

Louis Warren

*Louis Warren: Reflections on James C. Scott and  
the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University*

The Yale Agrarian Studies Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by  
Todd Holmes  
in 2019

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Louis Warren

**Abstract**

Louis Warren is the W. Turrentine Jackson Professor of US Western History at the University of California, Davis. He was a graduate student in the inaugural class of the Agrarian Societies seminar and the first student to return and present at the Agrarian Studies Program colloquium. In this interview, Warren discusses his recollections of the seminar and the founding of the program; the format of the colloquium and why he and others have replicated it; recollections of some of the program's early events; the uniqueness of the program; and the impact of James C. Scott and the Agrarian Studies Program on two generations of scholarship.

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## Project history

By Todd Holmes  
November 25, 2020  
Berkeley, California

Since its inception in 1953, the Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley has been responsible for compiling one of the largest and most widely used oral history collections in the country. The interviewees within this vast collection include many of the nation's high-profile citizens, ranging from senators and governors to artists, actors, and industrialists. And standing among this distinguished list is an equally impressive group of scholars. As a research unit based at UC Berkeley, the Oral History Center (OHC) has long gained rare access to the academy and ultimately built one of the richest oral history collections on higher education and intellectual history. Interviews with Nobel laureates and university presidents fill this collection, as do those with leading scientists and pioneering faculty of color. In recent years, the OHC has sought to further expand this interview collection with ambitious projects on University of Chicago economists and the founding generation of Chicana/o studies. Thus, a project on the famed Yale University political scientist, James C. Scott, and his equally renowned Program in Agrarian Studies stood as an obvious choice in these efforts and a fitting addition to the Bancroft collection. The result was the Yale Agrarian Studies Oral History Project, a two-part series featuring the life history of Jim Scott and short interviews with nearly twenty affiliates of the Yale Agrarian Studies Program.

Part I of the series, "James C. Scott: Agrarian Studies and Over 50 Years of Pioneering Work in the Social Sciences," was released in September 2020, marking Jim's final year at Yale and the thirtieth year of the Program in Agrarian Studies. This collection of interviews with program affiliates represents Part II of the project, aptly titled, "Reflections on James C. Scott and the Agrarian Studies Program." Here affiliates relate their experience with Jim and the program, helping to document the history and impact of Agrarian Studies, as well as offer future generations a glimpse at the scholar who shaped it. As Scott himself described their approach:

This is a sort of sermon I give actually, which is, you know how the health food people say, "You are what you eat"? Well, you are what you read. And if we can encourage students to read things broadly in several disciplines bearing on their interests, and force them, as we do in the Agrarian Studies Program, to make sense across disciplinary boundaries and leave behind their esoteric vocabularies of their own little discipline; if you're reading across disciplines, if you have friends across disciplines, you're going to be an interdisciplinary scholar. . . . So, you are what you read and you are who your intellectual companions are, and if we can change that . . . we can at least make a step toward real interdisciplinary work.

For the last three decades, this interdisciplinary spirit has made the rooms of the Program in Agrarian Studies at Yale University one of the most exciting intellectual ecosystems in the academy. For both the humanities and social sciences, the program has served as a haven for heterodoxy, where casting aside boundaries and going against the grain not only proved to be the norm but a rite of passage. Officially founded by Jim Scott and collaborators in the fall of 1991,

the program brought a critical and interdisciplinary lens to the everyday experience of rural societies. With the world as its intellectual playground and the sweep of history as its scope, the Program in Agrarian Studies became *the* place for cutting-edge research. Anthropologists, historians, and political scientists filled the rooms of the weekly colloquium, as did sociologists, activists, and real-life farmers. The topics of discussion stood just as diverse. From peasant revolts in France and ancient Roman cuisine to dam-building in India and the industrial foodways of American agribusiness, nearly any topic of interest found a place within the big tent of Agrarian Studies. Few could have realized in the fall of 1991 that the newly minted program would not only last thirty years but also come to shape over two generations of scholarship and redefine the notion of interdisciplinary work.

The interviews included in this volume take stock of the program's history and achievements. They discuss how the team-taught graduate seminar, Agrarian Societies, proved the springboard for the program when first offered in 1990. The unprecedented student turnout for the course revealed an unfeigned appetite for such topics to Jim and collaborating faculty. To this day, the course continues to consistently boast the largest student enrollment of any graduate seminar at Yale. The interviews also offer highlights of the program's renowned Friday colloquium, a weekly forum that for over three decades has hosted leading scholars from around the world. Here cutting-edge research is presented to the group in a format that would become as famed as the program's founder. Unlike the typical academic lecture series, presenters at Agrarian Studies were asked to pre-circulate their papers, and after a brief framing and introduction, sit silently while the group discussed. After an hour, the author would then be "ungagged" and join the discussion, directing their responses to whatever they deemed most interesting and relevant. To be sure, it was a format that fostered vibrant intellectual exchange, one that often proved to be fruitful for authors and attendees alike. In his oral history, Jim Scott recounts how his adoption of the colloquium format was based on the Women's Studies Program at the University of Wisconsin, where he taught between 1967 and 1976. And if imitation is the best flattery, it should be noted that it was a format well-copied by other colloquia and programs around the world.

As the interviews in this volume also attest, Agrarian Studies was more than just a seminar and colloquium; it was an intellectual community. From Friday lunches to evening potlucks at his farm, Jim Scott understood the bonds that could be built over a good meal and conversation. He not only built this understanding into the program but would also generously open his home to guests and affiliates throughout the year. Longtime affiliates such as Bob Harms, Helen Siu, Michael Dove, Peter Purdue, and Paul Freedman (just to name a few) also played vital roles in the Agrarian Studies community, creating an environment of friendship that transcended disciplines, generations, and one's academic ranking. So too did the program's ever-growing family of postdoctoral fellows. Cared for by program coordinator—and designated "mother hen"—Kay Mansfield, the fellows created a new group of scholars-in-residence each year that offered both a freshness and stability to the program. This fraternity of *Agraristas* also added to the program's diverse and cosmopolitan nature, with the list of fellows representing nearly 40 countries.

Moreover, it is hoped that these interviews with affiliates provide some measure of the program's impact. In the university environment, where academic programs come and go with the changing seasons of disciplinary trends, Agrarian Studies celebrating thirty years of operation is a clear

testament to its continued contribution and importance. These interviews help bring such attributes into clearer focus, as affiliates detail the program's influence on their own work and careers. In some cases, they even discuss efforts to replicate Agrarian Studies in one form or another at their home institutions. Above all, many affiliates offer their observations on the success of Agrarian Studies, namely how a program on rural societies has remained adaptable, relevant, and popular in an ever-changing academic environment. To do so for a decade is an achievement; to do so for thirty years is nothing short of remarkable.

As a graduate student at Yale, I had the privilege of working for the Agrarian Studies Program for four years. That experience left an indelible mark on me, both intellectually and professionally. It also inspired the idea of using oral history to document and capture intellectual history. Reading the works of James C. Scott is much different than having Jim Scott discuss the aims and struggles of writing those works. Thus, the same could be said for capturing the history and importance of programs like Agrarian Studies. I hope the interviews conducted for the project do justice to that intended goal.



## Interview 1: March 26, 2019

01-00:00:00

Holmes: This is Todd Holmes with the Oral History Center at UC Berkeley. Today's date is March 26, 2019, and I have the pleasure of sitting down with Louis Warren, professor of history at UC Davis. This interview is for the Yale Agrarian Studies Oral History Project. We are here at his office—away from his other office—here at the Huntington Library, in the beautiful city of Pasadena, California. Louis, thank you so much for taking some time out of your day to sit down with me on this.

01-00:00:36

Warren: Sure thing. Yeah. Happy to do it.

01-00:00:40

Holmes: I guess before we get started, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself and your road to UC Davis?

01-00:00:45

Warren: My road to UC Davis began, I suppose, back when I was finishing graduate school. I took a job when I finished. I did a one-year position at Yale, and then got an assistant professorship, tenure track, at a small Catholic school in Southern California, the University of San Diego. I was there for five years, and then applied for a job at UC Davis in 1998. In 1999, I moved to UC Davis, and I've been there ever since.

01-00:01:17

Holmes: And you got your PhD in History at Yale, correct?

01-00:01:20

Warren: I did, yes.

01-00:01:22

Holmes: In 1993?

01-00:01:21

Warren: Yes.

01-00:01:25

Holmes: All right. How did you first meet James C. Scott?

01-00:01:32

Warren: That's a good question. I had heard about him from a number of other graduate students. And I think I first met him when I saw him give the welcome to the Agrarian Studies seminar, the first one that was offered. And there had been a lot of talk about this seminar, because it was going to be team-taught by four or five people. The syllabus was circulating. In those days, when you circulated a syllabus, you circulated the actual syllabus; like people were handing it around in the History Department, and talking about it with great excitement. I was actually skeptical. I was really dubious. I was,

like, team teaching a seminar with five professors? Come on. That doesn't sound legit to me. I'd never heard of anything like that—I thought, sometimes people want to do team teaching to get out of doing work, right? I know of my own experience, team teaching actually is the opposite, it actually compounds the work for everybody. It's actually harder.

But I went to check it out, because so many people were talking about it. And I had talked to Bill Cronon, who was one of my advisors at the time. He said, "Oh, you should definitely check that out. That's going to be a really good seminar." He said, "I wish I could do it." So, I went. There was Jim, talking about what they were going to do. And I was really blown away by just the way he laid out the goals for this course, and the questions they were after. Then when everybody else—all the other faculty who were there—pitched in also, to kind of lay out the questions that they were hoping to get at, it was very exciting. There were a lot of people in that room. There must have been forty or fifty people there to take the seminar, which I don't remember quite how all that worked. But that's when I first saw him.

01-00:03:40

Holmes:

Let's discuss your involvement with Agrarian Studies. You took the seminar, which I believe was probably the spring of 1990.

01-00:03:46

Warren:

Yeah.

01-00:03:48

Holmes:

Did you get involved with the program after that? Because I think the program began about a year later.

01-00:03:55

Warren:

Right. It's hard to remember how it all worked. My memory is that I took the seminar. I wrote a paper for Robert Harms, Bob Harms was one of the faculty in that first seminar, and for Jim, I wanted Jim to read it as well. I wrote a paper about the making of an elephant reserve in Southern Rhodesia in the 1950s and 1960s, and the local resistance to that reserve. I remember, I took it to Jim. Jim graded it, and Bob Harms graded it. I got lots of good comments from the two of them. I actually met with Jim after that paper; we had a really good talk about it, and about that kind of work—thinking about conservation regimes as imperial projects, and about poaching as resistance. Sort of taking E. P. Thompsonian ideas and applying them to other parts of the world, that kind of thing. It was a great talk. We had a really good conversation.

Then the Agrarian Studies colloquium, it began, that whole series of visiting speakers and presenting works in progress, began sometime in there. I would go to those. I do recall that I graduated in 1993, and I came back. In 1994, I went away. I got my job at the University of San Diego, and moved the family to San Diego. By September or October—you could check the schedule—I had come back to give a paper at the Agrarian Studies colloquium. And at the

time, what I recall is, Jim introducing me as the first student to have gone through the seminar, and now to be coming back to present at the colloquium, which I thought was great. I was really happy about that. But yes, I did go to the colloquium, and it was a big influence on me, actually.

01-00:06:04

Holmes:

Talk about that experience a bit, presenting at the colloquium. Even casual visitors, or those who have attended it, will always say, the format of this colloquium is really different than other colloquiums you may attend. Talk about that experience of being a presenter there.

01-00:06:25

Warren:

As I recall, it was very heady for me, because I presented the introduction of my dissertation, soon to be book manuscript. There were a lot of people. The way it worked was, you got to sit down, introduce the work. You sit down with this big group of people. You were introduced by Jim Scott, and then you'd get five minutes to present, and put the work in context. But the work has been pre-circulated, so everyone's read the work. Then there are designated commentators who talk about your work, but you're not allowed to talk for the first 45 minutes, I think the rule was. So, the commentators go for maybe 10 minutes, then it's thrown open to the floor, and there is discussion back and forth about your work, with you not being allowed to say anything for 45 minutes, so you just take a lot of notes. Then after 45 minutes, you get a chance to come back in and address some of the concerns, and join the conversation.

01-00:07:33

I thought that format was so wonderful. I watched so many people come through Agrarian Studies and present with that format. And what was so great about it was, it took the spotlight off the author and put it on the work. A lot of times, with a colloquium, what you see is, somebody comes in with a work in progress—it's even pre-circulated—the people who've read it ask questions about it, and the author talks, so it's constantly interlocutor-author, interlocutor-author, back and forth, like this. But it's always back to the author. And it helps a lot to get away from the author a lot of times, and focus on the ideas. Then let the author back in, eventually, that helps, too, you know? So, it doesn't just become a seminar where we're discussing the work of someone who's not here, right? And I found that so interesting. There were two things about it. One was just a structure, which worked so well. And as I recall—I may be wrong about this—as I recall, when I was actually presenting that day at the colloquium, I don't think that Jim Scott could be there. I think he was away. I think that Bob Harms was there, and a number of others. But the structure just worked so well, right? It's one of those things that as a form allows for a really deep querying, a deep investigation of a work in progress with the author right there. It always went really well when I was there. I never saw any of the legendary sessions that got really tense, which I know has happened. It happens at every colloquium, eventually.

01-00:09:25

But it always seemed to work so well. And it helped bring out the best of the work, and at the same time highlight what the problems could be. And I just thought that was wonderful. In fact, I adapted it later on for a series that I run at UC Davis. I tend to like it a lot. Some people have said to me that they recognize this format as being what used to be called the "Social Science format." I had never heard that, until about five years ago, somebody said to me, "Oh, the old Social Science format," and this was an older person who would have been through graduate school many years before. I don't know where Jim had run into it before, or if it resembles some other form, but it is a fantastic format.

01-00:10:16

Holmes:

Jim has said that he partially borrowed the format from the Woman's Studies colloquium at Wisconsin, when he was there.

01-00:10:24

Warren:

That's fantastic, yeah.

01-00:10:26

Holmes:

So, he took that idea, and I think parsed it with one or two others, and that's how it came to be. But yeah, that's interesting, I've never heard of the old Social Science format.

01-00:10:33

Warren:

Yeah, and it may not be true. Maybe it resembles some other format, right?

01-00:10:38

Holmes:

Absolutely. What kind of other memorable events do you have of the program?

01-00:10:43

Warren:

Well, okay, one of the first attributes of the program is, it's a fantastic, ongoing exercise in community building because of the way that Jim approaches it—fellows, visitors, scholars, members of the public, practitioners. They're big on having practitioners, not just academics, come in. That we have ideas to discuss and things to discuss, and this means that we're going to need a space in time together, and also with Jim, that often means we're going to need food, right? There were always dinners at his house with a lot of the visitors, and then a lot of the people who had been at the session would end up with dinner at his house. The end of the year parties and pot-lucks, which were huge. I remember those being such joyous occasions. All of these graduate students, from all over the world, a huge number of people came from India, as I recall. Just people who came with other fellowships and other money to support themselves, but wanted to be at Agrarian Studies. There was a lot of that.

01-00:12:03

So it made for a fantastically cosmopolitan group of people, who got really close, over a year. People would tell me, "This has just been the best

experience of my life." People would say that to me when they would talk about being a fellow at Agrarian Studies. And you certainly caught that energy around that old ISPS building where it was housed before; I think that building became the Yale Admissions Office. Say no more—it was a great building! That was one of the exercises of the community building. And the other is just Jim himself, who's one of the great intellectuals of our time, or of any time, I think.

But there's a particular quality to his intellectualism, and that is the way it's grounded. He's got a way of speaking in the colloquium, outside the colloquium, in lectures and in his writing—everywhere—that is down to earth, and sounds very practical. It is a very convivial way of presenting intellectual ideas, I think. It's partly his own philosophy, which is something that I've always admired about Jim, that is he is able to express extraordinarily complex ideas in very simple language, and in examples of everyday people doing everyday things. And when he mentions something that way and talks about it and gives examples—he speaks about resistance toward the hegemonic power of the state as foot dragging, reticence, silence in the face of official pronouncements, long lists of examples that are everyday people doing everyday things—you think, "Oh yeah, right. That's what it looks like. This is what we're looking for here." It just is fascinating to be around that kind of intellect. He's also so widely read, and always so curious about things. He's just very easy to talk to. As the center of that community year after year, he's very powerful that way. He's a kind of a welcoming force, right? He is a force. His intellect is a force. But he's very welcoming. That's really rare; it's really hard to pull off. I don't know anybody else like him, in that regard.

01-00:14:52

Holmes:

Are there any memorable stories that you recall about Jim that you would like to share?

01-00:14:59

Warren:

Memorable stories about Jim? Let's see. I don't know if I have any particular ones at the moment. I remember he told me that when he was trying to publish *Hidden Transcripts*, right, that he wanted to call it "Domination and the Arts of Resistance" as the fore-title, he said when he pitched that to his editor, they said, "It sounds like a book about martial arts." [Laughter] We had a lot of talk about editors and publishers. You do what you have to do to get your work published, right? But that's not where you should be focused. In other words, when you get crap from editors and publishers, you just deal with it and get it out of the way. Don't fixate on it. All these little stories; I remember him once talking about departmental politics as the Balkans, frankly. There's not any margin in trying to engage that for him. When I brought up this issue of departmental politics for something that I was talking to him about, he said, "Yes. So those problems from the Balkans are always with us." He just has such a way of talking about things.

01-00:16:55

I remember there was a moment at the end of the first seminar, where they had asked for a student assessment of the whole experience, and they asked for it early, and tabulated all of the data and then shared it with us in the last session. There was overwhelming praise for the seminar. But some people said they would also like to read some people who were doing development work, because there were a lot of people, obviously, in the Yale graduate schools—Forestry School, School of Management, and so forth—who were in that seminar. So, some of them were, like, it would be really interesting to read some development work. Jim was just, "No. You know, that's one place we're not going with this seminar." Interdisciplinary—absolutely. But he felt the literature of development was lacking. He said, and I'm paraphrasing here, that these are some very, very, very smart people, but the work is this deep, and that it's not going to get us where we need to go.

I don't know if he's continued to feel that way, but it was really interesting to see somebody who's so capacious in his intellect, and where he draws the lines, and how he felt that the kind of intellectual questions they were asking simply weren't strong enough for us to engage them. I thought that was really interesting. I think it may have confirmed my own biases and reading of a lot of that work. But it was a really interesting moment, and one that highlights the tensions between development and doing the kind of work that goes on in Agrarian Studies. A lot of people who were in that seminar, did go into development work. So the tensions between doing that, how you do that, and how you think about the state when you're working with the state to do development work. It's a really interesting and difficult problem.

01-00:19:29

Holmes:

As one who was there from the beginning with the program, and has been obviously affiliated here and there with the program over its decades—as well as branching out and developing colloquiums of your own, programs of your own—what are the unique aspects of Agrarian Studies that make it different?

01-00:19:52

Warren:

That's a really good question. I mean, the community aspect that I've mentioned makes it different. The ability of the program to draw people from all over the world is really interesting. How it's funded, and remained funded for so long, right, has made it very powerful as an intellectual community. That's extremely rare. I can't think of another program like it. Then it has maintained its energy. Again, a lot of this goes back to Jim and some of the others, Bob Harms and others who had been involved with it. That the people at the heart of it continue to ask questions, continue to be curious makes it fascinating the way it continues to draw new scholarship to it. New scholarship gets worked through Agrarian Studies.

You know, I've read books in recent years that are prize-winning books in environmental history, for example, where I read the acknowledgements and the author says I went to Yale on a post doc in something-or-other, and

stumbled into Agrarian Studies. This book bears the imprint of that colloquium, which kind of became an inspiration for me. All kinds of people sort of end up being drawn into the orbit of it. That's the best of that kind of academic, intellectual program. Most programs that I know of where people set up a kind of seminar or series of speakers, or something with a foundational mission statement, you know, that mission statement generally becomes dated after ten, twenty years. But if you look at the mission statement for Agrarian Studies, it feels as fresh today, to me—I looked at it recently—it's as fresh today as it was back when it was started. And the writing of that mission statement itself was just so brilliant. I know that Jim wrote that in collaboration with other people. I don't think he would ever take credit for the mission statement. But it bears his imprint.

01-00:22:12

The funniest thing I heard him say was, right at the beginning, we want speakers around this mission statement, and fellows to apply around this mission statement, and it was back and forth about this. Then he said, "But the other thing is, we're really interested in good work. If you've got work that you think you should present here—and we look at it, and we think, yeah, this is really good work, you should present it here—and it's not within the mission statement, well, so much for the mission statement." I just think he's, again, so capacious, but at the same time, there are the themes that draw that work together, which are so fascinating. And they cut across so many traditional disciplines and so many traditional lines of inquiry.

Again, most of the time, what you find is, somebody sets up a program, and it gets funded. If it gets funded for a long time, which is very rare these days—if it gets funded. Then by ten or twenty years, a lot of the energy is kind of gone, and it's a program built around someone who's been in the field a long time and is connected to lots of people, and is able to still bring in new work. But the intellectual energy is not what it was in the early days. You see that a lot. That is just part of the human condition, unless it's Agrarian Studies, I guess, which seems to be eternal, immortal in this. At least for now. Nothing's eternal, but there you are. And that's very different, I think, from most academic programs that I've been around.

01-00:23:51

Holmes:

What kind of impact did the program have on you as a young scholar?

01-00:23:57

Warren:

The program, when I switched from doing African studies, African history to the history of the United States and the history of the American West, the program made it very clear to me that that was really important, that a lot of the people working in Agrarian Studies were working in formerly colonized places, of what we then called the "developing world" and the "third world," and so forth. Jim himself came from that tradition. And Jim was just adamant about, "Well, these questions are absolutely imperative to ask about the United States," you know? That was a very powerful affirmation for me, of

what I was thinking. It was just a great gift to have that. That way of thinking, that way of trying to reach out to other fields, it's become—partly because of Agrarian Studies—part of what I always try to do, looking for work in other fields, far distant from mine, that is just interesting; seeing if I can't take the insights that they're developing in a field distant from mine, and apply them to my field. Is there's something we're missing in American history because we're not doing what someone is doing in South Asia, for example? The answer to that is almost invariably, "Oh, yes. There's a lot we've been missing." And Jim was a big influence on me in doing that.

I struggled for a long time. I started as an Africanist, and became an Americanist. I talked to Jim a lot about that. He was very supportive of pursuing the questions. That's really what drives us, the questions, and where you take them. It's very important to have a place that you like to work, and do your research, it's important that you like to be there and all those things. But you don't need to worry so much about if you like all of these different places, and it's okay to choose one and work on it for now. You can take these questions and go elsewhere later. The world is open to you, right? It's the questions that are so important. And he would say, "You've got the questions. You know what you're trying to explore." Those conversations were just so helpful. The way he will connect examples, such as the experience of people in Southeast Asia to politics in the EU and the United States, the way he can make those connections is amazing. I've just always been in awe of that. I think that's been a really big impact on me.

01-00:27:00

Holmes:

In regard to his books, it seems like everything Jim Scott publishes becomes a ground-breaking study that becomes required reading in a number of disciplines. And when you go to the backside of that cover and you read the bio, you usually read something like, "Sterling Professor of Political Science and Anthropology at Yale University," which is then followed by, "He is also a mediocre farmer and beekeeper." In academia, there's not very many people who would have a bio line like that. What are your thoughts about that?

01-00:27:51

Warren:

Well, the self-deprecation, and the humility of it is very inviting. It's funny, it's just so funny, because you go out to the farm, and it's a beautiful place, right? To describe himself as a "mediocre farmer", you realize, "Oh, he's actually trying to grow things." You can order your lamb from Jim every year. He'll bring us a number of lambs that he slaughtered, and so forth. And you realize, he's actually doing this work. I remember him going off to Berlin for a fellowship one of those years I was there. He told me afterwards that he'd gone with a number of goals. In addition to having this fellowship and doing some writing, he wanted to work on a farm, he was going to be a farm worker. He was going to speak German, or relearn it. He'd learned some of it when he was very young, I think high school, but he wanted to go back to it. And he



was going to give a lecture in German by the end. I think those were the three [goals he had].

He worked as a farm worker while he was there. And he told me, other people, other farm workers, would think, "Who is this guy, and what is his deal?" When they figured it out, they said, "What, are you crazy? Why are you out here?" He was, I think, picking strawberries or something. I was, like, "Why did you want to do that?" He said, "To just try to be in touch with some of the kinds of labor I write about. I obviously am not going to have the experience of a farm worker, I'm not a farm worker. I can leave anytime." But something about physically doing was very important to him, and always has been. I think that's part of what a farm is about, is the physically doing, there's something of agrarian work to draw this energy out of the earth. I think that's the meat and whatever you raise, whatever crops you raise, how do we do it? There's some connection to all those ancient things people have been doing, that we write about. Obviously the experience of people doing that is completely different from us doing it as tenured professors, and Jim as a Sterling Professor, doing that. People would look at that and say it's a hobby, which maybe it is. But arguably, it's a passion of his. It energizes him, getting out at the farm. Jim comes in with the boots on and they're all splattered with mud, and he's got the shovel and the compost bucket, all that stuff. Living that way is just sort of central to who he is and how he thinks.

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I think it's keeping an eye on the farm, perhaps, that is one—I don't know this for sure—but I expect it's one way that he keeps himself and his thinking grounded, the specific examples that he's always using for things. There is something about his writing—there's an earthliness to it. I think that's what he's looking for, in part, on the farm, I would think. I've never really talked to him about the farm that way. I've just always enjoyed going out there, and seeing him...I haven't done it for years now, but I always enjoyed that. We all did. The parties out there on the farm, the gatherings, and just the way that all of it was part of his experiment—it seemed like it was important to the whole intellectual project without ever being fancy, you know, he doesn't try to intellectualize that. It's just, "Oh no, it's something I do that I'm not very good at." [Laughs] Again, it's one of these things that makes him so welcoming, right? The sense that you're talking to somebody who isn't going to try to dress this up as something sort of intellectual and fancy. It's just the farm, what I do out here. As he says, "You know, I have some successes out here, and make a mess of a lot of things. And you go on, right?"

So I guess that the bio reflects all those aspects of Jim. The academic world is one that's full of all the other professional worlds, full of insecurities. Jim doesn't have many of those. And you see that in his bio.

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Holmes:

Any final thoughts?

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Warren: Oh, you know, I just wish Agrarian Studies would go on forever. That's what I would wish. I think it has shaped a whole generation, two generations, of scholarship now. We are all the richer for it.

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Holmes: Thanks, Louis.

01-00:33:11

Warren: All right. Thank you.

[End of Interview]