ANITA HECHT: Tell me a little bit more about his approach to history and the use of empathy.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Well, I can do it best by talking about how he came to move into studies of the background of Nazism and other ideologies. And he did it by taking people seriously. One of the things, really after the second World War, one of things was to dismiss what the Nazis and what Germans had thought during the 19th and early 20th centuries. And especially during the Nazi regime, as some aberrant behavior. Propagandism. Something that had been developed just to get to. Power And that there was no coherence to this ideology.

And he said, nope. You've got to get inside, not just the heads of the Nazis, but the people to whom they were speaking. The pre-Nazis, the German nationalists, you've got to find out what it is that makes people join, empathize, tolerate, things which you might find irrational. Not simply to dismiss them because you think that, in fact, because it's irrational, it's incoherent. You can have rational mythologies which, in fact, embed themselves and appeal deeply to people.

And one of his favorite analogies was, if you want to find out what made Nazism so appealing, with its rituals and its decor and its choreography, go into a Baroque church. And you see that what the church is trying to do is not to stress just words, but to appeal to all the senses. To get people to drop their-- to let that critical sense relax. To say that there's something different and better and higher than logic and empirical rationalism. And I think that he communicated, even to his students in the undergraduate courses. He said, pay attention to myths. Pay attention not just to great thinkers, but to the novels that people are reading, the poems that they're writing, the pictures that are being drawn. The way in which movements project on meaning to history, and make themselves the endpoint of history. I think it was very important and very dramatic in what he did.
And that’s why he held, despite his complete carelessness about facts, which made me laugh constantly when I was a TA, and students would turn around and look at me, and I’d say, no no, you take down what he says. You are Mirandized. This is before Miranda, but you're Mirandized. You will be held responsible for any errors that are made. But he didn't care. He was conveying something very different. And it didn't matter. The facts were really, they were petty facts. You know, what's the proof of German influence on America. King of Prussia, the town of King of Prussia in Pennsylvania. Well, if that's all the kids get to know, they're not going to know anything about the influence.

But his ability to draw, to ad lib, to pull people in, to make them think about things, to make striking observation about, especially about irrational, how it links up. How people are hungry for this. How they want it. How they want meaning. It's terrible to walk around with chaos.

ANITA HECHT: It would be interesting to hear what he would say today about the political environment.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I would love it.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: This would be grist for his mill. He would say, ah, now the Americans have finally become people who talk irrationally to each other. They scream at each other from across these television stations. These political television stations. And across the Internet. I mean, it's opened up a whole new world of how you convey myths and world views. I'm sure he would be having a party with this. Images and words and whole narratives wrapped up in a, what do you call it? A Facebook Tweeter message.

ANITA HECHT: Do you have any sense of what he believed in at the antidote to--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I think best he could do was exposure. Let's say, this is what you're being subjected to. This is the kind-- I mean, you do ultimately need some facts. But you've got to draw people's attention to the facts. If you're teaching people about why the medical men in
Germany were one of the chief pillars of the reign. Of the regime. Why, in fact, they not only were people went along but people who wanted to be in the front ranks. Wanted to make this new racial revolution. You're got to study why people who raised and take the Hippocratic Oath, do no harm, why they'll do a lot of harm. They'll do the opposite. Instead of saving lives they will destroy lives. Or sterilize people at a lower level. But they'll do all sorts of things to segregated, incarcerate, and ultimately destroy. Why would they do that?

And you'll have to find out that, in fact, they had been led to believe that there's something higher than do no harm to the individual. And that is very simply, do no harm to the collectivity. The important collectivity. There is life unworthy of life. there are groups unworthy of life. And they must be, in fact, removed from the group. And that's the priority. Not saving every life, which could be, in fact, the worst that you could do. You save all these epileptics, schizophrenics, Tuberculars, deformed children, feeble-minded people. All these things, all they fit together in the same boat.

The Jews are one of the primary targets because they pollute invisibly. They have a way of doing things which is invisible. So, when these people stood in the Nuremberg trials their defense was, we believed that collective public medicine was the priority before our regime. And the national health was more important than the individual health.

Can't go better than to show people that. That there's a total transformation of what that Hippocratic oath actually meant to these men. And that's their defense, right in 1945, '46, '47.

ANITA HECHT: How did his interests and development as a scholar into these areas influence your path and what your interest became?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: OK. Well, in one sense, very little. Because when I left, he was still the scholar of the reformation. But when I worked on Tocqueville, I was not particularly interested in the irrational. Increasingly fascinated by it. But I turned to the idea, OK, we looked at stories that are told by men who are intent on very horrendous transformations of society, restructuring society.

But is it also possible that there are myths created by people in the name of the good. So, having gotten interested in abolition, I began to be interested in what are the myths of the abolitionists?
Which is in fact something I'm going to be talking about afternoon: the myth of the free labor ideology. That free labor is always superior to slave labor. And that's one of the reasons why, in fact, it's much better to introduce emancipations for everybody. Because, in fact, everybody will be better off, the society will automatically become wealthier and richer, and, of course, it will be freer. Therefore it's the myths of the abolitionists which also demand an analysis. And it's caused a bit of a stir.

But that's one of the real impacts that he had on me, just indirectly, just reading the stuff and reading his material and the way he approached things.

ANITA HECHT: Interesting. So as a scholar yourself, as a teacher yourself, you said he influenced you.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: The mobilization of the masses is my big deal with abolition. That's the big difference between why nobody talked about abolition for 2000 years and why in 50 years it suddenly became the agenda of a world movement and by a hundred years every civilized society had pledged itself to be anti-slavery instead of slavery. Not a bad transformation.

ANITA HECHT: Not a bad transformation, yeah.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: And then, of course, why it doesn't work all the time. Because in Nazi Germany, or in Europe itself, you had more slave laborers working in Germany in 1944 than had been working at all the Americas a hundred years before. Isn't that a tale with a happy ending. In history there only occasionally pleasant interludes, no happy endings. That's Drescher, not Mosse. But I'm sure he would have agreed with that.

ANITA HECHT: Tell me a little bit this is living back sort of yeah kind of logically just the context of Madison and the history department, and anything you can compare to today or contrast from today.
SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Well, for me, Madison was—First of all, it was an opening up of a whole world. I mean, Madison—five years down the road, I didn't want to leave this. I said, I want to stay for another year, do research. Part of it was, this is so comfortable. This is so wonderful. I've got this great mentor, I've got these wonderful—I was finishing my PhD in five years. Most of the seminar they were taking an extra year any way to do it. And I thought, it would be wonderful to spend another year. Why do I have to go out in the world and work? You're sitting on the consuming end, rather than getting out in front and really transforming yourself in relation to students.

Madison to me was a bit of paradise. I had lucked into, I had stepped into this magnificent relationship with this magnificent mentor. There were gathered around him a group of just bright, energetic people. Who, when they got the message, be as energetic and creative as possible, and responding to it. And he had produced a fabulous set of graduate students.

The history department in general, well, that was less important. Because at that point, I don't know if they still do it, you went into your major professors fief. And that's where you stayed for the full five years. I took seminars with other people. That's what we did. I never found even his near equal. I found some wonderful lecturers in American history, but that wasn't turf that—With your major advisor's permission you went to a certain turf. If I said, I'd like to do such and such, medieval history? Good, you can do it. Comparative literature? Good, you can do it. Russian history? Fine, you can do it. American? You don't need to do American history. That's off your grounds. You had enough undergraduate history in America You can't do that.

You can do Tocqueville in England, not Tocqueville in America. Get busy with looking at British history. That's the way, I mean it was not just one history department. Although the fact that we called our professors mister, and not professor. The fact that when I walked into Harvard, the chairman of the department, with my union card in my hand, I'm now a doctor, he says, call me doctor. I call him doctor. He didn't invite me to sit down. This is a very different thing from Madison, Wisconsin.

ANITA HECHT: It's more egalitarian here.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Much more egalitarian here. But George had his own-- I mean, look. You're out to his house every week. You're in a constant relationship with them. So, in fact, it feels more like a family than it does like being in a university graduate school. With a tremendous degree of comfort and security.
ANITA HECHT: How much did the wider world of politics enter? And this is also the late 50's, the Democratic party is on the ascendancy, McCarthy dies.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I came out just to witness the last move of McCarthy. I went to work for the guy who was the-- there was a group called The Young People's Socialist League. It was the last gasp of them. When I came out in '55. I think they were mostly people from New York. And he showed me, he came back one day from a meeting of YPSL, Young People's Socialist League, and he said, this is what they were caring outside. And it said, you know, "Kykes go back to New York." So it was there.

But, you know what? It was the left that was beginning to really take off. There was a group of students who founded a new journal called Studies on the Left. They were very committed. In fact, many of them were good hard Marxist. And mostly what you saw was a general changing, I don't how it had been in '52, '53, '54. But by '56, '57, '58, McCarthy is just gone. He's vanished. And McCarthyism has vanished. There's a new ethos that's brewing on the campus.

There were highly political events. The IS sent troops into Lebanon. There was a protest. There was, of course, the Cold War being fought. I didn't have much-- I did engage in lots of discussions with it folks on the left, but I was wary of them.

There was one thing that happened, there was a student, one of the one of the foremost students on the left, we were walking home one night. And his wife had gone, one of the first to go to visit Mao. I think it was 1959. '58, it must have been '59. Or the fall of '58. I said, well, you know, one thing I can't imagine is what's going on in China There are thousands, maybe millions of people that seem to be dying. The landlord class as a whole widening. Why do you have to have death as a penalty for living under a revolutionary government?

He said to me, you know, you fail to realize, life is very cheap in China. I said, so what is the revolution all about? It was cheap. It is cheap. What's the revolution? It's just one more person coming in, and taking his cut into the vast tradition of bloody suppression. And so I was a little wary. I stood off from that. I was not-- I figured I had one myth in my childhood. It was OK. It was comforting. It lasted for a couple thousand years. Let this new myth of revolutions for making the world, let's see it last for 50, 100 years. What happens to it? Are people wealthier, healthier, happier? We'll see.
ANITA HECHT: Did George become active politically while you were here in any way?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: No. He never took any political positions. I understood that he cautioned the students in the late 60’s that there are unintended consequences. They might get themselves into a position of being those masses that feel the moment for Utopian transformation has arrived. I do believe that there was there an explosion and death here, and it made an impact on them nationwide.

Other teachers, other professors had encouraged the students and then backed away when the time came to stand out for them. Because George had cautioned them, but always spoke to them, they had a confidence in him. He spoke to them straightforwardly, but he wouldn't betray them. He was, in fact, steady. And he did. He went to their defense when the time came. That's again the kind of person he was.

ANITA HECHT: So you worked on the Festschrift, that was 1982. Tell me about other joint work that you did together.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: In 1984, I was at the Wilson Center. And, as I said, I undertook this program at the-- well, I'm not sure. I told somebody else before, earlier in the morning. I undertook to set up a program in European studies. And what I liked most about the invitation to join it for a year, just take an additional year off after my fellowship there, was that they said they were setting up a program, it was all European studies. It was not going to be Eastern Europe and Western Europe. And that attracted me enormously. Because my general perspective was, look, Europe has been there for at least a thousand years, 2,000 years as a concept, and this is just one late development, this division along this particular boundary line. Really what you have to do is discuss the long term trajectory. And the European division is temporary, or we don't know if it's permanent, but got to be a European program.

So I came eagerly, set up the program. And before I left they announced to me, well, the state department was giving money, but only if they separated and made an Eastern European and Western European program. I'd asked George to come in and be one of my advisors. You have a little team. And he can spoke up very strongly for the retention of this original idea. He was taken by it. I hadn't consulted him before. He just came in and just made a beautiful, eloquent
statement. But a beautiful, eloquent statement doesn't talk as loudly as State Department grant which is going to be in perpetuum.

George Mosse and Seymour Drescher come and go. The money stays. So we had to wait. In 1989 before the two systems then began to fuse again.

ANITA HECHT: But he'd worked with you on an advisory--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: An advisory command. He came out and helped me to select the fellows for the next year. This is what part of our task was. He came out to give a talk. I got him to give a talk to the Wilson Center. Which was really a very prestigious gathering place for intellectuals to meet with politicians. And then our final collaboration, which was not as close as it might have been, was when he asked me to become an editor of the Journal of Contemporary History. He felt he was getting old. He wanted somebody to replace him.

I wasn't sure that I was person for that. Because I had been focusing mostly on 18th and 19th century stuff. The focus of the Journal of Contemporary History had been very heavily on Europe, and I'd been coming globalized. Looking at slavery in global perspective. And transcontinental, rather than regional European.

I agreed to go on. I thought it was a wonderful compliment that he paid me. I stayed for a few years and then I was very happy when Stanley Payne came on the scene. Somebody in the 20th century who had all the networks, who was willing-- they didn't want to have reviews-- he was willing to, in fact, introduce. I didn't have the confidence to say, look, this is your turf and I want to put reviews in there. You know, these different things. It was really-- I contributed less than I should have. And I was glad that I got out when I did.

ANITA HECHT: Did you and George stay in touch always?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Continually. Yeah yeah yeah. At the end of about 1997, early 1998, he called me up and we were just talking. I think the last long conversation we had. He said, how's your family? I started with my parents. I said, well, my parents are both 90 years old. And
they're on Social Security. I'll be going on Social Security next year, too. So I think it's a pretty nice thing. I've got an adviser who's got nice longevity. And so maybe, I have a feeling that maybe I've got something about me that keeps people alive. He said, yeah, well you've led a charmed life. And he's absolutely right.

But then a few months later he developed these symptoms which roared through his body very quickly. And I only had time to send him the preface for a book, a collection of my essays which was coming out and would come out the next year. I wanted him to see what I had written about him. I'd like to read it if you wouldn't mind.

ANITA HECHT: I'd love it if you read it.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: This was in the preface. I had a chance to send it to him. The book was From Slavery to Freedom. It was a collection of essays written over, by 1994 it had been written over almost 25 years.

So generational exercise is this series of essays it is inevitably stimulates multi-generational reflection. My teacher and friend, George Mosse, receives his due only tangentially in these pages, where my historical interest briefly intrude into his own area of expertise. That was the Holocaust, comparing it to the slave trade. Yet no graduate student could ever have had better fortune that to share the exhilaration that was George Mosse's seminar. No aspiring young scholar could have been more challenged to sustained effort than I was by the relentless tide of George Mosse's own work. And no sexagenarian, that is me, standing amazed at the restless energy of his globe-trotting octogenarian mentor, would dare to dream of pausing for a breath in hours the world's most satisfying preoccupation.

I can only be thankful that my wife, Ruth, appeared on the horizon of my life just in time to keep George's example in comparative human perspective. I was blessed with this man.

ANITA HECHT: And it sounds like he felt the same about you.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: He did. It was very--
ANITA HECHT: Mutual.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Very mutual.

ANITA HECHT: We talked a little bit about the uniqueness of his career and I wonder whether you could say a little bit on tape about that.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Sure. Well, I think I have to reiterate something. He was so much of an enigma to me at the beginning. And I think he was an enigma to himself. One of the things that surprised me most was a succession of things that he got interested in. This German ideology. Then the mobilization of the masses, this human behavior. Fallen soldiers. What the impact of the first World War. Jewish studies. Sexuality and nationalism. This is a man who didn't just flit from subject to subject. He just zoomed, and zig-zagged from subject. I don't think any other historian I've ever met had that kind of breadth, that kind of interest, that way of lending, of getting to a subject. You sensed that he felt that it was in the air and he's zoned into it. And then other people come on board.

And you could only fully sense what that had meant when, in the posthumous meetings that I attended, and the book that came out, what the breadth, the sheer breadth of his interest was. And how he could stimulate people to think about their own work in ways that had nothing directly to do with their own work.

Let me give you just one example. At one of the Festschrifts, the last one that I attended here, an Israeli who had attended his seminars in Madison and was talking about to fallen soldier, talked about but you standardization of graves, the fact that all these graves were exactly alike in these World War memorials. Same shapes, same size. Almost always the same, "For King and Country," or something like it. The same standard slogan. So it was the individual being absorbed into the group, into the nation.

And he said, I'm sure he said, that Israeli graves are just the same. I bet you your war graves are exactly the same this. This student said, you know what? I took him out to see an Israeli war graveyard. And every one was different. Every one had its own shape. And he said, the people
who buried these people refused to let the state absorb. It wasn't their dying and merging with a mission. It was the loss of a family, and their membership in the family that was important. And then he said, George said, oh. I like this. I like this graveyard. This is a good one.

I am giving you one example, but you could see how he touched people again and again and again. As things began-- and things just opened up behind him. He's always at the crest of the wave. I think of his as a kind of, to get back to the Cambridge boat incident. Intellectually he was Hawaii Five-O, on the crest, always at the top, keeping a little bit in front. And for the most part, making waves himself.

ANITA HECHT: So what do you think his legacy is in your mind? I mean that's such a huge--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Legacies are something we don't know about. I find myself being quoted as saying the opposite of what I said. And I realize that it's out there, it's out there for anybody to tear apart. There may be people who will deconstruct everything he says to show that he was really the opposite of what he was saying he was. I have no idea. I do know one thing. That he's obviously still part of the ongoing conversation. When I have a young person visiting me this morning and saying that he's working on an intellectual biography of George Mosse. Still going on. Still stimulating. Still part of the conversation. And that's really the important thing.

ANITA HECHT: And he did begins these new areas of steady here. Whether it was Jewish studies--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Jewish studies. Absolutely. And right at the front of things that's happened.

ANITA HECHT: You said that both the Jewish studies and the gay studies interests were shocks to you.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Absolute shocks to me. I thought, OK, he might have some affiliation with his Jewish tradition. But that's probably what it amounted to. And he might go to Israel but, OK, he would be talking about Europe to Israelis. But when he started the Jewish studies, that
really got me. I said, he's investing his time in this whole field. I'm absolutely positive he didn't have a huge breadth or depth of knowledge when he started to look at it. He plunged into.

As I said, one of my colleagues who's working with me now, was his first teaching assistant there. And said it was amazing how much he seemed to have learned almost overnight. It just was, again, it was a pleasure. He could stimulate students. He would say things which were not about Judaism or Jewish studies or Jewish affiliations which would speak to them, whatever they were. Whatever their background was. To make that come alive for them as well. He had that capacity.

There was that sense in his head that you can explain the unknown by the known. Make it relevant to somebody in ways that they can feel as part of their. That they know. They are familiar with, they are sympathetic with and, boom, you've got your audience.

ANITA HECHT: Again, that's using the empathy.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: He's making them empathic with the material. Not necessarily with the message, but the way the message is delivered and why the message could appeal to other people's empathy.

ANITA HECHT: I mean, if there are common threads, it seems to me that they have to do it outsiderdom, and the influence of being in exile and--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Right. A pilgrim, an outsider, saying to us, always keep a suitcase packed. You know that famous phrase. Because you never know when the wind is going to turn the other way. And very sensitive. After all, if you're empathic with the plight of outsiders you are also in a situation where you know that this is a situation of less power. There's a lot of talk now about agency. To quote, to paraphrase George Orwell, everybody's born with agency, but all agencies are not equal.

ANITA HECHT: Is there anything I haven't asked you, or a story that you've thought of, in terms of--
SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Let me see. Let me take a look at my turf thing here.

ANITA HECHT: You mentioned he had a great sense of humor. And that does come across in a lot of your stories, but if there are others that you--

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: One of the ways in which he could capture the audience was, of course, to make himself an exotic person. One of my graduate student's wives said, when she attended his classes she said, you were so exotic. You were old Europe. We could picture you and that was what Europe was all about. And he would play on that.

On his Festschrift program, we put one of his one of little sayings. He said, which is totally absurd, but actually was perfect in it's sloganeering. "I was born to rule the German empire. I was educated to rule the British empire. And they both vanished before my very eyes." OK. Now, of course, he wasn't born to rule the German empire. He was a Jew, he was not going to become a ruler of the German empire. And he was not going to rule the British empire, because he was also born a Jew.

In fact, one of the things that happened in England, I don't know if he ever told this story to anybody, was that one of his history teachers, I think Trevelyan, called him in once and said, you're a very bright student. But either you better go into journalism or go to America. This is 1938. Because it's going to be very difficult for a person in your background to get into the British establishment. Not that-- it had been done. There were very few underground that were--

ANITA HECHT: Meaning Jews shouldn't study history.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Jews shouldn't attempt-- they can study history all they want. Don't attempt to get a job in it. OK. That's the difference.

ANITA HECHT: OK. You know he had an unusual late life experience of coming into a lot of family wealth.
SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Another surprise, right? Of all the intellectual surprises, this is another one. Finally money could talk back. Not like the Wilson Center.

ANITA HECHT: Tell me about that and-- whatever you know about it.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I found out about it. One of the things I immediately did, I went to Berlin, to Germany, in 2000 because my wife had fled with her parents in August of 1939 to America. She was invited back to Stuttgart, which was her city of birth. To make her an honorary citizen again and to make her a real citizen, if she wished and she did. She became a real citizen. And we took a trip to Berlin. And, of course, we went to see the newspaper building in which George's father and grandfather had owned. A huge building on a city block and that was, I think, the basis of the wealth that accrued to him.

And we went in there and there were two things that were obvious. There was one little museum. Just an alcove, smaller than this little space around us, which had the history of the newspaper. Which he made, I think, as a condition of getting the money from the German government. The second thing was there was a space there for the Jewish studies and a third for Gay studies. That had to be part of-- the rest they could do what they wanted. But that was part of his conditions and I think there was a twinkle in his eye there, too.

I mean, it was not only that he was he was getting something back from-- history had turned around in his favorite. But also putting gay studies in there meant that all of nineteen century culture was being transformed in that little space, as well. And people could study this perfectly open and freely.

I knew nothing about how much money. I thought it was only $5 million, not $14 million dollars or something like that. I didn't ever ask him what he was going to do with all that money. My father was convinced that, in fact, he ought to leave it to all his graduate students. I said, that wasn't going to happen. It didn't need to happen. His graduate students were very comfortable, thank you.

ANITA HECHT: He helped set them up already.
SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Right. But my father had, of course, been an orphan is the first World War. No parents. In the depression didn't have much of a drive most of the time. So he was very anxious to get his hands on anything that might make him secure if he could.

But George, you know, he never spoke to me about what he was going to do with the money. He mentioned once in passing, he said, I will do something good with it. And I expected that he would. I had no idea that he would create this fabulous institution that he has created with the money. He was very grateful to this University. He may have had trouble getting in the front door at the very beginning, but I think he felt that they were enormously good to him throughout the rest of his career. And he would never had thought of going anywhere else. I don't know, but I'm convinced, like others who make a sufficient mark on the world, you do get invitations. I think he felt very, very loyal to this institution.

ANITA HECHT: Do you have any sense of how the community responded to his coming out?

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Here? I don't know. It didn't make a single ripple. I mean, I knew he was gay long before he actually said so. Because I saw him once, at the American Historical Association, a meeting. He embrace somebody and kissed him on the lips. And I thought, oh. That's interesting. He isn't really a sexless Buddha like we always thought.

I mean it. Look, I came out of a very sheltered-- I thought there were people who may act effeminate, but there was nobody who was really effeminate. I thought of this as really one of the myths made up about people who were effeminate. But they weren't really any really gay people. And it was a subconscious thing. I never discussed it. Nobody else, none of the other of us ever even speculated that he had anything like a different sexual orientation. Nothing. Sexless was the key.

So, again, all of these things- [UNINTELLIGIBLE] this man that like surprise. If you stood back and looked at his life, it's like one of these fireworks shows. You see this come out, that come out, next thing come out. And you say, OK, what's next? Because this is a bottomless pit. There is going to be more to come if you wait long enough.
ANITA HECHT: Shades of George Mosse in your current teaching, scholarly work? We covered a lot of that.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I have the myth of the free labor ideologism, my next project. Because I'm going to carry it all the way through passed the second World War. In fact, today I give a hint to what my aim is in doing this. And standing in front of a classroom knowing what George said, you shouldn't be a textbook wired for sound. Don't be afraid to say outrageous things. Although, as he said to me, if he had said some of the things in 1995 that he said in 1955 he would have lost his tenure. When Bermuda shorts came in, he said why are you girls wearing that thing. You all look ugly in it. That would have been on the campus newspaper. They'd have hauled him before the dean. You can imagine what would've happened.

So things have changed. In some ways things have gotten much freer. In other ways, of course, taboos always exist. So if it's not one, it's the other.

ANITA HECHT: Any ideas what conversations he would be in today.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: Oh my gosh. I think every lecture would contain some allusion to-- he loved to watch television. December Brides, so he could his finger on the pulse of America. Now he would be surfing. I'm sure-- that's one technology he could learn. He would surf the net and wait for something ridiculous to be said. If he was smart, he'd be watching Jon Stewart. Because that's where we got some of the most intelligent dialogue produced as clips, but a man who can condense things marvelously. And just bring things to your attention.

But I think he would make use of, as he did, from the Eisenhower era on, make use of everything that came across his inner brain screen and project it outward in some of his lectures. Make sure he alluded to that. I found, for example, I always want to talk about masturbation as part of liberalism, OK? If you're going to have a free society, everybody has to control themselves. So this is why some people in the 19th century got so excited about-- how do you make people very excited before the 18th century? OK. Now everybody's concerned, don't touch yourself, OK? You have got to learn not to touch yourself. But how do you introduce it to a class? Because I figure, I'm looking out at these kids, somebody's going to say I'm introducing things that make them uncomfortable in class. So when I talk about is the anti-masturbation movement. OK? Now that's-- who can object, right? Anti is always better.
And then I talk about him, in one of his books he has a little wax-- Napoleon put up a little wax museum against masturbation. You had a little boy and a little girl in different stages of what happens to you if you continue to abuse yourself. And in the last one, the little boy's wax penis is down on the floor. Thereafter, they closed it, and by the time you get to the mid-nineteen century, they don't want put penises out on the floor, so fathers take their sons to the tertiary ward of syphilis sufferers and show them insane. So they will wear protection when they have sex. That kind of thing. You want to keep those-- and now I can alluded to AIDS and to circumcision. Which, you know, they've make correlations of that. We can go into that.

But I think that's-- I can picture him more-- I can't picture what next. That was the wonderful thing. I could never picture what he was going to do next. But in the lecture, I can hear him. That I can always hear him doing. I can always hear him bringing this or that in. And he would have done, of course, much more than I would have even thought, imagine. But that's the infinite ingenuity of the human brain. We all think to pick out things.

ANITA HECHT: This is a complete non-sequitor. But I did fail to ask you about a film that you mentioned, I believe, that you made in '68.


[INTERPOSING VOICES]

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: He loved it.

ANITA HECHT: Tell me about it.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: What happened, you know, the events of 1968. The students go out, and in France the workers also go out, and they bring France to a standstill. And I was in Paris in '68, '69 with my family. I came in the summer of '68, so the events themselves were over, but they had what you'd call-- what do you call it when there's an earthquake? Aftershocks. And the police and the revolutionaries were constantly getting to it. And my son was eight years old. For him this was like, you know, street theater. Right? He sees these long police lines moving down
toward the students. He says, let's follow them. We'll see action. I said, we don't follow anybody anywhere. If you ever see police walking, you don't go any place because these police when they started-- these are the CRS, the security police. They take your head against the ground, they play a little game of ball. Head against the pavement, comes up, stick against the head. Goes back down, bang bang bang. Like a little ping pong, OK?

Anyway, students come. Some French student. They've taken films of these events. About nine hours worth of film. And I look at them and I think, this is just spliced films of different event. I can put them together, put them together. 50 minute, with a friend of mine, a colleague, in 50 minute film called Confrontation Paris: 1968.

Basically, it's what happens when you literally say, we are going to really overthrow this whole bourgeois culture, this whole social culture. We're going to make a complete, total social revolution. And imagination to power was the slogan. Anything you want to do. And they inverted all the bureaucracies. They closed down the hospitals. They seized the theaters. And finally the outcome was, at the end of our film, they didn't produce this film, we had a little [UNINTELLIGIBLE] about what happens at the end. Government calls for a national election and the conservatives win the biggest majority that they have every won.

And what did government do? In our film, we had shown the streets after, when there are burnt out cars, [UNINTELLIGIBLE] and Volkswagens and Mercedes, all burnt out. But there's nothing around them. There's burnt out cars on the block. I said, it's funny that the government took these pictures. About 30 years later I read a study, the government made a deliberate decision, we'll clean up debris around streets, but we leave the burnt cars there till after the election. Let people walk into the pole booth and say, that could be my car. I don't want that to happen. Enough people to give the conservatives, as I said, the biggest majority they ever-- I don't think ever matched it again. And they made, I thought, if things go too far in France now, we will have this scenario. It may work itself out in the same way.

And that would have been George's advice to students. Watch out for utopia. You may get what you wish for, but it may not look like what you want.

ANITA HECHT: Anything else?
SEYMOUR DRESCHER: I have a dry mouth by now.

ANITA HECHT: You've done a wonderful job.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: And I have a talk to give tonight.

ANITA HECHT: I know. Thank you very much for letting me interview you. And thank you even more for honoring George in this.

SEYMOUR DRESCHER: This is my obligation to him. This is such an opportunity, I can't tell you how much I've enjoyed this. I hope for your sake, and for mine and for George's that you keep going with this. And get as many people before they die as possible.

ANITA HECHT: Thank you.