
BOOK REVIEW

Long, Charles H. 2018. *Ellipsis ... The Collected Writings of Charles H. Long*. New York: Bloomsbury. xiv + 439pp. ISBN: 978-1-3500-3263-7 £130.00 (hbk); ISBN: 978-1-3500-3265-1 £140.40 (e-pub); ISBN: 978-1-3500-3264-4 £140.40 (e-pdf).

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Charles H. Long has been a fixture in the world of Religious Studies for a very long time, in fact nearly six decades. His latest work, *Ellipsis*, is a collection of 37 of his essays, some previously published and some unpublished until now. His interests have a rare breadth that those who know of his work will be familiar with. He is willing to engage virtually any topic that can be justifiably connected to Religious Studies, which means virtually anything is fair game.

Long shows tremendous curiosity and passion, two hallmarks of his style. He is deeply concerned with the more critical questions that often go unnoticed in mainstream scholarship. He is primarily concerned with location, that is, where we stand when we make our judgments and observations. Location makes all the difference to how subject matter gets described. Americans, in particular, are prone to miss basic ideas about location and interpretation. (Long once described a ferry ride with a distinguished historian of religion. The other gentleman saw Staten Island and commented to Long about how all of our nation's people had to come through there to get to America. Long was astounded by the ignorance and thought to himself, "You mean you don't know that we didn't come in there?" His critique is that Americans often don't understand "simple things" like this. "Black folks didn't come through there!" This incident is recounted in a lecture by Long here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c1xXvTL39os>. The incident referenced above begins at 42:20 of his "Shempp Conference" lecture. The lecture was delivered on 28 September 2013 and was published online on 22 December 2014.)

Long was raised in Arkansas and after school studied in a local community college until he went into the armed forces for two years. In 1947 he moved to Chicago to attend a technology institute but, admittedly, struggled and eventually withdrew. He did not know what to do with his life until his great aunt encouraged him to study religion, as he came from a Baptist family. He enrolled at Moody Bible College but it did not go well because he thought the heavy evangelism "showed a lack of regard for the person and the religious message that one carried" (p. 3). He then passed the entrance exams for the University of Chicago Divinity School and thus began his illustrious career with teaching appointments at the Universities of Chicago, North Carolina, Duke, Syracuse, and Santa Barbara, where he serves as emeritus.

Long served various academic associations throughout his career such as the Society for the Study of Black Religion. He was a member of the Administrative Board for the American Academy of Religion in its early years, and served as its president in 1973.

The University of Chicago was an electric place to be when Long studied there in the 1950s under the mentorship of Joachim Wach, Mircea Eliade, Joseph Kitagawa, and Kees Bolle. Like his mentors, his interests were extremely diverse: African religion, black theology, cargo cults, hermeneutics, and American civil religion. He studied deeply in the area of method and theory. His work is greatly impacted by W. E. B. Du Bois and Claude Lévi-Strauss's ideas on *bricolage*—using a diverse array of old intellectual resources toward new ends.

This book, *Ellipsis*, is an important and even brilliant collection of essays for those who have trained in methodological and theoretical studies of *religion*. Long is well-acquainted with other fields of knowledge—and happy to borrow their methods—but like the pioneers at the University of Chicago he is committed to the discipline of Religious Studies as its own unique field. Religion must not be reduced to anthropology, sociology, or philology. Religion is *sui generis*. This is Long's most fundamental assumption, the polar star of his long career (p. viii).

Ellipsis contains some of Long's writings from the 1950s up to 2017. The essays are not presented chronologically; rather, they are organized topically into four broad sections: 1) America and the Interpretation of Religion; 2) Theory and Method in the Study of Religion; 3) African American Religion in the United States; and 4) Kindling, Sparks, and Embers (intended to be reminiscent of Max Müller's *Chips from a German's Workshop*).

Reading this book, one sees clearly that Long—now in his 90s—is of a former era. At a time when people specialize into such narrow compartments and departments, Long is a throwback, when leading scholars thought deeply about their field, and connected it with other fields. Scholars felt a responsibility to think about the university in particular, and how its disciplines were being organized and presented, and carefully investigated why this was the case. Specialization is our fascination now, but in 1950s Chicago scholars of religion thought big, eventually producing the magisterial 16-volume *Encyclopedia of Religion* edited by Long's mentor and close colleague Eliade.

For thoughtful analysis of big topics such as memory, power, space and time, race, the nature of history, and community—all from a Religious Studies perspective—one could do no better today than by engaging the wide-ranging ideas of Charles H. Long, a brilliant intellect from a past era whose ideas need to be reasoned with today.