

CENTER FOR ORAL AND PUBLIC HISTORY  
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

Japanese American Oral History Project

An Oral History with TOGO TANAKA

Interviewed

By

Betty Mitson and David Hacker

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NARRATOR: TOGO TANAKA  
INTERVIEWER: Betty Mitson and David Hacker  
DATE: May 19, 1973  
LOCATION: Los Angeles, California  
PROJECT: Japanese American

BM: This is an interview with Mr. Togo W. Tanaka at his office in Los Angeles, California, the California State University Fullerton Japanese American Oral History Project. The interviewers are Betty E. Mitson and David A. Hacker. The date is May 19, 1973 at 10:00 a.m. Mr. Tanaka, where and when were you born?

TT: I was born in Portland, Oregon, on January 7, 1916—or I think it was. (laughs) My parents didn't register me when I was born. They didn't get me a birth certificate until I was ready to go to school, so this is why it is approximate.

BM: Do you know why they didn't register you?

TT: Well, the birth took place at home with a midwife, and I guess they just weren't familiar with that the requirements were. It wasn't at a hospital. I had some difficulty in getting into elementary school because they couldn't establish my age since I had no birth certificate. So, my mother guessed at it, and in view of the fact that I had an older sister and a younger brother, they established it as January 7, 1916.

BM: You weren't the first born, you say?

TT: No, I was next to the last. There were six of us, and I was number five.

BM: Would you like to provide their names?

TT: Well, I never met my oldest brother, Heihachi. He died in Japan. My oldest living brother is Minji, and then I have two sisters, Ayako and Fumi, both married. I came next, and then I have a younger brother, Koto, who was the last in the family.

BM: Were they all born in that same area?

- TT: No, the oldest was born in Japan, and the rest of us were born in the United States. My younger brother was born in Los Angeles, so we were spread from Japan to Portland to Los Angeles.
- BM: Did your parents ever discuss why they came to this country with you?
- TT: Yes. My father came here first, and I think he came over to make some money and then planned to return. He came over here by himself and had been unsuccessful, so after six or seven years my mother came here. Neither one ever got back to Japan. This would be the reason that I can think of, but I really don't know for sure.
- BM: Do you know what year your father came over to the United States and whether or not it was with a labor gang?
- TT: No, I don't believe it was. I think he came just to find employment. He didn't come with any group. I don't know what year. I'd have to check back.
- BM: Do you have any idea when your parents were married?
- TT: Yes, they were married in Japan. He was nineteen, and I believe she was eighteen.
- BM: What year would that be, do you know?
- TT: Let me see. My father died in 1953 at the age of seventy-eight, so I would have to work it backwards, and my mother died at the age of seventy-eight in 1955—she died in Chicago—so it would be in the latter part of the last century.
- BM: Well, you weren't born until 1916, so they would have been married a good many years when you were born.
- TT: Oh, yes. Yes, they were. My father was about forty.
- BM: Do you know what kind of work he got when he first came?
- TT: He did everything. That is, he worked as a farmhand, I think, and on the railroads. When my mother came over, then he and my mother were domestic servants in a large household in Portland.
- BM: They worked together as a team?
- TT: Yes, they did.
- BM: Was their port of entry Vancouver
- TT: You know, I don't know that. I wouldn't be surprised if it were. It might have been Seattle.

BM: Do you know how they happened to come down to Southern California?

TT: My father didn't care for domestic work, and I think he wanted something that would allow him to better his circumstances. So, they came down here. And he wanted to—at my mother's urging—go into some kind of business. I think that's why.

BM: Were you old enough to remember that?

TT: No, I was three months old when they moved down here from Portland, so that goes back a bit.

BM: I should say. You don't know, then, if he had work waiting for him when he came?

TT: Oh, I'm sure he didn't. They just came down here.

BM: Did he go into farming work at that time?

TT: No. As with most Japanese who moved into the city at that time, he was told that if he had any proficiency in gardening he could get jobs there. And this is what he started to do. They found a house here in Hollywood, and he went to work.

BM: Do you know if there was any financial assistance for him from the folks in Japan until he got established here?

TT: None at all, absolutely none. He said it was largely—apparently, one of the reasons for their not having saved much money was that they were constantly sending it back to Japan. It seems to me that they came down here virtually penniless with just enough to feed themselves for about a week and to find a place. He immediately went to work and found a job. There was no commitment in advance or any assurance that he would find anything, except friends had told him that it wouldn't be difficult if he would get out and hustle. And this is what he did.

TT: No, the oldest was born in Japan

BM: And they had birth certificates?

TT: Well, I received a certified copy. Apparently, my sister did have one. I guess they were born when my parents had slightly different circumstances so they did get it. I guess, in my case, they forgot it, so they didn't get it until I was ready to go to school.

BM: Do you know if he stayed with friends for a while when he first came?

TT: No, I don't know that. I would assume that they probably did.

BM: In his family in Japan, what brother was your father?

TT: He was the oldest son. And this is rather unusual. Usually, it was the younger one or someone down the line who emigrated, but he was the oldest son. He was expected to come over here, I presume, and make a small fortune and return. And I think this, too, is one reason why anything that he might have earned and saved here immediately went back there. He felt he had a responsibility to his brothers and sisters and family in Japan.

BM: Do you know how many brothers and sisters there were?

TT: There were too many! (laughs) I think my mother had a resentment of them too, so we never felt particularly close. I mean, she saw in them, you know, a competing second family in that whatever she might be able to put aside here soon disappeared and went back to Japan. I think she never really had any desire to return to Japan. He did.

BM: Do you think that he desired to return to establish residence there again?

TT: Yes, I think he wanted to return to Japan, but somehow never could. The family had increased, and all this time my older brother Minji had been left in Japan. So there were just four of us over here and he was in Japan. I think the intention was one day to return. But, they were unable to achieve any kind of economic security over here because the money went back there. So eventually, they brought my older brother here. At age sixteen he came to this country, quite a total stranger to his parents, of course.

BM: Oh, I would think so.

TT: At that time, I think I was four.

BM: Do you know how old he was when they left him originally?

TT: Well, he must have been about—I think my father hadn't really seen him, or maybe he was an infant when he left. And my mother left him when he was six years old. So, he was raised through his very crucial years by relatives with whom he had no particular love relationship. My older brother and I are very close. He lives in Winnetka, Illinois. He had great difficulties adjusting to family life, and I think he had a natural resentment for having been, what he regarded as, abandoned. It was a difficult time for him.

BM: Can you tell me how many brothers and sisters your father had?

TT: I wish I knew.

BM: You know there was several but don't know how many?

TT: Yes.

BM: I see.

TT: It was a large family.

BM: And what area where they in Japan? Was it an agriculture area?

TT: Yes. It was in Yamaguchi Prefecture, and this is—gee, I don't know how to describe it. It would be the southwestern part of the main island. It's next to Hiroshima. You know, it's very interesting. My oldest daughter has gone to Japan—and this is interesting. She was the only one who was at Manzanar. She was a child then, an infant. Just before the interview began, we were talking about the Sansei and whether or not they were interested in their racial and cultural roots in Japan. All three of our children have spent time in Japan. My older daughter, Jeannie, spoke not one single word of Japanese until she was in college. She started out here at UCLA [University of California, Los Angeles], and then decided it was too large and impersonal, so she asked if she might go to Europe. She spent three-and-a-half months in Europe and wanted to study in Switzerland, but we persuaded her to come back. She attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. They have a work and study program, so she decided she'd like to do some work, first in Black Studies. She volunteered for some work in the ghettos of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. But somehow she got interested in the Midwest where there are Japanese and began taking conversational studies at Earlham College in Indiana. She would go on a Saturday by bus, you know, from Dayton all the way to Earlham, and learn conversational Japanese.

Once, while doing some work at a Jewish community center in Skokie teaching the little girls how to cook gefilte fish, (laughs) she decided she was going to Japan. She had never indicated this interest at all. There's a Christian center in the mountains above Tokyo called Kiyosato. She volunteered to work in their hospital. She had never before indicated an interest. It was like a work camp or a peace corps in Japan. From there she attended Sophia University. It's a Catholic school in Tokyo. And then, she went to International Christian University [ICU], which is just outside of Tokyo at a place called Mitaka. She took her bachelors at ICU. It's funny, see, she became bilingual. And here she was writing letters in difficult Kanji Japanese to her grandparents, which neither her mother nor I could read. (laughs) She became a real nut on genealogy and tracing the history of our family. So, you know, you ask me, I don't even know how many brothers and sisters my father had, but I'm sure Jeannie knows it all. She's gone back to the ancestral community, and she knows the origins of the family as far back as it can be traced. She was doing social work in Tokyo, and she came back here and took a master's degree in Social Welfare at UCLA. Then I tried to persuade her to take a job with the state or the county here, doing casework, because this has been her interest. She did some very fine work out at Camarillo State Hospital, and she did some right after the Watts Riot here. She had worked in Watts as a caseworker for the county. But, she took an assignment from the Interchurch Board, which I think has some Methodist underwriting, and became a social worker in an orphanage in Tokyo. It's called Ikuseien. She had a three-year assignment there. She finished it, and she flew home to spend Christmas and New Year's with the family. We tried to persuade her to come back here. When her

assignment was finished, she went to work for a publishing company back there, the John Weatherall Company, but found it was too confining and didn't interest her, so she's teaching at Aoyama Gakuin over there, teaching English. Now, she's the only one in the family who suddenly got the idea she wanted to know about Japan. And she's quite—I think she's kind of racist in reverse, you know.

I think her sister [Christine], our second daughter, went over to Japan almost at the same time. She started also at UCLA, then went to Santa Barbara. Our children were kind of like gypsies. Then she went to UC Berkeley, and she decided to do a one year—you mentioned your son [Brian Mitson] thinking maybe he'd like a little change of pace from school. Well, our second daughter, in the middle of her studies at Berkeley, decided she'd rather get a job. So, she went to Chicago and got a job selling sweaters in the men's department at Marshall Fields. She said it was very educational. But ultimately, she wanted to become an M.D. she said. We didn't see how she could quite do that, but she wound up in Japan and she did the same thing that her sister did, but it didn't interest her. Instead of learning how to speak Japanese, she became very proficient in French. She has run through one marriage. She married a young Frenchman from Paris, but it didn't work out. They were divorced after two years. Then she went back to school and was a candidate for a Ph.D. in clinical psychology, and she was accepted at the University of Michigan. She was going to go there two years ago, but she met a young man here at UCLA, a professor in engineering, so they married and she stopped her studies. But, her interest in Japan and Japanese is very peripheral, whereas her sister's is quite extreme. I often wondered whether, because the older one was at Manzanar and this one was born in Chicago, whether it had anything to do with it.

Our son [Wesley] is just twenty-two. He took his degree at UCLA, and he's married. He was going to continue graduate studies at either the University of Colorado or the University of Washington or San Francisco State in physiological psychology. I've got him working for me right now. (laughs) He took a real estate license. He's very good. I mean, if he weren't my son, I'd still feel that he'd be somebody we'd try to keep. He spent three months in Japan when he was about fourteen. We sent him over on a Boy Scout tour, and he didn't know any Japanese. He spent three-and-a-half months, I think, going all over the country by himself with no knowledge of Japanese. He enjoyed it, but as far as he's concerned, Japan is just another foreign country.

We meet with their grandparents quite often, but the conversation is in English because my son can't communicate in Japanese. But, while they are not as interested as Jeannie in Japan, they very definitely are interested in the history. We share the publications we get with them. When there are ceramic art shows here at the county museum, they're there. They go to see Japanese movies. My son is married to a young lady who is from Pennsylvania. Her father is the ombudsman out at UCLA. I think her antecedents are Dutch—Hartsock. Yet, I found that the interest in things Japanese that she shares with him indicates that—when I think back, excepting for the fact that I was in a job that involved my having to know things that were Japanese, I think the Nisei weren't nearly so much interested in Japanese culture and things about Japan as the Sansei generally are. This is my own observation.

BM: This young lady, is she the one that works in your office? Is this your son's wife?

TT: My son works for me.

BM: You had mentioned something about you were hoping to keep the services of the young lady. (laughs)

TT: No, no, that was my daughter!

BM: Oh, that was your daughter. You have a daughter working in your office, too?

TT: I was largely in publishing for many years, and we still do some. We publish for clients, you know. They just subsidize publications. I have one client that we've had for nearly seventeen years, the California Federal Savings and Loan Association. There's a certain amount of production and coordinating work that has to be done, and my daughter Christine is very good at it. As a matter of fact, I used to have her work with clients like Dillingham Land Corporation and Tishman Realty and Construction Company and Great Western Financial Corporation. I had difficulty keeping her because they'd keep offering her jobs and paying her more than we were willing to. She's married now, of course, and she's a housewife, and I get her part-time to just handle the publications. She does most of it from home.

BM: Alright, you mentioned grandparents, were you speaking of your wife's parents?

TT: Yes, my wife.

BM: Your wife is a Nisei also?

TT: Yes, she is. She was born here in Los Angeles.

BM: And is your mother still living?

TT: No, she passed away in Chicago in 1955.

BM: The daughter that's in Japan, is she married?

TT: No, she's not. It's very interesting. She was on the verge of getting married. I don't think she intends to, but she was dating a young man here before she went to Japan. He was an engineering graduate of Purdue University, and he was of Polish descent—a young man named Nick Kurek. We liked him very much; my wife did and her mother did. But, I think when Jeanine began to feel that she was being cornered, then she took off for Antioch. We were then subsequently invited to Nick's wedding to another girl. (laughs) And we hear from him quite regularly. Then she came back from Antioch briefly, and she was dating a young man. I can't even remember his name. He was of Swedish extraction. And they were quite serious. He had proposed, and she indicated that she had other worlds to conquer. So, she went off to Tokyo.

He followed and went to work for a publishing company, but nothing ever came of it. He married another Japanese girl over there. It's interesting. We correspond a good deal, and Jeanine keeps sending us pictures of young men that she thinks she's going to marry. Then after about the seventh, eighth, ninth, or tenth one, you figure this is all one great big joke, and we tell her so. It's interesting that her requirements are that he be of the Japanese race.

BM: That wasn't her requirements in earlier years was it?

TT: My wife and I keep saying, "Well, she's out of her mind. She doesn't understand." She thinks she's native Japanese. In Japan, it's extremely unlikely, I think that—my impression is that first it's an accepted thing that people in Japan who are so—what is it? Conscious of stations in life, and the daughter of someone who is an immigrant abroad just simply isn't regarded as first-class. She feels that she's sufficiently native Japanese that she can be comfortable and at home, and we know that she can't. Because she still likes the physical comforts, the standard of living that she is accustomed to here. In Japan, it's expensive to live, and there's quite a broad range of stations. But, she keeps telling us she's met someone, and we think that for her to marry someone who was raised in Japan, a male, you know, this is disaster. We share this feeling with everybody. But, she thinks that she can be the exception.

BM: How many years has she been over there?

TT: Well, she went originally in 1962. That makes it eleven years. But she was back here for two years, and she comes back here periodically.

BM: Do you think maybe the fact that she worked in special areas where she might not be mingling with the local people as much as she would the kinds of work that would isolate her? In other words, perhaps she's really not getting clearer picture even though she's been there so many years? Do you know what I mean?

TT: That's possible, yes. Yes, I think so. I haven't been able to figure this one out. (laughs) She has many friends, many friends, and I think, generally, concur that if she really ought to, if she's going to find a husband, came back to the United States. Her sister feels that way. She had to do her thing, find it out herself. She's competent at what she does, and she's quite mature in those areas that she's put herself in. But, I don't think that in this other matter, she's very immature. (laughs)

BM: So, is it three children you have?

TT: Yes, three. Two daughters and a son.

BM: In interviewing people, I come across instances quite often of parents who were forced to come into the country illegally, and, of course, it would depend on the period. Do you happen to know if that was the case with your father, if he had to come that way?

TT: No, my father didn't. My son-in-law's father did. He tells me how he had to jump ship and then ran for years and years and years, always figuring he was two steps ahead of the law. He's a fascinating man.

BM: He's still living?

TT: Yes, he is.

BM: Does he speak English?

TT: Very well, yes. He's a mushroom farmer up in—it's just south of San Francisco, a place called Martinez, no, San Martin. He's a man who had served in the Japanese—the Imperial Japanese Army in Manchuria. His personal experience is incredibly physical in hardship, it prepared him for anything. (phone rings)

BM: When you say jumped ship, was that a case where he had to come up through Mexico?

TT: You know, I really—I'm trying to remember whether he came up through Mexico or just jumped off of some ship in one of the ports. But I was so entranced by his description of all the things he had gone through.

BM: When they jumped ship, do you suppose he actually had to dive overboard?

TT: I would think so. He had to swim or climb aboard. That's how I think of jumping ship. Because you can't come through the normal way; you'd get blocked. There were many who did that. As a matter of fact, I think one of the things I used to hear about when I was editing the *Rafu Shimpō* was that within the Little Tokyo community—it was one of the unfortunate things that people said—was the insecurity and the feeling that even though legally they were supposed to be permanent residents that some families, you know, had got started in this way and so they felt extremely—

BM: Insecure.

TT: Yeah, right.

BM: One lady I interviewed pointed out to me that her father was always very anxious to do anything authorities asked him to do. Even after the war, up until the time he died because afraid this fact that he had come in illegally. And I am interested in your opinion about that factor as it relates to the evacuation because it isn't mentioned in books to my knowledge. Do you think that was a partial factor in—

TT: Yes, I don't think there's any question about it. The only thing is to what degree, because no one ever counted noses and said that there were so many of them and what percentage. I used to wonder—I remember once at Salt Lake City, Morton Grodzins and I were discussing this. We shared a room when the University of

California [Evacuation and Resettlement Study] had a meeting there. Morton had done a lot of interviewing, you know, in the camps and all, and he said to me once, “Do you know, just making a guess, I think maybe 5 percent. I have nothing to go on, except my own reactions to conversations.” Because he was doing—well, he wasn’t taping his oral histories—but he was interviewing many, many people. And he said, “I think 5 percent of the Issei men who came over here were illegal entries, possibly.” And surely that would have a great deal to do with—you know, their children and their friends all felt, “Well, my gosh, we don’t even have a legal basis to be here in the first place.” I think it very definitely was a factor. You know, before World War II, if a Japanese was involved in an automobile accident or if he was involved with the police—I mean, there was no question—he caved in immediately, whatever they wanted him to do. He knew he didn’t have an equal break in the courts of law. And I think this did have a great deal—I remember once at a session when—let’s see, I think Frank Miyamoto, who was heading the University of California staff, we used to meet in the basement of Harper Hall at the University of Chicago, and there was Frank and Charlie Kikuchi, who had done some tremendous diaries and interviews, and then Tam [Tamotsu] Shibutani, and who else was it? There were several people from the University of Chicago staff. We were discussing just this thing: to what extent illegal entrants constituted the total population. They definitely were a factor. And you’re right. It was something that wasn’t discussed, because, one, the legal position was so tenuous that how in the world—and then to some extent, among the Japanese, if there were any difficulties, one among the other, you heard that this could be kind of a blackmail weapon against some people. It was a rather unhappy situation until it could be cleared up and everybody could be certified that, you know, you belong here and you can stay here. I think it was a factor.

BM: The fact that if people had resisted going into camps, they faced the possibility of those who come illegally being deported immediately. Then that would have left families just with the current generation. And the current generation averaged twenty years of age and younger. So that, that would have meant—

TT: In many cases, families would live children in preschool and grade school in their teens. I think they were ignoring that category, or even those that were old enough to fend for themselves.

BM: So, that even if family whose parents might have come in legally, they would probably the welfare of their friends in mind whose parents came in illegally. I mean, it would not have only influenced the family who had that circumstance, but the other families as well.

TT: Well, I think so. Frank Miyamoto used this expression that, I guess, is sociological, and that was in-group solidarity. In the Japanese communities on the West Coast, whether it was Little Tokyo or San Francisco or Seattle, or the farming communities, there was a close-knit feeling among the Japanese residents, simply because the non-Japanese world outside was, you know, inclined to be either hostile or threatening. You needed to close ranks and to protect one another. So, what was good for you

- was good for all. Now I think this general feeling prevailed a great deal more than in most communities that make up our population.
- MB: I will also like to touch a little bit on the fact that at that stage, for the most part, the Issei were the leaders of the community. I mean, you happen to be in a rather leadership position, but you were an exception, rather than the rule.
- TT: Yes, well, but I was not in a leadership position, as subsequent events turned out. I don't think any of the Nisei were, in a true sense, you know, either accepted or qualified to lead this population. One, because the Issei were really men in their prime. I mean, they were still in their thirties, forties, fifties, and the old ones were in their sixties. The older Nisei were still in their early twenties, or perhaps some of the oldest of the Nisei were in their early thirties, but by and large this was a teenage group. The Nisei were called upon to perform certain functions, and largely they were a liaison between the community, as it was constituted, and the authorities in the outside larger public. To attempt to really lead, so that you had a following proved disastrous. And this is what happened in the camps. This is how the rioting occurred.
- MB: So then, would you characterize your role, just prior to the war, as more of a liaison person, in a sense that you were in a situation of dealing with American authorities?
- TT: Yes.
- BM: Because the leadership in the community was not really in a position to do that?
- TT: Well, let me tell you very specifically, as I look back and analyze, what we did. I was English-language editor of the *Rafu Shimpo*. That was my primary job. I was one of two editors. Louise Suski, who had preceded me by ten years, was the other editor. When Pearl Harbor came, I went to jail, H. T. Komai, the publisher, went to jail, and all the other people who were running that publication were arrested and held in custody. I came out after a certain number of days and suddenly was asked to be the editor, not just of the English section, but of the entire publication. I accepted, simply because the leadership in the community was really not in a position to do that?
- BM: Excuse me, asked by whom?
- TT: By the son of the publisher [Akira Komai] because, in terms of the financial control, he now had succeeded his father, and I was to run that. Well, as I look back, I remember it was really a caretaker job until we got closed up, because I came out of custody in mid-December, or late December, and we were closed up, as I recall, at the end of March. So, I had several months in which, theoretically, Akira Komai, the son of the publisher, and I were to run that. Well, I can't even read Japanese! (laughs) You apply that circumstance. How in the world was I going to lead this thing? You're not a substitute. You think you are. But we were called upon in this period to kind of negotiate with those authorities who were in a position to change our lives, and we did. And often we gave the answers which really were hardly satisfactory,

and even if we gave the answers that we thought were right, did they really reflect the feeling and the genuine support of the people we were supposed to be representing? I think this is what happened at Manzanar, too. By the time, we were evacuated to Manzanar, I had a feeling that was kind of ridiculous, because the so-called leadership—and I identified myself in those days with the Japanese American Citizens League [JACL]—

BM: Excuse me, were you an actual member?

TT: Yes, I was. I had a national office. I was supposed to be in charge of their program of publicity at that time, and I had a small budget. We were running it from the newspaper. And we were trying to get favorable publication of articles and letters, et cetera, in all the California newspapers. We thought this was one way which, with the written word, we could communicate what our position was. But, it was an impossible situation, because if you're going to lead something, you've got to have a constituency. And we had not earned it. We had inherited it in a situation where there was a great deal of fear and uneasiness and mistrust and suspicion. This is, I think, what happened, so that when the FBI and the Naval Intelligence and all the other groups came in and took the leadership of this community, you know, and put them into camps, then we really didn't have a base from which you could organize any resistance or anything. You just simply had people who were fearful, uncertain, and didn't even know their legal rights. So, I think this is what happened.

BM: So, the power base was taken away?

TT: Completely.

BM: The ones the people would normally look up to for advice were gone.

TT: That's right.

BM: I'm going to mention for the purpose of this tape that we are skipping considerable amount of your life and also the pre-war period, and I'm hoping someday we can go further into that. The interview at Irvine did cover that to a great extent. But, for purposes of time today, we'll go on to the Manzanar period and find out what you can tell us about that. These questions I'm going to give you are rather basic, and you did address yourself to them in the lecture to a great extent but we are hoping, maybe, you can elaborate. So, just consider them sort of take-off points and not necessarily confine yourself to the question. First of all, you did mention in your lecture that you went to Manzanar, rather than Santa Anita. I was wondering what were the circumstances of that choice, since most people weren't able to choose.

TT: Well, that's correct. I think people were told to be ready, and they would go according to where they lived. But in the period between Pearl Harbor and the evacuation, I had the opportunity in representing the newspaper to visit the Santa Anita Assembly Center and the Pomona Assembly Center, as I recall. We were told

that if we were to avail ourselves of the opportunity early to uproot ourselves and go, we might go to Santa Anita, because from there we would have a chance to be shipped inland. So, the choice was an option early. But, we elected to wait until the very end because we thought maybe they wouldn't do it. (chuckles)

BM: Did you visit Santa Anita before it was actually occupied?

TT: It was being made already.

BM: Oh, did others have that opportunity?

TT: No, not very many. We were on a so-called committee. There was a gentleman named Carl Cover, as I remember, who was an executive at Douglas Aircraft, and a young man named Frank Yamaguchi who was employed at Douglas. He was one of the few Nisei at that time getting jobs outside the [Japanese American] community; that was unusual. Frank was a member of a small committee that the newspapermen had gathered together. We were seeking alternative means by which groups of us might go out to inland areas away from the Western Defense Command and develop wartime self-supporting communities. Mr. Cover had indicated that he would enlist some people to help us, so we were meeting at his home in Santa Monica. This was one of the efforts that we made. And then, as I remember, this man, Isamu Noguchi, had organized a group, and we met with him. He said that he could find properties in Arizona where, by getting people who had certain skills and organizing a community, we might go there. There must have been perhaps a dozen other such proposals from different people, and in the rather desperate and urgent effort to try to find ways by which we could avoid going into government camps, I think a visit to Santa Anita came about. All of these were great plans. Joe Masaoka came up with half a dozen very interesting things. As I remember, we would have wound up in Utah. Then I recall Joe Shinoda, who was a member of the editorial advisory board of the *Rafu Shimpo*, was very vocal about how stupid the whole thing was. He was going to fight it, and he would never go to a relocation camp. He never did. He took his family and flew to Colorado. Joe was one of the more affluent Japanese Americans. He had a very successful multimillion dollar business, and he grew San Lorenzo roses in nurseries. He had a fleet of trucks operating up and down the West Coast. He just simply felt that the whole thing was wrong and should be resisted to the very end. He had some plans that he came up with. But in the final analysis, we were unable to do much, so we just went to camp.

BM: First of all, would you identify for the tape Joe Masoka?

TT: Yes. Joe Grant Masaoka, at that time, in prewar days, operated a successful fruit and vegetable market in the West Los Angeles area with, I think, three of his brothers— Ben and Ike and, I believe, Hank. I don't know whether his brother Tad was old enough. In any event, his business was in the produce industry, but he was very active in the Japanese American Citizens League. The JACL had what they called the Southern District Council, and I believe Joe was chairman of that council on several

occasions. After the evacuation, Joe and I were at Manzanar. Then we went to apply for jobs as reporters for the *Manzanar Free Press*. We were latecomers at Manzanar, so we wound up delivering papers instead of being reporters. And then we were asked by, I think, Dr. Solon Kimball and Dr. Redfield, who came as a consultant from the University of Chicago, if we would become documentary historians. So, this is what Joe Masaoka and I did for seven months at Manzanar. That's it.

BM: May I ask, was Mike Masoko one of his brothers?

TT: Yes. Mike was the third of the Masaoka brothers. Mike never came to camp. He was up at Salt Lake City and we were in constant correspondence with him, getting directions from him as to how we ought to reactivate the JACL's activity inside the camp. When you look back on it, it seems kind of funny, but we were serious.

BM: And was Joe the oldest brother?

TT: Joe was the oldest, yes. And the next one was Ben; I was very close to Ben. Fought in the 442nd and died in Europe.

BM: How did Mike get away? Do you know? How is it that he went to Salt Lake City and the others didn't?

TT: All of us had the option of not going to camp, he just simply moved.

BM: And he did that?

TT: Well, he was regarded as too valuable by the JACL. They just moved their headquarters from San Francisco to Salt Lake City, and he went there and directed the activities of the organization from there.

BM: Was he the president?

TT: No, he was the executive secretary.

BM: So, they set-up headquarters in Salt Lake City? Had they had a branch there before that?

TT: Yes, they had but the staff moved there.

[recording paused]

BM: We were talking about the history books, what were you going to say?

TT: Well, after the war I became head of publications for the American Technical Society, a midwestern publishing firm that specialized in technical books and industrial arts education. It was largely for the junior college level and some high

schools. In the early 1950s, we thought we would branch out and go into the social sciences. I negotiated the purchase of some manuscripts. Well, one was a book called *Psychology for Life Adjustment*. A gentleman named [Charles Richard] Foster, down at the University of Florida, was the author. Another book was *United States History: The Growth of Our Land*, by a Merle Burke of La Salle Township High School in Illinois. He was represented to us as being a middle-of-the-road historian. Very interesting. We were in the habit in those days of seeking to get adoptions in cities throughout the United States. The man in charge of our sales sent a set of galley proofs down to Texas and to some of the other southern states. I remember a letter we got back from the American Legion indicating that the author of this book sounds like, quote, "If he's not a Communist or a pinko, he must be a New Deal Democrat." (laughs) I remember we had one book called, I think, *American History [Canada and British North America]*, by William Bennett Munro. This was a classic, a textbook published by the Macmillan Company, and we had purchased the reprint rights. We had a captive market in the country's largest correspondence high school, the American School. When I left the American Technical Society, I continued to do work for the American School as a publishing client. I had moved out here, and we did most of their student publication publishing. In the history book that we were to revise and reprint and try to use ourselves for the American School, as well as perhaps trying to market it elsewhere, the references to Japanese of the West Coast caught my attention immediately. I remember assigning it to an editor on our staff named Robert Sullivan, who had been a graduate of the University of Notre Dame. I think that in the rephrasing and the rewriting of that particular section, we were able to get at least a kind of objectivity and substance, too, in fact, that history books generally weren't characterized by when they dealt with the subject of Orientals of the West Coast.

I, subsequently, attended many meetings of and was a member of the committee of an organization called the Chicago Book Clinic, and became exposed to what was being done at the level of teaching materials, where you begin to have some effect on what students at the secondary-school level believed, the images they had. I came back to the West Coast and was exposed, I think, to a lot of the ranting (laughter) of the young militants who feel that the way to express themselves is—here, now, they want to clobber Earl Warren and deny him a platform. They think that they are positively and constructively accomplishing some good, because they feel better by reason of getting these emotions out. I think a lot of it is misguided. Maybe it's necessary. I'm not going to question for one moment their right to do this, because this is a part of our society. But, if they're truly looking for ways by which they want to correct some of these problems, then I just don't think that this blind feeling of being anti-Warren really accomplishes something.

I'll say this. I remember the years before Morton Grodzins died. You know, he died as a young man in his forties of cancer, and I was quite close to him because he became chairman of the Department of Political Science of the University of Chicago, and subsequent to that he was made director of the University of Chicago Press. His office was one block from mine at the American Technical Society. And Morton, who had, I believe, interviewed Earl Warren and knew him personally, wrote a book, I think, called *The Loyal and the Disloyal: Social Boundaries of Patriotism*

*and Treason*. He had a theory. He said that much of what Earl Warren did on the Supreme Court stemmed, of course, from his feeling about what had happened in California during this period, and that whatever we may ascribe to Warren's influence in extending the area of civil rights, of which we are all beneficiaries—I don't care whether we're Asian Americans, or Black Americans, or Chicano Americans—that we have to look at the whole man and the whole career. And that for Japanese Americans to waste their energies trying to crucify this man, it was merely to take one small segment of his total career and say, "That's all that's important." While they, by the irony of history, are the beneficiaries of much that he made possible. Doesn't he get any credit at all for that? This is what makes me feel that these young people are really not looking at—you know, life is not just one narrow segment. I think that they have tunnel vision, and that they are not giving themselves an opportunity to learn and to grow, nor are they giving this man the same fairness that they demand for themselves.

BM: Last year, Earl Warren was invited to speak at the commencement exercises at Sacramento State University. There was some agitation among the students there against that, and as a result he asked to be relieved of that obligation to speak.

TT: Well, you know, I probably don't represent the right generation, but I'd go to hear him talk if I knew that he was going to speak. (laughs) I think he would certainly be a very rich source of recollection. He did say—and I think this is what many people probably don't forgive him for—that the very fact that there had been no espionage or sabotage was in itself an indication that the danger was there. This kind of reasoning, I think, is what most Sansei probably repeat and remember. But, if people are critical of him can think back to things that they themselves did at one time, and can defend that today, I mean, I think this is the unfortunate thing.

BM: I don't believe that he has made any statements in recent years about his attitude. Probably he feels that his record speaks for itself and that he doesn't need to defend himself. Unfortunately, though, people read things in isolation. Of course, many people who later perhaps would have regretted what they said, said some very strange things back in those days.

I want to go on now to the situation when you were in Manzanar. You spoke briefly about the kind of work you were doing there. What do you think were the basic causes for the discontent that came to a head at Manzanar?

TT: Do you mean specifically what caused the rioting?

BM: Well, yes, or even before the rioting—the times when some of you knew that you were in disfavor with other members of the camp. Could you kind of outline, as best you recall it, the sort of things that, perhaps, you personally knew about that were going on, the irritating factors?

TT: Gee, I would have to do a lot of looking back. It would seem to me there was the overall feeling of uncertainty and fear. Someone once told me that, if you confine ten

thousand people in a one-square-mile enclosure and oblige them to live in conditions where there is lack of privacy, then you're going to get problems anyway, just out of that situation. It's communal living—people who come from so many different backgrounds, having only one thing in common, race, and being denied freedom of movement beyond those walls. But as I look back, probably one of the most aggravating and frustrating sources of this irritating thing which would contribute to unrest was that there existed a double standard, depending upon whether you belonged to one race or another. Here you had worked every day side by side with someone who probably was less competent than yourself, say, the doctors. An interned doctor would get \$19 or \$16 per month. Then someone else would be coming in on a government payroll and his salary would be many, many times that—and probably doing less work. This was pervasive throughout the camp. The economic structure was based upon a racist principle, you know. It was basically unfair. I think people were aware of this double standard, not only in how you were rewarded for what you did but also in the way you lived, and you were reminded of this every day. Evacuees were in tar paper barracks that were quite minimal, and the staff administrators lived in comfortable finished cottages. So, you had the visual reminder constantly and daily of the differences. Then, also, in the early stages, I think, there was a good deal of grumbling because some of the administrators were less than—the rumor went around camp—honest with the disbursement of what the evacuees, or the people in the camp, felt belonged to them: food and whatever else the government was providing. And wherever you have this kind of thing going on, then the beginnings of discontent set in. But overall, I think, there was also a great deal of fear, since there were two different schools of thought as to who was going to win the war. The lines were drawn rather sharply there.

BM: What was the makeup of the people involved in those two different schools of thought?

TT: Well, I think that in a very general way it was the Issei and Kibei who felt that Japan was going to win, and the Nisei felt that the United States would win. I think this is oversimplifying it, but it's as accurate as you can get.

BM: There was some overlapping, I suppose.

TT: Oh, sure.

BM: For instance, there would have been some Kibei in the group that felt the United States would win?

TT: Oh, yes, right. Well, then you have to remember this, too—you might feel that the United States would win. It might not necessarily mean that you wanted the United States to win, but you wouldn't necessarily want it. I mean, I think that it was a little more complicated than that. But, I think that without recognizing it, with most people it boiled down to how you were going to behave and act and what you were going to do. I think this is what happened. I think people who said they were going to live here

[in the United States] did one of several things. They had their college-age children apply for student relocation. They filled out questionnaires and answered, Yes, we want to get out of camp. They went out on furloughs to top sugar beets. They looked for the Quakers or whoever would sponsor them to get out. They wanted to relocate. They volunteered for service in the United States Army. This type of activity went on. And then, there were those who felt that there was no future in this country—whether or not at one time they desired to live here permanently—and those who weren't going to have a chance to, and those who actively said, We don't want any more of this country. These are the people who sat on their hands and said, "We don't want any part of this other activity. Just be quiet and we'll go whichever way we have to go." Or some felt, Those people who were agitating to get us into the service, they're troublemakers, and let's kill them. You know, this is about how it went. I think that this is how the trouble began to develop, brewing at Manzanar and the other camps.

BM: We were wondering about the role that rumor might have played, especially in the early period. Things such as resettlement and going to colleges really came later, didn't it?

TT: Well, rumor was a tremendous factor in what happened at these camps. I haven't read the published studies, but I knew of a discussion that took place. I think Tom Shibutani did some studies on the anatomy of rumor in relocation camps. I was fascinated by how he traced the origin of a particular rumor as it spread through the camp, how quickly it was out there, and how people identified according to these rumors as to what they were or were not. This affected the role of the JACL rather dramatically in these stages. It affected everyone who was either physically assaulted or beaten or threatened. These people generally were high on the rumor list early. There was no question that numerically it wasn't too silent a majority in those days, that people felt, I think, closer to the fact that they were Japanese, first and most importantly. Whether they could be recognized ultimately as Americans of Japanese descent, it was touch and go, I think. It took a great deal of faith and influence, I think, from the outside as people reached in to reassure those of us who really had no basis for believing, excepting to say that we hoped and wished this was going to happen, because in the early months it seemed pretty dreary and dismal. There wasn't too much hope that we weren't headed on a one-way journey either to some island in the Pacific or back to Japan, no matter what we wanted or hoped. So, I think that you're right. I think it was in the later stages that student relocation and resettlement became an actuality. But, you see the interesting thing is that from the outset the JACL and its leaders at Salt Lake City were strenuously and actively working to bring this about. But the opportunity for most people in camp to know that or, if they were told that, to believe it, just didn't come about until long after all the rioting and upsetting things took place in the camp.

BM: What month was it that you went to camp?

TT: The end of March or early April [1942]. I can't really remember.

BM: And how soon after that did you start on your historian's job?

TT: Probably at the end of the month, because we didn't last very long as delivery people [for the *Manzanar Free Press*. (laughs) One, I felt that by reason of our just being there, that the *Rafu Shimpo* and the people I had represented had been discredited pretty much in the camp. In other words, in Los Angeles' Little Tokyo community, our paper was the largest, and we couldn't help but feel we were the respected publication. And then, by reason of things that we had attempted to do among the community, we had the feeling of both acceptance and, you know, a certain degree—if you want to call it—of leadership, although in terms of the total community, no.

BM: You're speaking of the Little Tokyo community?

TT: Right, and of the Southern California Japanese community. We had a network of correspondents all through the southern California area up to Fresno. Right after I had gone to work for Mr. Komai, I had asked him for permission to organize the correspondents, so once or twice a year we would bring them in. We'd have a great evening and a banquet. We had a close-knit community. We thought we did, and it was. We instituted publications, special issues like a graduation, or commencement issue, and a holiday issue. We organized what we called the Nisei Business Bureau, which was really a promotional effort to contact representatives of large industries to find out if they would make available opportunities for the employment of Japanese Americans. In connection with that, I attended some conferences among Nisei students at Berkeley in 1940 to relate to them what we were doing here in Southern California to expand the horizon for getting jobs and getting into professions. We did that, and then we also tried to get housing. That is, I had myself experienced the almost impossible difficulty in buying a house, even if you had the money. So we thought by working with developers and banks and escrow people, people who were in the real estate industry, we could make restrictive racial housing covenants less effective.

This is one area where the Sansei give Earl Warren no credit. The very fact that the homes that they live in today—that they're able to go literally anywhere and buy without any difficulty, that they're not hemmed in, in the undesirable parts of the city, having to pay 15, 20, and 30 percent more just because the supply is limited while the demand is great—these things have changed, and Earl Warren was largely responsible for this. But then, we were doing this type of thing even in those days. I don't know whether we had any particular success or not, but the effort was all in that direction. The camp destroyed those efforts early.

You know, I had a funny experience. I don't know the new editor of the *Rafu Shimpo*. She's a young woman named Ellen Endo. About a month ago—I have some business interests in San Diego and San Francisco—and I was due down in San Diego to attend meetings. But I had this telephone call from Robert Vosper out at UCLA. He's the librarian, and I had a call from his office saying that UCLA had completed the microfilming of the *Rafu Shimpo* and the *Kashu Mainichi* and would I come and give a talk at the dedication? I said, "What for?" He said that Akira Komai, the present publisher, had said he wouldn't, and it was suggested that I go in his place. I

- said, “Well, I’m not about to. I worked there for a very short time, for about five or six years. And it has been about thirty years since then.” But, he kept calling. So, I finally called Aki and asked him, “What is it?” And Akira Komai said that he didn’t want to. Well, I know he’s a very retiring person. He didn’t want to do the talking. So, it turned out that I agreed. I canceled my appointments in San Diego and San Francisco, and I went there to UCLA and gave a brief talk based on what I knew of his father and the publisher of the other paper. I don’t subscribe to the *Rafu*, but someone sent me a copy of what Ellen Endo had written about what I had said. It was totally a misquotation, and left an impression that was completely outside—I said, “My gosh!” (laughs)
- BM: After you’d put yourself out!
- TT: Right. They made a tape of what I did say, and somebody sent the transcript of it to me. Tad Uyeno, who used to write for the *Rafu Shimpō*—he’s over in San Gabriel and owns a nursery—he called and asked, “Well, will you tell me what you did say?” I think somebody in my office sent [the transcript] to him. I read what I really did say and what I was purported to have said, and there is a very substantial difference. I had just simply read it from what had been prepared. But, I think this is part of history. This is how history gets written or garbled. (laughs)
- BM: And how former newspaper editors find themselves misquoted! (laughs)
- TT: Well, yes.
- BM: Yes, I recall you mentioning that in your talk for the lecture series.
- TT: Yes.
- BM: I want to ask you if your recruitment as a historian at Manzanar was a direct result, do you think, of your working at the *Rafu Shimpō*? Was the administration there aware of the fact that you had been an editor?
- TT: I think it’s possible, although Joe Masaoka hadn’t been. I think we just happened to be there when they needed somebody. I was so fascinated. I never even knew what anthropology meant, you know, and then I met this very distinguished Robert Redfield from the University of Chicago. I found that the meetings we had with him were quite—well, they were learning experiences. I enjoyed meeting and talking with him. He came, and suddenly, in the midst of all the despair and the negative feelings we were having, I thought, “Well, this is a great opportunity to learn something that we’d never had.” He convinced both Joe and me that we could do some valuable work by each of us, as accurately as possible, just simply recounting those things about camp life that we observed each day. It got to be fun. At the end of each day, we made the rounds. We went to the camouflage factory and the guayule farm and talked to the people in the mess halls and in the laundry room and all over camp. We would go to the nurseries and the churches. Joe even went with

me to services. I was baptized and confirmed in the camp by Bishop Reifsnider, who was the former Episcopal bishop of Tokyo. Mrs. Reifsnider became my godmother. I had never belonged to any church. Joe, who was of the Mormon faith at the time, came to communion because he figured that was the only place we'd get any alcohol. (laughs)

We were having a great time, we thought, until later when we discovered that we were being accused of being spies. It was quite a shock to us to learn that about the jobs that we thought we were performing simply to help compile the history of the camp. I think that what we did write and leave—and I'm sorry I never kept much of what went on—that we would just simply each day write, you know, Documentary Report Number so and so. I remember when we got into a gory triangle and a murder up at Manzanar. A young woman with an older husband and two children, I think, had an affair with a young sugar beet worker and the husband murdered her and then committed suicide. It was this type of thing. I think we tried to get as complete and as thorough a picture of everything that went on in the camp as we could. This can get you into trouble, because you get awfully nosy, you see.

BM: Did you go around camp with a little pad of paper and a pencil?

TT: Yes. Yes. They knew what we were doing. (laughs) We were not sophisticated enough. We had no bugging devices, no electronic equipment. (laughs) We just simply went and said that we were documentary historians. This was our job. We would interview people and ask permission to quote them. Often we would quote them without their permission because this is what we said they told us. We must have gotten to be known as a couple of very nosy snoopers.

BM: Do you know what happened to those records?

TT: No, I don't.

BM: Was it under the University of Chicago?

TT: No. This was under the War Relocation Authority at Manzanar.

BM: But, the man who was instructing you, you said, was from the University of Chicago, right?

TT: Well, no, Dr. Redfield was the man who introduced us to it, but there was another gentleman out of Washington, D.C., with the War Relocation Authority, Dr. Solon Kimball. He was in charge of it. I've lost track of him. I don't know. I have heard since of Dr. Redfield.

BM: Dorothy [Swaine] Thomas had nothing to do with the project, did she?

TT: No. I was employed by the University of California after the riot. We were removed from Manzanar, and I was sent to Death Valley. I think on the first night out at Death

Valley, or the second night, Dorothy Thomas sent Morton Grodzins to meet me at Death Valley to ask if I would chronicle for the study just what had happened at Manzanar, what I could recall of the previous few nights. And I did that. Then they asked me if I would do some writing based on the six years I had been at the *Rafu Shimpo* from the files that we had there. They wanted a study of the business community in Little Tokyo and organized gambling and any other crimes, as such. They wanted to know the nature and the extent of social organizations, both Issei and Nisei, and the farming. I gave them much of this information as best I could from files that I had shipped both to Manzanar and also to Chicago, where I went after leaving Death Valley. All that has been so long ago that I've lost most of it. I don't think I have ever given any thought to it until I received the invitation from Dr. Hansen to lecture at Irvine.

BM: Do you still have any of those old files?

TT: If they are around—my brother is in Chicago, and much of what I had there I had him take. He lives in Winnetka. You see, I had two homes. I had a home in Chicago for many years and here. It has gotten scattered now. I've had no reason for looking it up, so it must be somewhere around here.

BM: That would include your diary, too?

TT: It probably would, yes.

BM: Who sent you the files?

TT: I think a gentleman named Thomas Lynch. He was an attorney here who was active in the Democratic Central Committee. He was a very interesting man. He died quite a few years ago. You know, it's very interesting. I try to recall the people with whom I corresponded from Manzanar, because I think that each letter that we received had a disproportionate significance, in that you needed to be refueled and reassured that you weren't just completely lost. This man's letters were always, "So what are you complaining about?" He was of Irish descent, and he could recall some of the things that his forebears went through in this country. I think there was a man named Clyde Shoemaker. He was an assistant city attorney here. He had made a talk before some luncheon [service] club—maybe it was the Rotary or Lions—in which he echoed what General Dewitt had said—that there was only one solution to the whole problem: Ship them all back. They'll never belong here. And Mr. Lynch said, "Why don't you write him a letter?" He suggested it, so I did. I got back a letter from Mr. Shoemaker. It really was something! Well, he just simply reiterated how he felt, The kindest thing that can happen to you people is just to get lost. You see. Now I had some good friends here, too. A man named Louis Ardouin, whom I had met and used to lunch with quite frequently, was a real estate appraiser. Out of the kindness of his heart, he would write to me and say, "You know, really, for your own good, you should go back to Japan." (laughs)

BM: Oh, my!

TT: You know, with friends like this, who needs enemies? Well, many years later, of course, I recall meeting Louis Ardouin, and he acknowledged that maybe he was wrong. But, he said his motives were kind. He and I had a mutual friend, a man named George Smedley Smith, who had been active in a group called Forty-Plus. This is an organization to get jobs for people after age forty. I sent Smedley a copy of Ardouin's letter, and he wrote the most amusing and, to me, reassuring letter to Ardouin, telling him what a knucklehead he was, that he should think this way. So, we go to Japan. Who do we know? We don't know anybody. These people at least you knew, and I was always reminded by what Joe Shinoda frequently said, "If the danger was *that* great to us that we were likely to be assaulted in the streets or hung on the nearest lamppost, truly, I'd rather have it done by people who knew me than by strangers." (laughs)

BM: I think that at this stage I will turn this interview over to Dave Hacker, who is writing about Manzanar.

DH: You were talking a bit earlier about the riot. After you went to the CCC camp in Death Valley, you wrote a report for Dorothy Swaine Thomas. Have you read her book, *The Spoilage [Japanese-American Evacuation and Resettlement During World War II]* in which she cites your report?

TT: I have some years ago, yes.

DH: Do you remember it well enough to give your opinion on it as to whether she really applied what you said?

TT: Well, I don't remember now. I recall that at the time it was published that I felt that it was an accurate enough representation of what I had submitted to her. Was that the book she did with Richard Nishimoto?

DH: Yes, it was.

TT: I remember meeting Mr. Nishimoto and being at many conferences with him, and I thought they did a good job.

DH: What were your circumstances at the time of the riot itself?

TT: Oh, I was in camp, and we lived in Block 36. On the day of the riot, I was notified by several people that the rioters were going to be going after the people on their various death lists, and that it would be advisable for me not to be in my own barrack at a given time that evening, but to probably be at some other location. I was told this by neighbors on my block and on the other block, Block 35. My wife, mother-in-law, and father-in-law felt then that I ought to be with my older brother. So, my question was, of course, "Perhaps we *all* ought to leave the area?" They said, No, it isn't

necessary. That by the nature of what was happening in camp, they were rather singular in their listing of people and there was no danger to anybody else. So, I had dinner in a mess hall in another block, then spent that evening with my brother and people in his barrack when the rioting had broken out. Out of concern for what might be happening to my family, I joined the mob—I guess, the rioters—as they went by the block where I was staying and went to Block 36. So, I was there when they tried to find me. But, I've never been really able to figure out—in a camp of ten thousand people, where both Joe Masaoka and I were quite, I thought, reasonably well-known—our names were better known than our faces, although people knew what we were doing. It was a very dark night, and we were all dressed alike in these Navy-issue pea coats. It was a cold night. Most people were rather warmly dressed. So, I saw much of the moving about, but I saw no actual violence.

DH: How exactly did you go about getting the information for the report that you wrote? You see, the reason that I am inquiring is because most of the reports that have been written on the riot itself have been taken from Dorothy Swaine Thomas's book, *The Spoilage*, which in turn draws largely from your report.

TT: Well, I was only one of many. I think Ralph Smeltzer, who drove me out of camp, provided Morton Grodzins with a good deal of information. I think Morton interviewed people who were on the police force at Manzanar and who were there when the shooting took place, but who, for reasons of their own safety, denied permission to name them or quote them. I think that much of the material that Morton gathered at the time was not hearsay. It was based on firsthand observations by people who were there. He got it from the administrative personnel and from the evacuees who were there. In any event, Ralph Smeltzer came for me and said that I'd better get out of camp. He drove me to the barracks where people who had been on the death list were being kept, and then were removed to Death Valley.

DH: I think you mentioned before something about the beatings that happened. There was some violence and things like this.

TT: Well, there was the beating of Fred Tayama. He was number one on the death list.

DH: Before this, were there other instances of gang violence or instances where any group or the violent groups pointed you out and said that you were one of the people that they should get, or something like that? Were there instances of that before the period of the riot itself?

TT: Well, to my knowledge, we had heard some rumors a few days before, but neither Joe Masaoka nor I—and we were lumped pretty much together as the two people who were doing the same thing—could recall later that we had actually been threatened. I never had been, and he never had been. But, there was no question that on that evening they were out to kill both of us as well as others on the death list. Yet, I think that I never felt apprehensive, and people whom we met and who later were identified as those who were out to get us before the riot were affable and cordial and friendly.

I felt when we were debating the issue of urging young men to sign up for volunteer Army service, it was a dignified, intelligent, and friendly debate, that it was not going to wind up as, you know, “We don’t like what you’re saying, so we’re going to knock you off.” But, we were given—as a matter of fact, I became so confident, and even somewhat exhilarated by the idea of matching ideas, that in the last two or three instances when Joe was with me, I volunteered and did speak in Japanese about our ideas. We felt that we had to go the second mile; that we should take this position because we didn’t want to live in Japan under any circumstances, that we felt this was our home, and everything that we had stood for. I thought we communicated this. They were polite and listening—even those who sat on the other side of the table, who followed us, and said we were nitwits and that we didn’t know what we were doing. They didn’t indicate that they were about to murder us. So this was an experience—that they would accuse us of being dogs and informers. Had they given us an opportunity to respond, we would, of course, have attempted to set them right and tell them that this was not our function, and that we had no intention of doing it. We wouldn’t knowingly perform that kind of duty; that we were there trying to defend a position that we thought we could identify with, and we felt it was for the good of most of us. But this got nowhere.

DH: Well, there were people who were violently against you, such as Joe Kurihara.

TT: Yes, that’s right.

DH: You mentioned Joe Kurihara and Tokie Slocum before in your lecture. I wonder if you could expand upon that?

TT: Well, you know, I had regarded both Kurihara and Slocum as personal friends before World War II. Kurihara, because he was a very pleasant, congenial, friendly, and outgoing man who used to visit me at the *Rafu Shimpō*. He was an older Nisei, and I always enjoyed talking with people who could give me the benefit of their experiences. I knew he was active in the Commodore Perry Post of the American Legion. Tokie Slocum was a member of the editorial board of the *Rafu Shimpō*, so I had occasion to know his views. I liked what he stood for. I agreed with the substance of what he believed in, but I couldn’t stand his methods or his style. He was an extremist in so many ways. He was dogmatic, very assertive, and not very cordial or polite. He used to try to dominate some of our discussions, but I think we had some pretty solid people on our editorial board. In other words, to me he epitomized the—I’ve been to a lot of American Legion rallies—people who wear their flag on their sleeve. You never know what their private thinking or their private lives are like, or the kind of people they really are, and they’re often personally obnoxious. Slocum was one of these people. So, I didn’t like him, personally, that much. I liked Kurihara as a human being much more. But, in camp, the views Slocum expressed—by a stroke of irony—represented what Joe Masaoka and I believed in. In this war, we were Americans, not Japanese, and when we had to make the choice, this was where we belonged. Kurihara took the other view. In camp, Kurihara never personally or openly expressed to me a dislike for me to the extent

that I should arm myself or be equipped to defend myself against his wanting to have us put away. So this, I think, was a surprise. Before Joe Masaoka died, he and I were involved in a number of things. One was a business venture here. We used to think back and say, "You know, life is funny. Joe Kurihara was one of the last people in the world we thought would want to get us knocked off, whereas we wouldn't have put it beyond Slocum." So, Manzanar was a puzzle to us. We were glad to get out of there.

- AH: What do you think of the projects that existed at Manzanar, like the cooperative store and the camouflage net factory? What relation might they have had to the riot?
- TT: Well, camouflage nets represented something that were used in the war. I really don't know. As I try to remember, there were some people who didn't want to take part in it and others that did, and most of them thought, Well, we get paid for it. My father-in-law [Kango Takamura] did some drawings for the guayule rubber project. After all, during the war, it was necessary to find substitutes for rubber which had been cut off from us by what the Japanese had done in Southeast Asia. That, too, was regarded in some light as a war project, but I don't think these had great effect one way or the other. Maybe it was a part of the total cumulative effect that anything had. "Here we are, we're stuck in here, now we've been treated like prisoners of war and they want us to help in the war effort." I think some people might have felt unfriendly to that. But by and large, I don't think it had too much to do with the riot. I don't know very much about the cooperative store, excepting that I remember it was there. I think most of the things that went on in that camp... There were so many things that people felt good about. I discovered this after we were out, in trying to get my in-laws to come out of there and they didn't want to.
- BM: You mentioned a police force when you were talking to Dave. Were you speaking of a police force made up of people of the camp?
- TT: Yes, that's right.
- BM: Do you know if they brought any police in, say, from Lone Pine or Independence?
- TT: As I recall, they had one non-Japanese police chief [John Gilkey], and they had an evacuee subchief [Kiyoshi Higashi]. Everyone on the force was a member of the community. That is, they were evacuees.
- BM: Did they wear uniforms?
- TT: No. I was trying to remember how we did identify them. I think they wore bands.
- BM: Armbands?
- TT: Armbands. They might have had a hat, I'm not sure. But, there was very little need for them. I think occasionally there was a family quarrel. There was no thievery. The

- thievery going on was with the administrative personnel and on a large scale.  
(laughs)
- BM: There was evidence that that actually was going on? It wasn't just a matter of suspicion?
- TT: Well, I would say this, "In a court of law it would be difficult to prove."
- BM: In what sort of ways were the people aware of that, do you know?
- TT: In food.
- BM: I mean, did they notice a shortage of food when there should have been more?
- TT: Yes. Well, meat was in great shortage and, say, someone working at the warehouse said, "Did you know that so-and-so, the assistant project director, took two sides of beef in his car and drove off the camp with it?" And that should have gone into hamburgers for us, you see. Now that rumor takes all of about fifteen seconds to get around camp. Or that we should have had chicken stew, but if twenty-five of the chickens have disappeared, then it gets to be a little bit less. People were concerned with food and with eating, and if the rumors were that food that should have come to the evacuees had disappeared down the road because of hanky-panky by people in charge, then it got to be accepted as a matter of course, but it didn't make people like it any more. Whether it was true or not, there was no opportunity for those who were allegedly the victims of this to really get to know.
- BM: Did you personally know anyone that worked in the warehouse?
- TT: My brother. My brother was a night watchman in the mess hall. I got the impression that there was much of this going on. I think Joe Masaoka indicated to me that—well, as a matter of fact, I think our reports would show that. We documented, quoting different people, without putting them in the position of being likely to be the victims of any kind of retaliation, that this kind of thing was going on. It was a part of the feeling of uneasiness and apprehension on the part of the evacuees.
- BM: I don't mean to persist, but the reason I want to get into that is to establish the fact that you weren't hearing this as the tenth person in a rumor chain.
- TT: Oh, I see! We were talking to people.
- BM: You were. Did you actually get some information from your brother?
- TT: Yes. Oh, yes. Right, as to so-and-so having loaded his car, you see. Let me see, there were other supplies, too. Let's see, they brought in a certain amount of clothing, and there were rumors that some of these were being stolen and sold off elsewhere.

- BM: Were you able to speak to anyone who had seen that kind of thing happen?
- TT: We would report these and send them in. This was kind of naive. Joe and I often used to regret this. We should have had enough carbon paper and kept copies, and we'd have quite a collection of things. This must be like Watergate. We're writing it but who gets it, you know? (laughs)
- BM: So, in effect, the administration had the reports of all the rumors that were going around?
- TT: Well, if there were people in the administration who were guilty of this, then they must have had us on their blacklist, too, because here were these two dumb snoopers going around and writing all these things. Neither Joe nor I had had enough experience. We had neither the sophistication nor the training to know, and we just had one job: look and see, write it down. That's all we did. So, this was raw data. Some of it was hearsay, of course, because we talked to someone who said he was quoting someone else. But, much of it was from people who said, "I experienced this." So, we wrote it, and this was a part of our report. We were to document the day-to-day living that was in that camp, and that was our job. Later, I had reason to regret it. "Gee, why didn't we save some of that? We would have this much, you know." But, we didn't.
- BM: You could have written a book! (laughs) I wonder about this expression, They were out to kill us. How did you know they were out to kill you rather than just to beat you up?
- TT: Oh, well, yes. We were at Death Valley, and we were getting all kinds of reports from our friends who had attended the rallies. They had beaten up Fred Tayama, and then they had jailed those who had been apprehended for the beating, and it was a demand that these people be released, as I recall. So at several of the blocks they had rallies, you see, demanding the release. The speeches at these rallies were, "Unless they're released, we're going to kill these dogs: Fred Tayama, Joe Masaoka, Togo Tanaka, Tokie Slocum, and down the list."
- BM: How many were on the list?
- TT: A varied number, depending on who you were going to quote, but probably it was up to about five on the death list. After that they would beat them up, you see. So it must have run over to about ten. We didn't know whether we should feel honored or what! (laughter) But Joe and I concluded that we must have earned our place on the list by reason of our activities around the camp. Then, of course, my mother and father were at the camp, too, and they related what had been told to them by their friends and their neighbors. We were on opposite sides of the camp. They were way over in a block on the other side, and they said that we were lucky to get out of there alive. It was uncomfortable for my parents, so they moved from that camp to Utah.

BM: Was that after you were taken out?

TT: Oh, yes, right. One of the reasons is that I felt a little bit apprehensive for them, too, if it were true that I had been on the death list. The people might be a little bit unbalanced. And being concerned about their welfare, I asked if they might not be moved to a different camp. So they were, and they were willing to go, too.

BM: So, they went to Topaz?

TT: They went to Topaz, yes. My sister and her husband and family chose to move from the camp immediately. They went on to Chicago. That is, they came to Death Valley for a while. My other sister, also. My older brother was transferred to Amache, Colorado. Then my younger brother and his family were brought to Death Valley, and they subsequently went to Chicago. My wife's mother and father elected to stay in Manzanar. They didn't feel quite as apprehensive, although they were in the barrack at the time. They stayed on straight through. They kept me informed. I think, from these various sources, I concluded that I wasn't just going to be beaten up, that they had intended to do away with certain people, and I happened to be among them.

BM: Did Tokie Slocum have a Caucasian father? Is that the reason for the name?

TT: No, I think he was adopted by a farm couple in North or South Dakota, as a young man. He was raised there in the Midwest by the Slocums. But his Japanese surname was Nishimura. He was Tokutaro Nishimura Slocum. He was kind of an oddball in my estimation, because our backgrounds were different. He came from a community where there were no other Japanese. He had very successfully lobbied for passage by Congress—I think it was in the 1930s—of a law which permitted Japanese American veterans to obtain citizenship. I don't remember all of the details.

BM: Veterans of the First World War?

TT: Yes, First World War. He had served in the First World War, as had Joe Kurihara. I haven't been in touch with him since then nor with Joe Kurihara, although I think they're both in this country.

BM: I want to refer back to your lecture wherein you referred to the fact that Joe Kurihara had appealed for a reference from you through the Red Cross. Now, in view of this situation where you were on a death list and he was involved in that, may I ask what your response was at that time?

TT: Oh, I was asked merely to indicate whether or not he *had* been a law-abiding American citizen, loyal to the United States up to World War II, and I responded favorably. Of course, I was, at that time, on the staff of the American Friends Service Committee, and they're Quakers. For me to have done otherwise would have been a denial of what I was supposed to be doing with them. I have never borne him any

- personal animosity, and I can well understand why he behaved the way he did. This is why I can't understand why the militant Sansei, who have had nothing to do with it, are out to get Earl Warren! (laughs)
- BM: Well, I certainly want to make the comment that I feel that's a prime example of turning the other cheek. Do you think, then, that he did come back? Do you think he is in this country?
- TT: I was told that he is, but I have no way of knowing. I don't know.
- BM: And he made that attempt to return even before the war was over?
- TT: Yes.
- BM: Then it didn't take him long to change his mind, apparently.
- TT: No. No, apparently not. I received word when I was with the American Friends Service Committee. It was a very simple communication that came through Switzerland by way of the Red Cross. I was asked to sign a paper indicating that he had made a statement, and they were seeking confirmation of it from people who had known him. So, I signed it and returned it.
- BM: Did he have a family?
- TT: No. He was a single man.
- BM: I wonder about the people who went on that first trip back to Japan on the *Gripsholm*. I understand people were exchanged in Africa with people coming back from Japan. Then there may have been another trip, I believe. Do you know if there were more than two trips during the war that sent people back?
- TT: No, I don't. I probably have read it. I had a friend who came back from Japan on the first exchange.
- BM: I understand Ambassador Grew was on that exchange.
- TT: Yes.
- BM: Was your friend a Kibei?
- TT: No, he was a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] worker from Kentucky named Paul Rusch. Paul had been teaching at Saint Paul University in Tokyo, and had started this little camp called Seisenryo up in the mountains. This is where my children subsequently went.
- BM: The mountains of where?

TT: It's just outside of Tokyo. This is a place that's called KEEP, for Kiyosato Educational Experiment Project. In the 1940s, in Chicago, I helped Paul in his organizing of the American Committee for KEEP. Subsequently, over the years, the committee raised several million dollars. KEEP started with a church, and then with a library, and a 4-H farm, and it's quite a project there now. It had done a great deal of fine work. This is where my older daughter first went to volunteer in the hospital. My other daughter and son had also gone there. Paul came back on the *Gripsholm* and then, subsequently, went back to Japan in the American Occupation on the Intelligence Staff of General [Douglas] MacArthur. But, that was primarily so he could reorganize what he started before the war. He had done quite a tremendous job over there.

BM: Have you ever heard of people who may have committed suicide on the return trip to Japan?

TT: I know I've heard of them. I'm not aware of the details. If I have read about them, I can't recall.

BM: But, it is back in your memory somewhere that that may have happened?

TT: Yes, it is. I believe so. One man about whom I wrote for the University of California study was named Yamatoda. He was the kingpin of the Tokyo Club, which was the organized gambling group down here in Little Tokyo before the war. He was reported to be on the exchange ship. He went to Hiroshima, and I heard that the atom bomb finished him off. This is sad. One of the most successful of the Japanese Issei merchants here before the war was a man named Hasuike. He owned the Three Star Produce Company, which was a rather substantial chain. I can't remember how many he had. He had quite a few of these markets. Back in the late 1930s he was doing about \$3 million a year, which even in today's terms would be a very substantial business. He had several hundred employees; and it was kind of a standing joke here that, if you got a college degree at USC [University of Southern California] or UCLA, you'd wind up working for him, (laughs) which was true. I understand he returned to Japan, I don't know where. But, someone told me he had come back here. I don't know if it is so or not. I imagine that if I explored it enough I'd find quite a few people whom I had either known as acquaintances or friends who went that way and came back this way, too. I met quite a few who came back on that exchange ship, by reason of the volunteer work I did for the Quakers. You know, they brought back a whole shipload of missionaries from over there who went to work over here relocating the Japanese Americans out of the camps. (laughs)

One of the things—as I discussed with some of the Sansei militants—is that their whole focus is on all the things that were wrong, the injustices that we suffered. Yet, they're not even aware of, or interested in, the tremendous outreach of goodwill and help from the people who really went to work to salvage a situation that was bad. If they spent half of the energy honoring these people as they do trying to condemn those who did this, I think that we'd see things a little bit more in balance.

BM: Was Esther Rhoads one of those who came back on that ship?

TT: I think she returned from Japan before the war began. She's another person for whom I have nothing but the highest regard, and I've visited lots of people who somehow saved the situations that could get pretty bad. (laughs)

BM: I met her about two weeks ago.

TT: Oh, is that so?

BM: In Pasadena at a Friends meeting where she gave a little talk about the things that she was involved in. I'm hoping maybe to interview her. She lives now in Pennsylvania. I'd like to ask you about another former missionary, Herbert Nicholson. When you were at Death Valley, did he have occasion to visit you at that place?

TT: I can't really remember because Herbert Nicholson just stands out as somebody you remember whether you've seen him in ten years or fifteen. But, my memory of him is as a person who always brought, not only all the things—he must have driven truckloads of things—that the evacuees couldn't get. He would bring these things, but mostly he would bring good cheer. He would really restore the spirits of people, and refuel them, and make them have hope. To me he just stands out as one of those very rare and few people who, when people really need this kind of propping up the most, he was there. He's a very earthy and pragmatic man. He's the kind of person who pitches in and does things. He's a doer more than a person who sits back and thinks and contemplates. But, I never met anyone who, having met Herbert Nicholson, didn't remember him with a smile. I think of how he was regarded by evacuees: they respected and liked many people but I think most people loved Herbert Nicholson. He's an unusual man.

BM: I wanted to ask you, even though your birth wasn't registered in the United States, were you registered with the Japanese consulate?

TT: Yes, I was.

BM: Did that cause you any trouble later?

TT: No, it didn't cause me any trouble except, when I became English editor of the *Rafu Shimpo* and became involved in editorial debates with people who were criticizing the Nisei, I went to the pains of removing my name from the Japanese Consul's office. In other words, you had to renounce your Japanese citizenship and my father had registered me as Japanese. I guess, at around the age of nineteen or twenty, I renounced it and had only one single citizenship. But, it could have caused trouble. Had I gone to Japan, I would have been liable for induction in the Japanese Army. I had no intention of going to Japan. (laughs)

BM: Did your family as a group renounce or did you individually do that?

- TT: Well, at the time I did it individually. I had a younger brother who did go to Japan. He came back and I believe he renounced, too. With my sisters, who have never been to Japan, there was never an issue.
- BM: The camp you were taken to in Death Valley had been a CCC camp?
- TT: Yes, it was. It had been used for that. It had been abandoned, and we were just taken there, cleaned it up, and stayed there.
- BM: Had anyone prepared the camp before you came?
- TT: No. This was very sudden, so we had the job of cleaning it up and getting it ready.
- BM: How did you manage the first night?
- TT: Oh, it was pretty miserable! (laughs) And, you know, it was cold. I was amazed. We went out and got some wood to put in the stoves there. They gave us blankets and some cots. There were no facilities at all the first night. It was even more primitive than when we went to Manzanar. We were there from, I believe, December 8 until the day before Valentine's in 1943 or so—December, January, and part of February. In that period it was a very enjoyable experience under the circumstances, I think, because now we could look forward. We were assured that we were headed for Chicago or somewhere East, and I think the knowledge of that alone made a world of difference. I never realized it until I experienced it, that if you're in a situation where the future is blocked and you don't know, it does something both to the spirit and to everything. It takes a great deal to keep going and believing that it's going to come out all right. Once we were in Death Valley they said, Well, it's just a matter of processing the papers, and you'll be on your way. I'm sure that the facilities there were much poorer than at Manzanar, but we enjoyed it. We were digging ditches for a park ranger, so we went out every day and were digging. You know, though not being physical myself, I really enjoyed that work. (laughs) I look back on the Death Valley episode with pleasure. As we look at Manzanar it was a bleak experience, but Death Valley seemed to be the last step before something good was to happen, just to get out.
- BM: Were the families of the people there also brought at the same time, or were they brought later?
- TT: We weren't all brought that first night. But, within a couple of weeks, as I recall, all of us who were to be there were there.
- BM: I have met Karl Yoneda at Manzanar and have read a little bit of his writing. I wonder if you could tell me what you know about Karl Yoneda.
- TT: I remember him. I didn't know him very well. I think Joe Masaoka knew him much better. In my mind, he was a very successful leader in organized labor with the

- longshoremen, and he was a spokesman for that part of the Japanese community, which was generally, I think, identified politically as left of center before the war. But I remember his wife in camp more than I do him. I think her name was Elaine [Black Yoneda]. I'm not sure. I think Karl always spoke out pretty much and he encouraged us. He was an older person. I have the recollection that when Joe Masaoka and I volunteered to go out and try to recruit people to volunteer that Karl Yoneda was one of those who encouraged and supported the position we took. Beyond that I don't have many memories of him.
- BM: He mentioned in a talk that he gave at UCLA on November 12, 1969 that he had participated in a petition to encourage the government to draft people in camps. Do you recall a petition for that purpose?
- TT: No, I don't. We might have. I mean, we were signing so many things for the Japanese American Citizens League. He might have been one of those who signed that. I'm sure he was. If there were a line with Joe Kurihara on one side and some of us on the other, Karl was friendly with us.
- BM: I understand he went out. Actually, he wasn't there at the time of your evacuation. He had already left the camp before that to do intelligence work with the United States Army, or some branch of the military service.
- TT: Yes.
- BM: Was the whole group at Death Valley planning to go to Chicago?
- TT: No, I think some were to go to Chicago. Some were to go back to other relocation camps. It seems like my older brother was to go to Amache. Largely, I think, most of us were headed for Chicago. It seemed to be the one place that was prepared to receive us. I was due in Washington, D.C. They had a wartime agency called the OWI, Office of War Information, and some effort had been made to get me a job there.
- BM: On the part of whom?
- TT: By people like Morton Grodzins and Dorothy Thomas. Morton had written to friends of his at—I think he had done some work for the *Louisville Courier Journal*. He was in correspondence with—I can't remember the name of the editor. He wrote all over to get me a job on a newspaper. And then I think I was scheduled to go on to Washington, D.C., for a final interview and the assurance of a job with OWI when we landed in Chicago, at the Quaker Hospital. I decided then to cancel going further and volunteered to work for them. Could I get you some more tea?
- BM: That would be nice. In fact, perhaps we should bring this interview to a close now. You have been most generous with your time, Mr. Tanaka. On behalf of Dave Hacker, myself, and the Japanese American Oral History Project at California State

University, Fullerton, I would like to thank you very much for your cooperation and candor.

END OF INTEVIEW