

Hi. I'm Dr. Jack Porter of the Holocaust Survivors Project of Newton, Mass. And today, we'll be talking about the American GI. And our guest is Paul Parks of Massachusetts, Boston, Massachusetts.

Before I talk to Paul, I have a couple of things that I wanted to kind of show. Sadly, many of the artifacts and stuff that belong to GIs can be picked up at almost any kind of estate sale or yard sale. Believe it or not, I stumbled onto an estate sale in Brookline. And here is the hat-- excuse me, Mr. Novikov for wearing it, but I wanted to show it. This helmet or this hat was worn by Private First Class Edward Novikov, who was well known in Brookline, an alderman or selectman, the 90th Infantry Division, E Company, 359th Regiment, Third Army, from 1944 to '45. And he was a guard at the tribunal in Nuremberg in 1945.

This is the actual dress hat I guess you would call it that he wore while he was there. He also-- and he didn't give this to me. I had to buy it from him, believe it or not. He also sold me his flak-- is that what you call it, Paul?

No, that's just your helmet.

That's your helmet, not your flak helmet.

Just your helmet. I'm telling you, Paul, how can a person walk around for two or three years with a helmet? This is heavy.

You get used to it.

My God.

It goes up your neck muscles.

Wow. And I don't know, this seems to be like almost in perfect shape.

Actually, right. One of the reasons why they told us to never strap it, not to never strap it on your chin is because when a shell went off and concussion came, you could actually snap your neck.

I see. In other words--

Because of the weight.

Yeah.

So we always kept it on unfastened.

I see. In other words, it was kept unfastened like this. And--

We usually put the belt around--

And it did protect people's lives.

Oh, yes, it did, many times.

Interesting. The other things that I have picked up just to jog your memory, and believe it or not, like I said, I picked this up at yard sale. Here is a Soviet, a Russian officer's belt that I bought, believe it or not, at a yard sale in Newton.

Oh, my heavens.

Yeah. This is the kind of stuff that's being literally thrown away and picked up for peanuts at yard sales around-- and not

even in esoteric areas, but right here in our back yard.

Dog tags.

Dog tags. Kids out there, I don't think know what this is. Maybe you could explain, Paul, what a dog tag is.

Every soldier had two of these. On them was your name and your army serial number and your blood type.

Yeah. Maybe I could show the camera a little bit.

Yeah. And your blood type. And what happens--

This is William Tottenham. He was a Catholic. There's a C there.

And your religion. Now, what happened, if you were killed, they would leave one of these on the body. And they'd take one off and send it to graves registration who would keep a registered list of all the dead personal.

And then this too I bought at a yard sale. This is made by a GI. It's the bottom of a shell casing with a penny, right? A 1944 penny bent for a cigarette holder and a crude soldered cigarette. And they smoked probably too much in those days, especially Lucky Strikes. But in any case, this is the kind of stuff-- and then, of course, you had something that you're going to show-- we could show it now too-- some of the artifacts before we get into the discussion was Paul Parks, who was liberator of the Dachau death camp in Bavaria. This is the only thing you have, basically is that true?

This-- yes, this is the only thing I have.

And this is a menorah built by an inmate?

By an inmate, yes.

And using concrete nails, if you get a closeup, you can see it. These are individual nails. And the design of this is so modernistic. It is almost as if you could pick it up at some kind of Newbury Street-- it's like as fresh as if it was built yesterday. It was unbelievable.

And the person who did that--

And it has the Jewish star on the bottom. Yeah, what happened to the person--

Person deceased.

Deceased.

And the reason why I got it, someone showed up at my house one day about 20 some years ago and had it wrapped up in a newspaper, said they'd been trying to find me because he asked that I have this. He wanted me to have it as a gift. And that's how I got it. And I treasured it. And I keep it. And this is the first time I've ever had it out of the house.

And you plan eventually maybe to give this to the Holocaust Museum or some other museum or no?

I plan to keep it.

Keep it, OK. You keep it. You keep it, all right. I want the same thing. I want to keep these helmets and everything else, mainly because I like wearing them. I feel like General Patton when I put this on. And I think kids today, all they see is World War II films, and that's something I wanted to show.

I also when I was looking, you know, and we were talking a few days ago about Dachau, and I found Dachau mentioned

in the Encyclopedia Judaica. I don't know if we can get a focus on this. Here is a cam shot of the camp. It's a very poor shot.

But a lot of people are not aware-- maybe I could just read just a few lines. I know we're not supposed to do this on television. But let me-- people have no idea.

"Dachau was a town near Munich, Bavaria, where the nearby concentration camp was established on March 10, 1933. The first of the SS organized camps, it became the model and training ground for all the other camps when they were taken over by the SS. The Dachau camp existed until it was captured by Americans"-- and you were among them-- "on April 29, 1945."

"During World War II approximately 150 branches of the camp established in southern Germany and Austria were also called Dachau. The main camp consisted of 32 huts in two rows surrounded by an electrified fence in which there was a gate surmounted by the slogan, Arbeit macht Frei, Labor Liberates," which is the same sign in other camps too.

"The camp's first commandant was Theodor Eicke, who planned and organized the brutal Dachau regime. It was at Dachau that permission was first given to the guards to shoot a prisoner approaching the barbed wire fence. And this practice was encouraged by granting leave to guards who hit their targets. Dachau also produced commandants for other camps, including Rudolf Hess."

"From the very first, Dachau had a large population of Jewish inmates, and later criminal and political prisoners. And it was at Dachau that German doctors and scientists first experimented on prisoners. Many died as a result of the pseudo scientific experiments. And those who survived were often maimed for life."

"Dachau claimed many victims of selection, which the weak and crippled were sent to the gas chambers. Gas chambers were built in Dachau, but were never used." They were sent out to other gas chambers and other camps. "The exact number of people killed in Dachau is not known. At the least, there were more than 40,000 of whom probably 80% to 90% were Jewish."

"When Dachau," and here I'm concluding, "when Dachau was occupied by the American army, one of the uses made of the camp was for the concentration of German prisoners of war and war criminals, who were to be tried in the town of Dachau. Of these, 260 were sentenced to death and 498 to imprisonment. The camp was later a transit camp for refugees and foreign citizens freed from concentration camps. Part of the camp is preserved as a memorial."

And here is a picture of the memorial at Dachau. Again, it's a little hard to see, but just a little bit of a view. You can look this up in Volume 5 of your Encyclopedia Judaica.

Well, that was a very long introduction to welcoming an old friend, Paul Parks. It's hard to jump into this after almost 50 years. Paul, I've been reading a book about you. You're mentioned in several books. One of them, which another element of this interview is the fact that it ties together Blacks and Jews, Broken Alliance by Jonathan Kaufman, The Turbulent Times between Blacks and Jews in America. There's a whole chapter devoted to you. And I have read that chapter. And you also say that there's a chapter on you in the book by Kirk Scharfenberg.

Yeah.

And do you have the name of that book that we--

No.

So anyway, we have a pretty well known person here. In any case, where can we start? I mean, maybe we should start before you enter the army a little bit. Maybe you could tell us a little bit about where you were born briefly and your age and et cetera.

I was born in Indianapolis, Indiana. And I attended Purdue University. In fact, I was in Purdue University at the time I

was drafted out.

It's a very interesting story because Purdue at that time discriminated against, very severely against black people. We could not stay in the dormitories. There were places that were just off limits to us. There were restricted covenants in people's deeds in West Lafayette where Purdue was that would not allow-- it was against the law for any black person to spend the night in any house in West Lafayette in those days.

And it was one of the things that I-- my mother had been one of the leaders in the anti-lynching movement in America. And I had grown up in that kind of atmosphere of trying to always bring about your rights. And so I was leading an effort to get the dormitories at Purdue desegregated.

What year was that?

And that was in 1941 through the spring of 1943.

So you were a freshman--

I was a--

Freshman to senior--

I was a sophomore at the time.

In 1943.

Right.

And what happened was they said, if you had a grade point average, which was about a B, that you could be-- they would defer you from the army, and that you could finish your college education and get your engineering degree. So I went over to the dean expecting to have that happen. He gave me a letter, which I assumed was my-- that's the last time that I ever took a letter to someone without reading it. But I assumed that it was my draft deferment, took it to the draft board. And it was a recommendation on the part of the president and the dean that I'd be drafted immediately. And when I talked to them about it, they told me that perhaps I would learn how I could stay in my place.

This was punishment.

Yes, it was.

I mean it's almost reminds me of Jews being taken into the czarist army with the chance of being killed. And in the book, the dean says something to you about your chances of returning--

Yes.

--is not 100%--

Right.

What did he say.

I said, I'll be back. He said, well, that's not certain.

The dean said, that's not certain.

That you'll be back. You may or may not. And we'll leave it there. And I said, I will be back. And one of the

motivations--

Thank God you were back.

Well, one of the motivations--

Thank God, you were back.

One of my motivations throughout the war was that I was going back to Purdue. I had to go back. It was mandatory.

Did that sustain you during the war? This anger--

It did.

--at the racism and everything, to make sure you're going to prove that dean wrong.

Sure. And then I went right into the army, into the segregated army. And I got sent overseas because I took a position against discrimination that was going on in Camp Lee in Virginia. They had drinking fountains for Blacks and drinking fountains for whites. And the drinking fountains for Black was always dirty. You had to ride on the back of the bus.

So what I would do is walk down three regiments to the white regiment and get on with them. And so I was severely chastised for that several times for not adhering to the principals. And finally, what happened was I got involved in an altercation in Richmond. And as a result of that, they denied me any privileges of going to college-- going to finish my college through the college program. And they denied me the privilege of going to OCS. And I was sent immediately under guard to New York as a casualty replacement in the combat engineer battalion.

OCS is--

Officer's training camp. I was scheduled for that. And they denied both of those and said, you can't do either one. And they sent me off to an outfit that I knew nothing about. I'd been trained as a quartermaster soldier, end up in a combat engineer battalion, and knowing nothing about it at all and not even knowing anybody in the outfit as I'm going across to Europe.

Weren't you in Louisiana also?

Yes, during the conflict--

Because the book mentions--

I was in Louisiana--

--an incident there was--

Right, at the tail end of the Louisiana maneuvers.

What happened?

Maneuvers in Louisiana. And what happened was I was sent to town by my commander to pick up some supplies with another soldier. And two Black soldiers, and we went into this little town in Mississippi to pick up the supplies. And I went inside the store. And this fellow who was with me stayed out in the truck. And I was going back out when the owner of the store said, don't go back out there, there's a problem.

And I said, well, one of my friends are out there. He said, you better come go with me. And they put me underneath the porch in a little trap door. And I went underneath the porch. And I saw my friend being dragged up and down the street

behind a small vehicle tied on a rope, and they killed him.

Like a lynching.

Yes. And I--

You know what the irony is? My uncle was killed the same way by the Nazis. And almost at the same time. He was dragged up and down by Ukrainian SS with a horse.

What an awful thing to do to another human being? And so--

Were there any positive relations at all between whites and Black soldiers too? I mean--

Yeah, there were.

I don't want to emphasize the negative, but--

There were. I never had a positive relationship with a white enlisted soldier. We had all white officers. And a couple of the officers we had, I had a very good relationship with.

My battalion commander, I didn't. But his adjutant, I had a very good relationship with. In fact, he was the one who recommended me-- it was the adjutant who recommended me once for a battlefield commission, which the colonel turned down.

Yeah, he turned it down because--

He said that because I'd been a problem.

You've been a problem. You didn't know your place.

I didn't know my place. Constantly trying to get people to change. But anyway, that's what happened to me. And so my experience in the army was never a very pleasant one. So that's why I don't have many artifacts or uniforms. I have a one dress uniform.

And you don't even belong to a veterans organization.

No.

You don't speak to veterans organizations.

No, because-- I've never walked in a parade or veterans parade or none of that because I just-- the army was not something that I look upon. And I used to say that the only reason-- when reporters asked me once from the Stars and Stripes, what was I doing this for? And I told them, I'm doing it because it gives me the right to fight when I go back home against all the injustices. And they said--

That's interesting.

They didn't expect that answer. They was expecting something much different. I said, well, that's the only reason why I'm here. He said, what do you think about Germans? I said, Germans don't mean anything to me, or at that time, I said, what's the difference?

And this was like a training ground for you to go back and fight Civil Rights back in America.

Sure.

This was true for most Black GIs.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Most I talked to.

Fascinating.

But it was. And I felt that by my serving and serving with some honor that I could help to make things different.

Yeah.

And so it happened I have had that privilege. And I'm very appreciative of the fact I've had the privilege of being able to take part in bringing about change in this country.

And you have. And that's like a whole other story, your relationship to Martin Luther King, to Jesse Jackson. We can try to get-- but now, you're being shipped over to Europe. And you're over-- how did you go? You fly over there?

No, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no.

How did you get over there?

They put us on a boat.

A boat.

Yeah, a big one.

Remember the name of it by any chance?

I do. What the heck is the name of the ship? Aquitania.

Aquitania.

Which was a British ship. And we took this long ride and went up to the Firth of Clyde in Scotland and came down through Scotland to England. Somewhere in the middle, then I also went to North Africa for a short period of time but came back to England for training. And we were training for the invasion of Normandy.

Invasion of Normandy.

Which for the sake of the audience, the date was?

June the 4th, 1944.

June the 4th, 1944. So you're in England or--

Oh, I'm sorry, June 6th, 1944.

1944.

Yeah.

And you're being trained in?

We're being trained in mines. I was an expert in removing mines and booby traps.

Mines.

Yes. During the time that they used to drop the bombs on England, when the bombers came over, periodically they wouldn't go off. So I was a part of the bomb group, the disposal group. They went down the hole and took the fuses out and deactivated those blockbusters because many times, the Germans in their ingenuity had put anti-personnel mines, equipment, inside the mine so that it would be ticking off. So once it hit the ground and didn't go off, in a certain period of time it would go off.

That sounds like extremely dangerous work.

Yes, it was. You know, it was one of those things--

You had to unscrew--

You had to know, first of all, how to take them out.

Yeah.

And we'd been trained to do that and to do it with a certain amount of care because once in a while somebody got ingenious and changed the rules on you in terms of the activation process. So you had to be very careful.

This was to neutralize the bomb?

Yes.

Just to show you the back and forth, my father was a partisan commander. The people under him had to do the same thing in the partisan, except what they did is they didn't neutralize it. Only they utilized the powder or whatever it was in there to make other bombs. That is extremely dangerous.

Yes, it is.

And that's what the Jewish partisans did. You know there's a tremendous overlap between your role, the Black regiment and the Jewish partisans that we're finding more and more. So the story continues then. You are now getting ready for D-Day, is it?

Yeah, we're getting ready for the invasion of Normandy.

The invasion.

And what we our role was going to be was as they schedule it and it turned out to be that, we were to deactivate pathways, the mines and pathways, up for the infantry and the other guys to go up to the hills and up into the mountain, up into up over the hills and onto-- as the invasion proceeded, at the beach, there were cliffs at the beach. They had to go up, the rangers and some other people were. But our job was to get people to those cliffs.

Now, you were in those special duck boats, was that it?

No, we went across in the landing craft, the LCIs they called them. We came off the ships, this large ship, into the small-- came down the nets into small boats and came ashore. And--



But you were not naturally in the first--

I was in the third assault wave. So it was still we were--

Withering attack.

Oh, yeah.

Beach head, this is a famous scene from the longest day.

We were still under attack. The beaches were still under attack.

And you were still segregated. It was only an all Black regiment.

All Black regiment with all white officers.

All white officers.

And we went ashore. And many times, just the indignities that came from certain members of our outfit toward us, who had just a lack of respect for us and things of that sort because we were Black. And this constantly faced us throughout the whole time that we were training in England. And some of those same guys fought with the army to get approval to be transferred from our outfit when they knew we were going into combat. They didn't want to go in with us.

They didn't want to go in.

Right. But we distinguished ourselves. We run the soldiers medal and some other things for services.

Yeah.

Outfit was distinguished. But--

But ironically up until-- we're getting ahead of liberation-- you don't feel like you're fighting for-- who were you fighting for?

Only for--

For yourself.

For ourselves.

To save yourself and to go back.

So that we could go back because I had a bigger-- my war was more important at home than it was up here. And it's interesting. There's another story I could-- during the time I was in after the invasion, and we were up past Paris somewhere, I got a rest leave back to Paris. And without thinking, my Jeep driver took me to Rainbow Corners, which was the army rest center and social center for the army.

And when I went into the Rainbow Quarters, I told him I was coming to check in. And they said, I'm sorry, you can't stay in here. All Negro soldiers have to go around to the Liberty Club, which is around the corner. And I said, no, I'm not going anywhere.

And we were supposed to be disarmed. But I was carrying a weapon, which I always carried. It was a German handgun that I always carried.

Like a Luger?

It was a P38.

P38.

And so I pulled it. I said, you know, I'm staying. And the lady disappeared behind the desk. And everybody ran out of the hallways. And they called the MPs.

And I was sort of roaming around saying, you know, nobody's coming in or leaving if I can't stay here. So they had a megaphone outside. And they call and they asked, could this major come in? And I said sure. And he came in. And he said, can I have your weapon? I said, no, you can't have my weapon. He said, well, you can't stay in here. I said, I intend to stay here.

And up until now, the war has not been real for me, OK? But it's suddenly become real. And if I must fight, let me fight here. This is for something that I truly believe in. I can't understand how I can-- that when we died, and it was true when, when our fellas got killed, they couldn't be buried with everybody else. They were segregated.

If you go to that large cemetery, Sainte-Mere-Eglise, the Black soldiers were segregated. We could not be buried beside the white soldiers. And yet we fought in the same war.

And people saw this as ludicrous then too.

Right.

They were going to see the contradictions in the system.

I think that's why Harry Truman changed it because it was an absolute contradiction. But what he said to me was very significant.

Who was that?

The major. The major he said, we did not assume there was going to be a Black combat soldier returning here. And so we were not prepared for this.

Yeah.

And I said, what difference does it make? If he wears a uniform, they're serving the same army. So finally what he did was that the army-- he said, look, you can-- why don't you stay in here. I'll be back. I'll be back in 15 minutes. And he did come back. And he said, look, we've set up a hotel room for you in one of the nicest hotels in Paris. And the army is picking up the tab for it. You can go there, and you can stay without any problems. And that's what I did.

Yeah. As we're focusing now closer to Dachau, should we get to Dachau yet? Is there-- was there some other things to say before then?

Not really. Dachau was really-- now, it was an accident for me because my outfit was not at Munich. What happened was I had been put on detail to go to this outfit that was on the combat engineer battalion that was outside of Munich. And I was asked to go there, to train them into deactivating a new German mine that had been found. On the beaches, they were still using it-- it was a plastic mine that couldn't be picked up by detectors, by most detectors. So they had asked me to go and to explain to these fellows how to deactivate it. And that's what I was doing there at the time they got the order to move to take this camp.

Now, they just called it a camp?

Yeah, the camp. They called it a camp because that's what we were talking--

You thought it was what? An army camp?

We thought it was an army camp. Yeah. But we thought it was rather strange because most of the time we were supporting the infantry. And for us to be told to take a camp or to go and take a camp of any kind was rather unusual.

Once in a while, we were told to secure a bridge or something of that sort. But most of the time, we were supporting the infantry.

How many were you there? How many--

It was a battalion--

They were Black.

It was all black. It must have been about 1,500 of us altogether in the whole battalion.

And now what is the first thing, the smells or the taste or the-- not the taste--

Well, the first thing--

What hits you when you go into Dachau? What is the--

The first thing I remember, the thing that I remember--

Silence maybe.

Well, we broke through this fence, through the gate. And we were all prepared-- and we fanned out because we were all prepared to be engaged in the combat. And we had half tracks on some tank dozers and things.

And people came pouring out of these barracks. And they were so thin and emaciated. And they had sores and what have you. And we didn't know what they were.

They didn't want to touch them either.

Didn't want, no, no--

You were like--

No. And I felt badly about it after. But some people tried to hug me. And I kept pushing them off because, number one, I had made the assumption and I found out some of the other fellows had too that this was a German prison camp for people who had violated the law, like the chain gang, and they had been sent to this prison by courts and all. And that's what we assumed at first.

And so we weren't treating them as kindly at first as we might have had we known what they were. But at some point, I met a fellow who was coming who had come out who identified himself as a rabbi. And I was amazed because he spoke English so well. And we sat down on the side of on the ground by the roadway. And he explained to me what was going on.

Do you remember his name or--

No.

Never was in touch with him since?

No.

Now he spoke to you. And you don't know where he came from. But he sat next to you.

Right.

And he knew you were an American GI.

Well, he knew that I was American.

American.

And he said he'd never seen a Black soldier.

Yeah, I was curious. What did--

He said never seen people who had colored skin, as he said. But I've heard about you. And we started to talk. And he said, look-- I said, what is this place?

So he explained to me that the Germans sent Jews, most of the people, he said, was a death camp. And most of the people who came here were Jews. And they were coming here to be destroyed, or to be worked, or to work in forced labor.

And I was saying, that makes no sense. Why would they send Jews here? He says, well, because the Germans had made a decision that they wanted to eliminate Jews. And I said that still makes no sense to me.

But then I suddenly told him. I said, you know, maybe I do understand it because I know thousands, millions of Black people were rooted out of Africa and brought to serve as slaves in the South. And Southern plantation owners could kill you, destroy you, do whatever they wanted to with you. And you had no recourse under any laws.

That you were you were theirs. You were their chattel. They owned you. And they had a right to do what they wanted to do with you. And I guess I began to understand what you're talking about this is another incident.

You understood as a Black man that you were killed simply because you were a Black man. No other rational reasons.

No other reason.

And Jews were killed simply because they were Jews.

They were Jews.

This is the mind boggling message of the Holocaust.

Right.

I mean there's no-- students still cannot understand that today. Why are you killed? Because you were Jewish. Why are you lynched? Because you're black.

Because you're Black.

So you understood that. And the other GIs with you--

We finally told-- and I told the captain who was in charge of one of our platoons. And I told him, I mean the companies, and I told him, I said, look, let me explain to you what's going on. And I he says, oh, my God, he said, I did read about this somewhere. And then everybody began to understand. We began to talk about it.

Now, we understood that later on that we met some-- other American soldiers came in other entrance points at the camp. This was a big camp. And what we did after we had talked to these people and began to try to assemble them and all in some sort of orderly fashion so they could take them out of there, assuming somebody was going to come. We were told that we were not to feed them.

Not to feed them.

Somebody came and told us that somebody came in and told us don't feed them because they may not be able to eat your ration. We had field rations.

Yeah, there's some people who died because of eating chocolate or some of the food.

So we said, don't feed them. Number two is they said you can give them water if you like. But be careful. We don't know what kind of diseases they have. And he said there were going to be some people coming from headquarters to take over and take charge.

And what we ended up doing was using-- this outfit took the large tank, those large bulldozers and dug the trenches to bury the people who were stacked along the wall, the bodies that had not burned.

And so you were like with a bulldozer pushing these bodies--

We pushed them into these open trenches that we dug.

And cover them with dirt.

Right. And they took the numbers-- those people who came from headquarters took the numbers off their arms and kept a log of the numbers. And they told us that those numbers identified the person.

Now what--

But you know the thing--

--feelings, smells, what do you remember?

Well, the thing I remember, I guess that hit me most of all, was there was young children. There were women. Everybody's body had been stripped. But there were children. There were women. There were old folk. There were all kinds of people who had been killed. It was amazing to me that-- in particular little children.

But I think the thing that hit me is the most barbaric thing I saw was I noticed these little piles that were rolled up in the middle of the pathway.

Like pallet?

They were rolled up. And there were little piles.

Piles. Piles.

And what they were people's gold teeth--

Oh, my God.

--that they'd taken out of people's mouths before they burned them.

And they were going to take those gold teeth--

But they were all stacked in a pile. And I said, now that's the ultimate barbarism. How would anybody do that? So those are the things I remember most vividly. It's just amazing to see this.

It's like you're suddenly dropped in the middle of a foreign, alien--

Maybe like--

A nightmare almost. I mean--

It was.

It was a nightmare. Beyond a nightmare.

Beyond a nightmare.

It was beyond even any fantasy that you could ever think of.

Never in my whole life up until then had ever crossed my mind that a group of people who seem so intelligent and so bright could wreak this kind of havoc and lack of respect for people kind, to the point where they would do this. We had captured Germans before. And we were always amazed at how intelligent they were.

They spoke perfect English. They spoke several languages. At night when they were in the camps, they would play all sorts of classical music. And you know they had all the maturation--

They were charming.

Yes.

They were charming people.

--all the maturations of very highly trained, highly skilled, but there were a bunch of barbarians.

How do you explain that?

I don't really know. I can't answer that question. I can only say that-- and I've never been able to answer it. I do not understand how people can consider themselves civilized-- I can't answer why people would take slaves in the South and do what they did to them.

Because if one calls himself civilized, it seems to me one of the basis of civilization is a respect for humankind, respect for other people, respect for your environment, respect for the dignity of the person. And that somehow or another that dignity should never be so mangled and reduced to the place where they had reduced those people to.

Well, there's a contradiction there, isn't it? On one hand, you're looking at the dignity. And later you worked with Martin Luther King. And at the same time you see the depth that the humans can go and fall.

But you know something--

How do you manage that?

You know something--

Both of those--

--even in the South, the people who were the most vicious against us were inarticulate, poor people, by and large. The whites who did this were inarticulate poor people who felt put upon themselves. And they were using us as a scapegoat for their own anger and hatred.

But in Germany, this wasn't the case. These were very highly trained, educated people, who had all kinds of backgrounds, who were destroying people like this. There's a difference.

They couldn't even sympathize with them in that sense. This was like an automaton, a master race, a machine cutting down people.

But see, to me, it's important to know, to think-- that's why I've never been back to Germany. I have never been to Germany. I don't intend to go. I have made many, many trips to Europe. And in fact, I'm going to the Olympics this year. But I'm not going to ever put my foot on German soil again.

And why is that?

Because what I saw that they had done to these people for no reason, no justification, other than the fact that they happened to be-- this is the height of bigotry and discrimination to judge a whole race of people as being bad and then attempting to destroy that whole race of people when we all know that a race of people aren't anything that you can define. None of us are-- there is no such thing as an atypical Jew or an atypical Black.

There are a lot of us who may be alike. There are a lot of us who aren't. There are a lot of us who do things. A lot of us don't. But we are people. And we don't look any different than-- there's no such thing as an atypical white person.

But as a child of survivors myself, I find I cannot visit the sins of the parents on the children. I mean the young Germans have nothing to do with what their parents or grandparents did. I'm part of a project that now works together with Germans to try to rebuild. Could you see that might be a possibility?

I see no problem with that. I see no problem you're doing that.

But you personally could not step on German soil?

This is my little personal war that I maintain. I don't buy anything made in Germany if I know that it's made in Germany. That's my personal war because I used to-- I remember saying one day that it should take 1,000 years for these people to be allowed back into the group, into the race of mankind because of doing this.

But, look, I talk to soldiers, Black soldiers, who are coming out of Germany now, who have been there. And they talk about how the hatred toward racists who don't look like the so-called Aryan race called Germans are being treated badly even now in Germany. That there's this discrimination--

Say that again. There's discrimination against Blacks.

There's discrimination against Blacks.

Oh, OK.

And other people from third world countries who are coming into Germany.

I heard that the relations are good, that even there's intermarriage between Black GIs and German women.

Yes, sure there are. But there's also a rising force now.

Really?

That's not saying that-- there are certainly-- I would say that it appears from where I sit and what I've read and what I've seen that the majority of Germans aren't like that. But there is a movement once again that's began to get started, that begins to get angry about the fact that the Nazi--

Neo-Nazi--

Right--

--fascist movements.

Right.

I don't want to leave Dachau too soon because I want to talk about the impact of Dachau on your later life in the Civil Rights movement, et cetera. But how long were you working at Dachau as an engineer? Was it a couple more weeks there? Or--

I think we were there about two weeks if I remember, yeah.

And it was mostly just shoving-- bodies into graves-- deaths or--

We were burying people.

Burying. Burying people for two weeks.

Yeah.

My God.

Well, the process, you know, the process was not a fast one.

Yeah. In essence, this was like doing the dirty work. I mean you were given--

Yes, we were.

The Black corps was doing the dirty work. And yet in essence, in some spiritual way, they were giving you the most important one to think about it. Did you feel then that your attitude changed toward the war and toward America, that maybe now you knew what you were fighting for? Did you have that consciousness?

Yes, you're right. It got very serious. The war got serious. It was near the end of the war. But it got very serious.

Among all of you?

Yeah. Because at that point-- and I think for a while there was just an intense hatred toward Germans that we had to work with and try to overcome because once again I have always tried not to group hate.

Yeah.

But it was very difficult for me. To this day, if I sit-- I was sitting-- well, a few years ago, I was sitting on a restaurant in Paris. And I heard that German accent behind me. And I'm telling you, I just bristled. And people tried to be very friendly. And I was having trouble with it.



It's like many survivors have the same attitude.

But it's just-- it's just-- how do you deal with the fact that you lived in a world where-- you know, we kill soldiers. And soldiers killed us on both sides and that. Somehow or another you live with that. And that's what we were there for. And killing other soldiers really wasn't the same thing to us. But women and children and old people, there's something about that--

Those images stayed with you. Did you have nightmares about this years later?

It's interesting. The only thing I do is every June the 6th, I don't have to know the date, I dream about the invasion.

Every June 6th.

Every June 6th. It's really amazing. And there are times when I just don't even know the date.

You know, liberators like yourself are very similar to survivors, like my own parents. Nobody wanted to talk about it when we came back. It's like the '50s is back to normalcy, get back to a job, forget about the war. So in essence, you suffered the same fate of silence of many survivors.

Sure.

You couldn't talk about this for 40 years.

No, very close friends of mine said, you never talk to us about this. And I said, well, it's something I could never talk about, not feeling comfortable. I don't feel comfortable now talking about it. But I know that-- I'm convinced of the fact-- that I've been told by many, many people that there's a whole movement, attitude now, that many people believe it didn't happen. So since that's the case, then I have to talk.

You feel that you have to talk about it now because of this denial of the Holocaust.

Denial of the Holocaust. It occurred. And I know it occurred because I was there and saw it.

Yeah. And as we get further and further away, eye witnesses like yourself are just--

You see, maybe you know something, Jack, maybe there's something we got to keep. You know, my wife says the world-- that a lot of things won't end until there's a whole generation like me who will expire and there's a whole new group of people who will look at it entirely different.

And who know not pharaoh or something like a generation.

And there's something to be said about that. But at the same time, I think that we can't forget the Holocaust. And we can't forget that it happened. Because we do that, then we have pulled the plug of safety on all humankind.

Yeah.

Because somebody else can start tracking this same way. And if we have forgotten or not know what this ends up as, we may find it occurring again. And periodically, it occurs. I think that's very close to this in South Africa.

That's right.

It's happening in isolated cases all over the world.

You're talking about South Africa, and I hate to make this segue into Israel, you've traveled to Israel as a guest of the

Begin government. And you have been to Yad Vashem.

Oh, yes.

And Israel has had its problems. Naturally, the fact that it recognized South Africa, et cetera. But still your relationship to Israel has been pretty good. I mean, you have a warm spot I think, isn't it?

Yes, I like Israel. I have a great time in Israel. But I have a great respect for Israelis.

Now, that's another story because once during one of my trips to Israel, I met a fellow-- right after the Six Day War, I met a Black fellow who lived on an orange farm, plantation or farm in Jericho.

In Jericho.

And he was a Black fellow. And I was saying, well, this is interesting. So I finally talked to him through an interpreter. And he said that he had grown up as a slave in the Arab country. And that when the Six Day War came, the Israelis took the town and gave him the farm, his family the farm. That that's where he lived as a result--

We forget that--

As a result--

--that Blacks are slaves in certain Arab countries. And that's something that should--

Oh, I remember when I worked in Africa in 1962 I was doing some work in Liberia. And I remember the Liberian prime minister, a president rather, and several of the prime ministers and presidents of West African countries petitioned the United Nations to stop the Arabs from taking slaves out of remote villages in their countries and taking them across the Sahara into slavery and into the Middle East.

And I remember that I had been working very early in 1951 or '52, I had gone to Saudi Arabia to work on a project, an engineering project. And I saw slaves being sold on slave blocks.

Slave blocks. In what year was this?

1951 or '52.

'51.

Those years.

40 years ago.

And then I worked with the Black Hebrew Israelites because at one point they asked me to come over and see if we could work out an agreement with the Black Hebrew Israelites.

There were some tensions between the Israeli government and the Black--

So I made shuttle diplomacy from Israel, from Jerusalem to Dimona.

The Black Henry Kissinger.

To Dimona to talk to the Black Hebrew Israelite. And the fellow who was the spiritual head of the Black Hebrew Israelites and I had gone to school together in high school.

Really?

And so we had a great time. But he told me that the Black Hebrew Israelites could not stand the Arabs because the Arabs were so discriminatory toward them. And he said they didn't have anything at all to do with them. And they really liked the Israelis. They were angry with the Israeli government for not allowing them to come under the right of return. But they were not angry-- they were not angry, as he said, the average Israeli, I really like.

So why does Israel have such a bad press? Why is Israel losing the propaganda war and the Arabs come across as--

I think that's Israel's own fault.

Yeah.

I think there are so many conflicts going on inside of Israel about various groups of people and where they stand and who controls, what group of Jewish folk or what background do they come from, who act as the controlling force in Israel. There are a whole lot of things that are going on that keeps Israel from interpreting their role and the way which I think is politically smart.

It's distressing. And that's a whole other topic.

Israelis could have a much closer relation-- and the Israelis have done some interesting things. Nigerians tell me that it's the only country in the world that they really trust working with. Their cement, their materials come from Israel.

When I was in Israel in '62, I remember from Ghana and from Liberia there were hundreds of African students studying there with great respect for Israel. And that somehow has changed.

Well, it hasn't-- I don't know whether they're doing that still or not. I know that there were many there. Technion had many people there who were Black--

The great university.

And I met-- when I was in Russia, I met a Black fellow flying on a plane an African fellow flying on a plane from what is now Saint Petersburg to Moscow. And he told us that in Russia when they went to school, that it was absolutely prohibited for them to associate with any female Russian.

Yeah.

And they were not allowed to go without a special pass, they were not allowed to go outside of the perimeter of about 20 miles of where they were going to school. And he said, you get special permission, but you'd get sent home immediately if you would if you found with a Russian woman.

Yeah. Before getting into more about Israel's relationship to the Holocaust, et cetera, what about the Falashas, the Black Jews of Ethiopia? Did you have any contact?

I had very little contact with them. When I was there, they hadn't had-- the last time I was there was at the International Conference on Soviet Jewry. It was about four or five years ago.

You were active in that too?

I was active-- and in fact--

I didn't know that.

I had been chosen to go along with Father Drinan to the Olympics in Moscow. We were supposed to--

That was canceled later.

Yes. But we were supposed to be there to observe and to be sure that the Israeli athletes were treated right by the Russians.

We knew what happened in Munich.

Right. And so we were going to-- we were going there to do that job.

Interesting.

And we had our tickets. We were all ready to go. And they canceled the Olympics. So I have had a long relationship--

Yeah. How do you think Israel handles the Holocaust-- or Israelis handle it different from American Jews? Or just your-- or Yad Vashem-- your feelings about that if you have any.

I think that Yad Vashem is an example of Israel saying we will never forget. We will keep reminding ourselves that the world is not pure.

[NON-ENGLISH], we will not forgive, [NON-ENGLISH]. How do you believe that? Not to forgive as well as not to-- do you like that?

What can I say? I don't think I have forgiven. So I can't say. I think that's one of my problems.

I have, but it could be because I'm a child of survivors. I have forgiven in the second generation. I've forgiven maybe. I don't have the hatred of the Nazis that my father and mother had. I don't know.

I don't think I hate.

No?

I just don't want to have anything to do. That's a different statement. I wouldn't do anything to harm a German citizen or anybody else for that matter. But I remember when I was walking around in front of-- we were walking around from the German embassy in Copley Square about the extension of the limitation on war criminals.

That was in the mid '70s.

Right. And I was out there walking around with a whole group of people. And the Israeli ambassador-- I mean the Israeli consul general came down because he was so amazed to see this Black person on the line. What were you doing here? So he asked me to come upstairs and talk to him.

The thing he did to me that made me totally uncomfortable. When we got upstairs, he closed the door of the embassy. We were sitting in the chair. He says, now, you're on German soil. And at that moment, I was the most uncomfortable soul.

And he didn't know.

He didn't know.

And you're not getting out either because we're locking the doors. That is frightening.

So we talked. I told him why I was down there. He says, oh, my goodness. He says, we have totally ignored Black guys like you who might have been the liberators. We really must begin to have some kind of link with the Black community.

And the consul general from Germany here in Boston is a nice man.

Oh, yeah.

I think he would want to do that.

He invited me down to-- remember when the destroyers were turned over? There was a group of destroyers that were turned over to the German government by somebody here. And they had a series of parties on board the destroyers.

And the ships.

And they invited us to me to come to that. I didn't go to that. But they did an awful lot. And they used to send me letters, invitations. They didn't offer-- they did an awful lot. And I give them to their credit to try to somehow approach me in a way that would cause me to feel differently toward them. As I told them, I don't have any great hatred toward Germans. I just don't want to be involved.

So shift to your relationship to Martin Luther King and Black-Jewish relations and the impact you mentioned in your book in *Broken Alliance* by Jonathan Kaufman. You have a section there about how the Holocaust affected you and how you transferred that to Martin Luther King.

As I said, once I made the connection, I think I made the first connection when I was talking to the rabbi in Dachau.

Yeah.

And then when-- I had always been involved. I came back, I was still involved. I led the efforts to-- when I came back, I led the effort to desegregate-- I went back to Purdue, led the effort to desegregate the dormitories.

Would like something to drink?

No thank you. And I led the effort to desegregate the movies in Lafayette.

So you came right back.

So I came right back and went back to work.

What ship did you come back on? The reason I'm asking is-- the reason for this--

I came back out of the Pacific. I went to the-- I went to the Pacific because I was a part of that large armada that was going in the invasion of Japan. And our job was to pull the mines on the beaches in Japan. And the war ended. And so then they shipped us into the Philippines to wait, wait for transport back to the States.

You came into San Francisco.

So I came in to San Francisco on an APA.

So I thought we came over to America in the same boat. Our boat was the *Marine Peach*. That came out of Bremerhaven in 1946, '45, '46, and came to New York. So there's a connection between the survivors and GIs even coming over together, a lot of them. It's another story.

But you see, I guess in all fairness, I grew up in Indiana. And the only Jewish person-- I'm going to say this, I grew up in a neighborhood that was all Black. The police were Black. The firemen were Black. Everybody was Black. Except there was one person in that community that was white.

Well, there were two families that were white who stayed there. And I knew the-- young man and I were good friends of that family. It was an old American outfit. But the person who owned the little grocery store up at the corner, fella named Gabriel Siegel, who really-- during the Depression we survived because he was there.

During the Depression.

During the Depression, we used to go up, and he would tell us, you know-- and then he would let me work in-- and I would work in the afternoons when I got old enough and worked on the weekends pulling the feathers off of chickens, you know, and things of that sort. But as a kid it was--

To make them kosher.

But it was a great, you know-- it was good for me. And it's good for my family. And actually, most of us survived because of that. I don't know what we would have done--

It was a very warm and good relationship between Blacks and Jews for so long.

I only knew three groups of people, white folks, black folks, and Jews. And he was my example of Jewish people. When I went to college and my mother was struggling to see if she could get my tuition together and I was struggling, Mr. Siegel paid for a whole semester of mine.

That's fantastic.

And no--

When I came to America as a young boy, we lived in a neighborhood that was 60% Black, 40% Jewish, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Nearly all of the Jews were immigrants. And I have my favorite images of my Black friends running around-- in fact, when I grew up, they were nearly all Black, running the streets together. Mr. Cox who owned the barbecue stand and the custard stand. And of course, being Orthodox, my father and mother would not let me eat the two together.

Mm, hmm. Oh, yes.

But I still remember, you know, the images of a little boy on this big Black-- his big black hands, white teeth, saying, Jackie, have some custom, you know. And feeding me as a young boy. And it's that kind of image that-- it's almost like it's a different world today. I mean it seems how this intimacy has changed into anger and to other and mistrust. I don't know. It's--

I think you have to look at something else. We are entering a period of having a class war in this country.

Yeah. That's right.

The last-- I would say from Nixon now through Reagan through Bush, what they've done is forced the middle class to shrink in numbers, throwing more and more people into the poor and near poor. And what is happening is there's a conflict going on. And we're finally getting to a place like almost like the French Revolution was before it started when we had poor people and wealthy folk, or middle class folk--

And that includes Blacks, within Blacks too, a Black underclass, and a Black--

Yes, you have all of us there.

Yeah.

And that's beginning to be the separating factor. That's beginning to be the problem. So Jews fit into that middle, upper middle class group by and large, as Black folks see it. Obviously, there are poor Jews. But when you look at people who

seem to have something that they have--

Overall.

--overall, they look there, then you're a part of the enemy. And everybody else who's up there is a part of the enemy.

Well, James Baldwin says it that out of the four white people he grew up with in Harlem, three were Jewish, the social worker, the teacher, and the storekeeper. And the fourth one was the policeman, who was not Jewish.

Was not Jewish.

These were the four whites that he ran into. And sadly, that has--

But I think that we've got to think-- well, I guess--

You and Martin Luther King tried to-- that was a time when I've been seeing movies about this time of the '60s and '50s. And we tried to bring Blacks and whites together, Jews and Blacks together. I mean, did you have an influence on Martin Luther King in that way?

I don't know whether I had an influence or not. We certainly talked an awful lot about our ideals and our ideas. And I certainly shared with him my experiences from army and all, and from college and things of this sort. He shared with me my sense about nonviolence and talked about how I had to have the kind of discipline that would allow me to be a part of this movement, and that he demanded that of everybody who was in the movement, that they had to have the discipline of nonviolence.

Now how did you have that as opposed to--

It took me a while to get there--

Because you didn't have the nonviolent.

It took me a while to get there. But I finally did because I finally somehow or another went through this catharsis. I came out OK. But, you see, the same people that interrelated during the Civil Rights movement are still interrelated.

That's right. You and I in some ways.

Yeah, well, we are.

That's right.

And it's happening now because there is a interrelationship between white and Black people in this country, and a very positive one. There's an interrelationship between Jewish people and Black people, very positive ones.

That's right.

What's going on is is that trying to bridge that gap between the people who are in most need or who somehow or another don't see the system as being there's anything positive for themselves, families who have just gotten to the point where they feel like there's nothing going on in this nation that makes my life any better, and I don't have a stake in it, OK? And if he doesn't have a stake in it, then we become the people who are the enemies.

That's right.

And it's just a fact. And that's why I just wrote a paper saying we've got to be sure that the majority of Americans have a stake in the system.

Yeah.

And you can argue it any way, your bigotry, your racism, whatever else you want to bring to the table. But you better be thinking about doing something to give everybody a stake in the system. Because if they have a stake, then they have something to lose.

That's right.

If you have no stake, you have nothing to lose.

And that's causing the riots.

There you are. And when there are more have nots than there are haves, or there's a large enough group of them, they then will attempt to take the system. As a guy told me in the riots in Chicago, why should I fight to make you feel good? Why should I do without so that you will feel like you're doing well? And support you and being good and not destroy what you've got? He said, it just makes no sense because I have the same-- I should have the same right to have that you have. Now, you can argue about, well, I work for mine, so what? After you make the speech, there's a reality.

That's right. To just conclude and to tie it together, if we can, that young GI at Dachau, you know, and the fairly successful businessman and civic leader, how do you bring those strands together in a concluding statement and your impact of that Dachau experience in your life today?

There's a thread that permeates, that permeated through my life as a child, mostly because my mother and father. My father was a Seminole Indian. And my mother was half Indian and half Black. We grew up in intense discrimination in our own neighborhood because of our differences from other people. When you're different, you get discriminated against. And so there we were.

But we learned very early that there was no reason for that. And that my mother was fighting, all of us constantly were trained to fight against bigotry. That training is what carried me to this point. And I'm still fighting against bigotry. So that thread is still here, Jack, the idea that all people ought to be able to live in a world and not be oppressed by anybody else. That your right as an individual should be able to live in safety and feeling comfortable without me doing something to subtract that from you, and vice versa. Yet we all have a responsibility to the least common denominator of the person who is the worst off to try to do something about their lifestyle to bring it to a point where people can feel good about that.

Yeah. Thank you.

My pleasure.

Yeah. Thank you very much. And I hope the students and teachers out there listening, you know, will understand the message. Thank you very much, Paul.

My pleasure.

Phew. That was good.