

So don't mumble because we talking now.

Yeah. Tape's rolling. We need about 10 seconds [INAUDIBLE].

She said mumble.

OK, anytime, Sandra.

OK. We are continuing with the interview of John Steiner. Primarily from the point of view of your work. I'm Sandra Bendayan. We're here with your colleague, Carol Hurwitz. And today is the 4th of February, 1994. And this then, again, continues from the San Francisco Oral History Project with John Grant as our producer.

So today, let's continue with the discussion of all the things that you learned in your research with the SS. And begin by discussing the notion of an SS person as a victim.

Yes, well, that is something which I've developed. And I guess in literature, I think I'm probably the only one who's labeled them as also victims. Because, particularly when we think in terms of them as victimizers, it's very difficult to imagine that they themselves were victims.

But the interesting thing is that people who were victimized usually also have been victims. And that is simply because they've been socialized and treated in a way which caused them to behave the way they did.

And one of the things which is important for us to remember is that we all genetically are born with some sort of an IQ, intelligence, which varies from individual to individual. But we know what is just about normative. And that's one thing.

But very frequently, we are not aware of the fact that there is also such a thing as more intelligence and social intelligence. And particularly in these two areas, the SS are lacking because, in the earlier socialization process, these things have not developed to that extent.

Also because perhaps they were originating from a background which was not that fully cultured-- which was deprived very frequently, socially and otherwise, financially. And that is a very important aspect-- the fact that they came from low backgrounds also caused them to assume power roles which were in relationship to what they used to --.

The roles they used to play before were low in power-- as a matter of fact, powerless individuals in terms of their background.

Now, they assumed roles which had a tremendous degree of power, by virtue of the fact that they could decide between life and death of those people who were under their supervision. And that is being forgotten.

The second thing is also, because of their background, they are more susceptible to ideological propaganda-- which, of course, again, relates very directly to their feeling of, on one hand, inferiority. And then when Hitler came into power and they said, hey, you are superior, not inferior. So they jumped on the bandwagon. Because people who feel inferior, of course, will be very tempted to assume roles, even if they are a myth-- to feel superior and say, hey, I'm superior. I'm not inferior at all.

So that does something to the people's ego. And I think that had very much to do with the fact-- apart from the fact that they indeed were more susceptible to this type of National Socialist ideology, which indeed divided humankind in two parts-- the superior and the inferior. And they said, hey, I'm superior. I didn't know that. Thank you very much, Adolf Hitler, for making me feel superior.

Was there any aspect of victimization of them as they were SS-- victimization by their own hierarchy?

Well, not really, because I don't have any evidence for that, except that they had to adhere very much to the rules. And

years ago, I dug up a secret report on expulsions from the SS. And there are several reasons there for which they were expelled, including reasons where they associated with Jews, or had some relationship with Jews. Then because the lack of discipline, because of fraud, theft, and other reasons-- and also quite a few who committed suicide.

So they were not expelled. They expelled themselves, so to speak, from life. And so, there are a number of reasons why they are expelled. And the numbers were quite stunning, actually.

We had talked before about euphemistic language so much being used by Hitler. I was wondering if the SS was subject to that, too.

Well the SS was directed to use euphemistic language because direct language was not desirable. Because they had to write reports.

So very directly, I came across documents in which the reports about mass destruction were very blunt. And that was sent to Hitler's headquarters-- that is, to his chancellery.

And they then were directed by Bormann-- his chief Secretary, right-hand man-- to use different language. And that was directed to Himmler.

And Himmler then directed them to use different language, especially directed this letter to the SS statistician, who gave statistics about the mass destruction and was very blunt in the language. And then they told him that this type of language was not to be used in these reports and needed to be corrected.

And that's what they've done. So that went down to the SS directly. Of course, in camps, it was not that necessary, only in terms of misleading the victims, the inmates.

And so they said, well, showers and all this and that, because obviously, if they would have said, well, you are going to be gassed, there would have been a greater degree of resistance, except the resistance-- there were some cases of resistance, but not really very serious in terms of the SS to have to deal with them.

Because you talk about individuals who were not armed. You talk about individuals who had no support system and really couldn't defend themselves, other than with their own body-- and that was not very strong to begin with.

So the language, not only the euphemistic language used, was for the broader population so that the German people, as such, would not be too alarmed.

Because it was correctly assumed that, if the Germans had known specific details about all these atrocities, they may have responded very well. That's a good possibility.

So that was to be prevented. And then, of course, as far as the victims themselves concerned, they didn't want them to know that they were going to die, particularly in this way, or to die period.

So they didn't tell them, you're going to be gassed or something else, but used euphemistic, misleading language.

Was there any tendency say the SS who were assigned to the camps, that they would then know too much and have to remain [INAUDIBLE]?

You see, you had a very clever sort of way they structured the camps. You had the SS people, who were usually SS who were in the combat type of SS. It was mixed.

I don't want to overgeneralize, but usually these were people who only were guarding the inmates outside of the camps. They themselves were not permitted even to enter the camp-- a very important point.

And then you had personnel, which was particularly a specific type of personnel-- the Gestapo, certainly, but primarily

the security service, and they had this sort of diamond shape like SD on the left sleeve, just close to the arm-- and their special groups of people whose task it was to supervise mass destruction and what have you.

And then you had the death skull outfits. And they also had a function in the camps. But primarily, the SD, the death skull and then people who were part of the secret state police.

Why were the SS primarily outside of the camp rather than inside?

Well, you had two different groups. So, then, it's not that they were not. But the people who actually guarded the camps, they guarded them from outside the camps.

Even if you talk about the watchtowers-- which were specific points where you had towers which the controlled the movements inside the camp-- and they also were virtually outside.

So they couldn't get inside the camps themselves. They were outside.

Outside?

Yeah.

They stayed in the towers?

Yeah.

Going back to the notion of the victim and perpetrator relationship, what about the victims as perpetrators-- say, as in the case of kapos or people in a different level of power? [INAUDIBLE].

So you're really talking about the inmate functionaries.

At this point, yes, the notion of the victim/perpetrator combination.

Well, that, of course, is to be looked at from a different perspective. Because once you are an inmate, your major effort will be concentrated in survival of the camps. And the means available to survive were very limited.

So if then the SS comes and said, OK, you will be an inmate functionary and be working under my supervision, on my behalf, towards my interests, then it's a tremendous temptation.

Because these people were then rewarded-- with more food, places to live which were a bit different, more comfortable, and all that-- and also felt that, in that particular position, they would have a much better chance to survive, obviously.

And so, they were tempted-- the temptation was great-- to really assume these sort of things and these sort of positions assigned to them by the SS, roles assigned to them by the SS.

And that is something which, psychologically, is very different than if you volunteered to join the SS. So they were under a different type of pressure. And the temptation was greater because of survival and drive of self-preservation.

So we have to see that from that point of view. Now, of course, were also people who assumed certain roles which may have had a specific function. But because of their understanding of the situation, they assumed that function, but did all the things they could in order to aid the inmates.

However, these people were in the minority because it was at their risk. And it was not easy to do, because they were expected to do the dirty work on behalf or, or in the interest of, the SS. And to really turn that into something constructive was more difficult.

I've had friends who did that. And because of them, they may have, on several occasions, saved my life.

But most of the people who assumed these roles became savages-- brutal people who killed their fellow inmates. And I, fortunately, never came into the position where I would have either thought about assuming this. Because, to me, it was unacceptable.

I hope you know I've never been tempted in this regard. That is very important for me, because my survival today is of a nature where I don't have to have a bad conscience. Many other people who survived, survived simply because they assumed these type of roles. And they have to live with that.

And I don't have that problem-- fortunately. Because, if anything else, I've aided people. And I've helped people whenever I could. And even in one case, I helped a person to escape-- successfully escape. And that is a very important thing that happened. I think I talked about it already.

So my only problem is that, under extreme stress situations, I defended my life at the expense of other people. And that was particularly in the open boxcar situation. And that is a problem which is still with me.

Because I had a choice, an extreme choice which we have, is either die or cause the death of other people in order to live. And that was the only choice we had, because we knew that, if we defended ourselves, it was going to be at the expense of someone else who wanted to take our place.

And that is a problem, which I still have to come to terms with because -- yes, the choice I've had.

And there's only one person I've met, and had very direct contact with, whom I would come close to a saint, who made a conscious decision to die-- although he didn't have to, because he was able-bodied-- and decided that he'd rather die than cause the death of someone else.

And this person, of course, is something very unusual. And he's the only one I've encountered in this type of situation.

But, as you say, that situation is quite different than choosing to be a kapo.

That's right. Well, I mean, you don't choose to be a kapo. You see, you don't choose to be a kapo, because that role was assigned. I don't say, I'm going to be a kapo. I can't do that. I can work towards that, but you were appointed directly by the SS, or by some other man who was a high inmate functionary.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

That's right. You could volunteer. You'd said, I'm ready to do that, and this and that.

So, for example, I volunteered to be in a mine to deal with unexploded bombs. So I chose to do that until the camp senior told me, it's madness, don't do it. I don't want you to do it because you can't survive. And that way, you're not going to, and you may get more food.

But the risks that you will be blown up is much greater than your survival. And I listened to him and he took the pain to tell me. And I listened to him and said, I want you to do it. I don't want to continue to do it. And so I discontinued.

And then another thing is an SS man selected me for still different reasons. I don't know why. He just liked my face or whatever and said, I want you to work in the kitchen and peel potatoes or whatever, or put in turnips, or clean up turnips.

And against the majority of people who were functionary inmates and said, look, he is all yellow. He's sick. He said, I still want him to be there. And I still don't understand why he wanted even select me, because I really was sick. I had jaundice and I looked terrible. I remember that just like anyone, apart from all the other emaciated sort of appearance.

And the man insisted. And it was an SS man. And without him, I never would have had a chance. I didn't stay very long because I was just beginning to be really sick. And I had to go into the sick barrack in order to be dealt with because I couldn't function.

So I lost that. I was there only a few days. And I lost that because I had to be put there. So that was a direct appointment by an SS, which I never would have otherwise been able to get.

This seems to go back to that notion of the discretionary aspect.

That's right.

that the SS could have.

I'm glad you remember that, because we all play roles. And these roles have a great deal of leeway. That's what I call the role margin. And this role margin actually will show us what sort of morality we have. Because that's our personal decision, which is actually where we have the freedom to act in a way within this role margin, which makes all the difference.

So that, to me, is a very important concept, which has not been-- as I said before-- not developed in literature. And that's one thing which I'm working on and hope to have a lecture, which will include that back at Stanford. Because it has not been described in literature. And that's what I'm interested to do new things rather than rehash old stuff.

Was this true, I presume among the kapos and other inmate functionaries-- to have a discretionary [INAUDIBLE]?

Oh, yeah. Kapos, certainly, yeah. Because kapos really could help you. And they did-- some-- to survive and aid inmates in their struggle to survive, or they could kill them point blank because nothing would happen to them if they killed people-- just simply outright.

And not only that, but the SS certainly may have embraced that and say good man.

Do you think that the inmate functionaries were identified with the SS at that point-- those who behaved in that fashion?

You mean by other fellow inmates?

What I mean is, whether the kapo, in some instances, might identify with the role of the SS.

Well, I wrote about that. Because that is, again, a very important point which caused a great deal of misunderstanding. I don't think even the kapos, the most cruel kapos, identified with the goals of the SS-- namely, destruction and tyranny and cruelty and all that.

Some were certainly sadistic. And we are particularly talking about those people who were in these sadistic inmate functionary positions who were professional criminals.

And so, they were the ones who were most frequently selected by the SS because they knew that their morality, their ethics, and their consideration for fellow human beings, were very low-- and therefore they were a very useful tool in the hands of the SS to do their dirty work. And that's why they were selected most frequently. There is no question about that.

But some other people who assumed these roles-- or were assigned these roles, which is more accurate-- did not necessarily identify with the goals of the SS or National Socialism to destroy people.

But they certainly identified with power. They identified with power because that was a means to survive. And the more power you had as an inmate, the better chances you had to survive. And with this, they identified. They identified with the power of the SS, no question-- but not necessarily as to how the power was used.

And that is something which needs to be remembered. And there was some person-- I forget his name now-- who came out with the notion of identification with the aggressor.

And that is something which I oppose. Because it's a very misleading, and just downright wrong, way to look at it, which has caused, I think, quite a bit of damage in terms of understanding interaction and the group dynamics in concentration and destruction camps.

And I think it's done a great deal of disservice, because most of these people who write about these things are not people who actually experienced and know the situation as it existed in concentration and destruction camps.

And they are simply academicians who are theoreticians and think they are very clever. And some are, except it can lead to a great deal of misunderstanding.

Maybe this is a good place if you were to discuss the authoritarian personality. And I believe it's a scale called the F scale that

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Well, in my research-- and that's the only research which has been done on that level with the SS, or with the SS period, because not many people have done research with them-- where I had two groups of people who volunteered.

And some of them actually were assigned to fill in questionnaires. And these two groups were former members of the SS of all kinds-- all different parts of the SS-- and former members of the German armed forces. And there was a significant difference between these. It was significant enough.

So the conclusion of that study is that, indeed, the SS tended to be higher on the F scale-- the fascist scale-- than quote unquote "normal" members of the armed forces who were not members of the SS.

So there is no question that authoritarianism and rigidity dogmatism-- which is all part of that phenomenon-- is directly related to their conduct and the susceptibility of certain types of people to join organizations of this nature.

And that is the conclusion of my research.

What about the post-war playing out of this authoritarian personality?

Well, you see, the post-war roles former members of the SS assumed was limited by virtue of the fact that the people under discussion were professional SS people. That was their job. And it was not just temporary. It was pretty much permanent. It was to be permanent.

And so, because of their limited skills to assume jobs after the war-- which were available to them because, obviously, all the other things had dried up, with the exception of people who became part of the SS by virtue of the fact that they were professional police people-- many of these people were responsible for atrocities-- and that is something which has been documented beyond a shadow of a doubt-- then went back to normal police work, quote unquote "normal" police work in a to-be democracy--that is, post-war Germany.

And it did not come to any particular notice of the people, although we don't know how tough they were in their job as police-- high police officials.

So that was one way these people went back to continue their police work under different political economic situation.

But they were able to curb that behavior? [INAUDIBLE].

That's right. Well, you see, because they were able to somehow get away with it so that they only rarely were really

caught and brought before courts. Some did, but most of them did not.

And they just went back to be policemen-- not all, but many of them who certainly were guilty of a lot of atrocities were simply not brought before the court. In other words, people who were tainted with mischief.

And they were able to restrain their brutal tactics

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Well, the question is obviously the roles which they had to play were more limited. They couldn't go around killing people. They couldn't do it because there were different conditions and laws. And they couldn't do it without breaking the law. And that would have not been in their interest.

It doesn't mean that they could have not been brought to the courts because they may have been brought [? forward ?] whenever they had a chance to be and get away with that.

But it's not in a democracy. In terms of your function as a police person, it's more limited-- although what I've seen here in San Francisco and all that while driving with the police was just unbelievable, which was virtually the same thing, which happened in Gestapo. I've seen things which could have happened under Nazi Germany here in San Francisco not that many years ago.

So it just depends.

Then you had another group of people who may have had different functions-- all sorts of different functions, also in concentration camps, but primarily also in -- and they were in the majority who were combat SS.

And these people, then, usually-- and that's what I found, and that more or less closes the circle of those people, what sort of roles they played. They played roles in sales, in business and all that-- went into business, into sales, and all that highly aggressive sort of roles in business, and in which they were very successful, and more successful than their counterpart former members of the armed forces.

So for all practical purposes, those people-- who were not brought before the court for whatever they had done during the Nazi time-- were, by and large, more successful in adjusting to normal conditions after World War II and become existentially more secure than comparable age groups who were members of the German armed forces.

And that was an interesting sort of thing. So we have to see, look at the authoritarian personality on the one hand, tends towards certain aggressive roles, and also have to be mindful of the fact that, indeed, they lacked skills and not that many functions with that limited skills were available to them after the war.

And that needs to be remembered.

And also, some of the people actually-- and that's what I found also, I shouldn't forget that-- some of them went into the then-new German forces of the Federal Republic of Germany. And if they had up to Major, they could have a rank up to Major-- that is to say, in the SS-- to be then accepted by the armed forces.

And I know quite a few people I've interviewed who then went there, and were accepted, and continued to be officers of some sort-- usually officers, because the other ones who were disbanded and go back. Usually, those people had the rank of an officer.

OK. Well, let's focus then on this whole post-war period and the transition from being the SS officer to, as you say, the business person, the family person, the community person. Are you saying that, for the most part, whatever violence they were acting out during the SS period, they could abandon that and resume

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I think that that's a very important and excellent question, because that's one reason why I welcomed whenever they invited me to stay with them in their homes as a guest. And I took advantage of that whenever I could.

And some people-- most unexpected people-- were highly antisemitic and just absolutely very vocal about it who befriended me and always offered, when I came they just offered if you'd like to stay overnight? Because we're going to talk and go to bed late and all that.

And so, they were very interested for me to stay with them and were very hospitable. That's one thing which needs to be stressed.

And that came to me as a tremendous surprise that you have these sort of contradictions-- that, on one hand, you can, in certain situations, be exceedingly brutal. And in other situations, you can be very disarming or stable and really caring. And they're really caring.

Some of the hospitality which I've experienced staying with these SS people was just totally disarming. I'm still surprised. I still have to come to terms with that.

And so, you've got these two extremes. And I'm reminded of Philip Zimbardo's notion that the situation, or my notion of the sleeper, really stimulates certain things which were dormant-- personality characteristics which, under certain circumstances, then come forth, will become visible which heretofore were not.

And that, to me, is exceedingly interesting, exceedingly interesting phenomenon-- again, which is new, which has not been really discussed ever since Philip Zimbardo, and then I started discussing. They simply don't exist in literature.

And that's why both of us are being increasingly cited in that, because someone looks at it from a different, totally new perspective.

So there was no findings or notion that the situation drew this aspect out, but then it became habitual with the person to where they didn't let it go?

Well, you see, the question is, didn't they let it go because it was let's say -- Why did they like it, or why did they enjoy it? Why did it satisfy their needs? Let's put it that way. Well, sure.

Because if I do certain things and I'll be rewarded for things which, heretofore, were morally unacceptable, and they are now not only acceptable, but even desirable, and I'm going to be rewarded for them in a way which I've never been rewarded before for anything else, then I will start enjoying these things-- even if they are very contradictory and totally unethical.

But, you see, what is more important, the rewards which I get or the unacceptable ethics?

And the sad fact is that, for very many people-- probably for most-- the reward is more important than how they get to be rewarded. And that's the sad fact. And I think most of us also somehow there are times when we see, well, it is profitable. We will do things which, otherwise, if there would be no profit in it, we would condemn as unethical.

Did you find that there were any percentage of the SS members post-war who were depressed or otherwise felt negative about their behavior?

Oh, yes. But, you see, this needed to be dealt with.

And as I said before in one of the other previous interviews, I had no idea what I would get into when I started my interviews. because I said it's going to be for the questionnaire. It's going to serve a certain purpose-- find out what they did, roles and positions and conduct. and how they view the --



But I didn't reckon with the fact that, now, I would stimulate some sort of coming to terms, so that I would start something which they had repressed or were not prepared to come to terms with without my triggering it.

And so, then, kind of a chain reaction started to these interviews so that they actually did not break off the relationship with me after the interview, but they just continued to relate to me, and ask me back, and keep contact, and what have you.

And we talked about people who were SS gentlemen, as I call them. On one hand, some of them were gentlemen-- and they didn't do anything against the Geneva Convention-- up to those people who were known as hangmen of Buchenwald, and people who were mass killers.

And so that, to me, was very interesting that it started a process, a coming to terms. And then they needed me as a sounding board, as someone to reflect with.

And the culmination in public was, indeed, that these three people with whom I had interviews with the radio and all that, with whom -- denounced and said, if we had known, we regret. Yes. And if we had known what it would come to, what we would get into, we would have preferred not to be members of the SS.

And that's a very important recognition. And some other people also told me about other people who said, hey, I have no regrets whatsoever. And these were usually people who had tremendous lives by virtue of the fact [? that ?] very, very powerful people who were rewarded for that position.

And one of them-- the best example-- was Karl Wolff, who was Himmler's right-hand man. And shortly before he actually became very ill and died, he, in one the last telephone interviews, actually, said-- and that's part of a broadcast, as a matter of fact-- I have no regrets and I'm proud of him being a member of the SS.

Why? because the man had such unbelievable and the more I do research, the more I see old pictures. The pictures, that is photographs just came across two days ago where I see Himmler visiting Ravensbrück, the women's camp. And he was with Wolff. And then Wolff tells me, and said, hey, I didn't know anything.

I mean and he really believed that he didn't. He totally repressed .

On the subject of Wolff, there was a written paper that [INAUDIBLE] he sent you in which makes a reference to Himmler as whimsical. What does that mean, if you have do you have any recollection?

I don't know what you're referring to exactly at the moment.

OK. Well, never mind. It was this reference to Himmler as a whimsical person. And it struck me very strange when I read that.

Whimsically, maybe in terms of the Final Solution. And that is something which you have to be very careful to sort out what is truth, and what is fable, and what is meant.

And in this case, he said-- and that might be an important thing to mention in connection with your question-- is that, when Hitler gave Himmler the order to go into the Final Solution, Wolff told me-- and it's recorded also on tape-- that he came into his office when he was his kind of deputy, and his right hand man, and Himmler was in deep depression.

And so, when Wolff saw him and said, are you ill, Reichsführer? Is something wrong with you?

And he said, no. And then he started tell him that he got an order from Himmler, which is terrible, and which he finds very hard to do. But because he is who he is, he has to act upon that order.

And that was precisely when he received the order from Hitler directly to enact a final solution. And so, he told me that.

And so, that is something that, because he asserts, along with, perhaps, some other people too, but I'm particularly now drawing from Wolff's information. And that is something which I've seen also in connection with other people who are members of the SS-- that, on their own, they never would have done that.

In other words, they would have not initiated it. But they accepted it and went ahead with that order-- but not because they liked it. And that's what "whimsical" is, that he was not into it.

Himmler by himself, if there had been no Hitler, and he would have been a different position, and there would have been a different situation, he never would have initiated mass murder, mass destruction.

That was perhaps something which he related.

Perhaps. In the question of the post-war reactions, did you find ever people having symptoms of what now we call post-traumatic stress? But I presume those kinds of symptoms can occur after any kind of trauma, where their bodies would have symptoms, whether it was nightmares or a certain level of fearfulness.

You know, the interesting thing is that I've come across this very much-- certainly not in the discussions which I've had with the former SS people-- and my feeling is that they didn't have that, which is not to say that they have not been traumatized in combat or in some other things.

I have caused-- and that's perhaps something which I should say-- when I interviewed Auschwitz perpetrators. I had people that I came back and I saw them on many occasions. And, again, all these sort of things are taped. And it's important that I have that for posterity.

And when I came back the second time, also, said they, kind of in a rather accusing sort of way-- said, because of you, I couldn't sleep. I had nightmares.

So what happened is that I retrieved something which was repressed. And then, because of the way I questioned them, and that was non-threatening. And I used usually my way of questioning was the sort of Rogerian clients and that dialogue.

And so, I never threaten and say, God you swine, or you bastard and all how come?

So I did it very differently, in a non-threatening way. But I stimulated people so that I didn't corner them, but that they actually accepted the ball which I threw to them. And then they started to play with it.

And that opened up things which, heretofore, were repressed, or they were not prepared to face. And so, yes. That happened on several occasions. And then they, of course, had a continued need to talk to me about that now.

And that is something, in the case of Wolff-- and his lady friend told me-- that when he was in the process of dying of cancer-- and that may have been, or may not have been, connected directly with his dying and illness-- he, at night, shouted and was in anguish.

The right word for it would be screaming in anguish-- something like that. And [INAUDIBLE] why are you screaming?

The devil. I see the devil. The devil is after me.

So I think there was a confrontation at that particular point in his life, while dying, that he no longer could repress, no escape, sweep under the carpet, and was faced with some of the horrid things which he has witnessed now.

I don't know whether you went with us when we saw the documentary on Litzmannstadt-- the ghetto Litzmannstadt. I don't know whether you went. We went to see the movie. And Lodz.

I saw it, but not with you.

And there, also, Himmler with Wolff. Absolutely no question. And he never talked about that.

He said that in certain things. There were mass shootings. And he saw the brain splattered on Himmler, and he had to catch him because he was in the process of fainting.

And so, that he said. That] he said, but some of the things all these various concentration -- of which he visited that he never talked about. Only when I pressed, he said, oh, I may have been there, I may have gone there, or something.

Was this relatively common, relatively uncommon among the SS that they would deny large portions of their war time?

Well, of course. Because I think it's a general trait. We want to portray the best sides. And very few of us will admit our worst sides, or the shadow, or whatever. And we are not keen in propagating our weaknesses.

Well, most of us don't have to repress mass murder.

But still, I really think that this is all relative, isn't it? Obviously, in extreme situations, we will be capable of more extreme things than we are under normal conditions. And so that's all relative. We do bad things. Just think in terms of university, what happens-- bad things, the way we are being treated-- that, for that particular situation, is very interesting.

Because I say, hey, in extreme situations, these people would be killers. They would be capable of killing. Because that's a very important thing.

And that's exactly what I've discussed with Erich Fromm, particularly when the situation, and he said, well, you know, Dr. Steiner, I'll give you an example by Zimbardo's-- the techniques he applied to measure the students in that particular experiment, in the simulated prison experiment-- Stanford simulated prison experiment-- was inaccurate, because you simply can't measure these things-- to what extent you have sadistic tendencies.

And I'll give you an example, which is perhaps a much better way to measure things in real life. Just go to the post office, and the clerk is almost finished. It's closing time. And still one person waiting to be served.

And he just looks at him. But because his time is over, he has a smirk on his face and gets a kick out of the fact that the man is disappointed and is not being served, he closes the window, his cubby hole there, and has a smirk on his face.

And that, to me, is real proof of the pudding. So when I see that in everyday life, I am very mindful as I'd say, what would you be really capable of if the chips are down?

And that also helps me to assess with whom I want to interact in my private life. My public life, I don't have that much choice if you're an instructor or whatever.

But in my private life-- and some people say very judgmental-- very many of the things I see and say, hey, I can see that I don't have to really interact with you a very long time. I can see how you use your role margin, the discretion you have. And I think you're a louse.

I don't tell them that. I've got problems. I don't need it.

Did you want to say something?

To me, it seems that it's more than relative. In other words, it seems that someone who has to repress seeing 12 years of the Holocaust and the mass murder and the gore.

But there's not 12 years of the Holocaust.

Well, no. That's true. But they might have seen brutality beginning in '33. There was brutality happening here and there. There were cumulative public humiliations of people.

In other words, someone who watched the humiliation and the murder of the Jewish people, or Gypsies, or whatever there-- and the repression after the war that they would have to accomplish in order to forget all of that, and forget all the negative side of life during World War II-- has to be a much more extensive, complete, and energetic endeavor on the part of the human psyche than someone who merely has to repress seeing that occasional brutality or not having been responsible in any way.

And we find people that have even difficulty repressing things that they saw that were brutal, much less things that they were responsible for, or ordered themselves, or did themselves.

And I was more interested in the fact, I think, that there probably is a whole continuum of repression we need to begin to study.

Because you were able to find triggers. some people's repression by sort of, in a way, making it comfortable enough for them to become unrepressed.

But given the circumstances of, particularly for the first 10 years or 15 years after the war, that many of these men-- if they had remembered it, or if someone else had remembered what they had done, they might be implicated, and the threat was also to their own lives and well-being-- that the reason for repression is much more extensive in that case.

Well, I agree with the fact that they have more to repress than people under normal conditions. I don't have any problems with that.

But I still think it's relative, because I project, say, hey, if you [? will, ?] these people who are doing things which appear to be relatively minor in terms of comparing it to mass destruction. I think, already, tell me what they will be capable of if the chips were down. That's what I'm talking about. And that's relative.

So I don't want to be around until the chips are down, because then I think my life would be in danger. And we've had that at the college also. We've had one person who was a virtual Greek dictator. And the way he just dealt with people, with the ruthlessness, was just simply, under normal conditions, just unbelievable.

And yet I could see so many people today there and say, hey, I have nothing to do with it. It was very similar pattern. And I said, I wasn't a Nazi. I didn't do anything.

And they tell me, I was not one of the people who kowtowed.

And they threw out people that helped him to throw out people-- get people out of jobs, and discriminate, and all. And today, you're just a deny it, deny it. And so, I say that I have to see that in proportion. It's all relative.

But, to be sure, if I'm a mass killer, I've got more to repress than if I'm not, obviously. It stands to reason. But you know that. So that's not the point. My point is that we can detect these sort of traits before things happen.

And that's why I say we really have to be very active in helping to produce an atmosphere in which these things are not possible-- in other words, be sure that we don't participate in creating situations that people can act in a way which will lead to atrocities and mass murder.

That's the only thing I can say.

And very few people are mindful. One of the reasons why I do what I do is because there are very practical implications. Tell that to the politicians. Tell that to people in high power positions. Tell that to Henry Kissinger. The question is to what extent he will relate to that. Why? Because he enjoyed power. They enjoyed power. And they are prepared to pay the price.

And that's what I've seen. I say this because, whenever I talk to them, the Israelis also say, oh my God, it's so beautiful. We were all so close together. And people are closely knit. And there was all these friendships, and comradeship, and all these sort of things. And we don't have that anymore.

And these people are in high positions today. I mean high positions not in terms of power that much, but very successful financially speaking.

And so, I tell them that. I remember one person who was married to a lady who was quite well-to-do. And he married into wealth and all that in a very fashionable resort in Germany, They had two hotels. [INAUDIBLE].

And this fellow had it all. And I was sent there by General Steiner. He said, you want to interview this fellow. He was in my division. And he told me very many things-- among other things, that, yes, he's satisfied with his life. But he doesn't have the closeness, the comradeship, and all that.

So he was talking about that simultaneously telling me that he was to be sent to be a commandant of a concentration camp. And because he had good contacts, and because he couldn't identify, and because he was not to be playing this role, he was able to avoid it. He told me that.

What did he do instead?

He went to combat.

Did you ever see other kinds of signs of distress-- say, alcoholism, or drugs, prescription or otherwise?

Alcoholism, no-- not first of all. Yeah, well, many people, but I don't think that was because of what they've seen and all that. They like to drink.

Steiner, for example-- and I talked to him until 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock in the morning-- always wine, and I do have some wine, but it doesn't affect me that much anyway. But he was drinking like crazy.

And when he was in charge of a regiment and all that back in Munich, I remember one fellow then who also became an SS general. I also interviewed the person who was a significant other to him-- I've interviewed and then later on befriended-- and an old timer. He was even older than Steiner himself, I think.

And he said that they had to carry him around because they were totally drunk during that early time. And they said, you can't go on like, that totally drunk. So he just couldn't. They had to carry him, physically. So these people were drinking before.

And I certainly haven't seen that in terms of any sort of a drug situation we have now with the for example, Vietnam veterans. No, nothing at all.

Did you have any sense that they would talk with their families about their wartime behavior?

Well, you see, that's an important thing. Because they didn't talk to their families about it to begin with. So they usually kept them away from all these sort of things.

And that was a tendency which prevailed during the time-- and they were actually perpetrators-- and I think continued pretty much after the war-- unless, like Wolff, who was a person who was very frequently sought out to be interviewed.

But he had his young girlfriend. And she was present. So then she found out what was what and became interested. But no, never went beyond the interest of the interviewers. She never asked questions herself.

Because the interesting thing is, regardless what sort of heels these lovers may be, they relate to the role of the lover and

not the perpetrator. The role of the lover is what is important to them. And that is the satisfying aspect of it.

And the other thing they somehow put aside-- and they can't, because if you have a lover, you're not going to tell him what sort of a heel you are, right? You're just going to say what a nice person you are. Because you don't want to lose them. You don't want to deter them from loving you, right?

So that's exactly what they did. And some of these people were married once, twice, three times. And that was already the tendency among high-positing members of the SS-- just like you buy a new car, they discarded the old car, the old woman-- and then many of the younger ones, for which I have to say I have some understanding for that. I have some empathy for that.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Typical for highly posited people, because power is charismatic. And so, young women saw in them-- and I've seen that in many situations, people who were really, to me, repulsive almost looking.

So Wolff happened to be charismatic in so many ways, but also a very good-looking person and some sort of a model for an Aryan SS man.

But I've seen, Otto Strasser, who was an early Nazi-- one of the highest posited early Nazis in the '20s. Not later on, he fell into disrepute and no one got along with him. But he still had this charismatic personality. He still had charisma.

But he was ugly like hell. And there he got the most beautiful person, who was about 30, 40 years younger than he. And she married him. And she earned the money for him. And she did everything, and nursed him until he died.

[INAUDIBLE] he was kissing her fingers, hands, and all that, carrying on in my presence-- which was terribly interesting to me, because that was a learning process. I said, how could she, a beautiful woman?

Well, she didn't relate to all this. She related to the charisma, the power he used to have-- and still somehow a remnant of it, because he still tried to be active in politics and did the whole thing, which he hoped that he would develop his own political party.

Did any of the SS discuss their wartime experiences with other people in the community and non-family members?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

But, you see, this is one thing which is very important. Most people don't know why they have rallies. They don't have rallies in order to revive National Socialism.

That's an important thing, but they have rallies to get together and talk about old times, and recreate the atmosphere, which they enjoyed because, being so close and this brotherhood and all this sort of thing-- one ideology and all this sort of thing-- which really gave them their a unanimous -- great deal of satisfaction.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

[INAUDIBLE].

They just meet.

Was it called SS rallies, Nazi rallies?

No. The combat unit so-and-so, division so-and-so have a meeting at that-and-that place to get together and meet with each other and their families. And that's nothing at all. And it's not an attempt to revive National Socialism. That's not even their intention.

And what I'm trying to say-- and I'm absolutely convinced of that-- it was just to get together to relive again this sort of feeling they've had during National Socialism-- somehow to get a feeling of that, and get together.

And I've participated in a number of these things. So I think it was very evident. They justified National Socialism, why they were there, and they still admired it. But not at all they are interested in somehow reviving it at this particular point in time.

They're interested in recreating an atmosphere of closeness and brotherhood.

Yes.

That was the purpose-- and still is, because it still exists until the last people. Now they are dying left and right, because they are of an old age.

But they weren't discussing their behavior during this period so much?

Well, yes, a question of justification. They say, well, they were fighting for Germany and a non-communist Europe. That's something which they insist on-- and not only insist, but repeat.

What about the question of the next generation? How do their children relate to them?

Well, that's one thing which is being studied, but not by me. But some other people are very interested in studying children of Nazis. And I think it's a very important aspect. What I, in my limited experience I had had-- I've had some, and particularly with Heydrich's niece.

That's when it started, when I started. And some other people who were-- one was a medical SS doctor with a dreadful reputation for having killed an untold number of people.

There are two major responses-- denial or total shame. And we've had at the University also.

A woman, German, person and she was guilt-ridden because her grandfather was the leader of the Bavarian SA Brownshirts, the head man. Early in National Socialism, he was one of the senior people.

And his son was a high official under the Nazis-- and, apparently, tainted with mischief in some way or another. But not because he was an SS or something, but simply because he was a Nazi official of sorts.

And she was absolutely guilt-ridden. And that's what I found with very many, too. I've seen that with the younger generation, who dissociate themselves from the deeds of their-- so these are the two major groups. And you have some other people trying to come to terms with the past of their parents in one way or another.

My best friend was an absolute Nazi, a product of the Hitler Youth and a lieutenant during the war-- very young for a lieutenant, a full-fledged lieutenant. Absolute Nazi. His parents were absolute Nazis. But he got it out of the system. And he met me and said, hey, I've got to do something.

So he was the first one to deal with my restitution in being my attorney, and tried his best, and tries to make a restitution-- which he certainly has done in terms of what he has done for me, and how he stood by, particularly when I've had problems with my marriage, and all the other things-- stood by, a loyalty which I haven't seen with anyone else.

Did you feel that this reaction was a common one, that the children would feel alienated from the Nazi ideology?

Oh, yeah. I [? wouldn't ?] say alienated. I would say guilt-ridden.

Guilt-ridden.

Guilt-ridden. So that they say, I don't know whether you want to talk to me, because I'm German and you were in the camp. I don't know whether you want to talk to me.

Do you have any sense of whether the children confront, or talk with, their parents about the issue?

Oh, yeah. Except the parents are not taking it. Parents don't play ball. The parents don't want to talk about it. And, actually, they've been left in the dark for the most part. They have to find out themselves, inadvertently, or just surreptitiously.

Because very, very rarely -- they simply won't talk about it. And they don't talk about to their children. They don't try to talk about the wives and all that. They find out something by just happenstance, something just by accident or something.

Very rarely will they do some digging. Because once they start doing digging in some of the dirt, their relationship will change, to put it mildly. And they may not want that.

Did you have any sense that the post-war Nazis tended to be more violent within the family?

I haven't noticed that. I think they're authoritarian, all right. That there was no question. Master of the house-- no question. No question about male chauvinism-- no question about that. Well, that goes hand in hand with the authoritarian personality in males.

And so, that is something which there was no question about it. But I did not see any complaints-- no violence, either towards the spouse or the children. There was absolutely no violence I could notice-- none-- but the responsibility to take care, and to be responsible in their role as master of the house.

In which case you don't need violence. Because, in fact, you have already dominated the people in your environment. So you don't need to use force against them.

And that also reinforces their ability to never be questioned throughout their life on their role during that time. Because they've already established a standard that cannot be questioned. That's the patriarchal authority. That's how it works.

Along those lines, did you talk about any thoughts or feelings of apprehension that they had post-war that they might be called to the courts for their behavior?

Oh, yeah. There's no question about that-- no question about that at all.

And so, they could depress to a degree, but not when they fear authority, the present authority.

And so many people, of course, went underground, or changed their name, or left the country, or did some other things, or removed their blood group tattoo under the left arm.

And so, they went into all sorts of lengths in not drawing any attention to themselves, or hoping for the best, but not drawing any attention to themselves. So, therefore, they're very careful not to rock the boat in order not to draw attention to themselves. And that, I think, we can say with some degree of certainty that that was the tendency in most of them, [? FÄ¼hrer ?] people.

What relationships might they have with community members-- the local civilian population who, themselves, did not believe any of these things were happening during the war, or claimed they didn't know or didn't see?

First of all, let's make one thing crystal clear-- and that is the conclusion of many years of research. Anyone who wanted to know, could. Because it was even in the papers, particularly in Striker StÄ¼rmer.



I've been through all the papers from '40 to '44. And there were pictures of ghettos and letters from SS people about the conditions, ghettos, and threats of destruction, and all this sort of thing.

So anyone who wanted to find out-- perhaps not the specifics necessarily, in terms of gas chambers and all that-- but that something very dire was happening. So that's very clear-cut-- no question about that.

So any excuse-- I didn't know anything-- you didn't want to know. And that, I think, we can say with some real degree of certainty, too.

Could these SS perpetrators, then, in any way count on at least tacit support of their community for their wartime behavior?

Well, if they knew about it. It just depends if it was expedient for these people not to draw attention to it and the opportunists. And in most situations, and if it was useful or serve their purposes, they'd say, hey, you were one of those. And if it didn't serve any purpose, pragmatically speaking, they didn't. They simply ignored it. But it depends, of course. If the concentration camp people and all that had found out, of course, they would have responded. Survivors and all. So they would have responded, no question. Because I certainly did.

What about the maybe existent network of help among the SS people post-war-- getting jobs or what have you?

Very early in the game-- and that was actually virtually immediately after the war-- they started a support organization for each other. And I know quite a bit about it, because I really went to the very beginnings, which are not even published yet.

They've had their own kind of mimeograph type of paper. And they started it at certain names. And they changed the various names, became larger, and more people joined. And it was legitimate. It is not something which is illegal. It's legitimized by the German authorities.

So it's a mutual assistance society. And that is exactly the abbreviations-- "mutual assistance organization based on reciprocity" or something of that nature, would be the English translation. It's called [? Hilfsgemeinschaft ?] auf Gegenseitigkeit [INAUDIBLE] in short.

And so, they had dues and get money from various sources-- and some people have become very well-to-do-- to assist those people who are socioeconomically less successful and give them money-- pensions, widows, whatever. And works exceedingly well. They've been very supportive to each other-- no question about that. Actually a model organization in terms of helping each other.

Does it have any ideology?

No. I wouldn't say that it has an ideology, other than that they say, well, we've done that for Germany, and we all have fought for Germany, and we have commonalities, and Hitler was all this and that. And that's it.

And I've questioned people and also observed, during these sort of celebrities-- particularly one which I published-- describe very specifically they tend to not necessarily indoctrinate their children with what they used to believe in. And they justify because they have to live in a different world,

And that was something which I was told by them. I think they are fairly representative so that you don't make their lives more difficult because of their affiliation and their identification with National Socialism.

So it doesn't mean that they don't take them to some of these big meetings they have, and rallies and all that. They take their families because they don't want them to be ashamed of them, one, but also because they are family. But they don't indoctrinate them.

But they also, of course, would like to see that they are not being condemned by their children from having been what they were. That of course is, of course, very true. But even people whom I know were fanatic Nazis in the SS,

I don't think they impose the ideology on their children, other than expecting to be accepted by the children regardless.

What is your thinking about the feelings of the elder Nazi-- the elder SS in particular-- toward Jews?

Towards Jews?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Well, that was something which came out in my questionnaire. Because what I did in my questionnaire-- I'm very glad I did it, because then it measured something which it no longer would measure, because the conditions, the times have changed.

So I've asked them, where would you prefer to live? And gave them actually a list of places. And they're supposed to number these places-- one, two, three, four, which I like the least, and all that.

So my assumption was talking about antisemitism-- and Jerusalem was there-- that Jerusalem would be the place which they would like to live least.

Not true. It was Moscow.

Communism.

That's right.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

That's right. So there was very little talk about Jews among the SS now. Because that was finished, in a way, more or less.

That's for sure.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

This organization-- did it have ties to the Nazis who had fled to other countries?

Well, yes. The interesting thing is, because of my affiliation with Wolff, Wolff was on a mission to visit the people. And that was a real hush-hush affair. And at that particular time, I was there staying, there was in Dusseldorf at that time. We lived in Dusseldorf.

And I was staying there with him until the day he left for South America. And so that's how I found out. with a person who was a young fellow, a young journalist, who just got into very deep trouble afterwards and was imprisoned. But we won't go into that, because it's a separate -- a separate story.

And so, we accompanied -- that is -- his girlfriend. And I accompanied him to the airport. And before that, I went with him to a medical doctor [? who -- just checked up if we can go on this flight, and all this. And that was all hush-hush.

And they told me very little about it, other than that they wanted to retrieve the so-called blood flag, which was in connection with 1923, when Hitler tried to overthrow the Bavarian government and install himself or the National Socialist party with the help of some of his early Nazis in 1923.

And that the coup d'etat failed. so that had many consequences. And that's why he was also arrested and then put into

prison-- Hitler was, and a number of other people.

So he was going there in order to see all the Nazis who had fled there and do some sort of investigation, some research, and somehow reunite, or just see who is left, and talk to them, and what they were doing-- which he did.

And that was financed by a group of people who wanted to publish some of these things-- a popular German magazine. They financed that.

What did they want to publish?

The outcome. And some of these things-- they would have published only those things which was in their interest, that is to say. And Wolff was not going to tell them everything.

So I also think that they were looking for Bormann-- and may or may not have found him, because that's still not 100% clear whether he died in Berlin or whether he was able to flee.

And I'm still open on that. But they certainly went to see the other people. I'm pretty sure that they went to see Mengele and all the other people.

What year was that, more or less?

'70s--

'70s?

The second part of the 70s, I think. Yeah. Was that the main period you were doing this research? So this is maybe from the mid-'70s on?

No. I started much earlier.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

For all practical purposes, I started '59, '60.

And went through the '70s in any case.

Yeah, up to now.

Up to now?

Well, many people had died. Wolff had died. Steiner's died. Many people I've interviewed-- the Hangman of Buchenwald died-- lots of people died. I couldn't do it anyway. It was [? not ?] work, because the people are not around. The big players are not around. They've died or are totally senile.

And I know that because three, four years ago, when I did the Hitler-- Myth and Man, we interviewed some of the old Nazis. And they are just out of it. Those people were there, but they are so senile. There was not very much you could do with them. We've interviewed them, but they are pretty much out of it.

So there's no one left of stature to be interviewed?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Gone-- no question about that.

Back to this trip that Wolff took-- what, in fact, was the blood flag?

That was the one which they carried during 1923. And because people were killed by the Bavarian police there, they retrieved it. And that became now the main symbol. So whenever there were some new flags which were created for new segments of the SR, SA, or the SS, Hitler came with a blood flag and then touched the other new flags. And then that was accepted now as part of that.

So it was a symbol which was very powerful and very clever. And that black flag was exactly the one which Hitler always used to inaugurate, or to christen or whatever, the new ones, which were then accepted-- not new flags as such, but because a new battalions, new groups of people, segments of the SA or different National Socialist organizations.

And this flag then inaugurated the new included by touching that flag.

And presumably, somebody who was [INAUDIBLE] Latin America had taken that flag?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Do you know it was ever found?

Well, the thing is that is one of the things the details-- specifics-- it was not easy for me to find out. Because that was not even discussed with a girlfriend.

And so, I only found out, piece by piece, certain things, by him showing me Goring's ring or some other things-- pieces of jewelry which were in his possession, which they were able to get brought up. And so I even had Goring's ring-- and it fitted me perfectly-- and some other sort of things.

But he was not-- or he was really -- That's one thing which he was really not talking about. I would have eventually been able to if he had not died, because I was bringing up these things from time to time. But he was very quiet on that.

This organization that you were talking about that was a mutual aid society

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

I had heard that there was certainly a Nazi, if not a totally SS, organization that continues to try to recruit new people-- I presume to the ideology.

But the thing is, let me just make that perfectly clear. I was very interested at some time and other years ago, when I was still relatively new at the college. I was still relatively new. I think it was early '70s-- maybe '75 or something.

So I brought in the American Nazi party to my classes and let them give their thing. And everything was very well-guarded so that there'd be no conflicts. So I let them do it with sophisticated students. And I'm lucky. I had a sophisticated bunch.

And so, then, the question after that presentation, which was totally neo-Nazi-- totally based on the Nazi doctrines, just like translations from the German, just like it is in the book.

So then I had students questioning them and all that. And after that, in my office, which I still have, they came in and wanted to talk to me. And the leader of the thing had actually a leather jacket. And on this little leather jacket, he's got the SS emblem, which was a real original, which the SS wore when they were in civilian things.

And it was the SS -- which I have seen back when I was in Prague. And I've seen them in the original, when they were actually wearing it.

So he said, I really need to talk to you.

And I said, OK, fine, so sit down.

And he said, I understand from what you've done and what I've read about you that you're doing research on the SS and you've got good contacts with the German SS people, former SS people. We of the Nazi party would like to have some contact that develops. So I would like you to tell them that we would like to collaborate or cooperate with them.

And I said, OK, I'm going to tell them, and I'm going to ask them, and yes, I'll do it.

And so, I went back. I saw them every year, just as I do now every year. Some of all those who are left those I still have contact with. I don't stay long enough There are many more I could contact them.

So I went to the head honcho of the HIAG and said, you know, I've got an interesting proposition here for you.

Of course, they had no idea about my background-- none whatsoever. And I just came across California -- Aryan type of you know the Nazi party, which is the Nazi group of people who just --

And they were interested in somehow initiating contact with you, because they would like to work with you.

And he started laughing and said, tell them they are crazy. Tell them they are crazy We wouldn't touch them with a 10 foot pole.

Why?

Well, it's ridiculous. It's not interesting to them. And he was the head honcho. He was the person who was in charge of all the people who were members of the HIAG.

So do you think that--

Lieutenant of-- SS lieutenant colonel, and very close to Himmler. Very close to Himmler. No, no, but --

There's no [? ruling ?] [? power? ?]

No.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

New people rediscover-- your younger generation-- and they may go and talk to some of the people, get some information, and they may find that they are sympathetic, maybe, or lend them an ear.

But no. This is a generation They do their own thing. And they are very separate.

Because I've found different places say, hey, we don't want anything to do with that anymore, any sort of revival or anything. We're not interested.

So in the revival, is the same ideology [INAUDIBLE]?

Yeah. In essence, the same ideology, but it's done by different people. Because they're dead. The old ones are dead. And the young kids, they don't know.

The youngest people who still may be around are my age. My age, perhaps, one -- because the maybe '26, '27, maybe even two years younger than I, they are the last ones who were recruited.

And these people don't know nothing from nothing, because they're too young. They certainly were products of the

Hitler Youth days, but that's just about it. And they were in the combat SS--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Certainly not in concentration camps.

Are there any areas of study amongst these SS that you think should have been done?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Well, there are lots. Psychologists should have been involved. And they were not. And I've tried to recruit people. I've tried to tell them. That's one important aspect. And I still don't have a satisfactory explanation for why there was no interest by the social scientists.

And I'm talking about social scientists-- with the exception of historians, who certainly did a lot of studying and research, and to some extent some few political scientists.

No sociologists I know have been involved-- certainly no psychologists-- to conduct any research which would be important to the field. They shied away from it.

So, yes, lots should have been done and could have been done. But they didn't want to do it. I had to struggle.

I got some grant money-- and the only money I got, and the only support I got, from just a really sophisticated group of people-- is Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. And they are the ones who understood the merits of my work and went out of their way to support me. Let's put it that way.

But other than that, I was only discouraged, whether it was here in the United States or in Germany. None of them were interested or were supportive, other than that particular group.

What was the rationale to discourage you?

To stop me?

What sorts of things did people say to discourage you? Why shouldn't you study the perpetrator?

Oh, it was not important, or no one was interested, and let bygones be bygones, and that -- not that important, and a waste of time-- just anything of that nature.

What would be the psychological aspects that you wished had been pursued?

I certainly hope people, just in that sense, what I'm doing, except occurring as far as possible, and say why people do what they do. Why do people behave the way that they--

I have some answers, and I'm glad. And I know more than I knew when I started, obviously-- a great deal more. And I think I've got satisfying answers, but by no means exhaustive answers. And all these should have been researched as to why people get into situations in which they will commit atrocities and crimes against humanity. Let's put it that way.

And so, that's very interesting how come that people, for example, build support leaders who already are very clear-cut, where you can say i mean chances when that person comes into power or something that is going to happen. And why do they support them? What are the reasons for that?

So we're talking about mass behavior. And things have been written about that, but not in connection with the Nazis. [INAUDIBLE] and some other people have written about these things, but not directly in connection with the Nazis.

The [INAUDIBLE] were the main people who-- German psychiatrists who did some work in the psychology of this. Do you remember what their main findings were in whatever era they were working in?

Well, [Personal name] was primarily interested in the medical aspects of the people who were responsible. The medical SS people were responsible for mass murder. That was [Personal name] primary interest.

But she wrote quite a bit--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

But for that particular time, they've done very important, what I would call, preliminary research, which provided the basis. But they didn't go very far. And there are a handful of psychiatrists, maybe, but very few, actually. [Personal name] was one of the very few.

And so, all the other people in psychology didn't do very much at all-- just minimal. You really can't say that there is a body of research other than [Personal name] and maybe some other few.

Well, what are they going to study if people won't talk? That's my question. Because that was one of the main problems that they ran into over and over.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

It's not true. With this sort of assumption, I started mine so I said. That's what also some people forgot to say, that they won't talk, you won't get them to talk, and all this and that. It's not true. I found that out. But I believed that you were not going to make any headway.

But the very moment I started, and I was had it because I had, at that time, a body of knowledge where I really could engage them in a dialogue-- not just simply interview and say, yeah, there was this and that. I knew enough in order to engage in a meaningful dialogue so that it was worthwhile for them.

And so, therefore, that they got some satisfaction from my talking to them. Because otherwise, they wouldn't have been interested. But that only could have been achieved because of my knowledge at that time. And then, since now, of course I know much more than I knew then.

But my assumption that they would not talk, and that I wouldn't get them to talk, was totally wrong. Because there was only one person, or two or three, maybe, who didn't talk.

And one, unfortunately, was one of the most important ones was von dem Bach-Zelewski. And he was in charge of all the exterminations. He was [? imprisoned ?] got him face to face, and he said, well, the director of that prison asked him, would you like to be interviewed by Dr. Steiner, and said, I'd rather not.

He said, in that case, we're not going to force you.

And that was it. But he's one of the very few exceptions, not even 1% of those I interviewed who would have not been prepared to [INAUDIBLE] not even 1%.

I [INAUDIBLE] psychological patterns and so forth, which is what Margareta's point was-- that even though they would say things about where they had been or that sort of thing, that to get them to talk about motivations or some of the deeper psychological material-- that was not going to happen. That's what I meant.

I think we've mentioned, and we got to it, talking about authority in my questionnaire-- which, if that is not social psychology and in-depth psychology, I don't know what is. And certainly I had an unbelievable return. I've had an excellent-- out of a thousand questionnaires, I received over 600, which is a very nice return.

So you sent out a thousand questionnaires. You got back about 600 answers.

I forget the exact number, but it was around 600.

And, more or less, how many people did you personally interview?

I lost the count. I lost count of them.

Can you estimate? Some I imagine you interviewed maybe in more than one session and over time, you've talked about. And some maybe just gave you one or two sessions.

It depends on the different quality of the interviews, number one. Because some of those in passing and some people in greater detail must have been close to 100, at least.

Did you notice any difference in talking with those people who were in prison, and those who led a so-called normal life after the war?

What was the question?

Whether you found any difference.

Well, obviously, if someone is in a prison, it's a difference in attitude. But they are not less willing to talk about it. They wrote autobiographical accounts, and wrote things for me, and then added you know] didn't object to being taped.

They hope that I would reward them in one way or another. And to some extent, I could. In some extent, I could not. But they're in prison. But that didn't deter them from being interviewed.

What was their attitude about being punished for those deeds?

Well, they said that they were the peons. They were the ones who were acting upon orders and very correctly said that their superiors were, at times, scot-free someplace. And they were blamed for the orders they carried out. They were the bottom of the totem pole.

And that's what they pointed out. And they're unhappy with that. They didn't say that they didn't do it, but they minimized it. And they all said, well, what could I do? What else could I do? And all this, and simply justified why they did what they did-- no question about that.

But they didn't deny it. They didn't deny it, but they minimized it and said, what else could I do? In writing, in the interviews taped, and all this. And we talked about it at length. And talking about [? depth ?] psychology-- God, yeah, it was [? depth ?] psychology if I've ever seen one.

I'm talking about looking for ways to prevent

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Obviously, you do feel at this point that the material you got was enough. It was adequate. And it's satisfying to you in terms of what you found.

Yeah. Right.

Therefore, the subsequent premises, then, that you have found enough to know how to teach to prevent this again, right?

I hope so. Yeah. I think so. But the only thing is, so many people have to have a body of knowledge to relate what I'm doing. Most people don't. Now, the interesting thing is-- I wanted to commend you on that. Because you have, by far



with a distance, asked me the most intelligent, poignant questions of anyone I can think of.

Well, thank you.

Thank yourself. OK. You're welcome.

And so, then, you really can do things. Because once you understand whatever body of knowledge you can have, then you can develop strategies. But in order to develop strategies, you also have to know people in power.

I don't know any people in power at the moment. I'm closer to knowing people in power in Germany because you can't do more than be invited to the President of the Federal Republic. And I have been there many times-- different presidents.

And I engage people in this discussion. And particularly, the first president I have met when I was still in Hamburg fellow, I engaged the president and wrote about it. And he responded. And some other people, I could have, if I had had a better chance to really stay in touch and all that, which I was unable to do.

But there, I think I would succeed more readily than here. Because here, no one was really interested. I have only people who are totally novices or ignorant or uninterested to deal with. And our college is a pretty good example in point. It's a case in point of that type of ignorance. Because they have-- even my colleagues-- not the faintest idea as to the value of that research.

Well, we've jumped ahead. But now that we're on this point, let's pursue it-- the notion of what to do with this knowledge.

Right.

What about this mandate and the interest in teaching the Holocaust? Does that extend to the college level? Is it required that a college student have a course? relating to --

Not at all. And I don't think it's going to happen, either, in the foreseeable future. What I've been unable to do that I talk to responsible politicians, people who could make the difference by virtue of their power, their position. And I've certainly not made that at all.

So what you do, you hope for the best by teaching ignorant or less ignorant students, and enlighten them. But what they will do with it is something beyond your control.

So that's exceedingly limited, what I'm doing. And then, of course, I've got people-- fellow academicians and in the last few years, for reasons which would be interesting to find out, they've quoted me more and more and more. And I'm now really quoted in lots of places, which is very nice for me.

But the question is, what sort of difference will it make? Because what these people do is use it for academic purposes. And that's what's going to happen. That's where it's going to stay. But to convert it into action is another thing. It's a separate step. And for that you have to know people who are in power positions outside academia.

And also, I don't know. I don't have any contacts. Because if I would have contacts, I would not be at Sonoma State. I guarantee you.

Or you have to get popular coverage, which Spielberg has done, in a sense, for the Holocaust.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Even there, you may have a broader population, broader people, exposed to it. But the question is whether President Clinton is going to talk to him. I don't know. I doubt it. I doubt it very much-- and if a politician is going to talk to him,

and only to get a piece of action by being seen together, and all that.

So that's the question. Even people like Spielberg may not, beyond what he has done with it, and simply get the information among the people in a way which can be relatively easily digested. I don't know what he can do beyond that-- to what extent he is an influence which would reach to high-level politicians. I doubt it.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Public opinion may be up. You may influence, to some extent, public opinion. Yeah. That, perhaps.

But in the case of Germany, where you say you do know people-- and obviously, where Germany is so self-conscious about the issue, it might make a difference. Do you feel that those politicians that you do know, or know of, is there a self-consciousness-- any fear that this ideology may erupt, or is alive, or is it more restitution for past acts, or what do you feel?

I don't think it's the fear, because I don't think that people in high positions fear what we see in the neo-Nazi activities. There may be a concern. But I don't know whether it's a fear at this point. I don't see that.

But their interest may be purely academic or to satisfy their curiosity and their need to be able to say, well, it's not going to happen while I am, so to speak, in power. Because I'm not going to allow it.

But the details, the specifics as to how to prevent it, I don't think they know and have not reflected on. Because they don't have that information. And I'm not sure that they seek that information.

So I don't think it's fear. It's just simply to act in a way which will be identified by the world public as democratic and within the line of their convictions, which they espouse.

In your research project of interviewing the SS people, how did you present your questionnaire? What was, as it were, the title?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Well, just questions, and just like give the people a quiz.

I see.

And so, they didn't have to go into sentences or anything-- it was just simply like an objective test, so to speak. And I forget what I called it-- questionnaire. I didn't call it anything specific.

I thought maybe the title might have had something to do with it.

The thing is, this is one thing which is a very important connection-- because now, I just feel that there is one thing I haven't mentioned. Now, I've developed the questionnaire with the help of General Steiner. And the help he gave me was very simple.

I asked very specific questions which were also very clear-cut about antisemitism, racism, and all that, which was much longer the questionnaire was much considerably long. And so, I gave it to him and said, OK, what do you think about this?

He said, OK, if you leave it as that, they're going to throw it in the wastepaper basket. They're not going to even respond to that. So this is threatening, this is threatening, this is too clear-cut, this is something you have to leave out.

So, then, he just simply purified the whole thing. He just expurgated the thing and said, this is what they will accept and respond to. But anything beyond that, they're going to throw it out. They're not going to do it for you.

So that was invaluable help. Because he understood the mentality of the SS much better than I did-- especially at that time, and we] talked in '68-- something like that. Because '70, it got published. And I worked on it in '68 or something like '67, '68.

And so, that was tremendous help, because otherwise, I never would have gotten any results.

And did you have his or other people's entre by way of an introductory letter?

Yeah. So what he did-- and that was a tremendous help, also, because he wrote an introductory letter to all the other people.

And he worked with the HIAG. He worked with the HIAG and all the various regions of people in charge of the HIAG-- and not necessarily because they had the highest rank or anything-- simply because they're activists, or simply because they're a vested interest to have the time and motivation.

And so, he wrote. And he knew who was in charge, or who is very influential, if not in charge-- influential person this and that, up to the highest people, the central leadership of the HIAG.

And he sent all these batches of questionnaires. And then I gave it to the individual people I knew. And that's how I got the thing done. Because on my own, I would have whistled in the wind-- no question about that. And that was an invaluable thing.

And he wrote some sort of letter that said the man is an objective person. He's trying to find out more, and study, and research. And he deserves your support. I've got all these things you still.

What do you think his motivation, and the motivation of the HIAG people were? To further this --

I don't know about HIAG. They just wanted to look good by working and opening themselves. And Steiner was really authentically interested. He was very interested in my study.

He liked me personally. He liked me. He viewed me as a friend. I was his advisor on many things. He asked for advice, came to me for advice-- said, John, I'd like to ask you something. And he said that-- John, I'd like to ask your advice in this-- and that and also I helped him with his book.

Because I did the research in the Nuremberg trials-- which, 23 volumes that he was mentioned as a person who was a member of the SS and adhered to the Geneva Convention as a model sort of a military officer.

And he incorporated it in the book. And I was the one who got it for him. I did some research for his book-- which is a very interesting book, [INAUDIBLE] some self-justification in it. But there is very much tremendously important, insightful things, which I was able to use in my book.

It sounds like, as you say, that getting the response of 600 people out of a thousand is a high response.

Right. A good response. Yeah.

A good response.

Yeah.

In the course of analyzing the questionnaires and of meeting the people, do you think that motivation to answer came-- obviously, maybe in part from the influence of General Steiner-- in other words, a kind of an obedience response, in part?

In what way. I don't quite understand.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Yes, absolutely.

This was part of the obedience.

Oh, yeah. Absolutely. No question.

What I'm interested in, too, is what about the 400 who didn't obey?

Who didn't do what?

Obey.

Well, I don't know what happened to them. I have no idea, because I had no access to them. I don't know who they were. There is nothing I could do about it.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

It's not a question of obedience. Obedience played a part, no question about it. As we said, that's established. But so many people were just ignorant. They couldn't do it. It was too much work for them-- some other possible reason which was totally innocuous. There are lots of possible reasons.

Also, they may have misdirected. They may have moved or whatever-- so many things, they just didn't feel like it, postponed it-- lots of possibilities, or disinterest.

Along these lines, what do you think about the notions of people, particularly Alice Miller and her ideas of the ways of child rearing?

Socialization, There's no question. You just simply can't dismiss the influence of socialization.