An Interview with

DR. ERNST BORINSKI

January 13, 1980

Interviewed by

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JONES: Let me say this at the first to identify the tape. This is John Jones with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History, and I'm about to interview Dr. Ernst Borinski for the third time. We're back at Dr. Borinski's home on County Line Road in Tougaloo, Mississippi. I've just had another wonderful meal. Last time I believe we had smothered roast beef and spinach casserole, and this time we had meat balls and another of Dr. Borinski's cooking inventions...

BORINSKI: Call it a fancy potato casserole.

JONES: Fancy potato casserole it is. Today is Sunday, January 13, 1980. I think we left off last time with your being discharged from the army in 1945.

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: So let's just pick up with your story there.

BORINSKI: Yes. At that time I left Fort Dix and went back to Rochester, New York, which was my so-called home in the United States, and got ready to enter academic life again. I still remember the officer there at Fort Dix told me I was out of my mind because Chicago University is a university which is very demanding. He said he could never figure out why a person like me, who was not so young anymore and had never studied in an American university, thought I could possibly make it. I told him, "I will make it." I was damn sure I'd make it. I went to Rochester where I had this Jewish psuedo-family and parents and told them, "I leave now because another period of my life is over." The first period was my adjustment to America. The second period was my experience in the army, and the third period was my return to academia. I went to Chicago. I did not know a thing about that

either. I knew what sort of university it was. I knew what I wanted to study:sociology, but in a very broad sense. I was very interested in social science and education at the same time. I was equally interested in law, and they had at Chicago University a very good liberal arts program. So I inserted myself. I had no credentials from Germany, so, and that was interesting, they had to take my word for everything. There was one interesting situation which I'll never forget. They wanted to test me in some way, so they said, "We'll give this guy a reading test." My English was good, but they told me they would even make it easy for me and give me simply a grammar reading test where the _____ is there. They gave me this test, and I could read all right I was sure, but these people looke so dismayed. I asked him because he looked so dismayed, "What's wrong?" He said, "You have the worst reading record we ever had."

JONES: The worst?

BORINSKI: The worst, yes. And I said, "What do you mean 'the worst'? That's not possible." The eye span in English goes, let us say, from one to the other one and people who are bad English readers, their eye span stops and goes back and goes on again. And so I had the perfect eye span for the worst reader possible. Fortunately, I said, "You know, I can give you the key to that." "What do you mean?" I said, "You don't the German language structure. The language structure goes that you read, you find the prefix of the verb at the end of the sentence quick and go back and read on. The German reader goes like this: you start reading, jump to the end of the phrase, and go back again and jump again. That means I did a perfect German reading; although they don't do this anymore. The German reading test corresponds to the worst English reading test." Everyone laughed because they then saw

it right away. It was sort of an amusing interlude. I took courses in the education department, sociology department, and wherever I took courses I told the people I wanted to get a master's degree and asked them how long it would last. "Oh, about a year," they said. They said, "We can only take you as a German academician who has no credentials. We'll just figure it out from how you make out in your courses."

JONES: But they took it that you'd already earned a B. A.?

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. They knew that, but they said, "You have to meet our requirements someway." So I set up a schedule and asked if I could take these courses and they said, "Fine." I got me right away a typist in Chicago because I knew I would have papers and I always operate with typists. Now, the International House was in itself an interesting center because it was a time shortly after the war and there were very many refugees and very many veterans, people from all countries were in the International House, which is on the Midway in Chicago. I got a room there too. It was almost a community of its own. We were then a group of students who were really not young anymore. We were there to learn about the whole thing. It was wonderful. We took care of all the people. None of us had money. We had some GI Bill of Rights. So there was then the matter of getting jobs. I got a job at Stever Department Store. It was a very fancy clothing store. I hired myself out as a stock boy, and I said I would probably advance very rapidly before many hours. Everyone else took jobs and we earned enough to have a good living. I got acquainted with the people at Steven's. When I later came back to Chicago I went to Steven's and the office said, "We can hire you again."

JONES: You worked as a stock boy?

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: And did you advance?

BORINSKI: Yes. I started as a stock boy, but I knew, for instance, because I was well-versed in business, that my stock boy was not taking stock. I brought out to the floor manager who was a lady, I've forgotten her name, but I told her I'd looked the thing over and I thought we could make the prices lower so that we moved these things quick. She said, "Man, you know, you are just the best man we ever had!" I helped them bring other people in. All the people who were there, for instance; one is Henry Neppler. He is now the Chairman of the Humanities Department at the _____ in Chicago. One is Clement Roper(?) who is an outstanding professor of nuclear physics at Chicago University. Everyone at International House advanced. And we had a very good time. We were rather radical in the situation. We took care of all kinds of things. But we had a good reputation as a University because we were all relatively good performing students. That means we had no academic troubles. So I got the master's degree. At that time you had job openings all the time. I felt then that I didn't want to have a job in any established institution. I just figured out - I had the experience of Germany. I had the experience of the army. I said, "I don't want to go and become a professor at a university in social science and sociology." I knew I wanted to take a Ph.D. I said, "That's fine, but in the meantime I want a job somewhere nobody would go." There were black students also in the International House, and I spoke with them, I said, "John," or whatever their name was, "I am not so young anymore because I'm moving toward being forty years old." And I said, "I don't care how long it takes me, but I want an interesting teaching job not in an institution which they are offering me here. It is lovely, but I don't care." They said,

"Would you be interested in going into black education?" I said, "Certainly," not knowing anything about it. So their response was the American Missionary Association, which was an outgrowth of the abolitionist movement, and from the Congregational Church they run all the schools in the South, Mississippi and everywhere. They said, "Why don't you write them that you are looking for a job?" I said, "It is church supported. I am Jewish." They said, "They probably don't care." So I wrote to a Dr. Brownlee from the American Missionary Association. I wrote him a very candid letter of ten pages about my background and experiences and so on. I told him I would try myself in this situation. They wired me back and said, "We would be interested. Come for an interview." So I went to New York and got into the whole outfit and situation there with Dr. Brownlee and people who now I know very well. I introduced myself. I got the question: "What makes you want to go into black education?" I said, "I cannot say that I want to go into black education, but I want to go into education where I can use my talents." They asked me the question, "What are your talents?" I said, "A wide range of personal and social experiences, a wide range of experiences with people, experience of persecution, experience of army, experience of success and failure. I think I can offer in any situation education that is quite different. I am also a very well-trained social scientist, and a quite well-trained educator." So they said, "Would you like to teach in Mississippi?" I didn't know anything about Mississippi. I said, "I don't care." I was open enough. I said, "I don't know anything about Mississippi." They said, "Yes. That is one of the southern states where there are many blacks. There're many difficulties there." It was 1947 you have to realize. They said, "You would have to go and teach in

an all-black college in an all-black community. If you will, you may be our man." Then they said, "There is one minor reservation: we don't want anyone who is a big moralist, who wants to help the poor blacks. That's not our man. You have to be enthusiastic about education period, and you have to work in Mississippi in a way that you work in the black community without being ostracized by the white community." I said, "I cannot say what will happen, but I will try." They had me back and offered me a job after two days with a low salary. I didn't care. That was funny. There was in International House one Mississippian, Edna Davis. You may have heard about her. She may be retired. She was a statistician at Mississippi State and took her doctor's degree at Chicago University. We became rather good friends. So I told her, "Edna, you know where I am going?" She said, "Where?" "To Mississippi." "What college?" I said, "Tougaloo College." Then, after about two minutes, she said, "Anybody else who would've told me I would have said he was out of his mind, but I think you are the kind of character that can make it down there. Go." That was very very funny. So I...

JONES: Before we get any further, let me ask you a few things.

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: At that time you had only a master's?

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: When you decided to go to the University of Chicago, why did you choose social science rather that the law which you already had training in and experience in?

BORINSKI: I simply didn't want to become a lawyer. I wanted to go into teaching. I thought I could go back into law anytime I wanted to. I could go back to law school. I was also aware that I would work with law as I continuously

work with law now. And I was thinking about the sociology of law. In my whole law career, even in Germany, I was always aware of the social impact of legal decisions. I was teaching at the University of Jena Workman's Law, which I knew very well. I was engaged in all the cases before the courts of whatever it was. So I didn't want to go into an American law career at all. In fact, the question is interesting because in Germany, if the Nazis had not come, I would have left the lawyer's profession too and would have taught in a law school, in a university law school.

JONES: You would have taught law?

BORINSKI: Yes, I would have taught law. Again, when I was studying law in Germany I was aware that I was good in it. When I was studying at Halle and in Munich the law, I could always picture myself there teaching in these fine auditoriums real good law. The fact that I teach constitutional law here is very much a carry over. I may be better at teaching law than I am at teaching sociology. I don't know.

JONES: Let me ask you this. When you got out of the army you must not have had much money or means of support for graduate school?

BORINSKI: Yes, but I had the GI Bill of Rights.

JONES: That paid for all of it?

BORINSKI: That paid for some of it. In Chicago, as I told you, we had a kind of mutually supporting agreement among all the students there who were in a similar situation. We were always able to earn enough to keep up each other We figured out we would support each other because we were all practically in the same boat. It was after the war. I am friends with them still today. When I go to Chicago - all of them are very successful - and when I am in Chicago I am completely at home with them. We phone each other almost twice a week. They all now have grown-up children. I now think of them as

grown-up children, because you mustn't forget how time goes in. I was at that time already forty years old, and I am now seventy years old, and this is thirty-eight years later. There are interesting carry overs. Henry Nepler, who is a very good writer, is an international humanist. He wrote excellent books on acting and so forth. We have here Jerry Ward, one of our graduates. I think I told you about him. Through him I got Jerry Ward out of mathematics and into humanities and he ended up as a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia. That gives a certain idea.

JONES: Yes. After the war, did you have any thoughts about returning to Germany?

BORINSKI: No. That's also a good question because it was probably my good destiny that I was able to completely liquidate my past. That means I never had nostalgia to go back to Germany. However, that may sound strange, but it isn't strange because you have to realize I am a product of the border area That means if I had been borned and lived in western Germany I would have a completely different kind of loyalty than being born in eastern Germany in the Prussian area of Polish intermixed population, and in an area where your hometown could come by a plebiscite into Poland. So a return to German didn't even form itself in my mind. I remember very well when I boarded the express train to Holland - I told you this story - that I looked at the landscape and figured, "Okay, that's the end of it." But it was such a sound liquidation that I can now go back to western Germany without any nostalgia. It's like visiting a culture I know. That is interesting when I am together with Mississippians like Francis Coker, you, anyone, the people here I have learned are very loyal Southerners and also Mississippians. I have more loyalty to Mississippi than I ever had to Germany, because now I have lived here so long I have become very much a part of it,

in spite of being on the outside. That is a very interesting situation too But I feel completely at home here. And it is unique too that I feel at home in the black and the white community. Just this morning my neighbor here, Mrs. Bender, comes over just to say, "I saw your new doors and I liked them," and so on. I'd just gotten back from church. You know, it made me feel that I am a tremendous part of this community. So, anyway, I go back. I have many more friends in Germany now than most American citizens. Interestingly enough, the Germans who are visiting here, I could much easier convince them to come to America than they could convince me to go back to Germany. But that is not a negative orientation. It is more the outgrowth of being able to detach yourself. I still cherish very much what I have learned in the German culture and so on. That means I have still probably a very excellent university training in the area of history and so on. I think of people like Henrich Von _____. I think I still know the history of the Renaissance better than many other people. I can still identify very many things. That means I have not detached myself from German culture, German music, from German poetry, from German acting, from German philosophy. I know Goethe inside out. I know _____ inside out. I know Nietzsche inside out. I have a completely different relationsh to Nietzsche than most people have. The question was a good one because I look at Germany, but very differently. I have a friend in Baton Rouge, Rudolph Heberly, who is a famous sociologist and so on. We write Christmas letters in German. It is a very different type of attachment. My friends in Germany like Professor St. Peterman and so on, we correspond in English Even when I am there we speak in English.

MJAH JONES: But you must have had some curiosity following the war to go back to Germany and find some of the missing pieces.

BORINSKI: Yes. I did the following thing: I joined twice the Institute of European Studies, which was organized from Vienna. There were four Americans. I joined one institute which studied modern European philosophies, and anoth one which looked into theologies. I was so good the first time that they took me as interpreter in the second one. That brought me in some ways back to Germany. I remember when I went the first time to Germany there were certain things I did. I was interested first to meet some German Jews who had returned. That is very interesting too. I know out of history that the Jews settled Germany in the Merovingian time, that means in the 7th or 8th century. The Nazis said, "The Jews migrated from Poland in the 19th and 20t century." So I knew that in Vorrence(?), on the Rhine River, was the oldest Jewish community, and there was the oldest synagogue, and the oldest libra- ry. I said, "I want to see what the Nazis did with that." They destroyed everything except the old Jewish cemetary; it was on a low level which they had not reached. So I found the oldest Jewish gravestone out of the year 794, before Charlemagne. That was written in Hebrew and middle-high German. The old synagogue had been restored. They had then at that time - the Jews always lived in ghettos. I went into the old Jewish ghettos. I forgot the old Jewish-Hebrew name for it. Whatever it was I don't know any more. Anyhow I saw the houses where just poor Germans lived, and I spoke to the people there and asked them whether they would let me go into the courtyard there. I wanted to see the old used gravestones. They used the old used gravestones for building their houses. The people were very nasty, but not because they were Nazis and so on. That was something that I felt very uneasy about and I had compassion enough to say, "People, I don't want to find out what you did," I could speak in German, "I simply want to see

what is left."Then they gave me a man and said - to guide me around. I found very many of these old stones in the houses. There I had basically very good experiences. I wanted to get a picture of what was in Vorrence. Vorrence has an old _____, what they call a Kaiser dome. It is a beautiful Romanesque dome at the cathedral. Then they had the Reformatio Church, and the had the old synagogue. Then I went into a book store and told the lady there, "I would like to have three pictures." I looked and looked. She said, "Why do you want the pictures?" I said, "I want to put in a frame the three oldest religious buildings in Vorrence: the synagogue the Kaiser dome, and the Reformation Church. Then she became nasty, "If I had know you wanted trouble for the Jews I would not have shown it to you.' On the other hand I can tell you a story that is also very interesting. Then I went in _____ into a department store and spoke with the peop and so on. No, it was a specialty store and spoke with the people and aske them, "How is business in the specialty store going?" Then he started out, "You know, we got rid of all the Jews, but the department store still kill us." These carry-overs you find there, but you can find those things right here because that's just human anxiety and competition. I only remember these things because they were for me in part almost humorous. On the othe hand, there was one place we came - when we were through with this institute, there was a couple, Dr. Shannon from Tougaloo College, an education couple. They said, "We'll come to Germany when you are through and we'll rent a car and you will be our guide on the Romantic Road." I say, "With great pleasure." I can write you a book about that. We came then to Wittenberg to a place with the name Münzingen, M-Ü-N-Z-I-N-G-E-N, Münzingen. I remembered one of my old associations. I had a friend at the University of Munich, a Jewish fellow, whose father was a medical doctor in Münzingen,

a Dr. Lavey. We were speaking to the people in one of the small communities very friendly, and I asked one of the people there, "You know, many years back I heard there was here a Dr. Lavey in your community. What happened to him?" They asked me, "Are you Jewish?" and I say, "Yes, a former German Jew." One man came out, and he said, "He was the best man we've ever had here. We'll never overcome killing all the Jews in this community." Then they said, "We will guide you through the town," and they brought us to a kind of semi-official. They were having a continuous discussion. Then one of the citizens came back and said, "We want you now to all" - we were three people - "to come in the town hall. We want to make a memorial service for the Jews we have destroyed just to show you that we know it and lived through it." I don't know how I should have felt about it, but anyhow we went, because my colleagues were not Jewish. They were good Protestants and were more excited about it than I was. The reactions went through different channels. Then we came to the town house. They had mobilized the whole community, and they brought food. He said, "We want food. We want to distribute it to the people." They gave us gifts and all kinds of things. They were very reasonable, they said, "We don't want to make up for anything." They had a very good speaker, and it was such a unique experience for us. They said, "We want you to tell when you return to the United State that there're some Germans who feel at least now differently." They did not say, as I remember, that they had nothing to do with it. They said, "We were right in it." The reaction was that the doctor that I spoke about was on the conscience all the time. Then comes another experience that sounds like a fairy tale, but it is not. The Jewish experience there came to me completely by accident. We went on the Romantic Road up to Rottenburg and all these places. I certainly didn't know the area either, but Shannon,

my friend, said, "Ernst, we know exactly what you are doing, because you can come to any small community and there's an interesting townhouse to see, interesting churches to see, interesting museums to see. You've got it easy." We had a kind of silent understanding that's wonderful that way. The only agreement that we made was that I had to see to it as we followed the map that we come early in the afternoon into a place where we want to stay overnight."Okay," I said, "that I can do." We drove along and there was a sign that said "Narisheim." Shannon said, "Ernst, do you know the place?" I said, "Yes," but he knew I didn't know a thing about it. He made also the joke, he said, "There is for sure a nice church and a nice museum and a nice town house." I said, "Yes," so we go there. We came to Narisheim and there was nothing! Then there was a kind of hill with a huge baroque establishment. I said, just joking, "We go up there." My friends had a very good sense of humor. They knew I would not risk too far. We would get somewhere overnight anyway. He was so humorous. He was an Irishman. He said, "For sure there is everything we want?" I said, "For sure." So we drove up. It was the Sister _____ monastery. It was a beautiful establishment. So I said, "Let us park the car and I will see about the facilities." I didn't know at all if they would let us in. There was a sign that said, "_____ that means pilgrims and so on can come there and get something to eat and a place to sleep or something. It was a beautiful set up. I have a picture of the Narisheim church which is a nice baroque church in Germany which I didn't even know about. So I went in the door under the sign that said, "_____," and there were some very substantial monks there. I spoke German and introduced myself, I said, "I am a German-American." This was not too long after the war. I said, "I made this trip with friends of mine. We heard something about the monastery at Narisheim and we wanted to see

it." The monk gets quite excited. "You are Americans?" "Yes." And he said, "You are the first Americans who've come here." I said, "Yes, and we were lucky." And he said, "We want to do something special for you." "Why?" "Because," he said, "when the airplanes came after the invasion and so on we were able to communicate someway to the Allies that there is an old monastery which had nothing to do with the Nazis, and we asked whether we could save it from being bombed. And they didn't. We were not hit." So he said, "You are the first Americans, so we invite you to be the guest of the monastery for three days." So he said - there was a lady with us, Mrs. Shannon - "We cannot have men and women together," so Mrs. Shannon stayed in the nunnery. We stayed in other places. They gave us a wonderful place to stay, very clean, very neat. Then while Mrs. Shannon was at the nunnery Dr. Shannon and I were invited to the _____ of the monastery to have a meal with them in a large auditorium which was just very beautiful. They had a huge picture, the usual picture of Christ at the Last Supper. It is usually there, and it is painted that way usually so that the tables are fixed in such a way that Christ is always present at every meal. We had a wonderful meal there. Then there was a small, what do you call it, a preaching stand?

JONES: A pulpit?

BORINSKI: Pulpit, yes. A small pulpit. And there one of the monks read some gruesome sermons against Luther, Martin Luther. So that was all part of it and we enjoyed that very much. They showed us their garden where they had all kinds of medicines and herbs and so on. Then we wanted also to see the church, and we saw it. Then one monk comes over to us, and he said, "Do any of you people know any German music?" I said, "We certainly know it,

yes." And he said, "You know also that in the Catholic monasteries Bach cannot be played, because he is the musician of Protestantism. But," he said, "We have a brother who is a wonderful player of Bach. When the public services are over you two people stay in the church and he will play Bach for you." It was just a wonderful performance. Then, like in the Middle Ages, when we left after the third day they gave us provisions for about three or four days to take along.

JONES: For the journey. What a story!

BORINSKI: Then comes the next story. Maybe I also mentioned I was in Jena, the University of Jena, in Workman's Law. I was also in adult education. I was very active in it. We were doing this for the qualified optical workers at the Zeiss Works. Do you know Z-E-I-S-S? It is the best optical works in Europe. I was teaching these people. After the war the Zeiss Works remained actually in eastern Germany, and were partially transferred to Lunshund(?) in Bavaria in Germany, western Germany. I wrote to the social democratic party in Lunshund, Germany that I would probably be coming ther and I am a former social democrat and all that. Before I made this trip I had this in mind. Then I got a letter from there from a gentleman named Richard Honshue(?) (I am just spelling these names phonetically, please correct them as you see them, J.J.) whom I had taught in Jena and who was now in Lunshund in Bavaria that I should definitely come and should visit them. So we planned that into our trip and then let them know we were coming. It is an old Bavarian city, a beautiful city, which is close to the Czechoslovakian border. We went to Rottenburg first, which is an old German city, and then we went to Lunsford(Lunshund). As we entered the city I saw big posters saying "A former German, now an American, is coming to

visit and will address the social democrats on Sunday at 10:00." And so we were there. I can show you the books that they gave me. I was know in some ways because adult education by then was a tradition. So I was speaking in German to a group of west Germans who came out of Jena and additional peop! It was very strange for me because the German language was for me like a _____ before my eyes. I saw it pictorially. As I spoke I had the feeling that I was reading from a band.

JONES: From a what?

BORINSKI: B-A-N-D.

JONES: A band.

BORINSKI: I think I got through to them. I got very much applause. Then the next day in the newspapers they said they heard only one thing in my talk that in some ways puzzled them: How it is possible that I have already lived a good number of years in the United States and can speak such a correct German. The correctness had to do with nothing else than my coming from eastern Germany, from Prussian Germany, where we didn't have dialects. Our dialects were Polish. So if you spoke German you could only speak German because you didn't know a German dialect. Of course for the people who were down close to Bavaria it was something that was very strange. I will find one of the books maybe. (Walks out of room, returns with books) These were all gifts, these beautiful art books from Bavaria. Look at these pictures. Here they wrote to me. '63.

JONES: These are beautiful books. Was 1963 your first trip back?

BORINSKI: That was the first or second. I don't know. It must have been the first trip back. Look at these pictures. At Narisheim there was this kind of thing. I had a book of Narisheim, but I don't know what I did with it. You should see these pictures here. They are fantastic!

JONES: I've never seen anything like this.

BORINSKI: Yes. You see, these kinds of things are experiences which are very differe from having nostalgia for Germany. It's very different.

JONES: This is in Bavaria?

BORINSKI: Bavaria, yes. This is all in Bavaria. This goes all the way through to the visit in Lunsford. Yes, that is the central area where I was, where all thi happened.

JONES: Did you at anytime return to any of the places you had lived before the wa

BORINSKI: Yes. I went to Munich. In fact, I went with these friends from there to Munich. Munich was, I think I mentioned it, where I was during my German studies. I was first at Halle and one day I just broke out and went to Munich. I think I mentioned that already. We came to Munich, and since I had some Germans with me and my friends I could just point them out on this small alley, which was close to the house where I had lived as a student. I went also to the museums and found that certain things annoyed me. For instance, a painting by Kathe Kollwitz - she is one of the famous German painters - I asked them if they had any paintings by Kathe Kollwitz, and I'm asking them this in the museum there, I said, "Because I am an admirer of her. In fact, I'm a friend of hers." She said, "We still are reluctant to show Kathe Kollwitz to the average visitor because we are afraid they will spit at the pictures or something like that."

JONES: Kathe what?

BORINSKI: Kollwitz. The lady who did this picture on the wall. Let me show you this. It is interesting too. I think these things are good for you to know. I have all of her books. She was a very strong social critic. The Nazis wrote these horrible things about her, destroyed everything of her's, and burned

the museum up. The few things they had saved they didn't want to save because they didn't want someone to curse them. They don't want anything else to happen to destroy one of the greatest artists of the period.

JONES: All of this in this book was destroyed?

BORINSKI: It was all destroyed.

JONES: Was she killed during the war?

BORINSKI: No, no. She wasn't killed. She lived, I think, until 1946 or '47. She lived in East Germany. What happened was that some of the plates were saved. See, this picture is similar to the one I have on the wall.

JONES: Right. One of her self-portraits.

BORINSKI: That is an original etching which I got from her.

JONES: From her personally?

BORINSKI: From her personally. I got this when I passed the final examination for the law in Germany.

JONES: She lived in Munich?

BORINSKI: She lived in Berlin. You see, these kinds of things the Germans don't want to see. No, that was very hard. She is my favorite artist.

JONES: Most of her art is etching. They look to be pencil drawings.

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: Were many of the places you'd known in your youth destroyed by Allied invasion?

BORINSKI: You see, I don't know because, for instance, Halle that I knew when I was there was destroyed. Those are things I don't think about because I do still think about the real destruction I had seen, people going and destroying the Jewish cemetaries and everything. You see, I don't even like to speak about it at all even in this context, because I have erased my memory. I

came only practically by accident to that because I never talk about that either.

JONES: Yes, I understand. You said you returned to Germany shortly after the war?

BORINSKI: No, it was not shortly after the war. No, it was approximately ten years after the war. In fact, I'll tell you something. I went to this Institute of European Studies just out of mere curiosity. I went with Americans. It had nothing to do with Germany. I didn't go there as guide. They used me as an interpreter because I was quite capable. That's a very interesting story too. When I was in the Institute of Modern European Theologies, I was a critic there because they put European theologies in, but didn't consider that the Jews were a part of the theology. I was, as interpreter, the only Jewish representative. That was in itself not fun morally, but really it was quite amusing. I don't know whether you read that the Catholic excommunicated Kunz, the German theological spokesman. It's been through all the American papers. I met him in Tubingen. So I had a very interesting connection. I brought one German Protestant theologian here to Tougaloo, and to Millsaps College.

JONES: What was his name?

BORINSKI: Kaserman. He is quite famous theologian. I don't know what question you gave me to answer.

JONES: Well, I think in the interest of time and the chronology of the thing, maybe it would be best if we return to this country and your accepting the job at Tougaloo.

BORINSKI: Oh, yes, sure. That was kind of an interlude.

JONES: Yes. It was fascinating. I think something would be missing from your story if we hadn't ~~have~~ talked about your feelings about returning to Germany

after the war. Thank you for discussing it here. Yes. Let's talk about how why you came to Tougaloo.

BORINSKI: I came to Tougaloo in July or August, 1947. I remember also I was to be picked up at the train station by Dean Frazier, a black man. I came by train from Chicago on - what was it called?

JONES: "The City of New Orleans."

BORINSKI: "The City of New Orleans." I got here about 6:00 or something. It was terribly hard. I was not used to this kind of climate. I went out of the station and I didn't look for any kind of black or white. I didn't know about all of that. I knew it, but I didn't think about it. So I went out the white entrance and no one was there, so I just went over the streets. I tired of the heat and went back to the station again and there saw a Negro gentleman staying there, and so I asked him, "Are you Dean Frazier?" He said, "Yes." I said, "My name's Borinski. Have you come along to pick me up?" "Yes," he said, "but I didn't find you. You must have gone out the wrong entrance." So I understood right away. So he brought me to Tougaloo College. He put me in one of the old dormitories where there was 100 degree heat, there was no air conditioning. I didn't even care. I said, "I will see what happens here." The next morning I got up and looked over the premises. The president was Warren, Dr. Warren was the president then. He was a football player and he broke a hip or something, and so he was having to go on crutches. He was a very nice and wise white man.

JONES: He was white?

BORINSKI: Owens is the first black president of Tougaloo College has had.

JONES: Dr. Beittel was white?

BORINSKI: Right. So I was there. People didn't tell me very much. In the first place

they didn't know what to do with me. I was a kind of phenomenon. They decided the best thing was to let the man alone.

JONES: There was no other white faculty members?

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. They had a predominantly white faculty. But even with the white faculty I was very much my own man. They were not careless, but unconcerned not rushing anything. I had about three or four days time before the first classes started. They assigned me courses like Introduction to Social Sciences or history or something. I was ready to teach anything. I didn't care Then I looked around the buildings and saw what we call now Beard Hall. That was a building that was condemned. I looked through the basement and I figured out the basement had all kinds of good things. It was an old place where they did the laundry, but it was all already discarded. My instincts told me that was a good place for really developing something like a social science lab. These things came into my mind all of a sudden, like an inspiration.

JONES: The first day there?

BORINSKI: The third day there. And then I put a sign outside there that said, "Social Science Lab." No one knew what I wanted. So I went to the president, he was the only one that I could communicate with in some way, and told him, "I think I would like to have this place here for teaching." He said, "The whole building is condemned." Then I told him, "I've looked the place over and I think if you condemn that building you can condemn every one. Why don't you get yourself another committee and review that building over again." So he said, "Yes, okay." And then the committee said, "Yes, we can open it. This building will still be standing in 100 years." Then I said, "I need equipment. I need someone to clean the place up." There were

rats, mice and everything in there. The whole place was at that time totall unusable, and now it is all usable and used. The president tells me, "I will give you five dollars. Get yourself the people and the facilities you need." Five dollars? So my army insticts came back. When I was in my fifth day here I got contact with students who'd returned from the war. They were all in my class. I told the students in class, "I would like for you to come in the evening at 7:00 at the social science lab." They came, and I said, "I need about fifteen students." Then I said, "How many of you were in the army?" Most of them were. I said, "You know what requisition means?' "Yes." I said, "Okay. Let us use now army law. I give you the permission to break in any office that you see on campus. I want in two or three hours the whole social science lab furnished with tables,chairs, typewriters, everything. I don't want to know where you get them, but get them." Oh, and they were excited about that. And the place was furnished. It was so wild that people didn't dare to tell me anything. Owens tells this story. He got this story from others, and so he tells it like it was the best story ever told. Then the president called me in the office and said, "I give you twenty dollars to avoid further incidents." So I took the money and said, "I don't give you the guarantee." So then we got electric light, and at the end of the first week the social science lab was established. Walter Washington, who's here now, remembers my first days. I said to the students at the first class, "I am not from here. I am not even from America, but when I see the kinds of laws you have here I assure you it cannot last very long. We will challenge all the laws. I don't want you to accept any one of them." The students didn't know what I meant. They asked, "What do you mean?" I said, "All the laws which are made by white opinion are

just not good laws."

JONES: The Mississippi laws?

BORINSKI: The Mississippi laws. All the segregation laws. The next day I took five students and said, "Let us go in town." We had to go in town because there was nothing built out here. We went in a drugstore and sat down, and I said "I want ice cream." They said, "I cannot serve them." It was 1947. I said, "Why do you not serve them?" "You know." I said, "I don't know anything." So they were so afraid that I would make trouble they served them and said, "We will serve you, but get out of here right away."

JONES: Where?

BORINSKI: That was in a drugstore downtown. I don't know which one it was. That was the first breech of things we had. Then we continued from there to the poin when finally everything broke down.

JONES: Well, I want to get the full record of your experiences working with the social science lab as our conversation progresses.

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: Let me ask you this first: You had no knowledge of the racial situation in Mississippi before you came?

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. I was long enough in Chicago to know what the trouble was down her

JONES: Oh, yes, Edna Davis had told you.

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. In fact, I had another philosophy: I was not a rabble rouser, perio But I had always built bridges between people and made them aware that cer tain things that are there should not really be. I had the idea of building bridges. I never told the people, "Don't do that," I said, "Here, let us look what you are doing as a black or white; to what degree can we do this or that. I have been in the army and so on. I have seen things too, and

that really doesn't go." That had its impact on people, also on white peopl relatively early in the game. My advantage was that I was not a white American, that they know that I am an outsider. I played this game very carefully by often pretending I just don't know, just don't know.

JONES: When you arrived here at Tougaloo, were the black students ready to challenge Mississippi laws?

BORINSKI: Yes. We had here Reverend Bender, Mrs. Bender's husband, who was very courageous. He established the NAACP at a time when it was dangerous to one's life to be in it. He was the only one who, in the Bilbo affair, was a black who is historically known. That came all out of Tougaloo College. The college private students were ready for it because Tougaloo College was considered in the total setting as a college which by its charter had to be an integrated school. That's why we had no state support. The state with drew their support from us. There were two things. We had President Warren give us permission, but also the New York office said, "You can do what you want, but it cannot go at the cost of first-class academic benefits." That commitment we could keep. I made my own commitment: I will stay at Tougaloo College only if I am not ostracized by the white society, and if I can develop myself in my own profession anyway I want to. That means that for me Tougaloo College was a challenge, but I was not willing to sacrifice my career by staying at Tougaloo College. On the other hand, I felt that Tougaloo is for social scientists and sociologists in this time a base from which you can gain national reputation, not by doing great things, but by showing that you are a good professional. That turned out to be true. I joined the proper organizations immediately. And I had very great help from Millsaps College, to be introduced into the academic community. There was

Dr. Wharton, who died many years ago, and many other ones, and then later on Jimmy Ferguson and Miss Goodman, all these people. Millsaps College was at that time tremendously supporting. If fact, whatever I did I could do so well because I had always some backing from Millsaps College, the silent backing of Millsaps College.

JONES: They were supporting of your efforts to confront the law?

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: You say the average student at that time was just out of the army?

BORINSKI: It's interesting now that the students - take like Walter Washington, take like Eddie O'Neil, all the people I am in contact with - they are all people in great positions. They will simply say that I entered the situation at a time when they were ready for a change. They needed someone who was responsive to that. It was also - in order not to give the wrong picture - in my opinion, not being responsive was almost impossible, let us say, for a person like me who had experience and had a sense of history where you could say I knew enough already about history at that time and could feel already at that time that the changes were bound to come. The students were very much ready for it.

JONES: The white faculty at that time was turning a deaf ear to the student need to confront the law?

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: There wasn't a white leader among the faculty when you came that was preparing for the struggle?

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. Well, Reverend Bender was black, but we had also on the faculty a Mr. Rice and a Mr. Larsen. They were all very well-trained people who were all absolute leaders at the same time. You see, there was still the com-

mitment of the white, church-orientated people who grew out of the abolitionist movement. I came as an outsider in, but with enough orientation that I could tune into it relatively easy. As I say, my good luck is that I came at the right time, but, as I say, I could use my talents well and was excited about what I was doing. I never was a big man. I didn't care. I didn't care. I simply played my own role, always having in mind very clea ly the people - that it is difficult for people to change. So I thought I would build some bridges to make it change. I established the social science lab as a sort of a center where people who did not know what to do, white or black, could come and find always at least the sense of the liste er. The other thing that I did was I said, "You have to relate Tougaloo College to the larger academic community in the region, in the South and in the nation. That was a challenge for me because I could only do it by being good in my own profession, so that I could go to the national meetin and so on and could play my role very easily professionally.

JONES: The sociology lab that you set up,

BORINSKI: Yes.

JONES: Was it accepted by the faculty at Tougaloo? Were you supported in all of your efforts?

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. It's still accepted.

JONES: Certainly, but I mean in 1947?

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. You know it was one of those situations where people had no choic They had to accept it because no one was really in danger, and people felt that - you see, the whole history of Tougaloo College and of the American Missionary Association as something that grew out of the abolitionist movement gave to Tougaloo College the spirit to being the leader of change

That means the nature of the commitment never really changed. It was all a kind of commitment, but the commitment was always three-fold: Do a good job, work for the blacks, don't be ostracized by the whites, and be good in your profession, be a good teacher. That was the simple law. After that these things changed, not really because things are of a different quality now, but now we are much less dependent on the church organization than when I came. The church organization affiliation was a very good one because it was tremendously supporting. Even now when I come to New York and I call the American Missionary Association and say, "I am here and I want you to take me out to a good lunch." And we'll go in these real nice Manhattan restaurants and have a good time.

JONES: But the policy of the A.M.A. at that time was when confronted with ostracism from the white community to withdraw? You were told not to rouse white wrath?

BORINSKI: Yes. You see, they wanted to avoid it because you had people who were probably in their morals a lot stronger than I was who therefore identified with the blacks in a different way and to hell with the whites.

JONES: Yes.

BORINSKI: I simply felt that was not the way to be anyhow. It is the same way if you are Jewish, you can't break up the bridges to the non-Jewish community and say you speak for yourself. You cannot do it! There's the same aspect here I learned out of my Jewish experience very much for my operation here in Mississippi. You know what to expect and what not to expect. You are either inside-outside or outside-inside, but be aware that you are never inside-inside.

JONES: So you saw a lot of parallels between the Jewish situation in Germany befor

the war and the black-white situation here in Mississippi in 1947?

BORINSKI: That's right.

JONES: Well, at that time, were you able to build any bridges to the white community? The way we are made to understand it in this day is that in 1947 white Mississippi was a closed society.

BORINSKI: It was a closed society, but there was also one principle: If we wouldn't have had white supporters in the community we could not have existed. Tougaloo could not have existed without support of the white community either That means you had to have forces in the community which sustained you.

JONES: But those forces were covert, weren't they? They didn't make their presence known in the white society.

BORINSKI: But we knew them, and we could refer to them. In fact it was interesting. Relatively early in the game Bob Ezelle - you know Bob Ezelle, who died just recently - Bob Ezelle entered the situation relatively early with great risk. He was a man who simply said, "All that we've done to the blacks is wrong. We cannot stand up as citizens, we cannot stand up as Christians until we change." I think there was a letter in one of these clubs, I don't know what you call it, where the businessmen come?

JONES: The Chamber of Commerce?

BORINSKI: The Chamber of Commerce and another one of them.

JONES: Rotary Club?

BORINSKI: Yes, Rotary Club. I remember very well one man stood up in the Rotary meeting and said, "Tougaloo College is a wild place. There are rapes going on. I know:" this and this and this. When he was through Ezelle stood up and said, "I dare to say that every word that my brother was saying was a plai lie. If he thinks it's not a lie, let him say so." And he admitted every-

thing was a lie. You had a number of human experiences that were just tremendous here.

JONES: Yes. This is such a large and wide-ranging subject that we'll talk about it some more in depth, but we've talked for about an hour and a half and I think if we held off until next time it would be best, if that would be all right with you.

BORINSKI: Oh, yes, that would be okay.

JONES: Okay. I appreciate you letting us have a glimpse of your memories.

BORINSKI: At certain given times they come out.

JONES: Well, I do hope that you're enjoying it.

BORINSKI: Oh, yes. I'll tell you one thing, if I wasn't enjoying it I would be quite open, I would say, "Let us quit it." I enjoy it because I like to examine my power of reassociation of things. That's why I told you about my experiences returning to Germany, there were certain things that were simply reassociated for me.

JONES: And I'm sure there will be other instances of that.

BORINSKI: Again, that point is interesting to me. My life is interesting because I have, without intention, made a certain impact, but that is not intentional at all. It is just that certain situations develop for me, like this German linguist with whom I'm corresponding. It's very very interesting how that develops.

JONES: That's a story in itself. I think we'll take that and your continuing experiences here at Tougaloo up next time. Thank you again.

(End of Interview)

(Transcribed by John Jones)