

Narrator: George Mosse

Interviewer: Jean Feraca

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Begin Oral History #

00:00:00

JF: --question. What about the skinheads and how do you account for the phenomenon of their rise? And who are they, anyway?

GM: Well, the skinheads in Germany, specifically, arose only with German unification and the great economic and social problems of what used to be East Germany. They are--

JF: Does that mean—go ahead.

GM: They are youths between 15 and 19 years of age. They are not really bright. And they come from broken families. All phenomena that are familiar throughout the west, by the way.

They come from broken families. And they are recruited in bars and in gambling, gaming halls.

Not gambling halls, but gaming halls.

JF: Who recruits them?

GM: Well, you see, it's bad enough. But they would not be, I think, so dangerous if people had not, before their eyes, always the views of the past. Who's trying to recruit them as kind of storm troops? The rightist parties in Germany. Far rightist parties. They're small, they're splinter parties, and they don't have a great success at the moment. Because these young people cannot carry anything through. They like to beat up people. But that's it. They don't carry through. So you have to look at the political constellation to see how important they might or might not get.

JF: Are most of them from Eastern, what used to be Eastern Germany?

GM: Yes. Yes.

JF: And is one of the reasons for the phenomenon the fact that Eastern Germany has dealt very differently in teaching their people about the history of World War Two and the Holocaust and Hitler than Western Germany has?

GM: Well, there was very little of that kind of teaching. But that's really not the point. The point is that these young people are, in addition to the economic malaise, suddenly liberated from a very oppressive regime. That may certainly play into it. But they have very little idea of the past. For example, some journalist asked one of them what does the swastika mean, and he said that's a symbol of the First World War. They're simply rowdies.

JF: Are they dangerous rowdies?

GM: They will only be, well, they're dangerous to foreigners, and to people of color in any case. Yes? But they will only be a real danger if they hook up with a viable political party. A viable political grouping. Otherwise, not. No.

2:32

JF: And you don't believe that there is a viable political party? There is not a Neo-Nazi party on the rise?

GM: Germany is freest from that. If you think that in France at the moment, the far right is the racist Le Pen party, is almost leading in the polls, yes? In Germany, that's not the case. I would say at the **moment**, the German political system is at yet what I would call healthy. But that may, of course, change. It's a potential danger. It's not an actual danger.

JF: How is the phenomenon.... skinheads are not, by the way, a phenomenon that's isolated in Germany, or are they?

GM: No. It's also spilling over to western Germany, to some extent. But the core is in the

former East Germany, which is suffering a great deal at the moment. You must not forget that East Germans get less pay in their jobs, if they have jobs, than West Germany, for the same work. That rents are going up, yes? But salaries aren't going up. In other words, the adjustment to what is usually called free market is an extremely painful one. And these are the people left out, perhaps they would anyhow have been ruffians, I can't tell. Yes?

JF: Mm hmm.

GM: But now there is the other phenomenon. The great immigration of people who-the German constitution allows people in who want political asylum. But political asylum is a vague term. So there's a huge, you might say, almost an onslaught of people from the Third World. And that, of course, is what really triggered it in a way, you see. They say these foreigners, they take away our jobs. What are these foreigners doing here? And they are an easy target for them. They are an easy and identifiable target to them.

JF: Mm hmm. But immigration is taking place all over Europe.

4:29

GM: Yes. And this phenomenon is a European phenomenon. There have been incidents like that in Italy, in France, as I told you. The far right, racist Le Pen, whose racism is directed against blacks and people of color. Jews as well. Yes? Is now very high in the polls. Which he never was before. Of course, in France, that has to do with the incompetence of the present French government. That's always a factor, yes? The German government is viable, it's relatively competent. The French at the moment is not really competent. That's certainly an important factor. But there hasn't been this kind of anarchical violence in France as far as I know. Or certainly not in Italy.

JF: I know that you have, you're a great proponent of the idea that fascism could just as

easily have arisen in France before the start of World War Two as it did in Germany. That actually anti-Semitism was stronger there.

GM: Well, until the First World War, yes, yes, yes. But the problem with Germany was then -- I'm very afraid of historical analogies, they're usually wrong -- that France had a good antidote to fascism, which Germany didn't have, the French revolution, the tradition of rationalism, all of that sort of thing. Germany lacked that, yes? But I think what we really have to look at with the skinheads is that racism is reviving in a big way all over, in our own country as well as in Europe. The general revival of racism, which I hoped I would never see in my lifetime, but which I'm seeing now, unfortunately.

JF: To what do you attribute this general revival of racism?

GM: Well I suppose there are differences from nation to nation. But one matter is, of course, the economic maladjustments. Our present development, if you like, of our social and economic system has produced an underclass which is almost impossible to integrate. In France, in Germany, in Italy and in the United States. Yes?

JF: Mm hmm.

GM: So that is certainly one important feature of this, yes?

7:05

JF: But you're saying that the skinheads themselves constitute an underclass?

GM: Yes. They are part of an underclass. I think they're part of a more general phenomena, of an underclass which is produced by our present, if you like, economic and social developments. Which we know only too well in America. Broken families, broken homes. All of that sort of thing, yes?

JF: Mm hmm.

GM: A general lack of direction, yes? And I would say, not in Germany, and not in France, but in America, a general encouragement of racism through code words used by the government itself. That is not a phenomena in Europe yet.

JF: How do you connect the phenomenon of the skinheads to, for example, the political campaign that was just finalized this weekend in Louisiana? (David Duke, 1991).

GM: Well, I mean, in United States, things are of course different. You can't make such simple generalizations. But still, here, too, we have an underclass of this nature, if not an immigration underclass, which exists to the point of economic crisis, yes? Of a very bad economic crisis. You mustn't forget that, yes? And you have a government which is pretty removed from the people at times. Gives the impression of incompetence, certainly as I gather in Louisiana, yes? And you have something else here, which I think is very dangerous. The use by political opportunists of racial code words in order to garner votes. Reagan did it, Bush did it.

JF: What are the racial code words?

GM: I think that's highly dishonorable. Well, of course, the famous Horton affair with Bush, you see. You know. And affirmative action is a racial code word these days. I mean, I think it's a real problem. Mind you, I think it's a real problem. But it has become a racial code word as well. That seems to me one of the big problems.

9:12

JF: "Welfare" is also a racial code word.

GM: "Welfare" is a racial code word. But you see, I wouldn't put it so simply. I would say that the increased racism on the part of one side leads to racism by the other side as well. In other words, a phenomena among some blacks, yes? Like bringing Farrakhan to Madison, yes? An avowed racist. Which you would think would delegitimize any fight against racism. I hope not.

Or let us say you have Mr. Jeffries in New York, yes, thundering against the Jewish conspiracy, a very old myth, yes? Which are being warmed up. But you can understand that. That is a reaction to an increased impasse, if you like, as I see it, an impasse of a situation between a large and underclass which now exists, yes, in a kind of social and economic malaise, yes? And the failure of our government, and certainly, not in Europe, so much, of proceeding against all racism very strongly. There's no leadership against racism in this country at the moment as I see it.

JF: Is there an antidote?

GM: Yes. I think in the United States, a very strong antidote. I think for one thing, the Civil Rights Movement, which changed the whole United States. I don't know one movement in my lifetime that has changed so much as the Civil Rights Movement.

JF: But the Civil Rights Movement itself in some quarters is becoming a racial code word.

GM: Yes, that's true, and that's much to be regretted. Now there is a problem here, of course. That is to say some action has to be taken to integrate this underclass which I talk about, yes? Which unfortunately is largely black. The poor. Yes? There are also poor whites. To integrate it into the system, into the politics, into the economics, into the social system. And here, affirmative action is totally justified, of course. And we have to think of other more inventive means. But nobody thinks about these things. People are defensive these days. That's the problem. They don't think creatively, they think defensively. Bad. Very bad.

JF: There's something I need you to clarify. In this country—well, here's something that I'm just quoting from something I read in the *New York Times* this morning. In this country the black people have the Democrats. The rich people have the Republicans. And white middle class people are not represented.

12:05

GM: Well, but this is of course up to the white people. They can elect. But once, I don't think that's true at all. I think that's a myth. And it's partly now a racial myth, I'm sorry to say, that white people are not represented. How are white people not represented? I've never quite understood that. Because there's an economic crisis. The economic crisis has to be addressed by the Republican government.

JF: Mm hmm. But the point is that you are talking about an underclass of poor whites in this country. And I think--

GM: No, poor whites and poor blacks. Not just poor whites.

JF: But it's, I think, the middle class that really, well, David Duke had the support of the white middle class.

GM: No. If you look at the *New York Times* this morning, it's quite clear that the greatest support of Duke were the poor whites. And they say the middle class that was afraid of sliding into poverty in the economic depression.

JF: Okay. The middle class afraid of--

GM: But not the kind of middle class we have around here in Madison.

JF: Okay. Because it's hard to understand. What you're talking about, let's go back to Europe, is a distinction, I mean, the skinheads represent in themselves an underclass. But their hostilities are targeted against yet another underclass.

GM: Oh, yes. Yes, of course. Well, and so is the hostility of the middle class that's sliding into poverty in Louisiana. It's directed against the blacks, another poor class, yes?

JF: Mm hmm.

GM: There is no solidarity. There never has been a solidarity among the poor. That's a myth.

JF: Wasn't it Marx who said that he wanted to get rid of people who didn't work hard?

14:00

GM: Marx was a Victorian. He believed in the gospel of work. Yes? He was very archaic. In this way, too, he's finished. Not that Marx is finished, but this whole idea is finished, this Victorian idea. But it's very strong. And of course to pull yourself up, you have to work hard. But that is a matter of education, of goals, of directions, yes? So you have to look at the educational system. Is it fulfilling its function? Now you talk about the [unclear] under the Soviet Union, it was, in a way, counterproductive. They were educated to work. They were educated to all of that. But [youths?] rebelled against that sort of thing, the way it was done there, yes? With a stick, as it were, yes? [He was rebels?] against that.

JF: But this impatience with the underclass that refuses to be integrated into the mainstream, that refuses to be integrated into the middle class that refuses to assimilate the values of the working middle class.

GM: But you see, I don't think it refuses. You can't put it that way. It doesn't refuse itself. There's no effort made. Now the danger, you always ask me, you know, really about the fascist danger. All right. The danger is that one way to integrating the underclass, the disenfranchised, into society, is, in fact, through demagoguery. Yes? Not through democracy as we know it, but through demagoguery, through leadership. Yes? Through making them participate. Through liturgy, through ritual, through marching. Yes? Through salutes. All of these, these skinheads have, by the way. Like, of course. And you can do that. You can integrate, I'm sure it's been done, that was the great success of the Nazis. That was the great success of the fascists. They integrated everybody together through these kind of methods. Am I making myself clear?

JF: Mm hmm.

GM: That's the danger.

JF: Do you feel that there is a danger of fascism in this country?

GM: No. There's no danger of fascism as such. Fascism as such is finished. It's dead. Bits and pieces lie around to be used, such as I just mentioned, yes? But there will no longer be any fascism. And I am very much against this constant use of "fascism." I don't know how many times I have been called a fascist. But it trivializes it. It denigrates it. It was a very dangerous thing, yes? No, I don't see at the moment any chance in the United States, whatsoever, of becoming a fascist country. It's too regional. It's too fragmented. It just won't work.

JF: Is David Duke a Neo-Nazi?

GM: Yes. Obviously.

JF: What's the difference?

GM: No, no, there is no difference. He uses the same methods. Or if he had his choice, he would use the same methods as the fascists. That is demagoguery, making people participate through ritual, you know, all of this sort of thing. Marches, protest marches. All of that sort of thing.

JF: Then why doesn't his campaign – and its strength, even though he was defeated, after all, he got 40 percent of the vote.

GM: Yeah, that's right.

JF: It was a campaign that was watched all around the country, perhaps internationally as well.

GM: Right. Right.

JF: Why doesn't that constitute a threat?

GM: Well, it does constitute a potential threat. I think we must be very careful always to

distinguish – and people don't do it enough – between actual and potential. We have to watch these things. The potential threat is there. It depends on the health of society. Let me put it this way. It's like the cheese and the maggots, the worms and the cheese. If the cheese isn't healthy, the worms come to the center. That's what happened in Germany. Society and politics wasn't healthy. And the worms got to the center. That's what we have to watch. And the racism here is a very great danger. Racism on all parts.

JF: So fascism is not a danger, but racism is.

18:08

GM: Yes, yes, oh yes, yes. Fascism won't come. And Huey Long, to quote a Louisianan, said once, "If fascism comes to America, it will come under the guise of anti-fascism." (laughs) I don't think fascism, it is a historical phenomenon in its epoch.

JF: My guest this morning is Professor Emeritus George Mosse. We're talking about the rise of the radical right in this country and abroad. 263-1890 is the number to call in Madison or Milwaukee if you'd like to join us on the air with your own comments or questions. 263-1890. Everywhere else in Wisconsin, call us toll-free, 1-800-642-1234. Again, that toll-free number is 1-800-642-1234. This is the Ideas Network of Wisconsin Public Radio. I'm Jean Feraca.

[station ID: AM 970, WHA, Madison]

JF: My guests after 10 will be Jane and Michael Stern, authors of *American Gourmet*. They'll be talking about the social history of the United States during the '50s and '60s. Through food. At eleven o'clock with Larry Meiller, we'll be talking about Wisconsin's deer-hunting season, which kicks off this Thursday. At 11:45, Larry talks about things to do outdoors this winter, as well as upcoming events across the state. For example, various ethnic Christmas celebrations. Larry's guest will be the editor for *Wisconsin Trails* magazine, Howard Mead.

We have a caller from Milwaukee. Good morning.

Caller: Good morning. I, too, oppose racism. But I think you have to understand one of the reasons that David Duke did so well is that he ran on a program opposing racism. It is the Democratic Party which favors racial set-asides. It is the Democratic Party which favors racial quotas and, to some extent, sexual quotas. It is the Democratic Party which wants to intrude quotas and racial thought throughout society. Even into the senate. Who was it, it was a Democrat who said that the judicial committee and the Anita Hill thing was unrepresentative. Those were 14 senators chosen by the people. And yet the Democrats say oh, no, we can't have 14 white men as being representative. I think we've got to realize that the American approach has always been to get the most qualified, or to get those chosen by the people. That is who is representative. But the Democrats think in terms of race and quota. And it's precisely this kind of what I would call fascist thinking, social fascist thinking, that the people of Louisiana, many of them, 40 percent of them, anyway, rejected. They want, like the old Civil Rights Movement, which demanded a color-blind society. It was John Kennedy who said, "The American Constitution is color-blind." It's Martin Luther King who said, "Let's judge a person by their character, not by the color of their skin." But the Democrats and the recent so-called civil rights movement opposes that philosophy, demands racial quotas and heritage quotas, language quotas, that I think will make a mockery, will turn this country into a Austria-Hungary. If there is some racism in parts of Europe, [unclear] remember what happened before. You had privileges for people who were often foreigners. And most of those were people of color.

JF: Do you have a question?

Caller: An Arab could go to the west and get articles that a [unclear] citizen could not get.

JF: Okay. Go ahead.

GM: Yes. Well first of all, let's forget about fascism. It has absolutely nothing to do with racism. And I'm not absolving anybody. But I put the problem again to you. The problem is that the United States has grown for one reason or another, an underclass, a part of the population, a sizable part of the population that isn't integrated into the society. And that therefore tends towards violence towards each other, towards others, and that how are you going to solve the problem? So I see very well the contradiction. I, too, am very much for a color-blind society. I, too, am very much for that. But there is the other side. You have to balance affirmative action against the color-blind society. And that is really our main problem. Our problem that we should give some thought to and not simply take the easy way out.

23:20

JF: Winona, Minnesota.

Caller: Hi. In this country, we have a right to property. And the right to property has been amended. And it's been amended to include certain disadvantaged, you know, previously disadvantaged groups. And they were given entitlement programs. And those were to allocate a certain percentage of the resources of this country to them because they were disadvantaged. And they were also under the law of this country, so they have to be paid respect to. You figure that international treaties are being given to the steel mills. They're being given to the intellectual property of the foreign companies, the foreign protections to the automobile industry. Why do these shareholders have so much more right? Because they're public people, too, just like these other persons who are disadvantaged. If you take the shares away from the owners of General Motors, they have no more qualifications to work than anybody else. So the right to property has to be extended and re-addressed because the inflation and what have you in the international scene has eroded that.

GM: I really can't answer that question very well, as I know very little about these matters. So I think I'll just have to let it go as a statement.

JF: Okay. La Crosse, go ahead.

Caller: La Crosse?

JF: La Crosse.

Caller: Yes. I just wanted to mention that I had read your guest's book *Fallen Soldiers*, which I enjoyed very much [unclear] war. And I just want to comment on that. And the other thing is that I wanted to comment about today's program is that in the past 10 years or 12 years, there's been a redistribution of wealth, which everybody recognizes in this country. And with that, there seems to be a direct relationship with racism. And I wonder if you might comment on that, that there appears to be a correlation between the two.

JF: What do you mean by a relation—

Caller: Well, as the underclass or the poor get further and further away from the economic benefits of our society, okay, racism seems to be stronger than, let's say, back when the civil rights in the Martin Luther King time, I don't think it was, it was of a different type. Today's racism is that people blame the poor for their problems. People blame the poor for the poor economic conditions that exist today.

GM: You're right. We're back to Victorian times. They should work harder. And behave. But that just doesn't work in our economic society. So I come back to the thing I've said all along.

But I think to address your other question, since the Civil Rights Movement there's been a sort of cumulative fed-up-ness with all of this, I think. People have lost patience. People's patience isn't very long in any case. But they have lost patience with it. And that's partly what underlies, in any case, I think this kind of malaise.

JF: Let me understand this better. In losing patience are they, in your view, correctly targeting the underclass as the place where the problems originate?

26:47

GM: Yeah. Well, yes, of course. The underclass has these problems. But the problem, but the question is, how can you solve these problems? And the people who are blaming the underclass for that, as we say, say well, let's solve it through suppression. There is no other way. Either you integrate them or you suppress them. Either you use the police, or you integrate them. And meanwhile, things get worse and worse. Look at the big American cities. Only just look at them. Things get worse and worse. And they have to be addressed, I think, not through the police, which can scare people. That's right. But we're not going to get a police state here, I hope. That's one way to address these problems, yes? Through a kind of police state. And we come very close to fascism, yes? But otherwise you have to solve it by trying means and methods of integration. And as I see the American political scene now, certainly the present administration isn't making any effort on this. They just say, well, let the free market work. Let them work hard and they'll do it. But we don't live anymore in the 19th century, I'm afraid.

JF: How is the rise of the radical—[glitch]

GM: --own problems. The South, the North, all of these problems. Regional problems, racial problems. All of that sort of thing doesn't exist. But at this moment, we have a very interesting constellation. We have a rise of the radical right in Europe and the United States. And that can't be in the regimes in power. Because in France, there's a socialist regime in power. In Germany, conservative to be sure. In England, conservative. Here, conservative. I don't think it has anything directly to do, perhaps, with these regimes. It's a general malaise. Perhaps at this stage of our social and economic development, it all, in my opinion, has to do with this kind of

underclass and in Europe, of course, with the immigration. Yes? From the Third World. Which is very visible. And which does take jobs, of course. The immigration from the Third World. Here, what is the immigration from the Third World, in Europe, maybe, let us say, projected onto the blacks in general.

JF: I see.

GM: Is that clear enough?

JF: Yeah. I mean, it's difficult. We're talking about huge questions here.

GM: Yes. But they are vital questions if we're going to make it.

JF: (laughs) Okay. Watertown, go ahead.

Caller: Hello. I'd like to ask a question about a more dangerous form of racism. You mentioned, most people when they think of racism, like they think of white especially against the Jewish people. But lately in this country, the biggest anti-Semitic segment has been like that led by Louis Farrakhan. And I'd like to go a step further and say that, or ask you to address the question of racism in those Third World countries. And not just them, but countries like Japan and Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Where, like in Japan, they take mixed-bred babies, and they just, they ship them out. And in Saudi Arabia and in Kuwait, Kuwait is really run by a bunch of Nazis. And the Saudi government and the Kuwait government, which we sidle up to in everything, really look like they're just cloned from Goebbels and Himmler and the goose-stepping fascists. The way they treat Palestinians, we wouldn't have a Palestinian problem with Israel and Palestine if the Kuwaitis and the Saudis would employ these people fairly. But they just, the slaughter that took, I just cannot believe the slaughter that the Kuwaitis promulgated on the Palestinians. And what I'm saying is isn't racism really more dangerous from like Japan and the Khmer Rouge and Saudi Arabia than it is—I don't know anybody that's anti-Semitic, if you want to know the truth.

GM: Well, you see, we were talking about the West, and not about the Third World. And I'm really not an expert on the Third World. And I don't think it's the kind of racism we know here, certainly not in Kuwait. It has to do with the war. It has to do with a lot of things. It's deplorable. And the Israel, Arab problem would exist without Kuwait. If it were simply Kuwait, it would be easy to solve. It would simply exist without Kuwait as well. But yes, this is true. As I said before, and perhaps I'll emphasize it. That one racism begets another. In other words, the underclasses, would feel themselves oppressed, would see no hope and no future, turn also to racism. And they turn to racism to those who see they're better off. That is why you had the anti-Semitism, why you have the anti-Koreanism, if I can talk about the Korean shop owners, where was it, in some black ghetto.

JF: In Harlem.

32:02

GM: In Harlem. And you had it against the Jews who owned shops, and so on and so forth. Yes? But I think while anti-Semitism is always potential, certainly it is at a low ebb at the moment. I don't think that we can leave it out of sight entirely. Now racism was never only directed against the Jews. That's absurd. It was first directed against blacks, and then directed against Jews. And now it is directed against blacks again. But as far as I know, in circumstances it could be directed against Jews again. The future's open.

JF: But then what does that represent? What do all these groups together represent as "the other?" How do they threaten?

GM: Well, people feel very much threatened. First of all, we get back to basics. People feel threatened by people who are different. Different color of skin, yes? Different customs. They threaten people. People feel threatened. That's always been so, throughout modern history. It's a

pity, but there it is, yes? But if that is combined with violence as it is in our cities, they feel more threatened. If it is combined with unemployment, high unemployment in East Germany, you know, I don't know what it is, 20 percent or something like that. It's very high, yes? Then they feel still more threatened. Then they withdraw into themselves. And withdrawing into themselves, they look a group, their own reference groups. And they sort of build what the Afrikaans would call a kraal around their own reference groups. It's quite natural reaction, yes? And then racism lies readily at hand. And they use it, of course. You see, it gives them a feeling of roots. It gives them a feeling of superiority. I mean, that's both for blacks and whites. It gives them a feeling of superiority. It gives them a feeling of roots, usually mythical roots, yes? And all of this, people need in a situation which they perceive as a dead alley.

JF: Professor George Mosse with us this morning. Recently retired Bascom professor of history. He's also the author of *The Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, and *Toward the Final Solution: A History of European Racism*. If you'd like to join us in this conversation about the phenomenon of racism and its rise worldwide, 263-1890 is the number to call in Madison or Milwaukee. Everywhere else in Wisconsin, 1-800-642-1234.

[Station ID: AM 970, WHA, Madison]

JF: Carl Schmidt begins the final week of reading from *Italian Days* by Barbara Grizzuti Harrison on Chapter a Day at 12:30. Emily Orbach and Jim Fleming are up at one with part four of *The Courage to Write*. Charlotte Bronte is today's topic on University of the Air.

How do we refocus this program, Professor Mosse?

GM: You think it's getting too big. It's getting out of hand. Well, these are the larger problems. The smaller problem is the immediate problem. You started with the skinheads. That is, with teenagers out of control. Yes? That's what the skinheads are.

Now, I must say that the early Nazi movement appeared first as skinheads. The Stormtroopers, yes? But again, this out of control becomes important only like the early skinheads in Germany, yes? In 1918, 1922, they fastened onto a political movement which became viable. And that made them important, yes? But that is refocusing it on our immediate problem. Is there a rightist political movement which would make that kind of behavior viable?

JF: Who are the skinheads in this country?

GM: I don't really—(laughs) I'm not an expert. I don't think, there must be some, but I just don't know. I must plead ignorance.

JF: Well, I ask the question in order to make sure that we're not making parallels that are not really supportable.

GM: Oh. Well, the skinheads, yes, I'll tell you who are the skinheads. The skinheads are the gangs who roam the New York subways. If I'm told that I cannot take a subway down from the Bronx after four o'clock in the afternoon because there are gangs roaming the subways. These are the skinheads of this country. They're very alike. They're also young. The same thing. From broken homes. All the same thing.

JF: But they are not untied by a political ideology.

GM: No. neither are really the skinheads in Germany yet. They are about ten groupings which are trying to get hold of them. Neither has! They have no staying power. They like the Nazi symbols, but they have shock value, yes? And so on. But they don't even know what's behind them. Do you see what I mean?

JF: Uh huh. What do you make of, there was expected to be a huge demonstration on the part of these skinheads on the anniversary of Kristallnacht. And instead, there was a counter demonstration.

GM: Oh, Germany now has antidotes. You see, we started the program by you saying that, why didn't France become fascist? I said France had antidotes – the French Revolution, rationalism. Germany now has an antidote to all of this. The antidote to all of this is called Auschwitz. Yes? It has its memories. And that mobilizes people. Germany now is the least country that I would think would go right, radical right, of all European countries.

JF: Okay. We have a caller from Lac du Flambeau next.

Caller: Good morning, Jean. Good show again, as usual. I have a hard time addressing the rise of the radical right in Europe, because I have no familiarity over there. But as it relates to this country, the problem as I see it is that over this last 10 or 20 years, we always had a small coterie of the population in this country that had a substantial proportion of the property. But that situation has shifted so that now 10 percent of the people in the country own almost 70 percent of the property. And 10 percent of the people can't control the political will of the country unless they can do it financially. Which they're now able to do with political action committees and political donations.

In the meantime, the middle class, or what the professor was speaking of as that lower part of the middle class that is on the brink of sliding into something worse, looks at themselves and finds out what's happened is we used to have an income tax situation with a graduated income tax that took 70 percent of a rich person's next dollar. Now that's been reduced to 33 percent. And now when Billy Wegman signed a contract to make 9 million dollars for playing baseball for four years, pitching for the Brewers, and a guy that totes his lunchbox down to the brewery and is expected to buy an eighteen dollar ticket to sit in the bleachers, they're in the same tax bracket on their top dollar of income. That does not foster a lot of good feelings in the middle class for the rich. Even though the rich comprise a relatively modest portion of society.

And in the meantime, at the same time the income tax situation has been revised so as to benefit the wealthy, the very wealthy, the tax situation, including the social security tax, has been quadrupled so that now that fellow that totes his lunchbox to the brewery is having what amounts to 15 percent of his productivity taken out for social security taxes, 7 ½ percent comes out of his pay, and his employer has to dish in another 7 ½ percent of his income. And now he might make \$50,000, but he's working almost half a year to pay state and federal taxes, social security, and real estate taxes if he owns a house.

40:57

JF: So what you're talking about is economic redistribution? Is that what you're suggesting?

Caller: Well, the wealth was distributed poorly to begin with. And I'm not for glomming on, in other words, if you took that 10 percent of the population that has 60 percent of the wealth and took one half of everything they got and passed it out amongst everybody else, you would not solve the problem.

GM: Well, that's very true. But I think you have to look at the so-called, which is so popular now, and I'm not an economist, you understand, the trickle-down theory. I don't think it works. I've never really seen it work. I haven't seen it work in the Germany before '33, and after '33 (laughs), I've never seen it work. That the richer you make people, the better the poorer will be off. I'm afraid, I don't think it works. That's all I can tell you. And I agree with you completely about the graduated income tax and matters like that. But remember, the rich have never been popular.

JF: I don't really understand fully the connection between economics and racism.

GM: Well there isn't—look, I'm glad you mentioned that. Because racism is a state of mind. It's a totality. Racists look at the whole world through racist eyes, yes? There are we, and we are

the superior race. And there are you, and you're the inferior race, and you have no intelligence, you have no brains, you are ugly. Yes? And you're oppressing us. Yes? That's how they look at the world. At the other race. But the connection is, of course, there. In times of economic impasse, such as we now have to have, have at the moment, actually. In times of economic impasse, people are looking for a safety anchor, let me put it this way. Yes? And racism gives it that. It gives them an explanation of why it's happening. It gives them an explanation, who is guilty. It gives them a self-confidence. We are superior. We have a glorious history. We must fight against you. It's a confrontational thing, racism, and always has been a confrontational thing. And that is why I think it is so, so sad. So very sad. That those who are menaced by racism, the minorities, you know, Jews, blacks, I would say Gypsies, but not a problem here, yes? Fight each other. Rather than fighting racism. There's never been a solidarity among those racism has attacked. That's one of the reasons for its great success, let me tell you that.

JF: So what you're saying then is that one of the reasons to account for the phenomenon of the rise of racism, which as you say is a kind of worldwide constellation now, is the, it's not that it went away. It's just that it's surfacing because of economic flux.

GM: Well, very few things ever go away. They're always there potentially. Nationalism hasn't gone away. Look, the Soviet Union had so long to destroy nationalism. Has it? No. Racism won't go away, either. These are very basic and, I'm afraid, very deep-rooted views of looking at the world. Because they address certain needs people have and continue to have. In a world that is ever more complicated, that people never can really totally understand, where they're always endangered in one way or another, socially, economically or politically. Do you see what I mean?

JF: Yes. Madison, go ahead.

Caller: Hi. I would just, you had said earlier that, it was almost like before you were making a connection between, you were making that connection between the underclass and racism. Now you've kind of addressed it anew just recently. But it almost seemed as if you were saying that racism is related directly and very strongly to economics and that only the underclass experiences feeling of racism or the lower class.

GM: No, no.

Caller: But, what you just said, it's more deep-seated. And I'm just wondering you know, because I know a lot of middle class people that are racist, too, and that are educated. And you know, they're still racist. So there's got to be more to racism than just economics, because--

GM: Oh, yes. I'm sorry that this discussion got off on that foot, in a sense. Because, of course, economics is one matter. But at the moment it seems to be looming rather large. But it was the educated racists who were also Nazis, you understand. (laughs) I mean, you know that, probably. So racism addresses certain, I would say, psychological needs that people have in modern society. Just as nationalism addresses certain psychological needs that people have national in modern society. It is a kind of totality. Do you see what I mean?

Caller: Yeah, more of a state of mind than just—

GM: Yes, it is a state of mind. I said that, I think earlier, I hope.

Caller: Yeah.

GM: It is a state of mind. And that's why it is so awfully difficult to break it.

JF: So in your view, then, racism cannot be overcome. And the only way to keep it in check is through economic measures?

GM: Now you're addressing the pessimistic side of me. But one cannot have lived through this

century as I have (laughs) partly in Europe and here without being somewhat of a pessimist. At the moment I can only say as a historian, yes, racism is still there as a potential menace. Just as nationalism is still there as a potential menace. And both of them are linked. You understand that? They're linked even in the vocabulary of David Duke. And the vocabulary of American racism links nationalism and racism. Yes?

JF: There are a lot of people that are concerned about the general erosion of, for want of a better term, I will call the moral fiber of the American people. Their ability to tackle a problem, solve it, come up with a new way of doing something and so on and so forth. Sometimes that gets cast into the kind of political rhetoric that we hear David Duke espousing. Is there a danger, a particular danger, now for us in the rise of people who are looking to solve, looking for the quick fix? And the quick fix might very well be a form of disguised racism?

GM: The quick fix is always a danger. Yes. There is such a danger. Definitely. And that's why partly people are turning to racism. They are impatient, quite natural. They're impatient. Yes. These are long-range problems for which we need short-range solutions. That's always the problem.

JF: Next caller is from Madison. Hello.

Caller: Hello. It's great to hear you again, Mr. Mosse. You're clearly, I'm an ex-student of years back, and you clearly are not a myth. I have several questions. I'll go through them quickly and let you answer whichever ones you like.

JF: We only have a minute left. You have to choose one.

Caller: Okay. You talked about antidotes. If there's an economic decline in the US, it seems to me we don't have an antidote like Germany perhaps does now because of the war experiences. And that George Bush and Franz Schönhuber, whose both political parties have the same name,

is there any difference between those two men?

GM: Oh, let me answer, because we don't have much questions, much time. There's a great deal of difference. But I really want to answer your first question. Rather than this.

JF: Thirty seconds, Professor Mosse.

GM: What was it—I think that as far as that is concerned, the antidote in America are several things which are very strong. A liberal tradition that's very strong. A traditional civic service that's very strong, yes? A tradition of race, of tolerance, that is much stronger than it ever was in Europe. And above all, a tradition of pluralism that is very strong.

JF: Thank you.

GM: So I think there are antidotes. We end on an optimistic note, though I am a pessimist.

JF: (laughs) Thank you very much. It's not such a blue Monday after all. Professor George Mosse with us this morning. If you'd like to purchase a cassette copy of this program, be sure to call the radio store at 1-800-747-7444 and ask for program 1147. This is the Ideas Network of Wisconsin Public Radio. I'm Jean Feraca.

50:09

[End Interview.]