ANITA HECHT: The date is October 28 in the year 2010. My name is Anita Hecht, and I have the great pleasure and honor of interviewing Professor Seymour Drescher on behalf of the George L. Mosse oral history program of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. And we find ourselves in the Fluno Center for Executive Education in Madison, Wisconsin and welcome from Pittsburgh.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: And thank you. My pleasure.

ANITA HECHT: So here we are to talk about George Mosse. But to begin with, Professor Drescher, let's just start with a little bit about your personal and your professional background. When and where were you born?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I was born in 1934 in the Bronx, New York where I spent the first 21 years of my life. I attended public school. I attended the specialized school called Bronx High School of Science, which had the convenience of not only being an excellent school which you had to take a specialized exam for, but it happened to be 1/2 a block from my home so I didn't have to wander very far. And I made my big move in New York going down to City College in Manhattan Island. I led a very, very limited geographical life until I was 21.

ANITA HECHT: What was your family background?
SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Family background. My parents came from Europe immediately after the first world war, I believe, that same year, married in 1930, and moved in very close proximity with their families in the Bronx. And they were of Polish Jewish background. One from Galicia and one from Russian Poland before the 1914 war.

ANITA HECHT: Did religion play a part in your upbringing?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: It was a presence, not an overwhelming presence, but my parents did belong to an orthodox synagogue. I had a bar mitzvah. I was identified with the people who were in the community and very deeply identified with them.

ANITA HECHT: What level of education did your parents achieve?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: My parents not beyond the sixth grade. When they came over, they were both-- my father was probably 12. My mother 10. And they both went to school only long enough till they could get jobs in the New York garment district. My father became a hatter. He blocked hats. He had on his hands big callouses. My mother worked in a tie factory. She was the secondary earner but when my father lost his job and his industry, my mother continued to plug along until he could find himself a new job down at Wall Street. Not as a stockbroker but as a deliverer of large checks and other kinds of confidential information.

ANITA HECHT: Interesting. What were your early interests?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Well, one of my very early interests was history. As a kid, I used to, on Friday afternoon, head down to the public library and there were history shelves. And I would pull everything off the shelves there was to read. And read A Child's History of the World. Realized that it wasn't quite so different from the biblical stories that I also had read and just began to-- I read so intensively that by the time I got to high school I realized for most of my teachers, I knew more than they did about the period that they were talking about. It was a love that just turned into something that later became a livelihood.

ANITA HECHT: So when you graduated from Bronx High School of Science, it was 1951.
ANITA HECHT: The historic context of your life at that time what had influenced you?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: OK. First of all going to a highly competitive high school, you're coming out of the second world war. This was 1948 I head off to science so it's the immediate aftermath of the second world war. You're influenced by the huge mobilization. As a young man, you could follow in the newspapers the daily events of the second world war and, of course, the aftermath. In 1948 also the creation of the state of Israel.

An enormous number of things happening at the same time so my interest in history was, in fact, slowly gearing even in high school toward not American history. Which I thought had tremendous dramatic events of the twentieth century were leading me to think about Europe in general as a place whose history I would like to understand. And, of course, the fact that my parents had fled Europe-- I mean, not fled, but migrated from Europe in 1920 immediately following the first world war. And were actually the last people to come in before the quotas where introduced in 1920 in immigration, which by 1924 considerably slowed down immigration from those countries which did not have a large immigrant population in the United States in 1890, I think, which was the basis of the quota system. So that sense of the world, the sense of community, and the sense of events I think weighed in on me.

ANITA HECHT: Did it have a political influence on you in terms of affiliating with a party or a platform or--?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Most of the folks in my area voted for Roosevelt, voted for Truman, or Democrats. I didn't feel any obligation to veer from that. In the Bronx High School of Science in our discussion sessions, we did have one Republican. He came from Manhattan. And when we would go on to look for the Republican view, we would turn to Doug [? Middleman ?] and say, what's the Republican view? Right behind me I had a very radical student who had come from Austria and every day when we both looked at the Times, I would say, this is an interesting thing. And he's say, this is what it means and he would give me the party line. It was very interesting to listen to. If I disputed it, he sometimes became very upset. He said, come the revolution, we'll see what you have to say. It actually worried me a bit. I thought, gee, I didn't realize I had an enemy.
ANITA HECHT: Did you experience any anti-semitism yourself?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Very little. I was assaulted once. But that was by people who are not around the block. Every once in a while on Halloween, people would come over and invade the territory and claim it. But for the most part, it was a very mixed group and mixed religious and ethnic group and it was zero anti-semitism manifested there. It was really a very coherent and very friendly block.

ANITA HECHT: And even though your parents hadn't had the opportunity for higher education did they want that for their children?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: My father told me, I said-- you know, take your child to work that they've now introduced. I once asked him if I could go to work with him. I was terribly fascinated by the callouses on his knuckles and he said, you will never enter that place. You're going to college. And there was no question that they were both-- that was my fate. But he couldn't decide what I was going to do in college. Of course, he wanted me to become a doctor and I did but not the kind he wanted. And so he would refer to me as a schmekel doctor. That is, one who does no good for anybody immediately.

ANITA HECHT: So when you started college, were you already fairly sure that you were headed--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I was divided. I had a wonderful biology lab, and I flirted with biology. But sometimes you want to stick with the one that [?] you, and I was already so into history and so interested in it and so fascinated by it. I had a couple fabulous professors including a German Czech professor, Hans Kohn, who really made Europe come alive for us. And so by the time I was a junior, I was hooked on history for the rest of my life.

ANITA HECHT: Was there a particular area of study at that point for you?
SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Well, as an undergraduate, I mean, you had to pick a variety of courses but still it was European history, 19th, 20th century, which had grabbed me most.

ANITA HECHT: And you graduated with your B.A. in 1955?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: That's right. With a major in history, yeah.

ANITA HECHT: Tell me what happens next.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Well, when you're in your graduating year, you are going to go off to college, and I was fortunate enough to meet a young woman who was also graduating. And we went out February. No, January. And by the end of February I proposed to her, but in such an ambiguous way, that she just wasn't quite sure. I finally said, well, are you coming out to Madison with me? I'd been offered a scholarship. She said, in what capacity? And I said, oh, oh, I mean marriage. And it took her about a week and we got married so I did have a companion coming out into a part of the world that I had never seen.

Until the age of 21 probably 90 miles from New York was my furthest venture eastern Pennsylvania and upstate New York were about the limits. And a little bit of Connecticut. So I was extraordinarily provincial. Even downtown New York was not my turf. It was the turf of rich people. My only venture into that world was they came around auditioning young children for a children's chorus in metropolitan opera and I spent three years down there until my voice changed. And that was fabulous.

ANITA HECHT: So really coming to Wisconsin was like the wild west or something.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: It seemed like another world. You think of Madison as a metropolitan area. I thought of it as a rural village. And I kept a subway bus token in my pocket if I ever needed to go back fast, assuming that somehow right behind the capital there must be a subway station.
ANITA HECHT: So you got to Madison because of your then wife?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I got to Madison. I had made out applications. And one of the things that interested me at Madison, I wanted to work with a professor Merle Curti who was probably the most famous history teacher in Madison at the time. He was in the American intellectual history but I thought that I would be able to do something that would be transatlantic. I was determined to do something with Europe, and I came to work with him.

And the first day I arrived, I went in. It was, I think, August or early September of 1955. I went in to see the chairman, William Sachse, I believe. Sachse was his name. I think William was his first name. And he sat me down and asked me about my background and my interests, and I told him I had come to work with Merle Curti. He said, oh. He said, did you? He said, well, you know Merle Curti is on fellowship this year. He's on leave and he won't be here, so I'm going to introduce you to a new man that's just arrived. His name is George Mosse and you will be comfortable with him. I thought to myself, how the hell does he know who I'll be comfortable with and why would he even use that phrase. And later I found out and I will let you know when the time comes. And I realized that I was a virgin and this man was also a virgin to Wisconsin. And that, in fact, determined the composition of the first seminar. Do you want me to go on?

ANITA HECHT: Yes.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: OK. We walked into the seminar. There are these people ranging from baby faces like myself, freshman, all the way up to people writing their dissertations. There were people working in German history, Italian history, French history, British history, all there because of a common interest in intellectual history which was going to be George Mosse's assigned forte for the university. It was really a motley crew.

Some of these people were well formed. They were on their way to writing their dissertations. They were mature graduate students. And others were just like me, completely wet behind the ears. And that meant that the older ones were the ones that set the tone and the tone was also set by our new instructor, who gave us the impression right away with his statement, this is a history seminar. We reserve nice comments for the sherry hour afterward. This is a critical, analytical
Seminar. I really got the message. This is a bull fight and we are the bulls. We are also the picadors and toreadors. And that's the way it's going to be. And it was really an education.

I'll just give you one example because it was the example of my life. He said everybody has to bring in one paper a week. He's not going to do any of the talking. He'll talk at the end. He'll summarize. But you're assigned a paper. You bring it in and everybody has the task of going at it critically. So I thought I'm not ready for this. The older folks will have to go but he went around and we're sitting in order and I got week number four. This was week number one. Three weeks. Come up with a topic for your master's. He said you're going to get your master's fast in a year, so you better try to come up with a topic very quickly. OK. I know French. I run into the Memorial Library. I start pulling books in French history. No, that doesn't seem to work. It's not going to work fast enough.

French novels. I start pulling out French novels, and why would I be interested in French novels to give me a kind of transnational thing I had come to work with. French novels, novelists who write about America in the 19th century. So I started pulling off a few books and I realized I do have something to work with. One book I had known was there already was Alexis de Tocqueville's traveling companion to America in 1831, Gustave de Beaumont, who had written a book called Marie ou l'Esclavage aux Etats-Unis, Marie or, Slavery in the United States. So I look at that and I think, OK. I've got a topic.

And I quickly cobbled together an introductory essay. And I walk in and they tore me to pieces. It was put together hastily. You didn't do this. This is a non sequitur. This is no good. Why do you put this in? What's your thesis? And I'm sitting there and diminishing very rapidly in my own eyes, wanting to be out of there.

Going out of that seminar going home to my wife and saying, I think we're going to have to move back to New York. I think I've been finished by these folks. It took me a day to recover. I did not ever tell anyone this until my dissertation defense and I told George about this and it later entered his lore. He would tell all future graduate students coming in how one of his better students had been reduced to tears and went out weeping from the seminar, which was of course a total exaggeration but in typical George fashion. In any event he loved-- when he heard that, he couldn't get over it and, of course, none of the other graduate students ever got over it, but he was able to set the right tone, because he told them, this student almost broke down but, in fact, not only survived but went off to a very prestigious institution when he got his PhD. So that is the fall of 1955.
Well, there's another part of George that has to be talked about because this was his undergraduate teaching. George, if you saw him, you realized that he was a cut above all the other lecturers that you could possibly have. I only had one person in City College who came close to him and this was Hans Kohn. And I realized that I could only mention that once because George did not like rivals and he kind of said, yes, yes, but I'm better am I not? And I said, yes, of course, you are.

But in his lecture-- this was the first lecture, of course. And he had a relatively ordinary classroom, full but not immensely full. And I would sit up in front with my jeans which was my-- I had one other pair of pants-- and listen right in front and drink it up and be critical at the same time because I realized, OK, if you're going to be like this to us, we've got to learn how to be like this to you when the time comes for you to talk. You want us to seminar students who are critical, we'll be critical.

And I listened and I loved it. I mean, he was absolutely fascinating but I didn't know where I stood with him. This is late in the first part of the term. I'm getting good grades on my midterm. But where do I stand in the seminar? Was this first baptism of fire an indication of my standing? Is it worth my while continuing? And one day toward the end of term he said, come to the office. Come to office. And I go into his office and he said, there's a small fellowship waiting for you. It's $200 and I thought, oh. And he said, and the first thing I want you to do with that fellowship is to get yourself another pair of pants. I can't stand watching you only in jeans. Jeans were not the garb of everybody by then. He said you've got to have another pair of pants. It's just impossible.

I went off. I picked up my fellowship. And it wasn't until you began to ask me about this. Since then, I realize he may have created that fellowship. It may have been his money that he put in there. How does the history department come to give a fellowship? They may have had some money, but I have a feeling that he just wanted to show me, you know what, it's OK. I've watched you now.

You know, you take your turn as the bull but then you become picadors. And I was doing pretty well as a picador. I learned my craft pretty well and by the time the second or third year, we were all masters of slaughtering each other and then surviving for the next day. There's a wonderful cartoon in French history where there is in the third republic, they have ministers who constantly walk the plank on a pirate ship, but there's another plank under it and they fall and hit the plank and they go back in. And so I always told my graduate students, that's the way it is in a seminar. They can only kill you but they don't really destroy you and come back and you're a better person.
Anyway, so I knew that I was on the good side and pretty soon I got a chance to see that he really thought very highly of me. Do you want me to go on with this or should I--

ANITA HECHT: I've got many questions but if there are places you want to go, I'll let you go ahead. go ahead.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I have to say this about George. He was a combination to me. This was why I wasn't really very comfortable with him. This is a man who announced that he had been from the upper classes of Germany that put us at one distance. He had gone to a Quaker high school in England, Bootham, I think it was. And he spoke with a British accent. So he was a combination of a German bourgeois and an English gentleman, neither of which I was.

It kept ringing in my head, why am I supposed to be comfortable with this man? I'm not comfortable at all. He's an exotic European and I'm a Bronx American. And then it became clear to me why [? Saxy ?] had said this to me. In the fall of 1956, the year after I was there, the Suez war broke out. The Israelis invade Suez. Within a couple of days, they're down to the Nile. The British and French come in. And George Mosse comes into the seminar with a slight grin on his face and he says, these Jews have become Prussians. And then he smiles a little bit, like, you know, they know how to fight.

And I thought, he wouldn't be saying that unless he had some link. My first idea was, this is a guy who may have a Jewish background somewhere but obviously an Episcopalian or a Quaker. He's not Jewish. But then I said, maybe he's nothing but obviously there's a linkage there.

Other than that he was a closed book to us. This seminar made up of a composite was not like it was 10 years later when people came because he was there, because they knew him. This was a man who was introducing himself to us and us to him. And for the time I was there, it was a much more open seminar. People went in all directions. Reformation history. 19th Britain. I'm picking up on Alexis de Tocqueville. And we didn't know just where he was going and I didn't find out until I left.
His first major book on German history, The Crisis of German Ideology, hit me like a thunderstorm. I thought, this is what he's been working on and kept it all to himself. And it was intriguing that that was the beginning. That was only the first blossom in something that just blew Nationalization of the masses, which he talks about how people are psychologically mobilized towards the final solution in terms of racism. Moving into the first world war and the wounded soldiers and the dead soldiers and what is done with the death of the civil war. Talking about Jewish history. I think he opened up Jewish history at the University of Wisconsin. All these things like a flower.

And then, of course, the final capstone. Coming out as a gay individual. All of these absolutely unknown to us, any of us in the courses. We thought of him as a sexless Buddha who was interested in pure intellectual history of Europe, the classics, and popular culture, and that was it. And that was the place from which you went. And his main publications had been in 17th century England. So that was George in general.

In '56 my wife, who's played as much of a role in my development as did George-- not as to my development as a human being but in history-- she said to me one day, there's a new thing called Fulbright scholarships. Why don't you apply? This is the fall of 1956. I've been there a year. I got my master's degree. I worked on an article which passed through the seminar with flying colors. And so I said, OK, I'll try. And I write out a little thing about what I'd like to study, a break off from the master's degree. And I get it. And it comes through.

I haven't told George about this at all. I walk up to the Bascom Hill and I say to George, George, I've just gotten a Fulbright scholarship and I'm going to Paris next year. And he looks at me and says, you can't do that. He said, you haven't passed your comps. You're in the middle of things. What are you doing? Why did you apply for a Fulbright? I said, my wife suggested I apply. I applied. Should I not go? He said, of course you're going. He said, this is an incredible opportunity. But you better work hard there.

Off to Paris I went. In Paris I discovered a French scholar had just done a 1,400 page [UNINTELLIGIBLE], the classic [UNINTELLIGIBLE] of the French on the very topic I was interested in. So I thought, I'm going to work on somebody I had read. I read it in college, Alexis de Tocqueville, and I'm going to work on his-- something that nobody has studied-- his relationship to England. And while I was there-- I'll go into this story later if you want-- but while I was there, I decided that we should take a trip to England. We had a scooter. We drove through Europe on it, Lambretta.
We get to England and George happens to be there. And he says, I'm going to take you up to Cambridge-- he had spent, I think, a year in Cambridge-- and I will show you around. And George transforms himself as we reach Cambridge into a young English gentleman, an undergraduate who knows the and can show us what Cambridge is like as opposed to Wisconsin. They have a historic landscape here and a little river on which people go punting on little boats. And George, to show us how marvelous he is, takes us punting.

I said, Ruth, get your camera ready. This guy's going to get stuck. He's reached the end. As long as he was intellectual, talking about the Kings College Chapel, it was fine. He's getting out in a boat now. This guy better watch out. And, of course, she caught him at the moment when he had to make a decision as to whether to hold on to the punt or whatever it's called, the pole and missed the boat or leave the rail in the water in the mud and go along with the boat. He left it and we got back. I can't mock him because then he said, you do it. And the same thing happened to me. And these are things you learn.

Anyway, George wanted to keep us there for the whole time we were in England. We finally said to him, George, we've got to get out. I've got to see something about England besides you. And he said, OK. Go do it.

OK. And next-- OK, you want to ask questions. I've got one more thing which I think is the most important thing. I'm going to move right to the Ph. D. The Ph. D. thesis. I get back. I tell him I'm going to work on Alexis de Tocqueville. He says, fine. He loves everybody to take their own. He's a charismatic figure but he's not a pied piper. He doesn't like imitators. He wants people to venture.

I start working and I begin to produce my chapters for the seminar and after about the second chapter, he says to me privately, why would you work on a man like Alexis de Tocqueville. He's so sane. And I realize sane. S-A-N-E. He's not one of these mythical, irrational creatures whom he loves to study. And I said, well, George-- and I happened to get hooked on this guy and I wrote a poem about one of his books so I guess that touches the aesthetic a little bit and he said that was fine.

And then by early 1960, I'm ready to do my thesis and I get very ill. I have a leaking appendix. I go to the hospital over here in Madison. It turns out to be a very complex operation. I'm up on tubes for three weeks in the hospital. I'm constantly losing weight. My intestines don't work. George doesn't show up for two weeks. Finally my wife tells him I'm beginning to get better.
He comes in and he says, OK, I've got good news for you. Now he knows it's worthwhile investing himself in me, OK? I don't think he liked to see somebody smelling of pus and OK, [UNINTELLIGIBLE]. He says to me, I put you up for a job at Harvard and you've got a job. I said, George, we can't do this. I said, I haven't finished my research on Tocqueville. The big primary research at Yale, I've got to go back and do it. He said, nonsense. You're not going to do that. You're going to go and take the job. And you're going to write the dissertation and it's going to be written by June because that's what you need. I said, George, what am I going to do? He said, your topic is Tocqueville in England, right? I said, right. He said, you write Tocqueville said this, Tocqueville said that, you get your degree and you're out of here. You'll touch up the thesis for the book later on.

And that's a message which I've been able to communicate to all of my graduate students. A dissertation is a union card. If you work for 10 years on your dissertation and you put out a book style book, really a good nobody will publish it, because it all goes on digital dissertations. And what do they do with it? Anybody has access. Nobody's going to publish it. So he got me uplifted and that was the moment that to me was a supreme moment. It was a moment of utter confidence in me. A moment which he was sending me off and he knew that I had to make my career out there with a dissertation. It turned out Harvard was a very different place from Madison. A much more hierarchical place, but I was then on my way.

ANITA HECHT: And you were his first placement at Harvard?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Yes. Yes. I may have been his last. But I think they needed somebody then and he probably put my name forward and that was it. And I had about a half hour interview before.

ANITA HECHT: Do you think you were unique in the amount of attention he gave you as a graduate student or did he really take such a deep interest in the well-being of--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: That's one of the major points that has to be made about George. We all felt, all of us, that he was paying a lot of attention to us. And first of all, you have to realize that we had the luck of having a man who had no wife, no children. We were his children. We were his mates and we had all the seminars at his home. And sherry was served and we could say nice things to each other after the seminar. And I had the feeling that every one of us, every
single one of us was followed very closely and very carefully. And as he got into his full stride after we left, I think he attracted people for precisely the same reason. He paid attention.

One of the people came later. I met him at one of the meetings in Madison we had at the very end of the 1990s. And he said to me, he came to Madison as an undergraduate and he was a man who came down to the Lake Mendota, the waterfront, sat down. He recognized him from the undergraduates. Sat down and started talking to him right away. Only faculty member he ever met who did that. George did use his social and spare time. He had, of course, a special talent for attracting people. He didn't have a built in family and a built in wife and a built in social manager as wives frequently are or husbands if their wives are working.

And so he developed that sense of investment. No, no. I was never unique. I knew that and I wanted that. I was not even one of his housekeepers. He always had housekeepers and they were I think most intimately involved with him. And they would love to belittle him in his daily work. He was a complete incompetent in doing house work and washing dishes and the rest of that. So they could get a feeling of at least a technical superiority in the housework even though there were not his intellectual equals as yet.

ANITA HECHT: Do you have any ideas about where his skills as a lecturer and a mentor they came from?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: That I can't tell you. I do know that he was hired by Wisconsin for his ability to draw crowds. He had first gone to Iowa. I don't how he developed it. But I do know something. Yes, my brother in law during the second world war was in some training camp and George was lecturing on the background of Germany. And he said, George would always just walk to the front and make these two little steps and burst out with something. He was already a unique teacher. I don't know where he got it from. But he obviously developed it at Iowa with the point where he was teaching to a thousand students.

And when he came to Wisconsin, it was because of that and the very second semester of his teaching, he walked into the room and the room was not only full but there were students out in the hall. There were long lines of students and he said, oh well, we've got ourselves a bigger room. There are just too many students. And we all poured out of the room, marching down to the next hall and one of the students next to me said, this is the biggest migration since the exodus. And that's the way we felt.
You know, but it was Moses who didn't want to lead. He was his whole life telling, you know, charisma is one thing, but be wary of it. And be critical. And that's why he was training us all to be very critical. It's very easy to get people to be convinced of that. To be convinced of your specialness. That's a danger.

ANITA HECHT: Such an interesting contrast to the Holocaust of which he was--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Oh, yes. Exactly, he was saying that the basic big question, how is it that so many people get caught up in so much irrationality?

And then I can say something about the Festschrift because that's the next step. It was the end of the 1970s. George told David Sabeau who was another of his students, I'm going to be 65 soon, Dave, I might die. I want to have a Festschrift while I'm still alive. You get Seymour Drescher and somebody else that he mentioned, Allan Sharlin, and you get a Festschrift for me. I want it in three years. And so we did it. This is a man who knew exactly what he wanted.

And it was really exhilarating work. And as disciples will do, we fought over what to say in the introduction. David wanted him to be a quasi Marxist and emphasize George's focus on class. I wanted George to be a student of mass society and so I wanted to insist on his cross class analysis about the ideology and its appeal, especially German ideology. And so we quarreled in a wonderful correspondence for about three months and Allan Sharlin stepped in and voted, I think, mostly with me. So we got that in.

And so at the Festschrift, my talk was basically taken from our correspondence. The debate between the clearly classy Mosse and the mostly massy Mosse. And that was the Festschrift. But the most important thing that happened at the Festschrift was heading back to Mr. Merle Curti, who gave a talk and to explain how George got to Madison. He apparently came here very briefly, impressed people with his ability to draw a crowd. They wanted somebody in western civilization who could teach lots of students. And so he was put on a list of people who were potential appointments. There were no Jews on history departments at that time. George obviously had the best credentials at Iowa a thousand people were the best credentials. But he wound up only one of three people and he wound up choice number three.
And they hired someone else, I believe, in 1954, an independently wealthy scholar, who by the end of the first term decided he didn't want to teach all his life. This was not what he wanted to do, spend his time in a classroom. And so he left at the end of the year. Number two had already gotten a job at another place. And so there they were. George Mosse came having been acknowledged as eligible and now hired by default.

And Merle Curti said it was very interesting-- he wouldn't go into the details-- to see how difficult it was as late as 1954 to get into the history department somebody who was of that particular background. And I know this was the case because in the economics department, a very famous economist, economic historian, Selig Perlman, was on the history department list for outside evaluators and after, I think, in 1939 refused to serve anymore. He said, if they're good enough to be your graduate students, one of them should be good-- now that he meant Jews-- should be good enough to be in a history department but it took them another 14 years to get around to that.

But we came into a different world because I experienced-- you asked about anti-semitism. Nothing in my street. Bronx High School Science had 70% Jews. City College had 60% Jews. I was always in a majority situation. When I got to Wisconsin, that had almost, not quite, but almost disappeared. My way was clear. By the end of the 50s, people were going out of their way as a kind of silent affirmative action to prove that they were no longer bigoted from Illinois and other places which had been restrictive. And it was George's students who were going out and breaking ice everywhere.

ANITA HECHT: Did you ever have any conversations with him about being Jewish just personally--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: No, I steered away. Oh yeah. Later on. After he came out with the Crisis of German Ideology and then he started to have a Jewish program, we did have. He was not at all identified religiously. I think at his funeral he did not want kaddish read, but he did want to be identified as a Jew. I think he was very concerned, terribly concerned with Israel's development. Not just its existence. He had a list of people who were his culture heroes. That is, early Zionists who wanted an integrated or a two state solution for the problem of Palestine long before it was even formed.

And my favorite City College teacher, Hans Kohn, was a man who had been disillusioned by the fact that the Jews in Palestine were not sufficiently cognizant of the fact that they had a real
massive problem of people living on the land already. And were not addressing themselves to it. They were trying to look the other way. And so I think George felt affiliated in that way.

One of his friends, his very young like friends once told me that she sat in a seminar in Jerusalem and he was talking about Jews in the early 30s. And someone in the seminar asked him what did it feel like to be a Jew in the early 30s. He said, well, you could take a walk over to east Jerusalem. You might get some inkling there, what it feels like to be a minority, to be rendered, how shall I say, insecure, constantly and totally insecure. So that's the kind of affiliation he had. A great and deep, I think, an abiding affection and a deep interest in the history of Judaism, but also a sense of wariness about the way Israel was developing.

ANITA HECHT: And the nationalism.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: And the nationalism, of course. The dangers of nationalism. People who cease to worship God and worship themselves. That's the opening theme of the French Revolution and the nationalization of the masses. I think it sticks in your mind and it runs right through that. And worshipping is the key. Mythologies that you build up in order to create myths.