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Linda Pritchard, Oral History Interview, 2018

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MJ: Well the tape is rolling. Uh, let's just, uh I'm gonna give a little introduction here

LP: Okay.

MJ This is Matt Jones. I'm a grad student here at EMU in the Historic Preservation Program and along with me is Rachel Burns she's also a grad student here in Historic Preservation. And today we're talking with Linda Pritchard. Uh Linda served as the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences here at Eastern from 2002 to 2005 before joining the history department. um And Linda also played a primary role in the creation of the Women's and Gender Studies Department here at EMU and before retiring in 2016. So we'll get into a lot more other things, that was a very broad overview. But before we get to Eastern, could you just tell us, a little about, just some biographical details. Where you can from? Family? Anything like that

LP: Mmhmm. I was born in Lansing Michigan and spent my growing up years there. My father was a office manager. My mom was a cafeteria worker at one of the local junior highs and high school. I was a first generation college student. I wanted to go to the biggest and the best so I went to the University of Michigan.

MJ: Mmhmm.

LP: Graduated with a degree in History and a teaching certificate. When I was, when I graduated which was in the mid to the late 60s, there was only two things that women could do. They could be nurses or they could be, you know well there's really was three things. They could be social workers, they could nurses or they could be teachers.

MJ: Okay.

LP: And my roommates were nurses and since I faint at the sight of I blood I decided it wasn't for me.

MJ: Okay (laughs) .

LP: So I got a teaching certificate because if your a first generation college student, you think that, the, what college is for is for you to get a job. So I had to get a job right out of school. You know, people said to me 'why don't you go to law school?' and it was like 'law school, that's for rich people and its for- not for me' so it never even entered my mind. Although in retrospect I would have liked that field. So I went and taught in high school history for two years before I went back to graduate school. And I went as far away from Michigan as possible so I went to California.

MJ: Okay.

LP: And had a very interesting wonderful experience in a town called Bakersville. If you know anything about California that's like the armpit of California.

MJ: Ew, okay (laughs) .

LP: But it was there I mean it's was an "oaky and archy" place so we're not talking not that far removed from the Depression then. And so I had a very interesting time. I got radicalized in many many ways but knew that teaching high school was not something I wanted to do for long. I liked the study of history more than I liked working with adolescents.

MJ: Mmhmm.

LP: So, I went back to graduate school and then got a PHD in History.

MJ: Okay. Do you remember your first experiences with history? Do you remember getting interested in it at all.

LP: I never liked history in high school. I had the usual coach teaching it. Where you read the history books and do the questions at the end of the of the chapter. And so really, it was totally boring to me. When I got in college, I never thought I'd be a history major, it's not like I had a passion for history. It was because I tried two other majors which were not good fits and history is what I did best in. And I got some I mean I had some interesting courses that taught me a broader approach. You know those history classes where they ask you multiple choice questions and recall? I'm terrible at it (laughs) and it's really boring to me. But I had some good-

Mj: How did you teach it when you were a high school teacher?

LP: I don't know Matt, but I don't think I'd be proud of it. I mean I did do some projects that were cool. There was an election there and it was a hands on project. But I wasn't schooled even at UOM in how to run an interesting class. We do much better with our history teachers now.

MJ: I see.

LP: But when I got to college, at the college level. I was a graduate assistant just like you guys. And I was able to watch some faculty members who really able to present a larger picture. The other important thing about my background in history is I came up when something called the new history social history was new. It was in the late 60s and early 70s. That was the first time that you heard the phrase 'history from the bottom up.' I don't know if that means anything to you. But it means that the school that I came from which the University of Pittsburgh was where I got my PHD and they did a lot of work in that. It meant that you didn't just study important men and important events. But you looked at how ordinary people lived. And so really there was no women's history before that, there was hardly any African American History, certainly no Native American and working class history of any kind. And so that captured my soul. Right there. And there was enough of us as graduate students that began to work in the areas that were not classically defined as history. Namely, biography and great events. So that's where my passion in history came. When I realized that history could include me. In some ways it was a personal

epiphany to realize that my family should be looked at with the same seriousness that they looked at the Roosevelts.

MJ: Right. Did you think, did you sort of take that into the classroom with you? Especially teaching here. I should say off the top that I have had Linda for a few classes. (laughs) So

LP: Two.

MJ: Yep.

LP: Those were the only two I taught Matt! (laugh) So when you had me that's the only two I taught.

MJ: But that sort of ability to connect people and different contexts out of history connect that with the student is what's its all about isn't it?

LP: Well I think so. I certainly think so. I think you know the field of history changes. People think that history doesn't change. But that's not true. Because the interpreters of history change. We can never go back to the Civil War. We can only reconstruct and there's many ways to reconstruct. And so I think that's what imaginative and inventive about history. You find new sources, you have new ideas about how to interpret. and the ideas now are quite different from when I was going to graduate school and in my opinion have gotten away from the 'nitty gritty' ordinary person's perspective. But that's a whole 'historiographic' argument that we don't need to have here (laughs).

MJ: Okay (laughs). Well, you taught history of American Religion

LP: Yes

MJ: Did that play a role when you were younger? How did religion work its way in?

LP: in two major ways. One was I come from a religious family. Not a particularly evangelical or strict family. But religion was always important in my life. But more to the point, when I went to graduate school and the new social history was opening up alternatives to look at big groups of people not just individuals but big groups of people. What we didn't understand at the time was that you could have more than one Women's historian or more than one labor historian or more than one historian of teachers. So those fields already taken by other graduate students they were already researching it. Probably if I had to do it all over again, I would do it all over again I'd go into women's history. That's one of my passion. But someone is already doing that.

MJ: Okay

LP: So my advisor was very smart and I guess there's a third reason. I had gone to graduate school thinking that I would do American culture from the point of view of some well known

writers like mark twain and sort of look at how cultural values influence their perspectives. When I got there, I was more interested in the people's than the writers. But religion captures a sense of how people see the world. Religion for its all its faith dimension is also a way to understand the culture you live in. So when I put those two things together and religion was open, I majored in religion in terms of doing my research projects largely in the field of American religion.

MJ :Alright. So you had an interest already?

LP: I mean it was always an interest of mine.

MJ: Yeah, okay.

LP: Although you know, I'm not particularly religious in a classical sense now. Although my family continues to be.

MJ: Okay, I remember a story you told in class once where you said that you sometimes still went to service with your mother. But it was more of a, I think you, maybe I just interpreted this way but it was more of a way to spend time with you mother.

LP: Well here's how I think of myself. I don't know if you know the concept-it's a concept often applied to Jews. Jews who are not especially religious but are born in a definitional sense a jew so there mother, is it mother or father?

MJ: Don't know (laughs)

LP: One of the two. But they do not practice. But they can't undo their jewishness. They are and their culture is very much caught up with that. I am an ethnic protestant. No one would mistake me for a jew, a muslim, even a catholic. I'm a protestant. So I'm an ethic protestant. But I appreciate all of the 'protestanesses' including the religious services that I do attend. So while I attend with my mother, I actually go on my own sometimes. If there reason. Especially the music.

MJ: yeah

LP: So religion is a cultural phenomenon as well a faith dimension phenomenon.

MJ: Right yeah, okay. That makes a lot of sense. You answered a lot of my questions already, I like it. Did you spend a lot of time in south east michigan when you grow up in lansing? Did you have any association with Eastern at all?

LP: None, none. Here's the one association I did have. In my senior year, I student taught at Ypsilanti West it was a junior high at that point. I think it was Ypsilanti West. It could have been East. I don't really remember.

MJ: Okay (laughs).

LP: So my friend and I, Eric, were doing student teaching in the same building. We would drive out Washtenaw avenue which I thought it was a far distance to go to Ypsilanti from Ann Arbor. I didn't have a car but Eric did. So I did my student teaching in Ypsilanti so in that sense I was in the vicinity of Eastern. But what I knew of Eastern was it we'll know to be a teacher prep institution.

MJ: Mhmm. Really well known too.

LP: But for me, I never wanted to be can I say 'just a teacher' I sort of backed into at the University of Michigan because I couldn't figure anything else to do. I realized now that I have a different view of that know. I think that we all teach in one way or another.

MJ: Sure

LP: You certainly do Matt, in your avocation with your music. You teach a lot. And it doesn't really matter if whether I was dean of the college, or whether I was chair of the department of WGS or whether I was a professor. You know, we all teach. So in that sense I'm comfortable with my chosen profession which is teaching.

MJ: Okay. We're gonna come back to teaching. But first, I just want to talk about what happened after U of M. You studied in Pittsburgh from 69 through 80. Your master and your phd.

LP: That's correct. I took a very long time to finish my PHD.

MJ: Yeah, how did you liked Pittsburgh? I love Pittsburgh (laughs).

LP: I love, I love Pittsburgh. And I was there before it really cleaned itself up. But it's such a rich ethnic you know culturally diverse city that I really, really liked it. Perhaps that's why it took me 11 years to (pause)

MJ: To leave

LP: To leave, I don't know. I don't think so. You know one of the interesting though in reflection is that when you are first general college student you're also a first generation graduate student and then first generation faculty member and college administrator. So every step is like 'really, I found myself here?' When you go to graduate school, I don't know if you've found this Matt but maybe it's changed now, I suspect it's changed a little bit. While there's a variety of people a lot of them are very well healed and know exactly what their doing and often come from upper middle class and upper class families.

MJ: Yeah I know what you mean.

LP: So I felt the class difference in every different educational level that I managed to do. When I got to graduate there was a lot things people had experience doing that I didn't have any experience. I had never been out of the country, never travelled abroad. I did some things, I got a big grant to go to Berkeley and I did that for 18 months because it was such a cool place to be, I stayed longer. And I then I got myself a Fulbright grant. And that was part of that 11 year period. And so I felt I needed to catch up.

MJ: Mhmm. Yeah I definitely know what you mean. Well you then went you were hired an associate of the College of Behavioral cultural sciences?

LP: Right, my first job was at the university of texas san antonio which was a very interesting place at the time. It had been commissioned by the state of texas in the late 60s. Its open its first doors in a Kroger grocery store, old refitted Kroger grocery store in 1975. And I came in 1980. They had just opened the campus just a year or two before. So I was not on the absolute ground floor but I was have a step up.

MJ: Yeah.

LP: And so, the reason they were the state had allowed UT san antonio to open was because the ethnic mix. The number of latinos, Latinx i guess is the new word, I like it. And so, you really had first generation college students. They were locals. They were hungry and it was a very exciting place to be.

MJ: Okay

LP: My only serious regret was that I never learned Spanish even though I had opportunity to do so. I'm a terrible language student.

MJ: You know, actually, one of the things I was wondering about having seen that you were in texas and arkansas and then I've read some your writing that is religion and western ,American west I always thought you must be from the south west or the west and always been like 'how did she get here?' (laughs)

LP: I went West (laughs). And you know one of the interesting things of the economics of today is people are not moving as much as they did even 50 years ago when I was moving. And so that is sort of an interesting fact. You know, the opportunities for mobility were just greater. So you know, when I finished college, I interviewed in a number of places. And I don't really know I had other offers I don't know but California? Going from Michigan to California?

MJ: Yeah (laughs)

LP: What a wonderful you know, sense of enlightenment to learn new things! One of my roommates and my younger brother and I packed everything we owned in a ford galaxy. My

brother was just there for the ride. He was in college. You know my roommate was a nurse, I was a teacher and we went to California and we had two years of growing up.

MJ: So no school then? Just hanging out?

LP: No, no. I had a job. I had to have a job.

MJ: I mean yeah, but you weren't in academia at that point.

LP: No, no. I was just teaching school.

MJ: Okay

LP: I was just teaching school. My first experience of Spanish names and that was pretty embarrassing

MJ: (Laughs) What years were you there?

LP: 67 to 69. I was there when Martin Luther King was assassinated. I remember it very well. Coming home, you know, Bakersville was about maybe 75 miles from Los Angeles over a set of mountains. But we used to go in for the evening. Now, people are silly when they're kids. (laughs) I had all of the energy in the world. And my roommate was a nurse and she was a public health nurse. And one of her assignments was the WASCO labor camps. That was when the grape boycott of Cesar Chavez was in full force. And so she brought a rich experience of you know a sort of merging political sense to me from that experience. And I will just tell one anecdote. You can tell how much the structures support the status quo. So the school district brought lugs of grapes and had them in the front office for people to take for free. Because they were supporting the grape growers under this boycott.

MJ: Did you hear a lot of the Chicano/ Chicana music? The civil rights-

LP: I wish

MJ: Yeah

LP: I did in Texas more. Cause my mind was more open minded. You know I'm a white girl.

MJ: Right

And I was living with another Yankee Anglo. And so I had to say I didn't partake of the, part of it was I didn't like the racist culture that the whites had. And so, basically stayed away. I wish.

MJ: Kind of as a side note that was one of the things I got really in to after taking your research class. For two semesters in a row I did nothing but write about Chicano music.

LP: Oh that's cool!

MJ: It was awesome!

LP: I got into Tehana music in South Texas but part of it was I didn't like the hillbilly culture and the hillbilly music. Although I've even soften on that. I like western music now.

MJ: Well I read somewhere that after, when you were at Arkansas State and you were the Dean of College of Arts and Sciences there. I read in article I think and I couldn't tell if you were serious that one of the reasons you decided to come back here aside from the job was for the seasons.

LP: Yes! I missed my four seasons! I was not kidding! Now Even though it is cold and slushy outside I still you know, this is where my home is. I did come back. As now you know, I wasn't a westerner. I grew up with the seasons.

MJ: How are deans chosen?

LP: Yeah, that's a really good question. Most people would have no idea. Because you don't what a dean does do you?

MJ: We know the structure, the hierarchy. I don't know what they do! (laughs)

LP: Well that's a good question. It's a good thing I wasn't a provost, because no one knows what a provost does. But a dean, so, my first job was at the University of Texas San Antonio. I spent 18 years there, so my career was mostly spent at the University of Texas at San Antonio. And as a faculty member you have three areas that you have to show growth in. Teaching, Research and Service. And when I got to Texas, after being at Pitt and being fairly politically active in all kinds of women's movement kinds of things also all kind sort of new left stuff gay and lesbian stuff, i got to Texas and the stereotype of Texas is somewhat misleading but true in this way. It is not a place where radicalism is well known.

MJ: Mmmhmm

LP: I learned that wasn't true. There's sort of an underground. But Texas is being texas and San Antonio did not have any programs for women. There was no women's studies program. There was no women's activities no groups. No lectures. No nothing. Now this was in 1980 so they were a little behind the times but you know those of who went gone to graduate were coming out were bringing a whole host of political and intellectual and academic endeavors to them. It was my job to say 'well you look around, there's nothing here, what can I do?' And so, I am going to answer your question which is how I got into administration.

MJ: Take as long as you want.

LP: So while I was teaching and doing research at least enough to get me tenure, I was also trying to organize activities on the campus. One of the ways I thought was innocuous it wouldn't

cost me my job was or wouldn't send out the wrong signals was to suggest they do a fairly major Women's history month set of activities. Well we had a week of activities. So I started organizing that using the same political orientation I had learned, you know from my own studies which is to say you bring everybody to the table, you try to provide something for everyone. It was fairly successful this women's history month. Our first year was 1985, we had Ann Richards, the governor of the state texas to be. She was attorney general then. The only reason she agreed to come to us was she was running for office.

MJ: Yeah.

LP: She gave a fabulous talk. And people lots of people were there and said 'that's such a good idea, who is this Linda Pritchard person?' I was doing it with a buddy of mine too who is now at Brown. That got to be a big deal, what we were doing on campus in support of women's issue. And so at some point I had to say to myself 'do I want to do the job I'm paid to do which is teaching, research and a little service or do I want to think about service in a broader university way?' Because that's all administration is. It is service to the academic community. Presidents and provosts and deans and even department heads to a somewhat lesser degree we are trying to make the best, give students the best possible experiences. But we don't actually provide them. We hire, we promote certain kinds of programmings but we don't actually deliver it. And so administration is service to the university community. Now some may argue 'easy for you to say, they pay a lot'. I mean I think not as much as people think. Administrator are not paid as much as people think when you consider that its they're 12 month jobs and- and that's another whole argument with faculty and staff (laughs)

MJ: We might to get that in a minute.

LP: And so I sort of said 'I sort of like the service work. I'm very good at it' and my dean at the time recognized that I had some interest and so he said 'why don't you be an associate dean' and so then you have certain kinds of portfolios. And so I was that for five years. And then I decided that, you know, having having an 'ass' in front of your name is never having 'the' in front of your name. And so I thought I'd try my hand at becoming the dean. And so that's when I made the move to Arkansas State. It was not possible for me to be dean at University of Texas at San Antonio. Other people can manage to move up in the ranks of their own university. I would be unconstitutionally able to do that because I have no tact. And so you know I burned some bridges.

MJ: It's the politics aspects, you don't think your that good at that?

LP: That's right. I'm too blunt, I'm too not sensitive to some things.

MJ: Yeah, but I remember, just another side note, about your class. I remember the first day you said you very blunt to the students you said 'this will be the hardest class you've ever taken.' (laughs) 'but I will pull you through it but you have to talk to me. You have to come to me' So is that kind of how you operate?

LP: Yeah, yeah, I mean Matt, I did not get the best reviews as a faculty member because students that I was hard. Too harsh and too hard. Now I think that's how the way people learn. But I do understand that are different models (laughs). I absolutely understand. So I the reason I left Texas was in order to be a dean. And I was, Arkansas was about the last place I intended to go. But it was very wonderful experience. But I was only there four years because you don't want to live in Arkansas for too long. The culture is not very liberal.

MJ: Sorry about that (a notification sound from the laptop went off) I could imagine that. I guess I've wondered about that too. Because, like I said, you've been in Texas, you've been in Arkansas.

LP: I know.

MJ: I've always wondered you, we've never talked about, but I guess I assumed you had sort of a liberal bent.

LP: Yes.

MJ: I wondered if you've always had a feeling you would get out of there and come back up here.

LP: You know, I really didn't have Michigan on my radar when I went to Arkansas. And Arkansas was wonderful for me. But not there was no buts about. It was wonderful for me and I learned a lot about trying to negotiate a culture that was fairly foreign to me and in four years I finally began to get my sea legs. But at that point, you know, too little too late. So one of things I did when I first got to Arkansas because I thought the staff had real problems navigating a diverse student group. We actually had a lot of Muslims at Arkansas State because we had a Saudi arrangement to bring foreign students there. Jonesboro, the location of Arkansas State, is fifty miles from the Mississippi river and right on the edge of the mississippi delta. On the other hand, going north a bit moving towards the Ozarks and the a whiter, a very entrenched generally racist area. So Arkansas state sat at that nexus. And so I had a retreat for staff which I thought was wonderful, and I think they did too because no one pays attention to staff. These are like secretaries and clerical works and nobody pays attention usually. And they like that, so I brought in some cultural diversity trainers from little rock. And the first thing, they were great, I needed to do more along those lines. But these trainers were great. The first thing they said 'you I have a question. Is the KKK chapter still operating? They operated out of this building near the campus' so it was like 'woo!' (laughs)

MJ: Oh my god, you went from late sixties California to late, well not late sixties anymore, I guess that would have been what year when you were in Arkansas

LP: I was in Arkansas from in the nineties. 1998 to 2002.

MJ: But still going from California to the delta? That's quite a switch

LP: I know, but it's such a rich cultural environment.

MJ: Yeah.

LP: And of the things I'm most of proud of is recognizing that the Delta offered some opportunities for Arkansas State students that other places wouldn't have. And so that's when I helped create something called the heritage studies program which is a program to use local resources to teach people how to create you know heritage programs, heritage programming, much like you're doing with the Riverstreet Anthology. And we had some very good ethnographers there working in that program.

MJ: So-

LP: So, no what do deans do? I'm back on what do deans do. Okay so the dean, now associate deans they get things delegated to them. But the dean, fundraising is one of the things they do, overseeing all of the academic programs under their academic portfolio. The college of arts of sciences is always the most diverse college ranging from you know anthropology to zoology and everything between.

MJ: Sure.

LP: I took a special interest in hiring because I think that's the most important thing we do. Hire faculty. And I inserted myself in that process at Arkansas State as I did here in order to really focus people's attention on the notion that if you're hiring a faculty member you might be hiring them for 50 years. So we want the best, we want people who will give students the best possible experiences in the classroom. So the deans are the conduits from the big bosses, we're sort of like the middle managers. The president and Vice President and the deans have some control budget, depends on the place. Here there's not that much control over the budget, Arkansas state there wasn't either, much to my disappointment because if you have budget you can do a lot of things.

MJ: Yeah.

LP: But one of the things I did as dean that I thought was important and I enjoyed was all of the activities that the various departments had. That way, I kept engaged in the campus community and was able to reach out to students and have a relationship with students in that way.

MJ: You said you did the hiring. Did you also do-

LP: I didn't do the hiring. I oversaw the hiring.

MJ: Okay. Did you oversee the firing ever?

LP: Well, one of the things that the deans do, that's a really good question Matt, we review all of the promotion and tenure cases and offer opinions on it.

MJ: Okay

LP: So I don't make the final decision but its a hierarchical thing. The department makes the initial judgement, then the department head sort of weighs in and says 'yes, no, maybe' Then it goes to the dean, same thing. Ultimately it goes to the provost, the vice president for academic affairs and really the president and then it goes to the board. So there are a lot of chances for people to weigh in.

MJ: Yeah, are you supposed to try to keep your politics out of your job as the dean?

LP: Sure

MJ: So when you're overseeing the hiring, or the letting go, or the promotions, I wonder how much it works its way in. If it can if its-

LP: It is not supposed to. But as a social historian I would say we bring all of our philosophies to the table. But really when youre talking about hiring, you're doing it in a specific PHD level field. And you're looking for experts in the field. And so you can argue about the expertness of someone. Or can you argue this person doesn't represent the field that you want. So you might be looking for a cultural anthropologist and somebody comes in with more background as a linguist and is that cultural? Is it not? So you can argue about a lot of things. But you don't argue about if they like the President or what their values are. That stays out of it. That stays totally out of it.

MJ: Okay it sounded like, I asked that question because you seemed to come into a culture that seemed foreign and trying to navigate it. It seems like it would tough not to bring your-

LP: Within a faculty context though, they, the traditions of faculty hiring do not include political orientations.

MJ: Yeah.

LP: In fact, we would just be appalled.

MJ: Sure.

LP: And so we are not that happy to see the conservatives say 'we need more conservative voices in the university' we don't think we're conservative or liberal. We just think we're faculty experts. Now do you know, studies shows that university faculty do tend to vote in a more liberal way.

MJ: Yeah

LP: But we do not believe that we bring that into the classroom or that we hire based on those principles.

MJ: Okay yeah, alright.

LP: But as a dean, I have little bit more, what can say, a little bit more flexibility. When I perceived that the staff at Arkansas State were not as welcoming to students of color, I was able to say 'okay, I'm going to bring in some cultural helpers' and they might have seen that as a yankee carpetbagger trying to influence their values, when I saw it as a way to keep more students in a university and not having them feel like outsiders.

MJ: Okay. That was a good answer (laughs). When you were hired Eastern as Dean, did you have any apprehension about coming here. What kind of place were you coming to?

LP: Some people would see it as a lateral move. But I had a bigger portfolio here at Eastern than I had at Arkansas State. And Arkansas State only had 10,000 students. At Eastern, at that time, had 24,000 so the scope was much much bigger here. And so I suppose I was concerned about that. You can't have the same kind of close relationships when there are 750 faculty that you can have when there are 150 in my college. So, but, also all complaints against faculty come to the dean's office, and so that takes a lot of time.

(At this point, the recording software stopped, missing about three minutes of discussion. Matt asked "What kind of College of Arts and Sciences did you inherit here at Eastern?" Pritchard answered that the three years she was dean were a very conflicted time at EMU. She was hired by the individuals who were forced to leave. She was tarred by knowing the president, who at that time was Samuel Kirkpatrick. Kirkpatrick had been the president of the University of Texas San Antonio from 1990 to 1999. She did not know that Kirkpatrick was president here. The University of San Antonio was a regional comprehensive similar to Eastern. The leadership supported a usual agenda. When the leadership left, Pritchard felt as though she did not have many followers or supports. In general, when Pritchard arrived, the College of Arts and Science needed to move into the 21st century, the technology was awful and the building of the university house, the home of the University president, complicated that. Pritchard then said that her position was becoming increasingly difficult, due to not being political. While Pritchard believed she was not able to follow through on many things, she believes she has benefitted Eastern in many ways.

Matt then asked if there was anyone who made the transition to Eastern easier. Pritchard answered that the faculty and staff were wonderful but it was difficult to administrate. Pritchard felt welcomed but was not "the fit." This was because of Pritchard's view of the decision of regional comprehensives to hire PHD researchers. Pritchard alluded to the culture of Eastern faculty emphasizing teaching over research. Pritchard believes that

research should be more supported in order to balance the three responsibilities of faculty: teaching, research and service. ¹)

MJ: Okay, well I mean, I couldn't even really imagine what your answer was going to be like seeing, it seemed like such an unstable time. How the turnover from the top down it seems, how did it affect the job you were trying to do?

LP: Although one of the things about being a dean it's like having your own city. You know, you're fairly insulated in some ways from even the people at the top. They can, they can push you around but if you don't want to be pushed, you don't want to do what they want you to do there's all kinds of ways to just, you know, nod yeah and not do anything.

MJ: Okay (laughs)

LP: So for deans in large universities, they often move from a deanship to the presidency because in some ways being dean is like being president of your own-

MJ: Little kingdom

LP: Yeah, your own kingdom. That's right. And so while the meetings, you know, with the president were unpleasant during that third year, one of the things I say to myself and anyone else who cares if, you know it's really trite but I like it, 'if you don't stand for something, you fall for anything. Well, I always stood for what I stood for. And so I continue to do that. Some in ways I remember that third year being personally very upsetting to me, but it wasn't. But my job stayed the same. I didn't change my job. You know, you can put your finger to the wind and see which way the wind's blowing, but that is never my personality (laughs). You know I never lack for courage. I lack for common sense sometimes, but never courage. So even that third year which was extremely unsettling-

MJ: Was that 2005?

LP: Yes, it was 2005. And I

MJ: What was happening? Was it the president's house?

LP: Well no, that was over by that time. The president had been fired. The president was fired in June of 2004, I think yes. I think I've got this right, but you guys can check it up.

MJ: Okay.

¹ This summary has been composed from notes taken Rachel Burns. Burns was tasked with writing notes and a loose transcription during the interview, while Matt Jones was largely responsible for asking the questions and conducting the interview.

LP: The provost was fired in like October after the faculty contract was settled. And I was fired in June of the next year.

MJ: Okay.

LP: Allowed to step down shall we say.

MJ: So somebody was just going down the line. Just like checking off names?

LP: Yes.

MJ: Okay.

LP: Basically, I was, part of it was just what I stood for as a dean and part of it was that I was seen as part of the old administration.

MJ: I see. Okay. Also, as we were looking at that record of administrators, we saw that Michael Harris was interim president, I don't know if that rings a bell.

LP: Yes.

MJ: Well interim provost.

LP: Provost. He was not president. He left to become president.

MJ: Okay. Where did he go?

LP: To become president?

MJ: Yeah.

LP: I, you know I can't quite remember, whether he left as provost. He went to Ferris. Ferris state for a while. But I can't remember- I think he went as provost there. But then he became president at one of those I U schools I think in Indiana.

MJ: Is it tough to work under someone whose immediately above you and they're temporary. Is that difficult?

LP: Yes and no. As I said, deans, interim status have as much clout as you think it might. It's not like a business where things can turn on a dime. The university very slow to change, faculty governance is very set. And so, while it gets personally uncomfortable when you don't agree and you try to make arguments, it doesn't actually change much in the short term.

MJ: Okay, I kind of wonder if because they don't have as much power as we would think

LP: Right.

MJ: Then you don't have anybody above you that can make any decisions.

LP: That's right. That's true.

MJ: That must be very hard.

LP: That is true. It took a long time to get the Department of Women's and Gender Studies okayed because when you're interim you don't want to make a commitment that is going to cost a lot of money.

MJ: Yeah, okay. Well after Michael Harris, there was Don Lopnow.

LP: Right

MJ: He was also interim provost.

LP: That's right. And he was interim president.

MJ: Oh yeah, he's up on that wall up there, yeah?

LP: He was. I can't ever remember if he was ever provost. But he was interim president for a year or two I think. Right before Susan Martin was. Susan Martin began a period of relative stability.

MJ: Yeah he's on our list.

LP: Fabulous

MJ: Yeah, I got to talk to him a few weeks ago about Bruce Nelson. Same interview setting and he was really great! It was really great! Well does it ever feel like no one's driving the ship? When people are in flux above you-

LP: Yes, yes I think that's fair.

MJ: Yeah

LP: And that means people are driving their own individual kingdoms ships. So, getting a direction I don't know how unusual it is. Universities are very large ponderous places. So, you know, you wonder if people are really, if it's going to happen if everybody's moving in the same direction. That maybe a, you know, a myth. You may be able to do it in business. But it's harder to see you do it in a university setting.

MJ: Right. Okay, well-

LP: So I sat down as dean and I really didn't ever expect to leave Michigan which is what I didn't do.

MJ: Yeah.

LP: So I feel like I have, you know, that was a very long time ago and I have been able to make good you know contribution to Eastern in a variety of ways that didn't include being dean.

MJ: Yeah, do you want to talk about those?

LP: Well, I went back to the faculty, taught full time for maybe only a year but then began to do things that I'd always done. Plan programs and do the service component. We put on a Michigan Women's Studies Association meeting, a conference that was very successful I think, in 2007. And then the when I was dean I was able to hire for the first time a formal administrator for the program of Women and Gender Studies. They had just had rotating chairs for something called the program of women's studies. And but it had grown to the point where you justify a full time hire equivalent to a full time department head. And so I was able to do that, that had been on the record for a while and the administration and I agreed we should do that, so I was able to do that. Hired a woman by the name Lynn Shot and she did a fabulous job. But she was ready to move in 2008. And so I became the full time administrator for the program for Women and Gender Studies. I was interim, then I was program, and then we created the department. Then I was interim department head then I was the department head (laughs) . So for four years, I was the head of Women and Gender Studies, after which we hired a full time department head.

MJ: Alright. What is the benefit of having a department and not just a program?

LP: That's a very good question. As it turns out, the faculty union said that they would only agree to hire in the program in Women and Gender studies if it was a department. It sounds like a technicality and in some ways it is. But the reason for that was sort of a verse one. If your hired in the faculty, you have to be hired into a department. And a department decides is the first layer of evaluation of tenure and promotion so they have to be in a department. A program is not a department. A program, and this particular program was interdisciplinary from its inception which means people in english and history and sociology and art all kinds of fields anthropology, taught course that applied to first a a minor then a major and then actually a graduate degree in women now and gender studies.

MJ: Right

LP: So, the program was interdisciplinary and so the faculty union said 'yes, so you can't hire. You'd have to hire in one of these other fields if you wanted more people to do women's studies'. And at point the program had enough majors, minors and graduate students, we had

graduate students, whereas you needed a dedicated faculty member. I don't mean dedicated in a passionate sense. I mean dedicated in a structural sense to do nothing but serve those students. Because if you're in history, as I was, I have responsibilities in history. Not just to women and gender studies. And so, we were desperate to get more help for our students so we wanted to begin create a faculty in Women and Gender Studies. Well, Women's studies and then when the new, when Dr. Shot came, she created, they had a process to add gender to program. So it's Women's and Gender Studies, it used to be-. And so we were, how do you create a new department?

MJ: I don't know, tell me (Laughs)

LP: I don't know. Here's how we did it. I'm not sure that if another department wanted to be created, I don't how you go about doing it. But here's what we had to do. We had to get God and everyone to agree. Which means we had to get all of the faculty governance councils to agree starting with the college of arts and sciences. Then we had to get administrators to agree. Getting administrators was not the hard part. Getting it through faculty was the hard part. Cause they looked at us 'why do you want to be a department? You don't have any faculty members?' Yeah that's right. It's like a catch 22. We can't have faculty members unless we're department. And then they said 'you're too small' or 'who cares about women and gender studies anyway' and there was still some residual sexism. People saying 'why would you, the *whole department?*'

MJ: Sure.

LP: With the sort of political axe to grind. We had to sort of pull out all of our best organizing activities to finally to get the various bodies to agree to approve our department, which did happen in 2009.

MJ: I see, was there anyone in particular who helped you the most to make this happen?

LP: The now provost, Rhonda Kinney. She was associate provost at the time.

MJ: Yeah.

LP: Now it is also true that she was one of the many program coordinators for women and gender studies when she was in political science. So before she became the chair for political science. So one of the meetings where we had submitted, the program women and gender studies had submitted an application for new faculty member, which she approved. No, she didn't approve, the provost approved. Because she wasn't in the position of approving. And it was then the union stepped in and said 'no you can do that, it goes against the contract.' And so we had a meeting with the provost, associate provost, which was with Rhonda. And Rhonda 'let's try get you to become a department' so I know i had support at the higher administrative level. The key would be getting women's and genders studies faculty and getting the departments to agree to that. That's sort of an internal political argument. Do you want to be like

of the other departments? Or do you want to have this wonderful sort of more voluntary structure where everyone participates? So even getting the women and genders studies faculty together was not a given. Although we did, we were solidly behind that and trying to get, getting chemist to see why we want to be a department. You know, getting the business college to see- so it was challenge.

MJ: I had no idea that the faculty had to sign off.

LP: Yes

MJ: The entire faculty?

LP: It was not a vote. But the various committees that represent the faculty, the faculty senate had to agree I mean, you know, I don't know, it's hard to say what would have happened if they didn't. I think it would have stopped. I don't think the administration would have overruled the faculty senate. Also, the College of Arts and Sciences, it's so vast, you got biology and chemistry and math and all of the arts. They don't really see the benefit. And one of the, I don't know, one of the department heads at the time maybe said 'well if you become a department, you'll take resources away from the rest of us. Because then they'll have to slice the pie with one additional piece.' Some of it was academic, some of it was budgetary, some of it was plain old sexism. So it was it was one of our triumphs to be able to negotiate, those, those waters. But it wasn't about the administration, they were in favor.

MJ: Okay. That's not an enviable job but its

LP: No, but I did not do it alone. I had excellent support.

MJ: Alright, well since we're there, actually I want to step back for one second. Your time as dean we found some things your support for the jazz studies and the muslim-middle east studies center. What brought those on?

LP: Well for the Jazz studies, that was a happy time. We had a done, i forgot what they call it, we had a big party every year, and we were able to raise funding for that program.

MJ: There was no Jazz Studies program here?

LP: No.

MJ: Wow.

LP: That's right. That is correct. Of all the places not to have jazz studies. We have a nice scholarship setup. And we were able to, I think it's gone by the wayside now, we were able to do a fundraiser . Sort of a dinner dance fundraiser where some of the jazz musicians and the head of the Jazz Studies would come. And so that was a very happy time. And, you know, one

of our premiere occasions. Now the middle east studies center. The first year I was here, there was a free speech issue. Various groups on campus in arts and sciences had brought in an Israeli academic who was thought to be a liberal. And there was a backlash against that. I can't remember the fellow's name, gave a really good talk I thought. And so, some of the more conservative jewish agencies and students and faculty complained about that. And so there was a big flash in the papers and so we worked through that. One of the outcomes was agreed to have another academic speaker come later in that year and to offer not a rebuttal, but a different picture. And so, I thought one of the ways to sort of reduce tension on campus because faculty was upset. We had an afternoon tea to discuss some of the issues. Out of that came an idea for a middle eastern studies program which has never gotten off the ground.

MJ: Oh, wow.

LP: We have a jewish studies program, Professor Shichtman, Marty Shichtman has grown that program tremendously. But it's not Middle Eastern Studies, it's Jewish Studies.

MJ: Okay Ah I see. I ran across some communications between, I think yourself and maybe the historic preservation department. Was, I didn't have it completely clear, the details of what was going on. It was emails between back and forth with you and Nazzaro about consolidating the HP department with geography? Is that what happened?

LP: You know, I'd have to know more. Here's what I suspect. That was, universities have budget crises all the time. Last year when I was there, we had a fairly major one. Given that the department of G and G, geography and geology, they were constantly fighting. You know, and so, I know, sort of, I was wondering, suggested, and I don't think I ever dictated I never had that power, I suggested that they separate. That geology go with the sciences go with chemistry. And geography, I think, I don't know where they were going to go, they were gonna stand alone, I sort of forgot the details of that. But you know, once you, its like siblings that fight all the time. Once you say 'why don't you live with your dad,' I've divorced them, then the two are really like 'no, no we have to stay together!' So they stayed together.

Matt: (Laughs) Okay.

LP: But I think that's what those memos were trying to get at. So historic preservation wasn't going anywhere but with geography

MJ: That, I like that anecdote about keeping the two siblings apart, that must have happened all time. With departments and stuff

LP: Yeah, yes. That happens because we have mixed departments. History and Philosophy, that's my home department. They get along pretty well now, but it wasn't like true, certainly when I dean there was problems.

MJ: Well, it wasn't difficult to go back to the classroom after being Dean?

LP: I had been in administration then for about 15 years. So, I was concerned. But you know, that's what I'm trained to do.

MJ: Could you talk about what your concerns would have been?

LP: Well the workload.

MJ: Yeah (laughs).

LP: The workload. But really the workload was not as great as when I was dean. Probably that's, that's probably not true. It's differently construed. So, four classes it's hard to do all that. Faculty load is quite high. It is broader on a community college load. Where community college instructors don't have the kind of responsibilities for research and service that university faculty have. But I've found that it was, sounds trite, I didn't have a hard time readjusting. It felt comfortable to be back in the classroom.

MJ: Yeah, well I just heard you say to Alexis down in her office that you miss action being retired.

LP: I do. I miss the action.

MJ: Do you miss the action of teaching. Or is it the administration?

LP: I you know, teaching is very hard Matt, I think. You feel responsible for every single student in that classroom. And someone like me, I want them all to learn. And so trying to strategize and to reach out and to do what I need to do and to have thick skin when I tell students 'No, no. You gotta write another draft'. You have to be at the top of your field in order to be confident enough, I think, to really do what you need to do for students. I am not able to do that anymore (laughs). I'm tired. Younger faculty, they're gonna come up and they're gonna do a fabulous job. But I'm done.

MJ: Okay (laughs) What was the history department when you joined it? Was it fairly put together?

LP: Yeah it had been, when I first came there was some problems. But they resolved itself, it was a stable place. But I never really felt, and this was a two way street, I never really felt totally apart of the history department because the history department had to take me. They didn't hire me. I was hired as Dean and that's another process. The history department had to agree in an abstract sense to 'take me back' because that's where I hold tenure because that was what my degree was in. That's what my credentials were in. But they, I was not one of them. I was imposed on them. And I just tried to keep my head down and not cause any trouble and do some things nobody else wanted to do. So that's my relationship with the history department, not all that strong.

MJ: Did you have favorite class to teach?

LP: Now, I loved Research Methods. I loved it. Now, a lot of people loved it, so I did not get to teach it as much (laughs)

MJ: Now did you settle into, when you did you did religion-

LP: Yeah, I did religion. When I stepped from dean it was the beginning of the online push. And I had been doing some of that as dean but then I said "you know I better put my money where my mouth is and see what this was like." And so I developed an online class which was a survey. It was American History Survey. And so I taught that a lot. I really, I really enjoyed doing that. I was very happy with that class.

MJ: Did you like that format?

LP: Um, actually I got to think to myself if students hanged in there, one of the problems with online is people drop out a lot, I could do as well by them in the course as I did in the classroom. Online doesn't work for all things, I thought it worked for this.

MJ: Yeah, I had an online history class here too with John Wagner. Michigan History.

LP: Mmhmm

MJ: But he made it work. He made fun to come back to your computer at home when you could be doing a million other things.

LP: Right. So religion, the research methods and the survey were what I did. And I didn't really feel in my late stage that I wanted to develop any new classes, so I didn't (laughs).

MJ: As a college professor can you must be able to see the shifts that are happening outside of the college in your students. Like can kind of read the culture we live in by looking at your students?

LP: Yes.

MJ: Like how good of an indicator are they?

LP: I think they are quite good, well it depends on the field. I mean, I think, but for those of us of a certain age, I think we are used to different kind of students. That's one of things that I, and that's why younger faculty members, I think, can be more oriented to students needs.

MJ: that makes sense, yeah

LP: I mean, I'm used to a different kind of student.

MJ: Sure (laughs). Sure, well what would that be? What does that student look like?

LP: You know a more traditional students. Students have tremendous obligations not in the classroom or online, or whatever. You know, their parents, they work, some of them, 40 hours a week and then they're taking a full load

MJ: Right

LP: There is a, you know, I don't know, maybe if for those of us a certain generation we will be criticized to say that there's a sense that students have now of an entitlement to good grades.

MJ: Sure.

LP: And you know, we think, you gotta, you know, the grade isn't what matters it's the learning processes that grade represents.

MJ: Sure.

LP: And I think the emphasis on a consumer educational culture that students as consumers, there's a sense that consumer gets a say and you know, I'm of the old school, where I believe I have something to offer (laugh). And you're paying me to offer that, and you have to respect that and play by the rules of the classroom because I believe that I can help you learn.

MJ: Sure.

LP: But you know, students less likely to go with that these days. I don't know maybe its age and the retirement-

MJ: I mean, I'll edit this out, but I feel the same way as you do (laughs) but-

LP: I mean, when I started graduate school there was sort of a movement that's not unlike this which students could run the class. And I never liked that cause I said "I want to know what my professor thinks" I may not agree with it but I, you know, that's what he, I remembering this one case, what he knew. So maybe we're back to that. I don't really know Matt if there is a new student out there. But what I know is I was tired of fighting the battles with the students.

MJ: I see.

LP: I mean, I had very wonderful students. But the ones that weren't willing to put in the time, I can't help.

MJ: I mean even if time means just coming to your office and sitting down with. I mean that's what I did every week (laughs).

LP: But you know not everyone took advantage of my teaching in that class because you could hear week to week, remember our reports, there was no change!

MJ: Right

LP: And that final paper was not that much different from what they turned in before.

MJ: Right. Well, let's see, we're getting down. What, this is a broader question about EMU, what do you think is this place's greatest strength, or some of them. And then I'll ask about its weaknesses too.

LP: Yeah, I think the students. I mean ironically, ironically after what we just talked about. I think it's the students. They have a, a need to, you know, to advance themselves. They're coming to advance themselves. They don't always know what that entails. And sometimes aren't willing to take our direction but it's a, but we all feel it, we in the faculty feel their need. And we want to respond. People are here because they appreciate and are mindful of the generation of the next generation of students. And so that's the strength of this place. I think the weakness of this place is the weakness of many other institutions like EMU. The regional comprehensives the state is starving our budget, the cost of education is being shifted to students, I think that's the other thing about students these days, it's expensive, it's too expensive. And so I don't know what's going to happen to regional comprehensives. I don't worry about the University of Michigan and I don't worry about Michigan State despite the problems they are having now. But these, you know, the directional schools as they're called, they're getting squeezed between community colleges and research ones and people have different ideas about how to solve that problem. One of my best friends is a chancer(?) of the Penn State system. Pennsylvania State college system. And she thinks we have to stop being all things to all people. And I hear that a lot. But what that means generally means more technical and what she would call professional programs and fewer liberal arts programs and I don't really agree with that. So I think that Eastern is sort trying to keep its head above water in a changing higher education field.

MJ: Yeah

LP: And I think our history of administrative problems continues to haunt us. It wasn't just when I was dean but it was after the murder on campus, you know, the issues of, you know, what administrators say about us at Eastern is "we eat ourselves" (laughs)

MJ: That's what I say about Ypsi actually (laughs)

LP: Yeah, well I think Eastern and Ypsi are alike in many ways. And I think part of its living in the shadow of the University of Michigan and I wish we could, you know avoid thinking about it. It doesn't really what they do. What matters is what we do.

MJ: Well that is kind of perfect because one of the sort of main themes we've been pursuing in our research for this how has Eastern sort of attained the status of a 'little brother' like an underdog, second class even. How has that happened?

LP: Well I think partly the University of Michigan has fostered that and I have no doubt about that. But I also think Eastern walks with its head down too often. It should just pretend that Michigan doesn't exist and develops its own sense of self.

MJ: Yeah

LP: I mean, I think it's not so much about Eastern, I think it's about the fate of higher education in general. And how we will manage to educate a swath of the population that is never going to go to a research one.

MJ: Sure

LP: Either because they don't have the funding for it. You know, people's lives are messy. People sometimes go to the University of Michigan and either drop out or whatever and then they come back to us. I mean, I couldn't tell you how many students I had tell me in the summer when I was dean that "you know the chemistry at Michigan was you know, I didn't want to take that. I coming here for that chemistry class because your instructors are better they're more approachable they're more ways I can connect" So we do have more to offer. And we have students who have messy lives and that we need to be responsive to. Which would not and should not compromise the academic quality of this place. And so we have to keep that quality and the budgeting is a mess because we're not funded. You know Michigan doesn't have to be funded. We need funding. The idea that education is a social good seems to be flying out the window and the state is not willing to pay for it. So I don't, I see Eastern's administrative problems as being an internal issue. But the lack of, you know, cohesiveness is an external problem where we don't agree on how to get people educated.

MJ: Sure.

LP: And now of course, there is a lot of talk about how you shouldn't go to college at all because it doesn't pay

MJ: Yeah I'm hearing that more.

LP: Ha ha! That's a joke.

MJ: It's a strange thing to hear.

LP: You know, there was just an article in the Chronicle today that were throwing away money by sending kids to college. Huh? I don't think so. I don't think so. Certainly those Harvard folks aren't throwing away their education

MJ: (Laughs) Well is there anything else you'd like to put on record? Or correct? Or go back on?

LP: My, I feel as strong about my allegiance to Eastern as any university I've been at. I grew up at the University of Texas at San Antonio but Eastern is in many ways the place where I had been able to demonstrate the, you know, whatever I've contribution I've made to students who come here.

MJ: You feel you've had the biggest impact on students here?

LP: I think I've been able, you know, it's hard to say Matt. It's hard to say. I think I felt that I've contributed more. I've felt. I'm not sure I have.

MJ: I think that's a good bet

LP: Huh?

MJ: It's a good bet (laughs)

LP: (laughs) Thanks. One of the things about a faculty member is that we never know how much impact we've had on people's lives unless they tell us. Of the thousands of students I've taught, what handful have told me they appreciate what I've done?

MJ: Huh. I think that sometimes the student mindset is that our instructors are just so tired, they just don't, they just don't care, they're like "I just want to go home!" (Laughs)

LP: You know I hear it in other ways. I don't hear from my own students because you know you are out doing things. But when I was, I'm interested in people's careers. And Whenever I meet people, I ask what did they do? Did they go to college? Or did they go to college. I'm Engaging in conversation and what I often hear is "the most important course I had in college were the gen ed classes. Not the specific ones in my technical program."

MJ: Yeah

LP: "Because I learned so much about how to get along in the world and about literature and art and all those things." But also just thinking about people you know, empathy, all those things. And I say to myself "yes, that's what it is I care about students come away with." I care about teaching them how to write, I certainly care about that, how to read. And those things go with students and I'm proud to be a faculty to member to impart that to students.

MJ: Well is this a good place to stop?

LP: It is. It seems like a good place.

MJ: I loved that end. That was great.