

An Interview with

DR. ERNST BORINSKI

November 18, 1979

Interviewed by

John Jones

Mississippi Department of Archives and History
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Interviewer: John Jones

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JONES: This is John Jones with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History about to interview Dr. Ernst Borinski. Do you have a middle name?

BORINSKI: No, no middle name.

JONES: We're at Dr. Borinski's house on County Line Road in Tougaloo, and today, or tonight is Sunday, November 18, 1979. I think it would be best if we could start at the very beginning, if you could tell me some of your early background, when and where you were born.

BORINSKI: I was born on the twenty-sixth of November, 1901. That means my life covers almost the total century.

JONES: I didn't realize that, well, that you were that old.

BORINSKI: Yes. I even have my birth certificate if you want to see it. The birth certificate is interesting for the reason that it was done in the time of Gothic German. My birthplace determined very much the nature of my life and my early youth because the city at that time was in Upper Silesia. It was _____ on the Polish-German border on one side, on the Galician-Austrian border on the other side, and we were on the Russian side of that area. That was commonly called the Great Empire Corner. It may even be interesting to know that when I was born there was still William II ruling in Germany, Franz Josef ruling in Austria-Hungary, and Czar Nicholas was ruling in Russia. Even when we crossed the borders it was very interesting always. It was small things such as with the postage cards that when you bought them in Germany, William was in the middle and Franz Josef on the right and Nicholas on the left, and when we bought them on the Russian side Nicholas was in the middle and in Austria Franz Josef was in the middle. The city was _____ cit

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and it was also the customs city where the trains came in from Russia and Poland, from Austria, and I have from early childhood very much an image of the population which came over. From the Polish-Russian side there were always Russians coming over there in their big coats and so on. That was in the Czarist times and they came shopping because Germany had much better merchandise and there was a great smuggling enterprise there, and for this very reason one was very used to a very international population. My parents had at this time what you might call a kind of department store of high quality, and we as children were always in there because we liked the people who were there and we could speak their language. The language was either German or Polish or Russian, some Yiddish was in between. We really had quite a bit of that. It was also interesting that you had - I told you already before I am from Jewish background - and we were let us say about lower-upper class or something like that. We were well educated, but you had, for instance, relatives on the other side of the border. We had relatives in Krakow which was very close by - and there were also mixed marriages between Catholics and Jews and so on - anyhow, they were all very well-to-do people. The social language depended always on whoever was visiting with us. When the majority happened to be Polish we spoke Polish or Russian or German or Jewish. Sometimes, if there was some kind of social gathering and I wanted to show off I spoke French. French was the so-called language of the nobility. We all could speak it too. That gives you also a kind of interesting background. That means our loyalties in this area were not very well fixed. We were Germans basically. This was the time just before the first world war. We were Germans, but we knew the Russians, we knew the Austrians. It wasn't as if we'd moved to the other side of the border we would have cared. That at times was very interesting. Let us say that the first years of my life,

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because I was thirteen years old when the first world war broke out...

JONES: Did it effect your family?

BORINSKI: It effected us there because the first shooting was so close to our border that the windows broke.

JONES: That's too close.

BORINSKI: Yes, yes. In fact, my life was also interesting from this viewpoint. In the first world war, we were almost in the war zone. That determines again my life because the Germans lost the war and that changed the total situation. At that time you'll recall probably that Poland became independent, and there came Woodrow Wilson's statements. There came a plebiscite and through political means or some way our city came to Poland by the plebiscite. I find myself at that time all of a sudden in a Polish high school.

JONES: Yes, the boundaries were reestablished.

BORINSKI: Yes. That was interesting from the viewpoint or in comparison to things which are happening right now. We can say that in spite of war, people did not hate each other in such a way that you couldn't manage in often very grotesque situations. I was then a teenager and we were very much excited that we were now in a different country. There was not a kind of national feeling and so on. It was interesting that the first thing we did was not really worry what it was all about. Linguistically, it was sometimes even funny because we were faced with teachers in our school who pretended not to know German and we pretended not to know Polish though we knew each other's languages very well. Basically, the communication was carried on, again, in French. Then, it was very strictly regulated through the Geneva Convention that the German language was to be used as a third language. In our area, Polish, French and German were the three languages that we could use freely. You see, at that time, when you changed the country politically, there was no change in pro-

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perty. My parents could continue the basic currency rates, but instead of German Marks they had Polish _____. That went very well until the inflation time came in Germany. I finished my _____, they call it the here they call it high school, in Poland but you got a certificate that was valid in Germany as had been agreed upon. One had Polish and German citizenship at the same time and you could then decide where you wanted to study. Since I wanted to study in Germany, citizenship ^{was granted even} though my parents lived on the other side of the border.

JONES: But the war itself didn't effect your father's business?

BORINSKI: No.

JONES: He was able to carry on business as usual?

BORINSKI: Yes, normal business. In fact, the war business was basically a good business in fact. However, there were periods in between. I can remember, I cannot tell the dates anymore, when the Russians beat the Austrians ⁱⁿ Galicia. That is something I very vividly remember when the beaten troops came into our city. That was the first time I saw what war was. In fact, there was a famous Jewish holiday called Yom Kippur, you've probably heard of it, At that time the Jews would say they had to open all the stores in order to get the people handled. There one had the opportunity to see what war was. I came into a situation which was hardly believable. I saw it again and again in the second world war. There was though, a kind of pseudo-normalization. However, at the same time the inflation time came in Germany which was a kind of dream time a time of unreality. Normalization was then in terms of smooth procedures, but it was in character unreal because the exchanged money was worthless, but it was the only thing one was technically allowed to use. I can remember as the inflation time moved toward its end we played _____ using marks.

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I also learned that in a society things can be psuedo-normal and habits can be maintained to where they lose all their significance. The money was just a piece of paper that allowed the exchange of goods. When you give the piece of paper you get something for it. I moved then to Germany and moved into a university.

JONES: What were you studying?

BORINSKI: I was studying at that time the law, but I studied at the same time the humanities. I was always very much interested in history. I went to Halle on the Saale River which was practically Halle-Wittenberg. That was a Lutheran university in Germany.

JONES: How do you spell that, so that our transcriber will know?

BORINSKI: H-A-L-L-E, Halle on the Saale River. There I studied the law. It was a very good university.

JONES: This was after the war.

BORINSKI: That was after the first world war, yes. It was interesting too. I think that what I know of law now I learned at this university because we started out studying Roman law in Latin. It was not unusual. It was the common thing to do. We learned logical reason and so on. I was a relatively good student. I had no difficulty learning at any time. I went through Germany's total legal education, which is different than here, what you get here. In Germany I got what they called a referenda(?) degree which was simply the first part. Then you studied in the courts. For instance, you were assigned to a - what do you call it? - supreme court clerk. We came to the provincial supreme courts and served the court clerk.

JONES: Let me get this straight. You were assigned to a court clerk...

BORINSKI: Yes. I was assigned to a judge of, there is was the provincial supreme court

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it would be here the Mississippi Supreme Court. In Prussia we had provinces
There were three or five judges and all the time you were assigned to one
judge and you did most of his work. That is an interesting story anyhow.
There was one judge who was old, his name was Kloss, K-L-O-S-S. He was very
smart. He had a son who was about three or four years younger than I was. We
became somewhat friends. This fellow was unusually gifted. He was a born
linguist. The Kloss family lived on the Unstrut River in the wine country
where they made champagne; we call it in Germany _____. The _____
factory was Kloss and _____, and it was on a hill there and we went
there very often and had free champagne. This young gentleman was - one day
he came, we were in Naumberg, he came and had a book, five or four notebook
altogether. He said, "Here, I wrote here," - I may have been about twenty-
one or twenty-two and he was eighteen or nineteen - he had already studied
linguistics in terms of the old - what do you? I forget now the term. The
old Indian language, what's it called? Sanskrit, yes. He had studied Sanskr
and so on, and wrote everything down in that book and gave it to me. He sai
"Ernst, I want you to keep that." "Okay." We became friends. I brought this
story out because it is a good in between story. When I was already in Mis-
sissippi - well - Mississippi College at that time had German classics, but
the teacher didn't know German. The students, in spite of segregation, came
to me and said, "We want to compete for the Fulbright. Our teacher doesn't
know a thing about German." So I was helping them out. There was one whose
name was Jim Dunn who was very brilliant, and he got the Fulbright and is
now Chairman of the Iowa German department. He comes to Jackson once in a
while. He came here one time two years ago. He said, "Ernst, I have cor-
responded with a very famous linguist in Germany. I'd like you to read the
letter." So I was reading the letter, and it was signed Hans Kloss, the very

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same fellow I spoke about. The letter was interesting because he became a specialized linguist in German, in the German language as it is spoken in Russia along the Volga River. They had a correspondence. So I then wrote him a letter and I told him, "I want to find out, are you the Hans Kloss; we were in Naumberg together?" He said, "Yes." And there was another incident. When I left Germany I told some friends of mine, "Ship my books," which I had in Germany. A small part of shipped, and in this part was this book which I gave me. So I wrote him, "I have this book of yours," and told him right away "I will keep the book, but I will have my secretary make the best Xerox copy to the original which is possible and send it to you." Out of that developed a wonderful correspondence which is now going still. One week ago I got a letter from him, and he says, "I am now seventy-five years old." And on Friday of this week I went and got the numbers and dialed through to the place which is near Mannheim and dialed as soon as I figured out the time which was 11:00 there, but I phoned him. That was just a very great experience.

JONES: You got him?

BORINSKI: I got him on the phone, right. And he's now very much interested in the question of South Africa, whites and blacks and so on. So I phoned him and I said, "I wanted to congratulate you on your work, but I also wanted to, I'm curious to listen to your voice." One thing is interesting; we didn't speak German together. He speaks English rather fluently. My linguistic development is interesting. I speak German fluently, but such an interview as this I wouldn't do in German because I would look for words too long. So I spoke English, but I always apologized, I said, "It doesn't make any difference to me whether I speak German or English to you." He said, "No, it does not matter to me either." So we spoke English and maybe inserted some German words. It is interesting that that relationship dates back to the time that

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I was at the University studying law. There are very interesting stories that come up. I planned to have him come to the United States. I would pay for it because he's a brilliant guy. He's seventy-five years old, not young any more, but he could give us linguistic workshops for Millsaps and Tougaloo Colleges or anyone which may be very unusual. So I told him, "Instead of coming to visit you in Germany, I insist that you let me bring you and your wife over here."

JONES: I hope he comes.

BORINSKI: It's quite possible that he will come. Now, after I finished this service in the provincial court - I go back now to the story again.

JONES: Yes. You did complete your studies in the provincial court?

BORINSKI: Yes. Then you take a second examination which is called the assessor examination which really qualifies you to become a judge in any court in Germany including the Supreme Court. However, if you become automatically, when you pass this examination which really takes a lot of insight, it is much more difficult than any doctor's thesis here, you can get through the state any court position which is available. It was very interesting then. In Germany at that time the Jewish-Prussian always played the role - in terms of Prussia where there was suffering - a little bit like that of the blacks here. The difference was that the Jews, wherever they went, were always super-literate. That means we were really persecuted because we were too smart and we were overeducated. They kept the Jews out also in Prussia because we were too smart, and smart in a way that if you have penetrated and have insight into any bureaucracy, you are a danger. Even at that time, and I was young, I had sympathy for that. So what they did was offer me a position as general judge in a small community in, they called it Kelbra, K-E-L-B-R-A, a small community with industry and a factory where mother-of-pearl buttons were

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made. All kinds of things. And, you know, I was crazy to come to Tougaloo College, and I was equally crazy to take this job. That is a very interesting parallelism. These kinds of things must interest me because this probably was the most opposite of anything I'd ever done. I came from a Jewish, Polish border background into this German mountain community. I got me an apartment with a man who worked with the buttons, his name was Schultz I remember very well, and started out. I was completely the opposite of everything they had up there. That gives you some insight into why I came to Mississippi, I think. It was really interesting there. I was the only judge. I had one referenda: an assistant, and you had everything: court cases; everything that came to the court came to your desk. There were some very interesting incidents. There they also had those big - what do you call it? - those big properties, plantations there. There was one plantation there where the second wife of William II lived. All kinds of documents always came through. There was also a provincial prosecutor who we knew as colleagues. There was one case that was interesting. People are very poor there. One time a whole horde of the community people there invaded this feudal estate where they had all these chicken houses, and they stole all the chickens and cooked them and ate them up. So that was the prosecution. I had all these poor peasants there in the courthouse, and I told to myself they could have gotten a tremendous punishment, but I made up my mind not to go that way. In Germany there is a law that says if a minor crime is committed by a person who is very hungry, who may grab a piece of meat, they call it a robbery for the mouth and it is a misdemeanor. So I figured out, I considered this crew of thirty-seven people a collective _____.

JONES: Was this before the rise of the Nazis?

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. So then I had to convince the prosecutor. You see, in Germany the prosecutor can appeal this decision, and his case was very well presented.

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That same evening I was having a glass of beer with him and I told him, "You know, you made a very good presentation. I think I was very impressed. But do you have a real interest to appeal that case?" He says, "Yes!" I say, "Think it over. Can we not come to agreement to just forget about it and have a few more glasses of beer together?" And I got him to the point where he forgot the whole thing. But it was a very interesting experience. I was there for, what, a year and a half maybe, and then I decided I may be a good lawyer. I went to the city of Erfurt.

JONES: How do you spell that?

BORINSKI: Erfurt. E-R-F-U-R-T. The city is known because Luther was there at the Augustine Monastery. I went to that city and established myself again in an environment where I didn't know a cat, as a lawyer. I was very successful.

JONES: In private practice.

BORINSKI: Yes. I was very successful. I could get access to the highest courts.

JONES: You were no longer an employee of the state?

BORINSKI: No, no. You had to quit the state in private practice. That leads us already into the early '30s, that means the Nazi time. Stop that for a second.

JONES: Yes. Before we talk about the rise of Nazism...

BORINSKI: Yes, there is still quite a bit in between.

JONES: Okay. Let me ask you something that I forgot to ask you earlier. When you were growing up, did you have brothers and sisters?

BORINSKI: I had a sister. About my family I probably will not speak very much.

JONES: So we have you now as a lawyer in what city?

BORINSKI: Erfurt. I apologize for not answering your question, but there are things in my past that I will not speak to at all. Not that I have something to be silent about, but I just don't want to.

JONES: That's certainly fine.

BORINSKI: Yes, because it leads into my own life too. I liquidated this area completely.

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ly for my own mental good health.

JONES: Well, what prompted your decision to go into private practice?

BORINSKI: I'll tell you one thing, that is a good question because I never know why I make these decisions. In fact, when I came to this country I had wanted first to go to Alaska. I didn't know enough about it to really have the courage to do it. Mississippi was my second choice.

JONES: The second tundra.

BORINSKI: So, yes, so about my activities in Germany there is something that is significant in explaining what I do here too. I was from a very early age always very interested in teaching. I had the feeling that I had a born talent to be a teacher. From the time I was six or seven years old I always found peculiarly I taught something. That led me in Germany to become very leading in adult education. In the province of Turin I had a program, and I was leading in Erfurt in the adult education movement. In worker's education I was very much involved. I was partially teaching at the University of Jena, which was close by, and there I was teaching in part worker's law and in part - Jena had the famous Zeiss Optical Works. You've probably heard about it. Z-E-I-S-S, Zeiss Optical Works. I helped develop there adult education centers for young workers and so on. We did a very good job. It is still known in Germany right now. In Germany I'm still in Who's Who, even modern Germany, out of the contribution I made in the area of adult education. Politically, I was always a Social Democratically orientated. We were very strong in youth groups, but also in my _____ I represented what they called the Union Workshop. If the Nazis had not have come it was my ambition to teach in one of the best law schools in Germany, not lawyer, but to teach law. I had Jena in mind. I had Leipzig in mind. I had it systematically prepared so that my career would have been probably the leading career in terms of teaching law, and then may

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be become judge in one of the supreme courts. That was a challenge there because it was a challenge in terms of the Jewish background. That was interesting in terms of my family because my mother's family came out of an academic background in part. My great-grandfather was the first Jew who was professor of the _____ University in _____. It was a very unusual thing. The name was Stout. The law books from Germany I still use. I have used the same ones over and over even though they're outdated, but so am I. So my interest for law was always strong. However, I always had an interest in medicine. It was a gamble why I did this and not that. Even now I figure out I could have been good in either field. Now the law field, you have certainly internalized it well enough that you see that it's now accident that I teach constitutional law at Tougaloo College. I know something about it. But my legal reasoning comes out of the German training. You have that also there. Then the Nazi period came. It started out basically after Hindenburg's death with Hitler taking over. Erfurt was a city approximately a little bit smaller than Jackson. It was again interesting. I had a kind of legendary reputation in the city. Everyone knew me, knew me to the degree that the Nazis were very careful what they did to me. It saved my life. I was too well known; not known in terms of being famous, I was just known. It was a similar phenomenon here in Jackson. I told you when we spoke the first time about oral history, I told you I don't know what I really did which needed to be recorded for history. I meant it very seriously. They saw something happened in Germany. I had not done any great things. I had done for many people many things as here I can say in terms of education for Millsaps and Tougaloo students, Vanderbilt students, Duke students. I have a whole crew of students who do not necessarily know what I did, only that they got by their own development where they wanted to go. That is more my contribu-

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tion than having committed great deeds.

JONES: Well, I think you're being too modest.

BORINSKI: No. That is not modesty. That is reality. In Germany certainly I was a good lawyer. The situation was very funny. The Nazi lawyers - I call it the process of excommunication which the Nazi lawyers did. You know what excommunication means?

JONES: Sure.

BORINSKI: That's what the Nazis did. I can give you this clearly because I have experienced it progressively. Except, you see, I knew because I was maybe one of the few people who read Hitler's Mein Kampf and took it seriously. The excommunication of the Jews was completely clear to me. So they moved them out progressively in order to do the transition as painlessly as possible for them. So you could continue your law practice, but you were not allowed to present your cases before the court if you were unadmitted to the new bar. My practice was good and you simply took them to what you called an Aryan lawyer who presented them and he got half of your pay. But it was a time when we felt it had no meaning anymore. There in Erfurt we had what you call the City of Flowers. There were big hothouses there with vegetables and all. It was a great agricultural city, but also an industrial city. There were, for instance, shoe factories and shoelace factories. They were part in Jewish hands and part in Christian hands. There was one of the shoelace factories whose name was Bergmann, and we were good friends. Those people were very well educated. It was a Jewish enterprise. We discussed the situation very openly, what was going on and what possibilities we saw in the developing Nazi situation. He said to me one day, "Ernst, why don't give up this whole lawyer business and come in the factory and become manager there." I said, "Yes, why not?" I changed over. I was good in business situations too be-

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cause coming out of a business environment with my parents and uncles and so on it was for me not new and it worked very well. But I told them I had this premonition to leave Germany. I had thought about this relatively early in the game.

JONES: Leaving Germany?

BORINSKI: Leaving Germany, yes. So the Nazi situation became more and more critical. That was also an interesting thing, those small anecdotes. I figured out I had to get me a passport and a visa to the United States. This may have been in 1935 or 6 or something. The American consul^{was} in the neighboring city of Leipzig, which is well known, and my friends said, "Ernst, don't go to Leipzig because there are thousands of Jews that go to the consulate every day." There was an express train that went everyday. I said, "I'll go anyhow." Again, I had strange luck. I came to the consulate there and put myself in there, and the lady at the desk asked what did I want and I said, "I want to speak to the consul." Then she asked, "What do you want from him?" I said, "I want from him something different than what other people want. I want to have a visitor's visa to the United States, but with the equally true statement that I have no intention of coming back." And I could speak English, that was good. So she called the office of the consul and said, "You should see this gentleman," and he was probably only curious how someone could be so crazy, so he said, "Let him come in." So I went in. I forgot his name, but he said, "Come in. Sit down. What do you want?" I told him very clearly, "I want to live in the United States because I think there is no future for the Jews. I want a visitor's visa, but I want to let you know that I will try from the visitor's visa to become a permanent resident of the United States." So he then asked me what I was doing and I said, "I'm in Erfurt. I'm a lawyer," and so on, and all of a sudden he asks me, "Do

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you know the Thuringer(?) Mountains?" It is a mountain range like the Smoky Mountains. I said, "Yes, I know them very well. I go, in fact, even during this crazy time, there almost every two weeks. I go to one of the small villages with friends and we are out of the whole thing." So he said, "You are just the man I'm looking for." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "I want to go with my family also to a small Thuringer village, to get out of it. Can you tell me?" I said, "I'll give you the name. I'll give you the telephone and you can call right now. The name is Rempt, R-E-M-P-T. Tell them I am here where you are and ask them to give you a very good room in a good place. He called and I spoke with them and they got it. He said, "Borinski, as a reward I'll give you six months visitor's visa to the United States."

JONES: That's a good story.

BORINSKI: And so I had my visitor's visa to the United States. But the Nazis were after me anyhow. One day they came to my house and took my passport away. As I said I was very frank and I went to the policemen, they knew me anyhow, and I went to them and said, "I don't understand you Nazis. It's a contradiction. When you want to get rid of the Jews, why do you take my passport away?" And they said, "Ah, we'll give it back to you."

JONES: Let me ask you something before we go any further. You said that you had done some work with working class people, working class groups in Germany in the early '30s. Isn't it true that Nazism and the Nazi consciousness came up out of the working class?

BORINSKI: Yes. The working class was in a desperate economic condition. The working class was looking for solutions. This was in the middle of the inflation time. It was really the lower-middle class that carried it first. The working class came later, much later. I worked in the Social Democratic movement very long, and even worked in the education we called Worker's Youth. That

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came later. In a small community, when Nazism came it was a progressive movement, and was formed more and more by pressures. In Mississippi you had the Citizen's Council pressured whites who were liberal and so on. It was very similar. They had no freedom, they had to join. So it was not so very different. I know many people I knew were in the Nazi movement because there was too much interaction in between. There comes another story which comes later in the game. In my first revisit to Germany I followed up certain things which was also very interesting.

JONES: Let me also ask you something else. All during the rise of the Nazi feeling in Germany, was there always anti-Jewish or anti-Semitic militancy?

BORINSKI: The question is there. You have probably read the Clarion-Ledger. Did you read the Clarion-Ledger - I don't know where I put it. They had the same anti-Semitic feeling when they had this, did you read when they had this case on the First Amendment about prayer?

JONES: No, I didn't read that.

BORINSKI: Did you read what the school board in Rankin County wrote?

JONES: No.

BORINSKI: That you should know. They had this big article in the Clarion-Ledger from Rankin County that says it is basically a conspiracy of Satan, and specifically of the Jews. That was - I want to show it to you.

JONES: Recently?

BORINSKI: Five days ago. Well. So when you give a question on latent anti-Semitism, John, it's existing everywhere. When people are on hard time, the Jews historically are their first targets. This was a very interesting article. You could only read something that bad in the Nazi time. And this is what the Board of Education officially stated. And then came the religious organization in Jackson that they had yesterday in the paper who said they high

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reject this kind of statement. So the answer is that anti-Semitism is later for a thousand years all over the world.

JONES: I was wondering how you could have come to be a spokesman for the working class, how you could have come to be involved with the working class being Jewish.

BORINSKI: Yes, well, you had the same thing you had here. That means that the working class is basically less anti-Semitic than the middle class, but in a crisis situation that all doesn't work. It's the same way that people will accuse the blacks of everything here. It's the same thing. This phenomenon I call target practice. That means we had not matured to the point that you really accepted people as individuals free of class caste or anything, neither black or white. That mean that in times of frustration you use the target that you can reach most easily. I regret that I cannot show you that article I had it saved, but I lost it somewhere.

JONES: I can find it at the Archives.

BORINSKI: Yes, find it at the Archives. It was about a week ago in the Clarion-Ledger there. There were two articles and then the statement by the religious organization in Jackson, the Interfaith Council took a stand. The statement of the Board of Education was very interesting. They said the lawyer must ever be a Jew. He was not a Jew. They said, "Only a Jew could do these kinds of things."

JONES: You were in your mid-thirties in those years during the rise of Nazism. You weren't surprised, you weren't shocked by the anti-Semitism that was inherent in the Nazi ideology?

BORINSKI: Yes, well. I come more from the eastern part of Europe. You have to realize that on the other side of the border Jewish persecution was just the rule

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rather than the exception. I was not surprised by anti-Semitism. I was not surprised because - I usually make this statement, "The Jews and the blacks have committed two great crimes. The crime of the Jews is that they are not Christian. The crime of the blacks is that they are not white." I think I told you this already before. So that gives you the whole picture. My point is also that I don't ever want to make angels out of people, but we have to know our shortcomings and learn to live civilized in spite of them. That's a much better philosophy.

JONES: So when you came to Mississippi the idea of rejection of an individual just because of their skin color of their religion wasn't new to you.

BORINSKI: Yes, I could tune in here. I was not surprised about anything. That was probably my saving grace, why I could handle it. In fact, it was an advantage that I came as an outsider. I didn't come in as a do-gooder either. I said, "Here is a challenge to any good, intelligent, sensible person who wants to be in education." I was committed to education. In education you are responsible to people for what they do and what they think and what kinds of minds they are developing.

JONES: So tell me how you came to leave Germany.

BORINSKI: Yes. I told you the story of the passport. On the day that the Nazis - this was '38 already - the Nazis moved to Vienna; and I followed the news very carefully. I don't know when - the crystal light(?) came later. I left Germany exactly that. I said, "Whatever happens, I'll get out." I always had a few thousand marks with me. I had the upper part of this nice house where I was living. I decided simply to leave. That all sounds like the same story but they are all real too, like the movies. There was an express train which went through Erfurt, came from Leipzig to Erfurt to Holland. It was a night

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train, a pullman train. So I said I would take this train. The roads were very regulated. I boarded my compartment and I looked the conductor up and down and figured out I would take a chance. I told him, "Here. I'd like to make a deal with you." "What kind of deal?" he said. "Here. I give you two or three thousand marks." He said, "I've never seen so much money!" "That has only one purpose. I'll give you also my passport. All that you need to do, keep the money, and check me out in the morning, but don't wake me."

JONES: Don't wake me?

BORINSKI: Yes. Wake me up. He says, "Okay, I can do that."

JONES: What was the purpose in your asking him to do that?

BORINSKI: What?

JONES: What was the purpose of asking him not to wake you up at the border?

BORINSKI: I wanted to wake up when I was across the border. So I went into my compartment and took about five aspirin and went to sleep and when I woke up I was in Holland. My passport was with the luggage.

JONES: You didn't have to go through a customs checkpoint.

BORINSKI: Right. He checked me out. That was a risk. I figured out that in this case I could take the risk because I know when I don't take the risk I have to just play their game.

JONES: Yes. I think it's interesting that you foresaw in the Nazi ideology the potential for the Holocaust.

BORINSKI: Yes. In fact, I had debates with Jewish friends, family and so on. I came to them and I told them, "I have a legal training, I can read." I had learned enough about Catholicism to know what excommunication meant. I said, "This is nothing else than the complete excommunication of the Jews. The last step is their extermination." I had this logical picture in mind.

JONES: And there were Jewish friends of yours in Germany that remained and refused

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to accept your warning?

BORINSKI: Yes, that remained and refused to accept it, yes; most of them for that matter in my area. The area was at that time still not so bad, relatively speaking. These Jews were good Germans and couldn't accept that that would happen, because they didn't know enough of their own history. I know my history very well, so for me it was the only decision. That was my leaving of Germany.

JONES: When you got to Holland. Well, let's go along with your story chronologically. What happened when you got to Holland?

BORINSKI: When I got to Holland. I figured out in order to save time I would go to England, go to Southampton and get on the Queen Mary, a ship for the United States. However, I had prepared certain things in this country. First, I told you I was close to the Zeiss family in Jena and to the Jena University. There was in Rochester, New York a branch of the optical instruments works, and through the works in Jena I was able to connect with some names when I came here. There was one scientist - I forget the name right now - one scientist, a physical scientist, who was German-Jewish who was also in Rochester. So I decided when I got here I would go to Rochester, New York first. I was in Holland a few days, and then went over to Rochester all on a visitor's visa. That is another interesting story. Do you want to go on?

JONES: We can go on if you're not tired.

BORINSKI: Once I'm into the story I can tell it until tomorrow morning. I am not tired. I am very relaxed. For me it is very enticing to review...

JONES: And for me it is fascinating to hear it.

BORINSKI: ...my life anyhow. So I came to this country. I had one connection in this country with a newspaper reporter named _____. He was a famous

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newspaperman; like David _____ is now.

JONES: What was his name?

BORINSKI: H. E. Kattenborn(?). He was very well known. We knew each other in Germany. We corresponded and he said, "I know you are coming. We can manage most of these things." So I came to this country. I landed first in New York. I decided then I would go on working in the factories. I knew I could join the union and work in a factory, a clothing factory, and then in _____ which was a small machine factory and so on. I figured out I could produce for quite a while, but in the meantime the war broke out and I was drafted into the American army.

JONES: How did that come about?

BORINSKI: It came about because I was of German nationality in spite of everything, and I was an enemy alien. I had to decide either to go to the army or they'd send you back to Germany.

JONES: So you were drafted into the American army.

BORINSKI: Drafted into the American army.

JONES: What year did you arrive in Rochester?

BORINSKI: I arrived in Rochester in 1938. I was there for a few years and then came into the army in 1942, I think.

JONES: What did you do in Rochester?

BORINSKI: In Rochester I worked in the factories. I was in the unions. At that time I couldn't care less if I was in something academic or non-academic - I could not care less.

JONES: You worked as a laborer?

BORINSKI: Yes, a laborer. I advanced very rapidly though.

JONES: What position did you hold at the time that you were drafted?

BORINSKI: I was - I forgot the name of the clothing factory - but I became floor manager.

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ger. It was no problem at all to me. Once you have cut all your ties you can get anywhere. It was never for me a problem. Also, this is interesting; I lived at first with my friend from Jena. I then figured out I wanted to live with an American Jew. In Rochester they had what they called a whole Jewish section. They were mainly eastern Lithuanian Jews. I said I wanted to expose myself to that. They didn't speak good English, so I couldn't learn good English from them, but they spoke very good Jewish which I enjoyed. I lived with this family about two or three years until I went into the army. It was very very interesting. They had a very nice house and plenty of children, very typical Jewish-American family. I lived first with my friends who were German immigrants from Jena, who were very typically Americans of German backgrounds, and then I lived with the Jews to expose myself to a very different thing. I wanted in some ways to complete my Jewish education. I was not so close to the eastern Jews as I was to the German Jews. I had conquered the German Jews and I wanted to conquer the eastern Jews too out of a sense of psychology of their feelings. It was very helpful to me in many very different situations. And then I came into the army. I don't think we need to start with that tonight.

JONES: Yes, it would be a good place to stop.

BORINSKI: The war situation is also very very interesting. You will see that these are all events that are not really very big events as you understand them. I think you do know and understand what I mean.

JONES: Yes, I do understand that in your mind they are not cataclysmic events, but I do think that you are indeed a very unique Mississippian.

BORINSKI: Yes, for a Mississippian.

JONES: And in that way it is all a very valuable part of a very valuable and fascinating document for the Archives to get.

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BORINSKI: Yes. It is interesting enough to , as I say, whenever you have the talent to penetrate an environment with a certain orientation, you want to contribute to it.

JONES: Yes. So, if you'll have me back I'll get in contact with you soon and come back and pick up where we left off.

BORINSKI: Yes, because we have it now at a place where I need to stop and think about certain things because the army time was also very interesting, very unique in its own way because again, nothing here really special happened, but it was a matter of coming into a new situation there.

JONES: Yes. Well, I thank you for sharing your story with us, and I very much look forward to getting more of it.

BORINSKI: Yes, that's fine.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by John Jones)

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