

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with ALAN NISHIO

Interviewed

By

Traci Kiriya

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NARRATOR: ALAN NISHIO
INTERVIEWER: Traci Kiriyama
DATE: May 5, 1994
LOCATION: Long Beach, California
PROJECT: Japanese American

TK: This is an interview with Alan Nishio by Traci Kiriyama for the Japanese American Project of the Oral History Program at California State University, Fullerton. The interview is being held in Mr. Nishio's office in Cal State University, Long Beach. The time of the interview is approximately four o'clock. The date of the interview is Thursday, May 5, 1994. Okay, Alan, basically, if you can just begin with background on your parents, their full names, when and where they were born, where they were raised, and maybe the immigration experience, if any.

AN: Okay, let's see. My father's name is Kiyoshi Nishio, and he was born, roughly, 1911. And he was born in Whittier, California. He was born here, went back to Japan when he was relatively young, like four or five, and lived with his grandparents in Japan. Well, my grandparents were his parents stayed here, went back when he was around fifteen, and finished high school. He graduated from Whittier High School and after that worked in my grandfather's grocery store. It was in Los Angeles. He worked there until, roughly, 1939, when he bought his own store. And then, with the war and camps, lost the store and was in Manzanar. I'm sorry, married my mom in between that! Married my mom, probably, I would say in 1935 or something like that. Went to camp and after camp was a gardener. He passed away in 1968. So, that's my dad.
My mom was born in Seattle, Washington, 1917. She moved back to Japan, also, was more like a Kibei and lived with her parents in Hiroshima, where my father also lived. Came back here after high school, and let's see, married my dad. She worked in the grocery store with my father, my grandfather, the grocery store they owned together. Went to camp, Manzanar. And after camp, worked in my uncle's grocery store, and then worked for this pen company for twenty-something years. Retired about ten years ago.

TK: And your mother's full name?

AN: Mitsui Tsujimura Nishio.

TK: So, before the internment, they got married?

AN: Yes.

TK: And how did they decide on the kind of community that they would move to before internment?

AN: Well, it was kind of tied to, I think, my grandfather's store and where the other relatives were living at the time. It was kind of the South Los Angeles area. So, it was pretty much determined by my grandfather. My grandfather, I think the family kind of moved around that. Yes, so he was in the grocery business. He bought a store a little bit further down, but they lived in that particular area up until the war.

TK: Did they begin having children before the war broke out?

AN: Yes, I have an older sister who was born November 1941.

TK: What's her name?

AN: Her name is Jane Nishio. She was born right prior to Pearl Harbor, and I was born at the tail end in August of 1945, toward the end of the camp experience.

TK: And so from the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor to exact date of their evacuation with your sister, what was their reactions? What were the plans that they made right before they had to evacuate?

AN: Well, I'm not sure because I wasn't around, but in talking to my mother about some of it, I think that the first few months they didn't know what was going on. That was probably typical of the community. And there was some concern because other relatives got picked up by the FBI in December and things of that nature. After the Executive Order was issued, that was a time of screwing around and figuring out what to do. My father had to kind of try to find someone to buy the store and figure out to do with all the material, et cetera. So, he was busy doing that and trying to settle things and trying to figure out what best we could do with the situation. He ended up selling the store, right prior to going to camp, at a fraction of what he paid for, and he was kind of getting everything else ready. I think it was not knowing what the future was going to bring, and a lot of concerns about things and having a relatively young child at that point. I never had a chance to talk to my dad about camp. I've been talking to my mother. My mother, it's hard for her to talk—she doesn't like to talk about things that are not pleasant, so kind of talking about that time, we've had some discussion, but it has not been an easy one. It was more about a lot of confusion that was going on and a lot of concern. And it lasted a few weeks, just a lot of chaos going to get everything sold and figuring out what to do with things or whatever. As I mentioned, my dad was trying to sell the store. We sold a lot. Things that we couldn't sell or we didn't want to sell, we put in this neighbor's garage for safekeeping. And when my dad came out of camp, the neighbors were

gone. Everything was stolen. My father had a number of things, but one was he had a whole cigar box full of Indian head pennies, whatever they were. They were very valuable. We lost everything. So, he came out of camp without any money at all.

TK: Did he have any correspondence with the neighbors or did he totally lose touch with them once—

AN: They had left and I didn't know if he made any attempts to contact them or he was never able to contact him.

TK: So, were they evacuated straight to a relocation center or were they—

AN: They went to Santa Anita, were temporarily in Santa Anita and then went to Manzanar.

TK: Were they evacuated with other family members? Their siblings?

AN: Yes, most of the relatives, with the exception of a couple who were picked up in December—and they were sent to, I'm not sure where, but they weren't in Manzanar. But, most of the family was interned in Manzanar. They were all living in the same basic area. They were sent to Santa Anita together, subsequently Manzanar, and lived in the same block together.

TK: During camp, were your parents involved in any activities within the camp community?

AN: Yes, they were, though, I'm not too sure—my mom was more involved in things than my father was. My dad worked in camp. So, did my mom. He did some agriculture work during the day, et cetera and some activities they were involved in during the time. I'm not too sure what they were about.

TK: Did your mom ever discuss with you her experience or their experience concerning the loyalty oath?

AN: No. Not until—again, with my dad, we never talked about camp, ever. And with my mom we talked about that, and she signed yes-yes to them. My father signed yes, yes, but it was more peer pressure. Had a lot of problems about that, but he did sign yes-yes.

[00:10:00]

TK: Did they ever entertain any thoughts about expatriation to Japan or anything?

AN: No, no.

TK: Did any of the relatives?

AN: No

TK: No? Everybody wanted to stay.

AN: One of the family leaders was very kind of pro U.S. or whatever and had a lot of influence on the rest of the family saying it was in the interest of the family that everyone stick together and whatever, so I think they all followed that example. They all stuck together and did the same things.

TK: And when exactly where you born?

AN: I was born August 9, 1945, the day Nagasaki was bombed. Obviously, it was at the tail end of the war.

TK: Yeah. Okay, so once it was time to leave camp, you were saying your whole family had nothing to come back to. How did your parents decide where they would go to? Did they try to go back to their own community—

AN: No, what is was, I guess people were allowed to leave camp, probably, in the end of August or whatever. We didn't leave camp until December. My two uncles went out ahead of time and figured out where to live. They pooled some money bought this grocery store in Inglewood. We had a set of these little cottages that were there, so he was looking for a place where everyone could kind of move, in these kind of small cottages. So, that's where we moved in December 1945, and that was in Inglewood.

TK: What was your experience growing up in Inglewood as a child?

AN: I really didn't grow up in Inglewood. We lived in Inglewood until I was four, and then we moved to the Mar Vista area when I was four. So, I have no recollection of my Inglewood days. We were up in the Venice area. My recollection in the general kinds of things?

TK: In terms of your education, your social activities, and just the makeup of the community, ethnically and culturally.

AN: Let's see. Well, when we moved there, they weren't many people living in that particular area. We were like the only house in the block. It was kind of an undeveloped area. And, at the time, in the general area, there were a couple of other Japanese families. Most of them were white, kind of lower working class area. About five years after we lived there, a housing project was built about a block away from us so that changed the community. That was largely a Latino, African American, white, very few Asians. It was a low income housing project called Mar Vista Gardens. So, that changed the composition of the community significantly, and then, the community grew in numbers and concentration but always stayed relatively mixed. None of us knew African Americans, except with the housing project. They came in numbers, more white, Latinos, and Japanese Americans, fairly mixed. More

white, Japanese Americans at that time. So, I went to elementary school, Braddock Drive Elementary School, from kindergarten to sixth grade and was involved doing whatever you do in elementary school. At that time, I was not that much aware of my own ethnic identity, et cetera, just some fights with people when people talked about Japs and this and that. But, at the time, when they were talking about Japs and people on TV and these war movies, these were these other people. This was not me kind of thing. And a couple times when someone called me a Jap, I got in a fight and beat them up, but it didn't really affect me that much.

My own sense of ethnic identity—a lot of my identity changed in junior high school because what we had grown up—again, because of this housing project, most of my friends were blacks and Latinos and more whites, so to speak because we were in a working class area. There was no junior high close to us, so we were bused to this junior high, Palms Junior High. It was Palms / Cheviot Hills area. I don't know if you know the area? That school was about 90 percent white, and, in that white population, probably about 60 to 70 percent Jewish. So, we were kind of this one busload of folks of color, who were also not very rich. They were bused to this school. That was the first time I was aware of being poor and also being different. And, at that time, I thought Jewish people were the majority in society. That was an interesting time. It was being exposed to very different kinds of things, and socially being less mature than, especially Jewish people, were. That was kind of an interesting time. It was a hard time for me because I was becoming more aware of myself as a young man and these other kinds of things. People that were the hip people were these Jewish girls. I was very active in sport stuff and whatever. Basically, active in sports but really not feeling comfortable there so relatively quiet. Myself and some Sansei woman, Keiko Hega—Keiko, she lived near us. We took the same bus and everything. We were voted the shyest in the class in the eighth grade. But, it was an interesting experience for me because of just feeling the outside and looking at these people and how they lived. I remember being invited to this person's house for a party, and that was the first time I had ever been to one of these homes. It was up on a hill. And that's when I was embarrassed because my father dropped me off in this old beat up car. His gardening truck was like '36, so it was awful. He dropped me off there, and it was the first time I was aware that I wasn't really like this other people. They live in nice homes. They do different things. It was just a different experience. I was just blown away by that. I felt very uncomfortable.

And then, I kind of just got into a shell. During that time—because we were so different than all the others—I was involved in stealing. I got picked up for arson. We set a mailbox on fire. We used to be awful. We used to shoplift and do all these anti-social things. Robbed a liquor store once, you know, do things like that. Did that on the side, in addition to going to church and junior high and whatever. But, after being voted the shyest in my class—and when I left junior high school, most of the people that went to this one school, it's called Hamilton High, which at that time, mostly Jewish people went to them or whatever—and those of us that were bused were not in that high school; we would go to Venice High School. So then, I started at Venice High in tenth grade, and I had just told myself this was a whole new group. Most of these other folks were not there, so I told myself I was going to change, and I

kind of set these goals for myself. I was going to be more hip like the others were in junior high school, get involved in sports, and do this and do this and do this. And I went really crazy in the tenth grade. Even though I didn't know many people there, I just soshed it up. I was the tenth grade representative. I was in all the clubs and all this stuff, so a real sosh. I set these goals of being able to walk down these hallway and being able to say hello to as many people as I could and that I was really going to make an impact on the campus, so that's basically—

High school, I was very actively involved in different things. I was the senior class president. But, it was a miserable time; I really hated high school. In fact, it's funny, I was senior class president, and I had never gone back to that high school. I skipped the reunions and whatever because it wasn't a good time for me. It was kind of this image trying to—so I got away from my hoodlum activities and a lot of my friends that I hung out with in junior high school, stopped seeing them, and starting hanging around with, primarily white folks in Venice High. And, in fact, cut off from a lot of people that I grew up with in the neighborhood, et cetera, a lot of which are dead or in prison or cops, but I kind of made a conscious decision to cut ties with the people that I grew up with in the neighborhood and hung out with the white sosh types. And I just got into this very soshy of thing, cruising Whittier Boulevard, and doing all of these other things. Still staying active in church, though, Venice Free Methodist Church. So, that was my high school days and went on to college. My grades in high school were fairly miserable. I had about a C+ average because I wasn't that interested in school. I was too busy soshing it up and things like that. My sister, who was four years older than me, was a very good student, and she encouraged me to take the SAT test and to apply to college at the time. I was planning on going to community college and maybe going in the Army or whatever else because there wasn't many other things on my mind. But, I took the SAT. I did very, very well in it, so I was admitted into UCLA, which was beyond my comprehension cause my GPA was quite low. It was like 2.6 but scored very well on the SAT.

[00:21:30]

TK: Do you mind saying how much?

AN: Fourteen-forty.

TK: Wow.

AN: I mean, I was shocked that I was admitted. So, after I got admitted, my advance composition teacher told me, even though I was admitted, she suggested I not go because I wouldn't be able to survive there because my skills were so poor. Anyway, I went to UCLA, and that was another shift in my thinking. Each time I shifted schools, I made this conscious decision. Before going to UCLA, I decided I was going to really change and take school very seriously because I figured I screwed around enough. This is really an opportunity, and I wanted to prove my advance comp teacher wrong, that I could actually survive. But, I figured she's telling me that

because she telling me that if I don't change, I'll flunk out, and I don't want to flunk out. I did my freshman year at UCLA and was, by all accounts, relatively an obnoxious person. I kind of continued these soshy ways. I was really obnoxious. I had told myself one goal I was going as I set myself up as a freshman at UCLA, was I was going to date the entire pledge class of Theta Kappa Phi sorority. I was really an asshole. So, that was UCLA days. At that time, I was working part-time at a liquor store or whatever, but I was being really social. During my freshman year, I just decided I wasn't happy at UCLA, it was just too Asian. I made this transition from primarily whites to this all Asian thing. At UCLA everything was divided up where you hung out with Asians. My white friends hung out with other people so I felt this pressure to hang out with Asians and that whole thing. I didn't like that, so I decided—I went to UCLA majoring in math, and math was awful to me. So, my sister thought it would be better for me—because she graduated from UCLA—for me to go away for school and said Berkley was a good school. So, I said, “Well, I'll apply at Berkley.” I got accepted in Berkley, went there, again had this thing where I did okay at UCLA. I had a C average, so it wasn't great. I would really have to study hard to survive at Berkley. So, went to Berkley, majoring in business. That was during the Free Speech Movement—it was my first semester at Cal—and just kind of got blown away by the political environment at Berkley. The Free Speech Movement, the Civil Rights Movement. It was just a very different scene.

TK: At this time, you are how old?

AN: I was, at that time, nineteen. And loved it. Just got involved and for the first time, things began to click for me. I studied my head off, got involved politically in things, and it was where things began to come together for me. Am I talking too long about this stuff?

TK: No, you're not.

AN: So, I got involved in the Free Speech Movement, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee [SNCC], Vietnam Day Committee, and all that stuff. Plus, I just studied like a fiend. I would go to the library at eight o'clock in the morning and study Saturday and stayed until ten o'clock at night. I would keep this book and wrote all the hours I studied. I told myself as a rule that I have to put in at least thirty-something hours before the weekend or I wouldn't go out kind of thing. So, between Monday and Friday, I'd put in thirty hours, and I'd have to have a least forty hours each week of studying.

TK: Plus going to class and all of your—

AN: Plus going to class. I was just absolutely crazy. I was driven *because* I loved the campus. I felt like I had to compete, and I felt so under-prepared compared to most of the others because in mathematics I was okay. But, in political science, at that time, I was just—there were people that had read so much more than I had, and some were very verbal and could talk about things. So, my first summer I came back to

town, I told myself I felt really inadequate there, so I put together this list of books I was going to read. That summer I read I think twenty-something books. I read *War and Peace*, *Brothers Karamazov*, I mean, I wanted to be well read. I wanted to go back and read these things and understand. So, I read all these different books, most of which I jammed myself. I don't even remember very well. That had a big influence on me, doing this intensive reading for summer. And getting involved—I was involved but didn't know what was going on, very naïve. But, by my senior year, I was more on top of things. My grades had gotten fairly good then. I was getting a little more confident and, in a senior political science class, I was doing some research for some project I was doing. I can't remember what project I was doing, but I was just doing some research in the library. I ran across a book called *The Managed Causality* by John I. Kitsuse and someone else [Leonard Broom].

So, I ran across this book. I can't remember what I was researching, but it was related to some class project I was doing. I saw Manzanar. I said, "Manzanar? That's where I was born." I always assumed that Manzanar was this small town in Central California that my family just happened to be living in at the time I was born. My mom would talk about camp and all these things, but it never occurred to me—it was beyond my comprehension what it was, so I just assumed Manzanar was a place we used to live in and we moved. When you're growing up, you don't think about these things. That's the first time I had seen Manzanar listed, and it talked about Manzanar as one of the relocation centers. *The Managed Casualty* was an anthropological study of case studies of families. So, I read this thing and said, "My God, Manzanar was this camp. We were put in because of the war!" (laughs) That was the first time I had ever—and so, when I went home during the break, I asked my parents, "Why didn't you tell me what Manzanar was?" They didn't want to talk about it. My dad refused to talk about it, and my mom said, "Oh, no, it was fun, you know. We got to meet people." So, I thought, Well, that's kind of curious. At the time, it didn't strike me as anything major, but that was the first time I learned what Manzanar was.

And then, I graduated from Cal. I started my graduate work at USC. At that time, that's when a lot of ethnic awareness things were beginning to emerge, ethnic studies. I was politically very active in a number of things by that time, but most of my activity wasn't in the Asian American community. It was helping black people in the South and doing all these other things. And then, there was a time when I was involved in SNCC, and Stokely Carmichael kind of raised the cry of the Black Power basically saying, we don't need white people that are missionaries going down on buses and registering voters. That, if you really care about fighting racism, white people should be working in their own communities to educate people about black people to gain control of their institution, et cetera. And my initial reaction to that was very negative. My point of view was when he was talking about white people, I identify with [them]. He was talking about me, that kind of thing. (chuckles) But, it forced me to kind of look at things, and then I agreed with the perspective white people should be educating white. That, if they really want to fight racism, then they should be doing good deeds within the black community, that, if they really want to fight racism, that they should be educating white people about racism, et cetera, and it forced me to look at myself, saying, "Gee, I'm Asian. I should be doing more work

with Asian community to combat—” So, that’s when we started Asian American Political Alliance and these first groups.

But, my view was very paternalistic. It was like, We don’t have any problems. We are like white people. I have to be a part of educating Asians about how bad it is that we treat black people so badly. But, it’s not that we have any problems. We are just like white people. We’re okay. It’s these poor black people that have problems, kind of things. That’s how I started looking at things. But, through the Vietnam War and through becoming more educated, I began to realize that racism really impacted our community and then saw that we had a lot of issues and problems in the community, and so just became more aware of that during ethnic studies, reading more about camps, just getting more upset that this is all a bunch of crap. And then getting involved in the Title Two Campaign, McCarran-Walter Act, et cetera, but going back a little bit, before my undergrad days at Berkley, I was politically very active.

[00:32:26]

TK: Can you talk about the specific organizations you were politically active with?

AN: Yeah, well, it was primarily the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and then, in the latter part, the Vietnam Day Committee at Berkley. Plus, I was involved in tutorial projects and things of that nature. My father was extremely proud of the fact that I was at Berkley but was extremely embarrassed that I was politically active.

Also, after I had met Yvonne. You met Yvonne. Have you met Yvonne? I met Yvonne during my sophomore year at Cal. At first, we didn’t get along at all. We were politically very different. I started in ’64. We got to end the war. She had just come from the Republican National Convention, the Goldwater golden girl. So, she was Republicanism and whatever, and I was like, you gotta be crazy. She was active in the church that didn’t believe in dancing and didn’t believe in all these things, very conservative church. And all the women that I would date before—I was really an awful person. I would date attractive women, just for the sake of dating attractive women. I would call up women that I saw, that I would not know, and I would just start talking to them. I was just really a chump.

But Yvonne was the first person that we would argue, that it was like intellectually very challenging because I was very chauvinistic. I thought I was God’s gift to whatever in terms of just being able to argue. And she would just not accept what I said, so at first, when we knew each other, we would just argue, but we fell in love. So, I was finished, and I was doing my graduate at USC. Yvonne, when she finished, came to UCLA—actually came down here to be together—and she was doing her credential work there. And my father, when he met Yvonne, just wouldn’t talk to her. He wouldn’t even acknowledge that she existed because he hated Chinese people.

TK: Oh, I see.

AN: Largely as a result of the fact that he sold the store to some Chinese people, and he felt that they were just merciless in terms of not giving them the minimum and taking advantage of him, et cetera. And so, when my father died, he and I were not in speaking terms. We had not spoken for the two months before he passed away. Nor was he on speaking terms with my sister who was dating this African American guy at the time. That was kind of a sad note to our family history. So, when I started dating Yvonne, he was not really happy about that situation. Yvonne and I got married; we both became involved in some of the same activities. She was less involved in Berkley, and, once we got married, we became more involved in some of the community related issues.

TK: So, she moved back to L.A. with you?

AN: Yes.

TK: And when did you get married?

AN: We got married in 1968.

TK: And this was after you were done with school?

AN: Yeah, I had just finished my master's degree and was starting to work on my doctorate.

TK: How did you both decide where you were going to move to?

AN: Well, when we got married, the plan was for me to —I was just going to quit on my master's, and then I was just going to go take this internship in Washington D.C. I told her we would probably eventually move back to the Bay Area. She loves the Bay Area, and I like it up there more than down here. But, after I finished my master's, I was accepted into these internships in Washington. One of the faculty members kept asking me if I'd work with him on this project that he was working on and just work on my doctorate instead. So, I decided to do that. We stayed in Los Angeles, and I worked at SC. I finished my doctoral course work and was planning on finishing my dissertation and doing whatever. That's when the Asian American Studies at UCLA was getting started, and so they asked me to work there. And I was active in a lot of these activities and stuff like that. I was close to finishing my doctorate, and it didn't make sense for me to work there. It was the biggest mistake of my life! No, I'm only kidding!

TK: (laughs)

AN: But, it changed career direction considerably. Between working at UCLA and also just movement as a whole, had change. When I was working on my master's, I kind of decided my goal was first to work on this internship in Washington, just be this bureaucrat, just work at this agency. And then, after I started working on my

doctorate and working with this professor at USC, I kind of changed my plan when I was doing my doctorate work. My plans were fairly clearly to finish my doctorate at the age of twenty-three. Go to law school and get my law degree and finish that by age twenty-six. To work as an intern for someone in Washington D.C., a Congressional intern. Then to come back to California and work in some kind of office and run for Assembly. So, I was planning on becoming a politician. I even staked out the area that I was going to run in. I figured by the time I was thirty-two to thirty-five, I'll be running for office. So, that was kind of my plan. I've always been directed in those kinds of things. I've always been an egomaniac, extremely egocentric. That was my plan, and I changed because, one, being married to Yvonne who was not a traditional wife—I didn't know that until we got married—and being involved in the Asian movement at that time. I got a bigger sense of being part of a movement, the importance of working with other people, and it was a big decision for me to go to UCLA because that put my career goals on the shelf and decided to do something different than I was doing.

[00:40:21]

TK: Did your dissertation reflect what you were doing in the community?

AN: No. My dissertation, at the time, was focusing on comparative economic development strategies of—well, to a degree it did. It was looking at the economic development strategies of the Agency for National Development in Brazil and Thailand and application of those strategies to community economic development in South Central Los Angeles. My argument was that Thailand was a model of a paternalistic economic development model where there were foreign aid officers. In Brazil, there was more of an attempt to organize the indigenous community and provide support to allowing the people in those communities to develop. And what I was arguing is that a lot of poverty programs of the sixties had a paternalistic model similar to that used in Thailand. And we were using more of a local empowerment model similar to that used in Brazil so that was going to be the nature of my dissertation.

But, I got in a fight with my dissertation advisor who, at the time, I found out was on the payroll of the CIA. So, anyways, I just dropped my dissertation. I finished my exams and everything. To me, it became symbolic. For me to finish my doctorate would be kind of capitulating to the system, to go for just the piece of paper, and I'd have to subject myself to being a slave to this person who I have no respect for. The guy was a damn agent for the CIA, so I just dropped my program, dropped the dissertation, and just got involved with UCLA and community stuff.

TK: So, did you begin working at UCLA?

AN: Yeah, I was working at UCLA. At the time I started UCLA, I finished my exams, and my plan was to work at UCLA and then go finish my dissertation. But, all this stuff happened so I just decided the dissertation became a political symbol that I needed to not do. So, I worked at UCLA and directed the study center, there. After

two years, I left and studied in Japan for a year, traveled. Came back, worked with Bob Susuki who works in Massachusetts and then came to Long Beach. So, that's my career path. And my involvement in the community stuff, at that time, was initially while I was at SC. I was doing training primarily in black and Chicano communities to help them build black and Chicano community organizations. You know Miya Iwataki?

TK: Um-hm.

AN: Well, Miya, at the time, applied for a job at the center that I was helping to run as a secretary. And Miya asked, "Why don't we have training for Asians? Why are we just helping black and Chicanos?" My attitude was Asians don't need this because we don't have problems. We are trying to help these communities to develop leadership and organization within the communities. And Asians don't have that. We have organizations and we have—

TK: I'm thinking this is before you got more in touch with the Asian American—

AN: Right. And so, my initial involvement in the Asian American community was this very paternalistic attitude about, Asians are so backward. We are all middle class and politically backwards. And, since I was kicked out of the Civil Rights Movement because I wasn't black, I thought, I'll organize the Asian community for civil rights, et cetera, against the war. The things that I was previously doing, primarily in the white movement, I decided to do in the Asian movement. Fortunately, by working with people, now more reality based on the nature of our community, the issues that were in the community. And also the fact that I was a pretty awful person to be with. It forced me—because I was so arrogant and people would just struggle with me about the attitude—I am a very capable person and a very bright person, but really arrogant in terms of—I mean, I wasn't like an awful person. But, I was just very egocentric, very self-righteous and this confidence that I could make myself comparable to that you and I both know—well, you know how Ben is?

TK: Oh, yeah.

AN: Like that. Kind of this cockiness, right?

TK: Yes.

AN: Like you know the answers and it's my way. Fortunately, I married Yvonne—and also I was part of a movement with other people that emphasized collectivity, working together on things, and values that I very much value now and forced me to kind of change, and I'm very thankful for the fact that I was part of that. It's pretty clear what I would be doing if I weren't part of that. I think I'd still be a very egocentric maniac without a lot of values, just doing things to do things. But, I feel a lot more based and grounded in terms of what I'm doing. I'm digressing terribly. I'm sorry.

TK: No, no. Well, like you did with your education, can you trace through your experiences in the social movements, maybe starting with your actual involvements in actual organizations like the Asian American Political Alliance?

AN: Yeah, the first Asian organization was the Asian American Political Alliance, which we founded in 1968.

TK: And this was at Berkley?

AN: At USC. This was when I was at SC. The AAPA had actually begun at Berkley as a political organization, and then some of us down here decided we would form a Los Angeles chapter. At the same time this was happening, there was groups like Oriental Concern and these kind of social groups, identity organizations. Some of us thought we were politically heavy. We needed a political organization that would—and [thought] that these other things were lightweight, touchy-feely. So, we created this and organized demonstrations against S.I. Hayakawa and against the war, against the Emperor of Japan. We were primarily demonstration oriented, pickets, and this kind of stuff. We thought of ourselves as really, heavy, heavies.

We got involved with Asian American Political Alliance and, through that group, we did a lot of things. We had Asian American Experimental College where we did these summer classes on organizing and things like that. We did a number of political and other activities. And then, after that, I got involved with the JACS organization, Japanese American Community Services, and we started the JACS Asian Involvement office in Little Tokyo, which serves the people doing different kinds of doing these different activities in Little Tokyo. So, got involved in that and got involved in political organizations that were doing political work.

Then got involved with Little Tokyo people's right organization and the anti-eviction struggles and was president of _____ (inaudible) during the redevelopment things. And then, after the redevelopment phase, we were summing up what needed to be done, and we saw the redress as being a very important issue. And then got involved in creating and forming NCRP [Nikkei for Civil Rights and Redress]. So, it kind went from the redevelopment struggle and fighting against big businesses and fighting for the future of Little Tokyo—we chained ourselves and all that stuff—to getting more involved with the redress. And so, got involved with the redress in '79, and continued with the NCRP on the redress and other issues since then.

TK: So, a lot of Sansei, like yourself—I guess the activists were community-minded as well as politically minded. Do you think that the efforts that they put toward the grassroots efforts serve the people programs? Did that point you all in the direction of NCRP because their philosophy is much more grassroots?

[00:49:46]

AN: A lot of us came out of that period where a lot of phrases of *serve the people, rely on the masses*—they were political slogans, but they were inspiring and set the values for what most of us believed. We believed in issues of collectivity and a non-elitist

approach to things that one person contributed. Even though, he or she might be a college president [they are] no more value than a custodian. We believed in five basic needs that we should really fight. That everyone had the access to adequate housing, health, food, education, clothing, you know, kind of things. These are things that should be available to everyone. In other words, just a number of things that were going to help you define who we were and the kind of society that we wanted to build. It was clearly a time where there was much more optimism and a time where there was a feeling that things could change, and the feeling that the U.S. was all-powerful and had the resources and was the oppressor of the world. And that was the cause of all problems because of its greed. That defined who we were and what we were doing because we felt a real obligation. Because, again, if you were organizing, as we were, during the Vietnam War days, you just felt that very dearly, as an Asian person, seeing the racism in the war in Vietnam.

Just like you can't—not seeing why the hell we were there. It was just incredible what we were doing in Vietnam. You know what I mean? You see the carnage of people being bombed, shot, and you felt this need to stop the war. It was an insane war, one that had no logic in terms of benefitting the people in Vietnam, and it was not benefitting the U.S. in any way that we could see, other than it was advancing U.S. global interest economically. But being involved helped you define, I think. So, combined with the anger, the righteous anger that comes out of seeing something that wrong happening, combining that with the real optimism of people growing up in the sixties that things could change, society could change, and that you don't have to worry about things like careers, jobs, where your next meal is coming from. You know, the resources are there to take care of things. And that was how we emerged.

It's a very different environment now, obviously, but that was what kind of helped me mold my thinking and my involvement. I've always, coming out of the sixties and that period, have always valued grassroots involvement and valued being part of a grouping of people that do things together, rather than emphasize individual accomplishment or individual roles, et cetera, and just feeling much more comfortable in that environment, personally. But also, a real sense that, for myself, that's the really the kind of group I need to be involved in. That if I were involved in the JAACL [Japanese American Citizens League], I would be national president, and I'd be this egomaniac running, advancing my career. I just have this strong feeling that for myself, personally, that would have been the wrong environment for me. It would have fed the wrong parts of my basic nature. I like to see myself as a person who is extremely self-confident with a strong ego that's camelback in a relatively productive manner. Just like in my job, here, in student services, I have a relatively high position. But I feel it's very important that I'm in contact with students because I can see myself easily become arrogant and looking at students as I know what's best for them. These are silly little people. They're young don't know what they are doing; and I know what is best. You know what I mean?

TK: Um-hm.

AN: And there is one part of me—it's very easy for me to come up with what I think is right, what's the best thing to do in any situation. I have an opinion on something, and I'm willing to move on it. But, again, my values tell me that no matter what I think that typically being part of a group, you come up with better solutions than you do individually, and it's better to work in a group situation, interact with people and come up with things together than it is to come up with what you think it's best. In a political environment or in most organizations, it reinforces that the people that have the biggest egos are the ones that rise. You know what I mean? And that's what a notion of leader is, is the person that can speak well, da, da, da. I can see myself falling into that, and so my attitude was a very different approach of what leadership is. I don't feel like a martyr. It was best for me because I could have seen myself probably moving the other way. I'd probably be an alcoholic, probably have a heart attack because it's not very fulfilling kind of spinning out like that. That was an important time to be able to gain those perspectives. I think that's helped define what I've always been involved in, why I'm involved in groups like NCR, and other things as opposed to more mainstream forms.

TK: It seems like the people I've talked to that are involved with NCR, they have this same mentality—of course, because that's the basic philosophy of the organization. And it's just seems that when I talked to you, first, you said, "Well, you should talk to Brett Nakano." And then, when I talked to him, he said, "Well, you should talk to Frank Emi." And it just seems to be that there's this—not passing off onto another person because, obviously, you guys want to share as much as your history and information as you can. But, what's coming off to me that there is an importance of knowing that it's just not been a few people that have pushed for redress. It's just not been a few leaders. It's the whole collective group. It's the communal effort that is actually *the leader* in the movement.

AN: You're right. And again, it's not NCR. That's why it's so frustrating when we look at how some people sum up the redress movement who are trying to take credit for the redress movement. Be it the JACL or Grant Ujifusa or particular politicians or whatever. It's frustrating because, yes, everybody had a role, but people tend to sum up history from these notions of their individuals, John F. Kennedy who led things, as opposed to social movements and people moving together in a concerted action, basically, doing things. We tend to underplay the role of movements, communities, everyone doing their little bit together, making up the whole. We tend to play more of this thing of the influential individual with the right contacts, so the charismatic leader that grabbed the mic at the right time and lead.

And it's frustrating because we all fall into that trap. We like to think that César Chavez is the leader of the United Farm Workers. That Martin Luther King was the—you know, it's the media and the historians that prop these people up as being the leaders. And it's important. They're important *symbols*. César Chavez was a hero, and also, Mandela was a hero. But they are basically heroes. They are not the individuals that by their individual will moved a nation or moved a movement. They are basically the symbol of that broader movement. But the César Chavez's of the world were basically a reflection of the thousands of farm workers

that organized. The movement for United Farm Workers is not attributed to César Chavez. It's the tribute to the thousands. But we tend to underemphasize the movement part of it. We tend to emphasize the leaders.

Again, in redress, the battle that I see is people trying to take credit for redress with organization versus that organization. And I like to think that our approach is the lessons of who take credit for redress is the Japanese American community and the fair minded civil libertarians, supporters, and friends. That's the bottom line and that various people in the organization played very critical roles at key points in time, but we would have not gone nowhere without the dynamic of the community and everybody working together on some of these things.

TK: And going beyond that, also going beyond just naming individuals, it seems like a lot of times you'll hear people talking about redress and the whole movement as a Sansei movement. I talked with Brett Nakano and Frank Emi. They're both Nisei, and people like them can be forgotten as a very big part of this whole movement for redress.

[00:59:46]

AN: And clearly the movement for redress, the Sansei played a very important initial role because the Nisei had given up. What Nisei had was the experience of the camps and the devastation of that, but what they had lost was the spirit and will and the enthusiasm to launch a movement. What the Sansei brought was this optimism and spirit and willingness to fight on an idealistic manner for a movement. But it only would have gone so far if it was just a Sansei effort. Things fell together. Nisei told their stories and people came forward. I think that's why it's so hard to talk about the redress campaign because at different points, different players came. It's looking at it in the real world about how things are changed—it's always multi-dimensional—and all these varied forces, some luck and coincidence and everything.

But, people like to simplistically analyze it at the end, come to their conclusion, and justify everything else so it fits that. I see that a little too frequently. Leslie Hatamiya's book focusing just on the legislative process, and it was just the wheeling and dealers in Washington D.C. that did it. If you believe Grant Ujifusa, it was his car ride conversation with Tom King that convinced Tom King to speak to Ronald Reagan. This is all crap. Yes, that's important. Wes, that's important. No one argues the importance—everything was important—and try not to say this was the critical point, this was the key point. NCR could say that we were critical because, if it wasn't for NCR, I firmly believe JACL would have never taken up the redress. They would have to settle for an apology cause that's what Mike Masaoka was pushing: a little bit of a trust fund, then an apology, and they would have been happy. Because the leadership of JACL never, at that time, believed in redress. They felt we would never get it, and they were embarrassed that we were asking for it. It was a minority position in JACL.

But, what happened was that NCRR pushed, and they realized JACL had to take this position because if they don't, people are going to join NCRR! Because every time the leaders pushed for these things, the members, Hell no, we want

individual da, da, da, da, da. And so, you had these leaders that, we don't think that the people in Washington are going to accept this. What if we get a trust fund? They were backpedaling. But again, I'm not saying that was instrumental; that was *key*. Spark Matsunaga was key in terms of him working on the Senate side. At different points in time, different people were key, but it was all because we were driving off the same movement. And that's what movements are. They are not individuals. It's a synergy of a lot of people working on something that takes on a life of its own. And I think the redress movement was a movement in that sense, also. And that's what I try to convey at that historical society—fairly feebly, I think—that if you're never involved in a movement, they don't understand what that means. Because there are so few movements that capture that kind of thing today. Unfortunately, we are a whole new, different environment. It's much more conservative, it's much more reflective, less optimism for the future. People less willing to risk of themselves. We are much more into security in our own lives, et cetera. And most people today in college have never had the opportunity to experience being part of a movement, a social movement where you feel that you are part of creating change. Like I said in the speech, once you're part of a movement, you don't forget it. And that, to me, is the tragedy that people don't feel empowered. They don't feel that. And you learn some valuable lessons that things can change, not as individuals but collective action. Now I'm lecturing. I sound like a professor!

TK: No! Could you go back to the actual formulation of the National Coalition for Redress and Reparation, and maybe talk about the different people involved who began the organization?

AN: Sure. We started first in Los Angeles. And it was, basically, people in LT Pro working with some JACL people, et cetera. What our attitude was is to form a coalition around the issue of redress and unite with whoever could unite behind these basic principles seeking individual monetary compensation, and our reasons were many fold. We felt that this was such an important issue in the Japanese American community that we didn't want it hurt by organizational affiliations, that you had to join JACL or to become involved in redress or you had to be Christian or Buddhist. Our attitude was, let's try to unite as many people as we can around this issue and not get into the organizational affiliation stuff. So, we reached out and always had participation by JACL members and JACL chapters, different churches: Buddhist churches, Christian churches, et cetera. Our approach was, as long as you can agree these things, join us, be part of we are doing, et cetera. It was never: you have to be in our organization, et cetera.

So, that's what we did. Then we had our founding conference in 1980, and we basically brought together different people from different areas to unite behind that and talk about ourselves as a national coalition. So, that's how we were formed. And again, JACL was always a significant part of our effort in terms of individuals. Our approach was to be very grassroots, and our emphasis was around organizing, education, et cetera. It was around, again, uniting with everybody that could be united with, around these four principles. Our view with JACL was that JACL was an important organization, but we can't trust JACL because the leadership had a

history of selling out the organization. Because the leadership, historically, has always been these careerist-type people that are concerned with their own reputations and the contacts they make and what they are going to be doing, how it's going to look in their resume, et cetera. And whenever push comes to shove, and the membership wants one thing, but the patriarchs in the organization or influential people want another thing, historically, the leadership has always sold out. (chuckles)

So, this wasn't an anti-JACL—many of us were members then and continue to be members—but was more about not having confidence in the JACL that would carry this struggle. And that the JACL, whether we liked it or not at that time, was a Nisei dominated group by a particular clique of Nisei. And it was the Mike Masaoka and these kind of particularly—and they are not evil people. I never characterize people as evil, awful people. It's like _____ (inaudible) and _____ (inaudible). I was at his house for dinner a couple times. You differentiate between people as people and what they represent and their politics. That was what our view of JACL was and continues to be. JACL is changing in that it's more of a Sansei organization, especially in the _____ (inaudible) district; it's much more progressive, et cetera, et cetera.

But JACL has its limitations, too. It's never going to be grassroots in that sense. It's always going to be primarily professional type people, and it's always going to be persuaded in that kind of way. It's always going to be slow to react to issues, et cetera, because of the nature. But, its strength is its national network of *Pacific Citizen*, the size of its membership, so it's got more going for it than it has against it. But, I would never trust the JACL in terms of being the leader of a movement. It's too fraught with internal politics, personalities, and other kinds of things. So, that's why NCCR was formed.

TK: Were there Nisei and Sansei involved during the formation?

[01:07:53]

AN: Oh, yeah. There were Nisei and Sansei involved. We had Bill Hohri, NCJAR was involved, et cetera. But after the founding conference, when Bill realized that we weren't bash the JACL, he dropped out. He was hoping we were going to be bashing the JACL, and our position was no. Our agenda is not to bash anymore; our agenda is to get redress. That's what our philosophy was. And I like to think that overall we stayed true to the cause in that regard. Individual members in NCCR absolutely hate the JACL, will never be a part of the JACL, et cetera. But organizationally, we always tried to take a principled stance towards JACL of uniting with them, involving them, of giving them credit when credit was due. But, at the same time, trying to keep them in their place, so to speak. Whenever they tried to say, We speak for the Japanese American, we would want to say, you speak for 26,000 of the 400,000 Japanese Americans, et cetera. You are clearly one of the most organized voices, but you represent, largely, at that, time, professional Nisei that are Protestants. You don't represent a lot of Buddhists. You don't represent working class people. And I said, "That's not to guilt trip you. That's just a reality." No organization speaks for the

Japanese American community. The NAACP does not speak for African Americans. So, the JACL has more of the tendency and people—less now with Sansei, who I think are much more in tuned, but the Nisei, at that time—had this tremendous chauvinism that the JACL was *the* organization, and if you don't work for the JACL, da, da, da, da, da. So, these people were crazy. And that was more true, not in L.A., but outside because if you're in Pocatello, Idaho, or whatever, JACL *is* the only organization. And you develop this mentality that you're the only show in town. But, when you're in San Francisco or in L.A. where there is a whole bunch of things, the people here realize that JACL is only one organization but they are a whole bunch of others, and we can't speak for the community et cetera but as a national group. You lose that perspective because the Japanese American in Houston, the only thing they knew was JACL, so they only had this picture that they are the only ones around.

I think that's where NCRP was very important, was this coalition particularly involved with the Buddhist Church because JACL never reached out to the Buddhist Church. The involvement of working class people. If you look during the commission hearings, the people that testified—JACL's approach to the hearings was very clear. All they wanted was experts to testify. They wanted scholars and experts, and that was the wrong approach. Their approach was to have one hearing in Washington D.C. and that being it. And NCRP's approach was no, we want hearing in all the various cities, and we trained people to testify. It's just a very different approach to how you get across things. Their attitude was you have an expert testify. Well, there were 110,000 people that were interned, had a bunch of statistics and charts showing all these things. I don't know if you saw some of the commission hearing testimonies? If you're a commissioner, what's more powerful? Hearing, primarily, a white scholar talking about so many of these camps were set up, this is what happened, and the average mortality rate, or hearing talking about their life, someone who is a gardener or truck driver because you can tell the sincerity, that this wasn't a made up story. These were real things from real people. And, again, that was a difference in how we approached things, and both were valuable. Without JACL in the Washington D.C. lobby and the national network, redress would not have happened. Without NCRP pushing for community input, redress would not have happened. It happened as a result of everyone.

TK: How is NCRP's relationship with NCJAR?

AN: Well, NCJAR, understand, is a one-person organization. It's, basically, Bill Hohri and his friends, and Bill is formidable individual. The strength of NCJAR is that it's Bill Hohri who is bright, very committed, writes well, has good contacts, and whatever. The weakness of NCJAR is Bill Hohri. Bill is like what I could have been, this egomaniac. You don't agree with me? Then forget you. And, if you agree with me, support me. And the main way that people got involved with NCJAR is you send money in, and in exchange for money, you get a newsletter. But Bill's whole attitude was this is what we're doing, this is what we're doing, and, if you believe it, give me money. I'll give you a newsletter in exchange. That was his whole attitude. And if you don't agree with me, well, screw you. Who cares? And it was a very different approach; the court case was what it was all about.

And *our* attitude was, Let's check with the community. Let's organize with the community and say, "Well, what do you think is the best strategy? A court case or a legislation or what? Let's check to see what people feel and what's the best approach. But see, Bill was never committed. He's not based on the community, committed to organizing with people. And again, he's not an evil person. It's just that it was a single person organization, and I don't believe a cult of personality.

So, the relationship with NAJAR was strained only because Bill was negative toward NCRR. Not as much at JACL but for a couple reasons. One was he felt that we were not anti-JACL enough. And I think two, he thought we were too radical and too political and whatever. I don't know what he wanted us to be. But, it doesn't bother me. Bill is Bill. I think NCJAR was an important movement. Bill was an important player in the redress movement, and they should be given due credit for his dedication and what he has done. I think he's an important person in that regard. I tend to be more aloof and objective toward everyone. I don't tend to see that they are good guys and bad guys, in a sense, and I think Bill was important in the process. I'm critical of NCJAR because I think that Bill should have tried to subvert his ego and tried to build a movement of people and allow people become one involved. And if you ask Bill, "What can I do to help NCJAR?" His response is very clear: "Donate money." You know? Donate money, and that's it. He had no other ways of thinking of how you get people involved. And people did donate money, and it was to a good cause. But this notion that that's all you do—if we wouldn't have built a movement, it would not have happened. It would not have gone to the Supreme Court. Bill, even Bill, is not foolish enough to think the supreme court and these objective justice that read this stuff would say, "Oh, well, geez, this is what's right." It's a political court that makes political decisions based on what they see the environment to be and that is what happened.

TK: An individual cannot build a movement, which obviously means that NCRR was not lead by one certain individual. It was definitely a collective—

AN: Yeah, I don't think you can point to any individual in NCRR that is the leader.

TK: Did people have certain positions or roles in NCRR?

AN: Yeah, we all did at different points.

TK: But it was just a name?

AN: Yeah, I mean, that's the pro and con of NCRR. That the con of NCRR is that we don't have that structure. We don't have that pyramid. We don't have this leadership that organizes kinds of things and whatever because it's a very grassroots-y kind of thing. If you come to any general meeting, it's a little disorganized because you have these Nisei talking off the top of their heads, but that's what I like. (chuckles) But, it was a different kind of structure. And the reason why NCRR continues is that the kind of people that we've attracted, and we continue to attract, are people that are just good people because you don't join NCRR to add it to your resume. You don't get

any brownie points for it. You don't get a better job as a result of it. You don't get promotions. You don't get anything that is going to help you professionally or individually. So, you do it because you believe in it. Just pure and simple. You don't make any money off of it, et cetera. Whereas JACL is a lot different. There's the hard core JACL people that do it because they believe in it. But most people, they come in and see if they can, socially, meet people, or it helps them to get contacts for their business.

TK: The fact that it's a nationally recognized—

AN: Right. Or they get something on their resume, and, once they do it, they leave. I can show you so many JACL people that were players that were involved in JALC leadership. Once you got appointed to be a judge, they drop it like a hot potato. Or, once they got this political appointment, they were gone. And that's fine. That's not a knock on them or the organization, but it's realistic about what that organization is. It determines the politics of the organization, and the politics tend to be defined by personality. Who runs for president is not based on a platform of *I believe in this, this, and this*. It's base on who knows who and who has what base and who is most popular. Because it's a fight for personalities in positions, and it is not based in principle. And that's fine, but, as I tell people in JACL, that's not what I want to spend my time doing. I don't want to support John Sito versus Lillian Kimura based on the fact that I know John and whatever. I want to be involved in issues. If JACL becomes the leading organization and takes up an issue that I feel dearly about, I'll work with JACL. But, I'm not going to spend my time on the politics of JACL because I'll never win because I don't have the same level of commitment to advance myself for others for (chuckles) kind of the resume that others will.

TK: So, with the commission hearings—JACL was not happy with NCRRs role in the commission hearings?

AN: No, that's when our relationship got a little strained between the national Japanese—with the local JACL people, the relationship has always been good. We worked together, always. It's been a very positive relationship. But the national JACL people have always been suspect of pacific southwest district [PSD]. This is a slight digression—and remind me of the question so I can come back—but in 1972—I don't know if you knew about the JACL when I ran for national director of JACL?

TK: Um-hm.

[01:19:25]

AN: Yeah. The pacific southwest was threatening to withdraw from the JACL and all this other madness. So, the PSW was always seen as the maverick chapter, and that was true. And then, during that commission hearings, again, JACL's approach—they were embarrassed because they thought they had it all together. They were going to have this one hearing in Washington D.C., and we had letters jamming them saying

no, we want hearings in these different cities. It wasn't like we were so powerful, but the point is, what could the JACL say? Could they take the position of saying, No, we don't want hearings in Los Angeles? We want hearings only in Washington D.C. Because our arguments were, hey if you have them in Washington D.C., who can testify? Only the folks that work in Washington D.C. We want people to have access, to be able to testify that lived the life, and let them tell their stories. You got to come to them, not making them come to you.

And JACL was put in the position where leadership did not want that because they thought, Oh, no, it's too messy. We don't know who is going to testify, and this may embarrass us. They wanted it more controlled where they could dust off Harry Kitano and have him speak on behalf of all Japanese Americans, and that was what the whole notion was. You just got these lawyers and scholars, and they, in one day, lay out the thing and this commission will listen and do research and write the report. Just like every other commission does.

So, we pressured for that, the hearings, and then we pressured for who was allowed to testify and etcetera. The JACL was caught off guard, and they were very much embarrassed because they realized that the NCRRC really took advantage of the hearings and empowered the community. But JACL was definitely in the sidelines during the commission hearing period, and that's when the national started stepping up their efforts because they realized, Hey, we are going to lose this campaign unless we really become more aggressive and more active. And it was good because it forced them to get more active and more aggressive, and that benefitted the community, you know?

So, I didn't see that as negative. Isn't it terrible that JACL is becoming more active? I said, "That's wonderful." And that's why I've been a member of JACL for twenty-seven years, because I said, "Hey, if they do something that I can be proud of and I can be involved in, I'll support it." And that's what happened. The commission forced them to re-look at their strategy, et cetera. They were very late coming out with their position and individual monetary compensation, and because of the internal division within the organization, the old guard just thought it was too embarrassing and we shouldn't be asking for money. The politicians didn't think they could support it and all this other kinds of wonderful stuff. We jammed them to have to take a stronger position, and most of them felt comfortable taking.

TK: So, what specific things did NCRRC do to get everything that they wanted for the commission hearing and what actual steps?

AN: Well, the first thing was to find out who was working on organizing these things in Washington. We had some friends in Washington that were able to help us with that. Then we did a major telegram / letter writing thing providing a request that regional hearings be held in the different cities, et cetera. And once they were held here, then we worked to get a site in the community that was going to be large enough that was going to be able to accommodate people. And then when they made requests for people to testify, we solicited all these people to testify. We helped people prepare their testimony, and worked with all sorts of people, helped them write their testimony, and encouraged people to speak and share their stories, et cetera. And

then, we mobilized people for the commission hearings themselves, made sure there was translation to make the hearings very accessible, and they were. If you're used to governmental commission hearings, this was a very different kind of camp that most commission hearings are. Most commission hearings are very staged. They tend to be where the—it's like a congressional hearing where the people sit way up there and you're down here and you give this thing. It's just very pro forma kind of thing. This was a very different feel. You could tell the audience was into it. The air in there was so thick in terms of people's emotions, and the commissioners could not help but to be overwhelmed with, I think, the depth of things that were emerging. I think NCRP had *the* role in that particular phase of the redress campaign.

JACL's role was in creating a commission, which, NCRP was not supportive of creating the commission. When it came to things, our view was to submit a direct monetary compensation bill. Whereas, JACL's was to go for a commission because they felt there wasn't enough awareness in part of the American public and the Congress, and so we needed to do a commission to legitimize. Our feelings were, if people read, they would know what happens, et cetera, and we were wrong. We took a very left stance on that position. JACL's was the correct position, and we acknowledge that the JACL's role in leadership, at that point, was correct. And we needed to acknowledge that, but again, they would have dropped the boat if we would not had stepped into organize. Again, it's how people interact to different points that makes things successful. It's not one organization from A to Z that did it or one person. It's at different points in time, different people, and different organizations that stepped forward to play very critical roles. And that's how the movement emerges.

TK: So, with NCRP, what was the attitude? Was the attitude so optimistic the whole seven or eight years? How did it fluctuate?

AN: For some people, they were optimistic the whole seven or eight years. I, personally, was very pessimistic, and I was always criticized for that. My initial involvement in redress was that I saw this as a way to educate the Japanese American community and to make us take up more issues and become more politically active. But, I saw it as a symbolic struggle that my goals were educate, to confront the state. We were going to lose, but people would be better because they were going to tell their story. It was the process itself that was most important, but I always felt that we weren't going to win redress. That was always my attitude.

TK: You really, truly felt that way?

AN: Personally, I never felt that we were going to win. I will tell confidants, "Give me a break; we're never going to get this. Ronald Reagan is never going to pass this." I was very pessimistic, personally, but, obviously, externally, was trying to beat it up. I've been trying to get the word out, et cetera. But I had never thought it was going to get as far as it went. So, I always saw it as a symbolic effort. Even until Ronald Reagan signed the bill, and then when there was no funding, then I thought, Here we

go. We are never going to get money cause of da, da, da, da, da. Then Dan Inouye steps in, did this amendment and it happened.

I would have never believed it; I was never optimistic, personally. Brett and some of the others were way more optimistic than I was, but part of it was that I'm pessimist by nature. And also, what drives me is the process of organizing, empowering, and bringing people along, not this goal. A goal is secondary to me than the process of empowering. We had very different approaches to that because I took it more as, this is a good issue to organize around and then I increasingly became more identified with redress. And near the end, it was pretty tough because my name was out there, and I have these Issei people and Nisei writing you letters saying, *We really appreciate what you've done. We are really counting on you.* Oh, man, this is terrible. (laughs)

TK: (laughs)

AN: So, the pressure was on we felt really to deliver because we had carried it so far. That's why it was pretty tough because we've come this far, we can't drop it, not for being tired or whatever. We just continue on, do what we need to do. During the height of things, in addition to working here, raising two children, we were probably putting twenty hours a week into NCRR stuff because it was just too important, at that point, to not put whatever time was required. At least so that if you did lose, you could feel good about you gave it a good shot.

TK: I know you said you were a pessimistic. How did your family and relatives and close friends feel when you first got into this and over time how their attitudes fluctuated?

[01:29:25]

AN: When I first got in, all the relatives were—they already thought I was crazy from the Berkley days, anyways. But, it's interesting, my mom's sister—there was an interview of me in *Newsweek Magazine*, and in that article, I talked about that my father became an alcoholic in the camps. That he had not drank before the war, but during the camps, et cetera, just took up drinking, so he was like an alcoholic from there on—he died from an alcohol related condition—and how the camps changed him as a person. I didn't talk about that part, but it was important for me because the other part, personally, for why I got involved, was coming to grips with the reality of my life, that I was always down on my dad. He was a gardener, driving a beat up old truck. Especially, in junior high days, it was so embarrassing because I'd go to work with my dad, gardening route, on Saturdays and during summer days. I'd go to work with him, and he had customers in the neighborhoods where some of my classmates lived. Right? I'd always be afraid that I was going to be seen in this beat up old truck, mowing the lawn or whatever, and my classmates were going to be out there. So, he knew because, if I saw someone, I'd duck and tried not to be seen. Obviously, in retrospect, I feel stupid about that, but that was tough. My dad was kind of mean to my mom, never took her out, those kinds of things. I just saw him as this kind of person that hated his work and was just an alcoholic and just closed up in the garage

and drink, uncommunicative and all those kinds of things. And as a result of redress and talking to my mom and others, I began to see that pre-war, he was very different than post-war. I just heard other stories about how in the camps—especially toward men—some people rose to the occasion, joined the 442, or like Frank Emi stood up on principle, but the majority, what happened, was it just ate them up inside. They were confused and didn't have the will or the tools to rise above the situation, to understand it, and to fight against it. That they just got eaten up by it. My dad was one of those that got eaten up. My big regret is not being able to talk to him to sum that portion up. But, it made sense to me. That's why my dad was a gardener, as opposed to owning a store. That, to me, made sense of my life and made me understand a little bit more of why I was so crazy. (chuckles) That was helpful.

But, when I first got involved in the redress, my aunt, seeing the article in *Newsweek* where I talk about my dad being an alcoholic, she about died. She cut off communication with my mom. She did not talk to me or my mom for probably about fifteen years.

TK: Was this your father's sister?

AN: No, my mom's sister.

TK: Oh, wow.

AN: Because she was so upset that I embarrassed the family talking about my father being an alcoholic, and that I was involved in these political things. And most of the others, they had pretty much had written me off as this crazy guy, but now I'm an esteemed member of the community. (laughs) Now that redress was successful, people say, Oh, well, you were right after all, and they see me as someone who has mellowed. I tell people, "I've always thought of myself as a reasonable person. I've never been crazy, but the environment is different now, and the way we deal with things is different now. I'm in a different position so clearly how I deal with things are different. I wasn't crazy then and sane now. I'm probably just as crazy but it's just a different situation." But, at the time, there wasn't a lot of support. Most Nisei were saying, Why raise the issue. Let bygones be bygones. Don't rock the boat. We are all fine. We did okay. We got on with our lives, let's not da, da, da, da, da. So the majority of people were not real supportive of this.

But again, the key turning point was the commission hearings where people told their stories, and it became okay for people to be mad. All of a sudden, it became dinner table conversation where people could say hey—and my mom got into this because she heard some of that. And before she would only talk about, "It was wrong. We shouldn't have—let's not talk about the camps. It was only good times. Then she started talking about, oh, yeah, you know? And that's when I think everyone started turning around that, hey, you know? We were wrong. And that mentally, whenever you go with someone, you like to just remember the good things. Which, that's naturally for everyone. You don't like to remember painful things for thirty years ago, forty years ago. You only want to remember pleasant memories; that's what helps us as people survive. But, when you repress that other part, you pay

the consequence for that, and that came out. And, when people started talking about it, it became fashionable to understand that hey, it wasn't our fault we were put in camp. The government did it. They shouldn't have because they were racist and da, da, da, da, da. And that's when people began to understand. And then the issues were no longer do we do redress or camp, da, da, da. The issue was is it realistic? Can we win this? Can we win redress?

Then it became an issue of tactism. Is it achievable or is it just a pipedream? But it was in a different level than it was before. Some people thought the camps were right, that they were correct that we were put in camps, and some people felt that we don't deserve redress. The majority view was, one, the camps were wrong, and two, redress is justified. It's not just whether it was achievable. You know what I mean? The discussion on the level of understanding in the community moved forward at this point. We have to look at it historically to understand that. In the mid-sixties, no one talked about redress and camps. By the late sixties, people were talking about camps. By the early seventies, people were beginning to talk about redress, and it all began to come together in the eighties. Clearly, we were able to achieve what we accomplished.

TK: So, the hearings were a great turning point for the Nisei especially then?

AN: I think, if you look at any particular thing in terms of the community, the commission hearings had the most dramatic impact.

TK: So, how was the attitude then beyond just your family and friends? Because NCRR was all about grassroots movements, did you get discouraged often? If your relatives are an indication of what the general public, you know, their response was to NCRR—

AN: Not really because whenever we had an opportunity to meet with people and make presentations, we'd won people over. So, it was not discouraging because the feeling was, hey, we know we're right; we know we got screwed over. And we know the camps are indefensible, and we know that the redress is the right thing to do. And so, it was just a question of most of the arguments were whether how ignorance or whether racist; hard core racist. And the racist—who cares? Most of the other people were, basically, they just didn't know.

And so whenever there was an opportunity to talk about—because most of it was misconception or lack of awareness. Most of that generation, my generation, never even knew the camps existed. And so you kind of had to start from basics. Ones you laid out this is what happened, this is what they say why we were out in camps, but let's face it, we were not security risks. There was never anything proving this. We didn't incarcerate Germans and Italians. Why are we seeking redress? Hey, if you were put in prison for three-and-a-half years, a number of charges raised against you, and the only reason was because your parents happen to be born in Ireland *and* you were a citizen *and* it just happened to you, what would you do? Most people that were fair minded said, Hey, you're right. They understood the redress, and we would argue, Hey, this is not for Japanese Americans, in a sense, this is a

special interest bill that this is affirming how the constitution works. That if you agree that we were wronged, that if you agree that violations occurred, then don't you agree—how do we usually deal with these kinds of gross violations? This is a system to provide monetary compensation and restitutions for losses that were suffered. And we said, This is symbolic because we are talking about loss of constitutional rights, violation of individual liberties, loss of property, loss of opportunity. Again, most people said, Yeah. Every time I did a presentation, you would only get reinforced that you would say, geez, if we could only speak to everyone and lay out this whole thing the majority of people would support us. It's hard to argue against it. And we are saying, Hey, this is the single most gross violation of the constitution against the people, ever, and this is why.

TK: So again, the grassroots approach was the motivation.

AN: And through that was reinforcing.

TK: Yeah.

AN: Because after we are allowing to give your rap, so to speak, people would say, yeah, where do we sign up, and how do we support you? That was reinforcing for the grassroots movement. Also reinforcing was what we did really early is working non JA organizations and trying to unite and link up with other groups. And that was also reinforcing in terms of—it forced us to link what happened to us with the issues and struggles of Latinos and African Americans and Native Americans, et cetera, that they would not support what we were doing unless we linked together with some of their issues, etcetera. I think that also reinforced because people stepped forward and saw the broader implications of some of these things.

[01:40:24]

TK: One last question. What do you see as the end result, the most important idea of redress and reparations that goes beyond who gets credit for what?

AN: Well, this is off the topic—but to me the most important thing is, I feel, personally, that it is a chapter that has come to a conclusion. We want the lessons of both the camps and redress to continue for future generations so we learn. But, for those people who endured the camps and were fortunate to be alive today, it is a chapter that has come to a conclusion and people can fill that part, and that to me is the singular thing that is important to me. That we fought a good battle. We the community took a traumatic experience that happened to us and defined our existence as a people and fought to right a wrong, and we were able to do it. To me, that was the single most thing. It's a testament, again, to the power of the community, not organizations, not whatever, but the power of the community of the single most defining issue of our community, to stand up and to be heard and to be counted on. And that to me is the single most important thing, not the organizations, not the who gets credit, not the \$20,000 dollars. Again, the notion of we were wronged and as a

community we stood up. You said you were wrong, and we were able to, against tremendous odds, to win a significant victory.

TK: I ask that because I've heard people argue against redress, in a sense, saying that putting a dollar sign on it, when it is all said and done, and when the checks are all given out, I guess people somehow get the idea that redress is over. I would think that redress, no matter how much money you put on it, it doesn't matter. It doesn't mean that once the money is given out that the movement is over.

AN: Yeah, I think that the movement is not over. The important things are ensuring the lessons are learned, et cetera. The lessons of camp, again, and the injustices of the lessons of redress and movement and social movement and fighting for justice and that part goes on and continues. I think the part that is closed is the personal sense of achievement for those who suffered. And I think the movement continues but the ability to draw closure—again, I talked about my dad dying, and the time of non-speaking terms that he was really down about me about being active on the redress thing. I like to think that with the victory of redress, I think if my dad were alive, he would have been at the forefront of redress. He would have seen what happened to him, and it would have been therapeutic for him and we would have worked together on this thing. And that's that kind of closure. Not just for me and my dad but just for community, bringing people together to be able to sit down at the table. To be able to allow Frank Emi to sit down with some of the more reasonable people in the JACL. To say that Frank was not a traitor; he was a hero. Just like 442 was. And to draw closure on this, that we still have crazy people what want to punch out, some people think that Frank is a traitor. But most reasonable people see that, hey! It brought closure to so many of these pieces, the Jimmy Omuras of the world, the people who stood up against the camps that did not follow the JACL line. And so, that to me is the closure part that I see, not the movement, but the ability to draw conclusions on some of these key things. In terms of the money, it was symbolic. It's meaningful. We forced the government to make a meaningful gesture, and from that meaningful gesture, lessons were learned, and that's important as you know. It could have been easy to do a written apology or to cost a hundred million dollars, and at that time, it was nothing. It would not have been a meaningful choice to that Congressman from Georgia having to sit here and say, "Whew, this is a lot of money. Is this really important?" And it was important enough that it forced the Congress to really have to look at itself and to be able to say, Can I explain this to my constituents? Is this the right thing to do? I think that was important, and anything less would have been meaningless. It would not have the same kind of impact in terms of the process. So, I think it all comes together. We didn't get what we wanted, but hey, we got quite a bit, and it's clearly a victory. It's a victory, like I said, for Japanese American community and justice minded people. And there's few victories we have in the world like that.

TK: Thank you very much.

AN: Sorry, I kind of rambled on.

TK: No, that's perfect thank you.

AN: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW