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Jerome Long Oral History Interview, Apr. 2012

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Interview Two (undated [April 2012]) with Dr. JEROME LONG by Chandra Galbiati

JEROME LONG: What are we going to be talking about? Chronology or what?

CHANDRA GALBIATI: The suggested plan is that we should talk about when you got to Wesleyan, and about your impressions of Middletown. And the next topic I wanted to talk about was your teaching.

Long: Well, be more specific. Give me a handle or something to grab onto.

Galbiati: First—what were you teaching when you first got here, what classes?

Long: I'm in the Religion Department.

Galbiati: But what kind of religion? And what—what did the curriculum look like at that time?

Long: You mean the courses that I taught?

Galiati: What courses you were teaching, and what kinds of courses were offered in the department? For instance, I think right now the department has a lot of courses on Christianity and Judaism and Islam, and my understanding is that it's very much centered around the intersection of religion and popular culture. But I might be totally wrong about that.

Long: Well, let's see, which courses I taught: Introduction to Religion, Religions of African Peoples, Myth and Ritual, Religion of Hunters, Religion of Agriculturalists, Religion of Pastoral Nomads. I team- taught a course with the chair of the department at that time: Religion in America: Red, Black and White. I taught a course: Biography and Autobiography of African-American Peoples. The African-American Church. Now in the department as a whole, one woman professor taught the Bible: Old Testament, New Testament. My colleague right next door to me, he's in theology, so he taught Reformation Theology, American theology, Philosophy and Religion.

Jan Willis, who is retiring this year—or maybe she’s already retired—she taught courses in Buddhism and Hinduism.

So to put it in broad categories, we taught courses in History of Religion, traditional Christian courses, traditional Jewish courses. And everything was cross-listed. Let’s think of those as baskets, okay? That is, my degree is in History of Religions, and you know where to put that one. Gene Klaaren, my colleague, taught Philosophy of Religion, and that can include a whole heap of sins. Stephen Crites---who was in the department but passed away about three or four years ago—his specialty was in Philosophy of Religion, mainly Hegel. So these courses were cross-listed with the Philosophy Department. Some of my courses were cross-listed with the Anthropology Department as well as African-American Studies. And Jan Willis’ courses were cross-listed with Asian Studies and so on. Does that give you an idea of the scope?

Galbiati: Yes, thank you. So how much control did you have over what course you taught? Did you get to choose, could you say: “I want to teach a course on this”?

Long: [Laughs] A lot, but there are certain rubrics. We have what we call certain Foundation Courses, okay? These are courses that the department feels that anybody in liberal arts should know something about, like Intro to Religion, something like that. And then we have certain required courses, like the ones majors would have to take. And then we have a third category of sort of middle-range courses. Foundation courses, middle-range courses and courses for the major, and then seminar type courses. Those are the groups.

Galbiati: Yeah.

Long: And within this pattern, we try to stagger them, offer them every other year, or something like that.

Now in terms of who teaches what, that had to do with—well, let's say a teacher is coming up for tenure, and that teacher has just been allotted a time doing research to write a manuscript. Well, usually the department would say: "We'll give you a lighter course load, so you can spend time researching, getting your stuff together." But otherwise the course load was two-two: two in the fall; two in the spring.

The University expected—I'm sorry, they left it up to the department as to how the teacher balanced this research and teaching. I've been retired since '97, but---while I was teaching there for thirty-odd plus years—I think the Religion Department did a pretty good job with the balance. If a teacher was excited about a particular field, like, let's say religion and science—I don't mean they woke up in the morning and said: "Hey I want to teach that." You know.

Galbiati: Yeah.

Long: They had to show some interest in it or attend certain seminars or make some other effort. That teacher would present the idea to either the chair or the department, and provide a written draft of what he or she wanted to do. Now at least when I was teaching—and I think this is true of the entire University—I can't remember a course ever being vetoed by the Dean of Division II. That's our Dean. It was discussed in the department, but once we recommended it to the Dean, usually it was pro forma. Does that answer your question?

Galbiati: Yes. Did you ever present a proposal for a class to teach?

Long: Yes, Introduction to Religion. When I came here they didn't teach that.

Galbiati: Oh, really?

JL: No.

Galbiati: So what was your thinking behind wanting to teach that?

Long: Well, I thought it would be a good foundation course, not only for our majors but also other interested students. This is a liberal arts institution, so at least they should have a smattering of the language of religion.

Galbiati: I actually took an Intro to Religion class my sophomore year, and it was one of the better classes that I've taken in my four years.

Long: Who taught it?

Galbiati: Elizabeth McAlister. She's one of my favorite professors.

Long: Yes, she's good.

Galbiati: What were your intentions and goals, and how did you structure the course when you first started teaching it? Because I understand each—at least now---each professor has a lot of control over what they teach in that Intro class.

Long: Yeah, oh yeah.

Galbiati: So how did you teach it?

Long: You mean the nuts and bolts?

G: Or what were your goals? What did you want students to come away from the course with? What were the main themes?

Long: Well, I guess I wanted to try to expose them to the variety of ways in which religion phenomena appears—that it's not always within "a worshipful" situation. It can appear out of the blue, like a lightning bolt. It can appear in various ways, because in different societies there can be a variety of ways in which they proclaimed: "This is the manifestation of the holy Whichever." So I wanted to expose them to that, and also expose them to the complexity of it and the mystery of it, so that off the top of your head you cannot dismiss it as being nonreligious, you see.

For example, it used to be you'd go to the airport and you'd see all these people dancing around with drums and stuff asking for money, "Hare

Krishna, Hare Krishna.” And so, instead of dismissing that, you’d say: “Well, that’s a religious phenomenon. Now what religious phenomenon is it?” And I could tell you that I tried to get the students to pay attention to what was going on.

For example now, a lot of religious forms in a lot of religious cultures involve water—baptism or whatever, purification or whatever. Now, how is it that water is an ingredient of the sacred? It has a history to it. Let’s talk about this history of the sacredness of water. Or of stones. Almost anything throughout the whole history of humankind, in one way or another, had at one time or another been attributed sacred practices. The sky, animals, social acts like marriage, death—the list is huge. So that’s what I would try to make them contemplate. You just sort of whet their appetites, then it’s up to them to take it wherever it leads, you know. That’s what I tried to do.

Galbiati: What did you enjoy about teaching?

Long: The give and take between the students and me. Well, I taught seven years before I came here, and I already knew that a teacher learns a lot from the students, in terms of the questions they ask or don’t ask, or whatever. So it’s a conversation, a dialogue, and it’s up to the teacher to keep that dialogue going. Which is sometimes hard because some students really don’t understand what the hell you’re talking about, and if they feel that they’re stupid, they won’t ask a question. They think: “Oh, that question is so stupid, everybody will laugh at me, or the teacher will laugh at me.”

It took a long time for me to get the confidence enough to say there is no stupid question. If it is stupid, I will take you aside after the class and tell you, “That is a fantastically dumb question,” you know? I enjoy that kind of interchange, but it’s a part of the learning process. And for the most, sometimes a student can ask very, very important questions, but they don’t

know they're asking them. And also, if the atmosphere of the class is so iron bound and tight and limiting that a student can't ask that question, then that's a bummer.

Galbiati: So how did you try to open up your class?

Long: Well, the best method I found was the Socratic Method. This doesn't mean that I mastered it. Just by asking questions: What do you think of this? What does it mean to you? And just by conversing, you try to take each level up, up. Sometimes you succeed. Sometimes a lot of the responses can wind up dead end, going nowhere. Then, you know, you just start all over. My daughter is a long distance runner, and she had a poster on her wall with a picture of a woman running, a teenager running. And the poster says: "There is no finish line." In a way, that's the way I feel about teaching. Every response gives rise to another question, so if you get to the point where you don't ask any more questions you're in the wrong profession! You need to do something else—find another line of work!

Galbiati: So you, a couple times I think, once in the last interview and once now, you mentioned the team-taught class on Religion in America. Can you tell me more about what that class looked like?

Long: Team taught?

Galbiati: The class that you taught with the chair of the department.

Long: David Swift?

Galbiati: Black, White and Red?

Long: Oh yeah. Most of the time, at least back then anyway, in a course like Religions in America, in most classrooms in most universities or colleges, they wouldn't even mention the religion of African-Americans, or the religions of the Native Americans. It would just be the religions of white Americans, and within that just the religion of either Catholics or

Protestants. And Dave Swift and I said; “No, no. This is not giving them a true nature of the landscape here.” So we included *Black Elk Speaks*. That was one of our books. *Custer Died For Your Sins* by Brian DeLauria. The can opener in the courses like this would be history. It has to include Pilgrims and all that stuff, but you really can’t talk about history in America unless you talk about religion, insofar as the history has to include the American Indians, and has to include slavery and black folks. How in the heck are you going to teach a course in Religion in America and omit two-thirds? It would be very difficult—impossible; a non-starter.

Galbiati: And so how did they respond to the class? Was it dramatically different from what they had seen in classrooms in the past?

How did they react?

Long: Oh, most of them were very excited. They never knew about religion in relation to some of the other races or cultures. And that was encouraging. Well, see, the problem is---whether it’s class or color or whatever----the problem is they have been assumed all the time, but they’re invisible, you see. So, say you’re going to teach a course on black politics, okay? You’ll hear: “Blacks ain’t got no politics. What is he talking about, black politics?” So the first problem would be to just redefine what politics means. And how do you talk about space? And political space—what does that mean? And religion: Black, White and Red—what is black religious space? What is Red Indian religious space? Stuff like that, you know.

What is regarded as sacred, in terms of these historical traditions? For example, in that class the students had to visit an African-American church during worship, and come back and report what happened, and how did it fit in with what they knew of the history?

I taught a course in Religion of the Hunters. The students had to construct—without mechanical tools or anything—a shelter, limited just to the resources that the Paleolithic hunter had. And I team-taught that with a faculty member of Anthropology. She was a pre-historian. And there were two requirements. One, they couldn't use anything other than what the ancient hunters had. And two, it had to keep the elements off. So Diana Crader—that was her name—and I, we inspected the shelter when it rained, and we had to stay dry. It was that kind of a hands-on thing—but the hands-on is more than just quaint novelty. Unless it introduces the students to think, then it's just a nice sideshow.

CG: You said you team-taught at least a couple of classes. How was it teaching with somebody else?

Long: It was great. We learned from each other. Because usually you taught with somebody who was from a different field, like Dave Swift, who was an American historian. Gene Klaaren is a theologian. Steve Crites was a philosopher. So it was always somebody who had different slants on the topic. What's your major?

Galbiati: English.

Long: Okay. It would be like if you taught a course with somebody whose major was sociology. They have different insights, and might ask questions about the English language, and why upper class people talk differently from other groups. It would be that kind of interchange.

Galbiati: Yeah, I always think those are interesting classes.

I've read about some situations involving junior faculty versus senior faculty. Were there people trying to make changes? And what were the power dynamics in your department?

Long: Well, you mean like promotions, untenured and tenured, or what?

You have to ask about a specific problem, and we can talk about it.

Galbiati: OK. What about those who were more conservative versus those who were more liberal? What did the department look like in terms of that sort of cross-section? Well, what kinds of problems were going on?

Long: Oh man, in the Seventies? Well, in 1971 or '72, the secretarial staff—maybe the custodial staff, too—went on strike

Galbiati: [Laughs] Oh!

Long: Over negotiations with the administration. And certain faculty members—I don't say religion—all over the University (because it affected every department), some of them said, "Rah, rah, rah for the secretaries." Others said, "No, they've got to work it out, they have a contract."

Another issue was divestment. Wesleyan owned stocks invested in South Africa, and that caused a whole lot of mess. There was a faculty meeting where I could vote on whether to divest of that stock, and we were told: "If we divest of that stock, then you can't have student aid," and so forth. Now, are you asking how it filtered down to our specific department, or just generally like the examples I gave?

Galbiati: Yeah, or—what kinds of people were in the department?

Long: What do you mean? When you ask what kinds of people, do you mean did they have four heads, or where they were born, or where they were educated?

Galbiati: Yeah, sort of: I assume they all had heads, and hands, and noses, but were they mostly upper class Christians? Were they mostly conservative? Were they mostly liberal? Or were they a mix of all sorts?

Long: Arms, two eyes, two legs, two ears. There was a rabbi, a priest. In addition to the rabbi, there was another Jewish faculty member who taught Old

Testament and Jewish Studies. The priest said mass at the student chapel, and also taught a course on Catholic theology, Ecumenical Movement—something like that. Most of the department faculty had attended Ivy League seminarian religious schools: Yale, Harvard, Columbia, and so forth. I went to the University of Chicago. I think I was about the only one that had taught at a state school before I came here. I taught at Michigan: Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Michigan. The rest of them came to Wesleyan straight after receiving their PhDs. Almost all of the faculty was involved in some way in the Middletown community. That is, either the church or the arts or---I don't know---Kiwanis. Is that what you had in mind?

Galbiati: Yes.

Long: And all of us had kids that hung around with each other. That is, in the department, none of our kids, I think, went to prep schools. They all went to Middletown High.

Galbiati: I think that's changed a lot.

Long: Oh? What do you mean?

Galbiati: I don't think that most professors' children go to public school in Middletown these days.

Long: Why? Because they live in New Haven?

Galbiati: Yeah. I think a lot of professors don't live here, and also a lot of professors send their kids to prep schools, because a lot of people don't think the Middletown schools are very good right now.

Long: Well, they could be better. There's more to going to school than getting a good education. There's the social life and all that business. Our kids went to Middletown High, part of the reason being that my wife and I felt they could get more diversity going there.

But we had to make sure that they were exposed to the right courses, and so on. So we would go up to PTA meetings, and teachers' conferences. We soon discovered, however, that a lot of black kids fell through the cracks, in terms of Middletown High. You know, unless you could play football or basketball, the teachers didn't seem to give that extra push.

Galbiati: Did you see that happening at all in the time that you were here?

Either school's going downhill, or professors increasingly not wanting to send their kids there?

Long: I never noticed it that much. I know some of the children of some of the faculty went to high-fallutin' schools like Miss Porter's School or Choate. But most of the children of most of the faculty that we hung around with, their kids went to Middletown High. Now, a lot of the faculty, they wanted their kids to go to high fallutin' colleges: Yale or Harvard. Not University of Connecticut at Storrs or Central.

Galbiati: Did most professors live in Middletown while you were teaching?

Long: The overwhelming majority did. Very few of them lived as far away as New Haven. A lot of them lived in Portland. You know this area?

Galbiati: I know where Portland is.

Long: Okay. Cromwell—you know where that is?

Galbiati: Mm-hm.

Long: Haddam, you know where that is?

Galbiati: I don't think I do.

Long: That's adjacent to Middletown. Most of them did. I think most of them did. If you want to check on that, get some catalogues, because it has addresses of the faculty by city.

Galbiati: Now I think that probably almost half of the professors I've had don't live in Middletown. Did you see that change happening at all?

Long: How do you know that?

Galbiati: Because they often talk about driving. And they often are only on campus for a couple of days a week, while they're teaching. I've had a couple of professors who live in New York—

Long: We had that.

Galbiati: —and then several in Hartford and New Haven.

Long: You don't want to be putting down unsubstantiated rumors like that: "I heard—somebody told me while I was at the hairdressers that---" Uh-uh. Call the *Argus*. They would know.

Galbiati: And also it might be that this applies more to the English Department or the Theater Department.

Long: Yeah. Do you know a woman in the Theater Department—Shaw, Rashida Shaw?

Galbiati: I don't think I've ever taken a theater class.

Long: Okay. What about Wright, Leah Wright? A black woman. She's in History.

Galbiati: I don't know her either.

Long: I ask because they ask us retired faculty to be sort of mentors to junior faculty. Those are two of my mentees, one in Theater one in History.

Galbiati: Can you tell me more about your involvement in the African American Institute, which became The Center for African American Studies?

Long: What do you want to know?

Galbiati: Like how did you first get involved? It was still the Institute, right, when you got involved?

Long: Yes. Institute of African American Studies.

Galbiati: How did you get involved in it?

Long: How did I get involved in it? It was already here when I came, so it's not like I started anything.

But it was in a transitional stage, because it was sort of a runt department. You couldn't call it a department, or a defined curriculum, because it didn't have legitimacy.

Part of the understanding was that I would help define it more structurally, giving it an academic discipline, academic legitimacy. Academic legitimacy means that the teachers had to have credentials, and their courses had to count toward a major of some type. Okay, so I was brought in to help that process along. In the course of helping it along, which took two or three or four or five years, we changed the name to CAAS: Center for African American Studies. The faculty was jointly appointed. Like, somebody teaching let's say the Politics of African Americans would have a joint appointment in the Government Department and the CAAS. The same thing of Black Poetry: joint appointment English Department and CAAS. But the CAAS did not have the power to hire on its own. It had to be joint.

Galbiati: So what kinds of challenges did you encounter with that?

Long: The challenges? Well, any kind of joint thing is a mess because you're hooking up with someone that may or may not share your vision, or the processes, or whatever. And it doesn't always have to do with black-white, or whatever. It just has to do with different people, you know? So you find yourself sometimes making compromises, etcetera. But, in some kind of way, you have to turn it around, so that instead of compromising, you look at it as a strengthening instead of a weakening of the joint. It's like a marriage.

What was laudable, really, was the support that we got from the faculty and the administration---from President Campbell, Colin Campbell,

to chairs of different departments, to other faculty and staff. Without that support we couldn't have transitioned from AAI to CAAS. And we also had some very, very, very demanding and challenging African-American students, as well as white students that were very good.

Also when I came here, we didn't have a critical mass of Hispanic students. We didn't get them until around the Eighties. When I first came here we had a teeny smattering of American Indian students from the Northeast. But that didn't work out at all. Had some from the Northeast; a few from out in your part of the country, West; a few from the Midwest, Oklahoma. And there was absolutely no preparation or infrastructure for them to come here long-term. And there were only about one or two faculty interested—McAllister in the music department and then a couple anthropologists, but that was no groundswell as there had been in the Civil Rights movement.

Galbiati: And so what kind of infrastructure should there have been?

Long: Well, it seemed to me there should have been somebody here who knew something about the language—linguistics. There should have been someone here who knew something about American Indian culture and history. Okay, we teach a course here in American history. Somebody in the History Department should know something about the relationship between the Pilgrims and Indians in the Northeast, not what is written about them by the conquerors, but their own stuff. That's the kind of infrastructure. They should have had lectures by the curators from the museums in New England to educate the faculty, and so on. That's what I mean.

You didn't necessarily have to have this in regard to African Americans, because it was woven so deeply already, you see. But the Native

Americans had no support system, and it's very, very hard to come into this all-white environment without a support system.

Galbiati: And what do you think that the school lost by losing them?

JL: I think they lost a vital dimension in terms of understanding American history.

Okay, you're from Colorado How would your state look if there'd been no Indians out there? Just think about that. Would it have made a difference? And what difference would it have made?

Galbiati: I think it's definitely a big part of my understanding of Colorado history.

Long: Right. There'd be a big vacuum there.

Galbiati: Yeah, there would be a huge piece missing.

Long: That'd be the same thing here. And it's not as if Wesleyan had to bring in Native Americans from Oklahoma. Up in the East Coast you've got the Narragansetts. Now---just in terms of the name structure, no one ever asked the question: What is Narragansett? What does that mean? So we're missing that. And after they had all been diluted or killed, you've got the tedious, tedious job of reconstructing, like archeology, layers and layers of history and culture, and then trying to figure it out. For example, the church I attend, Cross Street AME Zion, used to be right across the street from Freeman. And it's the second AME Zion Church in Connecticut. The first one was in New Haven. Okay, now it's being excavated as an archeological site. Fortunate. Now if the church had not approached Wesleyan to be incorporated, you see, a healthy part of the relationship between Middletown and Wesleyan University would have been missing.

Galbiati: So back to AAI and the CAAS—what were the goals of the program when you first got here? What was the program trying to do? What were they trying to accomplish?

Long: Well, AAI had been in existence before I got here, so I don't know what their origins were.

Galbiati: When you came into contact it, what did you observe? What were they trying to do?

Long: Get noticed and be recognized. At the time—I call it the time of the troubles—there were takeovers at almost every university or college. The college had to recognize the presence and the educational presence of African Americans. And not only physically, but also articulated in terms of curriculum. Now, this filtered down into offering courses in African American history, African American music, African American culture. It filters down and now, in an African American dorm, we want African American food—stuff like that.

When I came here, the committee that I was chairman of wanted to broaden the vision, to make it African American like this--- as part of the University, but separate. And we're still working on it! At least, they're still working on it. That is to say: included in the vision of the University. For example, when I was growing up in Little Rock, Arkansas, once a week in February—every February--- we had Negro History Week. Now we don't confine it to a week. Moving from AAI to CAAS was part of that growth. On the one hand, I think that for any student who's majoring in history, American history, the African American experience should be an integral part of American history. So should Native American history.

So that's the vision that we try to instill: instead of making the program merely an addition, it becomes integral. Just as the U.N. has said that April is the month of the woman. Well, all right. Does that mean that the other eleven months are not months of women? You see what I mean?

Now this has got to be expressed in terms of the faculty of color. For instance, here in Division III, that's the Natural Science Division, I don't think there's at the most two or three African Americans on the faculty!

Most of the African American teachers are in Division II and Division I.

Galbiati: I think Division I is Arts Division II is Social Sciences.

Long: So, mostly Divisions I and II. Why is that? You know?

Galbiati: Why that is?

Long: Go ask Roth; he's the President! No, I've been trying to get an initiative for the last ten years. You get something going, and then the president resigns, or the department chairs leave; it's always something. Bottom line is that nothing changes.

Galbiati: What are the challenges in getting minority faculty hired? I mean, you were just talking about trying to get them into the Sciences.

Long: Well, part of it is stubbornness on the part of present faculty and administration. Part of it is the times. The University at any given time has a lot of stuff on its plate, and African American faculty in this particular case is not one of the priorities that they deem to be as important as others.

I seriously doubt that it's just flat out blatant racism. I think it's more neglect, or not being sensitive to things. And this is sort of contradictory, because on the one hand you have a very healthy percentage of black students. It seems to me this should parallel, you know, the same percentage of black faculty, or exceed it. These are just obvious reasons.

There could be underlying factors. In the Sciences, maybe a lot of the teachers in science like to go to research universities because they've got more money, and they can afford to invest in facilities. Plus, if they sponsor more research, their pool can be larger and they can attract a broader spectrum of investors. Another reason is that even though Wesleyan is the

premier Wesleyan—that is to say the first Wesleyan (there’s Ohio Wesleyan, Wesleyan of Iowa, Wesleyan of whatever) very, very few African-Americans have even heard of Wesleyan—I mean this Wesleyan.

Galbiati: I see.

Long: So, that’s a PR job. What time is it anyway? Wait a minute. I got it right here. Four—4:07.

Galbiati: Oh, I have to go to class pretty soon. I guess maybe we should wrap up for today. Thank you.

Long: Okay. Until next time.

[End of Interview]