

Spring 2015

Interview of David L. George, Ph.D.

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La Salle University, GEORGE@LASALLE.EDU

Bradford J. Morith

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Field Notes

- Interviewee:** David L. George, Ph.D.
- Interviewer:** Bradford James Morith
- Interview Dates:** March 15 & 22, 2015 (Two Sessions, Both Midday)
- Interview Location:** Conference Room 308, Student Union, La Salle University, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Field notes written on March 31 and April 1, 2015

The Interviewee:

Dr. David L. George is currently professor emeritus of economics at La Salle University, having begun teaching at La Salle in 1979. Dr. George holds a B.A. from the University of Michigan, a M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, and a M.A. and Ph.D. from Temple University. He has published approximately thirty scholarly articles, twenty book reviews, and two books during his career. His first book is *Preference Pollution: How Markets Create the Desires We Dislike* (University of Michigan Press, 2004), and his second book is *Rhetoric of the Right: Language Change and the Spread of the Market* (Routledge Press, 2012). His primary foci of research include meta-preferences in the free market and economics rhetoric. Dr. George has been a longtime member of the Association for Social Economics (ASE), including being this association's president in 2005. Dr. George was also honored by this association in 2011 when he won the prestigious Thomas F. Divine Award, an annual award that recognizes ASE members who make significant contributions to social economics. Dr. George currently serves on the editorial board of *Review of Social Economy* and *Journal of Socio-Economics*. At La Salle University, Dr. George was an engaged member of the faculty senate, and he won the Distinguished Faculty Scholarship Award in 2012. Dr. George was born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1947, where he was also raised. Today, he lives in Melrose Park, Pennsylvania, and has two adult children. His hobbies include classical music and Russian studies.

The Interviewer:

I, Bradford James Morith, was born in 1975, and I grew up in Princeton Junction, New Jersey, and Yardley, Pennsylvania. My family, on the maternal side, is also native to the Delaware Valley and northeastern Maryland, going back to Pennsylvania Colony. I am a graduate of Marlboro College (2004), with a bachelor of arts in music and a minor in German. For my bachelor's degree, I wrote a senior thesis on the classical style of Haydn, Mozart, and Beethoven in context of the European Enlightenment. I have a master's degree in secondary education, as well, having received this degree from Springfield College in 2007. I taught, and tutored, social studies for over five years, and I worked briefly as a non-profit executive, as well.

Currently, I am a master's degree in history candidate at La Salle University, and I reside in Philadelphia.

Background:

I learned of Dr. David George as a potential interviewee from my oral history professor, Dr. Barbara Allen, when she emailed me on January 21, 2015. I contacted Dr. David George to invite him to interview on January 29, 2015, outlining the general purpose and time commitment of these interview sessions, and he emailed me on February 2, 2015, to affirm the interview.

After several more email contacts, we agreed to meet on Friday, February 20, 2015, to go over the fundamentals of the interview. I also used this meeting to learn more about Dr. George to gather research on which to premise my interview questions. He was interested in learning more about me, and I was happy to share about my life, as well, to help build rapport and comfort before the interview.

At the February 20th pre-interview meeting, there were a number of informational and logistical items I wished to go over with Dr. George, so I created an outline sheet with all the points I wished to convey. The points on the outline included the interview's purpose for the La Salle Digital Commons, the copyright deed of gift form, the pre-interview research I was doing, permission from Dr. George for me to conduct informational interviews with colleagues, the life history focus of the interview, any topics verboten from the interview, my interviewing style, suggestions for answering my questions, and the setting of time/place for two interview sessions in March 2015.

We set the interview sessions for Sundays, March 15 & 22, 2015, and I subsequently reserved the locations for the interviews with La Salle Student Affairs, securing a Student Union conference room for three-hour slots on these days. The conference rooms are generally quiet on Sundays, and they are easy to set up logistically for interview sessions.

Finally, during this pre-interview session, I learned from Dr. George his Detroit origins, his love of classical music, his upcoming trip to Russia, and his overcoming brain surgery in the early 1990s. All of these topics became bases for interview questions during the recorded interview. I was not sure if he wished to discuss his brain surgery in the interview, so I contacted him on March 6, 2015, to ask his permission to do so.

Starting before February 20, 2015, and continuing to March 6, 2015, I conducted much background research of Dr. George, including email correspondence regarding Dr. George with an administrative assistant in the economics department, Sister Betty McDonald, in order to learn more about Dr. George. I also emailed Dr. David Robison, economics department chair, to inquire about Dr. George, and we met on Tuesday, February 24, 2015, for about fifteen minutes for me to learn more about Dr. George. Dr. Robison is a long-time colleague of Dr. George in the economics department, and he related to me invaluable information about Dr. George's

signature class taught at La Salle, as well as information on his teaching style. Dr. Robison also told me of a past student who was positively and strongly influenced by Dr. George, and he explained to me Dr. George's current interests in economics. Much information from meeting with Dr. Robison was used in forming the interview questions, and this information led to some of the strongest responses during the recorded interview with Dr. George.

Also, during this time in late February and early March, I researched relevant parts of Dr. John Rossi's book, *Living the Promise*, which is on La Salle University's history. I focused on the 1970s to the present and used much information in this book to form my interview questions, most notably on questions relating to the legacies of presidents, the shift from college to university, and the economic exigencies of the 1990s.

I also researched the introductions and acknowledgment sections of Dr. George's two books, *Preference Pollution: How Markets Create the Desires We Dislike* AND *Rhetoric of the Right: Language Change and the Spread of the Market*. I learned more about Dr. George's primary research foci, but most importantly, I learned fantastic biographical information about Dr. George in the acknowledgment sections, including the influence of family members, professors at other institutions, La Salle professors, and La Salle students. Included in the acknowledgment sections were detailed accounts and anecdotes regarding those who influenced Dr. George most strongly, and this information helped me to create stronger and more targeted questions for the interview.

I also researched online, as well, gleaning information from Google searches and finding information regarding Dr. George's professional history from the websites of scholarly societies and of La Salle University publications. La Salle Digital Commons also provided strong information from past newsletters regarding Dr. George's scholarly publications, campus lectures, and involvement in the faculty senate.

I contacted Dr. George on March 6, 2015, to ask if he had any scrapbooks or photo albums he wished to lend to me in order to serve as a research tool for drafting interview questions. He agreed over the subsequent week, and he gave me a scrapbook of professional correspondence from the 1980s to the present, giving me this scrapbook at the first interview session on March 15, 2015, for use in the 2nd interview session. The scrapbook of correspondence provided strong material for interview questions, including professional correspondence from John Kenneth Galbraith.

Dr. George and I met for one final pre-interview session on Thursday, March 12, 2015, to go over any final questions, comments, or concerns. There were no major concerns, and we were all set for the first interview session on Sunday, March 15, 2015. He was excited about the interview and visibly looking forward to it. I felt confident in my interview research and preparation, the first set of interview questions being drafted on that March 12. The interview questions were divided topically into sections regarding growing up in Detroit, student years at university, and La Salle University sections divided by the tenure of each president. My professor, Dr. Barbara Allen, reviewed my interview questions, and she felt they were solid.

Description of the Interview:

Dr. George and I met at noon on Sunday, March 15, 2015, to begin the first interview session. We met in front of the Starbucks restaurant in the La Salle Student Union. I bought him a bottled water for the interview, and I am glad I did so. During the course of the first session, which lasted approximately two hours, he drank from this bottle of water quite frequently.

We were both anxious and excited about the interview, and we went to our reserved conference room on the third floor of the student union. I configured the room for interview just before we met, setting a table and chairs near an electric socket for my iPhone, which was used as one of the recorders.

At this point, Dr. George discussed his binder of professional correspondence and showed me letters from professors at other universities who reviewed his scholarly work. Dr. George gave me this binder, and it became a strong research tool for interview questions for the March 22, 2015, session. For the 2nd session, I based a number of questions on correspondence in this binder, including professional correspondence from noteworthy scholars such as Robert Heilbroner and John Kenneth Galbraith.

Before the interview, I gave Dr. George a copy of the narrator deed of gift form, and he decided to sign it after the interview session.

I then proceeded to do brief sound checks on my two recording devices, an iPhone 5c and an Olympus digital recorder. We both spoke briefly, and both devices were working properly. I recorded on two devices for sake of redundancy.

The interview then proceeded, and I began the session with a brief introduction to identify us and to state our purpose. He then permitted me to record him, and I began the session with questions relating to his birth narrative. The interview session lasted approximately two hours and five minutes, with one five-minute break approximately one hour and five minutes into the session. His voice was audibly hoarse at this point, and he drank much water. We then proceeded to continue with part two of session one, and part two lasted slightly less than one hour.

Dr. George was enthusiastic during the interview, and he related much invaluable information about his life history and La Salle University history. I sensed he was tiring near the end of the session, and I saved remaining questions from my questionnaire for the next session.

The background research I conducted for this session was very important to help elicit the strongest responses possible from Dr. George, and I used a questionnaire that was divided sequentially by childhood, study at university, and one section each for each La Salle University president. To note when a question was asked, or when Dr. George answered the question without prompting, I marked with highlighter next to the question to signal its completion.

After the first session, the questions still left to explore were regarding scholarship and current interests.

The quality of the recording was solid for the most part, but it was slightly corrupted by the wind clanging the windows, as well as distant stadium music from the nearby college baseball game. However, both I and Dr. George are clearly heard in the recordings.

At the end of the first session, Dr. George expressed concern about an approximately five minute section where he revealed private family matters in the interview. At this point, he agreed to restricted access to this interview session, not including this brief section regarding these private family matters.

At the start of the 2nd interview session on March 22, 2015, we clarified the restrictions on the first interview session, setting the complete audio release for January 1, 2090, for this session. We also agreed to restrict the section in question in the printed interview log, omitting this private family information in the log but keeping all other information in the session.

After this clarification, Dr. George and I proceeded with the 2nd session at the same meeting place in the student union. I bought him another bottled water, and the importance of the water to encourage interview flow was critical. In the 2nd session, my confidence as an interviewer was greater, and we delved into his scholarly work. Dr. George, in this session and the first session, was enthusiastic, thorough, and a joy to interview. His insight and experience was fascinating and will be of great benefit to future researchers.

Regarding the 2nd session, the sound quality was slightly better because there was no distant baseball game, and the wind was not as rambunctious as the first session. The 2nd session lasted approximately one hour and forty minutes. I thanked him at the end, and he signed the deed of gift for this session without restriction. The next day I gave him a nice thank you card.

Note on the Recording:

For the recording, I used both an Olympus digital voice recorder on battery power and an iPhone 5c 'Voice Memo' recorder. I did not use any additional microphones. After the interview, I downloaded the interview from the Olympus digital recorder onto my laptop, Canvas software online, and USB drive. I made redundancy a priority regarding recordings.

Editing the Interview Log:

My editing decisions included:

1. Printed and online verification of spelling of people, places, and things
2. Research of online and printed sources for explanatory footnotes
3. placing time stamps at each of my questions and comments
4. restarting the time stamps for part two of session one
5. omitting personal remarks at the end of part one, session one, per Dr. George's request