

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH MELVYN L. FEIN

CONDUCTED, EDITED, AND INDEXED BY THOMAS A. SCOTT

for the

KSU ORAL HISTORY SERIES, NO. 135

MONDAY, 6 JUNE 2016

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KSU Oral History Series, No. 135
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Conducted, edited, and indexed by Thomas A. Scott
Monday, 6 June 2016
Location: Sturgis Library, Kennesaw State University

- TS: This is June 6, 2016, D-Day plus seventy-two years. Today I'm interviewing Mel Fein. Mel is a professor of sociology at Kennesaw State and has been here since 1991. Mel, let me start the interview with your background and especially your educational background. I know that you grew up in New York City and went to Brooklyn College for your undergraduate degree. Why don't you talk about your background? I know too in your most recent book, *Unlocking Your Inner Courage: Five Strategies to Achieve the Life You Want and the World We Need* [Prometheus Books 2016], you talked a good deal about where you were growing up and how it shaped your beliefs and fears and what have you.
- MF: When I was growing up I didn't know what I wanted to be. Initially, my first vocation of choice was to be, believe it or not, a rabbi. But when I ceased believing in God that was not really a viable option.
- TS: That would be a problem. There may be a few that are.
- MF: Not many.
- TS: Probably not. So did you go to synagogue regularly as a child?
- MF: No, as a matter of fact. I was bar mitzvahed and I did the training, but before my bar mitzvah was when I ceased believing.
- TS: That early?
- MF: That early.
- TS: Like twelve years old?
- MF: Twelve years old. The last time I prayed and really meant it I was eleven years old.
- TS: What happened?
- MF: Well, then I switched. My father was an electronic engineer who had never gone to college. My idea—and I never would have said this out loud—was to take him one better and to become a physicist. I was a good student, so I decided I would be a physicist. I went to Brooklyn College, and that first term I discovered that I loathed and despised physics. There was no way I was going to be a physicist. Then I tried chemistry with equally poor results. So I knocked around, trying psychology and various other things, until I found philosophy, which was going to help me to understand what life was all about and to be able to deal with issues on a level beyond what I learned at home. It was actually quite interesting to me in part because my professors, especially the man I

considered my mentor, Martin Lean, was an analytic philosopher who had been trained in the University of Cambridge in England. He was very good and opened my eyes and helped me understand that I didn't understand what the world was all about and that I needed to be a little bit more modest. Mind you, that does not come easily to me. He taught me that there were things I did not know and that I needed to learn.

TS: Do you sympathize with students now who think they know it all?

MF: Actually I do, assuming that they have a little bit of humility. Some of them have no humility at all, and you can't open their eyes. Those folks I tolerate because I know where they're coming from, but I'm hoping that something will open their eyes.

TS: They're set in their ways. So you had humility then?

MF: A little bit. Let's not overestimate it, okay? At one point, honest to God, I was attempting to write my first book, and I was immodestly calling it *Finite Philosophy*.

TS: That's almost a pun of your name.

MF: That's exactly what it was. I did a little psychology and what-have-you. Then I fully intended to get my doctorate degree in philosophy and become a professor of philosophy. I actually started a master's course program at Brooklyn College, which was also analytical in its orientation. Quite frankly, by that time I had become a star. I knew that kind of philosophy very well and expected to do well. The question was where would I go for my doctorate. I had two offers, one from the University of Nebraska, which would give me a decent amount of money, the other from Wisconsin without money. But Wisconsin had a better reputation, and so I went with Wisconsin. To my chagrin I discovered they were not into analytic philosophy. Then I made this other very painful discovery, and that is in philosophy there was no way to settle disputes between people. If you disagreed, there was nowhere you could go to figure out what the issue was.

TS: I would think not.

MF: So a) they were not going to accept me, and b) I was not going to simply change to accommodate them. So I decided that I had to drop out. Mind you, this was during the middle of the Vietnam War, and without a student deferment that meant a quick trip to the army. Basically, what I did was I got into the National Guard in Wisconsin, got trained initially as a cook in the army, and then, when I went back to New York City, [President Lyndon B.] Johnson changed the rules for the National Guard. You see, the rules had been that if you moved from one outfit to a different place, and there was no similar unit there, that you would be on an administrative list, and you wouldn't do anything.

TS: There's no National Guard in New York?

MF: There was a National Guard, but you didn't have to do anything. You would be on the list, and you'd be safe, and you'd be okay. Then Johnson said, "No, if you're only on a list we're bringing you back to regular duty. You have got to find yourself another outfit."

TS: So you found another outfit?

MR: I found a reserve outfit, and they required that I get additional training initially as an artillery mechanic. Then, ultimately, I became an armorer for my unit.

TS: Armorer?

MF: Armorer. I was in charge of all the weapons, don't you see? It seems so out of character, but it is true.

TS: So in the National Guard you did six months of active duty, and how much time of reserves?

MF: It was a total of six years.

TS: So your bachelor's degree is 1963, so this is like '64 to '70?

MF: No, the year after I graduated, I was still in Brooklyn [in graduate school], and the year and a half after that I was in Wisconsin, so we're talking about '66 now. After I dropped out of graduate school I came back to New York. I had no idea of what to do.

TS: So you spent a year and a half on a master's program after a year on a master's program at Brooklyn, but you still didn't have a master's degree?

MF: I spent a year and a half on a doctoral program after a year . . .

TS: Oh, and they were just going to give you the master's at a certain point in your doctoral studies?

MF: It never got to there because . . .

TS: You didn't get that far?

MF: It was mutual by then. I didn't like them, and they didn't like me.

TS: What exactly is analytic philosophy?

MF: Analytic philosophy is associated with the names of [Ludwig] Wittgenstein and John L. Austin and John Wisdom, and folks of that sort. The idea is that an awful lot of the philosophical puzzles are actually linguistic puzzles. If you understand the quirks of language, you understand that many of the issues are not really real. Let's put it this way. John Austin, for example, talks about how the word "reality" is what he calls a trouser word. It doesn't wear the pants. In other words, in order to understand the word "reality," you have to understand that it comes from the word "real" and that "real" is actually a derivative of many things. It's real, not phony, it's real, not dishonest, it's real, not a story—in other words it's real as opposed to what it is not. The meaning comes from what it is not. When you understand that, then you realize that the word reality doesn't have the substance to it that you think it has, and a search for reality isn't the search for anything. It's a simple linguistic confusion.

Their idea is that there are lots and lots of those linguistic confusions, and that what you need to understand is the nature of these things. This may sound trivial to you, but it goes back to such issues as the conflict between the realists and the nominalists in the Middle Ages. Are words something that signifies an external reality or are they simply names for some things? Well then if you start saying, "Are they names for some things," you get the impression that every word matches some object out there. But what the analytic people would say is, "Wait a minute now. Language is more complicated than that." It's a question of how you use it. They don't always talk about things. The simplest example is many words are what they call performatives. They don't describe reality. If I say during a wedding ceremony, "I now pronounce you man and wife," you're not describing a reality. You're doing something in the saying. In other words, there are lots of variations in what words do that help you understand what's going on apart from the grand philosophical visions.

TS: Okay, at a certain point you decide you can't ever resolve anything finally?

MF: I certainly couldn't resolve it with the folks in Wisconsin. I dropped out, came back to New York, had no idea what to do, and tried a number of different jobs that went badly. Was in a relationship, a live-in relationship that went badly, okay. This was cohabitation before it was fashionable. I was ahead of my time. I didn't know it then, but I was.

TS: All right. "Immoral Mel Fein."

MF: You got it! I went to Dr. Lean, whom I considered my mentor, explained that I had no idea what to do, and he in the process of talking to me said, "You know, when I was your age and was having problems, I went into psychotherapy, and it helped me." I was amazed. I was dumbstruck. I considered Lean one of the sanest human beings I had ever met.

TS: Oh, you couldn't believe he went through psychotherapy?

MF: The attitude in my family was psychotherapy is for crazy people. My father always called me crazy. To go to therapy would have been to confirm his accusations. So I had never considered psychotherapy until Lean said, "Hey, you know, it helped me." I went, "Whoa, if it's good enough for him, it's good enough for me." So I went into psychotherapy, and I stayed there for six years. That really was a turning point in my life. It was not until then that I had I attempted to look inside and understand myself, and it began a project that I have continued ever since. I did all kinds of things during this period to survive. I worked at a methadone clinic. I worked in a group home for emotionally disturbed boys. I worked for the welfare department. I drove a cab. I worked as a newspaper reporter. I did market research.

TS: I was thinking that paying for psychotherapy is not cheap.

JF: You're exactly right. I went to a group. I could afford it but not much more.

TS: Right, because you were living frugally.

MF: I was living very modestly. You better believe it. I was busy exploring, not knowing what I wanted to do.

TS: You know, some people go to a rabbi for counseling, and it's a lot cheaper.

MF: Yes, but it wouldn't have worked for me.

TS: Right, okay.

MF: I'm busy trying to figure out what to do when I grow up, what to be when I grow up.

TS: I hate to interrupt you because you're on a role, but you wrote a nice column in the paper [*Marietta Daily Journal*] about your commonalities with Bernie Sanders the other day. I just wondered if you could reflect a little bit on that culture. Was it Brooklyn where you grew up?

MF: I grew up in Brooklyn.

TS: Was it a Jewish culture?

MF: It's a Jewish culture. Everyone I knew was liberal, actually socialist. All my teachers were socialistic certainly in high school. My two best friends in college were both initially very liberal. The two of them switched from philosophy to economics, and in the process one became conservative and the other a libertarian. They both incidentally went on to get their PhDs in economics. One of them became a professor at UCLA and was even nominated by somebody for the Nobel Prize in Economics. So he was not chopped liver. The other friend is a distinguished professor of economics in New Orleans right now. Both of them did very nicely, thank you. When we graduated, during the year I was following the master's program, we roomed together. We argued about politics and economics incessantly night after night until six in the morning. You will understand that I can be a pretty stubborn person. The two of them were against me, and I held out for an entire year.

TS: At this time they were very left wing?

MF: Very right wing.

TS: Right wing. So you were arguing from the left?

MF: I argued the left wing, and the big fight, the one that persisted over the whole time, was rent control.

TS: Rent control? Oh, you wanted it, and they didn't? They were libertarians?

MF: Exactly. Rent control. "The landlord can't keep up the buildings; they will go to rack and ruin." I'm saying, "These folks are monsters. You have to control them."

TS: You were Bernie Sanders?

MF: I was Bernie Sanders to a tee. That's why I understood him.

TS: It's fascinating to me because it is absolutely totally opposite of the background that I grew up in.

MF: I grew up this way, and, mind you, they opened my eyes, through our discussions. I had to pause and think. Prior to dealing with them I thought all intellectuals were liberal. I had never heard of Friedrich Hayek. I'd never heard of Ludwig von Mises. I didn't know any of them existed at all. I didn't even know about Mr. Friedman.

TS: Milton Friedman?

MF: Now mind you when my friend Ben went out to get his doctorate at University of Chicago, and I was in Wisconsin. . .

TS: Oh, he was a Friedman student at Chicago?

MF: I came in and sat in on Friedman's classes, and I said, "Whoa! This guy is not an idiot. This monetary policy is an intellectual thing." This was what started me on the road to changing to become a conservative. First I felt betrayed by the folks who had educated me that they had given me one side of the story and made me feel it was the only side of the story. Then I realized that their arguments weren't nearly as strong as they thought they were. Mind you, it took me a full decade before I would say to myself that I was a conservative because I felt like I was betraying my roots and my family.

TS: Why do you think that everybody was so liberal in Brooklyn?

MF: Because of the whole experience.

TS: You mean the Jewish experience coming out of Russia, Ukraine, or wherever?

MF: It was considered a rational way to gain liberty from the system. Remember what the socialists promised. They promised equality for everybody. This is one of their basic tenets. This was going to be for Jews too. My grandfather on my mother's side came to the United States just before World War I. He came because he was afraid that he was going to be drafted into the Tsarist army, and that would be for a period of twenty years.

TS: He probably would have been.

MF: That's exactly right. He was coming for freedom. On the other side my grandparents came in 1898.

TS: On your father's side.

MF: On my father's side. They came to get away from the 1898 pogroms in Bialystok, Poland.

TS: Where in Poland?

MF: Bialystok. It's a name of a roll actually too. It's a major city in Poland. So they came to get away.

TS: I've never understood, I'm amazed, what's the word for it, that you can do something like *Fiddler on the Roof* and make it so light and uplifting about something so horrible.

MF: I said it in the *Courage* book, and I didn't realize it until years later how gracefully my mother's father handled this whole thing and this whole transition, how much of a change it had been for them, but I never heard a complaint about it.

TS: Did they talk about it?

MF: Very little. I only learned tangentially that they had been in touch with their relatives in Ukraine until the Second World War. Then after the war they were all gone. Then there was no talk about it. My grandmother never learned to talk English well, but she learned to talk some English because they had a roomer to make ends meet, a man named Charlie Ross. I always thought Charlie Ross was Jewish. It turned out he was German. He wasn't Jewish at all. He was a German Christian.

TS: Why did you think he was Jewish?

MF: He was my grandparents' friend!

TS: Oh, they didn't have any friends that weren't Jewish?

MF: They could speak together in Yiddish and whatever.

TS: He could speak Yiddish?

MF: No, he could speak German, and Yiddish is just a bastardized form of German, so they could communicate. My grandparents were not religious. I'll give you another example from my grandparents from my mother's side. My grandfather used to barbeque in his backyard, and he made these delicious shishkabobs, lamb shishkabobs, and I just thought, wow, great Jewish shishkabobs. No, he got the recipe from his Greek neighbor! My grandfather on that side was actually atheist. While I was still studying for my bar mitzvah I did the Passover service and he came over and he laughed through the whole thing. He thought it was hilarious. Then on the other hand he was conscious of the discrimination. When he came to the United States, he talked about having been treated like a green horn. And he was called a Kike and whatever, but he took it all in stride, and he ultimately started his own business and raised a family. He was a hard-working man working with his hands, not an intellectual. Although I must say from the time I was a little boy he called me a philosopher.

TS: Really? How about that? Because even then you were . . .

MF: Because I was an intellectual little kid. I was a smart little kid, you know, and it was like . . .

TS: Why didn't you get along with your father, do you think?

MF: I can tell you the story if you want to know.

TS: Well, not unless you want to tell.

MF: My father was a very difficult man.

TS: You did talk about this in your book.

MF: Yes. He beat me; he beat me from infancy. My father was a man who could not be contradicted. This was a man who among other things suffered from dyslexia. He didn't understand and didn't know why, as bright as he was, there were some things he couldn't do. I didn't understand until afterwards that his problem was his mother. His mother was apparently a bitch on wheels, and I'm pretty sure she must have beat him. From multiple sources I got the impression that she was a bit crazy. His father was apparently a wonderful man. The mother, the one who raised him, had eight kids. He never learned to deal with these issues. He never learned to control his temper. He could not brook a disagreement. Certainly, disagreeing with him taught me how to debate. That's one of the reasons I'm so good at it.

TS: Were you the first child?

MF: Yes.

TS: I can see that.

MF: Yes, obviously.

TS: What about him? I bet he wasn't.

MF: No, he was not the first child; he was number five. There were four girls and then four boys. He was the eldest boy, so a lot was expected of him. Nonetheless he had four older sisters.

TS: So he had trouble dealing with the first child anyway probably.

MF: Yes, and apparently he was closest to his second sister whom I understand was hell on wheels also.

TS: So you had an unhappy childhood.

MF: I had a miserably unhappy childhood. I knew I was unhappy going through it. It was a matter of keeping my head down, so that I didn't get beaten, so I didn't get killed. My father would have lost control, I mean . . .

TS: Did he drink?

MF: No, he did not drink.

TS: So he's sober and doing that?

MF: Oh, I think I explained it in there, I can still close my eyes . . .

TS: When you say "in there" you're talking about *Unlocking Your Inner Courage*.

MF: I can still close my eyes and see him with his face beet red, eyes bulging out of his head, gnashing his teeth, temples throbbing, holding himself back as best he could, so he didn't let loose and really kill me. When I was in therapy a second time the therapist wondered was it true, or was I making this memory up?

TS: That's a good question.

MF: I asked my mother for a picture of me when I was an infant, and she sent me a little picture of me as a one-year old baby, and I showed it to the therapist. She said, "This is an unhappy baby." And I was.

TS: And your mother was so traditional that she put up with everything?

MF: My mother was terrified herself. She was terrified of him.

TS: Did he beat her?

MF: He never touched her. When he was angry at her, he hit us kids, me first. So lots of times the sin was not mine; it was hers. I could never predict these things. Something happened at work, and I got it, and what did I do? I remember saying to myself over and over again, "What did I do, I didn't do anything!" My goal growing up was simply not to die. That was my goal, pure and simple.

TS: I'm surprised you didn't go off somewhere else to college.

MF: I had no money and I was terrified. I told in the book, I was afraid of my own shadow. It was like, "Oh, my gosh, I can't do anything. I don't have any skills. I don't understand the world. I know these people are not treating me well, but what is my option?"

TS: It sounds to me like Professor Lean may have picked up on some of this when he suggested therapy.

MF: I think he probably did. I am eternally grateful to him for having done this because I did not start to become my own person until I moved in with my friends after I graduated from undergraduate. We roomed together, and it was such a liberating experience. I didn't think I could survive. They didn't think they could survive. And I'll never forget our first trip to the supermarket. We bought the cheapest of everything that you possibly could and discovered that actually we could afford a little more and live well. Then it was such a liberating experience. I was terrified to leave but after I left, I never looked back. I was never tempted to go home, ever, under any circumstances.

TS: I guess with you being in the reserves all those years you were not a longhaired hippie.

MF: I was decidedly not a longhaired hippie. I was always a reasonable person. During my undergraduate years, this is a small story: I and my friends found a political group to try to bring peace to the world. We called ourselves the Goldfish because we did not want a more political name. We interacted with the SDS [Students for a Democratic Society] people, but we were decidedly not SDS.

TS: There was SDS before '63?

MF: Oh yes, absolutely. In Brooklyn they had deep roots, socialism everywhere. But it struck me that these folks were just unreasonable people. It was like we didn't want to be them. So we were going to be reasonable in our quest for peace. I was actually the president of

the group. At one point we went to the Russian mission to the United Nations to explain the virtues of disarmament.

TS: Oh, I'm sure they were impressed.

MF: Actually they treated us wonderfully. They ushered us into a big conference room, they gave us sodas, and they listened patiently. Then they explained that we didn't understand. "Russia is a peace-loving country," they said. "The problem is the United States. You really need to talk to your own government." I've had an interesting career [laughs].

TS: You've got to go through a sophomore phase before you can move on.

MF: That's exactly right. This is one of the things I've learned. One of the things that influences my attitudes here at KSU. People need time to explore. They need to have time to figure things out. You've got to let people come to these things themselves. You can't tell them and expect them to come along. If they do, even if they say, yes, it's temporary because the next wind that blows from another direction will take them there. So I'm very in tune to that.

TS: When did you become a clinical sociologist?

MF: Well, I was in therapy for six years. I was in all kinds of different jobs. "What am I going to do? Okay, let me become a clinician." So in fact I took some courses at the psychoanalytical training institutes in New York City. I had a lot of Freud and other things too of that genre mostly. I had done other things. I had discovered some of my dreams like being a newspaper reporter wasn't going to work out. It was not what I thought it was. Okay, what can I do? The only thing I knew how to do was to help people, so how can I help them best? Okay, I really need to go and get that PhD. What will I get in? I was already very well versed in psychotherapy and psychology and had developed some very real clinical skills working in places like a methadone clinic. I was very good. It surprises people because I talk so much, but I'm actually a very good listener. One of the things that I learned in therapy myself is that the trick is to get people to open their eyes, not to tell them. One of the best ways to do that is to listen in a way that encourages people to be open and honest and that among other things this means you've got to be trustworthy. You can't be phony. It's got to be for real because people will test you. I had developed those skills and was quite good at it and figured, "Let me go and get a degree that will enable me to do this." I toyed with the idea of psychology, but I figured that what I was really missing was my understanding of people's social backgrounds. Working at places like methadone and welfare had taught me that people came from backgrounds that were very different from my own.

TS: So sociology gives you the context to understand their psychology.

MF: Exactly. We are psychological animals, but we're also social animals, we're psychosocial animals. The two interact. The emphasis has been on the psychological, but if you don't understand the social, you're missing half of the equation. I decided to go in and become a clinical sociologist, but there was no such program. I went to the City University of New York for the degree and essentially created my own program.

TS: Is that right?

MF: Yes. Taking an internship, for example, in a community mental health center in Brooklyn and learning to do, of all things believe it or not, child psychology and play therapy.

TS: What year did you start that? I know you got a Master of Philosophy in '81 and Ph.D. in '83.

MF: I think I went back in '74 or '75, something like that. Maybe even '76. It was a while.

TS: Mid-seventies?

MF: Mid-seventies I went back and didn't finish my coursework until '79.

TS: So you're working and taking classes part-time?

MF: Initially part-time and then full-time. I decided, "Okay, let me go and get this thing done."

TS: That should have prepared you to deal with the non-traditional student we have.

MF: It certainly did. There were a lot of non-traditional students besides myself at CUNY. It was new then. It was a mixed bag at the time.

TS: That's about the time when they actually started charging tuition there, wasn't it?

MF: I got through paying basically very little. I had to take out some student loans, but it was still very, very modest. Actually, one of my professors that I worked with was studying open admissions to the university system, so I learned something about that. I learned something as well about recidivism and rehabilitation programs and what-have-you. I studied socialization, I studied education, and I studied organization. Those were my specialties.

TS: What do you think was the driving force in your wanting to help people? For a lot of people it would be a religious motivation, but not for you. Do you think your Jewish heritage in any way influenced that or where did it come from?

MF: Maybe a little bit, certainly psychotherapy is a Jewish thing. But I think it's a Jewish thing in part because of the whole repression that goes with the Jewish tradition. My family was not open about expressing emotions at all. I remember in psychotherapy . . .

TS: Oh, they're repressed within the family.

MF: Oh gosh, yes. Very repressed. Guilt, guilt, guilt. To me it's was only Jewish guilt. Catholic guilt, what are you talking about? Jewish guilt is the real thing. Repressed all the way. I remember in therapy, certainly the theme for at least a year and a half was something like this, "Okay, you've told me what you think. Now tell me what you feel." I would tell my therapist over and over again what I thought, never what I felt because when the feelings came out they were not nice. It was simple terror.

TS: Terror?

MF: Terror, that's the only way to describe it, terror. I learned how to deal with these things from the inside out. One of the things that's different between me and a lot of academics, especially in sociology, is I lived through a lot of this stuff. I've been in the homes of poor people. I've been a therapy. I've been on both sides of the couch.

TS: Okay, so you plod ahead. It's still called a master of philosophy degree instead of an MA.

MF: No, when I went back to school in sociology after I finished my comprehensives they said to me, "Would you like to have a master's in philosophy?" And I said, "Sure," and it was as simple as that.

TS: So basically when you passed your comps.

MF: When I passed my comps.

TS: Then they gave you a master's, and instead of an MA they called it a master of philosophy.

MF: Whatever it was.

TS: That's what the catalogue says.

MF: Whatever it is. I pay it no mind because it was just a piece of paper along the way.

TS: I got you. But you're studying to be . . .

MF: I'm studying for the PhD, pure and simple.

TS: I see. What did you write your dissertation on?

MF: I actually wrote a column about this. I don't know which paper or period, but I think I was talking about why I left New York City. I was finishing up at the graduate center and living in Brooklyn and commuting an hour and a half each way on the subway, which is never fun, standing up, noisy, cold, going to the train. There's a guy on the car with his boom box on his shoulder playing it as loud as he could. I thought he was a mean looking fellow, so everyone stayed away. About three stations later another guy comes into the other end of the car with an even bigger boom box, and they began to play dueling radios. I am standing there saying to myself, "There has to be a better way to live." That's when I decided to leave New York City. So as soon as I finished my course work I got a job doing vocational counseling at a psychiatric hospital in Rochester, New York. Now, I'm applying what I have learned in graduate school, what I have learned in psychotherapy, what I have learned working in methadone clinics and in welfare and in a group home for emotionally disturbed boys, and I'm doing it with clients in a psychiatric hospital behind closed doors. Nobody knew what I was doing, just me and my clients. I tried to figure out, okay, what's going on here, how can I really help these people. This is where I became in my opinion a genuine clinical sociologist where I was able to apply sociology to clinical issues in a way it hadn't been done before. But in many ways it had. What I did was really to re-conceptualize what was going on. A lot of the techniques

were really not that dissimilar, but I understood things differently than the traditional modalities.

TS: So nobody's looking over your shoulder?

MF: Nobody's looking over my shoulder, it's just me and my clients. I'm learning all kinds of stuff and helping all kinds of people. You asked what did I do my dissertation on? I did my dissertation while I was there, and basically it was a participant observation study. I did something similar to what Erving Goffman did when he wrote the book *Asylums: [Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates]*, one of the very famous books in sociology that I actually read before I went to work in the hospital. So that one gave me a model for what I could do in studying the hospital. So my dissertation was about how when people work with clients and judged clients, they were more likely to judge them in terms of their moral beliefs than in terms of any psychological theories or anything of that sort. It was like, having gone to work in the hospital, I discovered that my colleagues were not nearly as emotionally mature as I expected them to be. The books made it sound like these were going to be especially enlightened people, and too many of them had unresolved emotional issues.

It frightened me and angered me. I saw people using the clients for their own purposes. One of the things that upset me the most was when clients would make progress, and therapists who had still not resolved their issues would undermine the client because of their envy. They thought they would vicariously solve their own problems, and when they discovered they didn't, what they did is they took it out on the patients. It upset me no end. I had some people I worked with whom I respected. My immediate supervisors however were not among them. I got into conflict with one. I wrote that in the book too, where he took me into the central office to watch over me. So eventually after fighting them, I learned there are some things you can't fight in that kind of organization. I got sent from there to a community mental health center, where in fact I learned things that I could never learn in the psychiatric hospital. So in some ways it helped me out in the long run. But during this period my supervisor's supervisor's supervisor came to ask me what I was doing with the patients. I explained it to him. By this time I had developed what I call a resocialization paradigm and was having, as far as I could see, good success with it. I explained it to him, and then he said to me, "Stop it. Don't do it anymore." I said, "Why should I stop?" He said, "I don't understand it." I said, "If it's working, why shouldn't I?" He said, "I don't understand it; don't do it." I was like, oh, oh, oh. It was at that point that I realized that I had hit a brick wall. There would be no further growth sanctioned by this position. I was there for more than a decade, and I had learned a great deal in the process, but I'd gotten to the point where I realized they weren't going to permit me to go any further, and they weren't going to learn from what I had learned. I had surpassed them. I had gone farther. I had also tried something else. I had gone into an MSW program. I said, "Look, let me . . ."

TS: Master of Social Work?

MF: "Let me be able to get into MSW, so I can get third-party payments, and I can have a private practice." I already had a small private practice in my home. People paid me directly. But if I could get insurance, I could expand it. Once I went to the MSW

program I made the unhappy discovery that I knew more than the professors that were teaching me.

TS: I guess so after all the practical experience you had.

MF: It really was true. Some of them were intimidated by me, and there was a rigidity in the social workers. I did that for a year, and then I just couldn't do it anymore. I actually at one point rented an office, so that I could get out, be an independent clinician, and see what happened. I walked into that office and suddenly it felt like the walls were closing in on me. It was like, "Oh, no, I'm going to have to do this for the rest of my life. I don't want to do this for the rest of my life." It was similar to what I had when I was doing physics or when I was in philosophy. "Oh, no, I can't do this for the rest of my life." It was at that point that I realized that the old dream of becoming a college professor was still alive.

TS: When you say the old dream, when did you first have that dream?

MF: Well, going into college and then when I moved into philosophy and then the doctoral program.

TS: When you were at Wisconsin?

MF: I was in Wisconsin. I assumed that I would become a college professor. And then it was a dream that died, and I had no idea how to pick up the pieces. I went into therapy and did this world of exploration which most people never come anywhere near. Okay? I learned way more than I had known previously, way more than my parents or grandparents ever taught me. Their world was so much narrower than my own. Then I went to Wisconsin and learned stuff there and learned stuff from my friends. Eventually, by the time I got to this place, I thought, "Okay, I'm ready to try to see if I can get a college teaching job." The question was who would want me? My background is so peculiar. This is not a standard sociological background. I'm busy looking. By this time I had gotten involved with what was then called the Clinical Sociology Association. I was involved with other people who were doing various clinical things, but mostly with organizations. I was renewing my connections to sociology. I did research on who is looking for somebody remotely like me? Well, there were not any possibilities up in Rochester, New York where I was working and there were some possibilities down in this place called Georgia where I had never been there. My only connection with Georgia was I rode through on a bus once upon a time, and it was at night, and I saw nothing. So I knew nothing about Georgia.

TS: So you did that job up in Rochester for another eight years after you got your doctorate?

MF: Yes, roughly speaking, yes I did. That was actually not very pleasant either because the PhD meant nothing. I was surrounded by people who had master's degrees, and it was threatening to them. The only time I remember using it, I was initially uncomfortable calling myself a doctor. I was trying to get information from the welfare department, and they had always been so rude. This time I said, "This is Dr. Fein calling," and they fell over themselves trying to help me. So from then on, Dr. Fein, thank you. Now, I also

wrote and published my first book when I was still working there. Not only did that not impress them, they couldn't believe I wrote it! It was like, "Who the heck are you?!"

TS: So that was a good place to get out of.

MF: It was time to get out. Actually, my favorite uncle, Uncle Milton, was a bus driver.

TS: You mentioned him in your book.

MF: Yes, I loved him. He literally drove all the way up from New Jersey to Rochester to try to persuade me not to leave.

TS: Not to leave Rochester?

MF: No, not to leave my job. "It is a government job; it's security; it's a good pension. Don't be foolish. Stay. Be sensible." But I knew I had had enough.

TS: So you were applying to different places.

MF: I applied all over the bloody place.

TS: And Kennesaw was an answer?

MF: I had no idea where Kennesaw was or what it was. Actually, I had exactly two interviews. One was at John Carroll University in suburban Cleveland, which is a Jesuit school. I thought being a Jewish guy, actually, they were wonderful. I was their third choice. They had already pre-selected somebody, but they had to bring someone in. So they brought me in, but it was wonderful practice. Then I came down to Kennesaw. Mind you, that summer I had quit that job, and I was like, "Oh, my gosh, I've cut my tether, what the heck."

TS: I can understand Uncle Milton saying don't give up the job until you've got something else.

MF: He did say that, and it was a sensible thing, but I was fed up. So I came down here. My attitude by that time was if you don't want me for who I am, then I don't want you.

TS: Good philosophy.

MF: I was myself. They were looking, and this was a miracle. They were looking for a clinical sociologist. They were looking for a way to make sociology relevant. They had decided that clinical sociology was the way to go, and I had all this clinical experience. I had a book out, another one coming out, and I had developed an expertise in this thing. I let them know that I had the expertise because I did, and that was what they wanted. Mind you, before I came down here—I just wrote about this too—I looked at the map to see where is Kennesaw. It looked like this little town twenty miles north of Atlanta. That's what I was expecting, a little rural town. I was positively blown away. They picked me up at Windy Hill and put me onto I-75.

TS: Oh, because you road the shuttle from the airport to Windy Hill?

MF: Yes.

TS: They didn't send someone to the airport to pick you up?

MF: They didn't. And here is this highway that's eight lanes, and I'm going, "Wow!"

TS: In Georgia of all places. What did you think, that everybody was still barefoot down here?

MF: As a matter of fact, oh my gosh, here I am a Brooklyn Jew. I'm going to come into this rural area, and soon they're going to find out my background, and somebody's going to burn a cross on my front yard (laughter).

TS: Well, that was a culture shock.

MF: The culture shock was learning how mistaken northern attitudes were towards southerners. That was the shock to discover that what I thought I was going to run into was utterly different from what I actually found. It still amazes me when I run into northern attitudes towards southerners, the notion that somehow southerners are stupid and don't know anything and they're all a bunch of rednecks who are ready to lynch as many blacks as they can get away with.

TS: Had you ever heard of Leo Frank before you came down here?

MF: I had, but I didn't know the details. My wife [Linda A. Treiber] just finished reading the book about Leo Frank, so she's been giving me a blow by blow account, the history of it.

TS: Steve Oney's book [*And the Dead Shall Rise: The Murder of Mary Phagan and the Lynching of Leo Frank* (Pantheon, 2003)]?

MF: Yes.

TS: That's a good book.

MF: Yes, so she tells me.

TS: I mean, I have a little prejudice against journalists writing history, and he doesn't have the background knowledge of what had been written in the past on the topic the way say Leonard Dinnerstein [*The Leo Frank Case* (1968; revised edition, University of Georgia Press, 2008)] does. But in terms of the details of the case, nobody has done more research in the primary sources than Oney has. I'm amazed that anybody could take something that depressing and spend eighteen years researching it without going crazy.

MF: My wife said it opened her eyes, and it made her realize that it was a much more complicated phenomenon than we thought. This wasn't simple. Yes, there was anti-Semitism involved, but it was a much more complicated situation than that.

TS: We had Oney on campus for a symposium in 2003.

MF: I was there.

TS: Okay, so you come to Kennesaw for an interview and I guess you met Lana [J.] Wachniak.

MF: Yes, Lana was there. The one who was the most welcoming was Vassilis [C.] Economopoulos. Vassilis invited me to his home, which was a lovely home. He and his wife [Marjorie] were very gracious, and I thought this is very nice. And Barbara [C.] Karcher was very nice at that point too.

TS: She was in the sociology department doing gerontology.

MF: Yes. So they were eager for me to start this clinical program.

TS: Was that pretty much the sociology faculty at that time?

MF: The sociology faculty was part of the Department of Political Science and Sociology with more political science than sociology. The chair was in fact a political scientist.

TS: So that was Helen [S.] Ridley?

MF: No, no, it was before her.

TS: Oh, Willoughby?

MF: Yes, Willoughby [G.] Jarrell. Yes, and she was very nice. She was the one that picked me up. She was a sweetheart. I remember just before the department was splitting up because she found it too big and unwieldy to deal with because it had grown. She had been here from near the beginning [since 1976]. I remember going with her around the campus. She looked around wistfully and said, "Where has my lovely little college gone?" This is over twenty-five years ago.

TS: Yes, '91 was twenty-five years ago. And she's already saying the little college is gone? Well, we had about 10,000 students at that time. What was Brooklyn College?

MF: About 35,000 or 40,000.

TS: So much larger. So that was pretty much the sociology faculty I guess those three that you named.

MF: And we had [M.] Louise Bill. She was in social work, but she was there.

TS: Oh, so they hadn't broken off to a separate department?

MF: No, it was all the same department at that point, and we had anthropology in there too.

TS: Right, so Betty [A.] Smith.

MF: Yes, Betty Smith was there absolutely and Wayne Van Horne was there [in 1992] as well, and he's still here.

TS: Sure. Okay, it was a fairly sizeable department even though it's multiple disciplines.

MF: Here's the interesting thing. My first term here, before I get started I didn't know what I was going to teach. They did want me to teach counseling and what-have-you, but it was like, "What will I teach?" "Well, you will teach intro, and Barbara Karcher is tired of teaching race and ethnicity, so, can you teach race and ethnicity?"

TS: We didn't have anybody who was black on the sociology faculty?

MF: No. So they asked me if I could teach it. Mind you, I had exactly zero courses in race and ethnicity.

TS: Oh really.

MF: But I come from Brooklyn. I was raised in a neighborhood that was half Jewish and half Italian. I'd been working in black neighborhoods and Hispanic neighborhoods. Hey, I know something about these things. Okay, Barbara gives me the book that she's been using. I read the book. I'm off to the races, and I become the first race and ethnicity person on KSC's campus. But my goal is to start this clinical sociology program. I'm busy trying to work out the details, but you needed permission to go forward. So Willoughby brought me into for an interview with Dean [George H.] Beggs.

TS: Are you talking about when you're still applying for the job?

MF: No, I now have the job.

TS: So you had to meet him when you applied for the job.

MF: No, I don't think I did.

TS: Really? We're big enough at that time that the dean wasn't involved?

MF: Maybe, we might have met. I probably did, but the first meeting with him was pro forma, and it was "yes," and I was polite, and he was polite, southern gentleman, military bearing, and the whole business.

TS: You had your coat and tie on.

MF: Oh, by all means, absolutely.

TS: Did you have a beard when you came down?

MF: Yes, I did.

TS: Was your hair the same length then?

MF: It was probably cut then. It was cut and neatly trimmed, and it was okay with him. He never said a word about it. He did say to me—I forget when he said it; it may have been during the initial interview—"Well, if you come down here, you're going to have to read the *Marietta Daily Journal*." And I'm thinking to myself, "You've got to be kidding. I'm cosmopolitan. I'm not a local."

TS: You'd rather read the *New York Times*? He was trying to see if you wanted to get integrated into the community.

MF: I understand what he was saying, but, remember, I'm a New Yorker who's coming down to the unwashed south.

TS: Right, they don't have anything to teach me.

MF: Exactly. Little did I know that I would eventually be writing for the MDJ. That never occurred to me. Anyway, I'm here now, first term.

TS: Then you have to go in to sell the clinical sociology program to him.

MF: That's right, and I'm explaining to him, and he's as polite as can be. And he says, "Well, we'll have to do this, and we'll have to do that," and whatever. Then I finished with him, and he speaks to Willoughby alone out there. Then Willoughby comes out to me and says to me, "You know, Dean Beggs is never going to let you do this. It's not going to happen. He was polite, but there is going to be no clinical sociology program."

TS: Oh, did he give a reason?

MF: No. There was no reason.

TS: That's typical George Beggs to make a decision on the spot, but getting him to back down was another thing.

MF: The way Willoughby explained it to me, "It's over; it's over." And that was actually another one of these unexpected turning points in my life, because if I cannot pursue the clinical program, I could still teach counseling courses. I was teaching counseling courses, but if I couldn't turn it into a program, what was I going to do. My first book was a book called *Role Change: A Resocialization Perspective* (Praeger 1990). My second book was *Analyzing Psychotherapy: A Social Role Interpretation* [Praeger 1992] which was a book putting all psychotherapy is a socialization psychotherapy perspective. That book I think came out shortly after I arrived here. I was finishing up a book on anger management [*IAM (Integrated Anger Management): A Common Sense Guide to Coping with Anger* (Praeger 1993)]. Why had I written a book about anger management? Dear old Dad! I needed to understand where he was coming from. I needed to understand my own anger. So this was a way to do it and to do it from a sociological perspective. Everything is not just psychological you understand. I'm realizing it's a social phenomenon, not just a psychological phenomenon. So I'm busy moving in that direction. Then boom, it's not going anywhere. What am I going to do?

Well I'm teaching, and I'm doing a whole bunch of other things. I'm doing race and ethnicity, I'm doing intro, and I forget what else I was doing, but I'm teaching a whole variety of courses. You know what teaching is like initially. I had done some adjunct teaching up in Rochester, like the College at Brockport [State University of New York] up there. I did some other stuff. So I had a little bit of a background in teaching, but you know when you're new there's a lot to learn. You think you know it, but you don't know

it. So you've got to spend the time. If you're going to stand up and pretend like you know something, you really should know it.

TS: J.B. Tate used to say "stay one step ahead of the posse."

MF: I tried to stay a lot more than that. I don't want them nipping at my heels.

TS: Right.

MF: So I'm busy doing that, and obviously that's a stimulating thing to do. I love to teach. Teaching is fun to me. I'm a good teacher, by the way. I'm a wonderful storyteller, and I'm honest and open, and even by that time I knew so much more than most sociologists know about the real world. So I had something to share, and I enjoyed it, and I enjoyed the feedback I got from students. I started looking for some other area to research and write about, and the next area for me was morality. Why morality? Because this was how my mother controlled me. My father used anger to control me, and my mother used morality. "Someone has to be the one to understand. Someone's got to be the good one. It takes two to fight, and if you don't fight there won't be a fight." It was all on my shoulders. "Be nice, be nice, be nice." This is one of the reasons why I went into the clinical thing; all I knew how to do was to be nice. I certainly did not know how to be assertive. So I said, "Okay, I understand the anger thing. I had a better grasp of that, and myself and my father. Now let me understand what morality is about."

This is where I went in a very different direction. Mind you when I was trying to understand psychotherapy, I was using sociological concepts in ways that I don't believe had been used before. I was used to using concepts from analytic philosophy, and so now I took that. When I had studied philosophy, one of the areas I studied had actually been ethics, so it had long been of interest to me. But now I came to morality from a totally different direction. I said to myself not what is right or wrong or even how do we know what is right or wrong? I said, "What is morality, how does it work, and what are people doing when they're engaged in morality?" This is a human enterprise; it is a social enterprise. What's happening when people engage in morality? So I wrote another book called *Using Morality*. No, excuse me, that wasn't the title. The book on anger was originally called *Using Anger*. The publisher hated that title, and they said you must come up with another title. I came up with a title, *Taming the Red-eyed Monster*. I think that was a great title!

TS: They didn't like that either.

MF: They hated it even more. They forced a title on me. *IAM*. Why *IAM*? It reminded them of the then popular book *I'm Okay, You're Okay*. Mind you, people look at it and have no idea what IAM means. What it means is Integrated Anger Management. But nobody knew, and obviously that did not help sales.

TS: I would not think so.

MF: It taught me a lesson about publishers, believe me. One that's been reconfirmed many times, but be that as it may.

- TS: I think either of your titles would have gone over better.
- MF: I think so too. In any event the book on morality is called *Hardball without an Umpire: The Sociology of Morality* [Praeger 1997].
- TS: Yes, I remember that.
- MF: It was a sociology of morality. And it's like, hey, this is a tough game that we're playing here, and there is no umpire, no one to decide who is right or wrong. So I came up with what I'm calling Tripartite Theory of Morality to explain what we're doing when we engage in morality. Now I'm involved in a different kind of sociology that I don't know that anybody else was doing. To this day I have not encountered anybody who's written about it. I've written about it in several places. What grabs me when I write about it is people don't know what to make of it. It's so out of the mainstream. When people deal with morality, the question is always what's right? How do we decide? What is our criteria? I'm saying there is no criterion. You're looking in the wrong place. There is no criterion. You assume there is; there isn't.
- TS: Okay, well, I mean a lot of people would have a religious criterion.
- MF: They do, but it is an arbitrary criterion, thank you. Yes, it's got a long history, yes it influences people, but guess what? Religion in fact has been used to come up with any number of contradictory criteria, thank you. If you think there is one, well that's usually because you believe in a particular faith, and you've adopted its criteria, but there are others out there. They used the same imprimatur that God told us. They say, "Okay," and I say, "No, no, no, no."
- TS: Okay, so in the pluralistic multicultural society there are no standards.
- MF: No, the point is this. First moral rules are informal rules. We think that they're exact prescriptions, but they are not. They are utterly inexact with all kinds of unstated qualifications; they are also learned paradigmatically. We think that we learned them through these propositions. No, we learned them through examples. We learned them by observing what gets punished and what gets rewarded. Examples are inherently ambiguous and open to interpretation. That's number one. So the rules are not what people think they are. Number two, when we need to change, which from time to time we always do when circumstances change, they change through polarized social negotiations. People generally choose a side, and they hate each other. It's good guy bad guy mentality, and each side wants to destroy the other. This leads to all kinds of extremism from both sides. And lastly, these things are largely enforced through emotions, anger, guilt, shame, etc. Which incidentally is how we choose our criteria. Now, that is not what anybody thinks morality is.
- TS: Is there a field of sociology and morality or are you moving into wide-open territory?
- MF: I'm in wide-open territory. When I went into doing a sociological analysis of psychotherapy, I was doing something that was very new, but the psychologists had at least been plowing this ground for a long time. When I moved into morality, I was moving into unplowed territory. This is when I made a big discovery. When you are in

unplowed territory, people don't understand where you're coming from. They don't go, "Oh, wow, that's a different way to look at things!" Their first reaction is, "That's wrong. It's not what *I* know. It's not what *I'm* committed to." So people don't know what to make of it, and basically they simply shove it aside. I thought, "Oh, my goodness, I'm going to be coming up with a whole new thing, the Galileo of morality." No! "You are a little fish who doesn't know what he's talking about."

TS: Well, the Galileos have a hard time when they're selling new ideas.

MF: That is true. That is part of what I discovered about social change, yes. New ideas are almost invariably rejected. This is the way of the world. Oftentimes, big changes don't happen except if there's a crisis. I tried to explain things, objectively, this is not the way things happen. I hate to say that. I truly hate it with all my heart. I wish it were otherwise, but I don't think it is.

TS: Okay, so you're developing a new field. Did you teach a course in the sociology and morality?

MF: As a matter of fact, at one point I did. I did a 490 course, whatever it is. I did one on anger too.

TS: Yes, we have a generic number that basically allows you to try new ideas.

MF: Oh, by the way, in the anger thing after the book came out: I routinely for several years taught a course on anger management for Leadership Kennesaw, especially for the students. So I got some experience doing that. Then I was busy trying to elaborate on it further, trying to find a way to break into the consciousness of people. I wrote a book called *The Limits of Idealism: When Good Intentions Go Bad* [Springer 1999]. I was saying, "Look, the way morality works is when we negotiate between two things we go to extremes. Idealism is inherently extremist. It is not where we wind up. We never do. We always wind up in a place that's different from what either of the sides expected." You almost have a Marxist kind of synthesis that develops in this sort of situation. That applies to all kind of things. An example I use is the feminism thing: "Hey, if you really believe that men are all a bunch of rapists, you're living on a different planet. It's just not true." Actually, the simplest example that I used was abortion. Is it abortion any time or abortion no time? What generally happens is people reach some kind of compromise: "Okay we'll allow abortion, but it will be with certain kinds of restrictions."

TS: Don't run for office on that though.

MF: I got to understand that this is not a politically instilled way to describe it. I'm not trying to be political. I'm trying to understand where people are.

TS: Where people are, right. What they really think.

MF: And what they're doing. It's a new understanding. Lots of times people do these things without understand why they're doing them; they just do it.

TS: Sure.

- MF: So I'm busy, and I'm thinking this is pretty good; I'm making progress here [at Kennesaw State]. What came next was *The Great Middle Class Revolution: Our Long March toward a Professionalized Society* [Kennesaw State University Press 2006], and then a little book called *Peoplization: An Introduction to Social Life* [Kendall Hunt Publishing Company 2007].
- TS: So you've written about fifteen now?
- MF: My next one will be seventeen. I just got the contract for another one. I'm getting ready to try to sell number eighteen, and I'm writing what hopefully will be number nineteen. And I'm planning number twenty. I don't stop!
- TS: It doesn't sound like it. Well, you've probably got the record at Kennesaw for the most books written.
- MF: The book that I'm going to write now actually got started about 2000. I forget what my original title was, but I called it *Social Stupidity*. There was something else in there too that I wrote. I wrote a course pack on social problems. Actually I must have written that after I wrote *The Middle Class Revolution* because the course pack was called *Social Problems: The Middle Class Challenge* [KSU Course Pack 2002]. I actually went to try to sell that at the ASA [American Sociological Association] conventions, and I literally went to talk to the representatives of the publishers. They told me flat out, "We can't publish this." Why? "The only sort of social problems that we want are written from the liberal perspective. This is not liberal."
- TS: They wanted a liberal perspective?
- MF: Only liberal. Mine was totally not liberal. What they said, and they were probably absolutely right, was, "It won't sell. The discipline is so liberal that you're not going to sell a problems book unless it's also liberal."
- TS: Who do you think your audience is for your books?
- MF: Well given how badly they've sold, I'm not sure there is an audience.
- TS: Your friends and neighbors [laughs]? Well, for whom are you writing?
- MF: Posterity. I'm writing to be right. I'm writing to advance the discipline. I'm writing to understand things. I'm moving from problem to problem.
- TS: Who do you want to recognize that you are right? Is it the field of sociology? Is it the general public? I'm really fascinated with your interest in public sociology, and I want us to talk about that.
- MF: I had hoped that it would serve the field of sociology, but sociology keeps drifting further and further to the left. I would hope that people would have realized that they're pushing a dead end. At one point I was at a conference in New Orleans and during a panel discussion, one of the guys was a Marxist. I got up and said, "Don't we understand that this kind of Marxist interpretation is a dead end?" If looks could have killed, I would have been dead on the spot, not from the guy I was talking to, but from the folks around

me. I thought that Marxism was the future at CUNY [City University of New York] when I went there. Little did I realize that it has become such a dominant factor in sociology?

TS: Marxism today dominates sociology?

MF: Fully one-third of sociologists identify themselves as Marxists. One-third! And that's not counting all the others who consider themselves liberal. To say you're a Marxist says I'm a radical. One-third, amazing!

TS: Except for those who think that Marxism is conservative, and they're even further out.

MF: We have one in our department who thinks that.

TS: I think I know whom you're talking about, so we won't name names [laughs].

MF: The point is for me that one step has led to another step, which has led to another step. Every time in my own mind I solved a particular problem, it opened up another question that I've tried to understand. Only now am I getting this book on *Social Stupidity*, which I think I'm going to rename something like *Non-Rationality*, something more academic sounding. But this has been brewing for a long time. Around 2000 when I started thinking about this book, I went back for a booster session of psychotherapy.

TS: A booster session?

MF: A booster session. My question was: "Why am I still not married? Why am I so afraid of intimacy?"

TS: You set the record, I think, for the latest age to get married for the first time.

MF: I'm up there [laughs]! So I went back, and this time I had a number of books, and I was comfortable with it. I went back and re-explored some kinds of issues and made a little more progress. I know when I did this. I wrote a memoir, which is yet unpublished, called *Too Lazy to Chew*.

TS: That doesn't describe you at all.

MF: Why *Too Lazy to Chew*? Because when my mother was trying to teach me to eat, I resisted. Mind you, I had been force fed by my father, and I was angry as hell. My mouth was closed, and I was resisting. I'm very good at resisting. Her explanation was, "You were just too lazy to chew."

TS: She said that?

MF: She said I was too lazy to chew.

TS: She didn't understand you at all at that point.

MF: She never understood me her entire life. She died last year, and she never even came close. She read all my books, and she still didn't understand me.

TS: Really?

MF: Really.

TS: Was she proud of you?

MF: Oh, yes, she was very proud of all her children. She had all the books. I was told in her later years she would sit and watch television with my book in her lap and reading it, but she never understood what I was talking about ever, ever. So I wrote this manuscript, trying to understand myself, basically, which was a help. You know, there's a part of me that hoped that it would get published, and somebody would go, "Wow, this is interesting." But [that seemed unlikely]. So I eventually wrote another book, the *Social Stupidity* book.

TS: This might be a good time to change the focus a little. Why don't you talk about what Kennesaw was like when you got here in 1991?

MF: Okay, we'll come back to the books.

TS: Well, finish the books if you want to.

MF: No, let me pause and go back, and then we'll come back to the books, okay, because the books are important to me academically?

TS: Oh, absolutely.

MF: Okay, at Kennesaw, remember, I was closed down in terms of doing the clinical sociology. I'm doing other things. One of the things that happened to me, an interesting little thing, is I was busy doing my anger workshops for Leadership Kennesaw. President [Betty L.] Siegel preceded me [as speaker], and was busy talking about some kind of pop psychology, and it was the silliest nonsense you ever heard. I was debating with myself, how am I going to follow this up? I mean, this is after all the president of our university.

TS: You were two different personalities, I think.

MF: Yes. I tried to be as diplomatic as I could to say, "You know, I think what the president just said was wrong." Well, whatever Betty Siegel's faults, she's not stupid. She was very aware that I was contradicting her, and I was instantly in her doghouse. Not to emerge until several years later.

TS: Okay, I can understand.

MF: So I didn't emerge until she realized that I was an influential person, and she wanted me on her side. After she got the new building [in 1999] with the queen's suite, she invited me to come up.

TS: The president's office in Kennesaw Hall?

MF: Yes, she invited me and tried to recruit me to one of her projects. Be that as it may, here I am doing my various things, teaching, enjoying the teaching, making progress as best I can. I'm realizing that I would have to do this whole other thing. You're now in for the

good stuff. I'm making progress. I'm doing very well, fully expecting that I'm going to get tenure. Then, in fact, I was the only one who has written books in the Department of Political Science and Sociology. Nobody had written books. The only one, by the way, who ever did anything and followed up on it was the current chair of the Department of Political Science and International Affairs, Kerwin Swint. He was the only one who came to me and asked, "How do you write a book," and then actually went out and wrote a book. The only one who did it!

TS: He's written several books.

MF: Exactly right. He's written some very nice books, but mostly what I encountered was envy. I remember being on an awards committee and talking about people and what not. Somebody in another department had written a book, and they dismissed it as if it were nothing. The only things that counted were refereed articles. If you hadn't done refereed articles and you had only written books, then [that wasn't good enough]. Well, that's me. I write books, so I'm nothing. I had been nominated for awards, and I had won none of them. Year after year I was nominated, and year after year I was an also ran. I remember one time, [L.] Annette Bairan [professor of Nursing] and I went up, and she won the award, and I didn't. On the way to pick up the award, she apologized to me because she knew I had done so much more than her. But I'm a conservative, you see, in a liberal institution, and now here is where it really came to bite me.

Mind you, the Department of Political Science and Sociology had grown. Willoughby thought it was too big and it was time to break it up. The choice was actually in the hands of the vice president for academic affairs.

TS: Ed [Edwin A.] Rugg?

MF: Ed Rugg.

MF: As a matter of fact, [Dean] Beggs was [about a year away from retirement] when this was happening [by the 1993-1994 academic year]. Here's what happened. Willoughby was lobbying for this change. Ed Rugg decided that it was time to do it. He got Beggs to agree to it. They let us know that there was going to be this split. We had assumed that political science would be one and sociology would be the other. No, that was not the plan. It started with the public administration program. Ed Rugg decided, no, what we needed was a Department of Public Administration and Human Services. What we were going to do was we were going to take sociology and human services and public administration, and we were going to put them all in this new Department of Public Administration and Human Services. [Then in 1997-1998, the administration decided that] we were going to take it out of Humanities and Social Sciences, and we are going to attach it to the College of . . .

TS: Health and Human Services?

MF: Yes. There is a rebellion. There is a total and complete rebellion.

TS: Yes, I remember that.

MF: By the way, Helen Ridley was deeply involved in this. She spoke up vociferously against this because sociology was going to disappear. [So on March 11, 1998, the Board of Regents approved the creation of a new Department of Sociology, Geography, and Anthropology, and the rest of the Department of Public Administration and Social Services joined with Nursing; Health, Physical Education, and Sport Science; and the Wellness Center to form the new College of Health and Human Services]. But now we were going to be moving into this direction, and when we thought about making this change, we needed a new chair. Lana [Wachniak] had left the department at this point and was working in CETL [Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning]. She was a one person CETL shop doing all kinds of programs by herself.

TS: Right.

MF: She came back. I'm losing the sequence a little bit, but ultimately the chair of the new department [of Public Administration and Human Services in 1993-1994] was going to be Louise Bill. I lobbied for Louise Bill because Louise Bill, I thought, was a real go-getter. She would be able to fight for sociology, and she assured me she would. Lana leaves at this point, and now it's Louise Bill. Lana had hoped to become the chair, and when she didn't, she switched her eggs into the CETL basket. All things were going pretty well at first as far as I could tell, only now we've got public administration in here and anthropology and we may have had geography and criminal justice. Louise Bill assured me that she was my ally, and we were friends, seriously. Then I go up for tenure and early promotion to associate professor. I've got books—nobody else had books—and what I thought to be wonderful evaluations. I had been on the faculty senate. I did all kinds of things. How can you deny me, okay? So I put my feet in. I was approved by the department committee. I didn't hear anything from Louise Bill. Then I get this thing from the college committee turning me down.

TS: The college committee?

MF: The college committee, and they said they were turning me down because of the chair's evaluation of me. It wouldn't have gone to the college if it hadn't been approved by the chair, but Louise, never sent me her evaluation. So now I got turned down by the college committee, and I see that she has approved me, but it damns me with faint praise. I went to her and I said, "Louise, this has to have been a fake; you couldn't have meant to write it this way."

TS: Oh, you didn't get a chance to respond because she recommended you for tenure and promotion?

MF: But she damned me with faint praise. I should have gotten the letter anyway, but she withheld it from me. So I say, "You couldn't have meant it." And she sits back in her chair, and she says, "Mel, I'm sorry, you're just not working out." Now mind you, this is a woman who weeks ago was busy coaching me on how to get approval. I said, "What do you mean?" "Blah, blah, blah, this, that and the other." Then she starts to get angry at me, and suddenly I realized I had an enemy. It's Louise who wants to prevent me. Remember she was a flaming liberal, feminist. I'm a conservative, not a feminist, and she wanted to be rid of me. So suddenly I shut up, and I think, "My God, this is my

enemy. I'm not sharing anything with her any more. This is where things lie." And I looked to see what she said. What she did was she cherry-picked my evaluations in the most ridiculous ways. I mean, it was totally a hatchet job. Now, it goes up, okay? Now I write a rebuttal, and it goes to Dean [Lois E.] Muir. She reverses it. She looks at my stuff. I've written books; nobody's written books; my [student] evaluations are good; I've got all these service jobs.

TS: She supported you?

MF: She supported me. Then it goes up to . . .

TS: Ed Rugg?

MF: And he reverses it, and denies it to me. Okay, but I went up early, so I can go up the next year. It was a bruising thing, and this was part of Lois Muir's downfall here when she went against the folks above her. Now, Louise comes to me after this and says, "This was a terrible fight; this didn't help anybody; let's make sure we don't do this next year." She offers me a bargain. She says, "I tell you what. I won't oppose your going up for promotion if you don't put in for tenure.

TS: You had to.

MF: Not then.

TS: You still have a few years to go? Okay, this is like 1995, you've been here four years, so you still have a couple of years before you had to go up for tenure.

MF: Yes. And I think to myself, "Now look, if you promote me one year, on what grounds can you deny me tenure the following year?" But I knew that that was what she was planning. So I said, "All right. I agree to the bargain." But I did a few things. First, because she had cherry-picked my reviews and then said that I was a lousy teacher, I brought in a whole bunch of colleagues to give me peer evaluations in my classes, so that I now had documentation, peer reviews from about five or six, all of whom gave me glowing reviews. So she's not going to be able to use this one again. She could never use the academic thing because I was way ahead of everybody else. Okay. The service, hey, "it's not really service." My sin was I'm not collegial. Okay, now, by this point she's got her allies in the department. I've got my allies in the department. I've even got an ally in one of the deans in business.

TS: Tim [Timothy S.] Mescon?

MF: Mescon. He was an ally of mine by this time. I had learned enough by this time to get allies around the campus, and I had a few in different places. Mescon was clearly my number one ally in this whole business. So I'm waiting for the next thing. Louise is pretending she's still on my side. She says, "Well, you know, the problem is that the associate dean doesn't think that your narrative was strong." Now the associate dean was a history professor.

TS: [E.] Howard Shealy?

- MF: Howard Shealy. And she said, “Send it to him and let him review it, okay?” I did. I sent it to him, and Howard sends back this lovely thing saying, “I think this is perfectly okay. I’m moved. I have no problems with this at all.” Now I knew Louise, and I knew what she was up to. I took this letter, and I put it in the drawer. Now I also had Vassilis [Economopoulos] on my side and Vassilis had thought that there was some kind of mistake. Louise couldn’t have meant this. He went to her to advocate for me, and she started yelling at him. Vassilis of all people! I had helped Vassilis become professor of the year for the whole college. A distinguished teaching professor. He was given no reward for that. He was not happy with that.
- TS: You mean in the department he got no reward?
- MF: So here we go. Muir at this point left. But in leaving she gave me the name of a lawyer that I could use. At this point the college had been sued the previous year by a professor who claimed anti-Semitism. She wasn’t Jewish, but her husband was Jewish.
- TS: Candace B. Kaspers [chair of the Department of Communication]?
- MF: Kaspers. She won [federal jury decision September 12, 1997].
- TS: She won big time.
- MF: Yes. Lots of money [final settlement of \$750,000]. Now I’ve got a lawyer who was involved in that. Vassilis is upset, and he wants to use this lawyer. He goes to this lawyer, and they sue for open records. Among the open records they got was communication between Louise Bill and Ed Rugg in which they were busy talking about sending Fein a message. It was stuff which could be construed as anti-Semitic. I say nothing; Vassilis says nothing. But we have the records in hand. Fine. We go into this next year. Now I’m up for tenure. What Louise Bill does is she packs the department committee with her allies. So I have two allies. She has two folks against me, both of them in public administration. One of them was in charge. She has two social workers, social workers and public administration. Now, what happened, I was told, was they debated this for six hours over the course of two days, and the vote was always the same. Two public administrators against me, Vassilis and Wayne Van Horne for me, and the two others who did not have tenure abstaining.
- TS: Two, two and two?
- MF: Two, two and two. Eventually the committee chair says, “Let’s have a secret ballot.” He hands out the papers
- TS: Which is something we often did.
- F: But wait, it gets better. The chair sweeps them up in his hand; he puts them in his pocket; and he says, “I’ll count them and let you know the results later.”
- MF: Now, as it happened, on the way back to the department, Louise saw him, as witnessed by Barbara Karcher. She asks him, “How did it go?” And he pats his pocket, and he says, “I got what I wanted.” Surprise, surprise. The next Monday it goes against me. Well, of

course, I write my rebuttal. It goes up to Louise. I knew she was going to turn me down. I think it was seven or eight single-spaced pages explaining all of my sins, which all came down to “he doesn’t walk on water.” I mean, it was just one trivial thing after another. But in there, and I knew it was going to be in there, was this thing to demonstrate just how much I lacked collegiality. “I had helpfully advised him to check with Shealy for information so he could clean up his really dreadful narrative.” I go into my desk to take out my letter from Shealy.

TS: So you could include that in your rebuttal?

MF: Exactly. My goal was to saw off the limb that she had climbed out on because by this time I knew she was going to go to any extreme that she could get away with. So I knew she was going to do it, and so I was ready. Now we go up to the college committee, and Barbara Karcher was in charge, and the vote was overwhelmingly in favor, one dissent. But, by this point I had let the word be known to the equal opportunity office and I had let the word out by back channels that we had this documentation of what was done including the records of communications, and if they turned me down . . .

TS: You’d sue them?

MF: Yes. I would sue. They had just lost [the Kaspers case], and they were not about to do this again. Now Louise Bill comes as an emissary from Ed Rugg to both me and Vassilis with a deal. The deal is this: if you do not sue we will give you tenure, and we will give you a separate department of sociology, and we will give you a major in sociology, which did not exist at this point because Ed Rugg had turned it down for over a decade. Vassilis had been petitioning for a major in sociology, and Ed Rugg had said, “But nobody’s interested in it; we’d never get enough students.” So he refused to do it.

TS: So that’s how you got a sociology department.

MF: That is exactly right.

TS: And a major.

MF: This is an interesting story. Then it goes up to the university committee, the highest one whatever it is. I pass, and Ed Rugg gives me a call to congratulate me. And he says, “But you know, you need to be careful because it was actually a close vote.” Tim Mescon, who was on that committee, let me know that the vote was eight to three in my favor. I said not a word because I understood what the score was.

TS: So you are describing a very political campus.

MF: Extraordinarily political campus. And there’s another story I should tell you, which doesn’t concern me but you may not know. After that I was home free. After that, nobody messed with me. They weren’t going to give me awards for anything . . .

TS: But at least you have your sociology department. This is where Lana becomes chair?

MF: This is where Lana comes in and becomes chair, and Louise goes to the human services, and they give geography to sociology, but they take away criminal justice and public

administration to the human services thing. But in point of fact they so messed up CJ that it went down to nothing, and Ed Rugg had to swallow hard and give it back to sociology where we turned it into a roaring success.

TS: That's right because you had four disciplines, didn't you? You had anthropology, criminal justice, geography, and sociology.

MF: And obviously we did well by geography and anthropology. They grew so big that they were able to get independent departments. What happened was Vassilis and I and to a lesser extent Barbara Karcher, but also Lana were so burned by this that we said, "This is not going to be the culture of our new department. We are going to stick together and support one another and help one another, and we are not going to do any of this nonsense." And we did, and we turned it into this huge success upon all levels. We made sociology work and CJ work and anthropology work and geography work. We made them all work because it was not one discipline against another. We're all going to help one another.

TS: You were very collegial.

MF: Extraordinarily collegial, and it turned out that Louise Bill got into a fight with the folks who went over there, and the lack of collegiality was clearly on their side, not my side. And it was like, that was a lot of fun.

TS: So after that in the sociology department, ya'll got along?

MF: There's another story. Do you know the story about Bill Wallace [William H. Wallace, Jr., husband of Lana Wachniak and director of personnel services at KSU, 1987-1999, and then associate vice chancellor for human resources at the Board of Regents, 1999-2006]?

TS: I'm not sure which story you're talking about.

MF: About his getting into the doghouse here at KSU? You probably haven't heard this story.

TS: I'm not sure. We've got an interview with Bill and Lana in the KSU series.

MF: Okay, good, because Bill told me this story. I told this to Dan [Papp]. Dan hadn't heard about it. The story where we had this professor, I forget what discipline—it wasn't sociology—who did this survey of faculty members, and discovered that faculty members liked students and didn't trust the administration.

TS: No I don't know that one.

MF: If they haven't told you this one, you are missing a gem.

TS: Okay, you know, we're putting this on tape.

MF: I don't care. It's up to you what you do with it, okay? This could be verified with Bill.

TS: I know you were talking about Bill in one of your stories in the *Courage* book, but you didn't mention him by name.

MF: That's right I was talking about Bill. The story is that Betty Siegel literally calls all of her administration team in three different groups to personally swear their allegiance to her. In all these things Bill Wallace says, "My allegiance is to the college." He had been the golden boy, and then he gets into the doghouse. If he hadn't written some things that got national attention he would never have gone to the chancellor's office, and before he left he was treated like dirt. He goes to the chancellor's office, and now he's back to being the golden haired boy, and they're all kissing his ring; you know what I mean by that. You said political, you bet you under Betty Siegel. I remember too sitting in the lunchroom listening to some colleagues trying to get Betty Siegel to help them with a project. I have never heard so much sycophancy in my life. "Oh, Betty, you can do this, oh, Betty, nobody else can do this, oh, Betty you do so much wonderful work." I was ready to puke, and Betty was just soaking it up. I read this book once about flattery, and one of the points it made was that the folks who were most susceptible to flattery are actually the most successful folks. Why? Because they think they deserve it. They basically believe it, so it must be true.

TS: You think the culture on campus changed big time with Dan Papp?

MF: I think it changed dramatically for the better. It became a much more academic-oriented institution where the goal was now to actually do good academic work up and down the line. I think that we started demanding that people publish more and what-have-you, and it was because of Dan who has academic accomplishments and wanted to see them spread across campus. It wasn't threatening the way it had been to many people when Betty was here.

TS: He had about eight books when he got here.

MF: Dan has done a lot of stuff, whereas Betty it was all a matter of her public speeches. She could give a good public speech as you well know, except she repeated the same material over and over again, and if you heard a lot of the speeches you knew, you knew.

TS: I almost got in trouble by sitting next to you at a graduation ceremony where you were mocking her speech. I didn't want to be too closely associated with you [laughs].

MF: I loved the thing about the turtle on the post. If you find a turtle on a post you know it didn't get there alone. I'm thinking to myself, so you're saying we're a bunch of turtles, is that right?

TS: Okay, so then with Dan you think the culture becomes better.

MF: I've got another story about that. We left my books, but this I've got to tell, okay?

TS: One more story and then we'll get back to your books.

MF: Yes. It has to do with when we get the new dean.

TS: Are you talking about Robin Dorff?

MF: The predecessor to Dorff.

TS: Oh, Richard Vengroff?

MF: Yes, Rich Vengroff. Vengroff, as you know, was a political scientist with lots of publications. Coming from the University of Connecticut, he was very liberal, and coming down to the South, he assumes that we are far more bigoted than even I had imagined. He is going to come down and reform us. He is going around to all the departments, and introduces himself. Now mind you, he doesn't know anybody, but he's going to come in and let us know what the facts are. One of the things he tells us is we are now going to be required to hire a specified number of African American faculty. Not black faculty. In other words, Africans don't matter. They have to be African Americans. I say to him, "Well, that's not legal; you can't do that." And he gives me some BS about what he can do and what not. I said to his face that I didn't know him, but this was ingenuous, and we couldn't do it. He was not happy with me. But I was not happy with him. I send a memo to Papp, whom I did not know at the time, and I said, "This is illegal, and if you do this kind of quota, I will sue." Then there's an apparent exchange between him and Vengroff, and I get a copy of a memo from Vengroff to Papp saying, "Ignore Fein; he is simply a trouble maker."

TS: Vengroff said that to Papp?

MF: Vengroff to Papp. Now Papp, who is politically astute, had the good sense to run this by the state attorney general. "Is this legal?" The verdict comes back, "No, it is not legal; you cannot do this." So here we are. Vengroff has been chastised, but meanwhile this is where Papp gets to know I may be a force to be reckoned with. He knew me from nowhere. All right. Years later, Vengroff himself is in trouble. You know he had difficulty with women.

TS: Oh, absolutely.

MF: He had all kinds of fights with women, and he got in trouble and was sent to anger management and all kinds of stuff. He calls on me for advice. Now he wants to be my best buddy. We get invited to his house. We go out and have dinner with him and his wife, me and my wife, it's all suck up stuff, and basically my only advice to him was, "Be honest, be decent," nothing of any use to him given what he had done. Then he dropped me like a hot potato. I thought okay. I was not going to help him. So it was sort of an ironic kind of thing. Anyway, in the process, I don't know if you're aware of this, but I became aware of how much we were a stepchild in the University System of Georgia, how much less money we were receiving per student than other schools. I decided to do something about it. So I did two things, at least two. I started a non-profit called Friends of Kennesaw State, Inc., incorporated in the State of Florida. Then I started a petition drive to the Board of Regents to do something about this. In doing this kind of thing, this is where I wrote my first columns (op-eds at this point) to the *Marietta Daily Journal*. I was busy, shaking the tree, trying to make something happen. As it happened, Papp was doing the same, lobbying the legislature while I'm doing this and making this happen. I ultimately got on his budget advisory board, and I got involved and got some further information about this. So what had happened was that the Board of Regents had originally told Papp that he could expect an increase of \$4 million for the coming fiscal year. After I made my fuss they upped it to \$12 million. And, no, I get no

credit for this. Really, I am responsible for maybe \$100 million more over the years than the school would have had. How much credit have I gotten for this? Zero. Nothing. Well, understandably, Papp couldn't very well say anything about it, and I was certainly not going to get anything from my department or Vengroff. It was sort of like, "Hey, I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have been of big time service to this university."

TS: That's true. Well, I guess we're going to have to wind up pretty soon for today, but we planned to go back to your scholarship, and I really want to talk about public sociology. I think of sociology as being computerized and statistical nowadays for a lot of the research, but that's not the kind you've done. We've got public history, of course. Talk about public sociology.

MF: I have seen myself as gradually becoming a theoretical sociologist because I don't do research; I use other people's research. One of the things that's different about me and other sociologists is I am very widely read, very widely read. I mean, I've learned a lot from history. I read a lot of history and a lot of biography and a lot of economics and a lot of psychology and a lot of political science. I mean, I read. Whenever I feel like, "Gee, I don't know something," I go out and I read about it. This is important too. Remember I come from a clinical sociology background. So I also consider myself a very practical person. One of the big fights I had with my father growing up was he considered himself a practical man. He could do things with his hands. He could make things happen. He thought I was just an academic. I read my books. I was in the ivory tower. It meant nothing. But now, wait a minute now, in point of fact, we need both of these things. You need theory and you need practice. If your theory cannot be verified in the real world then it is probably useless. If all you have is practice and you have no theory, then you're simply moving on blind in this world. The two need to dovetail, and that is what I have attempted to do throughout my career. In other words, okay, I'm going to understand morality, I'm going to understand idealism, I'm going to understand loss and losing, and I did one of my books on human hierarchies. It amazed me that I was able to get a book published on human hierarchies [*Human Hierarchies: A General Theory* (Transaction Publishers, Inc., 2012)].

How did I get here first? This seems to be impossible. I mean, we're a hierarchical species. Why haven't sociologists been writing about this for a century? They haven't. I absolutely got there first. The same thing with morality. I said, "What's going on here? Let me be honest." This is another thing that I pride myself on, and it goes back to the whole being in therapy and even before that. I pride myself on my honesty. I'm honest with myself, and I try whenever possible to be honest with others. I worried when doing sociology; the question I asked myself was would I ever be able to be creative. I never thought of myself as a creative person, and in point of fact I've been able to do a lot of groundbreaking things not by trying to be creative, but by trying to be honest. Remember I started out as an idealist myself. I assumed the world was moving toward perfection and that was the arc of history as so many people have written. Then I go, "Wait a minute now; time and again I have been disillusioned, literally disillusioned." I realized that a lot of my fondest dreams were illusions. What's the reality? And time and again I have been able to look at things with a degree of honesty that others have not. Therefore I have seen what is in plain sight to be seen.

In other words, it didn't really take a genius; it took honesty. Yes, you've got to be smart enough to put pieces together, and that is one of my strengths. I am very good at taking different parts together and synthesizing them. So the whole time I've been trying to be practical. Look, a book on anger, how do you deal with anger? Very practical stuff. Idealism, limits of idealism, well you can make the world a better place, but if you push it too far, you're going to make things worse. You've got to be practical about these things. Then when I did the middle-class stuff, well, how did I get on that? Well, I had to make the transition from working class mentality to an upper middle class mentality. What did I have to do? Well, what happened in history that enabled that to happen? Constantly, the peoplization thing, what did the students need to know? What were the fundamentals that the students needed to know? My book on colleges [*Redefining Higher Education: How Self-Direction Can Save Colleges* (Transaction Publishers, Inc., 2014)], what did the colleges need to teach to help people deal with this middle class world.

One of the books that I read in graduate school was a book by Melvin L. Kohn [*Class and Conformity: A Study in Values* (University of Chicago Press, 1969)]. It was a book on, believe it or not, the socialization of values. What he realized is that upper middle class people's attitudes toward raising their children is different from the attitudes of the working class. The upper middle class attempts to make their children self-directed. These are professionals, who have to make independent decisions in environments of uncertainty, like doctors and lawyers and so forth. It's like these are people who develop specialties. They have specialized knowledge, but they also have to have the right attitude that goes with it, so that they can have the confidence to make important decisions, sometimes life and death decisions, where they could be wrong, but they've got to be able to have the personal qualities to do that anyway. So parents who have that try to inculcate it in their children and try to support them, so that they become the kind of people who can make these independent decisions.

I developed an understanding of that initially through Kohn. Ultimately, one of the books I wrote that actually got published through Kindle was a book on the professionalization of society that argued we are become a professionalized society—that more and more people are in this position where they must do this, and we ultimately need our schools to prepare people to do this [*A Professionalized Society: Our Real Future* (2010)]. By the way, this then translated into my writing a book, which took me a while to get published, but which is now coming out again in paperback, entitled *Post-Liberalism: The Death of a Dream* [Transaction Publishers, Inc., 2012]. I came to the conclusion that liberalism is anti-professionalism. Liberalism, in demanding equality, is asking people to not develop and use these special talents. It wants everything to be controlled by the government. The bureaucracy is going to protect everybody rather than people making independent decisions on their own.

All right. That led me to how did that happen, and how did I develop these kinds of things, and where does it fit into the larger social picture, and so forth? As I've gone along, I've had these insights. The first one was on terms of psychotherapy being a form of social role change, resocialization and that kind of thing. Then I asked, how does anger work? Then how does morality work? Then how does social change work? One of my insights was the inverse force rule. That is, that small societies are held together

by strong social forces, highly emotional things like person-to-person relationships, whereas larger societies are held together by weak forces like social role relationships, which are not so emotionally charged. As we have become larger, the less emotional social roles are more important in maintaining social cohesion.

By the way, something I left out entirely is one of my books, a book called *Race and Morality: How Good Intentions Undermine Social Justice and Perpetuate Inequality* [Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers 2001], in which I tried to understand the problem with race. I grew up in a neighborhood that was absolutely segregated. We had one black face growing up, so I didn't know blacks until I worked for welfare and with methadone patients and so on. Like most white folks, in the north, not just the south, I assumed that blacks weren't as smart as other folks. Well, after getting to know people, doing therapy with people, teaching people, I have come to the conclusion that's just wrong, just wrong. Ability is pretty much evenly distributed irrespective of race. Then the question becomes, "So why aren't blacks being more successful?" You can say, oh well, white bigotry. Yes, there's white bigotry, but that's not enough to explain it because there are other groups like the Jews who faced bigotry.

TS: Absolutely.

MF: Not as extreme as blacks but in its own time very nasty.

TS: It depends on how you define the extreme. If you're looking on a worldwide scale . . .

MF: Worldwide, tell me something! More of my relatives died during my lifetime [due to the Holocaust] than your relatives. It's very real to me because of that. I've met people who survived the concentration camps.

TS: Right. You've known people with the tattoos on their arms.

MF: The tattoos, oh yes, I've dealt with people with the tattoos on their arm. So this led me to another insight, something that I call the SCS model. S stands for social structure, C stands for culture, so the model is this: social structure at time one creates a culture that reproduces the structure at time two. Simple model. The simple example I use is Jews in the ghetto, forced into poverty. Forced into poverty you have to develop a culture that helps you survive in that structure. You create poor people's food. What are poor people's foods? Matzo ball soup. It's basically dumplings made out of Matzo, chicken soup. Times change, structure changes, you're not in the ghetto any more, but you've got this culture, and it reproduces the same thing that you have in the structure. You're still eating Matzo ball soup. You don't need to, but you're still doing it, as if you were still poor. Now, you apply that to the black situation, slavery. Slavery was a terrible social structure. People need to survive it. Among the things you need to survive is the violence of slavery. People don't voluntarily become slaves. Violence is used against you, so what do you do with that violence? You cannot turn it against the master or you're dead. What you do is you internalize it into your own culture.

TS: That's your father.

MF: Yes. Yes. You're absolutely right, yes. That's my father. You turn it against your wife. You turn it against your children. It gets handed down through the generations. We don't have slavery any more, but how about the violence in the black communities. It's endemic, still being handed down.

TS: It's still a product of slavery?

MF: Exactly. And you understand when I wrote this, the response was, "Oh, you're a racist."

TS: What was the senator from New York, Moynihan? That's pretty close to what he was saying [Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Office of Policy Planning and Research, U.S. Department of Labor, 1965), known popularly as the *Moynihan Report*].

MF: It's not at all different from what Moynihan was saying. It expands it, and it puts it into larger context, but Moynihan would agree . . .

TS: He was a good sociologist.

MF: That's exactly right; he literally was a sociologist. You see the same thing with the family problems among the blacks and the dependency among the blacks. Once you have this insight it just opens up the whole thing, and you realize, "My God, this is a package, this is a culture of slavery, and it has been handed down. So why did I see that? As you know, it's not all that earthshaking an insight, but people have got their blinders on. It's all "prejudice"; it's all "the white folks"; "you can't blame the victim." "Oh, there are these poor folks." Okay? I look nowadays, and we accept things from blacks we would never accept from other people. Listen, if these were our children we would never tolerate this stuff from them. We would say to them, "Shape up; you can do it."

TS: I hear from African Americans that I've interviewed that they are often nostalgic for their segregated black schools because they had teachers that demanded the best from them and wouldn't put up with a lot of nonsense.

MF: You know what I hear? You've probably heard this too. How many good black students have trouble in high school because they are accused of acting white?

TS: That would be awful to be criticized for taking your studies seriously, wouldn't it?

MF: It happens. It's absolutely standard. And I understand why people are torn by these kinds of situations. But white liberals are just not helping. They are perpetuating this crap, and it just drives me crazy that these people think that they're doing well when they're doing ill. So, anyway, you can see again, I'm trying to be practical. I'm trying to be honest. You talk about practical. With this business that I'm talking about now with social individualism, this is the time more than ever that I've decided that I finally know enough to put it into action, not just to keep on expanding what I understand, but applying it to the real world and making a difference. It's taking my clinical skills and my philosophical skills and theoretical skills and putting them all together and making something happen. That's where I'm at now in my history.

- TS: All right. Well, you still sound like Bernie Sanders. You're on the opposite side of the spectrum, but you both have that enthusiasm for doing what's right.
- MF: That's exactly right. I've had that all of my life. That plus my mania for honesty were the shield that I used to survive a very tough childhood. That I was not going to be that way! This is "reaction formation" as psychologists would call it. There is no question in my mind about that. I was going to take things like the morality and the energy that was used against me and turn them for good. Here's another thing. I am my father's son. Of my parents my father was the more intelligent one. Of my parents my father was the one with energy. He didn't know how to use it. When my father lay dying and was on his deathbed—and this was before I wrote my first book and before I moved to Kennesaw—I grabbed his arm. He could barely speak, and I couldn't really talk to him because he was not really able to understand. But I said to myself, almost telepathically to him, "Dad, I promise I will finish your work. I will do what you were never able to do." I almost get tearful saying that because it's honestly how I felt and still feel.
- TS: Well, we could go on for hours and hours I think and still not exhaust all the many things that you've done, but why don't I just ask as a concluding question: I know you're almost seventy-five years old, but it doesn't look like you're ever going to retire. You're so full of energy and enthusiasm for things you want to do. I often ask folks why they stayed at Kennesaw. Why have you stayed, and what are your plans for the future?
- MF: I got so damn lucky coming to Kennesaw. Honest to God, had I gotten into a Research I university, I could never have gone off in the directions that I've gone off on, precisely because Kennesaw didn't make demands in these directions. So I had the opportunity to move off in directions I had never anticipated, precisely because I was on the ground floor in starting our own department and had colleagues around me who were ultimately my friends. They didn't agree with me, but they tolerated me. In many ways I've been the crazy uncle in the attic. I got involved with the Georgia Sociological Association. They're all liberal, but they liked me, so I became president, and I became editor of their journal, which, incidentally I was instrumental in starting. If I've moved the ball forward, I don't think I could have done it had I not been at Kennesaw. I also want to say a word about the South because . . .
- TS: I noticed that you've been editor [of the *Journal of Public and Professional Sociology*] since 2005, so eleven years.
- MF: There was an interregnum, and then I came back because it nearly died, and they called me back to rescue it.
- TS: I interrupted your thought about the South.
- MF: Talking about the South, I love the South. I honestly do. And I love southerners; not all southerners, bastards everywhere, okay; but I love the fact that people in the South are polite. I love so many of the old-fashioned values of the South. Now, mind you, slavery was a stain and what-have-you, but in point of fact I think that it is being overcome more honestly here in the South than it is in the North, and that blacks have a better opportunity here in the South than they do in the North. I really have come to believe that.

TS: African Americans have been moving back to the South in record numbers.

MF: And for good reason, for very good reason: I think that the nation is probably going to move forward more quickly from the South than from any other section of this country, precisely because the South was so backward and had such need to move forward and is not trapped. It has broken the chains that kept it tied and therefore is free to move forward in directions that other areas of the country are not. So I think I lucked out on that too when I wound up in Georgia. I love Georgia. Tom, I have always, always wanted to help people. I have always, always wanted to give to others what was not given to me. I lucked out also in marrying late and having a wife who is supportive. She's very different from me, but she also teaches here and is doing very well.

TS: Linda is also in the Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice and also a full professor.

MF: She's done well, and she has many achievements of her own. She's not really supportive when I come up with new ideas, but she's supportive of me, which is enough. So considering the very rocky start I got, it's come out very well, come out very well indeed. The irony is that in many ways I would not be the person I am had it not been that rocky start. It's a very strange world we live in, Tom, where you're never quite sure where things are going. Each step of the way you try to make the best of it. Did you see the [2015] movie *The Martian* [based on a novel by Andy Weir and starring Matt Damon]? We just saw it on TV, and it ends with this little guy saying, "It's one problem after the other, and you just keep going, solving each problem as you go along."

TS: And that's you.

MF: Yes, yes, yeah!

TS: Well, I think that's a good way to end the interview. Thank you very much!

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