saying make me shudder. Yeah, that's life.

POOLEY: Well, let me ask about Annenberg, and here you are in Washington, you're working for the National Science Foundation, thinking you'll go back to sunny Los Angeles, and yet you decide to move up to Philadelphia and go to Annenberg, and, were you invited? What were the circumstances of your appointment here?

WRIGHT: It's ... they're not quite hidden in what we've been talking about before. I thought that with a whole school devoted to the study of communication, I would — it would — attract more students who were interested in the same kind of thing that I was interested in. So I could truly say it was the promise of a school that was becoming more research-oriented. It started out as a more, little more performing-type thing but shifted over. Now it's almost completely research-oriented. I think that I was brought here to encourage and open the students' minds to concepts that come from sociology like role set and social structure, this, that, and the other thing. Not that they had to do that but they were to have that in their tool kit. They weren't thinking that way — I think they weren't thinking that way. So, therefore I didn't throw away my sociology. I brought it with me and there was an audience for a while. **[80 MINUTES]** They were forced to take some of it [laughs] but I had plenty of rigorous students who were interested. When we first came here it was strictly a graduate program. It wasn't until years later that they broadened the program to include undergraduate work, partly at the request and demand of students who were looking to the future or maybe had misconceptions of what it might be like. But they could test of it here and that worked out. It's a good quality program now, I think. We still stress the doctorate. That's our main, unique offering. So, I took my turn at teaching the undergraduate stuff too. Basically I did some of the same but presented it a little differently or I was still trying to guard myself against the jargon bit. [laughs] That worked out alright. And the students at Penn are very nice and very bright, and I can compare them favorably with the students at UCLA, and at Columbia. So, that was OK, but it was the academic program that brought me — which really sounds weird but it's true. That's the way it was.

POOLEY: Was it George Gerbner who recruited you?

WRIGHT: Oh yeah it was George. Yeah. He had tried to do that before I went to NSF. I said no, I was going to NSF, and then when my time at NSF was running out I was gonna go back to UCLA. But he did the recruiting. I had had one member of the faculty on one of my consulting committees in Washington, so I knew something about the academic program here.

POOLEY: And who was that?

WRIGHT: Percy Tannenbaum. He was going to be the chair of the graduate program, but he left to go to Berkeley to head up their Survey Research Center out there. I didn't know any others. It was a mixture, I guess, of some new people George had recruited and some folks he had inherited from the past, and he respected that, and he kept them on. So we had — Percy was there. Charlie Hoban, who had done some work in ... on the role of motion pictures in educational settings. Yeah, he was there. They had a young fellow, Larry Gross, [laughs] and he

stayed until a couple of years ago when he left to go to Annenberg West, to head up their graduate program there. We had Robert [inaudible], who was in the media in different kind of ways, I guess. We had Hiram Haydn, who was the editor of a scholarly journal — I've forgotten the name of it now — for Phi Beta Kappa people. [Charles] Hoban. We had Sol Worth, who teamed up with somebody from Temple, and did a nifty book on what Indians do with a camera when you give them and all that. We had the man who did those prints of **[85 MINUTES]** ... that print over there, Sam Maitin, yeah. Al Rose who did the television production stuff, which eventually we dropped. Who have I left out? Oh, Ilona, she did the drama, Ilona Gerbner.

POOLEY: Was Klaus Krippendorff there?

WRIGHT: Oh, Klaus? Klaus was the young fellow who was here, yeah. He had come with George from Illinois, Indiana — wherever it was. Yeah, and there were a few other people. I'm just blocking the names.

POOLEY: How about Ray Birdwhistell?

WRIGHT: Ray came the same year I came, yes. He did, you know, body motion and communication.

POOLEY: The school was smaller, and what was it like as a faculty member there in 1969 — the early 1970s, that period when it was still pretty young as a school?

WRIGHT: Yeah, it was small, yeah, smaller, right. What can I say? We ran it like a little department, and continued to search to add people who would bring something useful to our students. We had for a while an economist, William Melody, his name was, from Canada. Think, think, think ... Oh, I mentioned Sam Maitin. He did the silk prints and stuff. I'm gonna look at the old books and I won't remember their names. [laughs]

POOLEY: Were you close with any particular faculty members in those early years — any friendships?

WRIGHT: Birdwhistell.

POOLEY: Birdwhistell?

WRIGHT: Yeah, we were on the same page. I mean, he was on — oh, I shouldn't say we were on the same page but we were in the same book. [laughs] He was unique, and students loved it

because he would do what might sound like crazy things to you and me — or to me, not to you. [laughs] Like he'd bring something like this in the room before it was widespread, and he'd say, What's that? Describe it to me. And his students would look [inaudible], It's — looks like eight inches tall and it's got three legs on the bottom, and it's got a little do-hicky around there. It's black — it's painted black, and it's solid. And they'd think, Ha! There is it. And he'd look and he'd say, How's it taste? Taste? [laughs] Well, they'd taste the thing! He'd say, You gotta give a complete description. That just broke kids up, they were — they liked it, and it was a novelty to them to think, Yes, I don't know how things taste. Maybe I ought to, if I want to describe it. So that's where we were on different pages. I didn't go around tasting things, but he had his point and his reason for that. Well, that was it. That's how he did it. He [inaudible] told me once how much — don't want to take take up all your tape there, but he later built a house down in Brigantine on the bay — nice. It must have been an old lobster shack and he turned it into a house. I said, Wow, you're down by Atlantic City and the beach. You can just hop over and go to the beach like we did in California. **[90 MINUTES]** He said, No I can't. I said, Why not? He says, I get too tired. I said, Why do you get tired? He says, I can't stop working when I go to the beach. You go to the beach, you work at the beach. Why can't you stop? He says, "I look and I see different families with their little kiddies and some of them let the little kiddie run wild. No — and some of them keep them tethered close to the — wherever the blanket is or whatever they got. And I watch all their styles and so forth. He says, I'm exhausted after I've watched all that stuff. [laughs] I laughed but I understood what he meant. Yeah, he was a good guy. But I know I'm leaving somebody out — it's gonna come to me. I said Hiram Haydn did I, yes?

POOLEY: Well, while you're thinking about that, just as a follow up to Birdwhistell, I think during some of those years he was at least in conversation with a non-Annenberg pair of people including Dell Hymes, who might have been in anthropology or folklore, and Erving Goffman in sociology, and I guess I'm curious whether you ever encountered either of those two, and whether you had any relationship with the sociology department at Penn?

WRIGHT: Well, I met a Goffman a couple of times but we weren't close. And I knew Dell Hymes too, but again we weren't close friends. The connection with Dell was that he was related to Sol Worth. Their children when he got married and all that stuff, but I didn't seek or visit him socially or anything like that. I'm just a lone worker. [laughs] Yeah. The people I got close to that I worked with were — Herb was obviously my main friend and main teacher and main coworker, and his family, we got along. We were in Greece, Italy, we traveled together. It was very good, but I didn't have that close a relationship with people here. Joe [inaudible] out in California, I mentioned him, we spent a lot of time together and we got the same kind of dogs together [laughs] — makes a difference. My wife loved dogs, and I did too. And, again, since I was out there 13 years I began to ... it was a much more social place than my experience at

Penn. Partly it's geography: I lived just about a mile from here. We didn't go into town except to see the theater or something now and then, and the scheduled parties or dinners — that was alright. Yeah.

POOLEY: What kind ...

WRIGHT: Oh, I knew Phil [inaudible] in sociology pretty well; I knew [Samuel] Klausner from Columbia days, but we didn't have a lot of pal-around type things. And my wife and I did things together, and we enjoyed them — that was fine. We both loved the traveling and the sight-seeing and that, and we liked people here too — no problem. **[95 MINUTES]** But work occupied a lot of time, as you're finding out. [laughs] I felt for you when I got your phone call. Oh boy, he's on the trap. He's done! [laughs] You'll get the balance after a while. That's the kind of thing I've learned from Herb Hyman that you don't see in the books and places. Although we mixed home and work we could also at times just separate them. It was very nice.

POOLEY: Well, what kind of leadership style did Gerbner have at Annenberg during those many years when he was the dean?

WRIGHT: I don't know. I don't know how to stylize leadership, [laughs] and a lot of this is just my interpretation of things, but I think that communication, just like sociology, and somewhat like social psych, had to scramble to get academic credibility. So that — and sociology did I should say. For example, there were people who thought the kind of research that Lazarsfeld and others at Columbia did, survey-type stuff, was just looking at trivia. They wanted to look at the big things. But big things grow out of the trivia. [laughs] So, in that sense I think that George had to defend the study of communication — never had to defend like the dance or something but the study of it. Well how do you study it? What's scientific about that? Oh, a lot is scientific. So he had that to contend with, not within the school but with the rest — some, and not all of the university, but some people in the university. Then he had the usual balancing that you do between an artificial notion of the quantitative-qualitative type thing. Then he had also the fact that some people outside didn't like the results of his research saying television causes violence or ... So he had a lot to juggle. I think therefore in the — certainly in the early years of his term he had to keep things defensible, and the enemy was always at the gate about to crash in! [laughs] Therefore, he — you know, he just tried to get things done his own way, and with good reason probably.

POOLEY: You mention ...

WRIGHT: When he finally retired and — as chair — then we had a committee in the university set up to recruit a new dean, and that would settle on Kathleen [Hall] Jamieson — a very fortunate choice: a brilliant lady, a good scholar, and in the public eye in a good way with her research and her books and her work and all that, and also a very caring chair. I think I did tell you when I had my open heart surgery she and her family came and sat in the hospital all day waiting to see if I had survived. I never had a dean do that. I was very astonished and very grateful. That's just the kind of person she is. **[100 MINUTES]** She takes care of her folks. And then we moved to our new dean, and he's quite good too, and also very strong on faculty governance — self governance, which makes for a nice place to work, when you have that. So, I give each of them some good credits for doing what they had to do or liked to do or wanted to do, which is not to say there weren't bumps in the road — as in any organization there are bumps in the road. I think that's true of the whole field — it's life! I wouldn't have stayed that long if I didn't feel that it was a good place to be; the students were good. The program was good. It offers a lot of things in addition to what I do, so nobody's — comes in and is trapped, You have to do this kind of research, and that. At least it wasn't so in the past and I don't think it'll be so in the future either. It's a good place.

POOLEY: In the 1970s, maybe 1980s, you mention that there were some faculty who were more focused on production — television and film production — and other faculty were more research oriented. Right? And that George Gerbner had to deal with the tension that exists everywhere between the people who identify with qualitative and quantitative research, and I just wonder what it was like in the 1970s with those researchers who were more quantitative, qualitative, and more production-oriented.

WRIGHT: I didn't feel that. No, I didn't. It isn't that we turned our back on production things — that's important, that's what's going on. But I don't know, the mechanism for production was getting more and more expensive, you know, as new technology went in, and the faculty who joined us were interested in research and theory and on stuff like that. We kept some vestiges from the past, not — but eventually they sort of slid off. Oh, we prize Sam's work very highly, you see the copies hanging around the walls in the building. So we didn't kick him out or say, Hey, get away. But he had other work that he was doing, I'm sure. Maybe only the language has changed. I don't know, maybe there's still that tension and I didn't know it, but I didn't sense it back then when we were thinking of new appointments. We also have become very much more conscious nowadays of, Is there work for graduates when they get out? That played some part, I guess, in our reduction of the size of the student body, but never was the decision. It was just part of what you do. And I think people who were mainly or strongly production-oriented moved on to other places or other jobs where they could do that. They want to put on like a

movie or — Paul [Messaris] plays around a little bit with it. He's especially interested in as new technology comes out, and so that's there and I think that's a good solid groundwork for people who want to do that. **[105 MINUTES]** But we don't have a course in directing, a course in acting, a course in whatever else of that sort. And at the same we don't have anything music; we don't have that. It basically turns into a research-oriented project along the way. And we have the staff that can handle it. Now here's where both the professors and the students have to come eye to eye: we had a very nice student once — I'm not gonna mention any details — very nice student. He was interested in some new popular thing — I forgot what it was called now — where you imitate an actor or actress or whomever on the record, and they do it in the bars a lot, and the guy get's up and he thinks he's Bing Crosby — oh that's too old, he thinks maybe he's something else. Anyhow, the stage of research was such that exploratory, qualitative work would have been perfectly reasonable and certainly worth a dissertation project, I thought. But the student thought, He's a qualitative guy. I can't work it him, but I'd like to work with him. But he's a quali — quantitative guy. And he kept trying to design it so that it could be done quantitatively, and I kept saying, No, no, no. [laughs] And I said, Look we're stumped. You're trying to write something that you think is going to please me, and I'm saying 'no don't do that.' [laughs] Don't do that. The problem causes — calls for another, better, different approach. I said, Why don't you go see Carolyn Marvin? And he did, and she took him under her wing, and he got the degree, and he was happy. Why he thought he had to somehow turn it into a survey study or something, I don't know, but that student's misperceptions of the — what it was — I would have been delighted if he had done an [laughs] exploratory study and come up with some typology in the end or whatever it might be. We don't have a lot of that but it happens, and I'm sure it happens at other schools and times.

POOLEY: Yeah, I don't know when Annenberg adopted what it's now since abandoned: this bucket system whereby there were the effects, there were institutional, if I'm not mistaken, and then cultural studies or cultural approaches. Was that a formal division when you arrived, or was it adopted at some point during the intervening years?

WRIGHT: It was invented at some place along the way. It didn't work out, but that's alright. They tried it. You try it. It doesn't work. Get rid of it. Try something else. I'm glad it didn't harden. We were having difficulty with the nature of both sociology and communications is such that there's a ... there are a lot changing, going on within. Things, things become fashionable for a while and then they vanish. How many studies are we going to have six genders now or whatever because that's in the public eye? And anybody who has ever tried to classify any content, whether it was for a business to make up their filing system or whatever, knows how complicated the stuff is or learns how complicated they are or gives up in despair. I'm not sure what, but, so I think it ... it's healthy to see the field is flexible and grows. Not

cannibalistic or anything but just [inaudible] along. And I really have not had either the time or the knowledge or the research to know how these digital things are fitting into the scheme. I make that a question for the students when I give my seminar. [110 MINUTES] I say, Look, here's what I said back in the, whatever it was, 1980-something or '90. Now we got this new equipment. What difference does it make? Do people do things? I don't know. Or do they do different things? I don't like the words they use, but behaviors are still solid: people seek information. I called it surveillance — a bad term, but I was, I was stuck. I used it anyhow. But they don't just want information. They want to know how does it affect them, what should they do? There's going to be an earthquake in Southern California, but they can't tell you when, and they can tell you where, and they can't tell you how big. Do you pack up your family and move to Chicago, give up your job? No, you don't do that, you gotta work it out somehow. So, some character commit atrocities in the school or church basement or a celebration like in France. What do you do? Go fly off to the mountains somewhere where you can hide? No, you gotta go on with your life, and communication is part of it, and makes it ... sometimes maybe gives you ideas. But at the least it gives you a sense of what other people are planning or hoping to do. Whether they use a wrist and go tweeter tweeter [inaudible] they're still trying to spread information or opinions or advice, whatever it might be. The speed might be different. It's practically instantaneous nowadays except for a few old fogies, like me, who do not have that, but otherwise, yes, that's different now. You got to take that into account when you do the figuring out the functions of that kind of thing. Its' total — it's different, you know, you don't go into the country store with a line — a rural line that four families are on. No, you don't do that, you do your Dick Tracy act. Yeah, that's it. Is that really one? By golly. I wish my vision was good enough to do that stuff. That'll be part of your generational divide. There's no way I can use that stuff unless they give up trying to make it so tiny, and we don't have, not a wristwatch but a forearm watch. [laughs] You carry it around with you. You laugh, but you'll see it in your day. I won't see it in my day.

POOLEY: Well, let me ask about that class which was the core of your teaching, I think, through your Annenberg days, you know, usually called the *Sociology of Communication* or *Sociology of Mass Communication*?

WRIGHT: It's called *Media Sociology*, and I don't like that term. It's necessary since some students really know about — need to know about how television systems work and so forth — and they should. But it's not what I do.

POOLEY: So, how did that class evolve over the three decades that you were teaching it?

WRIGHT: I don't know. When I went from Columbia to UCLA I had begun the course at Columbia. I got to UCLA, there still wasn't anything ... any textbook that approached the problem as I tried to approach it. There were books that did just what you said — paragraph, a chapter on leaflets, a chapter on magazines, a chapter on cigar box radios [laughs]—whatever you had. **[115 MINUTES]** It was very much oriented ... and then some people got very interested in that and that took off, but there was nobody who said, Let's look at this. I take it back. If you went back far enough in the early part, earlier part of the ... and the middle part of the twentieth century you did have some sociologists who were interested in the medium itself. There were often parallels drawn between that stuff — I'm not getting it right ... Some authors thought of it as like equivalent to a transportation system. So you didn't have tracks on a railroad, but nevertheless you were somehow moving information like you'd move goods around, and so they were interested in that. And that's OK. You can refer to that, you know — students read it, you can teach it. That's OK. It just didn't do what I wanted it to do. It got away from me sometimes too, more than I wanted it to. They complement one another, is what I think, probably, and the title might not be as binding or as strict as it sounds: once [inaudible] starts teaching, things spill over into one another. I tend to be a linear person and that gets me in trouble. I think "B" should follow "A," and "C" should follow "B," and it sometimes is more exciting to stick in a "Z" or an "X." [laughs] I try it sometimes, but I could ... I'll just remind you that in the major research that I have done along with Herb, communication was a hidden thing inside of it. Look, in the Encampment book, what do we come down at the end for the bottom line and find that there were two ingredients in the program that this outfit was running, Ethical Culture Society. One was the didactic one: formally, they'd have guest lecturers come in with that sort of thing, and if a student in the program missed some of that, they changed less than the ones who heard it all. But then side by side with that was the living arrangement. They ate breakfast together. They were on their own at night or they shared a dormitory room or so forth, and so on. If some person — not that they missed one meeting or whatever, may have skipped one breakfast — but if they missed a chunk of it, they changed less. Well, that's communication, because what were they doing in the dormitories at night? They would be arguing the ... like when we were freshmen and you read some book. We used to stay up until two in the morning arguing about that. So that human communication played a very big part in major change in their outlook about life. The problems that they had to face and solve because of the self-governance thing — like who is going to pick up the garbage, who is going to do this, who is going to do that — that all played a part in that too. So, communication was there. It's not that there wasn't also formal or mass communication, but that interpersonal thing was there. And I found that almost — not deliberately, I didn't go out looking for it — but I found that in my early student study, I found it in — well, I can't say I found it in the educational studies that Herb and I did. **[120 MINUTES]** No, not much.

POOLEY: I would just like to ask ... I was just about to ask about those two books that were published as a part of the educational work. Those didn't have a communication element to them? Did those two books, *The Enduring Effects of Education*, they did not have a communication angle or element?

WRIGHT: Only in the sense that — no, I don't want to say [inaudible] ... I might be saying it wrong. But the more formal schooling people had had, made them — seemed to make them more receptive to more information, whether it came through radio or television or newspapers or face-to-face. Maybe it didn't give the same credibility to it. That's another story. But almost, in America at least, by now, almost everybody has and uses access to the mechanisms of mass media. Look, here is a kind of thing you are going to get into when you fiddle around like I did: Email. How could people be so uninformed or careless as to think that something sent by email, when you hit the delete button, vanishes? It doesn't vanish, it obviously ... as people are finding out, who are getting dragged into court about all that. So the human factor is there even, and I spent one class — didn't get very far. I asked them to sort of stylize the social and legal norms that we have about communication. I said, Look, suppose you are talking with a friend, and nobody else is around. They are not wearing a wire. You're just talking to your friends, you consider that private and it's personal. If, however, either by design or by chance, somebody had a recorder nearby and it picked up what you were saying, and then it came out on YouTube, it doesn't mean the same thing as what you said to your friend in private. Oh. I said, Look, we formalize it. Whether it's true or not we say, Tell your lawyer that they can't tell anybody. They could tell somebody — they'd get in trouble — but as even some lawyers are finding out that they get in trouble that way or whatever. So it's all intermixed, and easily spend a lifetime trying to sort it out. I can't. But little pieces of it, students work [inaudible]. Am I crazy? Yeah, I'm crazy. Too late to reform? Yeah, too late to reform. [laughs] I'll just ... I live with what I've done, and that's ... look, I was never bored. I'm blessed. I got into an occupation, stumbling blindly along the way, and a role called for a variety of things. I had to teach — OK. I have to write and publish — OK. I have to do research, to do the write — unless I want to write fairy tales or fancy things. I got to have data if I want my audience to pay attention, right? I did a little administration dropped on me. If I got ... I just switched from one thing to another, and I didn't even purposefully switched. You are just forced into it. You spend some hours interviewing an old man — you could be doing something different. But you are allowed to do this, and it's even considered in your evaluation and all that. Who could ask for anything more? I work with bright people and bright students. That's a thrill. Just to watch them grow — it's interesting. **[125 MINUTES]** It sounds corny but it's not. It's closer to what Max Weber called a calling than anything else, I think, and I didn't — maybe others do — but I didn't have it at the beginning. It grew. I think the South American experience just jettisoned me into a another realm. It was marvelous. And I was serious when I told you that I came back

to the East Coast because Annenberg had built a school and it was going to be research-oriented — or it was shaping up to be research oriented with George as dean — and that was a big decision. I liked the beaches in California, [laughs] but I can't get to them from here. So I don't know. If you want anything else just ask me and I'll tell you as best I can.

POOLEY: Well, I think, I think back to something you said in the first session, which was when I asked you about your motivation for writing the book in 1959. You talked about wanting to bring in a sociological perspective into communication research which, in some corners was more psychological. And I don't know if it would be fair to talk about your role at Annenberg over the decades as bringing a sociological voice and approach to the school

WRIGHT: No ...

POOLEY: Not that you were alone in that, because there were ...

WRIGHT: That would not be — that would not be fair. Percy [Tannenbaum] had done it in the beginning, Larry Gross did it, and we may have had, and probably did have, some others that ... no, I didn't mean to do that, I was just ... it just seemed to me that that's the way things were going. People were reducing behavior to being motivated within the individual, and some of it is. Again that's, that's the difference between sociology and some other — some humanistic, as well as some other social sciences. It isn't that everybody behaves the same way — and you never know if you haven't done a survey with random [inaudible] — you never know how common whatever it is you're studying is. You may have picked out an informant who was a little peculiar [laughs] in his or her behavior. If you've done a hundred people and there was only one who behaved the way that one did then you'd know that you did — that one was peculiar, or it might have been just like 51 percent of the rest of the group, so he's not peculiar. But there's now 49 percent that were different from him. That's what you can't get from individual studies, and I've done individual case studies. I know they're interesting — you never know where you stand. Are you outside the envelope or inside the envelope? Yeah, but I did fail to mention something which probably would — should not go in your thing, but you can if you want to. The best thing, one of the best things, from my Columbia undergraduate and graduate experience. I met my wife. And we stayed ... we were married for 51 years.

POOLEY: Can you tell me a little bit about her?

WRIGHT: Yeah, she had a ... perfect some training in home economics and nutrition. She was a nutritionist, and a happy, lovely, friendly person. Put up with this old grump for all those [laughs] years. And she worked ... if she hadn't been working when we got married we

would've starved, because I was working on assistantships that didn't pay much back in those days. So that helped put me through school. **[130 MINUTES]** And she worked out in California; she worked in New York; worked in California. Then when we came back east again we stopped ... by that time, I should be able to put enough bread on the table for us to eat, [laughs] and I could. But that was an unplanned and surprise experience. I just was going through the undergraduate ... yeah, yeah, graduate work was ... ah, gee, I thought I'd run out by then. We lived off of her salary and what I pieced together from a couple of assistantships. I got the call from ... the offer from California. Leonard Broom was the chair, he mentioned the salary they were gonna pay an assistant prof. I practically jumped over the Rocky Mountains, [laughs] and went to the West Coast. And that was good. It was a good move: the right place, good colleagues, and good students, but just not quite enough with the same interests I had. They were bright enough, but they had other things that they wanted to do. So Muriel [Cantor] taught me that sometimes a student knows what they want to do, and can do it — and she did, and I was grateful for that. Lovely lady — aneurism got her. Something gets us — very nice ...

POOLEY: You know, as a last question about Annenberg, and I invite you — if there's anything you want to say about Annenberg itself — but you mentioned a student earlier today at Annenberg. I can't remember her name now, but were there students that were as important in some way as Muriel Cantor was at UCLA? In other words, did you have ... are there any students that stand out for you over your time at Annenberg?

WRIGHT: Yes, Josephine Holz was one, Hannah Kliger was another. I don't want to leave people out though. I might hurt their feelings. I don't think I would ... please don't single them out and rank them in some way because they were all ... I ended up with good students. They were all good. They just had different paths, and they amazed me — just continued to amaze me. Hannah, for example, started out with what I thought would be a relatively tight, small project. God, she extended it to be a tremendous contribution to the ethnic studies. She's the one who studied the ... oh, there's a better word for it, but the voluntary associations of immigrant groups. Fascinating. And Jo studied, how did people visualize and make sense out of something that's happening in another city but is relevant to them? But she picked ... it was a period, I've forgotten the exact year now — back in the 1970 sometime, when an outfit in the Midwest was gonna do a neo-Nazi march through a suburb that was mainly populated by survivors of the Holocaust or their relatives. There were big debates about, should that be broadcast, **[135 MINUTES]** or should it be in the newspapers or not? That was very ... you could change the people ... here's a hostile group that tortured people, or they were connected with. So that was an interesting study. I could go on but just giving you my list of good students, [laughs] which is fine. I'm certainly happy with them. And, again, the trick was to not let it get out of hand if you could. I had another student, Judy [inaudible], who was interested in politics, and she was

trying to see where was a good place to put pamphlets or — you know, what the politicians have coming out. And I didn't know where to, how to get her started, but she'd read, by accident, a piece by two older sociologists — Arnold Rose, I think it was, and his wife, I think — where they identified places in the neighborhood where there's likely to be conversation and stuff. They had a name for it but I've forgotten what it was. She said, That's what I want to do. And I said, OK, but we have to find some place to do this. So we thought and thought and thought and thought, and she decided drugstores was where she was gonna go. People go in for prescriptions. They have pamphlets around; they can pick them up and look through them. Beauty shops, yes ... trapped there for an hour while these women got their hair done and all that sort of stuff. Yeah, OK, and I said, Well, you better throw barber shops in or you're slandering us men. Yeah, so you have to be careful about that. Don't be in there by yourself. Have somebody with you — blah, blah, the usual stuff. Anyhow. So she studied — not the pamphlets — hadn't gotten to that yet. She studied what they talked about, and it was very interesting. It was big enough by the time she found that out. She did a sample of Philadelphia neighborhoods and everything, and it stood as a dissertation by itself. And if she wanted to carry it further that was on her shoulders, but she got her degree. That was, yeah, that was a good study. She got a couple of articles, I think, out of it. I had another student — amy I tying you up here — who was very interested in and upset about homelessness in Philadelphia and how do people find out about it and how is it presented. So she decided to study the stories about homelessness that appeared in the *Inquirer*, and I think maybe in that time the *Bulletin* was still in business. I'm not sure. And did a very thorough job of interviewing and studying the stories that they got. Came to the conclusion that there was no consensus whatsoever, and without consensus there was no voluntary group that was formed to sort of defend the homeless, and so forth. The stories ranged from all the way from, Oh, the poor little baby left in the backseat of the car, to, Oh, the drunken bum, [laughs] or whatever. She did a good study — made good typologies out of it and all that. That was Bernadette McNulty. **[140 MINUTES]** She's over at Temple now, I think. Yeah. I don't mean to leave things out I just ... I don't ... I think you shouldn't identify these folks by name. They'll be ... even by dissertation name because it's a small school, and people, they'll say, Oh, he favored this one or that one or ... I didn't favor any of them. I liked them all. There were others but those were things that I thought were both sociological and communication and culture, you know. Though, oh, now we've got all the high-technology, you don't have — by then links were just face-to-face. People talked with one another, talked with their own kind. People from the same country, same town, or whatever it was. Now they can all talk on Twitter or whatever. That may change — change things, I don't know. But I liked Annenberg — I do like Annenberg. They treated me fine, the students were good. Couldn't ask for more — except the beaches. I'd like to bring the beaches back. [laughs] Yeah.

POOLEY: Well, that's a wonderful note on which to end — unless there's something else you'd like to bring up, but I'd like to thank you so much. It was an honor ...

WRIGHT: Oh, you're welcome.

POOLEY: ... to talk with you these three afternoons, and learn about your career and your trajectory.

WRIGHT: Yeah, well, there were a couple of things. One was I never accept the idea that someone couldn't learn at graduate school because they were stupid or dumb. If they were stupid they wouldn't have gotten this far, therefore there is something else in the way. And that interested me, and interests me, and underwrites some of my studies in education. And, I missed my partner very much, both Herby my work partner, and Ann Marie my home partner. That comes with age. Yeah, I'm glad to see the school at really healthy and standing on its own legs now — it's been a good ride. Thanks for your interviews. I appreciate it.

POOLEY: OK, thank you Charlie.

END OF SESSION THREE