United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Interview with Hans Mommsen
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PREFACE

The following oral history testimony is the result of a videotaped interview with Hans Mommsen, conducted by Joan Ringelheim on April 4, 2002 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Washington, DC and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies.

The reader should bear in mind that this is a verbatim transcript of spoken, rather than written prose. This transcript has been neither checked for spelling nor verified for accuracy, and therefore, it is possible that there are errors. As a result, nothing should be quoted or used from this transcript without first checking it against the taped interview.

HANS MOMMSEN
April 4, 2000

Q: Good morning Professor Mommsen.

A: Good morning.

Q: Nice to see you here in Washington.

A: Thank you.

Q: Tell me when you were born, and what your name was at birth.

A: Well, I was -- I was born on the fifth of November, 1930, and certainly I had the same name as I have, Hans Mommsen.

Q: Same name. Tell me something about your -- your family, your mother and your father, and your -- you have a twin brother, I gather.

A: S -- I had the twin brother, and my father was historian at Marburg, and -- because many people ask that, Theodor Mommsen is the great-grandfather.

Q: Right. And he won a -- a Nobel Prize, didn't he --

A: Yes, he did, yes, yes.

Q: -- in 1903. So, at what age did you start being very conscious of this very prominent background in your family?

A: Quite late, you know. There was no -- there was no -- no tendency to miternigize Theodor Mommsen at home.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: You know, that was not necessary.

Q: Right.

A: We rather were timid to -- to talk about Theodor, and especially not to use that relation, if one had contact to the outside.

Q: And was your mother a professional as well?

A: No, my mother is a -- just a housewife, she is from Prame and -- and she comes from a bank-banking fam-family, and they broke down in the hyper-inflation in 1923, and thus in a way, had a negative impact on the relation between my parents.

Q: In what way?

A: Well, it -- there was no money left.

Q: I see.

A: And my mother, you know, she was used to have s -- plenty of money all the time, and now -- and suddenly there was none, because the salary of a German [indecipherable] professor was not too high, if he now had four kids, and that was our case. And certainly he l -- lost many of his income after the Nazis took over.

Q: So that meant that your par -- th -- your relationship between your parents was not --

A: Right, it could have been a bit better.

Q: -- was not so easy -- better. Did that affect you?

A: I don't know. I think so.

Q: Mm. You said four kids?

A: Yes.

Q: So, twin brother, older brother, and?

A: Had two older brothers, we were four brothers, yes.

Q: I see. And what's the difference in age between --

A: Well, the oldest one is born in 1923, next in '27, and we are 1930.

Q: Uh-huh. So --

A: And the oldest are [indecipherable]. They had a lot of war experience in the second World War.

Q: When do you first become conscious of the -- the Nazis, what -- I mean, what kind of a dec -- do you remember as a kid seeing things in the streets? Hearing things on the radio?

A: Well, it -- Well, it's difficult to say, you know, because to recognize the Nazis as something which is really distinct from the general conditions, you wouldn't, I think, be aware. Before the war -- although, you know, my first interesting, and -- experience in the contemporary history, was arige Crystal Night. And it was a quite strange story, because my father wanted to see what was going on. The synagogue which was burning, was directly besides of the lecture building of the university, and my father was teaching at the university, and by that he had a pretext to go there. Because it was not accessible for the public, it was only SA men who were there. In order to get into that, and oh -- he took the twins, and by that, it looked that way, he [indecipherable] but we all the time, asked him, "Father, why doesn't the firefighters come?" And he said, "Psst, psst, psst." And I remember the scenery, and certainly the thing which is interesting then, for the historian, is that there was no public people, there was only the SA. It was certainly not as Goebbels had tried to let it appear, as a riot of the German people, it was just only the -- the Nazi activists, and the others didn't have any access to the place.

Q: And how did you -- And how did -- Do you ha-have any idea how your dad got access, or were you far away?

A: No, we go -- we went to the -- the adjacent building, we knew that way well, you know --

Q: Were you frightened?

A: Because he got exception. No, that was nearby, nearb --

Q: Were you scared by this?

A: Not -- Not random, oh, I don't know, maybe. You know, but I remember it only -- recollect it only because of the fact that the father has such strange answers.

Q: Right.

A: That was it.

Q: When you went back home, I mean when he -- when you asked him there, you know, why isn't there a fire truck stopping this, and he tells you to be quiet, was there any talk when you went back home? None?

A: No, wouldn't talk about that.

Q: No, huh?

A: Yep. We got the feeling that he didn't want to talk about it. He wouldn't talk about any politics at home. Certainly he had some contact to some representatives to the resistance movement, with one of the advisors of William Loishner, the [indecipherable] board visit

him regularly. And we got aware only of the fact that he left the house, he didn't receive th -- him in the house, and -- and everything was very secret, and -- and by that th-the kids got afraid there was something happening, and in [indecipherable] that was his conduct. And once, you know, I just picked up a sentence that was quite symptomatic, in German, that ronteheron in Berlin with an auchnie pas etou and so on. That means the people in the ministry down there wouldn't do either, you know. And certainly that reflected the situation as the German resistance, that they couldn't, in a way, use the governmental institutions to raise a resistance, because everything was Nazified, or -- or the administration was without any influence because the Nazi party had a -- a -- a bypass, or surpass them. That was the situation, but this is also a later [indecipherable] and a potential.

Q: Right.

A: And the other thing I remember were the -- two things I remember o-of the Nazi period. One is that it has a vidi -- visit of the famous historian, Freidich Meineker, who was known for his distance precision versus the Nazi regime. But he visited us in the summer of 1941. Then the German troops had conquered the Aprole, that was highest mountain in the Carpathors. And after Meineker had left, Sunday the father said, "Ee, Meineker's proud of that." We couldn't get to that, you know. But cernly all the money was owned in some respects, nationalist that -- although he criticized the regime, on the other hand, he was proud of the merit of the German troops, while my father, as an also World War One officer, all the time was deeply skeptical of what was going on in the Soviet Union, because he could not believe that this would end other than in a defeat.

Q: Your dad was not a member of the party?

A: He was a member of the party, he was --

Q: He was?

A: -- in 1940, he got a -- the -- the pressure of the district leader Karvitski that he should end the party, and then he was taken into the party, but pre-dated to 1937, but he, in a way, he came very late to the party. But you know, the party membership, as such, hasn't much meaning about what the people really thought of. And we have a lot of nominal members in that time. He had some problem, because he was a liberal historian, in the one paid he was a democrat, and in the -- 1943, he suddenly got some pressure that he would have to leave that university and -- and it was very difficult round then, there were somehow people in the education ministry in Berlin, who helped him, by that he could preserve his chair. But he lost the periodical he was editing and he -- his -- it was a ri -- way politically minored, and he would have liktus every day of that, everything was gone, and by that, he was in a bit di-difficult position, but he tried to adapt himself to a certain extent. Certainly that is what raise him to manifold that group who was not really conservative. And er -- which on the other hand, you know, lost the confidence in the

restoration, or the continuation of the parliamentary democ -- democratic system. There was some disorientation. Certainly, he was strongly directed against the prevailing tendency of the so called Reich mythology, and he still was very strong in pressing for the importance of the Bismark in tradition, so that that was a little bit directed against the great German tendencies. And so far he had a peculiar position, but he was -- he was not really a member of the opposition. He was in the midst between the camps, I think. And in a way he also had to fear that he got political pressure again, as it happened then, in 1944, I'll never forget then the famous Gunter Franzel was the historian for the peasants who were in the Third Reich, came from Strassburg. Strassburg had been lost, and now we were sitting at Marburg. So they had, years ago, a while been SS, and now my father's and -- said that he was just as helm, and I -- I never forget that the father was way, way for -- fearful that they wanted to get his chair. It looked like they had, you know. And then I met the same Franzel five months later, after the break down of the regime, you know, in another uniform, and a -- the way, free, different type, you know there you see the change. I never forgot that, you know. And so far, I think the position of my father's was a bit precarious, but he was now a hero.

Q: And your -- your two older brothers, were they brought into the army in '39, or later?

A: Well, my o-oldest brother, certainly he was brought into the army with 18, and then he served all the time, first in -- in the eastern front, and then in Africa, but he -- fortunately he didn't get to northern Africa because there end of the main -- because then -- there was everything finished. And then he went back to the Soviet Union, and he survived in a way because he -- in April 1947, fled, and swam through the er -- Oude river in order to get into the hands of the Americans. That was that story. So the -- he had the pressure o -- you know, of being all the time a soldier at the front, and he was also ma -- sa -- two times wounded, and so on. That way, typical war -- war age cahount.

Q: Right.

A: And the younger one, he went in -- first was what you call in German fleckhaffer, that means he had to -- to serve as a suen in the entire air company, and then later on, he also got soldier, and -- but he was younger, and in a way -- he didn't get to the Soviet Union, but to France. And you know, that's a really strange story, because when he went back to Schlevig Kolchda, that's in the north of Germany, that was a region where still the great Admiral Doernitz had his . And there they dwell for two or three weeks, they preserved as independent military units, and what is fairly not known, that they had that, what one calls in German, Ate tu exetsianser. Exercise the great thing, Heil Doenitz. You know that Doenitz wanted to continue, instead of having the Heil Hitler, they now should use a Heil Doenitz, and that was -- is almost unbelievable. And then he came home with everything one wanted to have, because I know there was a lot of foot stuff. And [indecipherable] over there at that time, while the other came in American -- ga -- custody.

Q: Uh-huh. Tell me about school during this period, when you started going to school. I know you have no comparison, because you go to school, and it's in -- within the context of the National Socialism, but what was it like?

A: But it's strange, you know, the school was called Adolf Hitler school.

Q: Really?

A: Got the name after 1933. About the time I take -- round that gymnasium -- in Germany we'd say gymnasium, that was the second day of school, you know. It was one of the -- not of the old k -- gymnasium, which have Latin and Greek in the center of the lessons, but they had modern languages, that was something, and mod -- more modern type of the German secondary school. And the -- the man who was running that, the director, he was definitely non -- a non-Nazi, that's quite clear. And he tried to avoid too much in indoctrination in that time. And I have the personal experience, I always warn people to overestimate the decree of ideological indoctrination a -- during the Nazi period. You know, that was very strong in the years after 1935, but later on, it was really German, Nationalists certainly, it was -- it was not liberal, it was not democratic. But I can't remember that there was any talk about -- about race, and racial ideology or so -- th-that would play a big role, and I remember it in the later war years, we had then a specific Nazi teacher, who came with a brown uniform, and so we had a [indecipherable] start, you know. It was not a -- the experience which then occurred after, in 1944. It's because they had the same men, and also after [indecipherable] and they had a way bad life, you can -- and that was, you know, not a serious type, he was way d -- he was, I think, really different from the other professors, you know? And it -- so far, I can't remember that there was a specific Nazi indoctrination in the school. Certainly some, you know, and well, you would have the -- the typical school pil -- festivals or something, but I can't remember that we were sitting together to listen to the Hitler speech or something. Maybe that happened, but it was not very significant, I think. And as a historian, I add on the commentary, that after 1935, Goebbels in the way, certainly the propaganda on the one hand was very rapidly and tr -- especially in the Jewish case, but there was also some deportization of the whole system be -- if the citizens remained loyal, everything was not -- and -- and so far, I think the school was not too much Nazified. And there was not too much change after -- in the teacher staff, after 1945, and certainly in 1944, we got a little bit more aware of the politic conditions and so on, but there was not much talk, and every f -- thing -- you had to be very busy all the time, and certainly we are -- spent every Sunday to have collecting this or that in the service, or the Deutsch yungfolk, the youth organization of the hi -- of the Hitler youth, or later on even in the Hitler youth. I th -- I think, well usually when people think the whole time is a time of interconnection, it's not so much. At least I didn't understand anything about the Jewish question before the war was over, then I learned a little bit about it before the -- I was very naïve in that way, you know. So they -- we -- the difference was that the father wouldn't talk about politics at all, you know?

Q: Right, right.

A: And that's what I have to say to the school.

Q: You know, in the -- in the museum we have, on the fourth floor, this thing about the school, and we show something about "The Poisonous Mushroom." Do you ever remember reading that book, or books like it?

A: No.

Q: No. So this was not so typical.

A: Se-Serious school teachers wouldn't use that.

Q: Yeah.

A: But that's a problem you know where i-it's a -- now, and there's a lot of tendency in the research to start it at -- but when should we weigh causes, you know. These things were very tedious. I can only tell my experience with it --

Q: Right.

A: -- with the Deutsch yungfolk, you know, so the --

Q: Yes, please do.

A: We had to go into the Deutsch yungfolk when we were 10, and I was in the Deutsch yungfolk from the age of 10 to the age of 14. And so that we were living in specifics quarter at Marburg, and there was something like the academic elite there, but that our -- our [indecipherable] some unit of the yungfolk, you know, had a lot of intellectuals, and you know, it's quite good. We had a library and I wa -- the -- Wolfgang, my twin brother and I, had to run the library, the fanela library, and had a lot of books, but you know, what did it guys lend out. So they lend out calimai, and technical literature. There's no universum literature dealing with a technical future, and something like that. They wouldn't read anything which is related to Nazi ideology, that was quite symptomatic. And you know, if you have to run a -- a youth group, you know, and you have to take one evening in the week, you know, which should -- what the Germans call that heimarm, that means, I have some program, you know. The pr -- The Nazi ideology is very poor, and after awhile it's very difficult to do something, and by that, you know, it was a little bit, you know, they had very different topics, but in Farenow, the specific ideological issues were not debated very much. So the e -- went -- there was criticism against it, but it wasn't -- it -- it was not so much in the minds, I think, of the people as -- from the -- from hindsight, one per -- would believe, if he looks at the specific literature. And I want to add one experience that then, in 1944, late in 1944, we were assembled and to be taken

over to the Hitler youth, that is the organization of the 14 to 18 old boys, and they had to swear the oath on Adolf Hitler. It -- The whole thing happened within the inner circle of the marble castle. And there were about 1200 boys, and we're way much packed. But the whole thing was a little bits disturbed, because there were two lightnings, and there was -- we -- we -- we would have preferred to go, you know, in it so far. In 1944 there was no much chance to indoctrinate people any longer. And -- But that's on -- all of my experience I had.

Q: And in your sense, at least in the world in which you traveled, was that while people were not necessarily going to resist the Nazis, and the regime. They were not necessarily believing.

A: Well, that's ish -- they were -- just to -- in the middle of that, you know. And do you know what was the problem with only if you wanted to -- to decide for assistance and -- there was some identity between the nation and the personality of Hitler, it was quite difficult for -- for I think ordinary people, you know, where you can say -- members of the elite, that's different, or Conservatives, or even Communists, that's different. But the ordinary people, what should they do, just you know, the -- the -- the -- the gentleman, tentative was, they criticize all the time the regime, and Goebbels and Himmler, and everybody, but would exempt Hitler from that. So they had a split consciousness, and you have that famous sentence, "Ven dusta fuhrer wusta," "If Hitler would know that, then it wouldn't happen," you know. And certainly that was a psychological mechanism, because you can't easily revolt against your own nation. And so far, Hitler was taken from out of that criticism, while certainly all the soldiers would say, after the war, then we will change the regime. And that was the other side of the other interrogations of German prisoners of war by the Americans. You know, we have a lot of material for that. You see, I am not a very good eye witness, you know. A historian usually --

Q: Is not, right?

A: -- reflects his own experience too much. No.

Q: Yeah, was it hard during the war? Did you ha --

A: Well, we had a good life because we are living a little town at Marburg. There was some air attacks, but not many. I never forget that I also was caring, and to help people, and if somebody wouldn't have taken me and -- and -- and thrown me back, then I would have not survived, and so on. And -- But in general, I think the conditions at Marburg were not too -- too bad, while certainly in the big cities, where you have the wide air raids, it must have been very problematic, you know. And especially in the last ter -- months of the war. I never forget when the Americans attacked the city of Giessen, that's just 30 kilometers away. That was in the night at three. And we were -- had a house with a good looking -- you could looks out a little bit on the -- on the hill. We could read on the balcony.

Q: Really?

A: Then Giessen was burning, we could read on the balcony, 30 kilometers away.

Q: Oh [indecipherable]

A: Well, that was the last face of the al-allied bombing of encef. That certainly was difficult. And it depended certainly also where the political pressure is concerned, how -- how -- how the local functionaries would behave, surely different.

Q: -- wouldn't talk about these things. Would your mother talk about these things with you?

A: No, she was apolitical, no, she would not.

Q: She was apolitical.

A: I know there was, I think some agreement not to talk about anything.

Q: Right.

A: So, the only thing I remember, that sometimes I didn't understand, my father ordered to us, please don't be too kind, or don't make friendship with the sons of Professor Funshdeal. 30 years later I learn that a Professor Funshdeal, who was a colleague in the medical faculty, was a -- participating in the concentration camp -- how is that called? Medical experiments. He must have known.

A: No.

Q: So your father would hint slightly at things?

A: Yes, you know, in this situation, if you have something like an political double life, then you probably wa -- should -- should -- wouldn't ta -- to tell anything to the kids, you know.

Q: Right.

A: Another question certainly was that he would tell so many nice stories, that he would listen, and evening be recie. And you know there was his -- his working room, and that would -- had to be dark, and nobody was allowed to go there. This was clear that something was happening. But he did not know that my older brother, before he came to the -- to the entire air troop, together with his friend, had a telephone connection to that radio, and were sitting in a neighboring house, and listening to the BBC too, you know,

which, as you can imagine, was very dangerous. But th-there was some feeling that there was something, and you'd been -- better wouldn't talk about it, you know?

Q: Right, right.

A: And may -- you know, but certainly that depends on my recollection, you know, no promise.

Q: Right, I know the promise. Why do you think historians make very bad witnesses?

A: Historians make bad witness because they put everything only the -- in history in perspective, and what you need is -- and what a historian needs if he is working with historical witnesses, that they just recollect immediately, which I hadn -- you have to get them bef -- and we have the re -- in the situation, to ask them the first time. And I am -- so a little bit ca -- or we could -- you can say afterwards, you have to shoot them, because it's quite clear that they would change an opinion, and have a -- you know, th -- that experience with the expiration of a ristock fire, where all the witnesses would change their opinion if they were in favor of a Communist, or of a National Socialist background, doesn't matter. The witness who told in 1933 that and that, they would tell them the opposite in -- after 1945, and the -- the other way around. It's very interesting, and I -- I had a way -- it was we -- when I had to study on the Volkswagen company in the Third Reich, and I had a good contact to the former -- former man of the management, who was responsible for the accunt -- commercial ex -- aspects. And I asked him, why are they put in Jewesses in the work to do to -- could use some pasokas because that was certainly not very important, and especially -- certainly they -- it was now pr-profiteering motivation [indecipherable] you know. First he immediately sa -- spontaneously answered, "Because we had to fill the capacity." A week later, or two, he called me and said he wanted talk about me, and now he added [indecipherable] of second day liberations, why that was there, but he never had reflected that the most interesting thing is when the -- th -- over 50 years, never had reflected that the occupied Jewish concentration camp inmates in the c-company. You know that, I think, was the most interesting. And then he got the original motive, that he didn't think that it just put in whom they got, in order to fill the capacity, not to lose anything of the capacity for -- well, possibly a later peace production. It was so primitive, that was it. This is one of the cases where I got him at a situation where he didn't reflect it, and then he told the truth.

Q: Right.

A: And otherwise, they don't tell --

Q: The truth.

A: -- things that they are.

Q: What was it like soon after the war? Your brothers come back. Is there --

A: Well, you know, it's quite interesting that when all is cu -- he talks about he -- the hour zero, you know, and that was a tobide whether it's a liberation, or whether it is a defeat. But what is, I think forgotten, is that there was a constellation which lasted several months, with a total disorientation, because it didn't know whether there would be a German state again, or something, or what would be a political structure, there was -- there was no future. And also, what my personal situation was concerned, I didn't know whether the -- whether we would continue the secondary school, then I didn't know whether there would be a chance to go to the university. There was, in a way, everything broke down, and I think that left an imprint on that generation, and those -- are those age cohorts, who -- who went through that situation of this extreme disorientation I think they are different from the next ones, who haven't, I don't think, gone through that. I never forget one situation, and I think, which has a -- being very, very important for my personal development. But those -- April 27th, 1945, in the early morning, the Germans -- the German troops left the city in disarray, you know, it was ger -- my father went to them, and said throw the rifles into the garden, ya -- bi -- please put it down the street and so on, and I went into the garden wa -- and so on, then they fled, and at last, the general who was there, there was some -- some -- had division staff there, and he hosed, then fled t -- by foot, you know, that was the end of the -- of the borf wars. And then there was something, Germans had left, and Americans would come, but nobody would know when. And then my notables, and my peers were all plundering. They were some deport of the German army, and they're plundering, you know, and I, for my first and last time, learned what is it, if there is never law and order, and no authority. And s -- you know, I didn't have much respect when I went to school, noby -- here's all these people, you know, I'm very nervous, don't you notice. It was just nothing, well, they could rape there, but they did what they could do, and -- and even the -- the directors of the schools, and the professors, and everybody belonging to the elite, that was it.

Q: Right.

A: You know? And this has -- had, I think, left an imprint on me, and cer-certainly may be somewhat responsible for my lack of accepting authority, and being very nervous if I got the authority [indecipherable] conditions.

Q: And wha-what do you think made those people do that, the plundering, at the end?

A: Well, you know, besides all -- as you know, far more important than any Nazi indoctrination was the terrible loss of -- of moral radius, something like a -- a -- people got accustomed to moral indifference. And all these radius were gone undone, there were no longer norms, and by that, you have then this certain de-decay of a civilization. Certainly if you look at the Jewish question, you have that very clear, you know, it's the same thing. And there is also, I think the [indecipherable] not only anti-Semitic indoctrination, but it's, you know, a mentality where people just do what is in their --

their primary interest, and where we have something like an amoral vitality. And I always grow the -- the famous atrons of -- of Hannibal James Homerker, the leader of the German resistance group, the so-called crisis [indecipherable] who said the foremost talk of the resistance is to restore to picture of man in the hearts of our fellow citizens, in order just to -- to come back to something like a civilized society, so the -- the extreme decay of all radius, of all habits, and so on, and -- we-well we had something like more anarchy. This is very important.

Q: Did that affect you?

A: Yes, certainly.

Q: So that you felt this lack in yourself?

A: Yes, I -- if you have it, if you are a young guy, and you don't have any -- any morals, any persons you can adore, or to follow their ideas, you know the oldest -- the old Nazis were gone, and the other ones, who were -- who was left?

Q: Right.

A: We were in that -- in that respect, I think psychologically alone.

Q: Psychologically?

A: Psychologically alone.

Q: Oh.

A: Without -- Without guidance. Who could at -- help us? Also, we had to li -- also, when we learned what was happening, we had some distance to the -- to the parents, too, you know. The whole peer generation was just without any -- we didn't have any respect towards the peer generation. And that's the way it differ -- ca -- education ca -- has a -- has a certain [indecipherable] you know, it's way difficult. And to get there somebody orientation, and that made for that -- made a -- a youth career very difficult. Next -- The next generation certainly didn't have these problems any longer, because they looked, and they had economic progress, and some put -- a positive [indecipherable] and so on. But in that situation of the ultimate decay of all moral radius, and also of national radius, and up, the Germans of that time, certainly was completely a national, and without any engagement, and a famous mentality as -- that's like signified by the word onimish. That means, without my participation, and no, they wouldn't engage themselves. They were totally isolated people. And this situation, I think, is what youngsters, I think, are quite -- quite exceptional, and quite important.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: I think it had a negative impact, insofar as I -- I was -- it was difficult to adapt me to conditions, which I -- already existed, and made me in a way -- in a way a critic -- a -- a critic of traditionalism, yes, maybe.

Q: Was it equally difficult for your -- for your twin brother? There he was --

A: Oh certainly, that's the same experience.

Q: Yeah, the same. Do you have a recollection when you and your brother, and your other brothers knew about the genocide, and about the killing of groups, o-other than Jews? I mean, that there was this mass death?

A: Well, that became immediately known a --

Q: After?

A: -- b-by the American re-orientation, and re-education, immediately after the war. Then it bees -- became quite clear, you know? Before that, they didn't really know that.

Q: So you must have been in -- in enormous shock from that.

A: Well, you know, that was -- there was a lot of shocks all the time, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: It -- It has to be put into the context of --

Q: Right.

A: -- the loss of the total political ori-orientation. And as historian, I was -- I add, you know, that at the time of the Nuremberg trials, the Holocaust in it's reality, wasn't really in the minds, you know. Even Americans didn't realize that this was the biggest crime by the regime, and still people like Odeelok Lobochnick could be witnesses at a -- at a trial, instead of being persecuted by themselves. You know, it's very symptomatic. But you know, step by step, that became quite clear, and certainly the -- but the -- the American films on the concentration camps, Bergen-Belsen and so on, were more known than the Holocaust, because the Holocaust was far away, you know, and the myth I think persevered, that -- that this was nothing that the German people was related to, and it took us, as historians many, many -- and you as many years to get that into the [indecipherable] where the Holocaust was not, if I went -- done by -- performed by Himmler and his chieftain. It was also a lot of people involved. But I don't know, maybe the -- you're a bit more, but I re-recollect, you know, that -- you know there -- these typical anti-sem -- anti-Semitic songs sung in the -- in the -- in the Hitler youth, I think

we didn't realize what we were singing. And sometimes it was corrected , then there is one of the essentials today belongs as Germany, and -- and -- and tomorrow the whole world, you know, it was corrected, and it will say that it's only today will be -- will be heard by Germany, and tomorrow by the whole world, you know. Some of these guys in my hired entourage, they thought that this couldn't be -- couldn't be really real, and by that they changed that you know, that's certainly exceptional. But that also shows -- show now, as a historian, I've learned that, you know, people do not reflect too much the [indecipherable]. If they would, you know, the main problem of the Third Reich is that the Third Reich was successful in preventing the people to have any time and leisure, in order to reflect. If they would have had the possibility, then I think that -- I think the whole thing would be proten down.

Q: That's interesting. You think that was on purpose, the way in which the --

A: Well, it was not so much on purpose, but it was a -- was a mentality of the party. You know, if you have such an organization which relies on continuous dynamics, you know, and they have a feeling, if there is no longer any dynamic, then there's nothing left, you know. And I run all this theory that there is a -- a connection between the Munich agreement, which meant that Hitler couldn't have his little war against Besarakia, and the party we have forgotten, stood on alert all the time, well -- because they just thought they would have a per -- a permanent role in the war later on, that it was dropped anyhow. And the Reich's Crystal Night. Because, exactly at a moment then, the German people believe now we c -- got a bit more quiet situation, and the peace is -- is rescued and so on. Then it's like a logical reaction of the party, was to push the Jewish question ahead.

Q: Mm.

A: There's a psychologic connection bet -- between both events. You have a radical assession especially in situations in which otherwise, that would happen -- who would come into being a stable, political situation. And then -- then they -- you know, their unrest, their inability to -- to wait, or something like that, could use a certainly dynamics, and the steady mobilization, and it -- so far, I think it wasn't a -- a deliberate policy, but it was a specific political style they had only learned in the 20's. That would be my theory.

Q: At the end of the war, does your father have to go through de-Nazification, because he was a member of the party?

A: Yes, he -- he -- he had some --

Q: And what did --

A: -- problems because -- well, that is a very difficult story. First of all, he had -- he had some problem because he had American students, and one of them was a man who was in the headquarters of Eisenhower, and he got the unfortunate -- unfortunate idea to ask him

whether he should take the position of Minister of cultures in -- in the -- the land of Hessia, because it was a reformer of the university system in the 20's and the [indecipherable], all the colleagues did everything to get him out of that, but that also put so much [indecipherable]. Then there was an American CID officer, he is still existing, he is politic -- political scientist in California. He ist -- came from Vienna, and you won't believe it, he wanted to press my father to support ESED. He was a leftist. And after my father declined, then he wrote a terrible expertise on him, and that dis-destroyed his career. He was losing his office, he had problems with the de-Nazification o -- although at the end he -- he was acquitted, but it took him like a couple of years, and so that -- that affected the kids, because all of the years he didn't have any income. So now you take a family from a upper, bourgeois class, with that background, and suddenly there is no money at all. It was very difficult for them. It was difficult for us, too. Later on, it -- that wasn't so -- so important. But if that -- if Major Dorn wouldn't have that wonderful idea, you know, it would have been better for the family.

Q: So how did you survive? Did you lose your house, or were you able to ge --

A: No, we didn't lose our house, but well, it was -- it was very, very difficult, and certainly we -- we sold everything what we could, and so on, and Fritz, that was the older brother, he was able to -- to use a black market, and so on, and somehow that worked, but only somehow, it was very hard time. And I think it wasn't just -- it was really bad. And now with that becomes a little bit known, because people are doing some research on the Marburg University, it's very interesting. Well, it's interesting sa -- that case, you know, because most all these people, all these professors, [indecipherable] officers, only very, very few were thrown out, but in this case, it was very bitter. But that was -- well, for me it was very interesting then, and Major Dorn came and then what's her name, other man who runs for many years, he asked me [indecipherable] Berlin. Had a moment, forget a name, also. You know, I never forget a -- suddenly there comes in an American officer, first time I see an American officer in uniform in so on, it was very impressive. I was 14, and then they -- when came, you know, before the war ended, you know?

Q: Really?

A: Because the war ended in [indecipherable] with big slayeron you know, and so on. It's a very interesting experience. And they had started with my father, you know.

Q: Really?

A: It was -- so Mr. Sweezy [indecipherable] who then was in Prame, and wa -- was the only one who accepted the antifar committees, and so on, which existed in Germany by that time. Oh --

Q: How long was it before you were able to go back to school?

A: Well, I think we could continue in school. That was interrupted anyhow, half a year, because the Americans got that crazy idea, just to have a collective taking into custody of all people who had a title rat. The German word is rat, and means counselor, th -- you know, that's in the German civil service, and there was a position, but then suddenly all the teachers sat in the internment camps, and the [indecipherable] was -- was gone. Whether we were Nazis or not, you know, that was a really crazy idea, and it took time, then to -- to put the school system into function again, and so on. By that, I lost a year in the school.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But then the -- we stayed in the school, and later on there was some improvement. I don't know why that was done.

Q: Let me ask you again, maybe I missed it. Did your father ever get back to teaching, or was his career --

A: No, he wud -- there was a compromise, and he gots a -- got an emeritus on that [indecipherable]

Q: And that was it?

A: Yes, that was it. But he was giving lectures all the time as emeritus.

Q: Uh, huh. And does that mean he was also getting a salary as an emeritus?

A: Yes, he got some pensions, you know --

Q: Some pensions.

A: -- but the problem was that -- that in the meantime the very nice colleagues had to put somebody on his chair.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And after the teenis vacation trial was finished, he -- the chair was -- was not available, and that was it, you know. And I had to study with that man, I didn't like that man much, as you can imagine. Now it turns out that he had way close relations with the SS apparatus, that man, the Fritz Wagner, you know, who ended that chair. But he was uni -- unisancta of the Catholic organization, and that had a much influence at that time.

Q: D-Do you recall, if you can be a witness to this, that this experience of your father was very depressing for him. Did he change because of this, or did -- was this just --

A: Well, he tried to write books, but in a way it was reda -- really depressing for him

Q: Uh-huh. I would imagine. Did you know for, I don't know, a long time, that you wanted to go into history, or was it --

A: W-We certainly didn't want to. We tried to avoid it, because of the family, you know? And Wolfgang, he started physics, and -- but he was still interested in philosophy and the -- and philosophy of history, and suddenly he was a historian. And I started German language, and everything, but suddenly I was a historian. Maybe we had a -- in the years when the father was with our business, we also, all the time, helped him to write many books, and so on. I don't know, but anyhow, we both wer -- became historians, although we don't wanted to become it. Well that -- that happens, you know.

Q: So you're a reluctant historian.

A: I had been.

Q: Had been a reluctant historian.

A: Yes.

Q: And your two older brothers?

A: Yes, the oldest one, he was archivist, but he had a -- certainly some trouble to gain a position, because it was -- he had to study, then later on, you know, he was already rather old, and what he -- when -- he lived on his whistle, I guess. The next one got a Protestant priest.

Q: Interesting. So, once you started in your reluctant career, what did you start studying? Whe -- How -- How did you move into history? What was the --

A: Well, we -- we would study many -- in two fields, or two and a half fields in Germany, and did Communistic, and as a second field, history, and at first I was at Marburg, and the only field in history which was interesting, was Medieval history, and certainly modern history was also there. The Fritz Wagner, whom I didn't like very much, as you can imagine -- although I had examinations with him, I'll never forget it, because he was really fearful, you know. In a way he didn't -- he didn't want to make blunders in the examination. Now -- And by that I -- I got a Medievalist, and then I made my exam there. I wrote a examination paper, which I deft -- I think quite interesting besides, on the development of the region in the west of the Rhine, which is to ca -- today called the naicowanda. But that didn't fit into the theories of my professor, and he gave me only a B minus. And I decided then I'll leave that, and go to teebing, to Hans Rodefass, about that I went back to contemporary history, and certainly to the Tside cacheefta essensasencherm. That means the history of National Socialism, although I did my

dissertation work on the nationality problem in the Hapsburg monarchy, and the period between 18 -- 1867 and 1907, which was quite interesting, and certainly had a lot to do with the German Czech relations at that time.

Q: I'm going to stop the tape now, so they can change tapes.

A: It's okay.

Q: And we'll take a slight break.

End of Tape #1

Tape #2

Q: Mr. Mommsen, during the break you started talking more about your own naïveté. So before we go back to your career, talk -- talk a little bit about what that reflection feels like, that you were so -- you say about yourself that you were so naïve about what was going on. You didn't notice.

A: Well, as a youngster, you wouldn't notice so much, and we were not polit -- very political. And if you are living in a situation where -- no-nobody would talk about that, then certainly some naïveté is arising. I told that I d-didn't know what Jews are, what Jewish life is, that in the post-war years there, it took me awhile to realize not only that there was the Holocaust, and the Jewish persecution, that was easy, but -- but that Jews were interesting individuals, you know, because you have to -- we're living in a German little town, Jews would d-disappear from the city, you wouldn't know who they -- where they -- wh-where are Jews, and even those Jews who lived there we-were not discernible, and were the -- they would cut all communications to the so-called Aryan population. By that, if you grow up as a kid, Jews didn't have any arriello -- idea of what that -- that was, you know. And certainly I was told that we were su-surviving as a -- as a -- babies, because of a Jewish professor, who was a junior colleggest -- trolegest, and knew what to do with early birds, and so on, and we knew that there was a lot of Jewish colleagues, and the father told us about that, but you know, that was no all reality of the Jews -- y-you didn't know much about that. I think that was very symptomatic for my age cohorder, yeah. And that they certainly were told in the Hitler youth, there was a Jewish question something, in Moscow, or somewhere, but they never realized that it's our Jews. Certainly those people who were with the olderunder -- really understood what was going on inorise Crystal Night, and so on. They must have realized that, you know. That -- But that is also part of what I -- I mentioned earlier, of that incremental depolitization.

Q: You mention in the break that you had gone into a kosher restaurant, you didn't even realize it.

A: In Genna yes, that was in the 50's.

Q: Wha-What -- What significance -- Did you eat there? Or did you sw --

A: I think so, yes, yes.

Q: Yeah? And it had no -- you didn't -- this was not a different -- this was just a --

A: I didn't know much about Jewish life, that was it.

Q: Oh, oh.

A: You know, nobody had told me about that. I didn't -- I didn't realize that --

Q: Right.

A: -- bef -- before I was there, you know.

Q: Right. So it's hard to --

A: I didn't have any pressure to this, not at all, you know.

Q: Right. But it's hard to know what's missing when it's missing.

A: A chit -- you know, the whole -- the whole time, mention of Jewish life had disappeared in our minds, and now that was no longer existing.

Q: I see. So, when did you come to decide that you would study the period of National Socialism? How did it happen that you decided that?

A: Well, I decided on the one hand because we were influenced by Hans Roadface, who was running the -- the leading periodical, and also after I ta -- finished my Ph.D. there, I went into the Institute Ratied Catcheechta, that means the leading institute for contemporary history, in Munich. And certainly wat -- and I was primary -- primarily in that business. But think that's not all, but it's very symptomatic for our -- our ca -- generation that they just we -- were preoccupied to learn why the father generation had accepted the rule o-of Adolf Hitler you know, that was -- was a pressing issue, and therefore, many of my fellow students would also deal with -- especially the Wimayears, in order to understand the seizure of power later on, then we would enter also the second phase of the regime, after 1934, and studied that. That is, I think a typical process. And the following generation then, would look into 19th century. What are the basic reasons for the German way -- for the deformation of German politics. That was when, signified by the so-called Beedafeld school.

Q: And how do you understand the -- th-the -- if -- if you could summarize the sort of historiography of what's going on in Germany, and how historians are trying to understand the Nazi era. Are there very clear demarcations as you see them, in how people are studying this, and --

A: Well, the deka -- a lot of demarcation lines. In our first [indecipherable] you know, in the early post-war, those people who dealt with that, even in journalism, or i-in history, certainly professional historians had a apprehension against -- to doing contemporary history, they did that on account of some sort epilaga -- epilagactic position, you know. And then they have the dichotomy between the SS state on the one hand, you know, the suppression, the police state, the apparatus, and on the other hand the German resistance, which we call the other Germany, and in the midst were also some people, but you know, this tule -- this picture was a way [indecipherable] one. And that was mixed then with the

fear of totalitarian dictatorship, and the idea of the molithic structure of the regime, and the predominant role of Adolf Hitler. That was the old position, which I think was prevailing in through the middle -- into the end of the 60's. Now there happened one change that the American government returned the captured German files in 1967. And our generation of [indecipherable] had the first time the opportunity to look really into the files, and not only in the selected documents, which we are typical for the Nuremberg trials, or living from memoirs of contemporaries and witnesses. We looked into the files, and we got a very different picture than that of the monolithic state, and so all the contradiction within a system, and that's why the -- but then developed it -- a quite different understanding of how the regime functioned then. For instance, Hans Roadface or Caldidish baha [indecipherable] older generation. And they also -- the so-called Functionalist school emerged. I belonged to the Functionalist school. I would certainly point it out that it -- it not sufficient only to look at the ideology on the one hand, and to -- to say that Hitler wrote his program down in the Mein Kampf, and then everything happened like that, it's nonsense. And that is also a apologetic element, just to put Hitler in the foreground all the time, because -- and our function was to show that the responsibility of what had happened, had to be put on broader sco -- shoulders, and that was, over there, some mechanisms of the -- the one hand, the -- the style of politics, and the perception of politics, which was specific Fascist, and a specific structure, which put Jews then what I call cumulative radicalization, which may explain the proceedings, or the -- the way Nazi policy took, and t -- that can be especially, I think shown with respect to the Jewish persecution.

Q: Let me ask -- L-Let's go talk a little bit about --

A: Yes.

Q: -- the Functionalist - Intentionalist --

A: Yes.

Q: -- debate. On the one had, the Intentionalist can often be considered to be Apologists, but there are many Jews, there are many victims who are very sympathetic with that view.

A: Well, I know that, you know --

Q: Right.

A: -- and especially the Israelis, because certainly the Israelis also have that -- that [indecipherable] reason for that one-ness that the -- the Israelian historiography has been developed by German professors who were mainly representatives of the history of ideas. That has been continued by men like Talman, and the others, I know them, you know? And certainly also the background of the Jewish religion is very favored for history of ideas, you know. But that, yeah they have still today, problems to -- to do a simple social

history. But mainly they are -- they are working in history of ideas. Therefore, they have one bias in that direction. Secondly, you know, the strong connection between notion of the creation of the state of Israel, and the role anti-Semitism stands in the background. And so had sa -- the survivors, they have problems, I can understand that, to -- to accept what already was a conflict with Hana-ah, and to accept the trivial elements in that policy. It's very, very comprehensible that they don't want to have these very trivial elements as elements of explanation, and -- and so forth, the Functionalists have a difficult time if they talk to those people. Although we say one can't explain everything where the ideological factor, or the personal factor Hitler, and they have to put in that element of bureaucratic competition, and so on, and no -- but you know the whole -- whole controversy between Functionalists and Intentionalists is coming to an end, you know. Eruda Bower says that, and -- and sometimes Karl Hiberg would say that he is a Structuralist, and -- and what Chris Browning did in writing the [indecipherable] 101, he suddenly got a -- got a notion that it wouldn't work with the Intentionalist explanation, which he originally had, you know, I never forgot, and that was [indecipherable] debate with them, you know. At that time, he was in another camp. But today, most of the researchers in a way of taking up our Functionalist -- Functionalist elements of explanation, and everybody gets aware that Hitler was not a man who was -- had -- had that [indecipherable] personality, you know, that this was a merth, and that things are even more -- were even worse, because there are many people who -- who pushed the process, I think, atafond, and certainly this viewpoint increases a responsibility, and a moral responsibility of the nation, versus a specific Nazi perpetrators, you know. And my generation, we fought against that position, that there are only very few people besides of Himmler, and [indecipherable] Hitler, that they -- seduced, is the term. For fear they seduced the German nation, you know. That was your -- the main argument. And we started to -- just to get rid of that crazy idea, I wanted to show how that could happen, I certainly -- that was, and still is our question, how could that happen? And certainly I would argue then -- your argument -- I can't go to the next generation and say there was some stupid, crazy individual called Adolf Hitler, that's why they killed five million Jews. I don't think that this is sufficient. It seems to be real plausible, but then it's not plausible by -- because why could one man do that? And so on, we're -- in a way we have to describe the background on which Hitler could then have that function. And so far, I think in the fear -- the misunderstanding of both fronts, I think have overcome. There's just the next polarization between younger historians who want -- who would go back to some ideological explanation, said as Uri Shalbud, and the other ones who were some experience and say, well, you will have the same development as we had at -- that he originally stud-studied all the time, the Nazi [indecipherable] longer, and we got a idea that it's not so important. Certainly there was a basic anti-Jewish resentment, no question, but that there had been other mechanisms we share, what then may explain the perversion of a civilicized nation into a -- a apparatus of criminals, and that is still the problem.

Q: Is -- Is the functional -- Was the functional -- I don't know, my study of history would s -- would suggest to me that this is a very odd dichotomy. I don't know of any other event where all of this -- where you have this -- is it a kind of fake dichotomy? How do you not

talk about ideas, and how do you not talk about the structure in terms of which these ideas function?

A: That's okay, but you know, there is some difference. You know, the terms have been coined by Jim Mason at a conference near Lornan many years ago, when there was -- was a clear cut, I think, distinction of the -- of the explanation between something like a history of ideas, and something like social history, that's different, you know? And so far, that was also related to the explanation of the field, and certainly the whole metalogical difference wouldn't play such a big role if they wa-wouldn't have been loden with some role -- with some moral legacies, you know. Because the Germans need a strong Hitler, because if Hitler would be weak, they can't [indecipherable]. I never forgot that famous Louden conference, where there was a discussion where Hitler could preserve his rule for so long, it was very long, in a way, while he was -- I coined that formula, in some respects, a weak dictator.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And certainly I wasn't tact all the time, because u -- I always thought I would defend Hitler, I didn't want to -- want to, but turn out that with the -- that the emotional element, that was very symptomatic, and then I said, really, look, if you have a dictatorship, then it's really likely that perseveres. Take Idi Amin. Oh, I was already wint by that, because that violated the chair of national pride. We want to have a strong Hitler, not Idi Amin, now that -- that shouldn't be done, you know. That's a basic background, all that, and to understand that, one has to come back to what we talked about, where the Germans would take the personality of Hitler out of the responsibility of the crimes and decay, because they preverse them -- pre-preserve them something like icon for their national identity. Now, in 1945, they certainly got aware that this was wrong. And not -- now the emotion turned against Hitler.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And if then somebody like Hans Mommsen [indecipherable] the other week in Germany, Hitler was not only the subject, but also the object of politics. You get immediately a very angry criticisms, even by -- by very good historians. Karl Dietrich baha -- he immediately wrote and said, "How can you say that Hitler's objects are [indecipherable]". Well, why not, you know. If you talk that -- If you talk about that in England or America, it's not so difficult, be -- but there is a -- apologetic element, the emotional elements, which I think are guided the debate, and also the research. And that's why we have that -- that's not only a metalogic distinction, or dim -- different starting point, but they had then this controversy between Functionalists and Intentionalists. That is certainly gone with the next generation, which doesn't have that necessity to defend in a way, indirectly, the Germans [indecipherable] pointing out the manipulative character of Nazi dictatorship and all that. But they needed, in order to believe that they had been seduced. Certainly the opposite was true, they made Hitler, they in turn wanted to use him certainly then Hitler

used them, you know, but that still proves with which certainly they -- nobody would reject them outright, but th-they are not very convenient. And then so far, I think I am still not too old fashioned [indecipherable] an old historian, you know. The next generation certainly doesn't have that problem. They don't see also this specific constellation under which we developing contemporary history.

Q: Let me ask you about a quote from your piece, and from Vimar, to Auschwitz. You say that the Nazi system of rule completely lacked internal coherence.

A: Yeah.

Q: Can you explain that for our --

A: Well, you know, there was a Sherman Oaks, one of the leading English experts in the field, and he talked about the re-organization of the party in 1932, in December 1932, immediately before the seizure of power, and he then said that from then on, they had 37 different territories, with a rather independent Gauleiter, and so far, as they can do what they want. And you know, the problem is -- is not coordination within the system. Everybody can act, everybody can make initiatives and so on, as far as that stays, as they accept the authority, or the prestige abi -- Adolf Hitler. And the thing we have to do with the specific style of Nazi politics -- it's very difficult, especially for a European say, Americans are better, to understand this regime, which doesn't have any institutionalized governmental board, or some representation. But after 1937, we don't have a cabinet, there is no political discourse between the different ministries. We don't have that on the party side either. There is nothing which would integrate diverging political interests, in sa -- in the -- the very diverging politic interests are then -- are brought to conflict or not, is by personal feuds. That's the reason why everybody among the Nazi regime hates the others. And some of the later Gauleiter would say if Hitler -- Himmler comes into my territory, my gow, I will imprison him, you know. They hated -- They hated each other, you know. And the whole system is built on that -- watha -- non-structure. At the same time, you have a system of non-communication. If you were in the high position of that regime, let's say you are the secretary of state in your [indecipherable]. You know something, but you don't know everything. The case of Mr. Kritchinger, who was a -- a member of the confessor -- confessing church, but he -- he was present at the Wannsee conference. Was really took -- Because he didn't get a clear cut picture of the Holocaust before, I think the middle of 1942. And then he wanted to get dismissed, and the lama said, "No, no, stay. It would be better if you stay here," you know. And there was a systematic non-communication. In the newspaper, you wouldn't get the necessary information of what was really going on, and then there was the so-called shtimmelsburchter report of the securities service, made by -- these so -- should in a way replace them -- lack of information for the leading functionaries within this history -- s -- within the system. But after they became inconvenient, because of too many inconvenient trusay they also were no longer permitted. Where did you get information from? It's very easy to read today the d-diary of Goebbels, and you see that even Goebbels, who is at a

[indecipherable] sometimes at a [indecipherable] the system, because they're changed all the time, he isn't very well informed about important ada -- aspects of politics. And that is a -- cer -- specific nature of that regime. And we have th -- we have also a travelma, to prove who was then really responsible for the onicol, because that happened, and there was no precise mechanism. And you know, I point that out, no-not only -- not to say that people were not responsible for what they were doing, you know, but to explain why there was no opposition, you know. And it -- In the question of the Holocaust, there could have been opposition on the side of the army, or other groups, not because they were not anti-Jewish, I wouldn't say that, but because of th -- the ta -- c-competing interests, because Jews the -- a certain amount of -- of manpower and resources in order to do the -- the Holocaust. Cosponick has shown that in 1943, they had 300 men just to liquidate Jews in the east -- and the whole army at that time has only 1,000,800. You know? But under those specific ambivalent condition, where you didn't have any institutional set of politics, then something like Holocaust could occur. That's a tatrol out of the analysis, and I've had this also a conclusion which may have -- be some importance for future events, because genocidal acts usually would come into being, if there is no clear cut command structure, not the other way around. If we look at Vietnam, we know that we will -- certainly that could be it -- not -- no comparable level, but you know, certainly, if we look at the Holocaust, we also look helpul existence are like, which would then be a -- able to be per-perverted in that direction, that there is no protest against the destruction of all the foundations of law, and destruction of all the radius, which is certainly accompanying the implementation of the Holocaust, according to my conviction.

Q: But that is somewhat counter to what one might think, right?

A: Well --

Q: That there -- Is there no notion that this is what somebody wants to be done, even if there's no clear cut order?

A: There is certainly -- well, that's -- the long run, they got accustomed to get rid of the Jews, and suddenly they learned, under the conditions of the occupied Soviet territory, where the recent study said a -- under certain conditions, then certainly then, see that it's possible, that it's the easiest thing just to kill those people. First, before that, they want to have some reservations, solutions, that turn out to be impossible, and so on, and at the end it was for them, the easy d -- way, to kill the Jews. And after they had started with that, then certainly the German bureaucratic perfectionism got into the business, and then they had the systematic liquidation of every Jewish women and kids which they could find in Ukraine, or elsewhere. You know, that is really in -- that is -- well, impresses me a lot, and well there you have then the marriage between Nazi fanatism, and Prussian state tradition, and this terrible affect -- affectivity of the Germans. Other nations would have just said, well that in -- why -- we -- we -- th-that -- that's not interesting for us. But the Germans, and the way they are on a problem, then they do that up to the way and -- and they hold icemen so he shows that that is still -- that business of killing the Hungarian

Jews, after he had a counter order, obviously a counter order by Himmler, you know, that's very symptomatic for that process. And it -- so far, we have not only to do with anti-Semitic moderation, but also with attitudes which are things stemming from the Prussian state tradition, in a way. -- murdered Fromme, certainly.

Q: And do you really think there's something very special about the German state, and the -- and Prussian history, given all the help that Germany got doing this?

A: Well, I wouldn't overestimate the impact of national history on the process, but certainly there is something like a -- a -- the -- well -- that has been called by -- from the authoritarian character, and the authoritarian character plays a role, I think, f -- to fulfill the expectation by the Nazis and by Hitler, you know, th-they then just did, and you can see that with their example, the Reich's Crystal Night, and all the -- the German population protested way much against the violent acts in the night of the ninth of November already, and the eighth, and so on. But then the Gestapo gave the explicit order that they should take into custody 20, or 20 thous -- 25,000 Jews. That was a state measure, they accepted that, you know? This is a strange element. Law and order can work under certain conditions. That they criticize the Nazi policy, but in -- then also can support Nazi policy. And in a way it did, especially if you look how they then proceeded in getting these European Jewry from the last isle in Greece, or elsewhere. You know, it's really nonsense, nobody would have done that in the whole world. In that respect I think it's uniquely German. Maybe the Russians, and some people there have a -- have some heritage from Germany to do that in their day, if they start then to bring it to a -- to a -- I think complete, and that's, I think one specific element. But, on the other hand, we're starting to study what the French police did, and maybe they count a very depressing results [indecipherable]

Q: Do you think that people -- that historians now are more accepting of your view of -- of Hitler?

A: Well, I think it's gone -- it's -- everybody is of that opinion, because w -- you know, we know more documents. We know that Hitler didn't -- didn't -- he was a ideological motor all the time, especially in the Jewish question. But, on the other hand, he didn't always push things ahead, and now it turns out that also the Wannsee conference has to be interpreted in a somewhat different context. The main problem of Heydrich, besides of getting, or increasing his competence for the so-called Jewish question, was that he didn't want to proceed with the Nuremberg laws, and hi -- difference between Jews and half Jews, and Jews living in mixed marriages, you know, that very complicated system, to distinguish between a more assimilated, and a less assimilating [indecipherable]. Because, certainly on the one hand, a party from the star wanted to include everybody who was of Jewish descent, up to the quarter Jew, and to the -- all the first -- the [indecipherable] exclusion from Germany, and later on the liquidation. And the problem arose that Hitler didn't want to change the Nuremberg laws, and he was not following the

suggestions of Heydrich, and Himmler, and the so-called mishling question, the -- the k -- the question of -- how do you say that in English?

Q: [indecipherable]

A: That means a half, quarter, and so on, Jews. And Heydrich invited the ministers to the Wannsee conference, to decuss -- discuss that issue, and to get approval of the ministries, and the Reich chancellor, which were involved. In order then to press on Hitler, to get the approval to include the half Jews, and the Jews living in mixed marriages. And Hitler at that point was a -- was something like a brake. Certainly motivation is very clear, he -- he didn't change -- want to change in later years, anything, and he thought it terribly inp -- unpopular if he would touch the assimilated Jews. And he was less strict in that issue than Heydrich, and Himmler and others. That gives to the Wannsee conference certainly, quite a new meaning, and Eichmann, who was expert on the mishlings question, that means the question of half and quarter Jews, he wanted to di -- let disappear his role. And by that, he over -- he pointed at the ongoing liquidation in that famous speech delivered by Heydrich, wh -- and now -- by now we know very well that Heydrich had in mind what was going on with the construction of that so-called rollbarn defore, that was a big street between Lublin and -- and Kraków. And from there he had a -- Jewish labor camps, and where he practized quote unquote, annihilation through labor, and that is then mentioned in this speech by Heydrich. Because 20 days later he would, in Prague, still talk about all the deportation, all the 11,000,000 Jews -- European Jews, to the Icemeer region, where the Gestapo wanted to have a -- it's own territory, and a continuing the archy period in the gulag. You know, that was really simple. But in the ensuing weeks, suddenly everything changed, and then they did not he-hesitate then, to implement the systematic liquidation of the European Jews, but not so much at the Wannsee conference. And you know, and so far, still the central part of that history, opened to different interpretations by now, but certainly that doesn't change anything in the very terrible development, and the criminal character of that, but it makes it, I think, a bit more comprehensible. And certainly the problem still is that -- that it's not only Hitler who is doing that, certainly he's supporting that all the time. The discussion is to what extent Hitler was informed. Certainly I -- I wouldn't say that Hitler was not, but on the other hand, he didn't want to know too much. And therefore, there was not too much discourse between the underlings and him, Hitler, as everybody assumed. But the -- obviously that was not necessarily the case. Hitler was living in the ideological world, he all the time was characterized by a flight from reality, and he was not a man who looked at things day to day, you know. That was a original position when I started that business of Nazi history. Well, is that some sufficient explanation of your question?

Q: Yes, you did. Let me ask you about your involvement with studying Hannah Arant, because you seem much more sympathetic than many historians.

A: [indecipherable]. Yes --

Q: Which --

A: Well, at that time, this was very difficult to get anybody who was ready to talk about Hannah Arant in Israel, and -- forget it. And also Hans Wartfels, he was a clear cut opponent of Hannah Arant. Why'd I think Hannah Arant had some good points? We know today that this was not very reliable, that he used the book of Raoul Hillberg to a good part, and that he -- that she, you know, all the time tends to -- to overshoot the mark, you know, and so on, but in general I think she was right with the main thesis [indecipherable] available. And all that certainly was a problem that is so difficult to understand for the survivor side. I do understand that very well, while that issue on the -- Raoul -- of the Jewish council, I think have been otherwise too [indecipherable]. But the main problem certainly is that, in fact, Iseman was very active, but he was on the other hand not a man who [indecipherable] and new research has found out that Iseman comes into that business first because of the resettlement of the ethnic Germans in 1939, because of the German-Soviet agreement. And he is responsible for the interpretation of the pillars, and the Jews, and other groups from Vladica, in order to resettle the Germans there. And there they make their first experiences, and by that they are working for the establishment of the greater German Reich, and that's not only that negative element, and later on you know everything in that [indecipherable] resettlement in [indecipherable] affairs, and it didn't work, but then something like an overcompensation down there, work very hard and honor -- at least -- at least, to implement the Holocaust, they did it. You know, I think that's a psychological mechanism, it's very important to give an interpretation of the group of the -- of the local and regional perpetrators.

Q: How do you understand -- I have seen, over the years, not a lessening of anger at her -- at Hannah Arant, but in some sense an enlargement of the anger. When the book came out about her relationship with Heideger, it gave people even more reason to --

A: Well, but change, the -- the other year, I have been in Jerusalem, they had on a scolley conference on Hannah Arant, and they took over the admiration of Hannah Arant, which is I think symptomatic for the United States, we would be more critical in Germany. And her problem certainly is that both sides don't understand that Hannah Arant is basically influenced by the [indecipherable] your Conservative -- tism. Which is different from bigots. One has to know that in order to understand Hannah Arant. In all her theories, you know, of the philasinhite, of the loneliness of man, and then there comes back the -- a model -- that the Jews are the model for the world population. Well, and if you look in a German idea, there's philosophy of the 19th century of Fishter, and all these people, you suddenly get it, that's her. But she t -- I think masschoserv has to be a pragmatic philosopher, she is not. Therefore --

Q: Mm-hm. No, she's an idealist -

A: She is -- Well, about an -- with that crazy mixture, you know.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: And a -- a -- th-- the easer -- it is -- don't understand that either, I think we -- I -- according to my opinion. I am not a specialist for Hannah Arant, but I met her. I never forget when I met her, because I was invited by American history department of the Columbia University. When was that? In 70 -- in '78, I think or '74. And my wife was there, and that was in affecta club of the Columbia University. And they had very bad organizer, sadly it turned out that also Henry Freidlander was invited to deliver-liver a lecture, and then they decided that we had each a half an hour rather than hour lectures. [indecipherable] care. And there were about 200 people there, once was very lively, and then suddenly somebody entered the room, that was Hannah Arant. I saw they knew her from the television, that was very clear. The whole atmosphere changed immediately, the -- the talk silenced down. She was there, you know, that was -- she had a radiation, no problem, no. Then we had to give our papers, then she said, "Well, both papers are very bad." This is wrong, that is wrong, she [indecipherable]. But anyhow -- And after that -- that was finished, the debate, I went with Wilfreda to her, and said hello, and she invited us immediately to go to her flat that was in Riverside Drive. And I forgot that she took a cab for that 300 meters or something, but that was the time there that was still very dangerous, you know. And then we were sitting there until two in the night, and that was -- that didn't change much, there were all the papers of her husband still there, the name of the husband at the entrance to the flat, and we had a very, very interesting talk. And she was really good, I never forgot it.

Q: Can you talk a little bit more about what you talked about, and what it was like?

A: Not a problem, it's difficult to say what we talk. Certainly we reported a lot about Germany, German history and so on, and possibly she was a receiver more than -- I have to talk with my wife, she is better in recollecting these things, I don't know, but I only recollect that th -- the -- the graduation of her personality, and on the other hand, you know, she had learned in Germany that openness of the American academics, you know? Immediately you talk about what you're doing, what you want to do, and so on. She was really good, you know.

Q: So you were impressed?

A: I was very much impressed, and also from the surrounding, these many books and papers, who knows, was a lit -- anything but orderly, and I think she didn't change too much since her husband died, and well -- and so far, I was very much impressed by her. That didn't much influence what -- what my -- because I -- I wrote about the Eichmann trial bukfa earlier.

Q: Yeah.

A: Th-That was far before she -- I met her then, and I was not influenced personally, but I think that she had some good points at -- at that book.

Q: Had she read what you had written?

A: She must have known -- at least she knew who I was, you know.

Q: Yeah, yeah.

A: I don't know. I don't remember that, you know. But I never got, you know, the openness and she was really ready to -- to talk with us, in spite of the criticism of that paper, you know, so.

Q: Tell me how you -- We all -- I don't know what I want to say, suffered through the Goldhagen controversy. Is there -- Was there something about that book that both took on the Intentionalists, and the Functionalists together, trying to come up with the [indecipherable]

A: Well, it was quite good, because you know, there was a [indecipherable] written by -- what is this Stuttgart destroy, and again, and a mountain -- and he -- bec -- and he criticized then, or could ha -- was criticized to be a hyper-Intentionalist. And that was quite true. And -- But that all my enemies, you know, say -- opponents, they would then argue with Functionalist arguments against Goldhagen. And that was in a way, the end of the Intentionalist school. Even if you take what the -- what the -- what Chris Browning said there, you know what, all the Functionalists are the ones against Goldhagen, and Goldhagen in a way, you know, by -- by expanding the Intentionalist position to the utmost, you know, it des -- he destroyed it, you know. And so far, it was in the -- it was quite interesting. I know him very well, I met him first in '85, in a conference which was run in Berkeley by Gary Feldman, and there he delivered a paper on the [indecipherable] republic, and he was very, very critical about [indecipherable] republican said there was still extreme anti-Semitism, which he would deny today, and he had, for instance, this strange conclusion that in the Secret Service, there are more party members than have been in the Third Reich. You know, so I mean, that may be true, and so far, as nobody could enter the Secret Service in the Third Reich, there was no member of the Nazi party. But you know, he really thought that the [indecipherable] republic was completely Nazi party, and anti-Semitic. And then later on, you -- now, his publisher told him not to tell that, and Jerry Feldman -- Gary Feldman should publish that conference, I ne -- I met him in Oxford, and said, "What's with the conference?" "Yes," he said, "I don't have yet the paper of -- of Daniel Goldhagen." I say, "You will never get it," you know, he would -- he's [indecipherable] himself, he's doing that. And I never forgot I said to him, "Well, Daniel, if you go to my class and [indecipherable] on the other hand that we are sympathetic to you, they wouldn't accept that, you would have hard time." And that impressed him a little. And then I met him at a conference in -- on Hannah Arant, and others -- other things in -- in Harvard. And we are sitting on a panel and he attacked me

sharply and [indecipherable] republic, I never forgot it. On the same line, you know, that anti-Semitism is still there, and there -- course, when I was answering, I said to the -- to the [indecipherable] also, you got it from the audience, anti-Semitism is still hanging, you know, it was really -- it was a really not a very friendly climate. Then I said to the audience, well people, you must know the German Jew, the younger generation is doing anything to study the Holocaust, and to go to Israel, and to improve the German Jewish relations, it's not fair if you say that. And I never forget that someday you tha -- that mud change, you know, that was clear, that this was no longer the topic, German anti-Semitism. And then he told them -- I invited him for dinner, and he told me what he wanted to do in Germany, the whole [indecipherable] things, so and so on. I know him. Know? Well, in a way, I glad that he got a prisoner of his own thesis, and of the whole affair, because I don't see that he has an academic future by that.

Q: Yeah.

A: Because, as y -- he -- I know, the father very well, ri -- when I was in Harvard, I met the father several times. That was in '72, and I also met that -- the very young Daniel, you know. It's -- It's -- In a way it's a pity, and the book is so terribly bad, from the -- from the scholarly viewpoint. It's not a -- so much a problem with the position, but he doesn't know anything about folkish anti-Semitism, and you know, it's quite interesting, where did he got his idea of the -- how is that anti-Semitism called, e-el --

Q: Eliminationists.

A: Eliminatri -- Eliminatri, or Eliminationists anti-Semitist. That's Julius Langbean.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But he never read la -- Julius Langbean, the [indecipherable] that very impressive and -- and very popular anti-Semitic book of the [indecipherable]. He never read it. He got it by Georgie Massey. There he got some information of Langbean that was also a bit one-sided, but well Georgie was a wonderful man, anyhow, and then he took that up without really knowing what he took up, you know. Because he never understood the context of the early -- that means the li -- 19th century Wagnerian anti-Semitism, which was strongly connected with the idea that the Jews are, in -- was -- some respects, a model nation for the German one, and then they got the idea that the German nation can't be built, except of the elimination of the Jews from the German nation, so that -- that was not meant in the sense of killing. Now see, all this assumes [indecipherable] he's as bad that he -- he c -- he -- he doesn't -- he isn't able to read German text correctly, you know. His interpretation of one quotation of pishta Israel is really terrible. He wants them to -- to say that there already was a idea of a systematic killing of choice. But, on the other side, where you have that, in the fergush movement, he doesn't mention it e-either, you know? But you know, that's a story for -- o-of itself, and the reason was that he discovered a bit late that Chris Browning had already written the book he wanted to write.

Q: So he had to write something else.

A: And by that, he added that part on the 19th century, and added that part on the labor camps, and the Death Marches.

Q: What do you think of George Massey's work as a sort of culturalist orien?

A: Well, George Massey, I knew him very well, we were together at Jerusalem, and he was a man one can't but adore, you know. But his book has some weaknesses. He is -- He is a historian of th -- of ideas, you know, and he also, I think, over exenderency anti-Semitic issues, or -- in a way he is a forerunner of Daniel Goldhagen, in a way, you know. And he has a lot of material that's very important. I wouldn't accept his a little bit monocausal interpretation.

Q: Mm-hm.

A: And certainly he is also one of those people who -- who if they have anti-Semitism, then they think they have to explain the Holocaust. That's not my opinion. But it's indispensable, it's very good at that time, but he published that, that was pioneering, and far better than everything which existed on the history of the German anti-Semitism it's quite clear. He put that in a broader politic context, you know, I can't have a lot of positive arguments, but in the principle -- principle, mathological point, I would say present research is -- is, I think, has developed farther, and couldn't -- would avoid to have this harda monocausal, and mainly I -- illogical interpretation, and but -- but I recommend to read these books, anyhow.

Q: D-Do you -- Cause I didn't speak with him about this. When Daniel Goldhagen's book came out, was George sympathetic to the book, or not? I don't --

A: I just don't know. I don't think so.

Q: You don't know? I doubt it, yeah.

A: I don't think so, because he must have seen the weaknesses, because George knows the material very well, you know, and what he's writing about in 19th century, you know. No, Geor-George must have wudwich senicher undehenderben kauf to sunwichlong, can you translate that?

Q: No.

A: D'you know, you -- I said, if you are upset, then you -- then you'll say that, you know. He can't accept that -- can't have accepted that, I think, because of the weakness of scholener research, you know. He was a really good scholar.

Q: Yes. And how are you -- h-how do you view Raoul Hillberg's work?

A: Well, that was a pioneering study, pioneering study. Unfortunately, it hasn't been translated to the German pur before 1982, and you know the reasons. It's not only the German disinterest, and it is today indispensable, you know, as a first book. But, on the other hand, the recent research, you know, did a lot more. Awhile ago, in 1932, I invited him to deliver a lecture in -- in my university at Buckholm, telling him, if you could enter -- reclude the resettlement policy of Heinrich Himmler, in 1939 - 1940, you know? And he answered he couldn't do that, then he would deliver what he usually delivers, you know, his very competent survey on how the implementation of the Holocaust occurred step by step. And then -- I met him in 1933, we -- at a museum, at that conference.

Q: You mean '92, we're talking about '92. You said '32.

A: '93. N -- I know, '93, you know?

Q: '93, right, the conference, yes.

A: Another famous conference.

Q: Yes.

A: Where it was a main issue, what is the future of Holocaust research? Then he said the future of the Holocaust research lies in the context. Where was it? Because today we see that we have to connect that with the other polit -- policy fields, especially the terminization and resettlement policy of Himmler, in order to understand why that could be performed without any significant opposition. And that makes it then also better comprehensible for next generations, who have difficulties to study only the little bit isolated Jewish field. Those are my position -- my field here, I thought I should be the generalist a little bit, in the midst of all these special -- specialists, and experts on certain fields of the Holocaust. They are far better than I am, but to know my role should be also in the lexus to give a little bit more the general context, because in the next generations will be ready only to see this aspect, and I think -- well that's -- I continue the idea by Mr. Raoul Hillberg, you know, I adore him, he's a really good man.

Q: Okay, we'll stop tape number two, and change the tape.

End of Tape #2

Tape #3

Q: Tell me about the emergence of the Klemperer diaries in Germany, y -- in your lecture to the Leo Beck Institute, you said that it was actually a bigger best seller than the Goldhagen book.

A: That's right.

Q: How do you account for that? I mean, what do you think about these diaries?

A: Well, the diaries are very impressive, especially for those youngsters, and for those students who want to realize how the living condition of Jews in Germany, and posey with other parts of Europe at that time, really were. Certainly he is living in a mixed marriage, that's -- a mixed po -- the -- Polish marriage. By that, he even certainly has better conditions than the average Jews, that's quite clear. But anyhow, what gets -- what gets a vivid, I think, picture of how -- what the Jewish situation in Nazi Germany was. And that's helps for the youngsters, I think, to understand what was going on. S -- You know, for the first time, they get an interpretation of Jews, and Jewish life, and how they had, or tried to survive, and so on. And because it's translated by a man who belongs to the m -- basically to the German culture, and so on, it's obviously easier to understand that, anyhow, that belongs to that new wave of sensitivity towards the Jewish question, which also was to be seen in the "Schindler's List" film.

Q: When -- When you read the diaries, and you think back upon your saying about yourself that you were naïve. Now, I understand you were a child, and he was an adult person, so I'm not trying to compare your naïveté, and his la -- so-called lack of it, but it was fascinating to me how much he figured out.

A: Yes, a --

Q: Even given where he was. It seems really extraordinary.

A: Well, that's right, yes, but I must atsee as a child I didn't -- I didn't hear that at the -- and -- and -- and I think in my hometown, that didn't -- that didn't occur too much. At least I don't know, you know, I --

Q: Right.

A: -- and, d'you know, when I was growing up, in order to see something, you know, the Jews had disappeared to the big cities, there was nothing left, and by that, I'm a bad witness in that respect.

Q: But it is interesting to see those diaries, because it's clear that if you were adult person, and you would take the information that was coming in if you thought about it, which is what you said before, if you actually thought about it, you -- you'd know.

A: That's right, or at least know what the general direction was like.

Q: Right, right.

A: That's right, that's no question.

Q: So it's quite a --

A: And then so far, it's a -- it's an explanation, you know, also. And certainly --

Q: An explanation of what?

A: An explana -- no, it's -- it's not an explanation of the attitudes of the population, you're right, but it's an explanation of how the isolation came into being, you know?

Q: Uh-huh.

A: I think that they don't know.

Q: There's often, when people talk about the Holocaust, nor -- regular people, including some historians, but --

A: Yeah.

Q: They talk about this as a unique event.

A: Yes.

Q: And from what I read about your work, that would be hard-hardly a word that you would use, because you want to talk about the Holocaust in context.

A: Yes, that's right, yes.

Q: So, can you tell me what you think is so problematic about this use of the word, uniqueness, and what it -- what it destroys.

A: I wouldn't say it's problematic, but you know, if I study historical events, I don't study them for their u-uniqueness, but in order to learn from that, to have a better understanding of comparable, or prospeels, or opposite situations. And by that, that category of uniqueness is not very variable, I think. And, well certainly there is an u -- u-uniqueness

insofar as this systematic liquidation of millions of people in the 20th century. It's incomparable to other developments. But I'm -- I'm always a bit cautious for what -- what uniqueness can mean, you know -- you know. Or, the other day I have been in Yucatan. What [indecipherable] with those populations. Well, it took them a century or two, the Germans did that within two years. That is maybe the uniqueness, that means our century. But the size of killing whole people, they maybe not so ni -- u-unique if you take in comparison to size of populations today, and in earlier periods. And so far, I would also have a principle objection to use the term unique, because in a way, we don't much about what is really unique.

Q: We don't know.

A: We don't know much about, compare -- well, history is a very broad business, I think.

Q: Is a very?

A: A very broad --

Q: Broad business.

A: -- experience, you know. Well, you know, would have been in ancient societies, and so far, but that's not a very important point. For me, it's not a principle question, whether the -- the pate or the uniqueness. But certainly, it's only from a German viewpoint, the average German viewpoint's only -- it's necessary to -- to connect that with the question of the murder of the Soviet prisoners of war, or the murder of Slav people, and Gypsies, and others. You know, that's quite clear ba -- th -- by that, it gets more comprehensible. And -- And if you look at that in order to show the pre-conditions for any pre-ju-jub -- any genocidal policy, you know, then it shouldn't isolate that, and so far, the term uniqueness is not very helpful, but I wouldn't re -- wouldn't reject the -- that on the other hand, this is a unique event, which isn't comparable directly with the [indecipherable] gulag under Stalinism, and so on, although it l -- it lies on the same level. They are -- We will discuss, I think, in future years a little bit, to what extent the -- the German perpetrators learned from -- from the local anti-Semitic populations in the east, and the Russians in the way. You know, the death marches are an invention by a Soviet -- by the Soviets. They did that with their own people. And then the German suddenly came to the idea to do it also, first with prisoners of wars, and at -- at the end, with concentration camp inmates. That's Soviet, the idea of that in -- can -- let -- march people about, hundreds and kilometers, was very familiar in a -- start in this period. And so far, sometimes there are comparabilities which are -- shouldn't be precluded by accepting the unique character of the Holocaust.

Q: Let -- Let me push this uniqueness just a little bit, be-because I -- there are certainly debates about -- and you take it on, though not in these terms. The Holocaust is about the Jews, the Jewish experience is unique. And then there's a -- a view that there's a

universal way to look at the Holocaust, that there are many victims during the Holocaust. The Jews may have been the major, or the primary ones. How -- How do you think it's best to actually look at this event?

A: Well, I would say -- would take up the argument that i -- on account of a -- a -- quite a lot of reasons. Some is certainly the traditional occ-Occidental anti-Semitism. The Jews were killed, and the others not, just because the Nazis didn't have enough time to kill the others. And my friend Kurt Salley, he would talk about the top of the iceman to know. Where's the iceberg, or where --

Q: Iceberg, yes, [indecipherable]

A: Iceberg, you know. And I mentioned that, at a talk to -- and now I got about the resettlement policy, you know, it's quite the -- after -- there was some compensation mechanism which [indecipherable] at first met the Jews. And suddenly they are the -- the prejudice, and anti-Judaism, and not only a distinct anti-Semitic philosophy was responsible, that the selection was then made, and a lot of other factors. But that - in -- in the long run, that wouldn't have been an isolated phenomenon, they would have killed other groups, also. So th -- it was in a way, to put it in question marks, the easiest to kill the Jews, because they didn't get opposition from their local populations, and you know, and you know, and you know. But the tendency to kill other groups as well, is unmistakably t-there. And it so far, you know, you can say there was a uniqueness on their -- within the general picture, there was something like a uniqueness, like maybe kind of ca -- try to put that in that way. And there is something which certainly explains that the -- the Jews were killed foremost, and the others anyway survived, although killing processes were underway all the time.

Q: There is --

A: Is that a sufficient answer?

Q: Yes. There is a way in which -- when I read your stuff, and I think about reading other people's material, that one gets the feeling that Nazism is either self-mutilating or suicidal, that in the end it would eat itself up with death.

A: That's my thesis, yes. So now, in the last months of the -- of the war, you know, they suddenly said, we don't need only racial homogeneity, we need only political homogeneity, and started to kill everybody in this time, 10 thousands of Germans, either, you know. And then so far, you know, that was symptomatic for that form of -- of -- that style of politics.

Q: Right.

A: You know? If you -- If you have politics which are unable to have something like a lasting compromise, and then you have only destruction as the alternative, you know, that's really --

Q: Tell me what you think about the emergence of movies like "Schindler's List", and television films and this sort of spate of popularization of the Holocaust, after years of a lot of people not thinking about it.

A: Well, usually historians are very critical, I'm not. I think "Schindler's List" is quite a good film, and I think the historical data are mainly, I think, reliable. One can talk about some interpretations here, but in general I think it helped to understand the process in the minds of many youngsters in Germany. And well, it doesn't replace the historical work, which is certainly more abstract, and less simple, but on the other hand, I think it was more helpful than the documentary films we had in the -- in the 50's and 60's, which didn't left an imprint on the German mentality, or at least not too much.

Q: Including Landsman's "Shoah"?

A: Landsman's "Shoah" is different, but you know, Landsman's "Shoah" has something for a few intellectuals who will sit there for 24 hours, I don't know how long that is, you know.

Q: Nine hours, I think.

A: Nine hours, I don't know.

Q: But still --

A: You know, that's not symptomatic for a -- for the public. It's very impressive, you know, and [indecipherable].

Q: A-As an historian, is it an odd phenomenon that the farther one seems to get from this event, the more interest there seems to be, or is there deep -- how -- do you understand what I mean? I mean, they -- there may --

A: I don't understand it very well, you know, we have an interchannel change, and suddenly we have a generation which starts, and you -- well, it goes a whole way. We did, as historians, starting with the ideas, and turning back to issues they don't know -- want to know that. And it's so forth they have, and -- and fairly increased interest in the second World War, and the Jewish issue, and so on. Among the younger students today, and that's quite a phenomenon, and -- but it has to be interpreted in terms of interchannel change. Do you know, after those generations have left office, or the positions who was -- who were in this or that kind involved, now the next generation wants to know, and to provide information and -- and that -- start anew, I think.

Q: So, is that connected with what you said in your Leo Beck lecture? Implicitly and explicitly, the legacy of Auschwitz forms the historical framework for the process of acquiring a new national self-concept?

A: Well, not necessarily, but that's certainly connected to that, that we have that phenomenon in Germany, which I think it's really remarkable.

Q: So tell me what this means. Why is this so necessary for it -- for a new self national -- a n-national self-confidence?

A: You know we had a national indifference in Germany at the time, and the nation stayed traditional 19th century, almost disappeared. If you talk to the kids today about Bismarck, they don't know who he is, you know, and if you talk about students in the war area, about the French scoo occupations, and they ask whether that's in the 17th century, or in the [indecipherable]. That's got national history in a traditional sense, in Germany has, in a way, faded out among the next generations. And there is, I think, growing a new national identity, which looks more at the chain of events, starting in the Third Reich, leading to the second World War, and the Holocaust, and certainly then, being in the background for the formation of the [indecipherable] republic. That's rit -- quite a different side of historical basic facts, which have -- they have in mind, and to which I think the experience of Auschwitz belongs, in a way, you know?

Q: Let me go back for a moment. You've -- Was this the first time -- I know it's not the first time you've been in Washington, but the first time you saw the museum this year?

A: No, no, no.

Q: No, you saw -- seen it bef -- you s-saw the [indecipherable]

A: I've seen it -- yes, I have been in it, yes.

Q: So, how do you evaluate, as you walk through the permanent exhibition, it's portrayal of this history?

A: Well, [indecipherable] books on that, d'you ever read them? You know, and I found it very interesting, the -- the recent book by Ted Hurwitz his name, on the -- on the miterzation of the Holocaust, you know, and he brings that interpretation that they want to put a positive meaning by stressing the Americans as liberators, and so on, in comparison to what is going on in wa -- Yad Vashem, you know. Well, from a German viewpoint, that is -- that's not very convincing. And I -- I always told that story that a Germans wanted to have a room for the resistance movement, but unfortunately that is too anti-Semitic [indecipherable] to wage that -- at --idea, you know, but that was very symptomatic. But we don't have the possibility to connect the -- that, even to bend with

some sort of suppositive national tradition, you know. That's it's -- has to do with what I told you about, the emergence of a new consciousness. We just can't [indecipherable]. At least the other Germany resistance no -- we have done five people, or 50, that's not enough, you know. It's not representative. And then so far, sh -- from a German viewpoint, you look at that as certainly a bit skeptically with all the politish and nutson went on the attendance to -- to have some general consequential slogans, or what do you say, you know. We are far more skeptical as -- us Germans who went through that experience. But anyhow, it's a very impressive exhibition, and is a -- is a very, very good and interesting material, in many respects, but it would be [indecipherable] to say that a most impressive place is where you have the pictures of that little town, what's the name?

Q: Rushishaka

A: You know, that is --

Q: [indecipherable] yeah.

A: But that would be also the reaction of the -- of the German yosterday, you know. Because that's like "Schindler's List", or that's the Klemperer diary. It shows the people again, you know. And what is our task as historians, is to -- not to -- well, the people should stay alive in the whole description of the process, that's difficult. And that is done, in a way, by the exhibition.

Q: So then you must appreciate what Saul Freidlander is trying to do in his --

A: Well I -- He is a good friend of mine, I like him. The book is wonderful in respect -- with respect to the style and the language and the -- I think the breadth of the material he uses. I differ in one respect, that I think that he doesn't show the political process leading to the events, you know. That -- I want to write now a small history of the Holocaust, and I am not so bright as my friend Saul [indecipherable]. Wh-What I want to show is how -- why the Nuremberg laws were in 1935, and not in 1943, or so on. And how did the rise kastern, cris - Crystal night occur in Sep-September 19 -- no, in November 1938, and -- d'you know, that he doesn't show, you know. What are the -- the political mechanisms which were involved, and that is a little bit what I think I can contribute to the business of all these experts who -- that's very impressive, but we have to -- to -- also to explain why that came into being, you know, and that's -- that's difficult and -- and so far, it's wonderful, but -- but it's written from hindsight.

Q: Uh-huh.

A: But one should try --

Q: To understand.

A: -- to write in the way that you still, as a reader, are not aware what is going on. Later on ows, that's still open -- open -- open -- open. And suddenly then, it will change. That's what I want to do. Whether I'll be able is another question.

Q: Have you started it?

A: Oh I don -- no, no, not yet.

Q: Not yet.

A: I -- In a way, I started with tha -- doing these nextashear, put a lot of work into them. I learned something.

Q: So, when at these conferences, people say where is the direction of the study of the Holocaust, what do you say? Or what should be the direction?

A: Yes, first of all, to interpret the Holocaust as political process, and to put it in the context.

Q: Simple.

A: That simple, clear, and difficult.

Q: Yes. Well, is there anything that I missed, that I should ask you, or that you wanted to say?

A: No, you were very good, no. Thank you.

Q: Well, thank you very much.

A: Thank you for the study of my -- my text.

Q: Thank you so much.

A: I think we have a lot of i -- of ideas in the talk.

Q: Yes, yes.

A: Yes.

Q: I thank you very much for your time, okay.

A: Was very good. Yes, I --

End of Tape #3

Conclusion of Interview