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MORRIS U. SCHAPPES
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BRAZIL (BORN UKRAINE), 1914
AGE 7
PASSAGE ON "THE TENNYSON"

NASH: Today is january 23, 1975. I am interviewing Mr. Morris U. Schappes who is the Editor of the Jewish Kahns Magazine that is published monthly. He is also a professor of American-Jewish history. Is that correct? At Queens College. He is also the author of several books of which he will tell us the title later. Mr. Schappes came to the United States in 1914 at the age of seven, but he was originally born in the Ukraine in Russia. what was the name of the town?

SCHAPPES: The name of the town in which I was born or delivered was Kamensk-Podol'skiy. I say delivered because I was conceived in Brazil, but my mother didn't want to have her first child so far away from her mother, 8,000 miles away in Kamensk-

Podol'skiy, so she went home from Brazil, left my father in brazil, and delivered me in Kamensk-Podol'skiy in her mother's home, and then about two years later my father came from Brazil to Kamensk-Podol'skiy to take us all back to South America.

NASH: How was it that your father wound up in Brazil in the first place?

SCHAPPES: In 1905 there was the attempt at a revolution in Russia against the Czar. The revolution was crushed and they developed a period that is known in Russian history as the period of the Stalepin Reaction, Stalepin being the name of the Minister of the Interior who organized the repression, including pogroms. In Kamensk-Poldo'skiy there was a pogrom. My father was a young worker and he went on a delegation with other young Jewish workers to the governor of the province to protest the pogrom. He was arrested and released on bail. His associates advised him to leave the country.

Kamensk-Poldo'skiy is near the Rumanian border, the old Bessaraboam border. and so my father and mother illegally stole across the border and headed for the Argentine, the Argentine because Baron de Hursh had at that time started a colonization project, and there were one or two Jewish families that my parents knew about who were in Buenos Aires, so that is how they got to South America. In South American my father's craft was useless. He was a skilled wood turner. Wood turning is a process by which on a lathe you put a rectangular stick of wood and an octagonal stick of wood and then with cutting tools while the lathe is wearing, you make incisions and therefore shape all kinds of wooden objects used in furniture and in lamps and bowls and so on. This craft was not used in the Argentine in 1910 or '11 or '12 and therefore he couldn't find work that would use his skill, so he was helped by one of these friends that he knew was in the Argentine to become a person who went around buying inner used tires from automobiles and selling them. It was a very difficult life, and my parents not being able to speak Spanish and being in a distant country, had a great deal of difficulty. He tried going to Chile for a while, but that didn't work. When they got to Sao Paulo in Brazil and that was where I was conceived.

NASH: What are your earliest memories in the Ukraine?

SCHAPPES: I don't know whether I have any direct memories of the Ukraine because I must have been two or three years old. My memories are now confused with what I heard from my parents, so I can't specifically recall anything. I do have some childhood memories of my stay in Brazil. I recall, for instance, that when we got off the ship from Europe in Sao Paulo that I ran over to a fruit stand and picked up an orange and dropped it because it was hot in the terribly hot sun that was there. I also have a childhood recollection of having a childhood disease or illness, I think scarlet fever, and my parents took me to the local hospital. The hospital as I remember it was a huge room with cold marble floors, and I remember once I think having to run to a bathroom, which seemed a terribly long distance away over those cold floors and the experience registered. I also remember that the doctors there, when I was discharged as cured, told my parents that I should eat salt pork. My parents, of course, were very much disturbed that non-kosher food was being prescribed for me, but since there is a Jewish tradition that for reasons of health and life one can violate ordinary ritual prescriptions, I was fed salt pork for a while after that.

NASH: Were both your father and mother religious?

SCHAPPES; They were conventionally orthodox in the sense that they observed kosher as much as they could. They were not synagogue goers. My mother would bless the candles on Friday evenings and try to keep a kosher home. I don't think they were a member of any congregation in either the Argentine or in Brazil. I don't know about the situation in Kamensk-Pool'skiy. In the Argentine, for example, I remember, and again this may be blurred with stories I was told, but women used to wear black stockings. The women who wore black stockings were prostitutes. When my parents came to this country, to New York, at that time black stockings were in fashion. At first they thought that they also were prostitutes until they found out otherwise. In Brazil, of course, I went to the first school I ever attended. All I remember of it is that I had to wear as a kind of uniform what was called a halut. That is a kind of long, light and light colored coat that all the students in school had to wear.

NASH: Was this a Jewish school?

SCHAPPES: No. This was, I guess, a public school. Well, halutus is also a Spanish-Portugese word.

NASH: Oh, it sounds Hebrew for some reason, but it is not.

SCHAPPES: No, And the first language I used in school was Portuguese. I also had learned some childish Spanish in Buenos Aires.

NASH: What were the factors that led your family to decide to leave Sao Paulo?

SCHAPPES: Again, my father was economically doing very badly. Yes, I had a little spout of illness --there are rains in Sao Paulo, he is a very, very heavy sleeper, and once out on the porch or something he slept through a heavy rain and caught a severe cold and was incapacitated for a time, so my parents decided that they should go back to the old country. However, by that time another branch of the family had come to the city of New York and my mother and father couldn't conceive of going back to Kamensk-Podol'skiy from Brazil without stopping in New York and saying hello to the relatives who were here. so we came on a ship called the Tennyson, a British steamer, by steerage, and arrived in New York, I think, either on June 28th or early in July 1914.

NASH: Do you remember the trip?

SCHAPPES: All I remember of the trip is an incident that had to do with my father's having, as a steerage passenger, to try to get hot food for us. The way in which this was usually done was to find a purser whom you could bribe or in some way induce him to provide you with hot food. This was, I think, a three-week trip. My father made the arrangements and things were going well until one day something happened. There was some altercation between the purser and my father. My father being a strong, young worker, leaped at the purser and threw him up against the railing of the ship and was sort of bending him over and choking him, and he was sort of torn away from him. that I think stopped the hot food that we got.

NASH: That seems very unusual. You would think that he would be kind of afraid to create any incident, otherwise they might have trouble.

SCHAPPES: The fact that he had gone on a protest to the governor of the province of Podol'skiy indicates that he was not a tremarious person and here he must have felt a grieve. I don't know what the issue was, but it had to do something with feeding his wife and child, and that was an incentive enough, and he was also hot tempered and perhaps lost his head and leaped at the steward or the purser who was responsible for the difficulty.

NASH: Do you remember anything about what steerage looked like? You must have slept with --who did you sleep with? did you sleep with your father or mother?

SCHAPPES: I have no distinct recollection. All I know is that the food facilities were difficult and that apparently made the sharpest impression on me.

NASH: Do you remember being seasick?

SCHAPPES: No. Although I think my mother was. Well, look, they had traveled already about 20,000 miles by sea. Once across from Europe to Brazil, once back, back again, so this was their fourth long voyage in a few years and apparently they did not fear it so much that it would keep them from going.

NASH: It must have been expensive to make all those trips.

SCHAPPES: Well, the first trip to flee, my father was a worker and maybe he got help from his associates who advised him to leave the country, I don't know. But they made it. Possibly also, yes, there was help from some people who afterwards threw it up to my father in the Argentine. I remember being told of that. They had helped him come over and he wasn't grateful enough or something like that. Then the voyage back, I don't know, but they managed it on steerage rates.

NASH: So where did your family settle? By the way, did they go to Ellis Island or don't you recall?

SCHAPPES: I don't personally recall, but I know they did because our relatives came to Ellis Island to pick us up and to bring us to East 10th Street between Avenues B and C, where my father lived and died, where my mother lived until 1964, I think, when I was able to get her into a Jewish old age home.

NASH: Is your mother still alive?

SCHAPPES: No, she died three years ago.

NASH: How old was she when she died?

SCHAPPES: I think she was 78. My father died much younger. He was in his fifties when he died of cancer.

NASH: How did they establish themselves?

SCHAPPES: When we got to East 10th Street we were put up on the third story of 370 East 10th Street, which was a walkup with a toilet in the hall used by, I think, four families on the floor. There was no bathroom facility of any kind. There was an iron sink, not a porcelain sink, three rooms. My father here found that there was need for wood turning so he was able to get employment at five or six dollars a week. During the war, by the way, he switched from wood turning to pants pressing in a uniform-making shop because that paid better. Then after the war he went back to wood turning. When I entered elementary school, there was a problem. When the branch of the family that had come directly to new York arrived, they changed their

Ukrainian name because the inspector couldn't spell Schappeshelevish, so he name them Shipero, so that branch of the family was named Shipero. In Brazil, the authorities couldn't spell Schappeshelevish either, but they changed it to Schappes. So the Schappes arrived to visit the Shiperos, and my parents, finding that the other branch of the family was Shipero, also took the Shipero. But when in September 1914 they had to take me to PS 64 to enroll in elementary school, not being able to speak English, they brought along all the papers, documents.

NASH: What was the language that you spoke at Home?

SCHAPPES: At home I spoke Yiddish. My parents were able, my mother was able to learn enough Spanish and Portuguese words to do her shopping, usually by pointing and finding out what the object was and then learning it and so on. So here my mother took me by the hand and brought me to the registrar at

PS 64 with the documents by which we had entered through Ellis Island, and there the name was Schappes. so I was entered in elementary school as Morris Schappes while my parents were always Ida and Himer Shipero.

NASH: I didn't get that. Your parents, weren't they renamed Schappes in Brazil?

SCHAPPES: In Brazil, that's right, but here they had taken the name Schipero in imitation of the other branch of the family. But when they entered me in school, they just handed my papers to the registrar, to the clerk, and she put down Morris Schappes. That is the way it was written. And so to this day I am the only Schappes in the United States, my relatives all being Shipero or something else.

NASH: Do you have children?

SCHAPPES: No, we don't.

NASH: Did your father pursue any political kinds of --

SCHAPPES: In the Argentine he had become sort of an anarchist. The labor ideology at that time of most of the militant groups in South American was anarchism rather than socialism, so he was ideologically an anarchist, although I must say first, my father was illiterate. That is, he couldn't read any language. He could pray in Hebrew, he could recite the prayers, but he couldn't read them, and I doubt whether he knew what they meant. This was not uncommon among workers. So my mother had learned to read Yiddish in Kamensk-Podol'skiy. Her parents were of a lower-middle class character, while my father was working class in his parentage. My mother felt that she had stepped down a class to marry my father, but that is another matter. Now she had learned how to read Yiddish and she could read Yiddish and so she was the one who would read the

Yiddish newspaper to my father. And when he was unemployed and looking for work, he would buy the Borgfen Shernal which was the daily Yiddish newspaper, now defunct, which had the most advertisements for employment. That is how they never got to read the Fervets because my father was unemployed sufficiently that habituated to the Borgen Shernal although the Borgen Shernal was orthodox in its religious outlook and my father was by that time atheistic. So he never was affiliated with any political organization. He became an active trade unionist in his shop, became the shop steward. I remember once there was a shop, I think on East 12th Street, within walking distance of our home, and on Passover I would go over to his shop and bring him a hot Passover lunch, and the shop was fascinating, was full of boiling lathes and machinery and sawdust and shavings, so for a kid it was an adventure. I also remember as a boy almost every year, it must have been every year, there was a strike. Every time the agreement ran out and they wanted a 50 cent a week increase or something, they had to strike for it, and since my parents' home was so near that shop, the strike committee would meet in our home, and I would cut off in a corner and listen. I didn't know what was going on except that this was a strike and my mother was always perturbed because it meant at least for two weeks there would be no wages. They had no strike benefits of any kind at the time and at the strike one day would get let's say instead of six dollars it might be seven dollars a week, and finally I think it worked up to nine dollars after a few years and so on. But that was the extent of his trade union activity. Now I also remember in 1917 during the mayor campaign. I was by that time ten years old. The candidate for the Socialist Party was Morris Hillquit, and I recall being taken by my parents to the auditorium at PS 64, which was then

through 10th Street. The entrance for the classrooms was around the corner on 9th Street. So we went in to hear Morris Hillquit speak. I think he spoke in English and my parents didn't understand, and anyway they couldn't vote. But this was, well Hillquit was kind of a hero of the socialist workers, Jewish workers, and the auditorium was jammed I remember. I had to sit on my father's lap because we couldn't get an extra seat for me. Now because of my father's anarchistic outlook, he didn't want to become a citizen. Be a citizen of the world, why be a citizen especially of this country. And also being illiterate there would have been a problem. He would have had to learn enough to pass a citizenship exam which was a problem. so he didn't become a citizen until I became 21 and was appointed to teach at City College. And I wouldn't have been able to get the job unless I was a citizen, so he quickly hurried around and somehow he took out his first papers and managed to work his way through the exam. I recall helping him to sign his name and learn how to read a few lines so he could answer some of the questions and so on.

so he became a citizen under pressure of the fact that my appointment might be held up if he wee not at least, well had declared his intention of becoming a citizen.

NASH: So by his becoming a citizen, did that automatically make you a citizen?

SCHAPPES: For about a year, you see, then I declared my own citizenship and had helter-skelter with the exam. My mother also became a citizen at the time. She went to night school at PS 64 and actually got a certificate from the school, which didn't meant that she could even read an English newspaper, but she could read street signs and so on so that she could function.

NASH: Did their English ever improve?

SCHAPPES: It improved sufficiently so that they could get along with non-Jewish neighbors because East 10th

Street was largely a Jewish block, but you had some Ukrainians living there. The whole Thompkins Square area was at that time a concentration of both Jews and Ukrainians.

NASH: How do the Jews and Ukrainians get along?

SCHAPPES: Functionally. There was no friendship, but they would relate to each other on the basis of what they needed to do. There was some, for example, there was one Ukrainian who owned a grocery store and when all the Jewish grocery stores were closed and you needed something, my parents would go to the Ukrainian to buy something, but was no difficulty. The only difficulty came from the Italians on 11th Street and 12th Street, who Halloween would come around with stockings full of chalk and rocks and beat the hell out of us Jewish kids on East 10th Street. now there are some facilities there. For example, there was the boys club on 10th Street and Avenue A where I got some of my early adolescent play activities. There was a pool there, they showed movies every Friday night three times. You know, you might be in the first showing, second showing. It was always free. They had game facilities, indoor game facilities, including a gym. I became a wrestling fan watching the wrestlers there. At that time they wrestled rather than grunted. They really did wrestle. And the Library. Now I was an avid reader. The kids I was with in PS 64 were always placed in alphabetical order, so Schappes, came before Schlitten and "Scoubker came after Schappes, so that Schappes, Schlitten and Scouker became fast friends, and we used to make a tour of libraries. You could take out only two books from each library, but if you went to enough libraries, you could get during the week as many as six or eight books. So our base was the Thompkins Square branch of the Library. Then somehow we wandered over and found the Attendofer Branch on 8th Street and Second Avenue. Then we found the Mulenburgh Branch on 23rd Street, I think, and Seventh Avenue. And then one day we got lost waling home and found the Jackson Street Branch in the Village. And then there was also the Stewart Park Branch on Houston Street. So the three of us would make, each week we would make a tour of the libraries and take out two books in each. Even that wasn't enough, so that the Boys Club Library was a big help too. There you could also take out only two books.

NASH: Why did you like books so much?

SCHAPPES: I read anything. I was brought up on Nikado and Wild West and Bill Bradey. Those were the nickel eight-by-ten size periodicals o the time. Horacio Alger, one of those. In fact, on Third Avenue between 8th and 12th Street and on Fourth Avenue, there were many more book shops than there are now and you could buy some of these second had, this nickel things for two cents. So when we had a dime we would load up with five of them and rotate them among Scouker, Schappes and Schlitten, and we would have enough to read.

NASH: Why were you all so literary? What led you to --

SCHAPPES: Well, that is hard to say. My father was illiterate, my mother could read a Yiddish newspaper and a Yiddish book, and I remember my father joined the Workmens Circle and on Friday evenings instead of going to synagogue, he went to the Workmens circle Branch. Once he came home with a book which I still have, a book which he bought although he couldn't read Yiddish, couldn't read at all, he bought because he had heard Mendell Bayless. Mendell Bayless was an historic figure in 1912. He was charged in the Ukraine with a blood ritual murder. There was an internationally famous trial and he was released, he was freed because of the international protest and the attention that was focused on it, and so on. Then he came to this country and wrote a book about his experiences, his autobiography, and he went around lecturing at Workmens Circle branches and selling the book and my father brought it home and my mother would be reading from that book in the kitchen when I was doing homework in the front room, what we would call the living room, the room with the big, big, table. Now there was also, I guess, an encouragement to read in the sense that my parents saw to it that I had all the quiet necessary. And when I was doing homework, everything had to be quiet so that I wouldn't be disturbed, which was a kind of family support for this. And also my parents read too so that we would reinforce each other. And then at that time you had no radio, no TV. We played ball in Thompkins Square Park, but after it got dark there was nothing to do. Movies cost money, movies cost two for a nickel. You would walk down to Houston Street on Saturday, if you had two cents we would try to find a kid who had three cents. If you were rich and had three cents, it was easy to find a kid who had two cents.

So you had no ordinary outlets for entertainment or even just passing of time. So there was much more reading done, and then we found we liked it. So that was the emphasis there.

NASH: Were you bar mitzvahed?

SCHAPPES: Yes. On East 10th Street on the same block, one floor up I think in a six story building without an elevator, with a big stoop, there was a rabbit, and i was sent to the rabbit. I think we paid him a quarter a week for the instruction. The rabbi was an old man. I mean anybody with a beard was an old man to a kid. And he lived in the back of this building, I think on the second floor. there were about five or six of us that would come in, and it was a tiny apartment, three rooms, and we all sat around the kitchen table learning. The calibre of the rabbi and his intellectual level can be judged by the fact that there was a clock, and alarm clock, in his kitchen, but neither he not the rabbitson could tell time. Now how do you keep a kosher home if you cannot tell time because you have to know when the half hour is up for the meat soaking, and an hour is up for the salting, or vice versa or something, and so the rabbitson would always ask us for the time, to look at the clock and tell her the time, which was alright. When the rabbi got nasty and pinched us and tweaked our ears because we were slow learners, we took it out on him and the rabbitson by falsifying the time so that they often ate kafe unwillingly because of us. He would say, "   ," and if it was five minutes I would say yes. So that was part of the educational process. Now I was taught the Humish, the five Books of Roses, in Yiddish. That was the language of instruction. I remember learning a dwish, as it is called, a little speech which I had to memorize, and on a certain day, it wasn't a Saturday, you had your bar mitzvah on the day itself. Not as happens now where you wait for the Sabbath and have a big party and so on. I had no party. I was taken to the synagogue and I delivered my little oration and I think that was the last time my father or I stepped into a synagogue, or I for many, many decades. so what I did learn was the alphabet and how to read elementary Hebrew and then elementary Yiddish. About Yiddish at that time, there was no bilingualism in the schools, unfortunately. Now I walk into the public library on 42nd Street and you can go to the toilet in two languages, in Spanish and in English. At that time if you couldn't read the sign you would never find you way. About Yiddish, there was a kind of --well, it was impressed upon us that you should speak English. During the war, of course, I remember as a kid, in PS 64 I was a crackerjack war stamp salesman. so at the age of ten there was a public meeting on the street corner of 11th Street and Avenue B. We had memorized two=minute speeches, all the crack salesmen of PS 64. And my parents arrived just as I finished my speech, but if you were heard speaking Yiddish on certain occasions or German, some patriot would insist that you talk English. Of course, the German was particularly abhorred so that the Duetch Savings Bank, the Deutcscher bank on 14th Street and Fourth Avenue, which is there to this day, was renamed the Central Savings Bank, and it bears that name to this day because during the First World War you couldn't keep a German name. What was asked before I got off on this subject?

NASH: Well, you were just talking about being on the --

SCHAPPES: Yiddish, Yiddish and bilingualism. Now when I went to Townsend Harris Hall High School, for example, I brought lunch, a big salami sandwich. Now, for me to wrap the lunch in the orthodox Jewish bog chanal would have been to expose me to all kinds of ridicule, so I wrapped it in what was at that time the first tabloid in the world, the graphic, which we used to call the pornographic because it emphasized what at that time was considered nudity.

so it was okay for me to bring my salami sandwich in the graphic, but not in a Yiddish newspaper. I remember, for example, we had relatives in Brooklyn. Used to take an elevator train, the Myrtle Avenue Line. Oh, it took an awful long time to get from East 10th Street to Myrtle Avenue. And my mother would sit in the train and read a Yiddish newspaper, or if she did I would walk off into the next corner because I didn't want to be seen sitting next to conspicuously un-English-speaking and un-English-reading people. So the attitude towards the language was one of high-hatting it. It was called a jargon. It wasn't fit for public consumption. And then when I got to college and took education courses in the Education Department, there we had another problem because by that time the board of examiners of the board of education had developed the most refined ears in the world. The could detect not merely a Jewish accent, but that mysterious thing called the Jewish intonation. And so at City College we education students were continually being warned against the possibility of a Jewish intonation because that would flunk you on the orals for the board of . So there was a heavy premium put in the Public Speaking Department, the Education Department, all through the educational system, on ridding yourself of any possible remote trace of a yiddish speech pattern or speech habit.

NASH: And do you think that your voice is a product of all those ethnics?

SCHAPPES: Well, I don't know. I apparently developed sufficiently adequate American pronunciation to be appointed to teach English at City College fourteen years after I arrived as a Yiddish-speaking, Portuguese-speaking , kid.

NASH: You were seven when you came, fourteen years --

SCHAPPES; Later at the age of 21 I was appointed --

NASH; Wasn't that awfully young? was that unusual?

SCHAPPES: It must have been unusual, yes. See in 14 years I had my elementary and high school and college education, not without difficulties. In PS 64, I was so bright that I skipped. At that time you didn't have rapid advancement classes so you would skip. I was skipped five times. That meant that I had five gaps in my knowledge because what you skipped you didn't learn. Yet apparently I caught up and was graduated in short order. My friend Schlitten skipped four times I think. Scouker four times. We were the skippers. But it left me with peculiarities. for example, in geography to this day it is hard for me to understand on a map that New Jersey is west because I would look across the Hudson and there was Jersey and somehow it looked east to me. So I always have to get my bearings as to east and west because, I suppose, I skipped the geography course in which we had a globe. We had a world map, a flat map, and west was over there and east was over here so I have this confusion. I probably had other confusions because of this kind of rapid advancement without rapid learning. It was just pushing you ahead because I would have been bored, I suppose. so I made elementary school education in five and a half years instead of eight. Then I was so bright that I was accepted at townsend harris Hall High School, which was at that time, it has been disbanded since, the preparatory school for the City College, just as Hunter high School is the preparatory school for Hunter College. And it accepted only the brightest students and it was a three-year curriculum. You got your four-year high school education in three years. Now the shift from East 10th Street and PS 64 and the whole cultural pattern there, to the Upper West Side, Townsend Harris Hall near City College, was apparently one that was very difficult for me to make. I remember the first day of school, Scouker, Schlitten and Schappes went, well we walked to Fourth Avenue to the Aster Place subway, which is quite a walk. Then we took the local to 14th street and took the express to 42nd Street, took the shuttle to Times Square, and then took the express to 96th Street and then the local to 137th Street to get to college. And during a blizzard, I remember during a blizzard, to get to high school, there was a blizzard around 1922 or something, one of the famous blizzards, my father took me by the hand and walked me to Aster Place, and really the snow was I think four or five or six feet high. We had to worm our way through so I didn't miss --I was never absent from elementary school, high school or college. Not a single day of absence. I would get sick Christmas week or Easter week or Passover week or something like that, but never missed a day of school. So at that blizzard he say to it that I got to school. so the first day we went to school, we were as clean as could be. We had bright, white shirts, blue knickers, and we carried our salami sandwiches in a brown paper bag and we got to Townsend Harris Hall on 138th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. We were the only three kids in that school building that day without longies and without a jacket, without suits that is. so the contrast, the cultural gap was tremendous. Of course, after that we went home and we soon got longies too so we could be like the other kids. But the cultural gap was so great that it must have affected me in my learning ability. So it took me four years to get out of this three-year high school and I got out only on two conditions. I was able to enter City College on two conditions. If I had gone through, not the preparatory school for City College but any other, I wouldn't have been able to enter on conditions. Now what held me up was, I think, the disconbobulation of an entirely different kind of cultural New York. The poor East Side boys were now with kids who were from middle-class families. I recall one of them was the son of a stationer, who had a stationary store on 116th Street near

Columbia, and once during the Christmas vacation to come to his home and we went sledding in the park. Now this was the first home outside the east Side I had ever been in. Looking back upon it, it was on the ground floor, not a particularly desirable apartment. It was a large apartment building, but I went in there and I saw the biggest rooms I had ever seen and well, he was just in my eyes a rich kid. He had a sled. And we went out to Riverside Park and sledded, but that was the contrast between the working class poverty and the middle class, not affluence, as I can look back upon it, but comfort.

NASH: Did you have a sense that you were poor? Did you ever feel that you were poor or what point did you --

SCHAPPES: Well, I felt I was poor because, well, I got a nickel a week.

NASH: And you were aware that you were poor, that your family was --

SCHAPPES: Yes. By the time I got to age 13 I went to work in the summer so as to help out at home, and also I think my parents started a savings account for me, a dollar a week or something. I got I think five dollars or something or four dollars on my first job. But we always lived --I saw things at home. I remember one scene at home, for example, on a Sabbath and we were having, it was called the dinner at lunch time, and I learned somehow that this was the last meal my parents could pay for. Certainly my parents never borrowed a penny from anybody. That was also a part of the code. If they didn't have, they wouldn't borrow. So here, you know, I was aware of the fact that my parents were very, very gloomy, if not crying into the soup, sort of acting as if they could cry in their soup. and a knock came on the door and a fellow worker of my father's came in. He had found a job that my father could fill, and so Monday he went to work and we were able to go on. so then I was conscious of this kind of thing. And also there are other people around us who were similarly poor, poorer than we perhaps or possibly my parents were proud and wouldn't show it so they wouldn't borrow any. borrowing was customary and I suppose that was a sign of their economic situation. Well, the consequences of my cultural disorientation in high school was this inability to keep up with the work and also at that time I developed a stammer, which looking back upon it, may have been a result of this cultural shock. Now some of the teachers in Townsend Harris high School were really out of this world. I remember there was one man named Determined Joseph Turnen. He was related to the Turnen families of Kenith Turnen, the literary critic, and so on. He was very tall and posing Irishman with a beautiful head of white hair, bearing, and so on, and he used to despise us kids. for example, when we started Ivanhoe, I don't know if you have ever read Ivanhoe, but we started Ivanhoe. it is about knights with lances and so on. His idea of humor was to take the window pole and go charging down the center isle in the classroom poking us kids in the back or in the front to show us what a man on horseback would do. He took care to mispronounce every name he possibly could that wasn't an Anglo Saxon name so that he would call me Skarpas instead of Schappes, and Scoulker instead of Scouker. he would always make us feel that we were immigrant kids who really didn't belong. I had a history teach, Asian History, Medieval History, Baine Mendleson, a German Jew who also scorned us East European Yiddish-speaking, Yiddish-background kids. In Medieval History we learned about Medieval architecture. To give us an object lesson about what Medieval architecture was like, he sent us down to St. Patrick's Cathedral to look for the arches. Well, I mean I went into St. Patrick's Cathedral and I was scared stiff. I didn't know whether to put a hat on or take it off or what. And it was big and dark and huge and vast, and I walked around. I was really dazed. You know, this Jewish kid going, it was a homework assignment, I had to do it, you know. There was no such thing as not doing the homework. so how was I to know that the arches are outside the cathedral and not inside. I afterwards found out arch, but his again, and these things are meaningful to me because to perhaps, I can understand how black kids going out of Harlem for the first time into a white school environment would also have that feeling of cultural disorientation. And feeling ill at ease, feeling strange. This is not the familiar world of your home where even if it is poor, at last you know who is who and what is what and so on. So that this continual emphasis in the schools that you must not speak Yiddish because it will affect your english speech and so on, made for gaps between children and parents. After I must have had some kind of uneasy relationship with my parents if I wouldn't sit in the same subway car with them while they were reading a Yiddish paper, you see. And so the generational gap for immigrants was much different from that aroused for the native born because there was a premium put upon being as different from your parents as you could, in speech pattern, in how you looked and how you dressed, and the kind of work you did, and so on. You had to get t as far away from the old culture as you could. This wasn't a process that the sociologists call acculturation, it was a deculturation. You were told to forget, not to practice your old home language, and if you had to speak to your parents in Yiddish, you did it but without impending handicap always.

NASH: A certain amount of self-hatred.

SCHAPPES: Yes, it would be called that now, and it wasn't until much later on that I could objectively see what was happening and overcome that and begin to respect my parents. I remember, for example, I was about in college and my father was an illiterate worker, anarchist, a trade unionist, but he knew certain things that I didn't know. It wasn't until I began to study radical economics that I would start talking to my father and asking him things. Before that, what did he know about economics. I was studying in college and so on. And there was also this high regard for anyone who was going to college, your son was going to college and so on, and he wouldn't be what you would be.

NASH: How did your father know those things about radical economics?

SCHAPPES: Well, he must have learned something about it orally, from hearing agitators and speakers and so on. He didn't hear it on the radio, he didn't hear it on TV and he didn't read it, so in the Argentine from whatever anarchist contacts he had, you see, and here in the trade union, he at least learned that there was a boss and the worker and your interests weren't exactly the same. I knew that because I saw him strike. He had a strike for every additional half dollar every year. So that I had an elementary sense which, of course, in school got grassed over with what I was taught and mistaught, and then I had to readjust and so in the later years of his life I was closer to my father than I had been as a kid because I began to understand that literacy wasn't everything, that there were some things you could learn even if you weren't literate, and that his experiences and his association with a trade union and so on had given him a certain insight which I hadn't gotten out of the books that I had been gobbling up and swallowing s rapidly.

NASH: And how about your mother? Did you have the same recognition?

SCHAPPES: Well, you see, with her there was less of a cultural gap than my father because she could read, she could read Yiddish, she could write English. In fact, she became the secretary of one of the . The immigrants were organized into these . She belonged to the Communist Ladies Progressive Association, and because she could write and add, do the arithematic, she became the secretary. She would have to send out notices for the meetings. And I often, as a kid, would do the addressing of the postcards for her. That was my share because I think she got 20 dollars a year for this. And so I would help her in that. But she was more overtly gregarious that my father was, except in his own circles. so she was more independent. She went to night school, you see, and would try to read the _Daily new_ and so on.

NASH: Well, maybe we could just briefly sort of just go --what happened to you when you graduated from college?

SCHAPPES: Well, let's go back again to PS 64. I recall, for example, one of the bugaboo words was the Gary System. I am not sure at that time I knew what it meant, but it was an impending danger. What it meant was that the adjustment to the need to educate immigrants who would not necessarily go to high school or college,, but would go out to work. Introduce them to the school system for the first time. that was called shop work. Now at PS 64 there was shop work. I learned some elementary carpentry and some other things. Now that was the Gary system introduced in Gary, Indiana as a way with dealing with immigrant children who had to be prepared for a trade rather than for continuing education. And so there must have been a half dozen classes in shop work that were part of my PS 64 education. PS 64 was sort of advanced in that respect. They didn't have only academic education. Of course, for those of us who went ton to high school and college this was only a byplay, but it was part of the important things. Now it is interesting that I can remember only two names of my teachers in elementary school, except the principal. One was a woman whose name was the only name we knew her by, was Slaughterhouse. She was tall and lean and she wore, it seemed to us, like the same long, black dress all her life, and it came with lace up under here. Now that wasn't why we called her Slaughterhouse. We called her Slaughterhouse because she would hit us. I once had my head cracked across the blackboard because for some reason or other I said, "Oh, Jesus," or "Jesus Christ," I didn't know what the hell it meant. But to her it was an insult to her god or something, so bang. That was the one teacher I remember. The other was a man named Leftkowitz who was known as the slugger in the school. He was a sharp teacher and he was the one who was sent around by somebody --to pick up and complete my description of Slaughterhouse., I said at one point that she had a long, black dress with lace that came up under here, which was a gesture that doesn't record early, so here, way up under her chin, so her chin was always way up and she always seemed to be looking down upon us from a great height, and this was visual impression I have never forgotten, as well as the banging of my head against her blackboard. About Leftkowitz, the reason this has been fresh in my mind is that whenever I read stories now about teachers having discipline problems in the schools in some areas, I remember that among the Jewish kids there were also such discipline problems and that the authorities had no hesitation in using corporal pressure to stop them. Now other early impressions of my boyhood in an immigrant atmosphere include the period when for about a year or two I was giving private lessons in English to Yiddish-speaking immigrants. I think it was connected with the Eron School, which is a famous institution on the Lower East Side, which supplemented the public schools for those who for some reason couldn't go or didn't fare too well in the public schools. If I remember correctly, I was given a thick of materials with lessons and lesson plans. I would go around from home to home, spending an hour in each. I must have gotten possible ten cents an hour or something like that, but I was a high school boy at the time and this was interesting. How much my pupils learned, I don't know, but this was one of the ways in which the immigrants sought by might and to learn to read English if they couldn't do it by going to night school, they would have these private tutors.

NASH: What nationalities did you teach?

SCHAPPES: Well, it was always Jewish because one of the languages of communication was Yiddish so that I would be able to translate from one to the other. Looking back upon it with some professional perspective, I don't know how effective the teaching could have been. Certainly the qualifications that were adequate for the administration of the school were pretty low. I don't know whether now we would consider having high school students, even bright high school students, undertake to teach, although I suppose it can be done. come to think of it, I think in Cuba where there was a campaign for mass literacy, they probably had high school students teaching illiterates how to read and write.

NASH: Who founded the Eron School?

SCHAPPES: That I don't know. That would have to be looked up. there have been articles published about it and it may even be in the Jewish Encyclopedia. Now another aspect of my days on the East Side had to do with the club I belonged to at Stiverson House. I don't know whether I have mentioned that. On 9th Street and Avenue B, which was just around the corner from where I lived on 10th street between B and C, there wa a big imposing building called the Christadora House. It was some kind of settlement house. But the name Christadora was sufficient to scare off all the Jewish kids in the neighborhood, so we had no contact with that Now this reveals, of course, attitudes towards christianity and towards Christians. Our contact with Christins was usually a rough one. I remember that around Halloween, for example, the Italian gang on 12th Street used to invade the Jewish boys on East 10th Street with socks with chalk, and in addition to chalk, hard stuff in it, that we often got a beating if we didn't run fast enough. Also on East 10th street most of the stores were Jewish owned, but there was one pork store I remember, and the smell that came out of it was something that provided a kind of cultural shock in the cultural distance, which was quite common in the area. However, there was a gentile owned delicatessen, as it was called. That is, it was the one grocery which was open on the Sabbath, and sometimes, if necessary, some of us Jewish kids would go into there to buy something which had not been bought in time the day before.

NASH: Were there many Irish people left in the Lower East Side at the time you were there?

SCHAPPES: Not in the area that I was intimately acquainted with. We did have Ukrainians and Slavs up and down the block. and, in fact, a little bit west of Avenue B and Avenue A there developed later on a concentration of Ukrainian clubs and so on, which I remember. Of course, I used to walk to the subway to go to high school. I would walk up 10th street and then turn to 8th Street and walk west on 8th and I would pass these Ukrainian homes and so on, and this was just a normal thing. Now the fact that I was born in the Ukraine made no impression on me at the time, although it is interesting that later on when I became conscious of nationalities in general, I would sometimes puzzle people by --if I would meet a Ukrainian, I would say, "I'm from the Ukraine too," and when I would tell him I was a Ukrainian Jew, he wasn't so much of a landsman to me, but it amused me.

NASH: When you left the Ukraine, or your family left, it was part of Poland or Russia?

SCHAPPES: No, it was part of the Czarist empire at the time.

when I travel to Canada later on as a lecturer, at the border when the Canadian Immigration authorities would ask me where I was born, I would say the Ukraine, which is specifically accurate. I would not say Russia as some people would because they confuse the Russian Empire with Russia proper. And since there are a great many Ukrainians in Canada, this was alright with the immigration officials, I was just another Ukrainian-born coming through.

NASH: I looked up a book because I was trying to get the spelling of the place where you were born, and it said that it was Kamensk-Podol'skiy.

SCHAPPES: Now that is interesting because that would mean that the Ukrainians have changed the name to the Ukrainian style. That is very interesting to me because I have been in a not concentrated way following the development of Ukrainian national consciousness even under the Soviet rule, and I am aware of the fact that some Ukrainians feel aggrieved about the way in which place names in the ukraine are often given a Russian spelling instead of a Ukrainian spelling. So that, for example, the city of L'vov is spelled by the Ukrainians, even in English translation, L'viv, so the fact that Kamensk-Podo'skiy has become Kamenski-Podol'skiy is very interesting to me. Now in avoiding Christadora House, I went to Avenue A where there was a Boys Club, and I think I mentioned that, but I also then when I was in high school went to the Stivenson House which is on Stivenson Place near Peter Stitvenson's old church in a building that was originally the Hebrew Technical High School, and there I had a club life that is near boys clubs, with a kind o faculty advisor or some adult. I remember there was a young mayor who was interested and he was doing what might be called social work on the Lower East Side, and he would meet with us and guide us and teach us some of the things that boys needed to know. We could ask him questions about things. I remember he would teach us parliamentary procedure, how to run our own club meeting without everybody talking at the same time, interrupting everybody, so this was a form of social discipline and it was interesting.

NASH: Did it have an ethnic orientation?

SCHAPPES: This also was a Jewish group, yes. In fact, social relations with non-Jews, I think I had to wait for until I got to high school and college. No, there was something else. Yes, the baseball field was a mixer. That is we used to play baseball in Thompson Square Park when there was a sand lot. Now there is a mechanized playground. But there was a sand lot ball field and I was an avid baseball fan and player, and there was a man there probably in his early 40s who had been semi-professional ball player. To us kids he was a giant and a hero. He was gentile and he related to us and we to him on a basis of the sports. I may have mentioned the instant where I got a hole in my head chasing a fly, a fly ball.

NASH: Yes, you did.

SCHAPPES: Yes. Let me get onto one other thing, the experiences that indicated the pressure upon Jews to, what was called assimilate, what was actually a process of deculturation and denationalization so that some of us grew up wanting to be as far away from the Jewish community, Jewish identity, as possible. Now this wasn't true only of Jews. When I was teaching at City College from 1928 on, I found, for example, that boys who were Italian in parentage almost never took Italian as a foreign language. They might take French or German or Spanish because it was so close to Italian,but they avoided Italian, and this was significant. I think the reason for it was that they too were trying to shed their identification because, looking back upon it, it seems to me clear that if a boy who spoke Italian at home took Italian as a second language, he would have an advantage in that he had a vocabulary and so on. If he learned the grammar and learned the literature, he might develop in the field, and yet to the external world he would still be a Wop and if he spoke Italian perfectly, it wouldn't matter. and if his grammar was excellent, it wouldn't matter and if he knew Italian literature, it wouldn't matter. But, if he spoke German badly, then he would be a cultured American gentleman and gone to college and learned languages, you see. So if you wanted to avoid the stigma that was part of the pressure to assimilate, you got as far from your home roots as possible. Now I am sure that just as this has had effect upon the Italian community, and I see now in the resurgence of italian conscious cultural life and aspirations, the same kind of process that we find in the resurgence of black and Jewish studies and so on. So that at Queens College now where I am teaching the History Department, there is a Jewish Studies program, and Italian Studies program, of course a Black Studies program, and Irish Studies program, and I think even an Armenian studies program because there is an Armenia colony somewhere in Queens. And all this is sociologically interesting and fascinating to me. Now the bilingualism that is so important today, we had none of. Our's was bilingualism in practice, but a shame-faced bilingualism, which in theory we wanted to be monolingual ad we used the other language only in safe domestic circles. Now there has been a swing. For instance, I know now as an historian that in 1908 when Theodore Roosevelt ran for the Presidency, he ran a program with a slogan which included the slogan, "Take the hyphen out of

Americanism." In other words, he didn't want Jewish-Americans, Italian-Americans, Polish-Americans. He wanted unhyphenated Americans. Now, sixty years later, you find a quite contrary situation. Now it isn't that the hyphen is being put back in. the fact is that the hyphen could never really be eliminated, and there the pressure to assimilate and destroy the old cultures was not as effective as they had expected it to be. There was a continuing residual of the old ethnic identity, and then we find that certain changes take place which encourage it. During the Depression of the 1930s, for example, there was the beginnings of an ethnic revival. FDR once issued the slogan, "We are Americans all, immigrants all," and this became a guideline for many things. For example, on the WPA projects, there was a WPA theater project in which there was theatre in Yiddish, in German, in French, in spanish, and also a black theater company. On the WPA writer projects, there were ethnic divisions. Books were actually published under WPA official auspices, even Yiddish and in other languages. I know, for example, that it was under the WPA that the first study was make of the Yiddish landsmanshofen, which are organizations in this country based upon the country of origin. And this was the first socially scientific compilation of who they were, what they did, what their programs were, how many of them survived, and so on, so that the WPA contributed to a cultural expansion and also to an ethnic revival in this sense. Now, of course, the theory of ethnic pluralism, cultural pluralism, goes back pretty far, as far as I think 1907 or 1908. The visiting Yiddish sociologist and philosopher named Hiem Shutloski, delivered a lecture here in Yiddish on cultural pluralism. He didn't call it that, but he felt that there ought to be a continuity of cultural identity here in relation to the American identity that was being developed. Then in 1915, what is more popularly known is the beginning of the theory of cultural pluralism, was presented by a teacher, philosopher, and writer and educational theoretician named Horace M. Callan, who died at the age of 94 or 95 only a year or two ago. He, in 1915 in the nation, published two articles entitled --I am trying to remember the exact title because there is a significance in it. Yes, the exact title was, "The Melting Pot Versus Imperialism," and he was the first one who argued that the melting pot was undemocratic, and it was a process, a product of imperialist pressure upon immigrant groups. Now Horace Callan believed that a democratic approach to the problem of immigrants and their relation to American culture would involved retaining their cultural characteristics, and having been developed within the American framework so that they were interact, they wouldn't try to escape from their past, but would incorporate that pst in their present, and he put forward the idea of instead of a monoculture, having a plural culture so that every person of ethnic immigrant background would retain as much as was viable of his past culture while he was acquiring his present culture. now this theory was picked up at the time, but soon came World War I and there was a wave of chauvinism so that foreign languages were suspect. The government had censorship of all foreign-language newspapers so that every foreign-language newspaper had to submit everything in advance to be, in English translation, to a censor. And, of course, all things German were put down so that the German Savings Bank or the Deutcher Bank on 14th Street and Fourth Avenue became the Central Savings Bank, and the Metropolitan Opera stopped singing German operas and all that. Well, this of chauvinism, of course, came a setback for the concept of cultural pluralism, but the theory of compulsory assimilation didn't work because the promise was that if you assimilated yourself, if you shed every trace of foreign identity, then you would rise in the economic and social scale and there would be unlimited opportunities. Well, came the economic crisis of 1929 and many people who had tried hard and shed their cultural identity found that they still couldn't get anywhere, and it was in that context that FDR's recognition of the immigrant origin of all Americans was a big morale booster and a big theoretical booster for the development of the practice of cultural pluralism.

NASH: Do you think that this policy that he had or this policy of encouraging that through the WPA, did it --it seems to have come from above, but did it also come from below and did it lead to strengthening of these attitudes?

SCHAPPES: I suspect that it came below. I am sure that if the Yiddish theater actors hadn't said, "Look, we are actors, we are Yiddish actors, if you want to employ us at $17.50 a week, we want to play Yiddish theater." And the same thing for the German and the French and so on. I know that is also true for the Yiddish writers ho wanted a Yiddish writer's project as part of the writer's project as a whole. Now this probably --the fact that there was assertion of desire from below by these cultural people indicates that since they have been practitioners of the culture and bearers of the tradition, their initiative of the time of the great democratic upsurge which marked the whole new deal period. This was a period when labor was organizing and the unemployed were organizing, the farmers were organizing and the tenants were organizing, everybody was organizing. The tide of this came, I think, also this ethnic assertion, which, fortunately, the government recognized.

NASH: Did there come a point in your life personally when you --what I have understood from you is there was a point in your life when you were escaping your ethnic identity. At what point did you begin to go the other way? Well, that is a good question. I was in my early day what might be called an intellectual cosmopolitan. After must understand. I came to this country at the age of seven. At the age of 21 I was teaching English and English Literature at City College. So in 14 years I had assimilated enough of this new culture to be appointed to teach it on the college level, and that is an indication, one of accomplishment, and also indication perhaps of my eagerness to escape from the specific culture I had brought with me. Now I remember, for example, when i was teaching at City College in the early or even as a student, as a student I had no difficulty swallowing anti-Semitism. When i came across it in the the esthetics were more important than the fact that this was vicious and anti-Semitic. So I was a product, up to a certain point, of the process of compulsory assimilation or the offers of rewards, if you would deculturate yourself. Now my change was brought about in part by the fact that my wife, or the girl who became my wife, had been brought up in a culturally ethnic-oriented home. Her parents were conscious of the importance of

Yiddish culture. She, in fact, was sent to a Yiddish cultural school where she studied Yiddish. It was called the in the Bronx, and her mother was widely read in Russian literature and in Yiddish literature, and had read many things of American literature and Yiddish translation. And this was an entirely different atmosphere from the home atmosphere I had, which was formerly Jewish religious, but without much of a cultural consciousness except a folk culture, folk sayings, folklore and so on I got from my home environment. now I remember once, this was around 1927, I was a senior in college at the time, or 1928 maybe, the girl who became my wife and I had been out late one Saturday night in Central Park when it was safe to be in Central Park late at night, and among other things we had been talking and I recall we were in a furious argument as to whether I am Jewish or not. And at one point she sat down on the curb of Fifth Avenue and Central Park, somewhere in the 80s and insisted that she wouldn't get up until I admitted that I was Jewish. And I was arguing that well, Jewish birth was incidental. I had nothing to do with it and I could make my own choices and so on, which indicates the far extreme to which the pressure to assimilate had led me. Now, she brought me into an environment where Jewish culture was more meaningful and then came also a political awareness. When the theory of cultural pluralism was developed by Horace Callam under the slogan, "The melting pot versus imperialism," when I became an anti-imperialist, I also extended this to anti-assimilationist, anti-compulsory assimilation, so that I then began to question my parents more about their background and to ask them things, come home with all kinds of curiosity, which before I had been indifferent to, and in fact this brought me closer to my father and mother than I had been before because now I was interested in them as individuals of a specific cultural background. And then, you see, the residue from the past served me in good stead. I had learned the Yiddish alphabet when I was attending a --when I was getting private instruction to be prepared for bar mitzvah, so I knew the Yiddish alphabet. I hadn't used it, but when I became interested in Yiddish literature, the fact that I had known the Yiddish alphabet and had been able to speak a hamish or homely kind of Yiddish at home was a help in giving me an orientation and facilitating my development of my ability to read and write and speak in Yiddish.

NASH: You were the boy who moved away from your mother on the train when she would read the Yiddish newspaper?

SCHAPPES: That's right. Incidentally, then when I started reading the Yiddish newspaper, i was teaching at City College, I would almost do it deliberately. I would deliberately read a Yiddish newspaper, and I have had experiences in the subway where people, usually women sitting alone beside me, would express amazement who looked as if I could speak

English, what was I doing reading a Yiddish newspaper, so that this was a kind of reassertion. More or less a conscious --I could have read the *Times* just as easily, but I wanted to demonstrate --

NASH: You started teaching English and you wound your way up to Jewish.

SCHAPPES: That's right, yes. See, I want to come back to the question of bilingualism. There was no such program that the man put forward in the 1910s, '20s, or '30s. There we took for granted that the language of instruction was to be English. Yet, looking back upon it and reading studies in educational history about the problems of immigrants and that generation or those generations, I fink there was a great deal of a great deal of delinquency, a great deal of dropping out. The truant officer was always around the school trying to find what was what and so on, and

I suspect that the rate of failure was significant. Now this total picture was counter to the propaganda picture or the promoter's picture, you know, that all the Jews on the East Side were bright boys, they all became doctors and dentists and lawyers and so on. that isn't so. There are a great many dropouts, a great many who became workers. This was before, incidentally, when I was of that age you could get your working papers when you were 13. You didn't have to finish high school. That came much later when the level of leaving school was raised to 16, so that a great many students, I am sure, found the difficulty of getting an education in English such that they dropped out and went into lines of work that did not require education. Also, I was aware dimly, of course, or crime in the Jewish community. that is there were people who were thieves and so on, and I heard about the, and an they were rough people and all that. There may have been some prostitution which I wasn't aware of until afterwards when I began to read about it. But they did develop in the Jewish community on the East Side and elsewhere, the element of gangsterism with finally blossomed out into murder incorporated, and that was a phenomenon which, I am sure, is related to the fact that here were poor kids who turned to crime because they couldn't make it in a legitimate way, and that was one of the things, so that today it seems to me the whole emphasis on bilingualism is very healthy in a social and psychological sense, and you don't compel the individual to make choices when there is no rationale for the choice. He ought to be able to live with both, and he ought to be able to get an education in the language with which he is most familiar while he is learning the other. So that now when I find that on the ballot you have spanish and English instructions, I think that is all to the good. When I go to the public library and find directional signs in Spanish and English where you can fink this and that, where you can go to the toilet and where you can find this department and so on in Spanish and English, I think that is all to the good. It certainly gives those who speak Spanish more of a feeling that they are legitimate than if you didn't have that before. so I am all for the expansion of this kind of program and for the proper financing of it and for the development of the proper teaching personnel because I think that we can go much further in helping people develop if we take them in their entirety as a whole rather than trying to fragmentize them and say this is important, forget about the other.

NASH: I would like to ask you how you got from teaching English to teaching Jewish history because it seems like that followed the patterns of your assimilation, dissimilation.

SCHAPPES: Alright. Now I taught English Literature, but then I began to read. I became under the impetus of political education and then conscious of the importance of nationality. One of the guides, of course, was my interest in the negro question and the black question and the situation of the black people. In fact, I think the first non-Jewish home I went into was the home of a college classmate of mine who was a filipino, spoke Spanish, and lived in Harlem. I met him. His name was Ramiriz. I used to go up the Spanish Museum which was not far from City College on 155th Street and Broadway. Of course, I was studying Spanish in school. And there I met him and once he invited me to his home in Harlem, and it was a rather stiff and formal thing, but it was interesting that he extended the invitation. I took it and we became friends in college while we were still in college. Now my interest in the national question off in a variety of things. For instance, in the English Department there was one course in American Literature. It was taught by a Mid-Westerner, very genial, popular teacher named William Bradley Otis. He was from Iowa. He was the first Mid-Westerner

I met. He was a friendly person, and friendly to us young teachers too, and he knew the gulf between my background and his background and he tried to bridge it on the basis of geniality and camaraderie. Now, some of us young people in the department began to press for more study of American Literature. We didn't see why there should be 30 courses in English Literature and only one in American Literature. We felt this was a slighting of American culture, American nationality, and we put up a battle for that. Now also I became alert through my process of political maturation to the meaning of anti-Semitism so that tin class when I taught Chaucer I pointed out what the anti-Semitism was and how vicious it was, and in The Merchant of Venice I made clear that this was an anti-Semitic, vicious play and so on. and I no longer was indifferent to, and could swallow anti-Semitism if it came in a cultural wrapper with a big poet's name attached to it and so on. Now then on the campus we became alert to anti-Semitism and to Jim Crow, to racism. for example, I remember there was a showing at City College of The Birth of a Nation, and some of us on the faculty objected on the ground that this was an anti-negro racist film, and we got the authorities and the students involved in producing the film, or in exhibiting the film, to allow me to speak in the intermission about the distortion of history and the anti-black features of the play. At the same time we raised a howl about some of the work of Jerome Wideman, and I Can Get it for You Wholesale, and so on, which we recognized as a book that had anti-Semitic edges and we would discuss that on the campus in the student newspaper and faculty circles and so on so that we became much more conscious of all aspects of the national question, with the negro question predominant, except for the struggle against anti-Semitism. We found that in the Spanish Department, for example, there are a couple of anti-Semitic teachers and we exposed that fact and the students became alarmed and also kinds of hearings were held on it and so on. then I began to read American Jewish literature in English and began to realize that in American literature too there was an ethnic strain. There was a book by John Macey, An Anthology of Writing in American Literature, and he had a chapter on Yiddish literature, which was amazing. I think he also had other chapters on the literatures of other immigrant groups, and this was important. In 1941, when I was separated from teaching at City College, I began to intensify my studies of American-Jewish literature and American-Jewish history, so that my first book was on Emma Lazarus. Now, I had been studying Emily Dickinson before that. The reason I couldn't continue has to do with the social context too. I became aware early that those who had edited her poems, members of her family chiefly, had tampered with the lines, had prettied them up and tried to make them other than she had written in her manuscript. I published an article in the Lernin Journal called "American Literature," in which I listed the errors in certain family editions of Emily Dickinson. When this was published, the Dickinson family barred its doors to me. They would no longer let me pursue my --I was going to do a doctoral dissertation on the poetry of Emily dickinson, and since they still owned the copyright, I was frozen out, and I therefore had to drop that work and instead of picking up something else, I dropped out of my doctoral work because I was more interested in economic and political struggles on the campus. We built a trade union, we built an ant-fascist association, we collaborated with the students in various student activities, and this brought down an attack upon us by the Ralph Cudair Committee, which caused the dismissal of about 40 teachers at City College and a score or more and Brooklyn, Hunter, Queens, and so on. It was a kind of forerunner of McCarthyism. This was a state version of McCarthyism in the 1940s, while McCarthy came along in the 1950s. So when I found myself out of a job of teaching english, I turned to a second career in American-Jewish literature, then in American-Jewish history.

NASH: How old were you then?

SCHAPPES: 1941, I was 34, and since then I have published four or five books in the field and established a new authority in that so that when the History Department at Queens College was looking for a man to teach American-Jewish History, I was a natural for them because my books had indicated my authoritative standing in that. So you have the full cycle. Now also, of course, I expressed my ethnic identification on progressive lines through the magazine, through the magazine, Jewish Currents, of which I am the full time Editor and Chief.

NASH: When did you begin with the Jewish Currents.

SCHAPPES: 1946, and this magazine is now 29 years old, which is something for a struggling magazine to endure all this time. It outlived many others who have come and gone. And what we tried to do was to bring to the Jews who could no longer read Yiddish or who could read Yiddish but not well, a consciousness of American-Jewish identity and culture and history in the English language. We do some translations from the Yiddish, Yiddish poetry and prose, and other material, but our work is in English and is aimed at the more Americanized or more deculturated Jews who are the product of the process of compulsory, of incomplete compulsory assimilation. So that what was knocked out often was the language and then other things trailed along with that. And it is interesting that there are in this country over one hundred periodicals published in English about Jews. In the field of English-Jewish journalism there are over a hundred weeklies, monthlies, biweeklies, and so on.

NASH: In Yiddish and in English?

SCHAPPES: In English. And in Yiddish there are two daily newspapers still published, there are weekly Yiddish newspapers and periodicals, monthlies, quarterlies, and so on, so there is still a strong base of Yiddish, and incidentally, there is now a kind of revival. A Swedish-American immigrant named Theodore C. Blagen developed the theory that the grandchildren tend to return to the culture of the grandparents. They don't feel as indifferent to it as the parent generation did.

NASH: Everywhere or just in the United States?

SCHAPPES: Well, this was his observation in the U>S., and the basis of our conditions of development, and you see something of this in this ethnic upsurge that cuts across ethnic lines but has its own specificity. So a few years ago I saw for the first time there was an exhibit in this city of Italian-American artists. Never before had there been that. There had been Italian-American artists who exhibited individually, but this was a group show reflecting again a level of ethnic identification that is modern. When I get my students in class in the beginning of each term, I ask them why they are taking the course now. And I get the usual unperceptive answers that, well, it fits into my program and so on, and I couldn't take it last year because I had a conflict with some other course I wanted to take. But I try to get them to see that they take the course now, first because it is available, and five years ago it wasn't and ten years ago it wasn't, and that the availability of these ethnic studies programs is a product of recent developments with the big dynamic blow, the growth of black studies. When that began to take hold in the colleges, then Jews and Italians and Irish began to say, "Well, why not Jewish studies and Italian studies," and there was this impetus so that the Jewish studies programs owe a great deal, even though there is tension between blacks and

Jews, they owe a great deal to the pathbreaking role of black studies and opening up this question on a higher plain than ever before.

NASH: Well, it seems like every aspect of your career, you could explore why did this happen, and one would learn a great deal about the experiences of American Jews and ethnic groups in particular in this century. I mean how each thing closed and opened for you. Well, I guess we could go on and on, but, okay, thank you.