

Dr. Rachel Harding

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Rachel Elizabeth Harding is Associate Professor of Indigenous Spiritual Traditions in the Department of Ethnic Studies at the University of Colorado Denver. A native of Georgia, a writer, historian and poet, Dr. Harding is a specialist in religions of the Afro-Atlantic diaspora and studies the relationship between religion, creativity and social justice activism in cross-cultural perspective. She is a Cave Canem Fellow and holds an MFA in creative writing from Brown University and a PhD in history from the University of Colorado Boulder. Dr. Harding is the author of "A Refuge in Thunder: Candomblé and Alternative Spaces of Blackness" as well as numerous poems and essays. Rachel's second book, "Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism and Mothering", combines her own writings with the autobiographical reflections of her mother, Rosemarie Freeney Harding, on their family history and the role of compassion and spirituality in African American social justice organizing.

Transcript

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

My name is Ahmad Greene-Hayes and I am here with [Dr. Rachel Harding](#). Professor Harding, if you could just say your name for the record, even though I have just said it.

Rachel Harding

Of course, I am Rachel Elizabeth Harding, and I am very happy to be here.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Thank you so much and do I have permission to record this interview?

Rachel Harding

You absolutely do.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Where do you currently work, or where have you worked over the course of your career?

Rachel Harding

Those are two different questions. Where I work right now is the University of Colorado, Denver in the Department of Ethnic Studies. I have been here for about 13 years, and before that I was an independent scholar for a number of years. Prior to that I worked with my parents, [Vincent](#) and [Rosemarie Freeney Harding](#), with the [Veterans of Hope Project](#), and I still co-direct that project. Over the course of my teaching career, I have taught at the University of Colorado Boulder, which is where I did my PhD; Brown University, which is where I did my BA and my MFA; Williams College; and I do a lot of

consulting on Brazil. Particularly, Afro-Brazilian religion and culture, and I take individuals and groups who are interested in learning more about Brazil, to Brazil.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is amazing. Can you talk a little bit more about your training? Which disciplines were you trained in and how does that actually show up in your current work?

Rachel Harding

Yes, because it is a little bit of a circuitous route. My position is called Associate Professor of Indigenous Spiritual Traditions in the Department of Ethnic Studies. I started my formal training with my mom and dad, growing up in the Southern Freedom Movement in Atlanta, Georgia and then Philadelphia in the circles of Black consciousness, Black studies and the related movements for social transformation in our country. The labor movement, the antiwar movement and the women's movement were all movements that my parents were involved in and therefore helped to form me. Solidarity movements with Cuba, Central America, and Southern Africa for example.

By the time I got to college, where I majored in religious studies, I was already interested in the connections that religion helped us make across and among communities. Particularly, across and among communities of struggle, communities that are working to transform their situation in the societies that they live in. So, I did a bachelor's in religious studies with a minor in Portuguese and Brazilian studies at Brown and went to Brazil for the first time as an undergraduate. Then, I did an MFA in poetry because poetry and the sensibilities of poetry have been very important to my life and my work. While I was doing that degree, I started studying with more focus Brazilian history and I learned about the scholar [João José Reis](#), who is a historian of Afro Brazilian struggle, history — particularly the late 18th and 19th centuries and the histories of slave resistance in the northeast of Brazil. When I found his work, I was studying with [Tom Skidmore](#) at the time, who was a major Latin Americanist historian. He was very encouraging of me to explore more in that area.

So, after a year or two I worked at [Blackside, Inc](#) and [ROJA Productions](#), which were Black-owned film companies in the Boston area. I worked there for a couple of years, about a year after I finished the MFA. Then, my dad had a stroke at the time that I was trying to decide where to do my PhD. After some consideration I decided to come home and do it in Colorado, so that I could be closer to my family. So, I did my PhD in history — colonial Latin American history — at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Although I met [Charles Long](#) before that period, that is where I began to start working more closely with him because [David Carrasco](#), another one of his wonderful collaborators who had originally been a student, was teaching at CU Boulder at the time. David made a way for me to essentially take a number of independent study courses that nominally were with him but were actually with Charles Long. Dr. Long did correspondence and conversation courses with me and was able to mentor me in some ways that were extremely helpful for me and my work starting in that period.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Thank you for that. I appreciate the attention to how much the familial is, in so many ways, our entry into these larger conversations and discourses. So, thank you for beginning there and bringing us to your graduate training.

You have alluded to this a bit and at the end hinted at it, but I am curious to hear more about your mentors, advisors, and teachers in Graduate School. How did that and those courses really shape your research agenda?

Rachel Harding

Excellent question. Again, I have to start with my mom and dad. My father was a trained scholar, so from him I learned most of the basics of research, writing, and critical inquiry. From my mother, who was also a historian and just a brilliant person who connected lots of threads of interest in very artistic and poetic ways, she gave me a great love for Philosophy. For, looking in the philosophical, ritual and religious traditions of people who have been, as Charles Long would say, “on the underside of modernity.” People who have been oppressed by these structures of modernity. Looking in the religious, the philosophical, ritual, and creative traditions of these folks for alternative meanings of what it is to be human. My mom and dad both, but my mom in some particular ways, helped encourage that in me.

So even though I did not have the language that I am using now to talk about this, those were things that I was interested in from relatively early on. So, I searched out, once I got to school, what kinds of courses, people and mentors could be helpful. So, starting with undergraduate, [George Bass](#), a magnificent playwright who was also the executor of Langston Hughes’ estate. He just did amazing creative work well before there was anything called Afrofuturism. His work was really at the foundation of just imagining different kinds of possibilities for Black creativity, based in ancestral resources, narratives and understandings, but open to all kinds of ways of manifesting that. So, he and another scholar by the name of [Rhett Jones](#) together established the [Rites and Reason Theatre](#) which was the Black theater project that accompanied the development of African American studies at Brown. So, when I got there as an undergraduate one of the courses that I took with George Bass was a course called Playmaking – like writing plays, creating plays – *Playmaking from the African American Folk Experience*. In the Brown context it was a really special class experience because I think there were only seven or eight of us and all of us were Black students.

And Charles Long was one of the guest speakers. And I think that is the first time that I remember, as a young adult, meeting him. Another of my very important influences that started in undergraduate years was [Anani Dzidzienyo](#) who was — he passed about two years ago — just a marvelous sociologist, scholar of comparative race relations in the Americas. He was a Ghanaian by birth and went to Williams College as an undergrad in the 1960s. He spent most of his professional career at Brown and influenced a tremendous number of people who do work on Brazil and do work on the diaspora. So, he was the one who first encouraged me to go to Brazil. We remained friends and colleagues, and he certainly remained a mentor for me through the rest of his life.

Then the third person in that undergraduate experience was [Michael Harper](#). Just a brilliant jazz influenced poet who was a powerful presence and encourager in my life and in my writing. He helped open some ways, spaces and meanings for me along the lines of my creative life and my work as a writer. So, I had those three men who were special mentors for me in undergrad. Then also, Michael Harper continued because I returned to Brown for the MFA. Then in Graduate school, in the PhD program, it was interesting. I was in Colorado and [Robert Ferry](#) who was my PhD advisor, was helpful to me. He was

helpful to me in the sense that he did not put barriers in my way. His specialization was Venezuela. They did not have anybody at University of Colorado when I came there who focused on Brazil. So, he did what he could to help me develop readings but let me find the people who I needed to work with.

So, I spent a lot of time in Brazil and was able to make connections with João Reis, did a lot of reading of people like [Mary Karasch](#) and others whose work was more centered around the areas that I was interested in. But in terms of history of religions, of course, David Carrasco and through him reconnecting with Charles Long. Again, my mom and dad continued to be helpful in this way and were, I would say, my primary mentors during the Graduate School period, during the PhD.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is such a fascinating journey and just to think about encountering Long as an undergraduate and then again come as a graduate just to affirm, it seems to me, the necessity for him to have been a part of your journey in that way. I am curious to hear more about your engagements with him.

What reading courses or general courses did you take with him? What was the focus of your time?

Rachel Harding

Before I answer that I want to mention two other people. I went to Brazil in 1992 to take a group of students from ITC, the Interdenominational Theological Center, the Black theology School in Atlanta, on a study tour of Afro Brazilian religion, culture and history. During that trip I met the woman who became my Iyalorixá, or the spiritual mother of the ritual community that I belong to. Her name is [Valnizia Pereira](#) or Mãe Val. Actually, even before that, in 1985 when I went to Brazil for the first time on a junior semester abroad, I met [Makota Valdina Pinto](#) who passed three years ago and was one of the most extraordinary people I have known in my life. A grassroots historian who was also a leader in the Angola tradition of Candomblé and who was just brilliant in her knowledge of ritual pharmacopeic traditions in Candomblé. All kinds of things about sacred plants, healing plants, about the traditions of initiation, and the history of the development of the religion in northeast Brazil.

So, those two women right alongside as I was studying with Dr. Long, learning from my parents and learning from others, were absolutely essential to my understanding of Afro Atlantic religion and in particular of Afro Brazilian religion. I want to make sure that I mentioned Makota Valdina and Mãe Val.

In terms of the way that I studied with Dr. Long, one of the things we did was a beautiful course of readings in the history of religion. He would give me articles and books and I would read them, do reviews and he would send me questions. Then we would have conversations about them. I did maybe two of those kinds of courses with him. But in some ways, my more extensive and involved learning with Dr. Long — although it may seem to be a little less direct than the one-on-one readings and conversations — I followed that man every place I could find him speaking.

When I was in Graduate School, I would look up who was going to be present at AAR and if Dr. Long was going to be there then that is how I decided I was going to go to AAR. I just loved listening to him. I loved the combination of the down-home, grassroots wisdom and the absolute erudition that he embodied. So initially, as I said, if I heard he was presenting somewhere, I was sitting up there in the audience taking very copious notes. Then, as I began to do more of my own work — largely because of several colleagues

that knew his work and knew that my work was profoundly influenced by him — we had a connection as mentor and mentee. I began to be invited to different conferences and to present at places.

There was one in at Farmington, Maine where over several summers Dr. Long and a number of his colleagues and proteges were gathered and we would have these wonderful weeklong sessions of sharing work then sharing food, drink and conversation. Those sessions were as important for my learning with him as any other thing. Professor [Jennifer Reid](#), of the University of Maine at Farmington was the primary organizer of these summer sessions in honor of Dr. Long's work.

Then, as I mentioned, David who was a part of those gatherings in Maine also came up and created other opportunities for us to gather. Then through the Veterans of Hope Project my dad and I invited Dr. Long and David together to come and teach a course at the Iliff School of Theology one summer, more than likely it had something to do with religion and modernity in the Americas and drew on David's specialization in Mesoamerica and Dr. Long's emphasis on African America and the African diaspora. That was a fantastic opportunity to help guide that course with them. Then, we interviewed Dr. Long. His interview of probably three or four hours is part of the archive that the Veterans of Hope Project has at Emory University, just for your own interest.

We created a study guide and a short video of about half an hour with excerpts from the longer interview with him that was available, particularly for people who were interested in religion and theology and its relationship to the African American experience and to the experience of modernity.

So those are some of the main places and points that I remember. There was a wonderful conference at Santa Barbara while he was still towards the end of his period there, I think this was in 1990 or 91. It was early in my PhD process and I remember going with my dad and sitting and listening to Dr. Long, just feeling like, "Ooh, this is it!" He is talking about exactly what I need to understand in order to do the work that I feel called to do and to do it well.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Wow. That is so beautiful and rich. It is a perfect segue to my next question for you, what was your dissertation about?

Rachel Harding

Like a lot of people, I went through a couple of stages before I settled on what I would do. I initially wanted to do a comparative study of the development of Santería/Lucumí and Candomblé in the late-18th and early and mid-19th centuries in Cuba and Brazil.

But I soon realized that I could not do both and finish in a reasonable amount of time. So, I decided to focus on Brazil. My dissertation was essentially what became my first book, [A Refuge in Thunder](#). It is on the 19th century development of Candomblé in the northeast of Brazil, and particularly looking at the religion as a site of resistance for enslaved people, their descendants, for freed people, for people of African descent in the Brazilian context.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Your work is so amazing and enriching, fascinating. It has been personally influential in my thinking. So, to know how you came to it is such a treat. How would you describe your research agenda?

Rachel Harding

Now or the trajectory?

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

We could think trajectory and maybe now, where are you now?

Rachel Harding

At the heart of it has always been an interest in the way religion, spirituality, philosophy becomes a resource for people — again using that term from Dr. Long — on the underside of modernity to hold onto a meaning of their humanity. In my case I am particularly interested in people of African descent in the Americas. Most specifically, Brazil and the United States. I am fascinated by the connections that I see with traditions in Haiti, Suriname, Puerto Rico and Cuba, and across the experience of indigenous peoples in the colonized world. Just the way in which people who come from roots that recognize ancestral connection, that recognize broader connection to the natural world, how and where those understandings of what it is to be human in the world, manifest in the midst of modernity, and in the midst of the kinds of stresses, struggles and transformations that are experienced in the modern world. From the colonization of the Americas and the creation of slavery in this part of the world, to our present moment. How the experiences of people of African descent in the realm of religion, ritual, creativity, and philosophy offer other meanings of what this stuff is about, of what it is to be human in this place, these places. That is generally what I have been interested in from very early on. My connection with Dr. Long just helped give me some framing, some really important theoretical, and to a certain extent methodological, framing for approaching those kinds of questions and issues.

More recently I have been interested — and this is partly because of my extended experience with Candomblé — which in Salvador Bahia, and particularly in the Yoruba based communities, has traditionally been a religion with very powerful leadership by women. Many of the oldest and continually operating Candomblé communities in Salvador were founded by, and continued to be led by, women. So, one of the things that I am interested in now, and that I have been doing some work on over the past 8 to 10 years — a little bit starting on this with the book that I did with my mom, [*Remnants: A Memoir of Spirit, Activism and Mothering*](#), her spiritual memoir is kind of a piece of this — but looking at the resources of spirit, the resources of religion among Black women in the Southern Freedom Movement context of the United States and to some extent, also more contemporary experiences like the Black Lives Matter movement. Then on the other hand, looking at the experiences of Black women in Brazil who have been a part of their also very powerful Black human rights struggles from the late 1970s and early 1980s to the present.

So, I am interested in doing some comparison around the mystic resources for social justice struggle that come out of the experiences of Black women who are involved in religious communities and in social justice organizing, in both places. In the U.S., particularly the Southern Freedom Movement context and

then the more contemporary Black Lives Matter context. Then in Brazil, looking through from the early 1980s to the present.

There are other things as well, but that is kind of the heart of what I am doing.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

With such a wide range of interests and topics, how do you ground yourself methodologically? Or perhaps differently, how do you identify methodologically as a scholar of Black religion?

Rachel Harding

That's a really good question, and before I answer that, I will say that the other piece that takes up a lot of my time, concern and heart space, is looking for ways and helping to make sure that my mom and dad's work, their legacies, are continued in some way. Or at least that the resources that they were gathering, collecting and embodying are available in some measure for the people coming even after me who would like to know more about them, and who see themselves in some ways, in that tradition of people with a great love for the potential of the United States to be a healthy multiracial democracy, and at the same time have very clear-eyed historical understandings and critique of what is happening in this country. So, in addition to my own stuff around Afro Atlantic religion and Candomblé, I also feel a great responsibility for my mom and dad's work, so that's heavy sometimes.

But the question that you were asking me about, how I identify methodologically as a scholar. I see myself, almost equally, identifying between someone who uses, appreciates and identifies with a 'Longian' approach to understanding African American and Afro Atlantic religion, that on the one hand. And on the other hand, my mama and daddy's daughter. Someone who has come up under their tutelage, as much as anybody else's. Who really embraces this understanding of the African American experience both within the United States and then that larger *American* — of North and South America and the Caribbean — experience as an essentially and powerfully transformative experience for all these societies, where we have found ourselves. And concern for looking at how our religious, our cultural, our ritual traditions can continue to help feed, nurture, sustain us and help continue to offer alternative visions of what is possible for the larger societies that we live in.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

As you speak, I am reminded of Morrison's words in "[Rootedness: The Ancestors Foundation](#)" where she calls for us to keep the ancestor alive. She says, "When you kill the ancestor you kill yourself. Almost like the burden of keeping them alive in spaces that call for — multiple layers of death and forgetting.

Rachel Harding

Ooh, that is deep.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Yeah, I can hear it so profoundly in your words. With that said, and I think you were kind of moving there, in your words, how did Charles Long shape the field of Black religious studies?

Rachel Harding

Ooh wow!

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

And what lessons did you learn from him?

Rachel Harding

Well, in that general sense I would say I do not know of many people, particularly people who are doing diaspora work, who were not essentially and profoundly impacted by Dr. Long, [Tracey Hucks](#), [Dianne Stewart](#), all kinds of people who are looking at the meanings beyond the U.S. borders of Black religion. I think that is one of the most helpful lessons that his work offers us. That is, a way of understanding what has happened here within the continental U.S. in this larger context of Afro Atlantic religiosity, Afro Atlantic religious history. He is the person, certainly, in my experience, who most creatively and continually urged us and gave us the tools to look at what it is that we here in the U.S. have in connection with folks in Jamaica, in Haiti, in Cuba, in Brazil, in Venezuela, in Peru. In terms of the meanings of Africa, the meanings of resistance, alternative meanings of the human in these situations where our humanity was—the attempt was for it to be denied if not destroyed.

So, what are these things in the ways of understanding how to be a human being in the world that we brought with us from Africa and then recreated in the context that we found ourselves? Whether it was Protestant or Catholic, whether it was connected to the indigenous folks who were already here, how that was related to the kinds of work that people were doing, the regions that they found themselves in. Those kinds of questions about the *matter*, the material experience of people and the ways that they use what is at hand to make meaning of their lives. And how that happened in different but related ways all across the diaspora. Those are some of the kinds of gifts that Dr. Long's work especially gives us.

It certainly has been really important to my own understandings of what Black religion is in the Americas.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

I could not think of a better way to succinctly capture Long's impact especially at a moment where a certain kind of Christological, U.S. centric approach to the study of Black religion was just so prevalent and his call to think beyond those very limiting confines. I argue that we are still in some ways wrestling with that.

Rachel Harding

I wanted to say something about the more Christo-centric stuff that, of course [Cone](#) had powerful critiques of — and I wanted to say something, I have said this in a few other places, I hope at some point to write about it because it is just fascinating to me. The Black theology writings and movement, thinking more about Cone now, had some powerful influence in Brazil, which you and whoever is listening to this may know.

So, one of the things that I have been aware of as I am looking at the development at transformations in Candomblé in the 70s and early 80s, is that at a similar time that we are getting the changes that Cone's work is encouraging in the U.S., in terms of people critiquing these images of White Jesus and reinterpreting meanings and understandings of the Bible more based in African American historical experience and African American ways of understanding the world, we are getting a very similar experience in the Brazilian context. Because for a variety of reasons — we do not have to go into all this right now — for a long time in Brazil, and this was true in Cuba as well, the Orishas, the Yoruba Orishas, were connected to the Catholic Saints in part, as a way to protect the religion.

Folk would connect Shango or Oya, with Santa Barbara and St. Lazarus with Omolu and Obaluaiye, because of similar characteristics. So, in this period, the same period that Cone is doing his work, there are people like [Mãe Stella de Oxossi](#), one of the great leaders of Candomblé from the 70s and 80s. She passed about three years ago, so up until the early part of this century she was leading a movement to decouple Catholic imagery, Catholic iconography, from the African Orishas, African deities, African spiritual forces of Candomblé. And using very similar kinds of language, similar kinds of critiques. Saying, this Afro Brazilian religion has its own validity, has its own history, has its own *raison d'être* in the world. There is no need to validate our practice of our tradition by putting a white face on top of these Afro Brazilian, African based entities. It is just fascinating to me that this stuff is happening at the same time. I do know that in some contexts, like in the development within the Catholic Church of the Black Pastoral, where they began to start using rhythms from Candomblé, actually. Afro Brazilian rhythms in the Catholic Church and enabling people to use African inspired dress and ritual that is more connected to Candomblé. A lot of that is being influenced by the Black theology movement in the U.S. But there are other kinds of things that make me think, some of this is just what was in the air globally at that time, that we see manifesting in the political sphere in terms of independence movements in Africa, and of course the Black power movement in the U.S., the Southern Freedom Movement, and then lots of anti-imperialist, anti-colonialist movements around the world; in Latin America, in Asia, in Africa. So, it is not necessarily just a one to one source that necessarily Mãe Stella read something by James Cone and said, "Let me do this." I do not think that it happened that way. But there is an ether in which these ideas are being thought about in this context of liberation — Black liberation in that period, starting in the 50s with African liberation movements in West Africa, moving through Portuguese speaking Africa in the 60s and 70s, and then finally in South Africa in the 80s and 90s. All of that is impacting Brazilians who are developing their own human rights movements and the role of religion in that is so fascinatingly parallel in a lot of ways to how both, the influence of people like Cone and folks like Charles Long. In terms of thinking along this diasporic sense of what Black religion is. We see that happening in Brazil at the same time as it is happening here in the states.

If I do not get a chance to write about it, I hope that somebody coming after me will pick up those pieces and look at those connections.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

That is really fascinating and to think about, Lilian Calles Barger has a book called [The World Come of Age](#), which is about Liberation Theologies across the globe and thinking about that, but I had never actually heard that connection being made to what is going on in Brazil.

Of course, we hear about Afro Brazilians in earlier contexts, but not so much in that mid-20th century, late-20th century period so that is really great.

Thinking in the spirit of Long's approach to the study of Black religion during that moment, thinking about his recent passing and there is just so much history between those two points. This is a question I post to everyone, and it can be a heavy question but a necessary one as we think about the intellectual history of the field and the role of ancestors. I like to think of Long, Cone, all these folks as intellectual ancestors.

Rachel Harding

Absolutely.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

In that spirit, if you could speak to Charles Long now, what would you say? What would that conversation look like?

Rachel Harding

Oh my goodness. The first thing I would do is just thank him. Thank him over and over again. I am so grateful that I had the chance, before he passed while he was in Hospice, to have a brief conversation with him and just let him know how much I loved him, how much so many of my generation who just benefited so much from his work, how greatly we hold and admire and appreciate him. And that our work would not be possible without his work. So, I would say that again.

I would tell him I hope he is somewhere doing something he loves with people that he loves and getting some rest. I would thank him for continuing to inspire really deep thinking about the meaning of the human experience through the lens of this Blackness. Giving us tools, connections and encouragement that enable us to do that kind of Intellectual work, that kind of spiritual work, that kind of creative work. He enabled so much of. Certainly, those of us who work on diasporic perspectives and interactions would not be able to do what we do without [Significations](#), without his just... I am trying to think of how to describe what he did and every word, every phrase that that comes to me is so wholly inadequate and incomplete.

But I think about him, of course, as just this amazing archivist of knowledge, of world knowledge that he was able to just keep in his head in ways that I do not know a whole lot of people who I have ever been able to see do. And then, to give it back to you in a way that combines front-porch storytelling, the mastery of somebody like [Coltrane or Miles Davis](#) as a jazz genius, a writer with the mastery of certain kinds of tonal capacities. Of somebody like [Sonia Sanchez](#).

I mean, he does it through the tones of the arguments that he is giving. The way that he is helping you see complexities, but it's a masterfully poetic form that he does this in.

I just remember sitting enrapt as I would listen to him talk. Also, frankly just so proud that this extraordinary African American thinker, was somebody who came up out of Arkansas and out of the southern Black experience and just knew how to use those resources, those wisdoms, those capacities, those histories and put them in conversation with any and every other aspect of the human experience. I was so proud to be one in number, to be present when he would do that.

So, I would just say that. I don't know that he would want to hear all of that, but I would say that kind of thing to him, just to thank him. Just to thank him.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Wow, that was just such a beautiful reflection and to think about the candor of who he was and who he continues to be. I think anytime you can crack open *Significations*, [Ellipses...](#), or any of the other texts there is a way in which you see — I love the way Tracey Hucks describes him as ‘Intellectual Rootworker.’

Rachel Harding

There you go. Hey, she got it, that's right.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

I mean, but all of that.

Rachel Harding

That's right.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

What you have named, what she has named, and I think there is a [recent book chapter she wrote in honor of him](#), describing him that way, really captures the mental gymnastics that he navigated.

Rachel Harding

Yes, he was a magic man. He really...who! In the best, best way.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Yes, thank you. Thank you for that reflection. In the spirit of Long, looking back, but looking forward where do you want to see the field of Black religious studies go?

Rachel Harding

I could say a lot of things, but one thing that I want is for more students of African descent in the Americas, outside of the United States, to be able to come and study African American religion. Because they will have understandings, and sensibilities and ways of sensing connections to things that other people who have not had their generational lived experience will not have. So, briefly in terms of the other side, I will say that my engagement with Candomblé over more than 30 years has been the primary thing that allows me to see powerful ancestral mystic elements in African American Christianity — in African American religion — that I would not have had the capacity to see if I did not spend the kind of time that I have in another diasporic tradition. So, while I also always want to encourage Black scholars from U.S. to get out of the U.S., I think even more at this point I want folks from Brazil, from Haiti, from Venezuela, from Colombia, from Peru to be able to come and look at what our ancestors here in the U.S. context created and help us see some things that we might not as easily see. Because we are so used to looking at them from this U.S. context, which — it's hard to get around it — is always in conversation with whiteness and with white supremacy. Even when we are not, we are still working within these structures that were created by this situation here. And our folks in other parts of the diaspora have some other knowledges because they were dealing with — sometimes the structures were similar, but they were also sometimes very different — and those visions, their visions of what have here, I think help us to see ourselves. Help us to see meanings of Black religion in the U.S. context with some very fresh eyes. With some very different meanings. And I would just welcome that.

I hope that there will be more opportunities for people outside of the U.S. who are part of this larger history of the diaspora — particularly the Afro Atlantic diaspora — to bring their insights to what is happening here and to be able to share that with us.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Thank you for that. I take that as a charge to the field to create avenues for cross cultural exchange and engagement. And to decenter this Western supremacy that colors and shapes so much of how we study Black religion. I do believe that was Long's charge, and I appreciate you for reminding us of it.

Thank you so much for your time.

Rachel Harding

You are so welcome, thank you for inviting me to talk about my beloved mentor. I love him still.

Ahmad Greene-Hayes

Absolutely. Thank you, thank you, thank you.