

And you can start in with that one.

I'm Sandra Bendayan, continuing the interview with John Steiner on his work with the Nazis. Today is April 1, 1994. This interview is being done for the Holocaust Oral History Project, and John Grant is our producer. I wanted to continue by reviewing this notion of the authoritarian personality. We had both heard Professor Zimbardo talk of Milgram's work and make a reference to the notion that you didn't need to have an authoritarian personality to evoke the kind of behaviors that we saw in the Nazis. What do you think of that?

Well, I think, in essence, he's right except what I'm trying to do, define his theoretical concept a little bit more. And I still feel particularly due to the research I've done, which was published and was one of my first major publications in which I interviewed about 600 people who sent in questionnaires, I thought that there was a tremendous difference, significant difference between former members of the SS and the average members of the German armed forces in their authoritarian personality, characteristics, and profile. And there was no question about the fact that there must have been some sort of very specific reason for that.

And I specifically came out with various notions how they assessed some degree of deviant behavior and how they judged it and how judgmental they were and to what extent, indeed, they in these particular references reflected a very authoritarian view. And there was no question that there was a significant difference in some of the items which we questioned them about.

So the leadership and some of the other members of the lower echelon of the SS were very high in authoritarianism. Now, if that is a coincidence, I would be very surprised. So I think it's a relationship. Of course, it is from my very many theories this notion of authoritarian personality has been criticized and has been reviewed and there are ways in which it is considered to be significant. There is really some very important information to be had from the authoritarian or so called F-scale. And some other theorists say that it is insignificant.

Now, Philip Zimbardo is of the opinion that it's not very important. I gave him my publication on that particular thing where I have interviewed about and questionnaires were filled in by about 600 people and let him just look at the data. And that was a type of research which is quantitative, so-called quantitative research. And so in these figures, you just can't manipulate unless you swindle, and we didn't. So I let him look at it.

So I think it is an important, significant outcome that these people happen to be authoritarian who were members of the SS. And I don't think it's a coincidence.

Along these lines, we have talked some before about the notions of Alice Miller in the sense of the Germanic or Prussian style of child rearing. What do you think? Do you think that the German population as a whole would rate higher on an F-scale because of that child rearing than some other?

Well, I mean, I would not jump to the conclusions. I would certainly consider that as a possibility. But I really can't come out with any conclusive notions other than perhaps reach some sort of a guess that this may be reflected. A guess that I would assume that as a possibility, particularly since I've traced the sort of Prussian authoritarian notion ever since the two Fredericks of the 18th century, particularly Frederick the Great. And there was no question about that, that the man instilled and had a tremendous influence in instilling the sort of obedience towards authority.

And I've traced that and documented it with the historic writings, which I think are very accurate and very reliable from that particular time. So it's not just in retrospect, but from that particular time of participant observers of the time, which had not been published, which was published from that particular source of a book which was published during the 18th century and were observations of a British educated person who was traveling with a duke in these various countries and a doctor, a medical doctor.

And so there is absolutely no question that this Prussian spirit of obedience, which was created particularly during the 18th century by the two Fredericks and particularly Frederick the Great, had a very important impact on the future and set a tone which was enforced and accepted as a frame of reference by Hitler himself, because he was one of the greatest

admirers of Frederick the Great for very specific reasons. Yes, namely unconditional, unquestioning obedience. And that's what he expected of his subordinates. And so obviously that was a very important influence in Germany, which was not just an influence of a given time but became a tradition.

Now, specifically about certain SS behaviors, it was noted that several, I presume, members of the SS committed suicide shortly after the war. Was this because fear of punishment or remorse or any other kinds of reasons that you know of?

Well, there is a number, I'm sure there is a combination. I don't think one can pinpoint it just one reason. But the entire belief system in which they had invested, their existence, so to speak, had broken apart. So that was one thing. Another thing is that, yes, indeed, some of the people were tainted with mischief by being perpetrators. And these perpetrators, of course, were brought to court, German courts. And first, of course, they had Nuremberg, the international Nuremberg courts. And so that was another reason.

And then they, of course, had to start anew in an environment with which they did not necessarily [INAUDIBLE], democracy and all that. And they did something which in my questionnaires came out very loud and clear. When asked what sort of preference they had in terms of a monarchy, dictatorship, and democracy, there was no question that most of them, since they didn't want to declare themselves as favoring a dictatorship because that was an ill repute and tainted with all that horror and bad things. So many said monarchy but certainly were not for democracy. And that came out loud and clear. That was one of my questions in that questionnaire which was answered.

And so to adjust to a type of a political system with which they didn't agree to begin with and all that, they adjusted to it eventually, but to begin with that to them was a change, which was very threatening. So that was another additional reason. And then also they were not prepared for what they were supposed to do existentially what sort of occupation to assume, because the SS no longer existed as an organization, as an institution. So they had to make a living in one way or another. And so the interesting thing is that the next best they were able to do is become involved in some sort of business, in sales and occupations which required a degree of aggression and that I too was able to pinpoint in my questionnaire.

So many of these people who, of course, were very high up and a tremendous influence and power and were rewarded for whatever they were doing for the national socialist system came to face a end of an era in which they had invested everything and didn't know how to continue. And that may have triggered their decision to rather die than to go on living. And yes, that happened.

And so many other people who were perhaps very fanatic, fanaticists in terms of national socialism decided to continue simply because they didn't necessarily feel that threatened. And some of the people, and that is something which ought to be said, changed their names and even though they changed their names were discovered. And then because they were tainted with mischief decided to commit suicide, because they would have faced very severe sentences.

Although one has to remember, and that is something particularly of interest in the United States, that after World War II in Germany, the death sentences was discontinued. So there is no death sentence ever since the end of World War II in Germany. And so none of these people actually would have been executed, with the exception, of course, the international tribunal of the Allies. And they indeed sentenced people to death and killing them. Although, some of them were pardoned, too.

Given that, as you say, they surprisingly voted in numbers for a monarchy and you speculate that they were perhaps high on this F-scale, did they tend to--

Well, I don't speculate. I know. It's not a speculation. It's something which is reflected in hard core data.

Did they tend to try to find work after the war in structured organizations? I mean, it seems that sales might not be a very structured organization.

Well, sales are usually very structured because business is structured. And so I would say no, that certainly is structured.

And they provided their own structured organization, which they started immediately after World War II. Changed names on several occasions. A organization in support of each other and former members of the SS. And they joined an organization which was called a mutual assistance organization of sorts, Organization for Mutual Assistance. In German, [SPEAKS GERMAN], and which abbreviation, HIAG.

And so they had a very structured organization which functions to this day in which they supported each other ideologically and otherwise and which is closely structured, because you have various cells in different parts of Germany headed by one SS veteran. And then they meet periodically and also have large annual rallies. And this is one of the rallies also I was invited, apart from some other things. I was invited to other organizational things. And it was just unbelievable how well and very closely structured they were.

And also when they sort of during the Christmas, which was the solstice type of celebration which coincides with Christmas, to which I was invited as guest of honor, this senior general with whom I came about 10 minutes late, they all stood up with the exception of some of the children and women. They all stood up in attention and all that. And I'll never forget that type of moment which I experienced. It was just really uncanny. And I was a former inmate and survivor walking in with a SS general and all stood up, all these former SS people, stood up when we came in. I'll never forget that. I also, of course, published that particular thing which took place.

Were they standing up for you or for the general?

For the general, for both of us. But primarily for the general, of course, because he was the senior commander. He was at that particular time the senior SS general, period, surviving SS general. And that was an unbelievable experience.

The power that he still had over--

Oh, absolutely. And also the influence here, because he was a very popular general. And I should point out that although he was an SS general, he was not tainted with mischief because he was cited in the Nuremberg trial publication as one of the few SS generals and generals in general who adhered to the Geneva Convention. And I found that as a matter of fact and I helped him with some of the research of the book he wrote. And I came across it and it was published in his book. Because I felt it was an interesting sort of thing.

So anyway, very tightly organized, although it was structured on a different, still seniority. But then when the older people died, the senior officers had died, then of course it was taken over by some other people, and then it changed its format, this organization. But it exists and they have the monthly publication, which is an illustrated publication, a very expensive journal, so to speak, with pictures and what have you. And that continues to be published, of course, until the time these people will be around. And it's not going to be much longer, because most of the people are getting in an age where people normally die.

Apparently there were during the war executions of SS people for crimes they had committed.

Well, that is something we know, because Schindler's List is so popular because of the movie. Amon Goth, who was the commandant, and Schindler's List come out, in the book comes out very accurately that the SS had their own judiciary and their own SS court. And people who did things which only could have been done by way of orders from above were brought before the court, if indeed it was detected, brought before the court and sentenced. And Amon Goth was one of them.

He was stripped of his command. He was I don't think degraded, because he didn't have that much of a rank. He was a First Lieutenant, in all actuality. First Lieutenant, I think, or maybe later Captain. I forget exactly. But he was I think a First Lieutenant, not a Captain. And that's right.

And so I don't think he was stripped of his rank, but he was stripped of his command and jailed for quite some time. And if the war had not ended in time, he certainly would have either been more severely punished and just by jail. He was let out again but jailed on several occasions. And he would have been in very deep trouble for sure, because the people of very much higher rank were shot.

Another commandant called Koch, the commandant of Buchenwald, was shot simply because of corruption and because he did things which were not based on orders from above. And he was shot.

During the war.

Oh yeah. He was brought before the SS Corps and shot. And he was an SS Colonel, which was a pretty high rank.

So some line was drawn between brutality and excess brutality.

Well, that's right. Excess brutality. So they were not permitted to simply kill without a reason or without an order from above. There was one thing. And of course, if they stole, and many people did of course, but they are not detected, because many people did. I mean, that you can hear from all the various accounts by inmate survivors and accounts SS people and all that. And I've got quite some few stories along these lines. And one of them I shouldn't forget, because that might be interesting to mention if I have not mentioned it before.

But anyway, so if they are corrupt and stole. And Himmler was very clear cut in one of his speeches and said anyone without any pardon is going to be shot, regardless who it is, whatever rank and all that if they would put what was taken from the inmates, confiscated and all that, would put in their own pocket. So that was a very clear cut situation everyone knew about. But it will still, because temptation was unbelievable.

So I remember also when I was in Auschwitz, I had a relative. Actually, she was a distant aunt of mine who was married to a well known Czechoslovak non-Jewish politician. And she was sent to Auschwitz but because of the backlog not gassed immediately. And for some reasons which escaped me, I was able to get into this camp because of some work detail and find her and talk to her. And she told me that some of the inmates were able because they are not sent to the gas chamber and searched directly but put into this camp to wait until their turn would come to be gassed, which I knew at that time, but of course didn't tell her, because I didn't want to face up to all these things myself.

So she told me that there are very many people there who simply threw \$1,000 bills, and at that time they had \$1,000 bills, into the latrine or simply buried it or just did something so that it would not get-- because many people actually knew that they were going to be killed. And she told me, that poor woman. And I loved her. She was a very special person. Her name was C-H-O-C, Choc in Czech, Choc. And he was a very well known politician who had died. If he had not died, she probably would have not been sent to the camp because by virtue of the fact that he was non-Jewish, he could have protected her from being deported.

Was she murdered also?

She was gassed in Auschwitz-Birkenau. I mean, that was the camp where she-- I went to the camp where they were waiting to be gassed. And she was an old lady. She was an old lady.

What was her first name?

Her first name was I think Sophie.

I know we mentioned also once before the question of whether there were any symptoms or exhibitions of problems for SS people after the war, like mental illness. Or we you talked once about nightmares, and you were talking about I know one person who was screaming in the night at the end, toward the end of his life.

Well, but you see, that was more because of his illness and also because of nightmares, indeed. And he used to be one of the most senior SS generals period in the whole outfit and a former right hand man of Himmler and a person whom Hitler favored, because he was in his immediate environment until the time he was sent to Italy, Karl Wolff.

So I mean, I know about that simply because his woman friend, lady friend, whatever you want to call her, told me about that. I was not privy to that myself. But I mean, there is no question what she told me. There is no question that

she would have possibly made it up, because it was not in her interest to say that if it did not mean the truth. And he was particularly concerned about the fact that the devil was after him. And he was howling, actually howling of fear. Because she said, why are you howling? And he was able to very clearly say, well, because the devil is after me. And that was a very interesting sort of thing to find out.

But I mean, no one else told me. And I think it made perfectly clear that no one else told me about nightmares other than some of the Auschwitz people whom I've interviewed in prison back in Germany who told me that due to the fact that I interviewed them, they had a hard time because all of what had happened just came up again, which they had repressed. And therefore, couldn't sleep and said you are responsible for I'm unable to sleep in peace and all this sort of thing. And some of them, as I said before, I think one of the interviews just simply broke down and cried like babies. And in a way from a therapeutic point of view, it was probably a very good thing for them to do.

But it sounds like you don't know hardly any outright mental instability in those early years after--

I don't know. Oh, well, there is one person who was in prison. One person who was in prison whom I interviewed who was obviously unstable. And this mental situation caused him to come into prison for unrelated things, not because he was an SS officer, which he was, but simply because certain things he had done after World War II, which got him into the conflict with the law. But he's the only one I know.

And so you don't know of any other kinds of--

I don't think it was a problem, no.

Other control kinds of things like alcoholism to where they couldn't function.

Well, I mean alcoholism no. You see, again, but I don't think this would be SS or not SS. Well, a lot of drinking. I mean, the first interviewee I've had General Felix Steiner. In order to talk to him and all that, I just simply had to drink with him, because he enjoyed drinking wine. He didn't drink any hard core liquor but preferred to drink wine. So when we discussed things up to 2, 3 o'clock in the morning, I mean, he was drinking like crazy.

And I somehow had to keep up, although I'm not a person who enjoys it at all. But fortunately, I don't respond to it. It just doesn't seem to affect me at all. But the result was that I couldn't sleep because it keeps me up. When I drink some alcohol, more the only reaction is not that I'm somehow tipsy or whatever, but I just simply can't sleep. It just keeps me awake.

But clearly this was a person, and I suppose others, who was still functioning in his life.

Oh, absolutely. I mean, very much so. I mean, he [INAUDIBLE]. And I'll never forget that. I mean, that would be really some movie a la Spielberg. Really might be interesting for him if anyone would get to him and suggest that. I still remember his apartment, General Steiner's apartment where I used to go very many times very frequently, because I saw him periodically.

And so he was very functioning. And his calling card, which he wrote himself longhand in front of the doors, Felix Steiner, author. Not general. Author. Yeah, sure, because he was a writer. He was writing books. And books which were very well sold. But he was not interested in money.

But along these lines, I want to say that what happened with him when I visited him, one day he showed me a map of an SS treasure and said, John, do you want it? I'll give it to you. And I said, my God, I don't want to touch it. I don't want anything to do with it. And I really regret it. I'll never stop regretting it. It was just a very stupid thing to do.

Well, why I say that, simply because they had amassed unbelievable riches in terms of what they took from Jews and other victims and what have you. And so many things they buried during the end of the war. And I don't know what was in this treasure. Because one of his subordinates said, well, you are the commanding general.

And talking about obedience and how they still functioned after the war, said because I'm answerable to you, continue to be answerable, I have to give you this thing where this treasure is buried. And so he gave him this map. It was in Austria. The only thing I remember. I don't even know. I'm not sure. It must have been around Salzburg. I'm not sure. I'm just no longer clear.

Anyway, so I didn't want to have anything to do with it. He was ready to give it to me, because he was not concerned with anything of that nature. He was not interested in it for whatever reason. He only asked me about, what do you think, John? Do you think I should buy myself a toy? You know I have enough money now to buy myself a car. But do you think I should buy myself a car? I always wanted a BMW. And I said, why not? Buy yourself a toy. Why not? You got the money. Buy it. He never did.

But it sounds like in your experience of the ones that you interviewed, they all made some kind of a relatively successful adjustment.

No, no, no. Are they not relatively successful. As a matter of fact, that also was part of the questionnaire in which I compared the former members of the SS to former members of the German armed forces. And the interesting thing was, which was very uncanny to me, it certainly was, that they are much more successful, the SS people.

They're more successful.

More successful in making an adjustment.

Yes, so they did make-- yes, that's what I meant.

Yeah. Yeah, right.

They did make a relatively successful--

Not relatively, no.

No, not relative. Absolute.

Yeah.

OK.

And that to me was a very interesting piece of information.

What do you think about the current strength of the neo-Nazis and how do they have a relationship with the old guard Nazis?

Well, I mean, I think it's something which I said, and maybe I'm repetitious when I say that again. When I invited American Nazis from the very active at that particular time in the Bay Area to give presentations at the university, I mentioned that I've had contact with former members of the SS and all that. And these people were disgruntled individuals who didn't quite make it in life. In some ways, they suffered what is called frustrated expectations. And therefore, they're susceptible to the sort of deviant notions, ideological notions which they felt could help them to have a better self image and improve their identity.

And that is something which I consider to be very interesting, because all these people are marginal in one way or another and felt that in this particular group, the neo-Nazi, and they call themselves American Nazis, in the Bay Area. And the leaders I invited to the college, at that time college, now university. And so when they found out that I had good contacts with former members of the SS, they asked me if I would give them the message that they would be very interested in cooperating with them.

And the interesting thing is said that the SS people absolutely laughed. Not only laughed, but said, we are not crazy to do this sort of thing and refused to cooperate or even participate. No. Second step. They have distanced themselves totally. And I've talked to one of my closest collaborators, a also SS officer who wrote an account on the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto, which I hope to publish eventually. And that's going to be a very important piece, which would be a key situation, because none of these things exist other than what he has written.

And so I've asked him about what he thinks about the neo-Nazis. And I found out that they said that, and he said, that we are of the opinion that now these thugs, neo-Nazi thugs who are totally undisciplined and unkempt and the sort of bizarre appearance would be totally unacceptable to anything we've done in the past. And we absolutely reject the way they behave. There are more anarchists than anything else.

And so for all practical purposes, what is now called neo-Nazi and all that is certainly not in terms of the actual original national socialist acceptable. And they reject them in every respect, simply because they don't adhere to the laws. They don't behave in a way which is disciplined and to them appealing. And so they dissociate themselves totally from these people.

The German neo-Nazis as well, the German neo-Nazis?

I'm talking about the neo-Nazis.

Right. But you were talking about American neo-Nazis at first.

Oh, yeah, well, same thing. Same thing. They just simply they feel they're ridiculous. And there is nothing which they have in common with the actual Nazis. So, OK, that's one thing. And the young generation really don't know, because they were born years after World War II and haven't read very carefully and all that and just simply appeal. What appeals to them is now that since they claim to be superior, feeling inferior, that this type of ideology with which they identify helps them to feel better about themselves. And yes, that's I think the major reason.

Apart from the fact that they tend to be unemployed and not properly occupied. And because of the economic situation which has arisen because of the now united Germany. Whenever you have economic strife which changes the level of expectation and the lifestyle to which you have become accustomed to or which you hope to attain because that's what you expect will produce types of organizations which will be deviant. And that's just one of those things. I don't think there would be a problem if the economic situation in Germany will be normalized again. If it should get worse, think I think it may be a problem.

As it stands now, and it should not deteriorate further, I don't particularly think they are a major problem at all. Because they don't have that many followers, and I don't think they've got the type of influence and ideas which would produce for those disgruntled people much of a hope, because they don't have any substance.

Do you know if they have been attempting to follow the original ideology? The original?

Well, I mean, obviously they haven't-- they are not dreadfully clever and sophisticated people, and they are not going to generate something new. Certainly they haven't so far, as far as I know. So yeah, they adhere to the old Nazi cliches. And that's all they have, because they are not capable of really formulating something new or interesting, because they don't have their minds.

In terms of class situation and unemployment, et cetera, is this so called pool of neo-Nazis different in any way than the people who were drawn to the SS Nazi party in the '30s?

Well, the times are different. So today Hitler as we remember him would not be a draw. And today someone else. Look at what we have in the United States. They're into rock people and idols who are the role models. Certainly not people like Hitler, for sure. And certainly not people who talk like Hitler. So whatever was an appeal he had during his time no longer is something which really would be a very viable draw for people who look for some sort of a redeemer, some sort of a prophet, some sort of a charismatic personage. I don't see it. I don't see.

Have you changed your thinking at all over time about the whole interviewing process that you did or anything you learned from the SS?

Well, I mean, hopefully I do, because you learn by experience. And the more you know, the less secure you are. Knowledge is limited and it needs to be built upon. So yes, I continue to learn. And there is one thing, however, which I have developed skill in is to interview people. And I've developed the method which to a large extent we can call client centered, very Rogerian type of approach, which has been very successful.

Because I don't go and call people names and reproach them but simply use some sort of a looking glass in which they can see themselves and ask questions on that basis and then take those answers and use them and formulate new questions so that I'm being as non-threatening as I possibly can, because I'm not interested in punishing them. I'm interested in getting the information which I need or which we need in order to better understand what took place. So yes, and I define that, this method.

And I've had just an occasion last summer when I was in Germany. This one mentor, a considerably, well, quite older professor who was very supportive of me when I was in Germany, a very well known criminologist and psychiatrist both. And so when I visited him at Luxembourg, which is what I would call a bistro culture because many of the conversations and meetings and conversations take place in the sort of bistro types of pubs, which I find very uncanny, because we get into a conversation with the minister, minister of state and all sorts of people who just come and everyone is the same and it's a very kind of very egalitarian sort of setting, which is just to me amazing and ought to be studied more closely.

And so I was introduced to some people within acquaintances, because I was interested, and I started to ask questions. And he was sitting back and observing my way, my method of questioning. And he said, I really am amazed. And coming from him, that is really something that is a real praise. He said, I'm amazed. You really masterfully questioned this in order to get all the information in the shortest possible time, and I really admire that.

You're really great in the method in which you've developed to get the information you are seeking. So that to me was a really interesting sort of praise, which you can't get from anyone else who doesn't know the methods and has impacted himself, because he himself has written books based on questioning people and researching things in which he had to develop the skills which I'm trying to develop.

And what do you think about the power of the revisionists?

Well, you see, let me just give you an example. Revisionists and neo-Nazis are very closely related. And I think also in our lecture series, we had one come up. And we probably had more than one. Yes, we had more than one. And so what you do, you respond to them, but some of the response then becomes-- that attitude becomes redundant, because it's a no win situation. Because how do you reason with unreason?

And so at times there comes a time when you simply have to ignore them, because there is no logicity. They are not interested in facts and evidence. They simply adhere to certain notions which apparently make them feel better, whether they are right or wrong. And so they are not after the truth at all. They are after being right or after somehow justifying whatever feelings they may have towards Jews or towards national socialism or whatever.

And to that end, this serves their purpose. Some of them, and I would also not exclude those people, some of them may be so disturbed about the carnage which was caused by the national socialists that they don't want to face that reality. That's also a possibility. Not because they are necessarily bad people, but simply because they can't accept the fact that such a dreadful thing as the Holocaust could have occurred. And so I think one has to judge and respond to these people case by case, individual by individual rather than have some sort of a preconceived notion. And that's what I've done whenever I came across these people.

And I've come in Germany more than here, I've had contact with these people and went to some of the meetings and what have you. And I don't at times feel that there is any point in arguing, because they are not interested in the truth,

period. And if you are not interested in the truth, so then the discussion ends, because you don't have a dialogue.

There are those that seem to think that the revisionists will have a growing influence or they fear that they may have growing influence.

I doubt that. Personally I doubt that very much, because I don't think they've got a leg to stand on. And overwhelming. Look, I've got written autobiographical accounts. I've got tapes of interviews with people who were directly connected with the gassing Auschwitz-Birkenau. I mean, how on earth will they negate it? I didn't give them any money. I didn't bribe them. I didn't change their predicament, what have you. So I mean, the whole thing is absurd, and I've got plenty of evidence, which is so hard core evidence, including that of the fact that Hitler gave the orders. And it's all over the place. If you want to look at documents, it's all over the place.

So whatever they say, well, they were fearful of you. So in order to be rewarded, they told you lies. Or they said, well, these documents are falsifications. And so, I mean, they'll come out with the most absurd responses. So I mean, they are not interested in the truth. They can't accept it, don't want to accept it regardless whether you stand on your head or do anything. It's a no win situation. So why bother? And I don't think they've got a leg to stand on.

And to me, I think one should not give them too much attention, because if you give them attention, a response, and that's what I found out with the neo-Nazis, they do all sorts of things. And some of the less sophisticated ones, but they are not stupid either, they will tell you that we can get by behaving in a very deviant sort of way which will draw attention to us, we will get free publicity. And if you take them seriously and respond to them, you produce a reality.

And I would say that in many cases, it may be preferable to ignore them, because if they don't get a response, they are not successful, and they won't get any attention. And then things will dissipate. And that would be my policy rather than to validate them by recognizing them as a group or as a movement which has something to say which we need to respond to.

There are those who might say that it's necessary to deal with this potential danger and its incipient stages, as people felt they didn't deal with the politics in Germany early enough.

Well, yes, but I mean, you see, they don't have a really viable movement at this point. And if they would have an organized, viable movement, then I think it's a different thing. But I don't see it.

They're more scattered.

That's right. Not only are scattered, they're very loosely organized and they don't really have the sort of following. Hitler had a very, very closely knit following ever since 1923 and even possibly a little bit before, but primary since 1923. And some people in 1925 indeed recognized his potential danger and spelled it out. And I published it also, because I've come across a book in which a minister of state, Bavarian Minister of Interior, has published a book on so called secret societies. And there was a passage on the National Socialists. And that was uncanny. It said, if this person Hitler should come to power and goes into very specific and said, we can expect a disaster. And that was in 1925.

So yes, there were people who recognized the danger. And yes, they said something need to be responded. But so many people didn't, because primarily, and that is something which very frequently, and that includes myself, I underrated the economic situation of the times which contributed towards the success of the National Socialist propaganda and promises which they made and gave people hope who were hopeless. And that is something which I have underrated.

So the economic process in a given time, the economic situation in a given time, is something which has to be taken into account, because it stimulates the type of people who will be disgruntled and dissatisfied, discontented who will flock to movements of that nature. And that will apply to the present and the future. And that's why it is very important to very closely watch the degree of frustrated expectations and to what extent you have a distance between what people expect and what they get. And the greater the disparity between these two, the more the greater the likelihood that people will be susceptible to charismatic ideologues and ideologies.

I'd like to go on talking about how you have applied all the research that you did in your work. But before doing that, I'd like to ask you whether there was any other things that you can think about adding, things that you learned from your research, per se, about the SS.

Well, first of all, question authority, number one. And not be a believer. And that's what I said. I can't believe something. Either I know something, as Carl Gustav Jung said, either I know something or I don't know it. And if I don't know it, I can't believe for a second believe in it. So that's what I-- you have a possibility, but you see, I'm not going to accept something on faith and believe it. That's a very important thing.

And then I will see that I am accountable and develop what is called moral and social intelligence and an emphasis on moral intelligence. And if that is not developed early in life, the chances that it will be developed later is remote. And so that is something which I apply to myself, apply to those whom I try to teach. The question is how successfully. But I'm working and refining my methods as much as I can with all my limitations. And certainly try to apply to myself.

And that is very important for me too and my immediate environment. But that doesn't necessarily make me very popular, because I'm not a person who will bend to all the various forces and so to speak go with the wind. And I have my principles. You have to have principles and say yes, I understand, I may be intolerant, but if you want me to do something which goes against my moral grain, I'm not going to do it.

And we have that situation, for example, at the university where people have turned against my assistant and coworker and they expect me to sell out. And I say, hey, I've got a degree of loyalty. She doesn't deserve to be betrayed and a person like myself whom she had confidence in that I would be supportive and have been supportive. And she's been supportive of me. I'm not going to sell her out merely because it may be advantageous to me. And this is where you have to put your foot down and say, I'm not going to do that.

Even if I have to pay a price. And it may be a very high price, because it may mean money. It may be friendships. It may be positions of influence and power and all this sort of thing. Well, you have to simply, that's the choice. And I think we all have a choice. And that's what I've said I think last time, and that is my latest which I've developed. But most of us look at the roles we play in life rather than the role margin, which is integral part of the role. And the role margin gives me a choice to act in a certain way, because that's my individual freedom to make decisions.

That is I have a discretion, a margin of discretion. And this margin of discretion I can use. And I look at the margins of discretions in people, because it tells me something about their moral fortitude. It tells me about the personality characteristics, a lot of other things. But for some reason in research, it has been dreadfully neglected, this thing. And that was part of the thing which was part of my lecture at Stanford just recently when I was asked to do. That's something which is to me very, very crucial and has been somehow not focused upon sufficiently, if at all.

So once I understand that, the more understanding I have or a person has in general, anyone, the more obligated you are to live accordingly. Now, you can't ask the person who is ignorant to live a life based on insight, because the insight is very limited. But people who have developed insight, and I think that's precisely what I expect, people who have been victimized and reflected upon that to behave more responsibly and be more accountable than people who have not. That's what I expect of people. If they haven't done it, that's why the world has also-- and that should be said loud and clear-- expected a great deal from Israel, because Israel is made up by people who suffered for centuries, for thousands of years.

And therefore, they should reflect that in the way they treat the minority, because they used to be a minority. And if they don't treat them properly and responsibly, there is absolutely no excuse. Actually, there's less excuse than if people behave that way who have not suffered themselves. And the more I have suffered, the more accountable I should be and responsibly I should behave. And that to me is very important. I've tried to do that.

I'm not a popular person because to very many people, these sort of notions you will pose a threat. Because they don't want to change. They don't want to be accountable. They don't want to be accountable and behave in a way which will be based on satisfying their basic needs and live a life which is based on insufficient responsibility and hedonism. And I can't accept that in view of what is in store for us and what happened in the past. Because from that, if we don't learn

from that what, what is there left? There's nothing left.

So that's the only thing we can do. And that's why we have interviews. That's why we talk about the Holocaust, I hope. And not just in order to fill the pockets of people who haven't been any farther than to smell their mother's cooking and simply use that in order to satisfy some of their basic needs. Hopefully we do it in order to help assist people to develop the insight so that they will become more accountable and responsible in the future and thereby prevent immoral behavior.

So I know one of the main avenues for you to be doing this is your work teaching at the university. When did you begin to teach at Sonoma State?

I just came there, for better or for worse, in 1968.

And before that?

Before that I was a guest at the University of Freiburg. And before that I was at UC Berkeley teaching there and working on my doctorate.

And in the Freiburg or Berkeley, were you teaching any Holocaust related courses?

I mentioned it perhaps in passing, but Freiburg, yes, I certainly worked along these lines, very much so. But at Berkeley, I did not other than in passing, because I was teaching something. I could have used it more, but at that particular time, I had not developed the understandings which I needed in order to even start to think about teaching these things, because I don't teach something I don't know enough about.

So at that particular time, I was doing still my research, and I was very far removed from being in a position where I would have had enough insight and understanding of all these intricacies which would have enabled or permitted me to teach. So I just mentioned some things occasionally, maybe in passing. There's just some sort of use illustrations or examples. But I mean, no, I didn't teach it.

When did you first start teaching Holocaust-related subjects?

Well, I would say I started to discuss these things on a more formal level probably in Germany in Freiburg, at the University of Freiburg. And then, of course, the very moment I came there, not the very moment, but I very soon started to teach the sociology and social psychology of the Holocaust at the university. And usually it was very poorly attended. One of the things you attended yourself and you know that it was just a handful of people. And some of them are pretty strange and not at all too well suited for this sort of difficult task, program and task. And then we developed this lecture series, which turned out to be quite successful.

Could you talk about how you began that and what response you got?

Well, I mean, I was there teaching these courses. And then the community group came and suggested that we would have this lecture series. And for that, they needed faculty. And since most of the faculty didn't know beans about the Holocaust because of their age and lack of experience and very limited knowledge, with one exception perhaps, I felt that I had to step in and make something out of it which was not just superficial and sensationalistic and what have you.

And that was in the-- I don't know exactly what year we started. Just early '70 something. Early '80s I think, not '70s. '80s. About '82, '83. And so that's when I took charge of the faculty and started this lecture series, which was a very painful experience. Not just simply because of the subject matter, but simply because the people we had to work with had very many personal problems and flaws, character flaws, and very difficult to work with. And it has been probably one of the worst experience in my teaching experience.

What was the response of the university hierarchy?

Well, they were pretty much indifferent. I mean, they let us do pretty much what we consider to be right. But they didn't support. They didn't necessarily hate us, but they didn't particularly support us either. So certainly we had no funds to speak of, and these funds were primarily provided for speakers. Paying speakers was primarily provided by the Jewish community group. And that was besides their problem, because it was a struggle for power, and they wanted to have a say.

And the thought that they knew everything, merely because they gave them money. But they didn't know beans about things and still don't know very much. But they just simply felt for whatever reason individual needs, ambitions, power, whatever to do this sort of thing, because they felt that this would give them some sort of an outlet for whatever needs they met. And so this sort of dependency on particularly these types of people turned out to be a very bitter and unpleasant experience. Struggle uphill all the way.

What was the response of the students? Did you get--

The students, the students I think by and large and especially a broad, large number of students, which increased because we started very few to begin with but ended up with quite a number. It just grew with the years in size. And I think the response we had from the students was excellent by large, with few exceptions to the rule. But I think it was by large a very, very good response.

Did you feel satisfied that you were able to put out your message to the students?

Well, yes. I think that part, I think, was satisfying. Yes. I think that part was satisfying except we had to overcome obstacles all the way. And that made it very arduous and very painful. And if I look back at it and say, well, was it worth it? I'll probably say it was worth it. But the price was very high.

Were these obstacles the personal difficulties you referred to?

Oh, yes, absolutely. Also the individuals who simply were driven by ambition and not for really reasons which would further humanity or because of concern for the well being but simply because of personal ambition more than anything else. And that was reflected all the way. So that so many people do it not in order to genuinely bring about some sort of sociopolitical or academic insight change but simply in order to satisfy their ambitions, whatever they may be. And that shows too, because we very frequently dealt with people who were totally unfeeling.

The university itself never totally absorbed or took on.

Well, why? Because they didn't simply because they're ignorant. They don't know beans about that. They were not that fully understood. It was just another subject which was taught, another subject for which people got credit and was taught and people were paid for. And just with all the other stuff, they didn't particularly see that's important. And even people in my own department in sociology, they were very opposed to it and did everything in order to prevent us from being successful.

Why were they opposed?

For whatever reason. Distaste. It's a horrible thing. And most of the people are Jewish and none of these people who were in my department were very helpful, supportive. On the contrary. And simply because it was a subject which they didn't want to face up to. They felt that it had nothing to do with sociology, which is the height of ignorance to say that. But there wasn't one particular person said that and said, well, reproached. What do you have to do? Nothing to do with sociology. The height of ignorance. And so with these sort of people we had to deal with. And it was a very, very difficult situation. And these people are supposedly qualified to teach and responsible pedagogues. The whole thing is just--

Do you think this was similar to the kind of reaction that many survivors met when they wanted to talk about their experiences after the war?

Yeah. Bearers of bad news. And who knows? Because that's something which people want to not only not face up to but sweep under the carpet, repress. And they don't want to hear that. It's too threatening, because they don't know how to deal with it. And you talk about professional people. And same thing happened to me in Germany when I suggested that I had too much material to work with by myself. They said, well, you have to do it. We can't do it.

And people who were really nice human beings, people I've respected and certainly very capable academicians, they said, John, you can't count on me. Just very recently a person who received his degree, a doctorate in psychology from Stanford University. He said, I'm sorry. I can't help you. I can't work with you, because I get too disturbed. And he started. He tried. And I took him to some of the interviews with me, to the Auschwitz perpetrators. And he came and asked questions. They're not the best questions, but he was present and all that. And he just couldn't take it. He just couldn't take it. And I've had in my seminar back in Freiburg, a person who was a psychiatrist and professional psychologist, and they all refused to work with me because they said, we can't take it. You have to do it.

Were you the only person at Sonoma State teaching Holocaust subject?

Yes, of course. Who else? Of course. Sure.

Let's talk about Carol Hurwitz. Normally she has been present at every interview up to now, but she wasn't able to be here today. Can you please talk about the evolution of your relationship with her in all this?

Well, Carol, I got to know Carol Hurwitz when she was a student of mine, a graduate student. And I don't know exactly the year. It must have been about '83, '84, something like that. She attended my sociology of the Holocaust. And at that particular time was a fairly large group. Very bright people. Very bright people were selected. Some of them just working on their doctorate. Some of the people, the professional people already with doctorates and what have you. And so that was a very good group.

So we didn't get along at all in terms of because she couldn't relate to the teacher. Was not satisfied with the theoretical perspective part of my research and all that. It felt that it was somehow didn't do very much with emotions well. And in a way, that is very true, because if you deal with a research subject, is it primarily intellectual and not emotional. I did mention emotions and all that in any way, but still in a very academic way. So somehow she felt that this did not do justice to the feelings people had who were either victims or people who were to learn about the Holocaust.

Well, that's a problem. I don't think it has been resolved. Anyway, so we've had quite a number of discussions and some of them were not exactly very pleasant. And especially because her response to my published material, and I used that particular book of which I am a co-author as one of the texts, she didn't quite appreciate it. Also because of the fact that after all, she is not a person who was educated in the social sciences and had problems with some of the terminology which she didn't very correctly understand and all this, which is because my level of teaching that was probably a little bit too abstract for some of the students. That's a good possibility. But other people really understood me well. So I mean, it just depends. So she had problems.

Anyway, so I had to deal with some of her disturbance because of that class, because the course. And she had to walk out at times because she was so distraught by the material, for understandable reasons. And she was not the only one. But she reacted particularly strongly. And so we developed a dialogue but which was purely based on my getting across what I understood and related to her so that she would benefit from it. And I don't know whether we were very successful in that.

But anyway, she was sufficiently and very strongly, I should say, stimulated by that particular course and developed an interest in continuing. And so that led to her willingness to participate in structuring some things and helping and doing volunteer type of work until the time she became more as an integral part of the Holocaust lecture series. And she did that simply because of a very strong motivation and interest in that particular subject.

Now, then it reached some sort of-- she spent so much time and identified so much with what we were doing there that she spent a great deal of time for which she didn't get any compensation. And then I pushed to get some for her, which was very difficult, because she was not a faculty. She was a graduate student and marginal in so many ways status wise.

And so finally she received \$5,000 for which some of the administrators expected-- \$5,000, which was virtually for two semesters. Almost \$5,000, a bit more maybe, grant money and all that. But I mean, just nothing, because she is a qualified nurse practitioner who was able to earn \$45,000 a year. And \$5,000, 6,000, \$7000 at most. And it was not more than that altogether. It's nothing.

And so they felt that she should be very grateful, but they were not at all appreciative of the energy she has invested into all that. And that became a very unpleasant situation, because they reproached her and behaved in a way towards her, and then because of my loyalty towards her said, hey, you can criticize, but you also need to recognize in terms of what-- but they are not willing to do that. Just only to criticize, and from Jewish circles and administrative circles and all that, simply because she's a person who gets things done and removes roadblocks which are unnecessary and cuts bureaucratic red tape.

So that then led to a situation where people couldn't accept her because they felt that she overstepped her authority and portrayed herself as a faculty, which is kind of ridiculous. But she's assertive, and there's nothing wrong with that, because without being assertive, you don't get things done. And so the people then turned against her, criticized her for all sorts of reasons, and behaved towards her in a way which is totally unacceptable, morally and otherwise. And led to very unpleasant situations.

And she suffered a great deal, because she dedicated many years of her life to that endeavor, which turned out to be something for which she was punished rather than praised. And to me, it's kind of nightmarish. It just reflects on something. And I'm a little bit confused myself in terms of how this is possible among people who want to be accepted as educated, sophisticated academicians and enlightened Jewish groups.

And to me, this is just not only outrage but devastating. Because I said all the things we do and then with what we do instead of saying, my God, we need to behave more civilly towards each other and be supportive of each other, they tear each other apart and behave in a manner which is totally and utterly unacceptable.

So after all the years of working there, we will most likely be leaving. And she for sure and I probably also, because I can't work in this sort of atmosphere. And it's a dreadful disappointment. Not in terms of what we actually produced, because with that, we are very satisfied. But the obstacles which have been put in our way and which we had to overcome, which were totally unnecessary, and the energy which went into that and the frustration. And there is absolutely no excuse for it. And I'm glad you asked that, because I think it ought to be recorded.

I know that there was a point in which I believe that you had hoped that Carol would be able to carry on your work with the passion that you worked with.

Absolutely. I haven't quite given it up, except in this institution, it will be virtually impossible. Because the lack of sophistication and the immaturity of these people we had to deal with by large is so unbelievable that anything which would have any sort of future and be substantive enough to really have a future, I don't think it's realistic under the circumstances. Also the ignorance, because people were unwilling, faculty I'm particularly talking, willing to familiarize themselves to some extent with the material but simply accept superficial notions, very superficial understandings as sufficient and on that basis espouse things which were of very little substance. And at times also misinformation and misunderstandings which only confuse rather than enlighten.

Also I know along with your teaching, you have written many books and articles over time. Would you talk about-- here you have quite a stack of books.

Well, I mean, I have not simply because, in retrospect unfortunately, I've been associated for too long a time with an institution which does not sufficiently emphasize publications. Because my notion is that I can't be a viable instructor, whatever, teacher, if I'm not creative myself. So that's the basic. The other extreme is I also don't accept and don't think that it is a good idea to publish or perish, which exists in some other institutions. I reject that because people ought to work and develop their own pace, which will produce quality type of products rather than produce because I'm forced to produce. And the products will reflect that.

So the publications were kind of above and beyond the call of duty, because we are fully occupied in teaching people in terms of units we need to teach. So that any publication is something which is, in addition to that, because time is not provided for and it's not emphasized either. So it is something that you do on top of all the other assignments you have.

Is it acknowledged?

Oh, well, to some extent, in your promotion. Or tenure, for what I know. Tenure and promotion will be honored. But some people have not published a shred and had no trouble in being promoted to full professors. And some people only have doctorates and failed doctorates. They have not been able to do that. They failed it and they are full professors and all that.

So I mean, you have all sorts of people who have not been productive but simply blow up their activities by virtue of the fact that they have said some few things and sat on some usually very sterile and unproductive committees and all that. And so they use that as some credential to be recognized for promotion. And they are the majority, because not very many people are scholars and not many people have published.

All right. So I've published but not enough, because quantitatively speaking, I have not, because I need my own space and I need my own pace and I need to do things which are reflected and which I can identify with. And that takes time, and it's not something which-- and also I may not have enough talent to really be a person who publishes in quantity.

Can you talk about what you have published?

I mean, these are different things which usually relate to my research with the Nazi thing, broader and more narrow. My first book is based on-- I've used the basis for my first book my dissertation I used and developed it further and refined it and what have you.

And what's the title of that?

That is Power Politics and Social Change in National Socialist Germany. And then I co-authored a book which with a Harvard psychiatrist called Joel Dimsdale, which is called Survivors, Victims, and Perpetrators, Essays on the Nazi Holocaust. And then I've had chapters in books and articles. Numerous things in German, in English, some in Czech. And that's what I've done.

And they've been published in all sorts of different textbooks and one which has had the largest publication was on the National Socialism in German. And I don't know how many editions there were. Which is very well accepted and popular and well reviewed book. And so that's what I've done. All I can say I've done what I could, but it's not enough, and I hope to do some more.

You have also had a number of, well, many, many newspaper and magazine articles and interviews as well as television documentaries.

Right, right. That's very true. And somehow I lost tabs on that, because they're so numerous. But I think some of them, if they are not too distorted, and usually that's one of the problems with journalists who interview you. They are not very-- they are not, first of all, they have to really understand the subject matter. And if they really are not too well versed in that and they misunderstand and distort and all that. And so there are quite some inaccuracies. The exception to the rule are those which are really accurate and insightful and go into depth. And those also exist.

And so yeah, it was Newsweek and some other things which were important. And important papers like the Boston Globe and Los Angeles Times and Bay Area Chronicle and Examiner and some of those things which were interested off and on in some of the things which I did, which by no means are just merely exclusively Nazi stuff, but also things which deal with deviant behavior. And one of the things which was published that got much more attention than any of my Nazi publications was on price tag switching where people switch price tags on items not to outright steal but simply reduce the price of an item which they want but don't want to pay the full price for.

How did you come to be talking about that?

Oh, simply because I'm interested in these things. And I I'm an eye person. I use my eyes and a keen observer, probably sensitive observer. And I saw that being done. And I got interested in that and followed up. And I was the first to describe that. And it just entered into criminological literature as the name price tag switching. And now of course, the new methods when you just go through the item which is just being-- still price tags are used still widely, but most of the more up to date stores use the screening and go through the electronic screen. And of course, you can't price tag switch anymore.

But so for example, the self destruct price tags were developed because of my research. And people use that. I didn't get a dime for it. But I mean, they used my research in order to develop new price tags so that when you try to remove them, and so they self-destruct. I still can do it in a way which will not [INAUDIBLE], but because simply because I've developed expertise in these things. And yes, I also went, for example, and price tag switched and went to the manager and said, you've got a problem here. And some people, oh God, don't just take it. I don't want to have anything to do with that. So let me price tag switch and not want to hear about it.

And some other people in Germany, for example, led myself, I was apprehended. And when I was price tag switching and because I was doing that only to have some international sort of thing and how people feel and all that and really examine that. So I was apprehended in this and led myself. And I explained it to the management and they laughed, Oh yeah, we read a piece other day. You also had some all sorts of interesting excuses.

So then I was arrested and a police station and interrogated and then I went to the public prosecutor and said, that's my name. I've got these credentials. And then they did research and said, well, we've had a lot of people claim things and all that. So of course, I had this mentor of mine who knew about my research on price tags, which were very interested. And they called him because he was one of the leading criminologists in Germany. And he verified my research and all that and I gave them also some-- at that time it was not published, but it was in the process of being published, and that's why I needed some more data.

So then they called me in, and said, well, next time, and they laughed, said they thought it was exceedingly funny. And of course, I got off the hook. But they said next time you do this sort of research and experiments, be sure to come to us first before you do it so that we are informed, because otherwise you get into trouble. And I said, well, I can't go and inform you, because then I won't understand the emotions which are-- and they somehow felt it very difficult to accept.

Because if you do certain things, you have to feel just like someone who actually does it psychologically and emotionally. And they had very little understanding for that. And of course, I didn't do it obviously. And by that time I was finished and it was published and closing the circle here. It just was United, UP, what is it called? United--

Press International.

Press International and all over the things. Canada, United States. And I remember when I went to Maui, the Maui people said front page things about me, and some people knew me and say hey, you were in the papers. So it was such a popular item which actually hit all the papers in the United States and articles and just numerous interviews and all that. And I'll say similar things I did, which not related to the Holocaust at all.

Was the bulk of the interviews and newspaper articles on the Holocaust?

Oh, yes, I would say. Oh yes, oh yes. Oh yes, I would say so. And also about communism and some of the things, because I've done some things on that too, and dictatorships and various articles which deal or used the National Socialist dictatorship but have reference and relationship to any type of dictator, which at that time included Soviet.

Have you been associated with any other kinds of media on the issues of the Holocaust like individual lectures in places or presentations?

Oh yeah. Well, off and on, yes. Over the years, yes, of course. Back in all over the place in Germany and here too and

radio interviews. And not so much television, but in Germany, television, yes. Major things, major radio presentations. But lately it was not that much anymore for some reason. Now it's just being revived because of Schindler's List.

Why do you think that Schindler's List has made such an impact when there's been such avoidance of Holocaust subjects for so many years?

Why? Because it appeals to emotions in a way which apparently is acceptable to the masses. It has a certain appeal which enables people to face up to it to some extent. Although some people get very disturbed in spite of that. And for example, I have a wife of a colleague with whom I work very closely on the Japanese stuff and other things at our university, happens to be a daughter of survivors. And she went to see with her husband Schindler's List and got terribly disturbed and called me and wanted to talk to me and wanted to find out from me if there was a group, some support group for children of survivors and all that.

So people respond to it in different ways. But people who have some sort of a distance and not personally involved in what happened during the Holocaust, simply because no one who was close to them was directly involved. They now have the type of information, which apparently is presented in a way which can be digested or they can relate to without being overly threatened and find interesting and stimulates some degree of awareness which is not going to be repressed but will be dealt with. And that, I think, is the positive thing of that particular movie.

But also one has to remember in spite of all the shootings by the commandant, it does not really reflect on the worst type of things. Because the Schindler Jews were very privileged. And they had, relatively speaking, a very, very good life, relatively speaking, and better life than those people who were not protected by a person like Schindler.

And that is something which is a very important piece of recognition, because it is not as nightmarish as some of the real nightmarish things which people simply cannot accept without dealing with it by being to some degree disturbed or to the degree disturbed that they will instead of facing up will repress and therefore put it aside.

And Schindler's List is presented in a way which can be digested, which can be integrated and dealt with more easily than some of the horrible documentaries which I at times show during the lecture series. And there are state documentaries. And of course, I have a feeling which is very strong, because there are lots of small but still important enough points with which I disagree the way that Schindler's List was presented, because there are a lot of mistakes in it and improvements and things which are misleading and whatever. But I prefer, for that very reason, I prefer documentaries in order to portray things which are closer to reality and less distorted.

All your work seems to speak of an optimism that you can reach people to teach them, as you say, a moral intelligence or make an inroad in what we might consider human nature. Do you feel this to be the case?

Well, if I would not do what I'm doing, I would have no hope left. So it is my conviction that human nature, as difficult it may be to change it, can be influenced. And that the momentum of choice, discretion, and insight is still very much present with which we can work and improve and become better people. And this is my perspective.

And with this sort of attitude, I'm working because if we would give up and throw our hands up in despair, what's the point? Because there's no purpose. There is no hope, and there is virtually nothing left which would be worthwhile living for. And that's my attitude. Therefore I have not given up. And yes, I do believe that we can change. Yes, I do believe that we can improve. And yes, I do believe that we have a responsibility to make a contribution towards that end. And as long as I can function, I hope to continue to do what I can.

You are officially retired from Sonoma State at this point, although I know you immediately were back involved again in the lecture series. Are you teaching a course also?

Well, I'm teaching a section, yes. And we have sections because now we have three units and one unit. Two units are devoted to the lecture series and one unit is in sections in which the material is discussed which needs to be clarified. People need to talk about their feelings, talk about the texts which we have chosen. All these sort of things are very important to have some sort of outlet for.

And so until this time we've had only two units without this third unit, and we thought that it might be useful to have a third unit. To what extent this will have proven to be useful will be seen at the end of the semester, and we will disseminate questionnaires and get the student's response and see to what extent it is they are more satisfied. This may or may not be the case. But I thought, and most of us, I guess, agreed that it would be worthwhile trying.

So do you plan to continue to teach as long as you are interested and able?

Well, I don't know whether I'll be staying at the same institution. I don't know whether I'll be teaching all the time. I think I will have to devote more time in order to have something on paper and record it. I will have to devote more time to writing and publication. But yes, I love to teach.

Although teaching has become much more difficult, because so many people who come to institutions of higher learning are really not qualified. They should be better off doing something else. And so then they become a tremendous problem and that has increased within the last few years and has become more difficult to do teaching on a level of sophistication which indeed can be defined as higher learning.

And that to me was a source of frustration to no end, because so many people are bothered by the tremendous resistance of some students who have turned to be having problems in dealing with abstract texts and those retention span and attention span has become very small. So that they no longer have the ability because of all the media and all the other things. This unbelievable need for so called entertainment and addiction to entertainment have shown increasing problems in dealing with abstract thought and reflection and dealing with things which they haven't learned.

Not that they are not capable. They haven't learned it. It somehow became buried. And to deal with these people has brought so many other psycho emotional problems which now have become more numerous in so many students, which prevent them from really being capable of learning as they used to, let's say, some time ago. Becomes a different type of work and a different type of problem for which most of the academicians are utterly unprepared.

So rather than dealing with these things and spending their time and energy and frustration for practical purposes with individual students, they simply give them good grades, passing grades, and avoid dealing with very conflicting situations. And I can't do that. I can't do that. And I can't lower my standards. So in a way, I would say that as far as my age is concerned, as far as my degree of frustration is concerned, it's the timing. It's right to retire.

Which is not to say that I've given up or that I would not be prepared if it's the right situation where I can teach. Just as I've had a great deal of satisfaction when I was asked to just a few weeks ago, about three weeks ago, to give a lecture at Stanford. It was a different ballgame. Although there too they tell me that times have changed and it's reflected in the students' response to learning.

Well, you have been extraordinarily generous in giving your time to the series of interviews here at the Oral History Project, both of your work and of your personal life. Are you in the process or have you ever written for publication about your personal life, your autobiography?

Well, I've done some. I've done some. Probably not enough, but I've done some. And that is primarily concerned with my experience in camps. And whatever I've written is now being used as one of the texts in the lecture series, which has been exceedingly successful. And some people feel that it is well written. I don't know. I can't be my own judge. I don't want to be. But it's just merely one third of what it really should be when everything will be done.

And I will and certainly intend to devote more time to it, and I hope to finish that. Whatever way it may lead, I have no idea. But yes, I think it is something I want to do and I've been urged to do. So I hope that I will complete that plus so many other things unless I'll kick the bucket before my time, before I've had enough time to complete all that. And since we never know when we will be in that position, so I'm kind of getting a little bit anxious that I'll get things done. And beginning to feel also that a very strenuous life and a lot of deprivation and in so many different ways, I've put several nails into my coffin. And so I have to accept that as part of the reality.

For example, I know you've had high blood pressure?

Yes, I have high blood pressure. And I've been very distraught about my divorce and the absence of my son, with whom I have a very excellent relationship and which is very rewarding and I think well matched in so many ways. Of course, you never know. He's in his puberty, so people change during that time. Change throughout life, but particularly during the puberty, something else may come out which was not there before.

And so it has taken its toll. And I'm sure that I've aged because of that and because of all the other experiences. So I have to do whatever I can in order to make the best with what I'm left.

We want to go on and record the photographs. But before we do that, I want to ask you first if you have any more information you would like to add. And second, if you have any thoughts, messages, or anything of that nature that you would like to include.

Well, I think our discourse or our dialogue has been dispersed with all sorts of information which gives or reflects on my personal views, convictions, and maybe also ambitions. And so I don't know what there is left for me to say other than that what I'm concerned with is that I leave some sort of legacy which will justify my survival from the Holocaust. And so that when I pass on that I will not be accused of having squandered my time with useless doings.

Because one of the strong motivation from doing what I do is I feel a very strong obligation towards those who have not survived. And feel that since I have survived, for better or for worse, I'm not at all so certain that it has been a blessing. I certainly haven't experienced it as such.

I feel that I have to use my-- or at least a part of my energy to do things which those friends of mine, those who were people I admired, and many people who were role models to me including and including some of my or most of my relatives who were-- I was blessed with tremendous family relationships and support system, which was the best thing which could have happened to me in my life and happened to me in my life.

It's something which sort of the experience which I've had and the satisfaction I gained from that I need to use in order to make a contribution for other people that they too can somehow make the best of their life and avoid some of the pitfalls into which we have fallen during the Holocaust.

Well, thank you very, very much, again, for all your generosity of time and energy to do this.

Well, it's my pleasure.

Well, thank you again.

John?