

# **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum**

**Interview with Drexel Sprecher  
September 28, 1998  
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## **PREFACE**

The following oral history testimony is the result of an audio taped interview with Drexel Sprecher, conducted by Margaret West on September 28, 1998 on behalf of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The interview took place in Chevy Chase, Maryland and is part of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's collection of oral testimonies. Rights to the interview are held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

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

**Interview with Drexel Sprecher  
September 28, 1998**

Beginning Tape One, Side A

Question: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Jeff and Toby Herr collection.

This is an interview with Drexel Sprecher, conducted by Margaret West, on September the 28th, 1998, in Chevy Chase, Maryland. This is a follow up interview to a USHMM videotaped interview, conducted with Drexel Sprecher on June the 18th, 1990. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum gratefully acknowledges Jeff and Toby Herr for making this interview possible. This is tape number one, side A. If you'd -- would identify yourself.

Answer: I'm Drexel A. Sprecher. I was a prosecutor at Nuremberg, and I've been writing a book on Nuremberg called, "Inside the Nuremberg Trial, A Prosecutor's Comprehensive Account." I've been working on it for nearly 10 years. It'll be published in late November or December of this year, by the University Press of America.

Q: I wonder if you'd talk next about your motivations in becoming a Nuremberg prosecutor?

A: Yes. I'd been with -- I'd written a senior paper during my last year in college, concerning the structure of national socialism, as we knew it at that time. And I read a few books, particularly by professors from the University of Chicago. And the book got a triple A, or the article got a tripi A -- triple A rating, and so I had an early interest

in the Nazi regime, way back in 1933 and '34. Then I went off to the London School of Economics for a year and there were a number of refugees there, refugees from Hitler, who -- with whom I became friends and went out to dinner with and parties and so on. So I got to form some friendships that way. Then, of course, came the war and I was overseas for nearly [phone ringing]. Well, what was I saying?

Q: Oh you'd -- were at the London School of Economics.

A: Oh, and I -- as I did -- was about to say, I traveled around Europe a bit and twice into Nazi Germany. I saw the wedding of Herman Goering and Emma Sonamen on April 10, 1935. I traveled into the -- the ruhr, because I'd met a German young man in London, who offered to show me the good hoffnoseeter and to stay overnight in their house and so on. He did this knowing that I was anti-Nazi, but his family was rather re-reserved, because I don't think they wanted to -- they didn't want to take a chance of exposing themselves too much. Anyway, I also went out one evening with -- somewhere near Frankfurt, with the Reverend Stuart Herman, H-e-r-m-a-n, who later became the American pastor in Berlin. He ra -- He later wrote the book, "It's Your Souls We Want." And Stu Herman and I became lifelong friends, we're still corresponding. After I came back from London, I went to school with -- I went to Harvard Law School for three years and my club won the moot court arguments, and the case was based on a -- a -- a labor case. So when I went down to Washington, I went to the Labor Board and they hired me in a half an hour, based on the fact that I'd contributed to this brief, which was on a point that was being argued before the

Supreme Court. So that started four years of trial work. They used me as a trial lawyer. Then came the war and in 1942, I enlisted and within a month was again back in England, as a sergeant and later a warrant officer. I was in England for six months until the -- after the invasion of Africa by the allies. I then went to Iran, Algeria, as administrative officer to the Inspector General. In that capacity we traveled all over North Africa, inspecting American army installations. I then -- An old friend of mine, Gerhard VanArkel, who was the deputy head of the German labor branch of the Office of Strategic Services, OSS, came to Iran and asked me to come up and become the training officer for the labor desk in Algiers. I had a hard time getting away from my boss, but I finally managed and for some six months I trained Germans who had fought on the -- for the Loyalists in Spain. And th-these anti-Nazi Germans were being trained to do parachute jumping, to do signals -- signal work so they could send out messages after they'd jumped into Germany, and so forth. Then I got a call from Washington to come and become the training officer at the central desk of OSS -- a central desk for labor and German operatives. And while I was there, Jack Ohly, O-h-l-y, whom I'd known in Harvard Law School, saw me with my parachute wings and said, "You ha -- should come to work for the labor branch, helping us settle strikes and gathering labor for the short supply labor industries in the midwest." And I said, "I don't think the OSS will release me." His boss was Colonel Brennan, who later became a Supreme Court Justice. Colonel Brennan called Arthur Goldberg, who was my top boss and later a member of the Supreme Court and convinced him that I should

perform this service. So, while that went on, the war finally came to an end and I came back to Washington with the idea of getting out of the army and returning to trial law for the labor board. At that time, s -- r -- Justice Robert H. Jackson had been appointed to be the US Chief of Council for war crimes. He made a statement which was released to the press on June second, 1945. I was so struck by it's -- not only it's understanding of the w -- the way Hitler had come to power, but of it's determination to see that the Nazi regime was exposed from beginning to end that it's top leaders were brought to justice and to an explanation of why they had committed the evils they had committed. I didn't know how to get with Justice Jackson's group, because I didn't know him at the time. So I went back to OSS and my old fraternity brother, Robert Thrun, T-h-r-u-n, was one of the three assistants to Wild Bill Donovan, the head of OSS. General Wild Bill Donovan. And I had told him my dilemma, and he says, "Well, we can take care of that." So we went down to see the general council of OSS, who is another Donovan, a James Donovan. And Jim Donovan hired me within a half hour and for the next month or so, I busily engaged in studying in detail, the OSS reports on Nazi Germany, and they were terrific and very well done. And a professor by the name of Noiman had written a book on Nazi Germany -- just a second -- Noiman had written a book called, "Behemoth" and I studied that in some detail and then went in to see him. And I told him of my background and he said, "Well, I -- Of course you're interested in the destruction of the trade unions by the Nazis." And I said, "Yes." He reached back and pulled out a German book that had been obtained by

OSS through Switzerland. And, an appendix in that German book contained the order of Robert Ley, L-e-y, the later defendant at Nuremberg who committed suicide. And Robert Ley had written this order on how the SA -- the Storm Troopers and the SS were to take over the trade unions. Well, this gave me the basis for not only a brief and for a -- an eventual presentation to the tribunal, it also gave me leads to labor leader with whom OSS was in touch, both in London and some of them in Germany. So I flew to London, Paris and then went into Germany to visit some of these trade union leaders. And I got affidavits from all of them and those affidavits were all introduced in the Nuremberg -- first Nuremberg trial. Neither one of the affiants was cross-examined by the defense, they didn't question at all the -- the horrors that surrounded that particular aspect of the Nazi regime. The result was that that made some impression on Justice Jackson and later on others and the main deputy to Jackson, Colonel Robert G. Storey, who later became head of the American Bar Association, he was quite impressed by this work and said, "You must make some -- a presentation to the tribunal," which of course delighted me. And he assigned me the case of a Baldur von Schirach, the Hitler youth leader, who later became the Gauleiter of Vienna.

Q: Let me interrupt to ask a question. Do you think that had you not sort of pushed yourself forward, you would ever have been approached to play a role? You s -- You were peculiarly fitted, I think, but I wondered if it's because you were aware of that fit and felt at once, very strongly, that this was something you wanted to be involved in?

A: Yes, as soon as I heard Justice Jack -- read Justice Jackson's report, I knew there was where Sprecher should next go. And so I'd determined to get there one way or the other, and it turned out to be a relatively easy path.

Q: I also want to go back to what we talked about before, really, your motivations, but in becoming involved, did you feel that you had something personal you wanted to achieve? I don't mean for the sake of your personal ego or career, but did you feel passionately about what this prosecution was going to achieve?

A: I felt passionately about what the prosecution could achieve.

Q: And then, what did -- what do you feel the Nuremberg trial -- what do you feel the effect was on you later? The -- Y-Your own writings bear testimony to what happened, but if we move forward, how do you look back on it and do you feel that it's been evolving over many years, the impact?

A: The impact of the Nuremberg trial on American public opinion was considerable for approximately one year. And then, with the coming of the -- after the war, with the coming of the Cold War, American opinion and the journalists and so on, turned very rapidly toward discussions of the Cold War and the Nazis and the Nuremberg trials were very much played down and not talked up for some time. I turned away to other things here in America, and then got involved in some business affairs and then got into Behavioral Science and teaching at George Washington University in Behavioral Science, which is a new field for me, but I really worked hard to get there and a couple of professors were kind of pushing me to do that. And then I began to get interested in

Nuremberg again, particularly after I th -- more or less retired, although I -- I didn't completely retire from training and consulting. But I slowed down a lot and I started to first work on Baldur von Schirach, the usel -- the youth leader, who -- wh-whom I had particularly prosecuted, I'd made the principal presentation against him. Then I decided I'd switch to something which was talked more about and that was Julius Streicher, the top Jew baiter of all time. But then, a lot was written about him, and so I started to move toward the idea of seeing if I couldn't contribute something different by writing the most elaborate book, the most comprehensive book on the Nuremberg trials, one which would agree with most of the conclusions that many other writers have made, but which would go beyond that, into the depth of the evidence, and particularly quotations from the contemporaneous documents and from the testimony of the 20 -- of the 22 defendants who were at Nuremberg -- 21 defendants. The consequence was that I finally developed a huge book, far too long for publication. It was rejected by a number of commercial presses as being financially unbearable with it's length, and I think it was, especially for a commercial press. I then started approaching university presses and they all insisted that the book should be reduced somewhat in size, so it'd fit into two volumes, rather than three. And so I spent a couple of years doing the difficult task of condensing. And finally, the university press of America, based on all the commendations that I had and their own scholarly research, decided that the book did have a special role to play and so I'm -- was very

glad to sign a contract with them and my book will be published in late December -- or late November or early December.

Q: And of course the length publishers want has nothing to do with the value of something to posterity. You know, your material and work is there to be handed on, in full length.

A: Yes, that's what distinguishes the book mainly. I don't attempt to be the final preacher about the Nazi regime, but I mean to make the account of the trial available, so that many scholars and a lot of others that are really interested and willing to spend some time, can really delve into the contemporaneous documents and particularly into the motivations of the defendants. It's so false for people to think of the Nuremberg in terms of defendants saying, "I was following superior orders."

These defendants worked for years for the Nazis and superior orders defense applies mainly to lower people in the -- at the bottom of the hierarchy, who are told to go and shoot somebody or to commit some atrocious crime. The people at the top give their loyalties to a regime over a period of time, and they do it for many different reasons. It has little to do with, I was ordered to do this by somebody. Most of the enthusiastically worked for the Nazi regime. Some of them, of course, had great reservations and some of them wept as they gave their testimony, being very sorry indeed, for having associated themselves with such an evil course of conduct.

Q: When you talked of Nuremberg and the fact that it was only for a year that it was extensively covered in the American press, I -- I'd like you to say more about that,

because I'm sure you feel that the very holding of the tribunal was immensely important in documenting what had gone on. I -- I was just reading about Benjamin Firense a-as just one small example of somebody gathering evidence. But I'm sure we gained immensely through -- in many ways, through holding the tribunal.

A: Yes, Professor Firense came to Nuremberg and when he find -- found out about the Einsatzgruppen, he immediately started to make some proposals to General Telford Taylor about his leading that -- the case against the main leaders of the Einsatzgruppen, the special task forces which killed millions -- a couple million Jews. And he did this with great ability and aplomb and he presented the case almost entirely with documents in an -- less than a day and one half. The case went on for months after that, by the defense, but the prosecutions case, in the shortest Nuremberg case of all -- the short -- the shortest case of the prosecution, was the one conducted by Firense. I became the head of several divisions, the subsequent proceedings division, economics division, chief of the I. G. Farben trial team, and later, deputy chief council in charge of the official publications. At -- Firense had been offered the job, by Telford Taylor, of being director of publications. He turned it down in order to become head of the Jewish successor restitution organization and he recovered from German firms that -- who had employed slave labor and who'd taken property from Jews, he recovered vast quantities of money for the people involved at -- the survivors of the -- of the people that were involved or the -- some of the people who still survived. And to this day, he's one of my best friends.

Q: What -- You're in touch with a number of people whose experience was somewhat simu -- similar. You mentioned for instance, a -- as a good friend. Have you talked with these colleagues about the impact or the effect of Nuremberg on your lives, and is there any similarity, sort of commonality of experience?

A: I've talked to almost all the survivors, in fact, I was the chairman of the executive committee that put on three Nuremberg reunions, beginning in 1979, nine -- then another 1991 and one in 1996 at the -- more or less at the 50th anniversary of the end of the first Nuremberg trial. And I'm in touch with almost all these prosecutors. I've sent them chapters from my forthcoming book. I've asked for their criticisms and their comments. I don't think anybody surviving knows as much about the people who were in Nuremberg than -- than I do. I don't think so, because of my continued work on this subject. I have constantly wanted to be in touch with them.

Q: And what do you think the impact has been? Has it colored everything that you've done subsequently?

A: Oh yes, I -- You don't do anything as significant as the Nuremberg trial was, in reviewing a modern dictatorship, without that having a tremendous effect emotionally, on you. I think the importance of the trial is much more on what it revealed than in the fact that it punished 19 defendants, and acquitted three. The effect of the trial later on, was very mixed. For some years, it had very little effect, and then as war crimes were committed in ce-central Europe, particularly in Yugoslavia, and then later in Rwanda, world attention turned much more to what international law was, that international law

was being violated, and that there was no established structure to deal with these crimes, and that no court was available which was -- had jurisdiction to handle these matters. So then you started to get the foundation laid and an international treaty signed to create the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal, and later on the United Nations also created the Rwanda tribunal. The Rwanda tribunal has had a great number of difficulties. It was poorly staffed, poorly financed and was not well taken -- it was not well administrated. On the contrary, I think the -- the beginnings of the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal are very promising. They do not have the number of contemporaneous documents or the great amount of contemporaneous documents which we had in the Nuremberg trial. This means they have to rely much more on investigations and interrogating witnesses and that's a much more difficult job to do when you don't have all the knowledge that we had about the detailed operation of the Nazi regime.

Q: What are the main shortcomings of these later tribunals?

A: International opinion does not regard them as essential to scoring the up events and illuminating the background and the nature what went on in the Balkans that led to some of these things. They aren't international opinion on the whole, is not in the same position of knowledge with respect to what's going on. And you don't have the same push, the same public demand. And the tremendous number of countries are so troubled by their own internal problems that they have not pushed the United Nations or the established tribunal to do more, more quickly, and they haven't given it as much funding and -- as they should. There are some very able people that have gone into the

leadership of the Yugoslav war crimes tribunal and I wish them well. I think that they are going to make a -- a big contribution in the long run.

Q: I wonder if you'd talk about areas of involvement in your life later, that you see as having a direct involvement with your Nuremberg experience.

A: I was asked to make a number of speeches at conferences of one kind and another and of course I was instrumental with health and my wife and others in putting on these three Nuremberg reunions. And this took up a lot of time and -- it meant that, however, that we were able to call back my former associates in Nuremberg and keep in touch with them. Nuremberg is not something that wears out of your life with time. It -- It becomes a -- an area where you think about it at night and you think about it in the morning and you wonder what can the world do, what can -- how can public opinion be advanced so that they're willing to reduce the rights of national sovereignty to a greater extent and to make the international law really international and enforceable by international agency. There are a tremendous number of isolationists and people who raise their hands and say, "We don't want any foreigners in a position where they can possibly judge Americans." There's a certain appeal in that for citizens who are not too well informed, and it's regrettable.

Q: Do you think there are grounds for optimism though? Do you feel things are getting better or getting worse?

A: No, I think things are getting somewhat better. I don't think the pace is nearly as great as it should be and certainly not as great as I would like to have it.

Q: And how can we change people's attitudes?

A: By more education in international affairs at a younger age, for younger people. By having more of the -- the books that have been written on Nuremberg circulated more widely, building up interest in -- in a broader public education, so that people are more aware of --

End of Tape One, Side A

Beginning Tape One, Side B

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Drexel Sprecher. This is tape number one, side B. Do you think your trips that you made as a young man to Germany, I think it was 1929 - 1934, was that a part of the forming of your own internationalism, if you like?

A: Oh yes indeed. The fact that I studied in London and I met many refugees from Hitler, that I traveled into Germany while Hitler was in -- in power, in 1934 and 1935, the fact that I worked with anti-Nazi Germans in the Office of Strategic Service, just left an -- an indelible imprint on my -- my whole life.

Q: What about the imprint left by your parent's values? What you had absorbed from them or been taught by them?

A: It had very little influence. I came from a middle class, lower upper class, small town family. My father was a banker. He'd been president of the Wisconsin Bar Association and I don't think he paid very much attention to the Nazi regime until I began to become active in my thinking about the Nazi regime and told him something

about it. He was certainly never sympathetic to the Nazi regime that I know of, but he was not active with respect to international affairs.

Q: Now, he did have -- your parents did have religious views, so would you not have perhaps had a strong moral sense that you would have absorbed from them?

A: Well, you touch on a very important point, not so much because of the moral values that my parents had, but they sent me to a small college my first year, North Central College, and there I met a minister by the name of Ralph Marion Holdiman, who was a very active Christian Socialist and his ethical values were very stretched into the political area and by the time I was done with that first year away at college, I was -- I was beginning to see the roots of Fascism in Germany and of course then, when I went to the University of Wisconsin, Hitler came to power during my junior year, and a number of professors played this up as one might expect, because it was certainly a tremendously forbidding development in international affairs. One of my professors was Selac Perlman, who was the chief historian of labor developments in this country. And I can remember one day in a seminar that he burst into tears as someone mentioned what was happening in Nazi Germany. And it was a very moving moment and I can still remember it very well. Max Carl Otto was a -- an American of German descent who was very anti-Nazi and he was also one of my heroes at the University of Wisconsin. I was asked to run the conference on war at the University of Wisconsin, shortly after Hitler came to power, and we gathered leaders, including people from military academies and professors from both Wisconsin and other universities, some

ministers, like Re-Reverend Alf da -- Alfred W. Swan and others and they made talks and there was questions by the students and there were some demonstrations about how important the whole thing was, by some of the students. And that put me on the bandwagon.

Q: And it does seem as if the early years have those strands, if you like, that become a theme throughout your life. I'm thinking of the group you were involved in as a student, Coinose?

A: Coinose.

Q: Oh then, I wonder if you'd tell the story too, of Beverly, that you mentioned once.

A: Oh it -- I -- I made a number of f-friends at the University of Wisconsin, who had strong ethical feelings. Catholics, Protestants and Jews. And a number of us got together and got the idea that if we held a number of meetings, it might help make a contribution to fighting this -- this racism and contribute to the broader education of students. One of them was Beverly Rabinoff, who was a Badger Beauty. She was one of the five women elected to that noble category because of her good looks. There were an -- a number of other people, George Dugger, Bill Blaiser, who were Aryans who were very active in this movement and we called it, "In Common," which was from the Greek word meaning in common -- coinose. We held meetings. We didn't allow people to join Coinose unless they had at least a B average and unless they'd done something on the campus. Well that made it kind of a distinct group and people kind of looked at us in a different way than if we'd just said, "Hey, everybody can

join Coinose.” And it turned out to be a very useful thing, they got a ver -- very great amount attention, including by the president of the university.

Q: But you -- What it was -- after, I remember you talking about including Beverly in a -- I think it was a fraternity dance.

A: Oh yes. There was quite a bit of segregation at the universities back in the 1930's and there were Jewish fraternities and non-Jewish fraternities and non-Jewish sororities and so on. And the -- there was very little mixing of -- inside the frater -- the sorority or fraternity houses of Jews and Gentiles. So Beverly Rabinoff, being a good friend of mine, I said to her one day, “Beverly, I’ve been asked to go to the Tri-Delt House,” -- the -- one of the sororities, “for a party. And I’m wondering if you would like to be my guest?” And she said, “Oh, that’ll upset things a great deal.” And I said, “Well, why not? After all, you’re a Badger Beauty, and if you go in there, we’ll cause -- with me -- we’ll cause quite a sensation.” So we ap -- walked into the sorority house at the time of that party and people’s jaws dropped. However, within minutes, everybody wanted to dance with Beverly Rabinoff. All the men wanted to dance with her and I was left alone throughout most of the evening while other people danced with Beverly Rabinoff. So that was a small contribution to integration.

Q: Do you have a lot of other examples like that?

A: Well, in my fraternity, which had no Jews, Phi Gamma Delta, I got el -- Edward Ellsworth Ross, who was a former Phi Gam to come and talk and I urged him to talk about the segregation problem and things like that, which he did. And so there was

some things like that. The dean of students, a fellow by the name of Holt, H-o-l-t, his son was in our fraternity. We went to his house and -- and the overall dean was Scott Goodenite. Bill Blaiser, who was the head of the student union, and I, went up to see him and told him that we were about to try something, that we wanted him to know what it was. Some Jews had gone onto the pier that stuck out into Lake Mindoda, of one of the fraternity houses -- I forget the name of it right now. And a fellow by the name of Max Knecht, K-n-e-c-h-t, who was the boxing champion of the big 10, went out with a couple of his fraternity brothers and threw these Jews in the lake. And this, of course, made a lot of newspaper publicity. Blaiser -- Bill Blaiser and I didn't want it to die at that point, so we went to Goodenite and said, "We're going down to see --" Blaiser was over six feet tall and so was I, and together we weren't too afraid of Max Knecht. So we went down to the fraternity and asked to see him and he blustered out and said, "What are you liberals doing here?" We said, "We've come to tell you that if you were to repeat what you did before, we can give you the straight word that you'd be ostracized from the university and that we would gather a group of people and throw you in the lake just to show that we wouldn't take this kind of thing any more." And he said, "Rrrr," and turned around, banged the door and left. But Max Knecht never threw any more Jews in the lake.

Q: Now, you said that he was calling you a liberal, but what was your family background, liberal or very conservative?

A: Very conservative. And -- But they didn't have any strong pred -- prejudices about race, as far as I know. We only had two Jewish families in the little town I lived in and both of them patronized my father's bank. And I bought my shoes there and things like that.

Q: What about your own politics and the way in which your Nuremberg experience might have colored that?

A: Well, I became very active in politics after I returned from Nuremberg. Up to that time, I had been an active Democrat in the sense of making a few contributions to the Democratic party and congressional campaign committees and so on, but I hadn't been very active. But when I came back from Nuremberg, my wife was also an active Democrat and I settled out in Potomac, Maryland area, which is largely an area of relatively wealthy people. And a lot of brainy people, a lot of intellectuals who had done well. So we formed -- I became precinct chairman and we also formed a -- a group out there, which was calculated to give talks about -- in the churches and otherwise, about anti-Semitism and -- and so forth and the local pastors were all for this. Reverend Gloyd Alice in the Methodist church was one of our great supporters and so forth. So, yes, this did have an effect and I went down to the hill with the idea of becoming an assistant to somebody that was helping on small business affairs, since I was running a couple of small businesses. A land development company and a construction company out in Potomac. And I met Senator Sparkman, head of the Senate small business committee, and Rite Patman, the head of the House small

business committee. I went in to see -- They said I should go see Paul Butler, the national chairman of the Democratic party and I did and he established the small business division of the Democrat national committee, which was composed of me and my secretary, no more. And we developed a lot of literature, which was broadly circulated to the state parties, county and local people, concerning small business issues. So that was my first move, actively into politics. About a year later, after the 1956 election, I was back to doing what I had been doing before, someone said -- Paul Butler, the national chairman, was forming a new structure to the Democratic national committee, which was going to pull together the political organization and build up more precincts and extend the amount of public relations that the national committee was going to have with the local organizations between elections. So I went in to see Paul Butler and he immediately said, "Well, I'd like to hire you, but I have to consult with the advisory committee on political organization." So I flew out to Michigan to see former congressman, Neal Staebler, S-t-a-e-b-l-e-r, who was the state chairman of the Democratic party in Michigan. And he introduced me to the Michigan leaders, and we sat down and had a dinner together and they queried me and they came back with the recommendation that I be made deputy chairman of the national committee -- deputy chairman for political organization. And we then hired a total of six regional representatives, each one of whom had six to eight states, and he -- they traveled around, building up ideas of better Democratic organization, and not trying to be pushy, but to -- get more people involved, hold more meetings and they would be

available to see what was happening in another state, to help -- still a different state, ye -- other notions and ideas and try new things out and things like that.

Q: Now what would the group have grilled you about, when they met with you over dinner, do you remember?

A: Not particularly. It was a very friendly discussion between active Democrats. And of course, they were interested in the fact that I'd been a prosecutor at Nuremberg and that I had edited the official volumes on the later 12 trials, the so-called Green series and I think they were kind of glad to have me come aboard.

Q: No, I just wondered what role Nuremberg might have had in -- in that, and you answered.

A: I don't think it -- I don't think it had much direct role, it -- Nuremberg exposures of things that were against democracy and the dictatorship, of course, contributed to democracy and I often mentioned the Fascist dictatorship in my discussions, naturally, because they'd been such a big part of my life, earlier.

Q: Mm-hm. Your years as deputy chair, wh-what do you look back on as your accomplishments in that role?

A: Well, we were asked to come to the Democratic National Convention and to make a presentation to the whole convention. So Paul Butler introduced me and I said, fac -- many of you people here, that are active at the state level, know what has been done by the political organization wing of the Democratic National Committee. Well, I want to just -- just tell you a few things that we have done and will be doing and to ha -- allow

you to ask questions, encourage your questions and then I want to have each of the regional representatives talk to you and so on. So, up here, in a little book that contains the proceedings of the Democratic National Committee convention in 1959, you'll find about 10 pages where we spoke for perhaps altogether, up to nearly an hour.

Q: What were the most important issues then? You were in that role from -- Was that 1957 to 1960?

A: Yes. Do you know, I -- I have a hard time now, figuring out what the roles were that we most talked about. I think they generally involved the idea of more social reform that would benefit-fit people. We had a -- a senior citizens group as well and we had an agriculture group, a farmer's group. We had a labor group, and they were available to help push democratic ideas through the democratic digest and through special releases and through the many speeches that we helped influence.

Q: What about Nuremberg and your -- your post-Nuremberg sort of sensitivity in the decades after that? I'm thinking of major events, the Civil Rights Movement or the McCarthy era or the Feminist movement. I think you would have been a person with sort of strong views on -- at all these times, a clear sense of what was right and wrong.

A: Well, yes, but I -- I think it's rather difficult for me to go into all the ethical and political implications of that time back there, three years before 1960. We helped elect President Kennedy and we were delighted with that. I can still remember when he was leaving the platform in -- at the 1960 convention and some poor photographer had gotten off to the side and -- and had missed him, so I flagged him down as he was

walking across the exit ramp, and he stopped and waved and this fellow took a picture. Well, little things like that are those that stick out in your mind as you look back. The fact that you -- we had a big conference in Colorado and -- and there was a head table of about 17. The head of the party in Colorado had the central seat and Kennedy sat next to him, in the middle. I sat in seat 17, on the very end and I said nothing, because I wasn't called on to say anything. We'd -- We weren't -- We didn't -- The [indecipherable] organization side of the Democratic National Committee encouraged other people to be active and talking and doing things. We were not the public relations side of the committee, which created speeches and things like that.

Q: But it would be hugely important.

A: Yes, it -- some people have said that's -- without our work, that Kennedy wouldn't have been elected. Well, I think that's problematical, but in all events, we were certainly a large contribution.

Q: Did you talk, you know, in these -- a-at these times? Would your experiences at Nuremberg had been something that you'd -- would often -- would it often come up in conversation?

A: No, no.

Q: You have a chapter in your book on the legacy of Nuremberg, but I'd wonder if you'd talk about that in general terms?

A: Well, aft -- right after the first trial, the general assembly of the United Nations, enacted a declaration on international law and affirming the principles of Nuremberg.

I'm not sure that that made a tremendous effect -- had a tremendous effect on the -- large numbers of people, but it did contribute to those who were concerned with international law and with strengthening the United Nations and international law. The Nuremberg trial set a precedent for trials held immediately after the first trial. In Nuremberg there were 12 other trials, a total of about 190 other people were tried. Then there were trials in the British war zone. There were trials in the French war zone. We didn't hear about any trials in the Soviet zone. The Soviet representative at the first Nuremberg trial, left Nuremberg the -- just after the tribunal made its decision in the first trial and they never associated with the later trials, at their election. However, they did allow our representatives to carry on investigations in the Soviet zone and they were cooperative in that respect. About two years later, during the later trials, a press contingent of Soviet journalists, did come to Nuremberg for one or two days and I recall sitting in with General Taylor as he was asked questions by them. And of course, we tried to turn it around and ask them a few questions as to why there were -- had been some trials that we knew about in the eastern zone of Germany, and they were rather embarrassed by that. Toward the end of the trials, the Genocide Convention was enacted as a treaty and it is of course, since been ratified by almost all nations. it took the United States quite some time to recognize it, because again some people, raising the banner of sovereignty were worried that the Genocide Convention would give other people the right to look into what was happening in the United States. The declaration of -- of human rights by the General Assembly was

[indecipherable] related to the rights we ex -- expounded at Nuremberg. And Eleanor Roosevelt at that time, said, "This is a fine declaration on human rights, but without some legal obligations, will governments be inspired to see that these rights are enforced?" And of course, that was a very incisive comment. The -- As I've mentioned, the international law committee of the United Nations did reaffirm the Nuremberg principles and this led -- after we left Germany, this helped lead to a tremendous number of trials of Germans, by the German courts. This is something most people don't know anything about. There's a whole book on it by a gentleman by the name of Rukerle, who was -- who was in charge of keeping track of these war crimes trials. And there's been a tremendous number of books published in Germany, which deal with the Nazi regime and an American photographer by the name of Ray Daddario, has cooperated with the German authorities in publishing a number of photographs concerning the Nazi regime and the Nuremberg trial, and these have sold very well. In Berlin there are at least two striking exhibitions that refer back to the Nazi period. One is in the old Reichstag building, and there they have a photographic exhibit that must be a half block long, where you walk along and you get pictures of the development of the Nazi regime, including it's horrors. A little ways away from that, there is a -- what's called a Plattenzae memo-memorial. And that's a very striking memorial. It has a -- a marble wall which says, in German, "To the victims of Fascism." A little ways away, there's a circular statue -- there's a statue with a -- a base which is circular and it has arrows which point in the direction of various

concentration camps, Auschwitz, Flossenbürg, Buchenwald. And it's very striking, you can't think as you walk by that, without realizing that in each of these concentration camps, hundreds of thousands and in the case of Auschwitz, millions of people were killed. The German Minister of Justice has spoken out about the significance of the Nuremberg trials. There's been a tremendous turnaround in German thinking, partly as a result of the Nuremberg trials. Course, one of the striking things about the Vietnam war is that a couple of our officers also went on a binge of killing Vietnamese citizens, the kind of thing that can happen when an ideologically motivated person is not constrained and is willing to kill people, certainly outside the law. This led to the conviction of Lieutenant William Calley, C-a-l-l-e-y, a junior officer in the US army. So this is one case where we've applied international law to one of our own officers, which is a good thing. The greatest thing that's happened by way of specific action, took place under the administration of President George Bush, after Saddam Hussein and forces of Iraq had invaded Kuwait --

End of Tape One, Side B

Beginning Tape Two, Side A

Q: This is a continuation of a United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with Drexel Sprecher. This is tape number two, side A. You were just talking about the Gulf War.

A: Yes, in 1990, after Saddam Hussein invaded Iraq, George Bush -- President George Bush, after consultation with a number of people that were leaders in the United Nations and the Secretary General of NATO, he ordered military forces of the United States to take measures to push back the for -- forces of Iraq. This was done in a magnificent fashion, by a -- special troops. The trouble is that an agreement was made with Saddam Hussein, which didn't provide for any permanent occu -- occupation and which didn't provide for any war crimes trials, and which allowed him, over time, to re-institute a dictatorship of the first water. Now, that is utterly different than Nuremberg, where we -- the allies that occupied the country, they not only conducted war crimes trials, but they assisted the democratic elements, which were latent in Germany, to slowly develop and to come out. We did not have the wisdom to do that, as a country, and -- in connection with the United Nations at the time, which is a most regrettable thing, and yet it does deal with the thing that started out very well. An inconclusive truce. I suppose the next thing would be what happened in Yugoslavia, and -- beginning in 1991, when military forces of Serbia invaded Bosnia and Croatia, there were atrocities committed on a huge scale and the fact that there had been a Nuremberg trial certainly did help, with respect to the creation of the international

criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. The war crimes are being studied on a great -- a greatly improved scale, by a number of universities. The -- At American College of Law, here in Washington, it's a part of the American University, a professor by the name of Diane F. Orentlicher, O-r-e-n-t-l-i-c-h-e-r, is the director of the war crimes research office, and she has led a group which has helped investigate the details of what happened in Yugoslavia and passed them on to the tribunal, because the tribunal didn't have an adequate staff to do as good a job as it might. And that very creditable work has been appreciated by several of the top prosecutors, including Louise Arbour, A-r-b-o-u-r, and a conference was held at the Washington College of Law School -- the Washington College of Law, and several of these representatives, the very top ones, from the International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague, came and participated in that trial, which got fairly good publicity.

Q: And you were involved in that?

A: Yes, in a minor way. I -- I made one little talk and so forth, but thank goodness she had trained and gotten a lot of people who are presently active. And so my contribution was very limited, and should have been very limited, because they were all sa -- the top people there were all familiar with what had happened at Nuremberg and what I might say would be redundant and not too useful.

Q: Are we moving quickly enough, do you think? I mean, we're -- I'm -- I'm thinking of the year 2000 and really this is a new area of -- of law that's evolving.

A: Well, what's evolving is not so much the law itself, because I think that's relatively clear. It's acceptance by many of the sovereign nations that's still not appropriate, number one, and number two, we don't have an international structure that's sufficiently powerful. The enactment of the International War Crimes Tribunal Treaty earlier this year at Rome, the Rome treaty, is a big step in the right direction, but look what year it is. It's the year 1998 and that's still -- that treaty still has to be ratified by a number of leading nations, including the United States. So th-the -- these is -- this is a very unpleasant area for someone like me, who would like to see that moving much more rapidly.

Q: How do you think we can change, most quickly, mankind's viewpoint on this? I mean, you went through a particular experience in your life, but how can that education you had, that sensitivity be spread to more people?

A: Well, it isn't just a question of spreading sensitivity to more people. If people are poor, if people are struggling to stay alive, they tend to be willing to follow a person who has simple answers and who claims to have an enemy, particularly a neighbor or a group or a race. And he drums up agitation about that and these poor, relatively uneducated people throng to his support. So the question of war crimes really gets down partly to the world's ability to feed more people, on the one hand, and to curb population growth on the other, so we don't have these tremendous cases of people struggling to stay alive, in terms of limited resources. And the question of educating people who are struggling and fighting among themselves and having great

difficulties, to sit back and think and learn, is certainly a central difficulty.

Q: Do you have great concern over the increasing discrepancy i -- within the United States, of wealth?

A: Yes, indeed, yes indeed. How many people are living just above the standard of living or just below it? And here we are, supposedly in a very prosperous ca -- time, and yet there are just tremendous numbers of people who are ill-educated and don't have the opportunity to forge ahead. The -- The remaining unequal treatment -- the continuing unequal treatment of women, is certainly a significant area where more people have got to become concerned and to do something. What -- I'm -- I -- My main worry is -- is places like Africa, where you have civil wars on every other country going on, and undoubtedly war crimes or civilian crimes that are at such a broad rate that they have to be classified as something of -- as violations of international law as well. These things have got to be addressed and more people have got to get to work educating more people, who will do something about it.

Q: When you refer to women, were you thinking of women within the United States, or really women worldwide in the -- the haves and have-nots of -- you know, the lot of women in the developing world?

A: Well, I think Marian Wright Edelman, who's -- heads the Children's Defense Fund, and Hillary Rodham Clinton and a number of other people are trying to do something to a-advance the treatment and education of children, as well as to involve more women in the economic affairs and the political affairs of this nation. And, you know,

more power to them, but it's a long way to go. So many people are struggling from day to day that they don't have time to really sit down and think things through.

Q: I wonder if I could ask, I'm -- I'm thinking of today as just one example of a day and with each day's news, I would suppose that you have an interesting viewpoint on it. And a -- I was thinking today of the election of a new political leader in Germany, and w-within the United States, I'm -- I'm thinking of the Lewinsky case. There may be other things you want to comment on, but a -- I just think that your own life experiences give you sort of informed views on things.

A: No, I don't care to become a great commentator at the age of 85 years, concerning all kinds of domestic affairs. I think o-others can do a lot better job of that than I can. I think that the election in Germany, of the new Prime Minister is a -- an indication that there is still more attention being paid in Europe to international affairs. His election I think, like the election of Tony Blair in Great Britain, is la -- is more encouraging, because I think it will strengthen NATO and strengthen adherence to international law and treaties. I think it will lead to more crossing the boundaries with respect to reaching people who violate international law and commit atrocities. As I think I pointed out before, the -- under Cole, as -- as well as I think under the new Premier, Germany will not be in the background, with respect to taking the lead on strengthening international law and NATO.

Q: How do you think your own views have changed with time?

A: Nuremberg was an extension in international affairs of some of the ethical principles that had been ground into me for many years before that. So I didn't feel I was moving into new territory with respect to decency and ethics, etcetera. I knew I was moving in -- into new territory with respect to getting international structures made, which could begin to deal with some of the things which were -- which need to be handled on an international basis.

Q: What are you proudest of?

A: Well, I'm of course proudest of having served in Nuremberg for four years, and for having been editor in chief of the 15 Green volumes, called, "Trials of War Criminals," before the Nuremberg military tribunals. I suppose that's what I'm most proud of. I hope I'll similarly be proud of this book, but we have to see about that.

Q: Well, that's part -- that's in a sense a natural progression. But did you have a sense that -- that your parents were immensely proud of you and what you'd accomplished? Did they understand the -- the significance, do you feel, at the time of their deaths?

A: I think my parents were very proud of the fact that I received some recognition for my work at Nuremberg, and that I had become a supergrade and a Deputy Chief Council, but we didn't talk too much about those kinds of things. We talked about many more local things that were of importance in Wisconsin and my father and I took fishing trips in Canada, and we played golf together and enjoyed each other, but we didn't engage in a tremendous amount of discussion about my past. They obviously were proud of some of the things I'd done, but we didn't talk much about it.

Q: This concludes the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum interview with  
Drexel Sprecher.

End of Tape Two, Side A

Conclusion of Interview